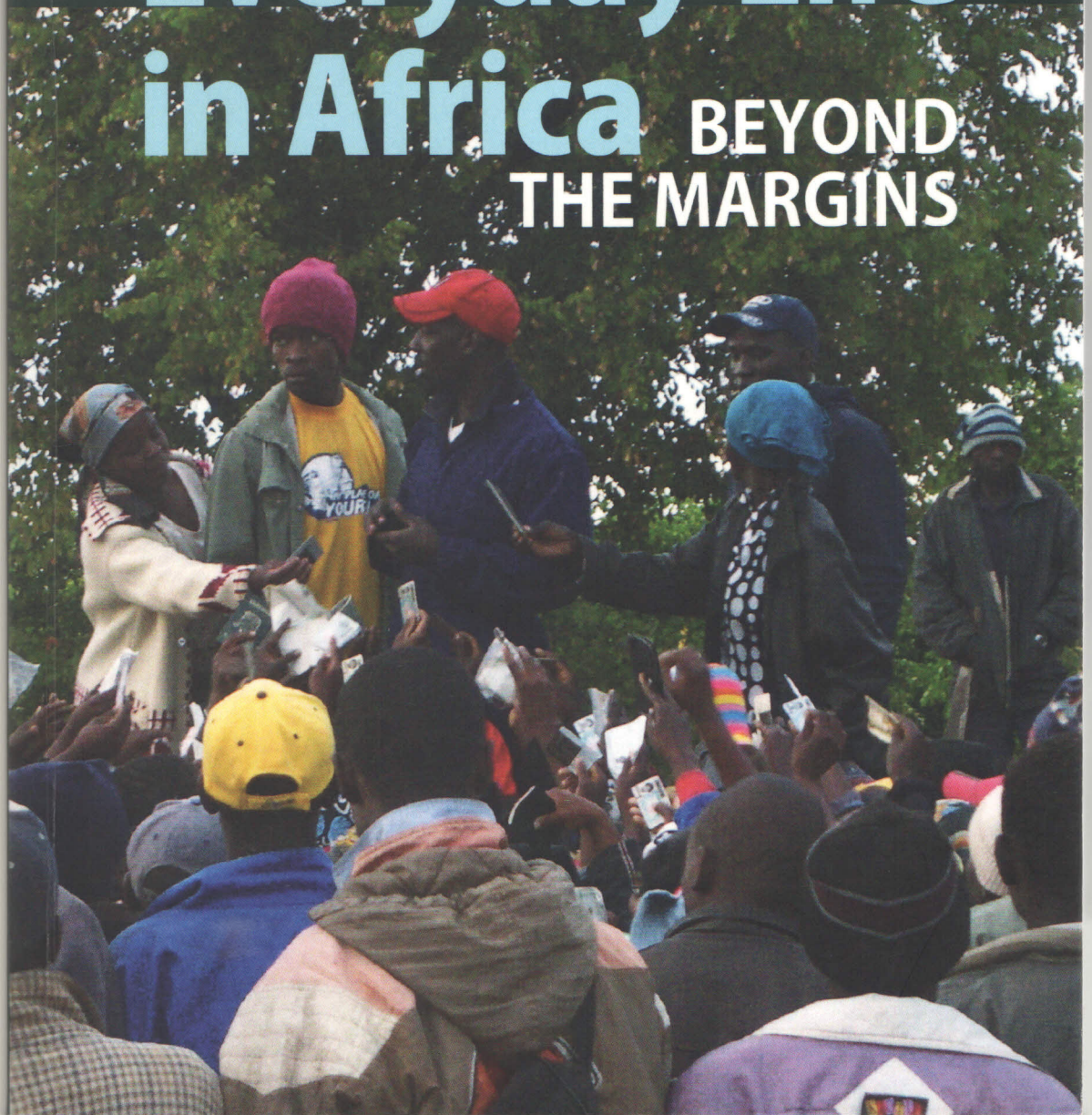


Edited by Wale Adebanwi

The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa

BEYOND THE MARGINS



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Beyond the Margins

Edited by
Wale Adebanwi

Foreword by James Ferguson

 JAMES CURREY

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Marginal Men & Urban Social Conflicts

Okada Riders in Lagos

Gbemisola Animasawun

Many of us (okada riders) are not happy with the ban because we see okada business as the only thing we could do. No need of any capital base and it's very lucrative. There are some of us who conspire with armed robbers and other criminals like hired killers for the sake of money from okada charter. (Moyo Fabiyi P.M. News 20 November 2012)

We have okada too in Rwanda. It is a lucrative business. A good number of people are doing okada business in Rwanda. But their activities are well-regulated. There are rules and regulations that define the limit of their operation. We also organise them into groups, such as association of owners and association of operators. The groups help in ensuring that the rules and regulations are duly observed. Because we have rules, institutions and structures in place, we do not have much problem with okada operators. (Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, quoted in Ilebare 2013)

@desmondc03: FOOTBALL inside POLITICS: Governor Fashola who's a Manchester united fan has rendered 80 per cent of Chelsea fans (okada rider) jobless in Lagos. (Nwachukwu Egbunike 2012)

'Struggle' Economy & City Life

In her preface to the important volume, *Money Struggles and City Life*, Jane Guyer (2002: ix-xvi) raises interesting questions about the ways in which those of us who live and work in urban Africa witness what de Certeau (1984) describes as the 'practice of everyday life', which 'encompasses systems of employment, provisioning, and meaning-making of impressive magnitude and relentless resilience' (Guyer 2002: ix). In reflecting on the 'domain of human struggles and achievement' – particularly in Ibadan and other urban centres in southern Nigeria – within which 'chronic uncertainty is pervasive' (ibid.: x), Guyer argues that '(c)ase studies have to be a source both of data for analysis and of witnessed documentation of the realities of life' (ibid.). In this chapter, I take up the task that she commended to African(ist) scholars in the 'context of the intellectual and empirical challenges' of 1990s Nigeria by focusing on an otherwise marginal phenomenon, albeit one that reflects

the deep crisis of urban life in Africa in the post-structural adjustment era – an era which still bears not only the structural, economic, including fiscal,¹ and social disasters imposed by Structural Adjustment Programmes, but also dramatizes the consequences of authoritarian rule with its attendant lack of urban planning.

Focusing on 'the wretchedly negligent, repressive and rapacious military government of Sani Abacha (1993–1998)', Guyer (ibid.: xi) describes the challenges of popular urban life in Nigeria in this period to include:

petro shortage, personal insecurity, long interruptions in electricity and water service, multiple road blocks ... and sheer worry about the futures ... the shocking waste of hope and energy as children failed to get medical care, very brilliant students failed to shape careers, farmers and traders failed to get goods to market before they rotted ... Life was fearful and profoundly discouraging.

While the situation in Nigeria in general – and urban areas specifically – has improved slightly since Guyer made this observation, particularly with the end of repressive military regime and the enthronement of democratic rule, life in urban Nigeria remains as Guyer concluded in late 1990s: fearful and profoundly discouraging.

Therefore, in this chapter, I show why the case study approach for which Guyer argued in this environment remains 'first and foremost ... a moral and political imperative, as well as a pragmatic solution to the penury of resources for research [in Nigeria]' (2002: xi). In examining social conflicts provoked by the phenomenon of greater informalization of the economy and the expansion of the 'popular economy' as evident in the *okada*² (commercial motorcycle) as a popular means of transportation in urban Lagos, I engage with what Guyer (ibid.) has succinctly described as one of the strategies 'within popular economy that has continued to provide for and employ people in spite of massive theft, idiosyncratic intervention, and policy incoherence at the top' in Nigeria.

Here, I take her emphasis on popular economy as reflected in what I will call *struggle economy* to capture how claims by and against those at the margins of the economy are 'articulated and put forward into the public realm' (Guyer and Denzer 2013: 57), on the one hand, through government's laws and actions, and on the other hand, through protests and demonstrations by the marginalized. Struggle economy points to those aspects of the popular economy in urban Africa dominated by the most marginalized, whose incomes are unstable and chronically insufficient for survival in the expensive cities in which they work and live, and who, nonetheless, face extreme precarity and danger in the work with which they strive to make a living. Even though people employ different forms

¹ Guyer emphasizes currency devaluation as a major consequence of this era (2002: xi).

² Okada is the name of a town in Edo State in southern Nigeria, the hometown of one of Nigeria's prominent millionaires Gabriel Igbinedion, founder of the first domestic airline established in the 1980s named 'Okada Air', after which the motorcycle taxi in most urban areas in Nigeria is named.



9.1 A crowd of *okada* riders in Lagos (reproduced courtesy *TheNEWS*, Lagos, Nigeria)

of resistance in the struggle economy, the economy also makes sense to them as they 'appear to be somewhat accustomed to [the] turbulence and policy confusion' (Guyer 2004: 8) responsible for their unstable income and precarious existence.

The Motorcycle Taxi in Contemporary African Cities

African cities provide spectacular vistas of urban chaos, resilience, limited capacity for organization, potentials for improvement and the stark reality of striving for the majority of their populaces. More than five decades ago, Peter Gutkind (1963), while decrying the insensitivity of governments, described African cities as places with large numbers of men who clutter cities, choking corridors of government offices, milling around building sites, docks, bus parks, markets, shopping centres, pouncing on car owners to wash or watch. The reality has not changed much since then. In fact, the intensity of what he described has increased as the explosion of populations and rural-urban migration put greater pressure on infrastructures, the economies and therefore lives of the denizens of cities in Africa. As Africa continues to urbanize in what Patrick Chabal (2009: 154) describes as a 'dizzily rapid pace', life is 'unremittingly bleak' for most young people in cities.

In their 'relentless determination to mitigate the effects' (Guyer 2002: xi) of the harsh economic realities on the continent, many young people have devised diverse means of striving and surviving. The lack of accommodation

in the formal sector for both the educated and uneducated has pushed many into diverse forms of legal, para-legal and illegal trades and entrepreneurship. This partly explains the proliferation of markets on major roads and street corners many of which emerge in contradiction to set rules by government at different tiers. This phenomenon brings about frequent confrontations that in many instances lead to violence between the traders and state authorities. These confrontations have not only turned the streets to sites of struggles and conflicts (Adebanwi 2012: 1), they also mirror, new 'temporal horizons' as 'new configurations of [social] power ... and plausible social action form and reform' (Guyer 2002: xi). The inevitability of socio-economic and political conflicts in the contemporary African city is understandable because most of these cities 'are growing demographically without necessarily developing economically or politically along any of the known pathways of the past' (ibid.: xii). In most cases, African cities are not industrializing, they not 'centralizing administrative functions and connecting them to regional policies ... They are not growing because of opportunity but rather because the countryside has often become a more difficult place to make a living, in some places because of disorder' (ibid.).

One of the defining features of African cities in the last three decades has been the exploding demographic growth accompanied by the lack of government capacity to provide infrastructure and services for the growing population. One of the areas where this is obviously felt is the transport sector which has given rise to disparate actors including motorcycle taxi operators, commonly known in Nigeria as *okada* riders. This important, and needed, informal urban transportation system complicates the challenges of urban governance. Richards (2009) describes the *okada* as a motorcycle taxi found in many congesting cities in the developing world. The motorcycle taxi has different popular names across sub-Saharan Africa and the global South. It is called *zemidjan* in Benin and Togo, *bendskin* in Cameroun, *okada* in southern Nigeria and Accra, Ghana, *achaba* in northern Nigeria, *kabu-kabu* in Niger, *peen peen* in Liberia, *pikipiki* in Kenya and *boda-boda* in Uganda and Kenya. In Indonesia, it is called *ojek*; *habal-habal* or *skylab* in the Philippines; *motoesai rap chang* in Thailand; and *xeom* in Vietnam (Mungai 2014). In African towns and cities, the activities of the riders have created a motorcycle economy based on the types of micro-businesses undertaken within the larger economy from Douala to Lagos, Accra to Dar es Salam and Kinshasa to Kigali (Olvera et al. 2012).

In most of these cities, there are three main actors in the motorcycle economy. These are the dealers who in most cases are rich business men who import the motorcycles, mostly from China and India. Next on the ladder are the owners comprising individuals and cooperative societies who sometimes pay for the motorcycles in instalments, with interest in most instances. Occupying the lowest rung of the ladder are the drivers who operate on terms given to them by either the cooperative societies or individual owners who will or cannot drive them. Out of the three, the worst affected by government bans are the drivers who in most cases face the danger of starving without a job

while they are dealers.

In a context where the state's performance' and the state's ability to constitute a modern government, the motorcyclists' government with the efficiency of Africa. Realistically, the government offered, government thus leaving.

Increasingly, the government's comfort, however, the government's hoods or robes, the government's buses and taxis, the city economy. Contrary to the government's occupy a significant role by the leading government ensure promotion (Mungai 2014).

However, the government's efforts in Africa to proscription of government and a means of proscribing government, the middle class in Rwanda the helmet regulation, the government's students without.

However, the government's balance with the government's Lagos, because of the government's performance against the government's driving a motorcycle (ibid.). Similarly, 'I would rather reveal the government's reveals the government's not only the government's riders. Urban taxis, even the

while they also must service debts owed to the owners and sometimes the dealers.

In a comparative study of Nigeria, Cameroon and Uganda, Ajay Kumar (2011: 1) argues that 'governance failure and weak (transport) sector performance' and failure in tailoring economic and political policies to local contexts constitute the underlying cause of the conflict between the *okada* riders and governments across many African cities. The remote factors that have made the motorcycles taxi riders indispensable could be located in the failure of government control and provision of bus transport services that coincided with the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 80s and 90s Africa. Realizing their inability to sustain the full and partial subsidies it had offered, governments left the sector without any plan for its management, thus leaving it open and accessible to all comers, including *okada* operators.

Increasingly, the *okada* drivers have continued to provide speed, relative comfort, home deliveries, flexibility and access to thinly populated neighbourhoods or remote parts of the cities that are not commercially viable for large buses and taxi cabs. Their presence continues to have impact on everyday city economies, settlement patterns, safety and security, and street trading. Contrary to the assumption by some that they serve only the poor, *okadas* occupy a strategic position as the main driver of e-commerce as attested to by the leading actors in Nigeria (for instance, Jumia and Konga) because they ensure prompt delivery of goods ordered online to the doorstep of customers (Mungai 2014) thereby meeting the needs of the middle class.

However, the relationship between the *okada* riders and many governments in Africa is dogged by frequent violent expression of disaffection owing to proscriptions, restrictions and disputes over exorbitant levies charged by government agents. Since it constitutes a refuge for many jobless young men and a means of augmenting income for many students and civil servants, proscribing the motorcycle taxis from the most lucrative routes pitches the government against a critical mass of the population comprising the poor and the middle class who largely depend on their services. In places like Kigali, Rwanda the government has been able to enforce strict licensing laws and helmet regimes as a way of curbing their excesses and reducing road accidents without necessarily making them lose their incomes.

However, Murdock (2013) reports that it has been difficult to achieve such a balance without threatening livelihoods of those on the margin in places like Lagos, because they are 'far more lawless and hectic than Kigali.' The resistance against bans in some African cities such as Lagos can be understood in the context of the view of a driver in Lagos who states that 'the danger of driving a motorcycle is much less than the danger of starving without a job' (ibid.). Similarly, a *boda-boda* driver from Kampala, Sam Kibuuka, asserts that 'I would rather ride a *boda-boda* than starve to death' (Ssenkaaba 2013). This reveals the everyday hunger and fear of starvation as critical in understanding not only the operation of the motorcycle taxis, but also the desperation of the riders. Urban governments seem to ignore this when they ban motorcycle taxis, even though they claim that the ban is also in the interest of the riders.

The frustrations and resistance of the *okada* riders in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, is not different from Lagos going by the accounts of Martin-Otteng Ababio and Ernest Agyemang (2015: 25). The riders, sustained by the mutually dependent relationship with the middle class, have remained 'an unofficial but thriving mobility option' despite government banning.

There has thus emerged a seeming alliance between the marginal men and the urban middle class to disobey or ignore the government. This is understandable given that, as Kumar and Barrett (2008) found in a study of 14 major African cities (including Lagos) that are 'stuck in traffic', there is an average of six seats to every 1,000 residents on the large buses while there are 30–40 seats to 1,000 residents in middle-income countries of Latin America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asia (World Bank, quoted in Kumar and Barrett). Therefore, the acuteness of the shortage of options for mobility in Africa persists. Consequently, the motorcycle taxi riders, despite the associated risks to themselves and the threats to safety and security in cities, will remain 'king in African cities' (Mungai 2014).

Lagos State Government versus Okada Riders: When Enforcement Clashes with Striving

The frequent clashes and tense relationship between members of the Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria (ACCOMORAN) and other associations of commercial motorcycle riders and many state governments in Nigeria provide a veritable context for examining how resistance and conflict between the state and urban marginal men or the underclass have defined the political economy of everyday life for the latter across Nigerian cities. In Lagos, the erstwhile capital of Africa's most populous country, the demographic details of the *okada* riders graphically depicts marginal men as explained by Mehretu et al. (2000: 14) as those individuals and communities locked in a 'complex situation of disadvantage and experiencing vulnerabilities arising from hostile environmental, cultural, social, political and economic factors'. Miller (1987: 30) posits that such people have no 'economic alternative'. Given the fact that a majority of Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day, it is clear that the vast majority of Nigerians live on the margins – economic, social and political. As result of this, many have devised legal, para-legal and illegal means of surviving; ranging from street hawking to selling of foreign currencies and petroleum products, and others like begging, prostituting, touting, etc. Evidently, the streets of commercial cities such as Lagos are a platform for meeting the needs of both the law-abiding citizens and the outlaws.

As one of the means of work and survival, the *okada* phenomenon has become a permanent feature of urban life in Lagos and all other Nigerian cities. It is seen by some as an informal and alternative means of 'mass transit'. Kayode Oyesiku (2002) traces the steady rise and ubiquity of *okadas* on roads across cities in Nigeria since the 1970s to the unaffordable cost of new vehi-



9.2 'Mass transit' crisis of urban marginal men constitute. (Repro-

cles, deterioration of many cities available for transport. Motorcycles registered for transport to 1,500 amid the search of an alternative. Akinrolabu 1999. The crisis of the 1980s intra-city transport feature in N

Okada as a mass transit feature in Calabar in the early 1990s nationwide after 1998). The use of *okadas* in the 1980s in the Ag after work hours. In the 1990s, it had been eradication/allev

Until they were highways in Lag



9.2 'Mass transit': this *okada* rider with seven passengers is both a reflection of the crisis of urban mass transit in Lagos and of the danger to safety that the *okada* riders constitute. (Reproduced courtesy *TheNEWS*, Lagos, Nigeria)

cles, deterioration of intra-city transport systems and upsurge in the population of many cities. Therefore, as population increased, the number of vehicles available for transportation was decreasing. In 1983, there were 16,500 vehicles registered for public transportation and by 1988, the figure had reduced to 1,500 amidst a rapidly growing population, which made the emergence of an alternative means of intra-city transportation expedient (Ikeano and Akinrolabu 1991). Olubomehin (2012) argues that the economic depression of the 1980s was the impetus for the search of an alternative means of intra-city transportation such as the *okada*, which has since become a permanent feature in Nigerian cities.

Okada as a means of commercial transport began in southern Nigeria in Calabar in the early 1970s and in Yola in northern Nigeria and increased nationwide after the mass retrenchment of civil servants in 1975/76 (Adesanya 1998). The use of *okada* as a means of public transport in Lagos started in the 1980s in the Agege suburb as a part-time means of supplementing earnings after work hours by people in paid employment (Kumar 2011). By the early 1990s, it had become a principal or only means of employment and by the 2000s, when democracy was restored, it became the major item of poverty eradication/alleviation programmes of state governments across the country.

Until they were banned or restricted, *okada* riders plied all routes including highways in Lagos metropolis and environs such as Epe, Ikorodu, Badagry,

Mushin, Oshodi, Alimosho, Ikeja, Victoria Island, Obalende and Surulere. Commuters found them effective both in the urban centres and the rural suburbs. For instance, Kujenya (2014: 7) states: 'Live in Lagos and you would see them – *okada* riders on the move often with two or more males aboard or in some cases, with a female sandwiched within them. Many believe their intentions are solely commercial driven, while others believe there is more to them.' Tola Adeniyi (2014) describes a typical picture of riding on the *okada* as humiliating especially for women because of 'the indignity of having to roll up your skirts past your knees, sometime revealing your underwear? A respectable housewife, a corporate lady, a college principal, all having to sit behind a stinking dirty *okada* rider? Some-times body hugging' in order not to fall off. Thus, this common everyday means of transportation for most Lagosians is one that involves a measure of humiliation.

In addition to being a faster means of mobility, the *okada* was initially hailed and celebrated as a veritable alternative to white-collar jobs. At the inception of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the *okada* served divergent purposes. While it was used as a distributive good by patrons within the political class in wooing swing voters and retaining core voters, especially the subalterns, it eased mobility for many commuters in urban areas with their traffic gridlocks. Also, it helped mobility in the rural areas where there is no efficient public transportation system just as it offered a source of livelihood for the riders. The Governor of Edo State and former leader of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Adams Oshiomole, even identified with the *okada* riders as members of the working class as the debate on whether to ban them or not was raging. Upon his re-election in 2013, Oshiomole said 'It is a class issue and I belong to the working class, so I cannot ban *okada*. First, I believe that *okada* is a response to certain deficit in our intra-urban transportation system' (Inyang 2012). A former governor of Anambra state, Peter Obi, also expressed similar sentiment 'I agree that *Okada* contributes to crime, but we must also accept that many of them are also good people and we cannot punish the multitude because of the sins of a few' (*Information Nigeria* 2014).

However, owing to an increasing number of deaths and maiming of commuters, including cases of criminality involving the use of the *okada*, many state governments had to either ban or restrict *okada* riders to limited routes. This decision had its harshest impact in Lagos metropolis, being the commercial nerve of the country and the city with the most mobile economy in Nigeria. This decision precipitated instant reaction from the *okada* riders under aegis such as ACCOMORAN, which saw the ban as a form of direct state violence that threatened their livelihood. Clashes between the affected *okada* riders and law enforcement agents of the state and federal government have become common, leading in some cases to loss of life. For instance, Aondoana Tavershima, a 24 year old *okada* rider, was shot dead at close range by men of the Nigerian police attached to the Maroko Police Station in Lagos on Thursday 11 November 2014 for refusing to stop after he was flagged down. The policemen rushed to clandestinely bury him at the Lekki beach where a fellow cyclist saw them and went to inform the relatives of the

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Obalende and Surulere. In the urban centres and the rural areas in Lagos and you would find more males aboard or on the streets. Many believe their children believe there is more to be made of riding on the *okada* than the indignity of having to show your underwear? A principal, all having to sit on the ground 'hugging' in order not to get transportation for most Lagosians.

The *okada* was initially used for white-collar jobs. At the time, it served divergent purposes. It was within the political class, especially the subalterns, who came with their traffic gridlock where there is no efficient mode of livelihood for the masses. The Nigerian Labour Union, with the *okada* riders as its enemy, wanted to ban them or not. One said 'It is a class issue with the *okada*. First, I believe that the transportation system is a class issue. Peter Obi, also expressed his opinion, but we must also remember we cannot punish the masses (Ogboya 2014).

The deaths and maiming of people using the use of the *okada* have forced *okada* riders to limited areas of the metropolis, being the most mobile economy. The ban from the *okada* riders is seen as a form of direct control between the affected states and federal government. It is a matter of life. For instance, one was shot dead at close range at the Maroko Police Station. He was shot after he was trying to stop after he was shot. They bury him at the Lekki cemetery. The relatives of the

deceased. Linda, the sister of Aondoana, revealed that the divisional police officer of the Maroko Police Station offered her ten million naira to conceal the matter but she refused. Also, sometime in 2013, three policemen of the Rapid Response Squad (RRS) killed one Lekan Ajayi in Ikorodu, a Lagos suburb, which precipitated a further clash with youths in the community that resulted in the death of another protester. The police claimed that they shot the *okada* rider in self-defence because, after he was flagged down, other *okada* riders came to the scene to join in beating up the policemen and it was in the ensuing brawl that he was shot.

While not excusing the killings by the police as they tried to enforce the 2012 traffic law of Lagos State, there is always a common display of 'team spirit' by *okada* riders as they stick up for one another whether they are right or wrong and even in the face of obvious danger. Michael Peel (2010: 91) quotes the secretary of the Somolu branch as boasting that '[w]hen we are riding *okada*, we are one ... we protect the interests of the *okada* rider – whether right or wrong'. Peel recalls that in 2005, around Ikeja, an *okada* rider crashed into a car belonging to a military officer who promptly stepped out of the car and shot him dead. Acting in 'team spirit' other *okada* riders started destroying everything in sight and at the end properties worth millions of naira were destroyed (ibid.). Orimogunje, secretary of the Somolu branch of the *okada* riders association, states that the spontaneity of the team spirit in such situation arises from the deep-seated anger they nurse against the rest of the society because many of them are in the business out of 'choicelessness, it's a system you enter by force ... that's what brings our solidarity – people united by frustration. It's like particles attracted by magnet' (ibid.).

Civil society activists in Nigeria have rejected the argument offered by the state governments for banning or restricting the *okadas* as 'anti-people'. For instance, Ilevbare stated:

The restriction on *okadas* is not only a lazy approach to problem solving, but pedestrian, unjust, inhumane, callous and vicious. Taxis and buses are used for the famous 'one chance,'³ why weren't they banned? Militants and pirates use[d] speed boats to bunker oil and attack ships on the high sea. Were they banned even at the height of the Niger-Delta militancy? For years, Nigerian airlines have become flying coffins leading to the death of hundreds, not even the lives of prominent Nigerians were spared. Aircrafts and air travel should have been banned! It becomes glaring why *okada* riders are singled out for ban, throwing their families and dependants deeper into the abyss of privation. For such an anti-people move to be taken somewhat hastily without due consultation with stakeholders, to a large extent, is an indication that these state Governors have lost touch with the common man. (Ilevbare 2013)

Politically, recent elections in Osun and Ekiti States in South-West Nigeria have confirmed the potency of the agency of the subalterns or informal workers especially the *okada* riders, so much that open association with them became a vote-seeking tactics for candidates seeking to unseat incumbents

³ 'One chance' is an urban phrase, which in this context, means quick-get-away street theft.

in the two states. Conscious of the electoral backlash, the incumbents in such states had to make conscious efforts to assuage their fears by assuring them that the number of routes they ply would not be reduced and that their use of *okada* to earn their livelihood would not be curtailed even though it contravened a core aspect of their administration's policy on security, urbanization and public safety. The potency of the agency of this class of marginal men was further demonstrated with the defeat of the incumbent Governor of Ekiti State, Kayode Fayemi, on 21 June 2014, partly explained as depicting the political cost of not appealing to the *okada* riders who constitute a significant percentage of marginal men and voters (*The Economist* 2014).

Since 2012, when the new traffic law came into effect in Lagos, there had been no love lost in the relationship between the Lagos State Government and the *okada* riders. Attempts to enforce this law and resistance against it often precipitated skirmishes disrupting public peace and security while hindering the free flow of traffic which the law seeks to enhance. The ban and resultant clashes have received condemnation and commendation virtually in equal measures, with critics condemning it as an inhuman neoliberal urbanization excuse.

Against the background of this crisis, this chapter analyses the conflict between the Lagos State Government and the *okada* riders based on spectacles of clashes witnessed and reported within neighbourhoods in the Lagos metropolis. It conceptualizes *okada* riders in a revised sense of Robert Park's (1928) 'marginal man', while being sensitive to Guyer's (2004: 25) point about the 'multiferentiality' and 'ambiguity' of the term 'marginal'. For my purpose, I approach marginal men as those living and sharing in the social life of the city, even though they are not quite accepted as properly belonging to the urban space in which they try to find a place. Subsequently, they don't fully belong to the city, yet they are no longer entirely of the place from which they came. The economic, social and political marginality of the marginal men predispose them to an economic life involving 'indefensibly small increments' (ibid.) of gains within the African popular economy. I also find Johan Galtung's (1996) theory of structural violence useful in explaining how government policies are experienced as 'pain' from the prism of the *okada* riders. Besides revealing the perceived conflict insensitivity of the proscription, the chapter argues that the organized resistance against the ban challenges the assumption of lack of agency by those in the informal economy and teases out the hollowness of initiating poverty alleviation interventions or economic empowerment programmes oblivious of sustainable livelihood in Nigeria.

In Lagos, the constant confrontations between state authorities and members of ACCOMORAN typify a classical example of how citizens encounter the state (Obadare and Adebawo 2010), just as it resonates the argument of Chabal (2009: 106–7) of the need to survey Africa's political economy through the prism of individuals and groups engaged in economic activities within the broader context of what he describes as 'politics of striving'. Chabal (2009: 106) argues that scholars ought to deepen analysis of political economy in

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Africa by seeking answers to questions touching on how people face up every day to the need to work. What does work mean to marginal men? How do they strive to secure a decent life and, when possible, improve their conditions?

Agential & Structural Causations of Social Conflicts: Marginal Men & State Policies

Early studies on marginality were led by geographers in the 1930s that focused on the social and spatial dislocations in areas described as *problem areas* following the Great Depression, the Second World War and the struggles for liberation in the global South (Mehretu et al. 2000). Generally, marginality as evident in spaces housing a mix of political, cultural, social, economic and environmental problems is summed up by Mehretu and Sommers (1992) as a complex condition of disadvantage lived by people facing vulnerabilities arising from such problems. Adisa (1997) has observed that lesser attention has been devoted to the people living in the margins of the society. Recently, much intellectual effort has been made to explain the factors that push people to the margins.

One of these is contingent marginality, described by Castells (1989: 172–97; cf. Guyer 2004: 25–6) as what befalls individuals who find themselves in situations wherein they are least or not prepared to cope socially and economically. Factors implicated in the inability to cope could be cultural restrictions, insufficient or obsolete labour skills, lack of information and cultural restrictions. As explained by Mehretu et al. (2000: 92), susceptibility or vulnerability to contingent marginality arises from sudden loss of capacity to socially, locationally, culturally and/or ecologically deal with the market. The market in this context includes the implications of the regulatory roles of the government and its self-regulatory effects on people (Chabal 2012).

Systemic marginality results from the difficulties felt by people and communities in a system and space where distribution is inequitably constructed through hegemony (Mehretu et al. 2000). Systemic or hegemonic marginality differs from market-induced marginality because it defies market reforms as a corrective measure. This is because it stems from a conscious plan by an existing hegemony to perpetuate its political control, social exclusion and economic exploitation (Mingione 1996). The history of hegemonic marginality can be described as specific to each community depending on the historical configuration of power within it. Examples would include the inequity and oppression suffered under apartheid in South Africa and Rhodesia, ethnically targeted exclusionary practices in countries like Rwanda, Ethiopia and Sudan, and policies that (in)advertently marginalize ethnic and religious groups leading to horizontal inequalities (Stewart 2009) in countries like Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire where autochthony confers and denies rights. In many African countries, it remains at the base of agitations for secession and ethnic militancy. However, the susceptibility of ethnic minorities to hegemonic marginality is not peculiar to Africa.

There is also *collateral* marginality experienced by people not because they have markers of vulnerability but because they are found in a geographic or social milieu dominated by victims of both hegemonic and structural marginality (Mehretu et al. 2000). Most of the people experiencing collateral or temporal marginality are aid workers, missionaries and journalists who are compelled to reside or operate in such spaces temporarily. Such spaces are avoided by tourists and direct foreign investment. *Leveraged* marginality emerges in the context of skewed economic relations in most instances. Mehretu and colleagues illustrate this as a derivate of contingent or systemic marginality.

The term marginality has also been linked to other concepts like exclusion, inequality, injustice and spatial segregation (Perlman 2004) based on realities in places like Brazil since the country's return to democracy. This was due to the growth in drug trafficking, illegal arms business and gangs, whose activities have been constructed by the local press as the violence of the margins and latched on by rap and funk musicians to construct a narrative of revolt against state injustice (ibid.). The spate of violence has led to a fear of the 'marginalized' in the Brazilian context. Also, since the 1990s, the concept of marginality has been reviewed in academic parlance especially in the context of its use to describe poverty in the first world cities (ibid.) and describing the very poor mostly found in the black ghettos of the United States and in the slums of Europe. In these places, marginality resonates with descriptions like the *underclass*, *new poverty*, *new marginality* or *advanced marginality*. This plethora of concepts constitutes attempts by scholars and policy makers to describe the situation of the poor.

In applying marginality as a concept to describe the living realities of the poor, Katzman et al. (1999) came up with a consensus that 'social exclusion' aptly captures 'marginality', while Moser (1998) advances the argument that specific kinds of 'assets' represent the 'survival strategies' of the poor. In the context of Nigerian cities, the *okada* may qualify as an 'asset' for the marginalized or politically excluded. *Okada* riders are described as 'marginal' and 'marginalized' and not 'socially excluded' in this chapter, cognizant of their electoral power and agency, especially during elections. This is in line with the argument of Ward (1976) that marginality implies being outside the formal institutions of formal labour, which may not necessarily mean that such a class does not have socio-political agency.

In Africa and most of the global South, the poor have responded through new forms of socio-economic organizing to the inability of the state to fulfil its welfare obligations, which has thrown up new patterns of self-provisioning and employment, thus producing micro- and macro-entrepreneurs (Portes and Hoffman 2003). Also, in many cities, from Buenos Aires to Rio de Janeiro, Aba to Kano and Lagos, new forms of associational life are emerging and conferring an unprecedented agency on socio-political actions that vote seekers have found too attractive to ignore. This has influenced the conception and implementation of most poverty alleviation programmes by state governors since 1999 in Nigeria. However, the same phenomenon has turned

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into a source of instability and threat to public peace since the decision by many state governments to opt out of the once friendly relationship with the *okada* riders.

Instability in Nigeria can be analysed broadly as arising from a tapestry of violent and non-violent conflicts. This can be broadly categorized as conflicts between disparate peoples on one hand and conflicts between the state and her citizens on the other. In the category of conflicts among its peoples are conflating issues including religion, ethnicity, access to land, and autochthony among others. Other sites of citizen-to-citizen violence and conflicts in Nigeria include socio-cultural and religious practices that legitimize exploitation and abuses against women and the girl child even in peace times. Such practices fall within the purview of the cultural sub-set of Johan Galtung's (1996) theory of structural violence.

Against the backdrop of this understanding of structural violence, for many Nigerians life has become a perpetual struggle and resistance of violence from the home to the public space. For those who cannot 'fight' by subscribing to ethnic or religious warlordism in the economic jungle that many African cities have become, options open to them are migration through both legal and illegal routes or living on the margin. Despite the launch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) followed up by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), virtually none of the Goals can be seen to have improved the lots of those on the margin in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Ghana that met both the poverty and hunger components of the MDGs through a robust agricultural reform (Annan 2012: 173). Realities across much of the continent affirm the 'Third World' appellation of Africa as a continent dismissed by Elizabeth Harwick in 1979 as 'having no future' (Clarke 2008: 20) because of some social characteristics. Joseph (2013) cautions that recent economic figures of growth in Africa should not be celebrated because what is actually being bred is 'discordant development', with growth negated by a rising poverty rate owing to lack of jobs and increasing numbers of young graduates and other school leavers. However, Annan (2012) opposes any bludgeoning push towards accepting Africa's current parlous state as given or irredeemable, based on the sustained success stories coming from countries like Madagascar and Botswana as telling examples of what right choices and decisions can bring.

From the preceding it is evident that 'discordant development' has pushed more people to the under-world of the economy in Africa, while setting many against the state, against their communities and forcing them into acts that negate the ethos and beliefs of their communities. Chabal (2009: 157) explains that the economic and socially marginalized class of young men and women has been pushed to the margin where they struggle to survive through different types of jobs that come their ways'. Most studies on economic inequalities in urban centres have dwelled on the causes and degree of social and spatial inequalities using the differentials of the quality of living (Mehretu et al. 2000). Also, the causality of this in the emergence of criminal gangs and insecurity has also attracted sufficient attention

(Adisa 1997). However, not much has been done in engaging how those on the margins, such as the *okada* riders who have elected not to go into criminality, are coping and how their quest for survival brings them into conflict with the state.

Apart from the greed grievance and the inherent contingent theories of conflicts, the objectivist and subjectivist explanations find resonance in the context of structure and agency towards a fuller understanding of causations of conflicts and attendant instability. The objectivists posit that the structure is the precipitant of violent conflicts in societies (Gorman 2011). They locate the causes of social conflicts in institutions, systems and dynamics that are not obvious. Therefore, for the objectivist, slavery, sexism, caste systems and other discriminatory practices are causes of conflict and instability that should not be ignored. In contrast, the subjectivists argue that conflict ensues once the parties (agents or actors) express incompatible aspirations (ibid.). This implies that conflicts do not occur in a given setting or relationship until the parties express incompatible goals even when there are structural indices visible to the objectivist.

The conflict between the Lagos State Government and the *okada* riders can be interpreted as one that moved from objectivist to subjectivist social conflict. It was objectivist with the signing into law of the Road Traffic Administration and Vehicle Inspection Law of Lagos State Law Number 4 on 2 August 2012 and became subjectivist with the resultant resistance and clashes between the *okada* riders and the law enforcement agencies. The stage was thus set for marginal men to interrupt the mapping and planning of the city by the government (Manton 2013). Contemporary Lagos can be described as suffering from acute over-urbanization. This is a situation in which the population grows much faster than the urban economies (UN-Habitat 2010: 278), with symptoms that include high unemployment rates, slum proliferation, social polarization and crime.

Lagos & the Marginals

African cities present few success stories of ongoing efforts by governments to instil order and sanity. However, the shrinking formal economic spaces have led to increasing casualization and informalization of work, and different forms of self-employment such as the class of *okada* riders. In pointing us towards the compositional nature of life in contemporary urban Africa as an 'asset' in the 'mitigation of poverty', Guyer (2014a: 146–50) alerts us to how increasing casualization and informalization are no longer marginal, but central in understanding what AbdouMaliq Simone (2004: 3) described as 'cities where livelihood, mobility, and opportunity seem to be produced and enacted through the very agglomeration of different bodies marked and situated in diverse ways'.

In the account of Baker (1974), Lagos was a heterogeneous town comprising peoples of diverse origins even during the colonial period. This

conferred an economic and contrasting backgrounds on them, of order compliance when the administration aimed at the reverse the economic (Lagos State Government) 'our vision is to achieve economic development and growth'.

Much of the Africa's fastest growing economies, Lagos often quipped particularly even of the *okada* riders more and more of south-western Nigeria experienced the low geopolitical zone in 1999.

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conferred an eclectic face on the town accompanied by gradual stratification and contrasting lifestyles (Fourchard 2006). Despite the different cultural backgrounds of these groups and the inequitable distribution of wealth between them, settlements continued to grow and this made the maintenance of order complicated (*ibid.*). This trend continued until the Fourth Republic when the administration of then-Governor Bola Tinubu commenced a project aimed at the revitalization of the historical core of Lagos Island in order to reverse the economic and environmental decline of the last two decades (Lagos State Government 2012). According to the Lagos State Governor, 'our vision is to make Lagos State the reference point of harmonious physical development in Nigeria through best practices and physical planning and development matters' (*ibid.*: 5).

Much of the efforts at expanding the infrastructure to meet the needs of Africa's fastest growing city have failed because the population increase in Lagos often quadruples the rate of the expansion of infrastructure. This is particularly evident in the multi-ethnic and even multi-national⁴ nature of the *okada* riders in Lagos. As the economic crisis in Nigeria deepens, more and more people move to urban areas, particularly the urban areas of south-western Nigeria, especially Lagos. This region of Nigeria has experienced the lowest frequency of widespread violence compared with other geopolitical zones in the country since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999.

However, despite the expressed determination of the government on urban renewal, it was conscious of the need to tread cautiously in the transport sector in order to strike a balance between technocratic ambitions and patronage demands (de Gramont 2015). This could be traced to the political agency of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), another commercial drivers' association, dating back to the Second Republic. The need to relate cautiously and sensitively in the transport sector stems from a cognition that actions perceived to be against commercial bus drivers and their trade would have been a sacrilege against one of the 'five gods' determining outcomes of elections in Nigeria (Fayemi 2009, quoted in Adebaniwi and Obadare 2011: 326). Due to their numbers and voting strength they were in the class of constituencies for the buying of bulk votes, as observed by Collier (2010). This created an air of licentiousness for the NURTW members leading to the worsening of the traffic situation which the Tinubu administration (1999–2007) could not frontally curb. However, the vision and drive to make Lagos State the epitome of harmonious physical development and urban order assumed a wider dimension from 2007 when Tinubu was succeeded by Governor Raji Fashola, described as the 'actualiser' – with Tinubu described as the 'dreamer'.

⁴ Some are from neighbouring countries such as Togo, Niger and the Republic of Benin.

Okada Riders & the Crisis of Restriction

The initial applause that greeted the appearance of *okada* riders on Lagos roads can best be appreciated in the light of the extent of time and pain experienced as a result of indefinite stays in traffic. Richards (2009: 210) argues that the 'go-slows' (as Nigerians popularly call congested traffic) have become 'go-stops', that is, the flow of traffic has changed from being sluggish to being at a standstill. In such instances, public peace and order can get disrupted. Richards (ibid.) reports that:

What little self control Lagos drivers have goes straight out of the window. Normally sane men become maniac, driving up kerbs or the left hand lane to turn right at the junction only to block the way completely and cause grid lock making other drivers to go out and remonstrate.

Remonstrations and sudden exchanges of blows and altercations as a result of bashing of cars, due to 'go-stops' that eventually become 'go-bumps' when vehicles bash one another, are not the only disruptions of order that are triggered by Lagos traffic. Richards (ibid.: 214–17) satirically dissects the types and causes of long traffic lines as a major permanent feature of the streets of Lagos.

The first type of hold up is the 'pothole hold up'. This is occasioned whenever there is a hole in the middle of the road that often gets deeper until it is big enough to contain a truck oftentimes due to neglect. The second type is the 'flood hold up' that emerges after heavy downpours fill the pot-holes or truck-holes. The third type of 'hold up' is the 'broken down vehicle jam', following the breakdown of one or more vehicles, usually in the middle of the road. Images of such vehicles with their owners pushing with one arm while steering with the other arm have been common on Lagos roads, especially prior to the enactment of the Lagos traffic law in 2012. Also, queues for fuel at petrol stations generate sudden hold ups, as do the police check points, actually extortion points where a series of human rights abuses are committed. Another type of hold up and accidents usually involves scenes of commercial bus drivers making U-turns in wrong places especially in busy narrow roads thereby rendering adjacent traffic stationary, and sometimes causing crashes leading to loss of life and limb. The most recent type of traffic hold up is caused by banks and other owners of business premises who fail to provide parking places for their customers. The phenomenon of hold ups makes 'the distance between home and workplace ... like travelling from Egypt to Canaan, only in this case there is no promised land' (Richards 2009: 219).

In order to avoid being trapped in traffic, most commuters in Lagos find the *okada* a ready means of escape. For some reasons, they are seen as constituting nuisances because, anywhere there is commotion, they are present. Some of the reasons that informed their description as 'nuisances' by Richards (2009) stems from their destructive and reckless manner of driving leading to frequent damages to wing mirrors of vehicles, and crashes.

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⁵ Interview, Kayode Opeifa

In an interview with the Commissioner for Transport in Lagos State, Kayode Opeifa (2007–15), he revealed that Lagos has an estimated 1.4 million registered vehicles and about 600,000 that go in and out of the city per day at a ratio of 224 vehicles per kilometre as at 2015. Against the background of the inadequacy of roads and the terrible state of most of them, traffic in Lagos became a crime- and conflict-generating phenomenon that the government could not ignore. The determination of the government to ensure order, peace and safety on Lagos roads informed the 2012 Traffic Law and the establishment of other agencies like the Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI) and the Lagos State Transport Management Authority (LASTMA), performing sanitary and traffic law enforcement functions. According to Kayode Opeifa, these two organizations were used as platforms to rehabilitate and reintegrate former street urchins ('Area Boys') into more dignifying means of livelihood, and enhancing street and neighbourhood security.⁵

The *okada* men typify a classical example of men living on the margin within an over-urbanized city. Most of them are migrants from other parts of the country and neighbouring countries with qualifications ranging from University degrees to school certificates, to drop-outs and the uneducated with none. Many of them resided under bridges until the coming of KAI, when they sought accommodation in the slums across the city and in some cases, established their own communes. Others converted their bikes into make-shift beds under the bridges after the KAI men would have closed for the day. Some also found refuge around the mosques from where they would generally leave before the first Muslim call to prayers around 5 a.m.

As everyday people, the typical *okada* men's day starts as early as 3 or 4 a.m., especially on weekends in areas where the night life is very boisterous. However, on weekdays, they usually resume business around 5 a.m. when they transport residents of Lagos living on the mainland – in order to escape the traffic – to the Island. Some of them do home pick-ups for passengers, taking their children to school, and sometimes conveying the entire family, first taking the children to school before taking the parents to work. Also, some of them do this for their wives and children before they begin the business of the day while others just ply their routes for passengers. Oftentimes by 10 a.m. many of them break to eat and/or take some locally brewed alcoholic drinks to keep them going. The commonest of the drinks is called *paraga*, an alcoholic herbal drink, but there are others such as *ogogoro*, a strong home-brewed beverage made from the juice of raffia palm trees. Also, they are known consumers of Indian hemp and cigarettes. All of these are very important for the *okada* riders because they supply them the 'fuel' to perform within the economy of struggle. To determine the fares charged by the *okada* riders, a lot of factors are taken into consideration, not the least the costs of their own 'fuel'. The haggling process and eventual fares charged by *okada* riders provides an opportunity to appreciate the mix of people in the trade, their anxieties and aspirations.

⁵ Interview, Kayode Opeifa 24 September 2014, Ibadan, Nigeria.

As a point of everyday interactions, the demography of *okada* riders consists of a *mélange* of unemployed artisans, professionals, (il)literate youths and natural-born chancers (Peel 2010). In determining the fares charged, haggling is done mindful of certain variables. Fasakin (2002) enumerates factors underpinning the fares charged by operators. These include garage fees, the newness of the *okada* and its passenger-conveying capacity, daily operational hours, terms of ownership, drinking habits of the operators, sex, having other source(s) of employment, family size, saving towards acquiring one's *okada* and motive for entering the business. Other payments influencing the fares charged include taxes paid to the local government, the police to forestall arrests after flouting the laws, and 'areas boys' (street urchins) many of whom control different parts of many cities in Nigeria. However, at the end of the business day, they eke in averagely amounts in the range of 1,000 to 3,000 naira daily (data from 2010; GB pound £2.50 to £7.50, US dollar \$3 to \$9.50 as at February 2017). While defiance of traffic laws brings them in collision with the government through the police, finding the right amount of change for the commuters has always been the cause of altercations and conflicts between them and commuters, sometimes degenerating into brawls. Despite these instances, the *okada* riders have become practically indispensable for many commuters for reasons ranging from the convenience of taking passengers to their doorsteps and ability to meander their ways through traffic, thus helping many in the corporate world to keep appointments. Peel (2010: 89) describes how their behaviour elicits cheers and condemnation: 'if you are in a car or bus, you curse their incessant horn-blowing and gadfly dodging across lanes; if you are late for a meeting you will cheer your *okada* driver as he rides roughshod over traffic laws to get you to your appointment in time'. Given the rare convenience they offer commuters, there is bound to be support for them from across class divides as expressed in the tweet quoted in the third epigraph where the rivalry between the fans of Manchester United and Chelsea football club fans was seen as the reason why Fashola, a Manchester United fan, endorsed a policy that adversely affected *okada* riders because most of them are fans of Chelsea football club.

The ban pitched civil society organizations against the Lagos State Government as several protests were held to protest it. Many of these were held under the aegis of leading civil society organizations like the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Path of Peace Initiative (PPI) and the Federation of Informal Workers Organizations of Nigeria (FIWON) (Ugbodaga et al. 2012). Izuekwe et al. (2012) reports that placards with inscriptions like 'You gave us no job, we gave ourselves one and you are killing us for it', 'They say *okada* riders are robbers, who gave them the guns?' and 'Fashola give me my vote back' were displayed during the protests. In an address at one of the protest rallies, Comrade Abiodun Aremu the Vice-Chairman of the Nigeria Labour Congress conveyed the mood of the protesters thus:

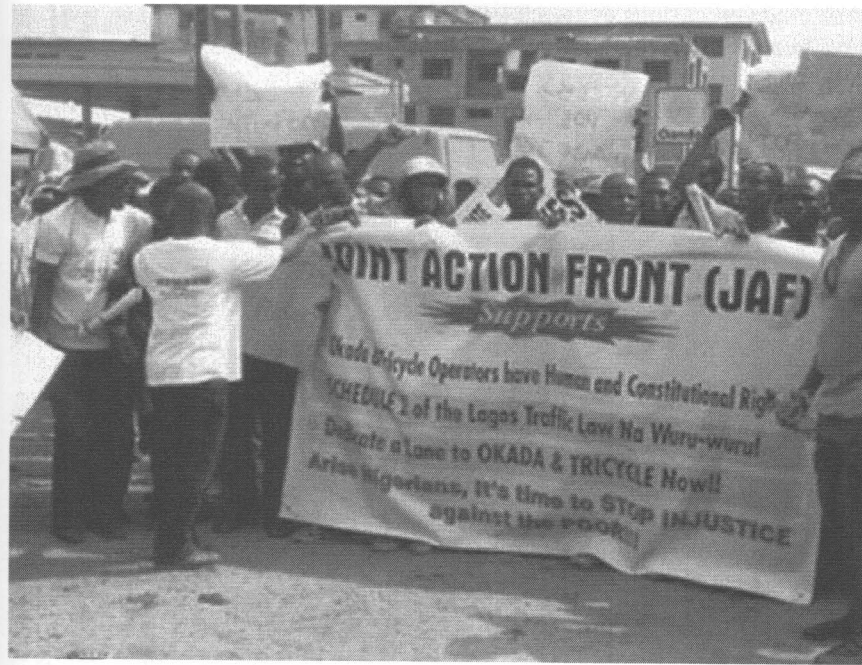


9.3 A civil society organization in support of the ban

[We are here to show the humiliation of the government and to continue to fight for our rights.]

Policemen became an army. Command vehicles were used to harass a violent luxury buses. The apparent explosion of the ban.

Eventually, the ban was lifted. Their various protests in Ghana, Togo, and Nigeria. The ban was lifted. The State agency negotiated the ban. After a while, a perversion of the fact on the fact and extortion shows how



9.3 A civil society group, Joint Action Front (JAF) was in the forefront of the protests in support of the *okada* riders. (Reproduced courtesy *TheNEWS*, Lagos, Nigeria)

[W]e are here to tell the Lagos State government that enough is enough of the humiliation of poor people. The law banning *okada* is a bad law. This is the beginning of the struggle to liberate the poor people in Nigeria and the struggle must continue until we win. (Izuekwe et al. 2012: 2)

Policemen also made money out of the ban, as their routine night patrol became an avenue to clamp down on them. At one time the Lagos Police Command was in custody of over 3,000 seized motorcycles and this triggered a violent protest from the *okada* riders who attacked more than 300 luxury buses belonging to the Lagos State Government (Ugbodaga 2012a) in apparent expression of Ted Gurr's (1970) frustration aggression theory.

Eventually, the majority of the *okada* riders were compelled to relocate to their various states while *okada* riders from neighbouring countries such as Ghana, Togo, Chad and Niger had to find other means of livelihood as a result of the ban and clampdown by policemen and officials of LASTMA, the Lagos State agency responsible for compliance. However, those who stayed had to negotiate new terms of doing business with the Nigeria Police and LASTMA. After a while, the *okada* riders became known as 'Any Time Money (ATM)' in a perversion of the abbreviation of Automated Teller Machine (ATM), based on the fact that they constituted instant sources of money through bribery and extortion for the LASTMA men and their counterparts in the police. This shows how state agents exploit the marginality of others whose situation has

been made precarious by harsh laws of the state. Over time, the *okada* riders have become accustomed to negotiating their ways through bribes and they even knowingly break aspects of the traffic law.

As observed by the author during field work, the policemen operate(d) in an ambush-like manner by suddenly emerging from hidden places to pounce on the *okada* riders who usually have to stop suddenly, sometimes leading to accidents in which the passenger, the rider and the policemen would sustain injuries. If no injury is sustained, the passenger is allowed to go while the negotiation between the policemen or LASTMA officials as the case may be, commences. If the *okada* rider has sufficient money ranging from 2,000 to 3,000 naira, the *okada* rider is released immediately. If the *okada* and/or the rider is taken to the Police Station, the rider or owner in some cases will have to pay a bribe as high as 5,000 naira to ensure release of the motorcycle, or risk permanent confiscation and/or trial and three years' imprisonment upon conviction. However, the bribe given to policemen is considered a milder option by many of the *okada* riders interviewed. This is because, according to them, if an *okada* is seized by a LASTMA official, rather than a police officer and it is taken to their office the chances of 'negotiation' are close to zero because the official penalty which is 'non-negotiable' is 20,000 naira and/or three years in jail. In instances of arrests where the *okada* riders feel they outnumber the policemen, they usually decide to resist the impounding of their motorcycles which often triggers clashes between them and the law enforcement agents, which can lead to fatalities and casualties.

In a focus-group discussion with some members of the top hierarchy of the *okada* riders' association, the consensus of opinion revealed a feeling of betrayal by the government given the roles they play(ed) during elections. One interviewee said: 'Before election in 2011, [Governor Raji Fashola] gave helmets and vests to *okada* riders. The *okada* riders were behind Fashola everywhere he went to campaign, then they were not armed robbers and they were not causing accidents. Weeks after he got the second term, he started chasing them everywhere.' Many of them cited their 'selfless' contributions during elections with some of them revealing that they helped politicians to snatch ballot boxes during elections so that the politicians can stuff the boxes with illegal pre-cast ballots to rig elections. They also feel treated as inferiors to commercial bus drivers whom they believe bear lesser risks than them during elections. A respondent stated: 'it is easier to snatch a ballot-box and take off on an *okada* than using a car'. The respondent also referred to many occasions when the *okada* riders constituted part of the motorcades to venues of campaigns for Governor Fashola. They described regretfully that they feel 'used and dumped' since Fashola is in his second and last term, and is therefore no longer in need of their votes.⁶

⁶ State decided to lift the restriction on *okadas* given the promise made by the rival Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) candidate that he would lift the ban if elected into office. This points to the electoral value not only of the *okada* riders but their dependants, customers and sympathizers.



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9.4 Several *okada* riders accompanying Governor Fashola (standing left through the open roof of the vehicle) during his re-election campaign in 2007. (Reproduced courtesy *TheNEWS*, Lagos, Nigeria)

Optics of the State: Justification of the *Okada* Restriction

A common narrative that can be teased out from the statements of the governors who banned and/or restricted the *okada* riders across the country can be summed up as attempts to prevent crime, ensure security and impose order on the streets. Also, implied in some of their narratives is their frustration with the nagging crisis of urbanization. The decision to ban and/or restrict *okada* riders in different areas across the Lagos State came into being through a bill signed into law on 2 August 2012 and published as Law No. 4, 'A Law to Provide for Road Traffic Administration and Make Provisions for Road Traffic and Vehicle Inspection in Lagos State and other Connected Purposes' (Lagos State Government 2012: 149). However, the ban would not have attracted the controversy it did but for the history of the relationship between the *okada* riders and the Lagos State Governor when seeking votes. Another cause of controversy was the police claim that 73 per cent of armed robbery cases in Lagos prior to the ban involved *okada* riders (Ugbodaga 2012b).

Three months after the ban, the Governor of the State, Raji Fashola, a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), revealed that records from 25 general hospitals indicated that auto-accidents involving *okada* riders dropped from 646 to 525 representing 18.73 per cent reduction during those three months, while deaths recorded from *okada* crashes dropped from 14 to 8 per cent, indicating a 42.86 per cent reduction. This was considered worthy of celebration by the Government because at one time in the city's main orthopaedic hospital, a ward was designated '*Okada Ward*': it was exclusively for patients of *okada* accidents. Also, within the same period the office of the Commissioner of Police, Lagos State revealed that reported cases of armed robbery dropped by 30 per cent in September and 60 per cent to the end of October (Ugbodaga 2012b). By the end of 2012, over 12,000 motorcycles had been impounded

with over 50 *okada* riders convicted under the 2012 Lagos Traffic Law (ibid.). The Lagos State Government reiterated that the restriction is about preserving lives, insisting that by banning the activities of *okada* riders on 495 out of the 9,700 routes in Lagos, the intention is to ensure safety of lives and enhance security of the citizens. But, for the *okada* riders, the law restricted or, in some cases, terminated their only means of livelihood, thus representing a devaluation of their labour and a threat to their lives, and making resistance and violent clashes with law enforcement agents unpreventable.

Conclusion:

Reconciling Urban Renewal with the Needs of Marginal People

Urban renewal efforts by state governments in Nigeria have increasingly become sources of conflict between the state and people on the margins, especially streets traders who are mostly women and *okada* riders who are mostly men. Despite the need for urban renewal in African cities, the process cannot be oblivious of its implications for the economic wellbeing of those affected, including *okada* riders. Therefore, there is an urgent need for a reconciliation of the urban renewal programmes of the state and the challenges of livelihood to urban marginals such as *okada* riders. An urban renewal plan that is not mindful of integrating the potential victims such as those who might become economically displaced will in no time become a threat to peace and security, and will imperil the renewal programmes in the long run. This is because men on the margins get pushed to the wall when their sources of livelihood are disrupted, and the attendant reactions will surely have terrible effects on urban peace and security. In the event that such men are displaced by state decisions on urban renewal, it is important to create choices for them so that they do not end up being without any choice.

In the light of this, a peace and conflict impact assessment of all phases of urban renewal initiatives would help in anticipating and being proactive in responding to likely areas of tension or conflict. As witnessed during fieldwork, the brutality and repression demonstrated by the law enforcement agencies (LASTMA and the police), saddled with the responsibility of implementing the restrictions and/or control of *okada*, often trigger violent confrontations.

Of equal importance is a conscious measurement of the economic displacement brought about by urban renewal on people in the margins such as *okada* riders. This is why the state must reckon with the fact that the informal sector where the *okada* riders are located provides opportunities for making a living to people struggling for survival (Lourenço-Lindell 2004). It also houses the highest number of workers, with huge numbers of dependants.

The conflict arising from *okada* riders and state agencies typifies the implications of not placing programmes of poverty alleviation on a framework of sustainable livelihood. A paradox is observed in Nigeria in that, at a point in time, the same governors banning or restricting *okadas* were struggling to

outdo one another young men. Some both core and swin Adebayo Alao-Aka cycles a cardinal p Governor of Borno distributed 5,000 them to facilitate of rigging ploys. of the enforcement bent political party riders for bulk vote are hard to retrieve albeit illegally for eventually end diff security and safety

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outdo one another in giving out *okadas* as 'assets'⁷ of poverty alleviation to young men. Some politicians actually used *okadas* as distributive goods for both core and swing voters. In Oyo state, south-western Nigeria, Governor Adebayo Alao-Akala (2007–2011) made the distribution of *okada* motorcycles a cardinal point of his poverty alleviation programme, while erstwhile Governor of Borno in north-eastern Nigeria, Senator Ali-Modu Sherif, once distributed 5,000 *okadas* to beneficiaries (Itodo 2005). Politicians also used them to facilitate easy carting away of ballot boxes on election days as part of rigging ploys, as already mentioned. This explains the gradual softening of the enforcement of the law on *okada* riders close to elections, as the incumbent political party and the opposition in Lagos State begin to court the *okada* riders for bulk votes. Therefore, just as weapons given out during elections are hard to retrieve after elections because they become sources of livelihood albeit illegally for their possessors, *okadas* given out in exchange for votes eventually end differently as real means of poverty alleviation, or threats to security and safety of the people.

However, a sustainable livelihood framework (Levine 2014) will ensure employment-generating growth targeted at the mass of youths who constitute the highest percentage of the *okada* riders. This will foster an economic growth hinged on building the capacity of the poor to have a decent living (Nussbaum 2006). Also, it is important to recognize that the marginal, the poor, do not necessarily go away from society when they are economically or spatially displaced. Rather, they scatter or regroup to generate new means of survival which may also become another source of crises in the future. Hence, it is expedient to initiate and sustain policies that will not set the grounds for its recreation. Envisioning and implementing policies must not lose sight of the safety and security of people and the environment, while empowering the poor as active agents to make positive contributions to society as whole. This, I suggest, is at the core of Guyer's scholarship on everyday life at the margins of the economy.

⁷ As discussed earlier, Guyer (2014b) has argued that '[f]or an anthropological examination, the composition of what are now considered to be "assets" in the mitigation of poverty should move to the center of concern.'

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