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They Eat Our Sweat: Transport Labor, Corruption, and Everyday Survival in Urban Nigeria Daniel E. Agbiboa (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

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Corruption has occupied the intellectual trope of many scholars in the last few years. Nowhere is this more prominent in the literature than Africa where corruption is often touted as the bane of development. Nigeria is a prime example of this intellectual engagement with how development and modernization interact with issues of corruption in public office. They Eat Our Sweat challenges many of the assumptions about the role that corruption plays in the life of a nation. The book "grounds corruption on the survival tactics of marginalized transport operators in Lagos as they socially navigate a bumpy terrain embroiled in manifold risks, ranging from travel to unfamiliar places and, most of all, other city dwellers" (19). It situates its analysis within an explanatory model that is derived from moral economy in ways that shows clearly how the study of corruption can be understood through an ethnographic lens of an everyday life of danfo (yellow bus) drivers in Lagos. The book shows how corruption can be studied from the bottom up rather than from top to bottom by grounding corruption in the "'politics of transporting,' that is, the micropolitics of relationships between drivers, passengers, unionists, law enforcement agents and local politicians" (29). The role of agberos (person who calls passengers to the bus) in building a relationship between urban spaces, people and politics is cemented through critical and mediating roles they play in the routine control of public transportation in Lagos (147).

Agbiboa demonstrates convincingly that reducing the daily survival practices of transport workers and commuters to mere bribery and corruption fails to take into account how survival is intricately connected to assumptions about corruption and that both categories—survival and corruption–are intertwined and interrelated. Hence, They Eat our Sweat argues that the struggle for legitimate survival needs to be properly understood in the context of perceptions of corruption. This is why Agbiboa suggests that "the insights of this book are equally about corruption as they are about the struggle for daily survival–the two intertwine in the context of informal transport and commuter journeys in Lagos, where giving egunje (bribes) is generally viewed as a legitimate survival strategy" (17-18).

They Eat our Sweat is organized in six chapters with each chapter focusing on an area of inquiry that connects with the subject of study–the relationship between survival and assumptions about

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corruption in Africa in general and Nigeria, in particular. Beginning with Chapter One, which focuses on "Corruption and the Crisis of Value," Agbiboa engages with the history of corruption in Nigeria showing clearly how societal values are continually being redefined with a changing economic system that places values on wealth more than on people. As Agbiboa shows, "(I)n adopting the notion of moral economy as an explanatory model, my aim is to account for the ways in which corrupt practices are often embedded in socio-political mutualities and cultural forms that grant them legitimacy. Furthermore, I seek to interrogate corruption as a central arena in which the state and ideas about interaction with it are discursively constructed in everyday life" (6).

If Chapter One is about changing societal values, the ethnographic details in chapter two show how "The Language of Corruption" gets inscribed in popular culture enriches the book's analysis. The language of corruption in popular culture becomes a way of showing how an endemic problem such as corruption cannot be seen as embedded in the cultures of Nigeria or Africa. One of the ways in which the language of corruption gets inscribed in popular culture is through mobility. Visuals on vehicles become a signage for public perception of corruption through inscriptions that are written on vehicle bodies in Lagos using Yoruba language. They Eat Our Sweat argues that "Vehicle slogans not only reflect the danfo workers' lived experiences and precarious labor, but they also are themselves fundamental ways through which these marginal men get by and get ahead. Vehicle slogans embody not only the power of the unforeseen and the unfolding, but are the very window into people's determination to impose order and predictability on their lives" (111). Thus, Agbiboa suggests we see the practices of daily survival on the streets and motor parks as a system of imposition of a regulated order through language use that create opportunities for thinking about an assured future.

An endemic practice of corruption especially among motor park operators has its own social and political history as the third and fourth chapters of the book demonstrate clearly. Agbiboa provokes a debate, in a good way, about questions of urban survival (Chapter Four), the mafia that controls the "informal" transport system in Lagos and how they are connected to politicians and the state (Chapter Five), and the shaping of urban reform through the transformation of Lagos to a mega city (Chapter Six). The mega city project started by the administration of Bola Ahmed Tinubu and continued by his chosen successor, Babatunde Raji Fashola, aims to make Lagos an economic model for Nigeria and Africa. What the book does very well is to show how politicians, who might despise the motor park agberos in private but support them in public, succeed in crafting a process that create a strong partnership between the two—the agberos and the politicians. As Agbiboa noted, "Tinubu and Fashola's bid to transform Lagos into a model megacity for the twenty-first century provides an account of the ways in which theatricality and performativity are increasingly dramatized in African metropolises, from Accra to Cape Town and Da res Salam" (175).

They Eat Our Sweat offers a captivating account of how politics interact and interrelate with the question of survival, mobility, 'paratransit', and the complicated meaning of corruption in Nigeria. The book presents a fascinating and refreshing argument that shifts our attention away from seeing corruption as a 'thing' that is ingrained in state practices to a system that is crafted as an everyday survival strategy by different actors from Lagos motor-parks to the streets of the North and South of

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Nigeria. This way, Agbiboa suggests we see corruption as a construct that interacts with different layers of power and sociality in an urban space in ways that define how survival shapes daily lived experiences of its residents. From political office holders who rely on agberos for their own political survival to the people whose mobility in Lagos is shaped by participation in an economic system screwed against them, we see the relationship between survival strategies and corrupt enterprise in a challenging economic system.

As with any scholarly endeavour, They Eat Our Sweat has its limitations. Some of these limitations are noticeable in the wrong translation of some Yoruba words. Second, Eko oni baje (Lagos never spoils) is not the official slogan of Lagos as the author portrays but was a campaign slogan of Governor Fashola in the 2007 gubernatorial elections in Lagos state.

Despite these limitations, the book makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the connection between layers of power, elite politics, and their interrelatedness to everyday survival strategies in an urban space. The book is intellectually stimulating and is bound to provoke debate about the ethnography of urban spaces in Nigeria, Africa, and beyond.

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