

Seeing the City through Traffic Hawking and Merchandise Differentials. Urban and Suburban Differentials in Lagos Megacity

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Abstract

One of the confounding and historical contradictions of Lagos megacity is its permanent state of traffic gridlocks that eventuate in what in this paper is conceived as “traffic hawking”. Although traffic hawking is a common site in Lagos, settlement patterns and economic class of dwellers mark a distinction between the city’s urban and suburban environments. Against this backdrop, this paper contends that the distinction is reproduced by an observed differential in the merchandise of the traffic hawkers. It underscores how social inequality is reinforced through the prism of traffic hawking. Data for the study were generated over a period of six months from four different locations that were purposively selected to represent urban and suburban settlements. Semi-Structured Interviews with 40 hawkers and 8 buyers were conducted between February 2019 to July 2019. Findings reveal that one of the most striking urban and suburban differentials in traffic hawking is the display of “live merchandise”. Highly priced pets, mostly dogs in various species and cross-bred hybrids and other sophisticated good, constitute urban hawkers’ merchandise. Where goods such as perishables and cooked food items are displayed by traffic hawkers, they are rarely and less patronized in urban settlements than in suburban locations. Regular urban traffic merchandise also includes car items such as windshield wipers, seat-covers, and foot mats; info-tech items such as storage devices, laptop bags, and phone pouches; painting and sculptural arts; cutlery and sport wares. The paper concludes that the observed differentials show income and consumption disparity between the urban and suburban dwellers and underscore the enduring colonial heritage of dichotomization of spaces within Lagos in the postcolonial dispensation, even when traffic gridlocks tend to level the spatial binaries in the city.

Keywords: traffic hawking, merchandise, income disparity, urban and suburban, Lagos State

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Introduction

Studies on Lagos State Nigeria are dynamic, numerous, engaging and vigorous, basically because it is the country's commercial hub centre. With an estimated 85 new immigrants per hour daily Tijani (2016), Lagos population is rising at an alarming rate. The challenging reality is that this increasing population is spread over a relatively small landmass of approximately 3577 km² out of which 39% are wetlands (Dekolo and Oduwaye, 2011, p. 122). Although Lagos land constitutes 0.4% of Nigeria's total landmass Opoko and Oluwatayo (2014, p. 19), it has enormous human capital. According to Hoornweg and Pope (2017, p. 213), Lagos has one of the highest urban growth rates in the world. Immigrants are attracted to Lagos because the state has proven to have an enduring legacy as the industrial and commercial centre of Nigeria (Adedire and Adegbile, 2018, p. 292). The word 'enduring' is striking as it indicates retention irrespective of confounding or contradicting challenges that it may be confronted with. This places it at an advantageous position over other states of the federation. It is why Lagos will continue to play both host and home to immigrants from far and near in search of capital(s) (economic, social, education, etc.). The ongoing urbanisation and optimal use of public and private transportation resulting in traffic congestion alongside other reasons is meant to cater to the teeming population. In Lagos, the subject of traffic is a recurring discourse in the daily conversation of its citizen's. It is being regarded as a monster that people have to live with yet, a normal setting prevalent in the state such that if the roads are traffic free, it plunges commuters into a state of awe and comments such as "why is the road free by this time of the day, have all Lagosians (as people living in Lagos State are popularly called) travelled or thank God the road is free" begin to escape the lips of road users. By Implication, traffic gridlock is considered the norm on Lagos roads and has become part of their everyday life. With the rapid and continuous industrialisation and urbanisation going on in Lagos, it is expected that more people will continue to relocate to the city, thus, leaving an overarching pressure on public infrastructure: one of which is transportation. As indicated earlier, population pressure in Lagos state is at an alarming level and the effect has permeated every fabric of the state. The effect on traffic is dreadful and contrastingly favourable to some others. It is so severe that Lagos public transport drivers charge exorbitant rate for fare with the premonition that they would spend longer time on the road, so, the passengers bear the cost of extra gas burnt. Ironically, survivalists (traffic hawkers) creatively and smartly make use of the congestion to earn a living. This research was motivated by the differential/variations in wares by hawkers in traffic at different locations noticed during a ride through the city of Lagos, and thus, seeks to examine traffic trade ware differentials in the reinforcement of settlement patterns, social inequality and economic status in selected locations in Lagos state. These trade ware differentials vary from place to place. While there are similarities in items sold during traffic gridlock, others are exclusive to particular locations. For instance, items such as (chin-chin, plantain chips, soft drinks, belts, wristwatches, compact disc, air freshener) were found in all study locations. Puppies and birds were exclusive to Lekki/Ajah express road. Hawkers of items such as, fitness kits, berries, apples, dressing mirror, artistic frameworks, toys, sun-dry bed were more prominent in Lekki/Ajah Road with only an insignificant number present in the other study locations. Details of this disparity is explored in the analysis section of this article.

Merchandise Differentials in the Materiality of Settlement Pattern and Economic Class

Economic, natural, socio-political and administrative factors have been classified as basis for spatial inequality (Raheem et.al 2014, p. 164, 167; Adedire and Adegbile, 2017, p. 192). These parameters not only create spatial segregation but also reflect in the consumption patterns of the people such that different lifestyles are produced and practiced. The characteristics of these lifestyles have cut through the city of Lagos to create a dichotomy of space and economic class in the state. The Lagos city space divided into island and mainland have come to be regarded as the high and low brow areas respectively. While the high-brow area is dominated by people of high and average economic income earners, the mainland has mainly middle class and low-income earners residents. However, the mainland also has to its credit some highbrow areas laced with smart houses like Ikeja GRA, Magodo etc. These different settlement patterns have attracted diverse scholarly discourse bordering on spatial unevenness, economic inequality, social class, urbanisation, etc. These studies have demonstrated how different variables drive spatial segregation and economic class (Olukoju 2018, p. 93; Adedire and Adegbile 2017, p. 192).

Alemdaroğlu (2016, p. 3) weaves his study around the nexus between spatial disparity and social inequality. He captures how the daily experiences of low-income workers in bourgeois location in Bilkent echoes social and economic inequality. The spatial and social margin that these workers traverse daily from their shanty or suburban settlement to high-brow areas in order to earn a living shape their personality or self-worth. This scenario resonates with the daily experience of Lagos suburban workers who travel distance to different parts of the city, especially the island, to work. Their experiences are basically hinged on their interactions with employers, colleagues and clients alike. These experiences are nuanced to include good and bad treatments, but the position of scholars like Reeves (2018, no page) appears to sympathise with low-income workers whose show of respect is expected to be limitless on the one hand, and are also expected to endure all manners of disrespect. As a matter of rule, it is the duty of the low-income or financially disadvantaged to pay loyalty to the wealthy. There is a sense in which these disparities leave psychological trauma with the workers who mostly are residents in sub or peri urban places. In a bid to capture the reliving of social binary, Yazıcı (2013, p.518, 519) analyses how the everyday experiences of commuters on traffic reinforces spatial segregation and social inequality. For him, facial expression, gestures or non-verbal cues are conspicuous indicators for class subjectivity on the go. This position reverberates with Lagos commuters in ways that are dynamic to the resonance of class and status.

In the light of understanding the mechanisms by which settlement patterns and economic class are reproduced, Kiran and Joshi (2012, p. 843) examines how human activities result in urbanisation, industrialisation and several other transformations which explains the pull of population. They drew attention to the effect of industrialization on the creation of urban sprawls. The study explicates how population growth or increase leads to traffic congestion which in this article, eventuate traffic hawking. Ding and Zhao (2011, p.48) had earlier expanded Kiran and Joshi's view by highlighting agglomeration economies, positive externalities, and spillover effects as factors that attract firms and businesses to locate together, creating cluster patterns of employment centres or nodes as factors that determine urban space. Put differently, the formation of urban space,

leads to the creation of spatial segregation and nowhere is this more evident than in Lagos megacity where central business districts are clustered on the island with vigorous on-going industrialisation and urbanisation projects. Also, (Ming and Zhao, 2006, p. 42) draws attention to the fact that spatial segregation is created as a result of government's urban-biased policies. Their findings reveal that settlement pattern by status is inherent in the master plan which further consolidates segregation initiated from colonial times. This kind of plan ab initio is class oriented, bequeaths power to the wealthy privileged. In a similar vein, Pierre (1987, p. 10) argues that 'class' is not a function of certain level of income, education or type of occupation rather, of how the accessibility of resource and power weakens the access of another. This is in conformity with (Ming and Zhao, 2006, p. 46) position that biased urban policy creates inequality. Be that as it may, the policy is one of favouritism which from inception, puts the underprivileged in an inaccessible position to resource and power. Along the same path is the position of Hechter 1972 (cited in Cohn, 1982, p. 477) that concludes that structural inequality is a function of the dominance of industrialisation in a particular region or location. It is important to state at this juncture that Sawyer (2014, p. 277) categorises Lagos Island under which Lekki/Ajah falls, as a Central Business District, which is why government's attention is concentrated there. Its continuous developmental projects both public and private is a factor critical to the interpretation of not only their economic status but other statuses. One of such other statuses is their educational advantage which according to Nunn et al. (2007, p. 42) is a yardstick for high social status. Now, these are all very interesting reviews meant to demonstrate how social status, economic inequality and settlement patterns are being constructed, created or measured using different variables. However, to understand the spaces of inequalities, as a product of economic class, social status, needs and desires, negotiations, the influx of population as an influencer of traffic which eventuate in hawking in traffic is examined. Traffic trade ware differentials as a parameter for categorising the city's settlement pattern and economic class is accentuated to allow a clearer understanding to the underlying causes of spatial segregation. As evident in the interviews conducted, economic status is reinforced not only in settlement locations, cars, quality of clothes worn, attitude or even looks, but also on the trade items sold in traffic in the different locations identified in this paper.

The Place of Government's Policies and the Concerns of Hawkers in Traffic in Lagos State.

In order to realise the vision of the Lagos megacity, the government has formulated series of policies that cut across different pressing issues in the state. To ensure that these policies are implemented, different agencies are formed- For instance, the Lagos State Environmental Sanitation and Special Offences Unit, (LSESSOU), and the Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI) are part of the state's agencies that are encumbered to ensure proper environmental culture. LSESSOU is the state's agency saddled with the responsibility of addressing the challenges of poor sanitary condition in the state. In addition to its primary responsibility, the agency offers support to sister agency like KAI to clamp down on street hawkers. To do this, the agency is empowered by law to prosecute street hawkers. KAI's primary responsibility is to keep hawkers off the road, and it is guided by the mandate of the policy to eradicate street hawking in Lagos State.

Several reasons account for this action and they range from security to health, environment, social, safety of the hawkers from road accidents in particular (Sam, Akansor and Agyemang 2018, pp. 92, 93). This government's action may just be informed by McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 41) position that hawkers are anti-developmental agents that hinders the development of a city. This sits perfectly well with the Lagos megacity vision. In line with the Lagos state policy to kick street hawking off the road is Sarpong and Nabubie (2015, p. 106) argument that the hawkers constitute nuisance and cause more harm than good for the government, other citizens as well as road users. As an affirmation to Sarpong and Nabubie's argument though contrary to their possible intention, some hawkers consider traffic hawking as the best medium of sales because they do not sell on credit, no payment of shop rent, neither do they pay levies to the government unlike traders who are in rented shops. They indirectly rob legitimate shop owners of patronages that may have come to them. Revealing is the fact that others have it as their last resort and would be quick to quit if and when life offers them a better survival opportunity.

In contrast, is the argument that traffic hawking is an enterprise and a form of employment therefore it contributes to the development of a city McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 49). However insignificant their contribution maybe, they cannot be erased from the contributors list of Internally Generated Revenue of the state. They, without gainsaying, increase the sales of production companies, transportation and expend money on many other logistics which trickles down into government's purse. This is why McGee and Yeung, (1977, p. 49) suggest policies that are more liberal and accommodating for the hawkers. This suggestion is reflected in the requests of the hawkers as they either want the government to provide better opportunity for them to earn a living or relax existing policies prohibiting traffic hawking. Incidentally, whatever sense the traffic hawkers make of their current location or trade, striving for the better and hoping for a better future are common narratives that reveal the engagement is temporal.

Study Area

The rapid industrialisation going on in the state has singled out the state for an impressive status as 'the centre of excellence'. The state has achieved a commendable relevance both locally and globally due to its flourishing trade and commerce industry (Cheeseman and de Gramont 2017, p. 457). Its demographic location by the sea and a status as a former capital to the country further consolidates its enduring status as Nigeria's commercial nerve centre. These two fundamental privileges have continued to sustain the myriads of activities which the state is predisposed to. Its division into mainland and island to mean low and high brow areas is founded on the concentration of housing types, literacy level, social network, economic or commercial activities/power, government presence etc. For these reasons, this study was carried out in four selected locations divided into two low/average income earning areas and two high/average income earning areas in the state. They include Maryland/Ikeja and Lekki/Ajah as urban areas while Ikorodu and Iyana-Ipaja make up the suburban areas. Maryland/Ikeja is on the Lagos mainland with Ikeja as the state's capital. This route is significant to this study because it connects the Murtala Muhammed International Airport while Lekki/Ajah is on the Lagos Island separated by the Third Mainland Bridge.

With exclusive houses, heavy urbanisation and industrialisation prominent on the island, it is a core central business district of the state. Iyana-Ipaja and Ikorodu which represent suburban areas are mainly dominated by residential homes, and pockets of private businesses operating mainly on small and medium scale. Iyana-Ipaja and Ikorodu are link roads that connect to the neighbouring Ogun State. Both suburban areas were selected for its strategic location that connects it to Ogun State- a state which many regard as an extension of Lagos. The population congestion in Lagos has forced many Lagosians to relocate to the neighbouring Ogun State (Onilude and Vaz 2021, p. 16).

Methodology

Following the nature of the study, qualitative approach with an ethnography design was employed for data collection. Hawkers were approached at each study site and the research objectives explained to them. Their consent was sought before recording was done for ethical purpose. Semi-structured interviews were recorded electronically for onward transcription manually. This method prevented the loss of information and also served as a reminder for unspoken expressions and gestures. Semi-structured interview guide was used to direct the path of this study. The essence for adopting an open-ended question is for follow-up questions that allows the interviewer probe for more explanation and clarity from hawkers. Interviews were conducted to the point when respondents only repeated what had already been said.

While hawkers were approached either when they are taking a rest or when they return to their storage bases to restock, buyers were approached when the traffic is jammed or when they pulled-up to buy wares from the hawkers. Some buyers did turn down the request for an interview for personal reasons, while some obliged the researcher. Interviews with buyers lasted between 8-10 minutes. The research was conducted for a period of six months from Feb; 2019 to July 2019 putting into consideration morning and evening rush hours. The rush hours fall between 6am-9am and 4pm-10pm. These hours are peak periods when the traffic is severe and when hawking activities are equally at its peak. During the off-peak periods when there is free flow of traffic, the hawkers either go to restock, rest or prepare for the next traffic congestion.

For each location, 10 hawkers and 2 buyers were interviewed. Questions were asked regarding their general knowledge about traffic hawking and merchandise differentials, why buyers choose to buy from these hawkers, their experiences (challenges and gains), the role of location to their trade, what they think about traffic hawking in the other areas understudied, the role of the government and its policies on their activities, their plans for the future etc. Although demographic information like age, state of origin, cause of hawking in traffic, year of relocation, and gender were collected but were not given priority in the discussion of the article because it had very little effect on the data collected. Although questions around quality checks were asked, attention was directed at the types of wares sold especially as quality checks on goods are done by the National Agency for Food Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and Standard Organisation of Nigeria (SON). Hawkers confirm that they only buy their wares from reliable sources especially dealers of the products they sell, so as to avoid selling fake or expired products. Nevertheless, simple quality check was done by the researcher who deliberately purchased goods to confirm their expiry dates and their registered

NAFDAC or SON'S numbers. All products purchased by the researcher either had their registration number, or had a farther expiry date. Data was grouped under themes, and analysed using deductive and explanatory methods. The study also relied on relevant secondary literature to deepen the study.

Findings and Discussion

This section puts the responses of hawkers through deductive and explanatory analysis. Responses are systematically grouped under themes for coherence.

Income capacity

This theme examines the nexus between income capacity and traffic merchandise. Here, road users earning capacity are determining factor in the type of wares that are sold in traffic. It also underscores the relationship between income capacity and choice of goods bought. Unavoidably, the sense drawn from this connection is that one's standard of living, is reflected in the choices of quality and types of goods and services purchased/patronised. Having recognised this fact, the hawkers and like any trader, ensure the types, price and quality of goods are in tandem with the standard of the location of their business. Below is a response by Solomon, a 24 years old hawker who incidentally stands as a representative of responses that highlights this fact:

“... you know this area is mostly occupied by rich people. They have the financial capacity to purchase the things we sell. As a matter of fact, if we sell local or low-quality wares, they will not stop to buy and it will affect us because we get our daily bread from here. Perhaps you can get local items on the traffic on the mainland. That is where you find those low grades of people”.

(Interview, Lekki, March, 2019).

Solomon demonstrates a good knowledge of income and merchandise differentials as obtainable on the Island and mainland of Lagos. His response also provides an understanding on how their survival is dependent on the taste of commuters whilst drawing a sharp contrast between both locations under consideration. In an elucidating contribution, Chibuzor's singular instance using quality and types of cars captures the income dichotomy that is intended in this paper. For him, more exotic cars ride on the Lekki/Ajah Road as well as Maryland/Ikeja. Quite vividly put, “*you do not expect a wound-up exotic car to stop, wind down the window only to buy coco*” (*cocoa yam chips*). From this narrative, it is presumed that people who drive exotic cars are wealthy and too sophisticated to buy such local snacks. They would rather stop at an eatery or supermarket as the case may be to get whatever they want. Perhaps that explains why sachet water is not commonly sold by hawkers on Lekki/Ajah Road but will certainly be found such in Iyana-Ipaja as well as Ikorodu.

Taste and income are not only brought to fore in this response but goes to determine behavioural patterns of people. Impliedly, there are activities or actions, that come with status which places a kind of restraints or permissions on a person.

Buyers Influence on Sellers and the Question of Attitudinal Differences

Of the 10 participants in Lekki/Ajah study area, 7 attributed their physical transformation to their everyday contact with enlightened customers. They claim to have been greatly and positively influenced by the show of love and care from customers. The impacts created a sense of belonging and importance which is why respect is suggestive of distance but love and care brings closeness. Others on the other hand have kept the contact as strictly business. There is also the sharp improvement in dress sense, body maintenance and outlooks, as well as their expressive capabilities and character. Audu (28) male who sells apples and berries at Lekki explains in the exact words below:

“Before I leave my village to Lagos, I cannot talk English but now as I sell on this Lekki road I can able to talk and understand my customers. Even at home, I can talk well to my neighbours now”
(Interview, Lekki, April, 2019).

Though grammatical errors are noticeable in Audu’s response, it does not take away the understanding conveyed in his thoughts. Audu’s narrative reflects the influence of interacting with the elite His description is comparative in retrospect to show his improvement in his communication skills. He recognizes the transformation that has evolved in him and he is appreciative of his influencers who are his customers. The impact of the business interaction between the buyers and sellers hawking during traffic also rubs off on the character of the sellers. Recognising that his location bears influence on his improvement again, is a reminder of the disparity in standard and calibre of people residing in the area. Aniema, a 33 years old female hawker, who sells groundnut, gave a narrative which corroborated Audu’s position. According to her, she has learnt and become friendlier following her daily interaction with her customers whom she qualified as “humble”. She confirms that some of her customers are friendly and would go the extent of inquiring about her day and sales, thus giving her a sense of relevance and love. However, a quick realisation that generalisation can be erroneous, the seller swiftly acknowledges the impolite manner with which some other buyers talk to them. According to her,

“...some of these rich people are so rude with condescending look, but because we have to sell to survive, we just ignore their insults”
(Interview, Lekki, March, 2019).

As illustrated by these narratives from Audu and Aniema, there is a shared experience of positive influence from customers, but on the flipside, is the confirming view of Reeves (2018, p. no page number) that respect is primarily the responsibility of the disadvantaged. Similar experience was echoed in the narratives of the suburban areas studied. Kelechi male, (42) who sells air freshener on Iyana-Ipaja traffic says:

“some customers talk to us calmly while some talk to us harshly. They insult us but when you remember you have children at home to feed, you just behave as if you didn’t hear them. You know when someone is poor, such a person is aggressive”
(Interview, Iyana-Ipaja, March, 2019).

For this participant, responsibilities at home is a driving force that aids him employ a coping mechanism of silence. His iconic connection between the buyers' economic status and attitude is extreme, albeit, a reiteration of Aniema's dualistic position of buyers' attitudinal differences to hawkers. The acknowledgement of attitudinal dynamics by buyers underscores Alemdaroğlu (2016, p. 14, 17) explanation of the mixed daily experiences by low-income earners who work in gated communities or bourgeois locations in Bilkent.

These narratives are nuances of the attitude exhibited by buyers of merchandise in traffic but should not be considered valid to rate as normal or general because they are overtly and covertly exhibited at individual discretion. They underscore the connection between attitude and personality, as well as the critical role spatiality plays in the personality of a person. By implication, your environment shapes your personality. The environment on its own is considered a field upon which other actors perform. It is therefore instructive to note that irrespective of economic, social or spatial segregation, different things may inform peoples disposition at different times of the day and should not be permanent labels on them. This failed to reflect in the views of the respondents who may be seen at some point as sentimental or subjective.

Ekene, 24 years old university student, who sells windscreen wipers in Ikorodu believes that no area emerges in a single day; development is a gradual process and with the right strategy in place, development will catch up with rural or peri-urban areas. His interesting contribution is a calculated strategy he believes earns him better than hawkers on the Lagos Island. He said: "I am selling this in this area because I will not make much sales in Lekki. In Lekki, most of the cars are in very good conditions unlike here. Most of the cars that ply this road have one fault or the other but the owners will continue using them until they pack up". He furthered his explanation:

"Ikorodu is equally a developing area just like Ajah but government's concentration is on the island that is the reason the island has more opportunities than the mainland especially areas like Ikorodu" (Interview, July, June, 2019).

Ekene's vivid explanation echoed Ming and Zhao (2006, p. 45) Olajide, Agunbiade and Bishi (2018) analysis of how the markers of urbanisation and urban-biased policies reinforces urban-rural inequality. Governments have been accused of playing the favouritism card for Lagos Island with little attention given to the mainland. Since the island has within its ambit the most concentration of the affluent and considered a CBD, it goes without saying that the government would raise more IGR from that axis of the state hence, the concentration of urbanisation and industrialisation. Ekene's explanation for selling such items in Ikorodu may not be absolutely valid considering that the statement criticizes itself to mean that most vehicle drivers who ply the suburban areas do not engage in vehicle maintenance, nevertheless, he was not out of place. Ming and Zhao (2006, p. 45) posit that the migration of labour from a location would reduce the competition of labourers in that area and also increase their wage. If logic is applied to this situation, it would mean that the less the people selling such items in Lekki/Ajah, the less the competition and the more their sales. However, in Ekene's case, he is more interested in regular and high turnover than uncertain sales with high profit margin.

The nexus between wares differentials and spatial segregation.

This theme considers some exclusive merchandise in the study areas. The next verbatim transcription shows the dynamics in the perception of security and safety demonstrated by residents in the two divides of the city. According to Geoffrey a 32 years old man who sells live puppies:

“...it is only in this area that I can sell these pets because the people here are fascinated by things like this. Is it in the suburbs that the people there are even afraid of pets that I would go and sell? They are rich here so they need it” (Interview, Lekki, May, 2019).

Geoffrey’s response highlights the intrinsic security benefits of dogs. Dogs are effective and efficient animal trained for various purposes such as security, detection, pet, etc. Austin (2000, p. no page number). This statement alludes to the patterns and wealthy lifestyle of people living in Lekki/Ajah. Deductively, they are protective of their wealth hence the need for dogs often used as security guards for their homes. In the same vein, from his narrative, one is not likely to find residents of the suburban particulate about acquiring a security dog for protection because they don’t consider themselves as possessing anything invaluable that would attract any form of harm to them. Nevertheless, the research discovers that a cogent reason some suburban dwellers don’t acquire dogs for any of the aforementioned reasons is because they may have neighbour(s) who abhors it since in most cases, they live in rented apartment. The people living in urban areas are most likely to be staying in their owned apartment which needs no approval from anybody to take such decision on dog acquisition. When asked why Richard was selling books on the traffic on Maryland/Ikeja road, he simply said

“...the people plying this road are literate, enlightened and exposed. Also, they know the importance of these books and have the time to read it. I said that they have the time to read books because they don’t belong to the struggling class who spend almost all their time looking for means of survival. My target audience have money” (Interview, Maryland/Ikeja, March, 2019).

This explains why Nunn et al. (2007, p. 42) understanding of a social world characterised by earnings, life chances, standards etc. is tied to education. For this seller, people living in the suburbs are too preoccupied to read books or perhaps, not enlightened or exposed to know the significance of knowledge acquisition from books. Their focus is so fixed on how to make ends meet such that reading books does not form part of their daily schedule.

Tomiwa (29) male who sells inflated mattresses along Maryland/Ikeja road gave an insight into the significance of the route as a determining factor for the types of items sold. He holds the notion that the route is mostly used by the wealthy since it connects the island where the rich lives to the local and international airports. According to him,

...we have to sell sophisticated wares as most customers get them in orders to engage themselves during their journey or even just drop in

the car for their driver to take home. Some of them do not have the time to go to the market so buying-on-the-go is an opportunity for them to get their needed items” (Interview, Maryland/Ikeja, February, 2019).

Tomiwa unveils the importance of route to the types of goods sold. In the same vein, route echoed economic class and vice versa. It won't be surprising if you do not find the affluent plying any of the roads in the suburbs because their social and economic status may possibly have no link to those areas. One can equally relate to the fact that the wealthy also have busy schedule trying to be better or at least maintaining the status quo. My interaction with hawkers in Iyana-Ipaja traffic reveal that instant consumables are of high demand. Fortune (30) female has this to say

“Customers buy snacks more on this road. Most of them work for *ogas* (boss) either in Ikeja or on the island. They get home late and are usually too tired to cook hence the need for on-the-road eating. But most of the people on the island have maids at home. So, they do not stress themselves preparing food when they get home late as dinner would already have been ready by the time they get home” (Interview, Iyana-Ipaja, June, 2019).

There is a corroboration between what Fortune said and Sawyer (2014, p. 277) referring to Ikeja as been known for employment. Fortune's narrative brings to the fore the confirmation that Ikeja and Lagos Island are dominated by employers who are basically not bound by the 8am or 4pm standard resumption and closing time respectively. They have the prerogative of time and days control so; they decide when to resume or close from work. They could leave the office earlier or later which may not subject them to spending long hours on Lagos traffic. They could equally take a day off work as they deem needed. The kind of lifestyle urban settlers observe is the reason perishable sellers take some caution in preparing their wares for sale. Seyi (24) female, who sells vegetables on traffic in Lekki, expresses a sense of health consciousness portrayed by buyers anytime they stop to buy her wares. That consciousness according to her informs the quality of vegetables she sells in terms of freshness and without blemish having painstakingly selected the vegetables. It is inferred that such degree of health consciousness is not exhibited by commuters on the mainland especially in the suburban areas of this study. This gives credence to Keene and Padilla, 2014, p. 393; Pearce (2012, p. 1922) view that spatial stigma has its effect on health inequality. In this circumstance, commuters in the different regions of study, exhibits different levels of health awareness which reflects on their consumption culture.

Spatial segregation and negotiation power.

The author's interview with Ifeanyi (31) male who sells sunglasses on Maryland/Ikeja traffic, reveals a rather controversial dimension to the nexus that exists between the calibre of people that ply a route and the negotiating power of the parties involved (sellers and buyers). He emphatically reiterated that he could and would not be able to cope with selling on the traffic on Iyana-Ipaja or Ikorodu roads because commuters in

those areas have strong negotiating power and would prefer to go to the market to purchase. He said, "I won't make the kind of profit I make here in those areas". Obviously, this seller is taking advantage of the economic status of the customers who buys from him. Ironically, he does not consider his exorbitant price as exploitation, but rather as having better bargaining strength which aligns with the experience of one of the buyers as highlighted in the succeeding section below. Diamantopoulous 1991 (cited in Kienzler and Kowalkowski 2017, p. 103) contends that pricing is determined by various factors amongst which is environment, firm objectives, customers' characteristics and pricing situation. Using the discriminatory pricing strategy, Ifeanyi combines these factors to fix prices for his wares to his advantage.

Exploring buyers' views and experiences of hawker in traffic

Responses from some buyers show a myriad of reasons for buying items in traffic. For madam Ruth, she considers it stress free and time gained to be used for attending to other needs. Like Chaudhari (2022, p. 7) puts it, inability to accomplish task owing to poor time management will result in fatigue and stress. Chaudhari position is relatable especially as this typically justifies the action of Ruth, who is compelled by her overwhelming activities to buy from the hawkers in traffic, and it does not matter at this point the relativity in price provided her time is saved. Mr. Ayo thinks the items are cheaper in comparison to what is being sold in malls or supermarket. Even though like the first respondent, he may have saved himself the troubles of going to the market and also time, this respondent is driven by the price advantage that he considers as "cheaper". As for Engr. David, he feels it is his own little way of encouraging people who are not as privileged as he is by not selling on the road and running after cars. Engr. David is moved to empathy for the hawkers and as such patronises them to encourage and support their trade. For him, their survival is tied to the fortune on the street, and they should be given the chance to at least survive.

On the other hand of the spectrum are people who would not buy from traffic hawkers because they consider their items too expensive and would rather go to the market to buy. Mr. Jude narrates how he bought a casual slipper on the traffic in Lekki and it was over #1,000 cheaper in the stall close to his house. For him, traffic hawkers are extortionists and should be off the road. One may consider his position as hasty or general but again, he is not to be brushed aside because while his opinion is factual because of his experience, it may be a fallacy to another who may have bought same product from the traffic at a cheaper rate. Others say they would not buy because the hawkers usually do not have varieties from which they could make a choice. Yet some others are of the opinion that traffic hawkers sell sub-standard products that won't give them value for money expended.

Conclusion

This paper analysed traffic trade merchandise differentials in the materiality of segregation in four different study areas in Lagos state. An ethnographic study found traffic merchandise differentials not only reveals the different strands of segregations and inequalities overwhelming the state, but also unfolds the influence of the commercial activities on the hawkers' behavioural pattern through daily interactions

with customers. The paper found that, for most respondents, the narratives provided for the differentials are substantially true when juxtaposed with previous related literature. Economic capacity, elitism, level of literacy, exposure, spatial difference, etc. resonated in the responses of participants. Finally, it is imperative to state that with the alarming population growth in Lagos state, traffic gridlock would always eventuate traffic hawking which on one hand emphasises the polarity between spaces, and on the other, levels the binary between urban and suburban areas of the state.



Fig. 1. Lagos hawker by Lagos Culture blog.

Seeing the City through Traffic Hawking and Merchandise Differentials



Fig. 2. Photo credit: The Guardian Nigeria News



Fig. 3. Photo credit: Participating Artists Press Agency

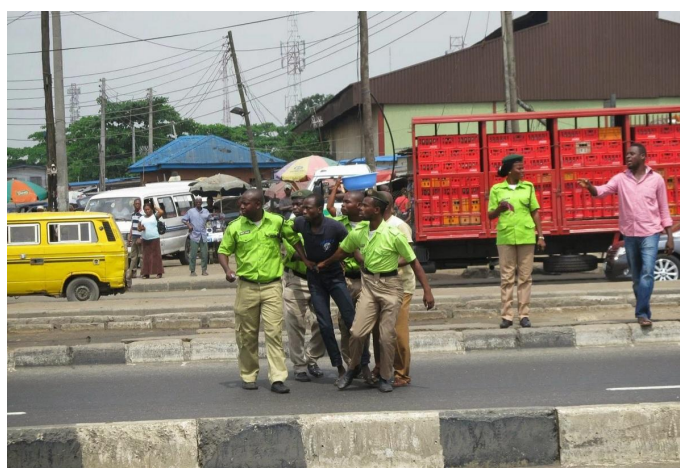


Fig. 4. A traffic hawker being arrested by Kai. Photo credit: TheInforNG.



Fig. 5. Traffic hawkers taking advantage of the traffic congestion. Photo credit: Alamy.



Fig. 6. Photo credit: The Nigerian Voice.

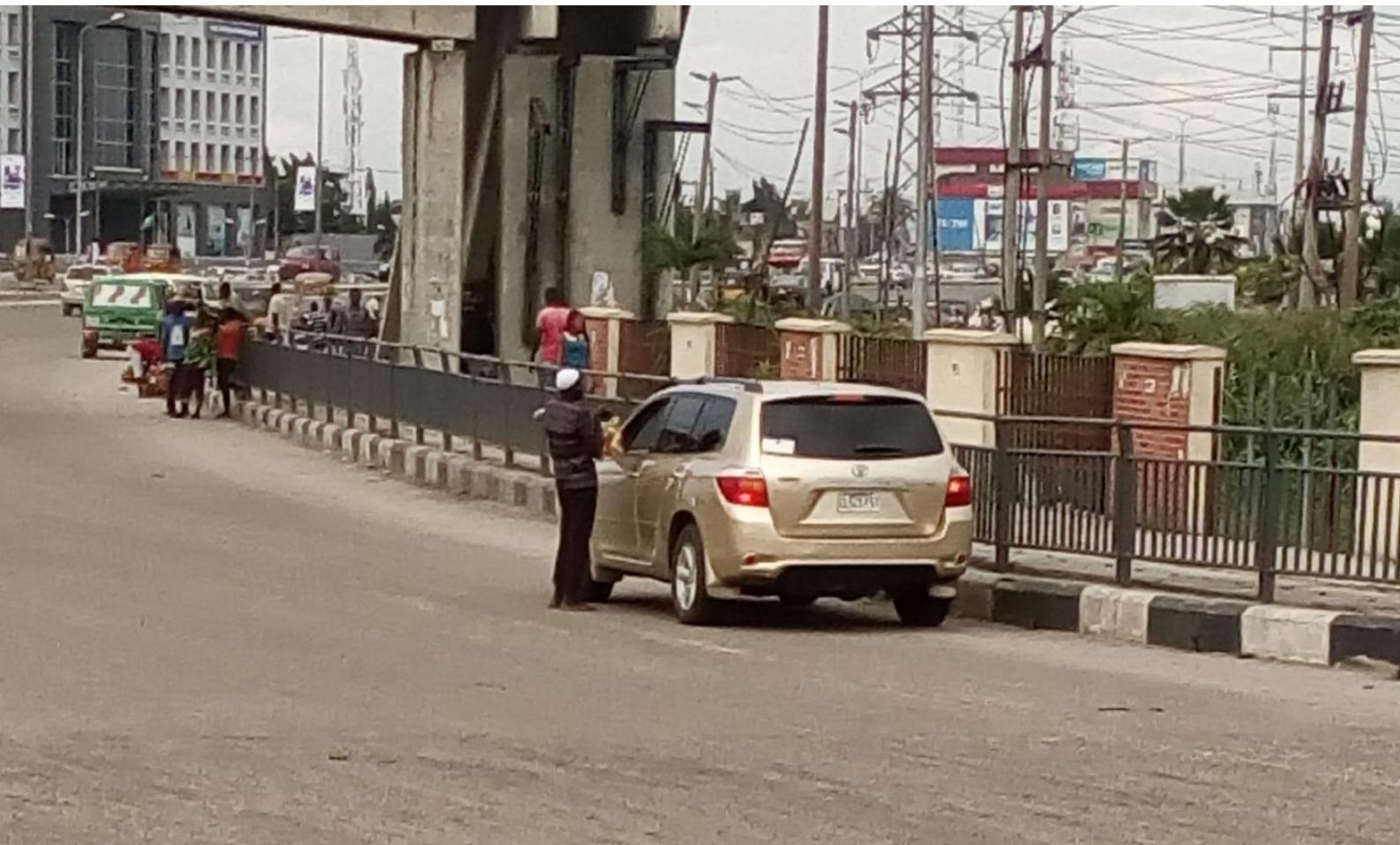


Fig. 7. Photo showing a commuter who pulled up before negotiating with a traffic hawker. Photo credit: Author.



Fig. 8.
Photo credit:
African Ripples Magazine.



Fig. 9.
Photo credit: Punchng.com.

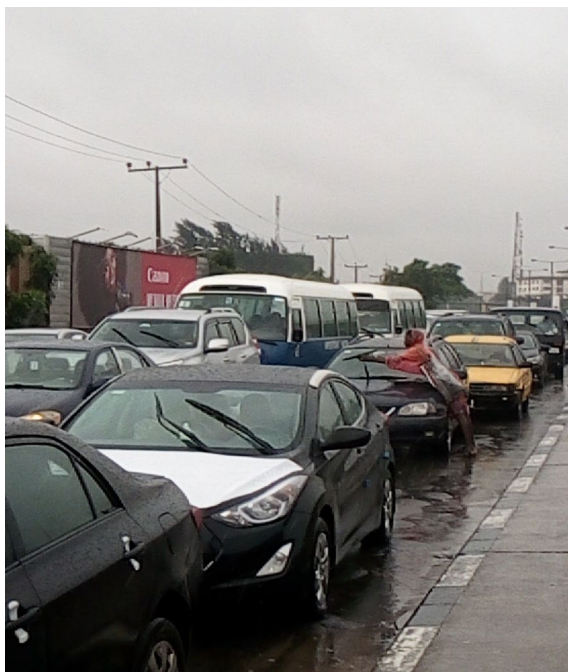


Fig. 10. A traffic hawker fixing windscreen wiper for a customer in the rain. Photo credit: Author.



Fig. 11. Picture showing a hawker transacting business with a commuter during traffic congestion. Photo credit: Author.



Fig. 12. Layout of high rising buildings on Lagos Island. Source: ArchNaija



Fig. 13. Photo credit: the MLS Properties. <https://www.mls.com/>

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