

Frontiers of Urban Survival
Everyday Corruption and Precarious Existence in Lagos

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by

Daniel E. Agbiboa

Oxford Department of International Development
Queen Elizabeth House
University of Oxford

St. Antony's College
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Abstract

The vast corpus of works on corruption in Africa focuses almost exclusively on 'grand corruption' and political elites (so-called 'Big Men'), and hardly on 'everyday corruption' and ordinary actors. When everyday corruption appears in the literature, it is frequently explained away as petty and/or normal – something expected and accepted. In this study, I take issue with this predominant narrative, couched in an equally dominant but narrow Weberian notion of corruption. Grounding corruption in the micro-politics of urban public transport in Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital and Africa's largest city, I argue that ordinary actors detest the corruption that they encounter daily. At the same time, their power(lessness) in the face of its banality compels them to constantly devise tactics to find a way around it or to make it productive for their ends. Structured into six chapters, the study begins by probing the popular imagination, discourse, and spatiality of corruption. It then shows how corruption is embedded in routine socio-economic relations, how it conditions ordinary lives and social livelihoods, and how everyday actors encounter it, exploit it, resist it, or become its victims each day. The study required eight months of ethnographic fieldwork grounded on the routine experiences and lifeworlds of road transport workers in Lagos, Nigeria. My direct experience of the 'surrounds' of these urban actors, the 'junctions' that constitute the spatial hinge of violent extortion and complicity, and routine participation in the omnipresent danfos' enabled access to a sense of how this complex system works.

Daniel Egiegba Agbiboa
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¹ Commercial minibuses-taxis

Abbreviations

AMORAN	Articulate Motorcyclists Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria
ANACOWA	All Nigerians Autobike Commercial Owners and Workers' Association
APC	All Peoples Congress
BRT	Bus Rapid Transit
BRU	Bike Riders Union (Freetown)
CPI	Corruption Perception Index
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FRN	Federal Republic of Nigeria
FRSC	Federal Road Safety Corps
IBB	Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida
ICPC	Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission
IGR	Internal Generated Revenue
ING	Interim National Government
KAI	Kick Against Indiscipline
KCC	Kampala City Council
LAMATA	Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority
LASDRI	Lagos State Drivers Institute
LASTMA	Lagos State Transport Management Authority
LGA	Local Government Area
LSFS	Lagos State Ferry Services
LSMPT	Lagos State Ministry of Public Transport
LSRTL (the law)	Lagos State Road Traffic Law
LSSAA	Lagos State Signage and Advert Agency
LUTP	Lagos Urban Transport Project
MOALS	Motorcycle Association of Lagos State
MOTOAN	Motorcycle and Tricycle Operators Association of Nigeria
MVAA	Motor Vehicle Administration Agency (Lagos)
NAI	National Archives Ibadan
NFA	No Future Ambition

NURTW	National Union of Road Transport Workers
PDP	Peoples Democratic Party
PPP	Public Private Partnership
RTEAN	Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria
RWC	Road Worthiness Certificate
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SURE-P	Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme
UGX	Ugandan Shillings
VIS	Vehicle Inspection Service
WAI	War Against Indiscipline

Glossary

<i>419</i>	Advance-fee fraud after the Nigerian criminal code
<i>Agbero</i>	Motor-park touts
<i>Aiye/Aye</i>	(Wicked) World
<i>Area boy</i>	Boys from the area/street
<i>Askari</i>	Police officer
<i>Bedskin</i>	Commercial motorbike-taxi (Yaoundé)
<i>Cars Rapides</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Dakar)
<i>Chop</i>	Eat/Corruption/bribery
<i>Danfo</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Lagos)
<i>Egunje</i>	Bribe
<i>Eko</i>	Another name for Lagos
<i>Esprit de mort</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Kinshasa)
<i>Gbaka</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Abidjan)
<i>Godfatherism</i>	Expected favoured treatment from a senior
<i>Go-slow (hold-up)</i>	Traffic congestion
<i>JJC</i>	Naïve newcomer to Lagos
<i>Juju</i>	Witchcraft/African magic/charms
<i>Kamuny</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Kampala)
<i>Keke Napep</i>	Commercial tricycle-taxi (Lagos)
<i>Kombis</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Johannesburg)
<i>Magbaa</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Conakry)
<i>Matatu</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Nairobi)
<i>Molue</i>	Commercial midibus-taxi (Lagos)
<i>Naira</i>	Nigerian currency
<i>Okada</i>	Commercial motorbike-taxi (Lagos)
<i>Orita</i>	Junction/roundabout/meeting of three roads
<i>Otobis</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Cairo)
<i>Paraga</i>	Locally brewed liquor
<i>Pidgin</i>	An English-based pidgin spoken across Nigeria
<i>Poda-poda</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Freetown)
<i>Settle</i>	Bribe
<i>Shine your eyes</i>	A call to be street smart/vigilant
<i>Songa Kidogo</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Kigali)
<i>Sotrama</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Bamako)
<i>Tro tro</i>	Commercial minibus-taxi (Accra)

Wayo
Yahoo Yahoo (boys)
Yellow Fever

Fraud/trickery
Internet fraudsters
Traffic police inspector

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother,
Esther Glory Agbibo

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General Introduction

Without transgression, without the red boundary, there is no danger, no risk, no frisson, no experiment, no discovery and no creativity. Without extending some hidden or visible frontier of the possible, without disturbing something of the incomplete order of things there is no challenge, no pleasure, and certainly no joy (Ben Okri, 1997: 32).

During the course of my fieldwork in Lagos, Nigeria, I was regularly struck by the many occasions when passengers of the omnipresent commercial minibus-taxis (aka *danfos*) will exhort their driver to follow ‘one way’² in order to get them where they are going as fast as possible, even as they will turn around and blame the driver when he is caught by traffic police inspectors. When this happens, passengers will urge their driver to ‘settle’ the police inspector ‘without story.’³ The same passengers are immoderately impatient with drivers who choose to remain in the correct lane. They will haul insults after insults to the driver and his conductor, calling the duo locally offensive designations like ‘JJC’ (a naïve newcomer to Lagos) or *igbin* (a snail). All the *dramatis personae* seem to know that following one way amounts to a dangerous behaviour (*iwa to lewu*), but because others are doing it, many feel obliged to participate or risk been left behind in the everyday struggle to get ahead or find a way. As the popular saying goes in Lagos: ‘Naija no dey carry last.’

² This means to drive against the flow of traffic. A cause of many head-on collisions on Lagos roads, this transgressive practice attracts a 3-year jail term, while a first offender gets a one-year term and the vehicle forfeited to the state (Lagos State Road Traffic Law [LSRTL], 2012, see Appendix).

³ Such ‘settlements’ are emboldened by the fact that, in Lagos, the written only makes sense in relation to its ‘other’: ‘oral formality’ (Mbembé, 2001: 148).

This paradox of ambivalent complicity reclaims the theoretical characterisation of corruption in the literature as a ‘collective action-social trap’ problem (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2006), where any self-interested social actor will reason like this: ‘Well if everybody seems corrupt, why shouldn’t I be?’ (Myrdal, 1968: 409). Theories of collective action hold that when the dominant perception in a society is that public officials are corrupt, this creates an expectation that everybody pays a bribe, and thus behavioral norm trumps any ethical objections that individuals may have.⁴ The result is a ‘low-level equilibrium trap’ (Rose and Peiffer, 2014) in which both citizens and subjects maintain or invest in a ‘moral economy of corruption’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999).⁵ The perception of corruption as a collective action-social trap problem in Lagos emerged during my interview with a vehicle inspection officer in Alimosho:

When you’re following one way, don’t you know its wrong? Of course it’s wrong and you know it. You don’t need to be told except you’re totally mad. But you feel this is Nigeria. This is Lagos. Nothing can happen. Anything goes. We all do it now. You reason: ‘When you catch me I will call the Commissioner and nothing will happen.’ Can somebody living in Britain violate a law and call someone in the high place and say “take the phone so and so want to speak with you...” Does it work that way? The punitive measure is not addressed enough... and that’s why a lot of people in our country do things with total impunity.

Fela Anikulakpo Kuti, the iconic Nigerian musician, once criticised what he calls the ‘follow follow’ mentality of Nigerians who are wont to close ‘*dem ears*’ and ‘*dem eyes*’ to truth. Nigeria’s ‘follow follow’ mentality is most evident in the participation of its ordinary citizens in a process wherein they are both victims and critics. This ambivalent complicity goes all the way to the top, mirroring the trouble with Nigeria

⁴ This view, however, downplays the role of human agency and fails to account for the masses of ordinary people who rise up daily in defiance against corrupt and violent public officials.

⁵ This perspective is usually adduced in critique of the ‘principal-agent theory,’ which assumes the presence of ‘principled principals’ in civil society and in positions of power to actively oppose corruption and enforce anti-corruption reforms (Klitgaard, 1988; Rose-Ackerman, 1999).

(Achebe, 1983). As Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari, stated in a 2015 keynote address on 'Incorruptibility: A Spiritual Premise for Material Wellbeing':

To curtail corruption, we have to reorder the mindset of all [Nigerians]... those who are critics today are most times not better than those they criticize. When they are availed the same or similar opportunities, they act likewise. In other words, those who didn't have the opportunity criticise and blow whistle but when they get into office; they become victims of the same thing they criticise... This points to the fact that curtailing corruption might require a more broadened social engineering (*Leadership*, 12 December 2015).

In a Nigerian context where corruption has 'passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage' (Achebe, 1983), it becomes easier to understand why the tactics of survival adopted by ordinary citizens resemble the ones adopted by their political leaders to accumulate wealth and power (Bayart, 1993: 237). It is here, within the very confines of this 'mutuality' (Bahre, 2014), that corruption in Africa must be studied. Such research, argues Achilles Mbembe (2001: 133), must 'go beyond institutions, beyond formal positions of power, and beyond the written rules, and examine how the implicit and explicit are interwoven, and how the [corrupt] practices of those who command and those who are assumed to obey are so entangled as to render both powerless' (see Chapter 6). This meaning is implied in the widespread reference to corruption in Nigeria as the 'Nigerian factor.'

1.1 The 'Nigerian Factor' and the Perennial Struggle

Corruption has featured prominently in every botched attempt to govern Nigeria since independence in October 1960 (Dudley, 1973, 1982; Diamond, Kirk-Greene and Oyediran, 1997; Agbiboa, 2011; Adebani and Obadare, 2011). To be sure, popular consciousness and discontent about corruption in Nigeria dates back to late pre-colonial era (Tignor, 1993), when Shehu Usman dan Fodio waged a *jihad* (holy war) against the corrupt and apostate Hausa government of his time (M.J. Smith, 1964).

The Shehu denounced certain everyday practices among the Hausa as oppressive and alien to the practice of true Islam, including *tawasa* (levies on meat in markets), *kamuwa* (illegal appropriation of property), *gargadi* (obligatory military services commutable for cash, the use of inflated titles, and the bribery of judges). Writing in 1827, Clapperton (1829: 215) describes the sale of offices as current among the northern Fulani. Likewise, Barth (1857: 16-17) details the gifts he had to present to gain access to chiefs in northern Nigeria. By 1903, when Sir Frederick Lord Lugard, the premier Governor-General of Nigeria (1914-1919), sought to impose British colonial rule on northern Nigeria, he found that it was customary for all people visiting their superiors to bring a *gaisuwa* or present (cited in M.J. Smith, 1964: 171).

Despite its consistently poor rankings in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index,⁶ Nigeria has historically been locked in the 'perennial struggle against corruption' (Diamond, 1991: 73). In fact, the promise to fight corruption has frequently served as a legitimizing force for new political authorities in Nigeria. Yet, these promises are neglected once the initial zeal for reform ebbs, or when, literally, 'corruption fights back' (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011). Following the epochal transition to civilian rule in May 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) established the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) and ICPC (Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission), promising expectant Nigerians that these corruption cleanup institutions would spearhead the fight against corruption that was lacking in General Sani Abacha's hypocritical 'Not in our Character' media campaign. Their initial promise notwithstanding, these anti-corruption institutions quickly degenerated into feckless rhetorics about principles of government accountability and transparency, offering little by way of real action.

⁶ In 2011, out of 183 countries, Nigeria was ranked 143 on the corruption ladder. In 2012, 129 out of 176. In 2013, 144 out of 177, in 2014, 136 out of 174, in 2015, 136 out of 168. 85 per cent of Nigerians believed corruption has increased from 2011 to 2013 (Transparency International, 2015).

1.2 Corruption Typology

Corruption is among the principal concerns of citizens and leaders everywhere, and it is now an important part of most national and international development dialogues. According to the African edition of the Global Corruption Barometer (2015: 2), the vast bulk of ordinary Africans (58 per cent) perceive corruption to be on the rise in their countries and think that their government is failing in its efforts to tackle corruption. Many citizens also feel disempowered as regards to taking action against corruption. In countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana, citizens are the most negative about corruption.⁷ A staggering 75 million Africans paid bribe in 2014 – some to escape punishment by the police or courts,⁸ but many were also forced to pay bribes to secure access to the basic services that they desperately need.

While corruption has existed in diverse societies for many decades,⁹ the theme has generated some evidence and a cornucopia of confusion. Three factors, I suspect, account for this. First, the surreptitious nature of corrupt practices makes them extremely difficult to register (Galtung, 2006; Anders, 2009). Second, corruption is a problematic category for analysis due to its cultural relativistic leanings (de Maria, 2009). Third, and this is crucial, corruption has historically been a domain of economists and political scientists, with anthropological voices largely muted (at least until the late 1990s) (Torsello and Venard, 2015). This disciplinary imbalance has precluded the emergence of a nuanced understanding of corruption, especially the routine logics and social norms that reinforces corruption as an opportunistic behaviour.

⁷ There are a few countries in which citizens see low levels of corruption in their public institutions and view corruption as on the wane in their own country. The views of citizens in Botswana, Lesotho, Senegal and Burkina Faso are particularly favourable (Global Corruption Barometer, 2015: 3).

⁸ The Global Corruption Barometer (2015: 3) found that out of six public services, people who come into contact with the police and the courts are the most likely to have paid a bribe. This is consistent with previous Transparency International surveys and highlights the lack of progress made in addressing bribery in these two institutions, which are crucial for citizen security and the rule of law.

⁹ One of the oldest Indian sources on corruption dates back over 2,300 years (Klitgaard, 1988: 23).

Now, each research field has its own priorities when it comes to studying corruption.¹⁰ Economists are interested in identifying structures of incentives that make corruption probable and how corruption impacts on efficient economic outcomes (Mauro, 1995; Bardhan, 2015; Granovetter, 2004). Political scientists, however, define corruption in close relation to state legitimacy, civil society engagement, and the manner in which political power is contested and exercised (Heidenheimer et al. 1989; Szeftel, 1998). From the two perspectives, the primary drawback of legal and moral explanations of corruption is their spatio-temporally contingent nature and, particularly, their failure to meet the standards of scientific rationality since they do not generate quantifiable and comparable data sets. Both economists and political scientists tend to converge on a basic distinction between two corruption typologies – grand corruption and everyday corruption – according to scale, social space, and type of actors (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Although this binary opposition provides a preliminary guidance for most studies of corruption (Blundo, 2007), it generates the necessities of keeping this template intact, which leads to faulty assumptions and skewed conceptualisations.¹¹

1.2.1 Grand Corruption and Bigmanity

Grand corruption describes corrupt dealings involving large financial sums. The most extreme forms are cases of ‘state capture’ where the state is appropriated as a conduit for private accumulation (Scott, 1972). In Nigeria, political coalitions and clusters have historically been engaged in determined efforts to capture the state apparatus for the primary purpose of using its redistributive powers to enrich themselves and their cronies (Joseph, 1987). Given the critical role of the state in capital accumulation,

¹⁰ In recent years, there has been a growing convergence of interests as anthropologists have started to carry out ethnographic explorations of the state (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001).

¹¹ While it might be true that economists and political scientists have skewed conceptualisations of corruption, I do not assume that the anthropologists or ‘culturalist’ conceptualisation is not ‘skewed’ towards a caricature of African culture and social dynamics. As I show later (in chapter 2), there is much to criticize in the works of African scholars like Bayart, Mbembe, Chabal and Daloz.

political contests and jostling for state capture have gained intensity, more so with the expanded national revenue base from oil earnings that rose seismically in the 1970s, accounting for something like 75 per cent of national revenues (Lewis, 1996). The consequence was that political influence became so entangled with economic power that the premium on the former became ‘a matter of life and death’ (Ake, 1981: 1163). As Nigerian historian Toyin Falola recollects:

The only way to grow rich was through state patronage. Consequently, today’s business elite struggles to identify with power in a variety of ways: by joining political parties, befriending military chieftains, and humouring the people in power. Either to protect wealth acquired corruptly, or to prevent their rivals from using power to destroy them, the entrepreneur class continues to strengthen its connections with the protective powers in the government (Falola, 1998: 63-4).

Against the above background, public officials hardly see themselves as rule-bound bureaucrats in the Weberian sense but have a primordial loyalty to family, kin, ethnic groups, and party supporters. Peter Ekeh (1975: 91) famously argues that colonialism in Africa, especially his native Nigeria, culminated in the emergence of a private realm, and two publics: ‘primordial public’ and ‘civic public.’ The primordial public former (ruled by indigenous shared norms and values) was founded on a system of accountability and control, founded on communal moral principles. The civic public (governed by the postcolonial state and its institutions) became a contested terrain for private accumulation based on the zone of amoral behaviour with much emphasis on rights and less on duties. Ekeh argues that the dialectical relations between the two publics are implicated in the distinctive woes that speckle Nigeria. For Ekeh (1975: 110), corruption is the ‘acme of the dialectics,’ and derives from ‘the legitimation of the need to seize largesse from the civic public to benefit the primordial public.’

Ekeh’s theoretical statement on corruption in Africa is, of course, over-simplified: it seems to romanticize the civic public, disregarding the cleavages, inequalities, and

ethnic hierarchies that underpin and complicate colonial Africa, shaping people's life chances and making ethnic mobilization an attractive proposition for many elites and non-elites (Mustapha, 2008: 6). Moreover, Ekeh fails to take into sufficient account the multiple overlapping publics in the African postcolony, which is made up 'not of one single "public space" but of several, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics...' (Mbembe, 1992: 4).

Despite its shortfalls, Ekeh's ideas went on to shape notable theoretical frameworks that sought to explain ways in which patron-client networks persists in postcolonial Africa through the intermingling of formal bureaucratic procedures with more traditional patron-client affairs and neo-patrimonial norms (Mamdani, 1996). Such frameworks include (neo)patrimonialism (Bratton and van de Walle, 1994; Médard, 1986), 'belly politics' (Bayart, 1989), 'predation' (Evans, 1995), 'instrumentalised disorder' (Chabal and Daloz, 1999), and 'disorientations of civil society' (Osaghae, 2006). These approaches sought to explain state pathologies and politics by alluding to the dynamics of internal social structures. They crystallized in an understanding of corruption in Africa as woven into the fabric of social life (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 99), reinforced by a predominant 'moral economy' in which the spoils of the state are expected to be circulated through embedded networks of political patronage (Joseph, 1987; Mkandawire, 2015). Corruption occurs in this context when expectations are unmet or when the spoils of the government are not duly circulated (see Chapter 2). In short, accountability is judged in terms of redistribution (Ekeh, 1975).

Attempts to locate the legitimisation of illicit practices within socio-cultural logics are rendered problematic on, at least, two important counts. First, they are prone to generalisation and tendentially disregard the specificities of historical narratives. Second, the 'methodological individualism' contained in these frameworks pivots on highly individualist notions of the state and of political action in Africa. More importantly, they emphasize the role of political leaders and 'big men' at the expense

of the politics and collective actions of ordinary people. In their fixation on the professedly all-powerful political elite or individual patron and their actions, acute observers of the African scene, among them Jean Francois Bayart (1993), William Reno (1995), and Pierre Englebert (2000), privilege form over content and credit ordinary Africans with little sociality, agency, or capacity to turn the tables on their alleged patrons or ‘big men.’ Their works, thus, preclude a view of African politics as a group process involving both citizens and public officials, both parties exercising a measure of autonomy and political expectation. The result is a distorted notion of the people that hardly goes beyond a ‘passive mass of victims’ (Mustapha, 2002).

Yet, as Richard Joseph (1987: 191) argues, ‘[the] sense of insecurity is felt as much by those who temporarily win control of critical resources as by those who feel excluded from them.’ It is this precarious prebendalism (Pratten, 2013) that makes political patrons in Nigeria ever more reliant on the mobilisation of ‘hard men’ around election time as political thugs, election riggers, and vote banks (Chapters 3 and 4). As a result, the imperative for political patrons to be seen to ‘remember’ these hardened men has become ever more pressing, especially since bigmanity is unfixed, multiple, relational, and situational (Utas, 2012; Nyamnjoh, 2015). And, as Olivier de Sardan (1999: 18) reminds us, the logic of solidarity networks – or what Francis Njamnjoh (2015) calls the ‘logic of conviviality’ – include an obligation of mutual assistance: ‘I scratch your back, you scratch my back,’ as people like to say in Lagos. Focusing on the Yoruba of Nigeria’s southwest, Karin Barber observes that:

The dynamic impulse of political life is the rise of self-made men. Individuals compete to make a position for themselves by recruiting supporters willing to acknowledge their greatness [...] but the self made man, rather like the Big Man of New Guinea, is only ‘big’ if other people think so. He has to secure their attention by display and distribution of wealth and by using his influence as a Big Man to protect them and intervene on their behalf. If he is not able to do this, he will not attract a following (Barber, 1981: 724).

Daniel J. Smith observes a similar logic with reference to southeastern Nigeria:

A man who enriches himself through emptying government coffers is despised in his community only if he fails to share enough of that wealth with his people through direct gifts to individuals and community development projects, but also through more ceremonial distribution such as lavish weddings for his children, spectacular burials for his parents, and extravagant chieftaincy installation ceremonies for himself. At such events, his people enjoy his wealth – they chop (eat) his money (Smith, 2007: 65).

It is against this backdrop that bigmanity has been closely associated with a ‘wealth in people’ system in which all persons ‘are for someone’ (Bledsoe, 1990), and where networks of political patronage are vital to the continued success of the individual (Utas, 2012; Chapter 3). In relational terms, ‘wealth in people’ also means power over people, so that people who are poor are part of others’ social capital and engage in social life on adverse terms (Meagher, 2005). Yet, according to one vehicle slogan sighted on a busy road in Lagos: ‘A Stingy Richman is Still a Poor Man.’ This slogan implies that if patrons in Nigeria are to enjoy prestige and respect, they must combine the pursuit of their own gains with recognition of the interests of others. This idea is neatly captured in David Pratten’s study of prebendalism in southeastern Nigeria:

The account one makes of oneself is judged in performative terms on the basis of the ‘achievements’ acquired for one’s people (*se enye anam* – your achievements for your people). These achievements, recounted in the obituaries of big men (*akamba owo*) are key indicators of personal progress – *ackpokpor inyene* (personal wealth). Wealth begets responsibilities and it is in these aspects that one’s achievements are judged (Pratten, 2013).

Against this backdrop, we can better understand Gavin Williams’ contention that ‘the values and goals in terms of which the success of the rich is defined are to a large extent shared by the poor and define their aspirations, thereby legitimizing the rewards of the rich’ (Williams, 1980: 112). Within this context, corruption implies a perceived collapse of ‘traditional’ moral economy in which haves were obliged to support the have-nots (D.J. Smith, 2007; Chapter 2). Not surprising, Andrew Apter

(2005) associates the oil boom-and-bust decades (of the 1970s) in Nigeria with the production of a *crisis of value*: ‘the value forms that emerged during the oil boom years detached from the value of oil itself to become forms of value and sources of illicit profit unto themselves’ (Apter, 2005: 249). The prevalent tricks and scams in contemporary Nigeria (including ‘419’ and *yahoo yahoo*) cashes in on this crisis of value, blurring in the process the putative boundaries between ‘the forged and the far-fetched, the spirit and the letter of the counterfeit, the fetish and the fake’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 15). Such blurred boundaries has come to characterise the post-colonial Nigerian state, erecting an edifice of ‘simulated government’ that ‘concocts false censuses and development schemes, even holds fictitious elections’ (ibid: 16).

1.2.2 Everyday Corruption and the ‘Ordinary Man’

Unlike grand corruption, everyday corruption involves smaller financial amounts and subsumes acts of corruption by ordinary people in their everyday encounters with street-level bureaucrats¹² (i.e. the police and officers of authority) and semi-private figures (i.e. motorpark touts or *agberos*). Everyday corruption is thus a ‘street level’ form of corruption (Andvig and Fjeldstad, 2001). On the roads of Lagos, bribery has evolved from a hidden affair (*owo eyin* – ‘money behind’) to an open practice (*egunje* – ‘the sweet forbidden fruit’). Already, the 1954 Storey Report on the administration of Lagos Town Council reported that corruption was rampant in:

hospitals were the nurses require a fee from every in-patient before the prescribed medicine, and even the ward servants must have their *dash* [bribe] before bringing the bed-pan; it is known to be rife in the Police Motor Traffic Unit, which has unrivalled opportunities on account of the common practice of over-loading vehicles; pay clerks make a deduction from the wages of daily paid staff; produce examiners exact a fee from the produce buyer for every bag that is graded and scaled; domestic servants

¹² Coined by Michael Lipsky (1980), ‘street-level bureaucracy’ argues that ‘policy implementation in the end comes down to the people who actually implement it.’ Lipsky refers to these front-line workers (i.e. traffic police officers) as ‘street-level bureaucrats.’ These are public employees who interact everyday with citizens and have substantial discretion in the execution of their work (: 3).

pay a proportion of their wages to the senior of them, besides often having paid lump sum to buy the jobs (Storey Report, NAI, 1954).

In Lagos, I found the most severe manifestation of everyday corruption to be violent extortion – that is, the illicit demand for money through (threat of) force (Chapter 4). A prime example is the manner in which *agberos*, representing (or claiming to represent) the leading National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), engage in unlawful collection of taxes and forceful extortion from urban transport operators (Chapters 3 and 4). In doing this, the NURTW flouts its assigned statutory roles (including the promotion of the economic welfare of its members), ‘denying the very freedoms it is supposed to uphold’ (Harvey, 2005: 69). So ingrained is this extortion racket that, during the course of my fieldwork, some *danfo* operators in Oshodi went on strike not necessarily because they were paying levies to *agberos*, but because there were too many ‘confusing’ sets of *agberos* at bus stops, junctions, and roads, using the NURTW’s name to legitimise their collections (Chapter, 4). Also, there was no fixed sum to be collected by these ‘crowned king of Lagos roads’ (Bolaji, 2008).

Several frameworks have been employed to make sense of everyday corruption, viz., ‘normalisation’ (Ashforth and Anand, 2003), ‘principal-agent’ (Klitgaard, 1988); ‘collective action’ (Persson et al. 2013), ‘functionalist theory’ (Merton, 1938), ‘social pathology’ (Bulmer, 1986), ‘arms-length principle’ (Tanzi, 1994), ‘moral economy’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999), ‘subsistence ethics’ (J. Scott, 1976), and the ‘economy of affection’ (Hyden, 1980). Despite the disparities between everyday corruption and grand corruption, both typologies are mutually reinforcing (Olivier de Sardan, 1999). Yet, neatly categorizing corruption into only two kinds oversimplifies its complexity (Chapter 2). As Torsello and Venard (2015: 4) argue, ‘focusing on one type of corruption puts any social reality into a static state without taking into account its environment, when corruption is in fact a dynamic social reality linked to its social and political setting, which by nature changes over time.’ Following Olivier de Sardan (1999), therefore, everyday corruption and grand corruption are seen as two

poles of a continuum, and attempt is made to understand narratives that legitimize both. From this perspective, ‘the political and the social become intermingled and semantically determined’ (Torsello and Venard, 2015: 7).

1.3 Research Gaps

The following research gaps originated in a growing dissatisfaction with much of the current work on corruption, generally in Africa and particularly in my native Nigeria. Following a critical review of the social-scientific literature (Chapter 2), it becomes only too apparent that everyday corruption, dismissed as ‘normal’ and ‘petty,’ is doubtless of secondary importance compared to grand corruption, which secures all the research grants and grabs all the media headlines. Yet, the regularity and reach of everyday corruption suggest that it need not be explained away as the trivial aspect of everyday life. Although grand corruption is seen as constituting a drag on the political economy of developing societies, everyday corruption represents, when aggregated, a substantial sum of public resources (see Riley, 1999; Global Corruption Barometer, 2015). Moreover, grand corruption has no immediate or direct impact on the day-to-day lives of the ‘bottom millions’ eking out a living at the dark underbelly of the economy, whereas everyday corruption most directly and most disproportionately impinges on the survival, fears, choices, and aspirations of the poor, stoking popular discontent and sapping the legitimacy of the state and its institutions.¹³

For these reasons, it occurred to me that the focus on grand corruption is all too narrow and needs to be expanded to engage routine acts of corruption that ordinary Africans are *au fait* with since they come into contact with it, exploit it, resist it, or become its victims on a daily basis. In other words, there is need to probe the routine

¹³ The African Edition of the Global Corruption Barometer (2015: 1) shows that Africans, particularly the poor, are burdened by corruption when trying to get access to key basic services in their country (22 per cent of people that have come into contact with a public service in the past 12 months paid a bribe). Across the continent, it was found that poor people who use public services are twice as likely as rich people to have paid a bribe, and in urban areas they are even more likely to pay bribes.

ramifications of corruption: how it implicates citizens and public officials; how it is legitimated and sanctioned; and how it interacts with grand corruption. Thus, I concur with Olivier de Sardan (1999: 25) that, ‘the social mechanisms of corruption are hardly explored nor are its processes of legitimation seen from the actors’ point of view.’ This lacuna is unsurprising given that most studies of African politics maintain a weird silence on the people who populate the state. Yet, states in their abstract form do not actually exist as a distinct entity (Abrams, 1988) but as ‘sets of persons, whose social personhood is formed, arranged and controlled in particular ways in order for state institutions to do their work’ (Owen, 2016: 37). This necessitates a ‘bottom-up’ approach that foregrounds the voices of ‘the people involved, their social strategies and the material basis of their “governmentality”’ (Bayart, 1993: xx).

My focus in this study is, therefore, not so much on grand corruption as it is on assessing how ordinary people imagine (perceive) and negotiate (practice) the corruption that impacts on their daily lives. The analysis extends to how corruption affects the ordinary ways in which citizens’ relate with the state, experienced not just as ‘an extension of disciplinary power’ but especially as an ‘epicenter of negotiation and legitimation of spatial claims’ (Anjaria, 2011: 58). In essence, then, the study gives an ethnographic account of corruption that foregrounds the everyday lives and politics of ordinary people in interaction with street-level bureaucrats and semi-private figures. While my initial motivation for undertaking this study was, and remains, everyday corruption,¹⁴ I came to the realization that its study must critically engage with the everyday space in which corruption is enacted – What is its nature? How is it constructed and navigated? How does it shape the habitus of its inhabitants? (Chapter 3). Grappling with these pertinent questions, it became increasingly clear that adopting Weber’s binary contrast to corruption was doomed to fail from the start

¹⁴ I originally framed the study in terms of ‘Everyday Corruption, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Popular Imagination in Lagos,’ although the title was later changed to ‘Everyday Corruption and Precarious Existence in Lagos,’ which better captures the precarious context of corruption.

since it discounts the complex web of spatial tactics, networks, interactions, and relations that shape the lived realities of the urban marginal and inscribe corruption in everyday life (Chapter 6). Thus, following Akhil Gupta (1995), I chose to foreground corruption as a key lens through which ordinary Nigerians socially construct the state, manage risk and uncertainty, engage in place-making, define themselves as citizens, and express their ‘hope for/against the state’ (Jansen, 2014). As Masquelier (2001: 269) observes, ‘the state appears to have no palpable existence outside the discursive formation that emphasize its alleged rapacity.’ This discursive formation is a *fait accompli* since ‘the state has become a magnet for all facets of life’ (Joseph, 1987: 1).

Thus, disentangling the social realities and popular imaginaries of corruption can take us beyond the rather circumscribed Weberian public-private split in favour of a state that shares a ‘blurred boundary’ with society (Gupta, 1995; Lazar, 2005).

1.3.1 Everyday Corruption and Blurred Boundaries

Mainstream corruption discourse is indubitably directed by thinking in binary opposition, notably the public-private separation¹⁵ (Chapter 2). Contained in this discourse are two important assumptions: that mutually exclusive public and private interests exist and that public servants must necessarily abstract themselves from the realm of the private in order to properly function. These assumptions rest simply and squarely on Weber’s ideal type rational-legal bureaucracy that assumes the existence of a public domain – a single public *à la* Habermas (2006) – manifestly distinct from the private (Weber, 1947, 1978). Yet, anthropological studies present ‘thick’ evidence

¹⁵ The relevancy of the notion of corruption to the question of the public/private bifurcation is apparent in two authoritative definitions of corruption. Joseph Nye (1967: 419) defines corruption as ‘behaviour that deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or state gains; or violate rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence.’ For Carl Friedrich’s (1989: 15), corruption is ‘a kind of behaviour that deviates from the norm actually prevalent or believed to prevail in a given context, such as the political. *It is deviant behaviour associated with a particular motivation, namely that of private gain at public expense.* But whether this was the motivation or not, *it is the fact that private gain was secured at public expense that matters.* Such private gain may be a monetary one, and in the minds of the general public it usually is, but it may take other forms.’

to show that the normative binary opposition of public and private is context-dependent (Gupta, 1995; Anders, 2009). Further evidence from my own fieldwork in southwestern Nigeria suggests that the public-private split represents a normative demand rather than a grounded reality (Chapter 2). Many ordinary Nigerians that I interviewed did not imagine corruption in a bifurcated way but as a complex problem that entails ‘very many things.’ Said a retired traffic policeman in Ikotun Egbe:

What you think as gift most times is utterly corruption. It is corruption. Gift giving is corruption. *Corruption entails of very many things we don't believe that is corruption.* If you influence a pastor of your church it is corruption. You want him to pray a special prayer for you, so you buy a tuber of yam or a bag of rice and take it to him. You think it is a gift or a *dash*? It is corruption. Let's call it clear (my emphasis).

The above statement supports the verisimilitude of Olivier de Sardan's (1999) ‘corruption complex,’ calling into question the view that traditional norm and values sanction corruption (as implied in the works of Ekeh, 1975; Le Vine, 1975; Alam, 1989). At issue here is the fact that Weber's rational-legal bureaucratic model is unable to explain the ‘corruption complex’ in Africa, which subsumes ‘prebendalism’ (Joseph, 1987); ‘bigmanity’ (Utas, 2012); ‘belly politics’ (Bayart, 1993); the ‘two publics’ (Ekeh, 1975); the ‘secret of law’ (Anders and Nuijten, 2007); ‘overlapping publics’ (Mustapha, 2012); the ‘wealth-in-people’ (Bledsoe, 1990), and the ‘blurred boundaries’ of the state (Gupta, 1995).

I take up issue at this stage with D.J. Smith's oft-cited book *A Culture of Corruption* (2007). Despite its profound insights into the socio-cultural logic of corruption in Nigeria's southeast, the work has notable shortfalls. In the first instance, the crux of Smith's book is that corruption is part of Nigerian culture: ‘The very expression “the Nigerian factor” suggests that Nigerians have concluded that corruption is so endemic that it defines the nation’ (Smith, 2007: 8). However, while Smith (2007: 5) claims that his book ‘examines the relationship between corruption and culture in Africa's most populous country,’ he makes little attempt to engage with anthropological

debates about what that culture is, and how it intersects with corruption. In fact, Smith essentialises what begs for explanation.¹⁶ His book would have undoubtedly benefitted from more engagement with the works of scholars like Olivier de Sardan (1999) and Larmour (2008), both of whom have cogently shown how the issue of corruption intersects with ‘cultural logics’ of permanent negotiation, gift giving, solidarity networks, predatory authority, and redistributive accumulations. This aside, Smith appears to shun a large corpus of works on corruption written by eminent political scientists. In the same breadth, he ignores a wealth of literature on everyday life sociologies and spatial dynamics. Not surprising, Smith failed to tell us how the imputed ‘boundaries’ between everyday corruption and grand corruption are, in actual fact, ‘blurred.’ In fairness to Smith, though, he later admitted that his book relates relatively little to a vast political science literature on corruption in Nigeria:

I certainly acknowledge and accept that my own analysis and understanding (as well as the larger contribution of my book) would have benefitted from a deeper engagement with the political science literature on corruption (D.J. Smith, 2010: 1176).

If Smith’s work reveals important analytical gaps, Akhil Gupta (1995) usefully interrogates those gaps through an ‘ethnography of the state’¹⁷ approach, that re-examines the conventional Eurocentric state-society separation and considers its import for the postcolony, especially his native India (: 376). Gupta argues that in the postcolony, the ‘boundaries’ between state and society are ‘blurred’ and the state ‘has become implicated in the minute texture of everyday life’ (1995: 376).¹⁸

Gupta’s thesis joins issue with current debates on the degree and character of change in the role of the state (especially in the context of neoliberal policies that promote

¹⁶ Although in p.6 Smith alludes to a ‘culture *against* corruption’ in lieu of a ‘culture *of* corruption,’ he disappointingly fails to develop this theme further.

¹⁷ Current sociological and social anthropological thinking now imagines the state as an object of ethnographic exploration (Hansen and Stepputat, 2001).

¹⁸ Shades of Joel Migdal’s (1988) ‘state-in-society’ approach, advanced in critique of Edward Shills’ (1975) one-directional ‘center-periphery’ thesis.

the diversification of governmental actors), with the theorized shift from government to governance (Ferguson, 2006: 40),¹⁹ whereby the nation-state is hollowed out ‘as functions are dispersed to supranational entities, localities, and non-state actors’ (Davies, 2008: 24). Here, governance is seen as ‘the formation and stewardship of the formal and informal²⁰ rules that regulate the public realm, the arena in which the state as well as economic and societal actors interact to make decisions’ (Hyden et al. 2004: 16). Pressing this view further, Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat (2001) refer to what they term ‘languages of stateness,’ distinguishing practical languages of governance (such as the monopoly over violence) from the symbolic languages of authority (such as the institutionalisation of the law). The case of transport unions and extortion rackets, for instance, enables an analysis of a language of stateness – a system of governance and authority – that is ‘neither hegemonic nor subaltern, but a hybrid mix of both’ (Jaffe, 2013: 736; see Chapters 3 and 4).

Gupta goes further to problematize the Weberian public-private bifurcation, arguing that it reifies the state, and shuns how citizens imagine and encounter the state in their daily lives and social routines. For him, ‘the discourse of corruption [is] a key arena through which the state and its citizens come to be imagined’ (Gupta, 1995: 376). This point is even more salient when we consider the state-citizenship dialectic through the decentered lens of Foucault’s notion of power.²¹ For example, numerous works have looked insightfully at how the state ‘sees’ citizens (J. Scott, 1998), how it ‘performs its stateness’ (Hansen and Stepputat, 2005), how ‘power’ is ‘sustained and articulated’ (Rademacher, 2008: 106), and how ‘the aura of sovereign ultimacy is

¹⁹ Scholars like James Ferguson, have examined ways in which state sovereignty is been restructured in relation to private actors such as corporations and NGOs. Focusing on Africa, Ferguson notes the emergence of ‘a form of government that cannot be located within a national grid, but is instead spread across a patchwork of transnationally networked, noncontiguous bits’ (Ferguson, 2006: 40).

²⁰ The terms *formal* and *informal* are used here with caution and as heuristic devices. These terms are often reified in discussions, whereas the argument advanced in this study attempts to challenge conventional dichotomies of public/private that ignore the ‘hybridity’ of the state (Jaffe, 2013: 746).

²¹ Foucault rejects Nietzsche’s assumption that power relations are inevitably relations of domination, that power descends necessarily in a linear direction from those who have it to those subjected to it (see Sluga, 2005: 232).

sustained and internalised' (Chalfin, 2008: 250). Less well known, however, is how citizens imagine the state, how they routinely negotiate with agents of the state, and the active role that citizens may play in representing and enacting their relationships with governmental structures. Another way of framing this is that, there is a dearth of understanding of how people on the margins perceive and experience the agency of the state and how practices at the margins shape the state itself (Das and Poole, 2004; Jaffe, 2013). Gupta's analysis of the postcolony resonates with my own experience of Lagos (both as a researcher and as a Lagosian) where corruption is banalised, and where the 'generalised informal functioning of the state' (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006: 5) cultivates a laterally supportive space for corruption to flourish. The result is the dissolution of the borderline between sociocultural logics and corrupt practices, giving rise to a 'corruption complex' (Olivier de Sardan, 1999).

1.3.2 The 'Corruption Complex'

At this stage, it should be quite clear that the Weberian approach to corruption is 'descriptively inadequate to the lived realities [it] purports to represent' (Gupta, 1995: 384). In particular, it stops well short of explaining the moral economy of corruption in Africa which does not merely concern corruption *sensu strictu*, but the 'corruption complex' in a wider sense, incorporating 'a number of illicit practices, technically distinct from corruption, all of which nonetheless have in common with corruption their association with the state, parastatals or bureaucratic functions...' (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 26). Coming to Nigeria, the 'corruption complex' was first observed among the Hausa people of the north who, according to M.G. Smith (1964: 164) (not to be confused with D.J. Smith), lack a term for political corruption in the strict sense of the word. For the Hausa, 'corruption is not easy to isolate from other conditions of its context for formal analyses' (ibid). Hausa language has a number of vocabularies denoting a range of political conditions and practices of interest in this regard:

Zalunchi refers to oppression, *tilas* to compulsion, *zamba* to oppression and swindling, *rikice* to fraud and confusion alike, *ha'inci* to bribery, *cin hanci* to taking bribes, *yi gaisuwa* to making greetings or gifts, *tara* to fines, *cin tara* to taking (keeping?) fines, *wasau* to forcible confiscation of property, *manafunci* to treachery and breaking of political agreements, *hamiya* to political rivalry, *kunjiya* to a faction or group of supporters, *baranktaka* to political agency, *kinjibibi* and *kutukutu* to differing types of intrigue, character assassination, and so on (M.G. Smith, 1964: 164).

The above terms cluster around foci of Hausa interest that includes the links between political solidarity and rivalry, and the relations between rulers and the ruled. For the Hausa people, therefore, corruption as it manifests in government is ‘a mode of oppression, its product, condition or correlate’ (M.G. Smith, 1964: 164). To analyse such complexities, argues M.G. Smith, it is to the historical and cultural contexts of the Hausa government that we must look, with specific attention to its ‘normative structure and change’ (ibid). Four decades later, another Smith – D.J. Smith – corroborated the ‘corruption complex’ in Nigeria, this time in the southeast:

When Nigerians talk about corruption, they refer not only to the abuse of state offices for some kind of private gain but also to a whole range of social behaviors in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power, or prestige as well as much more mundane ambitions. *Nigerian notions of corruption encompass everything from government bribery and graft, rigged elections, and fraudulent business deals, to the diabolical abuse of occult powers, medical quackery, cheating in school, and even deceiving a lover* (D.J. Smith, 2007: 55; my emphasis).

In Chapter 2, I build on the scope of previous studies by M.G. Smith and D.J. Smith by giving a detailed ethnographic account of the ‘corruption complex’ in Lagos, southwestern Nigeria. Corruption is understood in this study as a social malpractice whose meaning and significance ought to be analysed with specific reference to the routine socio-economic relations and ordinary forms of sociability between people in particular settings. My ethnographer’s predisposition is not to impose a universal meaning of corruption on the context and then arrange my data accordingly (*etic* approach). Instead, my aim is to examine the multiple, even contradictory, ways that

people employ (and enact) the idea of corruption, and then draw on localised idioms and implied definitions to weave a grounded analysis in light of what people do and say (*emic* approach).²² Such an approach reclaims Syed Alatas' (2015: xxii) position that corruption 'can only be grasped when it is explicitly related to the cultural setting where it appears and with which it continually interacts.' It also agrees with Peter Larmour's (2012: 165) point that 'the decision that something is corrupt might appear to be an isolated occurrence but is in fact a *social event* [that] involves language, and in practice is likely to involve discussion with colleagues, friends, family or some kind of internal dialogue that reproduces these interactions' (my emphasis).

While the above perspective may foreground corruption as a culturally embedded practice, especially its saliency for everyday encounters and interpersonal relations, it sits uneasy with a determinist notion of culture that often de-historicises corruption, seeing it as 'an essentially African problem' (Blundo, 2007: 34). Instead, following the insights of Olivier de Sardan (1999), my aim is to identify certain social logics which interact with or influence the practices of corruption, but which also leave a certain agency for maneuver to the ordinary actors who operate within or around these logics, regularly combining them, sometimes dislocating or even refuting them (Chapters 3, 4, and 5). Hence, (in chapter 2) I criticize the popular tendency to essentialise 'culture' and to deploy it – as 'a primordial trap, a mystical haze, or a source of hegemonic power' (Rao and Walton, 2004)²³ – to excuse or rationalise otherwise despicable corrupt acts. For example, gift giving in Africa is normally rationalised as 'part of our culture,' and outsiders are warned not to conflate it with bribery. However, Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria (1999 to 2007) and one of the founding fathers of Transparency International, has intervened:

²² The term *emic* denotes a general orientation in research toward the 'native,' that is, the insider's, or, as anthropologists call it, the 'informant's,' view of reality (Morey and Luthans, 1984: 27-36).

²³ Rather than a 'commonplace, malleable fact of life...' (Rao and Walton, 2004).

I shudder at how an integral aspect of our culture could be taken as the basis for rationalising otherwise despicable behaviour. In the African concept of appreciation and hospitality, the gift is usually a token. It is not demanded. The value is in the open and never in secret. Where it is excessive, it becomes an embarrassment and it is returned. If anything, corruption has perverted and destroyed this aspect of our culture (cited in Pope, 2000: 8).

In this study, I imagine culture as essentially about relationships – among individuals within groups, among groups, and between ideas and perspectives (Rao and Walton, 2004: 4). Culture is not ‘a set of primordial phenomena’ but rather ‘a set of contested attributes, constantly in flux, both shaping and being shaped by social and economic aspects of human interactions’ (ibid). In this light, I support Kate Meagher’s (2006) call for observers, like Bayart, Chabal, and Daloz, to go ‘beyond the cultural turn’ and the tendential primordialisation of discourse on Africa politics and processes.

1.4 Situating the Study within the Field

The current study is located within an evolving and straddled field of anthropology of corruption (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Haller and Shore, 1999) and the state (Chatterji et al. 2005; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Jaffe, 2013; Anjaria, 2011), a project that Gupta (1995) insist should be at the epicenter of any attempt to study the postcolony and its institutions. Studies within the growing field of anthropology of the state explore the possibilities of doing an ethnographic study of how ‘the state’ is produced and contested ‘from below,’ through everyday practices and discursive constructions and productions (Jaffe, 2013: 736). Thus, following Philip Abram’s (1988) distinction between the ‘state-system’ and the ‘state-idea,’ scholars like Gupta (1995) and Timothy Mitchell (1999) have contended that anthropological studies of the state ought to focus on the ordinary techniques of government and everyday practices of local bureaucracies. Far from a transcendent entity, a monolithic body, or merely a set of organizational practices, the state is imagined here as ‘an entity that exists in and is also constantly created by society’ (Chatterji et al. 2005: 4312).

1.5 Research Aims

Grounding corruption in the micropolitics of commercial urban public transport in Lagos, this study sets out to address five interrelated questions:

- (1) What is the popular imagination of corruption?
- (2) What experiences shape these imaginaries and how widespread are they?
- (3) What is the nature of the everyday space in which corruption is enacted and how does this spatiality condition the actions of those who navigate it?
- (4) What are the ramifications of corruption for the everyday lives and social livelihoods of ordinary actors?
- (5) How do ordinary actors manage, or respond to, corruption in a context of radical uncertainty?

1.6 Context and Sector

Why Lagos? Four reasons justify the choice of Lagos as an ideal laboratory for the study of everyday corruption and precarious livelihoods. First, Lagos is Africa's largest city and Nigeria's commercial capital. The city has a population estimated at between 15 and 18 million and projected to rise to 25 million by 2025 (World Bank, 2011), placing it as the third largest agglomeration in the world, after only Tokyo and Mumbai. Second, Lagos is a melting pot for Nigerians from all backgrounds. Over the years, Lagos life has evolved into a 'cultural amalgam in which different ethnic groups and classes, and types of persons attempt to make their own lives, "find their own ways," express themselves as they can and experience the many-sided realities that are both theirs and others' (Aina, 2003: 176). Third, since 1999, Lagos has seen an urban renewal drive that seeks to 'order' its 'chaos' (Chapter 5). Yet, despite some notable expansion of government authority, Lagos urban governance remains, at best,

uncertain.²⁴ Beyond embodying ‘accommodation, spatial engineering and economic growth,’ post-1999 Lagos is seen here as a ‘laboratory of change... that emphasizes the resilience and resourcefulness displayed by African cities, qualities drawn upon for local survival’ (Simone, 2005: 1). Lastly, Lagos is a vital node in the ebb and flow of people, resources, and ideas within the wider West African context.

Why road transport? Transport is a vital aspect of Lagos life, more so because the megacity is made up of a collection of islands that are separated by creeks and the Lagos lagoon. Bridges connect the islands to the Lagos mainland and smaller sections of some creeks have been sand filled and built over. Across urban Africa, everyday corruption and its insecurities are most legible in the transport sector (Soyinka, 1965; Rizzo, 2011), particularly in public road transport where ‘the ugly heads of greed and envy often seize the material opportunities for graft and corruption’ (Paterson and Chaudhuri, 2007: 159). Beyond its obvious functionality (i.e. connecting people and goods) and technical aspects (i.e. constructing roads and bridges with dedicated bus-lines), road transport incorporates an understanding of how transport, infrastructure and institutional mechanisms shape the everyday human condition and, by extension, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs within and about individuals and specific social groups (Sharmila, 2014: 96). In Lagos, as elsewhere in urban Africa, informal modes of public transport afford vital spaces of mutual exchange, interaction, production, and consumption, entangling the life of the road with the everyday lives of the people. Indeed, like the automobiles that ply them daily, roads are both ‘objects of fascination and terror’ and ‘spaces of fear and desire’ (Masquelier, 2002: 831).

In Nigeria, transport is largely a road-based affair, accounting for over 75 per cent of mobility needs (World Bank, 2013). In Lagos alone, 16 million person trips are made

²⁴ An estimated 10,000 migrants arrive in Lagos each week. Their first homes tend to be in the city’s burgeoning informal settlements or slums, where the state has a limited ability to deliver security or other state services (LeBas, 2013: 241).

each day using road transport (Nigeria Transport Policy [*draft*], 2010). Besides from their erratic and risky services, road transport is expensive for many Lagosians in the lowest income quintile as it represents more than 20 per cent of their individual disposable income (World Bank, 2013).²⁵ Moreover, the number of people involved in providing road transport services is significant. There are over 75,000 *danfos* and 200,000 motorbike-taxis (*okadas*) in Lagos, moving far more people than any other mode of transport and providing jobs to over 500,000 people (Kumar et al. 2012).

Before digging into issues of methodology, I should note that I remain agnostic about the continued reliance on perception-based data and conflation of data aggregation from various surveys into *one* figure used in international corruption surveys and indexes like Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), the best known and most referenced index in the world. Instead, I position my study within recent calls to 'refine and gather more experience-based measures of corruption' (Triesman, 2007: 213), informed by ethnographies of corruption (Haller and Shore, 2005) and the state (Gupta, 1995; Anders, 2009; Cooper and Pratten, 2015).

1.7 Methodology

The field of corruption is awash with comparative macro-level econometric-based data derived from large-*n* surveys and cross-national statistical studies (Mauro, 1995; Bardhan, 2015). This approach is most exemplified by the CPI which claims to be the 'survey of surveys' and is compiled on the basis of sixteen different polls and surveys from eight independent institutions comprising business people, country analysts and the public (Lambsdorff, 1999). Although studies in this tradition have undoubtedly contributed to an international 'movement against corruption' (Galtung, 2006: 106), debunking the long-advocated myths on the functionality of corruption (Leff, 1964),

²⁵ So critical is public transport that one of the justifications for relocating Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja in 1991 was as a result of its traffic congestion, seen as unfitting for Nigeria's capital city.

concern abounds about whether a complex and hidden phenomenon like corruption can be measured at all, let alone reduced to a single number (Haller and Shore, 2005). As Michael Johnston has pointed out:

Perhaps the most serious drawback of the CPI and similar indices is what might be called the ‘single-number problem.’ It is a precision issue, but one with validity and reliability implications as well. Actual corruption varies in many ways: there are many forms and contrasts within most societies. No single national score can accurately reflect contrasts in the types of corruption found in a country (Johnston, 2001: 163).²⁶

My focus in this study is on everyday corruption which varies enormously and, unlike grand corruption, is hard to quantify because of its embeddedness in social routines: ‘the more corruption develops, the more it becomes engrained in social habits (the more deeply it becomes inscribed in the “moral economy”) and the less possible it becomes to retreat’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 32). As such, there is no substitute, I think, for qualitative assessments and evaluations that produce ‘thick’ descriptions of ordinary practices (cf. Malinowski, 1922; Emerson, 2001). In this study, therefore, I marshal evidence from eight months of fieldwork research in Lagos using traditional ethnographic methods of ‘participant observation’ and interviewing. The very nature of ethnography develops through interactions with local people, which evolve into the building of mutual trust and understanding with them (Torsello and Venard, 2015).

1.7.1 The Strategy of ‘Learning by Doing’

The study comprises primary data derived from ‘participant observation,’ or what Clifford (1983: 127) refers to as ‘the dialectic of experience and interpretation.’ This requires me to continuously move between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ of the events under study (Baviskar, 1995: 8; Hume and Mulcock, 2004: xi). In turn, this helped not only to situate my informants within contexts that are familiar and have meaning

²⁶ For a succinct piece on the shortcomings of the CPI, see *The Conversation* (2016). ‘Corruption rankings are one of the great deceptions of our era.’ 18 May. Online.

for them (Fontana and Grey, 1994) – thus facilitating access to their experiences and practices – but also to see their lifeworlds through the partial eyes of the insider and outsider. Through cumulative observations and regular field notes from interpersonal interactions, I was able to gain access to transgressive spatial practices that otherwise remained in the sphere of ‘the implicit, the unsaid, and the inadmissible’ (Blundo, 2007: 36). Unlike Walter Benjamin’s *flâneur* – the detached observer and gentleman stroller of modern city life – I delved into the workaday world of operators and commuters by doing a two-month stint as a *danfo* conductor plying the busy Oshodi-Ikotun routes.²⁷ I ‘secured’ this job through a former primary school classmate whom I ran into while ‘walking the city’ (de Certeau, 1984) of Lagos, affirming Doreen Massey’s (2005: 116) point that chance encounters are intrinsic to urban spatiality.

‘TJ’ (short for Tunji) had graduated from a conductor (with six years experience) to an *agbero* with two *danfos* to his name. After explaining to TJ the purpose of my visit, he offered me the opportunity to do a stint as his *danfo* conductor to gain some real ‘action.’ Though daunting, I accepted the offer, mindful of Hume and Mulcock’s point that ‘by “being there” and actively taking part in the interactions at hand, the researcher can come closer to experiencing and understanding the “insider’s” point of view’ (2004: xi). By ‘hanging out and hanging about’ (Woodward, 2008) with TJ, I practiced the ‘go-along’ method which investigates the interviewees’ stream of experiences and practices *in situ* as they navigate, and interact with, their localities (Kusenbach, 2003: 458). Richard Carpiano (2009: 264) describes the ‘go-along’ as an ideal empirical technique for exploring the interplay between structural conditions and individual agency for shaping action. This method facilitated my analysis of a range of daily practices and their role in the negotiation and transformation of urban transport, while staying sensitive to the affective aspects of place-making (Carpiano, 2009). As a bus conductor, I observed firsthand the many unreceipted payments that

²⁷ I am very familiar with these routes having spent my early years in these local government areas.

operator's had to make per trip to violent extortionists (like *agberos*) on the road, and the emotions or 'bad blood' that accompanied such routine exchanges.

Unlike Meghan Ference (2013), a white female doctoral researcher from Washington University, who worked as a conductor as part of her study of the *Matatu* industry in Nairobi, I was not so readily noticeable as an 'outsider' since I blended in with other local operators in terms of my observable human qualities, such as my colour (black), my gender (male),²⁸ and my fluency in the vehicular languages: Yoruba, English, and Pidgin.²⁹ When unobserved, participant observation remains 'the most authentic and reliable ethnographic method' (Kusenbach, 2003: 461) since it provides much-needed access to 'naturally' unfolding events (Becker, 1958). My duties as a *danfo* conductor involved 'going along' in the *danfo*, calling in passengers and announcing bus stops, 'settling' touts, collecting bus fares, and attending union meetings and parties (*faji*).

I experienced firsthand the sheer daily demands on conductors, such as the ability to multitask and make quick calculations on my feet (for instance, holding money, counting change, opening and closing the door, attending to passengers, and watching the driver's blind spot since many *danfos* are without functioning gadgets). Amidst all of this, I needed to constantly *shine my eyes* (be always on the watch/vigilant) to spot passengers along the sidewalks, waiting in the bus stops, or walking down their streets; to determine when to lean out of the door and call passengers and when to shut the door and seat inside to avoid fines by trigger-happy police inspectors (this, of course, requires *a priori* knowledge of their strategic positions on the road³⁰); and the ability to 'act smart' in the face of aggressive demands for 'settlement' (*owo da? Owo da? (Where is the money?)*) by *agberos*. I also learned to develop a 'thick skin'

²⁸ Across Africa, certainly in Lagos, (informal) urban transportation is a male-dominated space.

²⁹ Ference's lack of fluency in the vehicular language (*Swahili*) and her colour gave her away as a foreigner and meant that people often laughed at her and her driver during her shifts (Ference, 2013: 57-58). My experience was significantly different from this.

³⁰ I derived information from talking to other conductors coming from the opposite direction during the usual *go-slows* or traffic gridlocks in Lagos.

in the face of insults after insults from rude passengers. In short, my responsibilities as a *danfo* conductor compelled vigilance and tactics – qualities central for navigating space and enacting possibilities (Pratten, 2006; Olivier de Certeau, 1984).

Beyond my stint as a *danfo* conductor, TJ was also helpful in connecting me to other *agberos* of his ilk. He frequently told me that you need ‘long legs’³¹ to get things done in Lagos since it always comes down to ‘who-you-know.’ This evokes a parody of the ‘snowball sampling’ method, which uses a small pool of initial informants to nominate other participants who meet the eligibility criteria for a study (Morgan, 2008: 815). Besides from serving as a strategy to find new informants, the snowball technique enabled me to draw on interpersonal networks to vouch for my reliability and trustworthiness. This is fundamental in a place like Lagos where epistemological uncertainties and anxieties over the authenticity of information and the veracity of claims abounds partly as a result of the highly generalised context of fraud (‘419’ and *yahoo yahoo*) for which urban Nigeria is deservedly notorious. Available statistics from an Afrobarometer survey shows that four of five Nigerians (80 per cent) are usually very careful when dealing with other Nigerians and only nearly one in seven citizens (15 per cent) believe that most Nigerians can be trusted (CLEEN, 2013).

I also relied on in-depth interviewing to garner evidence on the daily experiences of operators and commuters, mindful of the fact that ‘any outsider’s view of a setting that lack a local vantage point necessarily remains superficial, revealing more about the observer’s own standpoint than anything else’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 460). Because of its ability to go beyond the visible or observable, interviewing afforded unique access to the biographies and social interaction of informants (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Seidman, 1998). In most cases, interviews were held on the interviewees’ terms in places with which they were most familiar and felt most ‘at home.’ These included

³¹ This implies ‘connections’ to important people (*eniyani Pataki*).

inside personal vehicles, private residences, cafeterias, bus stops and motorparks, the last two been primary sites of ‘wealth creation, regulation, violence, accumulation, redistribution, sociability, and political and economic subjectivity’ (Roitman, 1998: 299). In moving in and out of these spaces, I operationalised Gupta and James Ferguson’s (1997) point about how doing fieldwork in a ‘deterritorialised world’ calls for research that focuses more on ‘shifting locations’ than on ‘bounded fields.’ This entails ‘cultivating an intellectual predisposition to see the familiar in unlikely places and the strange in familiar circles’ (ibid: 35-40). As the character Ezeulu in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* (1964) said, ‘the world is like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place’ (1964: 46). Thus, by traveling in and out of busy transit spaces like motor-parks, junctions, and bus stops, I experienced, in a very *real* way, how operators physically made the place of Lagos (as actual and imagined) by routinely moving through it (Buescher and Urry, 2009; Kusenbach, 2003).

Interviewing remains the most common and powerful method for understanding our fellow human beings (Fontana and Frey, 1994: 361). My field interviews provided a platform that helped to foreground the lived realities of operators, to elevate their marginalised voices, and to narrate their interpretations of their everyday experiences. I found interviews inherently flexible, allowing me to use probes to solicit depth. It also allowed my interviewees to include information that a structured interview will ordinarily preclude (ibid). With interviewing, I spoke to many operators two or three times to allow them time to narrate their experiences at these different stages. This revealed ‘greater detail and nuance’ in their spatial stories, and also helped develop ‘relationships of trust’ (see Kihato, 2007: 94). Also, this practice helped bridge some knowledge gaps and to ask other questions that may not have occurred to me during the initial interview session. Moreover, interviewing allowed for flexible responses where interviewees could guide the interview toward the topics they deemed relevant.

An effective strategy was to get my interviewees to talk about corruption *ex negativo* – that is, by avoiding explicit mention of the term in my interviews, and by engaging in some ‘role-playing’³² which involves seeking the views of operators on an event that I observed on the road. In this way, interviewees felt more relaxed about sharing their encounters, relieved that they were not been directly accused of corruption. This approach helped to broaden the narrative focus of my ethnographic interviews while stimulating the less easily accessible regions of the informants’ minds (Kusenbach, 2003: 462). The key point to note here is that interviewees found it much easier to say ‘so and so did this’ rather than ‘I did this.’ This strategy – which I call an ‘alienation effect’ – is critical if we recall Sian Lazar’s (2005: 212) argument that ‘telling a story about corruption frequently serves to highlight the moral integrity of the teller than anything else. Corruption is always somewhere else, perpetrated by someone else.’ Indeed, ‘it is this clandestine and elusive character of corruption that never fails to arouse the popular fascination’ (Anders, 2009: 19). Other times, my alienation effect was to simply ask informants to share the daily challenges they face in their business and how they negotiate these challenges and enact possibilities. Notably, corruption emerged naturally in all these cases, subsuming every other stated challenges.

1.7.2 Key Informants

A range of key informants were selected on purpose based on their direct and routine relations with road transport, including operators (drivers, conductors, and owners), commuters, and key officials within the NURTW, the Road Transport Employers’ Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), the Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA), and the Vehicle Inspection Service. During fieldwork, I was witness to a number of NURTW meetings and public exchanges between drivers, conductors, owners, and unionists, as well as animated conversations among operators about the

³² Some interviewees prefer to move away from a strict question-and-answer format, using props such as letters, books, maps, and photographs (see Harper, 2002).

role and relevance of the NURTW and other unions in their everyday lives. At times I was invited to join some of these informal conversations; at other times, I remained a spectator, conscious that the conversations conducted in my presence may have contained a performative element (Roy, 2015). All my interviews were conducted in English, Yoruba, and Pidgin, depending on the individual preferences of informants. In addition to facilitating trust, my fluency in all three languages (as hinted earlier) provided access into the popular semiology of Lagos. Language, according to Atto Quayson (2014: 20), is ‘the entry point into a broader structure of multi-layered levels and relations. It is out of the interactive multidimensionality of all such levels that we gain a sense of the spatial practice(s).’ Beyond its obviously descriptive dimension – that is, the simple reflection of urban social realities – language has ‘a performative function that makes it play an active role in interaction’ (Petit, 2005: 473).

With the consent of my informants, I recorded interview sessions in order to assist the natural limitations of my own memory and of my note taking. However, it quickly became apparent that most operators (other than those in positions of high authority) did not want to be recorded (some suspected that I was a spy from the local/state government). Every time I brought out my digital recorder, they became palpably edgy. Consequently, I adjusted my interview approach and began to take extremely detailed hand-written notes in all interviews. While this approach made it difficult for me to listen attentively to my interlocutors and was sometimes seen as rude (as one veteran driver told me off: ‘You can’t whistle and chew together’), I noticed that many interviewees were more forthcoming in an unrecorded interview. I sourced for extra information from an interpretative approach to ‘vehicle slogans’ (Chapter 3), from press materials (including newspapers, state gazettes, reports of tribunal of inquiries, National Archives), and from official court records (sworn affidavits and counter-affidavits, see Chapter 5). In particular, press materials were fundamental for understanding the everyday perception of corruption since they denote a discursive field that enables bribery and corruption to be labelled, discussed, decried, justified

and denounced (Blundo, 2007). Data gleaned from these diverse sources informed my interviews and helped to cross-verify my data to derive a nuanced perspective. As Howard Becker (1958: 657) points out, social scientists should not only strive to collect many instances of an identified phenomenon but also seek to gather ‘many kinds of evidence’ to enhance the validity of a specific conclusion.

All my interviews underwent content analysis where all the relevant and recurrent words were flagged, categorised and organised according to themes related to the study questions in order to interpret emerging patterns in the data and to form ‘webs of meaning.’ All transcribing and coding was done manually, without any software. Ethnographic summaries were used to enrich data analysis through verbatim of key responses that arose during the course of my interviews. I approached my data using an *iterative strategy* – a systematic, repetitive, and recursive process in qualitative data analysis (Mills et al. 2010). This meant that I transcribed and analysed my data as I collected them, using this analysis to inform further research. This process was important as during the initial analysis of my interview data I was able to spot and address some gaps in my interviews while still in the field and while the discussions was still fresh in my mind. The advantage for the informants is that they are able to talk about issues that did not figure in their awareness during the initial interview.

A common criticism levelled against ethnographic strategies is that ‘observer effects’ can, and often do, bias research findings (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). Thus, critics claim that the presence of a researcher often influences the behaviour of those being studied, making it near impossible for ethnographers to document social phenomena in any accurate let alone objective way (Wilson, 1977). Yet, such critics overlook the fact that however staged for or influenced by the observer, informants’ performances often reveal profound truths about social and cultural phenomena (Monahan and Fischer, 2010: 263). In looking closely at these performances, we gain insights into how informants perceive themselves and how they would like to be perceived (ibid).

As an *omo eko* ('child of Lagos'), I tapped into my special position as an 'outsider within' (Collins, 1986) to bring insights and experiential knowledge to bear on my data collection. To bridge any knowledge gaps, I often performed pragmatic validity checks on my primary data by comparing popular discourse to everyday practice, and by triangulating articulations from multiple informants, looking for discrepancies. This serves as a response to Gupta and Ferguson's call for anthropologists to invest in the linking of 'different knowledges that are possible from different locations and tracing lines of possible alliances and common purposes between them' (1997: 39).



Figure 1. Map of Lagos
 Source: Available online at: https://fluswikien.hfwu.de/index.php?title=File:Lagos_State_Map.jpg

1.7.3 Fieldwork Sites: Oshodi and Alimosho

My fieldwork was conducted in two local government areas (LGAs) in Lagos: Oshodi and Alimosho (Figure 1). Oshodi, which intersects Agege Motor Road and Apapa-Oworonsoki Expressway, is the central terminus in Lagos for intra-city and inter-city transport. This urban neighbourhood is the commercial hub of Lagos, even as Lagos is the financial capital of Nigeria. David Aradeon (1997: 51) once described Oshodi as 'the interface between time and the interchange between destinations; the meeting space for people between places, the living state where a collage of scenes

are acted and played out without a script.’ Prior to its radical facelift in 2007, Oshodi was widely represented as the ‘most radical urban condition on the planet’ (Probst, 2012: 139). Alimosho, however, is officially the largest LGA in Lagos with over two million inhabitants. This area is predominated by the *Egbados (yewa)*, a sub-set of the larger Yoruba ethnic group and original inhabitants of Lagos.

1.8 Study Limitation

My fieldwork in Lagos spanned a difficult 4-month period (July-October 2014) when the sprawling metropolis suffered the outbreak of the deadly Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). The resultant fear of contagion forbade intimacies and the gathering of Lagosians in public spaces (i.e. motor parks and bus stops) and sacred grounds (i.e. both churches and mosques). The tentative mood affected the willingness of many Lagosians to be interviewed by a random stranger like myself. I was a conductor in Oshodi during these very difficult Ebola months and recall occasions when a poor passenger would offer to pay for two extra seats – one to his left, the other to his right – so as to reduce the chances of bodily contact with other passengers. In a desperate effort to prevent EVD in public transport, the NURTW called on all its workers to avoid the usual overloading of passengers to maximise profit, a practice that increases the chances of contagion. The call was mostly heeded. In sum, the Ebola months impinged on the quality of social interactions in urban life. As one editorial notes:

Once rated in a United Nations survey as the “happiest people” in the world, Nigerians seem to have lost their natural good humour and increasingly more people are scared of shaking hands with or hugging other people, especially strangers, for fear of getting infected with the virus (*Punch*, 2014).³³

Other study limitations are embedded in individual chapters.

³³ Normalcy gradually returned to everyday Lagos following the declaration of Nigeria Ebola free on 20 October 2014 by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

1.9 Ethical Dilemmas

Corruption is a sensitive topic and studying it anywhere throws up ethical dilemmas. More so in a politicised, stigmatised, and criminalised sector like transport where rag-tag operators with a ‘spoiled identity’ (Goffman, 1963) are implicated in ‘dirty work’ (Hughes, 1962: 3-11). All this requires protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of informants. While some key informants (like senior transport officials) had no reservations about using their names in my study, in most cases I deliberately chose to protect their identities by disguising their names, and in some instances altering the context of their specific cases. In the first instance, I believe most informants were better placed (than myself) to evaluate any risk associated with their participation, particularly since the NURTW is the most politicised and violent union in Nigeria (Chapters 3 and 4). This reality posed its own spatial challenges, especially moving in and out of volatile and stereotyped spaces (like motor-parks) where collective ‘fear’ has become ‘a way of life’ and a strategy of regulation and profiteering (Chapter 4).

During my fieldwork, interviews with some hardcore union touts were literally quite intimidating and some rival union gangs did not appreciate my constant presence in the motor-parks and bus terminals. This created a lot of anxiety within me as I was uncertain about whose toes I was stepping on at any point in time. As my fieldwork unfolded, it became clear to me that I was becoming too familiar with a world that was extremely violent, and that keeping me out enabled those implicated to maintain ‘a unified front that hid the internal politics that are inevitably part of mutualities’ (Bahre, 2014: 578). This awareness of my own precarious positionality or ‘reflexive turn’ (Emerson, 2001) in the field echoes the ‘ethnographies of uncertainty’ recently observed in Africa (Cooper and Pratten, 2015). In this respect, I found Hume and Mulcock’s book, *Anthropologists in the Field* (2004), helpful for negotiating and navigating the sensitivities required in exploring corruption in a difficult urban environment like Lagos, bypassing some of the ‘methodological anxieties’ and ‘self-

doubts' that shape so many anthropological encounters in violent urban settings, and highlighting the potential productivity of ethnographic discomfort and awkwardness.

1.10 Conclusion: Thematic Summary

The study is structured into six chapters. The second chapter examines the popular semiology and local idioms of corruption in Nigeria in a way that strips it of its taken-for-grantedness in everyday public discourse, and subjects it to a much more rigorous analysis. The chapter takes issue with the simplistic foundation of Weber's ideal type rational-legal bureaucratic approach to corruption, offering, in its stead, Olivier de Sardan's 'corruption complex' as a timely corrective because of its verisimilitude and applicability to the Lagos context. The chapter further draws on my own cumulative observations as a Lagosian (born and bred there – *omo eko*), detailed field notes, in-depth interviews, and the repertoire of stories and rumours that embed corruption in urban social life. This chapter also integrates oral historical and archival methods to historicise corruption in Nigeria, especially since the oil boom of the 1970s.

To understand everyday corruption, it is crucial, I argue, to interrogate the everyday context in which it is enacted and how this space (as agent) conditions the activities and disposition of its dwellers and visitors. In the third chapter, therefore, I aim to piece together an understanding of everyday life grounded in the routine experiences of transport operators and regular commuters. The aim is twofold: first, to elevate the everyday experiences and encounters of operators to the status of a critical concept in order to advance an everyday life sociology in passenger transport in Lagos, and second, to ground these experiences on the precarious geography of public transport. Along the way, the chapter explores the various tactics deployed by operators to carve out meaningful temporalities and social livelihoods, to introduce order and predictability into their everyday lives, and to define their aspirations for a better life.

In the fourth chapter, I engage with the changing role of motor-park touts (*agberos*) in urban public transport, with particular attention to their role as conduits for the daily extortion rackets of the NURTW. This required a detailed examination of how *agberos* have managed to establish ‘collective fear’ in passenger transport as a means of spatial regulation and racketeering. Further, the chapter delves into recent history to disaggregate *agberos* from the confusing mask of *area boys* in Lagos, arguing that the conflation of the two social categories in much writing on Lagos and Nigeria is misleading. In short, the chapter has two interrelated themes within it: the changing perception (by operators, passengers and other urban commentators) of *agberos* as well as their role and organisation, including the role of ‘big politics’ and how it helps to explain the impossibility to remove these touts from the roads.

Chapter five draws on Henri Lefebvre’s idea of ‘Right to the City’ to contextualise the controversial legal dispute between the All Nigerians Auto Bike Commercial Owners and Workers’ Association (ANACOWA) and the Lagos State Government over the enactment of the Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012 (see Appendix). The chapter is set against the post-1999 urban renewal project in Lagos that seeks to impose ‘sanity’ on the ‘chaos’ of Lagos roads. The renewal project raises some key questions that are addressed in this chapter: Has it altered the material context that legitimizes corruption? Is it shifting the space, patterns, players and sanctioning elements of corruption on public roads? Can we conceivably have ‘better’ urban governance and more violent extortion?

Chapter six concludes with an analytical summary of discussions and key arguments pursued in the various chapters. It then proceeds to map the bigger picture for how we imagine corruption, especially in connection to labour precarity and informal agency.

The Complexity of Corruption

Corruption has become the real stuff of public discourse and everyday practice in contemporary Nigeria, implicating citizens and subjects alike. Walking the roads of Lagos, I was regularly struck by the extent to which corruption was the subject of many fantastic rumours, stories, and discursive production. The ubiquitous nature of corruption in Nigeria, arguably, makes it a ‘culture’ (Smith, 2007) of some sort, and as such it is easily taken for granted in its everydayness. In this chapter, I re-engage with the popular imagination and discourse of corruption in a way that strips it of its taken-for-grantedness, and subjects it to a more rigorous and field-based analysis. To do this, I start by critically examining four main definitions of corruption in the social science literature. I then assess how these definitions stack up against the experiential dimensions of corruption in the African postcolony, and through this assessment explore the social embeddedness and popular imagination of corruption in everyday Nigeria. The chapter suggests alternative but complementary perspectives to thinking about corruption in Nigeria – one that goes beyond Max Weber’s (1978) ideal type rational-legal bureaucracy characterised by ‘impartiality, impersonality and, above all, the strict separation of the incumbent and office’ (Theobald, 1990: 2).

The chapter draws on my cumulative observations, analyses of everyday discourses, interviews, historical research, spatial practices, local rumours³⁴ and the repertoire of

³⁴ Anders and Nuijten (2007: 18) argue that ‘corruption is shrouded in gossip, rumours and conspiracy theories...’ Drawing on the Burudian case, Simon Turner (2007: 93, 103) finds that ‘through rumours and conspiracy theories about political adversaries and powerful public figures, ordinary [people] are able to express their fears, hopes and anxieties... rumours reveal political leaders as frauds... they build on moral evaluations of political leaders... they

stories³⁵ that foreground corruption as a socially significant phenomenon in Lagos. Even when they are exaggerated or seemingly apocryphal, stories about corruption ‘tell truths’ by placing in the arena of public discourse ‘public secrets’ (Taussig, 1997) that cannot be exposed directly without fear of reprisals from those who control the means of punishment. The spatial stories, and ‘subjugative knowledges’³⁶ therein, also mirror the complex ways in which Nigerians make sense of their moral economy,³⁷ especially issues like corruption and inequality. Using only a few of the myriad of stories that I heard during fieldwork, I show how these popular accounts allow Lagosians to comprehend, and navigate, the complexity of corruption. My analysis here is very much interpretive, not only because it involves an interpretation of popular imaginations and discourses about corruption, but also in recognition of the fact that these ‘unofficial’ reports are themselves an interpretation of reality.

2.1 Literature Review: Corruption in the Social Science Literature

Understanding corruption is an extremely difficult mission since the very word ‘corruption’ evokes vastly different meanings and connotations. Yet, a careful review of the social science literature on corruption reveals four predominant perspectives:³⁸ public office, public interest, public opinion, and market-centered. In what follows, I undertake a critical examination of these perspectives in the order stated.

try to evaluate to what degree a politician is self-sacrificing and idealistic and to what degree he is simply thirsty for power.’

³⁵ Akhil Gupta (2012: 113) argues that ‘stories of corruption are saturated with emotion: disgust, anger, and frustration at corrupt officials or organisations; happiness at having cleverly beaten the system or satisfaction at getting a job accomplished; and humour, sarcasm, and irony can be effective techniques for coping with the absurdities of bureaucratic process.’

³⁶ By subjugative knowledges one should understand ‘... a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: *naïve knowledges, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity*. I also believe that *it is through the re-emergence of these low-ranked knowledges, these unqualified, even directly disqualified knowledges... that criticism performs its works* (Foucault, 1976: 83; my emphasis).

³⁷ Writing on moral economy focuses on the cognitive worlds of the poor and springs from a conscious attempt to move beyond simplistic notions of *homo politicus* or *homo economicus* (Isichei, 2002: 10).

³⁸ All four definitions are loosely linked since they affirm the dichotomy between the public and private spheres, and view ‘corruption’ as the inappropriate mix of the two.

2.1.1 The Public Office View of Corruption

The public-office perspective of ‘corruption’ centers on the abuse of public office for private gains. Some scholars are widely identified with this view. One of them, David Bayley (1966: 720), understands corruption as a general term that involves the misuse of authority as a result of considerations of private benefits, which are not necessarily monetary. This implies a situation in which a civil servant sells his public office to the highest bidder for private benefits (Scott, 1972: 12). For example, in Nigeria, as in much of Africa, public officials regularly arrogate the customary functions and prerogatives of the state, selling their services to their ‘customers’ (Petit, 2005: 467). Almost all the state’s usual attributes have been influenced by informal privatization (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006). Herbert Werlin (1972: 73), for his part, views corruption as occurring when public resources are diverted to non-public purposes. In this respect, the officeholder directly appropriates public resources for private use. For James Wilson (1968: 55), corruption occurs whenever a person ‘in exchange for some private advantage, acts other than as his duty requires.’

The *locus classicus*, of course, comes from political scientist Joseph Nye (1967: 419), who defines corruption as ‘behaviour which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique) pecuniary or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence.’ This definition extends to various behaviours, including bribery (the use of reward to pervert the judgment of a person in a position of trust); nepotism (bestowal of patronage by reason of ascriptive relationship rather than merit); and misappropriation (illegal appropriation of public resources for private uses). Central to public-office definitions is the violation of a legal code, ‘corruption as illegality’ (Underkuffler, 2005), upholding a link between the illegal³⁹ and corrupt.

³⁹ Here, the term ‘illegal’ implies that there are laws governing the conduct of those occupying public office and/or the process of selection to public office (Theobald 1990: 16).

The public office perspective is fraught with problems. The first appertains to the central question: which statement of the rules/norms governing public officeholders are to be employed and whose norms should set the criteria (Scott, 1972)? Another objection sees the concept of public office as essentially ‘Western.’ In developing countries (like Nigeria or Cameroon), public office as an institution and the ethos that goes with it remains weakly established. In such countries nepotism, patronage and minor forms of bribery embodied in gift giving, far from attracting opprobrium, are often socially approved (Theobald, 1990: 3). To the extent that public officials in Africa find themselves committed to upholding two inconsistent sets of values – those of the modern bureaucracy, which they have sworn to uphold (civic public), and those foisted on them by their traditional setting (primordial public) – they become ‘polynormative’ (Olowu, 1988: 219), and in many cases this translates into ‘normlessness’ (Riggs, 1964). An extra layer of complication is the fact that in many traditional African societies, loyalty to the family is perceived to override individual rights or personal accountability. The civil servant, thus, may become engaged in corrupt activities in a desperate effort to generate the additional resources he needs to meet his obligations to family members (Alam, 1989: 445). For example, In his illuminating study of civil servants and corruption in Malawi, for example, Gerhard Anders (2009) points aptly to the co-existence and interaction of multiple sets of contradictory rules through which a Malawian civil servant needs to negotiate on a routine basis; the official rules, kinship rules, and the unofficial code of conduct.

The understanding of corruption-as-illegality is also simultaneously too narrow and too broad in scope since that which is illegal is not necessarily corrupt and, inversely, that which is corrupt is not necessarily illegal (John and Welch 1978: 974). As such, an overly legislative approach to corruption overlooks the forms corruption takes and how it is embedded in social life (Routley, 2016; Olivier de Sardan, 1999). If law is considered as plural (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006), then an approach that reads law

as the benchmark of corruption leaves us wanting more (Torsello and Venard, 2015: 3). Olivier de Sardan (1999: 34) argues that practices that come under the ‘complex’ of corruption, while being seen as legally culpable and widely reprobated, are nonetheless considered by their perpetrators as being legitimate, and often as not being corruption at all. A prime example is Janet Roitman’s (2006: 249) study of the ethics of illegality in the Chad Basin. While viewed by most as ‘illegal’ practice, Roitman finds that local people also imagine unregulated economic activities and violent methods of extraction (i.e. gang-based highway robbery) as ‘licit’ and ‘rational or reasonable behaviour.’ This view finds comparative support in separate studies carried out in West Asia by Gupta (1995), Kondos (1987), and Ruud (1998). All three cases demonstrate that various forms of social corruption were imagined by all the actors involved as being a ‘legitimate way of going about doing things’ (Kondos, 1987), underlining the limits of a Weberian-based approach to corruption.

A key explanation for the above is that the full panoply of laws and administrative apparatus in many developing countries are ‘copied entirely from the West’ (Scott, 1969: 319). As Dele Olowu (1988: 216) pointedly argues, few African states have proposed ‘alternative standards of public service morality’; rather, ‘they have each striven to ensure that their public bureaucracies conform to the ethical standards and codes inherited from their erstwhile colonial masters.’ Yet, the norms ingrained or implicit in these Western administrative systems tend to render them otiose for the local context in many African countries (Anders, 2009). Weberian definitions can thus be seen as being too narrow and overly concerned with ‘the illegality of such practices, [as] defined from a modern, Western point of view’ (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 47). Also, seeing corruption as a breach of law obscures local normative values and the broader socio-political context of these breaches (Routley, 2016).

2.1.2 The Public Interest View of Corruption

In light of the aforementioned issues, other definitions of corruption have been duly forwarded. One of these is to focus on public interest centered definitions, which sees corruption as behaviour or actions that subverts public interest for private ends. These definitions started with Carl Friedrich (1966: 74) who argues that ‘the pattern of corruption can be said to exist whenever a power holder who is charged with doing certain things, i.e. who is a responsible functionary or office holder, is by monetary or other rewards not legally provided for, induced to take actions which favour whoever provides the reward and thereby does damage to the public and its interests.’ Elsewhere, Friedrich identifies corruption as a ‘deviant behaviour associated with a particular motivation, namely that of private gain at public expense’ (1972: 127).

However, the abstruseness of key terms used in the above definition, such as ‘public’ and ‘interest,’ remains problematic. Complex societies seem to have a wide range of publics each with its own interests. As such, the public interest is often appropriated by politically dominant groups and used to secure their position and dubious interests (Theobald, 1990: 6). Moreover, the naïve assumption of a single public *à la* Jurgen Habermas cannot find full expression in postcolonial African societies. Therefore, A.R. Mustapha (2012: 4) has suggested that ‘the African public spheres might best be understood as a multiplicity of publics and counter-publics.’ Such an understanding usefully shifts focus from the constricting Weberian utilitarian rationality that informs contemporary economic and policymaking in Africa to a much more Habermasian communicative rationality that gives pride of place to deliberation and pluralism.

2.1.3 The Public Opinion View of Corruption

Consequently, some have argued that the concept of public opinion is more superior to public interest. The advantage with defining corruption from a public opinion perspective seems to be that it sidesteps the difficulties that come with imposing the

Western-based notion of public office. 'Corruption' then is simply what public opinion in a given society deems to be corrupt. But there is a serious problem here: 'public opinion is not some monolithic entity but a confection of shifting and conflicting "opinions"' (Theobald 1990: 7). As such, whose opinion should we give most weight (especially in a country like Nigeria where the corruption discourse is rich in complexity, contradictions and critical analysis)? D.J. Smith (2007: 53), for example, shows how various everyday social practices, including medical quackery, deceiving a lover, and 'monetised grades' at educational institutes, are all subsumed under the public notion of corruption in Nigeria, in addition to daily activities like bribing a police officer, '419' scam e-mails, and dubious awarding of state contracts.

To approach this problem of normative evaluation, Arnold Heidenheimer (2002: 152-3), devised a complex typology that divides corruption into 'black,' 'gray,' and 'white.' 'Black corruption' designates those actions that 'a majority consensus of both elite and mass opinion would condemn and would want to see punished on grounds of principle.' 'Grey corruption' exists when 'some elements, usually elites, may want to see the actions punished, others not, and the majority may well be ambiguous.' In the case of 'white corruption' 'the majority of elite and mass opinion probably would not vigorously support an attempt to punish a form of corruption that they regard as tolerable.' This implies that they attach less value to the maintenance of the values involved than they do to the costs that might be generated as the outcome of a change in rule enforcement (Heidenheimer, 2002: 152). Heidenheimer's shorthand notations of black, grey and white is appropriate to the extent that it underscores the variability of societal reaction to corruption, ranging from nepotism to gift-giving and outright extortion. Heidenheimer argues, for instance, that giving gifts to public officials and nepotism may be categorised as 'black' or punishable if favours are exchanged at the level of the individual official, but 'their equivalents are likely to be tolerated if the funds in question are "collectivised" through devices such as party campaign treasuries' (ibid: 152-3). Despite its advantages, the applicability

of Heidenheimer's typology in everyday life remains problematic: terms like 'mass,' 'mass opinion,' 'elite' and 'elite opinion' obscure more than they clarify.

2.1.4 The Market Centered View of Corruption

Against this backdrop, market-centered definitions of corruption focus on the 'office as business' (Mbaku, 2000), the income of which the corrupt local bureaucrat strives to maximize. As such, these definitions offer themselves as a morally and legally neutral way of circumventing the kind of complexities involved in the preceding definitions. The crux of market-centered definitions is 'the application of social or public choice methods to the analysis of corruption – or, more crudely, the use of economic methods and models for the analysis of politics' (Philp, 1997: 443). The market-centered view is most authoritatively advanced by Jacob Van Klaveren (1990: 26) who argues that 'corruption means that a civil servant abuses his authority in order to obtain an extra income from the public... Thus we will conceive corruption in terms of a civil servant who regards his office as a business, the income of which he will... seek to maximize. The office then becomes a maximizing unit.' Yet, market-centered definitions fail to break away from the notion of a more or less defined set of rules (Nuijten and Anders, 2007: 7). It is impossible, therefore, to apply market-centered definitions without hacking back to a set of rules delimiting the boundary between improper and proper use of the office as a unit to maximize profit.

The point to carry forward from the above discussions is that the notion of public office is central to how corruption is theorised, at least in Western scholarship. But how does this stack up against the view of corruption in the African postcolony?

2.2 Corruption in Africa

In Africa, and much of the Global South, the public-private dichotomy is said to have little everyday utility. Mustaq Khan (2012: 10), for example, argues that 'developing countries have remained decidedly "non-Weberian" regardless of attempts at

strengthening formal enforcement.’ Africa, in particular, is traditionally depicted as a place where formal institutional rules have very little constraining effect on political conducts which are seen as governed by ‘the awareness that constitutional rules or administrative regulations can, and probably ought, to be evaded’ (Jackson and Rosberg 1984: 425).⁴⁰ William Reno (1995), for instance, famously uses the idea of ‘shadow state’ to describe personalized rule in Sierra Leone where the ‘real’ state is constructed behind the façade of formal statehood. Such an understanding is implied in Bayart’s (2000: 229-30) distinction between a *pays legal* (a legal structure) and a *pays reel* (where real power is wielded). The meaning extends to the dramaturgy of ‘personalised rule’ or ‘bigmanity’ paradigm that has dominated the study of African politics for the past three decades or so (Posner and Young 2007; Utas, 2012). In his work *Embedded Autonomy* (1995), Peter Evans argues that the state in Africa is predatory, ruthlessly extracting and providing nothing of value in return. As such, Paul Robbins (2000: 426) calls for an alternative view by examining corruption not as ‘the absence of rules,’ but instead as ‘the presence of alternative norms.’ Following Robbins, some analysts have questioned the notion of ‘state failure,’ rejecting *a priori* views about what the political domain should resemble and *a posteriori* depiction of Africa as the perpetual exception to the rule (Bayart et al. 1999). As Mbembé argues:

African politics and economies have been condemned to appear in social theory only as the sign of a lack, while the discourse of political science and development economics has become that of a quest for the causes of that lack [...]. The upshot is that while we now feel we know nearly everything that African states, societies, and economies are not, we still know absolutely nothing about what they really are (Mbembé, 2001: 8-9).

Approaches to corruption that stress the degree of (mis)fit between bureaucratic institutions and pre-existing indigenous norms and practices in Africa originate from the legacy of colonial rule when imperial powers accepted a substantial degree of

⁴⁰ A number of reasons have been adduced to explain the dominance of informal institutions in developing countries, including ‘the weakness of state capabilities in enforcing formal institutions’ (Khan, 2012: 15-54).

‘indirect rule’ through African institutions (Mamdani, 1996; Clapham, 2000). This allowed the persistence of ‘traditional African practices’ of small groups of ‘big men’ providing services to individuals, families, and villages according to personalistic and clientelistic norms in lieu of bureaucratic rules (Peiffer and Rose 2014: 7). The imposition of Western institutions was thus mediated by the response of existing African cultures (Acemoglu et al. 2000). Along the way, as Bayart (1993: 72) argues, ‘habits were formed and patrimonies build up, especially since chiefs were legally entitled to retain a percentage of the taxes they collected, and also benefited from various other payments.’ While retaining some verisimilitude, this position runs the risk of degenerating into ‘cultural primordialism’ (Meagher, 2006).

The understanding of African mode of politics as deviant and predatory, as well as its conflation into a ‘real’ state operating under the façade of formal statehood, is problematic in at least two ways. First, it gives rise to an imagination of corruption as ‘the form of politics in Africa,’ so rather than corruption of the state ‘they are, conversely, the state’s fabric’ (Bayart, 1993: 89). The result is a rendering of Africa as ‘naturally corrupt.’ Second, the ‘shadow state’ image of African politics and processes can lead to a situation in which it is assumed that official norms fall outside the purview of ‘the real deal’ and are therefore otiose. Yet as Olivier de Sardan notes:

For the researchers and actors alike, the official norms are part of the definition of the situation. They cannot be dispensed with under the pretext that the level of adherence to them is scant, nor is it possible to focus on the practices as if it were the case that the official norms did not exist (Olivier de Sardan, 2008: 7).

2.2.1 Beyond the ‘Cultural Turn’

In this section, I take issue with the tendency to essentialise culture in the analysis of African politics and related processes. As I mentioned *en passant* in Chapter 1, culture is relational in meaning and there is no overarching value system that induces the deportment of Africans. This position runs athwart the commentaries of notable

scholars like Bayart et al. (1999: 11) who in their so-called culturalist handling of the Igbo ethnic group in southeastern Nigeria, for instance, seize on an admixture of observed behaviour and current prejudice, concocting out of it an interpretation that suits their purposes (Mustapha, 2012: 4). The Igbos are accused of converting their ‘social capital’ into drugs trafficking and, *ipso facto*, identified with the ‘spirit of criminality’ (Bayart et al. 1999: 11).⁴¹ In short, the ‘criminalisation of politics’ came to signify ‘a new epoch in the sorry history of incivility in the global south’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 7). Bayart et al. (1999: 1) went so far as to suggest that we are witnessing a move, there, from ‘Kleptocracy to the Felonious State.’

Notably, in Africa, two key debates have shaped, and continue to shape, attempts to cast corruption in the light of culture (Bodruzic, 2011). On the one hand, analysts argue that corruption is a consequence of the survival of traditional social practices and logics in a modern context (McMullan, 1961). Scholars sympathetic to this debate emphasize patronage and patrimonialism in African societies, with special attention to ‘primordial traditions’ of gift giving (Ekpo, 1979) and the deep ‘culture of supportive values’ (Le Vine 1975). On the other hand, analysts observe that corruption is the result of a historic rupture that formed with the importation of the colonial state (Ekeh, 1975; Mamdani, 1996). Beyond these polarizing debates, anthropologists are interested in *how* local people imagine and navigate the morally ambiguous setting of corruption, using tactics such as cultural construction (Larmour, 2012), mis-recognition (Hansen, 1995), negotiation (Olivier de Sardan, 1999), irony (Mbembe, 2001), ‘categorization’ (Werner, 2000), ‘straddling’ of political and economic spheres (Bayart, 1993), and ‘everyday deception’ (D.J. Smith, 2007).

⁴¹ Contrast this approach with Anton Blok’s (1974) analysis of the Scilian Mafia, which focuses on weaknesses in the processes of state formation rather than cultural dispositions to explain the emergence and resilience of the Mafia. He flatly rejects any notion of Sicilians as having a ‘spirit of criminality.’

Meagher (2006) offers a critique of Chabal and Daloz (2006) and Bayart (2006) for their primordial appeal to 'culture' to rationalise corrupt performances in the African postcolony. To be sure, the resort to culture in explaining corruption conjures up the specter of expediency which has become an 'easy explanatory trap' for many African leaders (Ocheje, 2001). A case in point is President Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, where 'the practices of corruption... were politically constructed as indigenous forms of "African" resistance to the abstract formalism of the state' (Hasty 2005: 295; my emphasis). Such a relativistic position was criticized by Syed Alatas (1968) who bemoans the fact that cultural practices are used for the *purposes of* corruption rather than being the *cause of* corruption. Following a review of the cultural determinants of corruption, Johann Lambsdorff (1999: 13), inventor of the Corruption Perception Index (CPI), submitted that culture can only explain 'a certain fraction of the level of corruption...'. According to Michael Thompson et al. (2006: 322), 'the trouble with taking explicit account of culture is that explanation tends to go out of the window.' He identifies three ways in which culture is misused in relation to corruption.

First, culture can be invoked as an 'uncaused cause' when an individual is said to have acted corruptly 'because his culture told him to' (ibid). Such an explanation, argues Larmour (2012: 159), fails to address the prior question of what caused the culture to be like that. Second, culture is invoked as 'an explanation of last resort' (Thompson et al. 2006: 322). Having exhausted other explanations for corruption, we conveniently turn to culture as some sort of 'residual category' (Larmour 2012: 159). Third, culture is invoked as a 'veto on comparison' (Thompson et al. 2006: 323). For example, in his study of culture and corruption in the Asia Pacific, Larmour (2012: 159) describes how he frequently faced a 'blocking' character: 'To say "corruption is part of a culture" is not unlike saying "back off: this is none of your business."'

2.2.2 Neopatrimonialism Revisited

No discourse on the ‘cultural turn’ would be complete without revisiting the issue of neopatrimonialism. It was Jean-Francois Médard (1986) who coined the (now) buzz term in reference to the inherently contradictory nature of the state in Africa, in which bureaucratic process co-existed with the patrimonial management of public resources. In African studies, neopatrimonialism is tendentially viewed from two perspectives: the society-centric perspective and the state-centric perspective. The former describes ‘practices and norms in African society that prevents the embrace and sustained application of “rational” policy choices capable of promoting economic development and political liberalisation’ (Olukoshi, 2005: 182). Richard Marcus (2010: 117) sees this approach as ‘cultural representation in the political process.’ The latter locates the problem of neopatrimonialism not in the society but in the state itself, pointing to the ways in which the state encumbers society on account of the politics of predation which it nurtures (Olukoshi, 2005: 184; cf. Omotola, 2011).

Yet, the cultural logic of impunity represented in patrimonialism literature on Africa tends to be contingent on highly individualist notions of the African state and of political action (Pratten, 2013), and stresses the role of leaders at the expense of the people (Utas, 2012; see Chapter 1). Thus, I agree with Mustapha’s (2002: 6) charge against skewed readings of African politics that limit the political community to a predatory elite struggle for spoils, while ‘[t]he visions and passions that have fuelled broad-based African political life since the colonial era all disappear from analytic and popular view.’ Drawing on evidence from fieldwork in Lagos, the next section interrogates the less known popular imagination of corruption in urban Nigeria.

2.3 Corruption in Nigeria: Popular Imaginations from Lagos

In Nigeria, as in the rest of Africa, various terms has been predicated of corruption (Smith, 2007; Petit, 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Anders, 2002; Hasty,

2005). This not only reaffirms the ‘complexity’ of corruption (Olivier de Sardan, 1999; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan, 2006), but underlines the need for any grounded analysis of the ‘African public sphere’ to pay critical attention to ‘the connections between the public and the private spheres, as well as between the social and the personal’ (Mustapha, 2012: 5), a ‘conviviality’ (Nyamnjoh, 2015) which I emphasise in the conclusion of this study. This, of course, disrupts the Weberian public/private dichotomy based on a long established Western tradition. In what follows, I discuss some of the perceptions and practices of corruption that emerged from my fieldwork. Along the way, I ground aspects of this more contemporary discourse in the history and politics of corruption and misrule in Nigeria and the politics of illusion for which Nigeria, especially since the oil windfall of the 1970s, has been deservedly notorious.

2.3.1 Corruption in relation to Bad Leadership

One of the imaginations of corruption that emerged strongly during the course of my fieldwork in Lagos was that of corruption as bad leadership: ‘Our leaders have failed us in this country, that is why you see corruption everywhere like pure water,’ said a commuter that I interviewed in a motor-park in Oshodi. The majority of Lagosians that I interviewed were emphatic in their excoriation of their political leaders for the country’s woes. This perspective feeds into popular discourse about corruption in Nigeria that focuses on whom to blame, and how much is the fault of leaders versus ordinary Nigerians (Smith 2007: 55). According to a *danfo* conductor that I interviewed in a roundabout junction in Ikotun Egbe in Alimosho LGA:

We are in this mess because of what our leaders have done to us. They have eaten and packed away the money that is meant to feed us and our children and children’s children. Them *ogas*⁴² [‘big men’] at the top and their voracious appetitie for money are the cause of the poverty that is biting us everyday. We are really suffering and dying slowly. Only God can save us!

⁴² The term *oga* in Yoruba refers to a male adult. It takes on a special sense of respect and dependence when used to reflect a patron-client tie (Joseph, 1987: 207).

In *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983), Achebe formulated the bad leadership thesis in his usual succinct style: ‘The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character.’ Further, Achebe (1983: 38) argues that ‘If indeed there is any such a creature as “an average Nigerian” he is likely to be found at a point in social space with limited opportunities for corruption as we generally understand the word. Corruption goes with power; and whatever the average man may have it is not power. Therefore to hold any useful discussion of corruption we must first locate it where it properly belongs – in the ranks of the powerful.’ The weakness of Achebe viewpoint on corruption is the fact that it denies the average man of power and, as a result, fails to acknowledge ways in which corruption is constantly reproduced ‘from below.’ Far from standing alone, Achebe continues a dominant trope in many analyses of corruption – a trend that sees ordinary people as ‘innocent victims’ in matters related to corruption when, in actual fact, they may also be active participants or ‘doers.’ For example, during the course of my fieldwork, some operators among whom I worked in Oshodi and Alimosho had no qualms in admitting to me their own routine complicity in the corruption that they themselves bemoaned on a daily basis. As Seyi, a *danfo* driver in Ikotun, recounted:

When you point one finger at others, three points back at you! Everytime we blame the police the police the police. See, we drivers *too*, we deliberately influence their actions in a very corrupt way. Let me tell you. I have seen many *danfo* drivers go to the *askari* [police] and even *agberos* and tip them handsomly even before they demand *egunje* [bribe]. This is because they want the *askari* to protect when *wahala* [trouble] strikes. Sometimes, drivers do this so that they can pass one way without any hindrance from the *askari*. In this way, they can get to the garage on time to load more passengers and do more rounds. The rest of us who try to follow the rule, we are done for, simply rot in the go-slow. So we’re part of the problem too.

The corrupt practice described above is not unique to transport in Lagos. In Nairobi, *matatu* (commercial minibus-taxis) drivers frequently leave a 50 or 100 shillings note hidden under the handle of the *matatu* trunk. The traffic police inspectors know just

where to reach for it as they ‘inspect’ the vehicle. One *matatu* driver explained how he calculates his income and outflows: ‘If he earns 70,000 shillings in a month (\$800 US), the next month he spends 10,000 of that (\$115) on large-sum bribes to every cop along his route – a tactic he estimates saves him money over the long haul because the officers remember him and won’t pester him daily’ (Kushner, 2014). In Lagos, it is not uncommon for operators to drive right to the traffic police inspector (‘yellow fever,’ as they call them) and squeeze a couple of N50 notes into his hands and say ‘officer, for beer.’ The officer will put the money in his pocket quickly and wave their *danfos* through the traffic in a ‘one way’ lane. This initiation of the bribery act reflects the ambivalent complicity (see Chapter 1) in many African countries where corruption implicates both citizens and street-level bureaucrats, and where people reproduce the corrupt practices that they most detest. Yet, it remains surprising that most writings on corruption maintain a weird silence on the ‘supply side’ – that is, people who want to influence the public official to their own advantage. Once, I was seating next to a *danfo* driver who had just offered a bribe to a traffic police inspector to give him ‘right of way.’ I asked him why he offered a ‘dash’ rather than stay in his lane and wait for the traffic to clear up. He laughed in disbelief and said to me:

My brother looks like you are JJC. If I don't do that, I can be stuck here for hours without end. That is not good for business as time is money. If I follow one-way, I can get to the garage *sharp sharp* (on time) and load more passengers. Then I can make more money for the conductor and myself after the owner’s portion.

This agency and rational calculation of the ordinary driver on the road appropriating corruption to ‘find a way’ out of a difficult situation (i.e. traffic gridlock or ‘go-slow’) is muted in many studies of corruption which appear to be ‘thin on the subjectivity – the intentions, desires, fears, projects – of the [ordinary] actors engaged in these [corruption] dramas’ (Ortner, 1995: 190). D.J. Smith has argued that Nigerians are not oblivious of their culpability in reproducing corruption: ‘The same person who rails against Abacha or Obasanjo, can in a different moment, lament or laugh about

their own involvement in corruption’ (2007: 55). Yet, as I found in my own fieldwork, a great many operators in Lagos viewed their participation in corruption as inevitable; something so ingrained in their business that they had no power to alter it. In short, for these operators, corruption is something you do to survive. As one *danfo* driver in Oshodi told me: ‘The moment you refuse to give in to corruption in this our business, *you die!* You cease to exist. You become a Joke for all, a laughing stock.’

Two points are noteworthy here. First, corruption is perceived as a means of survival, reinforcing Olivier de Sardan’s (1999: 29) point that ‘whoever practices corruption auto-legitimizes his own behaviour, by presenting himself, for example as a victim of a system in which he is bound to this kind of practice to avoid wasting time/and or an insupportable amount of money, being penalized or condemned to inactivity [or social death].’ Second, corruption is represented as a means of negotiating shame, seen by Olivier de Sardan (1999: 46) as ‘a major form of social control in Africa... a morality based on other people’s opinions, rather than one based on an individual examination of conscience.’ While most Lagosian that I interviewed were probably sincerely in favour of stamping out corruption, ironically, ‘the struggle for survival forces many to participate routinely in the reproduction of the system they denounce’ (Masquelier, 2001: 285). My point here is that far from supporting corruption as a ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable’ transaction of public life, ordinary people abhor corruption in social interaction while continuing to deploy their social agency to navigate its generality and banality (I return to emphasize this salient point in Chapter 6).

2.3.2 ‘Dem Chop us Too Much.’ Corruption as ‘Overdoing Things’

If you steal, do not steal too much at a time. You may be arrested. Steal cleverly (*yi ba mayele*), little by little.

- President Mobutu of Zaire, 1984, addressing his party delegates.

Another related perception of corruption that emerged from the fields was that of corruption as ‘overdoing things,’ also known as greed (*oju kokoro* – ‘greedy eyes’)

and *enu to ti fe* (expanded or big mouth). This perspective came out in an interview with Jibola, a 23-years old *danfo* conductor plying Oshodi-Ikotun route:

In this life, I believe in eating where you work. I don't see anything wrong in stealing small small from where you work. But my view is that do not steal too much. Stealing big big is the problem and comes from *enu to fe pelu oju kokoro* ('wide mouth and greedy eyes'). If I am to be honest, as a conductor I make extra cash into my pocket without telling the driver. It is normal. We all do it. But I try not to steal too much at a time. Most of the money I make are from passengers who forget their change or market women who I charge *owo eru* ('Money for goods') that I carry in the back of the *danfo*. The driver is too busy so he is not aware of this – *ere temi ni yen* ('That is my own gain'). I steal little little so that we [the conductor and driver] can both enjoy the fruit of our labour. If everyone steals big big, there there is not enough to go around. But if we all steal small small, there there is enough to go round to make our stomach big. Then, my brother, people are not so angry.

Jibola's statement echoes the routine practice in urban Congo (DRC), where a person who fails to cash in on his position to turn things to his benefit is regarded as a fool (*akili*) (Petit, 2005). Yet, anyone who takes too much is seen as stupid because *ekonaharibisha kazi* (he spoils his job), that is, it will not be long before he is fired. Pierre Petit (2005: 477) makes a similar point, in his argument that 'predation finds the right tune in moderation.' As the Congolese proverb goes: *kula ndambo, kwaca ndambo* ('eat some, leave some'). Or as they say in Lagos: *Chop make I chop* (eat and let me eat). From this perspective, Nigerian leaders, like Generals Babangida and Abacha, are seen as corrupt because 'dem chop us too much,' as one trader said.

2.3.3 'Stomach Infrastructure'

The use of local idioms like 'choping' or 'consumption' to explain corruption has a long history. In a 4th century B.C. treatise on corruption and public administration in India, Kautiliya writes: 'Just as it is impossible not to taste the honey that finds itself at the tip of the tongue, so it is impossible for a government servant not to eat up, at least, a bit of the King's revenue' (cited in Kangle 1972: 91). In postcolonial Nigeria,

the popular imagination often has an impressive and evocative vocabulary when it comes to describing or justifying the meaning of corruption. In particular, two local idioms associated with consumption capture the popular imagination of corruption in Nigeria: ‘national cake’ and ‘chop.’ Starting with the former, it is no longer news that politicians in Nigeria frequently attain a constituency by promising ‘a piece of the national cake’ to their loyal supporters and by redistributing money and goods as an effective (perhaps even affective) strategy of regime survival.

Known in everyday parlance as ‘stomach infrastructure,’ in the run-up to 2015 elections, I was struck by the amount of political parties which placed huge emphasis on handing out essential ‘stomach’ items like rice, milk, kerosene, chicken, and staple foods to voters/supporters (and churches and mosques). For example, Ekiti State Governor, Ayo Fayose, distributed 80,000 chickens, 100,000 bags of rice and cash gift to the people of Ekiti under the so-called ‘stomach infrastructure’ programme of his administration. Other states in Nigeria like Osun, Cross River and Lagos followed suit (*Vanguard*, July 8, 2014). In Oyo State, the political influence of the Chief patron Lamidi Adedibu, nicknamed the ‘godfather of Ibadan,’⁴³ flowed primarily from his fantastic ability to mobilize violence and wherewithals in support of the politicians he sponsors. Adedibu distributed cash and food to various supplicants on an everyday basis from his Ibadan home, a brand of patronage referred to as *amala politics*, after a traditional dish common to Nigeria’s southwest. In the face of hardship, it is not hard to see why many ordinary Nigerians (who live from hand to mouth) seek instant gratifications in exchange for their votes. In this respect, the practice of stomach infrastructure reclaims the ‘wealth-in-people’ thesis (Bledsoe, 1990) and ‘logic of conviviality’ (Nyamnjoh, 2015) that inscribes the politics of ‘bignamity’ in Africa.

⁴³ ‘God fatherism’ refers to the process by which an individual establishes links with a senior within a given institutional hierarchy in the expectation of favoured treatment (Joseph, 1987: 207).

2.3.4 ‘Na Paper I go Chop?’ Corruption as Consumption

Lagosians regularly represent corruption using local idiom like ‘chopping’ or ‘eating’ (examples elsewhere in Africa include: Hasty 2005; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2006; Petit, 2005). But what does it mean to *chop*? In Nigeria, to *chop* can refer to many things depending on the context. First, to *chop* means to ‘eat’ (food) in the generic sense of the word. Second, *chop* can also be an informal word for enjoying the luxuries of life (*Je aiye* – ‘eat life’). Third, *chop* is imbued with sexual inuendos. For example, ‘I wan *chop* that woman’ implies the desire for coitus. In this sense, the woman is presented as a ‘food’ to be ‘choped.’ Fourth, and this is crucial, to *chop* is a euphemism for corruption, as contained in the popular expression on the streets of Lagos, ‘Chop Make I Chop.’ In Nigeria, public funds is often imagined as a ‘national cake’ to be distributed or ‘shared’ among officeholders, party leaders or partisans. The mentality is very simple: ‘let us *chop* as much as possible and go home to belch’ (Okafor, 2011). Criticising political leaders in Nigeria for the unimpressive state of affairs in the country, Bimbo, a regular commuter in Ikotun, had this to say:

National *cake* that is meant for all of us, our rights, some wicked, self-centered leaders are *eating* it. They are *sharing* it like *kola* among themselves and their families, while the rest of us *starve* to death. Few hands are *sharing* it. They will all die of *obesity*!

Notice how the above statement by Bimbo is replete with activities associated with consumption. Notably, a popular word for bribes in Nigeria is *kola* (the fruit of the *kola* tree). Culturally, the *kola* is a symbolic fruit in Nigeria; it is broken and shared for ‘eating’ during celebratory events (i.e. wedding ceremonies). On Lagos roads, I often heard yellow fevers or traffic police demanding ‘kola’ from *danfo* operators: ‘Any *kola* for us?’ In this case, the officer is directly soliciting ‘settlement’ from the *danfo* operator in question. It is noteworthy that the ‘national cake’ mentality in Nigeria does not only implicate leaders but followers as well. As one editorial noted:

While we make a passionate habit of hurling scorn-filled verbal attacks at our leaders, *we sometimes gloss over the uncomplimentary fact that most of us are equally guilty of the same obscene mind-set.* A mind-set that salivates and dream of a chance to belong to the thieving ruling class who sit together and carve up our resources for their capricious amusement, a mind-frame that is aptly made visible in such bumper stickers that scream ‘this is my year of financial break-through.’ Most of our compatriots moan about the kleptomania that is celebrated in our government activities while openly but secretly wishing to be a part of the orgy (Okafor, 2011).

Bureaucracies in Nigeria (and much of Africa) have long been seen as susceptible to ‘cake-eating’ since they are employed by the state and are poorly paid (sometimes after much delays). Individuals faced with these types of working conditions are quite vulnerable to corruption and are more likely to actively engage in corrupt practices to secure the resources they need to meet their basic needs. Far too frequently, even the most ethical public servants in Nigeria, readily mortgage their consciences and succumb to the temptation of easy bribes and easy satisfaction to do whatever it takes to avoid the almost certain life of misery that awaits. This is reflected in *danfo* slogans like ‘Man must chop’ or ‘Anyway na way.’ In Lagos, the police often stop *danfos* to check whether drivers have the ‘particulars’ and pretend to arrest them if they are not in order. A few squeezed nairas into the hands, and the problem is sorted (hence, Lagosians in haste tend to advise their driver to *fun lonje* – give [the officer] his food. However, if by chance a *danfo* driver has everything in order (they rarely do), after some discussion, the police will ask *Na paper I go chop* (Can I eat papers?), meaning that he is not concerned about the documents but about what he might eat.

During fieldwork in a motorpark in Oshodi, I caught up with Tajudeen Adepo, a yellow fever, who told me rather jokingly: ‘I love my job because plenty chances dey to *chop belefuf* [eat well]. My salary no reach anything so I dey use this one to keep body and soul together.’ Tajudeen was describing the many ‘opportunities’ available to him as an officer of authority to extort money from transport operators in order to supplement his meagre wages. Here, the rationalisation for corruption draws on the register of ‘just remuneration’ or ‘compensatory allowance’ for poor salaries (Blundo

and Olivier de Sardan 2006: 112). Thus, for many traffic police inspectors in Lagos, their uniform is a license to *chop* (eat), reinforcing the image of ‘office as business’ implicit in market-centered definitions of corruption.

Similar metaphors of corruption as ‘chopping’ or consumption can be found elsewhere in the Africa postcolony. In Francophone countries like Niger, Senegal and Benin, corruption is familiarly registered as *manger* (to eat) or *bouffer* (to devour). It is said of the embezzler that he has *mange la caisse ou l’argent* (‘eaten the till or the money’) or that he is *un mangeur d’argent d’autrui* (‘the devourer of other people’s money’). The Dendi⁴⁴ expression *dii ka dan me* literally translate into ‘take that and put it in your mouth’ and means ‘that’s your share.’ In Congo DRC, terms like *kukata milomo* (‘to cut the lips’) or *ya sucre, ya cayi* (‘for lemonade, for tea’) are popular idioms for corruption. In Liberia, the language of bribery is coded as *cold water* to quench a ‘very thirsty’ traffic officer (Agbiboa, 2016a). In Kenya, politics has often been described as the politics of deception and at election time you will often hear the phrase ‘our time to eat’ referring to the politicisation of ethnic identities and the popular expectation of politicians of particular ethnic association to ‘take care’ of their ethnic communities after electoral victory. In Lumumbashi, the image of eating or consumption is popularly used to designate the embezzling of funds: *Il a tout bouffe* (‘he has eaten it all’) (Petit, 2005: 476). In short, corruption has become so rife in Lumumbashi that people have developed an elaborate terminology to describe it:

Beans for the children, a little something, an encouragement, an envelope, something to tie the two ends with, to deal, to come to an understanding, to take care of me, to pay the beer, to short-circuit, to see clearly, to be lenient or comprehensive, to put things in place, to find a Zairian solution (Riley, 1999: 190).

⁴⁴ A Songhay language used as a trade language across northern Benin

In Lagos, whereas corruption is imagined with metaphors of eating, anticorruption is often sensationalised through the metaphor of ‘vomiting.’ For example, referring to unscrupulous politicians in Nigeria, one *okada* rider in Oshodi hopefully lamented:

I know God will arrest these corrupt politicians and make them *vomit* all the millions they have *eaten* at our expense, at the expense of our sweat and blood. Everyday is for the thief, but one day is for the owner!

2.3.5 Corruption in relation to Witchcraft and Belly Politics

In his book on the *Politics of the Belly*, Bayart (1993: 270) argues that ‘to eat’ in the political realm means ‘to nourish oneself... it is also to accumulate, exploit, defeat, attack or kill by witchcraft.’ Thus, Bayart relates ‘the politics of the belly’ to the ‘politics of the cannibal witch.’ For him, the cupidity of the politicians in many African countries evokes the witch’s hunger for human flesh:

In Africa, this theme of the belly is based on two original cultural registers which are, moreover, closely linked: that of munificence which, for example, makes physical corpulence into a political quality and, above all, that of the invisible, i.e. the nocturnal world of the ancestors, of the dream, of divination and magic, of which the gut is the actual centre. When the Africans assert that their leaders are ‘eating’ them economically through excessive extortion they lend this assertion a disturbing connotation which haunts them from infancy and obsesses them until their death: that of the specter of an attack of witchcraft which generates prosperity for the aggressor and failure, illness and misfortune for the victim (Bayart, 1993: 69).

Several authors have already explored the way in which political deeds and witchcraft intersects in African states (Geschiere, 1997). Rowland and Warnier (1988: 121), for example, argue that in Cameroon: ‘Sorcery is not only a mode of popular political action but lies at the centre of the state-building process both in the present and in the past.’ It is against this backdrop that Bayart identifies belly politics (*politiques du ventre*) as the essential logic of the African state operationalised in the kleptocratic schemes of African elites as well as the survival tactics and strategies deployed by ordinary people. Commenting on Bayart, Jennifer Hasty (2005: 275) identifies ‘the

‘politics of the belly’ with ‘a form of governmentality that essentially constitutes the African state as a “rush for spoils” carried out through competitive patrimonial networks.’ This is the sense in which Olivier de Sardan (1999: 43) argues that ‘for a civil servant [in Africa], positions of power provide the only means of coming into any kind of wealth. [Thus,] To refuse them is to make a simultaneous show of ingratitude, egoism, pride, naivete [shamelessness] and even stupidity...’

In describing political corruption in Cameroon, Bayart (1993: 235) argues that Cameroonians, like Nigerians, frequently use the proverb ‘Goats eat where they are tethered,’ implying that ‘the social struggles which make up the quest for hegemony and the production of the state bear the hallmarks of the rush for spoils in which all actors – rich and poor alike – participate in a world of networks’ (Bayart, 1993: 235).⁴⁵ In focusing on the ‘accumulation of wealth through tenure of political power’ (ibid), however, Bayart in my view stops short of tracing the logic of belly politics into daily life (‘politics from below’ – *le politique par le bas*), even though, vitally, the postcolony is drained as much from the top as from the bottom as a consequence of *politiques du ventre* (Chapter 1). Also, Bayart’s analysis disengages with how the logic of belly politics is popularised, rumoured, criticised and satirized in daily life.

2.3.6 Corruption in relation to ‘Fast and Easy Money’

Corruption is widely represented in Lagos as a matter of ‘fast money’ (*owo kia kia*) that implicates people (especially young people) seeking to get rich through any and all means possible. As one *danfo* slogan in Lagos puts it: ‘Get Rich or Die Trying.’ This is the city infamously depicted in Cyprian Ekwensi’s *People of the City* (1963), where a young crime reporter discovers a world of money, music and glamour: ‘His motto had become money, money, money. This was the way the people of the city realised themselves. Money. He saw the treachery, intrigue, and show of power

⁴⁵ This implies the logic of conviviality, which I return to in Chapter 6.

involved' (Ekwensi, 1963: 108). Many Lagosians imagine corruption as an act perpetuated by people without *suru* (patience); in other words, people who have abandoned the traditional Yoruba ethic of *ise* (work) before *owo* (money). Thus, according to this view, corruption is an outcome of the inordinate desire for *owo kia kia* or *owo gbibona* ('hot money') without regard for due process. This view came out in my interview with a Vehicle Inspection Officer in Alimosho:

As far as I am concerned, we public, Nigerians as a whole, we are a problem to ourselves. We want to look for where we have fast and easy money. You know, day-to-day money. For instance what happens to all the artisans, nobody wants to go to apprenticeship anymore. Go and find out all these *okada* riders and *danfo* drivers, go and see the way they live. Some have multiple wives and all that.... That is why I said we need to work on the mindset of the general public. Many people are just interested in what brings in fast cash not considering what happens in the long run.

What explains this quest for 'fast money'? Segun Oshoba (1996) argues that rampant elite corruption with impunity has taught the average Nigerian (especially the youth) the disruptive lesson that 'being honest and law-abiding does not pay.' Hence, some of the people who have learnt this lesson from their political leaders replicate them at their own lowly levels in the form of fraud, bribery, peculation and embezzlement of public funds. It is through these shortcuts to prosperity, argues Osoba (1996: 384), that corruption has become pervasive and popularised as a way of life. Nowhere is this more evident than in the rumours and stories of 'blood money,' occult powers, and deception through which ordinary Nigerians in Lagos are able to make some sense, in unofficial discourse, of the oppressive structures of power and its popular discontents. Let us drill deeper into these fantastic rumours and stories, locating them, where appropriate, in historically significant events.

2.3.7 The Enemy within: Corruption in relation to 'Blood Money'

During the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria used its oil windfalls to create the 'blood of a nation' (Smith, 2005: 737). However, during the oil burst of the 1980s, oil fell

from its highs of ‘black gold’ to the lows of ‘devils excrement’ (Watts, 2008). During this era, popular stories and rumors circulated about the emergence of a ‘Vampire State’ where Nigerian elites were not only profiteering from the State, but using human blood for money rituals (locally known as *owo eje* – ‘blood money’) – shades of the ‘omnivorous potentialities of the postcolony’ (Masquelier, 2001: 269) and the mutual intertwining of the fetish and the fake (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 25). Indeed, this discourse makes more sense as part of a larger process of ‘commodity fetishism’ in which Nigerians increasingly see money as *the* value that mattered and became obsessed with its accumulation (as they say in Lagos, *olowo laye mo* – the world only recognises the rich). When Karl Marx alluded to ‘commodity fetishism,’ he was referring to a form of commodification in capitalist societies – that the products of human labour, when alienated from their producers through the capitalist mode of production, adopt transcendent, mystical properties. Money, the ultimate fetish of privilege, reifies the process by which value and power are constantly alienated from productive labour, and thus can be accumulated by the powerful – not necessarily as a result of their own labors, but by virtue of sacrifices made by others (McCall, 2003: 83). As the following quotes from Apter (2005) suggests:

This notion of effortless gain at the expense of even ‘consumption’ of others is echoed in various witchcraft beliefs as well, but the underlying template motivating it is the conversion of blood into money – bad money to be sure... (Apter, 2005: 249).

As the cost of living rose, real incomes fell, and the professional middle class gradually withered away, oil was transformed from the life-blood of the nation into the bad blood of corrupt government; or as Watts (1994) has so elegantly put it, from black gold into the devil’s excrement (Apter, 2005: 251-252).

Alongside the problem of falsified identities, Ruth Marshall (2009: 186), referring to Nigeria, argues that ‘the uncertain origins of wealth and its increasingly socially unproductive nature gave rise to a public obsession with invisible and dangerous occult forces and evil ritual practice.’ Indeed, the problem of falsification, the origins

and value of wealth, and the use and abuse of power were central thematic concerns of stories of ‘money medicine’ and ‘money doubling’ that abounded in the 1990s, relating actual practices in which human blood and parts were trafficked in macabre rituals for the creation of instant wealth (Bures, 2008: 60).⁴⁶ Popular stories of blood money (*owo eje*) are particularly widespread in Lagos. During fieldwork, Lagosians often propagated stories about how ‘big men’ in the neighborhood had used the blood of their children (*eje omode*) or relatives (*eje arale*) or strangers (*eje alejo*) to ‘kill’ money (*pa owo*) and advance their fame and realise their political ambition. These fantastic rumours and stories reinforce Ruth Marshall’s (1998: 304) contention that ‘in Nigeria, power is itself evidence of strong spiritual connection; all “big men” that have “eaten well” are understood to have links to secret and occult forms of power!’

During fieldwork, for example, I recall walking along Bamidele Street in Ikotun Egbe with a childhood friend, Shegun. We happened to pass a huge mansion: with green shutters and a brown roof, and an impressive fence surrounded by barbed wires. The mansion belongs to one of the *olowos* [rich men] in the area, Chief Femi Badmus. Shegun pointed to a mentally sick young man, probably in his mid-twenties, who was lying naked by the huge gates of the mansion. The young man, as I learnt, was Wale, the only child of Chief Badmus. As a version of the story goes, Wale was a victim of his father’s obsession with fame and fortune. One rumour have it that Wale’s mental condition coincided with his father’s inexplicable wealth and sudden and inexplicable transformation from a ‘poor church rat’ to been a ‘bastard millionaire able to have his own transformer to generate electricity for himself.’ Ever since, says Shegun, Wale has been roaming the streets naked and ‘eating from the gutters and waste bins.’ Most people in the area who encounter him shake their head saying *eni to mo yon lon pa yan*’ (It is those closest to us that kill us). Others say *kokoro to n’jefo idi efo lo wa* –

⁴⁶ In January 1998, the front cover of *Fame*, a Nigerian celebrity tabloid, showed grisly pictures of a woman whose eyes had been gouged out for ‘money medicine.’ The 1990s also saw the widespread phenomenon of penis theft in Nigeria, especially Lagos (Bures, 2008: 60). These happenings increased insecurity in everyday life.

the insect that feeds on the vegetable inhabits the vegetable, that is, Wale's problem lies with someone closest to him – his father. In these allegations of blood money and wicked acts that came to dominate contemporary Nigeria, the religious sphere has not been spared. The famous attack by an enraged crowd on a branch of Overcomers church in southeastern Owerri in 1996 shows the existing confusion between the 'itineraries of accumulation and success of certain pastors and the trajectories of a new generation of young ultra-rich "businessmen"' (Marshall, 2009: 185).

In Lagos, everyday rumours has it that these ultra-rich businessmen have gained their wealth not just through criminal means (i.e. advance fee fraud or drug dealing) but through ritual human sacrifice, macabre trafficking in human body parts, contacts with cults, and dubious pacts with powerful witches and other evil spirits. Politicians have also been implicated in blood money. In March 2015, Fashola, former Governor of Lagos, announced in an APC (All Peoples Congress party) rally that any money collected by a Yoruba leader from former Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan during his campaign in the southwest is tantamount to 'blood money':

The Yorubas need to have a rethink. Some Yoruba leaders have betrayed us the Yorubas because of money. This election is for freedom. And this was how it happened in the past which prompted the late Hubert Ogunde to sing one of his songs titled 'Yorubas rethink.' *The money is blood money*. And posterity will judge them for that action (*PM News*, 2015).

During the 1990s, in particular, Nigerian home video boom pivoted on a wide variety of evil occult forces. One of the biggest blockbusters of that decade, *Blood Money I and II*, tells the story of 'Mike' and his involvement in the 'vulture cult,' involving human sacrifice, the mutation of men into 'vultures,' and the conversion of children into chickens who 'vomit money.' Another popular Yoruba movie, *Egba Orun* ('The Necklace'), tells the story of a woman who uses her daughter for money ritual. For the most part, these films are not cast as allegories or fanciful representations, but rather as accounts of real-life events. In these films, as in the various stories and

rumours circulating in the press and public discourse, the key theme is ‘excessive riches obtained from evil occult power – riches that are represented as antisocial, destructive, and ultimately unprofitable’ (Marshall, 2009: 188). For example, Andrew Apter (2005: 269) argues that, ‘money magic, like the money it invoked, was iconic of [Nigeria] and symptomatic of its unproductive wealth.’ By describing inexplicable wealth as bewitched or ‘blood money,’ Lagosians, seem to be actively engaging in a critique of social inequality, oppression, and conspicuous consumption.

There are many notable similarities between witchcraft and corruption allegations in Nigeria, and, by extension, Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999; Geschiere, 1997; Bayart, 1993). As Nuijten and Anders (2007: 19) argue (with Malawi in mind), ‘they [referring to witchcraft and corruption] both tend to be directed toward people who have suddenly and inexplicably increased their wealth or power. Both types of accusations are surrounded by conspiracy theories, while practices take place in the hidden and are never completely revealed.’ Hence, ‘the efficiency of the phantasmatic logic of conspiracy demands that the enemy remains an unfathomable entity whose true identity can never be fully disclosed’ (Zizek, 1996: 120). This not only sheds light on ‘the secret world of obscure rituals that forms the background of power’ (Nuijten and Anders, 2007: 19), but points to the fact that it is the very clandestine and elusive quality of corruption that never fails to arouse the popular fascination. While rumours and stories about witchcraft and occult rituals place considerable blame on rapacious elites in Nigeria (the powerful), ordinary people – especially the youth – are also implicated in the obscure rituals that underpin the sudden rise to fame and fortune (as evidenced by the problem of *yahoo yahoo* boys in Lagos, which falls outside the current scope). But to appropriately locate these more contemporary corruption-related imaginaries, it is expedient to pause here to briefly ground them in the history and politics of Nigeria, especially since the oil boom decade of the 1970s.

2.3.8 Oil, Blood and Money: Recalling the ‘SAPped’ Years

All our people are now caught in this intense craze for money. Money and women. People are terribly mean to each other now. The old trust, the open handshake is gone. There is so much hatred now, a lot of hatred and a lot of bitterness and a lot of greed and a lot of jealousy, in short, a lot of everything that is bad. And the reason is that everyone wants to be rich. So they steal from each other and plunder the nation’s coffers and use the people carelessly and shamelessly... And women are amongst the most cruelly and callously used. Women are used as logs are used for the fire (Iyayi, 1982: 24, cited in Marshall, 1991: 25).

Fear and lack of confidence in the future are becoming the common currency of the day. Job seekers have no future to look up to – at least not from the system. We no longer trust anything or anyone. Those we trusted have mortgaged us and held us to ransom for foreign loans which we did not benefit from... Everything – absolutely everything – is on the decline and on the verge of collapse. What more is still promising? What is it that is not declining? Is it education, health, agriculture, industry, politics, religion, marriage, or the family? No jobs, no money, no food, no clothing, no personal dignity. Any hope for tomorrow? (Marshall, 1991: 25).

The two quotes above offer deep insights into the widespread distress that the 1980s unleashed on many Nigerians, especially those in the lowest economic quintile. In particular, the mid-1970s was a period of rapid, albeit uneven, economic expansion based on petrodollars (Apter, 2005). During the halcyon years of oil boom, a Nigerian president is reported to have announced that ‘our problem is not money but how to spend it.’ However, by 1981, years of relative prosperity came to a sudden halt with the fall in oil prices. By the end of the decade, the inflation rate had skyrocketed and Nigeria was well on the way to becoming a net debtor for the first time (Gandy, 2006).⁴⁷ This period coincided with record unemployment in the south, with political patronage acting as ‘the only way to secure any important employment or contract’ (Falola, 1998: 60). Meanwhile, the population in Lagos swelled as migrants from the countryside flocked to the already ‘overloaded city’ relentlessly, settling wherever

⁴⁷ The country’s external debt rose from \$13bn to \$30bn between 1981 and 1989. By the end of the decade, Nigeria’s foreign debt had risen to \$36bn, equivalent to some 75% of GDP and nearly 200% of export earnings (Gandy, 2005: 46, 48). Meanwhile ‘extreme poverty’ figures for the country rose from 28% in 1980 to 66% in 1996 (ibid).

they could get a foothold in the spreading shanty towns on the margins of railway tracks or highways, in moribund bus stops and dilapidated motorparks, or in shacks precariously extended over the filthy canals, ditches and waterways.⁴⁸

In Lagos, economic decline and everyday struggle for survival and social becoming gave rise to a cohort of dispossessed youth, variously labelled in the literature as ‘lost generation’ (Cruise O’Brien, 1996), an ‘alien nation’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999), a cohort ‘without-importance’ (*les sans importance*), at the mercy of global, political and economic changes.⁴⁹ As already noted, the crisis created by the ‘SAPed years’ (Barber, 1997) taught many youth that being honest and law-abiding does not pay. The result was a new (a)moral economy which holds that ‘it is better to sell your soul to the devil than to be scrupulous. The cunning required to meet immediate needs has replaced the respect of any righteous moral code’ (Nzeza, 2004: 21). Nowhere is this best seen than in the mentality of *owo kia kia* (‘fast money’) among Lagos youth. In short, *owo* (money) morphed from *idi gbogbo buruburu* (‘root of all evil’) into *ewa* (beauty) and the *koko* (the essential). This reclaims Cyprian Ekwensi’s thoughts in *Jagua Nana* (1961), which paints a dark picture of Lagos as a vanity fair where money has become an ‘idol worshipped in every waking and sleeping moment’ (: 30). Ekwensi (1961: 15, 6) likens Lagos to a nightclub, ‘Tropicana,’ where ‘money always claimed first loyalty.’ For him, people come to Lagos to ‘make fast money by faster means, and greedily to seek positions that yielded even more money.’⁵⁰

Following the oil burst, oil lost its popular appeal as the ‘lifeblood’ of the nation, furthering development and nationhood. Instead, it became ‘a mischievous substance

⁴⁸ The numerous infrastructure programmes of the 1970s – including ports, airports, roads, bridges, oil refineries, and steel mills – were abandoned incomplete, or left to decay. This set into motion a sustained disintegration of socioeconomic order in Nigeria (Mustapha, 1999). Falling oil revenues from 1981, widespread hardship and pervasive corruption left many Lagosians distressed about the present and fearful for the future.

⁴⁹ Yet, as chapters 3, 4 and 5 suggest, it is important to look beyond the narratives of ‘lost generation’ to see vigorous ways in which youth are securing new avenues of livelihood, protection and meaning.

⁵⁰ Ekwensi’s (1961: 165) sharp contrast of the immorality of the city to the morality of the village reinforces Ekeh’s (1975) distinction between the primordial public (moral) and the civic public (amoral).

turning politicians into corrupt potentates and making the national political process crumble from the inside' (Apter 2005: 250; see Dudley, 1982). D.J. Smith (2005: 733) contends that the oil burst 'exposed the contradictions in Nigeria's largely non-productive oil company, making control of the state and its increasingly scarce oil revenues the object of even more intense competition, feeding corruption and stoking discontent over the consequent poverty and inequality.'

In an effort to re-impose order, the Buhari-Idiagbon regime (1984-1985) unseated the Second Republic (1979-83) and mounted a curious public propaganda 'war against corruption and indiscipline' (WAI) along with a special paramilitary squad – 'WAI brigade' – for its execution (Falola, 1998: 62). Yet,

The regime shot itself in the foot by trying to arrest the country's economic and social decline by doctrinaire and anti-people policies like massive retrenchment of workers in the public service, the introduction of many new taxes, levies and fees on citizens, drastic reduction in public expenditure, especially on social welfare and agricultural subsidies, and the widespread destruction of the means of livelihood of small privately employed persons like motor mechanics, food vendors and petty traders by pulling down their makeshift sheds, kiosks and bukas in the name of urban environmental sanitation (Osoba 1996: 381; see Chapter 5).

By August 1985 when General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (aka 'IBB' and 'Evil Genius') seized power in a bloodless coup, the Nigeria state faced an intense 'crisis of legitimation' (Jega, 2000; see also Diamond, Kirk-Greene and Oyediran, 1997).

2.3.9 The 'Evil Genius': Illusion as the Basis of Survival

IBB's regime (1985-1993) derived much of its popularity and legitimacy from a self-proclaimed 'corrective mission' (Graf, 1988; Mustapha, 1999). To put a halt to deep economic stagnation, IBB implemented a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in July 1986, alongside a Transition to Civil Rule – what many have referred to as a 'transition without end' (Mustapha, 1999) – to meet the demands of the International

Monetary Fund and World Bank (Alao, 2000). Premised on the alleged rationalistic logic of the supremacy of market signals in economic management, the SAP was a reform package aimed at reviving and reconfiguring the economy. Core elements of the SAP included currency devaluation and exchange rate deregulation, significant reductions in public expenditure, especially in social services sector; and privatisation and commercialization of public enterprises and services. Yet, the SAP in Nigeria, as in much of Africa, proved ‘inconsistent and irregular, and economic management was soon overshadowed by political discord’ (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 2).

The personality of the implementers is often missing in many analysis of why the SAP failed. Nigerian musician Fela Kuti once described IBB and his regime as *wayo wayo* [fraudulent] government. Already, Apter (2005) neatly indexes the many ruses deployed by IBB (infamously nicknamed the ‘evil genius’) to loot the treasury and lead a democratic transition that ultimately left the juntas in charge. On the economic front, IBB deviously exploited both the public expectations for development and the international lender’s demands for SAP to establish programs that diverted resources back to his pocket and those of his cronies (Smith, 2005). For seven years, IBB involved the Nigerian masses in a political transition to civilian rule whose cost is estimated at N30 billion (Mustapha, 1999: 278). According to Mustapha (1999: 278), ‘It became clear in the end that [IBB’s] Machiavellian maneuvers were ultimately aimed at perpetuating his personal grip on power, even at the cost of fragmenting the country along regional, ethnic and religious lines.’ IBB’s wife, Maryam Babangida, was not left out in the act. Maryam created the ‘Better Life for Rural Women’ program – sarcastically dubbed by Nigerians as ‘Better Life for Rich Women’ or ‘Better Life for Ruling Women’ – wherein ‘the first lady, together with the wives of governors, launched their projects in state capitals while supporting the finest lace and fanciest head ties, forever out of reach and out of touch’ (Apter, 2005: 248).

The concentration of power and the personalization of state institutions under IBB ensured that only those with the ‘right connections’ could ‘hope for’ (Jansen, 2012) economic wellbeing and selective justice from the state. While the majority struggled for ‘connections’ or bore the costs of not being ‘well-connected,’ an esoteric few groveled at the feet of Babangida and Maryam. Petro-naira, political patronage and government repression became the trademarks of IBB’s kleptocracy. Perhaps General Buhari, Nigeria’s current democratic president, had it right when he said:

The regime that came to power in 1985 that ushered in General Ibrahim Babangida destroyed all national institutions, which in its own opinion, stood in its way. It tolerated, encouraged, entrenched and institutionalized corruption and glorified its perpetrators... At the end of its tenure in 1993, the military government had established an image of corrupt, unreliable and unaccountable lords of the manor (cited in Mustapha 1999: 278).

The ruses of IBB culminated in a moral economy where ‘survival and success’ in Nigeria, especially Lagos, rested squarely on ‘mastering the arts of deception’ (Smith 2005: 735-6). Obsession with falsification and fraud gathered momentum throughout the 1980s and 1990s: Advance fee fraud and confidence tricks involving forgery and impersonation, covered under the infamous article ‘419’ of the Nigeria criminal code, developed with the deregulation of the banking and foreign exchange system under IBB’s SAP from the late 1980s (Marshall, 2009: 186). For Apter (2005: 248), ‘419’ became the ultimate symbol of ‘world-as-misrepresentation’ in terms of economic, social, and political practice, as well as the second source of foreign exchange in the country throughout the 1990s, second only to oil.

A Lagosian who lived through the difficult rule of IBB poignantly recalls:

All the 419, fraud, corruption practices you see today have their roots in the IBB era. Those things were not only acceptable, they were the norm. You

could defraud anyone as long as you were smart enough.⁵¹ All kinds of wrong things began to happen – smuggling, bunkering, drugs – and Babangida encouraged it. Fraud and corruption became the prevalent ways to really make money. The society descended into utter depravity.

One of the primary effects of 419 in Lagos is what David Pratten (2013) calls ‘epistemological insecurity,’ which centers on anxieties over the authenticity of information and the veracity of claims in a highly generalised context of fraud. This has contributed to the palpable lack of trust in everyday life (Chapter 1). For example, on the roads and inner streets of Lagos mainland, I sighted numerous buildings with bold inscriptions like: ‘This land is not for sale. Beware of 419.’ According to Mbembe (2001: 148), a common feature of this urban culture is its ‘simultaneous multiplicities’ – ‘the lack of correspondence between what one sees and exposes, and the real value of things... the unexpected is the rule.’ In the wake of the oil burst in Nigeria, the downward trend, exacerbated by the deregulative measures of SAP, produced a ‘crisis of value:’ mostly ‘of runaway inflation, distressing depreciation, defaulting banks, and above all the impoverishment of everyday life... IBB’s regime of fraud and deception gave rise to a national culture of ‘419,’ in which illusion became the very basis of survival’ (Apter, 2005: 249-50). In this respect, the crisis of the 1980s exposed not only the innate contradictions of Nigeria’s oil-led economy, but revealed a state-controlled system of unproductive accumulation:

As the oil economy imploded and collapsed, the signs of wealth and development became increasingly estranged from their referents, infusing the value forms of everyday exchange with ghostly simulacra – food that did not satisfy, clothes and uniforms that disguised, financial instruments that had no legitimacy, banks lacking capital, hospitals without medicine, and finally democracy that had no demos (Apter 2005: 274).

⁵¹ In Liberia, corruption is translated as *gbagba* which means ‘trickery’ (Pailey, 2013). A similar word in Nigeria is *jibiti* (Yoruba) or *wayo* (pidgin) which means ‘trick’ or ‘419.’ So, Nigerians will often say, ‘our leaders dey play us wayo’ (our leaders are playing us trickery) or ‘No let dem play you 419’ (don’t let them defraud you).

IBB was forced out of office in June 2003, following his botched attempt to subvert his own deceitful Political Transition Programme (Alao, 2000: 11). An official report issued shortly after his exit declared that \$12bn from public funds went missing under his rule (Okigbo Panel Report, 1994). IBB was replaced by the unelected Interim National Government (ING), which was later forced from office by General Sani Abacha (1993-1998), Nigeria's last despot, in late 1993. By the time Abacha seized power Nigeria was in free fall. However, Abacha's regime only served to deepen the 'gun powdered democracy' in Nigeria, through which incumbent juntas manipulate political processes to reconstitute themselves as 'elected democratic' governments (Alao, 2000). Due to the popular opposition which Abacha's regime, indeed the entire military as a *force majeure* in Nigeria, faced, he adopted populist, nationalist, and draconian measures to contain the series of crises threatening his regime survival. Dubbed a 'coup from heaven,' Abacha's sudden death in June 1998 was followed, four weeks later, by that of Chief Abiola, on July 7, the other leading protagonist in the intractable political crisis that had plagued the country since June 1993.



Figure 2. "This Land is not for sale. Beware of 419."

Before wrapping up discussions in this chapter, I would like to briefly draw attention to three other important micro-level perspectives of corruption from the field, namely corruption as 'general problem,' 'enslaving the masses,' and 'abuse of power.'

2.3.10 ‘We are all in the Game’: Corruption as a ‘General Problem’

Another perspective of corruption that emerged from the fields was that of corruption as a ‘general phenomenon’ – an activity that implicates ‘all of us.’ This view holds that corruption starts from our homes and goes all the way up. As one retired traffic policeman in Alimosho traffic unit said to me:

Let me tell you, corruption is a general problem in this our Nigeria. [‘Sir, when you say corruption what exactly are you referring to?’] My friend, anyone who gives, who takes, who receives. Even corruption starts right from your house. From when you love one of your son than the other one. It is corruption. Because when he is going to school you on the side give one son N50 on the otherside you give the other one N100. [So corruption] is just a common phenomenon in the country. It is like ‘pure water.’ Even in the church where the pastor tells you come and buy candle in my church. A packet of candle is N70 outside. And he is telling you a stick of candle in my church is N100. What is that?

In another interview, a commuter in Oshodi lamented the fact that:

This country Nigeria is chronically corrupt and, in my opinion, beyond redemption. We live and breathe corruption here. No one is spared of this problem. You are either giving or receiving something. So we are all part of this sickness that is threatening us. Yes we can blame our leaders for chopping the resources meant all of us. But if we are to be honest we will realise that we are also encouraging corruption in our daily activities. Sometimes you are in the bus and police asks the driver for bribes, and you see the passengers shouting at the bus driver to ‘settle’ the policeman so that they can be on their way. Why can’t we collectively challenge that issue? Why do we look the other way when *agberos* [touts] are harassing bus drivers for illegal fee? Other times, it is the passengers who encourage the drivers to take a one way and face on-coming vehicles all in an attempt to avoid traffic and get to their work faster. Only God can help us!

In their book on *Everyday Corruption and the State*, Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006: 131) argue that ‘the “belief” in the general nature of corruption is a crucial factor in its generalisation, as everyone thinks it is necessary to defend themselves using the same methods, hence the high level of demand for “string-pulling,” various kinds of protection, corrupt and complacent officials, and so on.’

2.3.11 Corruption as ‘Enslaving the Masses’

One perspective from the field imagined corruption as a socio-economic problem related to entrenched poverty and un(der)employment. The paucity of jobs and poor salary situation in Nigeria is widely perceived as forcing people to turn to corruption in order to earn extra income that can sustain their family in the face of untold hardship. In other words, this view rationalizes corruption in light of poor economic circumstances. In particular, poverty and lack of gainful jobs are said to arise because the ruling cabal have refused to ‘circulate’ the money (that is, to *chop* alone), thereby ‘enslaving the masses.’ As a retired traffic officer in Alimosho (aka ‘Baba Legal’) said to me in a statement worthy of lengthy quotation:

Things are getting worse everyday because there is scarcity of jobs outside. Look for yourself at the turnout of students everyday in the university. There is no job for them. That is just the problem of this country. So if it happens that I say that I have a job opening and I want to employ people for traffic, if I ask them pay N50,000 each, they will bring it. Because there is scarcity of these jobs outside. And it aids corruption. The Yoruba adage says *eni ebi npa ko gbo wasu* [‘You don’t preach to a hungry person]. So you find out that corruption increases. To wipe off corruption, it is going to be very difficult in this our country because there is no job, the level of poverty is rising. The population of the country is increasing everyday and there is scarcity of jobs. So the level of poverty becomes higher. And the few influential ones don’t want to give up. I went to meet my friend about four days ago. I was telling them here in the office about my encounter. The friend I am talking about came out for House of Representatives in one of these states. I told him I am going for a funeral ceremony. Before I could see him it took him about 2 hours to leave the office. All he did was that he put four N500 notes into the envelope [that amounts to N2000]. He came outside and said ‘Ah, Baba legal I am going now. Take this.’ When I got outside I just looked at the envelope and the amount and shook my head in disappointment. And he is going to pay N5million for party position. N5million! And he left the second day. *So you see that the few who are having these things [money and power], they don’t want to release it out. You see. It’s more or less they are enslaving the masses. Lets call it clear. They are enslaving the masses.* And that is why [there is] increase of armed robbery menace. That is it. Those are our money equally [sic]. The armed robbers want to tap into it. The Niger Delta boys and Saro-Wiwa boys. Look at what happened. It is after they struggled, that the government started now sending them abroad for various training, giving them money.

If you don't go violent, they won't listen. Our boys have just left here now with fleets of vehicles going to contest against the pick of the Executive Secretary of the Local Government that is supposed to come on board by Friday. *You see, these things circulate pretty much within and between the system. Nobody wants to leave for another person. So the level of corruption in the country is very high; it begins from the bottom and goes right up to the top.* These boys have heard that they have given 5.5 million each to these people at the helm of affairs, at the top level. You see. So they have gone there now to protest. There is every tendency that these youth are going to be beaten up. So you find out what caused all these? Corruption. Corruption. This is just it. Except there is going to be revolution like what happened in Ghana under the regime of General Rawlings. That is what we need in this country. These are things we need to checkmate. And if there is no revolution in this country it cannot be checkmate. The youth must rise up one day and scatter these moneybag men. This thing is a circle, [it] is a circling thing and they don't want you to come in, to come on board. Because the problem is if you can't beat them, join them. [Head of Traffic Management Unit, Alimosho LGA]

The above statement is dense in meaning and contradictions. To start with, Baba Legal attributes corruption in Nigeria to the 'enslavement' of ordinary Nigerians by the ruling elites through the lack of job creation and poverty in the country. This compels frustrated youths, even armed robbers, to subscribe to violence and other vices in an attempt to alter the corrupt system and partake in the 'national cake' which 'circulates between the system' without trickling down to the masses. Such a view reinforces Janet Roitman's (2006: 249-250) finding in the Chad Basin about how bandits perceive their actions (i.e. smuggling goods) as 'licit,' even 'reasonable behaviour,' directed mainly at participating in 'prevailing modes of accumulation and prevailing methods of governing the economy.' This calls into question the equation of corruption with illegality, as implied in public office definitions of corruption. Further, Baba Legal sees youth-led 'revolution as the solution to corruption in Nigeria: 'the youth must rise up one day and scatter these money bag politicians.'

Baba Legal also admits a causal link between grand and everyday corruption: 'it begins at the bottom and goes right up to the top.' More importantly, Baba Legal's account reveals the popular expectations in Nigeria, and much of Africa, that people in position of wealth and power must use it to help their friends and relatives (Ekeh,

1975). In the above account, Baba Legal was disappointed that his ‘big man’ friend and politician, who came out for House of Representatives, gave him a token N2000 in contrast to the N5 million he was going to pay to secure political position.⁵²

When I got outside I just looked at the envelope and the amount and *shook my head in disappointment*. And he is going to pay N5million for party position. N5million! And he left the second day. So you see that the few who are having these things, they don’t want to release it out. You see. It’s more or less they are enslaving the masses.

From the above account, there is a sense in which corruption may be interpreted as a situation whereby those who (are perceived to) command influence and affluence fail to use their position to enrich or help those closest to them or around them: family, friends, kinsmen, etc. Baba Legal, in the above account, is convinced that those who control wealth and power frequently ‘kick away the ladder’ for others who aspire to join their circle. In this way, they ‘enslave the masses’ and keep them perpetually poor: ‘This thing is a circle, [it] is a circling thing and they don’t want you to come in, to come on board... Nobody wants to leave for another person.’ This view reflects a *danfo* slogan that I encountered in Oshodi: *Chop alone, Die alone* [‘Eat alone, Die alone’]. This slogan is contrasted with another slogan: *I chop, You chop* [‘I eat, You eat’].⁵³ While the former implies that those who refuse to circulate their wealth are condemned to a ‘cold death’ with no one to mourn their passing away, the latter implies that when you find yourself in an influential position, you must *chop* and help those around you to *chop*. As one commuter in Ikotun said to me: ‘I don’t care if our leaders steal. But at least, they should think of us. If they’re corrupt and still make all the necessary social infrastructures available to us, I am okay. But this senseless and greedy chopping of our money must stop!’ To resolve corruption in Nigeria, Baba Legal believes that elites in Nigeria must ‘touch the hearts of the masses’:

⁵² According to the *Guardian* (Lagos), ‘hardly did any politician get to the Senate without spending at least N700 million. A House of Representative aspirant had to cough out minimum N450 million’ (*The Guardian*, 2016).

⁵³ In late 1978, a group of individuals sought registration as a political party in Nigeria with the name ‘I Chop You Chop’ (Joseph, 1987: 207-8).

If you want to do anything, you have to touch the hearts of the masses not even the civil servants. That is what is needed at this stage. Look at governor Fayose [of Ekiti state]. He said he is the governor that eats and dines with the masses. That he takes *paraga* [local gin] by the side of the road with the *agberos*; that he eats maize with them; that he eats roasted yam with them. And that is why they voted for him. Someone who would be very close to the grassroot and promote ‘stomach infrastrucutre.’ So its very important to at least improve the living of the grassroot not the civil servants as such. Touch the soul of that individual Nigerian. There are very many things that they can do to help these people. If its building minimarket for people let them buy and sell there. Empower them. There are ways you can create a job for people. The money is there with the government. But they will not want to do anything. The governors know what to do but they don’t want to do it. That’s just it. We are hearing they spend billions and that is all. We are all Nigerias and we qualify to eat out of this money that is in circulation.

2.3.12 Corruption as Abuse of Power

‘There is nothing you can do about it. This beloved country is utterly lawless,’ said an *okada* rider in Ikotun Egbe. For this poor rider, corruption is when those who enforce the law use their powerful position to break those very same laws. Hence, corruption is essentially the misappropriation of power by the powerful:

Corruption is when the state makes the law that *okadas* should not ride on the highways. Yet a policeman will seize an *okada* from a poor rider in the name of enforcing the law. He takes the *okada* as his own personal property, and ride with it on the highway to work everyday and nobody can seize it from him or talk to him. *Just because he is police officer with gun in his hands, nobody can talk to him. He has power. He thinks he is above the law.* If that is not corruption, nothing is! (my emphasis; see discussions in Chapter 5).

2.4 Conclusion

Drawing on ethnographic data and historical research, this chapter has addressed the complexity of corruption through the eyes of ordinary practitioners of the city who come into contact with it, exploit it, resist it, or become its victims on a daily basis. Particular attention was paid to the embeddedness of corruption in local idioms, fantastic rumours, and spatial stories that produce subjugative knowledges. Far from

adopting the traditional Weberian normative binary to corruption, one that underpins and limits economic and political science understandings of corruption, the chapter favoured an approach that does not present the binary opposition between the public and private as a *fait accompli*, but as a product of the ongoing processes of social construction. The implication is that corruption needs to be carefully grounded in the everyday context in which it occurs and that has meaning for the actors involved. It is precisely the nature and agency of that everyday context – in other words, how Lagos (as a place and a subject) conditions the actions and dispositions of those who inhabit and navigate it on an everyday basis – which I want to explore in chapter 3.

The Aesthetics of Precarity

In this chapter, I examine how transport operators in Lagos construct and appropriate an everyday life that is inscribed by corruption and radical uncertainty. In particular, the chapter explores how the daily experience of uncertainty serves as a resource that operators draw upon to navigate urban life and to carve out meaningful livelihoods. I suggest that it is the very unpredictability that uncertainty cultivates that operators embrace and that enables them to transform their current precarious⁵⁴ spaces into spaces of ‘hope’ (Harvey, 2000), ‘vigilance’ (Pratten, 2006), and ‘active waiting’ (Cooper and Pratten, 2015). Thereby, the chapter foregrounds empowering ways of being-in-the-city, one that goes beyond the conventional disempowering narratives that focus for the most part on the product(ion) of uncertainty (crisis as context) to underscore the productivity of uncertainty (crisis as possibility). By placing the locus of analytics on the interstices between what is and what might, could, or even should be (Taussig et al. 2013: S6), this chapter drills deep into how operators manoeuvre through violent extortion and manage uncertainty, embodying dynamic subjectivities.

The chapter contributes to an area of inquiry that phenomenologically minded social-anthropologists have only begun to explore in the last two decades or so (for instance, Milligan, 1998; Kusenbach, 2003), namely the role and meaning of *place* in lived experience. To do this, the chapter develops an interpretative approach to ubiquitous

⁵⁴ I use the concept of precarity here to ‘conjure life worlds that are inflected with uncertainty and instability’ (Waite, 2009: 416), as manifested in job security, the demise of social welfare, and the ensuing psychological effects of these processes (Kalleberg and Hewison, 2013; Standing, 2009).

slogans inscribed on *danfos*.⁵⁵ These slogans cover nearly every vector of life in Lagos and form a permanent visible feature of its landscape. As one commuter in Ikotun Egbe said to me: ‘I can’t even imagine Lagos without its yellow *danfos* and their wry slogans.’ Now, *danfos* are very much a Third World phenomenon⁵⁶ found wherever there are informal economies and popular need. Across cities in Africa, minibus-taxis like *danfos* are easily recognised by their rickety bodies and striking tableaux (Mutongi, 2006; Rizzo, 2011). These ‘transportation torture on four wheels’ (see Soyinka, 1965) often serve as sites for everyday rumours, conversations, fashion, politics, and petty crimes; they are spaces of, and form for, everyday conversation in which ‘humour alternates with pathos, and dreams coexist with existential angst’ (Masquelier, 2013: 472). In spite of their obvious significance, there is scarcely any work on *danfos* (as objects) and their operators (as subjects), particularly the latter’s social routines and the discernibly tactical ways in which they imagine, appropriate, and traverse a Lagos spatiality⁵⁷ and urban public transport sector where ‘crisis’ has settled as a ‘social state’ rather than a ‘passing period of chaos’ (Vigh, 2008: 13).

3.1 Theoretical Framing: The Production and Practice of Space

The analysis here is informed by the spatial theory of Henri Lefebvre as proffered in *The Production of Space* (1991). Therein, Lefebvre developed a sophisticated account of how urban spaces are relentlessly constructed at the intersection of ‘representations of space’ (by architects, planners and developers), ‘spaces of representation’ (which denote the vast symbolic associations we link with specific kinds of spaces), and ‘spatial practice’ (which denotes the material, concrete, tangible dimensions of social

⁵⁵ Such vehicular slogans are a distinctive feature of many African cities like Accra, Nairobi, and Dakar (see Quayson, 2014; Mutongi, 2006; Date-Bah, 1980).

⁵⁶ Known as *tro tro* in Ghana, *daladala* in Tanzania, *matatu* in Kenya, *otobis* in Egypt, *car rapides* in Dakar, *kamuny* in Kampala, *gbaka* in Abidjan, *magbana* in Conakry, *esprit de mort* in Kinshasha, *poda-poda* in Freetown, *sotrana* in Bamako, *songa kidogo* in Rwanda, and *kombis* in South Africa

⁵⁷ The term ‘spatiality’ was coined by Edward Soja (1989: 80) to describe the inherent dynamism of space and its connectedness to lived realities or the ‘third space.’ Coupling spatiality and being, Soja argues that ‘the organisation and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience’ (ibid.).

activity and interactions). Lefebvre's spatial theorising advances our appreciation of how cities everywhere embody immense heterogeneity, especially in terms of 'their density as concentrations of people, things, institutions and architectural forms; the heterogeneity of life they juxtapose in close proximity; and [crucially] their siting of various networks of communication and flows across and beyond the city' (Amin and Thrift, 2002: 2; see Simone, 2010). For Lefebvre, the reproduction of social relations is central to the production of space: 'The spatial practice of a society secrets that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly as surely as it masters and appropriates it, i.e., through the network of roads, motorways and the politics of transport' (Lefebvre, 1992: 38).

Further insights are drawn from the French Jesuit, Michel de Certeau, who, in his masterpiece on *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), argues that people's everyday practices, especially the 'tactics' they deploy to traverse the city, are central to the invention of space. De Certeau understands practice to include the entire repertoire of 'dispersed, tactical, and makeshift' procedures by which individuals and groups make sense of everyday life. It involves the various dynamics of 'making do,' whereby ordinary practitioners of the city seek to manipulate the edicts of a disciplinary power 'to suit their own interests and their own rules' (: xiv). For de Certeau (1984: 37), 'the tactic depends on time – *it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing...* it must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities' (my emphasis). If there is a critique of de Certeau's analysis it is the fact that it appears to depoliticize daily life and construes spatial actions in a social vacuum. As such, de Certeau's agonistic city of tactics neglects what Ben Anderson (2009: 78-80) describes as the 'affective atmospheres' generated in place and the myriad social, material, and discursive resources such atmospheres support.

Be that as it may, both Lefebvre and de Certeau usefully attribute to urban spatial practice a form of *active agency* which is important, especially, in my own case, for

making sense of how transport operators in Lagos, through their everyday practices, (re) make their city (Locatelli and Nugent, 2009). Thus, this chapter takes seriously Simone's (2010) point that urban life in Africa should not be imagined as 'a series of policies gone wrong.' Instead, agency and determination by urban Africans to 'find their own way' and 'the resourcefulness' and 'astute capacity' on which they draw hold the keys to understanding and navigating urban society in Africa.

3.2 Approach: Riding on Slogans

The fieldwork for this chapter was conducted in various motor parks, bus stops, and highways across Oshodi and Alimosho. These are fluid spaces where the 'mental life of the metropolis' (Simmell, 1969) – including the powerful energies (creative, malevolent, ambiguous), the frenetic tempo, the unbounded multiplicity, and the infinite complexity of Lagos life – converge. When I was not conducting research in and around these field sites, I joined Lagosians by the roadside and sidewalks, which were always overcrowded due to the 'colonisation from below' (Appadurai, 2000) of every inch by a vigorous informal commerce amidst a clear failure of urban planning. As an official in the state's Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI) group complained, 'in Lagos, people will just see space and occupy it.' With no start-up loan to rent a retail space, street vendors set up collapsible stalls by the roadside and itinerant hawkers frequently cash in on the extreme 'go-slows' to adroitly weave in and out of traffic, hawking all of everyday life's necessities. In short, 'walking the city' (de Certeau, 1984) of Lagos is very much an 'art' of improvisation, requiring me to walk in 'zigzag'⁵⁸ – that is, to maneuver in and out, get around or step over things and people. This art of the city constitutes 'a determining element of behaviour and urban knowledge' (Mbembe, 2001: 147) and evokes the image of an 'overloaded' city:

⁵⁸ Walter Benjamin writes in his *Moscow Diary* (18 December 1926) on the circuitous routes of pedestrian life in the Russian capital: 'It has been observed that pedestrians here walk in 'zigzags.' This is simply on account of the overcrowding of the narrow sidewalks...'

There is overloading. Overloading of language, overloading of public transport, overloading of living accommodations. Everything leads to excess, here. There is the noise of car horns, the noise of traders seeking to ‘fix’ a price, the noise of taxi drivers arguing over a passenger, the noise of a crowd surrounding quarreling neighbours. There is the infernal noise of music from discotheques and bars. All this overloading constitutes an aspect, not of the environment, but of the culture itself (Mbembe, 2001: 147).

The data for this chapter draws interpretatively on a visual aspect of this Lagos *overloading* – that of vehicle slogans. I analyse 312 eclectic slogans collected from the dilapidated bodies of *danfos* (moving and stationary) in Lagos. The construal of these texts and tableaux was shaped by interviews with operators and owners.⁵⁹ These interviews were supplemented by cumulative observations drawn from my long residence in Lagos and my experience as a *danfo* user. Some of the vehicle slogans were so cryptic in meaning that it was only by directly questioning the transport operators themselves that I could avoid the ‘problem of communication’ (Izevbaye, 1980: 90), and uncover ‘the text within the text’ (Lotman, 1988). Questioning the operators about their slogans helps to dilute the ‘misleading one-sidedness of textual interpretation’ (Jaworski and Thurlow, 2010: 1).

However, in some cases, I was unable to do this since I collected the slogans from moving *danfos*. While this may go down as a study limitation, it is instructive to note that lexico-semantic meanings are fluid and never entirely under the author’s control (Fashina, 2008). As Karin Barber (1987: 4) reminds us, ‘texts generate “surplus”: meanings that go beyond, and may subvert, the purported intentions of the work.’ So conceived, I derived intersubjective meaning from the interpretations offered by other operators. For those who may question the relevance of vehicle slogans to the lived realities and imaginations of operators, Karin Barber has an apt response:

⁵⁹ It is not unusual for *danfos* to change ownership several times during their lifespan, with subsequent owners keen to impose their own vehicle slogans on newly procured *danfos*.

The views that ordinary people express may be ‘false consciousness’ (a concept not without its own problems) but they are also their consciousness: *the people’s arts represent what people do in fact think, believe and aspire to*. Their ideology is forged in specific socio-historical circumstances and takes specific forms (Barber, 1987: 8; my emphasis).

Following Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 145), as cited in Mbembé (2001: 153), vehicle slogans are imagined here as that ‘something’ that is ‘present for us not only because it is displayed before us and we experience it – we experience the thing – but, more decisively, because it is the very thing of our experience: tangible, palpable and visible, but at the same time secret and distant.’ Vehicle slogans, therefore, exude ‘powers of enchantment and symbolisation’ which enables the owner ‘to think of his existence not in a purely politico-instrumental way, but also as an *artistic gesture* and an *aesthetic project* open as much to action as to meditation and contemplation’ (Mbembé, 2002: 629; my emphasis). In other words, slogans are not only abstract and discursive but ‘embodied, felt, interactive and cumulative’ (Morgan, 2008: 228); they derive from, and mirror, the ‘simultaneous promise, threat, and resource’ (Simone, 2010: 3) of Lagos life. Thus, an analysis of slogans brings to light the oft-neglected affective aspects of car cultures (Sheller, 2004), showing the salience of ‘ordinary affects’ (Stewart, 2007) in the practice and production of place (Duff, 2010: 885).

In terms of form and content, most *danfo* slogans are characteristically short phrases that derive their meaning(s) simultaneously from repertoires of orality and literacy. Examples of *danfo* slogans include ‘Trust,’ ‘Let Them Say,’ ‘No Shaking,’ *Aiye Mojuba* (‘I respect the world’). A number of *danfo* slogans in Lagos draw on local or traditional proverbs (like *Ise l’oogun ise* – ‘Work is the cure for poverty’), holy texts (‘No Food for Lazy Man’ – Proverbs 12: 27), or street slangs (*Jeun Soke* – ‘Eat Upwards’). Other *danfo* slogans recycle popular Nigerian songs (i.e. *Eko o gbabere* – ‘Lagos tolerates no sluggishness,’ *Adara* [‘It will be well’], *Seun rere* [‘Do Good’], or ‘Nigeria Go Survive’). A great many slogans are multilingual, using a creative blend of the linguistic art form of pidgin or the predominant languages in Nigeria (Yoruba,

Hausa, and Igbo). For instance, the vehicle slogan *wa-zo-bia* adapts the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo⁶⁰ words for ‘come.’ This is the *danfo* owner’s way of saying ‘all are welcome’ in my vehicle. Combined, slogans constitute what, following Kant, Ricoeur calls ‘operations of the productive imaginations’ (cited in Mbembe, 2001: 159).



Figure 3. “Let them Say”
Source: Fieldwork

The inherent diversity of slogans reaffirms the plurality of Lagos life, a ‘no man’s land’ where myriad cultures and variegated subjectivities intersect and generates cultural ripples across the world. Perhaps, the real force of vehicle slogans comes from their citational density (that is, the fact that they may have traveled across various popular cultural platforms before forming a *danfo* slogan) as well as from the subtle rhetorical twists embedded in them. This acts as some sort of guarantee of their ‘mnemonic efficacy’ (Quayson, 2014: 144) precisely because they remind urban dwellers of the many other different sites upon which they may have visualised (or heard) the same slogan or its variants. In this, vehicle slogans share an ethos with local proverbs not because of their pithiness but because of their ‘entextualisation’ or the process by which circutable texts are produced by extracting discourse from its *in*

⁶⁰ The three majority ethnic groups in Nigeria.

situ setting (Bauman and Briggs, 1990). Barber (2007: 22) uses ‘entextualisation’ to describe the relations between texts, persons, and civic publics in various contexts. Hence, the morphologies of slogans helps to ‘focalise several layered backgrounds against a foreground that is produced as an invitation to interpretation’ (Quayson, 2014: 144). Coloured by local cultural inflections, therefore, slogans seem to have ‘a better claim to speak with the authentic voice of the people’ (Barber, 1987: 24).

3.3 The Theatrical City: Visual Culture and ‘Textual Poaching’

Since Walter Benjamin’s celebrated *Arcades Project* (1927), it has been evident that cityscapes are subjects of the gaze. The city not only constructs itself to be seen or gazed upon, but also speaks to its inhabitants through what it makes them see daily (Mumford, 1937), through its *visual culture* (Oha, 2001; Magee, 2007). As one *danfo* slogan in Oshodi puts it, *oju loro wa* (‘communication is in the eyes’). Writing in 1937, Lewis Mumford argued that ‘the city fosters art and is art; the city creates the theater and is the theater. It is in the city, the city as theater, that man’s most purposive activities are focused...’ (cited in Makeham, 2005: 159). Of Lagos, for instance, Ruth Marshall (2015: 2) writes: ‘It is impossible to move through the streets without being bombarded by a multitude of posters, billboards and banners advertising churches, services, prayer meetings, revivals, miracles...’ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill (2000: 14) argues that visual culture derives a ‘social theory of visibility’ based on ‘what is made visible, who sees what, *how seeing, knowing and power are interrelated.*’ Hence, visual culture considers the act of seeing as ‘a product of the tensions between external images or objects, and internal thought processes’ (ibid).

As a primary site of ‘resistance’ (see Norman, 2003: 232; Mieke, 2003; Mutongi, 2006; Rizzo, 2011; Osinulu, 2008), visual culture embodies the ‘silent encroachment of the ordinary’ (Bayat, 2009: 45). Consider, for example, the resistance associated with *danfo* painting and signage. Even within the prescribed anonymity of state

legislated yellow and black paint schemes, and despite the sheer numbers of *danfos*, operators still find a way of expressing a *sui generis* sense of identity through the everyday manner in which they adroitly design and colour their *danfos*, as well as their creative use of inscriptions. By way of an illustration, ‘one might find that one of the required black strips is thinner and shorter than the other and that the painter has made inscriptions within the black strip... The state has legislated conformity and anonymity, but the [*danfo*] painters have carved out an identity for themselves within the interstitial spaces of the legislation’ (Osinulu, 2008: 50).

This tactic of ‘subversion by reinterpretation’ (Osinulu, 2008: 50) appears to reclaim de Certeau’s (1984: 166) ‘textual poaching,’ which implies resisting by posing different interpretations from the official ones. That is, reclaiming textual material by ‘making it one’s own, appropriating or reappropriating it.’ Thus, by superimposing their own meaning, operators have found their own tactics for ‘avoiding, taunting, attacking, undermining, enduring, hindering and mocking the everyday exercise of power’ (Pile, 1997: 14). This lends support to Simone’s (2010: 3) point that ‘no form of regulation can keep the city “in line”’ because ‘practices of inhabiting the city are so diverse and [fluid].’ A good example is the Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012, which stipulates that ‘the use of marks, stickers, painting, photos, etc. on commercial vehicles is prohibited’ (LSRTL, 2012: 7). Yet, the Lagos State Signage and Advert Agency (LSSAA) have failed to enforce the ban on the use of vehicle slogans, which continue to illustrate the ‘dramatic side of [urban] existence’ (Mbembe, 2001: 159).

In his article ‘The Visual Rhetoric of the Ambivalent City,’ Obododimma Oha (2001) shows how the visibility of the Nigerian city is a means of ‘diagnosing and requesting the treatment of the sense of loss, violence, and routine exposure’ of the urban denizen. The visual rhetoric of Lagos, for instance, includes vehicle slogans that attempts to (re-)construct everyday life. The sighting of these slogans on the road reinforces and appropriates the sense of visibility, for, as Oha (2001: 33-34) argues,

the road not only narrate everyday realities of human contact, synergies, and interference, but also ‘metaphorizes the meeting of people... [who] are already always a plurality of texts, some of which are naturally in opposition.’ In this Oha echoes the insights of two spatial theorists whom we encountered earlier. The first is Lefebvre (1991) who imagines space in an active sense as an intricate web of social relationships that is endlessly produced. The understanding of space as socially produced rests on an acknowledgement that space is an integral part of all social life, both affecting and affected by social action. As Massey (1994: 251) argues, space is ‘one of the axes along which we experience and conceptualise the world.’ The second spatial theorist is de Certeau (1984: 117) who imagines space as a ‘practiced place’ – that is, the way a place is practiced (that is, used) produces its space. But since these practices are far from fixed, space is ‘ambiguous, unstable, and mutable’ (Magee, 2007: 112). Closely connected to space is place which functions as a conduit for the expression of, and resistance to power, resting on its ‘complex web of relations of domination and subordination, of solidarity and cooperation’ (Massey, 1994: 81). In other words, place is where everyday life is situated (Merrifield, 1993: 522).

The value of a visual culture approach lies in its rethinking of the visual as a fluid space where meanings are ‘simultaneously represented, contested, and invested’ (Foucault, 1984: 3). By analysing the visual experiences of *danfo* operators, my goal is not to supplant discourse but to make it more legible. As Francois Quesnay said of his 18th century ‘economic picture’ of society: ‘[It] brings before your eyes certain closely interwoven ideas which the intellect alone would have a great deal of difficulty in grasping, unravelling, and reconciling by the method of discourse’ (cited in Buck-Morss, 1986: 116). In *danfo* slogans, therefore, we see inverted mirror images that refer us to our own everyday experiences of, and encounters in, the city. The alterity and ‘ethics of possibility’ (Appadurai, 2013: 295) embodied in *danfos* and their colourful slogans furnish us with insights into Lagos life: its structures,

potentials, constraints, and deficiencies. In looking at *danfo* slogans, we gain insights into our own fluctuating hopes, our need for security, and our quest for the good life.

Thus far, I have focused on the anthropomorphic nature of *danfo* slogans and their stylistic variations and social routines as a backdrop for understanding how transport operators socially construct the urban spatiality in which they live, move and have their being. What about the *danfos* on which these slogans are inscribed?

3.4 The Cultural Biography of Vehicles

Vehicles have a history of neglect as objects and subjects of ethnographic inquiries (Van der Geest, 2009: 9). Already, Igor Kopytoff (1986) called for an anthropological inquiry into the ‘cultural biography’ of vehicles because of its powerful capacity to reveal a wealth of cultural data:

The way it was acquired, how, and from whom the money was assembled to pay for it, the relationship of the seller to the buyer, the uses to which the car is regularly put, the identity of its most frequent passengers, and of those who borrow it, the frequency of borrowing, the garages to which it is taken and the owner’s relations to the mechanics, the movement of a car from hand to hand over the years, and in the end, when the car collapses, the final disposition of its remains. All of these details would reveal an entirely different biography from that of a middle-class American, or Navajo, or French peasant car (Kopytoff, 1986: 67).

Since Kopytoff’s call, researchers have probed the role of cars as tools of African colonisation (Gewald, 2000), indicators of popular and material urban culture (Miller, 2001), and as spaces for the discourse of identity, faith and social vision (Klaeger, 2013; Chilwa, 2008). For many Nigerians, and, by extension, Africans, owning a car remains a distant dream. In particular, among young men in many African countries, there is ‘no more widespread ambition [...] than to drive, and if possible own, one of the thousands of passenger lorries that rave about the roads’ (Field, 1960: 134). With their immediate visibility, cars are not only commodities of modernity but powerful symbols of class differentiation (Isichei, 2002: 215). This is true of Lagos where the

car you drive says a lot about how ‘big’ you are – whether you’re *olowo* (rich) or *mekunu* (common man). In fact, there is a presumption that car owners are *eyan nla* (‘big men’), *eyan pataki* (‘important person’), or *olowo* (‘rich person’). In his novel *My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours* (1981), Nkem Nwankwo describes how vehicles in Nigeria from the 1980s became humanized – echoes of commodity fetishism – while people are treated like things. Thus, vehicles embody wealth; they are an immediate measure of how materially well one has done. By contrast, the expression ‘leggedes-benz’ (a parody of Mercedes Benz) is used to taunt Lagosians travelling on foot. *Tie da?* (Where is yours?) is a common *danfo* slogan and reflect the pride in owning a *danfo*, even when its rickety or ‘hire purchased.’ As Olatunde Lawuyi (1988: 5) observes, ‘the travellers themselves know that, if angered, the driver may refuse to take them to their destinations, for a certain power inheres in the owner’s control of the vehicle and in a sense makes him a privileged citizen.’

Having set out the overriding concern and visual approach of this chapter, the next part focuses on the popular imagination and construction of Lagos life, the risk and precarity that its space cultivates, and how differently positioned and empowered actors in urban transport navigate Lagos to make meanings and define aspirations.

3.5 Lagos and the Popular Imaginary

The question is whether the current situation in African cities is correctly characterised as chaotic, or whether systems of social rules are operating which are different from those of the formal systems but which are either more effective or command greater legitimacy (Rakodi, 2002: 46).

At risk of been overly schematic, two competing narratives have informed ways of seeing Lagos. There is the dominant narrative that sees Lagos as the *ne plus ultra* of urban *apocalypse* (Probst, 2012) and a primary site of ‘intensifying and broadening impoverishment and rampant informality’ (Simone, 2001: 16). The city’s ‘crime, pollution, and overcrowding make it the cliché *par excellence* of Third World urban dysfunction’ (Kaplan, 2000: 15). This lurid narrative, inscribed in notable works like

Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* (2000), and Pep Subiros's *Lagos: Surviving Hell* (2001), has been criticised by Mbembé and Nuttall (2004: 353) who deprecate ways of *seeing* African cities that are dominated by 'the meta-narrative of urbanisation, modernisation and crisis... Forgetting that the city always also operates as a site of fantasy, desire, and imagination.' According to this view, African city's fabric has been seen as 'a structure in need of radical transformation and only rarely as an expression of an aesthetic vision' (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004: 353). Elsewhere, Mbembe (2002: 2) argues that 'there is no single way of "seeing" Africa... Here, as in other spheres of contemporary African life, plurality is the norm.'

An alternative narrative has since emerged – the 'aesthetic of chaos' (Gandy, 2006) – which celebrates the coping mechanisms and creative forms of self-organisation of Lagosians whose extraordinary ability get by is interpreted as contradicting common sense and creatively defying constricted Western ideas of urban order (Parker, 2006: 66; Haynes, 2007). Such narrative is exemplified by Rem Koolhaas, the architect leading the Harvard City Project. Koolhaas and his team argue that the chaos of Lagos reveals a hidden order, echoing Hecht and Simone's (1994: 13) 'invisible governance (...) that maintains competing agendas and aspirations in some kind of functional and parallel existence.' In an interview, Koolhaas said of Lagos:

What is now fascinating is how, with some level of self-organisation, there is a strange combination of extreme underdevelopment and development. And what particularly amazes me is how the kinds of infrastructure of modernity in the city trigger off all sorts of unpredictable improvised conditions, so that there is a kind of mutual dependency that I've never seen anywhere else (cited in Probst, 2012).

With its massive congestion creating opportunities for markets on roads and highways, Koolhaas' Lagos is not 'a kind of backward situation,' but rather, 'an announcement of the future' (Parker, 2006: 66). This thinking is reclaimed, with some modification, in recent explorations of African cities that stress the 'elusive' (Nuttall and Mbembe, 2008), 'invisible' (De Boeck and Plissart, 2004) and 'yet to

come' (Simeone, 2004) character of urban life (Guyer, 2011: 474), without losing sight of 'how people shape, perform, transform and (re-)create the urban space they inhabit in a changing world' (Castrick and Sieveking, 2014: 4). Koolhaas's (2001: 652-3) Lagos 'represents a developed, extreme, paradigmatic case study of a city at the forefront of globalising modernity. That is to say that Lagos is not catching up with us. Rather, we may be catching up with Lagos.'⁶¹

Koolhaas's depiction of urban Lagos has various limitations that have been stressed *ad nauseam* in the literature. First, it shuns the suffering of the poor and the predation of many informal sector provisions (Gandy, 2006). Second, it overrates the extent to which coping with adversity is vitalizing, instead of depressing for many (Haynes, 2007). According to Fourchard (2012: 77), Koolhaas underestimated 'the on-going criticism by Lagosians of their city, of the corruption of its elite and of the permanent failure of the mass public transport system.' In his fascination with a Lagos that works, he overlooks the fact that it works 'mainly for those who are able to extract resources, in particular resources from the use of its public spaces' (ibid). While understandable, the negativity around Koolhaas' writings has blinded commentators to his contributions to understanding the dynamics of urban informals in Lagos, those described by Asef Bayat (2000: 534) as an '[ever] increasing number of unemployed, partially employed, casual labour, street subsistence workers, street children and members of the underworld.' Despite his well-documented flaws, and they are many, Koolhaas challenges urban analysts to go beyond the *a priori* view of the African city as 'a helpless wasteland of horror, corruption and incurable diseases' (Weate and Bakare-Yusuf, 2003), and, instead, to begin to engage with the multiple modernities, rationalities, and moralities that inscribe urban informality⁶² (Harrison, 2006; Bayat,

⁶¹ Like Koolhaas, Peter Lewis (2009: 116) also reached the conclusion that Lagos is 'an alternate expression of modernity, combining elements of market dynamism, consumer culture, and global linkages filtered through local improvisations and social routines.'

⁶² Along with Roy and AlSayyad (2004), I use the term urban informality to indicate an organizing logic, a system of norms that governs the process of urban transformation itself.

2000). Regardless of its prematurity, this point opens up a hopeful reading whereby urban Africa ceases to be a basket case of pathologies using the Procrustean bed of Western modernist imaginaries and standards, and becomes rather an example of inventiveness (Pieterse, 2011: 15). As Harrison (2006) argues:

This new imaginary may provide a conceptual opening that would allow us to think about Africa in ways that are more hopeful and positive; that acknowledge the success of Africans in constructing productive lives at a micro-scale, and economies and societies at a macro-scale, that work despite major structural constraints (: 323).

In this regard, Koolhaas' work offers alternative visions or imaginaries of urban informality in Africa with particular reference to the raw creativity and resilience of urban denizens to fashion parallel infrastructure and political systems (Meagher, 2014; Larkin, 2004). As Thomas Bierschenk (2010: 2) points out, decades of detailed anthropological work on informal and non-state forms of organisation reveals that 'political order is possible without state,' or even alongside the state (more on this later). To be sure, emerging theoretical accounts on the idea of 'hybrid governance' suggest that violence and rival forms of order and authority may be part of 'more authentic processes of state formation rather than symptoms of criminality and state failure' (Meagher, 2014: 501). Koolhaas advanced a view that contributes to seeing informal institutions⁶³ and 'clandestine economies' as an alternative and promising site of political order, subjectivities and economic dynamism, reinforcing the thesis that the state's withdrawal has led to the mushrooming of various parallel and independent circuits of power, alternative networks, and personal relations (Meagher and Lindell, 2013), as well as multiple modes of social livelihoods (Mustapha, 1991), that 'frequently offer far more effective instruments of public management' (Bayart

⁶³ Informal institutions are understood here as rules that are not enforced by formal agencies. They include behaviour that is supported by habits, customs, cultures and values; however they also include rules that may appear to be formal but are actually enforced by informal agencies like mafias (or touts) and patron-client organisations (Khan, 2012: 10).

et al. 1999: 91). In fact, as Meagher's work on informal cross-border trading in Africa confirms, transcending Weberian stereotypes of economic and political order(ing) has brought home the realisation that 'the opposite of rational bureaucratic order is not disorder or corrupt political networks. The image of a "shadow economy" regulated by a "shadow state" is giving way to the recognition of a whole range of indigenous institutions that create local forms of order in the shadow of the state' (2014: 501).

3.5.1 'This is Lagos': Lagos through the Eyes of Lagosians

'This is Lagos' is a popular saying directed at newcomers to Lagos or people who act sluggishly. Lagosians are quick to advise/remind you that *eko lo wa* ('This is Lagos') – a *particular* space where people must 'shine' their eyes to get by or risk falling prey to everyday deception. Indeed, to the popular saying *eko lo wa* (this is Lagos), the popular response is *la ju e* (open your eyes). The need to *la ju e* confirms the popular imagination of Lagos as *ile ogbon* ('the citadel of street wisdom'), while evoking the common saying that 'You don't go to Lagos to look at/count the bridges.' Anecdotal evidence suggests that 'This is Lagos' is an expression from an old joke in Nigeria:

It used to be said that whereas other Nigerian cities receive visitors convivially with signs like 'Welcome to Jos' or 'Welcome to Kaduna,' visitors are not welcome to Lagos. Instead a terse notice informs you ominously, 'This is Lagos.' To confirm that you are now in a different clime, the familiar but unwelcome stench of refuse wafts in through open windows to assail the nostrils of those coming in by road... This is clearly not a city for the faint hearted (Ngwodo, 2005).

During the course of my fieldwork, I asked some transport operators and commuters in Oshodi and Alimosho about the meaning of 'This is Lagos.' Below are two voices from the field that indexes the recurrent views:

'This is Lagos' means that everybody has to be careful. Because in this Lagos *brothers don't know brothers sisters don't know sisters, uncle don't know uncle. Anything you can do and get money you will do it.* That's why they say 'This is Lagos.' No one cares whether you are dying or

living. Everybody dey vex. Everybody is frustrated. Even though you are the same papa the same mama they don't want to know if you are living. If you like you live, if you don't like you die, all for your own pocket.

'This is Lagos' means that this is *a land of nobody*. A land of no mercy my brother. You have to look sharp sharp sharp. You have to be sharp you understand me. But all those things is cheating. It is not a language of a child of God. It is not a language of Love. What is the difference between Lagos and other places. Is a place., but is *a place like hell*. My brother this life! My brother at times I start to cry when I look at things because we are living in a place where there is no love. See them *Oga* wey get money buy this *Keke* (commercial tricycle) N420,000 as hire purchase. But now them he give am out N750,000 as as hire purchase and you are paying N15,000 every week. And you go still dey pay N1,000 ticket everyday from *agbero*. If you nearly pay finish and you miss one week, oga (big man) go collect the *Keke*. *There is no love in our country*.

The above statements reinforce not only the agency of Lagos itself (how the city conditions the actions of its occupiers) but also Mbembé's (2006: 153) image of the *Postcolony* as a 'figure of brutality' and 'archive of abjection.' Lagos, in short, is not a place for the slow-to-think or the gullible. As they say in Lagos: *Eko o gba gbererara* ('Lagos does not accommodate sluggishness'). Despite the widespread 'brutality' and 'abjection' that Lagos life represents, many operators that I spoke to told me they would rather live in Lagos than anywhere else in Nigeria. Already in his song *Eko, Ile* ('Lagos, home'), Fela touches on this strong bond of many Lagosians to the city:

There is no where I can head to, nowhere else, but Lagos home
If I travel to London, I will return to Lagos home
If I travel to New York, I will return to Lagos home
Lagos Lagos, home.
Even if I drove in London, I would have to learn driving anew
when I return home
Even if you drove in New York,
you would have to learn driving anew on return
Because 'Turn Right' in Lagos, open your eyes, is really 'Turn Left'
Because if you see 'Turn Right' in Lagos, my friend,
it is really 'Turn Left' you see. Ours is different from yours, you hear.

As you may already suspect, Fela's *Eko Ile* is also tongue-in-cheek, capturing the malpractices, inherent contradictions, and everyday precarities that underpin Lagos

life, rendering the megacity familiar and strange to both its residents and the JJs. Nowhere is this precarious reality thrown into starker relief than in the micropolitics of passenger transport which I now turn my attention to.

3.6 The Precarity of Passenger Transport

Most cities in sub-Saharan Africa share some common characteristics, including an increasing urban population poorly served by the transport system, falling standards of commercial transport, overlaps and conflicts among the agencies responsible for planning and implementing transport solutions, massive growth in the use of minibus-taxi services, increasing dependence on private transport, inadequate transport infrastructure, and poor facilities for non-motorized transport (Kumar and Barrett, 2008). Lagos, the world's sixth biggest mega-city, is no exception.⁶⁴ During the oil windfall of the 1970s, Lagosians who earned over N600 (\$3) per month frequently owned private means of transport, reducing the demand for public transport (Olukoju, 2003). However, the economic decline of the 1980s turned many marginal car owners into transport users (Bolade, 1993). The mid-1980s in particular saw a rapid decline in the number of cars available for public transport. For example, reflecting the declining fortune of the economy, the total vehicular fleet in Lagos fell from 165,000 in 1984 to 100,000 in 1988. Newly registered cars fell from 72,000 in 1982 to 10,000 in 1988, while new public cars dropped from 16,500 in 1983 to 1,500 in 1988 (ibid).

Hard on the heels of the 1989 riots in Nigeria over the SAP and its intensification of multiple modes of survival⁶⁵ (Mustapha, 1992), the federal government initiated the Urban Mass Transit Scheme under which buses were distributed to various states to alleviate the acute problems of (urban) transport. However, the scheme failed to make

⁶⁴ Officials estimate that by 2015 the current population of 18m will have swollen to 25m and by 2050 to 40m people, making Lagos one of the fastest growing world cities (World Bank, 2013).

⁶⁵ During this period, the informal sector increasingly became a primary employer of the urban poor and dispossessed (Lawuyi, 1988; Okpara, 1988).

an enduring impact due to ‘mismanagement of the service, poor maintenance of the vehicles and the lack of spares’ (Olukoju, 2003: 225). With the rapid growth of the population (Gandy, 2006), urban public transport services in Lagos became burdened by demand in spite of the mitigating effects of the ferry and rail passenger services. Private sector entrepreneurs cashed in on this vacuum to increase their operations with the influx of imported second-hand vehicles (commonly known as *tokumbos* – ‘from overseas’) into the transport sector (Bolade, 1993).⁶⁶ Such massive importation benefitted from SAP policies and the associated devaluation of the currency and liberalisation of import controls (Mustapha, 1992). This boosted the local transport industry by making more vehicles available to commuters (Olukoju, 2003: 229).

Consider, for example, the construction of *danfos* out of Mercedes 911, Bedford or Volkswagen chassis and engines adapted from *tokumbo* buses from Europe. This process, according to Damola Osinulu (2008: 49), is one of ‘hybridization’ wherein local craftsmen build a new steel frame around an imported chassis. This is ‘the main condition of cultural production in the postcolonial and globalised environment. It is a condition wherein local users take an imported idea and transform it into a cultural vehicle for their use’ (ibid). Seen as instruments of spatial relations and popular mobility, the creative adaptation of *tokumbos* to the local transport system reinforces Doreen Massey’s (1994: 5) point that ‘the particular mix of social relations which are... part of what defines the uniqueness of any place is by no means all included within that place itself. Importantly, it includes relations which stretch beyond – the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside.’

By 1991 more than 80 per cent of the second-hand vehicles shipped into Nigeria were running in Lagos (Bolade, 1993), most of which were used for the unregistered and unlicensed cab service called *kabukabu* (Mustapha, 1992). This period coincided with

⁶⁶ Indeed, across many African cities, the importation of commercial minibus-taxis as a central mode of transport accelerated in the early 1990s, expanding by 11 per cent in some cases (Kumar and Barrett, 2008: 8).

the emergence of informal forms of transport – including *danfos* (seating 14-32 passengers), midibus-taxi or *molues* (seating 32-48 passengers) and motorbike-taxi or *okada* (seating 1-2 passengers) – as an ‘indigenous response to growing demand and commercial opportunity’ (Kumar and Barrett, 2008: xi).⁶⁷ Carrying over five million passengers each day, informal urban transport services of very poor quality became the primary, though unreliable and unsafe, mode of transport in Lagos, especially for commuters in the lowest income quintile (World Bank, 2013).⁶⁸ These vehicles are privately owned and run by commission-paid workers.⁶⁹ They are organized into two major unions – the National Union of Road Transport *Workers* (NURTW) and the Road Transport *Employers* Association (RTEAN) – which are the most politicized, factionalized, and violent in Nigeria (Albert, 2007; Chapter 4).

3.6.1 Overlapping Roles and Conflict

Ordinarily, the administration of public transport replicates the three-tier structure of government administration in Nigeria, that is, federal, state and local. At the state level, agencies and parastatals established by Lagos State Government for the management of transportation include: LASTMA, the Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA), the Lagos State Ferry Services (LSFS), the Lagos State Ministry of Public Transportation (LSMPT), and the Vehicle Inspection Service (VIS). The overlap and conflict between these transport agencies (particularly state and federal agencies) are a constant worry for road users. Consider, for instance, the violent conflict between the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) and the VIS. Part of the statutory law that established the FRSC empowered it to check vehicles for

⁶⁷ There is a perception among some older operators in Lagos that *danfo* and *molues* have been in Lagos since colonial times. For example, they make reference to a radio play in the 1950s called ‘Alao and Shaky Shaky.’

⁶⁸ In his article ‘The Go-Slow Journey,’ Ola Awonubi (2010: 25) describes *danfos* and *molues* as ‘yellow pieces of metal with broken windows that sucked in air as they rattled down the road...’

⁶⁹ Most transport workers operate on everyday franchise basis (casual and temporary work), earning daily income only after an agreed fee is paid to the transport owner and petrol cost is covered from the day’s takings. Over 80 per cent of these transport workers do not have an employment contract or fixed wage. ‘Hired today, fired tomorrow,’ as one *danfo* driver in Lagos told me (Interview with Wale, November 2015).

roadworthiness just like the VIS. The conflict arises when the FRSC mounts its own roadblocks and the VIS will do the same in close proximity in apparent show of power and inter-agency competition. The result is the obstruction of free traffic flow.

During fieldwork, officials of Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and Federal Road Maintenance Agency (FERMA), also known as Federal Task Force, frequently clashed with officials of LASTMA, over who has the right to control traffic on federal highways across Lagos state. LASTMA officials frequently drafted to the old Toll Gate, along Lagos-Ibadan Expressway and Ikorodu Road were chased away by armed Federal Task Force. According to one editorial, ‘Initially motorists were confused about what traffic control signal to obey amongst LASTMA and SURE-P taskforce, as SURE-P taskforce would ask them not to move when LASTMA officials signal them to move their vehicles’ (Okoro, *All Africa*, 2015). The ‘do-or-die’ struggle to control traffic in Lagos is not surprising if we consider the significant amount of money that can be made at (illegal) check points by these agencies through the imposition of illegal taxes on transport operators, sometimes in collusion with *agberos*.⁷⁰ During fieldwork, I interviewed Mr. Ibrahim, a vehicle inspection officer in Alimosho, about the issue of inter-agency competition:

A lot of time people misconstrue everything and say we’re doing the same thing. That’s not true. We [referring to the Vehicle Inspection Service] are for vehicle inspection and we are for vehicle drivers and we ensure that drivers on our roads are certified. LASTMA’s case is to see to traffic flow on Lagos roads. And when you want to see to that, so many factors will come into play. LASTMA is meant to combat anything that will hinder easy flow of traffic. That is why if your car breaks down on the road, LASTMA gives you 10 to 15 minutes to sort it out. If by then it is still on the road, they will tow it and their towing comes with a charge. All transport agencies are to see to safety of life and properties on our roads. So obviously there is an interface. We’re all under the umbrella of

⁷⁰ For example, if we crudely estimate that there are 70 checkpoints located on roads across Lagos and that 1,000 *danfos* passed through each checkpoint daily. Taking an average toll of N20 as a yardstick, the average checkpoint in Lagos will make N20,000 per day. This means that 70 checkpoints will collect N1.4 million everyday, N42 million monthly, and N504 million yearly.

transportation. In the case of FRSC, they are a federal organisation, which is supposed to complement the efforts of all enforcement agencies. *They call themselves leading agency, which we don't feel is all about competition.* They are supposed to be on federal road borders, whereas these other enforcement agencies are supposed to be within but *you even see FRSC at times trying to duplicate the functions of other agencies.* Their own major schedule should be that of monitoring of the federal corridor and federal outskirts from one state to the other. And in their case, according to the law that regulated their activities, they are supposed to stop you when they see you're violated, its different from our own case where we can stop you at random, the law backs that. FRSC, LASTMA are supposed to stop you when you're violated, so we have different interpretation, it depends on the view each and everyone has.

3.6.2 'Remember Ur Six Feet'

Many *danfos* ply for hire without licenses and brazenly flout traffic rules. These minibus-taxis are usually perilously overloaded, dangerously speeding, and notorious for causing noise and air pollution. As one transport official said: 'You wonder how most of the buses secured roadworthiness certificates in the first place. And when you ban the buses from the roads, they still find a way of returning to the roads.' Seating in a *danfo* is uncomfortable as many Lagosians complained about being 'packed like sardines' by operators. Fela Kuti, in his album 'Suffering and Smiling,' famously sang about the discomfort of passenger transport in his native Lagos: 'Everyday my people dey inside bus. Forty-nine seating and ninety-nine standing. Them go pack themselves like sardine. Them dey faint, them dey wake like cock.'



Figure 4. "Remember Ur Six Feet."
Source: Fieldwork

In 2013, the Lagos State Drivers' Institute (LASDRI) conducted a test on *danfo* drivers, the result of which showed that 22 per cent of them are 'partially blind,' while the results of another survey in 2015 showed that 'over 99 percent' of *danfo* workers are 'hypertensive' (Akinola, *Daily Trust*, 2015). Many dilapidated *danfos* often bear slogans like: 'Remember Ur Six Feet', 'Trust in God Always', 'Let us Pray,' 'Relax! God is in Control,' 'God moves with his people,' 'Remember now thy Creator!' These slogans are tongue-in-cheek since the *danfos* are ordinarily dilapidated. According to one commuter, 'We know most of the buses are death traps but since we can't afford the high taxi fares, we have no choice but to use them.' 'Osa Straight' [Straight to the Ocean] is a popular expression for describing the penchant of *danfos* to literally fly off the third mainland bridge into the lagoon.

During fieldwork, I found that *danfo* operators had easy access to *paraga* due to the location of *paraga* kiosks⁷¹ within 100 meters of motor-parks and bus stops. Many of the sellers (mostly women) told me that their reliable customers were drivers and touts. According to one seller, 'these operators throng to my joints as early as 5am to drink and smoke before they start work.' The perils of driving in Lagos are mirrored by road safety slogans like 'Drive Carefully. Your life is in your hands,' 'Choose – Arrive Home or Mortuary,' 'Accident Kills More Passengers,' 'Drive to Stay Alive,' and 'Many Have Gone,' 'Be easy, life no get part 2.'

3.6.3 'Life is War'

Various concepts have been used to understand the contradictions and contingencies of the everyday, including Michael Taussig's (1992) 'nervous system' or 'siege,'

⁷¹ In an interview I had with the Area Commander of the Vehicle Inspection Service (VIS) in Alimosho, he pointed to the clearing of illegal *paraga* kiosks across Lagos as a key factor in the reduction of road accidents and misconduct in and around the motor parks/garages. In his words, 'Many motorists think when they take *paraga* they become invincible.'

Anthony Giddens' (1991) 'ontological uncertainty,' Stephen Lubkemann's (2008) 'social condition of war,' Mbembé's (2003) 'state of war,' and Pratten's (2013) 'precariousness of prebendalism.' These notions do not only integrate 'ethnographies of uncertainty' and mistrust (Cooper and Pratten, 2015) but also produce 'structures of feelings' that generate and register the insecurity and bankruptcy of everyday life. Perhaps, this explains why commentators like Vigh (2006) and Mbembé and Roitman (1995: 324) have all framed urban Africa in terms of 'crisis,' underlining the 'incoherence, uncertainty, instability and discontinuity' unleashed by a potent mix of economic depression, instabilities, fluctuations and ruptures. For many operators that I spoke to, the struggle for survival and security (both material and spiritual) remains the overwhelming worry. As one *danfo* driver in Ikotun Egbe told me, 'Life is war. To *chop* [eat], you need to hustle everyday because stomach has no holiday.'

With little or no chance of securing employment in the formal labour market, many young men say they have nothing to lose by joining the transport sector as drivers or conductors. Thus, *danfo* owners found themselves in an ostensibly strong position to dictate the conditions of labour on a day-to-day, individual-by-individual basis. The implication is that most transport workers operate on everyday franchise basis (casual and temporary work), earning daily income only after an agreed fee is paid to the owner and fuel cost is covered from the day's takings. In short, workers are contracted as they are needed, and often work long hours. As two *danfo* slogans puts it: '24 hours on the road' and 'Punctuality is the sole of business.' As in Lagos, Matteo Rizzo's finding in Dar es Salam shows that the jobs of *daladala* workers or *daladalamen maisha* ('workers for life') are not permanent and they have no formal contract (in fact, 80 percent of these workers do not have a job contract or fixed wage). The label 'for life' applies, ironically, to their lengthy working hours (for example the average working day of a *daladala* worker = 15 hours) (Rizzo, 2011).

Beyond their insecure access to jobs, their harsh working conditions and their meager economic returns, the workaday world of operators is complicated by the ubiquitous presence of violent extortionists (i.e. yellow fever and touts) on the road creating a ‘predatory’ economy of patronage and protection rackets (Bayart et al. 1999; Chapter 4). During the course of my fieldwork, I observed that nearly every bus stop between Oshodi and Ikotun had its own unit of *agbero* operatives who are armed with wooden clubs, sticks, or iron rods, to attack *danfo* operators who do not stop to financial tributes ranging from N50 (\$0.25) to N500 (\$2.5). When a *danfo* driver hesitates to respond to their aggressive shouts of *Owo da?* (Where is the money?), windscreens are smashed, side mirrors broken or forcibly pulled out, wipers, fuel tanks removed, and seats are broken off. Delay or refusal to pay the toll could also result in severe beating (to death) of the conductor and driver by a battle-ready cohort of *agberos*, a ‘standing army of the dispossessed’ (Pratten, 2013) lurking around motor-parks and bus stops to keep an eye on collections. Many transport operators that I interviewed were convinced – at least, about the possibility – that *agberos* have ‘no shaking’ (feel no fear) because local politicians partake in the monies that they collect each day.

3.6.4 Junctions and Multiple Urban Governance Regimes

Scholars like Thomas Bierschenk (2008: 130) and Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2006) have drawn attention to ‘the phenomenon of a grey area of semi-private figures on the interface between the public service and citizens in all areas of the public administration in West Africa.’⁷² Across urban Africa, semi-private figures come under various epithets: ‘fixers,’ ‘brokers,’ ‘auxiliaries,’ ‘intermediaries,’ ‘go-betweens,’ ‘captains,’ or ‘bosses’ (Price and Ruud, 2012). Semi-private figures also surface in ethnographies of youth marginality in Africa, for example, Jeremy Jones’ (2010) account of hustle in Zimbabwe, Roitman’s (2005) illuminating work on road

⁷² In fact, intermediary figures were already central to socio-economic relations between bureaucratic apparatuses and populations in colonial Africa (for instance, Mamdani, 1996).

badits in the Chad Basin, and Sasha Newell's (2006) notion of 'estranged belonging' and *bizness* in Abidjan. Writing about popular urban culture in modern Cameroon, where 'there is always something upstage that is not immediately perceptible' and where 'to know it you must really get to know the environment in depth,' Mbembé (2001: 148) underlines the key role of 'fixers' – that is, 'those who, because they have some knowledge of how things work, are responsible for "setting things right," "scheming," and carrying on negotiations.'

My fieldwork supports the presence of 'fixers' in Lagos, especially at road junctions. Serving as strategic entry and exit points, a junction describes a fluid space where miscreants, marauders, beggars, police, and touts converge to exploit all sorts of money-making opportunities, including the collection of illegal levies from motorists, load carriers, building contractors and JJs (Ismail, 2009: 474). In Yoruba tradition, junctions (*orita*) denote a sacred place, configured by the intersection of three roads (*orita meta*), where mortals offer sacrifices (*ebo*) to spirits. In Yoruba mythology, *orita* is the home of two powerful ministers of *Olodumare* (God), *Esu* and *Ogun*. Shrines and *ebo* of all sorts are placed at *orita* because of the ubiquitous and wandering nature of these spirits. *Ogun* is feared for his propensity to induce violence and cause death at the slightest provocation. *Eshu*, however, is referred to as *onile orita* (owner of the junctions). *Eshu* hovers in the spaces between the physical and the metaphysical. Its shrines are frequently found at the entrances of compounds (*esuona*: 'Eshu of the road'), crossroads (*eshurita*), and marketplaces (*eshoja*). Yorubas dread *eshu* since he is believed to hold the power of life and death by virtue of his office as an *intermediary* between the other divinities and the creator, *Olodumare*.

Eshu is also the god of the mixed message: 'a thief, a trickster and a transformer: transforming blockages into flows; impasse into passage; order into chaos' (Weate and Bakare-Yusuf 2003: 8; cf. Pelton, 1989). The implication is that any activity carried out on *orita* cannot, in the first instance, be devoid of trickery, cunning,

violence and, ultimately, death. As such, the first stereotype of junctions is their confusion and vampiric character. Many of the activities associated with *orita* are never considered good ventures deserving of *omo luwabi* (a true and well-mannered person). When parents and teachers in Lagos tell their kids that if they don't succeed in school or work, then they will be out on the *orita*. The *orita* here is not only something 'out-doors' but 'outside normative social life' (Simone, 2010: 223). Thus, junction actors like *agberos* and the police appropriate the identity of *eshu* and *ogun*, and see moneymaking opportunities at *orita* as part of the repertoires of *ebo* on offer. This explains why Weate and Bakare-Yusuf (2003: 12) describe Ojuelegba junction as 'a micro-economic self-organizing system that embodies the spirit of *eshu*.'



Figure 5. The economy of junction extortion (*Agbero* and traffic police doing their thing at Ikotun Roundabout). Source: Fieldwork

During fieldwork, I routinely observed as many *agberos* where 'employed' by traffic inspectors (aka *askaris*) and strategically positioned at junctions (a lucrative spot) to collect tolls (i.e. *owo askari* – 'money for the police') from operators. At the junction, the police wield a wooden stick or a gun, while the *agbero* holds a cane/stick and felt marker to mark the *danfos* whose drivers have 'settled' them. The sticks they wield

become useful when the operators hesitate to part with their money. Thus, *agberos* operate at the interface between formal law enforcement agencies (i.e. the police) and informal workers (i.e. operators). Based on my observations, an *agbero* typically works at the junction with an *askari* for five days (morning or night shifts) after which he is replaced with a new *agbero*. As one *danfo* conductor in Ikotun Egbe told me, this regular change is meant to reduce complacency in the business of collecting taxes. Some *agberos* may make friends with operators in the process of collecting taxes and this may reduce the daily takings of the police inspector.

At the end of each shift, the *agbero* gets a share of the incomes from the *askari* in what may be termed ‘collusive corruption’ – a corruption that is said to emerge when ‘public officials and private agents collude to share rents generated by the illicit transaction’ (Sequeira and Djankov, 2009: 4). However, the ‘corruption’ tag detracts from seeing these transgressive practices as ‘varieties of exchange transactions’ that creates ‘degrees of specificity of obligation on the parts of the exchangers’ (Heidenheimer, 2002: 141). For example, out of the routine settlements solicited by the *askari*, he has to ‘deliver’ some to his chief otherwise he would be removed from the busy junction and may have to remain at the less lucrative police stations. As one policeman said to me: ‘You have to deliver up to chop up or quench.’ This reflects the nature of police institutions in Nigeria where ‘rank [or “seniority,” as they say in Lagos] orders persons and defines their relative agency in the overall system, their access to opportunities and, notably, their entitlements both as understood by themselves and as defined by others’ (Owen, 2016: 45). As is clear in this case, ‘each act of corruption creates a new link: through it, both parties [i.e. *agberos* and police] are jointly responsible for a transgression that afterwards will unite them under the law of silence and the gauge of future solidarity’ (Petit, 2005: 478).

The alliance between the *askari* and *agbero* echoes the one described by Roitman (2006: 250) in her work on the ‘ethics of illegality’ in the Chad Basin. Roitman found

that the networks of local people who engage in unregulated economic activities and road banditry partake in prevailing modes of governing the economy in the Chad Basin. These networks involve relationships between state agents, those who straddle lucrative economic and government positions, and those who are simply trying to make money according to the available resources. Moreover, the above partnership between *agberos* and *askaris* calls into question the tendency in the literature to cast urban governance regimes in a singular and mutually exclusive light (Schindler, 2014: 403). In this respect, a prime example is Simone's (2010: 4) argument about two governance regimes in Lagos that can alternate in the course of a single day. Simone argues that Ojuelegba, a busy area in Lagos, undergoes a nightly alteration in which 'the assemblage of discrepant activities seems to pile up on each other,' only to give way to a regime of formal governance during the day.

Yet, the everyday alliance between *agberos* and *askaris* would suggest that multiple urban governance regimes coexist, and frequently determine how and by whom urban space is used. 'Rather than opposing the "formal" and the "informal," Mbembe and Nuttall (2008: 8) argue, 'we need a more complex anthropology of things, forms and signs in order to account for the life of the city in Africa.' They go on to argue that 'the informal is not outside of the formal' and that the 'processes of formalisation and informalisation work together.'⁷³ They argue that what ought to be the focus of inquiry is 'how they work together and how this working together ends up producing city forms and urban economies' (ibid: 9). The alliance between *agberos* and *askaris* is a useful insertion into the debate, one that calls into question reified and 'outdated dualities' like formal versus informal and, instead, stresses seeing urban informality as 'an organizing logic' (AlSayyad, 2004: 26). This requires more research into how formal governance regimes in 'state space' are related to, and intersect with, informal

⁷³ As urban governance regimes emerge through the interactions of state and non-state actors, the state becomes a 'contingent development' that undergoes constant reconfiguration (MacLeavy and Harrison, 2010: 1038). Through this coming together of 'heterogeneous elements,' 'new social-spatial relations and forms may emerge' (McFarlane and Anderson, 2011: 163).

associational activity that adheres in ‘shadow state space’ (Schindler, 2014: 404). Lastly, the alliance between *agberos* and *askaris* produces an awkward but fruitful complicity between the governing and the governed, the state and non-state, each party simultaneously trying to enlarge its sphere of influence and power. This web of tightly interwoven arrangements may be thought of as part of ‘urban governance [in Africa, which] results from a wide range of transactions among varied interests, where functional compromises are negotiated and renegotiated’ (Simone, 2005: 5). For example, *agberos* who are intuitively supposed to be in conflict with the police by virtue of their proscribed acts are surprisingly finding ‘zones of interaction and cooperation in endless search for opportunity and intelligence’ (Pieterse, 2011: 19).

3.6.5 ‘I dey like deadibody’

For many *danfo* operators, everyday life is a battle (‘Life is War’) that takes place in a precarious space (the road) where there is ‘No Time to Check Time,’ as one *danfo* slogan puts it. To my question about how he is doing, one *danfo* driver in Oshodi replied: ‘I dey like deadi body’ [‘I exist like a dead body (or) corpse’]. This response evokes Julia Kristeva’s (1982) discussion on the corpse as the main form of *abjection* in its capacity to remind us of our own finitude and materiality. According to James Ferguson (2008: 10), the literal meaning of abjection implies ‘not just being thrown out, but being thrown *down*.’ For Elizabeth Grosz (1990), the abject describes ‘that which falls between the cracks of corporeality and subjectivity, as mismatch between object and subject.’⁷⁴ However, this zone of abjection, as Obadare and Adebani (2013) point out, is not only ‘spatial in a physical sense,’ it is also ‘spatial in a material sense. It is a state of (non-)being in which one is and is not; nothingness that is disturbingly physically evident.’ Not infrequently, operators see themselves as a ‘sickening waste’ *waiting* for their decomposition. For these operators, the transport

⁷⁴ This is the sense in which Ferguson (2008: 10) casts the *abjection* of Africa in light of its ‘humiliating expulsion.’

business is constructed to infinitely ‘fall’ them. Thus, the response ‘I dey like deadi body’ corroborates Mbembé’s (1997: 157) prototype of the ‘common man’ in Africa:

Vulgarly carved from day to day by the harshness of the times, brutalized by the police, the search for subsistence, the fear of having nothing and the obsessive dread of famine... [for the ‘common man’], *Life itself is nothing but a permanent struggle. That is the reason why, here, the ordinary man defines himself as a ‘fighter.’* To the question: ‘what is your occupation?’, he will reply: ‘I get by’ (Mbembe, 1997: 57; my emphasis).

However, in a somewhat contrasting sense, the expression ‘I dey like deadi body’ can also help to contextualise the ‘waithood’ experience of operators in the realm of *ad-lib*. Honwana (2014: 23) argues that ‘waithood involves a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence in circumstances of deep socio-economic crisis.’ Vigh (2009) found a similar notion – *dubriagem* (‘getting by’) – among youth in Guinea Bissau. Young Mozambicans use *desenrascar a vida* (‘eke out a living’); young Senegalese employ the French term *débrouillage* (‘making do’); and young South Africans talk about ‘just getting by.’ In addition to conveying ‘the extemporaneous nature of their lives’ (ibid: 23), these terms elucidate simultaneously a way of examining possibilities and of actualising those possibilities in praxis (Vigh, 2009: 150). In Lagos, the slogans on *danfos* often reflect the abjection of life and speak to the vexing gap between labour (*ise*) and reward (*ere*). Such slogans include:

‘The Stomach has no Holiday,’ ‘From hand to Mouth,’ ‘Condition make crayfish bend,’⁷⁵ ‘No Money for Pocket,’ ‘24 hours on the road,’ ‘*Ogun la’ye*’ (‘Life is war’), ‘See me, See Trouble,’ ‘*Aiye le*’ (‘Life is hard’), ‘*gbori e*’ (‘Take cover’), ‘Ghetto boy. ‘Water pass Garri’ (referring to a situation that has spiralled out of control), ‘Naira hard,’ ‘*Ko si ere!*’ (‘No Profit’), ‘*Monkey dey work, Baboon they chop*’ (The poor work, the rich benefits), ‘I don tire’ (I am tired), ‘Suffer Suffer,’ ‘*Gbese*’ (debt), ‘Child of suffering,’ ‘Man must Chop,’ ‘Everyday same thing,’ ‘Man must

⁷⁵ Saying used when one is forced to do the unthinkable due to prevailing financial circumstances. Many drivers/conductors told me that they did not originally intend to be *danfo* drivers or conductors, but ‘na condition make crayfish bend’ (their impoverished conditions forced them to try their hand in the business in order to survive).

survive,’ ‘Time *na* money,’ ‘Survival at all Cost,’ ‘Get Rich or Die Trying,’ ‘Mr Nobody.’

Similar visualisations of everyday life as a constant struggle (‘life is war,’ as one *danfo* slogan in Ikotun Egbe puts it) may be found elsewhere in Nigeria and beyond. For instance, David Pratten’s (2013) ethnography in south-eastern Nigeria shows how the Annang ethnic group used the idea of ‘the rugged life’ when describing their daily experience – in *Annang*, the life of *ntime ntime* (‘trouble’) and of anything can happen (*akeme itipe*). In Dar es Salam, Matteo Rizzo (2011: 1186-187) found that informal transport workers were preoccupied with the struggle for economic survival and ‘hardship of life.’ Rizzo adduces the case of hapless commercial minibuses-taxis (*daladalas*) with colourful slogans like *Kazi mbaya; ukiwanayo!* (‘Bad job; if you have one’), ‘Money Torture’; *Maisha ni Kuhangaika* (‘Life is suffering’); *Kula Tutakula Lakini Tutachelewa* (‘we’ll eat, but we’ll eat late’).

3.6.6 ‘Work is the Medicine for Poverty’

Despite their hard life, many transport operators in Lagos believed that hard work is vital to altering their bad fortunes. As one *danfo* driver said to me: ‘Lazy man no dey chop for Lagos’ (in other words, you have to be able to hustle to get by in Lagos). This view is reflected in *danfo* slogans like ‘No Food for Lazy Man,’ ‘No Work, No Pay,’ ‘No Pain, No Gain,’ ‘Today’s Struggles, ‘Tomorrow’s Success,’ ‘Work and Pray.’ During the course of my fieldwork, I registered several *danfo* slogans that saw hard work as an antidote for poverty and a key to success. Implicit in these slogans is the nexus between laziness and stealing. Slogans like: *Alapa ma sise ole ni da* (‘the one with hands yet refuses to work will turn a thief’), *Eni o sise a ma jale* (the one who refuses to work will steal’), *Ole o raye wa* (the thief has no place in this life), *Ole sun o daso iya bora* (the thief sleeps, cloaks himself in suffering), *Ole darun* (Arun is disease – ‘Laziness is a disease’), *Mura si ise ore mi, ise la fi deni giga* (focus on work my friend, work help you to be a big man), *Eni tio bi ole koromo bi*

rara (the one who gives birth to a thief has not given birth at all), *Ewo aiye ole, o ma se o* (Look at the life of a thief. O what a pity). Slogans like *Ise loogun ise* (work is medicine for poverty) point to the belief that each individual is spiritually bestowed with the capacity for success, but have to make that success by him or herself.



Figure 6. “No Pain No Gain.”
Source: Fieldwork

The centrality of work for success draws on Yoruba traditional worldview, which makes a distinction between labour and its appropriation. This view holds that those who appropriate labour (i.e. *agberos*) are like parasites that suck on the blood of the labourer (i.e. *danfo* driver). This is captured in the Yoruba proverb: *Osisewa l’orun, eni maaje wa ni iboji* (‘The worker is in the full heat of the sun but the one who reaps the fruit sits in a restful place’). So, what ordinary tactics do operators (and commuters) resort to in their efforts to navigate the precarity of their urban lives?

3.7 ‘Art of the Weak’: The Tactics of Everyday Life

In *The Practice of the Everyday Life*, de Certeau’s (1984: xiv) concern is with how an entire society can, and frequently do, ‘manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them.’ His penetrating microanalysis vividly illustrates how the ‘weak’ make use of the ‘strong’ and create for themselves a sphere of autonomous actions and self-determination (Pratten, 2006). De Certeau (1984)

starts from the premise that ‘many everyday practices (talking, reading, moving about, shopping, cooking, etc.) are tactical in character.’ By tactics, de Certeau (1984: 37) implies ‘a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other... It operates in isolated actions blow by blow... In short, a tactic is an art of the weak’:

[A tactics] takes advantage of ‘opportunities’ and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance of offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any moment. *It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse* (de Certeau, 1984: 37; my emphasis).

To elucidate, de Certeau introduces the notion of *la perruque*, which describes the worker’s own work being performed at the place of employment under the disguise of work for the supervisor. De Certeau (1984: 25) argues that ‘*la perruque* may be as simple a matter as a secretary’s writing a love letter on “company time” or as complex as cabinetmaker’s “borrowing” a lathe to make a piece of furniture for his living room.’ Such tactics as *la perruque* infuses daily life, including ‘clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, “hunter’s cunning,” maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike’ (*ibid*: xix). As noted earlier, ‘The tactic depends on time – *it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized on the wing...*’ (*ibid*). For de Certeau (1984: xix), ‘a tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalise on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances.’ As a mode of analysis, de Certeau’s insights illuminate the agency of operators (i.e. how they monitor and seize opportunities each day), while illustrating the complexity, plurality, temporality, and improvisation of their everyday actions.

In this section, I focus on some of the most visible and legible tactics of survival adopted by operators and commuters in their struggle to secure niches of profit and protection within a patrimonial mode of governance (Chapter 1). I do this to emphasize the agency of the ordinary actors to find a way out of difficult situations, to carve out meaningful livelihoods. Far from being mere victims of circumstance, I show how these operators ‘constantly manipulate events’ (de Certeau, 1984: xix) to get what they want. In other words, they do not adopt a passive attitude in the face of everyday problems, but have developed ‘a strong sense of inventiveness and determination to “reinvent order” amid this apparent chaos’ (Petit, 2005: 468; see Chapter 6). As one *danfo* driver said to me: ‘Life no easy but we dey manage. Man must chop. Man must survive.’ This ‘fend-for-yourself way of living’ (Petit, 2005: 468) lends support to Mbembé’s (2001: 20) argument *On the Postcolony*, that ‘fluctuations, volatility and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to disorder, and any representation of an unstable world cannot be subsumed under the appellation of chaos.’

Yet, it is important to make clear that underlining the resourcefulness and survival tactics of informal operators in Lagos should not overshadow the misery that is at once part of its origin and part of its consequences (Petit, 2005: 468). Instead, the various tactics are meant to illustrate the creative ways in which Lagosians carve out meaningful temporalities out of crisis. Thus, unlike James Scott who argues that the goal of such ‘weapons of the weak’ is resistance, I argue, in line with Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1993: 533), that the goal is *existence* because calling it resistance ‘runs the risk of romanticizing human suffering or trivialising its effects on the human spirit, consciousness and will.’



Figure 7. “No More Person.”
Source: Fieldwork

3.7.1 Patron Client Tactics

The literature on the politics of the urban poor argues that the urban poor are involved within complex and overlapping networks that include the nonpoor, who help them marshal information and resources, private contacts, and mobilize themselves for action (Das and Randiera, 2015; Appadurai, 2001). This is true of Lagos where operators are always devising tactics to evade the illegal taxes imposed by violent extortionists on ‘farmished’ roads (Okri, 1992). This regularly involves aligning themselves to *awon oga mi leko* (big men in Lagos) who provides them with material and social security, often in exchange for political loyalty transferred into votes during elections. This lends support to Eric Wolf’s (1977: 175-6) contention that patron/client relations serve primarily to bridge ‘functional gaps’ in the social fabric and protect individuals against insecurity. It also reinforces, as earlier noted, de Certeau’s analysis of how the ‘weak’ tactically make use of the ‘strong’ and create for themselves a sphere of autonomous action and self-determination (de Certeau, 1984; cf. Napolitano and Pratten, 2007: 9).

In order to secure elections and maintain grip on power, political patrons need to distribute largesse to their loyal followers ('stomach infrastructure,' as they say in Nigeria), which in turn raises the stakes for control over state resources. Such 'logic of solidarity networks' (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 40) points to the 'forms of social capital' (Bourdieu, 1986) of operators in the building of social networks that will 'watch their back' if they run into *wahala* (trouble). Thus, in the often zero-sum politics of patrimonialism, 'woe betide the man who knows no one, either directly or indirectly' (Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 41).⁷⁶ While some big men or patrons may assist operators when they run into *wahala*, which is never too far away, others may not. Patrons who have the resources to help and do render help are celebrated in *danfo* slogans like, 'Givers Never Lack,' '*Ola Oga mi l'eko*' ('The benevolence of my Big Man in Lagos'), '*Oga nla fans*' ('Big Man fans'), '*Oga Oga*' ('Big Man, Big Man'), '*Oga mi*' ('My Big Man'), '*Oga Tie da*' ('Where is your Big Man'), '*Ere Oga mi*' ('The benefits of my Big Man'), '*kiku ma pa alanu mi*' ('may death not befall my helper), etc. Slogans like *Ola Iya* (my mother's benevolence) carries a tribute to the driver's mother who helped procure the *danfo*, whereas *Ola egbon* (brother's benevolence) implies the same meaning, *mutatis mutandis*. This supports Abby Hardgrove et al.'s observations that when people face 'insecurity and uncertainty of a precarious labour market, consistent support from family members' furnishes them with the 'necessary base of support to negotiate jobs that stop and start or provide unpredictable hours and therefore, unpredictable income' (Hardgrove et al. 2015: 1072)

⁷⁶ This echoes Leslie Bank's finding that taximen in South Africa organised themselves into tightly-knit associations (i.e. *Majakathata* – the strugglers) which employed survival tactics in fiercely competitive markets which entailed 'seeking alliances with state officials, urban street gangs and elements of the rural unemployed.' Far from being authentic class alliances or narrow contractual relations involving the exchange of goods and services between parties, Bank (1990: 89) casts the routine relationships forged by taximen in their survival struggles in the form of 'social relations of patronage built on commonly held notions of trust and mutual dependence.'

Patrons (including ones own relatives) who have the means to help but fail to help are labelled *awon aiye* (the wicked world),⁷⁷ illustrating how ‘beneficial and deleterious possibilities follow on from relationships’ (Cooper and Pratten, 2015: 5). When patrons disappoint, it is time for operators to console themselves, and to ponder on the frailty of human behaviour (*iwa eda* – human behaviour, as one *danfo* slogan puts it) and the precarity of everyday life. This mood is rendered in popular *danfo* slogans like, ‘Such is Life,’ ‘No Condition is Permanent,’ ‘If Men were God,’ *Eyi a lo* (This too will Pass), ‘Delay is not Denial,’ ‘No more Person,’ ‘Who Knows Tomorrow,’ ‘Blessed from above is above all.’ The disappointment of big men or individual patrons illustrates Cooper and Pratten’s (2015: 4) point that, ‘while certainty and security are sought by investment in social relations, so those proximate, intimate social relations provide no guarantee and may produce further uncertainties.’ Thus, there exists in urban public transport a ‘widespread sense that disadvantage and unpredictability permeate not only the economy but also social and personal relationships’ (Johnson-Hanks, 2005: 366). Therefore, to reduce disappointment and uncertainty in the hands of *awon aiye*, transport operators tend to keep many big men simultaneously. The logic is simple: the more big men you have, the lesser your chances of disappointment. Yet, the ultimate lesson of disappointment for many operators that I spoke to is that *igbekele omo araye, asan ni* (‘Reliance on people of this world amounts to disappointment’) because *Olowo kin se Olorun* (‘The rich man is not God’). Thus, operators appeal to God – the *oga pata pata* (‘biggest man’) – to negotiate turbulence and impose ‘order and predictability’ on their everyday lives (Mbembe and Nuttall, 2004: 349). This is illustrated in sayings like *olorun ti seleri, oro baba ko ni ye* (God has promised, and his promises *never fail*). The turn to God reinforces Gavin Williams’ argument that

⁷⁷ *Aiye* is seen as superior that must be constantly supplicated lest our destiny (*ori*) be altered: *aiye mojuba* (I respect the world).

In an uncertain and competitive world where fortunes are seen to be made and lost and one's own fortune often appears to be beyond one's control, *God, fate and luck are common (and not unwarranted) categories for the explanation of success or lack of it* (Williams, 1980: 114; my emphasis).

In such an everyday world of corruption and 'incompleteness' (Nyamnjoh, 2015), the turn to God supports a necessary contingency to hope: 'You can do all you can to realise your hopes, but ultimately they depend on the fates – on someone else' (Crapanzano, 2003: 6). Thus, we can better understand Walter Pater's point that, 'We need some imaginative stimulus, some not impossible ideal, such as may shape vague *hope*, and transform it into effective *desire*, to carry us year after year, without disgust, through the routine work which is so large a part of life' (Jebens, 2004: 128). Respectively, hope and desire assume a psychology and a metaphysics. Both require 'an ethics – of expectation, constraint, and resignation' (Crapanzano, 2003: 6).

3.7.2 'One Chance' Tactics

In a bid to evade the payment of numerous taxes brutally enforced by *agberos*, on behalf of the NURTW, *danfo* operators tend to load passengers along major urban routes and highways. These *danfos* attract passengers who are desperate to proceed to their destination without delay. They are called 'one chance' *danfos* because they usually have one space left which is ideal for a passenger in haste. 'One chance' was originally a catchphrase used by conductors to inform prospective passengers travelling towards their direction that there is only one seat left. For instance, a conductor could say 'Ikotun one chance!' However, this catchphrase has created an opening for robbers and money ritualists in Lagos to execute their wicked plans in the city. These elements usurped the 'one chance' expression to rob, sexually assault, and kill many Lagosians, thus making the term one of the most dreaded expressions in everyday life. The tactics of 'one chance' robbers, working under the façade of *danfo* drivers, is to have their own members seated in the *danfo* pretending to be *bona fide* passengers to make their victims – the *bona fide* passengers – unsuspecting.

‘One chancers’ typically reserve two or three seats for unwary passengers, whom they intend to rob and or kill for money ritual purposes. They drive their victims to a remote place, threaten them with dangerous weapons (i.e. gun, cutlass, charms) and rob them of their valuables (money, handsets, jewelleries, etc.). As soon as these thieves are satisfied with their illicit benefits, they push their victims out of the (moving) *danfo*! During fieldwork, I heard stories about the ordeals of one chance victims on the roads of Lagos, including that of a young man who was robbed and had a four inch nail driven into his skull because he refused to hand over his wedding ring! There are also stories of women being robbed and raped by these anti-social elements in passenger transport. ‘One chance’ gangs operate mostly during the early hours of the morning (when passengers are in haste), before daybreak and in the night. In late 2014, the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad in Lagos arrested a gang of one-chance robbers who operate under the guise of working as operators. One of the gang members provides an insider view on how their *modus operandi*:

We don't go out until 9pm. I was a *danfo* driver and I was plying the Oshodi and Mushin routes. I have been in the one-chance robbery for about 10 years, and we were able to escape police arrest on several occasions. When we go out for an operation, I usually drive while another gang member will stand at the door. Some of our guys will also be at some bus stops. When our bus is full we then drive to an isolated point, and rob all of them. We collect money, jewelry, gold, phones, and other valuables. We drop them at areas that we know will be hard for them to get another bus, thereby preventing them from calling the police. We made an average of N50,000 from each outing. Although we were rough, we never molested any woman during operation. We did not have guns, but we were many and we had objects like car jack to deal with any stubborn passenger. The jack actually looks like a gun, and then in the dark, no passenger wants to risk finding out if the gun is real or not.

Commenting on the issue of ‘one chance’ in Lagos, Babajide observes that:

Some people rode on a one-chance bus and never lived to tell the tale; they were either killed by ritualists or human organ thieves. The unfortunate passengers are driven to a secluded place and are taken to a spiritualist who kills them and use their body parts for spiritual sacrifices. Human organ

thieves kill their victims and harvest their vital organs i.e. heart, kidneys, tongue, liver, etc. so they can sell it to foreign hospitals for a lot of money (Babajide, *Sahara Reporters*, 2014).

According to one commuter in Oshodi, ‘At a point, one chance robbery died down in the state, but unfortunately, the menace is very much on the rise again.’ To address the resurgence of one chance in passenger transport, the Lagos State Government established a new road traffic law in 2012 (Chapter 5) with a section that dictated that all transport operators must now wear registered uniforms and badges for proper identification. The hope is that the decision will enhance better security and address kidnaping and robbery in passenger transport. According to the former Lagos State Commissioner for Transportation, Kayode Opeifa, ‘with these moves, we want to curtail kidnaping, robberies and other forms of crimes perpetrated by the continuous usage of unregistered vehicles for commercial purposes. We are out to tackle the issue of one chance headlong’ (Ibekwe, *Premium Times*, 2014).

3.7.3 Front Seat or ‘Olopa’ Tactics

During my fieldwork, I observed that *danfo* drivers often carry (free of charge, of course) uniformed security officers – i.e. soldiers, air force, and police – in the front seat of their *danfos* in order to shield them from *agberos* on the road. While the visibility of a uniformed officer in the front seat of the *danfo* may lessen the usual level of assault from *agberos*, it does not completely prevent extortion, which has taken on some *de facto* legitimacy. In carrying uniformed officers, who are also seen as extortionists, to ward off *agberos* on the road, operators illustrate de Certeau’s point about how everyday tactics play on and within a terrain imposed upon them and therefore manoeuvre ‘within the enemy’s field of vision’ (de Certeau, 1984).

3.7.4 The Junction Tactics

Like transport operators and commuters, *agberos* are also deploying tactics to ensure that no driver or conductor escapes their violent extortion net. This often requires

them to position themselves strategically at junctions or roundabouts (*orita*) to ensure that all *danfos* pay their levies. To enhance their efficiency, many *agberos* make use of a felt marker with which they mark the *danfos* whose driver or conductor has ‘settled’ them. Not infrequently, *agberos* hold *koboko* (horsewhips) to whip operators who give them a hard time. As one *agbero* told me: ‘If they act like animals, we treat them like animals.’ In some cases, *agberos* issued tickets to *danfo* operators as evidence of their illegal payment. So ordered is the extortion business that during the course of my fieldwork, some drivers went on strike not because they had to pay bribes everyday to *agberos* and *askaris* on the road, but because there was no consensus on how much bribes should be paid, at what points they should be collected, and, crucially by whom. ‘Champion,’ a *danfo* driver in Alimosho area, complained to me about his meagre profit due to the daily extortion by *agberos*:

My brother I live from hand to mouth. I make like 12,000 naira [\$60] daily. Out of this, I pay the owner 6,000 naira [\$30], and *agberos* collect 3,500 [\$18]. I am only left with 3,500 and I still have to settle my conductor, make repairs and buy fuel. That is not fair at all. Because of this, I am forced to increase the bus fare, sometimes I double the fare in the night because people are desperate to get home. I know its wrong, but what can I do? Fashola needs to do something about these *agberos*.

3.7.5 Early to Rise Tactics

For their part, commuters in Lagos are always devising tactics to beat down the inflated *danfo* fares in Lagos. This involves waking up very early in the morning (as early as 4am) to ensure that transport fares are reduced. On several occasions during fieldwork, I observed that the *danfo* fare between 4:30am and 5:15am was usually half of the price of the fare between 5:15am and 10am. In other words, if you board a *danfo* say from Ikotun to Oshodi between 9am and 10pm, you will have to pay N200. However, if you take that same bus between 4am and 6am, a half-price of N100 applies. So to save money, Lagosians are typically ‘early risers.’ Through frequent interactions with commuters, I gathered that one of the core reasons why bus fares are

very low in the early mornings is due to the fact that most extorting *agberos* and *askaris* are not on the roads until 5:30 am. This amounts to less holds-up on the road and also means that operators can make hay *before* the sunshine. For their part, Lagosians can get to their businesses in good time. Said a commuter in Ikotun:

If I wake up by 4am to catch a *danfo* from Ikotun to Oshodi, the bus takes 20 minutes to arrive. But if I make the mistake of catching a *danfo* between 6am to 11am, it takes nothing less than 4 hours.

According to Ayodeji Olukoju (2003: 56), ‘Lagosians have come to terms with waking up and leaving home for work very early, to beat the early morning traffic congestion, and with returning home late.’ Thus, rising early is an effective tactic used by operators to reduce exorbitant fares and constant go-slows compounded by the ubiquitous presence of extortionists. This tactic, however, comes at a high cost to an individual’s health and social harmony in the home. As Olukoju (2003: 56) argues:

Many children hardly see or interact with their parents during the week as the latter leave for work before their children wake up and return at night after their children have slept. This practice also means that workers in Lagos generally lack time for recreation, even though commuting for long hours on the road impose much strain on them.

During interviews, some commuters told me how risky it is to rise early to board a *danfo* to their workplaces. I spoke to one trader in Oshodi market:

It is true that when you wake up very early in the morning, you are able to catch a cheap bus fare, half of what you get when you wake up late. But the danger is that when you wake up very early, you are most likely to run into the hands of pickpockets, bag snatchers, and thieves who are constantly on the look out for people hurrying to catch the early bus. In my case, I live in Agodo and it takes me about 15 minutes to walk to the bus stop to catch a *danfo* to Oshodi market. The road is not good at all. Electricity is hardly available and there are no streetlights. So the road is constantly dark and silent like graveyard. And there are no *okadas* operating at that time. Before, I try to leave home at 4am so that I can walk to Ile-Iwe bus-stop. But on more than one occasion, my handbag has been snatched

by a group of young boys. On one occasion, I was held at knife point. But you are lucky if its only your bag that is snatched by these crooks who will not do well in life. My friend Beatrice was stabbed twice before they took off with her bag. I have even heard cases of rapists and ritualists operating during this time [the ritualist] looking for people to kidnap for money-making purposes [In Calabar, *unam okuk* – ‘meat of money’]. Sometimes, this ritualist are only looking for certain parts of your body – maybe your pubic hair, your private parts, or your left arm or even your head. Many people have lost their lives or parts of their bodies because they are trying to beat down the bus fares and get to their place of work on time. Because of all this, I have decided to wait until 6am before I leave my house so that the day is bright a bit. I don’t want to lose my life for nothing (Fieldwork).

The above statement paints a familiar picture of daily risk that Lagosians face in their bid to beat down the city’s high bus fares. Through the lenses of de Certeau (1984), one can also argue that ritualists, rapists, and pickpockets are mobilising ‘tactics’ as a means to an (ignoble?) end. Such anti-social elements are always vigilant (Pratten, 2006) for opportunities, deploying tactics against Lagosians with ‘will and power’ (de Certeau, 1984: xix). Pickpockets in Lagos, for instance, thrive on the constant manipulation of power relations between themselves and the early-rising Lagosians trying to beat down the fare. This manipulation becomes possible because the subject with ‘will and power,’ in this case, the commuter, can be easily isolated from the environment. The manipulation is helped by the fact that there are no police on the road, no streetlights or surveillance technology to record their actions, no community member to raise alarm. So they strike when the commuter is most vulnerable and when the darkness can conceal them. Clearly, this is an ‘art of the weak.’

3.7.6 Mock Load Tactics

Given that most commuters in Lagos are in (undue) haste, they are frequently willing to board only a *danfo* that shows signs of filling up quickly and leaving the motor park in a short time. As a result, I routinely observed that most drivers looked to cash in and deceive commuters by gathering some motor park loiters and paying them a

token to seat in the *danfo* and pretend as if they were real passengers for the journey, reinforcing the ‘politics of illusion’ (Apter, 2005) which is so entrenched in Lagos, nay Nigeria. The sight of a half filled *danfo* encourages more commuters to enter.⁷⁸ As more passengers come on board, the counterfeit passengers tactically exit the *danfo* ostensibly to purchase something at a nearby store. This process continues until the vehicle’s maximum passenger load has been achieved. A similar practice obtains in Kinshasa: ‘During rush hours, when it was extremely difficult to find a seat on a bus or a taxi, young men functioned as “booking agents.” One just had to tell them the destination and they would run towards the car or bus even before it had stopped, jump on it and reserve the seat. The cost of this service varied between CDF 50 and CDF 100 (\$0.05 and 0.10)’ (de Faveri, 2014: 80).

In Lagos, after ‘full loading’ (which is ‘overloading’) of passengers, there is usually no legroom because *danfo* owners usually weld more rows of seats to their vehicles (to increase it from between 12-14 to between 18-20 seater), which explains why passengers have no legroom. Some *danfos* have lost the padding that is placed in the ceiling to insulate passengers from heat or their windows are permanently sealed creating a stuffy atmosphere within the *danfo*. Passengers frequently have to sit on bare planks, which are crudely welded to iron bars. Apart from the steering wheel, the dashboards of most *danfos* are without any functioning gadgets or indicators. Thus, the driver relies on his conductor (sometimes commuters) to marshal the roads and bark instructions to him regularly: *O wa legbe o* (there is vehicle by your side), *Wole wa* (enter this side of the road), *O nbo le o* (a passenger is dropping), or more lewd ones like *Wole pelu shenji e o* (enter the bus with the exact fare), *O loyun o ponmo o* (She is pregnant and has a baby fastened on her back).

⁷⁸ I observed this practice elsewhere in Nigeria like Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.

Sometimes, while stuck in go-slow, the conductor takes a walk to survey the points where there are *agberos* and then runs back quickly to advise his driver who then tries to avoid this points by taking a different route. Other times, fellow drivers coming from the opposite direction will stop to offer advice on the nature of the traffic ahead. Sometimes, based on the nature of the advice, the driver may decide to off-load his passengers, pay them whatever is left of their fare (the amount is often fiercely disputed), and make a u-turn to load along a different major route. Indeed, part of the primary duties of operators is to keep up-to-date with variations in passenger demand depending on the time of the day, and to be flexible enough to alter their route as they hear about ‘bumper-to-bumper’ go-slows in particular locales. It is not rare for a *danfo* driver, set upon plying one route, to spot an accumulation of passengers on another and, having off-loaded his passengers, then to backtrack at incredible speed in order to cash in on the situation. One passenger described how she boarded a *danfo* from Ikotun going to Cele only to be bundled off at Pako Bus Stop (midway between Cele and Ikotun) in unseemly fashion as the driver has received signals from his colleagues coming in the opposite direction that there is a massive hold-up ahead. Since ‘time *na* [is] money,’ this news often dictates the sudden change of plan of the hard-pressed driver and conductor. This example shows how the shared economy of knowledge on the road helps operators to reduce the meaningless flow of time and maximize profit. In this case, the road embodies not only ‘multiple spaces’ but ‘multiple temporalities’ as well. In short, the time of the road is an ‘incessant process of being tipped up, re-routed, and side-tracked’ (Simone, 2010: 222).

3.7.7 Lapping and Standing Tactics

As operators find means to maximize profit, passengers also find ways to reduce exhorbitant transport charges. One popular tactics used by passengers is what is known in Lagos as ‘lapping.’ This describes a process whereby a passenger will offer

to carry the other passenger on his/her laps.⁷⁹ This helps both passengers to half the price of the *danfo* fare, as they both have to pay for one seat rather than two (usually, the agreement is that mid-way into the journey, the ‘lapper’ swops with the ‘lapped’). A related strategy employed by passengers to reduce cost is ‘standing.’ This means that a passenger will wait for a midibus (*molue*) to finish loading passengers. And when there are no more available seats, the passenger will enter the bus as a ‘standing passenger.’ In one of his songs, Fela Kuti picked on the fact that *molues* in Lagos travelled with ‘49 sitting and 99 standing,’ despite its 100 passenger limit. The transport fare for standing is often half the price for seating. For example, if a bus fare from Oshodi to Ikotun is N100 for seating, standing will cost N50, sometimes N70. In this way, passengers are able to offset their high transport cost. If they are lucky, one of the seating passengers close to them is due to alight after a few stops so they don’t have to stand for too long. However, the competition for the available seat often leads to physical fighting and verbal abuse between standing passengers.

The fierce competition is understandable if we bear in mind that standing is difficult. Most times, passengers (including pregnant women and the elderly) have to stand for long hours due to the traffic congestion (a journey of 20 minutes can take up to 4 hours). While standing, female commuters often accuse their male counterparts of sexually harassing them ‘from behind.’ As one female commuter complained to me:

These men are sexual perverts. Their minds are *corrupt*. They will stand behind you and begin to push hard at you from behind. Because the space is so tight and we are packed like sardines, you can’t avoid them. You are trapped. They take advantage of the situation to push into your behind. Even those who seat are also corrupt. Sometimes the men will offer to carry your daughter who is also standing on their lap. You will think they are doing you a favour but they sexually abuse her in the process. It is just a tactics to satisfy their urges.

⁷⁹ This practice used to apply only to children (especially in the 1990s), but during the course of my fieldwork I observed that adults now lap each other in *danfos* to save money, much to the annoyance of the conductors.

3.7.8 ‘Go-Slow’ Tactics

Mobile street vendors in Lagos are a prime example of de Certeau’s (1984: xix) idea of everyday people as tactical people who are ‘always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized.’ They also epitomise the popular Lagos slogan: ‘No dulling’ (don’t lose guard). While Lagos is deservedly notorious for its go-slows, they create daily opportunities for street hawkers to exploit space by selling food and other items in order to make do. Research has shown that street hawking plays a major role in facilitating the circulation of basic goods in urban areas (Schindler, 2014: 405), while providing those on the margins with an important source of daily income (Sanyal and Bhattacharya, 2009). In Lagos, with no start-up loan available to rent a retail space (which are very expensive), street hawkers set up collapsible stalls along the road and itinerant hawkers take advantage of the go-slow to weave *en masse* in and out of traffic, hawking their wares. Young female and male hawkers sing *pya wata pya wata* (‘pure water, pure water’) or *gala gala* (sausage) offering bags of water through the windows of *danfos* to the keenly outstretched arms within. One or two of these female hawkers may even have a young child strapped to their back and often rely on the help of the buyer to help them in adjusting the neck position of the child.

All of everyday life’s necessities are sold by these mobile hawkers: snacks, engine oil, onions, chillies, plantain, cassava, smoked fish, roasted peanuts, ice-cold water, oranges, mouse traps, rat poison, toilet brushes, hankies, phone accessories, even toilet seats. During the course of my fieldwork, I gleaned some information from street hawkers by buying goods from them and then staying on to chat about their routine experiences. Many hawkers told me that *agberos* only allow them to work after proper ‘settlement.’ The following interview with Sikiratu, a street-hawker of soft drinks in Ikotun Junction, illustrates the context of widespread informality and vulnerability among hawkers in Lagos, but also their considerable social agency:

Everyday *agberos* will give us ticket of N100 which then allows us to hawk our goods. If we don't pay, they will seize our goods from us. They're heartless. As you see, I sell cold soft drinks: Coke, Fanta, Sprite, Pure Water, and Yogurt. I remember one day, I begged the *agbero* to give me some time to work before paying him. He got angry and grabbed my goods from my head and started to drink the Yogurt. He drank two 'Fan Yogurt', which is N100. And then drank one more. He said that is to teach me a lesson. That extra one he drank was my day's profit... Sometimes government will send KAI officials (Kick Against Indiscipline) to raid markets and confiscate our goods or boot them into the gutters. *So we have to be vigilant always*. Sometimes the *agberos* are important because they tell us when KAI officials are around and we run and hide our goods. So they are not all bad. Some *agberos* are considerate... Before I moved to Ikotun area, I used to hawk at Oshodi. Then it was a bit easy because I noticed that one of the *agberos* liked my daughter Bimbo. So I used that as a strategy. Anytime I bring Bimbo with me, he would not collect any tax from me. He will say, 'use that to take care of her o.' But all this changed when he was posted to another unit.

In line with de Certeau (1984), the daily practices of mobile street hawkers may be interpreted as tactical actions in the face of immediate needs as opposed to strategic ones aimed at long-term goals. After all, tactics, as de Certeau argues, are among the key weapons available to the poor. This, however, does not in any way imply a 'culture of poverty' (as does Lewis, 1966; see page 164). Street hawkers in Lagos call to mind Levi-Strauss's (1962) idea of *bricolage*. The *bricoleur* (French verb), according to Strauss, is someone who adroitly cashes in on situations presented to him/her; it describes those activities that are performed by a handy person. The *bricoleur* carries out his tasks with materials and tools that are at hand, from 'odds and ends' (Strauss, 1962: 22). In other words, the *bricoleur* draws from the already existent, rather than seeking to exceed the boundaries imposed by society. As Strauss argues, 'The scientist creating events (changing the world) by means of structures and the *bricoleur* creating structures by means of events' (ibid). Following Strauss, street hawkers may be seen as cashing in on the permanent go-slows to create mobile structures for selling their petty goods and earning a living on risky and 'blood-thirsty' roads. Beyond their 'heroic' struggle for survival, hawkers also add to the precarity of Lagos life. Many commuters told me that hawkers are wont to escape

with your change when you buy goods from them in go-slow. ‘They are small thieves,’ said a commuter in Oshodi.

However, street hawkers are not the only ones cashing in on the go-slows to earn a living each day. During fieldwork, I spent many hours observing and talking to street beggars (known as *atoro je* – ‘Those who beg to eat’ or those who live and eke a living on the streets day in day out). Teamed up in small gangs, these *atoro je* comb the streets in search of locations to settle down (for a while) and convert it into their home – they eat, cook, wash, do odd jobs, deal in drugs, prostitute themselves, get involved in petty crime – blurring the line between the public and the private and reinforcing Kristien Geenen’s (2009: 347) argument that ‘sleep occupies no space.’ In fact, in Lagos, ‘space, in a way, belongs to whomever uses it, despite the half-hearted attempts of the city authorities to control the slow but unstoppable occupation and the progressive denser use of that space’ (de Boeck and Plissart, 2004: 230). Many *atoro je*, mostly (adolescent) youth, cash in on the religiosity of Lagosians to get by. Recently, 39 *atoro je* in Lagos were arraigned before the Special Offences Court in Ikeja for soliciting alms from motorists. The Lagos State Government said the *atoro jes* constituted public nuisance and the suit against their presence in the city was a renewed drive in the war against begging in the state, adding that any *atoro je* found on the roads would be prosecuted. Three of the *atoro jes* were sentenced to 72 hours community service or fines of N500 each, while 10 others were sentenced to 3 months behind bars or fines of N1000 each. In an interview, Dolapo Badur, former Special Adviser to Governor Fashola on Youth and Social Development, reported:

We have rehabilitated a large number of them, but some of them do not want to be rehabilitated and they don’t want to work. They feel more comfortable preying on people with superstitions. Some [religious and traditionalist] people believe that if they are unlucky in certain cases, what they need to do is to give alms to beggars so that their fortune can change. *A lot of beggars now prey on these people’s superstitious beliefs to get money from them. Many of them pretend to be blind or crippled.* They make more money than many employed people (Adeniran, *Daily Post*, 2013).

The beggar's ability to prey on people's religious beliefs may be interpreted as a tactic of survival in the face of precarious conditions, akin to de Certeau's *la perruque*. Moreover, it suggests, in line with A. Bayat (2000: 539), that 'although the poor are powerless, nevertheless they do not sit around waiting for their fate to determine their lives. Rather they are active in their own way to ensure their survival.' However, their survival encroaches on themselves and their fellows (Scott, 1986). The phenomenon of begging for alms on the roads, and its antics, is, of course, not unique to Lagos. In his essay *The Coming Anarchy*, Kaplan describes how:

Each time I went to the Abidjan bus terminal, groups of young men with restless, scanning eyes surrounded my taxi, putting their hands all over the windows, demanding 'tips' for carrying my luggage even though I had only a rucksack. In cities in six West African countries I saw similar young men everywhere – hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting (Kaplan, *The Atlantic*, 1994).

In Lagos, the commonplace impact of what Pierre Bourdieu (1998: 98) terms 'structural violence' emanating from the collapse of the city's economy and the external imposition of sweeping cutbacks in government expenditure has contributed towards a break-down in social life (Gandy, 2006: 388). Thus far, my focus has been, for the most part, on the vividly precarious existence of operators and road users in Lagos. What about transport owners? How secure is their position in the urban public transport business? How do they navigate corruption and precarity in their business?

3.8 Owning a *Danfo*: A Precarious Opportunity?

Owning a *danfo* is as precarious as driving one. For many owners, the *danfo* business is their primary source of income. I also found that self-employment is one of the reasons why people invest their resources in a *danfo* business. This is primarily because government jobs are seen as unrewarding and, as the mass retrenchment of workers during the SAP period testified, they are not as secure as some might

imagine. All *danfo* owners faced the problem of how to minimize risk and maximise return on their investment. In Lagos, I observed that many owners who invested in the business without prior (insider) knowledge of how it works frequently opted for a ‘hire purchase’ business strategy. This involves leasing your *danfo* to a driver on the agreement that he will use it exclusively for commercial transport purposes in an effort to recoup the cost of the *danfo* (with interest) in instalments. The expectation is that the hired driver will use the *danfo* for passenger and goods haulage and remit an agreed sum of money (daily, weekly, biweekly or monthly) until he covers the cost stipulated in the agreement with the owner (usually within a time frame of 6 to 12 months). Many owners told me they bought their *danfos* for N750,000 (\$3,770), and spent an extra N150,000 (\$753) on vehicle inspection, registration, and painting of the *danfo* to the authorized yellow and black colours of Lagos state.

Most owners in Lagos also told me they made an (informal) agreement with their driver(s) to remit around N4,000 (\$20) each day. After 6 to 12 months, drivers are permitted to own the *danfo*. However, failure to meet the target means that ownership is forfeited. Many *danfo* drivers-owners have reportedly died from depression resulting partly from debt burden – that is, paying back the money borrowed to hire purchase their vehicles in instalments (Lawal, *Pulse.ng*, 2015). Like Lagos, in Kampala, *matatus* were run based on a system whereby the driver paid UGX 60-80,000 (\$30-40) per day to the owner for use of the *matatu*. Most of what the drivers made in excess of this they used for fuel, maintenance and the payment of union fees (Goodfellow, 2012: 205). Across Africa, owners are usually ‘government officials, businessmen, or professionals for whom involvement in public transport provides a way to supplement income without incurring much, if any, tax liability’ (Kumar and Barrett, 2008; cf. Goodfellow, 2012; Rizzo, 2011). These rich owners tend to ‘exploit their position to protect their transport activities... [and to] ensure preferential route access for their vehicles’ (Kumar and Barrett, 2008: 8). In Kampala, ‘taxi ownership is highly secretive’ to the extent that ‘it was reputedly dangerous to attempt to profile

the ownership' (Goodfellow, 2012: 203). This is partly because the owners are mostly 'national politicians' (with fleets of *matatus*) who 'accrued rapid profits, enabling multiple purchases and progressive enrichment' (ibid).

In Lagos, however, most *danfo* owners were not so wealthy. In fact, the *danfo* business is fragmented and small-scale, with 80 per cent of owners holding just one *danfo*. Most owners that I interviewed were either former workers or civil servants who have invested their gratuity in the industry. In the face of newly amended traffic rules in Lagos, many owners are increasingly responsible for vehicle conditions and find themselves compelled to 'buy wipers, give their vehicles a coat of paint, have them panel beaten, fix brakes, have the engine overhauled and fit new tires before taking their vehicle for inspection' (Mutongi, 2006: 555) to the Vehicle Inspection Service towards issuance of a Road Worthiness Certificate (RWC). For example, the amended Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012 stipulates that:

Where a person is convicted of an offence relating to the condition of a commercial motor vehicle then in addition to the person convicted, *the owner, if such person is not the owner, shall also be guilty of the offence unless he can prove to the satisfaction of the Court that he was not aware and could not by reasonable inquiry have been aware that the vehicle did not comply with the requirements of the law relating to the condition of the vehicle* (LSRTL, 2012 [S31]: A89).⁸⁰

3.8.1 Ownership and Spiritual Insecurity

During fieldwork, I was often struck by *danfo* owner's 'pervasive sense of insecurity in the face of unseen powers and invisible forces capable of causing real, palpable, material, physical effects in the here and now' (Ashforth, 1998: 62). This sense of 'spiritual insecurity,' as Adam Ashforth (1998: 62) notes, is evident in the widespread

⁸⁰ As in Lagos, in Cape Town, state policies and tight control over the past three decades have greatly increased the financial burdens on taxi owners, forcing them to 'incur huge debts for "safe" new vehicles and obligating them to purchase broad insurance coverage, while this wide range of fees and taxes has made taxi owners increasingly vulnerable to the solicitation of bribes by the police (Bahre, 2014: 591).

perception among owners that they are perceived by *awon aiye* (the (wicked) world) with a potent mixture of admiration, envy, and contempt. The status and strains are so great for minibus owners that M.J. Field, writing of Ghana in the 1960s, found that ‘of all the modern callings the one whose followers most often come in trouble to the shrines are the lorry owners’ (1960: 108). Three decades later, Birgit Meyer (1995: 238) suggests that ‘many an owner of a minibus used for public transport is said to give the Devil a bloody human sacrifice in exchange for the financial success of his enterprise every year.’ In Lagos, faced with perilous situations, many owners fall prey to fears that forces, both known or unknown, are conspiring against their progress when it may well be ‘[their] powerlessness and estrangement that produces this erosion of self-confidence’ (Jackson, 2008: 71). The meaning of *awon aiye* is conveyed in an interview I had with an owner-driver in Oshodi:

The world [*aiye*] is an enemy [*ota*] of progress, the world is jealous of success. They want you to remain on one spot and not progress. They don’t want you to be as successful as they are. Instead, they want to keep you at a point where they always give to you and *you can’t really become independent enough to own something* or to take care of yourself but continue to depend on them and say ‘yes sir’ ‘yes sir’. This world is very wicked [*aiye buru*] and don’t wish for good of others!

Whenever *awon aiye* is used in *danfo* slogans, it evokes various reactions, ranging from threat to acknowledgement of a malevolent force that can do great harm to one’s *ori* (destiny). *Aiye* (the world) is a power, a superior that must be constantly supplicated (*aiye e ma binuwa* – ‘World don’t be angry with us’) and respected (*aiye mojuba* – ‘I respect the world’) by owners lest their business be altered (*aiye e ma pa kadara* – ‘World, don’t alter our fate’). Many owners that I spoke to also used *aiye* to describe operators who are cunning, dishonest, unpredictable and uncertain in their everyday social relationships. The widespread fears expressed by owners is hardly surprising if we consider that car ownership, as argued earlier, is related in popular imagination to wealth and prestige.



Figure 8. “No Loss. No Lack. No limitation.”
Source: Fieldwork

During interviews, many owners expressed fear of being struck by *juju* (witchcraft) orchestrated by their *ota* (enemies),⁸¹ revealing the world of power and uncertainty in which their lives unfold. For these owners, ‘everyday life has come to be defined by the paradigm of threat, danger, and uncertainty. A social world has gradually taken form where general distrust and suspicion go hand in hand with the need for protection against increasingly invisible enemies’ (Mbembé, 2006: 310). The *danfo* owners’ perception that he is a target of *juju* intersects with ‘occult economies’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999) and cosmologies, which ‘claim that power operates in two separate yet related realms, one visible, the other invisible’ (Sanders and West, 2003: 6-7). In this workaday world of *danfo* owners, uncertainty produces ‘hyper-vigilance’ and ‘apprehension’ (Cooper and Pratten, 2015: 10).

⁸¹ Osinulu (2008: 52) defines the *ota* as ‘persons or entities that have malignant feelings towards the individual.’ In one of his songs, King Sunny Ade, a famous Yoruba musician in Nigeria, noted that, ‘one’s good luck and prosperity in life may attract enemies.’



Figure 9. “Trust Nobody”

Not surprising, many owners used their vehicle slogans as a talisman against *ota aiye* (enemies in the world), a warning to jealous *ota*, and a prayer for ‘No Loss, No Lack, No Limitation,’ as one *danfo* slogan puts it. In this respect, slogans like ‘Back to Sender’ express the owner’s supplication that any bad wish towards his business boomerang on those who wish them. Others like ‘Sea never dry’ reflect the owner’s wish that his *danfo* (his main source of survival) will never leave the road. Implicit in slogans like ‘No Weapon Fashioned Against Me Shall Prosper,’ ‘Touch not my Anointed,’ ‘Blessed from Above is Above All,’ *Iwo dan wo* (You dare), or ‘Blood of Jesus,’ is a firm warning of the superior source of the owner’s divine power. In this case, the message to the *ota* is clear: if you take me on, you take on *Olodumare* (‘The Uncreated Creator’) who is superior to *aiye*. In this case, *danfo* slogans are a ‘tactic of survival’ (Osinulu, 2008: 52) used by owners to negotiate their fear of *ota* and other insecurities associated with owning a *danfo*.

The spiritual insecurity experienced by many owners in Lagos is not *sui generis*. In her study of the social lives of Ghanaian commercial drivers, Eugene Date-Bah (1980: 525) found that owners of passenger vehicles were often ‘supplicants at shrines because of a *paranoiac fear of failure*, perceiving themselves as the *objects of*

envy of those who wanted them to have financial disaster.’ Similarly, in her work on everyday security in Ghana, M.J. Field (1960: 134) found that the lorry owner is ‘acutely conscious of himself as an object of envy, and has much anxiety lest those seeking his humiliation should bring it about by bad magic designed either to wreck his lorry or to bring it financial disaster. Therefore he seldom neglects to take his lorry to a shrine for protection.’⁸² In *The Farmished Road* (1992), Ben Okri describes Madame Koto, the proprietor of a local bar and brothel whose knack for business and friends in high places make her the most powerful person in the locality. Her social status is cemented when she acquires a new car and approaches a traditional herbalist who promises her that the new car will bring ‘prosperity [and] plenty of money’:

Anyone who thinks evil of you, may this car run them over in their sleep. This car will hunt out your enemies, pursue their bad spirits, grind them into the road. Your car will drive over fire and be safe. It will drive into the ocean and be safe. It has friends in the spirit world. Its friends there, a car just like this one, will hunt down your enemies. They will not be safe from you. A bomb will fall on this car and it will be safe. I have opened the road for this car. It will travel all roads. It will arrive safely at all destinations (Okri, 1992).

3.8.2 ‘Trust Nobody’

For most owners, maximizing returns on investments is the ultimate goal. To this end, owners tend to rent out their *danfos* on an everyday franchise basis. In this way, they ensure a regular and substantial return on their investments. The golden rule is to ‘Trust Nobody’ (especially drivers and conductors). This lack of trust in passenger transport mirrors a Nigerian malaise, lending support to Eisenstadt and Roniger’s (1984: 211) point that ‘the social structure of “clientelistic societies” is characterised by a relatively low level of trust.’ For example, a recent survey by the Afrobarometer shows that four of five Nigerians (80 per cent) are usually very careful when dealing

⁸² The spiritual insecurity of informal transport owners are muted in most analyses of the urban transport sector in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa.

with other Nigerians and only nearly one in seven citizens (15 per cent) believe that most Nigerians can be trusted (CLEEN, 2013).



Figure 10. “Because of Money. No Truth.”
Source: Fieldwork

The lack of trust in passenger transport is not unrelated to the fact that ‘with a vehicle in reasonable condition and with a reliable driver, it is possible to realize a healthy regular cash flow’ (Kumar and Barrett, 2008: xii). However, when major repairs are required, it is not uncommon for owners not to reinvest (ibid). From the vantage point of most owners, operators will always be inclined to filch from the day’s takings in order to supplement their wages. Thus, one *danfo* had the slogan plastered on its side: ‘Because of Money, No Truth.’ This slogan reflects the view of the owner on how he was forced on many occasions to part ways with drivers who played him ‘419’ (used his *danfo* to line their pockets or connived with a mechanic to dupe him). In Nairobi, Mutongi (2006: 554) argues that ‘wealthy owners hired drivers whom they ruthlessly fired if they did not collect a minimum amount of money each day.’

Already, the role of money as a catalyst for the transformation of social life and relations is indexed in the field of ‘anthropology of money’ (Simmel, 1978 [1900]). For instance, in an introduction to the book *Money and the Morality of Exchange*,

Bloch and Perry (1989: 5) view money as ‘driving a wedge between persons and things, in that it appears to sever the relationships between the producer and his produce.’ Many owners in Lagos openly expressed a preference for a ‘matured’ driver who is married (preferably with children) to run their *danfo* business. The perception is that married drivers have more family *bukata* (responsibilities) and would thus take the *danfo* business more seriously than most *odo* (youth) who are carefree in their approach to life. As one owner in Ikotun Egbe said to me:

I personally prefer a family man with children because I know he will try to be responsible to his family. If he defaults, I don’t ask questions, I just collect the *danfo* from him and show him the door. No *abeg sir* [please sir] in this matter. I don’t like stories because I have a family to feed. I have my own mechanic. If my driver repairs the car, it is on his own account, unless I gave him the order to go ahead.

Furthermore, I observed how informal social networks are often used to vouch for the character of workers prior to employment. Some owners told me how they would only consider a driver who presented a character reference from his pastor or was highly recommended by a trusted friend. Due to the trust factor in transport, a number of *danfo* owners reported that they prefer members of their own family or kinsmen to run their business. For these owners, ‘blood’ is always ‘thicker than water.’ But this is not always the case. One owner in Ikotun told me how the son of his late younger brother, to whom he entrusted his *danfo* business, stole all his money and ‘vanished into thin air’ with his *danfo*: ‘Till today, I haven’t heard anything from him. I don’t know whether he is alive or dead. The thing is like magic. My own brother’s son whom I thought will be honest with me because of the blood in us!’ This experience echoes Caroline Bledsoe’s (2002: 21) point that ‘[a] sense of vulnerability applies even to intimate social relations despite the security these relations appear to offer.’ Other owners shared personal stories about drivers who absconded with their *danfos* and resettled in other states in Nigeria (Calabar came up many times) or sold the *danfo* and changed their contact address. Said a former *danfo* owner in Oshodi:

Running a *danfo* is like digging your early grave. The drivers always have one problem. Yesterday police, tomorrow gear problem, next tomorrow radiator or silencer or tout *wahala* [trouble]. Everyday is a new story. One excuse after the other. I bought a *danfo* and within three months I was left penniless! The problem is that my driver was bringing about N4,000 every day. But he was arrested twice in two weeks and given ticket of N27,000. Each time he brought the ticket to me to *settle* [bribe] the authorities.

For this owner, ‘the key is to choose a driver who needs the money more than you do and you should be ready to park the *danfo* at anytime.’ Morenikeji, a commuter in Oshodi, narrated the troubles of her husband who tried his luck in *danfo* after his retirement from civil service:

My husband ran this business for a while. So I’m talking from experience. We nearly died of hypertension I tell you. Every week I had high BP [Blood Pressure]. The driver would work full day, after which he would lie that he was with mechanic the whole day. He would have arranged with a mechanic who will testify and share your money. My brother, drivers would take even the money you think you made. He would collude with the mechanic to remove a spare part that is working well and replace it with *daku daji* (erratic part). When he tells you about the spare part you have to buy, he will inflate the cost and try to *chop* (eat) your money. I got so frustrated that one day I told the driver that I will be the conductor for that day. The useless driver kept telling the *agberos* at the bus stop that I was the *danfo* owner, which made them inflate the illegal dues.

The above voices from the field lend support to Tim Gibb’s findings regarding the taxi-industry in South Africa. Gibb (2014: 437) describes how, during his interviews with migrant factory workers in Johannesburg’s shack settlements, he was frequently ‘struck by the number of men who had dabbled unsuccessfully in the taxi [owning] business and could tell bitter stories of failure.’ Its uncertainties notwithstanding, some *danfo* owners in Lagos were of the view that the business is a lucrative venture if a trustworthy or reliable driver can be found. But ultimately, these owners insisted that driving the *danfo* yourself is the most reliable way to overcome the trust factor. As one owner in Ikotun Market said to me:

There is money in *danfo* business but the problem is that you can never get an honest driver who would not *chop* you. The best thing

you can do is drive it yourself. That is what I used to do when I was a primary school teacher. I will close at 2pm and drive from Ikotun to Oshodi or Ipaja. Sometimes, I call Ikeja directly from Ikotun.

Due to widespread mistrust, most *danfo* owners usually arrange with their drivers and his conductor to arrive at their home in the morning (4am), whereupon the driver remits the day's takings. This payment, however, is sometimes negotiable depending on the route plied, the size and condition of the *danfo*, the period of the year (i.e. a yuletide period), the weather conditions, and the number of violent extortionists (i.e. touts and yellow fevers) on the route. Any other extra income over the agreed daily payment goes to the driver and conductor. From the day's takings is also to be deducted the cost of fuelling the *danfo*. The conductor receives a token of the day's takings and has less say in what he gets due to his subordinate role as an apprentice of the driver ('hired today, fired tomorrow'). The conductor's aspiration is to become a *danfo* driver in his own right after years of 'learning by doing.'

Now, most conductors have a reputation for enhancing their wages by dipping into the day's takings while the *danfo* driver is busy driving. Conductors have many tactics of making extra income. Hence, one commuter described them as 'conductor.' One way in which *danfo* conductors cash in on unwary commuters is through 'delay tactics' – that is, by delaying the return of change to commuters in the hope that they will forget. For any regular user of *danfos* in Lagos, 'Conductor, where my change?' is a very familiar expression. To which the conductor typically replies: *Eni suru* ('exercise patience' – an ironic response since conductors are perceived as the very epitome of impatience, especially in matter of money). As is sometimes the case, commuters end up forgetting their change in the mad rush to alight from the *danfo* (and perhaps catch another one). *Ere te mi ni yen* ('That is my own gain'), said a *danfo* conductor in Oshodi. Another commuter who had lost her change on several occasions made this complain: '*Danfo* conductors are *all* thieves. You must be very very vigilant when dealing with them else they will play you 419, or drop you at the

wrong bus stop or be cajoled into paying more than once for the same trip.’ The sweeping tone of this comment reinforces the criminalisation of informal (transport) workers across Africa as involved in what Everett Hughes (1962) calls ‘dirty work.’⁸³ In Nairobi, for instance, Mutongi (2006: 549) argues that *matatu* operators are usually viewed by commuters as ‘thugs’ who ‘exploited and mistreated’ passengers and participated in ‘mafia-like’ violence. Similarly, in his study of informal transport in Dar es Salaam, Rizzo (2011: 1187) draws attention to the ‘immutable discourse’ that ‘criminalizes the [*daladala*] workforce and attributes the many accidents and chronic tensions of the transport system to the hooliganism and greed of its workforce.’ Yet, in Lagos, many operators complained to me that extortion by *agberos* and traffic policemen remains the biggest threat to their everyday survival – it is ironic that workers are regarded as criminals, but are actually daily victims of crime themselves.

Moving on, the overwhelming preoccupation of many *danfo* drivers was with finding a reliable conductor who would not *chop* them ‘too much.’ As one *danfo* driver-owner in Ikotun said to me: ‘All *danfo* conductors will cheat you. You’re lucky if you find one that cheats you with love.’ This explains why many drivers preferred not to hire conductors but to run the business alone. They do this by inviting passengers to help them collect the money during the journey. The total money is then passed on to him and this is where the multi-tasking skills of the driver are put to test. While still trying to circumnavigate the usual extreme traffic gridlock (‘go-slow’ as they say in Lagos) on most routes, the driver counts the money to make sure that it is complete, responds to hostile demands for change by passengers in undue haste. In all these movements, the *danfo* driver still finds time to answer his phone, and spot passengers on the road (even far off in the streets) that might be going towards his direction. In this sense, *danfo* drivers embody the popular saying in Lagos, ‘No Dulling.’ Multi-tasking on the steering wheel is, of course, a transgressional practice that accounts for

⁸³ A term that describe tasks and occupations that are likely to be perceived as degrading.

grisly road accidents. To avoid this, many conductor-less drivers now collect their fare and distribute change before they embark on the journey.

The nature of many day-to-day rental agreements between workers and owners partly explain the aggressive and belligerent character of rag-tag workers. Since drivers have to remit an agreed amount to the owners on a daily basis, they can only increase their own income by increasing the number of trips or the number of passengers (Rizzo, 2011). Invariably, *danfos* are overloaded and dangerously speeding, putting themselves and owners at risk of prosecution.⁸⁴ In Lagos, many passengers bemoaned the fact that they were regularly ‘packed like sardines.’ The practice of overloading is common across many African cities. In Nairobi, Kinshasa and Dar es Salaam, for example, commuters often ‘hang out of the bus or even sit on the roof’ (Kumar and Barrett, 2008: xv). In Kinshasa, as in Lagos and Nairobi, ‘there are [usually] many more passengers than seats, and lines are long. Without knowing exactly where the minibus-taxi is heading, people try to squeeze in, even before the arriving passengers have succeeded in making their way out’ (Trefon, 2004: 30). In Lagos, a combination of high speeding and driving ‘on the edge’ is required if workers are to recoup the daily payment as quickly as possible. The driver must race between two end points of his chosen route at the highest speed he can possibly generate, while his conductor calls out destinations at bus stops or anywhere he spots passengers. When passengers are not going in their routes, the conductor shouts out to his driver, *ma wo ju won* (‘don’t look at their face’ – in other words, don’t waste time on them) or *jeun soke* (‘eat up’). Note that these workers ‘do not race to experience sensations since they are not in it for a sport. They speed to meet deadlines if they are to keep their jobs’ (Mutongi, 2006: 564). Tellingly, the word *danfo* means ‘hurry.’ This abiding sense of

⁸⁴ Section 30 of the Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012 states that ‘Where a person is convicted of an offence in respect of the overloading of a commercial vehicle or trailer or of driving a commercial vehicle at a speed exceeding that provided by Law, then in addition to the person driving the vehicle at the time of the commission of the offence, if such person not being the owner of the vehicle, the owner of such vehicle shall also be liable, and may be charged accordingly (LSRTL, 2012: A89).

'hurry' in passenger transport is neatly indexed in slogans like 'No Time to Check Time,' 'No Dulling,' 'Time is Money,' 'Sharp Sharp,' and '24 hours on the Road.' In Nairobi, Mutongi (2006: 554) observes that *matatu* workers 'worked about eighteen hours each day.' To save time (which is money), they sometimes 'took off while passengers were still boarding, racing each other to the next stop to have first crack at the next group of passengers' (ibid). All this explains why, for many workers, 'life is war' (Rizzo, 2011: 179). The colourful slogan 'Money Torture,' plastered on the side of a *matatu*, typifies how many workers view their jobs: 'Long hours, ruthless police and gang harassment, and susceptibility to deadly traffic accidents all render the work of operators one of the most dangerous jobs in [Africa]' (Mutongi, 2006: 564).

Sometimes operators are aware that their *danfo* is not mechanically sound to cover the full length of the journey. But this knowledge does not prevent them from loading passengers and 'taking a chance.' Halfway into the journey, the *danfo* gives way and the passengers are stranded – some with urgent business appointments and job interviews. Of course, the workers feign ignorance of the mechanical fault and remain defiant amidst curses after curses from angry passengers. Sometimes, however, they attempt to 'help' the passengers by stopping a (half-)empty *danfo* and negotiating payment with the driver who is often happy to load the passengers without having to pay the usual *owo load* ('money for loading passengers') to touts (*agberos*) on the road extorting *danfo* workers in the name of the NURTW (Chapter 4). Against this very precarious working conditions, experienced owners rarely rent their *danfos* to only one driver, since, having worked in the industry, they are *au fait* with the excruciating demands on workers daily. Hence, many drivers are only able to rent the *danfo* for three or four days in a week, whereupon they are compelled to hand it over to another. Even an owner with only two *danfos* will have at least four, and probably more, drivers on hand. More established owners usually have ten to twelve drivers.

Some owners told me how they delegate routine tasks to ‘managers’ who monitor workers and reports back to them. One very wealthy owner in Oshodi employed relatives and homeboys to monitor his drivers and report back to him weekly on their performance levels. The prosperous owners have diversified their income into other lucrative ventures like canopy rental business. Not having the time to adequately supervise the worker’s daily performance, the owners entrust the daily transaction costs (i.e. of hiring and monitoring) to middlemen (usually friends or kinsmen). Through them, owners are able to supervise their *danfos* and weed out ‘rotten apples.’ When workers are fired for their corrupt or reckless behaviours, the news quickly filters through to other owners in the commercial transporting fraternity (usually through rumours and gossips) who then respond by blacklisting such workers, underscoring the ‘security of mutuality’ in ownership business. As Erik Bahre (2014: 577) argues, ‘mutualities produce particular economies that cannot exist without some level of social networks of trust, reciprocity and protection to deal with the many uncertainties that business owners have to face.’

The foregoing reverberates with Raimondo Catanzaro’s (1985: 40-41, 1992) discussion of how Sicilian Italian mafia, in defending their prized assets, were forced to establish solidarities and coalitions beyond the immediate confines of their families. In these conditions ‘instrumental friendships’⁸⁵ underpin economic transactions and action (Catanzaro, 1985: 34). Through daily rumours, which build on moral evaluations of operators, owners are able to manage their fears, hopes and anxieties, and evaluate to what degree a worker is honest and self-sacrificing or dishonest and lazy. Further, through social monitoring, owners have found a way to maximize profit, sanction corruption, and protect their vested interest in a precarious sector. As Judith Butler (2012: 148) notes, a shared sense of ‘precarity exposes our

⁸⁵ Instrumental friendships, as Raimondo Catanzaro (1985) points out, are seldom stable, and the informal trust on which they are based requires constant reconfirmation through actions.

sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency.’⁸⁶ In this case, uncertainty ‘calls forth considered action to change both the situation and the self’ (Whyte, 2009: 213-14).

Similar to the precarious conditions of operators, I have argued so far that owners *too* make a living under precarious circumstances, inscribing the simultaneous reality of owners’ privileged position (as owners) and their equally precarious existence. In exploring the routine challenges encountered by owners, this section contributes to a nuanced understanding of the precarity of (informal) labour in Africa and the ‘sense of vulnerability’ (Bledsoe, 2002: 21) that encases minibus-taxi ownership and labour relations in Lagos and beyond. Moving forward, in his study of informal transport workers in Dar es Salam, Rizzo (2011) found that their harsh working conditions are an inevitable outcome of the intense struggle of the workers for ‘economic survival.’ While this view applies to my experience of Lagos, I found that beyond the transport operator’s quest for material survival was a ‘positive expectancy’ (Burrige, 1995), a ‘capacity to aspire’ (Appadurai, 2004) about the ‘near future’⁸⁷ (Guyer, 2007) and the city yet to come’ (Simone, 2010). This supports Simone’s (2010: 38) point that ‘the pursuit of survival involves actions, relations, sentiments, and opportunities that are more than survival alone.’ Another way of saying this is that the lives of operators are shaped by a myriad of factors that transcend basic material scarcity (Chapter 4 and 5).

3.9 Beyond Survival

It was Arjun Appadurai (2004: 68) who once argued that the poor’s aspirations, non-homogenous as they appear, are ‘inevitably tied up with more general assumptions

⁸⁶ This is a wider understanding of precarity that is often present in human geography – recognizing the consequences and possibilities of ‘*feeling precarious*’ (Worth, 2015).

⁸⁷ Guyer defines this near future as the anticipation of what is to come in the short term, and this anticipation is an outgrowth of the rational planning and deliberations that take place in the present.

about the good life, and life more generally.’⁸⁸ Appadurai points out that like any other group in society, ‘the poor express horizons in choices voiced, often in terms of specific goods and outcomes’ (ibid). Despite the apparent uncertainties of their lives, I was regularly struck by the fact that many operators never ceased to dream, to aspire towards a range of good things in life, such as owning a *danfo* (or a fleet of *danfos*), keeping good health, happiness, travelling to *obodo oyibo* (‘Land of the white man’), winning American visa lottery, marrying a graduate, becoming *eni olokiki* (someone well known), *olowo* (someone with lots of money), *eniyán giga* (a high person), *eniyán pataki* (someone important), paying for their children’s tuition, and acquiring a university degree. These dreams are not necessarily ‘weak reflections of truth [but] its source’ (Crapanzano, 2003: 24). They ‘are not simple fantasies woven from sleep [but] a normal technique for solving a problem or *finding a way* out of a dilemma’ (Burrige, 1995: 219). Thus, the dream is the chosen vehicle for expressing, if not reclaiming, the desires/hopes of operators in a precarious transport sector where they are often perceived as ‘NFA’ (‘No Future Ambition’). As Burrige remarks:

When expressed through a dream hope merges into positive expectancy. Any man may wish or hope for something at any time. But, when in association with a dream the hope comes near to realisation. Dreams tend to pull a future into current sensible reality; they give definiteness to hope, adding faith, thereby putting the dreamer in touch with a verity shortly to be manifest (Burrige, 1995: 180).

In the face of an everyday life that ‘seem to be falling apart before their very eyes,’ few transport operators that I spoke to accept ‘victim identities’ (Kihato, 2007) which analytically alienates them from their social agency in ways that perpetuate imageries of disempowerment. Rather, they use positive qualifiers and temporally-inflected and

⁸⁸ According to Appadurai (2004), the ‘capacity to aspire’ is not evenly distributed. ‘The better off you are... the more likely you are to be conscious of the links between the more and less immediate objects of aspiration.’ This is because the better off are better able to navigate their way toward potentially actualising their aspirations. Thus, the capacity to aspire is, at its core, a ‘navigational capacity.’

hope-imbued slogans like ‘I dey Manage,’ ‘We thank God,’ ‘God dey,’ ‘Very Soon,’ ‘Time will Tell,’ ‘No one Know Tomorrow,’ to manage the challenges of the present for the *yet to come*. This positive expectancy of operators is most evident in future-looking slogans like: The hopes in these future-looking slogans are epitomised by the official Lagos slogan, *Eko o ni baje* (‘Lagos will not spoil’). Or as one *danfo* driver modified it, ‘*Eko o ni baje ju bai lo*’ (‘Lagos will not spoil more than this). Future-looking slogans – such as ‘One Day’ – reinforce not only the ‘temporality of hope’ (Crapanzano, 2003), but also the observation that ‘conjectures about the future [form] an implicit part of the understanding of the present’ (Moore, 1987: 727). In Lagos, for instance, I frequently encountered *danfos* with slogans like ‘God’s Time is the Best,’ ‘My time will Come,’ ‘Time will tell,’ ‘Time is Money,’ ‘Very Very Soon,’ *asiko lo la ’ye* (There is time for everything), *better dey come* (Better is coming).

The *danfo* slogan ‘God’s time is the Best’ is one of the ways in which operators negotiate a competitive, corrupt, and precarious business where, to reiterate Gavin Williams’ (1980: 114) point, ‘fortunes are seen to be made and lost and one’s own fortune often appears to be beyond one’s control.’ In this respect, future time liberates the operator from the present order of disorder, serving as a departure from a terrain of experiences and encounters that threatens the fulfillment of self (Lawuyi, 1993: 101). Ultimately, therefore, the *danfo* operator’s capacity to aspire reveals their abiding awareness that ‘No Condition is Permanent’; only the permanence of change is unconditional (see Chapter 6). It is a world of risk and radical uncertainty, where ‘Your worst enemy can be your best friend,’ as one *danfo* slogan puts it.



Figure 11. “One Day”
Source: Fieldwork

The multiple aspirations of transport operators, configured through local idioms of chance and God’s fortune, is premised on the fact that things can change in uncertain times (‘No condition is permanent,’ as one *danfo* slogan puts it), what Ato Quayson (2014) calls the ‘transitoriness of social life.’ Hence, to take advantage of the opportunity that luck or fate may afford requires ‘anticipation and mobility – a propensity to being in the right place at the right time’ (Cooper and Pratten, 2015: 12). Being young and surviving on the margins is recast as still having time and of still having hope. This is illustrated by *danfo* slogans like ‘young shall grow,’ ‘today’s work, tomorrow’s success,’ ‘Better dey Come.’ In light of this temporal horizons,⁸⁹ ‘uncertainty produces dispositions by which people not only “get by” in the here and now, but “get on” in the future’ (Cooper and Pratten, 2015: 12).

⁸⁹ Horizons are temporal in nature: ‘what looks like a hopeful prospect now may be shut down without warning tomorrow, and another potential future may open up’ (Johnson-Hanks, 2002: 871).



Figure 12. ‘Your worst enemy can be your best friend.’
Source: Fieldwork

This realisation led Johnson-Hanks (2002: 871) to intend ‘a unit of social analysis based in aspiration rather than event.’ It also underpins Jane Guyer’s (2007) call for an ethnography of the ‘near future’ which arises from a concern for empirically informed and more open-ended, studies of processes of change that address ‘the reach of thought and imagination, of planning and hoping, of tracing out mutual influences, of engaging in struggles for specific goals’ (Guyer, 2007: 409). What emerges from an analytic focus on the ‘near future’ is a better appreciation of how operators tactically position themselves and remain vigilant to future possibilities (Cooper and Pratten, 2015: 12). This relates back to what Appadurai (2013: 295) calls the ‘ethics of possibility’ – that is, ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase hopeful horizons in the city. In urban public transport, one of the vital, though ambivalent, symbols of hope is the road (Soyinka, 1965; Masquelier, 2002).

3.9.1 The Famished Road

The social aspects of roads cannot be detached from the lives of people who ply them daily (Argounova-Low and Prisyazhnyi, 2015: 3). Roads, as many operators told me, symbolised their source of survival. At the same time, roads are fraught with various predators (physical and metaphysical). While roads bring jobs, consumer goods, and economic prospects, they can lead to death (Soyinka, 1965): ‘rather than serving as pathways to prosperity, roads can become deceptive traps that maim and kill their prey’ (Masquelier, 2002: 842). No wonder the Yorubas refer to the road as the ‘long coffin that holds 1400 corpses’ (Isichei, 2004: 213). A columnist in *Osun Defender* compared the scale of deaths caused by bad roads in Lagos to ‘Boko Haram’ that kills innocent lives almost on a daily basis in the north. The columnist points to the case of Lagos-Badagry expressway, which in the past seven years has become a death trap:

From Seme, the Nigeria-Benin Republic border to Volkswagen in Ojo Local Government of Lagos State, there are over 10,000 potholes and several other valleys that are big enough to consume a car. Ordinarily, from Seme border to Mile 12 is not suppose to be more than 45 minutes for any vehicle speeding at the moderate of 80km per hour, but due to the horrible condition of the roads, commuters spends more than 4 to 5 hours lurking one another up in hundreds of the bad spots on the road. As a matter of fact, vehicle plying the road gets spoilt so easy, thereby making owners spend lot of hard earned money in repairing their vehicles (*Osun Defender*, 2012).⁹⁰

Commenting on the nature of unpaved roads in his Ikorodu district, Akadri Adeleke, Chairman of the Ikorodu Youth Council, reported:

This road consumes lives on daily basis. Besides, hoodlums have found it convenient to be dispossessing people of their belongings and injuring those that manage to use the road. The impassable state of the road again has been causing accidents and vehicles plunge into ditches caused by the engineers while doing the construction work (Ejiofor, *Daily Times*, 2012).

⁹⁰ Lagos-Badagry Expressway: A ‘Boko Haram’ in the West.’ *Osun Defender* 2012.

Already, notable African writers like Okri (1992) describe a road that ‘swallows people,’ Soyinka speaks of *The Road* (1965) as an agent, while Ngugi wa Thiongo (1987: 7) depicts a road ‘that has no beginning and no end.’ In this sense, road, along with its many forces, is a liminal space that embody ‘all the basic contradictions of the experience of modernity itself, of its inescapable enticements, its self-consuming passions, its discriminatory tactics, its devastating social costs’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993: xxix). What is salient about these road narratives and mythologies is their potential to both express and construct the daily experiences and encounters of transport operators as a process fraught with risky and contradictory possibilities.

3.9.2 The Turn to *Juju*

Against this unpredictable backdrop, a great many operators expressed conviction in some form of divine intervention needed to enhance their success and safety in a precarious business. Many turned to *juju* (charms) as a tactic against accidents and bad luck, as well as to attract passengers and to ensure self-protection and competitive advantage. The appropriation of *juju* by operators reverberates with Michael Taussig’s illuminating work on *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism*⁹¹ in *South America* (1980), which depicted sorcery as resistance to the numerous material and ideological contradictions fostered by capitalism, a creative assertion of the human will. Taussig (1980: 3) found that Bolivian miners and Columbian plantation workers invoked the devil to secure production of tin or sugarcane. He studies the ‘preexisting cosmogony’ of the peasants as a source of vital images, beliefs and rituals, which the people reinterpret to meet current needs.

In both instances – the miners and plantation workers in South America and the operators in urban Lagos – we see how hard-pressed informal workers tendentially

⁹¹ This term is used here to refer to ‘the adventurous appropriation of an exotic object as a means of increasing one’s own status and value’ (Weat and Bakare-Yusuf, 2003).

appeal to supernatural forces to cope with, or manage, conditions of turbulence in order to impose predictability on their lives. Such spiritual practices do not merely reduce the anxieties of these workers or give them the illusion of control over a situation in which they are powerless (a functional notion favoured by traditional anthropological explanations); they are also ways to make sense of the world in which these informal workers ply their trade (an epistemological notion). The *juju* used by transport operators in Lagos are, however, not substitutes for laziness or tiredness. On the contrary, they are used to ‘facilitate profit and protect the individual and property in a competitive environment’ (Lawuyi, 1988).

Iris Young (1997: 153) has already argued that ‘dwelling in the world means we are located among objects, artefacts, rituals, and practices that configure who we are in our particularity.’ This is true of the many *juju* that caught my eyes during my frequent go-alongs on *danfos*. This *juju* comes in various forms, including the shape of a lock or a comb, a dry head of a rat tied to a cowrie, a dry animal skin twisted into a rope and tied around the driver’s arm (attached to it are cowries), or a feather with a red rope tied to it. These symbols – often hidden under the dashboard, tied to the mirror, or placed under the driver’s seat – display ‘a form of empowerment which expresses the fact of “powerlessness”’ (Jeffrey, 2010: 93). A study of Yoruba taxi drivers in the 1980s found that 80 per cent of Muslims and 60 per cent of Christians had protective charms in their vehicles, a ‘resort to symbolic action in the face of uncertainties’ (Lawuyi, 1988). In Lagos, argues Lawuyi:

Armed robbers may attack and steal the vehicles. The roadside mechanic may have mistakenly connected two wires that could ignite and burn the vehicle. Nobody can predict when accidents will occur, as drivers in a hurry overtake dangerously. The *juju* in the vehicle serves to remind the drivers of their power to escape from any danger... make drivers disappear into thin air when accidents occur. Alternatively they may prevent accidents. They also bring wealth by attracting passengers. Through their mystification the *juju* make it possible for the individual to survive the disruptive processes created by national and international tensions, which affect economic processes... *The juju themselves are not mechanical*

reflections of power relations, but are autonomous entities which can act on the power order and modify it (Lawuyi, 1988; my emphasis).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has pieced together a complex sociology of Lagos life that is grounded in the precarious existence of transport operators and road users. In particular, the chapter explored the tactics used by operators in negotiating challenges, seizing opportunities, and producing life in the city. The operators featured in this chapter show how ordinary practitioners of the city navigate contexts of risk and uncertainty to create meaningful livelihoods and define their aspirations for a better future. This form of urbanism offers the operator ‘a considerable freedom to capture the sudden possibilities opened up by unexpected occasions that are generated by the synergies and frictions of urban life’ (de Boeck, 2011: 272). Through an interpretative approach to slogans, the chapter shows how operators involve themselves in place-making and the social construction of their localities – that is, the actual transformation of space (through social exchanges, memories, images, and everyday use of the material setting) into ‘scenes and actions that convey symbolic meaning’ (Low, 1996: 861-2).

Importantly, focusing on the ways in which operators construct and appropriate urban space illustrates the considerable agency and creative resilience of informal actors to manage adversity without necessarily adopting a utopian narrative of the (eventually) victorious subaltern (Castrick and Sieveking, 2014: 13). The chapter also draws our attention to creative ways of being-in-the-city that uncovers a resolute openness to the unclosed possibilities that uncertainty can uncover. In sum, therefore, this chapter provides evidence for how operators manage uncertainty in a precarious business characterised by violent extortion, dysfunction, fear, and intimidation. Going forward, what emerges is a better appreciation for ways of thinking about urban informality in Africa, one that transcends a conventional focus on the product(*ion*) of uncertainty (crisis as context) to underscore the productivity of uncertainty (crisis as possibility).

Violence as Regulation

Upon this a question arises: whether it is better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? One would wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, it is much safer to be feared than loved.

- N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1909, XVII.

If in the previous chapter, I argued that everyday corruption transpires in a space inflected with crisis and possibility, in this chapter, I explore how (fear of) violence serves as a vital source of spatial regulation for the extortion rackets of the NURTW. In particular, I pay attention to the less known role of *agberos* – the foot soldiers of the union. The nomenclature *agbero* is a euphemism for a feared cohort of urban youth gang who survive through their parasitic dependence on the violent control of passenger transport in Lagos. Predominantly a male affair, *agberos* appropriate the stereotyped spaces of motorparks (aka garages), bus stops, and roads across Lagos, which they use as a major operational base to wrest all sorts of taxes from operators in the name of the NURTW – the most politicized and violent trade union in Nigeria (Albert, 2007).⁹² In so doing, *agberos* have converted these transit spaces into a major resource for economic accumulation, thereby establishing a ‘simulacra of social

⁹² The NURTW came to being as an affiliate of the Central Labour Organisation, the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) following the restructuring of industrial unions in the country by the Federal Military Government through Trade Union Decrees 21 and 22 of 15th August, 1978 (now Act) and Trade Unions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Decree 17 of July, 1986. As stated on its official website, its mission is, ‘To be seen as the foremost transport union, organizing and unionizing workers in the road transport industry, and regulating relations between workers and employers for just and proper work conditions, professionalism; and to foster solidarity, unity and progress among transport workers.’

order' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 5). Yet, the capture of these hotly contested and violent spaces by *agberos*, and the creation of parallel modes of profiteering, even spatial governance and taxation, constitutes a usurpation of the constitutional function of local governments in Nigeria (Constitution FRN, 1999).⁹³

In every single *agbero* I encountered on the roads of Lagos, there was the same no-nonsense attitude, the hair-trigger temper, and the willingness to get into a fight over all conflicts. Often under the influence of *paraga* and *igbo* (Indian hemp), sold within 100 meters of most motor-parks and bus stops across Lagos, *agberos* are wont to brutally attack *danfo* operators who delay in responding to their aggressive shouts of *Owo da? Owo da?* (Where is the money? Where is the Money?). Such raucous demands are accompanied by ominous remarks like *Ma ba fine boy e je* ('I will spoil your fine boy'), *aiye o ni da* ('It will not go well with you'), *Ma fo oju iya e* ('I will destroy you mother's eyes'), *Oti pade iku* ('You have encountered death'), *So fe ku?* ('Do you want to die?'), or *Ma f'ese yo gbo gbo eyin e* ('I will blow all your teeth out'). These are no empty threats. As Alabi, a *danfo* driver in a busy motor-park in Oshodi, said to me: '*agberos* get plenty action. They can do and undo.' He was right. For the eight months I spent conducting fieldwork in Oshodi and Alimosho areas, I witnessed the violent deaths of four *danfo* operators in the hands of *agberos*. Not surprising, the excesses of *agberos* recurred *ad nauseam* in my interviews with operators, owners, and commuters.

Jimoh, a *danfo* driver plying Oshodi-Ikotun route, reported that '*agberos* have converted all the bus stops and motor-parks spaces into commercial avenues to extort money from us to the extent of physically assaulting us if we delay in parting with our hard-earned cash. Sometimes they will remove your wipers, fuel tank cover, side-

⁹³ There is a sense in which we can compare *agberos* to the violent *Mungiki* gang in Nairobi who collect fees from *matatu* operators and other 'protected' businesses under duress; they work in small units (at motorparks and bus stops) and report to a lieutenant or *munene* (LeBas, 2013: 250; Ference, 2013: 191).

view mirror, or break a seat from your *danfo*.' Jimoh's account illustrates the extent to which violent extortion, indeed chronic crisis and uncertainty, provides the context in which many operators weave their precarious existence (as we saw in Chapter 3). By dint of a 'constant sense of threat' (Green, 1995: 105) inscribed in the collective imaginary of transport operators and commuters alike, *agberos* have succeeded in establishing 'collective fear' as a tactical means of spatial regulation and social control. And when fear becomes a 'way of life,' a 'culture of terror' emerges and flourishes (Green, 1994; Taussig, 1984). In such a culture, there is a permanent 'threat of repression, torture, and ultimately, death for anyone who is actively critical of the status quo' (Sluka, 2000: 23). This explains why, comparing *agberos* to *ogun* (Yoruba god of the road), a *danfo* driver in Oshodi said: 'The fear of *agbero* is the beginning of wisdom in our business.' To my follow-up question about why *agberos* are so dreaded, the *danfo* driver replied in no uncertain terms:

It is because they are mafias who can do whatever and get away with it. *Agbero* will beat you to pulp if you refuse to pay and nothing would happen. The policeman would even blame you for not settling them on time. Their "long legs" [connections] extend to the top. *Their bosses wine and dine with the governor, with party officials, and with police commissioners who all get a slice of the cake they collect from us each day.* Some party officials and *agberos* even own fleets of *danfos* that they loan out on hire purchase. If your life means anything, don't argue with *agberos* (my emphasis).

A number of previous studies have focused attention on themes of informal politics (Goodfellow, 2015; Date-Bah, 1980; Lawuyi, 1988), struggles for survival amid abysmal working conditions (Rizzo, 2011; Mutongi, 2006; Khosa, 1994), and social 'becoming' (Gibbs, 2014) in Africa's urban transport. Recent accounts have started to look at contemporary neo-liberal reforms (such as the recent rapid growth of Bus Rapid Transit (BRTs) systems across urban Africa) and the associated production of

precarious livelihoods (such as the current displacement of paratransit operators).⁹⁴ In a study of Dar es Salaam, for instance, Matteo Rizzo (2014) analyses how informal workers fare under conditions of flexible labour markets and economic liberalisation. An earlier strand of research looks at the micropolitics of relations between operators and commuters (Peace, 1988; Lawuyi, 1988), and, of course, my own forthcoming manuscripts in *African Affairs* and the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, which broaches the empirical question of violent patronage and protection rackets implicating the NURTW in Lagos partisan politics (Agbiboa, 2016b and c).

Important as these micro-level insights are, we still know surprisingly little about the role and changing (historical) perceptions of hardened union officials on the ground⁹⁵ who ‘patrol’ motorparks, bus stops and roads across many African cities issuing tickets and extorting tolls from informal operators under duress.⁹⁶ In some studies, the tendency has been to conflate these semi-private figures with existing street gangs or social miscreants (such as the usual error of conflating (the history of) *agberos* with *area boys* in Lagos) in a way that obscures their emergence, modus operandi, and changing (historical) role and perceptions. Such conflation reinforces homogenising narratives that undercut a number of studies on youth, crime and informality in Africa. The situation is further complicated by the inaudibility of the voices of these union touts in many studies of urban transport, precluding a proper understanding of how such actors differentiate themselves from ‘other’ social actors in the city, and

⁹⁴ Since 2002 the World Bank-funded Lagos Urban Transport Project (LUTP) has supported a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, a mode of urban public transportation that combines the high quality and speed of the rail system with the affordability and flexibility of a bus network. The coming of the BRT in Lagos coincided with the crowding out of informal midibuses (*molues*), and the restriction of motorbike taxis (*okadas*) on major Lagos routes, resulting in a massive loss of jobs in the informal sector. In Ghana, the World Bank sponsored Urban Transport Project, which seeks to introduce a BRT system, remains ‘conspicuously silent on the informal sector as a key stakeholder’ despite the sector’s command of ‘approximately 70 percent of the market’ (see Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2015: 36).

⁹⁵ Known across African cities as ‘touts’ (in Lagos, *agberos*; in Kampala, *bayayes*, in Harare, *chipangano*), ‘union boys,’ or ‘ticket officials.’ These hardboiled and rough-looking actors are usually the city dweller’s ‘first contact’ with the transport union.

⁹⁶ Two notable exceptions include Enoch Okpara (1988) and Alick Munzara (2014).

how their own perceptions about their role in transport stack up against those of the rest of the public who interact with them on a regular basis.



Figure 13. “Owo da? *Agberos* demanding ‘settlement’ from a *danfo* conductor in Lagos.
Source: Fieldwork

Against this backdrop, this chapter focuses attention on the role, tactics, and changing perceptions of the gang culture⁹⁷ of *agbero* in passenger transport. The analysis extends to the micropolitics between *agberos* and *danfo* operators. The focus on *agberos* is critical and urgent since their presence on roads across Lagos impinges on the quality of public transport for over seven million Lagosians who depend on some 75,000 *danfos* for mobility (World Bank, 2013). For instance, many *danfo* operators that I spoke to during my fieldwork blamed the high bus fares that they charge

⁹⁷ Predominantly from psychological and sociological perspectives, mainstream literature on gang (sub-)cultures focuses on marginalisation, criminality, deviance, and masculinity (Virgil, 2003). In this study, the invocation of gang culture implies a closed world of young men defined primarily by a culture of boundary-making (in membership, territory and signification) and of cultures of toughness and testing (through aggression, violence and intimidation) (Pratten, 2009: 2).

commuters on the many unreceipted fees they had to make (per trip)⁹⁸ to various *agberos*. During fieldwork, I worked mainly among various units of NURTW *agberos* and transport operators in Oshodi and Alimosho. At times, interviews were recorded on the spot with audio equipment. But in most cases I simply hung around with operators, *agberos*, commuters, traffic police officers, and unionists, engaging in informal conversations with them. In addition, I regularly screened established local newspapers for events that involved *agberos* in Oshodi-Isole and Alimosho.

4.1 Social Ordering and Spatial Regulation

Increasingly, urban authorities in the so-called Global South ‘deploy risk discourse to legitimate intervention in public space which are motivated from another source’ (Watson, 2006: 170). Actors like street gangs, street hawkers and roadside beggars are supposed to be ‘dangerous, a nuisance, a shame to the city and its citizens, so they should be dealt with in a radical way’ (Geenen, 2009: 351). Such line of thinking plugs into Western imaginaries aimed at modernizing and ordering the city by defining who has the right to inhabit the city and who does not belong in it (Myers, 2010). In the process, patterns of socio-spatial inclusion and exclusion in the city are significantly altered (Chapter 5). So conceived, on February 21 2008, Governor Fashola inaugurated a 12-member Tribunal of Inquiry, headed by Justice Dolapo Akinsanya, to investigate the routine role and operations of the NURTW and their representatives on the ground. The avowed expectation was that the ‘instant inquiry’ would help the Lagos State Government to identify ‘a unique opportunity to unravel the circumstances which might have precipitated violent [union] clashes in the past and challenges confronting passenger transportation system, in order to prevent re-occurrence in the future’ (Office of the Governor, Press Release, 2008).

⁹⁸ In Kampala, every time a *matatu* stopped, the conductor paid an unreceipted ‘loading fee’ to an official (tout) of the UTODA (Uganda Taxi Operators and Drivers Association) stationed at that particular *matatu* ‘stage,’ the amount of which varied by route but was ‘equivalent to the fare of three passengers.’ Failure (or delay) to pay often results in a violent reaction on the part of the UTODA official(s) (Goodfellow, 2012: 204).

The findings of the Tribunal confirmed what many have long suspected about the NURTW in Lagos: ‘fighting and misuse of parks, collecting money on the roads indiscriminately, stopping passengers, abusing alcohol, among others’ (*Punch*, 2012). The Tribunal also found that *agberos* have morphed into ‘complete menace that must be addressed; what we considered needed to check the widespread menace is the total enforcement of the existing laws on the NURTW because if enforcement takes hold, Lagos will become the real and desired megacity’ (*The Nation*, 2008). Citing the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that empowers local governments to collect tolls at motor-parks, Justice Akinsanya argued that ‘it is a pity that [*agberos*] have *taken over*; they now collect tolls at these places; they even rape innocent victims after taking drugs’ (ibid). The Tribunal’s recommendations inspired the enactment of the Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012 (Chapter 5), which barred *agberos* from collecting taxes inside motorparks, bus stops and roads across Lagos.

Thus, to address the problem of *agberos*, the Lagos State Government resorted to interventions within the frame of ‘spatial governmentality’ – a principle that gathers ‘new mechanisms of social ordering based on spatial regulation’ (Merry, 2001: 16) that focus on space in lieu of networks and institutions. The overriding objective is to regulate people’s behaviour by (lawfully) prohibiting particular conduct in particular places. As former Commissioner for Transportation, Kayode Opeifa, declared:

Henceforth, union activities are no longer allowed at our parks. They are to relocate to offices from where they will operate just like the National Union of Teachers and the National Union of Journalists. Also, no union member must be seen collecting money on the road. We recognize the right for them to associate but we believe that the motor-parks should be made easy for those who want to carry out their legitimate business of commuting in the state... no union member should be seen on the road collecting money from transport operators as it is *illegal*.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ This is not the first time that the Lagos State Government has banned the activities of *agberos* in motor-parks, or that the question of ‘control’ of motor parks have surfaced. Fed up by the violent activities and internal clashes

There was early promise when the authorities attempted to enforce the ban by channeling the physical presence of *agberos* in transit spaces. In June 2013, for example, the Lagos State Task Force on Environment and Special Offences arrested 46 *agberos* who were collecting illegal dues from operators on roads across Lagos, terrorizing motorists during traffic hours and causing ‘go-slow’ on most routes. The Special Offences Court in Ikeja sentenced these *agberos* to 50-hour community service for ‘constituting nuisance to the public peace,’ noting that ‘we are simply telling them to repent’ (*National Mirror*, 2013). In an interview with the *National Mirror*, Mr. Bayo Sulaimon, then Chairman of the Lagos Task Force, announced:

We have declared war against *agberos* again; we will not allow them to take over the state. We have flushed them out and they are coming back and we will flush them out again. In the next few hours now, more of them will be arrested. We are moving to different places to arrest more of them. Soon, we will move to other areas in the state. With this arrest, we are passing a message to others. Their leaders should call them to order.

However, the authorities emphatically failed to sustain the ban against *agberos*, reinforcing not only the huge gap between law and enforcement in Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006), but also the perception that the NURTW towers ‘above the law’ and that *agberos* are ‘sacred cows.’ To my question about what they think about their ban in the city, an *agbero* in Oshodi bragged: *Ta lo fe dan wo? Ni bo? Oga Fashola gon ko to be. Ti won ba dan wo, a ma dagboru* (‘Who can try it? Where? Even Fashola cannot outlaw us. If they try it, we will make this city ungovernable’). To the same question, another *agbero* taunted the lip service of the Lagos State Government: *Wo bi, enu ni’joba ni, won’ni action. Nah we get Lagos’* [‘Look here, the state only has mouth without action. We own Lagos’]. According to a *danfo* driver who plies the Ketu-Iyana Oworo routes:

of the NURTW, Fashola’s predecessor, Governor Bola Ahmed Tinubu (1999-2007), took a landmark decision in 2002 by banning NURTW from operating in motor-parks across Lagos state. Tinubu’s government argued that the NURTW do not have the constitutional backing for some of the powers they arrogate to themselves (Albert, 2007: 135).

When we heard that the activities of *agberos* have been banned by Governor Fashola, I was relieved that they have left the road for good, but within one month, the touts soon found their way back to bus stops. Out of the N10,000 I make daily, N6,000 goes to the owner of the bus, and I end up giving out about N3,000 to these touts who collect money with various names. At the end of the day, I share the little that is left with my conductor. We are not happy about this situation, and government should not only make orders, they should also ensure compliance (*The Guardian*, 2015).

Governor Fashola of Lagos is internationally applauded as ‘a rare good man’ (*Economist*, 2011) and an ‘action governor’ (Ekundayo, 2013) who ‘tamed Nigeria’s most lawless city’ (*Telegraph*, 2014). However, Fashola failed to show his true action against *agberos* described by the Lagos *Guardian* (2015) as ‘untamed monsters.’ This failure has only served to intensify the fear and influence of *agberos* in Lagos, fueling the perception that *agberos* are ‘state pickin’ (‘state children’), ‘untouchables,’ *iku* (death), *orisha* (god), *onile* (land owner), *ogun* (god of the road), *eshu* (trickster god), *satani* (satan), and *alagbara* (powerful). Reinforcing the powerful image of *agberos* as ‘tough men,’ one *danfo* driver in Oshodi said to me:

If them give am blow for mouth wey blood begin pour, *agbero* go buy *paraga* use wash am down tell you say na medicine be dat. *Agbero* no get fear. *Agbero* no be person’ [Meaning, ‘When you blow an *agbero* in the mouth, he would buy *paraga* and wash down the blood with it and tell you that is the treatment. *Agbero* has no fear. *Agbero* is not human’].

Today, *agberos* cash in on their feared status to collect all sorts of charges from transport operators and street traders alike. As one street hawker of ‘pure water’ in Ikotun Junction said to me: ‘There is *agbero* for everything. Their code is simply tax anybody and anything that is taxable.’ However, in an interview at his office in Alimosho, Mr. Ibrahim of the Vehicle Inspection Service told me that the blame for extortion and social disorder in passenger transport should not be heaped entirely on *agberos* but also on unruly transport operators and commuters who facilitate their activities and complicate the flow of traffic in the city:

Agberos are supposed to generate their funds in the motor parks. They are not supposed to come to the main roads to collect their tolls. When you see them go on the main roads to collect their money, it is because most of these vehicles do not want to enter the motor parks. You're not supposed to pick or drop passengers along the road. You're supposed to get to the designated parts of garages to board vehicles. Because even members of the public too, we are a very serious problem to the society. Why do I want to stand by the side of a road and board a bus when there are bus stations? These are the issues. Because most of these vehicles due to their menace, due to their socio-economic problem the bus operator wants to meet up his target and he feels going into the motor park to queue up for his turn will delay him since he can readily see people to pick on the road and make quick, good money. In this way, they boycott the standard and that's why you see those boys [*agberos*] coming out to collect money. So the two parties are wrong. Even the three parties: the commuters, the vehicle operator and the unionists [*sic*].

Mr. Ibrahim's account echoes Mutongi's (2006: 549) argument about the popular perceptions of *matatu* workers in Nairobi. She argues that while commuters have constantly criticized the crews, they have simultaneously helped make the notorious *matatus* by encouraging and participating in the transgressions of the crews. The above statement from Mr. Ibrahim also resonates with Oscar Lewis's (1966) analysis of the everyday lives of poor people in Mexico, which gave rise to a 'culture of poverty' in which the habits, values and behaviours of the poor were used to explain their everyday predicament, giving rise to myopic state-instituted solutions that end up 'treating the phenomenal forms rather than the essential relations behind the problem' (Lugalla, 1995: 178-9). Such a portrait is, of course, couched in a neoliberal ethos that attributes "equal agency" to all, including those with their backs up against a wall of social exclusion (Scheper-Huges, 2006). I distance myself from such a perspective because it obscures more than it clarifies the political, socio-historical and structural dimensions of poverty in Nigeria – factors beyond the control of individual people. It also runs the great risk of insulating poverty and urban planning from the economic and political forces of history, pervasive corruption, and misrule, in the same way that much emphasis is frequently placed on a 'negative youth culture'

rather than on the inability of institutions in Africa to mediate the transition process from youth to adulthood (Osaghae, et al. 2011: 2).

4.2 Research Gaps and Contributions

Studies of urban youth gangs in Nigeria have hitherto focused on issues of ‘juvenile delinquency’ (Fourchard, 2006; Heap, 2010), youth vigilante groups (Pratten, 2006; Nolte, 2004), *area boys* and girls (Momoh, 2000; Omitoogun, 1994; Salaam, 2014), and ‘campus cults’ (Bastian, 2001). However, studies on the role of touts in passenger transport – particularly in relation to unions, patronage, and rackets – are non-existent. When *agberos* appear in the literature, they are habitually conflated with the related, but distinct, group of *area boys* (Momoh, 1999) as if both terms were co-extensive. Such routine conflation obscures the historicity of *agberos* and makes it difficult to capture them (and their stories) in their everydayness. Not surprising, there is hardly any hard data on *agberos*, and their synergies and networks.

The little data on *agberos* are often founded on media accounts or hearsay. This lacuna, I suspect, arises partly because the study of *agberos* is often seen as a ‘no go’ area, with some scholars comparing it to the study of ‘armed robbers or guerrillas’ (Momoh, 1999, 2000). Such sweeping assumptions only constrain our understanding of this critical social category, while refreshing Robert Kaplan’s (1994) alarmist work, which places young men in West Africa’s cities on the Procrustean bed of ‘out of school, unemployed, loose molecules in an unstable social fluid that threatened to ignite.’ In focusing on the origins, role and changing (historical) perception of *agberos* in passenger transport (*agents*), along with the existing structural factors that condition their everyday activities (*agencies*), this chapter makes a fresh contribution to clarifying the literature on urban youth and street gangs in Nigerian cities.

Agberos are seen in this chapter as a cohort of anti-social ‘youthmen’ (Abdullah et al. 1997) drawn into the ‘heady adventure’ of violence as an urban ‘way of life’

(Murphy, 2003). The actions of *agberos* in Lagos are perceived in this chapter as occurring within an ‘institutionless arena’ (Sandbrook, 1972) characterised by crisis and uncertainty (Chapter 3). The harsh realities in Lagos has not only facilitated a self-sustaining spiral of corruption, deception, and popular discontent (Smith, 2007), fed mainly by unwaged youth, but has also created alternative apertures for survival at the dark underbelly of the economy – an opportunity which *agberos* have grabbed with both hands but which has led to further insecurity. The result is a vicious circle where everyday insecurity produces the very behaviour that generates exclusion and further insecurity (Joseph, 1987; Pratten, 2013). In this respect, *agberos* may be compared to Nigerian leaders who frequently find tactical ways to translate declining law and social order into patronage resources that shore up the unalloyed loyalty of their clientelistic networks (Joseph, 1987; Chabal and Daloz, 1999).

Indeed, the continual re-enactment by the political, military and business elites of rituals of practice in which the privileges of power are used for pillage and to protect ‘a vested interest in chaos’ has permeated the cultural fabric down to the level of the yellow fever demanding bribes at road junctions (Chapter 3). As Ruth Marshall (1991: 26) aptly puts it, ‘people must wield the little power and influence they have as a matter of survival.’ Against this backdrop, disorder ‘symbolizes both danger and power;’ while ‘it spoils pattern, it also provides the material of pattern’ (Douglas, 1996: 26). This ‘potency of disorder’ is critical for navigating an urban life that ‘swings in tune with its proximity to disorder’ (Vigh, 2009: 421).

A final point here concerns not simply economic decline and the struggle for survival by youthful actors like *agberos* (which forms the backdrop of their violent habitus), but, importantly, the *modus* in which *agberos* are inserted into that material struggle. In this respect, I examine the vital role that access to certain kinds of privilege or influential networks (i.e. the NURTW), play in inserting *agberos* into extortion rackets. These powerful networks, of course, work to produce and alter the existing

structures and realities that inevitably contribute to and affect the lived realities of motorists in Lagos. In this regard, the interface between *agberos* and the NURTW illuminates a model of ‘urban youth clientelism’ – that is, ‘the social production of dependency on patronage when local and national structures fail to provide for the social and economic needs of youth’ (Murphy, 2003: 62). Many *agberos* that I interviewed in Lagos became dependent on the patronage of NURTW elites, and did their bidding, as a way to alter their physical vulnerability and economic despair and enhance their social status. This supports Patrick Murphy’s (2003: 62) point that patronage networks furnishes youth with ‘a response to the political marginalisation and economic destitution enforced by the corrupt regimes of the nation-state.’

Pratten (2009) reached a similar conclusion in his study of the *agaba* youth gang in Nigeria’s southeastern. He notes that ‘the subjectivities of young, generally male gang members in Nigeria are fostered out of a generalised and profound sense of insecurity’ (ibid: 2). Mbembe (2004: 364) describes this as a radical, epistemological insecurity.¹⁰⁰ In Lagos, the menace of *agberos* in motorparks and bus stops is often cast in the light of a nationwide job crisis, where youth(men) with little or no opportunities view politicians and ‘big men’ as essentially a ‘meal ticket.’ As Maja-Pearce writes: ‘There [are] too many young men hanging around, waiting for some action. All you have to do is go and meet them and pay them and they will do what you want... you can’t blame the youths... they want to eat’ (cited in Animasaun, 2015). Maja-Pearce, however, overlooks the fact that youth (at least, the *agberos* that I encountered in Lagos) are not merely passive agents who things happen to, but active agents capable of manipulating just as they are of being manipulated. In short, *agberos* are tactical in the sense that they can *see* opportunities and seize them.

¹⁰⁰ This constitutes not only physical security, though that is primary, but also uncertainty in three fields: identity, authority and knowledge (see Pratten, 2009: 2-3).

For instance, a unit of *agberos* in Bolade bus stop in Oshodi boasted about how they would organize themselves and meet with local politicians to negotiate a deal – often involving ‘sorting out’ (eliminating) a rival. According to one *agbero* with multiple stiches on his forehead and a few missing teeth: ‘Sometimes if we suspect that the politician is worried about a rival, we go to meet him and ask him if he wants us to “sort that person out” or “shake him up a bit.” Then we negotiate pay and job done! If he is reluctant, we go to his rival and present him with the offer. If he accepts or ‘settles’ better, the first one is in our trouble net.’ In this respect, the relationship of (inter-) dependence between *agberos* and the NURTW is best understood in light of Anthony Giddens’ (1979) association of autonomy and dependence in his ‘dialectic of control,’ or J.-F. Bayart’s (1993) view that ‘subjection can constitute a form of action.’ These positions are laced by Foucault’s (1976: 81) decentered idea of power as ‘an action upon action,’ or ‘a way of acting upon one or more subjects who are themselves actors, for as long as they are capable of action.’ The marginality of youth as a social category therefore contributes to the dual character of its engagement in the making of patrimonial mode of governance – ‘at once innovative and creative and yet subject to co-option as clients by patrons’ (Pratten, 2006: 712).

4.3 The SAP and the Transformation of Youth Identity

As previously noted, under the SAP years of the 1980s, the real incomes of the Nigerian working class devalued so much that it became very difficult for salary earners and those on marginal and inelastic incomes to survive on their official earnings, forcing many hard-pressed civil servants into multiple survival tactics (see Chapter 3). Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1999) alluded to the contradictions of the market economy when they eloquently framed it as:

A world in which ends far outstrip means, in which the will to consume is not matched by the opportunity to earn, in which there is a high velocity of exchange and a relatively low volume of production. And yet, it is a world in which the possibility of rapid enrichment, of amassing a fortune

by largely invisible methods, is always palpably present (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 293).

Following an abrupt reversal in their living conditions, daily life for many Lagosians ‘became increasingly more precarious, until they approached the point where existence itself [is] impossible... Thrust back by poverty to the very brink of death, a whole class of men experienced, nakedly as it were, what need, hunger and labour are’ (Foucault, 1966: 284). With the dwindling economic and traditional support base occasioned by the SAP, youth in Nigeria were pushed to the limits of survival on the fringes (Jega, 2000), ‘finding vent in all kinds of social and political outcomes – both negative and positive, making the youth both victims and agents’ (Momoh, 2000: 181). The lack of social services, and the rising educational cost intensified by the withdrawal of the state from social provisioning, made it hard for many youth to attend, or remain in, school. The situation was compounded by the lack of jobs after graduation (Ya’u, 2000). Such disempowering conditions revived (colonial) views of the youth as ‘a smouldering fire ready to burn African urban areas’ (Bay, 2006: 10). Nigerian newspapers of the 1990s and early 2000s painted a picture of the moral panics about the youth predicament in that era. For example, in its piece entitled ‘Nigerian Youths: What Hopes, What Future?’ the *Post Express* of 1998 writes:

Formerly a vibrant force for positive social changes, today’s Nigerian youth has been clobbered by societal contradictions unto at best a supine state of schizophrenia and at worst unto a state of dare-devilry with increasing properties for anti-social activities... with its army of unemployed but qualified and able-bodied youth, Nigeria could be said to be sitting on a tinder-box (*Post Express*, 1998, cited in Beekers, 2008).

Comaroff and Comaroff (2006: 5) have argued that ‘with market fundamentalism’ comes a ‘gradual erasure of received lines between the informal and the illegal, regulation and irregularity, order and organised lawlessness.’ In Lagos, the SAP contributed to the institutionalisation of organised street gangs as a means for youth to cope with economic distress and exclusion, as well as a strategy to fight boredom

(Momoh, 1999). One of the results of the SAP was the effect it had on *area boys* – youth who identify themselves with the area in which they live and seek to control the flow of goods and services in that area to their benefit. Adisa (1994) identifies the crisis wrought by the SAP as pushing un(der)employed youthmen into criminal networks, thus deepening existing conditions of daily insecurity:

Illegal roadside markets have become fertile grounds for petty thieves, day light robbery and activity. Those youth who survive the period of apprenticeship provided by the streets normally graduate into *Area Boys*, they grow into jobless youths with a penchant for ‘living in the fast lane,’ aspiring to a lifestyle of wealth and flamboyance which makes them easy targets for employment in the network of drug merchants where money flows fast and easy (Adisa, 1994: 139-75).

Identities are said to undergo constant change, particularly in periods of great socio-economic flux (Mustapha, 2000: 86). As Nigerian historian Toyin Falola (1998: 45) argues with reference to the SAP, ‘since the 1980s, forms of identities have multiplied, consciousness has sharpened, and self-identification has begun to be taken more seriously than before.’ This rings true in the case of the changing identity of *area boys* in Lagos. To be called an *area boy* ‘used to be a thing of pride,’ as one Lagos resident told me. The notion of *area boys* had its origins in *omo eko* (‘child of Lagos’) or *omo area/omo adugbo* (a child of the community, locality or street). Thus, youth in Lagos were ordinarily identified with the streets where they lived and once you belong to a particular street, the youth of that street protects you from any abuse from youth from other streets (Omitoogun, 1994; Momoh, 1999).

Historically, an *area boy* was perceived as a form of identity and social control. As one of the key informants in Olawale Ismail’s (2009: 470) study noted, ‘back then, young people are known by two ways... their family name and their area. From your area, people will know the *area boy* group you belong to... so if you do anything bad like fight, steal or cause trouble somewhere, you are easily traced to your *area boy* group.’ Prominent figures in Lagos – such as Dr. Wahab Dosunmu (former Nigerian

Minister of Works and Housing), Bola A. Tinubu (former Governor of Lagos), and Prince Demola Adeniji Adele (former Chairman of Lagos Island Local Government) – all claim to have belonged at some point to *omo area* which they see as made up of ‘responsible, respectable and well-to-do’ (Momoh, 2000: 188) indigenes of Lagos Island. While this category is perceived as the ‘real’ *area boys*, ‘fake’ *area boys* are identified with the influx of post-SAP migrants that altered the respectability of *omo area* as a social category. This view emerged in an interview with Aderinsola Disu, Special Adviser to the former Lagos State Governor on Central Business District:

When we were much younger, *area boys* meant youth of the area. It was mainly to do with various pockets of youth in various locations, hanging out together, living life, and just generally been boys and girls. But gradually with urban migration, youth coming into Lagos from villages and the other areas around, the term now degenerated to include undescribed miscreants, confused young men and women, tax collectors, and political thugs.

According to Abubakar Momoh (2000: 188):

The transformation of the social identity of *omo area* into *area boys* has to do with changing economic conditions. But with this came the criminalization of identity: whether one was rich (and very few were) or poor, being *area boy* alone became an anathema because the reason for being an *area boy* was seen no longer in cultural terms but in economic and deviant senses.

The contemporary perception of *area boys* as deviant young men came out clearly in an interview with Pastor Badmus in Lagos:

Been called an *area boy* means you are an outcast, been called an *area boy* means that everybody looks at you with suspicion. Been called an *area boy* means that there is nothing you can’t do for a living. Been called an *area boy* means you can take advantage of anybody regardless of gender and class. Been called an *area boy* means that you’re generally rough and blamed for all sorts of crimes and misdemeanors within the society.

4.4 *Agberos* in relation to *Area Boys*: One and the Same?

While urban scholars have studied *area boys* and street violence in Lagos (Adisa, 1994; Omitoogun, 1994; Momoh, 1999, 2000), the related category of *agberos* has been surprisingly muted in these studies. This inattention is partly because *agberos*, as I mentioned earlier, are often conflated with *area boys* as if both categories were coterminous, reinforcing the widespread tendency to homogenise the youth discourse in (urban) Africa. The result is a heavily skewed and distorted notion of *agberos* that precludes the ability to properly diagnose and respond to their important role in the regulation of passenger transport. A major source of the confusion is the absence of interview data on *agberos* due largely to their dreaded status as ‘urban terrorists’ and a ‘no-go area’ for people in their right senses. Indeed, a major difficulty that I experienced while collecting data for this chapter was the paucity of good quality information on *agberos* and the internal, changing dynamics of the NURTW.

From my interviews, especially with veteran operators in Oshodi and Alimosho, I gathered that *agberos* unravelled during the socio-economic flux of the mid-1970s when the material (and spiritual) insecurities of the Nigerian urban and rural economies generated a range of practices for youth (especially boys) to get by in the blossoming informal sector.¹⁰¹ This ‘cohort of the dispossessed’ turned to passenger transport in droves – touting at motorparks and riding *okadas*. It is against this backdrop that the figure of *agbero* emerged as a mode of survival, a ‘trickster who survives and can “eat” without “handiwork”’ (Pratten, 2013: 246).

While the concept of *area boys* is closely associated with a particular area (*omo area* – child of the area), *agberos*, on the other hand, are identified with *omo garage* (child of the garage). This nomenclature marks out the operational base of the *agbero* – the

¹⁰¹ Commentators like Roy and Alsayyad (2004) and Jan Bremen (1999) have linked informality to processes of economic liberalisation and regimes of accumulation.

garage. According to a *danfo* driver in Ikotun, '*omo garage* is superior to *omo area*. To move from *omo area* to *omo garage* is to step up big time.' Yet, *agberos* may be said to have carved out their identity from *area boys* with a more established history dating back to the colonial period (Heap, 2010; Fourchard, 2006). Further, in contrast to *area boys*, *agberos* are embedded within the routine management of passenger transport under the aegis of the NURTW. Unlike *area boys* who are often perceived as deprived street urchins surviving on the margins of the informal economy (Heap, 2010; Momoh, 1999, 2000), 'real *agberos*' – by this, I mean those able to appropriate the NURTW's name to legitimise their extortionary activities – are perceived as moneyed (*olowo*) and powerful (*alagbara*), with strong 'connections' to '*ogas* at the top.' As one *danfo* driver said to me: 'Some of these *agberos* have been doing this work for over ten years now. They won't leave it because it is very lucrative. Where else in this Nigeria can you *chop* [eat] over N10,000 a day without really working?' Thus, unlike the marginalised and excluded *area boys*, *agberos* are, in actual fact, the 'included' youth who play a key role as conduits for the everyday extortion rackets of the NURTW. As one *danfo* driver in Oshodi said to me:

Agberos have mouth and money [*agberos* are connected and moneyed]. Put *agbero* in prison, and his *ogas* [big men] will bail him within 24 hours. Put *area boy* there, he will rot there. You will see police arrest *area boys* but hardly *agberos* because they are well connected. *Agberos* keep several wives, girlfriends, and eat and drink as if there is no tomorrow, and this is with the money of our sweat and blood. They are illiterates and dropouts who live better than many university graduates in Nigeria. And you wonder why many youth are trying to become *agberos*.

According to one *agbero* I spoke to in Oshodi:

We are not like *area boys* who are hungry people. They beg or steal money in addition to their *owo ita* [street money]. We are not like that at all. Let me tell you, we *agberos*, we work for our *ogas* [big men] in union and the APC (All Peoples Congress) and they feed us well. That is why anywhere they send us to, any job they ask us to do for them, we just go there and conquer for them. They treat us like human beings. They nourish their boys.'

The above statement reinforces recent works that have studied the informal economy as a terrain where power and political dynamics and forms of differentiation are at work (see Rizzo, 2011; Meagher, 2011; Lindell, 2010; Di Nunzio, 2012). In fact, my understanding during fieldwork was that to call an *agbero* an *area boy* was an insult because it implied that you were debasing them by implying that they are *talakas* – a term that describes ‘a person who holds no official position... a man in the street... a poor person’ (Bargery, 1984: 984). This perspective is reinforced by Louis Theroux’s gripping ‘Law and Disorder in Lagos’ BBC documentary. During his interview with the state treasurer for the NURTW, ‘MC Oluomo,’ Theroux noted that ‘the question of *area boys* seemed to be a little sensitive’ because it presupposed ‘youth waiting for work.’ MC Oluomo deprecated the labeling of his *agberos* as *area boys*, insisting that ‘we are not hooligans’ (Theroux, BBC, 2010). The question of *area boys* led him to exit the live interview (though he returned shortly after). While *area boys* sometimes extort monies from operators, this often happens when, in an attempt to avoid the traffic gridlock on the road, *danfo* drivers use alternative street routes. When this happens, boys from that area will block the streets with sticks that have open nails, and demand *owo ita* [street money]¹⁰² from the drivers.

Furthermore, many *agberos* made a distinction between themselves (*awa* – ‘we’) who represent the NURTW, and ‘other touts’ (*awon* – ‘they’) who collect tolls from operators pretending to represent the NURTW. The *agberos* I spoke to in Oshodi unit, for instance, saw themselves as the ‘official’ and ‘rightly connected’ *agberos* (in Yoruba, *awon to lenu nbe* – ‘those who have mouth/or a say’) because they work daily for the NURTW on a commission-only basis; the ‘others’ are renounced as ‘unofficial’ (*awon ti o lenu nbe* – ‘those who have no say’ or those of rival transport unions). These are seen as the ‘fake’ *agberos* who collect money from passengers by (ab)using the union’s name for ignoble ends. ‘These people are spoiling our name,’

¹⁰² *Owo ita* is not to be confused with *owo garage* (‘garage money’) collected by *agberos*.

said an *agbero* in Ikotun. During fieldwork in Lagos, many operators and commuters complained to me about the confusion between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ *agberos*. Drivers and their conductors bemoaned the fact that they ended up paying triple of the tolls that is imposed on them each day since each sets of *agberos* claim to belong to the NURTW and threaten to unleash violence if their demand for money is not immediately met. Reinforcing this point, a *danfo* driver in Oshodi said to me:

It is total confusion. You don’t know who is who. Everyone claims to represent the NURTW and threaten to unleash violence if you don't pay them. *Maybe it's a money-making strategy that they use to extort more money from us.* With this people anything can happen. I don't trust them from here to there. Some of them now wear uniforms but these are all packaged *agberos*. Lagos should be a place for well-behaved, civilized and educated people just like the civilized developed country like America and Britain. Then we can call it the ‘center of excellence.’ *Agberos* should find better things to do with their lives (my emphasis).

This confusion partly explains why ‘official’ NURTW *agberos* now wear a green and white uniform and carry a union identity card to ‘determine those who really “belongs”’ (Newell, 2006: 179) from fakes.¹⁰³ Many *agberos* that I spoke to were quick to claim legitimacy through the proud show of their union identity card. Key transport officials see those without uniforms and/or form of identity as ‘hoodlums’ who constitute a nuisance to the free-flow of traffic in Lagos. According to an official in the Ministry of Transport, ‘It is because the system has become so fluid that a lot of people have decided to take advantage of it. Some hoodlums have taken that opportunity to terrorize motorists, because nobody will ask them who they are.’ Morality here, to adapt Sasha Newell’s notion of ‘estranged belongings,’ is relative to social (union) belonging, and in this way, not all *agberos* are treated equally, for not all *agberos* are uniformly ‘estranged’ (Newell, 2008: 186-7). Thus, ‘the collective interpretation of a crime always depends on the... social networks to which both criminal and victim belong’ (ibid). The confusion between ‘real’ and ‘fake’ *agberos*

¹⁰³ *ThisDayLive*, ‘As Miscreants Reign Supreme in Lagos,’ 19 December 2010.

is not surprising when we consider that even within the NURTW, there are various rival fractions (each with their sets of *agberos* and chairmen) jostling for ascendancy and control of motor-parks (Albert, 2007). This confusion partly explains why many Lagosians tend to lump *all* transport workers as ‘criminals.’ Said a commuter:

They are all the same. They are looking for where they will get easy money. I don’t really care if they are drivers or conductors or touts. They are good for nothing hoodlums who reap where they have not sown.’

The above criminalisation of operators is not unique to Lagos, though I suspect it is more legible there. In Nairobi, Mutongi (2006: 549) argues that by the end of the 1990s, *matatu* operators were ‘typically viewed by commuters and, indeed, by Kenyans of all ranks, as political thugs who exploited and mistreated passengers and participated in gang or mafia-like violence.’ In his study of Dar es Saalam, Rizzo (2011: 1187) alludes to the ‘immutable discourse’ that ‘criminalizes the [*daladala*] workforce and attributes the many accidents and chronic tensions of the transport system to the hooliganism and greed of its workforce.’ Yet, in Lagos, many *danfo* operators and *okada* riders told me that violent extortion by *agberos* poses the biggest threat to their everyday survival – Is it not ironic that *danfo* drivers and conductors are often seen as criminals, but are actually daily victims of crime themselves?

4.5 Changing Perceptions of ‘Agberos’ in Lagos

From the outset, *agberos* assumed the self-imposed responsibility of recruiting and organizing passengers who wish to travel by road, and for this work they received a fee or commission, usually paid by the *danfo* drivers shortly before departure from the motorparks. In Yoruba, *agbero* means ‘caller of passengers.’ Similarly, the Igbo word for *agbero* is *och*o (‘procurer’) – a designation that captures the primary function of the *agbero*, while reflecting his poor public image as ‘a kind of pimp who makes a virtue of his open or disguised unemployment’ (Okpara, 1988). In the moral reckoning of honest labour, argues Pratten (2013: 247), ‘labour taxi driving is *real*

work, loading the vehicle is *agbero* work.’ To my question about how the activities of *agberos* affect his work, Feyi, a *danfo* driver in Ikotun, ‘corrected’ me: ‘Let me make something clear. *Agbero* is not work, it is stealing by force. Fashola is impotent because he *chops* [eats] the cake collected by *agberos*. They planted *agberos* on the roads to make our lives hell.’ Yet, during the course of my fieldwork, many *agberos* belaboured the fact that they are not ‘hoodlums’ but ‘loyal’ people doing all it takes to survive (like any other Lagosian) and getting a reward for their efforts.

The above account resonates with Alick Munzara’s (2014: 207) finding on the role of touts in the informal road transport of Zimbabwe’s city of Masvingo: ‘Most of the touts interviewed expressed disheartenment over the popular public perception that touts were a rowdy lot who survived through harassing and coercing passengers to board specific vehicles. Some of them indicated that they were respected members of society who were simply fending for their children through honest means (touting).’ *Ise wa lan se* (‘we are doing our work’) was a recurrent line during my interviews with *agberos*. This statement offers an insight into the Yoruba traditional idea of work and its costs as contained in the saying *e se nidi pepe a je nidi pepe* (Whoever works at the altar must eat there). In Yoruba tradition, a distinction is drawn between labour (*ise*) and its appropriation. The view is that those who appropriate labour do not work as hard as the labourer (Soyinka, 1965). This view is implied in the Yoruba proverb, *Osisewa l’orun, eni maaje wa ni iboji* (The worker is under the full heat of the sun but the one who benefits sits in a restful place).

Many *danfo* operators used the expression *monkey dey work, baboon dey chop* to describe their exploitative dealings with *agberos*. In this case, the ‘monkey’ is the driver or conductor who is perceived to labour for the money they earn each day; the ‘baboon’ is the *agbero* who reaps where they have not sown. Not surprising, many definitions of *agberos* stress their fluid role as ‘thugs, miscreants and extortionists’ (Pratten, 2013: 247). Because of their utilitarian value as political thugs during

election season, the widespread perception is that the Lagos authority often turns blind eyes to the ‘daily acts of suburban terrorism’ by *agberos* (Ngwodo, 2005). Newspapers in Nigeria tend to depict *agberos* as rascals located in transit spaces across Lagos, extorting and terrorising transporters. Describing the figure of the *agbero*, the *Vanguard* notes:

Their ages range between 20 and 50. They can easily be recognized by their gruffly voice, bloodshot eyes and sometimes incomplete set of teeth obviously lost in street brawls. At almost all the bus stops in the metropolis they could be seen racing after commuter buses that have just arrived or are about to leave. They normally charge at the *danfo* drivers or conductors and demand for money. Once the driver pays what is expected of him, the windscreen of his vehicle is marked with a felt pen of a certain colour. If the driver fails to comply either his side view mirror or his petrol tank cover is instantly grabbed and the tout melts into the crowd. Any *danfo* conductor who challenges a tout would surely receive some slaps sometimes in full view of the enforcement officers.¹⁰⁴

The above view of *agberos* is somewhat sweeping since it fails to account for the diversity among *agberos*. For example, my interview with Hakeem Ibikunle, a *danfo* driver and former *agbero* drew my attention to two kinds of *agberos*:

The one at the top they are somehow closer to the government. And the ones below they are the *eruku* – they are the ones dying for the ones up. The ones up they can travel abroad, have investment but the one dying for them they have but not much. They are very loyal to those at the top who reward them handsomely for their loyalty. The *erukus* aspire to rise through the ranks one day, to become patrons to other *erukus*.

The *erukus* are mainly recruited from among a large and ready pool of jobless *area boys* roaming the streets of Lagos, many of whom were born into abject poverty and live a life of utter desperation and organised street violence. Many *erukus* migrated to Lagos from neighboring states to ‘become somebody in life’; they are often ‘from

¹⁰⁴ *Vanguard* (2001). ‘Nigeria: Caught Between the Police and the Devil,’ 21 November.

“extended” families, with a mother in one place and a father in another’ (Kaplan, 1994). Many *erukus* are victims of what J.D. Vigil (2003), in his paper on ‘Urban Violence and Street Gangs,’ refers to as ‘multiple marginality’¹⁰⁵ – that is to say, they are ‘bereft of social control from families, schools, and law enforcement, which have all failed to maintain or even gain a guiding influence on their lives’ (Virgil, 2003: 230). In this respect, street socialization becomes crucial because some youth with particularly tarnished, traumatic family and personal backgrounds have had to spend most of their lives in the streets (ibid). To join the leading union, the NURTW, it is hardly enough to be unwaged and in the streets; you must also be feared in your street to stand any chance of been recruited into the union ranks. As one *danfo* driver in Oshodi said to me, ‘If you’re in your street or area and you can create a scene, cut somebody’s head, do whatever. They [NURTW] will find a garage for you as an *agbero*. You’re born to kill.’ Another *danfo* driver in Ikotun told me used to be an *agbero* until the day he witnessed another *agbero* detaching a person’s head with cutlass in a fight in Oshodi. According to him, ‘*Na dat day I run commot for agbero work*’ [that was the day I ran away from *agbero* work]. These accounts reinforce Virgil’s contention that ‘the streets have become the arena for what is learned and expected by others to gain recognition and approval’ (Virgil, 2003: 230). Following Virgil, therefore, it would appear that the kinds of youth recruited by the NURTW into the powerful ranks of *agberos* are those that have gone *loco* [the psychological state of quasi-controlled insanity] (Vigil, 2003: 230):

Theroux’s BBC documentary on ‘Law and Disorder in Lagos’ lends some support to Virgil’s statement. One of the *agberos* he spoke to claimed that ‘when you want to be an NURTW member, you have to control some part of your area. You have to be a tough guy. When you want to be a tough guy, you have to go through scarring things

¹⁰⁵ A complex problem such as urban gang violence necessitates examining many factors, such as neighborhood effects, poverty, culture conflict and sociocultural marginalization, and social control, among other gang dynamics (Vigil, 2003).

in your streets. You get caught several times in violence and life goes on after the wounds have healed' (Theroux, BBC, 2010). Thus, violence, along with its visible scars, are critical to the making of an *agbero*. Indeed, nearly all *agberos* that I spoke to in Oshodi and Ikotun had multiple scars/stiches on their faces from combat. Whenever I asked them how they sustained it, they simply say: 'It comes with the territory.' In fact, during fieldwork I got a sense, from interacting with *agberos* in Lagos, that the more visibly scary scars you have, the more respected (feared) you become among your peers and the operators, underscoring the power of visibility.

According to a Lagosian who lived through the SAP years, the act of extorting tolls from *danfo* operators was originally a survival strategy for youth who fled to Lagos because of their parent's inability to cater for their needs:

The boys who didn't have anywhere to go after coming to Lagos were forced to sleep in motor-parks, uncompleted buildings and under the bridges. The good ones survived by working as house helps, truck pushers and hawkers, while the criminal minded ones took to armed robbery and extortion from commercial drivers. Initially, *agberos* did not start collecting money by force. Then, what they did was to assist drivers to fill their vehicles with passengers after which they would take any amount the driver gave them.¹⁰⁶

This view was supported by another interview with a *danfo* driver in Ikotun who provided insights into the emergence and identity alteration of *agberos*:

Agberos were historically poor and hopeless people. They were the drivers who were once in business but suffered a misfortune maybe because their cars were destroyed in accident or because they lost their jobs due to their *jibiti* [dishonest and fraudulent behaviour]. And we their fellow drivers often helped them out of pity by asking them to load passengers for us so we can pay them a token. But over time, *agberos* have realized that they can make so much from the business and have organised themselves into a powerful union to now oppress us, to bite the fingers that once fed them. Nowadays, the table is turned on us. *Agberos* are now the rich ones with power and connections in high places. They are

¹⁰⁶ *9jabook*, 'Where Touting is Big Business: Get Rich or Die Trying.' 13 August 2009.

rich at our own expense. But from the start, *agberos* were the wretched ones, the unfortunate ones.

According to Omotunde, a long-time resident of Lagos, *agberos* morphed into a major problem in Lagos with the creation of the NURTW:

When the NURTW came into existence, *agberos*, who had hitherto been a set of docile and jobless individuals, adopted a new kind of independent aura of invincibility, and gradually became more of a nuisance to the transport industry. The NURTW came into existence in 1978. They are the creation of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in the south-west unity when the Party of Nigeria (UPN) was in control. The NPN wanted to wrestle power from the UPN at all costs and the late Chief MKO Abiola backed the NURTW by funding the newly formed union. Their entrance into unionism was marred in violence. They became the foot soldiers of the NPN, as they were well funded and encouraged to take over all existing unions.¹⁰⁷

Omotunde's statement corroborates Fourchard's (2010: 51) contention that the 'NURTW chairmen act as providers of thugs recruited among the union to assist the state governor during his electoral campaigns' in exchange for 'large autonomy for levying taxes in the motor parks of the state.'¹⁰⁸ Indeed, many Lagosians that I spoke to were convinced that the NURTW acts as a kind of support base for political parties during election. As such, the government is seen as lacking the required gravitas to regulate them. Lagos is not unusual in this respect. In his study of the 'politics of order and chaos' in the public transport of two East African cities – Kampala and Kigali – Tom Goodfellow (2015: 210) found that *bayayes* (*matatu* drivers, conductors, and touts) constituted 'both an important voting bloc and a potential source of violence [that] could be mobilised' by the respective unions whose relationship with politicians encompassed 'collusion alongside the threat of opposition if the state attempted to exert control over the industry.' In Lagos, however, the NURTW is more violent and politicized: 'union leaders are narrowly

¹⁰⁷ *Newswatch*, 'Agberos: Menace to Road Users?' 18 November 2013.

¹⁰⁸ During the run-up to the 2007 elections, for instance, the *Nigerian Tribune* described over forty street fights in Lagos in which *agberos* were involved as political thugs.

connected to state politicians and local government officials according to a deal that satisfy the main actors but which has nothing to do with the planning of the city or the transportation system' (Fourchard, 2010: 51).

Now, many commuters in Lagos perceive *agberos* as lazy and cursed people who exploit operators struggling to survive. Others perceive *agberos* as a product of elite corruption and youth un(der)employment in Lagos. Said a commuter in Ikotun: '*Agberos* are not all illiterate who did not attend school. Many of them have their primary and secondary education. Even graduates are among them. But the lack of jobs and the hardness of life have forced them into stealing. *Eni ebi pa ko gbo wasu* ["You don't preach to a hungry man"].' Further, some see *agberos* as desperate youth who can 'kill for money.' As Yusuf, a conductor in Oshodi, said to me, '*Agberos* can kill you because of N20 [\$0.1]. Most times, it is we who suffer most because we deal directly with them. *Agberos* have action I tell you. I don't hesitate. I just pay them and go my way to avoid their *wahala* [trouble].' In this context, fear becomes the reality of everyday life in passenger transport, 'the hidden state of (individual and social) emergency' (Green, 1995: 228) that is always factored into the daily choices of operators. Yusuf's statement is supported by a commuter in Ikotun who narrated his experience of the brutality of *agberos* against a conductor in Cele bus stop:

The other day, *agbero* beat one *danfo* driver to death at Cele. They pushed him down from the *danfo* and descended on him with sticks and heavy blows. This was because he refused to pay only N200 [\$1]. The policeman watched from a distance and did nothing. Absolutely nothing. After all, the *agberos* are their boys; they collect bribes on their behalf.

The police's role as a 'passive bystander' (Cohen, 2001) in the above atrocity is hardly surprising if we consider that *agberos* are regularly 'employed' (on a day-to-day basis) by members of the police and positioned at road junctions (perceived as lucrative spots) to extort illegal taxes from operators (*owo askari* – police money)

(Chapter 3).¹⁰⁹ The perception of *agberos* as intermediaries or ‘fixers’ emerged during an interview with a *danfo* driver in a motor-park in Oshodi:

Only God can remove touts from the roads. I tell you, only God. Even the *askari* cannot stop touts because they work for them. They are mutual friends for mutual benefits. In fact, many police hire their personal touts to collect money from us. So you see different kind of touts collecting money for different people. Some collect *Owo chairman* [‘Money for chairman’], others *Owo Kabiyesi* [‘Money for the King’], or *Owo askari* [‘Police money’]. Sometimes even police will fight themselves over specific junctions where they can position themselves, along with their touts. Junctions are the most lucrative spots because every vehicle passes through that place. The other day, one policeman open fire on another one because of this junction battle.

The economy of junction extortion supports Ismail’s point that ‘junctions represent parallel regimes of order existing alongside, in competition with or in collaboration with the state’ (2009: 478). It also corroborates Comaroff and Comaroff’s (2006: 5) point that ‘vastly lucrative returns inhere in actively sustaining zones of ambiguity between the presence and absence of the law: returns made from controlling uncertainty, terror, even life itself.’ Moreover, as argued in Chapter 3, the alliance between *agberos* and the police suggests that coalitions among state (formal) and non-state (informal) actors do, in fact, play a key role in shaping urban governance regimes. In Lagos, such coalitions emboldens the *agbero* to conduct his affairs with ‘no shaking’ (no fear) of the police who, in any case, are ‘in on the game.’¹¹⁰

To the extent that many *agberos* insisted that they are ‘staff’ of the NURTW, it behoves us to examine the activities of the union vis-a-vis *agberos*. Such inquiry can illuminate the acquired disposition or habitus of *agberos*; particularly how they are

¹⁰⁹ In the *matatu* industry in Nairobi, it is well documented that members of the police collude with the *Mungiki* – an organized criminal network – to extort taxes from *matatu* drivers.

¹¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, ‘“Everyone’s in on the Game”: Corruption and Human Rights Abuses by the Nigerian Police Force’ (HRW, New York, 2010).

inserted into violent networks of political patronage and the interplay of ‘force and violence’ (Mbembé, 2006: 300).

4.6 The National Union of Road Transport Workers

They can beat you, beat the conductor join, just for N50. They are not a union, they are a group. You can say they are a kind of gang, really.

- A *danfo* driver, on the question of how the NURTW operates

Extant literature documents how, through intensive protests and sustained strikes, trade union collective activities in many African states enabled the delegitimation and, at times, removal of authoritarian or corrupt regimes (Kraus, 2007; Saunders, 2007; Akwetey and Kraus, 2007). In Nigeria, the unions in the National Labour Congress (NLC) were key engines of protest against authoritarian rule and SAP policies in 1988-89 and, despite divisions, against IBB’s annulment of the June 1993 elections (Mustapha, 1999). The NLC also remained a constant thorn in the flesh of Abacha and his military tyranny (Kraus, 2007: 2). However, while scholars have studied the role played by trade unions in the intense political struggles that led to political liberalisation and democratic transitions in Africa (for instance, Kraus, 2007; Akwetey and Kraus, 2007), few studies have looked at the strategic roles that unions have played in the newly democratized political systems (i.e. weather they have been supporters and/or opponents, beneficiaries and/or victims, of the new political systems and economies). What we do know is that democratization has been accompanied, almost everywhere, by a sharp rise in crime and violence (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006). In this section, I attempt to fill this gap in knowledge with reference to the NURTW (Lagos Chapter).

The NURTW has its *fons et origo* in 1978 when it was established with the goal to ‘promote the economic welfare of its members’ (NURTW, 2015). As one of the 29 registered industrial unions, the NURTW came to being as an affiliate of the Central

Labour Organisation, the Nigerian Labour Congress, following the restructuring of industrial unions in the country by the Federal Military Government through Trade Union Decrees 21 and 22 of 15th August 1978 (now Act) and Trade Unions (Miscellaneous Provisions) Decree 17 of July 1986. The NURTW remains ‘the only organisation duly recognized to function as a Trade Union representing the interest of all workers who engage in road transport operations both in the public and private sectors of the economy’ (NURTW, 2015). As officially stated on its website, the NURTW mission is: ‘To be seen as the foremost transport union, organizing and unionizing workers in road transport, and regulating relations between workers and employers for just and proper work conditions, professionalism; and to foster solidarity, unity and progress among transport workers.’ All commercial drivers, except for Petroleum tanker drivers,¹¹¹ belong routinely to the NURTW.¹¹² This is in accordance with Article 5 of the NURTW’s Constitution, which clearly states that ‘any person who is engaged in the road transport services, or employed in the public transport companies for transportation of passengers and foodstuffs by road shall become a member of the Union upon organisation of such employees into the Union’ (NURTW, 2015). Since coming into existence in 1978, the NURTW has grown rapidly to 1.5 million members spread throughout Nigeria. Although admission into the NURTW is said to be ‘free,’ all admitted members must pay a monthly Elected Officers’ Dues (EOD), while commercial drivers operating from various motor parks across Nigeria pay their dues daily through the issuance of receipts printed by the Union. Election into various offices of the NURTW is conducted every four years.

¹¹¹ During fieldwork in Lagos, I watched *agberos* obstructing a Tanker driver delivering gasoline to an MTN communication station. The *agberos* demanded for money before the gasoline can be offloaded, even though the tanker driver claimed not to be a member of the NURTW.

¹¹² These include drivers operating taxi and bus town services/interstates, trailer and lorry drivers engaged in passenger and goods transport from Local Government-owned motor parks, Government and private (road) transport companies as well as *okadas* and tricycle (*keke napep*) operators.

The NURTW controls 1,240 motor parks and 225 town service parking spaces covering over 95 percent of all motor parks in the 774 LGAs of Nigeria. This is in addition to private, federal and state government transport companies and other designated loading points (NURTW, 2015). The union generates its funds through the dues it collects each day from transport operators through the *agberos*. True, the law establishing the NURTW assigned it the role of collection of check-off dues, such as deduction at source from the pay of each employee, with the employer's accounting office serving as collecting agent. These dues have now been multiplied by the NURTW in such a way that 'they are now used to oppress us,' as one *danfo* driver told me. The lucrative economy of motorpark rackets is responsible for the explosion of motor parks across Lagos. While it is difficult to estimate the number of vehicles plying Lagos roads, one veteran *danfo* driver in Oshodi claims that 'The union chairman for Lagos State pockets up to five million naira [\$31,250] daily from the different units under him.' However, the chairman does not 'pocket' all the funds but distributes them among other union executives, police inspectors (for protection when laws are trespassed and to prevent interference in the course of work), local council chairmen and party officials. I learnt that this system of distribution is in tune with the NURTW's guiding slogan 'Eat Alone, Die Alone.' In 'declaring surplus' (distributing the funds), as they say in Lagos, the union chairman secures his 'big man' status and power within the NURTW structure and the state political network.

During fieldwork, I gathered that *agberos* are responsible for collecting and making returns to their respective unit chairman who reports to the zonal chairman, who reports to the local chairman, who, in turn, reports to the state chairman, who is the direct link to the national chairman and along this chain, financial returns must be remitted daily (see also *Daily Times*, 2015). This arrangement mirrors Bahre's (2014) description of a 'trickle-up economics' in South Africa's taxi industry that 'relies on mutualities to allocate cash' to the state, to taxi association leaders, and to officers:

Over the past twenty years, the members of taxi associations have become a key economic resource for the state through taxes, licenses and fines; for law enforcement officers through bribes; for warlords through ‘membership fees’ and protection rackets; for banks through obligatory credits; for insurance companies through obligatory policies; and for car manufacturers and dealers through obligatory vehicle replacement (Bahre, 2014: 590).

In Alimosho, I learnt from a resident there that after the NURTW chieftains receive their daily returns from their *agberos*, the ritual is for them to throw a huge roadside party (*faji*) where no cost is spared and people in the neighborhood *chop awoof* (‘eat for free’). The wife of one of the NURTW unit chairmen owns the shop that supplies liquor and meat. Unit chairmen who fail to regularly throw *faji* are perceived as corrupt and self-centered, reinforcing D.J. Smith’s (2007) point that ‘ordinary citizens [in Nigeria] see their leaders as having forsaken the obligations of sharing associated with patron-clientism in favour of personal enrichment and unabashed venality.’ The ultimate reference for the actions of the chairmen is, of course, Eric Hobsbawm’s *Bandits* (2000), which argues that social bandits constitute a professional class implicated in actions and processes of economic redistribution as much as criminality. Perhaps, where my own views depart from that of Hobsbawm is in the attribution of philanthropic qualities to these acts and their relationship to social justice and rebellion (Hobsbawm, 2000: 18-19). While Robin Hood reportedly stole from the rich to give to the poor, *agberos* in Lagos are backed by their rich and influential superiors, and engage in extortion rackets as a way of *chopping* out of the ‘transport cake’ in circulation. These *agberos* are encouraged by the fact that most unit chairmen started out as *agberos* in one of the many motorparks in Lagos. To my question of why most *agberos* are so hostile, Boniface, a driver in Ikotun replied:

It is not about them, it is the chairman that protects them, so *they must show loyalty to him at all cost*. Even if you arrest the *agbero*, before you treat the wound they inflicted on you, they are back to their duty post at the bus stop, the NURTW unit chairman ensures they are freed. That is how the system works. They’re all like *mafias* (my emphasis).

The view that the NURTW serves no useful purpose other than exploit drivers, conductors and hapless passengers ‘day and night,’ is one that recurred *ad nauseam* throughout my interviews. In this regard, the statements of two *danfo* drivers, Ayeni and Akande, are instructive. According to Ayeni, who plies Ikorodu-Oshodi route, the NURTW is ‘useless to our everyday business.’ For Ayeni, NURTW leaders are only ‘concerned about collecting from us. We are their mobile bank account:’

The question is: what does the union stand for? What are they doing for their members and the society at large? When you look at it very well, you will see that the union does not cater for the interests of the commercial drivers whom they collect different dues from. Another bizarre thing is that majority of these people in the union are not drivers. They are merely political thugs foisted on the drivers by the political gladiators, making use of their services. They do this as a compensation for them due to the easy money obtainable from the transport industry. Looking at it critically, you will see that the union has so far contributed nothing to the infrastructural development of the Lagos motor parks and has not impacted the construction of roads in Lagos State. They cannot boast of a motor park that belongs to them. They are not responsible to the community. What can they then point out as their achievement, putting into consideration the huge amount of money being collected on a daily basis? The most annoying thing is that they believe that it is their right to collect money from us. Sometimes, you will see them beating conductors and drivers mercilessly. And if truth be told, it is our politicians that have empowered them to behave this way and that is the reason the issue of *agberos* will always be a part of Lagos.

Reacting to the violent extortion of *agberos* in Lagos, Akande, a *danfo* driver in Oshodi and a high school graduate, argued that the dues collected by *agberos* are ‘madness’ and constitutes a ‘failure on the part of the state government’:

Why are we paying the money demanded by *agberos*? What is it meant for? I mean for what purpose? Where is the money going? We are the ones doing the work and *agberos*, for doing nothing, forcefully collect money from us, using clubs and whips. Why should this be so in a lawful and civilized country? For me, I believe the activities of the *agberos* are a slap on the face of Governor Fashola of Lagos State whose efforts to turn Lagos into a mega city are lauded all over the country. Their activities are just madness, collecting tolls without accountability. That is the reason most of them married two to three wives, while we the drivers dare not do that. For

morning, afternoon, evening and night, there are different *agberos* collecting the dues. When you see them eat, you will know that if they are the ones doing the work, they will never eat in such a manner. You will see an *agbero* eating five pieces of goat meat worth N3000 [\$15] at once. Apart from this, they will give their girlfriends, lovers and wives extravagant feeding allowances on a daily basis. In some cases, you will see their wives queue up to collect their daily allowances from their hubbies at the motor parks. Is this not madness?

Akande's statement evokes De Boeck and Plissart's (2004: 242) description of an uncertain, predatory milieu, in which success is boldly displayed in 'lavish spending and excessive consumerism,' which *agberos* and their NURTW bosses have come to symbolize in Lagos. For instance, during fieldwork I observed that many senior *agberos*, along with their chairman, often have one or two gold teeth and wear expensive gold accessories (i.e. chains). Pointing to an *agbero* in Oshodi, one *danfo* driver said to me: 'that *agbero* get money no be small. That gold chain for him neck cost over N750,000. *Agberos* will go to *faji* [party] and spend N100,000 naira in one night. Can you imagine that in this our Lagos? God dey sha!'

4.6.1 Politicised and Violently Contested Spaces

Since the 1950s, local government councils in Nigeria are statutorily charged with the duty of establishing, maintaining and collecting rates at motorparks. During the Second Republic, however, the control and management of motor-parks, especially in Lagos, became a focal point of political antagonism when transport unions usurped their management. As Fourchard (2010) argues:

The politicization of the management of motor-parks started in Lagos as the capital was the place of two concurrent powers: the Federal government, the president Shehu Shagari, and his party, the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) on the one hand, and the governor of Lagos State, Lateef Jakande and the UPN on the other hand. NPN decided to enlist the support of members of a new union, the Nigerian Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) created a year before, in 1978 under the leadership of Adebayo Ogundare, known as Bayo Success who was giving the assignment of

winning all the motor parks in Lagos over the UPN. He did so in mobilizing his large clientele of drivers during the 1979 electoral campaign and in resorting to violence and killing of his potential opponents in most of motor parks in Lagos (Fourchard, 2010: 40-56).

Due to their close association with power and party politics in Lagos, there is a widespread perception among many operators that *agberos* are above the law. In fact, many believe that the total impunity enjoyed by *agberos* is related to the networks of patronage and protection between NURTW elites and the ruling political party – APC – in Lagos state. As one commuter in Ojuelegba claimed, ‘NURTW leaders wines and dines with the Governor. *Egbe ko no ni wan* [They all belong to same party].’ Since 1999 Lagos state governors have tended to give the NURTW leadership who have supported their political candidature the free hand ‘to do and undo’ within motor-parks across Lagos (Albert, 2007). In fact, during the 1980s NURTW played a key role in the Second Republic elections. This gave them huge power and immunity to run motor-parks in Lagos. NURTW members then created various unauthorized motor-parks across Lagos from where they extort levies from operators under duress (Fourchard, 2010).¹¹³ The NURTW’s shady autonomy is therefore protected by politics – some union groups are very loyal to the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), others to the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), or other fringe parties. In this environment, fights between rival union are the rule (Albert, 2007; Akinwotu, 2016). Given their lucrative and politicised nature, motor-parks across Lagos are arguably the unsafest and most fractionalized spaces in the megacity, and their control have become ‘a matter of life and death.’ As Albert asserts:

The huge revenue collected by NURTW leaders and the high social mobility this facilitates, explains why every member of the union aspires

¹¹³ A similar alliance was found in the taxi industry in South Africa where ‘the state cooperates with criminal taxi associations sometimes out of convenience, sometimes as part of corruption, and sometimes out of fear. Equally, businesses rely on violent association leaders. Banks, insurers, car manufacturers and car dealers cooperate with suspicious taxi association leaders in order to sell their products to the thousands of members they represent’ (Bahre, 2014: 590).

to become a chairman – whether at branch, city, state, zonal or national level. This partly explains why the members regularly engage one another in bloody skirmishes. It explains why NURTW members and members of other transport unions kill each other in defense of their position in most Nigerian cities (Albert, 2007: 134).

In 2008, Alhaji Saka Saula, Chairman of the NURTW (Lagos Chapter), was shot dead by masked gunmen outside his house in Iyana Ipaja. Saka Saula had taken over from Alhaji Baruwa who held two positions: the Ogun State Chairman and the South West Zonal Chairman. There were palpable divisions and dissensions on all fronts. The redeployment of Alhaji Baruwa from Lagos to Ekiti State seemed not to have gone down well with him and his loyalists. Notably, three of the people who opposed Alhaji Baruwa's candidature for the National President of the NURTW at the Jos 2007 quadrennial conference died mysteriously. All suspects accused in relation to Saka Saula's death were eventually released on grounds of 'insufficient' evidence.

In 2012, members of the NURTW (Lagos Chapter) clashed over the chairmanship of the Union. The clash culminated in the killing of popular businessman, Alhaji Ola Shehu Ekeniojuoti, by gunmen suspected to be loyal to one of the chairmanship candidates. The deceased brother, Abu Ekeniojuoti (aka ABU STAINLESS), was the former chairman of NURTW on Lagos Island and public supporter of the NURTW treasurer in Oshodi, Alhaji Musiliu Akinsanya, popularly known as 'MC Oluomo.' The violence broke out after the NURTW National President, Alhaji Nasiru Yasiu, had a closed door meeting with the five contestants at the Union's Abule-Egba office, with the outcome that the election would hold since the contestants could not present a consensus candidate. The followers of the ex-chairman, Alhaji Rafiu Olohunwa, were incensed with the outcome, as their expectation going into the meeting was that the NURTW President would endorse their candidate for the position (*Vanguard*, 2012). On September 30 2015, gunmen suspected to be members of a rival NURTW fraction killed one Olayinka Mamowora (aka Mamok), a close ally of MC Oluomo, the State Treasurer and Chairman of the NURTW (Oshodi Branch). Mamok was MC

Oluomo's point man and allegedly led the unnamed gang that killed Baba Esi, a popular *agbero* in Oshodi surrounds, in April 2015 (*Vanguard*, 2015).

In March 2015, Babajide Dosunmu, (aka 'Mandos'), NURTW Chairman for Yaba Unit and Vice Chairman for the Lagos Mainland NURTW Branch, was shot dead outside his house by gunmen. I had returned to Oxford after fieldwork when the news of Mandos' violent death reached me. To glean more information surrounding the killing, I called 'Egungun' (masquerade) over the phone, an *agbero* in Oshodi whom I had interviewed and who had described how he benefitted from the patronage of Mandos while he was still an *eruku*. Egungun told me that Mandos was killed by a rival NURTW gang in a bid to seize control of motor-parks in the Tarmac area in Oyingbo, which was controlled by Mandos. Although he declined to name the rival group, he insisted that 'we will revenge his death. That is sure thing. You just watch.' When the constant presence of lethal rival groups combines with losses of murdered patrons, existence conforms to what Zygmunt Bauman describes as the postmodern tactic for warding off death: 'daily life becomes a *perpetual dress rehearsal of death*. What is being rehearsed... is ephemerality and evanescence of things that humans may acquire and bonds that humans may weave' (Bauman, 1992: 186). Within this context, *agberos* and their patrons are left not with death, but with 'the end of living' (: 321) – death lived over and over again. No wonder, then, that 'anxieties about betrayal, loyalty, and envy should be high [in the union] and that trust becomes something to be carefully constructed and difficult to obtain' (Caldeira, 2006: 135-6).

My interactions with *danfo* drivers and conductors in Oshodi showed that one of the primary causes of fractionalization in the NURTW has to do with leadership tussle because of the 'winner-takes-all syndrome' and the 'sit-tight-mentality' which contradicts NURTW's constitutional provisions. I found that election, as a democratic tool of regime change, was hardly used by the NURTW chapter. Frequently, it was the more militant group that seized control according to an underlying principle of

might is right. Furthermore, I found that the leadership tenure as contained in the NURTW was not adhered to, resulting in recurrent forceful takeover of motor-parks and bloody clashes between NURTW factions at various motor-parks across Lagos. In early 2015, while I was finalizing my fieldwork, a renewed clash between factions of the union in Oshodi left several dead or critically injured. The fight was reported as a ‘spillover’ from a previous ‘supremacy fight over control of parks in Oshodi by NURTW members’ (*Vanguard*, 2015). Since the majority of motor-parks in Lagos do not have defined boundaries, the presence of hoodlums and *paraga* sellers in and around motor-parks often accentuates violence. Indeed, many motor-parks are hiding spaces for drug dealers and hardened criminals. From my interactions with operators, I gathered that three major kinds of hard drugs are easily accessible at these motor-parks: *paraga*, *kukuye* (locally prepared hard drugs), and *gbanna* (marijuana). Operators and unionists hooked to any of these hard drugs misbehave at motor-parks. It is no surprise, then, that many detained criminals interviewed on Lagos TV by the police claim to have began their ‘careers’ in motor-parks, bus stops and junctions.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with the changing role of *agberos* in Lagos, who, despite their obvious significance, are often muted in studies of urban transport. In mapping the changing role of *agberos* in urban public transport, the chapter sheds light on how *agberos* have established collective fear among operators and road users as a tactics of spatial regulation and extortion. The analysis extended to the influential role of the politicised and violent NURTW in legitimising the daily extortionary practices of *agberos* across Lagos. This suggests that youth’s complex journeys in and out of violence do not necessarily take place in a vacuum but are closely linked to broader structures and actions. Thus, the multiplex relations between *agberos* and the union underlines the growing militarization of patronage networks that has become endemic to the African postcolony, especially the Nigerian state itself. It further suggests that a

grounded understanding of corruption must attend to the routine instantiation of patronage as they occur within networks of violence and interpersonal association. Besides, by clarifying their emergence and changing role, this chapter disaggregated the time of *agberos* from that of *area boys*, challenging the processes through which youth categories are homogenized, absorbing and erasing all (historical) differences.

While violence in transport, ‘like fire, can flare up suddenly and burn you,’ I was regularly struck by the fact that through repetitiveness and familiarity, operators and commuters have learned to adapt themselves to terror and fear (Green, 1995: 109). Thus, fear has become a routinised reality in everyday life. By way of an example, I recall an experience¹¹⁴ during fieldwork in Oshodi. I was sitting at the back of a *danfo* in a busy motorpark when a fight broke out between an *agbero* and our conductor over *owo load* (‘loading fee’). The conductor refused to pay because, as he claims, he had only just resumed work for the day. A group of *agberos* quickly arrived at the scene with one of them breaking a beer bottle on the floor and stabbing the conductor in his left hand. The violent scene unnerved me and I made for the exit. But the passenger sitting next to me, a woman with a baby fastened on her back, refused to make way and imperturbably said: ‘Mr. Man *abeg* [please] cool your temper. Are you “JJC” [new to Lagos]? When they finish killing themselves, they will take us where we are going.’ At this point, I looked around and, to my embarrassment, realised that I was the only passenger who seemed openly anxious to exit. A veneer of normality seemed to mask the violence that was taking place just outside the *danfo*. Far from implying conformity to the status quo, the ‘routinisation of terror’ (Green, 1996: 108) here allows people to ‘carry on’ in a state of fear with a façade of normalcy, while that terror, at the same time, permeates and shreds the social fabric of everyday life.

¹¹⁴ In concluding this chapter, I have chosen to include an example of my own experience of fear during my field research rather than stand apart as an outsider, a *flaneur*, for two reasons. First, it was and is impossible to stand apart. Understanding the daily experiences of *danfo* operators and *agberos* involves ‘a journey into the state of fear in which terror reigned’ and that would shape the very nature of my interactions and relationships. Second, it was from these shared experiences that I forged ‘common grounds of understanding and respect’ (see Green, 1996: 230).

In the next chapter, I delve into the changing geographies of risk and uncertainty with regards to the negotiations of access to public space for urban livelihoods in a Lagos context where paratransit operators (like *okada* riders) dominate. The notion of risk in this chapter denotes the question of access rights, and thus to ‘social space’ which is produced through the associations and actors claiming space (Hackenbroch, 2013).

The Paradox of Effective Urban Governance

I would like to appeal to the Lagos State Government to lift the restriction on some of these routes to make life easy for both the *okada* riders and the residents of those areas who depend on *okada* as a means of transportation. Some of the people riding these *okadas* are graduates from various universities who took to riding *okada* due to the acute unemployment [and underemployment] in the country.

- Tajudeen Agbede, NURTW Chairman (Lagos Chapter)
Punch, July 13 2015.

NURTW Chairman for Lagos, Tajudeen Agbede, made this appeal to the Lagos State Government to review its restriction on *okada*¹¹⁵ (commercial motorbike taxis) from plying 475 major routes across Lagos (Lagos State Road Traffic Law [henceforth ‘the law’], Schedule II, 2012).¹¹⁶ The law was enacted in 2012 by the former Lagos State Governor, Babatunde R. Fashola, to protect lives and properties and, ultimately, to ‘restore sanity’ to Lagos roads.¹¹⁷ The government went further to produce a film documentary entitled *Aye Olokada* (‘Life of an *okada* rider’) aimed at educating Lagosians about the danger posed by *okada* riders to road users and discouraging millions from using *okada* as a means of passenger transport. At issue here is not

¹¹⁵ *Okada*, a name for commercial motorbike taxis in Nigeria, derives from a private airline in Nigeria (now defunct), which was established by a successful businessman, Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, and named after his hometown, *Okada*, in Edo State (Beekers, 2008: 65). Commercial motorcyclists in Nigeria are referred to as *okadamen*. I sometimes refer to them in this chapter as simply riders.

¹¹⁶ Prohibited routes listed in Schedule II (see Appendix) include Lagos-Ibadan expressway, Apapa-Oshodi expressway, Ikorodu Road, Agege Motor Road, Funsho Williams Avenue, Eko Bridge, Carter Bridge, Third Mainland Bridge, Lagos-Badagary Expressway, Alfred Rewane to Falomo Bridge, Eti Osa-Lekki-Ekpe Expressway, etc. (Lagos State Road Traffic Law, Schedule II, 2012: 4).

¹¹⁷ Such rationale reinforces existing normative attempts to address the problem of car cultures in terms of restitution of ‘public goods’ that have been eroded by contemporary automobile and road systems.

simply the future of *okadas*, but the future of the entire ‘*okada* culture’ in Lagos. As a vital aspect of mobility in Lagos, *okada* riding is embedded in *affective* ways of existence and support networks that builds the *infrastructure* of Lagos – ‘a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city’ (Simone, 2004: 407-8). In *The Creative City*, Landry and Biachini (1995: 17) argue that the most creative approaches to city planning recognize and value the subjective and the unquantifiable: ‘memory, emotions, passions, senses, desires, all of which engender motivations and loyalties.’

This chapter is the first attempt to critically examine the deep politics surrounding the controversial enactment of the road traffic law and, particularly, its ramifications for poor *okada* riders eking out a living in Lagos’ ‘informal’ sector. The analysis extends to popular resistance to the law from a set of *okada* riders belonging to the Incorporated Trustees of All Nigerians Autobike Commercial Owners and Workers Association of Nigeria (ANACOWA). Along the way, I engage with the violent and venal way in which the law has been enforced by the police and other officers of authority, as well as the extent to which the restriction of *okadas* can be said to constitute a violation of their human and constitutional rights as Nigerian citizens and Lagos residents. In short, the chapter addresses the pertinent question: Can we conceivably have ‘better’ urban governance and more violent extortion?

The chapter draws broadly on the legal case (Suit No. ID/713M.2012) filed by ANACOWA against the Lagos State Government over the restriction of its poor members from plying major routes in Lagos (detailed in Schedule II of the law). In analysing this dispute, I follow J. L. Comaroff and Simon Roberts’ insight that the ‘dispute process may provide an essential key to the disclosure of the socio-cultural order at large’ (1981: 249). In this sense, I agree with Pat Caplan (1995) that disputes are not only about material goods and the right to make decisions, but also about configuring social relations and reflecting ‘contested meanings and conflicting interpretations’ (Roy, 2013: 3). The evidence and argumentation presented in this

chapter derives from poring through numerous pages of court records (i.e. originating summons, affidavits, counter-affidavits, and exhibits) obtained from multiple local sources: the Lagos State High Court in the Ikeja Judicial Division, Bamidele Aturu and Co. (legal counsel of ANACOWA) and Simon Coopers Partners (legal counsel of the Lagos State Government). Obtaining access to court records proved a complex, lengthy and rather expensive process, partly because gatekeepers at various levels control access and regularly demand ‘settlements,’ from the Ministry of Justice to individual court staff each of which can restrict access for various reasons. Other sources, such as press materials and interviews with riders, transport union officials, and legal representatives, helped to supplement and cross-validate my primary data. Further insights came from attending union meetings in Oshodi and Alimosho. I used *okadas* as a means of transport myself and took the opportunity to ask questions during the eventful ride. This ‘go along’ research method afforded the opportunity to combine participant observation and interviewing, key to gaining access to some of the ‘transcendental and reflexive aspects of lived experiences *in situ*’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 456). Lastly, I spent most of my time at various *okada* stands across Lagos, talking to poor riders about their everyday challenges in the business.

5.1 The Emergence of *Okada*

Okada riding remains one of the most popular means of survival for young men across Nigeria. Cities like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, and Jos are bursting with youth carrying commuters on their *okadas* and adroitly navigating the usual ‘go-slow’ and unpaved roads. For many of these cohorts, *okada* riding ‘puts food on my table and change in my pocket,’ as one rider told me in Oshodi. Beyond survival, young men are drawn to *okada* riding because it affords a degree of control and personal freedom, especially from owners who ‘look down’ on them. Such self-determination animates – at least discursively – the rider’s decision to enter and remain in a self-help business like *okada* riding. As one rider in Ikotun said to me: ‘I dey inside this

okada work because I be boss, my own boss.’ This need for self-determination, recognition, respectability, and representation (see Standing, 2014), is one that is muted in many analyses of Africa’s informal workers, which pivot, rather narrowly, on economic survival and the politics of vulnerability in labour relations (e.g., Rizzo, 2011; Goodfellow, 2012; Megaher, 2005). With relatively low start-up capital and maintenance costs, the *okada* business signal ‘the intersection of youth social agency, responses to unemployment, and social transformation (Ismail, 2016: 143).

During my fieldwork, I conducted a non-systematically administered survey of 200 *okada* riders in both Oshodi and Alimosho LGAs.¹¹⁸ The results showed that 85 per cent of riders fall between 18 and 30 age bracket, and only 44 per cent had undergone any type of formal education. Commuters who used *okada* for their daily mobility (i.e. for going to work or running errands) do so because they are ‘fast’ and ‘easily accessible.’ However, most commuters reported that they dislike *okadas* because they are ‘unsafe’ (67 per cent) and ‘costly’ (43 per cent). Nearly all commuters accused *okada* riders of been extremely rude, inclined to violence, law breaking, criminally-minded, and ‘no-gooders.’ As a commuter in Oshodi complained to me: ‘These *okadamen* you see, they are all criminals. They are always smelly, violent, and womanizers. They speed as if there is no tomorrow. When you utter a word, they insult you and all your family and ancestors.’ Despite these sentiments, a good number of Lagosians opted for *okadas* over other mode of transport, even when many have been involved in *okada* accident in the past or know people who have fallen victims. These commuters insisted that *okadas* remain the most efficient way to navigate the extreme traffic gridlock and bad roads in Lagos. Said a commuter in Oshodi: ‘When you’re involved in an *okada* accident, the fastest means to get to hospital is *okada*. *Okada* has taken and saved many lives. They are a contradiction. *Okada* no get enemy.’ One commuter in Ikotun, however, made a curious

¹¹⁸ The survey was administered in November 2014. In Oshodi, the survey was carried out around Bolade Bus Stop and under-bridge. In Alimosho, the survey was carried out around Ikotun Roundabout and Ile-Iwe Bus Stop.

observation: ‘Tarred roads are not the best for these *okadamen* because it incites them to speed like crazy and the accident is usually ghastly. It is better if the road is potholed, bad and muddy. In that way, they are forced to slow down.’



Figure 14. “Arrested okada rider on Macauley way.”

Here, it is worth noting that Lagos is not an exception when it comes to *okadas* and widespread concerns over public safety. In Nairobi, although the state government continues to offer tax waivers on imported motorcycles, it has promulgated a law that bans their usage in certain urban areas. In Yaoundé, apart from banning motorcycle (*bedskin*) in the national capital, official registration is now required of *bedskins* and their riders must, by law, have a license, insurance, and a crash helmet. In addition, the use of reflective jackets by both the rider and the passenger(s) is mandatory. In Ouagadougou, special bus-lanes have been dedicated for *boda-bodas*. In Accra, the government, following in the footsteps of Lagos, has enacted the ‘LI 2180’ to ban *okada* riders from operating in the city (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2015: 29).

The emergence of *okada* riding in Nigeria in the late 1980s was largely a result of the adverse effects of the SAP and the accompanying devaluation of the currency and liberalisation of import controls, which permitted a massive importation of *okadas* and secondhand cars or *tokumbos* (Chapter 3). In Lagos, this boosted the commercial transport business by making more vehicles available to commuters (Olukoju, 2003: 229). The devaluation of the real incomes of the working class under SAP made it virtually impossible for most salary and wage earners and those on marginal and inelastic incomes to survive on their real earnings (Mustapha, 1992). Indeed, for many Lagosians, ‘life and death ended up fitting exactly one against the other, surface to surface, immobilized and as it were reinforced by their reciprocal antagonism’ (Foucault 1970: 260-1, as cited in Mbembé, 2001: 246).

Reduced to ‘bare life’¹¹⁹ by the SAP, Lagos *youthmen* turned to *okada* as a means of making do by carrying passengers on very bad and congested roads, thus creating new youth enclaves in urban neighborhoods. Since *okada* riders could weave adroitly through extreme traffic and take Lagosians to their destinations in good time, they became popular mode of transport in the city. Thus, *okada* has been represented in the literature as a business strategy that exploits an unmet need, tapping a revenue stream that had not existed previously for appropriate and timely transport (Ismail, 2016: 148). As an important entrepreneurial marker, *okada* provides new identity status and opens up new social networks. There are over 200,000 *okada* riders in Lagos, providing jobs to over 500,000 youth as riders, renters, mechanics, and spare-parts dealers (Ismail, 2014; Kumar, 2011). In Lagos, taxes by *okadas* constitute a key source of revenue for the state (Fourchard, 2010). Although no figure is available, it is hard to suggest otherwise, since *okadas* are seen in every street and roads in Lagos. Similarly, in Freetown, *okada* provides jobs for over 200,000 youth (Burge, 2011),

¹¹⁹ Understood here as the narrowing of everyday life conditions to a minimal domain of safety or efficacy (Simone, 2010: 225).

with the Bike Riders Union (BRU) of Sierra Leone contributing around \$22.2m in official taxes to the government's income on an annual basis (Ismail, 2016: 147).

5.2 Why Youth become *Okada* Riders

Many *okadamen* that I interviewed during fieldwork adduced various reasons for joining the business, including lack of jobs, desire to achieve a personal ambition (i.e. to further their studies), dream of getting married and keeping a family, or the immediate need to simply *chop*. Many *okada* riders referred to some difficult experience that compelled them to try their hand in *okada* as a *pro tem* survival strategy. A common expression used by riders in Lagos was 'Na condition make crayfish bend' which implies that it was very poor conditions (i.e. the need to eat or realise a dream) that compelled them to join the business. For these riders, their turn to the *okada* business was a means to a 'desired' or 'better' end rather than an end in itself. A large number of *okada* riders are unemployed graduates, as the opening quote suggests (*Punch*, 2013). Tayo, a 28-year old rider plying Ile-Iwe-Ikotun routes, reflects on why he became an *okada* rider:

I am a graduate of public administration in AAU [Ambrose Ali University]. I graduated with a second class. When I finished my studies, I did the NYSC [National Youth Service] for one year. But I did not get a job after. For two years I searched and searched but nothing was forthcoming. Most of the money that I saved from my *alawi* [a stipend paid by the government during the compulsory one-year youth service programme] was spent in applying for jobs. I made it to several interviews but I was rejected. My friend, we both know that in Nigeria it is all about *long legs* (connections) and whom you know. *If you don't know any Big Man in high places, it is almost impossible to get a job.* I saw candidates who had third class or even a pass. They were taken ahead of me because they had connections. Me I don't know anyone except God. Sometimes, I was told to bring N50,000 or N25,000 to 'settle' those who will review my job application. But these were all '419' fraudsters. My money was eaten and there was no job. Seeing my plight, my mother took out a loan from the cooperatives, which I then used to purchase this *okada* to put food on the table for myself and daughter. I feel like I wasted my time and funds in the university because now I can't use my certificate to eat and thank my poor mother who worked hard to train me. I feel like the system has failed me and I am really sad. But since

stealing is not an option for me, I have to continue in this *okada* to survive. My wife used to assist me with some cash from her hair making business. But she died last year from appendix, which burst in her stomach because we did not have money to take her to the hospital on time for operation. Now I am alone. Life is really hard but I have to be strong, at least for my little daughter and my mother.

Tayo's case mirrors the harsh realities facing many young men in Lagos, forcing many to turn to the informal sector *en masse* in search of all kinds of survival jobs. Consider the case of Akeem, a 30-year old rider, who migrated to Lagos from Osun in search of 'greener pastures.' Akeem described how his father sold his only plot of land to a wood factory in order to raise capital, which he used to buy an *okada* on 'hire purchase' (Chapter 3) His hope is that he will raise money through *okada* to acquire a polytechnic qualification:

I have always wanted to be a graduate, to be a mechanical engineer. I desire it a lot. It is my passion. But my family is very poor. My dad is a farmer and my mum sells *okrika* (second-hand clothes). My parents could not afford to send me to university. We are five in my family. I'm the last-born and the only boy. My parents could only manage to send me to a public secondary school. In fact, my elder sisters had to sell *moi moi* (bean cake) on the streets so that I could raise the money for my secondary education. One of them was even forced to get married to a man she did not like all to raise money. None of my sisters went to school as my parents felt they were girls and it was a waste of time. I came to Lagos and took this *okada* business because I wanted to save some money. It's not easy because union like to oppress us but I'm coping by God's grace. Lagos is tough place. All man for himself!

Another *okadaman* in Oshodi, Akangbe, explained why he joined the business:

I became an *okadaman* to raise money to get married so that I can be become somebody, a respectable person. I will be 45 this year and I'm still not married and without children. Most people mock me and call me a boy because I can't take care of a family. So I took up *okada* business to raise money in order to marry a wife, to feel good about myself again. You know it is not easy to marry wives these days. The family of the woman wants so much and the list of things you have to buy is a lot for a poor man like me. My girlfriend left me last year for another man because he had more money to throw around and the family of the girl encouraged her to leave me, even though we have been together for five years. I know she likes me more, but

she was under pressure. Nowadays, girls their eyes are open, they like money and will go for comfort than love.

In Nigeria, most graduate jobs offer meager salaries that are barely enough for basic survival. It is not unusual for a university graduate to earn a monthly salary of N15,000 (\$75), out of which he devotes N10,000 (\$70) for the exorbitant and unpredictable cost of public transport. However, many graduates still accept such jobs partly to avoid the ‘stigma’ associated with idleness. As one graduate told me, ‘I needed to get out of the house and search for some job, any job. An idle mind is the devil’s workshop.’ For such poorly paid graduates, a worthless job does not exist. People are hardworking. To ensure their daily bread and avoid a life of shame, they would do anything (Mbembé, 2001: 157; Trefon, 2002: 487).

5.3 The Janus-Faced Nature of Unions

A larger literature on criminal and violent organisations has established that their operations are janus-faced (Arias, 2006; Gambetta, 1993; Varese, 2001; Volkov, 2002), serving as ‘agents of order’ and ‘primary perpetrators of violence’ (LeBas, 2013: 243). The case of Lagos is instructive. *Okada* riders are required to register their *okadas* with the leading union (NURTW), obtain a riders’ card, and join one of the nine *okada* associations, including ANACOWA, Articulate Motorcyclists Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria (AMORAN), Motorcycle and Tricycle Operators Association of Nigeria (MOTOAN), and Motorcycle Association of Lagos State (MOALS). Failure to register with the union attracts heavy sanctions, including fines or the impounding of *okadas* by *agberos* who act as union ticket officials. As in Lagos, in Johannesburg, ‘it is impossible to run a taxi without being a member of an association. The so-called “pirates” who try to do so risk being killed. The taxi associations have become aggressive protection rackets mobilised by profit at the expense of drivers and owners’ (Bahre, 2014: 590).

Okada associations in Lagos are well organized. The leading union – the NURTW – is organized according to neighborhood units, local branches, state offices and the national office (see Beekers, 2008). In addition to the daily fees for local government taxes – ‘tickets’ – all *okada* riders in Lagos are required to pay a one-time union membership fee. Ticket collections are a major source of revenue for the unionists who purchase them in bulk from the local government and sell them to riders at inflated prices. As one rider in Ikotun decried:

Every morning we have to pay ticket money to union. *On the ticket is written N100, but we pay N1,000. If you argue, they descend on you with blows, impound your okada and your day is over.* Some of the unionists carry *juju* [charms] in form of a ring [*oruka*] which they wear on their hands, which they can use to hit you into coma. So we don’t waste time arguing with them. We give them what they ask and get on with work. What can we do? (my emphasis).

Some *okada* riders in Oshodi and Isolo shared stories of how ticket disputes (over inflated fees) have resulted in the death of, or serious injuries to, fellow riders.¹²⁰ Despite cases of violent extortion by ticket officials, membership in *okada* unions provide a supportive network of ‘solidarity,’ ‘accumulation’ and ‘survival’ (Meagher, 2010: 127), a means through which the daily interest of riders are protected within Nigeria’s patrimonial environment. Participants in these associations sometimes use them as ‘a framework to back up and provide a kind of moral security to a wide range of experimental economic ventures’ (Simone, 2010: 219). At the neighbourhood units, members of *okada* associations form close-knit groups with a strong sense of collective identity and group solidarity. This is evident in the descriptions that many *okada* riders provided of their associations as ‘extended families’ in which members provided each other with unreserved support. Members of these associations render financial support to needy riders by keeping a common savings purse (*ajo*) that is

¹²⁰ Such conducts on the part of union ticket officials were, however, condemned by a chairman of AMORAN, Alhaji Nurudeen Jimoh, who stated that, ‘The standing order for our officials is to avoid any argument that can lead to fight between them and *okada* riders. How could an argument over ticket degenerate into killing? That is a clear violation of our mode of operation.’

allocated to members ‘turn-by-turn’ or based on emergency needs (including paying hospital bills of sick members or accident victims, contributing to the marriage expenses of their members, and offsetting the burial costs of deceased riders). Such ‘conviviality’ (Nyamnjoh, 2015), which I return to in Chapter 6, is fostered by the dynamics of mutual need and the prospect of mutual gain. Indeed, the embodied, affective relations and sense of solidarity among riders is expressed in slogans like ‘Marry One, Marry All, Mourn One, Mourn All.’ Such popular slogans both draw on, and reinforce, the traditional Yoruba worldview that frowns upon working exclusively for one’s own profit (‘chop alone, die alone’) (Peace, 1988). It also resonates with the African *Ubuntu* philosophy, which communicates a basic respect, empathy and compassion for others (‘I am because we are’). Given the uncertainty of everyday life in Lagos (Chapter 3), and the entrenched patron-client system (Chapter 2), any rider will think twice before rejecting union support, which he is sure to need one day. Olivier de Sardan (1999: 41) puts it well, ‘Woe betide the man who knows no one, either directly or indirectly.’ The point here is that riders are not some ‘atomized individuals with similar positions brought together through space’ (‘passive network’). Rather, they represent ‘individuals with similar positions brought together by a deliberate attempt’ (‘active network’) (A. Bayat, 1997: 65).

Beyond financial support, members of *okada* associations also display a strong sense of loyalty. This is evident, for instance, in the swift mobilisation of riders when any of them gets into trouble with the authority. At the executive level, *okada* associations provide strong institutional support for members. Unions are closely aligned with partisan politics and are powerful players in the national political arena (Chapter 4). In fact, as earlier argued, the relationship between NURTW chairmen and Lagos governors are shaped by a set of contractual client/patron transactions. Beekers and Van Gool (2012) argue that union officials tendentially ‘settle’ police to protect their members from extortion rackets. Yet, during my fieldwork, many riders complained about union officials who usually connive with members of the police to

extort money from them on a daily basis. In Oshodi, however, riders lauded the role of their unions in leading protests against the state over their ‘ban,’ interpreted by one rider in Oshodi as an ‘insensitive law that compels us to take up guns and rob to eat.’

This aside, *okada* associations also serve as a primary source of patronage for their group members, reinforcing Meagher’s (2010: 127) point that ‘the dynamics of networks of accumulation depend on linkages to resources and influence in the wider society.’ For instance, a sizeable number of *okadamen* obtained their *okadas* from senior union leaders on ‘hire purchase’ (Chapter 3), repaying their debt in weekly installments. Through interviews, I gathered that some *okada* riders received their *okadas* from local politicians, in return for show of support during elections¹²¹ or for acting as political thugs against rivals. Such practice is, of course, entrenched in Nigerian electoral politics. D.J. Smith (2007: 198), for example, describes how former governor of Abia State (1999-2007), Orji Uzo Kalu ‘garnered significant urban support (and recruited a small army of potential thugs) by pledging and then creating a program to provide riders with new *okadas* on credit.’ Among the riders that I spoke to, there was a perception that they were ‘used and dumped’ by Fashola and his All Progressives Congress (APC) party. During the mass protest against the enactment of the law by *okada* riders in Lagos, for example, one *okada* protest banner boldly displayed: ‘Fashola distributed helmets in 2011. NOW destroying OUR bikes.’ The import of this banner comes out in an interview with Dr. Fredrick Fasheun, National Chairman of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN):

Lagos citizens must remember that this [All Progressives] party used and dumped commercial motorcycle operators popularly known as *okada* riders after harnessing their support and services in the elections of 1999, 2003, 2007 and 2011. During campaigns for those polls, APC politicians even donated to *okada* riders branded helmets, motorcycles and reflective

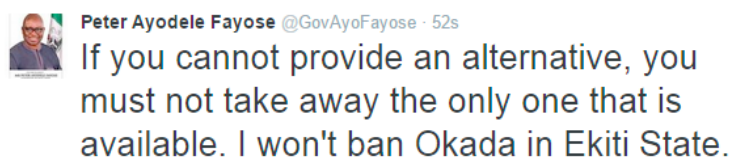
¹²¹ This view emerged during my fieldwork, which took place at a time when Nigeria was preparing for its general elections and the so-called ‘stomach infrastructure’ among local politicians was making headlines almost on a daily basis.

jackets. But no sooner did the Action Congress of Nigeria (now a part of the APC) come into power than they turned around to bite the finger that fed them, by banning *okada* all over Lagos State (Ezeamalu, *Premium Times*, 2014).

Furthermore, in the build up to the 2015 general elections, the enforcement of the law was appreciably relaxed as a tactics to secure the votes of *okada* riders. In so doing, politicians *inversely* mirror de Certeau's (1984: xiv) argument about how everyday people tactically 'manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to evade them...' This passage equally applies to politicians in neighboring states who have adroitly seized the opportunity offered by the sour relations between *okada* associations and the Lagos State Government to shore up their own patronage, which boosts their regime survival. In Ekiti, for instance, Governor Ayodele Fayose pledged not to restrict *okada* activities. In the wake of the *okada* restriction in Lagos, Fayose astutely took to twitter:

A screenshot of a tweet from Peter Ayodele Fayose (@GovAyoFayose) posted 2 minutes ago. The tweet text reads: "If the remaining 35 states in Nigeria decide to ban okada, Ekiti under my watch as governor will never ban Okada".

Peter Ayodele Fayose @GovAyoFayose · 2m
If the remaining 35 states in Nigeria decide to ban okada, Ekiti under my watch as governor will never ban Okada

A screenshot of a tweet from Peter Ayodele Fayose (@GovAyoFayose) posted 52 seconds ago. The tweet text reads: "If you cannot provide an alternative, you must not take away the only one that is available. I won't ban Okada in Ekiti State."

Peter Ayodele Fayose @GovAyoFayose · 52s
If you cannot provide an alternative, you must not take away the only one that is available. I won't ban Okada in Ekiti State.

In addition, Fayose charged *okada* associations in Ekiti State to join forces with his government in registering all its members in view of the robbery operations in the state. In an open address to riders and owners in Ado Ekiti, Fayose said:

If they cancel *okada* in every state, that won't happen in Ekiti. But what I want is disciplined and responsible motorcyclists' association that can partner with government for meaningful development. *Government alone cannot maintain security; I have to partner with an organisation like you.* But I won't tolerate unruly behaviour (*The City Pulse*, 2014).

5.4 The Culture of Legality

Okadas are above all machines that transport people, but they do so in many senses of the word. As I have shown, they create a path for marginalised youth to earn a living and to become respectable members of the city, earning their right to urban space in the process (Fenster, 2005: 219). As Burge (2011: 60) argues, ‘bike riding is about building up one’s personhood as a responsible and full member of society, an adult, in continuous check and balance with the environment...’ Neither integrated into official national transport policies nor recognized as an official means of transport by Lagos, *okada* riders continue to contribute to the city’s progress by accelerating socio-economic activities, moving people and goods through go-slows and extremely potholed roads. In addition, *okada* associations create a platform, which supports and sanctions their members and resolves various disputes among them.

Through *okada* riding, thousands of jobless young men in Lagos are empowered to be economically independent which is crucial to ‘acquiring’ the status of adulthood (Agbibo, 2015). Following insights from Young and Jeffrey (2012: 45), many of these young male riders find themselves ‘in-between’ in multiple senses: between youth and adulthood, the rich and poor, and the rural and urban. Thus, as Michael Burge (2011: 60) comments, ‘[by] riding a bike, young men had found a way to overcome at least partially the social inertia of not becoming adults, caused by the lack of resources.’ Subsequently, one can understand why for many *okada* riders and their associations, the law is symptomatic of the insouciance of the government to their plight – their tenacious struggles to survive and ‘become somebody in life’

The above partly explains why the *okada* association ANACOWA have resolutely resisted the enactment of the traffic law to the point of dragging the government and its House of Assembly to court over the (perceived) violation of its members’ human and constitutional *rights to the city*. This legal action taken by ANACOWA supports Comaroff and Comaroff’s argument that ‘interests, identities, rights and injuries’ in

Africa and the Global South are becoming ‘saturated with legality’ as conflicts, once articulated by popular means of ‘street protests, media campaigns, strikes, boycotts and blockades, tend more and more to find their way to the judiciary’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006 143). Tersely put, class struggles in these hybrid places are morphing into class actions: ‘People drawn together by material predicament, culture, race, sexual preference, residence, faith and habits of consumption become legal persons as their common complaints turn them into plaintiffs with common identities’ (ibid). Far from the long-held view that Africa is not committed to constitutionalism, the legal action taken by ANACOWA illustrates that ‘there is more to the *fetishism of the law* than an enchanted faith in those constitutions’ (ibid: 142). It also confirms that a ‘culture of legality’ seems to be ‘infusing everyday life, becoming part and parcel of the metaphysics of disorder that haunts all postcolonies’ (ibid).

In short, citizens on the margins in many African societies are increasingly appealing to the law as ‘weapons of combat,’ recovering the Third World poor and urban dispossessed from ‘passivity, fatalism, and hopelessness’ (A. Bayat, 1997: 56) and opening up new channels for contesting government policies and decisions. This is despite the fact that many ordinary Africans, as I already noted, still perceive the institution of the court and police as the two most corruptible institutions.¹²²

By using legal channels to table their demands and express their grievances, *okada* riders come to imagine themselves as ‘rights-bearing-persons’ (Eckert, 2012). This suggests that turning to law is not simply a ‘weapon of combat’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006), which evokes a winner-loser binary, but also an act of ‘rightful

¹²² The stated ‘culture of legality’ improves on Brechtian forms of class struggle – famously dubbed ‘weapons of the weak’ by James Scott (1985) and the ‘quiet encroachment of the ordinary’¹²² by Asef Bayat (1997: 45) – including ‘everyday forms of resistance’ like foot-dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, slander, arson, sabotage, etc.

resistance'¹²³ (O'Brien and Li, 2006) in which urban marginals articulate and negotiate their grievances and 'hopes for/against the state' (Jansen, 2014). This partly explains why Eckert (2012: 167) argues that people invoke the law 'even [when] chances of "winning" are slim ...' The 'culture of legality' can, thus, tell us something about the 'rights that people perceive themselves to own towards the state' (ibid). For their part, leaders in Africa find themselves more and more under pressure to 'defend against public actions for unprecedented sorts of things against unprecedented kinds of plaintiff' (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 143). A prime example is the legal struggle between the South African government and AIDS sufferers. Another case concerns the government of Brazil, which, in 2000, was found guilty by its own high court, and ordered to pay damages for the death and suffering of Panara Indians. Twelve months earlier, Nicaragua was held to account by the Inter-American Court for violating the territory of Tingni Indians by unlawfully granting a timber concession to a Korean company (ibid). In 2013, the Uganda Taxi Operators and Drivers Association (UTODA) sued the Uganda Revenue Authority (URA) over what it sees as an unwarranted collection of Value Added Tax between 2004 and 2010, amounting to UgShs 3.9 billion.¹²⁴ All of these cases won, but many fail.¹²⁵ In this chapter, my primary focus is on the dispute between *okada* riders and the Lagos State Government over the latter's enactment of the law. At the onset, it is expedient to locate this dispute within the wider and changing urban context in Lagos, especially since mid-1999.

¹²³ A form of partially institutionalized popular contention against the state whereby aggrieved citizens seek to legitimize their causes by making use of state's own laws, policies or rhetoric in framing their protests (see O'Brien and Li, 2006).

¹²⁴ The friction between UTODA and URA started in 2004, when UTODA was mandated to oversee the taxi park operations on behalf of the then KCC (Kampala City Council) and by 2010, URA had collected more than UgShs3 billion to that effect. The taxi drivers' plea was initially dismissed by the then Judge Vincent Zeburikize. However, in 2015, UTODA successfully appealed the ruling and the Court of Appeal ordered the URA to refund the VAT to UTODA as well as to cover the costs that the latter used to pursue the case before the Court of Appeal (*Daily Monitor*, 2015).

¹²⁵ The Ogoni, for example, lost their claim against Shell for its complicity with Nigeria in killing those opposed to its presence (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 144).

5.5 Post-1999 Lagos: From Demography to Polity of Cities?

The 1980s saw a marked shift in research from the ‘demography of cities’ to the ‘polity of cities’ (Brockhoff and Brennan, 1998), with increased attention to urban planning and *governance* (Meagher, 2011; Lugalla, 1995). By governance, I mean ‘the way the power structures of the day and civil society interrelate to produce a civic public realm’ (Rakodi, 2001: 344). The emergent view holds that the costs and benefits of cities (especially in the Global South) stem from ‘the commitment and capabilities of municipal governments to undertake and sustain policies that improve population welfare, particularly infrastructure maintenance, increased productivity of the labour force, and poverty alleviation’ (Brockhoff and Brennan, 1998: 83). Across urban Africa, understanding governance processes requires a critical focus on the ‘morass of complex networks and arenas within which power dynamics are expressed and deployed’ (Healey, 2000: 919; cf. Meagher, 2011), as well as ‘bringing these multiple networks and arenas of urban governance into view so that more fine-grained critical research can be conducted’ (Pieterse, 2005: 142).

The rapidly changing nature of urban spatiality hold significant implications for democratic rights and justice claims within the city. One implication is that the urban poor are rendered increasingly invisible, while their livelihood structures are eroded by the ‘political economy of urban megaproject’ (Rizzo, 2014: 249). Some scholars have pointed out that a key feature of urban policy in Africa today is its stress on decentralisation, deregulation, democratization, and the privatization of public services, which have expanded and intensified socio-economic hardship and the prominence of informal socio-economic networks in the organisation of urban life (Meagher, 2011; Lugalla, 1995). This observation aligns with Yong-Shook Lee and Brenda Yeoh’s (2004: 2296) contention in a recent Special Issue of *Urban Studies*, ‘places are actively forged as products of the politics of inclusion and exclusion and

by power struggles played out among global, national and local actors in globalization processes.’ These power struggles – cast here in ‘relational’¹²⁶ terms (Foucault, 1980: 102) – act to politicize the contradictions of capitalist restructuring (Harvey, 2010), to contest the very discursive and institutionalised terrains of urban politics, and, ultimately, to reclaim the rights of city dwellers to appropriate and move freely in the city of their inhabitation (Lefebvre, 1991). It follows, therefore, that urban life is not simply ‘enframed, constrained and colonized by the disciplinary technologies of power,’ as Kong and Law (2002: 506) would have us believe, but also primary spaces of, and for, ‘contestation’ and ‘resistance’ (Routledge, 2009: 1165) against ‘a society of exploitation and alienation’ (Debord, 1961).

It is against this background that the question of *Le droit à la ville* (‘right to the city’) (Lefebvre, 1968), a frame not without its critics, has taken on a new urgency in contemporary discourse on urban Africa, as megacity planning threatens to dislodge thousands making do in the economy, and reshape their localities in ways that elicit shock, anger, and resistance from below (Myers, 2010; Rizzo, 2014). Such megacity projects are shaped by ways of seeing African cities, which are still shaped by ‘metanarratives of urbanization, modernization and crisis’ (Mbembé and Nuttall, 2004: 353). These imaginaries give rise to the idea that African cities are ‘not-quite cities’ (Myers, 2011: 4), having failed to meet the ‘expectations of modernity’ (Fergusson, 1999: 20) as dictated by Western planning and logic. Subsequently, this thinking activates particular state-led interventions in Africa aimed at ‘modernizing’ and ‘ordering’ the city (Pieterse, 2011). Yet the urban, as imagined throughout this study, remains a place of ‘encounter and simultaneity’ (Butler, 2012: 152), an ‘ensemble of differences’ (Lefebvre, 1996: 109).

¹²⁶ Foucault defines power as ‘a multiple and mobile field of force relations where far-reaching, but never completely stable effects of domination are produced’ (Foucault, 1980: 102). Modern power is a ‘relational’ power that is ‘exercised from innumerable points’ (ibid)

5.5.1 Performing the City: ‘A New and Beautiful Lagos’ for whom?

After over three decades of systematic neglect by the federal government, the Lagos State Government has (since 1999) made notable strides to transform the city into a ‘Center of Excellence’ – one that is financially less dependent on usual allocations from the federal government. In fact, the initiatives of previous civilian government rehabilitated Lagos State and brought huge expectations of change to millions of Lagosians. Akin to the civilian government of Lateef Jakande (1979-1983), the post-1999 urban renewal vision of the Lagos State Government represents a departure from previous military governments whose ‘deliberate punitive underdevelopment of the city itself partly conditioned the chaotic environment that became stereotypical of the place in the global imagination’ (Owen, 2015: 655). For instance, in ten years, military governors (nominated by the government) were only able to complete one waterworks to serve the upper-class town of Festac (supplying four million gallons of water each day), whereas in four years, the Jakande civilian government built ten waterworks in various poor and middle-class areas of Lagos (20 million gallons per day). Also, Jakande’s government in five years built more primary schools than all the schools built by previous military governors combined (Fourchard, 2010). Though Jakande was later criticized for accepting a ministerial post under Abacha’s regime of the 1990s, his progressive political legacy from the early 1980s extended to education, housing, and sanitation (Godwin and Hopwood, 2012).

Until 1999, Lagos was regarded in certain quarters as an ‘urban jungle.’¹²⁷ A fast-growing population (600,000 people added annually), without commensurate improvements in social services such as housing, water and transportation, had pushed Lagos to the cliff’s edge (Ighobor, 2016: 8). However, during his time in office, the civilian government of Bola Ahmed Tinubu (1999 to 2007) envisioned a

¹²⁷ President Olusegun Obasanjo, during his first official visit to Lagos State.

change to the status quo, announcing a rescue operation ‘to make Lagos the reference point of harmonious physical development in Nigeria through best practices and physical planning and development matters’ (Lagos State Government, 2011). Among other laudable initiatives, Tinubu’s government initiated a project that targeted the revitalisation of the historical core of Lagos Island in an attempt to reverse the decline of the last two decades or so. Building on Tinubu’s legacy, Governor Babatunde Fashola started his tenure in office (in 2007) by announcing his megacity vision of ‘a new and beautiful Lagos which would be a reference point for best practices that you can find anywhere in the world’ (Basinski, 2009: 6). This modern mega-city vision coincides with growing scholarly interest in the mega cities of Third World countries, exemplified by notable books like Mike Davis’s *Planet of Slums* (2006), Suketu Mehta’s *Maximum City* (2004), and Robert Neuwirth’s *Shadow Cities* (2006). In a recent state-authorized documentary entitled ‘Lagos: Africa’s Big Apple,’ the Lagos State Government projected the image of Lagos as follows:

[A] vibrant mega-city whose pulse is felt as wide as its influence reaches, a discovery of opportunities at the heart of Africa... a world of unique possibilities where untold opportunities are never far away... whatever it is you are looking for, Lagos has it all and is waiting for you (YouTube, 2013).

Governor Fashola sought to realise his ‘world class’ megacity aspirations through the overhaul of tax revenue,¹²⁸ reforming of waste collection systems, introducing high-capacity BRTs,¹²⁹ and concerted efforts to contain violent extortion by union touts. The wheels of the urban renewal project were set in motion with the radical and largely unannounced clearing of ‘illegal’ shops and sprawling slums, evictions of dumpsite dwellers, and beautification of Oshodi, known for its clutter and criminality.

¹²⁸ Fashola reformed the tax system, which resulted in an increase in tax revenues to \$115 million per month in 2015, up from \$3.2 million in 1999. Tax compliance increased to 80 percent, up from about 30 percent in 2005 (Ighobor, 2016: 9).

¹²⁹ The BRT was adopted to provide safe, affordable and reliable transportation services to all Lagosians, while simultaneously formalizing the obstreperous transport industry.

This move was cast in some media circles as a warning to other informal roadside traders and dumpsite dwellers that Fashola’s government ‘means business.’¹³⁰



Figures 15. “For a better megacit. Pay your tax”
Source: Fieldwork



Figures 16. “Keep Lagos Clean. Eko oni Baje”
Source: Fieldwork



Figures 17. “Don’t mess with Lagos. It is an offence to write or paint on public walls”
Source: Fieldwork

For many of the urban poor chased out of Oshodi surrounds, and other parts of Lagos, informality had become a ‘way of life’ (AlSayyad, 2004). More contentious examples of displacement in Lagos can be found in the partial demolition of slum dwellings at the notorious Makoko neighbourhood, which sparked worldwide condemnation and unfavorable media attention for Lagos. This threatened the new megacity aspirations of Lagos and forced a halt to demolitions. Reacting to the partial demolition and discharge of thousands from their slum dwellings, an astute observer in Lagos noted:

They want a Lagos that looks good, that feels good, that glitters. But they forget that Lagos is Lagos because of the people that live here.

¹³⁰ During the demolition of slums, *area boys* were employed by the state government’s demolition squad and paid around \$10 (*The New York Times*, 2013).

They're doing this without regard for people who live here (*The New York Times*, 2013).

While the clearance of Oshodi is often cited as an example of displacement by some observers (like de Gramont, 2015), in reality it was a result of transport planning by Fashola's technocratic administration to ease flows through the city and test the possibilities of clearing the railway corridor in advance of a light railway planned to run along the existing rail tracks. It is worth noting that this is not the first time a similar clearing of street traders has taken place in Lagos or even in Nigeria. Military regimes, especially that of Mohammadu Buhari (1983-1985) and its Lagos military governor, Gbolahan Mudashiru, demolished stalls and illegal shops, and forbade street trading in the main streets of Lagos, but once the government left power, streets were once again occupied by informal traders (Fourchard, 2010: 77).

Also, between the 1950s and early 1980s, the Lagos town council was ineffective in its attempts to enforce a ban on street trading. This was largely because politicians feared the potential impact of the activities of market women who, as Laurent Fourchard (2010: 76) claims, 'formed an auxiliary wing of every major party in Lagos State, establishing factions that continued to be meaningful even after the imposition of military rule.' In Nigeria's capital of Abuja, a former minister, Malam Nasir El-Rufai, embarked on a massive, though unpopular, destruction of 'unlawful' structures and evictions of extra-legal squatters. Between 2003 and 2007, 800,000 ordinary Nigerians in Abuja were forcefully evicted (Mberu and Pongou, 2010) with no alternative livelihood source. *Thisday* (19 September 2006) captured the misery suffered by the many urban poor in Abuja by dismissing the government's grandiose project as 'the search for splendor amid excruciating mass poverty.'



Figures 18. “Fashola Must Stop War Against D Poor.”

Particularly striking about the Lagos State urban renewal project is the fact that it carried neither the promise nor the pretense of resettlement or alternative source of social livelihood for the displaced urban poor. Instead, Fashola’s government began a systematic ‘deportation’ campaign against street beggars, mobile street hawkers, and the homeless poor, causing widespread agitations among Lagosians. As one astute observer decried: ‘Making Lagos a mega city does not mean that beggars will be banished from the state. The menaces of *area boys* and *agberos* are more inimical to making Lagos a megacity than the presence of beggars.’ Here, a cursory comparison may be drawn between the clearing of Oshodi and the Mumbai evictions in India – ‘Vision Mumbai’ – where state authorities pulled down several slums in a matter of weeks, rendering approximately 300,000 people homeless (Roy, 2012: 7). Like the Lagos case, Vision Mumbai sought to transform Mumbai into a ‘world class’ city – one that is globally competitive with other Asian successes. The municipality officer who led the demolitions declared that it was time to turn Mumbai into the ‘next Shanghai,’ and to do so ‘we want to put the fear of the consequences of migration into these people. We have to restrain them from coming to Mumbai’ (ibid: 8).

Since 2002, the Lagos State Government's urban renewal project has seen increased spending on infrastructure and public services, including the launch of the World Bank-funded BRT under a public-private partnership (PPT), road (re-)construction projects, and clearing of garbage off the streets in an attempt to beautify the city. Inter alia, street slogans – such as ‘For a better Mega-City, Pay Your Tax’ – have been used to great effect by the Lagos Internal Revenue Service to raise tax consciousness in the city.¹³¹ Rallying slogans – like *eko o ni baje* (lagos will not spoil) – have also been used to remind Lagosians of their duty to ‘Keep Lagos Clean.’

Fashola's efforts to rehabilitate Lagos into a ‘center of excellence’ provide us with an account of the ways in which theatricality and performativity are made manifest in cities. His use of visual slogans, combined with his emphasis on accountability and ‘service delivery,’ plugs into the ‘urban performativity’ argument that, ‘good city planning demands an ethics of performance, whereby citizens become spectators and co-performers in the urban drama’ (Makeham, 2005: 150). Yet, as I will demonstrate shortly, performers and spectators exist in a complex and contested power relation that ‘heighten the drama of living’ (Bacon, 1974: 19). This ‘urban drama’ begs some difficult socio-political questions: Who owns and controls the performance space? Who has the right to it? What is the dominant discourse of performance? And, vitally, whose interests are fostered by the performance? But I am getting ahead of my story.

In light of his efforts, Fashola garnered praise worldwide as an ‘Action Governor’ (*Vanguard*, 2014), who ‘tamed Nigeria’s most lawless city’ (*Telegraph*, 2014). *Al Jazeera* even produced a documentary entitled ‘Boom Time in Nigeria: Action Government Transforms Lagos.’ John Campbell (2012) of the *Council on Foreign Relations* described Lagos as a ‘success story,’ while Seth Kaplan of *New York Times*

¹³¹ Taxes produce 60 per cent of Lagos's revenue. Its internally generated revenue (IGR), about N300 billion (\$1.5 billion) in 2014, is equivalent to the combined IGR of 32 of Nigeria's 35 other states (Adams, 2016). P. Adams (2016). ‘State(s) of crisis: Sub-national government in Nigeria.’ Africa Research Institute, Briefing Note 1602 March.

(2014) viewed Lagos as a ‘Model City’ of effective governance in Africa, while the *Economist* (2015), in a piece titled ‘Learning from Lagos,’ claimed that Lagos was ‘a model for the rest of the country... a lesson in how one big city can sometimes kick-start wider change.’ Back home, the *Vanguard* (2014) newspaper claimed that, ‘since the lofty days of [Governor Lateef] Jakande,¹³² no other leader has filled us with such adulation as Fashola.’ Perceptions that the Fashola-led administration is ‘delivering the goods’ have had a snowball effect on tax compliance in Lagos (de Gramont, 2015).¹³³ With 70 per cent of its budget funded by taxpayers’ money in 2014 (*The Guardian*, 2014),¹³⁴ Lagos has been upheld as the only state in Nigeria whose Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) about doubles its federal allocation from oil earnings (de Gramont, 2015). Currently, the total revenue of the Lagos State Government ‘stands at N33.95 billion monthly compared to 27.82 billion monthly it generated in 2011 as the IGR averages 65 percent of total revenue with Statutory Allocation plus Value Added Tax being circa 35 percent’ (*The Guardian*, 2015).

Yet, a 2015 document recently released by the Lagos Ministry of Finance shows that Fashola’s administration had a debt stock of N418.2 billion compared to N15 billion left behind by his predecessor Tinubu. As indicated in the document, ‘the Fashola administration had a domestic debt of N69.966 billion; 225 billion debt from bond issuance and N207.499 billion from external loan from foreign bodies, though the state had a sinking fund of about N100.73 billion’ (*The Guardian*, 2015).

¹³² Lateef Jakande (aka ‘Baba Kekere’ – ‘small father’) was the first elected governor of Lagos State from 1979 to 1983. During his time in office, Jakande advanced a strategic plan for Lagos and undertook large municipal investments in housing, schools, and transportation, including plans for an urban rail system.

¹³³ Notably, between 1999 and 2011 tax revenues in Lagos rose from roughly 190 million USD to over 1 billion USD in 2011, making the state less dependent on federally-allocated revenue (de Gramont 2015: 1).

¹³⁴ In 1999, the Lagos annual budget was roughly N14 billion and at that time the Lagos internally generated revenue was just about N600 million (*The Guardian*, 2014a).



Figure 19. “Okada and Tricycle Workers. They have Human and Constitutional Rights.” Source: JAF, 21 Dec 2012

5.5.2 No Place for the Urban Poor?

Fashola’s megacity project has been criticized as having ‘No Place for the Poor’ (*Daily Newswatch*, 2014), reinforcing Asef Bayat and Kees Biekart’s (2009: 815) point that ‘cities are shaped more by the logic of market than the needs of their inhabitants.’ The displacement of hawkers, the expulsion of roadside beggars, and the flattening of illegal structures have been adduced as the ‘deepest pains’ Fashola’s administration inflicted on Lagosians, ‘60 per cent of which live below poverty line’ (*Daily Newswatch*, 2014). This pain was palpable during my interview with Abosedo, a roadside *okro* seller in Oshodi whose livelihood was displaced by members of the Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI), charged with enforcing the Lagos megacity vision:

I am a roadside *Okro* seller who was chased out of Oshodi by member of KAI [Kick against Indiscipline]. I used to earn my living from this *Okro* selling but since *Oga* Fashola’s campaign, my source of livelihood have been violently taken away from me. Those with shops gloat at me because they think I am the one spoiling their market and preventing customers from coming to meet them in the shops [she starts sobbing]. In less than one month, I became half of my size. My children all quit school. I tried to go to my village. But those in my village chased me out of the market saying that there is no space for me. They mocked me that I

have come from the big city to take their work. I had no choice but to let myself be caught by the tax force and taken to Alahusa. At least I can get one free meal a day.

Experiences like that of Abosede explain why local newspapers in Nigeria, including the *Vanguard* (2013), have mocked Fashola's mega-city vision by stating that 'The true Lagosian is the rich man. The poor have been served quit notice. They are no longer wanted in Lagos... they can have no place in Lagos, if Lagos is to become the megacity of Fashola's lofty dreams!' Other news headlines are more attention-grabbing: 'The Kidnapping of Poor Nigerians by Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola of Lagos' (*The Village Square*, 2013), 'WARNING: Poor People are not Wanted in Lagos Megacity' (*Vanguard*, 2013), 'In Nigeria's City: Homeless are Paying the Price of Progress' (*New York Times*, 2013), 'Can't the Poor Live in Lagos?' (*NewswireNGR*, 2015). In particular, the *Osun Defender* (2013) stressed the effects of Fashola's campaign on the poor, especially paratransit operators:

From mobile street hawkers consistently terrorised by KAI operatives to taxi drivers [increasingly] priced out of business by the government's decision to phase out the trademark yellow-and-black taxis in favour of brand new cabs, to dumpsite dwellers at the mercy of a government that has no plans for them, to the multitudes forced out of the city into the hinterland under a puzzling 'deportation' programme. Are we asking ourselves this troubling question: All these former *okada* riders now out of work – where are they; what are they doing; how are they surviving?

Similarly, *The Punch* (2014) newspaper in Nigeria noted that:

Today, the average Lagos commercial driver bears the burden of multiple levies. How can any business survive under such a draconian regime? With all its pretensions to attaining mega-city status, Lagos has the worst transport extortion regime in Nigeria, Africa and perhaps the world... the different levies and impositions being heaped on commercial busses in Lagos State have become a disincentive to commercial bus operators. And the *danfo* drivers ultimately pass on the heavy bill to the commuters, the common man, who will be forced to pay more for transportation.

According to Simone (2010: 3), ‘No matter how hard analysts and policymakers might try, practices of inhabiting the city are so diverse and change so quickly that they cannot easily be channeled into clearly defined uses of space and resources or patterns of social inter-change.’ In other words, at the heart of city life is the capacity for its different people, spaces, activities, and things to interact in ways that exceed any attempt to regulate them. Similarly, Weate and Bakare-Yusuf (2003: 18) argue that ‘the intended linear logic of formal city planning will meet with very limited success, if any. Lagos does not obey the logic of geometry and the orthogonal directives favoured by western city planners.’ As such, they argue that ‘planners and policy makers can learn to work with the transductive flows of the city rather than unsuccessfully against them.’ While the focus on Fashola’s mega-city project has been on displacement of slum dwellers and informal settlers (especially in Oshodi), there has been no scholarship that looks at its ramifications for transport operators.

The oft-celebrated ‘success narratives’ of the Fashola government pales in the face of the violent and venal manner in which the urban renewal projects have been enforced, as well as its ramifications for the lives of transport operators like *okada* riders. In particular, I focus on reactions from below to the traffic law of 2012 (a cornerstone of the Lagos mega-city project), exploring its rights-conscious framing by *okada* riders and associations. As one *okada* protest banner reads: ‘Okada... Workers! They have Human and Constitutional Rights!’

5.6 The Lagos State Road Traffic Law of 2012

Perhaps, no transport policy in urban Africa has elicited more controversy than the enforcement of the law enacted in August 2012 by the Fashola government as part of the drive towards making Lagos a ‘world class’ megacity that will become ‘Africa’s

big apple.’ The major grievance against the law revolves around Section 3(1)¹³⁵ which restricts the spatial and temporal activities of *okada* riders in the city (see Schedule II – Appendix), imposes punishment on offenders (up to 3 years imprisonment), and gives more power to the police and other officers of authority:

*3—(1) No person shall ride, drive or propel a cart, wheel barrow, motorcycle or tricycle on any of the routes specified in Schedule II to this law.*¹³⁶

(2) No person shall operate a motorcycle or tricycle without a Rider’ Card issued by the Lagos State Motor Vehicle Administration Agency

(3) No person shall operate a motorcycle or tricycle either as a rider or a passenger without wearing a standard protective crash helmet as may be prescribed under the Regulations of the Law

(4) No motorcycle operator shall carry more than one (1) passenger at a time, provided that a pregnant woman, a child below the age of twelve (12) years, or an adult with a baby or heavy/large load placed on the head or which obstruct normal sitting on the motorcycle shall not be carried as passenger.

(5) Any person who fails to comply with any of the provisions of this Section commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to –

(i) Imprisonment for a term of three (3) years or render community service in accordance with the provisions of Section 347 of the Administration of Criminal Justice Law of Lagos State; and

(ii) Have his vehicle forfeited to the State

¹³⁵ In its response to the State’s *counter-affidavit* (discussed in due course), ANACOWA emphasized that the association and its *okada* members ‘are not seeking a nullification of the entire Lagos State Road Traffic Law , 2012 but only section 3(1) of that law out of the entire 41 sections’ (Claimant’s Reply, Suit ID|713m|12, p.286).

¹³⁶ From the perspective of the Lagos State Government, Section 3(1) of the LSRTL is ‘a deliberate legislative response to the growing public concern about the spate of avoidable deaths, crime and high casualty rate directly associated with the commercial motorcycle operation in Lagos’ (see Counter-Affidavit, Archives).

(8) *As from the Commencement of this Law Commercial motorcycles shall only operate between the hours of 6.00a.m – 8.00.pm within the State (LSRTL of 2012: A76-A77).*

The law also prohibits under-aged persons (under 18 years) from riding *okadas*, stipulating a fine of N20,000.00, while banning *okadas* that fall below 200cc engine capacity from plying bridges and carriage roads (LSRTL, 2012: 4). Further, the law gave much discretionary power to the police and other officers of authority to ensure full implementation and zero tolerance. Section 28 of the law states that: ‘Any Police Officer or officer of the Authority may apprehend without warrant any person who commits within his view, or whom he reasonably suspects of having committed, an offence under this Law’ (LSRTL, 2012: A88). The implication of such powers is evident when we consider that, in Lagos, the legacy and public image of the police has been identified with ‘arbitrariness, ruthlessness, brutality, vandalism, incivility, low accountability to the public, and corruption’ (Alemika, 1988: 161). In giving the above discretionary powers to the police, the law (ostensibly enacted to protect lives and properties across roads in Lagos) paradoxically created a vicious circle where insecurity produces the very behaviour that fosters corruption and further insecurity. As Lord Acton said in that famous 1887 letter: ‘Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.’¹³⁷ Above all, what the Lagos State Government is being indicted for here is its commission of ‘lawfare’ – ‘the resort to legal instruments, to the violence inherent in the law, to commit acts of discrimination, coercion, even erasure... reducing people to bare life’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2006: 144). This reinforces the view that the legal and the lethal animate one another.

In this chapter, I show how lawfare is also a ‘weapon of the weak’ (Scott, 1985), turning state authority back on itself by commissioning courts to make claims for

¹³⁷ Lord Acton (1887). Letter to Archbishop Mandell Creighton. April 5.

rights to urban space. Despite their restriction, many *okada* riders remained defiant by continuing to ply the restricted routes but not without the fear of the Lagos State Task Force. During fieldwork, I witnessed the taskforce officials impounding hundreds of *okadas* and arresting its riders for violating the laws of the state. According to Tunde, an *okada* rider in Iyana Ipaja:

Once we hear they are around we run now! Anytime we hear that taskforce is around, everybody will take cover because there is nothing you can do but run. If you drag the *okada* with them, they will carry you and the *okada* to Alahusa [headquarters], which is *double wahala* [double problem]. What can you do? So we run for our dear lives!

For many riders like Tunde, the Lagos State Government is an ‘oppressor’ and a ‘big bully’ because it has not provided them ‘alternative jobs’ but taken away the only ones that they have managed to fashion for themselves. These riders argue that ‘the restriction will further pauperize us and send our families to untimely graves’ (Sworn Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.91). On this issue of *okada* ‘ban,’ Lagosians are divided between an existential and legal approach. According to a Lagosian who was at the scene of one of the Lagos State taskforce crackdowns on *okadas*: ‘In Nigeria, there is unemployment everywhere. These people [*okada* riders] are trying to survive on their own. The government needs to provide jobs for these people. You can’t just limit their movement or take away their means of livelihood, something they use to feed themselves and you tell them to disappear.’ This point reinforces John Urry’s (2007: 9) contention that, ‘where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion.’ For other Lagosians, however, *okada* riders have violated the law of the state so they deserve the consequences of their actions. Said a resident in Oshodi: ‘If they are going against the law of Lagos state, then whatever happens is good for them.’ In any case, a great many riders that I spoke to felt discriminated against by the authority since other forms of transport were not restricted. In his affidavit, for instance, Mr. Aliyu Wamba, Chairman of ANACOWA and a veteran rider with 18 years of experience, is persuaded that the road restriction was imposed

On account of our being poor and underprivileged as some of the deadliest robberies and felonies are committed using cars, and there are more fatal car accidents than *okada* accidents. We all pay permit fees to the State Government as conditions for operating *okadas* from which they (the government) earn sizeable revenue for Lagos. We are not averse to regulations which are limited to speed limits, use of helmets and maximum number of passengers (Affidavit, Aliyu Wamba, 8 February 2012).

As will become clear, this statement is an attempt by *okada* riders to lay claim to ‘equal rights of membership’ in a political urbanity that is not only ‘spectacularly unequal’ but highly uneven in its capacity to admit – let alone accept – such claims (Ferguson, 2006: 175). In the wake of their restriction, riders across Lagos marched to the streets *en masse* to protest indiscriminate arrest of their members and forcible seizure of their *okadas* by the police. The protesters carried placards with various slogans like: ‘You gave us no job, we gave ourselves one and you are killing us for it.’ ‘People like *okada* pass motor. Allow us! Free us!!!’ ‘They say *okada* riders are robbers, who gave them the guns?’ ‘Fashola, give me my vote back.’ A few of the protesters took out their frustration on the government-backed BRTs, vandalizing them, while pelting policemen and BRT operators with stones. Of primary interest here is the fact that *okada* riders articulated their grievances in the language of ‘rights’ (i.e. freedom of movement), their struggle for rights being the means of not only organizing and contesting the insensitivities and injustices of the state, but also of spatial production. Invariably, such open defiance resulted in more clampdown from the Lagos task force. In his sworn affidavit, Mr. Wamba criticized the fact that:

On a daily basis (state enforcement) agents forcibly seize our *okadas* and detain some of our members and their *okadas* at the Task Force Office in Alahusa, Ikeja. I have been arrested on two occasions by law enforcement agents along with my *okada* forcibly seized from me and detained (Affidavit, Aliyu Wamba, 8 February 2012).

The foregoing raises three matters of concern in this chapter. The first relates to whether diverse practices of inhabiting the city can be channeled into clearly defined

uses of space. The second concerns how affected urban informals respond/react to spatial interventions affecting their own opportunities and livelihoods in the city and their own visions about what that city should look like. The third relates to the venal and violent manner in which the police and other officers of authority enforce state laws imposed on marginal groups (like *okada* riders). To appropriately situate these issues, suffice it to ground my analysis in Lefebvre's 'right to the city' approach.

5.7 Right to the City

The right to the city is like a cry and a demand... a transformed and renewed *right to urban life* (Lefebvre, 1996: 158).

Henri Lefebvre's 'right to the city' remains a *tour de force* on how we theorise the politics of space and the transformative possibilities of daily life. Here, 'right' refers not just to a 'legal claim enforceable through a judicial process' but essentially a 'right to totality, a complexity, in which the parts are part of a single whole to which the right is demanded... a collectivity of rights, not individualistic rights' (Marcuse, 2009: 193). Lefebvre (1996: 147) argues that the struggles for the right to the city are vital to any emancipatory politics of space. Beyond processes of industrial production and capital accumulation, the urban is 'more or less the *oeuvre* of its citizens,' like an artwork that is constantly being remade (Butler, 2012: 143). As Mbembé and Nuttall (2008: 8-9) argue, 'the everyday human labour mobilized in building specific city forms is not only material. It is also artistic and aesthetic.' For Lefebvre (1996), the right to the city is violated when certain urban marginal groups are prohibited from fully and centrally participating in this collective and creative artwork. In this regard, Lefebvre's right to the city implies a right not to be discharged from the city through forced dispersal to the peripheries, with attendant dearth of economic opportunities:

The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller and user of multiple services.

It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (Lefebvre, 1996: 34).

The right to the city legitimates the refusal to allow oneself to be removed from urban reality by a *discriminatory and segregative* organisation. This right of the citizens... proclaims the inevitable crisis of city centers based on segregation... which reject towards peripheral spaces all those who do not participate in political privileges (Lefebvre, 1996: 34).

The use of ‘segregation’ in the second quote implies both market-driven processes that deepen social divisions and accentuate the polarisation of cityscapes, as well as the re-location of marginal groups into ghettos by deliberate enforcement of state policies informed by urban renewal visions. Lefebvre sees the proliferation of capitalist forms of accumulation as intensifying the disenfranchisement of urban inhabitants. To address this situation, he argues that the right to the city must involve ‘an urban spatial approach to political struggles with the participation of all those who inhabit the city without discrimination’ (Dikec, 2001: 1730). A notable case of segregation in Lagos is the law which restricts *okada* riders from plying 475 routes in Lagos, forcing them away from the lucrative center to the slow periphery. During the course of my fieldwork, many *okada* riders complained that the law has brought them ‘suffering’ and ‘put salt on our sores.’ One rider in Ikotun, Jimoh Salau, recounted:

Before before, I used to run my *okada* in Apongbon area. It is a very busy area and in a day I can make up to N4000. Sometimes, I could earn N200 for just one trip with a passenger. And if the passengers are two, that will be N350. The trip is quicker because I pass through tarred express roads. But now, with the restriction on us, I have been forced to relocate to Ikotun where business is very slow and I operate mainly in small streets and over short distances. The roads are so bad and every time I have to take my *okada* to mechanic for repair because of one fault or another. Local government has refused to do anything. For them, it is not important road. For each trip, I get only N30. In a day I am lucky if I make N1,500. Yet my family *bukata* (needs) keep increasing. My four children need to chop (eat) and go to school. My first child, Banke, is starting high school this year. Where do I go from here? What else can I do?

Jimoh's concluding questions gives a sense of how the need to maintain a 'dignified life' underlies the poor's sense of justice (A. Bayat, 1997: 61). For an impecunious head of a household like Jimoh, not only would the failure to provide for his family jeopardize their survival and aspirations, it would inflict an excruciating blow to his honour. Jimoh's predicament mirrors that of many riders that I interviewed who have seen their daily income halved by the LSRTL (from between N3000 and N5000 to between N1000 and N1,500). Many *okadamen* in Lagos are now without identified work after the seizure of their *okadas*. According to Aliyu Wamba:

Many of (my members) have huge responsibilities. Some have two to three children in the university. I'm aware of one of my members whose first child is currently at 400 level while the younger one is 200 level at the university. This man uses proceeds generated from his *okada* business to pay their school fees, buy books and provide feeding allowance for them. Now, under this current situation how will the man cope, Government just wake up one morning and say to hell with their problems (Interview, Mr. Aliyu Wamba)

Against this backdrop, ANACOWA's dragging of the state government to court may be represented as an effort by *okada* riders to reclaim their right to the city which, according to Lefebvre (1996: 131, 195), describes 'a transformed and renewed right to urban life' and spotlights the essential qualities of the urban as both a creative art work and a space of 'centrality,' 'gathering' and 'convergence.' It follows, therefore, that the right to the city is ultimately designed to advance the interests 'of the whole society and firstly of all those who inhabit it' (Lefebvre, 1996: 158). In this respect, everyday life (*la vie quotidienne*) becomes the touchstone of Lefebvre's right to the city: those who go about their everyday transactions in the city, both living in and creating urban space, are those who possess a legitimate right to the city (Lefebvre, 1991). Now, Lefebvre's right to the city is based on two major rights – appropriation and participation – which are both earned through 'meeting particular responsibilities and obligations in which each person helps to create the city as artwork by performing one's everyday life in urban spaces' (Fenster, 2005: 219). By blending

appropriation (usage) and participation (decision-making) rights into the inhabitation of urban space, Lefebvre's right to the city challenges the fictional division between the public and private, while simultaneously rethinking both liberal-democratic forms of citizenship (Purcell, 2003: 565) and capitalist social relations (Butler, 2012: 150).

5.7.1 Right to Appropriate the City

The right to appropriate urban space implies the right of urban denizens to 'full and complete use' of urban space in their everyday routines, work practices, and forms of play (Lefebvre, 1996: 179; cf. Butler, 2012: 144). The right to use space reinforces de Certeau's (1984: 117) understanding of space as a 'practiced place... [a composite of] intersections of mobile elements.' Using the example of people walking the streets, de Certeau (1984) argues that city dwellers transform the street from a place that is 'geometrically defined by urban planning' into a space that is useful for them. The right to appropriate the city also echoes Edward Soja's (1989: 80) argument that 'the organisation and meaning of space is a product of social translations, transformations, and experience.' For Soja, there is 'an essential connection between spatiality and being,' just as *okada* riders have linked their restriction to their survival in the city.

Imagining the city as spatiality invites a better appreciation of Foucault's (1982: 220) understanding of power as a product of relational dynamism: power is everywhere, it 'circulates' and is never 'localised here and there, never in anybody's hands.' Such decentered notion of power transcends the binary *idée reçue* that power is essentially about the oppression of the powerless by the powerful, aiming instead to interrogate how power plays out in everyday interactions between citizens and subjects or public officials. In other words, power is not only a means of the 'dominant' but is 'dispersed throughout society' (Few, 2002: 31), implying that those on the margins do indeed possess agency in that they 'always seek to negotiate options that help to

secure their livelihoods' (Bohle, 2007: 130).¹³⁸ Foucault's approach to power thus illuminates our notion of the ordinary ways in which power is exerted, contested and resisted. As such, the understanding of 'resistance' has come to represent that power and counter-power are not necessarily in binary opposition (A. Bayat, 2000), but in a decoupled, complex, ambivalent and perpetual 'dance of control' (Pile, 1997: 2).

Also, Foucault's characterization of power as relational offers a nuanced view of the abiding struggle to establish the pre-eminence of use value over exchange value in the everyday inhabitation of space (Fenster, 2005). As Butler (2012: 145) argues, 'the appropriation of space by its inhabitants provides a direct challenge to the prioritisation of exchange values that is pursued by neoliberal regimes of urban governance.' This is where David Harvey (1976) enters the fray, with his emphasis on the contradictions in the capitalist accumulation processes. For him (1976: 314), 'Patterns in the circulation of surplus value are changing but they have not altered the fact that cities... are founded on the exploitation of the many by the few.' Such exploitation adheres to an established pattern of 'accumulation by dispossession,' constituting the 'core of urbanization under capitalism' (Harvey, 2008: 34). The effect is that struggles for the right to the city involve struggles against forms of capitalist accumulation. Hence, the right to appropriate the city implies 'greater democratic control over the production and utilization of the surplus' (ibid: 37).

The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the process of urbanization (Harvey, 2008: 23).

¹³⁸ Exploring the frontier of livelihood research, De Haan and Zoomers (2005: 37) argue that 'power relations are recreated in interaction and thus constitute a dynamic process of "wielding and yielding"'

5.8 Contextualising the Right to Appropriate the City

In this section, I focus on four key declarations made by ANACOWA in its charge against the Lagos State Government at the High Court in Ikeja. These declarations bespeak Lefebvre's right to appropriate the city and, to some extent, contain the key ingredients for using urban space.

5.8.1 Declaration 1: Right to move freely without restriction

Moving between places physically or virtually can be a source of status and power, an expression of the rights to movement either temporarily or permanently. And where movement is coerced it may generate social deprivation and exclusion (Urry, 2009: 481).

We know already that mobility is vital for practicing space and, thus, appropriating or using it (de Certeau, 1984). As a 'basic principle of modernity' (Canzler et al. 2008: 3), mobility represents 'liberty' and 'progress' (Cresswell, 2010). For many Africans, physical and social mobility is first and foremostly an 'emotional, relational and social phenomenon captured in the complexities, contradictions and messiness of their everyday realities' (Nyamnjoh, 2012: 1). Yet, mobility has become 'a key dimension of unequal power relations' (Hammer et al. 2006), stoking 'inequalities,' 'marginalisation' and 'disconnections' (ibid: 3). Not surprising, ANACOWA's first declaration relates to its members' mobility – their right to move freely within the city they inhabit. In its Originating Summons, ANACOWA argued that by restricting the riding of *okadas* on major routes in Lagos (as specified in Schedule II of the law), and by limiting the operating hours of riders to between 6am and 8pm, the law violates the right to 'freedom of movement' of its members as guaranteed by section 4(1) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution and Article 12 of the African Charter on Human and People's Right' (Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 2-3). As a result, ANACOWA brands the law as 'illegal' and insensitive to its members' daily plight.

5.8.2 Declaration 2: Right not to be compulsorily dispossessed of property

The second declaration relates to the right of ANACOWA and its members not to be forcibly dispossessed of their belonging in the city they call ‘home’ (*eko ile*). In its Originating Summons, ANACOWA claimed that the incessant seizures or forcible possession of their *okadas* by state agents infringes upon their rights not to have their moveable property (their *okadas*) compulsorily possessed as guaranteed by section 44(1) of the Nigerian Constitution and Article 14 of the African Charter (Originating Summons, Suit ID|713m|12, p.3). This declaration is, of course, in tandem with the grievances expressed by many *okada* riders over the violent and corruptible manner in which the police and other officers of authority have enforced the law. During my interviews with *okada* riders in Oshodi and Alimosho areas, a recurrent point was that the traffic law has created more room for violent extortion on the part of the police. In Oshodi and Alimosho, for instance, riders accused members of the police of extorting their hard-earned money under the pretence of implementing the law, even when they were not plying the restricted routes as specified in Schedule II. One resident in Oshodi complained about how ‘the state’s security agencies often pursue *okada* riders right into the inner streets without regards for human life on the *okada* in the process of arrest.’ Seun Awoniyi, an *okada* rider in Ikotun, had this to say:

The traffic law has created plenty room for police to collect more money from us with impunity. Whenever and wherever they see us these days, they stop us. There is always one fault or the other, always one reason to stop us and demand *kola* [bribe] from us. They always did this, but it is now worse since the law gave them more powers. They threaten us with taking our *okadas* to Alahusa where it would be grounded. If you fail to give them what they want, *tie ti tan* [literally, ‘your own is finished’]

Supporting Seun’s point, Basse, an *okada* rider in Oshodi, said part of his anger was that the police, in the name of enforcing the law, were impounding *okadas*, which were released only after the owners ‘settled’ them with a sum of N5000: ‘Not all roads in Lagos were affected by the restriction but the police keep arresting us on every road and impound our *okada* if we refuse to pay.’ In some cases, these amounts

could be negotiated for a smaller, obviously unreceipted amount of money, as some riders in Ikotun told me. Most times such negotiation takes place verbally, what Mbembe (2001: 148) refers to as ‘oral formality.’ Other times, as I witnessed on many occasions while walking the roads of Lagos, the negotiation occurs through the *okada* man’s daredevil performance of dragging the *okada* with the police officer (even with the officer waving a gun uncontrollably at him) or standing in front of the police vehicle, leveraging the nuisance their presence creates for lower ‘settlement.’ More than just a corruption of how states ought to work, unofficial negotiations such as these ‘enable substantive rights to city space, showing not only that power objectifies but also that it is dynamically inhabited’ (Anjaria, 2011: 58). Yet, James Scott (1985) has cautioned against overly romantizing these ‘weapons of the weak,’ arguing that everyday forms of resistance are unlikely to do more than ‘marginally affect the forms of exploitation’ that is entrenched in everyday life.

Furthermore, Omole, an *okada* rider in Oshodi, bemoaned the fact that:

The traffic law restricts *okada* operations from majorly expressways and bridges. Most of us have accepted to obey the law but the police are not enforcing the law the right way. Police seize *okadas* on backstreets and minor roads and use it as an avenue to extort money. Why can’t the state government protect us from police harassment? If a policeman arrests an *okadaman* on a non-prohibited road and the police claims he arrested the rider on an expressway, who would believe the *okadaman*? Just last week Sunday, some policeman seized four *okadas* at Fashoro Street and collected N5, 000 for the release of each. It’s very unfair what they are doing.

Chairman of ANACOWA, Aliyu Wamba, also condemned the venal manner in which law enforcement agencies in Lagos have gone about their duties:

The law states that when you are caught violating the so-called prohibited routes, you will be charged to court. The minimum fine is twenty thousand naira for first offender. If you commit the offence a second time, your motorcycle will be impounded. But this is not what they are doing at the moment. Whether you ply the prohibited routes or not, wherever they set their eyes on you, your motorcycle will be impounded. Even if you’re fixing

your deflated tyre with a vulcanizer, the police or task force members will stop, and impound your motorcycle. For now, the police are haunting *okada* riders. It was in the newspapers that the Lagos State Government grind about 3,000 motorcycles. You see we had report that some task force members and police officers were even selling the impounded motorcycles and sharing the proceeds among themselves. At other times, some of them converted these *okadas* for personal use (interview, Aliyu Wamba).

My interviews with *okada* riders also revealed how members of the police are abusing the powers afforded them by the law to appropriate *okadas*. Many *okadamen* shared stories of how their fellow riders were badly beaten (some to death) by police officers, reinforcing Franz Fanon's (1963: 38) point that 'the agents of government speak the language of pure force... He is the harbinger of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.' One local resident narrated a story of seeing an *okada* rider in Ikotun that was hit by the butt of the gun so hard that one of his eyes 'popped out.' There was another story of how a police officer knocked down an *okada* rider while he was on motion at Ikeja and in the process, 'he fell off his bike and his left arm was badly damaged. While the *okadaman* was gasping for breath, the police impounded his *okada* leaving him in his blood.' A number of angry *okada* riders, now motorpark loiters, recounted how they saw police officers and LASTMA agents using their confiscated *okadas* to run errands and even riding them on the restricted routes. According to one rider in Ikotun Egbe:

There is real corruption going on here. Imagine a police officer will cease about four *okada*. They will collect N15,000 each from the four *okada* riders. You're even lucky if they collect N15,000 from you. You bought a brand new *okada* for N100,000 and they are demanding for N15,000 or they will take it to Alahusa and crush it. Won't you give it to them? Some of them will not even take you to Alahusa [the Lagos Secretariat]. They will take you to their own backyard. Complainants will go to the police station you will end up being the accused. Nigeria police is nothing to write home about. Few of them are okay. Just few. In short, Fashola has created a means of getting money to all these enforcers.

Another *okada* rider in Oshodi commented:

All these *okada* you see with the police. They did not use their money to buy it. It is the one they collected from *okada* men and it is new. They can ride and no one will question them. Is that not corruption my brother? Police will remove the plate number of the *okada* and say your machine is going to Alahusa. Can you go to Alahusa? You cannot go there. Who will you ask? What will you say you are finding? So the *okada* is lost you cannot do anything. So they use the opportunity to possess the *okada*, maybe about two or three better ones. Or carry it to another place to sell it into their pockets.

Beyond appropriating the impounded *okadas*, riders also bemoaned the fact that the police tend to sell the impounded *okadas* and share the proceeds among themselves. ‘This whole thing is big business for police,’ said an *okada* rider in Ikotun Egbe. In abusing their powers, law enforcement agencies preclude the emergence of the city as an artwork (Lefebvre, 1996: 172) – that is, the metropolis as a creative product of and context for the everyday lives of its dwellers, which includes *okada* riders.

The above claim of police opportunism is not unique to Lagos. During the 1980s in Nairobi, the Kenyan government passed the Traffic Amendment Act of 1984, or the ‘*Matatu* Bill’ which required that all *matatus* undergo an annual vehicle inspection supervised by the police; seating accommodation was restricted to 25 passengers exclusive of the driver; and they had to employ drivers who had attained the age of 24 and had held a driving license for at least four years (Mutongi, 2006: 55). Predictably, the *matatu* operators and union did not like the new law and, throughout the late 1980s, took to the streets to protest the *Matatu* Bill, staging massive strikes that threw much of Nairobi’s economy into disarray. Mutongi (2006: 555) argues that:

The police took advantage of this new bill and extorted bribes from *matatu* operators who were unable to meet the new requirements. At the same time, the insurance companies hiked their premiums for *matatus*, making it utterly impossible for poorer owners to afford insurance. When the *matatu* owners increased fares to meet some of the new costs the commuters objected and boycotted *matatus*; and the government backed the commuters.

In Kampala, Goodfellow (2015) describes how in the early 2000s the Kampala City Council (KCC) issued a bylaw banning *boda-bodas* (the equivalent of *okadas*) in the city and prohibiting them from carrying two passengers. The bylaw also required *boda-boda* riders to wear reflective jackets, carry extra helmets for passengers, as well as documents including licenses, passenger service vehicle permits, and third-party insurance. From late 2009, there was a serious crackdown on *boda-boda* drivers: ‘Police rounded up *boda-boda* drivers at random and impounded them, demanding 60 to 80 thousand Ugandan Shillings (UGX) in fines for absent helmets and documents. However, if drivers had ready cash, the police would often instead take a bribe of around thirty thousand UGX and let them go’ (Goodfellow, 2015: 13).



Figure 20. Heaps of confiscated *okadas* by Lagos State Government.

Source: <https://topetempler.wordpress.com/tag/okada/>

Returning to Lagos, in light of the manner in which the police and officers of authority have set about enforcing the law, one can draw a connection between officers of authority and the ‘occult economy’ of witchcraft observed in Africa, complete with its negation of life-giving material and social exchange (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 289). Like witches, the Lagos State Government and its agents ‘makes ghost workers out of the able-bodied’ riders (ibid). In dispossessing *okada*

riders of their symbols of livelihood, the state and its agents again assume the image of a witch who ‘thrives by cannibalizing others, robbing the rising generation of a legitimate income and the wherewithal to marry or to establish their own families indeed, of becoming fully adult’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 289).



Trucks moving confiscated motorcycles along Ketu Road in Lagos

Figure 21. Trucks moving confiscated motorcycles along Ketu Road in Lagos

Furthermore, in destroying or unjustly appropriating *okadas*, the state and its agents have forced thousands of young men (and their families) into a state of ‘living death’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1999: 289), creating, as Fela Kuti once sang, a ‘zombie’ nation and heaping ‘double *wahala* on *deadibody* and the owner of *deadibody*.’ The outcome is an increasingly visible number of ‘perambulators’¹³⁹ in transit spaces like motorparks and bus stops. Fela’s song *Perambulator* (1983) mirrors a context of crisis and confusion widely shared by Lagosians, especially since the 1970s. In the song, Fela criticizes the fact that Nigerians are continuously moving ‘right and left,’ ‘up and down,’ but still find themselves in ‘same same place’; their movement is ‘all

¹³⁹ In Nigerian parlance, to ‘perambulate’ means ‘to walk aimlessly about, to drift without purpose or direction’ (Olaniyan, 2004: 98, cited in Beekers, 2008: 5).

for nothing, all no progress, all no profit' (Fela, 1983). Nigeria, for Fela, is a prime case of a 'perambulator' state – a state drifting aimlessly.

Finally, *okada* riders may ridicule the legal restrictions placed on them as the product of insensitive and inept policy. Yet, by so identifying the state (and its agents) as the architect of their misfortune, they also reaffirm its power and authority. As Anthony Cohen (1985) argues, 'the referential power of the code – its omnipresent availability for subversion and manipulation – also confirms and perpetuates it.'

5.8.3 Declaration 3: Right to adequate livelihood and opportunities

This declaration speaks to the duty of the Lagos State Government to create an environment in which riders in Lagos can pursue adequate means and opportunity of livelihood and employment as provided for in Section 16(1)(d) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Thus, this third declaration alerts us to the perceived role of the state as responsible for addressing urban vulnerability and insecurity. Following the insights of Partha Chatterjee, in *The Politics of the Governed* (2004), one can argue that, alongside its reference to the government's obligation to look after the urban poor and underprivileged population groups, ANACOWA is also appealing to the moral rhetoric of a demographic category striving to build a decent social life under harsh conditions, and at the same time, affirming the primary duties of a good citizenship (Chatterjee, 2004: 60). In this respect, 'performing the city,' or claiming the right to public space, becomes an assertion of the political values of access, participation and cultural democracy (Makeham, 2005: 158).

5.8.4 Declaration 4: Right not to be discriminated against

In its Originating Summons, ANACOWA declared that section 3(1) of the law to the extent that it restricts the movement of *okada* on 475 routes across Lagos constitutes a violation of the right of its poor *okada* members not to be discriminated against in

government policies, as guaranteed by Section 42 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (Originating Summons, Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 3-4).

5.9 Right to Participate in the City

I return to Lefebvre's second basic right to the city: participation. This right requires those who inhabit the city to be 'present in all circuits of decision making leading to the control and development of the organisation of social space' (Lefebvre, 1996: 174), as a means of counterbalancing the dominance of space exercised by both state planning bureaucracies and capital (Martins, 1982: 183). This is important if we bear in mind that 'urban governing institutions have been restructured so as to respond more to the needs of security capital investments than to being a democratic forum for the interests of urban citizens' (Routledge, 2010: 1166). Hence, decision-making power that shapes urban spatiality has gradually shifted away from city dwellers towards the corporate sector (Peck, 1998); the appreciable restructuring of the parameters of political democracy has eroded urban democracy while creating certain opportunities for elite urban actors (Garcia, 2006; Taylor, 2007). This explains why Dikec (2001) argues that the right to participation entails the involvement of urban inhabitants in institutionalized control over urban life, which ultimately includes participation in the political life, management, and administration of the city (cf. Fenster, 2005). Hence, the pursuit of the right to the city hinge on mechanisms of participation that are controlled by urban inhabitants themselves since, for Lefebvre (1976c: 120), participation without 'self-management' invites 'manipulation.'

It is against this backdrop that Peter Marcuse (2009) interprets Lefebvre's right to the city as both 'a cry and a demand.'

The demand comes from those directly in want, directly oppressed, those for whom even their most immediate needs are not fulfilled... the cry comes from the aspiration of those superficially integrated into the [capitalist] system and sharing in its material benefits, but constrained in

their opportunities for creative activity, oppressed in their social relationships... unfulfilled in their lives' hopes (Marcuse, 2009: 190).

Another way of saying this is that, the right to the city rests largely on 'an exigent demand by those [like *okada* riders] deprived of basic material and existing legal rights, and an aspiration for the future by those discontented with life as they see it around them, perceived as limiting their potentials for growth and creativity' (Marcuse, 2009: 190). This not only vindicates Routledge's (2010: 190) contention that 'the city must be produced to meet the needs of the users of urban space,' but also reclaims David Harvey's (2008: 38) intervention that 'increasingly, we see the right to the city falling into the hands of private or quasi-private interests.'

5.10 Contextualising the Right to Participate in the City

As in the previous section, this section locates Lefebvre's right to participation within the context of ANACOWA's avowed grievances against the Lagos State Government over its enactment of the law of 2012. ANACOWA's argument is that the (perceived) violation of the right to participate in decision-making that affects the daily lives and livelihoods of its members was a primary reason why the association and its members sought the services of the human rights lawyer, Bamidele Aturu (now late), to drag the Lagos State Government to court. This view came out clearly in an interview with ANACOWA Chairman Aliyu Wamba:

*We were not consulted when the bill to ban commercial motorcyclists was in the works. But we decided to attend the public hearing when we heard of it. At the public hearing however, a 23-page document was given to us as the proposed bill (Road traffic law). After perusing through it, we eventually analysed it clause by clause. We realised that some of the sections were conspicuously removed from the law, particularly Schedule 22 that is currently generating the crisis in Lagos which banned *okada* from plying some roads in Lagos. I remember somebody asking at the floor of the public hearing where is the Schedule 22 mentioned? But he was asked to put down his observation in writing. So, when Governor Babatunde Fashola was to sign the bill into law, the Schedule 22 and others now*

emerged. What we later had as the law as a 78-page document as against the earlier 23-page document that was showed to us. The okada operators were not carried along.

Mr. Wamba's claims were confirmed in a separate interview with President of MOTOAN, Mr. Ibrahim Ekunola, who insisted that 'we weren't allowed to see the law before it was finally forwarded to the Lagos State House of Assembly. From what we, I mean the stakeholders saw earlier, the 475 roads were not included. It was later they added them to the law' (*Vanguard*, 2013). In deliberately omitting Schedule 22 from the public hearing of the LSRTL, *okada* associations felt 'manipulated in ways... damaging to their spaces and their daily life' (de Certeau, 1991). In short, many riders felt they had been played '419' (fraud) by the government, reinforcing the 'politics of illusion' (Apter, 2005) and 'deception' (Smith, 2007) that permeates all aspects of public and private life in Nigeria (Chapters 2 and 3).

The foregoing sheds light on the idea of inhabitation underlying Lefebvre's right to participate fully and centrally in all decision-making over the production of urban space (Purcell, 2003: 577). The right to centrality in decision-making confers the right to a key voice in defining urban space. Purcell (2003: 577) argues that in the right to the city inhabitants have a say in decisions both within and outside the formal state, decisions such as where capital will be invested, where new jobs will be created, where new public transportation lines will run, or where new housing will be built. From this angle, one can better appreciate ANACOWA's grievances against the state for excluding them from vital decision-making processes that affects their lives and livelihood. As Mr. Aliyu Wamba noted in an interview:

What the Lagos State Government would have done was to distribute the complete document to all *okada* riders' associations in Lagos for scrutiny before the eventual endorsement of it into law. I do know that most of us would have consulted our lawyers to fine tune areas of the bill that are inimical to our operations and eventually harmonise areas of anticipated conflict. Let the okada riders make their own input. Perhaps all these controversies would have been averted.

Furthermore, Mr. Wamba touched on a grey area of the enacted law, arguing that the law is manipulative and illustrative of the government's 'wickedness' towards poor riders struggling to make meaning out of their lives. In his words:

The law banned *okada* riders from operating in 475 roads in Lagos... These are 475 roads that *okada* riders do business. Then Schedule 4(16) of the law further says that if your motorcycle is below 200cc is banned from operating in the remaining roads. So automatically, these 475 roads and section that says if your motorcycle is below 200cc you are ban from plying the other roads further compound our problems. The logic is that if you put the two clauses together, you find that *okada* has been automatically wiped off Lagos State. We felt it was a *manipulative tactics* to wipe commercial motorcycle operators out of existence. So that their family members and dependents will continue to suffer and perhaps eventually die of hunger.

Following the enactment of the law, Mr. Wamba said he swiftly consulted with other *okada* associations to see how they could arrange a meeting with the Lagos State Governor to persuade him to reconsider aspects of the law that impinged on *okada* operation in the city. But all their efforts came to nothing.

The governor was very adamant. Some of my colleagues met the Transport Commissioner to assist us in convincing the governor but he refused to respond. I followed them in more than two separate occasions to the governor's office without recording any appreciable progress. When I realised that it was all an exercise in futility going to Alahusa to speak to a governor who was not ready to listen, I resorted to use my time for something precious. But those who were not ready to agree with m position continued their fruitless visit to the Governor's office, until it eventually dawn on them that the governor has zeroed his mind on the issue (Interview with Aliyu Wamba).

However, not all of the *okada* associations in Lagos spoke unanimously against the government and the law. According to Aliyu Wamba, 'we have about nine associations of *okada* riders in Lagos. Unfortunately, two of them have been *bought over* [captured] by the government. They are more or less like agents of the

government. The government is now using these two groups to frustrate others. But my Association [ANACOWA] understands state intentions. Hence, we distance ourselves from them whenever we are going for any dialogue. We solely took the government to court.’ Mr. Wamba also reiterated that the police and task force in Lagos have confiscated thousands of *okadas* belonging to poor members of his association and other associations of *okada* riders across the city.

In the next section I shift my attention to an analytic engagement with the sworn court affidavits and counter-affidavits relating to the disputes over the law, with particular attention to the perception by ANACOWA that the traffic law violates their fundamental right to move freely in the city they inhabit.

5.11 Affidavit in Support of ANACOWA’s Originating Summons

In support of its Originating Summons, ANACOWA deposed the following affidavit before the High Court of Lagos State. The presentation here is recounted through the eyes of the *okada* claimants who testified against the Lagos State Government. I adopted a strategy of narrative story telling because of its powerful ability to sustain ‘a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances’ (Jackson, 2002: 15).

5.11.1 ANACOWA Claimant: Aliyu Wamba

The first claimant to present an affidavit before the High Court of Lagos was Mr. Aliu Wamba, a Muslim *okada* rider who lives in Shogunle, Lagos. Mr. Wamba described how he became an *okadaman* due to unemployment.

I have personally searched for employment in about three states in vain before coming to settle in Lagos eighteen years ago when I decided to become a commercial motorcyclist (Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p. 6).

Mr. Wamba’s case reflects that of many riders who have searched in vain for gainful jobs. Earlier, I discussed the harsh conditions that compelled many riders to join the

okada business. In his affidavit, Mr. Wamba described how he became an *okada* rider in order to provide for his family so that he will not take to the streets or resort to stealing. Mr. Wamba is married with a wife and four children. As with many poor Lagosians, Mr. Wamba is a tenant who pays monthly rent with the income he receives from his *okada* business. Due to his meager income, Mr. Wamba described how he cannot afford to buy a vehicle and thus is restricted to the use of his *okada* to transport his family about when he has social functions and or when he takes his family to worship, or any other function or family emergency. According to Wamba:

I know as a fact that by using my motorcycle to take my children to school and my wife to the market, I have been able to save more money and cater better for my family as I do not have to pay the exorbitantly high public transportation fees for myself, wife and our children (Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p6).

From this statement, it is clear that riders use their *okada* for both public and private purposes. Wamba also touches here on the experience of many *okada* riders in Lagos who are unable to make regular use of public transport due to its exorbitant cost and therefore find it cheaper for them to use their *okadas* as a regular means of mobility (Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 6-7). Mr. Wamba told the court that the government and its law enforcement agents routinely and forcibly seize the *okadas* of his members and detain them at the Ikeja Task Force Office. According to Mr. Wamba:

I have been arrested on two occasions (by agents of Lagos State Government) along with my motorcycle, which was forcibly seized from me and detained. It was only when I sought the intervention of some senior officials in the Lagos State Government employment that it was released (Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.92).

Mr. Wamba claimed that at the time of speaking, ‘not less than 700 *okadas* are in the custody of the defendants and their officials’ (ibid). There were two other claimants – Yusuf Oladimeji and Mordecai Samuel – whose affidavit I will not delve into since they more or less rehearse the key points raised by Mr. Wamba. Suffice it to say that

all three claimants underlined the fact that the state did not restrict the movement of cars on any of the routes in Lagos, a point that relates to the rights of ANACOWA and its members not to be discriminated against. Further, the claimants noted that their *okadas* served as a primary means of mobility for themselves and their families as they cannot afford to own private cars. They bemoaned the fact that, since the enactment of the law, agents of the state have constantly harassed them in the course of their daily work. All three claimants have also experienced the forcible seizure and destruction of their *okadas* by the police and other officers of authority. They all claimed that if the Lagos State Government and its enforcement agents were not duly restrained by the High Court, *okada* riders would be banned from moving freely (either alone or with family members) on all the roads across Lagos. Lastly, all the claimants noted that they are not opposed to traffic rules that entail speed limits, use of crash helmets, and maximum number of passengers (Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12).

5.12 The Lagos State Government's Counter-Affidavit

In this section, I focus on the counter-affidavit of the Lagos State Government in defense of its enactment of the traffic law, and against ANACOWA's Originating Summons presented above. I draw on the counter-affidavit of Mr. Feyi Oladeji and Mr. Abimbola Ojenike on behalf of Lagos State and its House of Assembly.

5.12.1 First State Defendant: Feyi Oladeji

Mr. Feyi Oladeji, a Nigerian public servant who works with Ministry of Transport, deposed the counter-affidavit on behalf of Lagos State Government. Mr. Oladimeji is also a Legal Practitioner in the Office of the Attorney General of Lagos State by virtue of which he claims to be conversant with the facts of the legal case in question. In his counter-affidavit, Mr. Oladeji called into question ANACOWA's affidavit, with particular reference to the affidavit of ANACOWA's chairman, Mr. Wamba. Against the claims made by Mr. Wamba, Mr. Oladeji argued that *okadas* have never

been approved as a means of commercial transportation in Lagos. He maintains that the Lagos State Public Transport Master Plan does not recognize *okadas* or identify any route for their use as a means of transport. Further, Mr. Oladeji argued that the Lagos State Government restricted the use of *okadas* on highways and bridges in Schedule II (see Appendix) because of ‘health, safety, security and environmental protection of residents of Lagos State’ (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.32).

This claim seems to reinforce Governor Fashola’s 2012 speech on ‘Freedom from Fear’ in relation to law and order in Lagos. In the speech, Fashola challenged critics of the law to visit the hospitals and emergency wards and see those who have lost limbs, arms, those who have lost children or those who have become orphans due to the recklessness of *okada* riders (*Vanguard*, 2012). In less than two decades, argues Fashola, *okadas* have gained huge prominence that it has become a phenomenon which should not have been allowed in the first place: ‘The only way to stop the business from flourishing is by not patronizing them... If the income from [*okada* business] dwindles, the business proposition of those in it will change’ (ibid). In making this statement, Fashola displayed what many *okada* riders have framed as a ‘lack of concern’ for the plight of poor riders who have lost their only means of survival following the venal enforcement of the law by agents of the state As one rider complained: ‘The state government clearly does not know what the masses are going through. This is most evident in the haste with which they carried out the enforcement.’ A prime example of an *okada* rider who was hard hit by the law is the story of Kehinde, a graduate of Banking and Finance, and formally account officer with WEMA Bank Plc. Kehinde’s second chance to make meaning out of his life came to an abrupt end with the destruction of his *okada* by the task force:

I was a cashier with the WEMA Bank until I was sacked in 2011 as fallout of the Central Bank of Nigeria’s (CBN) tough stand on the bank. I went around in search of jobs to no avail and I decided to gather what I have to buy my *okada* so that I could make ends meet. This unfortunate event happened to me immediately after my wedding so I had to look for

an alternative means of making a living pending when I get a better job. Rather than roaming the streets, I decided to become an *okadaman* carrying passengers from here to there, it has been so painful an experience, but life goes on.

Moving on, Mr. Oladeji told the court that the Lagos State Government holds the constitutional power to legislate on the well-being, health, welfare, safety and environment, and to ensure the protection of life and assets of every Lagosian. To support his point, he adduced Section 20 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which provides that ‘The State shall protect and improve the environment and safeguard the water, air and land, forest and wild life of Nigeria.’ On this basis, Mr. Oladeji argued that the law is thus ‘a law to regulate standard, safety, security and sanity in the society’ (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.102). Mr. Oladeji proceeded to make three major claims relating to the *okada* business. First, that he was duly informed by Dr. Jide Idris, the Commissioner for Health in Lagos State, that: (a) ‘Commercial motorcycle operation is responsible for the alarming rate of avoidable loss of lives and serious cases of road accident in Lagos State and that this has increased the expenditure of the State on emergency health services;’ (b) ‘Between the period of December 2010 and November 2011 alone, 5,400 accidents and 736 deaths were caused through the instrumentality of *okada* operation in Lagos State and valuable properties were always damaged or lost in the process’ (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 32-3). Mr. Oladeji’s claims finds some evidence in a report by Oluseyi Coker, Permanent Secretary of the Lagos Ministry of Transportation, who argues that due to enforcement of the law, Lagos has seen 81 per cent reduction in the number of *okada* accidents reported in the state’s public health institutions and over 80 per cent reduction in *okada* deaths reported at public hospitals (Ugbodaga, 2015: 2). Coker goes on to argue that *okada*-related deaths have dropped from 192 per year to a maximum of 6 per year, noting that ‘we have saved about 465 lives since October 2012 to date. We have also prevented an average of 476 motorcycle-related injuries monthly and 5,712 yearly. By implication, we have prevented a total of

14,220 motorcycle accident-related injuries since 2012’ (ibid). For Coker, there were some months that *okada* casualty rates were as low as zero percent to the extent that the *okada* wards at some of the public hospitals in Lagos had become empty.



Figure 22. “No Stopping No Parking No Waiting No Trading. Commercial motorcycles (Okada) not allowed.”



Figure 23. “Okada operators are bound from entering this str... from 7pm – 7am”
Source: Fieldwork

During my fieldwork, I found that a major factor in *okada*-related accidents, as with the case of *danfos*, was the gross abuse of *paraga*. This view emerged in an interview I had with a senior vehicle inspection officer in Alimosho:

You see them riding *okada* without crash helmet, some no light at all. Some no pad on the seat and they know but they don't care. You hardly seen an *okadaman* without the aroma of *paraga*. Only about 2 percent of *okadas* have protective face shields. They never come with complete accessories. When you are riding a bike you can imagine the amount of wind that affects you, that goes into your eyes. Instead of them to look for corrective ways of addressing the problem, they want to drink *paraga* so that no matter the amount of wind they face, they [claim they] are strong because of the *paraga*.

Moving on, Mr. Oladeji claimed that he was informed by Major Babatunde Panox, Special Adviser to the Governor of Lagos State on Security matters, that: (a) 'Commercial cyclists constitute security risks as members of underworld and other undesirable elements adopt motorcycle as the preferred mode of carrying out their nefarious activities;' (b) 'In 2011, 71.9% cases of reported armed robbery incidents in Lagos State were perpetrated by armed robbers on motorcycles' (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 33). This is because weapons can be easily hidden on the *okada* or its riders. In addition, quick escape is aided with the rider's ability to weave its way around extreme go-slows in the city. Some *okada* riders that I spoke to during fieldwork found some truth in these claims. As one rider told me in Ikotun:

Let me talk true, *okada* was used to do robbery daily. They will not use their machine to carry passengers but to snatch bag. Before the law, *okada* accidents everyday. Some under the motor, some under the trailer. Accidents now reduce so Fashola try for that. No way they will do law, it will be good one side, bad one side. But Fashola try my brother but he should give us another option to use *chop*. As far as you don't have anything to do, you will do and undo. Anything you see you do. If you don't have work for hand, hungry beat you, anything you see, you will do.

Third, Mr. Oladeji told the High Court that he was informed by Mr. Tunji Bello, the Commissioner for the Environment in Lagos, that: (a) 'Serious air pollution is caused

by cheap two-stroke engine motorcycle generally used for public transportation by the Claimants herein [namely ANACOWA] and their cohorts;’ (b) ‘The pollution exposes Lagos residents, especially children and the elderly to respiratory diseases whilst at the same time contributing to the depletion of the ozone layer which is largely responsible for excessive heat and flooding recently experienced in Lagos’ (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p. 33). Contrary to ANACOWA’s claims, Mr. Oladeji insisted that the Lagos State Government has a robust mass transit system, which has become ‘the model of urban transport in the whole of west coast of Africa’ (ibid). This, according to him, includes BRT being operated by Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA) and LAGBUS Assets Management Company Limited and several routes for ferry services. This is in addition to public vehicles plying the roads of Lagos. However, Mr. Oladimeji conveniently overlooked the fact that the World Bank-funded BRTs have coincided with the crowding out of informal operators, thus intensifying precarious livelihoods, conflicts, and insecurity in urban life. Besides, the limited reach of the BRTs across Lagos came up *ad nauseam* during my interviews with regular commuters. As one commuter in Oshodi complained: ‘You can wait all day for a BRT to show up. The queue for a BRT is so long. It makes no sense because you can’t plan your day. So many will wait for like three hours and in frustration go back to *danfos* or *okadas*, which are more reliable.’

Mr. Oladeji further claimed that he knows for certain that several projects of the Lagos Government provide direct and indirect employment for Lagosians and that the Ministries of Women Affairs and Commerce have vocational training centers across the State to ensure that Lagosians are fully engaged (*Counter-Affidavit*, Suit ID|713m|12, p.34). Over the years, argues Mr. Oladeji, *okada* riders in Lagos have adversely affected the well-being, welfare and security of other road users and this has provoked much outcry in the press as well as petitions to the government. Mr. Oladeji noted that the Lagos authority has devoted considerable resources and time to train, orientate, educate and sensitize *okada* operators on traffic rules and policies

without much success. In his view, the problems associated with operations of *okadas* as a means of public transport far outweigh its economic benefits as most of the operators do not follow traffic lights, drive against traffic, drive on walkways and kerbs, weave in and out of traffic lane without due regard to other road users, amongst other infractions. In his counter-affidavit, Mr. Oladeji explained that in response to several complaints and public outcry on the risky operations of *okadas* in Lagos, the state set up a Tribunal of Inquiry, which advised that:

It is necessary to restrict *okada* operations to those Local Government Areas where they are needed and even then to certain roads within those Local Government Areas. They should then be prohibited from inter-Local Government operations as well as operations on our major highways and bridges like Third Mainland Bridge, Eko Bridge and all BRT designated routes' (*Government White Paper on the Report of the Tribunal*, June 2012; Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, pp. 34-35).

In addition, Mr. Oladeji noted that following several incidents of armed robbery with *okadas* in Lagos State, the government again set up a Security Committee to consider the activities of *okada* riders under the chairmanship of a retired Deputy Inspector General of Police, Alhaji Waheed Kassim. In paragraph 24(a) of its report, the Security Committee advised 'a systematic restriction that will prohibit *okada* operations in city centers and on highways and arterial roads followed by a gradual phasing out where there are verifiable accessible roads' (Suit ID|713m|12, p. 35). Mr. Oladeji told the High Court that Mr. Akin Hanson, the Permanent Secretary in the Lagos Motor Vehicle Administration Agency (MVAA), informed him that more than 80 per cent *okada* riders in Lagos lack licenses and riders card certifying and authorizing them to operate *okadas* in Lagos. Contrary to the depositions of Mr. Wamba, Mr. Oladeji claims that other Lagos *okada* associations have confirmed their willingness and readiness to abide with the provisions of the law. Mr. Oladeji maintains that, contrary to the claims made in Mr. Wamba's affidavit, the claimants (ANACOWA) were/are being arrested for contraventions of various provisions of the law, the Federal Road Safety Act and other extant legislation (*ibid*). In concluding his

counter-affidavit, Mr. Oladeji reiterated that ‘I know for a fact that the Lagos State Government is responsible for the well-being and welfare, safety and security of all the residents of Lagos State. I also know that other Lagosians have a right to proper security of their lives and properties, clean and sustainable environment, accident-free mobility and general well-being’ (ibid). According to Mr. Oladeji, constitutional rights relating to freedom of movement relate to the person, not his vehicle: ‘It is submitted that in all restricted routes, other means of transport are available. The claimants are therefore not prevented from moving’ (ibid: 107).

5.12.2 Second State Defendant: Abimbola Ojenike

The Second Defendant, Mr. Abimbola Ojenike, is a Nigerian Legal Practitioner and a Counsel with Simons Cooper Partners. His counter-affidavit, which overlaps a great deal with that of Mr. Oladeji, was deposed in the Lagos High Court. As with Mr. Oladeji before him, Mr. Ojenike’s claimed that there is a disturbing trend of increase in criminal activities associated with *okadas* in Lagos. In 2011, Mr. Ojenike claimed that the Lagos Police Command came up with a revelation that more than 80 per cent of armed robbery operations in Lagos State were perpetrated with the use of *okadas*. Within the same period, the Governor of Lagos, at the inauguration of the reconstituted Lagos State Security Committee in December 2011, confirmed that 346 robbers were arrested on *okadas* in various parts of Lagos State (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.121). Mr. Ojenike adduced, as a court exhibit, the newspaper report entitled ‘80 per cent Robbery Incidents Committed on *Okada*,’ published in *This Day* newspaper edition (9 December 2011). Mr. Ojenike also claimed to have read news and investigative reports published in local newspapers about the upsurge of armed robbery incidents, murder and other crimes perpetrated by armed bandits on *okadas*. One of the tragic incidents of *okada* robbery adduced by Mr. Ojenike was that of Damilola, a 25 years old female banker who was killed in front of her house.

The horror of Sowemimo's death was so palpable that Nigerians through the internet and various social media expressed their outrage against the state of insecurity foisted by motorcycle operation in Lagos State. They were concerned that the Lagos State Government would allow the continuing operation of motorcycles on the highways in spite of the grave social consequences and security risks to lives and properties in the State (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.122).

Damilola's case, according to Mr. Ojenike, is just one out of countless incidents of crimes reported to have been committed with *okadas* in Lagos. For instance, in the *Nigerian Tribune* (18 July 2012) was reported that one Lateef, a cybercafé operator in Ajisegiri Street, was shot in the chest by a gang of three armed robbers who invaded his office and carted away an unspecified sum of money, laptop computers, phone and other valuables. According to Mr. Ojenike, Ajisegiri residents lived in fear after incessant attack by robbers operating on *okada* and they appealed to the state for help (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.122). In the newspaper adduced as a court exhibit, a resident of Ajisegiri stated that '*okada* robbers have always been a problem to us in this area. They operate at will without anybody hindering their operation. This is the second time they came here. Each of the times nobody knew that a robbery operation was going on in the shop. It was after they left that people raised alarm' (*Nigerian Tribune*, 2012). Drawing on other reported incidents in Lagos, Mr. Ojenike consolidated his case that *okadas* have become the preferred means of transport by criminals because of the advantage it gives the rider to navigate the various traffic gridlocks and escape before security operatives are alerted. According to Mr. Ojenike, one Soyinka Adigun, an *okada* robbery suspect, confirmed this fact:

Let me tell you one secret, and I am talking from experience, it is better for the government to ban *okada* because it often paved the way for our escape. We have snatched so many *okada* and usually sold one for N3000 to N3,500. I will lead the police to the buyers. On that day we miscalculated because any time we left home, we often pray to God to give us our daily bread. Sometimes when we go on *okada* we will park in front of supermarkets, chemists, restaurants, and pretend as if we wanted to buy something and point gun at them, then snatch their money and other valuable items on them. At times, as we move on *okada*, if we see a

house and the gate is opened we will order the occupants at gunpoint to surrender all their possessions (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.123; *PM News*, 2012).

The inconsistency of the law, and Mr. Ojenike's counter-affidavit in particular, is noteworthy. In chapter three, I broached the problem of 'one chance' among *danfo* operators in Lagos. This reality begs the question: If *okadas* are restricted because of their use for armed robbery, what about *danfos* which are equally used for 'one chance' activities? Why are they not subjected to the same fate? Mr. Ojenike omitted, conveniently so, the fact that in the same *PM News* report (adduced as an 'exhibit'), the *okada* robbery suspect stated (further down the lines of his confession statement) that 'I am a bus [*danfo*] conductor and the bus [*danfo*] ply Sango Otta-Oshodi route' (*PM News*, 2012). In any event, with the increased public frustration on the menace of *okadas* in Lagos State, Mr. Ojenike claims that the House of Assembly – as the body vested with the power for the peace, order and good governance – was 'obliged by the *sense of responsibility* owed to the people of Lagos State to ensure their safety and welfare' (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12). Based on the foregoing, Mr. Ojenike submitted that 'I believe that the personal economic imperatives of any individual or group of people do not outweigh the public interest of the House of Assembly in the safety, security and welfare of the generality of the people of Lagos State which the House represents' (ibid: 124).

In making this claim, however, Mr. Ojenike, as with Mr. Oladeji before him, falls into the common trap of reducing *okada* riding to 'economic imperatives,' ignoring the affective dimensions of automobile culture and its role in the production of space (Sheller, 2004; Duff, 2010). As Burge (2011: 60) argues:

bike riding goes beyond responding to the most immediate need to survive in economically difficult times. It is about some people's particular way of participating [in the economy] and trying to become responsible and respected members of the community and society at large, contributing to its development and future prosperity in congruity with their own aspirations.

In his concluding statement, Mr. Ojenike argued that ANACOWA's contention that Section 3(1) of the law violates their fundamental rights to freedom of movement under Section 41 of the 1999 Nigerian Consitution is 'misconceived' and 'not absolute' since it is a 'constitutionally qualified right' which can be 'derogated from in the overriding interest of public safety, and security' (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12, p.161). According to Mr. Ojenike, the traffic law does not legislate that ANACOWA and its members must not move in and out of particular geographical locations in Lagos. It only bans certain means of public transportation which are deemed unsafe and which have been used for criminal activities:

The claimants are not prohibited from moving in and out of the identified highways by other means of transportation. By whether stretch of argumentation, a prohibition on specific means of transportation which are dangerous cannot be interpreted as a prohibition of movement. The clear objective of the LSRTL is to ensure public safety, security and the welfare of the people; not to restrict movement of any person (ibid, p. 181).

In making this statement, Mr. Ojenike evokes Section 14(2) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution, which provides that 'the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government...' And Section 318 which states that 'Government includes the Government of the Federation or of any State, or of a Local Government Council or any person who exercise power and duty.' For Mr. Ojenike, the primary duty of the Lagos State Government to ensure public safety and the welfare of the people 'necessarily embraces the power to regulate all matters having a close and substantial relation to the internal environment, and to the efficiency of internal state government' (Counter-Affidavit, Suit ID|713m|12).

5.13 ANACOWA: A Brief Response to the State's Counter-Affidavit

As part of its response to the counter-affidavit of the Lagos State Government and its House of Assembly, ANACOWA argued that the so called Committee and Tribunal

set up by the Lagos State Government to investigate the activities of *okada* riders, as adduced by the first and second defendant, was done ‘in pursuit of its predetermined elite fancy and intolerance of the poor that the riders constitute and their pursuit of ridding Lagos State of *okadas* by all means and at all costs and not in the interest of maintaining public order, safety, security and welfare of the larger majority of the people of Lagos State’ (Claimant’s Reply, Suit ID|713m|12, p.195). Furthermore, ANACOWA argued that the statistics adduced by the two defendants do not show ‘comparative figures of accidents and deaths that occurred within the same period through other means of transport’ (i.e. private cars, *molues*, *danfos* and *keke napeps*). Similarly, the statistics drawn upon by the two state defendants turns a blind eye to comparative figures of crimes such as robberies and kidnappings (i.e. ‘one chance’) that occurred within the same period through other means of transport (ibid, Suit ID|713m|12, p.196). Moreover, ANACOWA argued that ‘more heinous and daring crimes are committed with flashy and expensive vehicles such as Prado Jeeps, Toyota Sienna and Honda.¹⁴⁰ Yet the Defendants have not restricted the use of such cars because robbers used them to rob and escape’ (Claimant’s Reply, Suit ID|713m|12, p.196). The right been alluded to here by ANACOWA and its members is the right not to be discriminated against (as earlier discussed).

Putting the problem squarely on the failure of state urban planning and the lack of maintenance culture in Lagos, ANACOWA argued that the extremely bad roads across Lagos and unworthy vehicles are mainly responsible for deaths of people through accidents. They adduced, as a court exhibit, an article which appeared in the *Osun Defender* (2012), showing that ‘almost everyday, there has been record of 5 road accidents on the road. 99 percent of these accidents occurred due to the bad nature of the roads. Several lives and properties are being lost on daily basis as a result of the bad road.’ ANACOWA maintained that ‘the terms of reference of the

¹⁴⁰ Some of these crimes are well documented in Nigerian newspapers (i.e. *Punch*, November 13 2012; *Information Nigeria*, 2012).

committee and tribunal reveal a biased and preconceived notion that commercial motorcycles are unsafe and are used for perpetrating crimes... they reached predetermined conclusions without any sustainable statistics at all' (Claimant's Reply, Suit ID|713m|12, p.196). ANACOWA further argued that since the enactment of the law, Lagos has been thrown into 'unprecedented traffic gridlock with people finding it difficult to get to their workplace in time. Judges and lawyers are not excluded from the harrowing effect of the gridlock as those who would have taken *okadas* now put their vehicles on the road' (ibid. p.197). ANACOWA concluded that 'If the [*okada*] restriction is allowed without creating alternative means of livelihood for those who use *okadas* for survival and to support their children, there will be astronomical rise in crimes as they have to survive one way or the other' (ibid). In summary, therefore, ANACOWA maintains that the law infringes on their human and constitutional rights, in particular, that which allows them to move freely in the city.

5.14 Conclusion: Verdict

In her verdict on the legal dispute, Justice Opesanwo declared that 'the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) duly recognizes that the Lagos State House of Assembly has powers to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Lagos State' (Judgment, Suit ID|713m|12, p.316). She upheld the view that the 'true nature' of Section 3(1) of the law is 'to have the movement of certain categories of Motor vehicles and/or road users managed in order to reduce or limit the hazard to which they and/or members of the public will otherwise become exposed or indeed keep them out of harm's way' (Judgment, Suit ID|713m|12, p. 317). As she argues:

I am of the firm belief that it is an incidental provision in Road Traffic Administration enacted for the peace, order and good government of Lagos Sate. *It is a law in respect of precautions taken to secure the wellness and well being of persons in Lagos State by protecting them from the dangers inherent in the unregulated use of these modes of transportation.* The consequence of the foregoing is that I am unable to agree with the Claimant's Counsel to sustain his submission that Section

3(1) of the Lagos State Road Traffic Law is one the Defendants cannot validly enact (Judgment, Suit ID|713m|12, p.317; my emphasis).

Turning to ANACOWA's complaints on breach of their rights, Justice Opesanwo argued that 'serious as the right infringed upon may be the Court cannot raise its status to be that of a fundamental right... that is not to say that the allegation or wrong cannot be sustained under other heads of claim or simply as a civil right but *not a fundamental right.*' Pressing this point further, Justice Opesanwo argued that 'the traffic law prohibits an action which is, evidently, ancillary to movement. In other words, the objective of the provision is not the movement *of persons* but the *tool ancillary to the movement*' (Judgment, Suit ID|713m|12, p.318; emphasis in original). Justice Opesanwo further claimed that this meaning is not contained in Section 41 of the Nigerian Constitution (1999) – 'Every Citizen of Nigeria... is entitled to move freely throughout Nigeria and reside in any part thereof...' Citizenship, she argues, is 'exclusive of inanimate objects and this even when that object *aids* movement' (ibid). On ANACOWA's claim that the law violates Section 42 of the Nigerian Constitution, which provides for freedom from discrimination, Justice Opesanwo declared that Subsection (1) is worded in such a way as to affirm that the allegation of discrimination can be predicated on only five possible bases: 'A citizen cannot be discriminated against because (1) he belongs to a particular community; (2) he belongs to a particular ethnic group; (3) his place of origin; (4) his religion, and (5) the grounds of his political opinion' (Constitution FRN, 1999).

According to Justice Opesanwo, 'I am unable to find anywhere in which the Claimants have shown which one applies to them. Reading through the affidavit, it did appear to me that they believe they are being singled out because of their less privileged financial status and for being *okada* riders. Let me say straightaway that financial status does not qualify as a basis for invoking Section 42' (Judgment, Suit ID|713m|12, p.319). In her final submission, the Justice declared that

In totality, the Originating Summons herein is one lacking in merit and for which the only reasonable and legally sustainable verdict I am obliged to return is a dismissal of the suit. Accordingly, the action herein fails in its entirety and is hereby dismissed (ibid: 320).

To my mind, the verdict of Justice Opesanwo falls short on at least three counts of engagement. First, it fails to engage with the grievances of ANACOWA that given the economic situation of its members and the high transportation cost in Lagos, for them the right to movement is illusory without the use of their *okadas*. Second, it fails to engage with the reality that ANACOWA and its members cannot exercise their right if their only affordable means of transport – their *okadas* – is prohibited without any alternative arrangements. Lastly, it fails to engage with the venal and forcible possession of *okadas* by the police and other officers of authority, well documented by ANACOWA’s members. Not surprising, many riders have disregarded the court’s ruling as one that is lacking in merit and they have continued ‘business as usual.’

What this chapter shows is the huge gap between law and its enforcement in Lagos. It steps further to illustrate how corruption is a critical factor in understanding that gap. Furthermore, the chapter shows that, contrary to popular views, transport unions are not only sources of oppression and rackets but also sources of support for their poor members against what they perceive as a threat to their human and constitutional rights. This reinforces the ‘Janus-faced’ nature of ‘uncivil societies’ (Bayat, 1997), sliding as they often do between ‘roles as legitimate providers of social services and violent oppressors of communities’ (Henningsen and Jones, 2013: 372). More importantly, the chapter illustrates ways in which informal operators (like *okada* riders) increasingly appeal to formal processes (i.e. the Court and the Constitution) to articulate and redress their grievances. Also, the chapter revealed the inherent limitations of the legal instrument, especially the fact that the makers and enforcers of the law can, and often, manipulate it for their own ends. Finally, the chapter embodies the paradox of effective urban governance in Lagos, whereby in trying to create an orderly, ‘world class’ megacity, the Lagos State Government, through its enactment

of the law, may have paradoxically created more 'legitimate' avenues for corrupt practices, while awakening the rights consciousness of informal operators.

General Conclusions

Structured into six empirical chapters, this study has provided fresh insights into the routine dynamics of corruption and the frontiers of urban survival in Africa's largest city. In particular, the chapters underline the embeddedness of corruption in everyday forms of sociability, and locate it within a complex terrain of risk and uncertainty – urban transport. Combined, the chapters illustrate how ordinary practitioners of the city imagine and negotiate corruption, how corruption actually embeds itself in social life, how it impacts on the daily lives and social livelihoods of urban actors, and how various urban actors appropriate it for their ends. For this, I collected eight months of ethnographic data grounded on the lifeworlds of transport operators in Lagos.

6.1 Analytical Summary of Discussions

Beyond the first chapter, which sets the scene of the entire study, chapter two adopted a 'bottom-up' approach that re-engages with the social embeddedness of corruption in local idioms, fantastic stories, and spatial practices. The chapter argued for the need to go beyond the narrow Weberian normative binary oppositions as analytical lenses for thinking about corruption in Africa, especially its routine forms. To indulge in these neat dichotomies, as many studies do, is to miss out on, or gloss over, the experiential dimensions of corruption. Hence, my micro-level approach is advanced here as a corrective to the surfeit of studies still fixated on grand corruption and elites.

In chapter three, I locate corruption in the everyday context in which it occurs, with particular attention to the micropolitics of uncertain relations and networks in urban

transport. Foregrounding crisis as context of action, I showed how operators carve out meaningful temporalities amidst conditions of violent extortion and labour precarity, illustrating how ‘uncertainty transforms the conditions of possibility in the city, while generating new forms of urban life and livelihood’ (Zeiderman *et al.* 2015: 299). In making this point, we must not lose sight (as Koolhaas and his Harvard team did) of the precarious conditions in which many Lagosians, indeed city dwellers across urban Africa, reside. True, uncertainty serves as a resource, a terrain of unclosed possibility, for poor operators and commuters. But violent extortion and poor urban planning also index material conditions of protracted poverty and entrenched marginality.

Also, the chapter stresses the intentionality of these urban actors (as knowledgeable and dynamic agents) in navigating space and enacting possibilities, rethinking, in the process, dominant narratives that belabour the disempowering conditions of informal workers (such as Meagher, 2005; Lindell, 2010; Rizzo, 2011). A study of the aesthetics of precarity in urban transport suggests that the present and the future are not disconnected horizons of social practice but combine to make place and produce life in Lagos. Hence, the reality of uncertainty serves as a resource that animates the daily lives of operators, attesting to the unclosed capacity of becoming that Lagos, indeed ‘cityness,’ embody (Simone, 2010). This, in turn, educates an understanding of the real as process and the possible as ‘everything that is only partially conditioned, which has not yet been fully or conclusively determined...’ (Bloch, 1954: 17). Therefore, for transport operators who aspire to ‘become somebody’ in life:

The objective is not to tie themselves down to prevailing notions about what can be taken into account, what makes sense, or what is logically possible. The idea is to keep things open, keep things from becoming too settled or fixed. The messed-up city, then, is not simply a mess. In the very lack of things seeming settled, people keep open the possibility that something more palatable to their sense of themselves might actually be possible (Simone, 2010: 261).

Lastly, the economy of junction extortion, discussed herein, shows that the state is not a discrete and monolithic entity ‘acting’ impersonally above or outside of society. Nor are the daily social relations and place-making tactics of operators autonomous of the state. Instead, the putative state-society boundary is often blurred, fluid, and negotiable in daily life. As such, any attempt to understand, let alone address, corruption must acknowledge these imbrications, these messy associations, and these synergistic actors. In short, such an attempt must come to terms with the fact that the traditional demarcation between the ‘formal’ and the ‘informal’ is empirically inapt.

Chapter four revolves around the changing (historical) dynamics of *agberos* in urban transport, a social category on which nothing of note has been written thus far. The chapter engages with many important texts in the sub-field of urban public transport and with broader literature on the role of fear, violence in societies, as well as Nigerian specific literature. At the heart of the chapter is the figure of the *agbero* as embedded in a range of varying descriptions as to their origins, status, functions, and operations in urban transport. My direct experience of the ‘surrounds’ of the *agbero*, the ‘junction’ that constitute the spatial hinge of their extraction and complicity, and my participation in the *danfo* (as a conductor and a commuter), enabled access to a sense of how this economy works. In writing this chapter, I drew upon a wide range of secondary sources and interviews to substantiate the instability of the designation, how it morphs and mutates, shifts registers and, as such, sutures apparent divides between the licit and illicit, the boundaries of union organisations, and the relations among state and non-state actors. So, at times, the existence of the *danfo* is less about objects and routes of transporting passengers than it is an occasion and locus of the changing circulation of relations among different kinds of authority and currency. Thus, to focus attention on the figure of the *agbero* as an individual is to miss out on the interconnections and complex networks of relationships of power that makes the *agbero* an institution within urban transport. As Achebe (1974: 40) once remarked of Nwaka’s formidable power in *Arrow of God*, ‘when we see a little bird dancing in the

middle of the pathway we must know that its drummer is in the near-by bush.’ Far from being a discrete and coherent whole – a single person – the sets of *agberos* that I met in Lagos where more like a composite personality or a network of interdependent individuals that are open to reconfiguration as interests converge and diverge.

Semi-private figures (like *agberos*) and informal operators (like *okada* riders) are usually blamed for disrupting the city, transforming urban life into ungovernable, even alternatively governed, spaces. Against this backdrop, one can discern urban imaginaries in Africa – informed by the logic of Western modernity and development – aimed at regulating the irregular, ordering disorder, and bounding uncertainty. Such imaginaries are catalyzed by seeing urban life *from above*¹⁴¹ which has the less desirable effect of totalizing the city, while de-historicizing and depoliticizing its lived realities – an effect that satisfies the scopic drive to make the ‘complexity of the city readable’ (de Certeau, 1984: 91). Against this backdrop, chapter five draws on hard legal evidence from the controversial dispute between *okada* riders and associations and the Lagos State Government to interrogate ways in which informal urban workers respond to spatial interventions that poses the greatest threat to their daily survival and their human and constitutional right to the city. Focusing on the controversial traffic law (see Appendix), which coincided with the drive to make Lagos a ‘world class’ megacity, I showed how its enactment in 2012 has, paradoxically, contributed to more ‘insanity’ on the roads and opened more spaces for the police and officers of authority to abuse their powers ‘to make our lives hell,’ as one *okada* rider puts it.

¹⁴¹ Tellingly, it was from a ‘rented’ presidential helicopter ride by which Koolhaas and his team from Havarad showed that Lagos functioned as a series of self-regulatory systems: ‘From the air... the apparently burning garbage heap turned out to be, in fact, a village, an urban phenomenon with a highly organized community living on its crust... what seemed at ground level, an accumulation of dysfunctional movements, seemed from above an impressive performance, evidence of how well Lagos might perform if it were the third largest city in the world’ (cited in Gandy, 2005: 41).

6.2 Towards the Logic of Conviviality?

The chapters above highlight the social agency of operators to *find a way* out of a difficult situation where corruption is as widespread as ‘pure water,’¹⁴² and where chronic crisis has settled as a permanent state. Unlike contemporary perspectives in academic and journalistic accounts that perfunctorily view everyday corruption as a ‘normalised’ practice, something expected and accepted by all and sundry, I suggest that ordinary people actively detest – at least discursively – the corruption that they encounter in their daily lives. At the same time, their (power)lessness in the face of its banality compels them to always devise tactics to find a way around it or to make it productive for their ends. In the process, these urban actors socially reproduce the corruption that they detest, reinforcing the paradox of ambivalent complicity noted *ab initio* (Chapter 1). The active mobilisation of tactics, combined with the appeal to the law as a ‘weapon,’ illustrate ways in which urban marginals deploy their very marginality to their benefit, to ‘construct places of socialization and new sociabilities whose function is to show their difference, either on the margins of society or at its heart, simultaneously as victims and active agents’ (Diouf, 2003: 5). In so doing, they perfect the art of getting by reminiscent of the spatial practices of everyday life. Among other things, this ‘art’ requires them to continuously maintain gaze and gait (‘shine your eyes’) in an urban space of innumerable interruptions and interference.

It is unnecessary, then, to endorse conventional analysis that tendentially fasten upon the professed logic of resistance, disengagement, or disjunction on the part of the subaltern (as does, for example, J. Scott, 1985). Instead, this study emphasizes the convivial logic that arises from the precarious rhythm of everyday life and the vigilance its spatiality compels. Put differently, the study illustrates ‘the dynamics of domesticity and familiarity, which inscribe the dominant and the dominated within

¹⁴² ‘Pure water’ (sachet water) is the cheapest commodity money can buy on the streets of Lagos. But, yet, it is so effective in *quenching one’s thirst* in a very humid environment.

the same episteme' (Mbembé, 2001: 110). This dynamics is at play, for example, in the purported alliance between the union and the government (grand level), and the alliance between *agberos* and the police (everyday level). As we saw in chapter four, the union is implicated in partisan politics, which, along with their army of *agberos*, makes them attractive targets for cooptation by political actors for their short-run electoral interests. During the course of my fieldwork, for example, popular perception had it that the Lagos State Government lacked the required gravitas to call the union and its *agberos* to order because of the latter's strategic power structure in electoral process in southwestern Nigeria, especially Lagos (Chapters 3 and 4).

While this *pas de deux* (between union and state) undermines formal state capacity, it emboldens the union to gain a stronger foothold and a measure of legitimacy over the management and control of lucrative motorparks and bus stops across Lagos, which, constitutionally speaking, should be the domain of local governments (Chapter 3). This, in turn, leads to more violent and predatory forms of interaction between (and within rival) transport unions and local communities, destroying the moral certainties of ordinary citizens who are no longer sure who stands for what – an epistemological uncertainty that permeates this study. Indeed, there is a sense in which both violence and order result from the shifting relations between these 'multiple territorial and institutional scales' (Moncada, 2013). For example, efforts by local governments to reclaim their authority over the control of motorparks have often precipitated violent resistance from *agberos*. In a recent case that occurred during fieldwork, Oshodi witnessed a violent outburst when the local council's executive secretary ordered the immediate cessation of 'illegal' tax collection in motorparks and bus stops across Oshodi. Predictably, the decision did not go down well with *agberos* and their unit chairman. In a matter of days, *agberos* brutally attacked motorparks *en masse*, razing any *danfo* in sight. Worried about the threat to lives and properties in the dense area, the secretary was forced to revoke his order within the same week of its declaration. Without going into any detail here, normality in this context seems to resemble what

Paul Brass has called a (pre-Leviathan) ‘Hobbesian state of war’ in which there are ‘a set of formal rules and practices obeyed by a few, a set of informal rules and practices followed by most, and a lack of legitimacy attached to both’ (Brass, 1997: 273, 279).

The foregoing discourse draws attention to agency in Lagos as interdependence and intersubjectivity, rather than (in)dependence. In other words, discussions of agency in Africa must go beyond traditional discourse of the empowerment of the individual alone – his creativity, abilities and powers – to engage with how the quest to ‘become somebody’ negotiates everyday conviviality with collective interests. In this respect, agency has meaning only as derived from (or facilitated by) being interconnected with others in what Francis Nyamnjoh (2003) calls a ‘communion of interests.’ As well, agency is undercut by contingency and the use of tactics to manage risk and uncertainty and, at the same time, define aspirations for a better life (Chapter 3). Crucially, such tactics are based on complex intersubjective relations of sociality, intimacy, and ordinary affect. Related to this move away from the microsocial focus on individual agency is the need for more research that examines the linkages between tactics and structural outcomes – one that re-engages with how institutional processes and structural power relations impinge on the access of the urban marginal to basic resources and decision-making structures (Chapter 5). In this respect, it is rather surprising that there is no scholarly work on the origins, role, and changing dynamics of a powerful union like the NURTW, despite its vital role in urban transport and state politics and strategy.¹⁴³ By interrogating the blurred lines between informal and formal governance processes, I argue, we can better understand whether the much touted shift from government to governance (broached in Chapter 1) is actually tipping African cities onto trajectories of popular empowerment and spatial

¹⁴³ One of my next research projects is to do an institutional ethnography of the NURTW – a project not without its challenges, given that the NURTW is the most politicized and violent trade union in Nigeria. The question then is how to impose ‘order through writing on a world whose essence is its fragmentary character’ (Marcus, 1990: 191).

order(ing), which organises an ensemble of possibilities, or whether it is instigating a downward slide into violence and urban decay.

Whatever the case, it bears mentioning that the ethnographic evidence generated in this study do not pretend to exhaust the lived realities and survival tactics of operators in Lagos. In truth, no study can assuredly make such claims since there are multiple contested realities, constructed by people in different ontological positions (Baviskar, 1995). Yet, the wealth of evidence marshaled here does point, cogently I hope, to the fact that everyday corruption matters for the lives and politics of the urban poor. And, what is more, that tactical agency, uncertainty, creative resilience, vigilance, and even violence, are resources for navigating and regulating urban life, while simultaneously reproducing and stabilizing exploitation and the micropolitics of accumulation.

6.3 Some Emerging Questions and Future Research

While this study has provided fresh insights into the genealogies and modus operandi of the *agbero*, its distinctness from the relative marginality of *area boys* in Lagos, and their purported internal differentiations and dissimulations (Chapter 4), it would be important to garner more insight into how the daily proceeds of extraction operate. After all, the process of thousands of *danfos*, routes, passengers, repairs, junctions, and bus stops in play require a sustainable level of functionality. How is the sustained viability of the system assessed and addressed by the relevant actors? What are the tipping points where extractions threaten to immobilize the system, and how are such potential tipping points identified and avoided? Also, more analysis is required on just how *agberos* come to mediate amongst conflicting or complementary networks of the urban transport system, about the ways in which their efficacy is conjoined to particular stylizations of their activities and what other dispositions are conceivable and concretized. True, such conditions are difficult for researchers to operate in, and it is not really possible to always ‘follow the money’ or to get a handle on complicit dealings between so-called official and unofficial authorities. Still, it would be useful

to engage more with the ‘economics of the game’; in particular, how these persist in the restructuration processes undertaken by the Lagos State Government which, since 1999, has identified urban transport as a sector that is vital to transforming Lagos into a ‘world class’ megacity – especially with the operationalization of the second phase of the World-Bank funded BRTs with dedicated bus-lines.

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Appendix – Lagos State Road Traffic Law (2012)