

Those looking for standard versions of nascent democratization, the weak or failing state, familiar models of state-society relations, or the liberating and liberalizing effects of civil society should look away! Imaginative, erudite, and thought-provoking, this is the sort of sustained engagement with the space between state and citizens that the study of Nigeria has been crying out for."

—DAVID PATTEN, Director, African Studies Centre, Oxford University

"How do those who inhabit the often conficted, turbulent, and chaotic worlds of postcolonial Africa apprehend those, inside and outside of the state, who exercise power to the point of excess or violence? Why has the Nigerian state in particular, occupying such a crucial space in the lives of all Nigerians, seemingly lost its restorative and redemptive powers for the Nigerian masses and middle classes? In their magisterial collection of essays, Adebanwi and Obadare offer some provocative, exciting and often counter-intuitive answers to these and other questions. Here is a book to savor, one which takes the notion of Nigerian lifeworlds very seriously whether in the slumworld of Ibadare or on city streets with student protestors. At a moment (once again) when the future of Nigeria seems in question, here is a pathbreaking and foundational collection of essays by a posse of first rate intellectuals and scholars who have much to say about what that future might hold. A tour de force."

—MICHAEL WATTS, Class of '63 Professor, University of California, Berkeley

"Countless books, edited volumes, and articles have been written on the presumed pathology of the postcolonial African state, but few of these works carry the explanatory analytical force that illuminates the constitution and endurance of this phenomenon in specific African contexts. In this excellent volume, Adebanwi and Obadare, two outstanding young Africanists—and their colleagues—have provided innovative theoretical exploration and engaging case studies into one of modernity's most enigmatic constructs—the postcolony. With superior conceptualization and theorizing that privileges the imaginative agency of Africa's strong structures of society, the volume's rigorous introduction and comprehensive chapters ask probing questions about the problematic of Africa's postcolony—specifically in the Nigerian context. With deftness and alacrity, this excellent volume provides impressive comparative social science analysis, rigorous theoretical perspective, and engaging illustrative cases."

—OUREKA VAUGHAN, Geoffrey Canada Professor of Africana Studies and History, Bowdoin College

This volume reflects on the state constituted as the U-Power in society, particularly in Nigeria. It analyzes how various agents within the Nigerian society "encounter" the state—ranging from the most routine form of contact to the spectacular. While many recent collections have reheated the old paradigms—on the perils of federalism, corruption, and ethnicity, Adebanwi and Obadare focus on the nuance and complexity of how the state shapes society and vice versa. Through this, the authors depart from the standard state-versus-society approach that proves so limiting in explaining the African political landscape.

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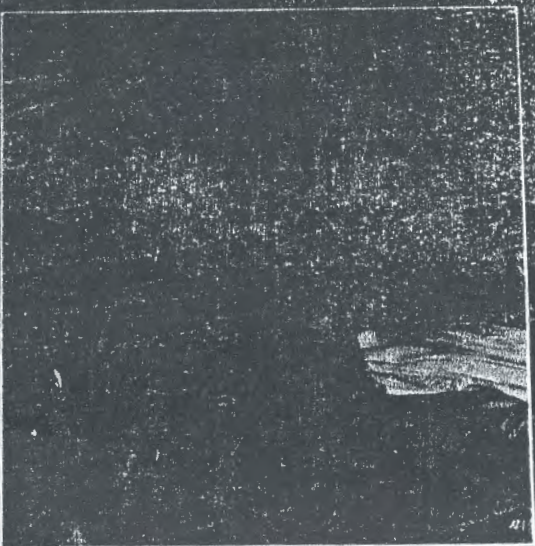
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AFRICA CONNECTS



# ENCOUNTERING THE NIGERIAN STATE

EDITED BY

WALE ADEBANWI AND  
EBENEZER OBADARE



AFRICA CONNECTS

Garth Myers (University of Kansas) and Martin J. Murray (University of Michigan), *Series Editors*

This scholarly series stands at the intersection of globalization and development studies, examining the social, political, and economic effects of these processes on the African continent. For advocates and critics alike, globalization and development are inescapable "facts of life" that define the parameters of social action not just in Africa but throughout the world. Yet while academic debates and policy discussions career between praise and criticism, too little attention is given to how these processes actually operate in African settings. Rather than simply reacting to the mainstream scholarly literature, books in this series seek to creatively engage with contemporary debates as a way of developing new perspectives that establish and analyze the linkages between globalization and development.

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## Encountering the Nigerian State

*Edited by*

*Wale Adebawo and Ebenezer Obadare*

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## Acknowledgments

This book was originally conceived as a festschrift for Professor Adigun Agbaje, then the Dean of Social Sciences, and now the Deputy Vice Chancellor (academic) of Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan, when he clocked 50 in 2006. Agbaje, one of Nigeria's most engaging scholars and social scientists, has been our mentor and has largely influenced our academic lives. He has played the same role to many members of our generation and remains influential among members of his own generation of Nigerian social scientists.

As is normally the case with this sort of endeavor, many of the contributors did not meet the initial deadline. The editors themselves suffered all sorts of distractions along the way, not least the battle to conclude our doctoral programs at the University of Cambridge and the London School of Economics, respectively. But we soldiered on. First, we had thought that we might end up with a festschrift much later in the year than the month of the target birthday. When we missed the year, we decided to explore other target dates. When that failed, we decided to put the project in the cooler for a while. It was revived in 2008 after we both relocated to the United States. Because we had a thematic focus, it was easy to resurrect the project even though it was already too late for the festschrift. However, in the intervening period, some of our original contributors had sought and found alternative outlets for their contributions. A few others could not meet the new deadline, while some chapters had to be dropped because of their incongruity with the volume's problematic.

It is against this specific background that we wish to thank the contributors to the volume who kept the faith for four years and endured the drudgery of the revisions. We thank our senior colleagues, Professors Rotimi Suberu, Olawale Albert and Ayo Olukotun, and our other colleagues, Drs. Bukola Akintola, Wale Ismail, Azeez Olaniyan, Remi Aiyede, Omobolaji Olarinmoye, and Sheriff Folarin and Mohammed Isa. Dr. Sarah Lincoln was invited to contribute to the volume only in 2009. We thank her for obliging us.

## The Spatial Economy of Abjection: The Evacuation of Maroko Slum in Nigeria

Sheriff Folarin

### Introduction

For several days after it had happened, “all the cover pages of newspapers bore searing images of pain and despair reflected on the faces of residents struggling to come to terms with (the) reality” (*ThisDay*, July 29, 2006: 11). That *reality* was the leveling by government bulldozers of an entire community, home to over 300, 000. Maroko, in Lagos state, was part of those areas that Harvey (2000: 152) would describe as a “sea of spreading decay” spatially located by the side of “a patchwork quilt of islands of relative affluence” that struggle to secure themselves against the urban squalor, misery, and poverty that dominate the spatial margin of the city.

It can be argued that government policies in relation to ownership of landed property, acquisition of estates and tenancy, have exacerbated the problems of poverty and spatial abjection in Nigeria. This chapter *reconsiders* the spatial economy of abjection in Nigeria with a specific focus on the evacuation of people, usually the poor and powerless, from shanties, slums, and other gloomy sites in the major conurbations around the country. This chapter uses the case of evictions from the Maroko slum in Lagos as a typical example of the disempowerment that is invested, reflected, and institutionalized in slums particularly in terms of their spatial, social, economic, and political relations with the state and persons, groups, and institutions that control or have access to the state and its resources.

Whether considered from the “traditional” urban political economy paradigm or from the paradigm of postmodern urbanism—which places

emphasis on the spatial dynamics of urban landscapes stressing their contested nature, particularly in terms of who belongs where and with what entitlements or citizenship rights (Murray and Martin, 2004: 139)—the case of Maroko reveals interesting perspectives on the spatial encounters of disempowered social *forces* with the typical postcolonial state.

Indeed, the economy of abjection in Nigeria is an expanding one, with government policies at the three levels concerning the ownership of landed property, the acquisition of estates and tenancy exacerbating poverty and abjection. This chapter sets out to examine how abjection pervades the nation as a result of the evacuation of communities, with particular reference to the Maroko slum in Lagos state.

### The State, "Sedentarization," and Widening Gaps between Opulence and Squalor

Is the postcolonial or developing state an accomplice of the wealthy in mortgaging the well-being of the poor? Could that be the reason why the state parades "good conscience" by instituting the policy of resettlement as a smokescreen to provide free passage for the privileged to acquire strategic estates and lands? Or does the state initiate grand policies of creating a sedentary livelihood for the people at a very high price, thus risking the trust of the masses? Marxist scholarship that celebrates the perspective that the wealthy class controls the instrumentalities of the capitalist state would more probably submit that because the rich class controls the state, there may never be a state policy with the ultimate goal or sole purpose to bail out or benefit the masses. Lenin (1939) had even regarded the state as a "product of the irreconcilability of class antagonisms" with the privileged class gaining final control. However, pondering the social and economic policies even in socialist states that have not fared better in repositioning the poor compels the perspective that there is a peculiar problem with the grandiose policies of the state (capitalist, socialist, or welfarist)—from conception, articulation to implementation.

The paradox in the welfarist intentions of the developing state explains its pitiable parody and the characterization of its so-called people-centered policies as either fantastic or viciously orchestrated to further enoble the wealthy (Ake, 1983), which has stimulated studies on governments' inadequacies in land, estate, and tenancy related policies. James Scott (1998) exhumes in a theoretical postmortem the remains of the *Ujaama*; Nyerere's peculiar socialist principle—which attempted a villagization of the Tanzanian society, and x-rays the impact of this and other related policies on the society—which according to Nyerere must be village-centered.

Scott interrogates governments' "perennial efforts" to settle or resettle mobile and homeless people, which he categorizes as sedentarization. Reflecting on the premodern state without standard measures or roadmaps for development programs that ended up in self-defeatist and crude interventions in masses' affairs, Scott wonders at the manner of the departure from the premodern to the postmodern times with all the standardization that should allow for simplification and legibility, ending up in "fiascos" because of the rigid and complex approaches to development programs (2–3). Hence, the more modernized statecraft became—just as the more state simplifications unfold—the more the tragic outcomes of developmental state projects. Scott (3–4) ascribes this paradox to the fact that the state simplifications "did not successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depicted, nor were they intended to; they represented only that slice of it that interested the official observer." It is these factors that are inherent in some lousy "white elephant projects" in the old "Third World," which have constituted examples of huge agricultural schemes and new cities that have failed their residents. These include the Great Leap Forward in China, Collectivization in Russia, and the compulsory Villagization in Tanzania already mentioned.

However, apart from these transformative state simplifications, three other factors central to the defeat of good state intentions to better the lot of their people include the following: high modernist ideology—an expression by the state of overconfidence in what science and technology can do leading to an uncritical, unskeptical, and an unscientifically optimistic belief about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement; authoritarian state—which uses its coercive power to bring these high modernist constructs into being with the faith and conviction that what is being done is in the best interest of the people; and a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans. Scott sums up that

the legibility of a society provides the capacity for large-scale social engineering, high modernist ideology provides the desire, the authoritarian state provides the determination to act on that desire, and an incapacitated civil society provides the levelled social terrain on which to build. (5)

The forced villagization in Tanzania under Nwailimu Julius Nyerere explains how "schematic, authoritarian solutions to production and social order inevitably fail when they exclude the fund of valuable knowledge embodied in local practices" (223–261). The project, the *Ujaama* Village Campaign from 1973 to 1976, was borne out of great motives, and being the pet African-socialist agenda of Nyerere, was a massive attempt to permanently settle most of the country's population in villages, of which the layouts, housing designs, and local economies were planned, partly

or wholly, by officials of the central government. It remains the largest forced resettlement scheme in African history with about 5 million relocated. The project was welfarist, but it was capital-intensive and overbearing on the economy of a weak state, which partly explains its failure. The other factors included its *forced* approach in which farmers had to take orders from the state on what to plant, how, and when to cultivate the lands with the state also assuming the position of arbitrary and cruel landlord.

### State Excess and Sedentarization Exercises: Nigeria's Experiments

A common thread running through all resettlement schemes in the post-colonial state is the use of state excess in evicting tenants, debasement in the process, and abandonment of the relocation schemes leading to more abjection. However, a distinguishing factor between Nigeria's sedentarization experiments and those of other developing nations is that it has always been difficult to place the backdrops or inclination of the former: welfarist or punitive; ideological or political-economic; sedentarization or deprivation. The 2007–2009 demolitions and reconstructions in the blighted cities of Oshodi, Mushin, and Lekki in Lagos by the Raji Fashola administration may, however, be a rare exception as they appear to form part of a larger agenda to beautify and transform Lagos into another Dubai. These recent exercises come within the purview of what Scott has called sedentarization.

However, from 1990 to date, the federal government has demonstrated a keen interest in the reacquisition and sale of its old properties, including land and residential estates: settling the fact that the state and local governments have no claim to properties, taking them back by force, evicting "tenants," evacuating them without proper relocation, and rendering them homeless, destitute, and impoverished in the process.

The 2006 forceful evictions of all the tenants of the 1004 flats in Ikoyi, Lagos, by security operatives on the orders of the federal government expanded the space of abjection as over 2,000 residents, including children, were socially dislocated. They had nowhere to go, slept in the open with property scattered everywhere, while the government ignored the children and families in their makeshift homes outside the premises as it commenced the renovation of the edifice (Vanguard, 2006).

Forceful evictions, characteristic of the landlord-tenant relationship in Nigeria, began to occur in the early 1990s. On July 14, 1990, over 300,000 members of the Maroko community in Lagos (Victoria) Island were forcibly evicted by the military administration of Raji Rasaki. They had been given only seven days' verbal notice to evacuate the place. The

troops that carried out the evictions bulldozed houses, looted, raped, and killed residents in the process and 16 years after the event, two-thirds of the Maroko community evictees are still awaiting redress (COHRE, 2006: 3).

In January 2002, about 1.2 million people were forcibly evicted from their homes in Rainbow Town, Port Harcourt. The evictees, who had not received an eviction notice, were stunned on January 21 as security agents invaded the town, demolished houses, beat and flogged the residents and damaged their property, without any form of compensation from the government. In 2004 alone, more than 30,000 households and over 150,000 people were evicted by force in the country (*ibid.*).

In the same year, the government planned to evict thousands of families living on railway land, a seemingly inevitable consequence of the proposed privatization of the Nigeria Railway Corporation (NRC) and the Railway Property Companies Limited (RPCL). The reason given by the government then was that illegal tenancy deals had been entered into (Daily Champion, 2004).

That there was a capitalist motive involved becomes evident in the report by the Nigerian Bureau of Enterprises ([www.bpend.org](http://www.bpend.org)):

It is expected that RPCL has immense potential of generating revenue from land, which could even generate as much revenue as NRC... The quality, value and location of land and buildings under RPCL control makes it a worthy investment to any investor... RPCL has a vast land mass spread across the Federation and most of the land and buildings are strategically located for any kind of business the would-be owner needs it for.

This line of thinking, which has as its compelling undertone the deployment of market forces in a floating capitalist economy, predetermines the recourse to the deliberate but recrudescing government policy of mass evictions from 1990 to date. In addition to Maroko, Rainbow Town, and 1004, other evictions included Maitama village in 1990 (in which those 3,000 persons were evicted), Banogoi in 1994, Ijora—Badiya and Ijora—Oloye in 1996 (2,000 people), Ilubirin in 1996 (220,000 persons), Kado village in 2000 (2,000 persons), Ijora—Badiya again in 2003 (5,000 people), Wari in 2003 (6,000 people), Ifiyang Usuk and Mbiakong in Akwa Ibom state in 2003 (200 households), and several other minor cases (COHRE, 2006: 4). In April 2005, there was the Makoko eviction in which 3,000 residents were involved. Those forced out included remnants of the 1990 Maroko evictees who found solace in other growing shanties and were allowed by their hosts to live in makeshift shelters in the surrounding area.

This chapter focuses on the Maroko evictions: an account of the incident, the motives for the evacuation, the manner of the evacuation,

the plight of the victims, and the consequences. The analysis identifies the increasing space of the economy of poverty caused by this excess of evacuations.

## Conceptual and Theoretical Constructs

### *Spatial Abjection*

According to Michel Foucault, the twentieth century began the “epoch of space,” an epoch in which scholars—and even social activists and movements—came to see location, “juxtaposition,” and (spatial) network of relationships as key to understanding social dynamics and social phenomenon (Martin and Miller, 2000: 143). In the context of this, scholars across the social sciences and humanities have been contending with the role and meaning of space and spatial processes for human action, particularly in terms of how spatial dynamics and relations shape identity, grievances, economic, and social opportunities and resources (ibid.). As Massey (1984: 4) contends,

Spatial distribution and geographical distribution may be the result of social processes, but they also affect how those processes work. “The spatial” is not just the outcome; it is also part of the explanation... (It is therefore crucial) for those in the social sciences to take on board the fact that the processes that they study are constructed, reproduced and changed in a way that necessarily involves distance, movement and spatial differentiation.

Human beings exist as much in time as in space. Indeed, it has come to be accepted in the literature that there cannot be a separation between “the spatial” and “the social,” both in theory and in practice. Space is a social phenomenon and social life involves social relations. As Martin and Miller (2000: 144–145) competently put it,

space constitutes and structures relationships and networks...; situates social and cultural life including repertoires of contention; is integral to the attribution of threats and opportunities; is implicit in many types of category formation; and is central to scale-jumping strategies that aim to alter discrepancies in power among political contestants. In short social relations are spatial as well as historical, and altering the spatial or historical constitution of social processes will likely alter how they play out.

Lefebvre (1991) has argued that even though space has ontological reality, it is *produced* through social relations and structures. Therefore, it can be observed that contemporary economic arrangements with its “ever-greater locational flexibility,” but also, paradoxically, locational

rigidity, point to the importance of space as power (political, economic, or social) move people and things from or into different spaces, expel, evict, or evacuate people from spaces, acquire or repeal rights over lands and spaces.

Lefebvre’s perspective is very illuminating in our understanding of the spatial economy of abjection. He argues that there are three types of socially produced space. These are *perceived*, *conceived*, and *lived* spaces. The first involves “the material spaces of daily life where social production and reproduction occurs.” As Martin and Miller develops this form of space, it is a “tangible form of space that provides a degree of continuity and cohesion to each social formation. It is also shot through with power relations” (147). For Lefebvre *prohibition* is the operative logic in this space, given that, for example, “the effectiveness of private property as a basis for allocating and controlling resources ultimately rests upon the ability to exclude others from the occupation and use of property they do not own” (ibid.). *Conceived space*, or representations of space, refers to the constructed discourses, signs, and meanings of space and is “tied to the relations of production (and reproduction) and to the ‘order’ which those relationships impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs and to codes” (Lefebvre, 1991: 33). This is the space *governed* by urban planners, technocratic subdividers, social engineers, and even political decision makers who *use* the experts. *Lived space* is a combination of the other two spaces. According to Lefebvre, this is

space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of “inhabitants” and “users”... This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced—space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate. It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. (39)

The term abjection literally means the state of being cast down. According to Robert Barnhart (1996: 4), abjection refers to abasement. Put differently, it is “to bring down,” to lower rank, condition, or character, or more succinctly put, to degrade. In contemporary critical theory, it is often used to describe the state of often marginalized groups, such as women or homosexuals. The term originated in the work of Julia Kristeva (1980; 2005) to describe the state of being rejected, cast out, or brought down, which inevitably results in a low, downcast, or meanness of spirit.

The connection of abjection to spatial economy is the habitation of the former in the compelling outcome of the latter. A growing number of the abjected naturally increases an empty economic space of poverty that the abjected or socially and economically debased essentially occupy. In other words, the spatial economy of abjection refers to a vast, increasing but unprofitable space that abjected human beings occupy. Spatial connotes



more than ordinary space; it denotes a large habitation with no expected economic rewards or leverage vis-à-vis the privileged other. A spatial economy of abjection finds multitudes, including the downtrodden, social outcasts, economically deprived, unprivileged, weather-beaten, tattered, and battered; competing for space and scarce resources.

It is, however, pertinent to note that the spatial economy of abjection is not physical like Maroko town itself, but structural in the social and economic sense. The abjected are found everywhere—in, shanty towns, villages, suburbs, and others; but they are frequently the destitute on the streets, hawkers on highways, garage routs, living in abandoned buildings and under the bridges and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed.

The link between excess-abjection and spatial economy works out in the following way: an excess is already at work in the emergence of the subject, arising from one's embodied relations to the other and to the everyday world that resists symbolization and remains enigmatic, that is, beyond the disavowals in egocentric theories of the subject (Laplanche, 1999). In their separate studies, Santner (2001) and Lyotard (1990) also examine the phenomenon of excess and abjection. Lyotard in his reflections on "the Jews" posits that the trauma of racism—the violence of such forms of exclusion and abjection—introduces another excess that cannot be translated, for the monolingual discourse of "identity" has no place for the excluded, except as remainders, or as supplements; the other is thrown into forgetting the disavowal. The social levels of disavowal produce a double mutism encrypting a double excess. Equally, the domain of the invisible and thus of what one must approach in working through and anamnesis is also doubled.

For the abjected and minoritarian other, the identity mirrored in the gaze misses or misrecognizes its fantasized ideal and must recognize its lack-of-being at both levels of the psychic and the social. There are compulsory stratagems, of course, that take different forms, including disavowals, depending on circumstances of class, status, gender, and so on.

The inevitable results of the spatial struggle in an economy of abjection is the further engraving of disempowerment and divides that erode the possibility of a united front to engender change in status, prevail on policy, or compel favorable outcomes. Such deep-seated divides and disarray are perpetuated by the hegemonic class through systematic policies of divide and rule and the ultimate preponderance of the power and privileges of the hegemon. Adebawo, in a study on ethnospatial politics in colonial Lagos (2003), acknowledges the spatial struggle for hegemony between two or more classes, with each using any means or resources at its disposal to establish its primacy in Lagos politics, including the text (media), and political and economic institutions. In postcolonial Nigeria, there is a perennial connection, or a conspiracy, between the military

class, the political class, and the bourgeoisie, with the military elite using the monopoly of the instrument of state coercion, to complete the age-long goal to disempower the poor, evict them from lands and territories considered to be the exclusive reserve of the economically privileged class for the appropriation of surplus value, and thus paving the way for the unrivalled and easy establishment of economic and political hegemony in Lagos and indeed elsewhere in Nigeria.

In law, eviction is an action that deprives a tenant of the use of leased premises, such as an apartment or an office. An eviction occurs if the tenant or landlord violates the lease. Eviction, thus, as Krier James (1999: 425) sees it, takes place when there is a breakdown of agreement between two contracting parties. The two must have had a legal contract to back the arrangement. What this means, therefore, is that eviction can take place only for concrete reasons and be carried out under the auspices of the law with appropriate legal steps taken before, during, and after the act of eviction. During eviction, the use of civil and not military forces is tenable and should be for the purpose of supervising.

To reflect on James (1999: 426) once again, eviction can affect not only the tenant, but the landlord too. The landlord can forfeit his property if he violates the lease. Hence, in a situation in which the government fails to fulfil its duties as a landlord, through poor maintenance of the building or estate, for instance, then, by law, control of the property can be taken away.

The government does not always have to be the one spelling out the terms and wielding the big stick like it has done in Maroko and other places. Moreover, if the government wants to "evacuate" a people from the land they inherited from their forbears for the sake of national development, it should do so with compensatory measures such as decent and affordable relocation. It has, however, been posited that the fundamental weaknesses in the law on land tenancy in Nigeria are responsible for the arbitrariness over land policy and issues (Meek, 1957; MacAuslan, 2003).

An appropriate theoretical framework for this paper is relative deprivation. It is an apposite tool to explain the emergence of the slum(s) on the one hand, and the spatial economy of abjection resulting from the military-oriented evacuation on the other. Relative deprivation connotes socioeconomic denials that ultimately culminate, particularly in the Third World, in abjection. According to Lea and Young (1984) who see relative deprivation from the group perspective, relative deprivation occurs when a group feels deprived in comparison to other-similar groups, or when its expectations are not met. Deprivation is in diverse manifestations, but Townsend (1970: 11) identifies two typologies, namely material deprivation and social deprivation. For him, material deprivation covers the deprivation of diet, clothing, housing, home facilities, environment, location,

prominently. Also, unsanitary conditions, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure are common phenomena (*ibid.*).

Slums are problematic for population and housing censuses and as a result, development becomes hampered. This is due to their nature, namely, informal and illegal settlements with, in most cases, improvised shelters and the impermanence of the residences. Hence, slums create a situation of undercounting and, by extension, inaccurate planning.

New slums in the twentieth and twenty-first century are rather more typically located on the edge and are a product of urban spatial explosions. Lagos is described by a UN writer (Otchet, 1999: 50) thus:

Much of the city is a mystery...unit highways run past canyons of smouldering garbage before giving way to dirt streets weaving through 200 slums, their sewers running with raw waste...no one even knows for sure the size of the population—officially it is 6 million, but most experts estimate it at 10 million—let alone the number of murders each year or the rate of HIV infection.

While this researcher makes the whole city appear to be a slum, it nevertheless underscores the exacerbation of urban explosion and attendant uncontrollability and poverty. Winter King (2003: 471) identifies the aspect of uncontrollability in his Harvard Law Review article when he claims that 85 percent of the urban residents of the developing world occupy property illegally because of the indeterminacy of land titles and lax state ownership—these are cracks through which a vast humanity has poured into the cities. In agreement, Davis (2004) asserts:

Indeed, national and local political machines usually acquiesce in informal settlement as long as they can control the political complexion of the slums and extract a regular flow of bribes or rents. Without formal land titles or home ownership, slum-dwellers are forced into quasi-feudal dependencies upon local officials and...by shots. Disloyalty can mean eviction or even the razing of an entire district. (10)

The phenomenon of slums in Nigeria, like elsewhere, is, therefore, politically produced and sometimes explicable by the political economy of poorly implemented neocolonial economic programs. Balogun (1995), for instance, believes that the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programme in Nigeria in the mid-1980s was the socioeconomic equivalent of a great natural disaster, “destroying forever” the old soul of Lagos, reenslaving Nigerians and opening a grave chapter of mass urban poor in slums scattered all over the cities. This slum crisis began when the urban poor pervaded everywhere, settling on hazardous and otherwise unbuildable terrains such as steep squats in the deadly shadows of refineries, chemical factories, toxic dumps, and more prominently in

the margins of railroads and highways. Poverty has thus constructed an urban disaster problem as typified by a munitions plant explosion in Lagos in 2000 whose fringes were “home” to many urban poor and in which hundreds of people perished in a canal. A slum, therefore, is more of a reflection and manifestation of poverty, than poverty being a reflection of the slum.

The Maroko incident in Lagos, from the foregoing analysis, was probably the result of three basic factors: political, economic, and social. Put differently, or rather more succinctly, these were politicization and political corruption; economic factors; social discrimination and irresponsibility; all part of the interplay in the government’s ruthless decision to pull down the slums in 1990.

### Maroko: Before the Demolition

In his study of Lagos, Otchet (1999), in explaining the fundamental underlying reason for the 1990 bulldozing of the Maroko beach slum in Lagos, alludes to the fact that the beach slum was considered an eyesore for the neighboring community of Victoria Island, a fortress for the rich. On the site of Maroko is now Lekki and the adjoining Garden City (VGC) where the super-rich buy land and construct beach-side edifices overlooking adjoining bourgeois estates, underscoring the probability that a conspiracy was reached between the military/political elite and the financially privileged class, those who Marx calls the actual owners and controllers of the state and its instruments of coercion by virtue of their firm hold on the modes of production, to mesmerize and displace the sizeable *hoi polloi* in Maroko.

Maroko itself is one of the 43 blighted areas identified in the Lagos metropolis by a World Bank project in 1981 (Chatterjee, 1983). Today, about 100 slums are present (Vanguard, 2006). The problem with Maroko was multifaceted. One was the overcrowding of urban low-income residents of Lagos, with unsanitary living and pollution that came to be of much concern to the Lagos authorities, both local and state. Maroko and the adjoining slum settlements are located within the Eti-Osa local government area of the state. Other settlements include Aja, Okota, Ilesan (in Eti-Osa), and Okokomaiko in Ojo (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997). Maroko fits the picture of Thelwell’s description (1980) as a place with mountains of trash stretching very far and an ubiquitous, jumbled, and pathless collection of structures. There were also cardboard boxes, plywood and rotting boards, rusting and glassless shells of abandoned vehicles scattered around: all these, including the heaps of rubbish, constituted a major nuisance and eyesore during the rainy season when the place is waterlogged and becomes a health hazard.

Closely related to the above was the fact that Maroko, with such unfortunate structural and sanitary conditions, was exposing the "rich" neighborhood of Victoria Island not only to medical danger, but also to vice. The area is considered to be a stretch of Victoria Island with little or no geographical delineations. The only factor of demarcation is structural, that is, the beauty of the well-arranged and well-built houses and the clean environment of V.I. as opposed to the sprawling quarters of Maroko. Yet, the expanding neighborhood of V.I. had no other place to stretch to than Maroko. The displacement of the "rag-tag" was thus only a matter of time.

Maroko was typical of most blighted areas. Despite its closeness to high brow Victoria Island and Ikoyi, Maroko had no good roads, drainage system, pipe-borne water, electricity, hospital, or communication system. The houses and buildings were drab, reeking with decomposing refuse. Unsafe water was rationed, human waste disposal inadequate, and the litter of human waste a common sight in the neighborhood (Vanguard, 2006: 2). The degree of environmental pollution from such a level of squalor culminated in epidemics of cholera, typhoid fever, and dysentery (3). The government justified the inevitability of these problems in Maroko by claiming that it was an illegal settlement unprovided for in the Lagos master plan. The reason specifically given for the demolition in 1990 was illegal occupation and little wonder that there was no compensation given immediately to the displaced persons (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997: 275). However, resettlements were provided but they were delayed, unaffordable, ill-equipped, and not available to all. This was 16 years after the demolitions.

## The Demolitions

Evictions and the demolition of settlements (slums or not) in Nigeria date back to the colonial period. Indeed, the first time Maroko was demolished was not in 1990. There had been two earlier cases, but Maroko kept growing back because demolition was not a solution to the problem. No wonder that after the third demolition in 1990, the government (military or civilian, federal or state) had to contend with another major evacuation in 2005.

Slum demolitions started in the 1920s when the Lagos Executive Development Board dismantled the Lagos slums as a result of the bubonic epidemic of the period. Again, in the 1950s, shortly before independence, the demolition of slums was carried out to give Lagos a "face-lift" that resulted in the infamous Isale-Eko clearance to provide a pleasant view of Lagos Island for the visiting Queen Elizabeth II. Between that time and 1995, 36 forced evictions had been carried out. In 1982, the Lagos

state government of Lateef Jakande evacuated Maroko to enable road construction. A year later, Maroko was again evacuated in October, with 60,000 residents evicted because the area was considered "a setback for the lagoon" by the state government. In both instances, there was neither compensation nor an offer of an alternative site (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997: 274).

The July 14, 1990 evacuation was, however, the most decisive and cruel. This episode marked the zenith of cumulative threats and dress rehearsals expressed in the minor clearances of the 1980s. What further distinguishes the 1990 evacuation from the earlier ones was that the 1990 eviction was at the instance of the military administration at the center with the Lagos state government under Colonel Raji Rasaki acting to protect the interest of the federal government. In actual fact, Lagos, the seat of power at the time, had dual control and it is important to maintain that such high brow areas as Victoria Island and Ikoyi the government had used as political bases in the past were regarded as federal government properties.

The government itself attempted to rationalize the forced eviction. Before Governor Rasaki ordered his troops of soldiers and town-planners to pull down the slum, a seven-day verbal notice had been given to the residents to quit in their own interest and that of the state. The government claimed that the residents were squatters on the land that the government had acquired in 1972, that the occupied land was 1.5 meters above sea level, making it vulnerable to flooding and eventual submergence and that the environment was generally filthy and susceptible to plagues and epidemics that could spread rapidly into other parts of the state (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997: 279). The evacuation was thus presented as engendered by social responsibility.

There was a political economy paradigm to the action, which was not as explicit as the government claims. As earlier mentioned and as corroborated by Agbola and Jinadu (279-280), Maroko's location was an important factor. Maroko was unbearably close to the highly priced lands and properties of Ikoyi and Victoria Island and was regarded as an eyesore by these high-income neighborhoods. Also, the fear of epidemics, and the high crime rate in Maroko, did not endear its residents to its wealthy neighbors. What was probably worse for the wealthy residents, who were also influential in the politics of Lagos and the government itself, was the reduction in property values in Ikoyi and V.I. due to Maroko's proximity. In addition, there was "land hunger" in Ikoyi and V.I. The only alternative available was Maroko, which must be evacuated and partitioned (Newswatch, 1990: 14).

Although the social responsibility and discrimination and political economy paradigms have been highlighted, it is important to look at the purely political variable. This paradigm also has security as a factor. It

explains the fact that the security report received by the military government of Ibrahim Babangida after the Gideon Orkar Coup of April 1990 indicted Maroko as the place where the coup had been plotted. Probably acting on this development and capitalizing on a 16-day rainfall that flooded the town, on July 7, 1990, Governor Rasaki simply announced on state radio a seven-day notice to quit after which it would be levelled (Newswatch, 1990: 19). Although the illegality of occupancy has been repeatedly adduced by government for the 1990 demolitions, this may not be factual as revealed in a study by Agbola and Jinadu (1997: 280). Indeed, most of the occupants were not squatters but legal tenants. Some had been resettled in Maroko by the Lagos state Environmental Development Board between 1958 and 1964 and were paying rent annually to the Oniru Chieftaincy family, which owns Marokoland. Others were found to be investors who had purchased 40 by 80 foot (12 by 24 meters) or 50 by 100 foot (15 by 39 meters) plots of land from the Oniru and Elegusi Families on 99-year leaseholds. Though many of the owners had acquired their property prior to the government's land acquisition in 1972, their properties also fell within the private portion of Marokoland that was released to the Oniru family after a Supreme Court judgment in 1976 (cf. *ibid.*; 180). According to them, it was nonsense to attempt to justify the evictions by saying that Maroko was below sea level as Victoria Island was in exactly the same position and as such

it would seem that the evicted population were simply victims of the greed of the Nigerian ruling elite and of an inappropriate urban development policy. (280)

On July 14 (precisely seven days after the verbal notice was issued on radio by the military governor himself), a demolition team arrived to bulldoze the settlements, with no relocation or resettlement policy arranged. This only goes to show that the demolition was spontaneous, and probably politically motivated. Six days after the demolition and after much pressure on the government, a Resettlement Committee led by Lt. Col. Tunde Buraimo was set up, which demonstrated great social irresponsibility through its haphazard and discriminatory allocations. For instance, only residents with evidence of property ownership before 1972 were considered and hence, out of about 41,776 landlords affected in the dislocation, only 2,933 were considered for resettlement, with 1,766 relocated at the government housing estates at Ihasan, 917 in the Ikota estate, and 250 at the Epe estate (Newswatch, 1990: 14–20; Lagos Horizon, 1990).

It is important to note that these relocations were carried out only in principle, because in actual fact, most of the housing estates and units were not habitable. At Ikota for instance, of the 2,000 one-bedroom flats

allocated, only 4 blocks were in a condition to be occupied. It was the same in Ihasan with only 1 habitable block of flats out of the 2,000 units. Like the slums from where they came, there was no water supply, electricity supply, sanitation, toilets, markets, hospitals, schools, postal service, or other facilities that meet the minimum standard for human habitation (Newswatch, 1990: 14–20).

In addition to these problems at the early stage, there were also economically motivated allocations. Individuals and groups paid through the "backdoor" to have two or more allocations. For instance, some who had not been landlords before the demolition succeeded in securing allocations. They had brought receipts of land ownership from the Oniru and Elegusi ruling houses with which allocations were obtained. Even those who were not victims of the eviction, the Lagos land and estate hunters, surfaced to acquire houses on production of illegally acquired receipts or evidence (Agbola, 1994).

The postdemolition resettlement was, therefore, a sham—the politically and economically induced action in Maroko was completed by acts of irresponsibility on the part of government and political corruption. The relocated persons were at the receiving end. Housing continued to be the major problem of the evictees, as did lack of access to food and clothing, health, education, and employment. As for overcrowding, it became worse with an average of 14 persons per household. In Ikota and Ihasan in particular, two or four households shared a three- or two-bedroom apartment. It is more graphically illustrated by Agbola (1994)—with cases of 9 people in one room and 26 people in one flat. Despite these harsh conditions, coupled with a deteriorating environmental situation and lack of basic facilities, the rents were still prohibitive. Residents in Maroko who had hitherto been paying between 10 and 40 NGN (about US\$0.2) monthly began to pay between 70 and 120 NGN (about US\$0.7) per month in their posteviction settlements. It was more prohibitive in Ihasan where residents paid between 1,000 and 1,500 naira per flat monthly (Agbola and Jinadu, 1997: 282).

The educational facilities provided in the resettlements were as inadequate as they were appalling. There was only one nursery school in Ikota estate; primary education was available in Ikota village and Ihasan; a secondary school was located in Maroko-Sandfill, which meant students would have to travel long distances to and from school. It is instructive to note that the government-community Development Association that sponsored schools up to the late 1990s still had no permanent structures, only improvised classrooms (ACHPR, 1995).

All in all, the purpose of the relocation or evacuation, which ostensibly was due to economic planning for development, appears to have been defeated by the unchanged hardship of the life of the Maroko evictees; the exploitation in the hands of government and all the social service

providers of the private sector; and worse sanitary conditions than in the Maroko slum. The final analysis may, therefore, be that upgrading the living standard of the evictees was not the aim of the government; getting rid of the "pests" from land that could be exclusively enjoyed by the bourgeois class, and probably ridding the area of a hideout for capitalists, was the real intent.

### Other Evacuations Up till 2006

What explains forceful evictions to the point of brutalization and massacre is the lessons of the failed rehabilitation or resettlement exercises such as the Maroko experience of 1990. With the benefit of hindsight, residents of areas marked down for demolition become resistant and the government moves security agencies in to pull down residences or settlements. In some cases, demolitions have been effected on purely political or personal grounds. The demolition of the Kalakuta Republic of the late Afrobeat musician Fela Kuti in Lagos in 1978 by government soldiers was the culmination of interpersonal acrimony between him and the military ruler of the time. In the case of the "official" evacuation of Aja and central Lagos, where 390 structures were demolished in 1995, a lot of physical force was applied. The degeneration to using coercion, however, is a demonstration of the lack of confidence in the government's ability to be socially responsible for the people.

The government has provided reasons for the over 36 evacuations to date. They range from "road construction" (Idi Oro, Agege Motor Road, 1973), "urban development" (Metropolitan Kano, 1979), "urban renovation" (Central Lagos, 1976), "illegal occupation" (Oba Akran, Ikeja, 1976), "encroachment on school land" (Elekuro, Ibadan, 1976), "city clean up" (Ketu, Lagos, 1976), "channelization programme" (Shomolu, Bariga, 1981), "structure under NEPA high tension cables" (Badagary Expressway, Lagos, 1985), to "urban beautification" (Shomolu, Lagos, 1986) and "FCT Development" (Maitama Village, FCT, 1990) and so on (*Daily Times*, 1995).

In addition to the pains of eviction from a land considered part of one's heritage, and beyond the financial and economic implications for the evictees, there is also the psychological trauma that evictees face in the course of the eviction process. Incidences of murder, torture, rape, and battering by the soldiers and policemen were recorded in Maroko. The recent 2005/2006 evictions in 1004 flats at Ikoyi Lagos represented the susceptibility of the privileged class to abjection. But it also demonstrated the government's lack of concern about its policy of impoverishment arising from a lack of foresight and poor planning and as a result of the prevailing political interests.

The Makoko Lagos evictions in April 2005 are evidence of this perspective. Amnesty International (2005) published an account of a woman thus:

My baby boy is 4 days old. I delivered him here after my house had been demolished. Only my mother was here to help me, and the (baby) has not seen a doctor or nurse yet. My husband (ran) away after the bulldozers came in on Thursday. Now I spend the night in the classrooms in the school with many other families. I have no money.

The Makoko evictions took three days to complete. Three thousand residents were forcibly evicted from their houses after which bulldozers demolished houses, churches, clinics, and schools. However, like the Maroko incident, the evictions were neither predated nor followed by palliative measures. None of the evictees has been supplied with adequate alternative housing and many were deprived of schooling or the means of earning a living. Those evicted claimed that they were neither given prior notice nor consulted on the planned evictions. Some of them, including children, were beaten up by law enforcement officials and suffered injuries as a result of the disproportionate use of force, others had their houses and all their belongings destroyed by the government forces (HRI, 2001).

Interestingly, the Olusegun Obasanjo administration and Lagos state government of Bola Tinubu carried out the evictions to execute a court judgment from 2000 that granted ownership of the area to a private landowner. The government of Lagos state continues the military-like demolitions of urban settlements designated as slums because of its fears that these areas are increasing the reputation of Lagos as one of the most dangerous cities in the world (Otchet, 1999). The city is one of the fastest growing in the world. The UN estimates that it will reach 24 million inhabitants by 2010 and could possibly become the world's third largest city (The Guardian, London, 2005). Stretching over roughly 300 square kilometres, it is a city with many deprived communities, called "blighted areas," and the population of these places as at 2002 was estimated at 957,365 (LMPD, 2002).

Makoko, like Maroko, was a victim of the interplay of economic and political ambitions in Lagos. Land in Lagos is increasingly sought after by property developers. Makoko is next to a big bridge and thus has easy access to one of the main thoroughfares for transport around the city. Such land with a high value for government and private developers is a target for fortune hunters. Makoko was one of the 43 blighted areas of Lagos in the area of Yaba/Ebute Meta. The forced evictions were undertaken in the larger Makoko slum area, one of nine areas selected for upgrading under the Lagos Metropolitan Development Project (LMDP)

proposed for World Bank funding. On Wednesday April 27, 2005, bulldozers and armed police moved in without notice and demolished houses, displacing over 3,000 people in the process (HRI, 2006: 5). Many of the residents had been living in the slum for over a decade and had receipts of agreements of usage of the land from land-owning families. Such agreements entitled them to build temporary wooden structures. After the demolitions, however, materials like wood, planks, and iron sheets were burnt by the operatives, probably to prevent reconstruction. The residents instantly became destitute, many of them sleeping in the open and their property scattered in the homes of friends or relatives in neighboring communities, while some found provisional shelter in school buildings or stayed with family or friends (Amnesty International, 2005).

After two days of nonstop demolition, the Makoko community put up a protest organized by the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC). Representation was made to the Lagos state Commissioner for Physical Planning and Urban Development and the Project coordinator for the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project, who were impelled to visit Makoko. The commissioner denied ordering the demolitions or evictions, and expressed shock that this was carried out without the knowledge of his office. He, however, admitted that he had instructed that some specific buildings be pulled down in May 2005 in compliance with a court order regarding a land claim by one of the land-owning families (HRI, 2006: 6).

In a similar vein, the LMDP project coordinator of the state government also denied any knowledge that police and government bulldozers had been deployed and dismissed the commissioner's claim of having ordered the demolition of some houses only in compliance with a court injunction as a "careless statement by some government officials." She denied that Makoko was part of the LMDP project and confirmed that the state government was taking a critical look into the evictions (HRI, 2006: 6). One year after the demolitions, Makoko evictees are yet to be relocated and the state government has neither made known the findings nor taken action after its investigations.

## Conclusion

The Maroko experience, like many others in Nigeria, are examples of state excess in so-called populist programs or rehabilitation or sedentarization of the citizenry. The Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights has defined forced eviction as the permanent or temporary removal against their will of individuals, families, and communities from the homes or lands that they occupy, without the provision of, or access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection. Forced

evictions deprive people of their homes and constitute a gross violation of the rights to health, education, earning a living, privacy, and the right not to be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment (UNCESCR, 1997: 4). If evictions must be carried out, they should meet the criteria of consultation with the affected people, adequate and reasonable notice, provision of legal remedies and reasonable alternative settlements, among others (4).

Evictions in Nigeria have constructed greater "slums" in social living than the physical slums demolished. Compensation has not, in many cases, followed evictions and while many have lost what they struggled to acquire from the pittance of daily earnings, some resettled "fortunate" ones have to contend with harsher social realities. In both cases, evictees have had to face worse conditions with worse shelter, worse roads, no schools, no clinics, no running water, poor or no electricity supply, untidy surroundings, bad sewage systems, and few available pit-latrines in their ramshackle government resettlements. Out of the 300,000 evicted from Maroko, only 2,682 have been "fairly" resettled, without any form of compensation. They pay for all the "available facilities" in the new areas.

The problems created by evictions in Nigeria, like other parts of the Third World, have increased the attention of the United Nations and other international organizations in recent times. The UN now considers forced eviction as a gross violation of human rights. Sixteen years after the evacuation of Maroko, Ajegunle, Ajiran, Ajangbadi, Okokomaiko, Abule Egba, Igbo-Efon, Agege Motor Road, and Ipodo, many other slums are still in existence. This simply corroborates the fact that the "policy" of evacuations was selective and had political economy undertones. But the poor and their children have had to resort to petty trading, hawking water, renting out wheelbarrows as beds, hawking food, beverages, wristwatches, and puff-puff along the busy Lagos express roads, underage children washing pedestrians' feet in the muddy markets of rainy Lagos for a token, black market sales of petroleum products, and such other menial work. The evictions and abandonment of evictees to their own plight by the government thus expands the spatial economy of abjection in Lagos state and, indeed, Nigeria. The ultimate effect of this is the exposure of Lagos to housing, environmental, economic, and social dangers. Lagos keeps increasing in size as a result of the migration of fortune seekers into it, thus overcrowding the city and encouraging the upsurge of slums. Crime escalates as a result of evacuations without preventive measures or resettlement policies.

The outright demolition of slums is not developmental, but anti-developmental because it only increases the problem of housing and the associated challenges and creates new ones as evident in the Maroko and Makoko resettlements. A redevelopment of slums into habitable towns

is more reasonably economical. The residents might be temporarily relocated to a nearby neighborhood for rapid work to commence after which they will be resettled on their old land. The Lagos state government needs to update its master plan. The one it used in the Maroko and Makoko demolitions was not only antiquated, but was also inaccurate as it still designates some developed areas like Agidingbi, Ikotun, Egbe, Oworonsoki as slums (Vanguard, 2006: 3).

Finally, the state government, like other governments in Nigeria, can seek the assistance of the World Bank to carry out pilot upgrading schemes during which slums can be turned into habitable settlements through the construction of blocks of low cost flats (it may even be the typical Nigerian "face me, I face you" housing), provided with pipe-borne water, sewage and refuse disposal systems, electricity, and good roads. This is like redevelopment, but it involves more upgrading, which may not result in temporary relocation of residents.

However, while the political situation is unpredictable, a stable urban planning and development policy is required for a growing city like Lagos state and Nigeria generally. Such a policy should defy changes in government and, in actual fact, succeed them.

Finally, the Maroko case and the associated cases of evictions show case the mutual constitution of "the social" and "the spatial" as underlying Lefebvre's understanding of contention. Argues Lefebvre:

Sociopolitical contradictions are realized spatially. The contradictions of space thus make the contradictions of social relations operative. In other words, spatial contradictions "express" conflicts between sociopolitical interests and forces; it is only in space that such conflicts come effectively into place, and in doing so they become contradictions of space. (1991: 365)

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3

## "Rotten English": Excremental Politics and Literary Witnessing

Sarah L. Lincoln

This chapter explores the language and literature of abjection in Nigeria. In his 1985 novel *Sozaboy*, writer and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa experimented with a form of literary language that he thought could best articulate the experiences, sufferings, and desires of those populations constituted as excessive, useless, and disposable by the Nigerian state. This language, which he called "Rotten English," expresses linguistically and narratologically the ways in which the Nigerian state fails to adequately "represent" all its citizens. Claude Levi-Strauss (1961: 386) classified societies as "anthropophagic" or "anthropoemic," depending on whether they "consume" and assimilate, or remove, exclude, or "vomit" out their adversaries. In Saro-Wiwa's assessment, the Nigerian state features both tendencies, vampirically consuming the bodies and resources of its micro-minorities, by exploiting their oil resources and using ethnic conflict as an ideological "fix," only to excrete these remainders by abandoning them to a space where the law and the political are suspended. Critically indicting the disjuncture between the state's "big grammar" rhetoric of democracy, representation, and national unity, and its "rotten" or necropolitical exercise of power in the oil-producing regions, Saro-Wiwa argues that the fate of minority populations, like his own Ogoni, can be productively read as an exemplary case (the *example* as that which is *taken-out*) for understanding the nature and effects of sovereignty in his country.

Reading Saro-Wiwa's work, which bears witness to the abject conditions in which the Ogoni and other minorities suffer in the Nigerian state, it becomes clear that Nigerian sovereignty depends on the constitution and "inclusive exclusion" (Agamben, 1998: 8) of its minority populations,