Article

Oju and *Inu*: Solidarity in the Informal Market Space in Ibadan, Nigeria

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Abstract

Informal markets provide employment for a large spectrum of Nigerians. These markets provide access to livelihood for those willing to work within the market environment and operate within its rules. A major normative value, which also spells out the ethics in the informal market space, is solidarity-in-completion. Indeed, traders are in competition, but they also solidarize for individual and market progress. This article examines the context of solidarity in informal markets in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study was guided by the *Asuwada* theory of sociation, which explains the context of solidarity as ethical in traditional societies. Qualitative data were collected through 12 key informant interviews, 60 in-depth interviews, six focus group discussion sessions, and 12 case studies. Access to space and retention of such space in the market is structured by the local contexts of *oju* and *inu* relations that determine and contextualize solidarity, and normative solidarity regulates competition among traders.

Keywords

Association, *Asuwada* theory, Ibadan Nigeria, market solidarity, the Yoruba

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Introduction

Elton Mayo's Hawthorne studies in the 1920s and 1930s provided early empirical knowledge about solidarity in the workplace (Kompier, 2006; Wickström & Bendix, 2000). Mayo's studies focused on industrial organizations with strict supervisory regulations. Mayo postulated that despite strict regulations, workers collaborated to "control" the production process; the findings of these studies revolutionized sociological inquiries into the industrial sector. The informal sector is often sidelined despite the fact that it captures more than 80% of workers in the less industrialized countries and is somewhat premised on solidarity values (Al-Mataani, Wainwright, & Demirel, 2017; Massenot & Straub, 2016; Siqueira, Webb, & Bruton, 2016). One of such informal working spaces in Nigeria is the informal market system (A. O. Omobowale, 2011; M. O. Omobowale, 2012).

In Nigeria, the market space is an epicenter of economic activities, which accommodates a large spectrum of the working-class population, people who moved to the market by choice or due to the unavailability of formal jobs. It is a space of "easy" employment and a center of trading culture which is blended with the values and ethics of solidarity amid competition (A. O. Omobowale, 2011, 2014). Clark (1994), in a study carried out on Kumasi market in Ghana, confirmed association among traders and noted that "being known as a group member carries significant advantages" (p. 220). These advantages are social capital, expressed through trust, support, brotherliness, unity, and acts of help. These advance market solidarity and help to reduce risks; hence, traders are able to survive economic crunches, social, family, and personal challenges. Furthermore, the older women traders assist the younger ones to care for their children within the market environment. They encourage nursing trader mothers to breastfeed their children adequately and offer pieces of advice on treatment options, depending on the knowledge base of the "adviser" (Clark, 2008; Oshikoya, Sebanjo, & Njokanma, 2009; Ukegbu, Ukegbu, Onyeonoro, & Ubajaka, 2011).

The values of solidarity in competition are derived in the indigenous contextual values of *oju* and *inu* in Yoruba market relations. Literarily, *oju* means eyes while *inu* is translated as stomach in Yoruba language. However, in the Yoruba market culture, *oju* and *inu* have deeper meanings, which depict the social relations of the transactional space. *Oju* refers to the transactional space. It is the market space a trader acquires or is allocated to for the transaction of goods. *Oju* transactional spaces are diverse and they include *oju iso* (a collection of stalls where similar items are sold), *oju igba* (individual sales space), and *oju tabili* (a table stall) among others.[1] Also, in in-market relations, *inu* refers to associational acceptance and solidarity,

without which a trader may not be able to access a transactional space (A.O. Omobowale, 2014).

The central question being addressed in this article is how do traders solidarize in Ibadan urban markets, within the indigenous and contemporary realities of social and economic survival. The first objective of the article is to document the ethnography of Aleshinloye, Bodija, and Oje markets in Ibadan. The second is to contextualize *Oju* and *Inu* solidarity in Ibadan urban markets, and the third objective is to examine solidarity in a competitive space among traders in Ibadan urban markets. This article also analyzes the *oju* and *inu* values using Akiwowo's (1986a) *Asuwada* theory of sociation, which explains solidarity normative relations among the indigenous African population (A. O. Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). Solidarity for survival is embedded in the indigenous cultures of most Nigerian and African societies. It is important to understand how solidarity is practiced in the contemporary "Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP)"–influenced liberal economy, which has resulted in the mass pauperization of the population (Keita, 2016; Umezurike, 2012).

Solidarity is mostly associated with traditional values and indigenous cultures (Efremenko & Evseeva, 2012; Jabri, 2007). However, it is also important to note that contemporary literature indicates that solidarity is a strategic element of urban cultures and businesses (Derpmann, 2009; Lehtonen & Liukko, 2011). Solidarity is an indication of the "resurrection" of the community in modern and urban communities, and portends social capital for social survival and advancement; in short, solidarity is no longer an element of an archaic culture (Stråth, 2017). Solidarity is, in fact, a pragmatic response of the contemporary society to address challenges occasioned by the economic realities of modern liberal economies (Conroy-Krutz, 2018; John, 2017). Solidarity is environment bound. Its forms and practices contextually promote development and survival among individuals and groups; specifically, it is a strategic tool among the working class for sustenance, survival, and progress (Paret, 2017).

On one hand, Hoston's (2009) research on brotherhood among African Americans revealed that brotherhood was stronger among Africans in White-dominated neighborhoods than in African neighborhoods. This arose out of a fear of marginalization and exclusion; hence, in-group bonding provided support and group value to accentuate the interests of the African Americans. On the other hand, Saatcioglu and Ozanne (2013), while using Bourdieu's epistemology of habitus and cultural capital, explained the context of solidarity and the social construction of privileged status among residents of disadvantaged working-class neighborhoods. Also, Cheung and Ma's (2011) quantitative study among Hong Kong Chinese revealed that

while mechanical solidarity played little or no role in social solidarity, organic, distributive, and dialogic solidarity play strategic roles. Hong Kong's highly urbanized culture has drastically reduced kin and neighbor solidarity, but the emergent system builds consensus value among workers on the import of reducing unemployment to the barest minimum, to promote solidarity and advance development.

Solidarity in work and through work is the hallmark of relations and productivity especially in informal work environments and among blue-collar workers (Paret, 2015, 2016, 2017). Informal workers are unencumbered by strict bureaucratic values; thus, through subsisting social relations, they develop solidarity because of their similar experiences within their work environments (A. O. Omobowale, 2011, 2014). Likewise, in the formal sector, blue-collar workers share similar experience, which is often constructed as exploitative, and consciously and unconsciously bond and form solidarity within the work space to address work and domestic challenges (Bieler, Hilary, & Lindberg, 2014; Kelliher, 2017). The working-class bond provides the guiding principles of worker solidarity to be achieved, while still subject to the elite class, or engage in worker protests and revolution. The direction of literature on worker solidarity is mostly based on workers' anti-bourgeoisie bonding (see Kelliher, 2017; Olesen, 2004; Paret, 2013, 2017; Turner & Brownhill, 2016, for example). A lot of research has been conducted on African (in this case, Nigerian) markets. The primary focus of most literature is on traders' marketing and survival strategies (Clark, 1994; Pietila, 2007), the market leadership and structures (Moruff, 2012; Oladejo, 2015), and sexuality and health among traders (Odeyemi, Onajole, & Ogunowo, 2009; A. O. Omobowale, 2014). Little has been done on how traders solidarize. This research, therefore, examines how traders solidarize in Ibadan urban markets.

This article focuses on trader solidarity for traders' advancement in the informal economy. It particularly examines the contextual essence of *Oju* and *Inu* solidarity in the Ibadan market system. Ibadan is predominantly a Yoruba city; hence, the embedded solidarity in Ibadan markets is entrenched in the Yoruba culture. The "*Asuwada* Solidarity in Yoruba Market Context" section provides the theoretic epistemology of the research and also explains solidarity in the Yoruba context. The "Method" section presents the methodology while the "The Ethnography of Aleshinloye, Bodija, and Oje Markets" and "Contextualizing *Oju* and *Inu* Solidarity" sections discuss the ethnography of the research markets and the context of *oju* and *inu* solidarity, respectively. The "Solidarity in Competition" section empirically presents market solidarity in competitive spaces, while the "Conclusion" section concludes the article.

Asuwada Solidarity in Yoruba Market Context

This research is guided by the *Asuwada* theory of sociation. The *Asuwada* theory is a relativist epistemology propounded by Akiwowo, which is used to explain association, survival, and development in traditional societies, especially in Africa (Akiwowo, 1986a, 1986b). The *Asuwada* theory situates the existential essence of the individual in the value for the common good, while the social group to which an individual belongs to must also accentuate his or her good. The theory prescribes association as the whole essence of human existence, which is used to achieve human survival, progress, and development (Akiwowo, 1986b; Burawoy, 2011; A. O. Omobowale & Akanle, 2017; Onyeonoru, 2010; Payne, 1992). Akiwowo (1999) encapsulates sociation in the concept of *isuwa. Isuwa* is the individual capability to interact or associate for the common good and well-being. By extension, *isuwa* explains interactional solidarity among in-group members to achieve a group's common good and social progress. The common good is unachievable by sole effort. Every individual within a group must normatively sociate to achieve group success, as every member has a valuable part to play, whether material or immaterial. Simply put, individual success is limited, but group success, especially in consanguine, co-residence, and co-worker relations, is wholesome for social progress and development (Akiwowo, 1980, 1986b, 1991, 1999).

The *Asuwada* theory rejects the individualistic notions of most Western Universalist theories (Akiwowo, 1986a, 1986b; A. O. Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). Although an individual works and competes within one or more social groups, he or she expectedly does so within group normative values, and thereby advances group progress as guided by the normative values of communal and social development (A. O. Omobowale, 2008). To this end, individual members of a group are expected to advance group-approved normative character (*iwa*) that would advance collective effort (*ajumose*) so as to achieve social progress. Without the expression of group-approved normative character, the unity of purpose and collective effort for social progress would be unachievable. In Yoruba normative values, "money does not answer all things." The expression of normation character in interpersonal relations is a major denominator of ethical procedures in all human relations. Hence, for example, a wealthy person who lacks normative character and misbehaves in interpersonal relations would not be respected, but would be called *olowo igbo* (bush-wealth). In local interpretations, an *olowo igbo* is a wealthy, but uncultured, person. Likewise, as much as the aged are accorded respect, an aged who eschews ignoble character is called *agba langba* (ignoble or dishonorable elder; M. O. Omobowale, 2014). Hence, even during competition, individuals are guided by the norm of working within group-approved

normative character to achieve in collective efforts for group progress. Any individual who acts otherwise becomes labeled as a social deviant (Akiwowo, 1986a, 1986b). To achieve this collective effort, which is needed for social progress, the interacting individuals must exhibit normative character. An individual who exhibits normative character for associational unity assumes the status of an *omoluabi* (a noble or a responsible person of inestimable value) irrespective of his or her class or socioeconomic pedigree (Akiwowo, 1986b; A. O. Omobowale, 2008, 2010; A. O. Omobowale & Akanle, 2017). In short, normative character for associational or group unity and social development is the very essence of human existence. This principle guides communal and kin relations in traditional societies and explains solidarity in competition.

The Yoruba market system represents a perfect case of solidarity in competitive spaces. A typical Yoruba market is informally structured and is seemingly rowdy and crowded (Golub & Hansen-Lewis, 2012; M. O. Omobowale, 2012; A. O. Omobowale, 2014). Even though stalls may be available, it is not uncommon for traders to place their wares on every available space in front of shops, pedestrian paths, and roads within or along the market (Ayoola, 2009; Lawuyi, 2005; A. O. Omobowale, 2014). Typical Yoruba markets are reflections of its working class' rowdy and marginalized environment. Nonetheless, within the so-called disorderly and unstructured environment is a system of organization predicated on traditional values of solidarity regardless of the competition, for the common good (Lawuyi, 2005; A. O. Omobowale, 2014). A common saying in Yoruba markets is *inu ko gba, l'aye o gba* (if a thing is unacceptable or a person is not readily accepted by the mind [or an association as the case may be], then no space will be made for such). This saying reveals association as being vital to gain access to the transactional space. The existing market *asuwada* essence accentuates associational value. As much as traders' entry and exit from the market is open, access to the transactional space must meet the satisfaction of *asuwada* sociational value. It is not just by the payment of some market entry, tenancy, and stall fees (which of course must be paid), there must be an approval of the micro-level traders' associations, which prioritizes market unity for social progress; it is important to note that this does not rule out personal interests and the politics of dominance and competition which occurs in every social space. Ultimately, the Yoruba market system is predicated on the underlying essence of the common good, a major concept of solidarity value, which the *Asuwada* theory captures in its relative epistemology that explains character-sociation for social advancement and development in traditional societies (Akiwowo, 1986b; M. O. Omobowale, 2014; A. O. Omobowale & Akanle, 2017).

Method

The design of this research is ethnographic. The ethnographic design was adopted to capture the context of the embedded market culture of solidarity (Mariampolski, 1991; Riles, 2013). Data were collected qualitatively from selected markets in Ibadan. These markets are Bodija (the biggest foodstuff market in Ibadan), Aleshinloye (the biggest wares market in Ibadan), and Oje (the biggest traditional market in Ibadan). Four techniques of data collection were used: Observation was used in other to understand the culture of each market and to unfold the unacknowledged social relations and life patterns of the traders. Also, four key informant interviews (KIIs), 20 in-depth interviews (IDIs), two focus group discussions (FGDs), and four case studies (CS) were conducted in each market. In all, 12 KIIs, 60 IDIs, six FGDs, and 12 CS were conducted between July 2016 and March 2017. In each market, the key informants were market leaders (two males and two females). The key informants were between ages 42 and 66 years and had spent between 10 and 16 years in the market.

Interviews with each of the key informants were extensive; the cumulated interviews with each individual ran into a total of not less than 24 hours each. Individual traders were visited repeatedly to verify data, which were earlier collected, and to achieve reliable ethnographic validity. The IDIs were conducted with the traders. The discussants were also drawn from the traders. Traders who had participated in IDIs were not included in FGDs. Each FGD had between six and 12 participants. Finally, the CS were conducted with individuals who had spent at least 10 years in the market and were considered prominent members of the market system. The data gathered were then sorted, coded, and categorized according to the research objectives. Furthermore, they were contextually analyzed.

The Ethnography of Aleshinloye, Bodija, and Oje Markets

Ibadan markets are largely populated by working-class traders who are predominantly Yorubas, while the Igbos have an appreciable presence in Aleshinloye and the Hausas in Bodija; Oje market largely remains populated by Yorubas. A typical market in Ibadan has different types of stalls: These include covered and lockable stalls, open stalls, and open trading units (in forms of tables or counters). The markets have leadership structures charged with the role of regulating the market system and ensuring peaceful relations with the ultimate objective of unison for market progress. The physical layouts of the markets are lines, rows, and lanes depending on the type of goods

sold and the services rendered. Traders selling the same items or similar items are clustered in a row of stalls, known as *iso*. The compartmentalization of the market space makes it easy for buyers/clients to locate relevant stalls of interest, and also to identify as well as choose the preferred good(s) from the many on display. However, the aforementioned arrangement also comes with some disadvantages that primarily affect the buyers; many traders shout to attract buyers' attention, increasing the noise level in the market and also confusing the buyers, who are attracted by the traders' endearing statements. On the contrary, this arrangement favors traders' solidarity to fix and control the prices of goods and services. It also ensures that prices are not bargained below profitable levels, which may adversely affect the competitive value of other traders.

Aleshinloye Market is a relatively modern market. It was commissioned on July 5, 1990, by the then military governor of Oyo State, Colonel Sasaenia Oresanya. It was established to accommodate the old Dugbe market in the Central Business District of Ibadan, because Dugbe was prone to fire outbreaks and vehicular accidents, which claimed lives and property. Aleshinloye is a transactional center for wares and household equipment. The physical landscape of the market is adorned with blocks of shops, arranged in alphabetically labeled lines. The market is administratively organized and governed by selected traders in the market. The market leadership includes an *iyaloja* (market matron), *babaloja* (market patron), three different chairmen (general affairs, fancy traders, and crockery and enamel ware), and the executive cabinet members of each chairman.

Bodija market, like Aleshinloye market, is also relatively modern; it opens daily. In 1983, the government of Oyo State saw an urgent need to establish a large foodstuff market in Ibadan, as the existing ones were no more conducive for trading because they constituted hazards to lives and obstruction to vehicular traffic (Olaoba, 2000). Before 1983, the three significant foodstuffs markets in Ibadan were Dugbe, Mokola, and Oritamerin. Oritamerin was the largest of the foodstuff markets, but its space and facility were insufficient for the traders, and because it was located beside a major road, vehicular accidents often resulted in the loss of life and property. Traders resisted movement to Bodija market, until Oritamerin was shut on October 3, 1987, on the orders of the military governor, Colonel Adetunji Olurin. Subsequently, Bodija market grew and became one of the biggest in South Western Nigeria. The leadership of Bodija market comprises the market chairman, the *iyaloja* (market matron), the *babaloja* (market patron), and the chairmen of different traders' groups.

Oje market is different in nature, origin, and administration from the other markets. It was established over a hundred years ago and is under the guardianship of the Delesolu family. Oje market is largely dependent on traditional

values. The market stalls are arranged in such a way that traders of the same goods and services are clustered together in space. The market is a major center of commerce in traditional fabrics (such as *aso-oke* and *adire*), herbs and herbal medicine, fruits, and groceries. Oje market runs both daily and periodic markets. It is run under the leadership of elderly market women and men, but the market operations are also somewhat influenced by the Delesolu family, which is regarded as the original owner of the market; hence, the family receives various regular tributes daily, weekly, monthly, yearly, and during festive periods.

Senior members of the Delesolu family preside over a market court called *Igbejo* (a place of adjudication) where complaints and cases are considered minor such as transactional space disagreements, petty theft, rumor mongering and backbiting among the traders, and spousal and partner disloyalties. The court is utilized by many of the traders who go in for consultation and settlement. The court venue is also a meeting place for different groups of traders who deliberate on affairs of their traders' groups. In addition, the court settles disputes among members of the Delesolu family. The decisions of the court are respected and accepted as final. Oje market's administration is led by the *iyaloja* and *babaloja*, but the Delesolu family influences the selection process of the leaders who handle the administration of the market.

Contextualizing *Oju* and *Inu* Solidarity

Working-class solidarity is the bedrock of survival among the vulnerable low class (Zeitlin & Weyher, 2001). This is also the case in markets in South Western Nigeria. There are complexities of symbolism and linguistics used in the organization of the physical space and social relations in the Yoruba market space. *Oju* and *Inu are* contextual market constructions that condition access to the transactional space. The meanings embedded in *oju* and *inu* inform the value of a transactional space, the access to it, the maintenance of the same, and the context of market sociation and unison. Hence, the indigenous market system is a complex space, whose intricacies dissolve into meaningful access through the symbolism of market solidarity, namely *oju* and *inu.* Access to space is obtained through methods of solidarity, which are expressed and actualized through symbolic objects of presentations and representations, location, size, and forms of space and acquisition, and maintenance and derivation through market social relational systems. In this context, "space" also includes the rewards developed and received within an allocated transactional space.

The symbolic representations of "access to the transactional space" are organized as forms of personal and collective identifications linked to

persons, positions, and agencies. They are also an attestation to the aesthetics of spaces in the market by their connections to objects such as tables, stools, baskets, and trays placed on stools, among others, as forms of transactional spaces. As mentioned earlier, in literal terms, *oju* (eyes) and *inu* (stomach) are two parts of the body that represent both the transactional/economic space (*oju*) and the administrative (*inu*) entity of the market. The eye (*oju*), without which the human sight is dark, and the stomach (*inu*), which receives and processes consumed food for human development and survival, metaphorically represent the essence of the transactional space (*oju*) and the association or solidarity (*inu*) needed to achieve trader access and success in the market. Hence, *oju* and *inu* are associated with both individual and collective transactional values, and representation and acceptance within the context of solidarity in the market space. In Ibadan markets, *oju* denotes both physical sales space/point and the collective representation of the traders in the administration of the market.

Oju, in terms of the transactional space are of diverse types and they include *oju igba* (a sales point of an individual trader located in an open market space), *oju tabili* (a table sales point), *oju gbangba* (open space), *oju gutter* (a sales point located near a drainage), *oju iso* (stalls), and *oju oja* (market square), among others. Here, *oju* represents the channel through which individual trader accesses livelihood. It is a symbolic representation of the presence and existence in the hustle for survival. An informant said the following:

> Your *oju igba* is where you derive your daily bread. If you are deprived of it, that is a death sentence. Erring traders in this market may be punished by having their shops locked up or by seizing their *oju-igba* (sales point) (Bodija market).

This statement confirms the fact that space is an economic sight through which the traders as individuals and groups visualize and access survival, wellbeing, wealth, and fulfillment, as long as they are in line with market solidarity normative values. The *oju* transactional space is of utmost importance. Access to the transactional space is not just by having wares to sell or having the wherewithal to pay for a space. It has to be granted by the *inu* (market association), who also ensure that the admitted trader would work toward market solidarity and unison.

Oju is also about collective representations (*asoju*). The *asoju* is charged with the responsibility of standing by and defending the welfare of his or her economic/trader association. An *asoju* represents others by speaking on their behalf and the trust of balanced and fair judgment is bestowed on the

representative. The *asoju* is the eye through which other traders see into the world of right and the wrong, when it comes to decision making. According to one of the stakeholders,

> The *asojus* are the representatives of their people. They are the eyes through which their people behold power and take a decision. Whatever they close their eyes to, is closed, and they have a way of convincing their people to do what they think is right.

Another informant also gave the following explanation: "There are so many associations in the market, which is why it is important that they have representatives, who will be their eyes as regards general matters so that they can be carried along." The *asoju* in this wise ensures the solidarity of his group within the larger market space and also ensures peaceful co-existence in the market space. In essence, the *asoju* is the eye through which traders view market realities. Although an equal, the *asoju* holds a privileged position among traders.

Yet, another important *oju* is *oju iwe. Oju iwe* is a register. It is not just a register of traders. Rather it is a register of paid-up traders. Traders attend periodic meetings where they are expected to pay amounts ranging between N20 and N200 depending on their kind of association. Although attendance is "compulsory" for all members of a trade association, sometimes absence could be overlooked so far the register fee (*owo ojuwe*) is paid. Refusal or inability to pay the *owo ojuwe* over an extended period would result in delisting, and a delisted trader would be denied access to transactional space. Failure to pay *owo ojuwe* is an indication of trader de-association and withdrawal from trader solidarity. Simply put, *owo ojuwe* is a monetary allegiance to the market association a trader belongs to; additionally, an up-to-date registration through the payment of the *owo ojuwe* is the evidence of solidarity and the commitment to the trader association, in particular, and the market as a whole.

The concept, *inú*, or stomach, is a reference to the association that grants the transaction space. The market *inus* are the different traders' groups or associations; without their permission, admission into the market and access to transaction spaces is impossible. This value was vividly pointed out by a key informant:

> If you want space, you have to come to the market. There are some people who are like landlords, you have to see them and people like us too. If we have any space within our reach, we can give it out. [Another requirement is that] if the person is going to sell jewelry, bracelets and all that, the person has to attend

> the association's meeting and pay a token [admittance fee]. . . . The association is there because they protect their members' interest when problems arise. That is why we have such groups. It also stops people from misbehaving. People will not just come into the market and start doing whatever pleases them. . . (Trader, Aleshinloye market)

Another respondent in Bodija corroborates this:

> They [new entrants] have to learn. Yes! Because you cannot do well in whatever you do, if you do not learn. Can you be a teacher without going to school? And that is the mistake most people make. They will think that because they have money, they can just buy goods and sell . . . whatever you do not work for will not last . . . lawyers have their training, teachers also go through training . . ., there is no work without some training . . . you have to learn so that you become familiar with transactional techniques . . . Therefore, it is good to belong to an association. May God not allow us to have problems, we need these associations and once we join, we can then trade. (Trader, Bodija market)

The excerpts above confirm that market associations are the admitting *inu*. The *inu* (association) constitute traders who transact the same goods or similar goods, and the acceptance of the association is a license to the transactional space.

Alhaji *Power* (not real name) is a 55-year-old male trader. He once worked with a government agency as a low-level personnel, but was disengaged in 1985. When he found it difficult to make ends meet as a result of his unemployment, he moved to Oritamerin market as an apprentice to a food stall owner, and later moved to Bodija market. Alhaji *Power* specializes in the sale of rice and beans. He sources for his supplies from Northern Nigeria and Niger Republic. From being a poor retrenched government worker and an apprentice, Alhaji *Power* is at present a successful trader and a market leader. Also, Chief *Fair* (not real name) is about 55 years old. He started as a clock repair apprentice in 1983 at Dugbe market. However, he moved to Aleshinloye market as a skilled watch repairer when it was opened in 1990. Chief *Fair*'s trade is relatively on a small scale, but he holds enormous influence in Aleshinloye market as one of the market leaders. Another individual is Mrs. Lawal, who was the market matron at the time of this research. She had a 2-year clothing materials sale apprenticeship at Dugbe market. She stated that after the completion of her apprenticeship (popularly called *freedom* in local parlance, see A. O. Omobowale, 2013), she started small, but gradually expanded her business, and eventually emerged as the matron of traders in Ibadan. As *Iyaloja*, she holds a position of honor among the traders and one of her appellations is *iyaloja to l'oja* (the market matron who owns the market).

Each association has leaders who serve as associational administrators and *asoju* of the groups. A potential trader gains access to the market and a transactional space through the association. The need to maintain associational solidarity is a guiding "creed" and so admittance is neither by imposition nor by the affluence of a potential entrant. Admittance is by the acceptance of an entrant into a traders' association. This is also indicated in the local metaphor, *inu ko gba, l'aaye ko gba* (one rejected by the stomach, cannot have a space). Simply put, anyone rejected by the association cannot have a space. Of course, initial acceptance by the association does not translate to immediate admittance. A new entrant must go through the tutelage of old traders to learn the tricks of the trade, such as price fixing, hoarding, and scale manipulation. Other things to be learnt include positive strategies such as solidarity values, access to cooperatives, and access to microfinance institutions (especially the informal, such as usury loans) in the process of market survival. The period of tutelage somewhat provides the initial process of bonding and solidarity among traders in the process of achieving solidarity in competitive spaces for the peace of the market and its progress.

Solidarity in Competition

Competition is the hallmark of all marks. As traders advertise their wares, they try to outsmart their competitors to sell and make profit (Çelik, 2011; Cohen, 2010). Despite the solidarity value embedded in the markets studies, traders are engaged in contextualized competition still. Individual traders try as much as they can to gain buyers attention and attract more patronage than the others. Traders use the term *customer* to attract the attention of the would-be buyer and to also lay claim to the patronage of a familiar buyer whose patronage the trader has enjoyed repeatedly over a period of time. In Bodija and Oje, once the "customer" yields attention to a particular trader, others refrain until the "customer" moves on to price items from other traders. It is a norm that once a trader has attracted the attention or patronage of a potential buyer, others must refrain to discourage unhealthy competition which could jeopardize market peace. Also, traders extend their wares beyond the boundaries of the transactional space they are allocated to, to the extent of displaying their goods on the roads and pedestrian paths in front of their shops, stall, or sales points.

In Aleshinloye market in particular, it is not uncommon for traders to aggressively tug at their potential buyers to gain "customers" attention at all cost. Traders seek to "acquire" the "unclaimed" spaces around their transactional space and aggressively attract the attention of customers to increase patronage. In any case, if the goods are not displayed on or very close to the road, there is a sense of loss of advantage to competitors, specifically, a sense

of economic loss because buyers may pass their shops without noticing the goods that are available for sale inside their shops and stalls. It is also not uncommon to witness grudges and assaults between traders (especially female traders in the market). In many of such cases, the respective market associations and leaders see to the settlement of such conflicts to maintain market solidarity. An informant describes one of the ways by which the market associations and leadership advance solidarity and reduce conflict to the barest minimum in the market, below:

> The rules we have sanction anyone who fights in the market. The person will be suspended from the market. We do not fine those who engage in brawls. If we impose fines, they will say it's not more than money . . . Whoever goes against the rules of the market will stay at home for a week. So who will stay at home for a week and not know that he/she has lost a lot? So that restrains them, such that nobody gives any trouble and there is peace in the market. Whoever wants to make trouble should go into his/her home or neighbourhood to do such. It is not allowed here. In fact, no man can come into the market to beat his wife, if they want to fight, they should go to their house. (Trader, Oje market)

This was further corroborated by an interviewee at Bodija market:

> We have rules in this market. You must not be caught dating a married woman, you must not fight in the market, you must not steal anything and you must be neat and pay all your dues. Failure to comply may attract a fine, suspension or expulsion from the market. (Trader, Bodija market)

Simply put, market rules keep traders in check at the pain of punitive sanctions and enhance traders' solidarity. Disagreements and mistrust among traders are addressed by the market leadership and traders' associations. In a way, the rules "forcefully" keep the competing traders united.

The solidarity among the traders is also shown in traders' social capital. For instance, competing traders come together to establish cooperative groups where small rotating loans are given to co-traders to ensure the sustenance of their businesses. This was revealed in the statement below:

> We, the men in this market came together to form a group to assist one another. . . .when we started the association, we started to contribute money and if we see that someone's trade is not booming as it should, we lend him money and he will pay back in bits every month. We do not collect interest on such loans. Yes, our association has a cooperative union. We do not collect interests, rather, those who loan money pay back the exact amount they borrowed . . . even when it is not a person's turn to get a particular contribution, if he/she is in need, we will grant him a loan and when it is his/her turn to collect, we skip it, because

> it would have been marked that he/she has collected beforehand. . . (Trader, Oje market)

The cooperative unions that grant rotating loans are informal banks. They are organized by social capital values of love, trust, and brotherhood with an ultimate essence of sociation for solidarity and unison, and individual and group progress. Co-traders also give support to members in moments of grief and/or celebration. A trader corroborated this:

> In this market, we do things together. When I buried my mother, my sub-group members came in two buses to offer condolences. The leaders called me and handed over to me a huge amount of money contributed by all members. They advised me to use it to complete my house, since I had started construction. If you have not bought a land, they will make sure you buy a land with the money they gave you as gift during your celebration and also make sure you improve your capital base through it. (Trader, Oje market)

Another interviewee also said the following:

> I just got back from my maternity leave. All through the period I was at home, my group members visited me; they brought different gifts (money and food items). And now that I have resumed at the market, they have also decided to give me some loans with which I can start my business again. (Trader, Bodija market)

The data collected reveal that despite competition, traders are united. They assist one another to surmount challenges, to remain financially afloat, and to remain in business, in spite of the competitive nature of the market.

Conclusion

The informal market system plays a strategic role in providing employment and daily income for a vast population of Nigerians, who would have been otherwise jobless. It is a multi-ethnic center and a melting pot of cultures, which strives to protect individuals and groups and promotes their success through a peculiar system of market solidarity. Away from literature's overwhelming focus on market leadership and structures, traders' marketing and survival strategies as well as issues of sexuality and health in the market space, this research uncovered the context of solidarity and solidarizing through the meanings attached to the relations of *Oju* and *Inu* in the market space. *Oju and Inu* conditions market relations and somewhat inform the processes marketing, sexuality, health, and survival in the market space. Through training and apprenticeship, associational groupings, loyalty, and

control, and social capital, Ibadan markets have evolved systems of solidarity amid competition. In spite of the ethnography of the markets, in an indigenous market like Oje or contemporary multi-ethnic markets like Bodija or Aleshinloye, the culture of solidarity for survival cuts across all the markets. The informal market is a social structure with a peculiar culture of solidarity amid competition, which ensures that traders work in solidarity to achieve mutual and group success amid competition.

The interpretations and relations between *Oju* and *Inu* ensure traders' solidarity, success, and development of the market. *Oju* and *Inu* represent an acceptance and access to the transactional space; without these, a trader cannot function in the market. The *Oju* and *Inu* are also protected within the shared solidarity of the market. *Oju* and *Inu* are symbolically contextualized in physical space, association, and the representation and administration of the market which are all exemplified in *Inu* as an associational solidarity. *Oju* and *Inu* in Ibadan urban markets are also agents of socialization through which new entrants are acculturated into market solidarity. Success in the market is not limited to individual success, but also the success of the market as a social structure and a cultural space. Solidarity in the informal market system bonds traders and embeds the value of solidarity in them. Although working-class traders are in the market to earn a steady income and to ensure survival in the midst of competition, the value for sociation and bonding is a primary requirement every trader must be socialized into and internalize. Traders' associations institutionalize solidarity as a factor essential for gaining access to the market and sustaining the same. Furthermore, through in-market socialization systems, traders internalize solidarity values and the intricacies of survival within the market system. Informal market competition is not carried out with the primary aim of edging out fellow traders but with the aim of trading to earn an income, as well as to be in solidarity with other traders so as to achieve mutual survival and success for market unity.

In the final analysis, informal traders are in a contextual competition, which prioritizes solidarity, even in the midst of competition. This is not to assume that traders are always in agreement and never have conflicts. Irrespective of conflicting interests, the primacy of solidarity as a guiding ethic in informal market relations, and as a principal market value, predominates. By extension, this ensures that traders, irrespective of their financial statuses, find a transactional space to earn incomes, sustain the same and be "protected" or "saved" from possible bankruptcy through internal market structures of social capital.

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Note

1. *Oju* meanings are further discussed under "Contextualizing *Oju* and *Inu* Solidarity" section.

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