

Political Development Narrative of Africa's Physical Space: The Case of Nigeria

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Structured Abstract

Article Type: Research Paper

Purpose—Space, particularly because of its contested nature, is discussed by political scientists as a feature of types of nationalism, mainly ethnic and sovereign state nationalisms (Hale 2016). It is discussed as nationalist and ethnic claims, not as the mutual impact that man and living space have on each other. Hence, there is evidently no effort put into examining the way in which one may influence or affect the other.

The story of the underdevelopment of sub-Saharan Africa has been narrated without the physical space narrative. If at all there is a reference to space, it is only in terms of the absence of infrastructure rather than as an artwork loaded with philosophical, physical, and indeed, political meaning. The comparison of Public Space (PS) on the one hand and Private Public Space (PPS), Personal Official Space (POS), and Personal Individual Space (PIS) on the other demonstrate the political narrative space embodies in Nigeria.

Design, Methodology, Approach—This article examines the consequences of political leadership on physical space and human welfare. In this examination, the comparison by observation of Nigeria mostly in four spaces—PS, PPS, POS, and PIS—will be used to show the connection between political thought and space.

Findings—The relationship between built space and human life is no less consequential than the relationship between the system of government, group conflicts, and wars on the one hand and human life on the other. The interpretation and meaning conveyed by PS and PPS reveal that space is an idea (architectural idea), a concrete structural expression; furthermore, space impacts a people and is impacted, in turn, by a people.

Practical Implications—If political leaders of developing countries realize that the

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condition of physical space as an artwork is a reflection of their thinking faculty, philosophy of life, and leadership which, in turn, affects their welfare especially when out of office and of those they govern, they might be more serious with the physical development of their countries. The understanding of physical space provided by this article may sensitize political leaders to pay greater attention to the improvement of PS.

Originality, Value—This article shows that physical space is a narrative of political thought/leadership and life in a given geopolitical space.

Keywords: development, narrative, physical space,
private public space, public space

I. Introduction

Nowhere is the modern state a negation of itself more than in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa. Hence, it has earned every kind of label from clientelist, prebendal, personalist, soft, neo-colonial, rentier to predatory.¹ With clear signs of loss of monopoly over the use of physical force and inability to provide services, Nigeria has been indexed as a failing or failed/weakened state.² South Africa, which showed so much promise after the Apartheid regime, has also been thrown into the failing state category for valid reasons.³ Barring national pride, the labels accurately describe socioeconomic and political conditions in most African countries.⁴ What is more important to note, then, is that the labels are products of the inability of the African state to prevent or arrest economic decay, efficiently provide services and security, foster hegemony and ensure that its authority is respected.

In the 1990s, it was popular to blame civil society for the deficiencies of the African state, especially for the poor performance of democratization and good governance in Africa.⁵ There is, as indicated by the lack of collective action towards public welfare, good reason to believe that civil society is non-existent or weak in Africa (details later). Some observers and commentators have found this to be an accurate assessment. For example, there is little or no collective action toward solving social problems in sub-Saharan Africa as people in most other parts of the world have done by either getting the state to live up to expectations or self-independently getting things done.⁶

The area where collective action is palpably lacking in Nigeria is environmental sanitation. Even so, the state is most culpable given its comprehensive authority and authoritative rules.⁷ As Bayart, Ellis & Hibou⁸ as well as Chabal & Daloz⁹ have separately shown, the political class of the African state deliberately fosters disorder in social relations. In such circumstances, civil society will be handicapped and unable to ensure good environmental sanitation.

Many past studies on the environment agree that poor political leadership has the primary responsibility for poor sanitation in Nigeria. For example, Michael A. Nwachukwu blames political leadership for not providing and implementing coherent policies.¹⁰ In Ibadan, mapping and extending sanitary good practice “has been more often tutelary than comprehensive; it performs and demonstrates at key times and places rather than enforcing, covering, and reaching across the entirety of the urban domain.”¹¹ This was more noticeable in Governor Adebayo Alao Akala’s environmental sanitation project

based on a desperate reelection campaign in 2011, which John Manton dubbed “Environmental Akaism.”¹² As Yekeen A. Sanusi has argued, poor sanitation expresses public service deficiency.¹³

This article identifies with their conclusion but in addition argues, based on interviews and field observations of the contrasting sanitary condition between public space (PS) on the one hand and private-public space (PPS), private official space (POS) and private individual space (PIS) on the other, that physical space reflects political and social thought. It argues that the condition of living space is ultimately a reflection of the political and social thought of political elites because they have the power and influence for creating and implementing an ordered and orderly space. Practice mirrors thought just as public policy mirrors the mind and thinking of rulers and policymakers. Therefore, African political leadership’s lackadaisical attitude to PS is a reflection of their political thought and philosophy of society. Consider that a capitalist system created by capitalist economic thought cannot produce full-blown socialist practice. It can only exhibit aspects of socialist practice. The challenge of practicing aspects of socialism in the capitalist economy is most exemplified in the United States of America where some elements mount fierce resistance to equalizing initiatives even if they are meant to address historical disadvantages.

As will be shown later, ordinary people, other kinds of elites, and non-elites may have to live in a deplorable living space in Africa not because they are incapable of espousing ideas for changing it but because they do not just have the power to do so. So, poor sanitation is not simply, the result of lack of awareness, as Foluke Ogunleye argues but the poverty of the philosophy of society of the political elites.¹⁴

Hence, this article interrogates the performance of statehood with a focus on waste management, providing evidence of the culpability of the state in poor environmental sanitation with a contrast of physical spaces in Nigeria. It focuses on space, not as a sphere of human relations but physical space of four types. These spaces are PS, PPS, POS, and PIS.¹⁵ As used here, PS is government physical space including its school buildings and premises; military (Army, Navy, and Airforce) barracks, police and paramilitary barracks; airport grounds; post offices and other public buildings; secretariat complex; intra- and inter-city roads; roadsides; streets; city centers and squares; markets; motor parks, etc., while PPS is the third sector’s space that includes bank buildings, cafeterias, and fast foods houses, event centers, hotels, business office buildings, shopping plazas, industrial houses, etc. On the other hand, POS and PIS are the official and personal residential spaces of the political elite.

While PPS, POS, and PIS are well-kept, clean, and attractive, PS is mostly neglected, filthy and decrepit and is more or less unclaimed from palpable neglect. Ironically, a government that claims the authority of regulation of PPS and other physical spaces and that should be setting standards for public good, has not only neglected its space but allowed “non-conforming structures” that degrade the environment and the value of conforming structures.¹⁶

Physical space has not been investigated by political scientists as a concrete structural expression to establish the way in which it impacts a people and is, in turn, impacted by the architectural idea of it by the people. It has featured in political discourse as a feature of ethnic and sovereign state nationalisms or as nationalist and ethnic claims not as a mutual impact that man and living space have on each other. If at all there is reference to space qua

space, it is only in terms of the absence of infrastructure and regional distribution of the benefits of development rather than as an artwork loaded with philosophical, physical, and indeed, political meaning.¹⁷ There is evidently no effort at examining the way in which one may influence or affect the other.

Consequently, this article examines the consequences of political leadership on physical space and people's welfare. In this examination, the comparison of four spaces—PS on the one hand, and PPS, POS, and PIS on the other—will be used to show the connection between political thought and the state of any given space. It is an original attempt at introducing physical space as an artwork and a reflection of the thinking faculty or philosophy of life of the leadership of a people or political community into political discourse. Granted, the dearth of material resources or the incapacity to harness them tells on the outlook of the geophysical space. If there is a philosophy or architectural design, it should reveal the limitation of the dearth of material resources or incapacity to harness them. For example, the clean simple old rural African settlement as well as the clean PPS, POS, and PIS can help us determine the precise role of the limitation of the dearth of material resources or the incapacity to harness them in the outlook of any space. The comparison of PS on the one hand and PPS, POS, and PIS on the other, is used to demonstrate the political narrative space embodies in Nigeria and elsewhere. How does the political thought of the elite/masses influence space and vice versa in Nigeria?

Nigeria—specifically, Ibadan—serves as the laboratory for the investigation of the relationship between the philosophy of space and what it looks or can look like. The field materials are interviews and public display signs simultaneously expressing a desire for clean surroundings and dismay over dirty surroundings caused by indiscriminate dumping of refuse by neighbors and members of the public. These interviews and public display signs expressing the opinions of ordinary people were collected and monitored over fifteen years in Ibadan, one of Nigeria's three oldest regional capitals. The secondary data were collected from books and journal articles. The data collected has been analyzed qualitatively to present the narrative of physical space through political thought and development.

The next section is devoted to space as an idea and consequence. This is followed by a discussion of PS as state failure and public service delivery in Nigeria. Another section presents individual, disparate and desperate responses to the reality of environmental filth in Nigeria's PS. This follows the view that space is not only a geographical expression but also a political narrative. The article ends with a brief comment on the challenge of civil society to initiate transformation or change in the context of structured privilege.

II. Space as an Idea and a Consequence

The relationship between physical space and human life/activity has been a subject of interest to people of various disciplines—philosophy, sociology, library science, and most certainly geography—because of its primary focus on the physical environment. For Francesco Patrizi, one of the Italian nature-philosophers of the 16th century, the fundamental importance of physical space is that without it nothing else exists.¹⁸ Sir Halford Mackinder's famous declaration, "Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland; who rules

the Heartland commands the World Island; who rules the World Island commands the World,” highlights the centrality of a certain geographical space to power relations among nations and peoples.¹⁹ L.R. Vagale writes that “in the final analysis, environment [physical space] is the determinant of the survival and the quality of life.”²⁰ The simplest way to recognize the impact of space on the welfare of people is a view from sanitation.²¹ Poor sanitation can lead to contaminated water, in turn, to cholera, the greatest killer disease of the 19th century. The effective control of cholera, which gripped London city for about five years, with the building of a new sewage system to clean up the River Thames, its source of water supply, is good evidence of the correlation between environmental sanitation and good health.²²

It is clear that there is widespread agreement that physical space and the socio-political organization of society impact each other. Feldman and Tilly put it specifically: “The city’s spatial order, in this view, reflects and affects its social order; social changes can be located by accurately tracing their spoor.”²³ Widespread disagreement about the factors that give rise to the intimacy between physical space and social order is beside the point. The many-faceted nature of space and the role of human activity in shaping it are articulately summarized by Jens Chr. Tonboe. According to him,

Space, as a material-geographical structure, can be found as a product, object, mediator, resource, restriction, and symbol as well as latent (“stored”) and inert power in many socio-political processes and conflicts. However, it is never active, never a motor by itself. It is created and recreated, moved, and adjusted only by human action, in the same way, that political, economic and, social structures are. (Its societal meaning and function are derived solely from its social setting in a specified time space.)²⁴

In other words, political activity goes into the making of space as it is in the definition of space.

But space, particularly because of its contested nature, is discussed by political scientists as a feature of types of nationalism, mainly ethnic and sovereign state nationalisms.²⁵ It is a subject matter of political analysis in the analysis of territory—nationalist and ethnic claims—not as the mutual impact that humans and living space have on each other. Hence, there is evidently no effort to examine the way in which one may influence or affect the other. Specifically, no effort has been made to determine the quality of physical space’s reflection of political philosophy and social outlook. Other things such as the type or system of government, group conflicts, and wars are thought to be more important for attention than the relationship between built space and political thought.

It is not surprising that the underdevelopment of sub-Saharan Africa has been narrated without the physical space narrative. Reference to space in the narrative of political development is only in terms of the absence of infrastructure rather than as an artwork loaded with philosophical, physical, and indeed, political meaning. By contrast, this article examines Nigeria’s space to show the political narrative of PS transmitted by PPS, POS, and PIS. This is based on the premise that the examination of space will produce similar or the same conclusions for other political societies. The interpretation or meaning conveyed by PS on the one hand and PPS, POS, and PIS on the other reveals that space is an idea (architectural idea), a concrete structural expression; further, space impacts people and is impacted, in turn, by people. When space as an idea requiring thought in terms of its organization is missing, it will be reflected in a haphazard, unplanned expression, in turn,

fail to inspire and contribute to the physical and mental well-being of those who inhabit and claim it in the particular context. Indigenous claimants of a neglected space are the worst affected because aliens and settlers are often able to choose the better part of the space or recreate a part of the existing space to their taste. Development is missed *ab initio* without an idea of space. The corollary of missed development in the absence of the idea of space is the perpetuation of a low lifestyle through disordered living space. Traffic chaos in the missed idea of space, that is, unplanned space, most succinctly illustrates this in Third World urban cities.

Herbert Werlin explains filthy Lagos, Nigeria's former political capital, which remains her commercial capital, as the result of political corruption rather than "municipal poverty or administrative ineptitude."²⁶ According to him, political corruption arises from inelastic political power, which lacks social energy that produces social relations for functional institutions. Drawing on Political Elasticity theory, he argues that Nigeria's approach to environmental sanitation has relied only on political hardware, which he defines as "objective' forms of organization, regulation, procedure, technology."²⁷ Political software, he defines as "policies and practices that foster respectful relations between leaders and followers,"²⁸ which should enhance political hardware for the achievement of public objectives such as orderly disposal of waste for a clean environment, has been utterly lacking. Specifically, he explains Nigeria's inability to handle garbage responsibly and efficiently in terms of systemic or "secondary corruption"—"partisan behavior that goes unpunished" because of "the absence of viable statesmanship or governance."²⁹

With his secondary corruption perspective, Werlin provides a great insight into Nigeria's poor political leadership and governance in respect of sanitation but falls short of identifying the fundamental problem because it is based on the secondary deficiency. The parlous state of a physical space cannot be explained by role plays but by underlying drivers as generic linkages between values and actions and/or products illustrate. The fundamental problem is the poverty of political thought of the Nigerian political leadership on PS. This political leadership cannot implement a developmental design because of self-centeredness and total contempt for society and its space, which is PS.

Democratic behavior is a product of the acceptance of the doctrine of equality of men just as social democracy is a product of the acceptance of the entitlement of all to a basic lifestyle. It is such values that generate political software manifest in policies and programs that impact people more positively in countries where life chances are much better. Werlin's perspective cannot explain the contrasting looks of the private and official residential quarters of top Nigerian political leaders with filthy and neglected, even abandoned, parts of PS. Indeed, these leaders give great care to their well-built private and official residences in routine maintenance. They also take a great chunk of the public annual budget for the renovation of their official residences and feasting. The federal government of Nigeria budgets a huge sum of money annually for the maintenance and/or renovation of State House, Abuja, despite a high budget deficit.³⁰ Similarly, the Kenyan government made provisions for a huge sum in the 2020/2021 budget for the renovation of the State House, Nairobi, and other government lodges.³¹ In 2016, South Africa's 11-member constitutional court ruled that President Jacob Zuma "failed to uphold the constitution when he ignored a state order to repay some of the government funds used in an £11m upgrade to his private residence, including a swimming pool and amphitheater."³²

If they are not replicating this third type of physical space labeled personal official space (POS), which as noted earlier is as clean as the clean PS of foreign countries where they love vacationing, it is a good philosophy of society they lack. If change comes from an idea, the parlous state of PS of most African states can only be understood as a reflection of their leaders' ideas of society and PS. It is their idea of private homes or PIS and state houses/official residences (POS) that is reflected in the palatial estates down to the last detail. Without the right philosophy of society, the easy weapon of political leaders is political hardware. So, it is from a public good philosophy of society that political software is generated. The problem, then, is not simply a lack of political software but fundamentally a lack of a public good philosophy of society.

From Marxist theory of social change, class consciousness is the true knowledge of one's position in the capitalist mode of production and separates class-in-itself from class-for-itself. But class consciousness is meaningless without revolutionary action. In other words, all actions start with an idea. To prompt action, an idea must become active. An active idea is an operational concept. The condition of any state's PS cannot be different from the philosophy of society of its political elites. If they have a good idea or philosophy of society, it is meaningless if it is not operationalized. Thus, the philosophy of society of sub-Saharan Africa's political leaders should not be stretched to outweigh the existing condition of her PS. A remark of then Brigadier-General David Mark, 1987–1989 Nigeria's Minister of Communications on access to a telephone by the poor says just as much. He is quoted as saying that telephone services are not meant for the poor. Not surprisingly, there were only 500,000 (all land) telephone lines distributed 1 to 224 persons based on the Nigerian National Population Commission's 1987 estimated population of 112.3 million.³³ It is also not surprising that the Global Mobile System (GSM) was already in use for more than 10 years in 41 of the 52 African countries before Nigerian rulers allowed it into Nigeria in late 2001. So in all the years, actually decades, the Federal Government of Nigeria enjoyed a monopoly over the provision of telephone services. From the introduction of the telephone in Nigeria by the British colonial authority up until 2002 when the market was opened to private participation, there were only 700,000 telephone lines.³⁴ Eight years (2007–2015) of David Mark's Senate leadership of Nigeria did not positively impact public policy for a better lifestyle for ordinary Nigerians.

III. The Public Space as State Failure

Nigeria has consistently been reported among the top nations on the list of the highest number of deaths from road accidents.³⁵ Various causes of this unimpressive record are a disregard for danger warning signs and safety precautions, robbery attacks, dangerous overtaking, excessive speeding, and overloading. However, the common descriptions of Nigerian roads even by Nigeria's topmost political leaders as "death traps," "death chambers," "madness of Nigerian roads," and "unworthiness of the roads" because of potholes are clear pointers to bad roads as one of the greatest causes of road accident in Nigeria.³⁶ Yet, the responsibility of neglected physical space for the destruction of life and property remains unattended to by political leadership. The gory reports of road accidents on Nigerian roads month after month in 2001 led newspaper columnist Kingsley Osadolor to ask,

“Does Obasanjo [President] use Nigerian roads?”³⁷ As the newly elected President, Muhammadu Buhari accurately put it in 2015, “The roads are dead. Those who drive between Lagos and Ibadan will have a lot of stories to tell you. Those who drive from Kaduna to Jebba may have more stories to tell. The same thing is applicable to the East-West roads.”³⁸ Lagos-Ibadan expressway President Buhari cited as an example of “dead” Nigerian roads remained mostly impassable even in his sixth year in office in 2020. Indeed, most Nigerian roads are still very bad. From the perspective of this article, neglect of PS is not just an expression of incompetence but a measure of the political and social thought of Nigeria’s political leaders.

The political leadership’s poverty of the idea of PS seen in the neglect of street roads and highways is displayed in the atomistic approach to environmental sanitation. PPS, POS, and PIS continue to present a contrast to PS in attention to routine maintenance, sanitation, and attraction. They go through reconstruction, restructuring, and renovation to give them a facelift from time to time. If PS receives attention of any kind, it is piecemeal, haphazard, and transient. Thus, it soon suffers neglect and is left in decrepit condition as unclaimed space if evidence of ownership is the care it receives.

In 1984, the Buhari/Idiagbon Administration launched the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) with a cardinal focus on environmental sanitation. This was a response to the disgusting sights of Nigerian towns and cities because of indiscriminate dumping of refuse. Thus, the government required all Nigerians to spend three hours from 7 a.m. to 10 a.m. on the last Saturday of the month to clean their surroundings. During the period, there was to be no movement. The country was shut down! Any Nigerian found on the street was liable to manhandling and/or extortion by security agents who usually extend their command for egotistic and monetary gain. Only medical personnel and newspaper vendors in addition to government personnel, such as field workers of the government-owned Nigerian Electricity Power Authority (NEPA) now known as Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) promptly and scornfully referred to by Nigerians as both “Never Expect Power Always,” “Power Withholding Company of Nigeria,” or “Problem Has Not Changed in Nigeria” for their consistent inefficiency, and water corporations on so-called essential duty were later excluded from the restriction on movement after the protest.

But the arrangement contained no provision for the cleaning of non-residential areas. Nor did it contain a long-term objective of achieving routine orderly disposal of refuse that will result in clean towns and cities. Yet, the ritual of shutting down the country continued for years. The monthly order of restriction on movement became a useful time for most Nigerians to stay back home and rest and, if there is electricity, watch television or home videos while the cities’ sanitation did not change with continued indiscriminate dumping of refuse. The military rulers were either unbothered or took no note of the futility of the monthly environmental sanitation exercise. It was a great relief for Nigerians with an artistic mind when the newly inaugurated President Olusegun Obasanjo, exercising the mandate of the Council of State, canceled the exercise in late 1999. However, some states of the federation have resumed the monthly exercise without a change in the physical cleanliness of their cities.³⁹ As Robert Guest wrote in his 2004 book, “In Lagos, I have seen piles of rubbish, some of them twenty feet high and three blocks long, festering in the middle of the road.”⁴⁰ Such sights are still everywhere not only in Lagos but in numerous other Nigerian cities and towns.

According to High Prince Ene Owoh, performance indicators from the studies of the National Technical Study Group of Clean Up Nigeria, which he coordinated, “show that over 172.7 million Nigerians in 2021 are living in unclean environments compared to 170 million in 2020” (interview, Abuja, 12th of December 2021). Mrs. Jadesola Surakat claimed that her company, Multi Pro Limited, makers of Hypo disinfectant, embarked on the “Team up to Clean-up” project in Ibadan to “sensitize the people on the need for environmental hygiene” (interview, 7th May 2017, Ibadan). However, the project was more like the national monthly Environmental Sanitation Exercise and not surprisingly, ended, leaving Ibadan dirty as ever because it was more, to borrow the words of Manton, “tutelary than comprehensive.”⁴¹

Governor Abiola Ajimobi’s Administration initially made efforts to keep Ibadan clean. But he “later played politics with governance” with the result that “you would think there were no sanitary inspectors” in Oyo State since filth could be seen as “an external décor for the entire span of many highways leading into and within the city of Ibadan” (interview with Mr. Segun Adeniran, Ibadan resident, 26th of April 2019). In the same vein, former Governor of Oyo State Adebayo Alao Akala expressed regrets over the uncleanness of Ibadan. He said that Governor Seyi Makinde “has refused to look in that direction lately by incapacitating the local government authorities and ignoring the stakeholders who have been calling for the removal of the filthy sites that have taken over the city” (interview, 15th of October 2021, Ibadan). A guest described the government-owned Premier Hotel as “dirty, unfriendly and overpriced” (interview 31st of July 2012). This was a hotel that was the best in Ibadan. Four years later, T. Feyisola dubbed it “zero-star hotel!!! Not worth the money!” (interview, December 2016, Ibadan).

The slums are thus a common part of Nigerian cities as it is in many cities of developing countries. Therefore, a slum’s basic feature, filth, should not surprise anyone familiar with slums. But in Ibadan, one of Nigeria’s largest cities, which typifies a slum city, private orders in the individual’s struggle against filth are interesting narratives of ordinary people’s political and social thought. Of particular interest is the desperation in the recent stages of their evolution. While the common sight of filth in Ibadan may appear as a normal condition for the people who live with it, the desperation in the new response to it points to the contrary. Desperation indicates not acceptance but a symptom of state failure and better still, of the dearth of the noble political thought of the minders of the state. Thus, the individual responses to their filthy surroundings range from an appeal to the sensibilities of fellow Nigerians to threats/curses. What are these responses? How effective are they? Why should the filthy environment not be blamed solely on individuals or a lacking/weak civil society? In a subsequent section, this paper attempts answers to these questions to show that the problem of filth in Ibadan and any other Nigerian or African city is distinct evidence of a dearth of political thought behind the Nigerian/African state. In this way, it contributes to the debate on the virility of civil society or more broadly, the third sector in sub-Saharan Africa, in social and political thought that its physical space denotes.

IV. Public Space and Service Delivery

Nigeria’s PS of which government is the most authoritative agent and legal trustee, with the worst dilapidation and abandonment, is a sharp contrast with its PPS, POS, and

PIS. The neglect PS exudes is the extent to which it is claimed or unclaimed. In Ibadan city, for example, PPS and most POS and PIS are a pool of attraction, silently telling the story of the government's neglect of PS, its space, and its quality-of-service delivery.

PS buildings are either in a dilapidated state or lack basic furnishing while PPS, POS, PIS, have a full complement of furnishing with air conditioners, running water, good furniture, constant water supply, internet connectivity, and the automobile of different types for ease of movement. A very noticeable neglect of PS is the absence of adequate automobiles for mass transportation. So, bus stops are a pathetic sight in big cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt because the public transport system is acutely inadequate. Heavy traffic Nigerians call "go slow" occasioned largely by bad roads and lack of traffic control are also common. Absolute negligence is explained away in the claim by a state government that main township roads are the federal government's roads while not making a difference in its "own" roads.⁴² It has often happened that the same government rips open a spot on a major township road under the guise of planned repairs only to abandon it with extraordinary hardship for the people as a result.⁴³ Besides, the government-owned media regularly insult the sensibilities of Nigerians with the admonition, "don't ask, 'what can Nigeria do for you?' but 'what can you do for Nigeria?'"⁴⁴

If anything, the nine-point agenda the Olusegun Obasanjo Administration proclaimed about service delivery in 2004 during his second term in office plainly admitted the government's gross negligence.⁴⁵ Even with ubiquitous disservice, disorder, neglect, frustration, and hopelessness, every retiring or dead public servant is praised for "serving the nation meritoriously" by peers, government officials, and friends.⁴⁶ Such praises have not ceased even without evidence of the high quality of public welfare or service delivery.

While in other societies, governments are being called upon to assume new functions such as "protecting the environment, guaranteeing the rights of consumers, arbitrating moral issues like abortion and ensuring equal opportunity for minorities and women," traditional responsibilities of governments of "ensuring the economic and physical well-being of their citizens" remain novel concerns of government in Nigeria.⁴⁷ One cannot agree more with a Danish student visiting Nigeria and indeed Africa for the first time: After a three-week stay, she concluded that Nigeria is a place "nothing works." Contrasting life in Europe and Africa, she declared,

In many instances, I find it hard to believe that things could be at the backward level they are in Nigeria. Where I come from, things that are already taken for granted are not just there in Nigeria. We believe in order. Services are perfect. No endless waiting to get things done. It is a clockwork system. People are conscious of time. No queuing for fuel. Public transportation is efficient and prompt. There is so much gap between Europe and here.⁴⁸

As Gbenga Salau, a reporter for *The Guardian* (Lagos) wrote in 2001 "it is ... puzzling that in spite of the number of people who storm the registry [the Federal Marriage Registry at Ikoyi, the busiest and most popular in Lagos] to be joined in wedlock every week, with each couple paying, it is still so unkempt. More worrisome is the fact that Nigerians, including the rich and elite—who throng the registry every week, could endure such filth and depreciated facility and keep silent or unconcerned."⁴⁹

The hopelessness and cynicism bred by rulers raise questions about the attitude of Nigerian leaders to the social and economic problems of their people. They make one

wonder: How does the commissioner for works and transport feel about the chaotic transport situation caused by bad roads in the capital city where he lives, not to mention other cities in his state? How does the commissioner of health or Environment feel about the eyesore, that most part of their capital city epitomizes? As a result of the indifference or rather limited political thought of its leaders, Africa is sprawling with hybrid political orders.⁵⁰

V. Responses to State's Environmental Negligence

The city of Ibadan in Western Nigeria exemplifies the political and governance narrative as well as the consequences of a disordered space and shows that space is not just a geographical expression. The operation of hybrid political orders is illustrated with the orders of environmental sanitation, security of life and property, and land use in Ibadan, which Layi Egunjobi described as a city that is “growing in all directions without direction.”⁵¹ It is important to note that the orders referred to here are in signs which are either self-operative or externally propelled. In any case, orders in the form of rules require an external hand to give them effect when deviants appear on the scene. A picture of a dump site in the walled premises of Oyo State Secretariat shot on the 17th of August 2021 shows that even state governments are not enforcing their orders on indiscriminate dumping of waste in PS (see figure 1). A sample of these orders collected and monitored all over Ibadan over the past fifteen years is presented in Yoruba and translated into the English language.

At the beginning of the lone struggle against filth, the common warning signpost at an illegal dump site was: “Dumping of refuse is prohibited.” Lacking internal and external deterrence, such warnings have been ignored by dumpers who find it convenient to dump their refuse at convenient sites. In response to their failure, those mounting them have decided to build into them some deterrence with the addition, “violators will be prosecuted.” This is an empty warning without prosecutorial resources and a judicial system that can empathize with the victims. Again, without visible external deterrence, the dumping of refuse at the sites continued. The orders had to be reinforced with some moral suasion. Thus, they moved from “Stop dumping refuse here, *eyin obayie je adugbo*” (you spoilers of the district or environment) and “*ma se da ile si bi tiki bojumu*” (do not dump refuse in the wrong place). Without success, the orders had to be further reinforced. The following box contains orders typical of such reinforcement.

Box 1: Warning Signs All Over Ibadan City	
Order in Yoruba	Translation
Da ile sibi Ki ori ijanba Sango.	Dump your refuse to incur the wrath of Sango (god of thunder).
<i>Enikeni ko gbodo da ile si oju odo yi. Enikeni to wo ba te, yo da rare lebi.</i>	Do not dump refuse into this stream. Whoever is caught will have themselves to blame.
<i>Ejowo a ni di igbe eniyan ni bi fun lilo.</i>	Attention please! Human excreta are urgently needed for traditional use.
<i>Ojo ti owo ba te eni ti o ba da ile si bi yi, Eninan di apadanu ni ojo nan</i>	Whoever is caught dumping refuse here is a goner.

Order in Yoruba	Translation
<i>To ba fe so ri buruku, da ile si bi.</i> (By People of Faith Church, Sango-Eleyele Road, Ibadan).	If you want to be cursed, dump your refuse here.
<i>Ti mo ba da ile si bi yi, kit e mio baja.</i>	I should be damned if I dump refuse here.
<i>Akosope kooma dale sibi. Sugbon, dale sibi koosofa tomo tomo.</i>	Nobody says you should not dump refuse here. Do so to lose your child.
<i>Dale si oju odo kio sofo.</i> <i>Dale si oju odo kio fi owo re gbe omo sin.</i>	Dump refuse into this stream and waste your life. Dump refuse into this stream and bury your own child.
<i>Ibanu je aye raye nifun eniken to ba yagbe tabi dale sibi.</i>	Everlasting sorrow is the portion of any that defecates or dumps refuse here.
<i>Eniken ti o bad a ile tabi egbin si inu gota yi, yi o si ri ibinu gbigboba Olorun.</i>	Anybody that dumps refuse or any irritating thing in this drainage shall incur the wrath of God.
<i>Bi mob a da ile sibi yii</i> <i>Ki nya were</i> <i>Ki nsofo omo</i> <i>Ki ma ri opin odun yii</i> <i>Ki nsofo oko/aya</i> <i>Oro jade ase tele</i> (By Nigerian Institute of Horticulture)	If I dump refuse here Let me become mad Let me lose my children Let me not see the end of this year Let me lose my husband/wife Amen
<i>Dale si bi ki oloko iparun</i>	Dump refuse here and perish forever.

Source: Various locations in Ibadan.

It is noteworthy that even with their threats, the above orders have not been obeyed since the dumping of refuse at the unwanted sites continues unabated. Thus, helpless individuals have to live with filth and other environmental hazards. They also have to contend with noise pollution from religious gatherings, generators, and small-scale enterprises such as block-making industries, grinding machines, and other environmental concerns including haphazard channeling of wastewater, emptying of soak ways into the streets, etc., in their places of residence. By contrast, PPS, POS, and PIS are substantially free of the nuisance that plagues PS. When they constitute a limited nuisance to themselves such as with generator noise pollution, it is because of the failure of the state to provide or maintain public goods and services. In this regard, the active civil society has failed to build pressure on the state to perform its basic functions as its albatross.

VI. The Odds Against Collective Action

Collective action includes lobbying, contributing to campaign finance, and protests.⁵² There is a dearth of literature on the frequency of usage of these forms of collective action in Nigeria. This is why their effectiveness is hard to determine. However, the role of civil society groups including those with ethnic motivations in the struggle for democratic rule in Nigeria is well acknowledged.⁵³ The print and electronic media communicate reports of protests by labor unions from time to time. For example, the #EndSars protests of 2020 were widely covered and reported by local and international print and electronic media.⁵⁴



Figure 1: Dumpsite with a warning of prosecution sign in Oyo State Secretariat, Ibadan. Photograph taken by the author on August 13, 2021.

These sources are rich with successful uses of protests by labor unions in their struggle for an increase in wages and salaries. If protests have been so effective in demanding an increase in salaries and wages, why have labor unions and other stakeholders in environmental sanitation not employed them?

There are at least two categories of constraints on civil society's effective response to state failure: Personal and systemic. A typical personal level constraint is desperation arising from the obligation to be gainfully employed particularly in the absence of social security benefits. From the second military interregnum of 1983–1999 till now, the state has existed in many parts of Nigeria as a negative force, shirking its responsibility to provide rules for social and economic behavior.⁵⁵ Governing is thus not a problem-solving activity. Although this lawless situation provides a leeway for some to satisfy their material and other psychological needs, for most other elements of society there lurks a war of all against all. For example, a person driven by the need for material self-reproduction and sustenance that the state has failed to guarantee by ensuring a conducive public health environment can decide to bring into a densely populated neighborhood, industrial equipment such as a power generating set, printing machine, tool making and redesigning machine, concrete block making machine, etc.⁵⁶ Some of these are put to use in the dead of the night. The quest for livelihood and hope for miraculous solutions to personal problems have also led unscrupulous residents to start noisy religious gatherings any time of the day and worsen the nuisance value of PS.

The complaint of a discomfited neighbor to the one who is responsible is often meaningless because there is no state instrument to mediate and set binding standards. The state has no idea of acceptable activity or behavior or what is injurious to public well-being because it is itself derelict in its duties to the governed. The result is rampant apathy that is undoubtedly antithetical to civil society action. The counter complaints of unscrupulousness stunt the growth of a joint stake in individual social and mental well-being necessary for collective action to pressure the state to play its role in guaranteeing public well-being. A commercial driver put his withdrawal from the irrelevant Nigerian state with implications for his citizenship duties in the following words: “Nothing gives one joy in Nigeria. I will not vote again but simply concentrate on how to cater for my family within my circumstances.”⁵⁷ The populace is decimated by numerous systemic problems and is like the peasantry Karl Marx described as potatoes in a sack.⁵⁸

The permission of parallel social facilities—individual and public provided—is an important contrast between the economically undeveloped Nigerian society and any pre-economically developed society or pre-industrial and economically developed country. In Nigeria, there is a dichotomy between the public and the private in respect of critical amenities/needs—energy (electricity), water supply, and security. This dichotomy has made mobilization for collective action by disadvantaged Nigerians much more difficult than it might have been for revolutionary changes elsewhere. The political elite who are culpable for the inefficiency of the state monopoly provider of electricity NEPA or PHCN has an alternative to it as a generator.⁵⁹ Thus,

When for any reason, the socially disadvantaged are mobilized on their own platform, say in form of a strike directed at NEPA, which if successful and effective, puts NEPA out of function, the victims of the action are the socially disadvantaged, and not those of the exploiting class who in any case are used to falling back on their standby plants, even when NEPA is in its normal but inefficient run of service.⁶⁰

In other words, a results-oriented protest is possible only if during protests the protesters can subject the beneficiaries or perpetrators of their deprivation to the same pain they have been consigned. Zuru, a town in the northern part of Nigeria is of consequence not for its size but for its large share of the number of serving and retired colonels and generals of the Nigerian army. In 2002, the power supply from NEPA nose-dived for the worse. The retired generals and their privileged civilian folks in the town simply turned to their generators. With the unbearable persistent blackout and the indifference of their privileged folks who could make a difference unacceptable, the youth of Zuru mobilized against them, asserting, “no NEPA, no generator.” This forced the elite to influence NEPA to restore a fairly stable supply of electricity.⁶¹ The usefulness of targeted action towards the elites indicated by the Zuru youth action recommends itself to those seeking to influence political leadership for responsive government.

Some in society who are fellow victims of an inefficient service delivery system are led by their desperation to meet their desire for personal advancement to seek a private solution in the acquisition of private amenities rather than join their fellow deprived folks to protest poor public service delivery. In the process, many Nigerians are caught in the web of systemic inefficiency because of their very limited material resources. This is because an inefficient public service delivery system contains numerous deflationary outlets for those

with little means. Their self-efforts soon prove futile and unsustainable. Just when such ones think that they have found a private solution to an inefficient public utility, the system deflates it with inefficiency in the provision of requisite service. From experience, a Nigerian of little means living in rented accommodation may be forced to acquire a generator as a solution to epileptic public power supply. But before long, this proves to be a non-solution to the lack of public power supply because desperate bouts of scarcity have befallen the supply of fuel by the inefficient production and distribution system for many reasons: Refineries have broken down again; tanker drivers are on strike; fuel dealers are hoarding fuel to make more profit in anticipation of an increase in the pump price; there is a great shortfall in the quantity of fuel imported, etc.⁶²

Those with great means who live in their own houses are able to respond to some of these causes of fuel shortage while those with little means can be crippled by any of them. The latter may not be able to sustain the use of their generators because the accommodation that is affordable to them is so crammed that stockpiling fuel for running them is impossible. Another constraint as noted earlier derives from limited material resources, which can be caused by delays in the payment of wages. Thus, the sudden eruption of fuel shortage heightens the desperation to meet obligations for personal advancement of a Nigerian of little means who is then forced to begin the search for a private solution, continuing the cycle of the never-ending search for a private solution in Nigeria. This foisted quest for a private solution for Nigerians is a big strain on the disposition to collective action against the rulers who have perpetrated poor public service delivery.⁶³ Even if successful, the ethnic or religious solidaristic competition to which the absence of public infrastructure drives the individual⁶⁴ cannot meet the individual's need for infrastructure because of the pursuit of the private solution it had initially set in motion. It is important to note that the private solution to public infrastructure deficiency takes strictly individual and not ethnic or religious solidaristic form.

System-level constraint on collective action derives from legally permissible action as well as minimal infrastructure as earlier on noted. For example, the disservice or inefficiency of NEPA or PHCN is legalized by the law that established it. This law gives it immunity against litigation for damage to personal property, poor service delivery, or non-service. It can punish and yet does not owe the consumer stewardship. Section 27, subsection 1 of Decree No. 24 of 1972 that established it provides that

The Authority *shall not* by virtue of making any inspection or test of a consumer's wires, fittings, appliances and apparatus in accordance with this Decree or any regulations made under the Electricity Act, whether during the progress of the work of installation at the consumer's premises or after completion, be *deemed responsible for the efficiency or safety* of the consumer's wires, fittings, appliances and apparatus so inspected or tested, or for the proper execution of the work of installation, or for any damage or loss arising out of the use or misuse of such consumer's wires, fittings, appliances and apparatus by the consumer or any other person other than an employee of the authority [emphasis added].⁶⁵

The use of the public utility for ethnic patronage mostly for the benefit of more powerful ethno-geographic regions is also an obstacle to cross-ethnic collective action that is called for with regard to the provision of public infrastructure. NEPA's managers before 1999 were reported by *Tempo*, Lagos (vol. 14, no. 2000) to have been doling out its fortunes to friends and discriminating ethnically in the distribution of electricity. The tariff was structured to

tax southern industries as the case of the cement industry shows. Those in the north were taxed as follows: Benue Cement Company (BCC) was taxed N5 million for 15 mw, Sokoto Cement, N5 million for 10 mw, Ashaka Cement N6 million for 10 mw. Those down south paid more: Calabar Cement N8 million for 10 mw, Okpella Cement N11 million for 10 mw, Sagamu Cement N48 million for 10 mw, and Ewekoro Cement N50 million for 10 mw. In the distribution of electricity for domestic consumption was to be found the same ethnic favoritism. Gombe, a small state with a population far less than that of one of the southwestern states was allocated 43 mw while all the mostly southwestern and Yoruba-speaking states of Oyo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, and Kwara states were together allocated 24 mw. In addition, NEPA's "Czars had a card of the exempted load of 733 megawatts, which they played with utmost ethnic cynicism." As the report makes known, "next, perhaps to oil, but no less crucial, NEPA has been one of the turfs the frenzied battle for control of the Nigerian state has been fought with a huge army of the unemployed, manufacturers and households as its prisoners of war."⁶⁶

VII. Conclusion

The resident social scientist is burdened by the methodological problem of how to comprehend the anomic Nigerian situation of which they are a daily victim. In many respects, the government watches simple problems grow into a conundrum for its people. It is baffling that the inconveniences of a disordered PS compounded by individual and group recklessness have been borne as normal part of living in Nigeria. Could this be attributed to a culture of permissiveness of neglect by the state (government), the custodian of PS? If the people can be blamed for preferring self-help with its glaring ineffectiveness to collective solution through public action, the evidence shows that government has primary responsibility for the situation of PS, its space as contrasted by an ordered and in fact, beautiful PPS, POS, PIS where its occupants, political elites, receive their dignitaries to wine and dine.

The government's inefficiency and decisions that are detrimental to citizens' welfare have not received the strong objection they deserve. Nigerians just groan perhaps helplessly while those who can turn to private solutions to the government's irresponsibility hastily do so.⁶⁷ White-collar employee-dominated civil society does not recognize its long-term social and economic interests. It has been more preoccupied with immediate pecuniary gains for tiny populations rather than demand provision of public goods for the benefit of all and sundry. As a result, the initial spontaneous response of self-help for self-preservation takes hold and dilutes civil society's collective action. Even in its preoccupation, it is shortsighted because its focus on increases in wages and salaries brings only momentary relief. The government's irresponsibility is expressed only in narratives of deprivation while its fellow victims in the civil society trade abuses for personal escapist measures such as dodging a pothole in the opposite way while driving and shunting a petrol queue. All this bespeaks the limitation of civil society as an agent of change.

This article has demonstrated the interplay between physical space and politics and how the conditions of certain types of space reflect the political consciousness of the elites and the masses. From its exposition, development and underdevelopment discourses are not complete without the examination of the philosophy of space in politics, the arena of

decision-making of any political community, particularly the state, which monopolizes comprehensive authority. Without a good idea of space, there will be no political software, specifically, policies that promote good governance. This is because the idea of space, which embodies space governance, defines government policies and the constraints on civil society action in altering the face of the PS without a philosophy. Physical space deserves attention to unravel the idea of it and how it affects the politics and development of other societies. Future researchers can address the limitation of this study, that is, its inability to do a detailed empirical analysis of more physical spaces outside Nigeria with comparisons of physical spaces through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches with which they can show that physical space reflects the political thought/leadership and life in geopolitical spaces and vice versa.

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