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‘Wheelbarrow livelihoods’, urban space and antinomies of survival in Ibadan, south west Nigeria

Wheelbarrows are a common sight in Nigerian cities where they function as an instrument of work among the urban poor. This paper explores how the wheelbarrow is increasingly deployed as a ‘mobile shop’, and describes the livelihoods of urban subjects who use it for street trade and space appropriation in Ibadan, Nigeria. Using 30 in-depth interviews, non-participant observation and picture documentary, we analyse how wheelbarrow street traders reconfigure urban space in everyday encounters with space managers who tax and exploit space users. Findings show that marginal urban subjects invest in wheelbarrows and exert personal agency to create ‘wheelbarrow livelihoods’. The participants use the tool to reconfigure urban space access and negotiate ‘presence’ in the city and engage in ‘visibility’ struggles with shop owners. People on the social margins of cities thrive by adopting livelihood strategies that enable them to occupy and maintain a presence in contentious urban spaces.

Keywords: informal economy, modernity, migration, street trade, urbanisation

In many Nigerian cities, wheelbarrows are a common sight in markets, neighbourhoods and other areas where business opportunities exist. This article focuses on wheelbarrows as ‘mobile shops’ appropriated for street trade in urban Nigeria. It profiles the urban subjects in ‘wheelbarrow livelihoods’, the economic activities involved, and how wheelbarrow street traders (WSTs) reconfigure urban space access and use through negotiation of everyday ‘presence’ and ‘visibility’ struggles with space managers and shop owners.

Among the range of work in the informal economy, Brown (2015) states that street trading is one of the most visible and contested domains. In West Africa, street traders contest with the state over access to, and use of, public space (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008; Brown, 2015; Gillespie, 2016; Onodugo et al., 2016). The state deploys discourse and discipline to banish and marginalise people who earn a living on the street. Gillespie (2016) critiques the aggressive state-led accumulation in Accra where street traders and the Ghanaian state struggle over urban space. The state, he argues, deploys physical-legal and discursive mechanisms to exclude or disrupt traders’ capability to make a living. The physical-legal strategies seek to privatise public space to benefit elites, ‘cleanse’ streets of hawkers and dispossess street traders by framing them as dirty and disorderly (Gillespie, 2016). Encounters with the state, therefore, generate conflict, which also leads to extortion, violent victimisation, forcible eviction, harassment, assault, and goods confiscation and destruction (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008; Gillespie, 2016).

The obsession of city administrators with urban space modernisation and African elite desires and fantasy have contributed to the growing aggression towards street traders. Kamete (2013), who examined the handling of urban informality in Southern Africa, contends that the authorities have a fetish about formality. He critiques the dominant official position that associates informality with disorder and spatial unruliness. While maintaining that the view is illogical and unjust, Kamete (2013) argues that the configuration of the urban socio-economic system in Africa renders informality inevitable. In a comparative account on informal workers in Dakar and Dar es Salaam, Brown (2015) posed the question of public space access as a rights issue. While contesting the idea that public space is state land, Brown argues that urban streets should be acknowledged as places of employment creation and poverty reduction for the poor.

In Nigeria, decades of economic and social crises and limited employment opportunities contributed to the upsurge of informal livelihoods in cities. Specifically, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the 1980s affected social services provision, led to income decline and increased the unemployment rate (Dawson and Oyeyinka, 1993; Ezeibe et al., 2017; Fourchard, 2003; Nzeadibe and Mbah, 2015; Yusuff, 2011). Those who lost public and private sector jobs because of SAP (Yusuff, 2011) joined the informal economy where they are exposed to vulnerabilities, from extortion to poor health and insecurity (Nzeadibe and Mbah, 2015). With no or low levels of education and capability to support themselves and their families, some people migrated to big cities (Onodugo et al., 2016) where they have become increasingly visible in neighbourhood spaces, roads and expressways, and motor parks (Agbibo, 2016; Gandy, 2005; Ikioda, 2016; Packer, 2006), using structures such as lock-up shops, open spaces and open street/road for trade (Taiwo, 2015).

In dealing with the harassment, criminalisation, stigmatisation and pressure to vacate urban spaces, informal workers are always on the run (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008, 199). They also respond by forming associations to resist abuse and exploitation and advance their positions more broadly (Akanle and Chioma, 2013; Onodugo et al., 2016; Lindell, 2010). Those with weak ties to these groups are at a high risk of exploitation (Yeboah, 2010).

This article focuses on wheelbarrow livelihoods and the socio-economic and space dynamics involved. An attempt is made to profile WSTs, their background, motivations and factors that shaped their decision to conduct street trade with wheelbarrows, as well as the meanings they attach to the object. Importantly, everyday encounters of WSTs with space managers who regulate, tax and shape access to, and use of, urban public space in Ibadan, Nigeria are discussed.

Wheelbarrows and livelihoods in urban Africa

Although informal economies in Africa have been studied extensively, the tools that poor people deploy to conduct livelihood activities are rarely placed at the centre of discussions. Amponsah et al. (1996) documented the use of wheeled-trucks and trolleys by the 'truck boys' of Accra who flourish because of the problems of market congestion, unfavourable proximity of interdependent urban nodes and low cost of non-motorised objects. In the same city, push-trucks are found to be popular among young entrepreneurs who deal in phone accessories at popular transport stations (Afutu-Kotey, 2016). Due to lack of access to space for business operation, young Ghanaians use spaces temporarily and flexibly, and sustain their presence by paying a space maintenance and upkeep fee to station authorities.

On wheelbarrows especially, Akanle and Chioma (2013) alluded to the uptake of the object by market porters in Ibadan, calling the instrument of work a 'professional implement and tool'. In post-war Liberia, youths deploy wheelbarrows for work. Owing to its ubiquity, Annan (2009) observes that companies in Liberia purchase advert spaces on wheelbarrows – just as on public buses and taxis. Researching the problem of youth unemployment in Monrovia, Liberia, Munive (2010) gives a detailed description of the livelihoods that young people built around wheelbarrows. At the heart of the West African city:

There are literally hundreds of wheelbarrows laden with bars of cheap medicine, soap and every other imaginable commercial item from industries around the globe, especially Asia. By their omnipresence wheelbarrows are the kings of the markets in Monrovia. (Munive, 2010, 331)

While enhancing visibility, wheelbarrows can also shape the earning opportunities of vendors in urban settings. Yeboah (2010, 51–52) reveals that wheelbarrows make a difference in the earnings of men and women porters who transport goods. While men are the most prominent users (Akanle and Chioma, 2013; Annan, 2009), women undertake multiple trips daily to earn more money (Yeboah, 2010). Wheelbarrow users have been observed to organise into unions; their members register and are assigned a serial number as proof of union membership (Akanle and Chioma, 2013; Annan, 2009). These associations function as a safety net and self-help group whereby members participate in daily or weekly contributions. Financial contribution is considered a duty which members must perform in anticipation of future health or social needs.

A distinction, however, is rarely made between different forms of wheelbarrow use among the urban poor. Also, negligible attention is paid to the importance of wheelbarrows as an object of space appropriation. In this article, we contend that wheelbarrows operate as 1) a self-contained, open-enclosure through which day-to-day buying and selling are executed in urban Africa and 2) a 'mobile shop' which people deploy to

negotiate access to and use of urban space. We make a distinction between two forms of wheelbarrow uses. The first kind of wheelbarrow use is what we call ‘wheelbarrow portage’, which refers to people who use it to convey goods. The second kind, which is our focus, is ‘wheelbarrow livelihoods’. Wheelbarrow livelihoods refer to all sorts of street trade where traders employ a wheelbarrow as a miniature, non-stationary shop which street traders rely on to display and hawk goods and negotiate access and use of urban public spaces for economic purposes.¹ Those involved in wheelbarrow livelihoods sometimes build additional structures – mostly from wooden materials – to display more goods and for aesthetics.

Urban survival and wheelbarrow livelihoods: a theoretical view

The contention of this paper is that poor urban subjects build livelihoods by interfacing with objects, which they deploy to reconfigure and negotiate public space access and use. Within this subject-object interaction, livelihoods and space become interlocked, producing and reproducing one another through the vagary of particular power relations among urban space actors. More precisely, the paper claims that wheelbarrow livelihoods are an emergent survival strategy among street traders, the marginal urban workforce who struggle to maintain a presence in contentious city spaces.

Following Chambers (1995), Mosiane (2009) observes that livelihood involves a range of elements, including assets, access, social relations and activities. These components are not only related and interdependent, they manifest as different forms of financial, natural, physical, human and social capital (Department for International Development, 1999; Nzeadibe and Mbah, 2015). De Haan (2012, 347) writes that ‘assets can be held in private or as common property, rented, borrowed, grabbed, stolen or conquered’. Regardless of whether it is spatially constructed (King, 2011) or socially construed, access to an asset is itself dependent on the availability of that asset. This intricacy suggests a construction of livelihood whereby access and asset interconnect and are laden with the agency of people.

Likewise, the social conditions and relations within specific structural and institutional landscapes determine people’s access to space and other livelihood-enabling resources. In this sense, Du Toit (2005, 23, as cited in Mosiane, 2009) opines that livelihood is constructed in a ‘social world in which people make their decisions, enter into conflict or make and break alliances’. Hence, livelihoods in urban centres should be analysed as a product of complex social, economic and political concatenations. One way of doing this is to interrogate the institutional arrangements, rules, official

1 Annan (2009) made a similar distinction while writing about ‘wheelbarrow workers’ in Monrovia, Liberia.

or otherwise, and relationships that shape livelihood systems. In urban Africa, where periodic clean-ups and dispossession constrain and criminalise poor people's ways of making a living, innovative and flexible livelihood strategies do not liberate the poor from operating on the margins of city life (Mosiane, 2009). Within existing opportunities and constraints, their approach reflects the undertones of class and power that permeate interaction among city dwellers (Fadaee and Schindler, 2017).

Meanwhile, the significance of the agency of things/objects is widely acknowledged in scholarship (Appadurai, 1988; Hodder, 2014; Preda, 1999; Schatzki, 2010; Trentmann, 2009). The interaction of people with things is important to how things transform and the roles they undertake. As Schatzki (2010, 129) observes, there are nexuses of practices and material arrangements that link up or overlap. We claim that poor people interface with wheelbarrows as a way to negotiate space access restrictions, and that their deployment demonstrates the agency of those involved in wheelbarrow livelihoods, while also forming the basis of their relative power to challenge, reproduce and reconfigure urban spatial and policy landscapes. The socio-temporal process of deploying wheelbarrows in an urban livelihood arrangement illustrates the practicality of Schatzki's (2010) avowed symmetry between people and things, whereby each depends on the other.

To summarise, wheelbarrow livelihoods have emerged in response to city realities. Besides, individuals and groups operate within, and relate with others, on the basis of existing power arrangements in urban space appropriation. The encounters generated by the existence of wheelbarrow livelihoods inform everyday contest, confrontation and negotiations among different categories of actors in urban settings.

Methodology

The research was carried out in Ibadan, Oyo state, south west Nigeria. The historically strategic location of Ibadan gave the city a rare prominence as a marketing centre for traders from all parts of Nigeria (Fourchard, 2003; Olutayo, 2005). The commercial outlook of the city was enhanced in the post-independence period by the presence of highly qualified people (Fourchard, 2003), but the Metropolitan section today is dominated by informal economy (Olajoke et al., 2013). Fourchard (2003) notes that in the informal economy, up to 70 per cent of women were involved in trade, with most men concentrating in small-scale craft and industry. The development of small-scale craft and trade after the implementation of SAP was responsible for the growth of the informal sector in Ibadan between the 1980s and 1990s (Fourchard, 2003).

This qualitative research relies on data obtained through in-depth interviews, non-participant observation and picture documentary collected from public and market spaces in Agbowo, Bodija market, Iwo Road, Mokola Roundabout, Ojoo, and Songo areas of Ibadan, Nigeria. These sites were purposively selected because



Figure 1 Wheelbarrow street traders in Bodija market, Ibadan, Nigeria
Source: Authors' fieldwork

of their characteristically high traffic flows and commercial activities. We visited the study sites repeatedly between October 2016 to April 2017 to conduct interviews and observe wheelbarrow street traders. We were unable to interview participants outside working hours, so intermittent interruptions occurred because of customers or state agents usually the police and sanitation officers. While this disturbed the flow of some conversations, it did not undermine data quality.

A total of 30 interviews were conducted in English/pidgin English, as well as Hausa and Yoruba languages, which were transcribed into English. Thematic and content analyses were performed with the aid of NVivo 11, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software. Data were organised into themes that reflect the questions explored and are presented as summaries and direct quotations. Participants' names have been anonymised in the report.

Out of the 30 participants interviewed, half were under 35 years old, and only two were aged 50 to 54 years old. Relative to older people, the higher concentration of young people is probably due to the physical demands of wheelbarrow use for trade. The majority were men (80 per cent), and 16 participants (or 53 per cent) were married with an average of three dependent children. The underrepresentation of women, as with older people, probably reflects the general unattractiveness and physical energy demands of wheelbarrow use among street traders. Four participants were originally residents in Oyo state, one participant lived in Côte d'Ivoire before returning to Nigeria due to political unrest while the rest migrated to Oyo state from other states in Nigeria.

The top merchandise that WSTs were selling are fruits and foods (33 per cent), clothing (27 per cent), mobile phone accessories (23 per cent) and footwear (7 per cent); others were selling movie CDs, snacks and toiletries. All the female participants (six in total) were concentrated in clothing, and food and fruits merchandise.

The making of wheelbarrow livelihoods in Ibadan

The experience of the participants with street trade, issues of poverty, survival aspirations, migration, and a desire for social and economic advancement all contributed to the emergence of wheelbarrow livelihoods. Before arriving in Ibadan, most of the wheelbarrow street traders have had previous experience with street trading. Apart from one female participant (43 years old, Bodija) who was employed as a teacher in a private school before joining the rank of wheelbarrow street traders, most of them were involved small-scale informal livelihoods trading in a range of goods:

I was in Onitsha before moving to Ibadan. I used to sell articles like torch lights and keyholders and so on. I left the East [Onitsha] for Ibadan because I just want to check how Ibadan is and see if the business will go well. (24 years old, male, Ojoo)

As such, being a WST in Ibadan is a continuation of informal livelihood practice on a different scale.

Second, the desire to make money and survive with minimal stress were also motivations for participants. Statements such as 'you don't stay in a place to watch masquerade' (29 years old, male, Agbowo) and 'I came here to fight for my future' (22 years old, male, Ojoo) are indications of this survivalist drive. Wheelbarrow street traders live most of their lives on the margins of society and struggle to provide for dependants. While making a decision about how to survive, some wheelbarrow street traders also experienced work-related difficulties. They spoke to friends and shared worries about their economic circumstances to people who eventually introduced and encouraged them to take on the wheelbarrow trade. In addition, a female food seller said she experienced poor health from her previous work. Hence, the wheelbarrow trade became the most viable strategy for her to adopt.

Social networks played a role in the process of becoming a wheelbarrow street trader. When we asked how they started, participants mentioned close relations, for example, a brother or sister, friends, a boss or just 'someone'. These networks consist of people with some knowledge about or experience of wheelbarrow livelihoods. A good example of an initiator with experience is captured below:

I [used to] sell at the roadside, I made a table. ... Then I talk to someone, who told me how they were using it [the wheelbarrow]. I asked 'what if I want to do it?' He said 'no problem, if I can handle it – [that is] dodge motor and other things, [then] I can do it'. (51 years old, female, Bodija)

Furthermore, lack of access by small traders to rental shop space in the main commercial areas contributed to the proliferation of wheelbarrow livelihoods in Ibadan. Like many cities in south west Nigeria, the obsession of the state to enthrone a modernity that will, in essence, reproduce Western urban centres has shrunk access to rental shop space. The ‘demolish and re-build’ model barred small-scale traders with limited financial means and made shops accessible only to new users at exorbitant rates. Once pushed out, people often occupy makeshift shops under informal arrangements until the state decides to tear these down.

To understand the increased congregation of wheelbarrow street traders in Ibadan particularly, it is apt to consider the participants’ migration experiences and the distinction they make between cities that can accommodate a wheelbarrow street trade and those that cannot. Among the wheelbarrow street traders that were interviewed, meeting personal and family needs often involved migrating away from their original places of residence. Although migration often occurs within the state or south west region, others moved far away and had stopovers at multiple urban sites in different parts of the country before arriving finally in Ibadan. In comparative terms, Ibadan was believed to be a much better city to earn a living than Lagos, the most populated and the most economically advanced city in Nigeria. For more than a decade, control of street trade has intensified in Lagos, with stricter implementation of laws banning and criminalising street trade. The policy on, and policing of, street trade made conditions hard and forced informal traders to move elsewhere. Thus, in the view of participant quoted below, Lagos is hard, but Ibadan is a much easier place to do business:

I was in Lagos before...I was a driver... but because of Fashola problem [referring to the policy of a former governor of Lagos], I stopped. ...They have seized my motor several times. ...I had to leave that bus work and came here to manage sales. [Here, first] I was hawking, but recently I decided to use a wheelbarrow. (45 years old, male, Mokola)

Aside from the difficulties involved in making a living, this quote shows that some wheelbarrow street traders in Ibadan have experienced state-led dispossession. Notably, during the administration of Babatunde Raji Fashola, a lawyer who governed Lagos for eight years, small shop owners lost their livelihoods to state-led ‘demolish’ and ‘re/modernise’ agenda in popular commercial centres (see Ibem et al., 2013). Rather than stay in Lagos, some moved to a nearby city. Unfortunately, the benefit of departing Lagos was often short-lived, with street trade becoming the only avenue to survive. The experience of a participant who was selling fabrics in Lagos before moving to Ibadan demonstrates this unrelenting dispossession:

I have traded very well in Lagos ... That was during the demolition crisis of Fashola’s administration when so many shop owners lost their businesses and shops. I came to Ibadan, rented a shop in Ogunpa [market]. Unfortunately, soon afterwards was when

Ajimobi entered for his first tenure and he also demolished a lot of shops in Ogunpa area. (35 years old, female, Iwo Road)

The point, therefore, is that, before taking up wheelbarrow livelihoods in Ibadan, some participants have had experiences of informal work in another city. In search of a more receptive city to work, these migrants ease into the constraints and opportunities of Ibadan by joining the ranks of wheelbarrow street traders. They formed opinions about the survival prospects of trading in the current city of residence, even though they were eventually confronted by the same state-led dispossession in Ibadan.

Wheelbarrows and use of space in Ibadan

Wheelbarrow livelihoods constitute an emerging pattern in urban space use. Everywhere, we observed the deployment of a mundane, yet symbolic object in the day-to-day economic exchange, mobility and space negotiation. Wheelbarrow street traders are visible on the main roads and business areas of Ibadan. In Iwo Road, a section of the city that is popular with intra- and inter-state commuters and informal commerce, women street traders displayed and sold goods with makeshift counters and tables while the men sell with wheelbarrows. Wheelbarrow street traders move around markets and manoeuvre busy roads with their mobile shops.



Figure 2 Street traders selling with wheelbarrows along a pedestrian walkway in the Agbowo area of Ibadan, Nigeria
Source: Authors' fieldwork

At other times, they station wheelbarrows in any available open space; in front of other people's shops or outside office buildings, fast food restaurants or petrol stations. They struggle for space and visibility by pulling wheelbarrows a little bit in, and then out as they try to cope with moving vehicles while, at the same time, seeking to attract or attend to customers. In areas where state actors are active, wheelbarrow street traders must always be ready to run.

Wheelbarrow street traders occupy public spaces in different ways. Sometimes, their configuration is scattered, comprising one or few individual, free standing wheelbarrow street traders. At other times, they form clusters, with several wheelbarrows lined up or densely organised in an area. Within a busy market like Bodija, wheelbarrow street traders fit into existing spaces by 'squeezing in' and maintaining a position, albeit only for the moment. In Mokola, one of the main congregation nodes that connects many centres in Ibadan metropolis, they occupy spaces behind, on and in front of pedestrian walkways. The following subsections present the importance of wheelbarrows in everyday survival pursuits and describe how they configure and reconfigure urban spaces.

Attractions of wheelbarrows for street trade

As an object of value, the wheelbarrow is attractive to street traders. First, from participants who have been involved with street trade in the past, wheelbarrow use is an advancement towards social improvement. In a setting where hawking is associated with impoverishment, and where shop ownership is outside the reach of many urban poor, the wheelbarrow gives a feeling of elation to its users. Reflecting on his life trajectory, a participant described the importance of the wheelbarrow in his social advancement:

Due to my family background, we used to hawk for my mother because we were six in number. We hawked things like pure water, garri and all other stuff. I can't follow my parent's ways. (29 years old, male, Mokola)

Its relative affordability as a tool of street trade, which is both available for instant purchase and for lease, makes it accessible to the participants. The vast majority, for instance, indicated that they started their business with rented wheelbarrows, only a few managed to purchase their own and even fewer aspire to acquire a personal one.

Second, unlike hawking whose entire operational architecture relies on, and exerts pressure upon, the human body, wheelbarrow trade was perceived as giving the body a break. Put in another way, the use of a wheelbarrow introduces a new regime of comfort as far as street trade is concerned.

The reason I am so weak is hawking. To tell you the truth, I am so weak! Tomorrow hawking, next tomorrow hawking. But when I started using *biro* [wheelbarrow],

sometimes I come out in a day just to relax. I park my *biro* because if you look at my age, I'm old. (45 years old, male, Mokola)

Expressing a similar sentiment, a female participant explains that after she was advised against becoming a maid, she had the choice between hawking and the wheelbarrow street trade.

I decided to stop at a point because I couldn't cope with the hawking. ...I used to fall sick all the time. So, people now suggested that I should stay in a place [with a wheelbarrow]. (30 years old, female, Ojoo)

Like the participants quoted above, women in other sectors of the informal economy experience health-related problems (Wrigley-Asante, 2013) that demand swift alleviation. In the case of wheelbarrow street traders, their tool of work provides the needed relief. While the participants did not all share the perception that a wheelbarrow gives comfort and rest to the body, the belief that it offers something different from common street trade forms like hawking is significant.

Third, wheelbarrows enhance the visibility of street traders. According to some participants, there appears to exist a distinct 'psychology of buying' in Ibadan, where people prefer to see what they intend to buy. 'People don't like going to shops to get goods' (19 years old, male, Mokola). Sellers have to come to the street to be visible because 'if you don't sell your merchandise on the main road, you won't sell well in other places' (29 years old, male, Mokola). This visibility requirement is reminiscent of the traditional open-market system in Nigeria and operates within the notion that what is on sale should be visually accessible to potential buyers.

A fourth attraction has to do with ease of mobility. Some wheelbarrow street traders evaluate the importance of the object in terms of ease of movement. Wheelbarrows can be moved about conveniently without the shortcoming of immobility of rented shops. As a 'mobile shop', a wheelbarrow can be relocated at will, and its operations can respond spontaneously to changes in selling opportunities. In explaining this mobility imperative, a participant, who fondly called his wheelbarrow an 'automobile popcorn machine' said that 'without the wheel, I can't stay on the street. ...Without it, there won't be any means for me to sell' (30 years old, male, Sango).

Another dimension of the mobility capability is that wheelbarrows help traders to adjust to state-led harassment and officially sanctioned destabilisation. When the government comes after street traders, some sellers pack up while wheelbarrow street traders simply move on to sell at another location (34 years old, male, Mokola). Consequently, wheelbarrow street traders respond to government crackdowns in ways that other street traders cannot. The state rituals of impromptu visits, chasing away and possible arrest requires a street trade tool that can retreat but not surrender. Due to its mobility capability, a wheelbarrow permits a consistent presence on the street, even in the midst of instability.

Visibility: a dynamic of urban space appropriation

Space access, use and control influence the nature of relationships between wheelbarrow street traders and other economic subjects in the urban context. Specifically, as far as wheelbarrow street traders are concerned, shop owners exert considerable influence on space access and use. The reason for this is that many wheelbarrow street traders ply their trade by standing in front of other people's shops, especially in the markets. As such, wheelbarrow users experience resistance from shop owners, who believe that they are being blocked off or prevented from making sales. Hence, 'you have to be careful, and you will not park your wheelbarrow where it will disturb other people' (29 years old, male, Agbowo).

When wheelbarrow street traders obstruct the visibility of a shop owner, they risk being screamed at to move aside or leave a space altogether. An example of this was observed in the field. While a participant moved from side to side to avoid vehicles, a shop owner screamed at her to leave as she was too close. Although the trader pleaded to remain in the space, she later explained that 'they don't allow us to stand; they always shout at us, challenging us "*comot for my front!*" [leave my front space]. We don't have a position' (38 years old, female, Bodija). This particular incident is not an isolated case. The narrative from another participant indicates that the contest over space is part of the day-to-day experiences of wheelbarrow street traders where shop owners push you out, and vehicles push back in – 'just like balloon' (46 years old, male, Bodija). Apparently, the struggle to be stable in space, by occupying a convenient spot between moving vehicles and 'shop owner's spaces' can be confusing, creating what may be called a 'push-back-and-out' situation.

In the midst of this confusion, the possibility that wheelbarrow street traders would damage or lose their stock is high. In particular, when shop owners expropriate spaces, they attempt to control who stays using oppressive means, including mistreatment, imprecation and 'kleptocratic discipline'. For instance, although she did not move around so much and has maintained a 'wheelbarrow shop' in Bodija market for many years, Mama, who sells women's fairly used apparel, has experienced all three oppressive practices of shop owners. According to her, shop owners:

[W]ill chase you like you're not a human being. When you don't listen to them, they will spoil your merchandise. ... There was a day that... this woman abused me; I paid no attention to her. But the insult was much that my customer intervened and replied her insults on my behalf. ... At times, I may be in the market, attending to four or five people at the same time, some of them [i.e. shop owners] will pick my goods and leave without paying. ... If you ask the person you suspected, they'll deny, insult and curse you. (51 years old, female, Bodija)

It should be noted that the authority exerted by shop owners over space use, and the minimal resistance from the wheelbarrow street traders, does not imply that participants were unconcerned by the 'illegitimacy' of such oppressive control. Rather, there is a tacit admission that everyone is struggling to be 'visible', an essential ingredient for attracting buyers, and ultimately, sales. Throughout the market, and in other areas where business is booming, having a shop is not enough; you must be capable of attracting buyers by being visible. Because of this visibility drive, shop owners expropriate spaces by setting up additional stalls to display goods. So, when wheelbarrow street traders occupy spaces in front of shops, even if temporarily, shop owners feel that such presence disrupts their own visibility. Moreover, wheelbarrow street traders have an advantage that is not available to shop owners: the capability to seek out visibility by merely shifting base or keeping the mobile shops moving. One participant recognised this advantage:

What you need is the location where you can display and sell. You can rent a shop and you won't sell, but the wheelbarrow gives me mobility. People see it and it is easy to buy from us because we are exposed to them. (29 years old, male, Agbowo)

Certainly, for wheelbarrow street traders and shop owners, to sell is to be seen. However, wheelbarrow street traders are in a position to be seen on multiple sites over the course of a few hours. When they bounce around with mobile shops and perch in front of shops, shop owners try to exercise authority over who stays and set rules about how much space is occupied and when such occupation is permissible. In their everyday struggle over space, therefore, wheelbarrow street traders battle over access and use of space with shop owners; essentially, the contest is about the quest for visibility and sales opportunities. Shop owners, who themselves appropriate spaces, exert considerable authority over space through oppressive means. This evidence is consistent with findings suggesting that the desire to be 'visible' often leads to new struggles for space among informal workers in urban Africa (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008). Just as the use of the wheelbarrow for portage introduces disparity to men and women's earning in Accra (Yeboah, 2010), the tool provides better visibility, and more sales opportunities to wheelbarrow street traders in Ibadan than shop owners who are 'fixed in a place'. Space appropriation, which involves both wheelbarrow street traders and shop owners, affirms De Haan's (2012) postulation regarding the limitation imposed by access to assets as a result of borrowing and grabbing of resources. The struggle also reveals that the marginality of the poor in cities is not structured by official rules and practices alone, as implied in some scholarly discussions about informality and marginalisation of the poor (Brown, 2015; Gillespie, 2016; Mosiane, 2009). Outside the state, non-state actors create and impose multiple and co-existing urban governance regimes through which the use of space is regulated (Fadaee and Schindler, 2017; Schindler, 2014). Within the informal urban working class, the character

of specific livelihoods (e.g. being highly mobile and more visible), and the dynamics of competition also promote a relation of power that, while lying outside the state, weakens the position of one group (wheelbarrow street traders) against another (shop owners). Additionally, the visibility contest between wheelbarrow street traders and shop owners shows that the existence of ‘trader hierarchies’ can easily produce resentment and opposition owing to competition over access to business opportunities (Turner and Schoenberger, 2012).

Urban space control and taxation

In conducting trade on the streets of Ibadan, wheelbarrow street traders encounter public space managers with different socio-legal and political standings, and varied degrees of power, symbolic or real, with which they exercise control over access to, and use of urban space. The managers fall into two broad groups: state and non-state. At the level of the state, the police, environmental sanitation staff and non-police public order officers were identified. Those categorised as non-state include market administrators, unions, shop owners and WSTs self-help groups. In their interaction with these groups, as individuals and as a group, wheelbarrow street traders confront state and non-state powers and control, and endure harassment, assault, arrest and detention, while also managing to maintain a position on the street through taxation and negotiations.

Narrating WSTs encounters with the state

The policing of public space affects the activities of wheelbarrow street traders. State agents maintain a regular presence in the street to forestall disorder and ensure a smooth flow of vehicular traffic, people and goods. Although the day of the week or the mandate of state agents operating on the ground can influence the nature of their presence at different times, it is impossible for wheelbarrow street traders to evade state agents. On one occasion, our interview was interrupted by a loud siren from the state taskforce. Immediately, street traders stopped what they were doing and looked around to be sure that the taskforce team did not plan to stop. In the ensuing conversations, they advised one another to watch out for ‘those mad people’ [i.e. the police or environmental authorities]. Based on how participants talked about their encounters – or the stories of others – with agents that partake in maintaining public order, it is clear that wheelbarrow street traders dread the state and perceive the police as a natural predator with whom they play hide and seek. The police chase street traders, seize goods and arrest them. Because of the constant threat, a participant said that whenever they notice the police:

Everybody will run away. When we run, they may feel not to pursue us; sometimes they will pursue us. Sometimes they will carry people's merchandise. They have carried my merchandise once, which I bailed with N500 [£1.013]. (45 years old, male, Mokola)

Similarly, environment and sanitation officers can 'seize your goods and take it to their office where you have to go to pay any amount they charge you. ... They collected around N7,500 [or £15.19] per person' (19 years old, male, Mokola). This is similar to the lived experience of 'being on the run' reported in other studies (Asiedu and Agyei-Mensah, 2008).

Moreover, there is a suspicion among a section of the participants that state agents are biased against them. A Hausa trader, who sells fruits in Agbowo area, expressed the view that while state agents scare them unnecessarily, and act aggressively towards them, 'they [the agents] don't act the same way to people from their ethnic group' (18 years old, male, Agbowo). Although we were unable to corroborate this view from other interviewees, unequal treatment was revealed in other ways in the state's handling of wheelbarrow street traders. A yoghurt company, for instance, guarantees a cover which is available only to wheelbarrow street traders selling yoghurt. As indicated below, ID cards, uniforms, and the tax record standing of companies reduce the chance of harassment or arrest:

We yoghurt people under the law we are given ID card in case the *wole-wole* [Environmental sanitation taskforce] people are chasing traders. When they see yoghurt hawkers on the road, they will ask for ID card, and when you show it, they will spare you. ... They know that the company pays tax to the government. (35 years old, female, Iwo Road)

Without the protection of a 'tax-paying' company, the majority of wheelbarrow street traders navigate the city with a substantial burden of vulnerability. Indeed, some of them acknowledge their weak positionality and powerlessness. Statements such as, 'I can't fight with government...if they catch me, I will pay' (29 years old, male, Sango) and 'when they carry my market, I will just leave it for them' (45 years old, male, Mokola) depict the powerlessness and surrendering engendered by occupying a weak position in a city's social and economic arrangement.

Meanwhile, although the state intends to clean up the street and retake it, those making a living on the street find a way to maintain a presence. Through the environmental sanitation staff, for instance, weekly tickets are issued to WSTs and defaulters are penalised. WSTs also pay for stickers issued by public order personnel (50 years old, male, Ojoo) and 'settle' them using money that the traders had contributed for that purpose. They have a special arrangement with the police as well. The arrangement involves making periodic financial contributions and delivering it to the police through their representatives. Through WSTs associations, individuals make contributions on a regular basis, or in response to an urgent 'settlement' need. To the participant quoted below, the intention of the payment is clear:

Yoruba adage says *eni ti o ba ni je ka jeun, a ma ko tie mo ounjẹ ni* [we cater to the needs of those who will disturb us in our plans]. So, I know how to follow them up, and they collect per month or week. Environmental officials collect per week but police charge per month. They will charge you, but you negotiate with them and pay any amount you can afford. They don't give receipt – black markets don't give receipts. (30 years old, male, Sango)

Besides the state, non-state actors, such as market administrators, unions and interest-based organisations, have a stake in public space access and determine the *modus operandi* of its use. Taxation is a big part of this process.

All of them impose tax. A group of people can organise themselves to tax you; authority can organise to tax you; union can organise to tax you. In fact, individuals too can arrange to come [and tax you]. We are not even facing one [taxation actor]; we are facing different types. (41 years old, male, Bodija)

This alternative rule-setting from below stands apart from the state and may be considered illegal. Yet, the legitimacy of its creators is seldom questioned, neither by the state nor the WSTs who obey it. Consequently, WSTs become centrally located within a tax arrangement that, while exploiting them also creates a system of reliance or dependency which toughens their resilience and presence in the city.

In specific spaces, non-state actors ensure that WSTs are properly integrated and stabilised. Within Bodija, a market popular with sellers, WSTs are well integrated into the market structure through taxation. By paying for the space they occupy, WSTs somehow 'legitimise' their presence. The payment also mitigates their vulnerability to exploitation. In this regard especially, according to several participants, the imposition of informal taxation on WSTs by the market leadership forced out groups like the *Agbero* or *Omo Onile*² who regularly harass and assault 'tax defaulters'. Evidently, the existence of a tax arrangement creates an atmosphere of relative stability in the urban space between WSTs and public space managers. The imposition of taxes (formal and informal) raises doubts about the veracity of the environmental disorderliness that some scholars attribute to street traders (Adeyinka et al., 2006; Olajoke et al., 2013) since payments are sometimes earmarked specifically for environmental sanitation (also see Afutu-Kotey, 2016).

Conclusion

We have shown in this article that wheelbarrow is a creative livelihood which marginal urban subjects created in response to survival constraints. The livelihood has become

2 Mostly youths who impose charges or taxes on land, goods and traders across the south west of Nigeria, often with violent force. Their right to impose illegal tax is usually based on claims to autochthony (see Ismail, 2009).

critical in economic exchange, mobility and urban space use and negotiation. We observed that a lack of financial capability to access rental shops and the relative affordability of a wheelbarrow contribute to the popularity of wheelbarrow livelihoods among urban subjects (mostly males) in the city of Ibadan. Those participating in wheelbarrow livelihoods use wheelbarrows to negotiate and reconfigure urban space. They push their tool in and around the markets and form clusters around locations where they are most visible to buyers. The article also shows that wheelbarrow street traders are permanently in contestation over visibility with shop owners who perceive them as obstructive. To maintain a presence and negotiate space access, further interactions occur between wheelbarrow street traders and state and non-state actors who constitute themselves as space managers. Such interactions impact on the terrain of opportunities available to wheelbarrow street traders in the city. Interestingly, with formal and informal tax arrangements, wheelbarrow street traders 'legitimise' their presence in a contentious urban spatial structure, despite the problems of exploitation and harassment they sometimes experience. We see that although state authorities disrupt the livelihood that they perceive and label as informal through harassment and arrest, wheelbarrow street traders adopt spatialising strategies that allow them to occupy city spaces and survive in contentious urban spaces. Therefore, there is no doubt that wheelbarrow livelihoods are an emerging manifestation in informal work in the city. Wheelbarrow street traders are a new group of street traders who combine energy, activities and interaction to institute a novel strategy to access and use public spaces. Because the wheelbarrow combines mobility capability with visibility to enhance the earning opportunities of traders, we have shown that the livelihood represents a different regime of comfort in street trade practice where the body is usually overworked (e.g. hawking).

There is a need to know more about how and under what circumstances are informal workers in other African cities using wheelbarrows to conduct street trade. Further studies can explore the role and political economy of wheelbarrow renting for street trade and trace the historical development and transformations that impacted on the rise of wheelbarrow livelihoods in African cities. Beyond the perspective of wheelbarrow street traders, accommodating the perspectives of others who shape the structure of wheelbarrow livelihoods will enrich our understanding of the political economy of this brand of street trade. This study is also not able to resolve the puzzles around gender constructions of health hazards that are implicated by wheelbarrow street trade. In addition, replicating wheelbarrow livelihoods studies in other African cities holds a promise of engaging in comparative analysis and understanding across spaces. To what extent are the tactics of wheelbarrow street traders in Ibadan similar to other informal occupation groups in African cities? Within the tax arrangement specifically, future studies should explore the contributions of WST associations towards linking up members with state and non-state managers through a system

of payment, which exploits but also 'legitimises' the activities and 'rights' of wheelbarrow street traders to survive in urban Africa.

In conclusion, the presence of wheelbarrow street traders reveals the dynamic interaction and interdependency of people, things/objects and relations of state and non-state modes of power and governance that make Africa's public spaces inherently contentious and negotiable. While the growing adoption of wheelbarrows as mobile shops underscores the agency of people who rely on public spaces for survival and socio-economic advancement, it also affirms their capability to resist urban planning policy and materialities that threaten to keep them off cityscapes.

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