



THE SOCIAL LIFE OF CONNECTIVITY IN AFRICA

Edited by **Mirjam de Bruijn**
and **Rijk van Dijk**



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CHAPTER 11

Ajala Travel: Mobility and Connections as Forms of Social Capital in Nigerian Society

Oka Obono and Koblowe Obono

Introduction

Nigerian society is a complex amalgam of systems of stratification and inequality although the question of how far social mobility has changed the norms of its sedentary moral economy has not received the kind of scholarly attention it deserves. This chapter advances the argument that, while human mobility is indeed an integral part of the country's ancestral migrant meta-narratives, with most of its settlements coming into being due to the actions of migrants, mobility has assumed a different form since independence in 1960.

This new pattern of emigration reconnected the country to a wider global society that had previously dominated relations with it in less transactional or equitable terms. Its distinguishing feature was that its self-consciousness was newly styled in a globalizing world. Within this autonomy and in its emergent aberrant forms, it was sometimes undertaken against the legislative will of host countries. The event was encapsulated in a worldview that assessed mobility and the establishment of ties as essential to the formation of social capital and the enhancement of one's material, economic, cultural, and political quality of life.

Modern mobility in Nigeria acquired its acquisitive tendencies within this latter subphase of emigration. Mobility on the scale described, that is, in its transnational character, was perceived as a strategic means for improving welfare during the course of a person's life and it was in general restricted to the

emerging elite. For this reason, and in this form, modern Nigerian emigration constituted a break from two major historical patterns of trans-Saharan and trans-Atlantic African migration in that both were forced. The first pattern was driven by business interests in human trafficking and slavery, and the second was short-lived by comparison, taking the form of military conscription of Black platoons to assist Allied efforts during the First and Second World Wars.

In neither of these previous patterns of slavery or conscription did emigration or mobility stem from the autonomous decisions of the migrants, nor was the movement expected by any of the parties to provide direct economic benefits or viable political connections to them. The migrants were, in both patterns, either chattels or conscripts and had no motives or aspirations of their own. They were the victims of forced migration motivated purely and simply by European business and political interests.

The third pattern of historical migration can be distinguished by its self-consciousness. Migratory motivations and aspirations were autonomous in the sense that emigration was self-directed and, possibly, self-initiated. This thus accounts for the organization of the historiography around Ajala. While migration remained a form of collective activity, in its motivations, its autonomy became more sharply defined than what took place earlier as international travel. This is the attribute that has characterized Nigerian emigration since the 1960s and has made it distinctive. Nonetheless, it is true that “until the early 1980s, few African professionals, especially Nigerians, saw emigration as a rewarding option” (Adepoju 2010: 13). But it is equally clear that a critical mass of migrants had begun to flow outward more than 20 years earlier.

The emigration described by demographer Aderanti Adepoju, doyen of African migration studies, was in fact stimulated by worsening economic conditions that were associated with the structural adjustment policies of the military junta in the 1980s. This subphase was an intensification of a process that had already begun and was not its beginning. In this sense, early postindependence emigration was the third main phase of Nigerian international migration. It emanated in that period from strategic thinking reflecting the aspirations of the indigenous elite as they scrimmaged and maneuvered for opportunities in what can be characterized as a postcolonial scramble for Nigeria.

A recent Brazilian article by Maia (2011: 393) argues that “there has been a rich discussion concerning the consequences of the spatial turn for social theory, but both its full potential and the contribution of non-European forms of spatial imagination remain unexplored.” This suggests the need for a tradition

of geographical thinking that provides different frameworks for global spatial imagination in which:

The aim is to argue that this perspective helps to de-centre social theory by providing new spatial images that diverge from those related both to the language of the city and the Eurocentric perspective that still characterizes the spatial turn.

(*Ibid.*: 392)

In line with this renewed emphasis on “the power of imagination in geographical discourse” (*Ibid.*: 401), the metaphorical analysis presented in the next section shows that the coincidence of this third wave or pattern of mobility with independence was not unusual. Instead, it was consistent with the emergence of a nonsedentary worldview, with a class that endorsed it. This metaphorical analysis conduces with conventions in linguistic research and communication theory that hold that historical fables and metaphors are germane to comprehending such contemporary forces and phenomena as modern elite mobility in Nigerian society. It resituates individual behavior within a fusion of time and space in which we present some preliminary syntheses of social capital and adaptations of a conceptual framework for studying aspirations proposed by Sherwood (1989). These syntheses help to relate mobility to the discourse of motives, perceptions, and aspirations intended to establish connections and increase social capital in the way in which Bourdieu first formulated the concept.

The Global Mobility of Local Clichés

A hermeneutic assessment of how mobility was redirected and intensified soon after independence when governing class formations were beginning to crystallize shows that this mobility was simultaneously shaped by numerous global factors as well as aspirations that were, to a large extent, endogenous. The assessment relies on stories that need to be decoded before their metaphors of mobility can reveal their connections with the Nigerian state and the global economy. The procedure is based on ideas contained in the article entitled “Meaning through Metaphor: Analogy as Epistemology” by Livingstone & Harrison (1981) that suggested that decoded metaphors were indispensable to the understanding of social behavior. For this reason, this chapter has adopted what is described as the “Ajala” motif as the springboard for its analysis because of the motif’s consistency with an approach in social biography.

The metaphorical analysis begins with basic historiography to identify not only reverse migrant flows but also a reverse mercantilism of some deviant African migrants who display the same predatory instinct and mercenary worldview that, in a previous age, made slavery and colonization possible. It is the countercultural perspective that has led to frequent media reports of financial crimes and other misdemeanors of migrants who are so desperate that they seek wealth and/or fame by fraud and subterfuge.

This mobility is a departure from the central trajectory of African emigration, whether in the third wave or the preceding two. In the main, the event is constituted by outward flows of law-abiding migrants who work in host countries to send remittances home while contributing to the maintenance of order and prosperity in their host countries. They regulate systems on both sides, which is why the tendency and process are conceptualized as *the mobility of norms*.

Our metaphorical procedure consists of a cursory review of colloquial expressions that have evolved in Nigeria to describe the imagined exotic character of the returnee or, more generally, the mobile person. We highlight the honor reserved for such returnees and how that honor was comparable to that reserved for respected warriors and eminent hunters at earlier stages in social evolution and community development.

In the sedentary state, where the moral code was strong and norms of propriety critical for societal stability, it was assumed by members of their communities of origin that return migrants had acquitted themselves as worthy moral ambassadors of their home communities in the host country. The historiography shows that wealth amassed through means opprobrious at home (such as theft or prostitution) was not accorded this respect. A range of diffuse negative sanctions were applied to mobility that had such outcomes.

Not only is it possible to trace or periodize the emergence and evolution of social mobility in Nigeria during the third wave, it is also necessary to account for its paradoxical depictions within the contexts of time, space, and stigma. Depending on the scope of mobility—the distance covered or boundaries traversed, whether within local communities or beyond national boundaries—these depictions can be positive or negative. In either case, the paradox is consistent with the assumptions of a sedentary communal philosophy as it encountered change. On the one hand, the expressions denote the excitement of travel and its many material and ideational benefits, while on the other hand, they focus on its less salubrious attributes. The determination of whether one type of movement is good or bad becomes the subject of moral geography as stigma can be realized as a function of space and social distance.

Among terms denoting mobility, the Yoruba *Tokunbo*¹ stands out. With its derivation from the word *okun* (sea), it suggests international travel and, by extension, imported secondhand cars are commonly referred to as *tokunbo*. Its use in this sense is so commonplace that Oladeji (2010) does not problematize it when reporting that:

commodities that are frequently smuggled in and out of the country include petroleum products, cigarettes, textile materials, and currencies, fairly used cars, “tokunbo” vehicles, fairly used electrical and electronic gadgets, arms and ammunition, rice and groundnut oil. While petroleum is the principal product being smuggled out; the respondents indicated that “tokunbo” vehicles, textile materials, rice, groundnut oil and arms and ammunition are the major goods being smuggled in.

A study of pollution levels in Yoruba-speaking Abeokuta similarly reports that “it is believed (quite erroneously) that the addition of the lead additives is the cheapest way for boosting the octane number of gasoline used by large numbers of old used cars (called Tokunbo locally) imported from the developed countries” (Odukoya, Arowolo & Bamgbose 2000).²

In the popular imagination, therefore, human *Tokunbos* had more connections by virtue of the circumstances of their birth, which conferred highly visible economic, cultural, and political advantages on them and, by extension, their families. Whether the word is used to describe men or materials, it generally conjures up the unmistakable image of affluence and well-being. It is a preliminary linguistic means of signifying status and separation, a device for acknowledging progress, inequality, and exclusivity. In this respect, the word *Tokunbo* foregrounds the long association of Nigeria’s local communities with the modern discourse of mobility and connections.

Another term that resonates in a similar way is *Ajala Travel*, the leitmotif of this chapter. This was the *nom de guerre* of the legendary Olabisi Ajala who is presented by the media in southwest Nigerian as a hero and exemplar of foreign travel. He was popularized by converted highlife-juju musician Ebenezer Obey (b. 1942) in a song memorializing his exploits as an explorer.³ It portrays him as traveling “all over the world,” presumably on a motorized scooter (Vespa),⁴ a swashbuckling Gulliver but with no documented accounts of his adventures. According to one commentary, “his story was like the Nigerian version of Mungo Park, a voyager that navigated some troubled oceans with a boat . . . Ajala’s globe-trotting story in the 60s became a lexicon in Nigerian language while allusions are made to people who love travelling as ‘Ajala’” (Odeyemi 2004).

Although the story has achieved iconic status in Nigeria, we view the use of a Vespa by Mr. Ajala as problematic. It was a poor and impractical strategic

choice for such a mission and we think its real significance lies in the semiotic nuance it introduces into the account. Its engineering was not designed for a mission on such a scale and across rugged territory.

With its practicality thus in question, the Vespa is to be understood metaphorically as the embodying emergent aspirations of a newly mobile and independent nation in the 1960s when Nigeria was just freeing itself of British colonial rule. It was the metaphorical vehicle by which change could come and in relation to which a generation of nationalists pushed themselves to great endeavor, to become mobile even with the most rudimentary methods. The Ajala personified the courage needed to initiate this.

The Vespa was integrated into Ajala narrative as part of this basic allegorical design—whether Ajala was in fact real or not, or undertook travels on the scale he was purported to have done. This is not quite the crux of the matter. In an erstwhile sedentary society, tales of travel within Europe or in societies with an advanced transportation infrastructure (good roads and railway networks) might hold a certain psychic appeal or fascination for a domestic audience. Ajala might merely have moved across a few closely linked territories covered by the modern Schengen Treaty—situated just mere hours from one another—and that would have been sufficient to accord him the status of someone who “travelled all over the world.” The distances covered might have been exaggerated by the absence of communication technology, such as the Internet, fax, and/or the mobile phone. This exaggeration might in turn have been intensified by the exotic stories he brought home with him. In any case, it is doubtful whether he literally traveled the world, as Obey claimed.

There are practical doubts about the specifics of Ajala’s adventures. It is easier to appreciate the story in the symbolic light of an avant-garde spirit in control of both the narrative itself and the emergence of an indigenous but mobile elite in Nigerian society at that time. It was a *Weltanschauung* that stimulated waves of migration to Europe and America by citizens in search of the proverbial Golden Fleece. These were the citizens who would in due course return to establish the country’s first republican bureaucracy and lay the foundations for its operation within a democratic state. The Ajala motif was the personification of this rising postcolonial consciousness while his Vespa was the index of the difficulties associated with realizing it in practical economic, political, and institutional terms. Assessing these metaphors for their meanings and contextualizing epistemology by means of analogical reference (Livingstone & Harrison 1981) is a valid procedure because, in the context of this metaphorical analysis, the symbolism of his travels is more meaningful than the actual facts involved.

Negative Mobility and Sedentary Stigma

The preceding sections discussed how the words *Ajala* and *Tokunbo* both imply movement and stand as status signifiers. They symbolize the presence of something exotic yet indigenous as well as, of productive migrant histories and rich family backgrounds without which neither outcome would have been possible. *Tokunbo*, in particular, foregrounds hybrid identities that confer status on people designated this way or identified by similar appellations in Nigeria's ongoing postcolonial relations with itself.

Along these lines, recent commentary suggests that the entire third trend of African emigration could be reversed. Obono (2010) notes that:

The European Social Survey, which has documented attitudes on a biennial basis since 2002, confirms that Europeans' views of immigrants have deteriorated drastically and steadily in this decade. Immigrants are seen as posing fierce competition for scarce benefits. Many observers agree that, in light of the new face of immigration policy in the customary destinations of African migrants, an eventual African exodus is inevitable. Already, Nigeria registers a continuous stream of deportees from many countries. Partly in response, many Nigerians abroad are buying up real estate . . . Funky looking estates designed for upwardly mobile families are springing up along expressways everywhere in the country. They are stimulated by forecasts of mass return as adversity grows in receiving countries. If corpses are still brought back to Nigeria for burial, it demonstrates that the return of the living awaits auspicious conditions.

In this light, there is a systemic irony that constitutes local variants of these *ajala* and *tokunbo* movements as something negative. These variants are couched in the admonitory pidgin *waka-about* (walk about) and its corollary *Amebo*. While *Tokunbo* and *Ajala* are viewed positively in their mobility, the local *waka-about* is seen as a regular menace to society. A rumormonger and meddlesome busybody, he/she is compulsively peripatetic. A restless nosy parker driven by an unaccountable need to pry into people's affairs, he/she is what the Yakurr call an *oseŋa-seŋa* (someone who walks about doing no good).

By spreading rumors, the *oseŋa-seŋa* helps maintain social order and systemic stability and keeps the members of society connected to a false information grid or network. The actions of an *oseŋa-seŋa* thus promote negative solidarity among victims who are united by their mutual adversity occasioned by his/her actions. This happens when the *oseŋa-seŋa* doubles as an *amebo* (the bearer of tales or quintessential gossip) or what is known in Yoruba as an *olofofò*.⁵

Such appellations and terminology depict a negative view of mobility and suggest a spatial dimension to the assignation of value or stigma to different types or patterns of mobility. Movements across national boundaries are heralded as more prestigious than those within domestic or national boundaries. There seems to be an inverse correlation between distance covered by travel and the probability of stigma.

The questions raised by these dynamics are clearly more nuanced and complicated than this but this chapter is only examining these clichéd views of social mobility to derive hypotheses about the spatial dynamics of identity and negation. By converging the constructs of aspiration and social capital theory, social mobility is shown to both cause and effect connections established across space and time by Nigerian migrants. Mobility is thus a predictor of social capital developed in the course of establishing those connections as well as a means of its expression among the elite.

Discussion: Mobility, Aspirations and Social Capital

Nigerian society is in general characterized by ubiquitous norms of inequality. Its historical forms of stratification have ranged from the condemnable caste systems among the Igbo in the southeast to forms of serfdom in the north. Other structural categories include gerontocracy, theocracy, and patriarchy. In all cases, people are segregated into unequal divisions that made status a criterion for accessing resources. There is a built-in systemic impulse to stratify. Hence, in a well-worn anecdote, it is said that if three Nigerians were marooned on an island with no provisions, their first order of business would be to appoint a Chairman—anything to trace, identify, reinforce, and perpetuate lines of inequality.

The result of this at a macrocosmic level is the size of the country's modern government with an executive cabinet of 42 ministers, a bloated civil service, and patron-client networks that fuel much of the official corruption for which the country is, unfortunately, so famous (Smith 2008). This mix of stratification systems would appear to be part of the reason behind the country's difficult transition to proper modern governance and democracy, and it is into this complex of systems that social mobility falls.

The phenomenon is usually measured in terms of occupational prestige or educational attainment but these two attributes are by no means exhaustive or exclusive. In recent models of countercultural mobility, that is, mobility that results from or leads to the suppression of communal values, there may be no clarity as to the migrants' occupational status so it cannot be measured. Being criminal, it might be secret. Identities may be concealed. Moreover, educational attainment might not have been part of the original motive for

the movement so it too might not always be a good measure of status change. In other words, while social mobility is usually measured by the variables of education and occupation, its emergent forms may involve neither.

One report notes that “interpreting the narratives of Moroccan migrant women in the Netherlands, alternative definitions of social mobility are discerned that go *beyond* formal schooling or paid work and which contribute to a broader definition of class and ‘social upgrading.’” It describes cross-generational differences in how migrant women subscribe to dominant definitions of mobility in Rotterdam (van den Berg 2011: 503), important differences that demonstrate that the social contexts of aspirations and mobility may vary widely. As shown elsewhere (Obono 2008; Obono & Obono 2009, 2010), there are important intergenerational differences of perception and practice among mothers and daughters on the same behavioral questions and attitudes that are linked to social mobility.

In instances where sedentary norms and livelihood systems give way to physical and social mobility, there are new contentions with alternate (sometimes criminal) economies as people develop solidarities and maintain networks made possible by new technologies. In such situations, economic prospects are linked to the scope and strength of one’s connections and access to social media, which also facilitate criminal activities. The conjuncture between technology and criminality is a crucial phase in Nigerian society that was previously built around fixed, inflexible, and mechanical networks of kinship and other primordial connections and solidarities. These changes have intensified with the emergence of new technologies but they have also created new and increased vulnerabilities.

While mobilities can consolidate connections, they also help produce mass alienation by interrupting harmony and bringing about new possibilities in the future course of human relations. Through access to the information highway, notions of mobility and connectivity have become more fluid and Nigeria is reputed to have the highest teledensity in Africa. There are substantial departures from the physical sense in which connections and mobility were previously understood. The cartographies have been resocialized into a more conscious awareness that appropriates connections, especially in transborder forms, as a requirement for occupational success.

Understanding this tendency to move in order to generate (greater) material and social benefits can be aided by the concept of social capital. Defined as the “resources that emerge from one’s social ties” (Portes & Landolt 1996), the popularity of social capital as a concept has been accompanied by “increasing controversy about its actual meaning and effects” (Portes 2000: 1). This is why Fukuyama (2002: 27) considers it “difficult to define.” While aggregate applications seem to endorse its use among World Bank economists and

academic political scientists, who attribute it to whole state systems or organizations, its original Bourdieuan sense was far more practical and instrumental in that it could be reduced to the level of a tradable and fungible possession. It dealt with benefits that accrued to individuals and their families as they intentionally built their relationships with others around sets of individual and group aspirations and goals (Bourdieu 1985).

Noting that capital can assume any of several mutable forms—cultural, economic, functional, linguistic, personal, local, professional, social or symbolic—Bourdieu (1985: 248) provided the first definition of *social capital* as the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.”

Nevertheless, in its purest form, the concept is strong because of its instrumental focus on “the benefits accruing to individuals by virtue of participation in groups and on the deliberate construction of sociability for the purpose of creating this resource” (Portes 1998: 3). In other words, “the core idea of social capital is that social networks have value” (Ecclestone & Field 2003: 267). Viewed in this way, the concept facilitates our understanding of how people acquire and apply skills and knowledge, which is part of its broad analytical appeal.

Hence our argument that since “social capital of any significance can seldom be acquired, for example, without the investment of some material resources and the possession of some cultural knowledge, *enabling the individual to establish relations with others*” [emphases added] (Portes 2000: 2), the utility of the concept for social mobility requires a perspective in aspirations theory. Without this perspective, the concept may be “further clouded by the fact that it is not always easy to judge whether or not a given set of relations constitute ‘capital,’ an investment that may yield a desirable outcome” (Bankston 2004: 178). This is why, in our view, the joint focus of both concepts (social capital and aspiration) on the individual, conscious material investment, and the expectation of reward warrants their synthesis to explain regular as well as irregular, subjective, and countercultural forms of social mobility. It is necessary and possible to do so because “aspiration studies [are located] within that class of theories which presuppose individuals make efficient choices to maximize their satisfactions and minimize their dissatisfactions” (Sherwood 1989: 61).

In this light, the two concepts are linked to rational-choice theory and utilitarianism and to even more remote sources in seventeenth-century continental rationalism and the Cartesian cogito. They are also associated with the orientations of American Pragmatism, a philosophical movement that has been described as “a system of humanist metaphysics in which the idea of

progress is built into human existence and with the notion that human beings can facilitate its operations” (Obono 2008: 238). Thus, Sherwood’s pragmatist framework not only reinforces the idea that individuals invest time, effort, and money in line with their aspiration—defined as “any goal an individual is willing to invest in beforehand” (Sherwood 1989: 62)—but that they acquire capacities and competencies that increase their social capital in the course of doing so.

This is the framework used in this chapter to analyze the behavior of Nigerian migrants in the third phase of transatlantic migration. In the Nigerian setting, the construct of social capital facilitates thinking and our understanding of how people acquire and apply skills and knowledge as well as how *created social networks* are transformed into viable and durable relationships that provide or enhance value. The concept relates imaginaries of mobility with imaginaries of aspirations and “connections” in an individual’s bid to maximize satisfaction and minimize stress in a global universe. It helped us derive the perception of benefits from individual- or corporate-level strategic alliances within the fluid milieu of Nigerian society, which approximates a “risk society.” By framing it as an aspect of network discourse and political economy, we have explored here the local uses and appropriations of the term not as a residual theoretical category but as an active part of a compelling body of options calculated to aid the attainment of personal and collective goals and aspirations.

Conclusion

In Nigeria, connections confer privilege and impunity in a prebendalist regime that is characterized by patron-client relations rather than due process in the provision of basic services. It paves the way for one’s entry into networks of trust, a compromise that may occasionally shield criminal activity and subvert due process. For this reason, establishing and maintaining connections have become agentic and imperative in Nigerian society. There has been a loosening of ties to the family and social heritage in the perpetuation of these connections. The space for participation is expanding for many persons who previously had limited access to resources, while the space is at the same time shrinking because the cosmopolitan elite is being threatened by competition that has become more intense.

As a consequence, there has been an increase in both innovation and deviation. Nigeria is witnessing the historic emergence of a class of entrepreneurs that will alter the basis, nature, norms, character, and consequences of the idea of connections. Whether in the sphere of religious leadership, corporate enterprise, or political rule, the idea that connections are indispensable to

personal or professional growth is ingrained in the public mind and central to professional commentary in sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, the effects of social mobility are better represented within frameworks that associate with connections and the acquisition of social capital.

The discussion in this chapter identified a third wave of migrant outflows cast against the historical settings of two previous patterns of forced emigration. This transition was explained as being accompanied by a reverse mercantilism in which the outward push was inspired by the quest for long-term connections. In the process, African transatlantic mobility, like the African transatlantic aspirations behind it, appears conditioned by the same mercenary worldview that once triggered slavery and colonization. These two patterns were products too of the ideational aspects of social capital. African emigration and mobility are currently legitimized by perceptions of interracial unity as a global value relative to the perceptions of difference that were behind the first two forms of historical migration.

The Ajala motif has enabled metaphorical analysis of processes underlying this third wave. It was used here as a semiotic device to organize early emigrant motivations although it does not explain the perversions and subversions that began with more criminal forms of emigration in the 1980s. This departure was an errant form of mobility that is not supported by norms of propriety in the communities of origin. This is what we referred to as the mobility of norms—a bundle of communal aspirations conveyed by migrants who project the identity of their home community wherever they go.

Ajala was celebrated precisely for these reasons, not merely because he undertook unlikely travels “all over the world.” They were improbable because of the circumscriptions of time and the logistic burden involved, and were important because he personified an emergent regional, societal, and/or national aspiration. His travels were the congealed portrait of what society wanted at the time. He was an exemplar. This is why modern Nigerian “frequent flyers” are anecdotally referred to as “Ajala,” demonstrating the fit between his exploits and a visceral need to replace the dominant sedentarism that had been the main attribute of the older social order.

It is noteworthy that among the Igbo, who occupy a landlocked territory in southeastern Nigeria and are being pushed outward by restrictive ecology, there is no parallel to Ajala. This may be because Igbo outmigration was a strategic response to limited space. With high reproductive motivation and a caste system in parts of the Igbo hinterland, migration was established early as a way of life. The absence of an Igbo equivalent to the Yoruba Ajala therefore conveys the same significance of mobility. What the Yoruba expressed through the celebration of Ajala, the Igbo achieved by routinizing mobility and establishing networks that fostered subsequent migration.

These two groups are Nigeria's second and third largest ethnic groups, respectively. The routinization of mobility as a means of establishing ties, particularly in Europe, is a major asset that forms one dimension of individual and group social capital. The size of their populations makes Yoruba and Igbo migrants omnipresent in Nigerian society and in many other countries. Consequently, their norms of mobility and social-capital formation have diffused and intensified patterns of mobility among concentrations of minority groups in southern Nigeria.

Notes

1. *Tokunbo* is a Yoruba name commonly given to children born overseas (especially in Europe or the United States) but, in modern usage, has been extended to include secondhand cars and vehicle and electronic parts that, since the early 1980s, have been imported or smuggled into the country from Europe (notably Belgium). These cars and equipment are widely perceived to be more reliable than even brand-new products whose life spans are thought to be much shorter.
2. See also Popoola *et al.* (2011: 58), Omoniyi (2010: 244), Ogunbodede (2008), and Ajayi & Dosunmu (2002).
3. Many Nigerians aver that Olabisi Ajala was a real historical personage but documentary evidence of this is scanty. This is unusual for someone of such global prominence who lived as recently as the middle of the twentieth century. In the absence of stronger historiographic evidence, musician Ebenezer Obey's song is the most credible extant account and can be trusted because it was conducted in the praise-singing tradition of the Yoruba bard. Songs of this nature are never sung in praise of purely fictional characters. For reasons of patronage and marketing, the genre tends to celebrate the life of real persons.
4. We are grateful to Akinyinka Akinyoade at the African Studies Centre, Leiden, for his insights on Ajala's mode of travel although we have reservations about its functionality. Our arguments in the main text explain this position.
5. Amebo, a character played by Veronica Ibidun Allison (b. 1941) in the Nigerian comedy, *Village Headmaster*, that was aired on Nigerian television from 1968 to 1993, was an *olofoto par excellence*. An *amebo* is defined as "a person, mostly a woman, of Nigerian descent, of questionable, cowardly character and low morals, esp. one who delights in EXTREMELY idle talk; an unproductive individual; a silly twat" (Ness 2009).

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