

## **Transnational Entrepreneurship in Nigeria: The Case of Tokunbo Automobiles**

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*Tokunbo* is a Yoruba word loosely translated as “from across the water.” On the streets of Lagos, Nigeria, “Tokunbo” has evolved to mean imported used items from the West – in particular automobiles. *Tokunbo* is a thriving business in Nigeria. As early as the year 2000, *Tokunbo* automobiles comprised 90% of the imported automobiles in Nigeria (USA Trade On-Line, 2009). The development and growth of this industry is entirely dependent on transnational entrepreneurship. The key foci of this research project address how this process came about, the socio-economic significance of this practice, the network and diversity of transnational, ethnic, and returnee entrepreneurship that sustains this process (Drori, Honig, and Wright, 2009), and the endangered future of this entrepreneurial industry.

Recent research has shown the economic importance of transnational entrepreneurs in developing countries (Levit, 2001; Light et al, 2002; Portes et al, 2002; Black and King, 2004, Grillo and Riccio, 2004). However, an examination of transnational entrepreneurship in the used car economy in Nigeria is largely absent from this literature. This study begins to illuminate this vibrant instance of transnational entrepreneurship, its importance highlighted by the fact that Lagos is a city of seventeen million people with a growing middle class generating ample demand for automobiles (Senauer and Goetz, 2003)

The research project employed multiple methods (interviews, field data collection, participant-observation, film-making, and archival research). The site of fieldwork and filming was the Berger automobile retail park in Nigeria, a sprawling connection of

informal car parks owned by dealer collectives. It is arguably the single largest used car retail facility in West Africa. By using ethnographic visual methods of research and analysis we showcased the range of participants in this transnational automobile trade such as sellers, mechanics, those doing custom modifications to the vehicles, and the buyers themselves. The project also deploys a unique approach to participant-observation through the active involvement of one of the researchers (Anaele Iroh, a native Nigerian) in procuring and exporting used vehicles to Nigerian traders as a transnational entrepreneur. The paper will be presented along with video footage from the ethnographic film.

### References

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