

19th Century Conflagrations and the Architectural Landscape of Lagos.

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Abstract:

The 19th century was a boisterous time for Lagos. Quite momentous were the events that they left a significant change on many aspects of Lagos' urban character and outlook. This paper looks at city fires and how they shaped the architectural landscape of Lagos. While city fires are in some ways a standard occurrence in many sprawling 19th century metropolises, not many received nearly as many fire as Lagos did. Though some of the fire events were acts of incendiarism, a significant number were accidental but the destruction were equally damning. The horror of these incessant fires prompted consistent reactions and policy promulgation by way of ordinances from the Colonial administration. The articulation of these law produced a sequence that initiated the reshaping of the city's urban fabric. This paper will show that a significant amount of the architectural change and development in 19th century Lagos directly relate to city fires.

Keywords: City Fire, Lagos, 19th century, Architecture, Urban renewal.

Introduction:

The discovery of fire and our ability to control it is critical to the history of man's development. Anthropologists are unanimously agreed on this (Roebroeks and Villa, 2011). The awareness of how to make and control fire marked a major turning point in our journey toward modernity. While it is sometimes difficult to control because of its assertive nature, it does possess transcendent regenerative powers. Ultimately, whichever way fire acts, it usually leaves a significant and life changing impact. This was the case in 19th century Lagos. City fires were so frequent and destructive that it permanently logged terror in the hearts of many 19th century Lagosians. So miserable was the situation that the *Lagos observer* on the 6th of July, 1882 reported: "If ever you should be attacked at night, never shout murder for no one will bother about you. Yell, Fire! And everyone will be out of doors in a jiffy".ⁱ

This study will look into selected 19th century fires in Lagos and how they affected the architectural landscape, policies, institutional reforms and the urban fabric of the town in general.

Further, the study will argue a philosophical position for fire as a catalyst for change and regeneration. While this essay is vehemently against the intentional use of fire as a means to an end and does not advise or instigate the same, it hopes to encourage policy builders to learn and possibly employ the ideological foundation behind the character of fire in the planning of city regeneration.

This study used secondary historical data from the Lagos archive database and online resource of the Church Missionary Society as its main base for reference. Related past published works on the dynamics of 19th century Lagos was also consulted. While no photographs exists of the major events discussed in this study, ample and detailed description were available in some data reviewed and this was central to the discuss.

19TH Century and Its Many Fires: A global perspective

Almost all major great cities of the world experienced conflagration throughout the 19th century. Ample examples of these abound. Some notable cases are the Sunday October 8th to 10th 1871 Great Chicago fire which is believed to have claimed almost 300 lives and destroyed 18,000 buildings (Groves, 2006). While the cause of the fire was not certain, the rapid spread of it was confirmed to be a combination of drought faced by the city weeks leading to the fire and by the cities dominant use of wood as building material. The 1842 Great fire of Hamburg in Germany is another well-known case. The fire started at night on the 4th of May and raged for four days. It destroyed the main town hall and countless amount of buildings which included three major churches. The fire claimed 51 lives and rendered over 20,000 others homeless. It is reported that rebuilding of the city effectively took 40 years. ("London Illustrated," 1842) There is also the 1812 Great fire of Moscow. This case is one of the most horrific episodes of city fires ever recorded. Though related to war, the fire of Moscow has been famed to be one of the most classic case of arson. It recorded a death toll of 12,000, about 2000 thousand of the dead were wounded Russian soldiers who would have been trapped and cremated alive. 122 churches and over 7000 houses were gutted and reduced to rubbles in the rage which started on September 14th and lasted for four days. Other popular 19th century great city fires include the 1871 Peshtigo great fire in Wisconsin, the 1863 great fire in Santiago, Chile and the Boston fire of 1872. Also, there is the St Louis great fire of 1849 in Missouri - this case claimed 430 houses and 23 ships at the harbour. The great fire of Yokohama, Japan is also regarded as a major 19th century great city fire.ⁱⁱ

Certain characteristic elements of 19th century cities predisposed the emerging and often crowded cities to fires - Building material was one of it. Most cities of the 19th century comprised of houses and or pavements made from wood and thatch. In the history of city fires, no other catalyst would do greater damage. Sunar and Ceylanli (2012) analysed the causes and effects of city fires on the urban fabric of 19th century Istanbul. The duo identified that rapid increase in population of

Istanbul due to migration triggered the density of wooden building and this created a threat of fire as never experienced before. For the most part, the case is not different in Lagos. The emerging trade economy that started to thrive in the early 19th century opened Lagos up to the massive and uncontrolled in-flock of merchants – both local (from the hinterlands and other West African towns) and foreign. Since wood in itself cannot combust spontaneously but serves only as a diligent flammable agent, the real trigger must be identified here. Sunar and Ceylanli (2012) pointed out that the main cause of the many fires that ragged Istanbul were both intentional (incendiarism) and non-intentional which are those accidentally spread from open cooking fires, candles or overnight interior warming fires. Curiously, the causes of celebrated 19th century city fires are quite similar, if not exactly the same in many of the different cities. As stated earlier, 19th century fires in Lagos was not unique in any way. They were also mostly caused by incendiaries and accidental ignition as will be discussed shortly.

19th Century Fires in Lagos

Otunba Payne, the first registrar of Lagos paints a picture of the frequency of fire outbreaks in Lagos in his celebrated work *Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History*. Payne (1893, p. 8) asserts that there were as many as forty major fires in Lagos from 1859–1892. That is an alarming average of about one major fire per year for the small Island of Lagos. Of these fires, one stands out as a major event in the history of the town – the 1877 Lagos Great Fire. On the 29th January 1877, a prominent Badagry trader known as Hotonu had just completed funeral rites for his late mother. To honour Hotonu, his followers fired shots into the air as a sign of homage and solidarity. Wadding from one of the guns set ablaze a nearby house with thatch roof and in no time, a city fire started to rage. The fire which went on for several hours engulfed Olowogbowo district all the way to Ereko end making considerable damage (Akinsemoyin & Vaughan, 1977, p. 38). The Archdeacon H. Johnson reported this fire incident in a letter to Edward Hutchinson (The Lay Secretary of the CMS) describing it as an astonishment to Lagosians who saw it in spite of their being accustomed to seeing yearly conflagrations (Johnson, 1877, p. 246). At the end of the disaster, about 2000 houses were destroyed along with a great deal of material goods. The ruins included two notable churches – St Paul's Breadfruit Church and Holy Trinity Church, Ebute Ero, one chapel, three mosques and sadly seven lives (ibid). In those days it was not unusual to see followers loyal to one royal (political) sub-lord or the other parade the streets with arms and not hesitate to use such in 'negotiations' as they see fit. Carrying of arms by groups of people was not totally outlawed, in fact licensed sale and use of fire arm by civilian individuals were quite popular in those times (Ordinance, 1905). Shots going off every now and then was part of the tapestry of 19th century Lagos life. Nwanunobi (1990, p. 112) describes the none-effectiveness of the 1877 Ordinance for prevention of fire. He blames the ordinance's

weakness in allowing the continued discharge of firearms in the street while it outlawed the use of firecrackers and similar items. This provision of the ordinance which remained silent on the use of firearms was key to its failure. One would imagine that such generous allowances would be curbed especially when a major conflagration had just occurred for the very reason of discharging firearms openly in the street. The reason, though out of the scope of this paper, might not be unrelated to the politics of 'favour for peace' which pervaded the polity of the times. One would recall the unsettling events of the early 1860s - this will still be fresh in the minds of the people.ⁱⁱⁱ A decade later, it is safe to posit that a kind of fragile relationship still exist between the colonial masters and the local chiefs (particularly the *Akarigbere* and *Idejos* class) and as such, a perceptive consul will particularly be tactful in the systematic withdrawal of the cultural privileges of these sub-lords.

Possession of firearm or associated substance such as gunpowder in 19th century Lagos obviously did more harm than good in the development to the town. A related event can be seen in the fire that resulted from the explosion of gunpowder in 1841. Oba Oluwole – the ninth king of Eko dynasty- had just come out of a civil war with Chief Kosoko. The conflict was caused by a kingship dispute which consequently led to a needless waste to life, buildings and property. The latter exiled himself to Quidah at the instance of his loss to the ruling Oluwole. It however happened that Oluwole (Son of Oba Adele 1) will later be caught up in an accidental explosion of gunpowder stored in the palace. His body was gravely dismembered that his pieces were only to be recognised by the presence of the royal beads he was wearing at the time of his death. This explosion was said to be as a result of lightning which struck the royal quarters. The occurrence was described as an event under mysterious circumstance (Kotun, 1997, p. 42). Fire raged from the explosion destroying nearby houses and property.

Another major incident reported is the fire of 1884. In March, a fire started around 10am from the kitchen of a house on Breadfruit Street. The incident, apparently caused by cooking with open fire quickly spread through Bankole Street and made its way unabated for three hours destroying houses, property and livelihood in its wake.

Even when intentional, as it is in the many cases of arson or otherwise caused by the indigenous lifestyle of the people of those times—such as open-fire cooking or overnight warming of sleeping interiors with oil lamps in cold season, the wrath of fire was indeed a depressing part of daily urban life of 19th century Lagos. *Lagos times* of 28th March 1883 reported that over six hundred houses were destroyed with countless property between 14th February and 28th March 1883 alone (Nwanunobi, 1990, p.115). Fires continue to occur frequently in Lagos even till the later years of 19th century. Some recorded fires include the 21st November 1887, 16th January 1888 episode which started in Olowogbowo destroying an untold amount of goods. Another cases is that of 28th February 1888 which claimed three lives. ("Lagos Observer," 1888)

Government Response to Recurrent Lagos Fires.

Nwanunobi (1990) has discussed the aspects of incendiarism and the consequent dynamics of its criminality in great detail therefore this study will not belabour this area rather it will focus on the reactions and response of the government to curtailing the unprecedented recurring cases of city fire whatever the cause. Having now established that city fires were a part of everyday 19th century Lagos, one can further state that the frequency of it played a role in the creation and speedy implementation of government policies on fire prevention and control in the 19th century. This in turn brought about a change in the architectural landscape of the city as a number of the policies concerning building materials and codes for city layout (Town Planning) were created. While policies in form of ordinances were issued at different times, they were sometimes not enough in themselves to effect desired change. In many instances, the expected change was intensely slow or altogether resisted by the populace. Muhtar (2009, p.14) argued that the rules relating to fire misdemeanour charges were hazy at best and they consequently failed resoundingly to satisfy the exigencies of the period. Factors of economics and social construct also played a role in the process. The rate of adherence to a law is in some way directly proportional to the economic and social capacity of the populace. In some instance where the edict is concerned with the replacement of materials by procurement and viable alternatives are not made available and affordable, a certain degree of non-compliance and consequently non-effectiveness will plague such a policy.

A good starting point for government's official response to the spate of city fires in 19th century is the 1863 Ordinance for the Better Preservation of the Town of Lagos from Fire - also known as Ordinance 8. This ordinance was issued by the colonial administration of Lagos on the 9th April 1863 under the steering of Captain (Later Sir) John Hawley Glover fondly known as *Oba Goloba* by the natives. The document approached the issue of fires from the view that if the catalyst which allows small fires spread into conflagrations is removed from the equation then the occurrence of destructive city fires might be greatly reduced. In light of this, the ordinance gave a six months grace for which no habitation or covered building of any type will be roofed with inflammable materials of any kind – thatch or other forms of dried organic matter. The ordinance indicated that other non-easily flammable materials such as the local bamboo mat (also called Calabar bamboo) be used in place of thatch (Nwanunobi, 1990, p. 112). Ordinance 8 decreed that a penalty of the sum not exceeding fifty Pounds or three months imprisonment with or without labour shall be instituted for any infringement of the articles stated within it. While some houses obeyed the directives, the ordinance suffered such resistance from the masses. The reason for the resistance and eventual ineffectiveness was that the material prescribed by the ordinance as an alternative to the thatch was not readily available and complains were presented to the authorities that the cost of reroofing a house is far beyond the reach of the masses as such the idea of the ordinance did not redeem anyone of their already sorry situation, instead, it laden them further. Efforts of the administration of Governor

Glover to enforce compliance met with such rebellious reaction that the administration gracefully extended the grace period for another six months (Ibid).

When eventually the compliance of ordinance 8 was appreciable, the grim reality of the failure of the approach became apparent when on the 29th January 1877 the Lagos Great Fire occurred. A renewal of thought on the administration's approach to curbing the fires was evident in the 1877 ordinance for the prevention of fire where exemption was made on customs duty for items like corrugated iron sheet. The move was to make new non-flammable iron roofing sheet available and affordable to the people with the hope (still) that if the 'fuel' for wild fires are removed there will be less incidences. The 1877 ordinance for prevention of fire was invariably designed to be an improvement of the 1863 version but owing to what one may term as a costly omission in the area of codes that will control certain aspects of civil life that presents a continuous danger of fire to the city, the ordinance fell short of the mark. The 1877 fire made apparent the incapacity of fire prevention and control mechanism in 19th century Lagos. More so, it showed how porous the existing law was as it concerned empowerment for so called fire fighters. Crowd control and issue of legal empowerment to breakdown structures fanning fire or posing hindrances to the work of firemen were not in place. Fire men or the police also did not have the right to mandate and control onlookers to tasks when and where needed. Ordinance 9 (*An ordinance to make better provision for the protection of the town of Lagos from fire*) was to resolve some of these problems, but it did not come into existence until 22nd September 1897. In this ordinance, tasks and responsibilities were better stated and legal covering was made for officials to breakdown structure and control the crowd as they see fit in the event of a fire. It also mandated the police to assist the fire service in all complimentary aspects of arresting a fire (Colonial Laws, 1901, p. 771-2). Though ordinance 9 may be seen as a commendable step towards arresting the menace of Lagos city fires, it did little to actually stop the fires from coming up. In the late 19th century, the fire service was more poised than ever to fight fires but another problem continued to undermine their effectiveness. It was the availability of water for use in fire incidences.

As far as water is concerned, for the better part of the 19th century, residence of Lagos depended on well water and springs for their daily water needs. Water, and availability of the same remained an issue of great concern all through 19th century Lagos (Olukoju, 2003, p. 47). Needless to say that the problems that was to be faced by the proto-Lagos Fire fighters was already cut out for them. The double edge issue of incendiarism that came to a highpoint in the mid-19th century and the lack of water (or to put it more appropriately, lack of access to water) to fight it was indeed a most distressing problem for the fire service. In 1863, Governor Glover had introduced wells at several different locations with the aim of improving the usefulness of the fire service in Lagos (ibid). Though the service had only one fire engine, it was believed that access to water in the different quarters will ultimately improve its effectiveness and presence. The men of the service were equipped with firefighting tools which included machetes, metal buckets, ladders and grappling hooks but the most important element for their performance – water, continued to prove an item of concern for the most

part of their career in the 19th century. It will appear however that the helpfulness of the fire service in extinguishing the very many fires that plagued Lagos was not sustained beyond Governor Glover's tenure which ended effectively in 1872. The *Lagos Observer* of 10th April 1884 reports of the idleness of the fire engine in Tinubu Square since the departure of Glover. This imbroglio was however tidied up later in the century with the procurement of better equipment.

The irony and mockery of Lagos' 19th century city fire situation is such that makes for profound thoughts. The island sits on a massive body of water yet it suffers such fate so dire and a most difficult task of harnessing the water for its use. Conversely, the fortune of those who would beat the government to the task of making water accessible to the needs of the people was to change for ever. An example can be found in Joao Esan Da Rocha, the Afro Brazilian returnee who is famed to have become significantly wealthy from selling portable drinking water to Lagosians around 1890s. The water, described as *sweet water* was from a well he dug in his No 12 Kakawa Street compound where the famous Water House is built.

Beyond medical and hygiene realities that also become a menace in the 19th century Lagos, the concern of the administration for fire and the non-accessibility of water for general use led to the search for a viable inland water basin in Iju. The search for inland water had earlier failed to yield fruit as the colonial administration were focused on Ikoyi and Apapa areas. Iju presented a most viable option and the water works was later to be situated there – 1000ft away from Adiyin River and the Iju stream (Olukoju, 2009, p. 50). The success of the Iju water works led to an impressive progress in the battle to make water accessible to the people of Lagos. A total of 200 fountains were provided all over the city and 250 hydrants were installed to provide water in case of fire – this will of course only manifest in the early 20th century (*Nigerian Pioneer*, 9 July 1915).

The very early period of the 20th century saw a positive change for Lagos in terms of fire cases. It will appear that the perils of incessant city fires was finally brought under control. The colonial annual report on Lagos (1906, p. 42) states that only seven fire calls were put through (in 1905) to the fire service which was then a unit under the control of the police. Equipped with a better performance Shand & Mason steam fire engine with various hoses and other fire appliances, its staff strength of 21 men were poised more than ever to take on the task of battling Lagos fires. Progress in firefighting may be attributed to improvement in fire prevention and possible public awareness coupled with better town planning and fire resistant building materials. Above all, it may be attributed to better access to water. The early 20th century also saw a more improved communication and alertness. Telephone lines were installed in a number of government service offices and both the police and fire station were connected. This made for easier and early communication of a fire to the service men thus stimulating prompt responses.

Right as we may be to conclude that the 19th century was a time of great difficulty for Lagos with regards to fire incidences and control, it is also clear that the direct response of the government of that century to the disasters set the foundation and legislation for the many dynamics that will later

manifest into positive changes in the early 20th century. Many of those formative policies still form the basics of today's regulations and models for approaching the issues.

Impact on Architecture and Planning

Major changes hit the architectural landscape of 19th century Lagos as a direct consequence of the response to the century's conflagrations. The most noticeable were in the areas of building materials used, spacing of buildings and the arrangement and use of spaces. Mabogunje (1968, p. 116-120) already discussed that the collective traditional Yoruba compound style of space organisation disappeared during the 19th century in Lagos. The Yoruba extended family compound structure which was already dwindling made its final exit during this period as a result of the immense population growth and admixture. Because the population became heterogeneous very quickly by way of migrant influx, the traditional system was wanting for time to metamorphose and adjust. As such, the ideological basics for the traditional Yoruba compound failed to hold its own in the emerging metropolis. The reoccurrence of fire also contributed to the dismembering of the closed circuit system as access to burning areas and channels for escape in case of fires necessitated the 'breaking down of the walls'. The internal structure which was comprised of several individual dwelling became autonomous and a natural realignment and reorganisation was necessary. In 1883, further to ordinance 8, owners were directed to build in proper alignment and as such streets were better defined. The colonial administration also required that adequate space must be made between two buildings in order to avoid the spread of fires. In 1886 under Governor Evans, the streets were further opened up and residential quarters also had to adhere to the directive which stipulates not less than seven feet minimum space between buildings.

Akinsemoyin & Vaughan (1976, p. 18) already mentioned that brick production started in Lagos Island as early as 1857 by a Sardinian - Giambattista Scala, who was an astute trader and the Sardinian consul to Lagos from 1855. Scala made bricks and tiles for local use. While the wealthy - private merchants, trading companies and religious institution took to it as a building material of choice, it did not quite permeate the breath of Lagos as it was seen at that time as luxury and not necessity. This is not to say that brick did not get appreciable patronage, contrary to that. In fact, no sooner than Scala's enterprise started, a brick kiln was established by Matthew da Cruz in 1859 (Godwin and Hopewood, 2012). The American Baptist preacher – Joseph Harding also established a brick making factory in Iddo in the mid-1860s. Around the same time, the C.M.S trading agent and teacher, J.A. Ashcroft started a brick factory as well in Ebute Meta (Akinsemoyin & Vaughan, 1976, p. 26). All these brick manufacturing outfits suggest a growing acceptability for the 'new' building material from the mid-1800s. The city fires of 19th century Lagos however, brought a greater attention to the staidness of brick to fire and its durability became quite apparent. The outstanding performance of brick in cases of fire is not new at all. The very words of King Charles II of England

as recorded in his declaration to London in 1666 after the infamous London Great Fire captures it flawlessly.

In the first place the woeful experience of the fire hath sufficiently convinced all men of the pernicious consequences of building with wood, and even with stone, and the notable benefit of brick, which in so many places hath resisted and even extinguished the Fire; And we do therefore declare that no man whatsoever shall presume to erect any house or building, great or small, unless it is made of brick or stone, and if any man shall do the contrary, the next Magistrate shall forthwith cause it to be pulled down.

(“Extract of Charles II’s declaration to London,” 1666)

The fate of brick as a building material greatly improved in the late 19th century. Ironically the material has been in our midst but for lack of the knowledge to put the raw materials and processing together, one may guess that we would have engaged it much earlier. While the walls were not the main focus of anti-fire policies as mud does take a great amount of heat too before it starts to crack beyond need, it was clear that roofing was the focus. Roofing with corrugated iron sheet however, would amount to a type of waste if consideration is not made for presentable and durable walls also. The traditional Yoruba gave such importance to roof and roofing. The Yoruba’s philosophical standpoint is that ‘the roof is the house’. In traditional Yoruba architecture, one will notice that the proportion of the roof to the other parts of a building (walls) is almost at a ratio of 3:1. The Yoruba ascribe such pre-eminence to the roof. In ancient Oyo, there exist an annual festival tied to the gathering of *Bere* – an organic matter used for roofing the houses. During the festival, the thatch roof of the king’s palace and those of other important chiefs are replaced with fresh stock received from their subordinates (Johnson, 1921, p. 49). So great is this festival solely dedicated to this ritual that it goes on for days and all look forward to it earnestly because of the attending pomp. To the Yoruba the roof - just as the head (*ori*) - is the crowning essence of a body and there is no value to a body whatsoever without a befitting roof or head as the case maybe. In the light of this, while the natives of 19th century Lagos (who were essentially Yoruba) will relate well to the changing of roofs, they will deem the new roof too valuable to be placed on an old body (walls). Invariably, what this portends is a full rebuilding of their houses. They reasoned that the base must be worth it for the venture of a new roof. In essence, the transition from thatch to corrugated iron roofing sheets, or roofing tiles consequently necessitated the generic adoption of brick and cement walls – this being as much pragmatic as it is aesthetic from a Yoruba ideological point of view. As such, ordinance 8 created a situation where the natives translated its content as a directive to rebuild their whole house(s) in six months or less. This study thus posit that the gradual change from thatch to tiles and iron sheet directly brought with it a concurrent metamorphosis of mud to brick and eventually cement walls.

Further, the destruction that 19th century conflagration brought upon Lagos regularly in a twist of fate made way for the perpetuation of a new architectural style that will later redefine Lagos' landscape. It is the Afro Brazilian architectural style. As a result of the reforms happening in early 19th century Americas and efforts from the different emancipation movements, the coast of the blight of Benin started to receive a gradual but sustained arrival of returnee slaves who were either manumitted or had been a part of those who got their freedom from the sea campaigns sponsored chiefly by Great Britain from the late 18th century. Though the returning of slaves to West Africa started very early in 19th century, it did not become significant until post 1835 after the Bahia Male revolt (Soumonni, 2005). Returnees brought with them new knowledge that bordered about agriculture, architecture, crafts and cuisine. The carpenters, masons and builders are of interest to this study. Alinta (2013) reports that in 1897, carpenters made up 23% of the total Afro Brazilian population in Lagos. There were also 11 brick layers and master builders. Masons, master masons and cabinet makers were also of an appreciable number. Their arrival coincided with the time when Lagos was experiencing reoccurring city fires. It will not require much discernment to see how timely their arrival was to the city in need of a renaissance. Based on, and with regards to already discussed factors, the entry of the Afro Brazilian builders-craftsmen met with an opportunity for performance. Hence, as a result of the lacunar caused by the fires, the grounds were bare for the birthing of a new epoch of architecture in Lagos. A curious fact however is that the new architectural style met with almost no resistance what so ever possibly owing to the state of comatose of the former. While it is common knowledge that there was ample raw material available for the sponsorship of the new style and skilled artisans were not wanting, it may still be argued that other factors contributed to the phenomenal success of the introduction and growth of Afro Brazilian architecture in Lagos as the aborigine style gave way to the battering of fire making the stage bare for new expressions. Perhaps Afro Brazilian architecture may not have gained grounds – at least not as rapidly as it did – if the tenacity and continuity of the traditional style was not being compromised by the very many fires and the changing times. Therefore, the impact of city fires in Lagos, however negative, has a direct bearing on the perceived success of Afro Brazilian architecture in 19th century Lagos. It must be mentioned however that though many notable Afro Brazilian buildings such as Lumpkin House (ca. 1890) at Abibu Oki Street, Ilojo Bar (1890), Maja House, Gerber Square (ca. 1895), Branco House at 27 Kakawa Street (1885), Water house (1895), Shitta Mosque on Martins Street (1894)^{iv} were erected in the 19th century, some of the most remarkable were to come later in the early part of the 20th century. An example can be seen in *Ebun* House – Home of successful Sierra Leonean returnee immigrant, A.W. Thomas, which was built in 1913.

Also along with, and as a direct response to the prevention and control of fires in Lagos, trees were planted to serve as fire breakers and to improve the greenery of the town. It will be safe to conclude that as a result of an interplay of several factors, a 'new' Lagos was to emerge from the ashes of the former, one that proper city planning started to take form as a result of

the tactile response to the terror that fire meted on 19th century Lagos. The haphazardness or chaos which is usually symptomatic of fast growing and heavily populated town was to begin a tireless transition into a sense of arrangement that is to form the basis of 20th century colonial Lagos. The unabating spate of city conflagration formed the foundation for the validation and justification of the later ideas of colonial planning and design. It also formed the rationalisation for such edicts like the Cantonment Proclamation of 1904 and other related policies engaged by successive colonial administration in 20th century Lagos.

Conclusion and Recommendation

In this study, it has been demonstrated that there is a direct correlation between the incessant city fires of 19th century and development in Lagos. The apparent vacuum brought about by fire begs a reaction to fill the void. Policies that have impacted on certain aspects of the developmental life of Lagos was as a result of direct response to the reoccurring fire cases in 19th century Lagos. While we may be quick to categorise fire as a destructive and negative force, the historical reality as far as city development is concerned says quite the contrary. Philosophically, fire does not ‘destroy’, it purifies. In its true character, it will not leave a system void, rather, intrinsically it makes room for newer and more functional advancement. Many disciplines of Earth sciences generally share this view of the redeeming nature of fire. If our framework for appraising city fires springs forth from this ideological stand point, we are likely to be better prepared in handling the opportunities that may emerge from the ashes and consequently we will achieve more from the full circle of an incident. Fowler and Konopik (2007) studying the natural and human induced fire regimes of southern Americas see a central importance of fire to human existence. They clearly present that since the earliest times, man has been using fire or has been taking advantage of its occurrence to create a desired environment that produces for his needs and sustenance. They further conclude that man and fire have been rendezvousing for millennia and their relationship is extremely intimate to the degree that they are inseparable. Pausas and Keeley (2009, p. 593) presents a view which agrees with the conclusions of Fowler and Konopik. They fervidly argue the essentiality of fire and its regenerative powers to the balance of the earth’s ecosystem.

When fire clears a system that is tired, unproductive and decaying, it does so while concurrently making provision for regeneration of new life. No policy will survive, let alone succeed if aspects of it does not assure a people of a parallel or better situation than the former. However powerful a policy maybe, one may conclude that a good policy which is poorly implemented is every inch as venomous and detrimental to the fabric of urbanism as a pitiable policy even (especially) when that is superbly implemented. The question then will be, can policy always deliver a ‘better than former situation’? The answer must be sort out in the creativity of thought that must bring forth bright strategies designed to help achieve a set of goals within a practical and sustainable framework. While

policy must be assertive for desired change to occur promptly, commitment to monitoring and allowance for modification is the heart, soul and survival of any policy. Without the above, no policy can perform optimally. The result of a policy implemented without a decisive and sustainable standards monitoring plan is chaos. Cobin (2013) has discussed the effects of neglect, poor funding and outright failure of standards monitoring in his rather caustic paper on fire safety in Nigeria. For any form of success to be recorded, a well thought out and holistic approach must be employed in creating policies that affect people and housing.

So to attempt the question posed earlier, this study will answer *Yes*, a good policy can and must in fact always present a better than former situation.

END NOTES

ⁱ Nwanunobi also cited this proclamation in his work. See: Nwanunobi, C. O. (1990). Incendiarism and other fires in 19th century Lagos (1863-88). *Africa*, 60 (1), 115.

ⁱⁱ London is also a notable city which suffered several prominent fires. The most remarkable London fire however falls out of this study's time frame. See: Hanson, Neil. (2001). *The Great Fire of London in that apocalyptic year, 1666*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Smith, R. S. (1978). *The Lagos consulate 1851 – 1861*. London: Macmillan Press.

^{iv} Alonge, M. D. (1991). *Afro-Brazilian Architecture in Lagos State: A Case for Conservation* (Doctoral Dissertation)

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