

ISSN 2141-9744

# Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies

Volume 23, April 2013



UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

### **EDITORIAL BOARD**

- Prof. A. Raji-Oyelade – Chairman  
Dr A. Ojebode – Editor  
Prof. O. Oha – Member  
Prof. C. B. N. Ogbogbo – Member  
Dr S. A. Odebunmi – Member  
Dr B. Lanre-Abbas – Member  
Dr R. Sanusi – Member  
Dr A. A. Lewis – Member  
T. Gbadamosi – Business Manager

### **EDITORIAL ADVISERS**

- Professor Jane Plastow, University of Leeds, U'K.  
Professor James Gibbs, Bristol University, U.K.  
Professor Niyi Osundare, University of New Orleans, U.S.A.  
Professor Dan Izevbaye, Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria  
Emeritus Professor Ayo Banjo, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

*Published by:*

Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria  
© Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Nigeria, 2012

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED BY THE COPYRIGHT OWNERS, THE  
FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, IBADAN, NIGERIA.

ISSN: 2141 - 9744

## **West African Migrants and *Okada* (Commercial Motorcycle) Business in Ibadan Since the 1990s**

**Rasheed Oyewole Olaniyi<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

In Ibadan, Nigeria, urban dysfunction was signified by overcrowding and a chaotic transport system. The widespread use of *okada* (commercial motorcycle) generated income and inconveniences for urban dwellers. Due to their poor economic background, most *okada* (commercial motorcycle) riders were in the business to buy time and get cheap money. This paper examines the social experiences of young West African migrants who competed with unemployed (or underemployed) Nigerians in the ubiquitous *okada* business and illuminates the risks and ambition of young migrants in making money in the informal transport sector. Since the 1990s, *okada* has been a symbol everyday coping mechanisms of the struggling migrants and the urban poor to earn a living against the vagaries of harsh economic realities. The paper argues that there are confrontations over the use of urban space between state authorities and *Okada* riders. Banning *okada* invoked a new urban governance dynamics in terms of security and rebranding. Against all the risk factors, West African *okada* riders continue to struggle with the aspirations of making money.

### **Migrants as Labouring Poor in the Informal Sector**

Migration is one of the key processes making Ibadan, the capital of

<sup>1</sup> Department of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. rasolaniyi@gmail.com

Oyo State, Nigeria, an important centre of the regional economy. With a population of 1,338,659 according to 2006 census, Ibadan is the third largest city in Nigeria after Lagos and Kano. Ibadan is located in Southwest Nigeria, 128km inland northeast of Lagos, 530km southeast of Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and 120km east of border with Benin Republic. This geographical features make Ibadan a prominent transit point between the coastal region, regions to the north, and trans-border mobility in West Africa.

The history of Ibadan was built on different migration forms, manipulated spaces and collective representation (Awe, 1973; Falola, 1989; Adeboye, 2003 and Akinyele, 2011). The growth of the city has been intertwined with the search for protection, social mobility and opportunities. From its establishment in the 1820s, Ibadan developed by incorporating new groups of migrants from other parts of Yorubaland and beyond. West African migrants added further diversity to the city in the 1990s. However, the urban landscape continued to deteriorate as migrants and poor masses struggled to make a living on the streets. Ibadan metropolis consists of eleven local government areas: five urban and six semi-urban. Fourchard (2003) noted that lack of co-ordination among these local governments increases the difficulties of urban management. Akinyele and Ibadan North Local Government areas are two urban spaces under the siege of migrants from various parts of Nigeria and the West African sub-region.

This paper examines the coping mechanisms and adaptation of young West African migrants from Senegal, Mali, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Togo, Benin and Niger Republic, who competed with unemployed Nigerians in the *okada* (commercial motorcycle) business. It demonstrates how West African migrants negotiate the 'narrow escape' in the city in order to make money and how urban residents in Ibadan patronise *okada* to 'hit targets' and make a living in the informal sector. *Okada* business developed in response to structural adjustment conditions and adaptation to the challenges of development. The paper argues that there are confrontations over the use of urban space between state authorities and *okada* riders. Banning *okada* invoked a new urban governance dynamics in terms of security and rebranding of cities. Government ban threatened the survival of *okada* riders who eke out a living at margins of the urban economy.

Many of the young migrants operate in the informal economic sector. Informalisation of labour relations is prevalent in the socio-economic experiences of West African migrants in Ibadan. Migrants in this study, especially those who migrated between the 1990s and 2011, belong to what Bhattacharya and Lucassen (2005) termed as 'informal sector labour force,' 'labouring poor' or 'marginal'. The labouring poor are those whose daily labour is necessary for their daily support. They are workers in the informal sector operating beyond the purview of state regulation in the form of labour laws. They are also self-employed in micro-enterprises, in household artisanal production or in the tertiary or service sector. Some are circular migrant labourers linking the rural informal sector with the formal or informal urban sectors.

From the mid-1980s, neo-liberal economic reforms have exacerbated the grim situation in many cities, making social inequality across urban space more visible (Hansen and Vaa, 2004). As a result of this, there has been an increase in the informal sector employment in the cities since then as a high proportion of people seek their livelihood in the informal sector (Olaniyi, 2005). According to Fourchard (2003), this growth of the informal sector has characterised the development of urban poverty in Nigeria.

Following the informalisation of the economy in the mid-1980s, labour structures have also changed. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) produced a highly mobile labour force capable of engaging in a variety of occupational services and menial jobs in the informal sector. Many unemployed youths and migrants hired out their labour in the informal sector. Studies on the labouring poor in the informal sector are very rare in the Nigerian historical scholarship. This paper is a social history of unknown migrant *okada* riders in the informal urban transport sector. *Okada* plays dominant roles in public transportation system but little is known about the origin and identity of the teeming riders.

The economic crises of the mid 1980s forced struggling migrants to initiate various ways of earning money through fastest means. In their quest to survive the harsh economic realities, many youths including university graduates plunged into menial jobs, especially *okada* business. By 2011, the number of migrants on *okada business* swelled due to growing unemployment and porous borders.<sup>1</sup> In

many Nigerian cities today, young people of diverse origins work as *okada* operators. This is due to their dream to escape poverty, 'see a bit of the world' and provide for their poor families at home. *Okada* becomes the 'narrow escape' and principal means through which people navigate the city streets.

Due to their poor economic background, most *okada* riders are in the business to *buy time* and get *chop money*. *Okada* business is an evidence of falling standard of living, social inequalities and dependency on foreign technology in most of the underdeveloped countries of West Africa.<sup>2</sup> Migrant *okada* riders work in the context of conflict between failed public transport system, collapsed infrastructure and disillusionment among urban dwellers. In all these, Todaro (1969) migration model presupposes that the informal sector is a temporary 'staging post' for new migrants planning to get the desired formal sector work. Banerjee (1983) argues that, "a sizeable proportion ... of migrants who entered the informal wage sector and the non-wage sector had been attracted to the city by opportunities in these sectors and did not consider employment there as a means of survival while waiting on the queue for formal sector job." Ogunrinola (2011) corroborates Banerjee (1983) by suggesting that a number of operators in the *okada* business are in the occupation for other purposes than making a lifetime career. Ogunrinola further asserts that there is strong preference for self-employment in the informal sector as opposed to the formal sector.

Evidence from this study suggests that many unemployed Nigerian graduates or retrenched workers who engage in *okada* business are in the job to *buy time* while waiting for lucrative employment opportunities. On the other hand, most of the young West African migrants engage in *okada* business to enable them send remittances home, finance other businesses or return home after raising enough capital for business. Some engage in *okada business* to finance their education while others combine *okada* business with wage labour.

As stated by Lourdes, Plat, Pochet and Sahgbana (2010), the boom in the use of commercial motorcycle in most African cities was due to the growing demand not satisfied by other modes of public transport. Under different local names such as *Boda boda* in Uganda and Tanzania, *Okada/Achaba/Going* in Nigeria, *Okada* in Ghana,

*Okada* in Sierra-Leone, *Kabu-Kabu* in Niger, *Bendskin* in Cameroon, *Ganzemidjan* in Benin, *Oleyia* in Togo, commercial motorcycles are predominant in most African cities ravaged by the devastating consequences of SAP. Since the early 1990s, *okada* has emerged as the most popular mode of transportation in Nigeria.

### **Narrow Escape: The Emergence of *Okada***

Urban transport service, developed largely by the informal sector, has passed through several stages in Nigeria. Urban transport system evolved without proper planning by the colonial and post-colonial governments. Urban mobility problems in Nigeria became more acute after World War II. This was because the automobile explosion in the post-WWII period was not commensurate with adequate planning. From commercial buses in the early 20th century, *okada* became a dominant player in urban transport system. In 1914, Anfani Bus Service pioneered commercial transport system out of concern for struggling commuters in Lagos. Commuter bus services increased in response to urbanisation between the 1920s and 1950s. In the 1950s, Morris-minor cars were used as taxi-cabs in Ibadan until 1965 when lorries by Bedford, Austin and Morris were introduced as intra and inter-city means of transportation (Olaoba, 2002). The increasing rate of transport business prompted the introduction of new laws to regulate the sector. In order to mitigate the emerging challenges of urban transportation services, the Ibadan City Council passed a bye-law, *Control of Traffic Bye-law 1964*, under section 11 (1) (9) of the Road Traffic Laws (Western Nigeria). The Bye-law required any person who wanted to operate any stage or hackney carriage within the areas of the Council's jurisdiction to obtain a permit from the Council. The function and power of granting permits was delegated to a transport committee.

By 1970, bus business continued in Ibadan with Kombi, German automobile model buses (also known locally as *danfo*) to cater for increasing transportation demands by workers, marketers and generality of urban dwellers. At the beginning of bus-business in Ibadan, there was no strict compliance with traffic order which occasioned social conflicts and lawlessness. From the 1970s, urban transport system in Ibadan "... became obstructive to free-flow of traffic. The drivers and conductors became unruly and

uncontrollable" (Olaoba, 2002: 10). Such rascally instinct and social deviance dominate *okada* business in the 1990s and 2000s.

The problem of urban transportation continued during the oil boom years and Udoji Award in the mid-1970s. The use of commercial motorcycle was more prevalent in the rural and border areas during the period. It facilitated rural-urban mobility in the wake of urban-bias development and rural neglect. This situation persists till today not only in the rural areas, but also peri-urban sectors. According to Oni (2004: 194), "instead of proper public transportation being established, the use of commercial motorcycle became celebrated, and they began operation informally as intra-urban or para-transit passenger mode of conveyance along various urban roads." By the 1980s, as Oni further analyses, "commercial motorcycling renders more flexible service. The service is faster because motorcycles are hardly caught up in traffic hold-up. The major problem in this is the high rate of accidents that has resulted in increased cost of treating people involved in accidents" (p. 202). In the 1990s, most government Urban Mass Transit collapsed within few years of establishment due to corruption and mismanagement. The decline in organised public transport systems led to rapid growth of non-conventional means of public transport, especially commercial motorcycle (Olubomehin, 2012).

However, it should be noted that urban transport services in Nigeria were provided by the informal sector. For many years, taxis and intra-city bus services were owned by local and foreign entrepreneurs. *Okada* filled the gap created by inadequate and inefficient urban transport system as economic crises deepened. *Okada* is an offshoot of *kabukabu* (unlicensed, unmarked and speedy) taxi-cabs. The use of *kabukabu* became prevalent in Nigerian cities from the mid-1970s when civil servants and low-income earners supplemented family income using their personal cars directly or otherwise to offer unauthorised taxi services. By 1984, *Litehace* buses dominated urban transport service in Ibadan. However, in the 1990s, *okada* provided alternative mode of transportation for urban dwellers who reluctantly coped with low speed, rickety taxis and commercial buses. Ibadan has a predominance of rickety vehicles and crowded, uncomfortable seats. Due to interrupted movements, these vehicles are at odds with

mobility standard in a modern city with highly competitive economy. Following unplanned urbanisation, inadequate parking facilities were worsened by the growing rate of roadside trading and refuse dumps that made efficient transport services difficult.

The emergence of *okada* is an important signifier of economic downturn in Nigeria. The name, *okada*, originated from the Benin town of Okada, Edo State, Nigeria. Okada Airline derived its name from the same source. The link between Okada Airline and *okada* (commercial motorcycle) is interesting in the economic history of Nigeria. Okada Airline based in Benin City, Nigeria, started as charter flights in 1979 and commercial flights in 1983. It was established by Chief Gabriel Igbinedion, the *Esama* of Benin and a wealthy entrepreneur (Edo, Olaniyi, Ndukwe and Muritala, 2014). Between 1980s and mid-1990s, *Okada Air* was one of the largest airline operators that served many airports for relatively low fares. In 1997, *Okada Airline* finally collapsed after air crashes in 1989, 1991 and 1992. Obviously, *Okada* was borrowed from *Okada Airline* due to its low fares, popular patronage and ability to break the monopoly of the state-owned Nigerian Airways. As a mark of economic backwardness and perpetual dependency on foreign technology, *Okada* (commercial motorcycles) became widespread after the collapse of *Okada Airline*.

According to Oyesiku (2001), commercial motorcycle was introduced in Nigeria in the 1970s. The use of commercial motorcycle continued in 1980 by a group of individuals in Agege Local Government Area of Lagos State. They were initially used to supplement family incomes by operating them after normal working hours. The phenomenon spread to Ibadan by the late 1980s as a strategy devised to cope with crisis in urban transportation. For Ikporukpo (1994), the decay in urban transportation is signaled by unduly long commuter-waiting periods due to the short supply of vehicles, a high number of traffic accidents due to poor conditions of the commercial vehicles, and disorganised traffic and parking systems. Though *okada* allows commuters to achieve their goals and meet targets, it added to urban transportation crisis in terms of congestion, accidents, health hazards and air pollution.

*Okada* was a popular response to a growing demand and the commercial opportunity provided by the failure of state-owned or

subsidised-monopoly public transport enterprises in the 1990s. It was also a response to the growing urban population, which according to the United Nations' estimate, increased by over 5 per cent per annum. In 1995, almost 10,000 motorcycles were registered for commercial purposes in Lagos (Kumar, 2011). Economic recession contributes to the increasing popularity of *okada*, rising to almost 200,000 by 2007 in Lagos (Kumar, 2011). The growing popularity of *Okada* is also due to its low capital outlays, and the fact that most of the urban areas are growing with unplanned peripheral settlements and un-motorable roads. Small scale entrepreneurs, peasant farmers, civil servants, politicians, sex workers and others invested in *okada* with the expectation of daily returns and remittances. In addition, *okada* business is mostly self-regulated with easy entry and exit.

### **“Okadisation” and Individualisation of Urban Space**

Mobility on *okada* depicts liberty and fast-moving scheme of things in a rapidly changing world. It introduced a new notion of individualisation within the urban space and it signifies overcrowded city, threat to order and process of human mobility. The city is no longer shaped by industrial modernity but by other notions of rural informal economy and consumption capitalism. There is also emerging politics of mobility in the city, new social relations between classes, gender, hosts and migrants breaking down boundaries of interaction. *Okada* operators invent new cultural practices involving socio-economic mobility to resist marginality in the declining economy. Indeed, *okada* exemplifies the economic strategies that young people devised to occupy the urban space and make a living.

Falola makes the point that the traffic problem is glaring in cities. Traffic moves very slowly in major urban centres where there is a long distance separating residential areas from work and business places.<sup>3</sup> *Okada* enables many urban dwellers to cope with the gridlock of traffic jams and dysfunctional urban transportation system. It has become a way of life, which is indispensable to everyday socio-economic engagement of Nigerians. This explains why outright ban on *okada* has been resisted in Kano, Ibadan, Owerri, Lagos and Abuja. Since the *okada* boom in the late 1990s,

it has sustained other economic activities in peasant farming, technical skills and auto-repairs, petty trading and transportation of workers and students. It enhances transportation of goods and the referral of patients between healthcare centres. Of crucial importance is the fact that *okada* services provide self-employment for teeming unemployed or underemployed youths, thereby reducing the high rate of pick-pocketing and armed banditry in the cities as well as in rural areas.

*Okada* promotes a culture of intolerance, aggression and indiscipline. Most of the urban youths, especially internal and international migrants shared a sense of restlessness about “fast” money and “making” it big. It is common to see *Okada* overloaded with passengers as operators strive to maximise earnings at the expense of safety. Bye and large, *Okada* contributes to current urban social crisis and complicates youth's construction of meaningful livelihoods and social identities. The “*Okadisation*” process launched a new phenomenon in the social history of Ibadan, as urban dwellers shifted from traditional trekking and cycling to *Okada* riding between places and destinations. As economic crises deepened, a new trend of consumption capitalism became entrenched in urban lifestyle.

### **Social Identity of West African Okada Riders**

*Okada* plays dominant role in public transportation system but little is known about the origin and identity of the teeming young riders which included local and foreign migrants as well as socially excluded indigenes. During this research (2011-2012), the population of West African migrants in Ibadan included young and new arrivals who had the aspirations of migration to Europe. Young Senegalese, Guineans, Malians and Gambian immigrants left Libya to settle in Ibadan and looked forward to further migration to Europe. Globalisation has redefined migration patterns in West Africa. In the past, kinship networks influenced African migration systems but from the early 2000s, some Yoruba men and women who engaged in international businesses across ECOWAS sub-region sometimes facilitated migration of young West Africans to Ibadan. Such merchants provided accommodation for them and served as their guarantors in the process of negotiation for jobs.<sup>4</sup> Through this process, Yoruba merchants entrenched social and commercial

networks to facilitate their own business in the sub-region. In addition, the high volume of West African immigrants in Ibadan represents the most visible sign of integration in the sub-region and the success of the 1979 ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of Persons and the Right of Residence and Establishment. Young migrant *okada* riders with similar experiences of economic crises and poverty migrated from various African countries to Ibadan in pursuance of legitimate means of livelihood in the urban informal economy.

It is imperative to note that most of the migrants were young school leavers. Some of them dropped out of school due to poverty, civil wars and economic crises that ravaged West African countries. There were those that engaged in farming, menial jobs and vocational skills before migration to Ibadan. Evidence from fieldwork indicated that some migrant *okada* riders were formerly engaged in other businesses such as precious stones' trade.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the salient nature of ethnic identity in the city of Ibadan, new identities are created from the struggle for survival among the young migrants, which protect the interests of the labouring poor within the urban space. Life stories of individual *okada* riders help us to understand how migrants tried to determine the pattern of social interaction through the uncertain and rapidly changing urban environment.<sup>6</sup> Many of the migrant *okada* riders live a transnational existence, by belonging to communities that span the borders of their countries and thereby, creating new integration mechanisms in West Africa. There are instances of inter-marriages between the migrant *okada* riders and the local Yoruba women, which further reinforced their transnational identity. Due to the influence of Islamic religion, West African migrants often cluster around Hausa *okada* riders who they consider as their 'brothers.' Migrants develop new social ties and solidarity which makes the city a place of renewed identity formation. They are mostly unmarried men who share accommodation and food. Those who combine *okada* business with work as security guards are entitled to accommodation. As they spend less on accommodation, their remittances home increase. Their womenfolk supply food and commercial sex.

Foreign *okada* riders, except those from Togo and Benin Republic who could speak Yoruba, are severely handicapped by an almost

total deficiency in Nigerian languages. Hausa seems to have come closest to a commercial *lingua franca* and appears to have been the most common means by which foreign *okada* riders transact their business. Majority of foreigners speak Hausa and Pidgin English in their daily transactions with passengers. Many of the migrant *okada* riders operate in Sabo, Mokola, Agbowo, Orogun, Ojoo, Challenge, Moniya and Sasa areas of Ibadan where Hausa migrants reside, due to the booming commercial activities and their multi-ethnic nature. Many of the West African *okada* riders are employed by Yoruba entrepreneurs. However, there are apprehensions about hiring out *Okada* to strangers without fixed addresses.

Many of the migrant *Okada* riders desire to stay in Nigeria because of the tolerance they enjoy from the host community. As a way of negotiating their belonging and integration, many of them attempted to vote during elections by disguising as Hausa or Yoruba. Only accents gave them away. Riding *okada* constantly remind them of their own mobility, destination and temporality in the city. Realising that making money within a short period was almost impossible, migrant *okada* riders decided to stay in Ibadan longer than they had originally envisaged.

### Rivalry and Competition

This study shows that struggle within the immigrant population over economic difficulties and adaptation brought them in close contact with the local people (internal migrants and Yoruba natives) by competing in the same informal sector of the economy. Unlike in other African cities, such competition has not produced social tension or conflict in Ibadan. According to Mr. Adewole Ojo, a 39-year-old Yoruba *okada* rider, "the sky is big enough for everyone."<sup>8</sup>

There are diverse perspectives on the migrant *okada* riders. Some Nigerian *okada* riders consider them as spoilers, "awon to nba ise je". They allegedly collect lower transport fares for distant routes as opposed to local *okada* riders. Union officials usually arrest such freelance *okada* riders. Foreign *okada* riders are also accused of violating the rules and regulations guiding the business, such as carrying two passengers and riding without a helmet and driver's licence. However, such practices are not peculiar to foreign *okada* riders alone but generality of those in the business. According to an



*okada* rider – ‘Easy’:

*Okada* work has mixed both ‘human and animal legs’ together. There are so many people in the business, both natives and migrants with different characters. We tolerate them because as Yoruba and in particular, Ibadan, we welcome everybody. This is because we don’t know where we are also going to find ourselves tomorrow.<sup>9</sup>

At Oluyole Estate Station, the *Okada* Union dominated by Yorubas helps members, including migrants, by granting them loans. A foreign *okada* rider remarked that, “if anybody needs money, members will contribute for the person and he will promise to pay installmentally (sic). But if they want to really help anyone who is facing any economic challenges, the association will buy *Okada* for the person and the person will remit money installmentally (sic).”<sup>10</sup>

The population of foreign *okada* riders continued to increase from 2008, but it is difficult to determine their exact number. At Ojoo, out of over 200 *okada* riders, there were 58 Guinean migrants in 2012. As co-ethnics, migrants clustered together for social solidarity. In 2010, immigration officials arrested foreign migrant *okada* riders without passports and residence permits. However, there are no reports of deportation.

Police extort money from all *okada* riders, but more frequently from migrants, without residence permits. Most of the foreign *Okada* riders who are from Franco-phone countries and without adequate understanding of English are vulnerable to extortion by police. However, some local *okada* riders often intervene in their cases with the police in the spirit of urban proletariat and camaraderie. An *okada* rider’s perception of the police is that, “All they want is money...when they are broke, they mount roadblocks waiting for us to come, as if we are working for them ... Police are too harsh on us. They extort money from us.”<sup>10</sup>

Irrespective of origin, status or identity, entrance into the *Okada* unions — ‘ACCOMORAN’ (Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycles Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria) and National Union of Road Transport Unions (NURTW) is without discrimination. Unions control the routes in various neighbourhoods and major roads. For the purpose of social security and justice, West African migrants

joined others in the *okada* unions. The Unions intervene whenever their registered members have cases with the police. *Okada* union members pay registration fee of ₦4,600.00 (\$28.16) irrespective of nationalities. Daily tickets range from ₦20.00 (\$0.12) to ₦30.00 (\$0.18) for plying neighbourhoods; and ₦50.00 (\$0.31) to ₦70.00 (\$0.43) for those operating on the major highways. Since registration is for the individual rider not for the *okada*, operators have easy mobility in the city and could work anywhere. In this process, foreign *okada* riders buy ‘commercial spaces’ for their operation. In order to survive in the city, *okada* riders invest in their unions and networks by being constantly present and “in touch” with passengers.



*Okada* riders at Ojoo, Ibadan

Source: Fieldwork, 2011.

Foreign *okada* riders are incorporated into the Executive committees of their union but cannot contest for chairmanship of the union. They are mostly appointed as Provosts to enforce rules and regulations without prejudice. They are treated with respect because they never defaulted. This is because they are hustlers, responsible and calm, which reduce conflicts with their Nigerian

counterparts. For most of them, everyday life of riding *okada* on the major roads and interior neighbourhoods means negotiating multiple relationships that are significant for survival.

### Risky Business: Killers or Transporters?

West African migrants constitute a small fraction of the overall *okada* riders, but as strangers, their involvement in the business symbolises the risk factor of living and making money in the city. Migrant *okada* riders face the challenge of knowing the routes and understand Yoruba language for effective service delivery. They allow passengers to guide them to various destinations. When Senegalese “stone boys” joined *Okada* business, many of them had accidents due to inadequate riding skills, knowledge of the routes and traffic rules. Many were avoided by passengers. West African and other internal migrants rushed into *okada* business merely to earn income without knowing the technicalities involved.

*Okada* developed without adhering to safety prescriptions as contained in the traffic laws of the country. Many of the migrants do not wear crash helmets which they consider as waste of money. Despite widespread accidents, the use of crash helmets has declined due to social beliefs that it is used for ritual purposes. Differential aspirations, targets, destinations and worldviews introduced new tensions and provided new theatre for conflicts between “strange bedfellows”, but co-travellers in the city.



Overloaded *okada*

Both the riders and commuters continue to use *okada*, daring its harmful consequences. Though *okada* serves as alternative source of income for many youths and poor households, its social vices make it a risky business for operators and urban dwellers. Historically, criminal gangs have always used modern means of transportation especially railways, bicycles, buses and taxis to perpetrate crimes. In Nigeria, *okada* has been used to perpetrate various crimes ranging from kidnapping to robbery. *Okada* became a risk factor in the city as a source of evil and disaster in the popular social imaginary. The innumerable dangers posed by *okada* riders became a hot debate in the media, civil society and government circles on whether they are killers or transporters.

*Okada* makes life in the city more precarious as it promotes culture of intolerance, aggression and indiscipline perpetrated by different categories of road users. *Okada* riders have a reputation for aggression. Most of the urban youths, especially internal and international migrants, share a sense of restlessness about “fast” money and “making” it big in the city. Among the *okada* riders, consideration for money and economic gains far outweigh safety and security concerns. Therefore, one of the foremost causes of *okada* accidents is overloading. Physical shortcomings of *okada* include openness to the weather, difficulty of travelling with others and other hazards.

Increasingly, *okada* contributes to current urban social crisis and complicates youths’ construction of meaningful livelihoods and social identities. “Hunting method” among *okada* riders results in desperation, including consumption of drugs and intoxicants to stimulate productivity and enhance earning power. This has led to high speeds, accidents and intolerance.

*Okada* contributes to the chaotic nature of passenger-transportation in the city. Due to reckless riding, *Okada* accidents have led to deaths, injuries, traffic jams and partial or complete damage to body parts. The magnitude of *okada* accidents led to the creation of Special Wards for the victims in most public hospitals in Nigeria. According to Federal Safety of Corps (FRSC), at least 450 people die monthly from *okada* accidents in Nigeria. Oyo State recorded 4,000 *okada*-related accidents between January and May 2011.<sup>11</sup> Victims of the accidents attributed the accidents to drunk-

driving and were admitted at the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan. In many parts of Ibadan, some “traditional bone setters” and orthopedic wards are kept busy by victims of *okada* accidents.

### Cash and Carry Business

Trade liberalisation and globalisation encouraged dependency on imported goods, especially automobiles and motorcycles. *Okada*, especially Mistuba, Daylong, Boxer and Bajaj are imported from two of the world’s fastest growing economies in Asia— China and India. *Okada* became a feature of cultural landscape in Nigerian cities due to its low cost of purchase and fuel efficiency. Various brands of motorcycles are imported from Asian countries due to their seeming affordability. The business seems profitable and does not require huge capital outlay. In effect, *okada* business has attracted a wide range of investors. Before 2010, *okada* was sold at the rate of ₦70,000.00 (\$428.52) for those who paid cash. Between 2010 and 2011, Bajaj and Boxer were sold at ₦100,000.00 (\$612.18) but in 2012, they were sold at ₦110,000.00 (\$673.39) due to high demand. Hire purchase in 2010 and 2011 was ₦150,000.00 (\$918.27) with registration and number plate but in 2012, they were sold at N170,000.00 (\$1040.70). Mistuba was sold for ₦65,000.00 (\$397.71) in 2010 and 2011. Hire purchase was ₦95,000.00 (\$581.57). In 2012, it was ₦70,000.00 (\$428.52) and ₦105,000.00 (\$642.79) for hire purchase with number plate and registration. Daylong was sold at ₦90,000.00 (\$550.96) and ₦130,000 (\$795.83) hire purchase and registration respectively in 2010 and 2011. In 2012, Daylong was sold for ₦95,000.00 (\$581.57) and ₦145,000.00 (\$887.66) hire purchase and registration respectively. Abro and Grand King are new products sold for ₦90,000.00 (\$550.96) in 2012.

Capital for the purchase of *okada* are raised from different sources. One interesting trend among rural youths is to sell their ancestral land for the purchase of *okada* and in desperation to migrate to the city. Another source is through the trafficking of young girls and children across West African borders. Proceeds accruing from trafficking are reinvested in *Okada*. Lastly, most raise capital for *okada* through personal savings, loans from cooperatives and micro-finance banks.

Among the West African migrants are two types of *okada* riders: owner-riders and hired-riders. Most of the owner-riders had lived in Ibadan for about a decade and had engaged in other businesses such as gemstones trade before joining *okada* business. Others accumulate capital to buy *okada* through cash purchase or hire purchase. This category of *okada* owner-riders operate at their own pace without any pressure to meet particular targets or “delivers”. On the other hand, hired-riders were employed to ride *okada* and remit (deliver) a sum of money on a daily or weekly basis to the owner of *okada*. This category of *Okada* riders work full time on daily basis and have the tendency of using intoxicants and drug consumption to enhance productivity. They paid their bosses some amount of money weekly, monthly or quarterly before they could purchase the *okada* from the original owner. An *okada* rider remarked that, “*okada* is not really lucrative but it is better than not having a job. The proceeds from *okada* riding take care of my family’s needs every day. Therefore, I thank God for it.”<sup>12</sup> Hired-riders who could not complete their payments often risk losing their instalments and the *okada*.



*Okada* riders at Ojoo, Ibadan Source: Fieldwork, 2011

In 2007, *okada* riders delivered ₦700.00 (\$4.29) per day out of an average of ₦1,000.00 (\$6.12) they made. In 2008, *Okada* riders earned ₦1,500.00 (\$9.18) and delivered ₦700.00 (\$4.29). In 2011, they earned ₦1,500.00 (\$9.18) but delivered between ₦1,000.00 (\$6.12) and ₦800.00 (\$4.90) per day. They got motorcycles on credit and instalmental payments by paying ₦5,000.00 (\$30.61) per week. In 2011, due to increase in competition, *Okada* riders earned between ₦1,300 (\$7.96) and ₦1,600 (\$9.97) per day with about six litres of fuel at ₦390.00 (\$2.39). During the same period, *okada* riders remitted between ₦700.00 (\$4.29) and ₦800.00 (\$4.90) per day to the owners. According to Ogunrinola (2011), the average monthly income of *okada* riders is over ₦38,000.00 (\$232.63), which is about five times the minimum wage of ₦7,500.00 (\$45.91) in 2008. Transport fares vary according to demand, weather conditions, socio-political situations and the initiative of the *okada* rider.

Notions of capital accumulation become intricated because capital is in constant circulation and consumption. According to a Yoruba proverb, 'money made in the city stays in the city.' Despite the challenges, some local *Okada* riders have built houses and made other remarkable investments. Foreigners tend to meet daily targets and deliver money promptly unlike local counterparts who default in daily payment and make flimsy excuses.

### Crackdown on *Okada* Riders

Control of informal trading, services and street vending has been a long-standing problem since the colonial period. In 1998, Col. Mohammed Marwa, former Military Administrator of Lagos State, introduced tricycles popularly known as *Keke Marwa* to address transport problems in the city. Since then, various state governments have been importing *Keke Marwa* from Asia.

The National Road Traffic Regulation 2004 as well as the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) Establishment Act 2007 along with other road traffic regulations in all the states of the federation including Abuja, mandated it for motorcycle riders to ensure that their motorcycles are registered, and the riders while on motion must wear crash helmets. And if there is a passenger, the passenger as well must wear a crash helmet. Some states in Nigeria, such as Rivers,

Plateau and Abia banned *okada* outrightly, while others restricted their operations to the peri-urban and rural areas due to their involvement in armed robbery, kidnapping and accidents.<sup>12</sup>

Attempts by state authorities and police to enforce traffic regulations on *okada* riders often led to clashes.<sup>13</sup> In Oyo State, political interference has denied FRSC prosecution of *okada* traffic offenders. Section 10 (8) of the FRSC establishment Act 2007 states that, "The Chief Judge of a state or the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja shall have power to establish special or mobile courts for the purpose of a speedy trial of traffic offenders under this Act".

Today, what is popular among state governments in Nigeria is the introduction of tricycles and taxi cabs with the aim of addressing unemployment, poverty alleviation, youth empowerment and banning *okada*. The underline motive is to keep the "undesirable youths" away from the roads in order to attract foreign investors, create "mega cities" and provide urban security. From the mid-2000s, federal and state governments as well as major stakeholders in urban planning began to "act locally and think globally". In December 2008, Governor Alao Akala opened 55 new buses for inter-state transport service, for use by the Oyo state-owned Trans City Transport Company.

In an attempt to "re-invent" transport system and boost tourism in Oyo State, Governor Alao Akala introduced intra-city taxi in October, 2009. The state government purchased 200 new cars from Asia for taxi services. Akala taxi was to run a dial-a taxi-ride scheme. Under the scheme, passengers could call in local stations (to be established in various neighbourhoods) on telephone to be picked and dropped at any given address. The new transport scheme was launched under the State Youth Empowerment Scheme which made university graduates beneficiaries of Akala taxi. The 200 taxi cabs were released to members of the NURTW and unemployed graduates in Oyo State.

This generated several controversies. Members of the public perceived it as an instrument of campaign since all the new taxis painted in Oyo State commercial colours of white and blue had inscriptions of Governor Alao Akala. In addition, government programmes were usually designed to favour party members and cronies to the exclusion of political opponents and generality of the masses.

On 1st December, 2009, the then Oyo State Governor, Chief Adebayo Alao Akala assented to the law to amend the "Control of Commercial Motorcycle Law, 2009". This law amended the 1995 law. The law is cited as the "Control of Commercial Motor-Cycles (Amendment) Law 2009". The full enforcement of the new regulation banning *okada* commenced on 24th March, 2010, in Ibadan. The banning of *okada* and police harassment prompted a few of West African migrants to leave Ibadan. Some flocked to other urban areas in Nigeria, but a large number of them continued *okada* business outside city limits.

On Tuesday, 20 December, 2011, Oyo State Governor, Senator Abiola Ajimobi inaugurated the State Empowerment Scheme, tagged *Keke Ajumose*. He gave out 1,000 tricycles to members of the Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association (ACOMARAN) and banned commercial motorcycles from the highways. Beneficiaries of *Keke Ajumose* tricycles were expected to pay N42,000.00 (\$257.11) each. Obviously, foreign *okada* riders were excluded from the patronage system. The introduction of *Keke Ajumose* further complicates transportation problems in Ibadan. Urban dwellers had to contend with rickety vehicles, *okada*, tricycles, street traders and beggars on poorly maintained roads.

However, the ban on *okada* was not without its social drawback. Commuters and *okada* riders considered the new legislation as too draconian for their only alternative means of livelihood. The ban on *okada* was considered repressive in the context of widespread poverty and unemployment. It was also perceived as favouritism meted-out to some select members of NURTW as a result of inter/intra-union rivalries and party politics. The NURTW is a politically mobilised group responsible for many political mayhems in Oyo State since 1999.

*Okada* riders have embarked on proactive measures (or jungle justice) to protect their 'professional image' and dignity of labour by lynching criminals using *okada* to perpetrate crime in the city. Against the backdrop of the non-feasibility of an outright ban and ineffective enforcement of urban transport legislations, Oyo State government set up traffic policing mechanisms.

## Conclusion

This paper argues that the deepening economic crises, political and social instabilities in West Africa were critical factors in the migration of young men to Ibadan. As a result of de-industrialisation process and lack of formal job opportunities, many of them joined *okada* business to raise capital for other businesses and send remittances home. Being "strangers" in the city, West African *okada* riders put their own and other people's lives at risk in the city. Most of them lack the prerequisite skills for riding *okada* along unfamiliar routes. The everyday use of *okada* fast-tracks the integration of West Africans in the city through constant interaction, dialogue and commercial relations with various social categories of urban dwellers. The increasing use of *okada* signifies declining quality of life, human underdevelopment and insecurity in the city.

There are confrontations over the use of urban space between state authorities and poor residents. Banning *okada* invokes a new urban governance dynamics in terms of security and beautification. Government ban threatens the survival of *okada* riders who eke out a living at the margins of the urban economy. West African *Okada* riders continue to struggle with the aspirations of making money. It is also amazing that despite the explosion of *okada* as a popular mode of transportation, the Federal Road Safety Corporation in Oyo State has no statistical data that can aid planning and policy recommendations.

## Endnotes

1. The Road Safety Command, Oyo State has no statistics on the number of registered *okada* in the state.
2. Since the 1960s or earlier, commercial motorcycle was a major means of transportation in many West African countries, especially Benin Republic, Niger and Ivory Coast.
3. T. Falola, 1989, "The Cities" in Y.B. Usman, *Nigeria Since Independence: The First Twenty-five Years*, Vol. I: The Society, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited p. 235
4. Interview with Mr. Joseph Adedayo (a.k.a Baba Ewe) at Eleiyele, Ibadan on 23rd August, 2011.
5. Interviews with Boubacar Barry from Dioula, Cote D'Ivoire on 15 July, 2011 in Ibadan ; Korfa Laban, from Equatorial Guinea on 10 June,

- 2011 in Ibadan; and Punu Sangu, from Togo on 13 June, 2011 in Ibadan.
6. Interviews with Siaka Tiene Baoule from Cote D'Ivoire on 16 June, 2011 in Ibadan and Mohammed Mohammed Malingo from Guinea Conakry on 15 June, 2011 in Ibadan.
  7. Interview with Mr. Adewole Ojo at Moniya, Ibadan.
  8. Interview with an *okada* rider at Ojoo, Ibadan.
  9. Interview with an *okada* rider at Oluyole Estate, Ibadan.
  10. Interview with an *okada* rider at Agbowo, Ibadan.
  11. "Oyo Records 4,000 *okada* accidents in 5 months." <http://www.kemisearch.com/nigeria/forum/news/10697/oyo-records-4-000-okada-accidents-in-5-months.html> 8 July, 2011 retrieved on 20 March, 2012.
  12. Interview with an *okada* rider at Mokola, Ibadan.
  13. Comparatively, police in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, launched a major crackdown against operators of *bodaboda* reportedly used in transporting suspected criminals. "Police Swoop Nabs Suspect 'Bodaboda'" *ThisDay*, 22 May 2012. [http://www.ippmedia.com/frontend/functions/print\\_article.php?](http://www.ippmedia.com/frontend/functions/print_article.php?) Retrieved on 19 June, 2012.
  14. In June 2009, Boko Haram members defied a ban on riding motorcycles without helmets, which led to violent clashes with Joint Military and police in Maiduguri. In Kano, commercial motorcycle riders clashed with Hisba (Sharia police).

## References

- Adeboye, O.A. 2003. "The City of Ibadan" In G.O. Oguntomisin (ed.) *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, Vol. One, Ibadan: Bookshelf Resources Ltd, pp. 7-19
- Awe, B. 1973. "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example" *Journal of African History* 14 (1) pp. 65-77.
- Akinyele, T.A. 2011. *Ibadan Traditional System: Reform and Regeneration*. Ibadan: Kajia Publishing.
- Barnerjee, B. 1983. "The Role of the Informal Sector in the Migration Process: A Test of Probabilistic Migration Models and Labour Segmentation for India", *Oxford Economic Papers* 35, pp. 399-422.
- Bhattacharya, S. and Lucassen, J. 2005. "Introduction: Informalisation in History" In: S. Bhattacharya and J. Lucassen (eds.) *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History, 1800-2000* New Delhi: Macmillan India, pp. 1-18.
- Biaya, T.K. 1999. "Hair Statements in Urban Africa: The Beauty, the Mystic and the Madman". *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 1 and 2 pp. 32-38.

- Biaya, T.K. 2005. "Youth and Street Culture in Urban Africa: Addis Ababa, Dakar and Kinshasha," In A. Honwana and F. De Boeck (Eds.) *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* Oxford: James Currey, pp. 215-228.
- Cohen, A. 1969. *Custom And Politics in An Urban African Community: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Town*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Cohen, A. 1974. *Urban Ethnicity*. London: Tavistock.
- Daniel N., Ekpenyong, N.S. and Eke, P. 2008. "Understanding Road Rage in a Developing Economy: The Port Harcourt City Experience" *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 6, (4).
- Edo, V.O., Olaniyi R.O., Ndukwe, P.K. and Muritala, M.O. 2014. *The Living Sir (Dr.) Chief Gabriel Osawaru Igbinedion: A Biography*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Falola, T. 1989. *Politics and Economy in Ibadan 1830-1945*. Ibadan: Modelo Publishers.
- Fourchard, L. "The Case of Ibadan, Nigeria," <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/dpu-projects/Global-Report/pdfs/ibadan> [retrieved on 19th March, 2011].
- Hansen, K. T. 2004. "Who Rules the Streets? The Politics of Vending Space in Lusaka" In K.T. Hansen and M. Vaa, (Eds.) *Reconsidering Informality: Perspectives from Urban Africa* Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, pp. 62-80.
- Hansen, K.T. and Vaa M. 2004. "Introduction" In K.T. Hansen and M. Vaa (Eds.) *Reconsidering Informality: Perspectives from Urban Africa* Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, pp. 7-24.
- Ikime, O. 1979. "Through Changing Scenes: Nigerian History Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow". Inaugural Lecture, Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- Kumar, A. 2011. "Understanding the Emerging Role of Motorcycles in African Cities: A Political Economy Perspective" *Sub-Saharan Africa Transport Programme (SSATP) of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development/The World Bank* [www.worldbank.org/afr/ssatp](http://www.worldbank.org/afr/ssatp) [retrieved on 19 March, 2012].
- Linden, M. 2005. "Conceptualising the World Working Class" in S. Bhattacharya and J. Lucassen (eds.) *Workers in the Informal Sector: Studies in Labour History, 1800-2000*. New Delhi: Macmillan India, pp. 21-44.
- Lourdes, D.O., Plat D., Pochet, P. and Sahgbana, M. (2010) "Motorised two-wheelers in Sub-Saharan African Cities: Public and Private Use" <http://intranet.imet.gr/portal/o/> [retrieved on 19 March, 2012].
- Mittelman, J.H. 1994. "The Globalisation Challenge: Surviving at the Margins" *Third World Quarterly*, 15 (3), pp. 427-443.
- Ogunrinola, O.I. (2011) "Global Economic Crisis and Career Aspirations

- Among 'Okada' Riders in Nigeria: The Influence of Apprenticeship Skills Training" *Business and Economics Research Journal*, 2 (3), pp. 51-67.
- Olaniyi, R. O. 2005. "Child Labour and Nigeria's Informal Economy since the 1990s" *The Nigerian Journal of Economic History* 7 and 8, pp. 205-235.
- Olaniyi, R.O. 2008. "Children Abroad: Exploring the Role of Remittance in African Development" In I.M. Zulu and A. Aderemi (Eds.) *Africa and the Diaspora*. California: African Diaspora Foundation, pp. 94-142.
- Olaoba, O.B. 2002. *Business on the Wheels: Bus Conducting and Social Conflicts in Ibadan City*. Ibadan: Rex Charles & Connel Publication.
- Olubomehin, O.O. 2012. "The Development and Impact of Motorcycles as Means of Commercial Transportation in Nigeria" *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (6).  
<http://www.iiste.org/journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/2395/2394> [accessed on 5 September, 2013].
- Olukoju, A. 2003. "Urban Transport in Metropolitan Lagos" In T. Falola and S.J. Salm (eds.) *Nigerian Cities*. Trenton: Africa World Press pp. 211-236.
- Oni, S.I. 2004. "Urbanisation and Transportation Development in Metropolitan Lagos" In M. A. Adejugbe (ed.), *Industrialisation, Urbanisation and Development in Nigeria: 1950-99*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited, pp. 193-219.
- Oyesiku, K.O. 2001. "City Poverty and Emerging Mobility Crisis: The Use of Motorcycle as Public Transport in Nigerian Cities" presented at the 9th World Conference of Transport Research Seoul, 22-27 July.
- Western State. 1969. A Review of the Military Government of the Western State of Nigeria.

### Oral interviews

- Asamoah Mensah from Ghana 11 July, 2011.
- Boubacar Barry from Dioula, Cote D'Ivoire 15 July, 2011.
- Chairman, Eleyele Okada Riders Association, 23 August, 2011.
- Korfa Laban, from Equitorial Guinea 10 June, 2011.
- Mohammed Mohammed, Malingo from Guinea Conakry 15 June, 2011.
- Mr. Joseph Adedayo (a.k.a Baba Ewe) Yoruba, 23 August, 2011.
- Punu Sangu, from Togo 13 June, 2011.
- Siaka Tiene, Baoule from Cote D'Ivoire 16 June, 2011.