

# Cohabiting commerce in a transport hub: Peoples as infrastructure in Lagos, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Based on a case study of Iyana Ipaja, one of the largest transport hubs with a spacious motor park and the most vibrant markets in North Lagos, we elaborate on the nuances of interactions between commercial actors and various forms of infrastructure in the spatial and temporal senses. In terms of materiality and mobility of their businesses, commercial actors are categorised into three types, shopkeepers, stallholders and hawkers. They have extensive interactions with the objects with which they are attached (shops, stalls and goods), the physical infrastructures (vehicles, roads, bus stations and motor parks), and ‘people as infrastructure’ – a term coined by Simone – including drivers, passengers, passers-by and government agencies. We suggest that a modification to the concept of ‘peoples as infrastructure’ should help to articulate interactions among differently positioned actors. We argue that the localities and mobilities of commercial practices manifest spatial conviviality among peoples as infrastructure. The temporality of their commercial practices is embedded in the urban rhythm of Lagos and remediates the flows of people and vehicles through the spaces of Iyana Ipaja. The focus of commercial actors provides a new perspective to rethink grassroots spatial politics of motor parks in Nigeria. Moreover, this case study critically engages the theory of relationality of ‘people as infrastructure’ in urban Africa.

## Keywords

Lagos, materiality, people(s) as infrastructure, spatiality

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## 摘要

lyana Ipaja是北拉各斯最大的交通枢纽之一，拥有宽敞的停车场和最活跃的市场，我们通过对它的案例研究，详细阐述了商业行为者和各种形式的基础设施在空间和时间意义上的相互作用的微妙之处。根据生意的重要性和流动性，商业行为者分为三类：店主、摊贩和小贩。它们与自己所依附的对象（商店、货摊和货物）、有形基础设施（车辆、道路、汽车站和停车场）以及“作为基础设施的人”之间有广泛的互动。“作为基础设施的人”是西蒙尼（Simone）发明的一个术语，包括司机、乘客、路人和政府机构。我们建议对“作为基础设施的人”的概念进行修改，这将应有助于阐明不同定位的行为者之间的互动。我们认为，商业实践的地点和流动性体现了作为基础设施的人之间的空间友好性。他们商业行为的临时性根植于拉各斯的城市节奏，并通过lyana Ipaja的空间来补救人员和车辆的流动。商业行为者的关注为重新思考尼日利亚停车场的基层空间政治提供了一个新的视角。此外，该案例研究在非洲城市批判性地运用了“作为基础设施的人”的关系理论。

## 关键词

拉各斯、重要性、作为基础设施的人、空间性

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## Introduction

Transport systems have been a vital constituent of African cities and their connections to broad rural areas (Beck et al., 2017). Scholars have addressed various political-economic and socio-cultural conditions of roads (Klaeger, 2012), motor-vehicles (Hart, 2016; Mutongi, 2017; Wa Mungai, 2013) and bus stations (Stasik and Cissokho, 2018) in transport systems. Among them, bus stations in African cities epitomise constellations of social and spatial relationships among various actors within urban rhythms. Furthermore, as one of the prominent daily socio-spatial practices around bus stations, the interaction between small-scale commerce and transport mobilities deserves a close analysis.<sup>1</sup> This is important for two reasons.

First, it deepens understandings of informality by teasing out the seemingly chaotic intersection of ‘informal’ commerce and ‘informal’ transport. The notion of informality has been widely used and critically discussed for decades (see Acuto et al., 2019). Instead of engaging the debates over

‘informality’ discourses – which is informal and which is formal – we explore how the ‘popular’ socio-spatial practices in the fields of commerce and transport are inherently interwoven while also grounding them in terms of ‘informality’ that existing literature usually uses (e.g. Agbiboa, 2016; Ikioda, 2013). Here, Simone’s (2019: 618) recent reflection on informality and suggestion on using ‘popular’ is instructive, as the popular embodies the various efforts undertaken by people who participate in larger circuits of sociability and elaborate the semblance of public infrastructure. To echo the existing literature, we still use ‘informal’ in the discursive sense to describe market and transport but, in the empirical sense, we suggest exploring how commercial actors dynamically appropriate material infrastructure in relation to each other and in response to transport mobilities.

Second, to study those interactions, this article brings spatial thinking to the understanding of conjunctions and relationality among ‘people as infrastructure’ (Simone, 2004) and situates this spatiality in a broader

city landscape and everyday rhythms. Spatiality is an important dimension of interpreting urban informalities (Lindell, 2019). As noted for years in Africanist ethnographic works (Grieco et al., 1996; Hansen and Vaa, 2004; Hill, 1984; Thiel and Stasik, 2016), various commercial actors have spatially utilised the transport spaces for their own benefits and influenced mobilities of people and vehicles through temporal ebb and flow of commerce. In this vein, we will empirically articulate spatiality in the study of human interaction by engaging with Simone's conception and related critiques.

Iyana Ipaja, selected as a case study, is one of the largest transport hubs with a spacious motor park and the most vibrant markets in the North of Lagos – the largest metropolis in Sub-Saharan Africa. In this local context, the focus on commercial actors will provide a supplementary perspective to rethink grassroots spatial politics of motor parks in Nigeria. Apart from unions playing an influential role in transport and market governance in Lagos (Fourchard, 2011; Ikioda, 2013), we have discovered that various grassroots commercial actors deploy their agency to construct autonomous spatial orders from formal spatial regulations by transport and market unions.

Moreover, place matters in understanding what is behind and beyond a transport hub. Thinking of place as performed and practised can help us understand place in radically open and non-essentialised ways where place is constantly struggled with and reimagined in practical ways (Cresswell, 2014: 39). Iyana Ipaja is a locale of various infrastructural materials and spaces, through which urban dwellers live lives. Space also matters. Space is relational, and such relationality is performed and constituted through iteration rather than through essence (Rose, 1999). Commercial actors utilise spaces in Iyana Ipaja for different ends. Negotiations on spaces among commercial actors and

between commercial actors and motor vehicles are made according to specific unwritten rules and 'hidden transcripts' of power (Scott, 1990), on which this article will shed light.

The fieldwork has been collaboratively conducted by two authors with different situated positions: an *oyinbo* (White foreigner) and a Nigerian.<sup>2</sup> The co-presence of two authors facilitates ice-breaking in interactions with people in Iyana Ipaja. With the support of transport and market unions, we first walked through various spaces of roads and markets. As a result, we mapped and pinpointed potential informants. Based on the criterion elaborated later, we conducted 25 semi-structured recorded interviews with a range of commercial actors and drivers.<sup>3</sup> Within a week, we conducted a video recording repeated on four separate occasions from morning to evening on daily flows of people and vehicles. Over two months in 2017, to normalise our presence as ordinary passengers rather than union or government affiliates, we periodically visited the field site and extensively chatted with different actors, as documented in field notes.

## Rethinking 'people as infrastructure' in urban Africa

Defining infrastructure is 'a categorizing moment' – the moment of 'tearing into those heterogeneous networks to define which aspect of which network is to be discussed and which parts will be ignored' (Larkin, 2013: 330). For instance, by examining how citizens are or are not able to access basic infrastructural provisions, scholars have questioned the 'right to the city' (Amin, 2014) and the malfunctionality of post-colonial states (Gandy, 2006). In African urban studies, infrastructure has become a major focus, ranging from roads (Lamont, 2013; Melly, 2013) to public toilets and sewerage systems (Chalfin, 2014). Instead of limiting analysis to the public, material

infrastructure, we regard infrastructure as ‘windows into social worlds’ (Angelo and Hentschel, 2015) and as networks of human and non-human relationships.

The notion of ‘people as infrastructure’ was proposed in this regard. In contrast to Western cities in which material infrastructure has been planned in an orderly way and spatially fixed, Simone (2004: 407–408) argues,

African cities are characterized by incessantly flexible, mobile, and provisional intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used. ... residents ... engage complex combinations of objects, spaces, persons, and practices. These conjunctions become an infrastructure – a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city.

In addition to the social dimension of infrastructure, scholars have also addressed ideological and discursive dimensions of infrastructure in relation to socio-political dynamics of urban Africa (Mains and Kinfu, 2017; Trovalla and Trovalla, 2015). In this paper, we not only employ Simone’s loosely defined social infrastructure but consider how social and material aspects of infrastructure are interwoven.

One of the main contributions of Simone’s conception is to reveal the significance of urban informalities in providing vital resources and connections that sustain social life, mobility and the future. The way in which people practice informalities is to forge connections between them or to create certain platforms for urban livelihoods (Simone, 2004). This idea is supported by a case study of mobile airtime sellers in Kigali, Rwanda, in which informal networks are re-engineered to provide them with sustainable livelihoods at the base of the economy (Mann and Nzayisenga, 2015). However, in the case study of motorcycle taxis in Kampala, Uganda, Doherty (2017: 9) argues

that people as infrastructure is ‘unable to take up the ways in which these infrastructural worlds can be experienced as unfair, exclusionary, degraded, and degrading by those who live and work within them’. Following up this critique, we maintain that the differentiated actors should be articulated in the relational analysis of people, spaces and objects.

Thus, in modifying Simone’s phrasing slightly, we suggest exploring the meaningfulness of dynamic interactions between *peoples* as infrastructures. We emphasise ‘peoples’ rather than ‘people’ because different actors hold their own spatial and social positions in the city while interacting with each other. However, phrasing ‘peoples’ does not mean there are discrete, bounded and coherent ethnocultural units of peoples, which has been implicated in the categorising approach of ‘peoples of Africa’ (e.g. Olson, 1996). Our case study articulates the interactions among specifically positioned actors, including commercial actors, transport workers and others in the spaces of Iyana Ipaja.

In the studies of public transit spaces, interactions on the move have recently drawn much attention (Jensen, 2009, 2010). These empirical cases are analysed through European settings of public spaces such as squares, traffic lights and pedestrian crossings, and are generalised for more universal concepts of mobilities, such as negotiation in motion, mobile sense-making and temporary congregations (Jensen, 2010). Since these infrastructural spaces are not universally used in Africa, it is doubtful that these terms can be applied to Africa’s urban conditions. Different from Euro-American transport mobilities, automobilities in Africa, which are rooted in colonial techno-politics, provide a new means of engaging with African political economy in the aspects of road construction, transportation costs and drivers’ regulation while also facilitating new debates

about meanings and significances of autonomy and belonging (Hart, 2016: 4–10). Such vernacular politics involves various interactions among motor-vehicles, peoples as infrastructures and public transit spaces.

To examine these interactions, we suggest exploring (1) spatial interactions between peoples with their appropriation of material infrastructure, and (2) temporal dimension of interactions in the urban rhythms of mobilities. First, as we have reviewed, there is a difference between studies of people as infrastructure and materialities of infrastructure: both ‘categorical acts’ (Larkin, 2013) only show partial facets of urban lives, which are, in fact, interconnected and manifest meaningfulness from different ideological and political perspectives. Doherty (2017) amended Simone’s (2004) theory with a new term ‘disposable people as infrastructure’, which focuses on an uneven exposure to death that, at a global scale, disproportionately discards certain lives, particularly young motorcyclists’ lives, from the institutions of social and economic (re)production. He, however, intentionally leaves out people as infrastructure who are not disposed of but closely related to these young motorcyclists in co-habitant spaces. Thus, examining spatial interactions between peoples as infrastructure with their appropriation of material infrastructure will provide a more comprehensive perspective towards differently situated actors in urban spaces.

Second, the forms of interactions vary over time, along with urban rhythms of mobilities.<sup>4</sup> Smith and Hetherington (2013: 5–6) have indicated that ‘the urban has an intrinsically rhythmic organisation which, in turn, gives rise to specific forms, configurations, and relations of space, time, interaction and mobility’. For instance, Ghanaian hawkers’ everyday engagements with time frames, speeds and rhythms along a main suburb road to Accra (Klaeger, 2012) and in a bus station (Stasik, 2017) embody their

subjectivities in urban livelihoods. For these peoples as infrastructure (e.g. hawkers at bus stations), spatial interactions with various actors do not appear in static forms but follow the mobilities of peoples and material infrastructure (motor vehicles in the case of hawkers). Paralleling these studies of hawkers which employ the concept of rhythm, we will shed light on the dynamic of varying interactions along with rhythms of (auto-)mobilities. Thus, our research will explore how commercial actors spatially and temporally interact with mobile peoples and materials as infrastructure, thereby shaping the spatial arrangements in a transport hub.

## Commerce and traffic in Lagos

The description of Lagos as ‘simultaneously growing, dividing, polarising and decaying’ (Gandy, 2005: 52) captures its essence as a city that thrives on paradoxes (Gandy, 2006; Ismail, 2009). According to the Lagos State Government (LASG), Lagos is the most urbanised city in Nigeria with an estimated 24 million inhabitants (LASG, 2016a), and a population density of 5928 people per km<sup>2</sup> (LASG, 2014). About 85% of the population is squeezed onto 37% of the total land area (Ikioda, 2012: 31).

The size of the economy of Lagos makes it the most commercialised centre in Nigeria. According to Lagos Bureau of Statistics (2010), the GDP of Lagos was US\$80.61 billion and accounted for 35.6% of national GDP – a figure higher than that of 42 African countries, including Kenya (US\$66 billion) and Ghana (US\$61.97 billion). Its economy is driven by 28 sectors with manufacturing (29.60%), road transportation (26.47%), and building and construction (19.70%) as the top three sectors.

The city is also known for its markets – formal and informal – and commerce ‘springs up everywhere in Lagos like fungus after the rains’ (Packer, 2006). Since the

1970s, proliferating street trade made the state embark on massive market development programmes (Ikioda, 2013). A Market Development Board was created in 1980 overseeing the establishment of more than 300 open markets and several shopping malls and wholesale markets (Lawal, 2004). By 2016, there was a total of 1019 markets with 75,471 stalls (LASG, 2016a). In popular markets such as Alaba International, Balogun, Ladipo, Mile 12, Oshodi, Idumota and Iyana Ipaja, many traders assemble and distribute rural products, imported second-hand goods, clothes and textiles, household items and movie CDs/DVDs (Grossman, 2016; Ikioda, 2012).

Market traders unionise themselves with regulations on taxes and levies, working locations and time-periods on a daily basis (Ikioda, 2012; Ismail, 2009; Lawal, 2004). Market buildings may be owned either by local governments or by private people, but market activities are governed by elected leaders with term limits or for-life terms (Grossman, 2016). Market leaders such as *Babalaja* (male leader), *Iyalaja*, (female market leader) and other officers take charge of finances, secretariat, and general administration and coordination. Nevertheless, Ikioda (2012; 2016) suggested that physical market infrastructures have not grown commensurately with the rising number of traders in the city, resulting in the expansion of trade in other informal market spaces.

The expansion of small-scale commercial activities has intertwined with the city's transport spaces, which are currently unable to meet the competing needs of a fast-growing population. For instance, there were only 4921 km of primary roads interconnecting highly populated areas in Lagos in 2001 (Atubi, 2010). Although between 2007 and 2015, 222,417 km of roads were constructed (LASG, 2016b), private cars, haulage trucks, commercial (*danfo*) and government (BRT) buses, motorcycles (*okada*)

and tricycles (*keke marwa*) compete on acutely limited road infrastructure. In this circumstance, around 8 million people use public transportation every day and close to one million trips are made at peak periods (Economic Intelligence Unit, 2013).

While the severe traffic congestion is a setback for the city, millions of informal commercial actors who recognise 'the brutal characteristics of routine life' (Agbiboa, 2016: 7) in Lagos sense an opportunity to earn a living. In a narration of in-traffic commerce in the city, Gandy (2005: 41) comments:

[T]raffic congestion itself becomes a slow-moving market space, as lines of hawkers work their way between the trapped cars of the interminable 'go-slows' and 'no-gos', offering motorists and their passengers plastic sachets of 'pure water', roast peanuts, fake designer sunglasses, mobile phone top-up cards, cheap jewellery.

This movement of commerce in synchrony with 'go-slow' traffic represents a temporality of rhythmic dynamism (Stasik, 2017) of commerce and traffic in Lagos.

Since re-appropriation of the road infrastructure for vast small-scale commerce challenges the order of urban mobilities, city administrators have coordinated a set of responses, including road construction and expansion works, the establishment of a BRT (Bus Rapid Transit) service, introduction of specialised agencies such as Lagos State Traffic Management Authority (LASTMA) and Kick Against Indiscipline (KAI), and reforming the traffic law in 2012. Yet, informal commerce continues to thrive in the public space as more traders occupy pedestrian walkways and roadsides to leverage on the traffic-induced economy (Ikioda, 2012).

In addition to the roads where informal economic activities pervade, motor parks have featured increasingly at the intersection

of mobility, traffic and commerce in Lagos. Lagos has 491 motor parks (LASG, 2014, 2016a) that function as pickup, drop-off and parking spaces for *danfo* buses. In commercial zones such as Oshodi, Obalende, Ikeja, Iyana Ipaja, motor parks are routinised spaces in everyday mobilities, exchanges and interactions. Commercial buses in motor parks are registered with the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW), a well-organised and powerful association which collects levies and manages the space of motor parks. While maintaining an 'ordered disorder', the union plays a crucial role in postcolonial partisan politics and governance (Agbibo, 2017; Fourchard, 2011; Ismail, 2009). During our fieldwork in Iyana Ipaja, both transport and market unions were closely connected and worked collectively to facilitate our research.

### **Commerce meets traffic: Spatial conviviality and temporalised mobility**

In this section we introduce Iyana Ipaja and describe how it is represented in government discourses. Then, we analytically categorise commercial actors in Iyana Ipaja into three types and respectively discuss how they spatially and temporally interact with each other and with traffic flows and market governance.

#### ***Iyana Ipaja: A commercial centre at the transport hub***

*Iyana Ipaja* in the Yoruba language means a road or branch off to Ipaja town. According to Chief Alli, a local intellect in Iyana Ipaja, Ipaja town, which used to be a quiet town on the far fringes of the mainland, has primarily hosted Yoruba migrants from Ogun state since the colonial era. The location presently known as Iyana Ipaja came to acquire its present name after the construction of

the Lagos–Abeokuta expressway by the Federal Government (Oluikpe, 2015).

The prosperity of commercial activities in Iyana Ipaja benefits from the emergence of the transport hub. Before the Abeokuta Expressway was built in the late 1970s, Iyana Ipaja had been farmland.<sup>5</sup> Residents walk or take *danfo* buses along the Old Ipaja road through Agege to the centre of Lagos. They widely believe that the construction of the Abeokuta Expressway, which made Iyana Ipaja come into being as an intersection, led to increased population and an expansion of small-scale businesses.

Along with many markets in Lagos (Lawal, 2004), commercial activities in Iyana Ipaja appear to be informal. In Alimosho LGA, 75% of people are employed in informal economies; 61% of the working-age population earn less than 40,000 naira (US\$110) a month (ALG, 2011: 88). When asked about an ideal place to carry out their businesses, respondents in Iyana Ipaja unanimously mentioned Victoria Island, Ikoyi and Lekki, which are the most developed commercial centres in Lagos. Nevertheless, they are still satisfied with the prosperous business activities in Iyana Ipaja. Oluikpe (2015) reported that goods sold in Iyana Ipaja are cheaper and more popular than those in other markets. This could be a reason why some respondents moved their businesses from markets in Agege and Oshodi to this area. Thus, Iyana Ipaja formed as a transport hub, but its functionality has expanded beyond a bus station, a motor park or a transport interchange.

Transport is also largely informalised in Iyana Ipaja as in much of the Lagos metropolis (Agbibo, 2016). Although Iyana Ipaja has several major formal bus stations in the BRT system, which is situated at the intersection of BRT routes to Lagos Island and Iyana Oba, it serves as a more significant hub of informal transport for *danfo* buses on more than 20 routes and numerous *keke*

tricycles running to Ipaja town. The seeming disorder of those yellow *danfo* buses concerns the local government and Lagos transport authorities have proposed reforming the *danfo* system (ALG, 2011).

Iyana Ipaja has been designated as a major commercial/transport interchange by Alimosho Local Government (ALG).<sup>6</sup> The government plans to develop Iyana Ipaja into ‘a significant new “gateway” to Alimosho with a free flow of traffic, and an active and functioning modern market and commercial centre, taking full advantage of proposed public transport interchanges’ (ALG, 2011: 45–46). This proposal aligns with the Eko Mega City Project initiated by Fashola government.<sup>7</sup> However, the status quo of Iyana Ipaja, according to the government report, appears to be ‘chaotic’: ‘The current market, bus station and expressway off-ramps, all converge on the same spot, which has led to an extremely congested and dysfunctional melee, with the traffic at a standstill, and a physical environment totally not conducive to commercial success’ (ALG, 2011: 45–46).

### *Peoples as infrastructure in Iyana Ipaja*

During Jakande’s regime as Lagos governor in 1980, a two-level shopping building was constructed in Iyana Ipaja.<sup>8</sup> The shops in the shopping complex were gradually privatised. Shop owners collect fees from shopkeepers annually, from which around 5000 naira (US\$14) is submitted to Alimosho Local Government. In addition, market unions play a joint role with the government in governing the market. Each sector of goods has a union with an elected leader. Every week, each union has a meeting to discuss concerns and issues among its members. These union leaders are organised under the leadership of *Babalaja* (which literally means the elder/father of the market). At the same time, there is a role of *Iyalaja* taking charge of women’s interests in the market. The current

*Babalaja* has been in office since 1989, overseeing seven markets in Alimosho. The office of *Babalaja* is located in an old building. The location of the office reflects the significant status of Iyana Ipaja in Alimosho.

According to our field observation, we tentatively categorise commercial actors into three types in terms of the materiality and mobility of their businesses: shopkeepers, stallholders and hawkers. In Iyana Ipaja, shopkeepers in the shopping complex and a wide range of mobile commercial actors – stallholders and hawkers – constitute the diverse and prosperous market. Materiality, as a central feature of infrastructure, should be emphasised in terms of peoples as infrastructure, because it could demonstrate very basic ‘ecologies of embodied experience’ (Simpson, 2013) in which Simone’s (2004) idea of conjunctions and relationalities are materially actualised. Spatial mobility is another criterion of categorisation, which contributes to the analysis of peoples as infrastructure in the urban setting of commercial/transport interchange.<sup>9</sup>

First, the materiality of shops demonstrates fixed physical presence in the market, which restrains shopkeepers’ mobility – they must stay to take care of the shops. The spaces they occupy in the market are formalised through contracts and agreements with shop owners. As mentioned above, shopkeepers pay rents to shop owners annually. The shopkeepers we interviewed sell clothes, domestic wares, grocery, food and musical instruments. These types of goods can be easily displayed and stored in the shops.

Second, stallholders utilise a variety of facilities to set up businesses. In front of the shopping complex facing Yaba Lane, sellers display their goods on small baskets or wooden boards. At a corner of the *danfo* bus garage, sellers set up higher tables to display fish, meat and vegetables. Some sellers put small electronic products, such as earphones, batteries and power banks, on the wheelbarrows. The material infrastructure they rely



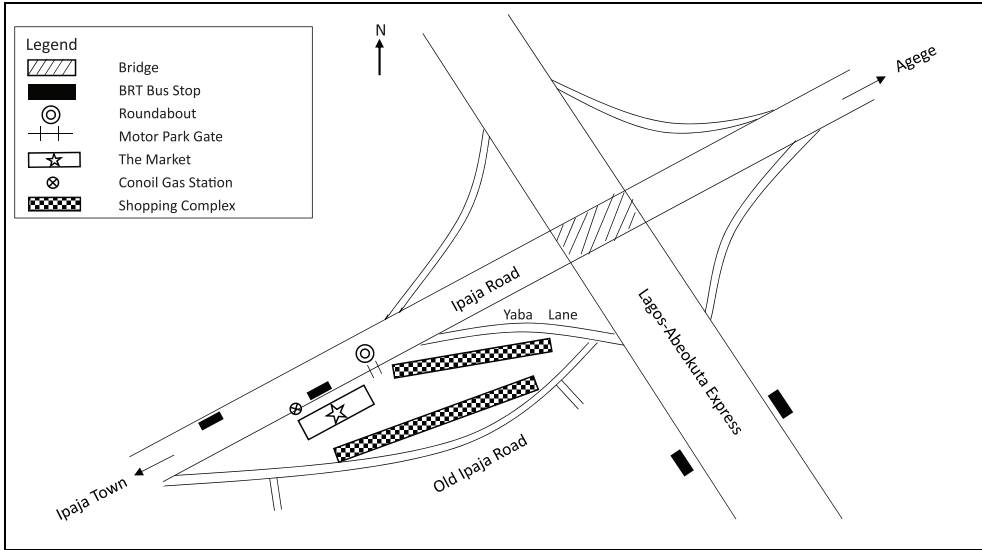


Figure 1. Map of Iyana Ipaja.

on is flexibly mobile in that they can easily and quickly wrap up their goods and move to other places for various reasons. Market unions regulate their location and mobility, and collect monthly membership fees.

The third category is hawkers, who always move around with their goods. Typical hawking goods include drinks, snacks, biscuits, peanuts, books and CDs. These goods are easily carried by hand or put on the head. Like stallholders, hawkers also pay a certain fee to the market union in Iyana Ipaja when recognised by union personnel on the streets. The mobility of hawkers follows specific routes and spaces in Iyana Ipaja, which depends on their perception of business opportunities. Given this regularity, we could identify hawkers whom we usually encountered during our fieldwork.

**Spatial conviviality**

Various small-scale businesses have occupied spaces in and surrounding the motor park. To understand spatial interactions among these businesspeople, we need to analyse the

locality of their businesses, which can also be conceptually categorised as three types, as shown in Figure 1.

The first locale is the roadside. Businesses in Iyana Ipaja prosper along Ipaja road, especially along the branch of Yaba Lane from the Conoil gas station to the intersection between Yaba Lane and Abeokuta Express. By occupying the spaces along the roadside, commercial actors benefit from larger flows of people. For shopkeepers, renting shops at the front of the shopping complex facing Yaba Lane is more expensive than renting those at the back facing the motor park. Stallholders are concerned about rents after economic calculations. A stallholder who sells onions in front of a shop at Yaba Lane said the rent for the shop may be ‘15,000 or 20,000 naira’ a month, but her earnings are ‘not up to 20,000 per month’ (US\$55). For hawkers, the roadside is the primary space of their businesses. Whatever route they follow, they spend much time along Yaba Lane where they can encounter as many people as possible.

The second locale is inside the motor park. Shopkeepers who cannot afford the rent of the front shops choose to do businesses around the garage. These businesses (e.g. restaurants) primarily target passengers and drivers rather than passers-by outside the garage. Stallholders at the garage gate have sold fish, meat and vegetables for years. Hawkers in the motor park need to pay attention to moving motor vehicles while hawking. Some hawkers use wheelbarrows to display their electronic products, a strategy popularised in other Nigerian cities to negotiate access to and use of urban space (Adebayo and Akinyemi, 2019).

The third locale is inside the Market. 'Market' here narrowly means the building behind the motor park. It was built together with the shopping complex along Yaba Lane in 1980 and was renovated recently. Away from populated roads and that motor park, this marketplace is not very active, with some vacant spaces, because the rent and hidden locality make the Market less favourable. Some sellers store their goods in the Market but set up a stall or hawk at the roadside, while some elderly sellers stay inside the market. An older lady commented, 'I can't stay outside in the sun. I don't have that ability. With the sweating? All your face will burn?! I prefer here.'

Spatial interactions among different commercial actors vary at the three locales. At the roadside, stallholders often occupy the space in front of shops. Some shopkeepers complained about their businesses being disturbed by the presence of stallholders because it is not convenient for customers to 'look into the shops'. However, most stallholders have agreements with shopkeepers on their spatial and temporal presence. A T-shirt seller told us, 'on working days we don't use them [stalls] (in front of shops) ... They didn't open today (Saturday), that's why we have space to hang it here.' In some cases, the spatial boundary between shops

and stallholders is drawn according to physical infrastructures such as drainage. Market unions also recognise this spatial register.

Hawkers have extensive spatial interactions with various material infrastructure and peoples as infrastructure. Instead of chasing motor vehicles, which hawkers on the roads or along congested highways usually do (Klaeger, 2012), hawkers in Iyana Ipaja periodically move around based on the routes they have personally designed. Most of them hawk along Yaba Lane, passing many shops and stallholders, while those who target *danfo* passengers, such as drinks and snacks sellers, often hawk inside the motor park. In some cases, hawkers are stationed at some spots approved by market unions. These hawkers stay in one spot for a few hours and move to another spot according to varying flows of population. This variation does not mean they will change the goods they sell at different spots or in different time periods, which was found in hawking in a Ghanaian bus station (Stasik, 2017: 12–13). The goods they sell, such as drinks and snacks, are sometimes supplied by the shops inside the motor park and the market. At the roadside, hawkers often pass in front of stallholders as passers-by do. Therefore, they do not interfere with stallholders' businesses.

Motor drivers, primarily *danfo* operators, play a central role in spatial interactions among commercial actors in Iyana Ipaja. Owing to limited spaces in the motor park, some *danfo* buses temporarily park at the roadside in front of the shopping complex. Although shopkeepers are not affected, stallholders have to adjust their spatial location when buses move around. Some stallholders complained that drivers like to threaten them by driving the vehicles against them. Nevertheless, stallholders and hawkers comment that relationships with motor drivers are positive. A female onion seller said: 'The drivers too are our customers and we take

the buses as well ... I use the buses to transport the goods from Mile 12 (a place in North-east Lagos).'

On the other side, drivers are also used to commercial actors' presence in Iyana Ipaja. As both transport and market unions approved *danfo* buses' temporary occupation over some stallholders' space for a specific time, spatial adjustments are recognised by both drivers and stallholders. Moreover, drivers also consider this informal economy as an important livelihood for hawkers and stallholders. A driver working on the Iyana Ipaja–Sango route said: 'It is not possible to remove them. If you say they should not do this, you want to kill them.' Parallel to the situation of these hawkers and stallholders in 'informal' markets, *danfo* drivers are also working in the 'informal' transport system (Agbiboa, 2017).

From the analysis above, we can see the forms of spatial conviviality among different peoples as infrastructure in Iyana Ipaja. Conviviality emerges as an alternative to 'autonomy' and encompasses meanings of interrelatedness (Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014). Throughout extensive spatial interactions, which sometimes cause complaints and disputes, interrelated peoples, both commercial actors and motor drivers, demonstrate cohabitant peace in the relational deployment of spaces.

However, this spatial conviviality does not downplay inequality among commercial actors in terms of coping with market governance implemented by the KAI authority which usually regulates the spatial occupation by commercial actors. The enforcement by KAI often gives rise to resistance or even violence in which market unions intervene to mediate the dispute. This governance has affected spatial arrangements of small-scale commerce to varying degrees. Shopkeepers, stallholders and hawkers, who have different investments in the material infrastructure they employ, respond to the governance

differently. A wheelbarrow holder at the gas station said: 'The people they (KAI) disturb are at the roadside. I'm a few metres from the roadside so I think I'm safe.' On the contrary, shopkeepers have no concern with KAI authority as their shops do not occupy any space at the roadside. Some shopkeepers indicate that KAI regulation benefits their businesses. The responses to KAI governance mainly reflect the uneven power of capital invested in the materiality of infrastructure and disparities in the agency of coping with authorities, which instead affect their spatial interactions.

Moreover, gender division of work in the spaces of Iyana Ipaja complicates the inequality between female stallholders and male drivers. In front of the shopping complex and close to the motor park gate where stallholders are primarily female, male *danfo* drivers sometimes drive aggressively back to the parking spots and simultaneously make stallholders give way to them. Some female stallholders described drivers as 'intimidating and careless' but could do nothing about this inherent masculinity. Although small disputes may arise, the interaction between them hardly leads to conflicts on the scale caused by the KAI authority.

### *Temporalised mobility*

Mobility, defined narrowly as patterns of spatial movements in this research, is temporalised in urban rhythms (Edensor, 2012; Smith and Hetherington, 2013). In Lagos, traffic is temporalised in terms of busy hours and idle hours. As demonstrated below, the mobility of commercial actors in Iyana Ipaja depends on both temporalised city traffic and livelihoods in the markets.

The place of Iyana Ipaja is 'temporally rhythmic' (Wunderlich, 2010: 52). At about 08:00, the lack of motor park space is concealed by the regular morning flows of people and motor traffic at the roundabout and

bridge. Few stationary buses are seen, fewer shopkeepers have opened for business, and only a handful of stallholders and hawkers are noticed arranging items needed daily for display. By noon, however, these spaces are filled with more traders and buses. Around 15:00, the nearby BRT station that was virtually empty in the morning has been overtaken by stallholders who deploy objects of varied shapes and sizes – cartons, tables, fabricated irons, large-sized umbrellas, crates, stools, baskets – and who appropriate tarred roads to display goods. The space outside the motor park gate is occupied by a well-organised cluster of *danfo* buses from late morning to around 16:00. Stallholders and hawkers generally give way to bus drivers who usurp the space as a temporary loading area. By 17:00, *danfo* buses have begun to move away from the space, giving room for stallholders to return. From then until evening, stallholders gradually return to the roadside in large numbers. By nightfall, the entire space outside the motor park transforms into a night market with candles and emergency lamps in the absence of lighting infrastructure at the roadside. At this time, the noise from the generators beside the shops, loud music and haggling exchanges mix with competing honking sounds from cars and *danfo* buses moving in and about the motor park to produce a rhythmic bustle all over the crowded Iyana Ipaja roads.

Doing businesses in Iyana Ipaja is rhythmic for different commercial actors every day. For shopkeepers, market unions usually suggest opening shops around 08:00 and closing them around 20:00. However, there is variation according to personal situations and the things they sell. For instance, food sellers usually get up earlier to prepare food, but the timings for stallholders and hawkers depend on the flows of population. Especially for hawkers, their movements, gestures and voice create certain rhythms and imply ‘small temporalities’ (Herzfeld,

2016: 175). Owing to agreements on the use of space among commercial actors, varying flows of traffic and regulations by market unions and KAI, stallholders and hawkers start their businesses relatively late. For instance, a used-clothes seller usually sets up her stall at Iyana Ipaja bus stop after 17:00 when BRT buses do not come into the station. She further explained, ‘We don’t stay here in the morning. When the KAI people see me during the day, they can seize me.’ This politics of everyday coping strategies is widely found in the relationship between street vending and state governance (e.g. Cross, 1998). Also, to decide when to start work, mobile commercial actors often considered the potential for profit. According to the abovementioned clothes seller, latecomers might aim for night markets, because ‘people are coming back from work or church’.

Traffic conditions in Lagos also affect the timing of commercial livelihoods in Iyana Ipaja. The majority of commercial actors we interviewed live nearby, especially in Ipaja Town and Ayobo, from which it takes no more than 30 minutes to arrive at Iyana Ipaja. However, if living outside Ipaja area, the rhythm of Lagos traffic needs to be considered. A shopkeeper living in Sango, which is located to the north of Iyana Ipaja, usually sets off by 06:00 so that he can reach his shop by 07:00. As indicated above, in the morning, usually between 07:00 and 10:00, Lagos is congested on the routes from north to south. This shopkeeper’s strategy reflects a way in which the timing of commerce is embedded in the rhythm of city traffic.

During some special periods of the year, the everyday timing of commerce has to be adjusted. For instance, Ramadan affects food businesses. Muslims constitute a major portion of the population in Nigeria and also have a considerable presence in Lagos. Muslims do not eat and drink during daytime throughout the Ramadan period. Therefore, food sellers very likely prepare

food much earlier and prolong their working hours until late in the evening. Their business model also changes. A restaurant owner said, 'We cut down on what we prepare for sale during this period. We also prepare our food in bits instead of cooking a lot at once.'

Additionally, special events affect temporalised mobility of commercial actors and spatial conviviality. Some events which bring business opportunities, such as an outdoor birthday party we observed on 28 May 2017, attract some hawkers and stallholders to relocate their businesses around the event site. New competition over emergent commercial spaces in this period was not always in harmony. During the evening of that day, a thief in the crowd was identified and chased by a few people along Yaba Lane, which abruptly caused chaos at the night market. Another event that impacts the markets in Iyana Ipaja (also elsewhere in Lagos) is Isese Day on 20 August every year. This masquerading activity starts from 11:00 and ends around 16:00. Many shops were closed, and stallholders and hawkers along Yaba Lane relocated elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Igunuko Masquerade paraded throughout all roads in Iyana Ipaja with special rituals played at Baale's palace, *Babalaja's* and *Iyaloja's* sites. A group of area boys<sup>11</sup> followed Igunuko with loud calls to passers-by, which interrupted traffic at times. Both cases indicate that special events are outliers of the unwritten rules of spatial conviviality and temporalised mobility we have analysed.

## Conclusion

Iyana Ipaja, where commerce meets traffic in various ways, appears as a platform of interactional infrastructures mutually constituted by a wide range of objects, spaces and peoples. Simone (2004: 410) has emphasised that these conjunctions of varied activities 'become a coherent platform for social transaction and livelihood'. In his account of a transport depot

in Abidjan, he argues that collaboration among various actors does not depend on 'specific rules but on their capacity to improvise' (Simone (2004: 410)). We, however, argue that rules may not be written formally but are maintained through agreements among commercial actors. From the case study of Iyana Ipaja, we address two key points in response to Simone's theory of 'people as infrastructure'.

First, the materiality of infrastructure still matters in conjunctions of peoples as infrastructure. Different appropriation of material infrastructure, including shops, stalls and hawking goods, demonstrates different investments of capital in formal and informal economies, which are always in a continuum rather than a dichotomy (Guha-Khasnobis et al., 2006). We have categorised the *peoples* into three types of commercial actors based on the materiality of infrastructure they appropriate and the mobility of their businesses. This categorisation helps us to understand differences and inequality between peoples as infrastructure. Shopkeepers have more spatial interactions with stallholders than hawkers at the roadside, because shops and stalls, acting as two physical demonstrations of infrastructure they appropriate, are spatially interconnected but also compete to some extent. Some shops inside the market and the motor park provide stallholders and hawkers with sources of goods, though most of the commercial actors are independent individuals. The partial economic connection has formed according to different spatial positions and involvements with flows of population. Thus, social agreements reached by commercial actors can lead to spatial conviviality. This varies over time and in urban rhythms but can sometimes be disrupted by special events. This argument both underlines the spatial and material dimensions of peoples as infrastructure and helps to avoid over-romanticising interdependence among peoples as infrastructure.

Second, rhythmic mobility of peoples as infrastructure is a feature in conjunctions of commerce and traffic in Lagos. In Iyana Ipaja, commercial actors do not stay in a particular place without any movement. Spatial conviviality among them is embodied in varying spatial positions they have taken in response to flows of people, *danfo* buses' movements and market governance. Despite the lack of formalised rules, one's mobility is related to another's in impersonal communication and agreements. This individualistic agreement is rather dynamic than static or permanent under ongoing, unfinished negotiation. Moreover, within the rhythm of traffic in Lagos, their livelihood is temporalised. Thus, temporalised general mobilities in Iyana Ipaja and temporalised individual mobility between Iyana Ipaja and their residences in the city embody relationality of peoples as infrastructure in Africa's 'networked city life' (Lindell and Utas, 2012).

Theorising relationality, networking, or interconnectedness is themed in studies of urban Africa (Lindell and Utas, 2012; Myers, 2011; Simone, 2004). This is usually associated with emphasising the significance of informalities in everyday life and livelihoods (Lindell, 2019; Simone, 2004), in which bus stations provide resourceful dynamics (Stasik and Cissokho, 2018). To further these discussions, we argue that examining spatial interactions among specifically positioned actors helps to articulate what empirically constitutes relationalities and informalities in urban Africa.

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### Notes

1. In a strict sense, transport workers, including drivers and conductors, are also engaged in transport businesses – a kind of commerce. However, 'commerce' in this paper more narrowly means an activity of buying and selling goods. Thus, commercial actors are different from transport workers.
2. As part of our research strategy, we agreed to alternate roles during recruitment of and discussion with informants. We wanted to observe how our identities would influence informant recruitment and participation. Even though the second author is Nigerian, informants wanted to be sure that he was not from the governments or that he was not going to collect information that would be used against them – personally – in some way. He often had to show his university ID card as additional proof. In contrast, the first author did not need to show anything, as he is obviously a foreigner and his *oyinbo*-ness makes him attractive. His presence raises curiosity and attractiveness that the second author did not exude. Despite the first author's limited fluency in speaking Yoruba, potential informants were amazed and, at times, apparently pleased by the sound of his exotic Yoruba language. This co-presence of two distinct identities was often the most useful ingredient during recruitment and while having conversations with a wide range of people in Iyana Ipaja.
3. These interviewees are not necessarily union members. They pay stipulated fees to the unions every day as a kind of registration. Based on personal connections with unions, we successfully got permission to research this area, but

we were not always accompanied and monitored by the unions, especially when they gradually became accustomed to the research work.

4. In the case of Iyana Ipaja, the bus routes also link to other cities and further to rural areas. However, given its locality in Lagos, it primarily functions as a transport hub linking motor parks in the city.
5. Interview with Chief Alli, 11 August 2017.
6. Administratively, Lagos is divided into 20 Local Government Areas (LGAs).
7. Eko City Project, initiated as a form of central business district in the south of Victoria Island in 2009, was designed to satisfy needs for financial, commercial, residential and tourist accommodations, with a state-of-the-art high-tech infrastructure in line with modern and environmental standards. It was still under construction in 2017.
8. Interview with *Babalola*, 12 August 2017.
9. For the sake of analytical angles, the categorisation of commercial actors does not follow the organisation of unions based on things they sell, which have been discussed in detail by Hill (1984). Also, the material infrastructure those commercial actors use primarily refers to those features directly related to their businesses, excluding public infrastructure such as toilets.
10. Isese Day is a traditional Yoruba festival when the tallest African masquerader Igunuko is performed (Ogunlusi, 1971). According to field observation, when Igunuko moves, surrounding people should not wear shoes.
11. Area boys are stigmatised by popular discourses as a group of young people associated with crime, drugs and antisocial behaviours (Ismail, 2009).

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