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In the common sense, corruption is the misuse of public power for a private gain. It occurs when individuals or organizations, such as governments or business, abuse their position of authority to make illegal decisions or gain financial benefits for themselves. It can have many different forms involving bribery, extortion, cronyism, misappropriation, nepotism, fraud, embezzlement, favouritism and so on. In *They Eat Our Sweat: Transport Labor, Corruption, and Everyday Survival in Urban Nigeria*, Daniel E. Agbiboa goes beyond this simplistic understanding considering corruption as an “empty signifier” (Koechlin 2013), i.e. a signifier that has different meanings to different people and thus its signified remains variable and vague.

According to Agbiboa, corruption is “a multi-faceted phenomenon, located in ‘gray zones’ between the legal and the illegal, and shaped by the complex and shifting interactions between political, social, and economic actors and processes (formal and informal)” (206). The author sees corruption as embedded in everyday life and sociocultural relations. As such, it is deeply interwoven with language and idiom. *Chapter 2 – The Language of Corruption* presents what I think is one of the main contributions of the book: the linguistic anthropological perspective according to which “language, culture, and society are mutually constituted; language shapes and is shaped by sociocultural factors and power dynamics” (27). By grounding corruption in local discourses, Agbiboa examines the “language of corruption” (211) in order to understand how people talk about corruption and what are the categories and social discussion through which they construct meanings of it.

By understanding the linguistic complexity and the sociolinguistic environment made of several languages, idioms and discourses, the book offers a very good understanding of corruption in Africa, beyond macro-level and economic-based data. Focusing on the popular semiology of corruption, it represents a radical break from the normative analytical model that sees the world through corruption indexes and ranks.

One striking research result highlights that corruption, in Africa and beyond, is commonly scripted in metaphors of eating, food and bodily fluids. Also in English, a *rotten apple* defines a dishonest individual able to spoil a group of good ones. The expression from Romanesco dialect *magna magna* (literally “eat eat”), that has entered the Italian common language, is used to show disappointment with politicians when cases of corruption and personal interest in public affairs occur. In Nigerian phraseology, the verb *to chop* is used in many slang phrases: among them, *to chop money* means to accumulate wealth illegally. Agbiboa explains how Nigerian politicians see state funds as they were a national cake to be eaten rapidly until they are in power. Nigerian “cashivourous” (92) elites then use institutions to get their hands on wealth, leaving citizens in a precarious existence and blocked in the social standing where they are born: according to the World Bank’s estimates (Afikehena 2005: 15),

80% of Nigeria's revenue from oil and natural gas is in the hands of 1% of the country's population. Hence the title of the book is a sentence extracted from an interview: the sweat of the people (i.e. the work) is *being eaten, consumed and drunk* by a powerful elite, a metaphor for their exploitation, precarity and insecurity. Against this context, corruption becomes the norm: it is not a misbehaviour of some individuals, rather an endemic system in which everyone is implicated. Corrupt practices are constitutive elements of the everyday life.

This challenges the opposition between institutional, grand and petty forms of corruption, that Agbiboa sees as two poles of a continuum (together with Olivier de Sardan 1999): a complete study of corruption should not only focus on top-down corruption moving grand financial sums, but it should include also the everyday practices of corruption that occur at the societal level.

Following this view, Agbiboa uses corruption as an arena to analyse "the intersections between the formal and the informal, the urban and the political, and the spatialization and materialization of power, exclusion, and inequalities in cities" (206). Urban institutions are not only the background where corruption simply occurs but have long been an actual vehicle for corruption. Already in 1904, the journalist Lincoln Steffens published *The Shame of the Cities*, a collection of investigation articles on corrupt political practices developed in several major US cities. Today, 56% of the world's population live in urban areas and this number is expected to increase with the urban population doubling its current size by 2050: at that point, 7 out of 10 people in the world will live in cities (World Bank, 2022). This phenomenon is particularly relevant in Africa where about half of all Africans will be living in cities by 2030 (Agbiboa 2022: 95). Urban corruption and misgovernance is then a global-scale issue that requires global cooperation to address.

Agbiboa uses Lagos as a case study, the most populous city of the African continent. He offers an insightful study of the city's informal transport sector: citizens of Lagos rely on informal road transports, such as the motorbike-taxis (*okadas*) or the minibus-taxis (*danfos*), whose operators are victims of the violence and extortion of transport unions and officials working in complicity with the government.

The analytical part of the book draws on Agbiboa's extensive fieldwork in two areas of Lagos (Oshodi and Alimosho). Fieldwork was based on a critical mobile ethnographic approach including in-depth interviews with informal transport passengers, drivers and participants. He also spent two months working as an informal bus conductor coping with the traffic, collecting fares from passengers and negotiating bribes to make the bus continue its journey.

Through this approach, Agbiboa provides insight into the daily survival of Lagos' citizens and transport workers. Chapter 3 analyses the politics of informal transport in Lagos and other cities in Africa. The chapter demonstrates that informal transport services are a substantial part of the transport culture, a fundamental element for the urban functioning, despite being penalised by constant bribery, nepotism, extortion and violence by law enforcements officials. New plans to modernise public transport systems in Africa often ignore the importance of informal transport that has become a fundamental element for the functioning of African cities:

For now, though, African cities generally run on informal modes of transport – typically minibuses, but also motorbikes, tricycles, and shared taxis. These are ground-level responses to the growing demand for mobility in the face of absent of inadequate formal public transportation services. [...] Although paratransit services are commonly associated with chaos, criminality, and death, they nonetheless offer more than cheap transportation for multitudes of city dwellers in Africa. They also provide employment opportunities for many jobless youths from both urban and rural areas, which partly explains their influence on politics and popular culture. (98-99).

Chapter 4 turns to the mobile semiotic landscape (Jaworski and Thurlow 2011) proposing an interpretive analysis of the slogans on minibus-taxis. These slogans give a narrative structure into which the lived experience of the everyday practices of the mobile subjects are inserted. There are only few studies on the slogans on vehicles; this chapter represents an important contribution on the topic by advancing the understandings of the interrelations between texts and people in contemporary African cities. It also demonstrates that “the lexico-semantic meanings are fluid and never entirely under the owner’s control. Texts often generate surplus meanings that transcend, even subvert, the purported intentions of the author” (112). In this respect, Agbibo could have also drawn on Umberto Eco’s theory of textual interpretations. Eco (1990: 50) suggested that textual interpretation lays on an intermediate way between the authors’ intentions and the total arbitrariness of the readers’ interpretations. Eco (1990: 145) dubbed this intermediate way intention of the text or *intention operis*, that interacts with the *intention auctoris* and the *intention lectoris*, namely the author’s intention and, respectively, the reader’s intention. In light of these proposals, semiotic analysis has begun to include interpretations deviating from the intentions of authors. However, Eco explained that texts necessarily impose certain constraints on interpretation and make certain reading more desirable than others:

To say that interpretation (as the basic feature of semiosis) is potentially unlimited does not mean that interpretation has no object and that it “river runs” merely for its own sake. To say that a text has potentially no end does not mean that every act of interpretation can have a happy end. (Eco 1990: 143)

Accordingly, slogans on minibuses have very dynamic and flexible meanings which arise and develop in the context of informal public transport in African cities. The chapter interestingly demonstrates how the material and visual appearance of minibus-taxis conform to their slogan: unsteady taxis driven by older men have ironic messages such as “Slow but Steady”; young drivers have more optimistic slogans; drivers over thirty have more realistic messages; finally, drivers over forty often show off their success (112).

Chapter 5 explores the figure of *agberos*, gangs of largely male youths who operate in bus stops, parks and conjunctions extorting money from informal transport workers and passers-by under the auspices of Nigeria’s Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Agbibo analyses the transition of their aims and functions, from recruiting passengers for minibus-taxis to being pawns doing the “dirty work” for NURTW, often using intimidating and violent means. Since 1999, the Lagos State Government has taken several measures to get rid of *agberos*, but underpinned by a view of a “controversial neoliberal urban renewal project which responds to the logic of the market rather than the needs of the Lagos subalterns” (45). Thus these attempts were seldomly successful.

In the last chapter, Agbibo focuses on how groups of informal transport workers strive to claim their right to the city against Lagos State Government's neoliberal agendas aiming to restrict *okadas* as an attempt to turn Lagos into a modern world-class megacity. The chapter critically examines the 2012 Lagos State Road Traffic Law, which aimed to make the streets of Lagos safer at the expense of informal transport workers and especially *okada* drivers. The chapter first looks at the brutality with which law enforcement officers have enforced the Traffic Law. It then moves to explore how and why informal transport workers and their associations appeal to state laws as a weapon to fight against the city institutions and reclaim their right to the city (Lefebvre 1996 [1968]).

Agbibo demonstrates that corruption is not rooted in Nigerian culture but, rather, a set of everyday practices aimed to obtain economic survival and counter precarious livelihoods. This is his main argument. A convincing study of corruption should therefore consider these practices and how they interrelate with institutional forms of corruption.

The book addresses research communities on corruption and informal governance, as well as urban theorists interested in the politics and poetics of survival in urban Africa. Researchers interested in contemporary African cities will find several insights in Agbibo's insightful ethnography. Chapter 1 also presents a review on the literature on corruption as well as a comprehensive account on Nigerian history and culture, helping the reader that is not familiar with them. Scholars in anthropology and linguistics can find an entry point in the linguistic anthropology perspective that sees language, culture and society as mutually constituted. Research communities in semiotics can find interest in the Agbibo's exploration of the popular semiology of corruption in Lagos. However, I observe as wanting an adequate in-depth examination of some semiotic concepts that are central in Agbibo's study, such as the notions of *text* and *context*, *author intention* (see above), *interpretation*, *discourse* and *culture*. Despite analysing the "popular semiology of corruption" (78), the book does not convey a clear definition of what popular semiology is. Of course, the author did not aim at a contribution to semiotic theory and analysis. Future works could make a valuable contribution by bringing research from focusing on the semiology of corruption alone to defining a broader semiotics of corruption able to analyse the cultural meanings, the interpretations and the culture of corruption (as Ansell 2018 and Hodge, Andrade and Zarza 2019 already started).

Transport scholars and professionals can gain original insights from Agbibo's work, difficult to find elsewhere, on informal modes of transport, its politics and on the everyday practices of informal transport workers and passengers. Agbibo also offers an insight on the narratives and poetics of informal transport: occupying a central place in news, gossip, urban myths, visual culture, informal public transport is a sign of transport poverty but also the only practical opportunity for mobility for many citizens in Africa.

Finally, ethnographers can appreciate Agbibo's insightful research as useful to tackle issues related to informal transport in urban Africa and not only. Ethnographically, Agbibo draws on a combination of in-depth interviews, participant observations, archival sources and analysis of popular texts. Besides proposing a grounded-in-

context multi-method approach, very effective in achieving the research objectives, Agbiboa's book is a valuable opportunity to learn about the everyday life of informal transportation in Lagos through both the author's account and the actual words of the interviewed people. The author makes a gift to all the scholars in the world that, for a reason out of many possible, have no possibility to access the violent settings of Lagos' streets. While this is a gift offered by taking many dangerous risks during fieldwork, in Agbiboa's words,

[...] Does one abandon urgent research simply because a predatory trade union [i.e. NURTW] and a complicit state government do not want their extortion racket to be documented and exposed? (43)

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