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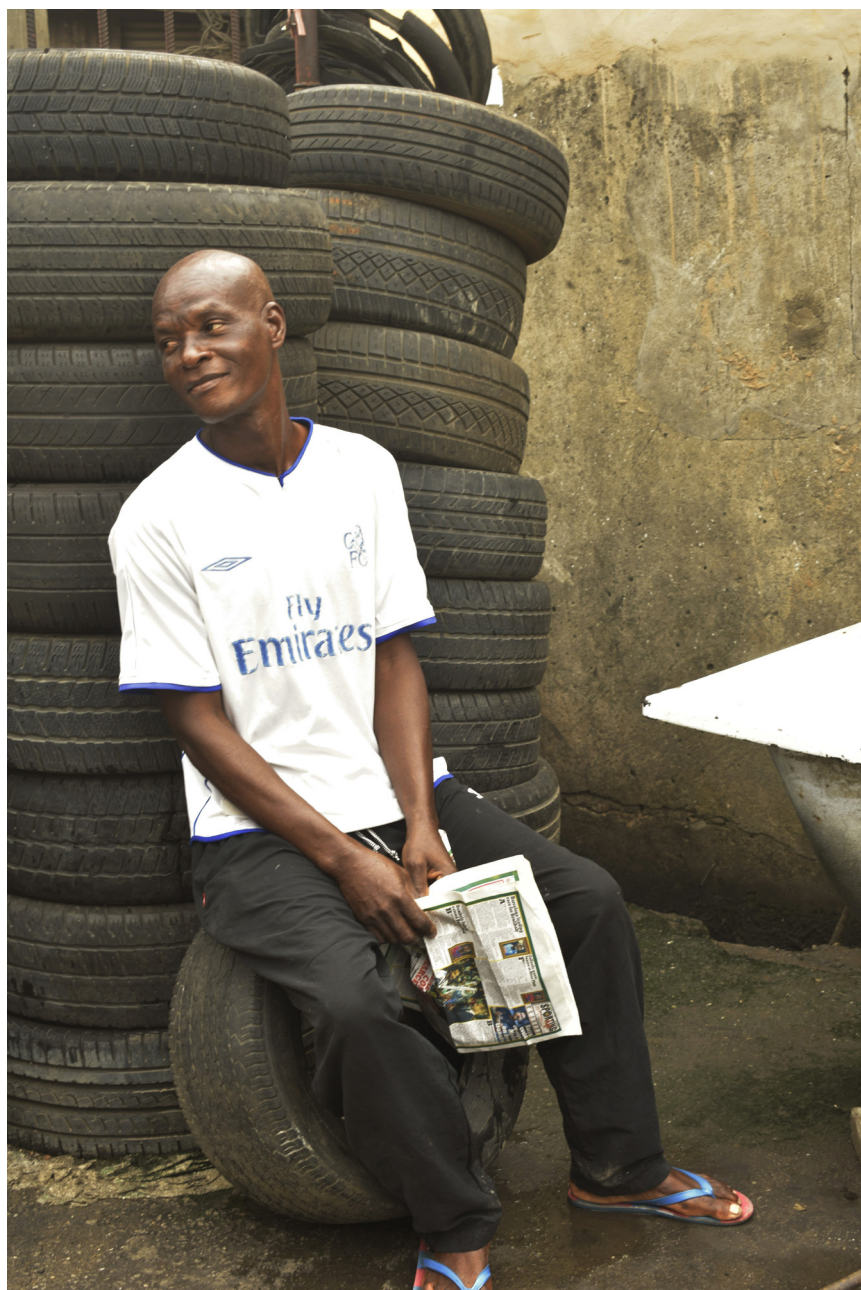
LIBRARY ON THE GO!

in collaboration with

OM20
Production Ltd.

**GOETHE
INSTITUT**

Sprache. Kultur. Deutschland.



© Mr. Almaruff Okunola

There are many readers in Lagos.
Yes o, many.
Numerous sef.

On any given day, on multiple street corners, in varied contexts, you can spy many Lagosians reading.

Books, newspapers, phones, and bibles no less!

Yet, sadly, there lies an absurd assumption that Lagosians do not read.

LOG

LIBRARY ON THE GO!

PRODUCERS Goethe-Institut Nigeria, OM20 Production Ltd.

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Goethe-Institut Nigeria's Library on the Go, in collaboration with Hassan Abiodun, a Lagos based photographer, is a photo series which celebrates the under-acknowledged readers of Lagos.

These are not big scholars, or professors, or business magnates or even renowned book critics.

The images in this collection are those of everyday readers in Lagos. Through this series, the photographer asks questions such as:

- What are your reading habits?
- Where is your preferred reading space?
- Why do you read?

An aside by the author: To be honest, the vision of this work is not one I am used to. But strange as it is, I recognise it. It brings a certain recent event to mind.





© Alakija Kehinde Rodhiat



The place in time was Obalende @ COB. And as you can probably imagine at this time, traffic was choking; the buses were choking; commuter bones were aching. And yet, in spite of the general tension, right outside the bus I was in, there was this young woman sitting in the open air, face-wearing the awkward hint of a smile; beside her was a tray of kola nuts.

Shugbon, however evident the presence of her body was, in that space, in that very public space, there was no denying the young woman's absence of mind. Even with all the sweat and engine oil passing her so closely, so intimately; even with all that grime, she was not there. It seemed she could not really bring herself to be there. Not at that moment. It was obvious but it wasn't. Whatever she had her eyes on; it had put a spell on her.

When I eventually leaned out of my seat to look too, like what's going on here? It was a book I saw she was reading. And for that reason, as well as the kola nuts on sale beside her, I kept staring. I kept staring at her. Something in me could not understand; could not accept that it had understood.

Now, it is possible that the vision of the Lagos many would rather believe in is one where the city's streetfolk are eternally moving, eternally busy and eternally drained. But this is not what I saw that day in the middle of Obalende traffic at five p.m. Oh no, that day I saw leisure on a busy thoroughfare. But is it so different from stumbling on a middle-aged bread seller reading a Yoruba translation of her Bible in her downtime?

Madam Olorunsholafunmi, businesswoman slash breadwinner, has been selling bread to hungry and impatient Lagosians since 1998. Imagine that! Next year she'll be 25 years in the business, and so far, she has been able to take care of her boys, as well as give them a basic education, both from this work that she does.

An hungry reader, Madam Olorunsholafunmi never misses her daily ration of Bible-reading just before the start of business. On milder days, even, one is sure to see her sitting by a stack of nyloned loaves, reading a copy of one of her favourite Yoruba-language newspapers. And when Madam Olorunsholafunmi finally finds something that lights up a bulb in her, or needing to attend to a certain crucial something, she folds the leaves of her magazine, she usually does so having made a mental note to share this discovery with her carpenter neighbour at nighttime. For her, reading has over the years become a way of staying informed about the bigger world, as well as a vehicle for practising her religious devotion.







© Balogun Taoffek A.K.A Counselor

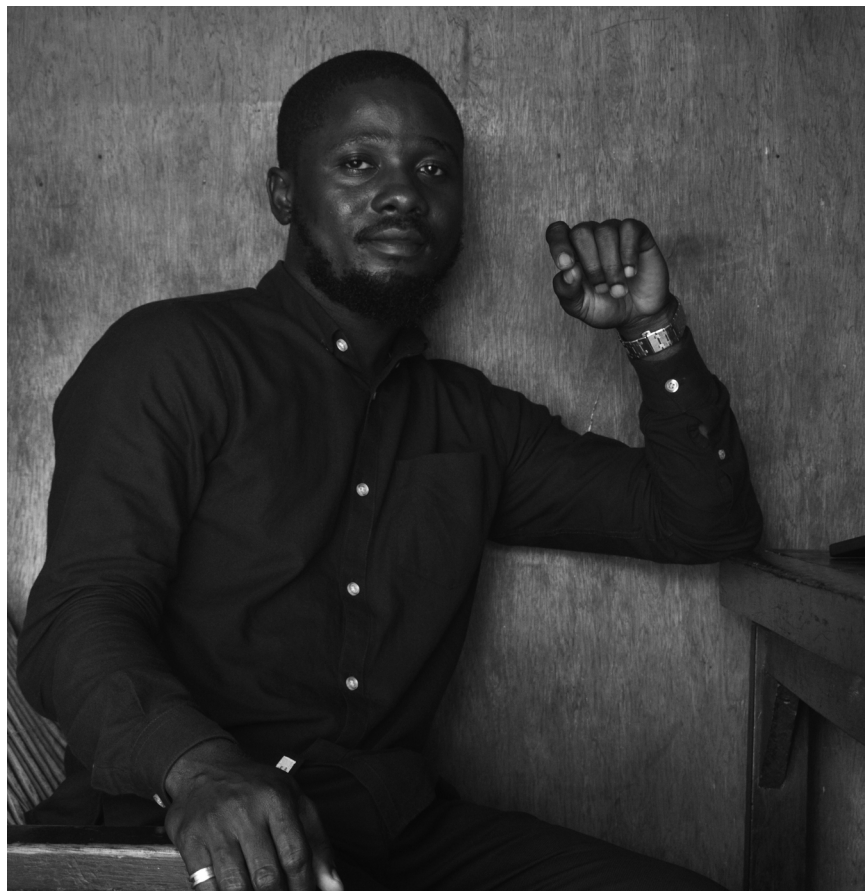






Indirectly or otherwise, most of Hassan Abiodun's subjects find their books in the same kinds of places. In the more accessible markets. At thrift sales. By theft. Or as a gift. And yet they are as mindful as any reader. As individual in taste as the postcolony affords. No less curatorial choices goes into the catalogues of the various sellers they purchase from.

Mr. Nkume, now in his late forties, is one of such sellers. Pricing at a market level, he tells Hassan his books can go for anything between 500 Naira and "infinity". A reader himself—of history books, to be precise—he has realised that, for him, the best time to set out on his spatiotemporal book voyages, at home with family, is before dawn. Early momo. Before the sunlight drags his children out of their sleeps. But sometimes he skips on this ritual and saves the reading for when he's at his store. There he has all the time in the world.



© Ayeni Olakunle Steven

In the world of booksellers like Monsieur Nkume, it is possible to abstract a category of those drawing value directly from bought books, and then another of those who choose to share this value with others; the book lenders. “I do buy o; not that I borrow,” a 42-year-old noodleseller assures Hassan. It is a statement that curves away from his question of genre preference. A digression though it may have been, it however says a thing or two about the book culture of the ‘less seen’ among us. The first: that there is a whole lotta borrowing that takes place in this ecosystem. And with this ‘borrowing’ and its implied demand on bookbuyers, comes the exchange of value—monetary and so much more—among sellers, buyers/lenders and borrowers.

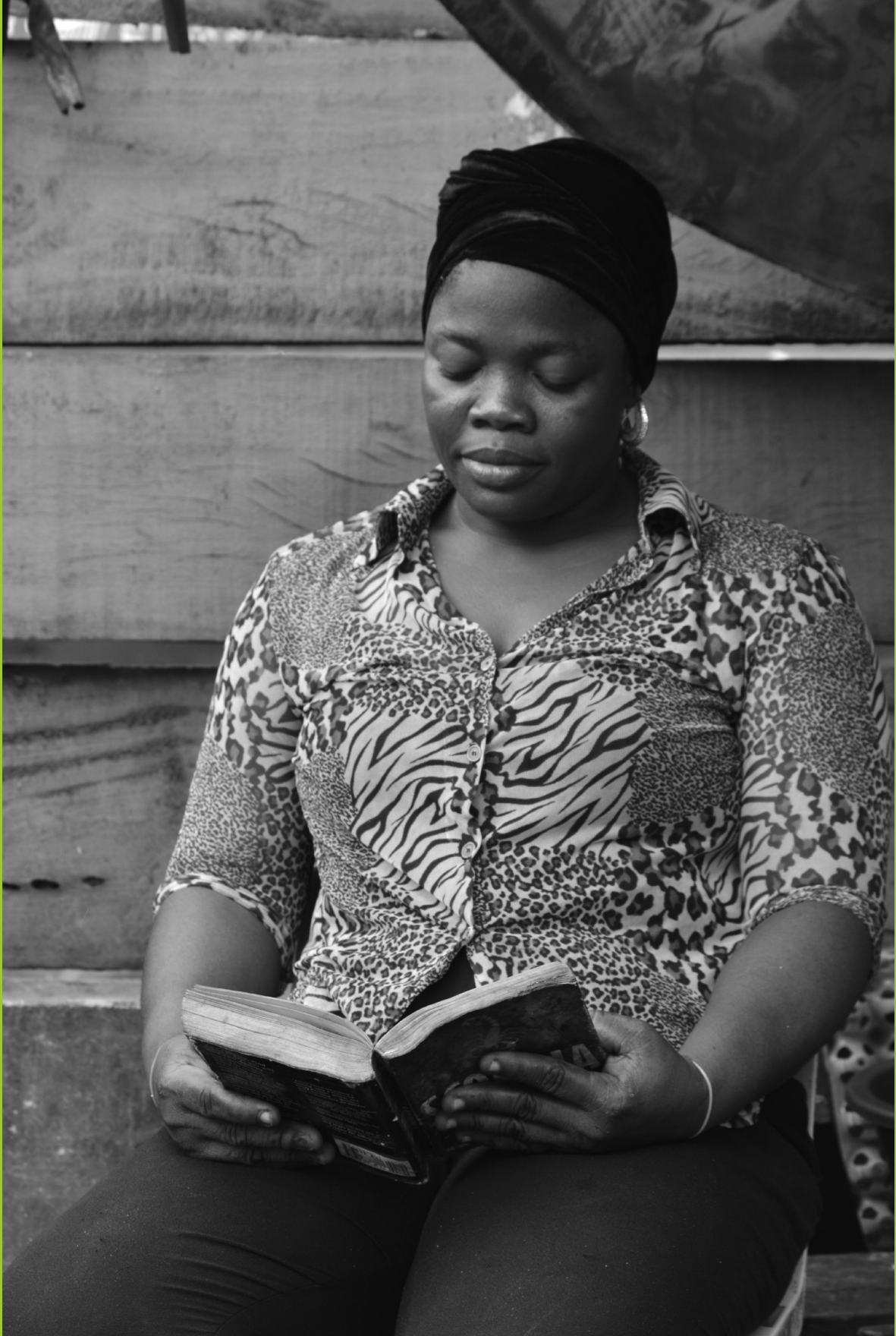
But while book-borrowing is the one bone our 42-year-old noodleseller cannot chew, for Almarroof the Vulcaniser, it is the papers. The statement, “Nigerian newspapers are full of lies,” are, verily, his. Almarroof says he prefers sports journalism. He thinks it portrays reality in a truer form than political commentary. As per, who politics epp? As per, political apathy. And yet, his statement is a political one. With him, we have Taiwo Osunbade, another ideological, albeit cautious reader, who thinks books are a repository of vibes, and that it is possible to catch a bad one off the page, or as he puts it, “be led astray”.

Some distance from Almarroof the Vulcaniser, we find his converse, Tao-feek, on the richer end of the spectrum of political participation. Mr. Balogun Taofeek aka Counsellor, an occasional community conflict mediator, says he does reading for the knowing; he says that he has an aversion to dulling. (By dulling, he means not knowing what is going on in the realm of government.) And so he reads. Newspapers mostly.





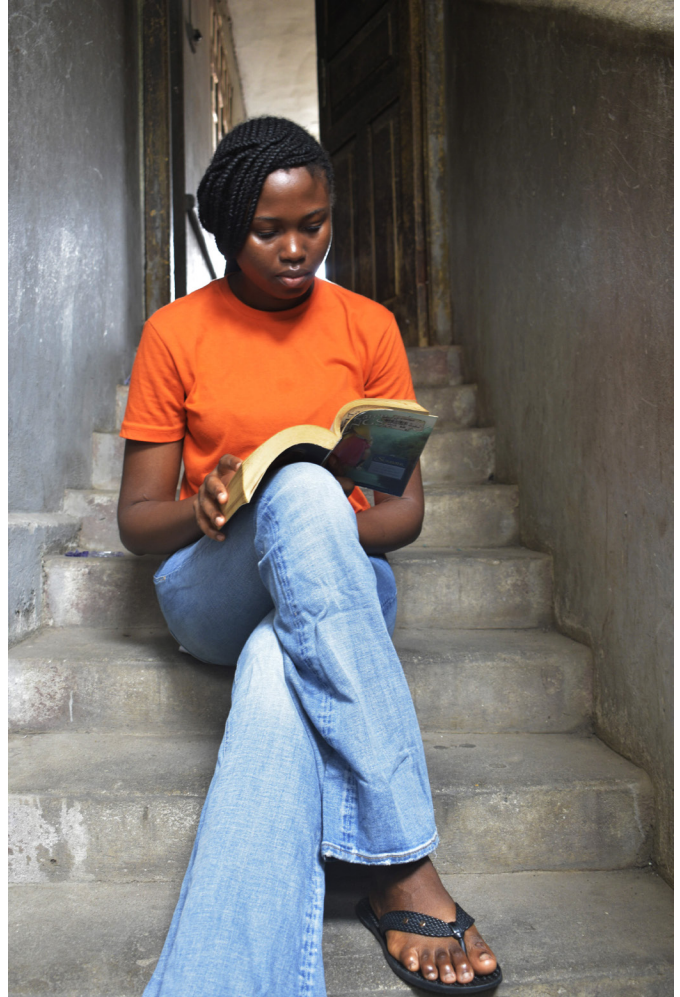




© Miss Soneye Atinuke

For 25-year-old Abidemi, who has “not had time to indulge” in the kind of fiction that keeps her up at night, reading has been an avenue for exercising her curiosity about the world since her childhood. And the best place for this sort of activity has always been her room: her room(s) in all the buildings she has ever inhabited. “I’m not a library person,” she reminds Hassan later in their conversation. And this is the type of sentiment both Steven and Ogunleye, self-employed fellows, express.

Although leading separate lives within the bowels of Lagos, Steven and Ogunleye, an auto dealer and a freelance copywriter respectively, can’t for the lives of them, stay away from their phones. Steven needs his to stay in touch with clients and to market his cars. Ogunleye does a ton of research on his. But the thing is: in addition to work, their phones find utility in their book reading as well. They both enjoy consuming nonfiction. But while Steven has a preference for business literature, Ogunleye stays with his motivationals.



© Odetayo Olamide Abidemi





More still, there are undergrads like 20-year-old Kehinde of Yabatech, who are fond of saying they do not read their fields. Which, should you be wondering, implies that, in this case, a student of the discipline though she is, reading her engineering books means sleep for Kehinde. And who can blame her? She'd rather be reading some sci-fi or werewolf-type fantasy anyway. Besides, most people in the pith of academia know academic writing can be lifeless. But this is besides the point.

The point is Library on the Go. The idea that whether the text is living in a paperback-without-a-back or on the front of their phones, Lagosians are reading. And it's not even the most televised amongst us that Hassan Abiodun focuses his lenses on, here. It's the ones considered too small to be seen.





© Taiwo Osunbade