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# Planning, Anti-planning and the Infrastructure Crisis Facing Metropolitan Lagos

Matthew Gandy

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**Summary.** Many of the ‘mega cities’ of the global South face an escalating crisis in the adequate provision of basic services such as water, housing and mass transit systems. Lagos—the largest city in sub-Saharan Africa—exemplifies many of these challenges but has tended to be viewed within a narrow analytical frame. In this essay, ‘exceptionalist’ perspectives on the African city are eschewed in favour of an analysis which frames the experience of Lagos within a wider geopolitical arena of economic instability, petro-capitalist development and regional internecine strife. An historical perspective is developed in order to reveal how structural factors operating through both the colonial and post-colonial periods have militated against any effective resolution to the city’s worsening infrastructure crisis. It is concluded that a workable conception of the public realm must form an integral element in any tentative steps towards more progressive approaches to urban policy-making in the post-Abacha era and the return to civilian rule.

## Introduction

Lagos is a difficult city to study or understand. Its spatial organisation has a kinetic quality that allows it to escape conventional methods of analysing cities (Uche Isichei, 2002, p. 14).

If you want to wash, na water you go use  
T’o ba fe se’be omi l’o ma’lo  
If you want cook soup, na water you go use  
T’o ri ba n’gbona o omi l’ero re  
If your head dey hot, na water go cool am  
T’omo ba n’dagba omi l’o ma’lo  
If your child dey grow, na water he go use  
T’omi ba p’omo e o omi na la ma’lo  
If water kill your child, na water you go use  
T’omi ba pomo re o omi na no

Ko s’ohun to’le se k’o ma lo’mi o  
Nothing without water  
(Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, 1975).

When the Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti recorded his song “Water no get enemy” in 1975, he could not have anticipated that living conditions would continue to worsen in coming decades to the point at which Lagos would garner the dubious accolade by the 1990s of being widely regarded as one of the worst cities in the world.<sup>1</sup> The deteriorating state of the city since the post-independence euphoria of the early 1960s, to reach its current position as a leitmotif for urban poverty and injustice, has occurred in the midst of a global transformation in patterns

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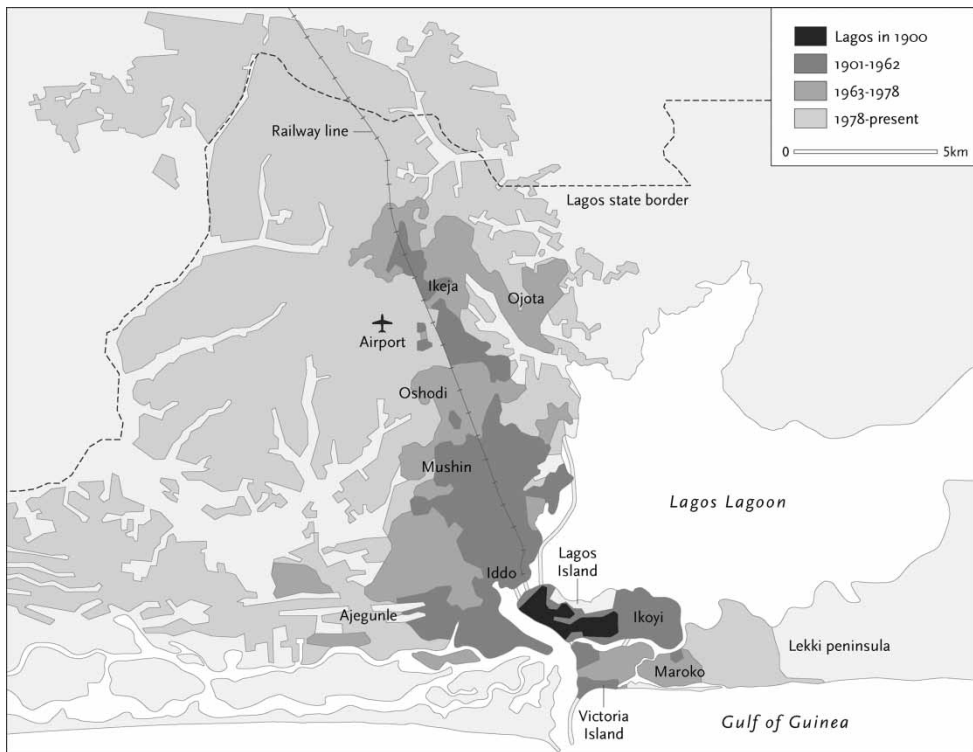
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of urbanisation. Lagos is now one of a number of rapidly growing cities in the global South which appear to challenge many previously held assumptions about the relationship between economic prosperity and demographic change: unlike the experience of 19th-century Europe and North America, for example, we observe a form of urban 'involution' marked by vast expansion in combination with economic decline (see Davis, 2004; UN Human Settlements Programme, 2003). The UN has recently predicted that, by the year 2015, the population of Lagos—currently estimated at over 10 million—will reach 17 million, making it one of the largest cities in the world (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2004). The sprawling city now extends far beyond its original lagoon setting to encompass a vast expanse of mostly low-rise developments including as many as 200 different slums ranging in size from clusters of shacks underneath highways to entire districts such as Ajegunle and Mushin (Figure 1). This urban behemoth has emerged in spite of all efforts to contain the growth of the city and has produced a loose federation of diverse localities whose interaction is perpetually hampered by immense 'go slows' which periodically threaten to bring the city to a virtual stand-still.

The recent history of Lagos has been marked by a stark deterioration in quality of life. Over the past 20 years, the city has lost much of its street lighting, its dilapidated road system has become extremely congested, there are no longer regular refuse collections, violent crime has become a determining feature of everyday life and many symbols of civic culture such as libraries and cinemas have largely disappeared. The city's sewerage network is practically non-existent and at least two-thirds of childhood disease is attributable to inadequate access to safe drinking water. In heavy rains, over half of the city's dwellings suffer from routine flooding and a third of households must contend with knee-deep water within their homes. Average incomes of under US\$1 a day are now lower in real terms than in the 1960s and export earnings

from manufactured goods have fallen dramatically since the deindustrialisation and economic instability of the 1980s. A combination of external debt, currency collapse and capital flight has contributed towards an investment crisis across virtually every sector of the Nigerian economy complicated by centrifugal tendencies that threaten to tear the country apart along lines of ethnic, religious and tribal difference.

Cities such as Lagos have become pivotal to recent debates over the need to transform modes of urban governance as a prerequisite for social cohesion and economic development (see, for example, Abiodun, 1997; Olukaju, 2003; Rakodi, 2002). Yet the word 'governance' has been used very loosely in an African context to encompass everything from an externally driven concern with the institutional context for economic liberalisation to a 'grassroots globalisation' agenda stemming from ethnographic explorations of civil society and community self-help organisations.<sup>2</sup> The narrowly communitarian, neo-liberal or technocratic conceptions of urban governance that predominate in 'developmentalist' literature fail to grasp the degree to which power is radically dispersed through a variety of different social institutions and networks. Much of the focus on 'good governance' by NGOs and development agencies based in the global North ignores the reasons why rent-seeking, clientelist and 'neo-patrimonial' states have emerged across much of sub-Saharan Africa (see Lockwood, 2005). Much academic discourse about Africa has taken on the normative role of 'social engineering' rather than the need to provide critical and politically aware insights into actually existing conditions (see Mbembe, 2001). The idea of governance, for example, as an expanded role for civil society cannot be disentangled from issues of legitimacy for traditional power structures persisting within the modern African city. Similarly, the innate weakness of the state in Africa—further eroded under structural adjustment programmes since the 1980s—has given added impetus to an emphasis on governance as a concept that can incorporate the efforts



**Figure 1.** The growth of modern Lagos. *Cartography:* M. Tyler. *Source:* Gandy (2005b).

and capacities of civil society to provide basic services in the wake of various forms of 'state failure' (see Hyden and Bratton, 1992; McCarney, 1996). In this paper, however, the discussion of governance is supplemented by the term 'governmentality', which as originally developed by Michel Foucault and subsequently elaborated by Mitchell Dean, Patrick Joyce and others, offers the possibility to combine an exploration of the historical emergence of specific ideologies and techniques of governmental activity with a recognition of the cultural and historical specificity of the 'governable subject'.<sup>3</sup> In Nigeria, for example, the introduction of so-called indirect rule under the administration of Frederick Lugard sought to co-opt traditional power structures into the British colonial project deploying regional variations across the newly created state to reflect different types of indigenous political organisation (see Mamdani, 1996). Any consideration of the exercise of power in contemporary Nigerian

society must contend with networks of subjugation that pre-date yet co-exist within the modern yet at the same time intersect with sources of disequilibria and violence that emanate within a wider political and economic arena. In his analysis of post-colonial Nigerian developments, for example, Michael Watts (2003) has deployed Dean's term 'authoritarian governmentality' to denote the particular conjunction of violence and rent-seeking activity undertaken by the Nigerian state in conjunction with corporate oil interests. In addition to studies of 'petro-capitalist development', the concept of governmentality is also well suited to an analysis of the infrastructure crisis facing Nigeria since the construction, planning and maintenance of the built environment require specific organisational and governmental capacities that fall outside the scope of civil society: the crucial co-ordinating role of the state is obscured in those accounts of urban politics that consistently emphasise

communitarian or local solutions to structural problems that are regional in their manifestation. Although the state in Nigeria is weak, it nonetheless exerts considerable influence through its 'parasitical' and rent-seeking activities at the behest of various political, economic and military élites. The emphasis on different forms of governmentality adopted in this paper does not ignore the agency, imagination or survival strategies adopted by Lagosians themselves, but seeks to highlight the practical limitations and analytical weaknesses of both academic and policy-oriented literatures that fail to grasp the paradoxical characteristics of the contemporary African city as a dysfunctional yet dynamic urban form.

In this article, we trace a succession of phases in the development of metropolitan Lagos in order to elucidate some of the factors which lie behind the city's predicament. We focus in particular on the growing crisis facing the city's physical infrastructure and the absence of adequate water and sanitation: access to water provides one of the most poignant indicators of social inequality and also illustrates the scale of the challenge facing different governmental strategies to improve urban conditions. Although the city may appear to present an ostensibly unfamiliar set of urban developments—principally from the overwhelming scale of poverty and environmental degradation—the argument presented here resists any reliance on 'exceptionalist' interpretations of urban change in sub-Saharan Africa and seeks to connect the experience of Lagos with wider developments operating both within the regional and global arena (see, for example, Riddell, 1997; Simon, 1995, 1997). Recent developments in African research have enabled themes such as power, identity and rationality to be explored in new ways; and an engagement with the complex realities of everyday life has facilitated a broader conception of social and cultural practice in the contemporary African city (see, for example, Abrahamsen, 2003; Ahluwalia, 2001; Enwezor *et al.*, 2002; Simone, 1998, 2004). The cities of the global South have begun to assume a far

more prominent role within urban theory to the extent that these cities do not represent an anomalous category but rather a fundamental dimension to the global experience of urbanisation (see, for example, Gandy, 2005a; Robinson, 2002). A focus on a city such as Lagos has the potential to illuminate not just a peculiarly African experience, but also raise wider questions about the nature of modernity, urban governance and the interactions between global capital flows and the material conditions of actually existing cities in the global South.

In the first part of the article, we consider some of the antecedents to the current infrastructure crisis facing Lagos within the context of the bifurcated systems of urban administration inherited from the colonial era. It is suggested that urban planning in Lagos was from the outset characterised by an 'incomplete modernity' which was repeatedly justified through the use of cultural distinctions between modernity and tradition. We then explore how an already unstable urban system deteriorated further in the post-independence era under the combined pressures of political instability, accelerated rates of migration and the destabilising effects of oil wealth. The earlier colonial patterns of social and political inequality became incorporated into new forms of 'authoritarian governmentality' and the collapse of civilian rule. In the next section, we pick up the story from the 1980s onwards when the city continued to expand within a context of pervasive political and economic crisis. The spread of rent-seeking activities on the part of the state, driven by a succession of nefarious military regimes, had led by the late 1990s to an almost complete break-down in the public realm and an extensive collapse in the provision of basic services. In the post-Abacha era, however, we can detect signs of new social and political developments that may yet have an impact on the capacity and legitimacy of urban government. But as the final section shows, the scale of this task remains immense in relation to the fragility of any putative public realm in the context of immense social inequalities, ethnic tensions

and on-going political instability affecting the capacity of the state to intervene on behalf of the city as a whole.

### 1. Colonial Lagos and the Interstices of Modernity

From its early development as one of the leading centres for trade and commerce in West Africa, Lagos was imprinted with a persistent and striking disjuncture in living standards between European élites and the African majority. Successive colonial administrations from the middle decades of the 19th century onwards failed to tackle the problems of overcrowding, disease and inadequate urban infrastructure. The so-called Manchester doctrine of minimal financial support for overseas colonies ensured that Lagos would be perceived as “little more than an entrepôt of trade” (Aderibigbe, 1959, p. 8). The British colonial administrators sought to transform the port into the ‘Liverpool of West Africa’ yet attempts to improve urban conditions were hampered by lack of financial support from the British Treasury, regional political instability and wider economic perturbations affecting the price of commodities such as cotton and palm oil. Lagos became renowned as one of the most insalubrious cities in West Africa on account of its swampy setting and virtually non-existent sewer system (Brown, 1992; Echeruo, 1977; Gale, 1979). Earlier efforts to tackle malaria, foster public health education and improve the sanitary conditions of poorer districts were gradually abandoned in favour of new strategies of segregation between wealthy enclaves and the supposedly indifferent general population (Home, 1983; Olukoju, 1993; Peil, 1991). The ‘hygienist’ discourse which developed in tandem with new scientific approaches to public health policy in the cities of Europe and North America was refashioned in a colonial context to produce a cultural dualism between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ so that investment in urban infrastructure was disproportionately concentrated in wealthy enclaves. In order to manage the growing

city, colonial administrators incorporated the existing power structures of chieftaincy into the apparatus of government to produce a highly iniquitous and unstable legacy of authoritarian and undemocratic control over the African majority (see Mamdani, 1996). This ‘incomplete modernity’ was to have catastrophic consequences for Lagos as the partial completion of water supply systems in the absence of any systematic modernisation of sewerage and drainage infrastructure led to a series of devastating public health crises culminating in the bubonic plague outbreaks of the 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

The public health negligence that was associated with the incomplete modernisation of colonial cities such as Lagos was to play a significant role in fostering growing hostility towards British rule and the inequities of colonial municipal administration. In 1908 and 1911, for example, there was political agitation against attempts to impose a water rate for which the benefits would not be fairly distributed. The politics of water, sanitation and urban planning also proved a significant spur to the formation of the Nigerian National Democratic Party in 1923. After the first of a series of outbreaks of bubonic plague in 1924, a comprehensive plan for the modernisation of the Lagos sewers was prepared by the colonial authorities but after the economic downturn of the 1930s the scheme was “indefinitely postponed”.<sup>5</sup> A further post-plague initiative was the creation of the Lagos Executive Development Board in 1928, but the remit of this body was geared towards extensive slum clearance. The demolition rather than improvement of African parts of the city provoked increasing anger and hostility and underlined the degree to which planning activities ignored African opinion.<sup>6</sup> By the 1950s, local newspapers were describing sanitation conditions in impoverished districts as “poor and disgraceful” and the Nigerian National Democratic Party was making increasingly vociferous attacks on the mendacity and incompetence of colonial administrators. At a mass meeting held by the NNDC in July 1954, for example, a public statement was produced which highlighted “the surreptitious attempt to



evict the indigenous population of Lagos from their ancestral heritage to insalubrious surroundings” and called for the “immediate liquidation” of the unelected Lagos Executive Development Board.<sup>7</sup> The political agitation began to extend beyond inadequate housing and sanitation to include virtually every aspect of colonial administration.

The creation of the Lagos Executive Development Board had also introduced a powerful rival structure to the Lagos Town Council so that strategic policy-making was consistently marked by a lack of co-ordination between conflicting and overlapping spheres of jurisdiction. Problems of co-ordination in urban policy-making were exacerbated by the creation of a further raft of autonomous agencies such as the Lagos Drainage and Swamp Reclamation Board (1939), the Lagos Housing Committee (1942) and the Mosquito Control Board (1945). The structure of local government increasingly resembled that of a 19th-century English town with a “confusing maze of interim committees appointed to deal with specific needs” (Baker, 1974, p. 168). The official response to African demands for municipal reform in the 1940s and 1950s was to either play on the perceived differences in ‘traditional’ sanitary practices or to highlight the nefarious effects of urban life on indigenous power structures. The urban question was thus repeatedly framed in terms of a problem of public order rather than the outcome of inadequate investment or unaccountable policy initiatives. In 1946, for example, the city’s Commissioner E. A. Carr describes Lagos as marked by “the sharp contrast of thriving city and primitive rusticity” where “substantial residences” of wealthier Africans can be found “side by side with slums which present all the more sordid aspects of a Yoruba village”.<sup>8</sup> We find here a duality in colonial representations of ‘tradition’ as something which is both ‘dirty’ and thereby inferior but also ‘stable’ in the sense that it enabled some semblance of social order. Carr contrasts the persistence of “indigenous social organisation” outside the city and the break-down of traditional power structures within the city itself where

new arrivals are “bound by no form of tribal discipline and owe allegiance to no native authority”

The masses do not desire any change in their way of life and the progressive measures of Government are usually regarded with suspicion and resentment. . . . Evils such as child prostitution, exploitation of child labour, bribery and dirt abound in every part of the township but the energetic efforts of Government to combat them meet with little support, and often with open opposition, from those who claim to serve their country. . . . The almost complete lack of an informed public opinion and of a civic sense places the masses at the mercy of the demagogue, and schemes for improving the lot of the people are deliberately distorted and misrepresented for political ends (National Archives, Ibadan, CSO 09512 XII, Lagos Colony Annual Reports).

In these and other public statements, one can detect a palpable air of exasperation on the part of colonial administrators combined with contempt for their increasingly outspoken African critics. At stake here were two diverging conceptions of ‘the public’ and a challenge to the authority of colonial élites to determine how this ill-specified public interest might be served. An ideological distinction between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’ was drawn on in order to obfuscate the fiscal and administrative limitations of the colonial state. A pervasive sentiment on the part of colonial administrators was that poor environmental conditions facing the majority of the city’s population were essentially an outcome of unregulated or ill-advised settlement patterns and hence largely the fault of the people themselves. “In general, it is probably true that no legal liability falls on Government”, argued one federal land officer in 1955, in relation to the atrocious drainage conditions in Ikoyi, “since its tenants took their leases of the land subject to all natural disadvantages”.<sup>9</sup>

In the run-up to Nigerian independence, the city of Lagos faced an escalating and

multifaceted set of problems which undermined the legitimacy of colonial authorities. The first attempts at municipal reform in 1950 to extend the political franchise appeared to exacerbate problems of local government corruption and within two years local government had been disbanded with the control of Lagos passing to regional authorities. Under the control of Nigeria's Western Region, a further reform of city government was instituted in 1953 to include traditional rulers within the decision-making apparatus of the state for the first time in distinction to the delegation of administrative functions that had characterised the earlier introduction of so-called indirect rule. The responsibilities of the reconstituted city council were extended to a range of new functions such as housing provision, welfare services, traffic management, primary education, medical care and the provision of cultural and recreational facilities such as parks, libraries and museums, yet the administrative and financial resources available were totally inadequate (Baker, 1974). Emerging tensions between different understandings of the city's complex predicament translated into sharply diverging strategies for their alleviation and the definition of a putative 'public interest'. The need for municipal reform also became subsumed within nationalist demands for political independence so that rival political party machines vied for influence over newly democratised local government structures. Lagos found itself caught within a wider set of regional economic and political dynamics which would ultimately foster even faster rates of growth and an accelerated decline in social and environmental conditions within the metropolitan region.

The experience of colonial rule in Lagos involved a medley of different power structures in which successive European attempts to manage the settlement revealed both the internal contradictions and outer limits of their governmental strategies. The Lagos colony annual report of 1928, for example, despaired at the lack of funds that had prevented even a partial implementation of long-standing technical recommendations for

the reconstruction of the city's physical infrastructure.<sup>10</sup> Whilst European educated engineers and sanitary inspectors sought to influence colonial administrators, the unfolding dynamic of largely unregulated capitalist urbanisation served to instil an ideological coalescence between fragmentary forms of urban governance and a weak public sphere marked by intense and deepening forms of social inequality. In 1949, for example, mounting water shortages in Lagos led to the distribution of a 'public notice' from the colonial authorities that instructed householders not to allow "staff to bath, wash themselves or household utensils under a running tap".<sup>11</sup> The clear implications of these and other official communications in the final years of colonial rule were that 'the public' in any meaningful political sense extended only to wealthy households and the business community. Indeed, it is arguable that the 'splintering urbanism' thesis, recently elaborated by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (2001) in relation to the post-Fordist restructuring of urban technological networks, is in fact a closer approximation to the existing structure of Lagos than the never-implemented 'modern infrastructural ideal' which preceded it in the cities of Europe and North America. The truncated modernity that evolved in Lagos reflected the realities of a metropolitan growth that could never accede to the universalist impulse behind the modern industrial city as it had evolved elsewhere. As a consequence, political discourse about deteriorating urban conditions became increasingly polarised between an attachment to an idealised model of the capitalist city and an intellectual backlash against the hubris of colonial rhetoric in relation to the inadequacies of nationalist demands for self-rule.

## 2. From Optimism to Despair: The Post-colonial Metropolis

The city of Lagos at Nigerian independence in 1960 was fast becoming not only the commercial but also the pre-eminent cultural centre in West Africa. This is the city depicted in Cyprian Ekwensi's *People of the City*, where



a young crime reporter discovers a world of money, music and glamour.

His motto had become money, money, money. This was the way the people of the city realised themselves. Money. He saw the treachery, intrigue, and show of power involved (Ekwensi, 1963, p. 108).

Like other famous evocations of Nigeria at this time, the prospect of urbanisation and city life was closely tied with the attempt to articulate a distinctively African modernity: self-confident and largely independent of the West, but at the same time cosmopolitan and open in outlook. The city's growing international status as a cultural and commercial centre was underpinned by developments such as the creation of the Mbari Writers and Artists Club in 1961 which included figures such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and the American painter Jacob Lawrence.<sup>12</sup> To some degree, however, this cultural and intellectual effervescence masked underlying ethnic and political rivalries that would ultimately shatter the legitimacy and effectiveness of independent civilian rule.

The fast-growing city of just under a million people was wrought by organisational complexities and political tensions including continuing jurisdictional disputes between city and regional government. The municipal authorities lacked both the institutional mechanisms and administrative capacity to cope with the needs of the city: a survey of Lagos by a United Nations research team shortly after independence identified a range of serious problems including extreme congestion, extensive housing shortages, exorbitant rents, scarcity of housing finance, rapid growth of slums and inadequate sanitation (UN Technical Assistance Programme, 1964). The city had expanded in a haphazard way with little co-ordination between employment opportunities and affordable housing (Ayeni, 1977; Marris, 1961; Pullen, 1966). High land values in combination with weak municipal government ensured that the best sites were consistently allocated to élite low-density housing in a continuation of colonial

land use patterns. Yet even if enlightened planning policies had been adopted, there would have been major difficulties in implementing them since the Nigerian state had very little technical and administrative expertise available for the management of cities: in the mid 1960s, for example, there were only 30 professional planners working in the whole of Nigeria; and in the immediate post-independence era, there was reportedly only one skilled engineer in charge of the city's entire water distribution system (Muench and Muench, 1968; Williams and Walsh, 1968).

The limited investment in water and sanitation infrastructure had left a situation in which only 10 per cent of dwellings in the Lagos metropolitan area were directly connected to the municipal water system whilst the rest of the city relied on shared taps, standpipes, wells and polluted creeks. Water supply, like other public services, faced persistent financial and organisational problems including wide disparities in access, haphazard collection of water rates and limited investment in new facilities. The existing arrangements had produced huge disparities in both the costs and availability of drinking water so that there was a plentiful supply to public and commercial buildings and high-income residential areas, whereas low-income areas were "served by sparse standpipes, while some sections are not served at all" (Williams and Walsh, 1968, p. 99). As for the city's sewer system, the situation was even worse with the complete absence of any functional system at all. The creation of a comprehensive underground sewage system had been proposed at various times since 1902 but with little impact. The most recent attempt in 1956 had been abandoned because of lack of capital combined with political chicanery on the part of an 'anti-sewage' clique on the Lagos Town Council who had business connections with night-soil collectors (Williams and Walsh, 1968). The continuing absence of a functional sewer system in Lagos provides perhaps the most striking indication of an emerging disjuncture between a 'showcase modernity' reflected in



**Figure 2.** Transport chaos and uncollected garbage in Oshodi Market, May 2003. *Photograph:* Matthew Gandy.

the construction of prestige projects such as the National Theatre in 1977 and the city's continuing inability to provide basic infrastructure.

The problems of adequate infrastructure provision and the implementation of regulatory frameworks for the development and establishment of more responsive and accountable forms of municipal government simply

overwhelmed what limited resources that were available. The inherited governmental structures of 'decentralised despotism' from the colonial era militated against the development of more inclusive or responsive forms of democratic government (see Mamdani, 1996). In 1966, following Nigeria's first military coup, the Lagos Town Council was dissolved to be replaced a year later by a new



**Figure 3.** Satirical cartoon by Nd'Urso. Source: *Daily Times* (Lagos), 25 August 2001, courtesy of the *Daily Times* Newspaper Archive, Lagos.

administrative structure called Lagos State under military control. In the wake of the two-and-a-half-year Nigerian civil war which broke out in 1967, the city's difficulties were further exacerbated by huge waves of migration from eastern parts of the country. The civil war, fostered in part by secessionist attempts to control newly discovered oil resources, resulted in an intensified militarisation of Nigerian politics and a shift from the colonial legacy of 'indirect rule' towards a new form of 'authoritarian governmentality' stemming in part from a political compromise between the Muslim north—where the army drew its main sources of support—and the concentration of commerce and natural resources in the mainly Christian south.

The vast waves of migration in combination with slum clearance programmes also undermined long-established kin networks within the city such as the 'tribal unions' with their origins in earlier waves of migration from the 1930s. Whole districts of Lagos such as Ajegunle and Mushin became characterised by new forms of anomie, violence and

community breakdown. In the academic literature of the 1960s, we can find a continuing emphasis on the interrelationship between traditional power structures and the maintenance of urban order that had inflected the earlier colonial perceptions of 'rurality' within the city. Concern was directed, for example, at the decline in established modes of social discipline and family support systems so that "traditional customs such as street and courtyard maintenance by particular members of family compounds" were being threatened by "overcrowding and residential heterogeneity" (Williams and Walsh, 1968, p. 29). The politics of urban governance in post-colonial Lagos was marked by an ambivalence between tradition and modernity expressed through a tension, on the one hand, between a proliferation of impoverished communities which were somehow perceived to exist outside or in opposition to the modern city and, on the other hand, by the promulgation of new kinds of social and economic aspirations fostered by capitalist urbanisation.

At independence, Lagos was the leading industrial centre of Nigeria. The city accounted for at least 30 per cent of national production with more than 200 factories producing products such as soap, beer, building materials, textiles, steel, aluminium, motor cars and some 30 per cent of the male workforce was engaged in skilled manual work (Mabogunje, 1968; Marris, 1961; Williams and Walsh, 1968). From the mid 1970s onwards, however, the city suffered from acute and accelerating industrial decline marked by declining real incomes and huge increases in poverty and unemployment. The provision of infrastructure for the city's industrial base remained so poor that most firms had to spend over 20 per cent of their capital on providing their own sources of water, electricity and other basic services (see Anas and Lee, 1989; Boisvert and Senouci, 2000). Companies such as Lever Brothers and Guinness, for example, were having to pump water from half a mile below the surface to continue production and many of the city's 14 'industrial estates'—established in the 1960s and 1970s to attract inward investment—were in a state of total disarray (Ayida, 1981). The city's ill-fated industrial estates also fostered the development of vast slum settlements for their workers, characterised by hastily constructed two- or three-storey dwellings with as many as 10–15 occupants per room and often no water or electricity (Fapohunda and Lubell, 1978). The origins of some of the most extensive slums in Lagos such as Aje-gunle, Mushin and Somolu represent the remnants of the city's failed industrialisation strategy: they are in effect intense concentrations of human labour for which the promise of work and prosperity has never materialised.

The conversion of the Nigerian economy into a 'petro economy' after the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta just before independence was to have far-reaching consequences. During the 1970s, for example, government oil revenues multiplied almost 60-fold yet the 'rentier' nature of oil wealth in comparison with other forms of productive activity fostered the emergence of powerfully

fetishistic conceptions of money and wealth that served to destabilise Nigerian society.<sup>13</sup> The Nigerian economy, like those of other oil-rich states such as Angola and Venezuela, became increasingly characterised by a paradoxical combination of extreme wealth in the hands of a few accompanied by a generalised deterioration in living standards due to a combination of currency collapse, hyperinflation, income polarisation, political instability and rising poverty and unemployment. What Michael Watts (2003, p. 15) describes as "the logic of petro-capitalist development" has suffused every dimension of Nigerian society. The rapid appearance and disappearance of wealth during and after the oil bonanza of the 1970s contributed towards 'magical' conceptions of money and intensified spreading webs of economic dependency. The flaunting of material possessions also became part of a systematic display of new social and economic hierarchies that exacerbated the desperation of the impoverished majority and gave explicit expression to growing inequalities in wealth and power. The global recession of 1981 led to a collapse in oil prices that immediately plunged the Nigerian economy into debt and led to the abandonment of many of the city's infrastructure programmes (Okunbla, 2003). The city's lattice of crumbling bridges and highways built mainly by the German engineering company Julius Berger in the 1970s presents one of the most striking legacies of the oil boom before the economic collapse of the 1980s. In 1986, the military regime of Ibrahim Babangida instituted a devastating structural adjustment programme that further intensified the spread of poverty and declining levels of investment in public services. Even those few capital investment projects that garnered political support during the 1980s were often abandoned for economic reasons: countless contracts became untenable because of the collapse of the naira (the Nigerian currency unit) and the impact of spiralling foreign debt which rose from US\$13 billion in 1981 to in excess of US\$30 billion by 1989 (now equivalent to some 75 per cent of Nigerian GDP) (see Elliot, 2005; Isichei,



2002; Owusu, 2001). Above all, oil has not proved a panacea for improving the standard of living for ordinary Nigerians—yet it remains the determining feature of Nigerian political life accounting for some US\$350 billion in government revenues since 1965 (at 1995 prices) (see Lockwood, 2005; Salai-Martin and Subramanian, 2003). The period since the 1970s has seen the squandering of vast sums of oil revenue whilst Nigeria's four oil refineries lie in a state of disrepair. As a consequence, the country faces incessant and politically destabilising fuel shortages and is now reliant on expensive imports of petrochemical products despite its substantial oil and gas resources.

### 3. Centrifugal Governmentalities

The extraordinary Lagos master plan of 1980, produced before Nigeria's economic collapse and return to military rule, marks one of the most ambitious attempts by a civilian administration to grapple with the complexities of the city's problems. The UN-initiated plan, upon which work started in 1973, anticipated that the city would grow from a population of over 4 million in 1980 to reach around 13 million in the year 2000 to produce a situation in which

Government will need to fully marshal its resources to attain maximum efficiency in addressing the multitude of physical, social and environmental needs of an area of this size (UN, 1980, p. 1).

As if to underlie this sense of anxiety, the plan also anticipated an emerging stand off between municipal authorities and civil society

The Master Plan for Metropolitan Lagos, no matter how logical or technically sound, will fail without adequate levels of enforcement on the part of the government to: (1) protect existing investments and (2) to control future development patterns. Untold millions of nairas have already been lost in equipment, structures, road facilities and other infrastructure because

of undisciplined and/or illegal behaviour on the part of the populace of Lagos (UN, 1980, p. 2).

The Lagos plan identified various activities that threatened its realisation such as the spread of illegal structures, non-payment of income and property taxes, and illegal connections to public utilities. The centralised approach adopted marks the end of a distinctive phase in technocratic policy-making whereby the urban population are regarded as an undisciplined impediment to the rationalisation of the city and planning discourse is pre-occupied with how the city can be controlled or shaped according to a pre-conceived set of technical specifications provided by an array of experts (see also Mitchell, 2002; Rabinow, 1989). Following on from the UN Mar de L'Plata declaration of 1977, for example, which initiated the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, the plan envisaged that within the space of two decades all households would be connected to a water supply and sewerage system.<sup>14</sup> Under the so-called Second Republic, between 1979 and 1983, the Lagos State administration of Alhaji Lateef Jakande attempted a significant expansion of water supply infrastructure but the programme of works was curtailed by a combination of economic crisis, externally imposed structural adjustment policies and the return of military rule (Olukoju, 2003). The failure of the Lagos master plan signalled an effective abandonment of attempts to conceptualise the city's problems in any integrated or strategic way and the rapid urban decline and brutalisation of political life experienced from the 1980s onwards heralded a retreat of policy discourse into the realm of crisis management.

Since the state has proved unable to improve social and environmental conditions, an intensified divide is emerging between better-connected commercial and high-income districts which can take advantage of new modes of service provision and vast areas of the city which may be permanently excluded from this new phase in urban development. The association of the state with force

or the threat of violence, as has been the experience of Lagos through most of the colonial and post-colonial period, has denuded the prospects for building a workable relationship between state institutions and other social networks originating within civil society. Yet the state brutality which manifests in the urban arena through political repression or the forcible clearance of informal settlements is also an indicator of innate weakness: the seeming inability of the state to improve urban conditions for the poor majority presents not just a crisis of legitimacy for urban government in general but also fosters a fragmentary, refracted and truncated political discourse within which any putative 'public realm' can find only uncertain expression. The intense social polarisation and spatial fragmentation since the mid 1980s have led to a scenario in which many households—both rich and poor—attempt to provide their own water supply, power generation and security services. As night falls, the drone of traffic is gradually displaced by the roar of thousands of generators that enable the city to function after dark. Many roads in both rich and poor neighbourhoods become closed or subject to a plethora of *ad hoc* check-points and local security arrangements to protect people and property until the morning. In the absence of a subsidised housing sector, most households must struggle to contend with expensive private letting arrangements often involving an up-front payment of two years' rent and various other fees, whilst the richest social strata seek to buy properties outright with vast quantities of cash. A self-service city has emerged in which little is expected from municipal government and much social and economic life is founded on the spontaneous outcome of local negotiations.

Deficiencies in water and sanitation provision continue to provide some of the most striking manifestations of the city's worsening infrastructure crisis. We now find that less than 5 per cent of households in Lagos have piped water connections (a fall from around 10 per cent in the 1960s) and that less than 1 per cent are linked to a closed sewer system (principally hotels and high-income

compounds). Even those with piped connections must contend with interruptions due to power supply failures affecting the city's water works. The rest of the city depends on wells, boreholes, water tankers, various illegal connections, street vendors and, in desperation, the 'scooping' of water from open drains by the side of the road (Expunobi, 2001; Sulaimon, 2000). Inhabitants of slum settlements often face a stark choice between either polluted wells or expensive tanker water distributed by various intermediaries at high and fluctuating prices, making the management of household budgets even more precarious. When municipal authorities do attempt to extend water supply to poorer neighbourhoods, they are often met with violence and intimidation from water tanker lobbies, 'area boys' and other groups who benefit from the unequal distribution of water and the 'micro-circuits' of exploitation which characterise slum life: the city's water corporation must consistently confront the 'water lords' who intentionally vandalise the network in order to continue charging exorbitant rates to the poor.<sup>15</sup> People's daily survival is based on careful distinctions between different kinds of water suitable for drinking, cooking and washing, with much time and expense devoted to securing household water needs. Regulatory authorities also struggle to cope with the proliferation of 'pure water' manufacturers producing small plastic sachets of drinking water sold throughout the city which have been associated with the spread of water-borne disease (Aina, 1994; Osumah, 2001). The sellers of these 'pure water' sachets—thousands of mostly young Lagosians—weave their way between lines of slowly moving or stationary traffic as the need for potable water has become part of the city's burgeoning informal economy.

The politics of infrastructure provision in the post-Abacha era is currently undergoing a subtle yet profound transition in Lagos, marked by an extended influence for NGOs and a plethora of interest groups which could not function under military rule. Organisations such as the housing activist network Shelter Rights Initiative, the critical





**Figure 4.** Illegal water connections and street sales of water in Ajegunle, February 2003. *Photograph:* Matthew Gandy.

architectural forum Central Intelligence Agency and the urban environmental group Metamorphosis Nigeria have made demands for an improvement in urban conditions and have become a significant element in new forms of civic mobilisation facilitated by the

rapid spread of wireless communications, new press freedoms and the wider dissemination of information. And patriarchal structures, underpinned by political clientelism and military rule, are now being increasingly challenged by a new generation of

women activists and public servants committed to improving social and environmental conditions within the city.<sup>16</sup> Yet as the Lagos-based planning consultant Ako Amadi relates, the pervasive problems of corruption, however, we choose to define this term, in combination with widespread public indifference have produced a scenario that is peculiarly antithetical to more socially responsive forms of urban policy making.<sup>17</sup> Despite these formidable barriers, however, some limited changes are discernable in the electoral arena: in the regional elections of 2003, for example, the governor for Lagos State, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, a US-trained accountant, was re-elected on a political programme which specifically sought to address the city's crisis in the provision of basic services. The issue of water, for instance, featured prominently within Tinubu's re-election campaign as part of a more technocratic approach to Nigerian politics reflected in the appointment of public administrators with extensive international or private-sector experience. In the space of 4 years, water billing and revenue collection efficiencies in the city have leapt from less than 4 per cent in 1999 to reach nearly 30 per cent in 2003, leading the recently appointed chief executive of the city's water corporation to quip that "Tinubu was the only governor in the country who could use pipe-borne water supply as a campaign issue" and his campaign slogan "the primary objective of this administration is to provide potable water for all" was prominently displayed on billboards throughout the city.<sup>18</sup> The shifting complexion of urban politics in Lagos remains fragile, however, because Tinubu represents a different political party from that of the federal government based in Abuja and, in the absence of significant borrowing or tax-raising powers, the city remains dependent on the federal government for its derisory annual budget of less than US\$400 million dollars.

Yet the current emphasis on more technocratic forms of urban politics threatens to widen disparities in service provision between different parts of the city: rather than a renewed dynamic between the state

and civil society, the underlying impetus is towards a business-led model for urban regeneration. In 2003, for example, the city transformed the administrative structure of water provision to create 28 water zones geared towards "strategies specific for the demographics in those areas".<sup>19</sup> Yet the creation of these 'governable entities' based on the demographic characteristics of different areas raises important questions: in prosperous parts of the city, for example, water charges will be made directly to individual households, whereas in slum areas 'community-based markets' will be established utilising the traditional authority of chiefs as a revenue-raising strategy (see Page, 2004). This emerging dichotomy in modernisation strategies for water provision raises the spectre of new forms of 'authoritarian governmentality' which combine neo-liberal concerns with 'full cost recovery' with a dependence on non-democratic sources of power in civil society.

International agencies such as the World Bank have emphasised the privatisation of public services as a panacea for the city's infrastructure crisis, but the broader implications of legal and institutional reform that might underpin tentative moves towards improved and more accountable modes of public administration have been scarcely addressed.<sup>20</sup> These tensions were exposed in 2003 with the break-down of negotiations between the Lagos State Water Corporation and the International Finance Corporation when it became clear that the proposed privatisation proposals prepared by external consultants were unworkable and bore little relation to the "social and economic realities on the ground".<sup>21</sup> This represents a significant change from the late 1990s when a number of Lagos newspapers openly embraced the prospect of privatisation as an alternative to the municipal control of basic services.<sup>22</sup> We can discern a shift in policy discourse underway in Lagos which is marked by less reliance on external expertise and a greater commitment to developing local solutions which learn from best practice elsewhere: the impact of failed large-scale divestment programmes in cities

such as Buenos Aires, Manila and, most recently, in Dar-es-Salaam, have had a profound impact on policy discourse in the city. The newly emerging African technocrats running public services in Lagos and elsewhere are much better informed about international policy developments than their predecessors and are far more sceptical towards the advice of the World Bank and other international agencies.<sup>23</sup> The economic reality is that the urban poor cannot afford to pay high enough charges to make the necessary extensions and improvements in urban water and sanitation systems viable let alone profitable: an argument which now appears to have been widely accepted by the water multinationals themselves since the scale of the need far outreaches the financial and risk-taking capacities of the private sector.

The prohibitive capital costs of improvements in water and sanitation infrastructure help to explain the growing 'concrete divide' between the rapid spread of new telecommunications technologies throughout the city in the context of widening inequalities in social and environmental conditions. Nigeria has the fastest growth in mobile phone use in sub-Saharan Africa with the number of subscriptions having risen from a mere 30 000 in 2000 to over 9 million by 2005—a development which may yet have profound consequences for new forms of social and economic interaction in hitherto isolated or marginalised communities. These spreading digital networks also illustrate new patterns of capital flow within Africa, the South African company MTN being a major player in this process (Vasager, 2005). Early 21st-century Lagos is undergoing a new phase of development in which poorer parts of the city are subject to a dual process of exclusion and integration into both established and emerging urban technological networks.

A fundamental paradox facing Lagos is that its vast demographic expansion over the past 20 years has taken place in a context of far-reaching economic decline. Whereas city administrations in the past tended to deny that slums had any legitimate presence within the city—exemplified by the clearance

of the vast Maroko settlement in 1990—there is now an emerging recognition that the morphology of Lagos is shaped to a significant degree by informal and unplanned settlements (see Agbola, 1997b). The upgrading and improvement of slum areas, including institutional innovations over security of tenure, are preconditions for any development strategy that does not exacerbate existing inequalities (see Ahonsi, 2002; Aina, 1989; Aina *et al.*, 1994; Olanrewaju, 2001). The state has played an active role in attempting to control the land market in the face of extensive confusion over communal and private ownership claims and successive city administrations have engaged in 'rent-seeking strategies' which are ubiquitous in many African metropolitan areas (Simone, 2005, p. 21). The city's population is currently growing at some 4 per cent per annum but in some districts such as the Lekki peninsula annual growth rates have reached nearly 17 per cent, driven in part by displaced communities from civil strife elsewhere in the region. The role of conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere, as contributory factors behind the city's growth, are largely overlooked in most recent debates on the city. These developments underline the degree to which the city has always served, both now and in the past, as a kind of 'city-state' which can provide safe haven. Eschatological accounts of the city's problems fail to perceive the degree to which urban conditions within the Lagos metropolitan region may afford greater security and opportunity than innumerable other spaces occluded from analysis or discussion.

#### **4. Violence, Insecurity and the Fragility of the Public Realm**

The transition of Nigeria to an oil-exporting economy served to exacerbate the political and economic weaknesses of the Nigerian state and instituted widening disparities in living standards. In the absence of either a viable public realm or a workable set of institutional mechanisms for urban reconstruction, the structural deficiencies within the Lagos urban system were significantly worsened.

An emerging 'oil culture' has worked powerfully against any civic ethos in public life by fostering widespread opportunism on the part of social and political élites; the illusion of unlimited wealth has served to deflect attention from the efficiency or effectiveness of public services.<sup>24</sup> The kind of secular and cosmopolitan ideals promoted at Nigerian independence have become increasingly remote from the lived realities of the city as a fragmentary, polarised and unstable urban space within which the legitimacy of municipal reform must contend with alternative modes of utopian transcendence offered by new and volatile forms of religiosity and ethnic identification. Given the young demographic profile of Lagos and the high proportion of migrants from elsewhere in West Africa, most people have never experienced functional public services so that any political mobilisation for change cannot simply be predicated on the memory of Lagos before its rapid deterioration during the 1980s and 1990s. In these circumstances, the construction of a viable public realm is doubly difficult because of the fiscal and administrative weaknesses of municipal government in combination with the lack of political salience for any appeal to better urban conditions experienced in the past.

A critical exploration of the infrastructure crisis facing a city such as Lagos cannot be disentangled from an engagement with the complexities and significance of the 'public realm' as an organisational, political and material dimension to the development of the built environment. The emergence of highly fragmentary and clientelistic modes of political discourse in the post-colonial era has had a profound impact on the scope and limitations of public policy-making in the African city. Much recent planning literature has tended to combine a Habermasian ideal of communicative rationality with various forms of philosophical pragmatism as if some kind of consensus could emerge on the basis of mutual understanding alone. In a city such as Lagos, however, where fervent religiosity intersects with politically mobilised forms of ethnic chauvinism, it is

extremely difficult to establish a viable public sphere—even the post-Habermasian public sphere described by Chantal Mouffe and others where fundamental disagreements are accepted rather than occluded in political discourse (see Mouffe, 2000, 2002). Mouffe's 'agonistic' public sphere presupposes the existence of a framework for political contestation that does not exist in a context such as Lagos where an ideological vacuum has produced a scenario in which counterposing arguments have yet to find shape, form or rhetorical clarity. A mix of generalised hopelessness and disenfranchisement under years of military rule has led to a scenario in which political demands and expectations are much lower than in other volatile urban contexts such as Latin America where alternative urban visions have been more widely articulated. The issue at stake is whether a workable concept of the public realm can be established in a context where social and economic relationships are in a constant state of flux and uncertainty (see Swilling *et al.*, 2003; Simone, 2005). The past 20 years have seen a vast expansion in the informal social and economic networks that serve to sustain everyday life in the city—largely in response to protracted economic crisis—but by far the most dynamic development in civil society has been the vast expansion in religious activity principally represented in Lagos by the spread of charismatic and Pentecostal strands of Christianity (see Adichie, 2005; Falola, 1998; Marshall-Fratani, 1998). The emergence of a 'post-secular urbanism', in which a combination of fatalism, religiosity and profound insecurity infuses everyday life, cannot be adequately captured by an appeal to 'multiple rationalities' since a recourse to relativist discourse risks replicating those distinctions between modernity and 'non-modernity' that have pervaded the governmental interventions of both the colonial and post-colonial period.

The tentative moves towards democracy and freedom of expression since the return to civilian rule in 1999 have still not begun to facilitate the emergence of urban 'citizens' as opposed to mere 'inhabitants' with little

stake in the city's future. As a consequence, Lagos faces real difficulties in articulating itself as a city in a way that transcends the multiplicity of sectional interests that share urban space. The city's rapid growth and successive waves of migration necessitate a more fluid and less territorialised conception of citizenship (see Holston and Appadurai, 1999) yet the experience of citizenship remains essentially passive and unconnected with common political programmes or agendas that might directly challenge the state or reshape the politics of entitlement to basic needs such as health care or sanitation. A radical extension of citizenship rights—or in Lefebvrian terms an explicit recognition of 'the right to the city'—involves looking beyond the technical discourses of urban management or the humanitarian conception of the city as a place of refuge. It is better understood as a "right to urban life" (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158) that combines the practical needs of everyday life with a substantive rather than abstract conception of modern citizenship. The dilemma facing cities such as Lagos, however, is that the possibilities for building a functional public realm have been consistently undermined through the combined impacts of economic insecurity and clientelist political regimes within which inequalities have become magnified and deeply entrenched. In February 2002, for example, vicious interethnic riots between Yoruba and Hausa gangs in the Mushin district of the city left at least a hundred people dead and many hundreds more injured. The interconnections between urban citizenship and any national state-building project have similarly been placed under severe strain since the 1980s as different manifestations of 'state failure' have underpinned the deterioration of urban conditions and a growing sense of powerlessness. The transformation of Lagos into a vast metropolitan region has occurred within the context of centrifugal political and economic tendencies that have produced an urban topography of fear and anxiety. The impact of what Pierre Bourdieu (1998, p. 98) terms 'structural violence' emanating from the collapse of the city's economy and

the external imposition of sweeping cutbacks in government expenditure has contributed towards a break-down in social life. The increasing prevalence of violent crime since the 1980s, for example, has led to the withdrawal of many Lagosians into a private realm that has further denuded the possibilities for rebuilding civil society (see Agbola, 1997a). In less dangerous times, notes Tunde Alao, "people flocked to the Rainbow Cinema in Mushin or the Debarco Cinema in Idi-Oro" without fear of harassment from either the police or 'hoodlums' (Alao, 2002). The lack of trust that pervades every aspect of social and political life also undermines the potential for 'fixing' capital in space through the use of bonds or other institutional mechanisms that might facilitate the reconstruction of the city. In many ways the city of Lagos exemplifies a space of 'actually existing neo-liberalism' where global economic and political developments underway since the 1970s have resulted in fundamental yet often poorly explored changes in the urban realm (see Brenner and Theodore, 2002). Such lacunae in our current knowledge are especially apparent in the cities of the global South where the interactions between different scales of political and economic change are generating profound changes in the urban landscape that extend from the micro-level of individual household survival strategies to the regional impact of global capital flows and the geo-political dynamics of trade in primary resources.

## 5. Conclusions

Central to any attempt to comprehend the current challenges facing a city such as Lagos is the ambiguous nature of urban planning as an organisational principle behind the modern city. In a European or North American context, the emergence of urban planning, new modes of municipal administration and the development of integrated technological networks for water, energy and other services became part of a nexus of institutional reforms associated with the transformation of the industrial



metropolis. These developments held at their core a tension between the need to secure a degree of political legitimacy in the service of an ostensible public interest and at the same time a need to co-ordinate and rationalise the morphology of space in order to facilitate economic activity. The very idea of 'planning' denotes the possibility of influencing or directing different sets of developments, but the periodic aspirations of successive colonial and post-colonial administrations in Lagos to improve the morphology and structure of urban space have had minimal impact: we encounter a metropolitan region which reflects the steady accretion of human decision making outside of or in contradiction with stated goals and objectives. The modernist ideal in Lagos was in any case little more than a chimera that characterised sketches, plans and isolated developments, but never constituted the majority experience of the city even before the collapse of the Nigerian economy in the 1980s. From a classic planning or architectural vantage-point, much of the city's topography can be considered 'blind' in the sense that most urban vistas do not represent any design conception beyond the *ad hoc* vernacular of local construction methods or the self-build of individual dwellings or shelters. A largely spontaneous landscape has evolved in which an unco-ordinated and incremental assemblage of structures has gradually spread across all available space.

Lagos faces a paradoxical situation within which any tentative steps towards improvement may engender new waves of migration from more precarious locations elsewhere. Yet this is not a city undergoing an economic transformation comparable with Mumbai, Shanghai or other dramatic examples of a globalised urbanism. Lagos is a city on an uncertain trajectory which differs from recognised patterns of capitalist urbanisation because the city is growing rapidly in a context of economic stagnation to produce what one might term a 'post-productive' metropolis on account of its degree of dislocation from the global economy. This dilemma is illustrated by the evolving relationship between capital

flows and the built space of the city: under the classic model of Western urbanisation, flows of capital were fixed in space through a combination of financial and institutional mechanisms ranging from municipal bonds to legislative interventions in the urban land market. In Lagos, by contrast, the colonial state apparatus and its post-colonial successors never succeeded in building a fully functional metropolis through investment in the built environment or the construction of integrated technological networks. Vast quantities of capital that might have been invested in health care, housing or physical infrastructure were either consumed by political and military élites or transferred to overseas bank accounts with the connivance of Western financial institutions.

The continued poverty and international indebtedness of Nigeria also pose immense obstacles for the containment of HIV, malaria and other public health threats that may yet engender a further spiral of social and economic decline. The extreme poverty and ethnic polarisation within Lagos present a continuing threat to rebuilding the social and physical fabric of the city. Although informal networks and settlements have made an enormous contribution to alleviating the most pressing social and economic needs of the poor, these grassroots responses cannot in themselves co-ordinate the structural dimensions to urban development for which the state must continue to play a pivotal role through its potential to articulate a public interest above either sectional interests or the impetus towards a purely market-driven approach to urban development. The severe and increased flooding experienced throughout the metropolitan area is one clear outcome of the absence of any strategic vision to manage the urban environment in the public interest as uncontrolled developments encroach across all available land and comprehensive drainage schemes under discussion for decades remain at the most rudimentary planning stage. "Infrastructure is government's responsibility", notes the Lagos-based architect Koku Konu, "if not to put it in place, then to plan."<sup>25</sup> Critical to



any improvement in urban conditions is the need for a panoply of institutional reforms ranging across specific areas of law, tax and regulatory intervention which encompass new codes of professional conduct, transparency and accountability. With the increasing influence of a new generation of technocratic managers, a different kind of governmental paradigm may be emerging in the city but the long-term implications of this shift remain unclear. There is a danger, for example, of perpetuating a dual discourse of governmentality between wealthy enclaves which emulate the commercial zones of other global cities and the mass of the urban poor trapped under the arbitrary largesse of powerful local networks or held in abeyance by chiefs, elders and other unelected dignitaries.

Many urban spaces and practices in Lagos appear to confound existing bodies of urban thought, yet this does not preclude the possibility for rethinking or reworking what we already know about African urbanism or cities more generally. Appeals to various forms of 'African exceptionalism' serve to contain the city within a category of ontological difference whilst obscuring the relationship between urban design and any meaningful forms of social or political deliberation. If we perceive Lagos to be a model for the future on account of the city's capacity to function in spite of its ostensible lack of co-ordination or planning, we risk condemning much of the city's population to continuing hardship.<sup>26</sup> If, on the other hand, we recognise that the city is beginning to articulate its own vision of African urbanisation, however, tentatively, it might be possible to initiate a genuine dialogue which would extend to the experience of other fast-growing cities in the global South and thereby bring the African city to the centre of policy deliberation and debate. The city's infrastructure crisis, for example, is clearly a multifaceted phenomenon that links with political and economic factors operating in a global as well as a regional arena. Similarly, the impact of a denuded or fragmentary civil society on modes of political discourse is not a peculiarly African experience. The potential role of

infrastructural networks in forging social collectivities through the 'binding of space' holds implications for many cities facing similar problems of poverty, social fragmentation and governmental failure. It is only through the identification of commonalities which transcend emerging patterns of social, ethnic and religious polarisation that Lagos can begin the complex task of reconstruction and the development of new and more legitimate modes of public administration.

## Notes

1. In 1991, Lagos was named by the UN as the dirtiest city in the world. Much recent writing on Lagos has tended to develop an 'eschatological' perspective (see, for example, Liebs, 2002; McNulty and Adalemo, 1988; Maier and Huber, 1989; Otchet, 1999; Richter, 2002; Schmitz, 2002; and Subirós, 2001). For a Lagosian perspective on the city's recent travails see, for example, Alao (2002), Isichei (2002), Obibi (1993) and Onibokun and Faniran (1995). For a trenchant critique of Conradian perspectives on Africa see Achebe (2003).
2. Compare, for example, the World Bank's 1992 publication *Governance and Development* with the more recent writings on 'grassroots globalisation' by Appadurai (2002). For recent critiques of the limitations to 'governance' discourse see, for example, Beall *et al.* (2002) and Cleaver (2001).
3. For elaborations on Foucault's conception of 'governmentality' see, for example, Clifford (2001), Dean (1999), Gordon (1991), Joyce (2003), Osborne *et al.* (1996) and Rose (1999).
4. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 179, vol. II "*Lagos water supply—report of analyses*", from A.G. Caslaw to the Commissioner of the Colony (20 April 1936). Caslaw notes that in the settlement of Ogogoro on the urban fringe "there is no good water supply at all—only surface wells with no proper shaft which supply very poor water indeed. As a result the people have much sickness and disease". From the Director of Medical Services to the Honourable, The Director of Public Works, Lagos (28 November 1936). The letter reports two serious break-downs in water supply for Lagos Island during the previous five months and notes that "the menace to health resulting from a failure of the water supply in a crowded town of the size of

- Lagos ... cannot be stressed too strongly". From Superintendent, Lagos Water Supply, to Commissioner of Colony's Office, Lagos (21 March 1949). The letter notes severe water shortages and exhorts Europeans to prevent their staff from bathing: "Do not allow staff to bath, wash themselves or household utensils under a running tap". National Archives, Ibadan, CSO 26, vol. II from the Deputy Director of the Sanitary Service, Lagos to the Honourable, the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, Lagos (15 August 1925). From the Director of Medical and Sanitary Services to the Honourable, the Chief Secretary to the Government (letters dated 25 February 1926, 1 June 1926 and 18 January 1928). These letters sought to draw attention to increasingly insanitary conditions and water shortages but were met with little response at national level. From Director of Public Works, Nigeria, to the Honourable, the Chief Secretary, Lagos (28 June 1927). This letter is annotated by hand in the office of the Chief Secretary to state that "the work of relaying water mains in Lagos is not of very great urgency". For recent explorations of the public health problems under British colonial rule see also the excellent account by Klein (1986) on the incidence of bubonic plague in late 19th-century Bombay.
5. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 3950, "*Sewerage disposal scheme for Lagos Town Council*".
  6. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 3860, "*Central Lagos Slum Clearance*".
  7. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 3860, "*Central Lagos Slum Clearance*".
  8. National Archives, Ibadan, CSO 09512 XII, Lagos Colony Annual Reports.
  9. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 675, "Drainage, Ikoyi", Chief Federal Land Officer to Chief Administrative Officer (11 July 1955).
  10. National Archives, Ibadan, CSO 09512 V, Lagos Colony Annual Reports.
  11. National Archives, Ibadan, COMCOL I 179, Vol. II, from Superintendent, Lagos Water Supply to Commissioner of Colony's Office, Lagos (21 March 1949).
  12. On the vibrant cultural life of Lagos in the early 1960s, see, for example, Oguibe (2000). In architecture, for example, a new cosmopolitan and modernist sensibility emerged which won significant international acclaim.
  13. Cyril Obi, Senior Research Fellow, Nigerian Institute for International Affairs, Lagos, interview with the author (28 April 2003). For greater detail on the impact of oil on Nigerian economy and society, see Obi (2001), Karl (1997), Okonta and Douglas (2003) and Watts (1984, 1994).
  14. It has been assumed that all households will be connected to the water supply system by the year 2000 ... A separate water-borne sewerage system, including adequate sewage treatment facilities, for human and industrial waste should be provided for all properties connected to the water supply system (UN, 1980, pp. 385–386).
  - Further details on planning history in Lagos derived from Paul Okunlola, Environmental correspondent for *The Guardian* (Lagos), interview with the author (28 April 2003).
  15. Interviews with residents on the Ikota Estate, Lekki Peninsula (May 2003); Olumuyima Coker, Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Water Corporation, interview with the author (6 May 2003).
  16. Bayo Anatola, Shelter Rights Initiative, interview with the author (19 February 2003); Koku Konu, Architect and director of dkr associates, interview with the author (21 February 2003) (see also Uduku, 1994; Tostensen *et al.*, 2001; and Järvelä and Rinne-Koistinen, 2005).
  17. Ako Amadi, Executive Director, Community Conservation and Development Initiatives, interview with the author (17 February 2003); and Victor Olusegun Emdin, Director of Town Planning Services (Development Matters), Lagos State, interview with the author (2 May 2003).
  18. Olumuyima Coker, Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Water Corporation, interview with the author (6 May 2003).
  19. Olumuyima Coker, Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Water Corporation, interview with the author (6 May 2003).
  20. A consultative forum on policy-making in Lagos hosted by the World Bank at the Sheraton Hotel in Lagos on 25 February 2003, for example, exposed a deep divide between the intricacies and complexities of the city's predicament and their prescriptive agenda for market-based urban governance.
  21. Olumuyima Coker, Chief Executive Officer, Lagos State Water Corporation, interview with the author (6 May 2003).
  22. See, for example, the editorial "Privatising water supply" in the *Midweek Concord* (Lagos), 1 July 1998.

23. For further details on the shifting contours of the water privatisation debate, see, for example, Bakker (2003), Budds and McGranahan (2003), Hall (2004) and K'Akumu (2004).
24. Paul Okunlola, *The Guardian* urban and environmental correspondent for Lagos, interview with the author (1 May 2003).
25. Koku Konu, architect and director of dkr associates, interview with the author (21 February 2003).
26. Koolhaas (2001, 2002), for example, has emphasised the novel morphological and organisational aspects of the city. For a critique of this approach, see Gandy (2005b).

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