

*S*igma, Violence and the Human Agents on the Motor Park Space in Ibadan Metropolis, Southwest Nigeria*

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Abstract: *This study is concerned with violence imposed images of the Ibadan motorpark space and the human agents on that space. We shall examine the 'orita-omoita' (the violent space-violent being) marker and the sub-cultural identity of the space vis-à-vis its relationship with the general public. We use Erving Goffman's labelling theory to explain how the image got skewed and the sustenance of the markedness by the public. Through the use of participant observation and key informant interviews we provide explanations for the sustained violence image of the motorpark, the ability of/attempts by the marked to live with/rise above the marked expectations and why the public is so imbued with the negative stereotypes that they have refused to appreciate the likely effects of the sustained label on urban development, crime control and security of the state.*

Keywords: stigma, motor park, labelling, stereotype, urban development

And I always feel this with...people—that whenever they're being nice to me, pleasant to me, all the time really, underneath they're only assessing me as a criminal and nothing else. It's too late for me to be any different now to what I am, but I still feel this keenly, that that's their only approach, and they're quite incapable of accepting me as anything else.

—E. Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*

Stereotype, Motor park Agents and the Ibadan Motor Park Space

Stereotypes are special kind of perception or image attached to a particular person or group, as peculiar to and defines that person or the group. In most cases, stereotypes are products of assumptions or supposedly drawn conclusions after dealing with and/or listening to similar narratives

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of habits or behaviour considered as uniquely peculiar to a group or individual. Stereotype formations are generally regarded as capable of fragmentizing and engendering discriminations, as it is with the caste system in India, and also capable of making the 'victims' or the 'stereotyped' very dejected, thereby creating a sense of helplessness that nothing could be done to salvage a particular situation (read again Erving Goffman's opening quotation, above, for example).

What is essentially unique about stereotype creation is that the less is known of an individual or group, or the more seemingly mysterious an individual or group, the easier it becomes to stereotype such a group or individual. The process of stereotyping, therefore, compounds and amplifies the insidious simplification that accompanies classification (Ademowo, 2011:198). Hence, its condensation creates in minds and in socio-scopes, boundaries or marked figures, in similarly uncritical, though marked, grounds.

There is no limit to what and who can be stereotypes, old, young, poor, rich, brilliant, foolish, etc, anyone and any group can be a victim of stereotyping which eventually leads to an effective stigma that may ward off or create a sense of negative possibilities in the preceptor or members of a community. Both 'body' and 'space' can be stereotyped. While bodies refer to the individuals and groups relations, nature and identities, spaces stereotyping are essentially about locations and places. Once stereotyped, the 'stereotyped body and space' assume unwanted responsibility for managing stigma that they did not invite, create nor imposed.

One of the many spaces in Nigeria today that is surviving amidst stereotypes is the motor park space, a unique geographical location that services the transportation, market, social and cultural needs of the people. This space is stereotyped with many vices, namely, rowdiness, poverty, unruliness, criminals' den, violence, etc. The stereotype here is focused on 'body and the space.' The activities and the living condition of the human agents of the motor park, which created the 'stereotypes', have undermined the significant role of the space in the social, political and economic well-being of the Nigerian society.

These stereotypes did not, however, emerge overnight; rather they evolved and developed overtime with increase in the park-public interactions. In fact, as Anderson (1991) explains, such stereotypes, as these, are

....self-organized evolutionarily in open systems, replete with serendipity and surprise, and they emerge developmentally in more limited systems permitting of some prediction, thereby engendering suspense (Anderson 1991: 204)

The perception of the motor park has supposedly gotten so skewed today, in violence, and 'good-for-nothingness' representation, that only the human agents of park themselves could be aware or sure of the 'true' image. The 'markedness' of the park has heightened to the level that violence is

perceived today as, barring any other indicator, synonymous with the motor park. Indeed, the newspapers headlines say it all:

“Nine persons injured, 20 vehicles destroyed in Ogun motor parks clashes”

Premium Times, February 14, 2013

“Violence: Soldiers, Police take over Onitsha motor park”

The Punch, February 21, 2014

“After years of violence: Peace, orderliness return to Oyo NURTW”

The Nation, December 25, 2013

“Boko Haram: Police uncover plot to bomb Abuja motor parks”

Sun Newspapers, July 13, 2014

The above headlines did not only convey the intended information/news to the general reading public, they are intended to reinforce or remind the public of the image of the motor park as ‘violence space with violent human bodies’.

Violence on the Ibadan Motor parks space

Violence can be defined as “any use of force—verbal, written, physical, psychological or sexual—against any person, by an individual or a group, with intent to directly or indirectly wrong, injure or oppress that person by attacking his or her integrity, psychological or physical well-being, rights or property” (MELS, 2009). It is the “the unlawful use or threat of force” (Tamuno, 1991).

Wilkinson (1977), in his own contribution, defines violence as the “illegitimate use of coercion resulting, or intended to result in the death, injury, or intimidation of persons or the destruction or seizure of property”. Violence can also be described as the “use of physical force to injure people or property”. From these definitions, one could move on to say that violence has to do basically with the use of force to access what other party will not willingly let go. This underscores Burrowes’ (2007:2) position that “Violence does not ‘just happen’. The exerted force, be it covert or overt, is meant to intimidate, subdue and, if necessary, destroy in order to achieve a set aim.

There are three basic dimensions of viewing violence. These are:

1. Psychological, involving irrational and murderous use of force, like robbery, thuggery, among others
2. Ethical, involving the vandalism of a neighbour’s property or an abuse of his liberty and;
3. Political, involving forceful seizure of power or the illegitimate use of political power. (Domenach, 1978)

The above three dimensions can be subsumed under two diverse types of violence, namely, individual or interpersonal and group or mass violence. We shall be considering both views, i.e. inter-personal and group as relating to the motor parks.

The inter-personal and group violence on the motor parks are sometimes used not to hurt *per se* but as a momentary means of appropriating the motor park space. The use of violence in the appropriating process is itself only a means to subdue the 'other' and his or her forces that might be interested in the space. The aim for the use of the violence is not to harm or hurt, intentionally, but sometimes the 'harm' or 'hurt' is often inevitable as the struggle for the space continues. But once the desired power is accessed, normalcy often returns to the motor park as the new leader and his group takes over the affairs of the motor park. This is not totally different from what is observable in Nigerian political arena where violent acts are employed to 'deal ruthlessly' with oppositions and used by oppositions to 'vehemently resist' the intimidation of the ruling party. This leads us to the question: if the use of violence is not peculiar to the motor parks, what is the basis of the formed stereotype that has imposed a violence stigma on the space and the human agents earning their living through their activities on such space?

Study Area/Case study

Ibadan, our study area, is located on the coordinates of 7°N 23°E/7, 23 of the Equator. Etymologically, the name, *Ibadan*, was coined from the phrase 'eba odan', which means 'that which was found near the savannah'. History has it that 'eba odan' was founded by a group of warriors led by Lagelu. It was originally founded as a place of refuge, on a neutral ground, a kind of no man's land serving as an informal boundary between the inhabitants of the savannah (*Qdan*) who were the Oyo people and the forest (Igbo) dwellers, the Ijebu and Egba (Layonu, Okosun, Kehinde and Ishola, 2008:18).

The inner Ibadan city, often referred to as 'Ibadan metropolis', comprises of 5 radial local government areas, while the outer rings comprise of six local governments (Fabiya, 2007). During the colonial era, Ibadan, was made an administrative centre of the old western Region in Nigeria and presently it is the capital of Oyo state.

There are motor parks or 'garages' in almost every community in Ibadan, including its rural semi-urban ones. But as Lawuyi (Unpub.) posits, "the intensity of conduct of economic and communicative affairs, the vastness of the space the garage occupied and the political structure and roles that transport plays" differentiate an urban from a rural motor park space. And based on this indisputable difference, it is incontrovertible that it is the complex nature of the motor parks within the Ibadan metropolis, which often makes them susceptible to all manner of activities which can be easily stereotyped. To make the choice of an urban study site, we observed four major urban motor-parks for two weeks, namely, Iwo road, Beere, Orita and Ojoo. We were looking for a

park that will be representative of all the transportation and market-park closeness among the four and also that which will be closely linked with the intra and inter-state transport as well as the haulage long distance transportation. Eventually, we chose Ojoo Motor park.

The Ojoo Motor Park is a unique and all-segment urban motor park space. The uniqueness can be found in the levels and classes of popular road transport sector that it contains, namely, the intra-city, intra-state, inter-state, motorbike/Okada and the trailer section (which adds the 'uniqueness' to it for there is hardly any other urban or rural motor park in Ibadan that has higher numbers of trailers or a virile standing motor park associations).

Theoretical framework: Labelling Theory

Labelling theory belongs to the social construction theories. The theory holds that deviance is not inherent to an act rather that focuses on the tendency of majorities to negatively label minorities or those seen as deviant from standard cultural norms. The theory concerns itself with how the self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them, which can be associated with the concept of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The theory had its origins in *Suicide*, a book by French sociologist Émile Durkheim and deals mostly not with the normal roles that define daily lives, but with those very special roles that society provides for deviant behavior, called deviant roles, stigmatic roles, or social stigma. (A social role is defined as a set of expectations we have about a behavior). It must be noted however that society makes use of stigmatic or stereotyped roles to control and limit deviant behavior. To the marker or the society therefore, to proceed in a kind of behavior or act in ways considered similar to them, is to become a member of that group of people. Those who are assigned those roles will be seen as less human and reliable. Deviant roles are the sources of negative stereotypes, which tend to support society's disapproval of the behaviour. Prominent labelling theory scholars, apart from Durkheim, include: Frank Tannenbaum, Edwin Lemert, Erving Goffman and Howard Becker. However, Erving Goffman's version of the theory is most relevant for us here.

Goffman's contribution to labelling theory, could be found in his famous book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. There are five core insight to Goffman's idea of labelling theory (Goffman 1963: 81, 88,108,122). Goffman (1962:81) explains one of the key insights into the labeled world with his 'Living in a divided world' principle.

According to Goffman,

Deviants divide their worlds into: 1. forbidden places where discovery means exposure and danger, 2. places where people of that kind are painfully tolerated, and 3. places where one's kind is exposed without need to dissimulate or conceal (1963:81).

What must be clearly noted about labelling theory is that it emphasises that the labels applied to individuals or group influence their behaviour, particularly the application of negative or stigmatizing

labels (such as 'area boy') promote deviant behaviour, which then translates to a self-fulfilling prophecy. The use of the label can also be an attempt to change the individual from their deviant behaviours and to prevent others from behaving in similar manners. However, sometimes, an individual who is labelled has little choice or say but to conform to the essential meaning of that judgment imposed on his/her or them, which then makes the intended control ineffective.

Methodology

A case study research strategy is adopted for this study. This is to enable us to carry out in-depth study of a given social unit (Ukpokolo, 2002). The case study approach affords the researcher the opportunity to carry out a thorough investigation in the chosen area, just as Malinowski and Mead did when they studied the Trobriand Islanders and the Samoans respectively. Due to a high number of motor-parks in Ibadan, Ojoo Motor Park was purposively selected due to its unique 'all segment of transportation' nature because it has a regular inter-city unit, the inter-state, the Okada/tri-cycle unit, the taxi unit as well as the trailer section. Sixty key informants were interviewed for the purpose of data collection. They constituted the sample size. Using snowballing method, made it quite easy to interview these informants. The selection is distributed among the seven identified segments of the Ojoo motor park as follows: drivers and union officers, 15; market men and women, 15; local government officials, 2; bus conductors and other menial park staff, 8; members of the Nigerian Police Force, 4; the commuters, 15; and an *ifa* scholar. The study was carried out between 2009 and 2012.

Research Findings

a. *Violence, the park and the park agents*

One Yoruba word that has close affinity with violence is '*jagidijagan*'. It is often attached to people's way of addressing issues. Majority of those addressed as "*onijagidijagan*" or 'violent people' are usually non-educated, poor people. The educated or rich yet seemingly destructive people are not violent but '*alagidi*' or stubborn people. Such is the belief among the Yoruba as explained by Chief Labi a key informant. In his opinion:

What we often call violence or what papers (newspapers) carry as headlines are nothing but usual fights among groups as a result of a ruptured relationship. But because many of our members are perceived as 'out casts' 'omo-ita' 'omo-garage' and 'no-do-gooders', all shades of minor fights are blown out of proportion...may be because they do not expect us to do good or be better citizens. (Field, 2009)

We then asked him if the park do not witness violence at all. Chief Labi replied "do not get me wrong. I did not say we do not fight. Rather what annoys me is how news of our minor fights is handled" (Field, 2009). He did not deny the fact that the park agents are often involved in fights, his grouse with the public, the government and the press is that they are biased in their reportage of their crisis because some of the fights are too unimportant to be given the kind of attention they get.

Mr Chuks, an elderly market man in the Ojoo daily market, who has been trading on the park for close to three decades, believes that the park cannot be saved from continued violent clashes:

Last week, we witnessed a clash between the members of the Association of Commercial Motorcycle Operators of Nigeria and Okada section of the National Union of Road Transport Workers over space. Their constant clashes over space snatching and control of units will continue as long as they will have to eat unless government can do something about it. (Field, 2009)

The clashes over space acquisition for control purpose in the view of Ms Tam, is the major cause of violence. As we discovered through our interactions with the people, the situation is more tensed now because the park's governing slogan has changed from "chop alone, die alone" to "chop alone, go away".

What this change means is that unlike before when one can siphon or mismanage the union's funds alone or with only a few executive members and still be pardoned, such will not be tolerated again.

As Alhaji Bash (Branch Treasurer, NURTW, Akinyele Local Government) observes:

Now, it is the era of 'chop alone, go away'. Once you are caught or suspected to mismanage the union's fund, the first thing is for you to step-down from your post. (Field, 2009)

We then asked what happens if such person refuses to step-down. Without mincing words, Alhaji Bash replied "of course, we are not expecting many of them to willingly surrender. We know how to handle many of such persons" (Field, 2009). He however did not agree that such persons are removed forcefully, thereby further confirming peoples' image of the park agents as violent. But as confirmed by Mr. Kay, "even when we report such case to that police, they do not take action because they think we are all bunch of useless and irresponsible people".

The market men and women sharing the park also fight over such issues as customer snatching, over stepping of/or encroachment of assigned space and over leadership as was the case with the Ojoo Igbo Trade Association (Field, 2009).

Much of this violence has root causes in power seeking, in the quest to amass material wealth so as to rise above the others, to create identity that would be respected and of course for the sake of status change. Obviously, it is not only on the park that people kill to get power. News abounds in the Nigeria media of the activities of the political gladiators who kill their opponents in their quest for power. But what is incontestable is the fact that the fingers of accusation have also been pointed at the park agents' unions as having one or two questions to answer in such cases.

Violence is not in the domain of just a group of people. All humans are capable of exhibiting violence if and when pushed to the walls. To imagine that the motor park is the first place in Ibadan that many of my informants can think in terms of violence, means there is more to it. What about the University

of Ibadan where students are readily on rampage? What about the political rallies where members of the ruling People's Democratic Party and the All Nigerian Peoples Party easily engaged one another in open fights. Or shall we concur with Chief Labi that there is more to the eye that could be seen on one surface of this crisis?

b. *Orita, Omo-ita* and the public marking of the Ojoo motor park space

The Ojoo motor park came into existence sometimes in late 1960s. Like many other parks or 'garages', it's been surviving amidst markings of diverse sort since its establishment. In fact, its very location, *Orita* is believed to be one of its first markings that created the violence stereotype.

The Ojoo motor park is located at *Orita Ojoo*, at the intersection of roads coming from, University of Ibadan and Moniya. *Orita* in Yoruba mythology is the home to two ministers of Olodumare (God) believed to be very powerful and dangerous, *Esu* and *Ogun*. "Shrines and sacrifices of all sorts are placed at the *Orita* because of the ubiquitous and wandering nature of these divinities" (Field, 2009).

Ogun is widely praised as

Olomi ni le fe je we,
O la sho nle fifi mo
Ki mo bora

(He that has a house filled
with water; yet chooses to
bathe with blood; He that
has so much clothes, yet
chooses to cover his body with palm fronds)
(Field, 2010).

He is feared for his propensity to induce violence and cause deaths when provoked. Beside this, *Ogun* is the divinity in Yoruba cosmological myth to whom belong,

iron and steel and therefore any implement and tools made from them. All who make use of these tools and implement therefore depend upon him and owe him tribute it is a consequence of this belief in his Lordship over iron and steel that he is acknowledged as the divinity of war and warriors'; mechanics, all engine drivers and in fact all who deal in anything made of iron and steel. Such people are said to be under obligation to worship or propitiate him. (Bolaji Idowu 1996:85)

Esu, on the other, is widely regarded as "*onile orita*" (he who owns the cross roads). The attitude of the Yorubas to *Esu* is generally one of dread; for he is believed to hold the power of life and death by virtue of his office as an intermediary between the other divinities and Olodumare. No other divinities accept any sacrifice without requesting that that of *Esu* be removed first. Hence the saying:

Bi a rubo; ki a mu t'Esu kuro
(When sacrifices are offered, the portion which belongs to *Esu* should be set aside for him).

Esu according to Fatade Ade, an Ifa scholar, is believed to be capable of causing crisis; of making enemies of very close friends and allies, causing husband and wife to quarrel, and making

antagonists of even father and children (Personal Communication, 2010). In fact, *Esu* is believed to be the master of mischief making and a trickster. Although he is not the biblical devil, *Esu* is predominantly associated with *things evil*. The unruly, the headstrong, the ones prone to evil-doing, the wicked ones, are all considered to be *omo-Esu*.

From the foregoing, it could be deduced that any activity carried out on *orita*, which is believed to be home to these divinities, cannot be expected to be devoid of rancour, violence and death. Hence, the first stereotype or maker of the motor-park is its proneness to violence, rancour, chaos and deaths. Indeed, the fact that *orita* usually served as battle ground during inter-communal wars in early centuries makes the violence stereotype of the space stronger. Premised on these, it was discovered that many of the activities associated with *orita* or crossroads are never considered as good ventures or worthy of pursuit by '*omoluwabi*', (a very good person). So, most violent, rancorous and unruly persons are then easily identified with *Esu*, and the blood thirsted with *Ogun*. As a result they are then referred to as *omo ita*. The 'good-for-nothingness' of the agents of the motor could also be traced to this because, with reference to the biblical *Esu*, they are not expected to be good in anything or activity but mischievousness and violence.

Our observation shows that the attributes of '*omo-garage*' are not that different from '*omo-ita*' for both are markers used to stigmatize and delineate the 'good children' from the 'bad children'. From the space and the activities of the divinities associated with the space originated the marker with which '*omo-ita*' (the wicked and unruly one) is separated from "*omo-ile*" (the good child). Certain standards of conduct are then set for both. The '*omo-ita*' who is a no-do-gooder is expected to be involved in marked jobs like driving, bus conducting, and park rate collecting, among others; while '*omo-ile*' is expected to be the scion of hope in the society. S/He is expected to govern, lead others, and take decisions, among others. This is a social role that could be linked to labelling.

The '*omo-ita*', apart from being excluded is also determined by the society to be a source of strife and crisis. The kind of job he/she is expected to be involved in are low-level jobs. They are never expected to be capable of governing and managing the affairs of others. If one could look closely, it will be discovered that the kind of jobs expected an '*omo-ita*' to be involved in are the typical jobs commonplace on the motor-park space. Hence, it is glaring that the space is not just stereotyped as abode of violence, rancour and deaths, but the human agents are expected to be agents of violence, rancour and deaths.

This marking makes it difficult for the 'marked space' and the 'stigmatized' to be integrated into the society. They are held at arm's length and any happenings resembling the attributes associated with them are easily apportioned to such space and agent, even when they are not circumstantially involved.

Conclusion

We have attempted, thus far, to show the indices of stereotype on the Nigerian urban motor park space, with special focus on a typical urban moto rpark (Ojoo Motorpark). We have highlighted the role of the public, who are the *marker* or the *stereotyper* and the *marked* or the stereotyped, the park and its human agents, in the sustenance of the skewed violent image of the Ojoo motor park. We have been able to do all these with the aid of data collected using direct field observation, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The constant eruption of violence on our urban motor park space, we noted, has been of concern to both the government and the general public. The study concludes that not much has been done in remedying the situation because the public are imbued with a kind of feeling that nothing could be done to salvage the situation because the human agents are merely living to the expectation of the majority. The essence of the marking, as was observed through participant observation, is to engineer a change of attitude in the observably rancorous human agents on the motor park. However, rather than induce a 'change in attitude', we observed that, the human agents of the park, the labelled, have involved themselves in more various deviant activities in their search for daily bread and power to influence change of attitude towards them. This has led to clashes and struggles which have in turn created tensions in the motor park. The tensions have in turn resulted in violence of diverse magnitudes. But as we observed these do not warrant the need for a sustained label, for most of the park's incidents of violent events are not peculiar to the space.

Finally, we conclude that the noticeable disconnect between the public's desire for a 'change in attitude' that warrants the stereotyping of the motor park has not yielded positive result but a 'change of attitude' towards them (the public). Hence, one could say that the public is merely 'reaping' the product of their creation and that the continued imposition of the 'good-for-nothing but violence' label is destructive because the sustenance of the created violent sub-cultural images could be dangerous for the peace and security of the state. Already, it was observed that disgruntled politicians are patronizing the Ibadan metropolis motor park space for the recruitment of the public marked 'good-for-nothing but violence' human agents of the park to unleash mayhem during elections. Hence, it is advised that the public revisit their image of the park and its human agent and consequently treat them better rather than with disdain. The government on its part should try to rehabilitate the park agents because the 'good-for-nothingness' stereotypes imposed on the Ojoo motor park is destructive and dangerous in the long term, hence, needs reconsideration if the space is to be properly appreciated and managed for urban development and crime control.

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