

**“Shit business is serious business”: Isaac Durojaiye Agbetusin (“Otunba Gaddafi”) and the business of mobile toilets in Lagos (Nigeria) since the 1990s**

Ayodeji Olukoju [University of Lagos]

**ABSTRACT:** A comprehensive history of sewage management in urban Nigeria has yet to be written. In precolonial Lagos, faecal matter was buried outside the settlement but this became increasingly impracticable under colonial rule and in the face of population explosion. From the colonial period (up to 1960), human waste was deposited in pit latrines and bucket latrines, evacuated by night soil men (*agbepo*). Middle and upper class homes had modern water closets. Spatial, cultural and management aspects of sewage management have been studied, but there is no study of it as a business enterprise.

A major turning point came in 1992 when Isaac Durojaiye Agbetusin (better known as “Otunba Gaddafi” from his earlier career as a bodyguard) pioneered mobile (public) toilets in Lagos. His entry addressed two issues: the huge demand for (non-existent) mobile public toilets and the odious image of the *agbepo*. He demonstrated that sewage management was “serious business”, and that it was as respectable and profitable as any other (“shit money does not smell”). After his pioneering effort, more mobile toilet operators emerged to meet the demand for their services as Lagos became a megacity and played host to major outdoor sports, religious and political meetings. This paper fills a gap in the literature on urban sewage management in Nigeria by examining the neglected socio-economic dimensions of the subject, with Agbetusin’s career as entry point.

**AUTHOR’S PROFILE:**

Ayodeji Olukoju (PhD, History, Ibadan, Nigeria) is University Distinguished Professor of Maritime and Economic History at the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

A Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, he is the author of several books and monographs, including *Infrastructure Development and Urban Facilities in Lagos* (2003), *The Liverpool of West Africa* (2004) and *Culture and Customs of Liberia* (2006), book chapters and articles in journals. He is the co-editor of seven books. Olukoju served on the advisory board of *Journal of Global History* (2021-23).

Research Publications Profile:

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1667-0469>

SCOPUS: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=6603259963>

Google Scholar: Ayodeji Olukoju

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=hZEUghAAAAJ&hl=en&oi=ao>

E-mail: [aolukoju2002@yahoo.com](mailto:aolukoju2002@yahoo.com)