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HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF TOUTS AS A DEVIANT SUBGROUP IN LAGOS STATE – NIGERIA

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Abstract

Over the years, Lagos State has been faced with a cyclical crescendo of unemployed deviant subgroup mainly youths; known as 'Area Boys or Touts' whose activities usually revolves round the transportation corridors of motor parks and bus stops for survival. Though, many scholars have limited their existence to the period of economic recession and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in the 1980s with little or no emphasis on the historical dimension of their growth and development during the period of colonisation. This study traces the emergence of touts to the colonial era and traditional practices of neighbouring communities and states around Lagos under various names like Alikali boys, Boma boys, and jaguda boys which later metamorphose into the present day touts in Lagos state's motor parks and bus stops. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions among 150 randomly selected areaboys, the study revealed the economic benefits and patronage of touts by Nigerian Politicians and government officials were major factors fostering their continuous existence. The study concludes that so long as areaboys/touts serve as a pool from which National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW); Road Transport Employee Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) and Politicians employ their staff and bodyguards, it will be difficult if not impossible to eradicate touts from Lagos environment.

Key words: Deviant Subgroup, Touting, Transportation Corridors, Historical Analysis

Introduction and Background

Lagos was the capital city of Nigeria until 1991, and retains a central place in the life of the country and is home for by far the largest concentration of Nigerians (15 million at the last count in 2006). With regard to studies of the social aspects of urbanization in Lagos, these have been undertaken by social scientists who have for the most part been concerned with contemporary or recent developments without any historical background, creating the impression that the phenomena being studied are of recent origin. It is against this background that this study has sought to shed light on touting as a form of deviant career in Lagos. Like all societies, Nigerian society is a process; even its most stable structures are the expression of equilibrium between dynamic forces. For the historian, the most challenging task faced is that of recapturing that process, while at the same time discerning long-term shifts in social relations, in economic organization, and in the meanings infused into these relationships. Within the context of continuity in some of the principal facets of Nigerian society, the forces of change

interacted in such a way as to produce two developments engendering deviant ways. On the one hand, integrative forces penetrated local communities more deeply than had been the case and bound them more loosely together into a national society and economy. On the other, there was a simultaneous enhancement of the degree and the complexity of social differentiation within local communities. Interconnected demographic and economic developments brought an enhanced prosperity to the upper and middling ranks of society based upon exploitation of the opportunities provided by expanding markets. They also brought about a marked polarization of living standards and a growth in poverty and deprivation. Inequalities of wealth became more marked. Sharper distinctions of attitudes, aspirations and manners emerged to reinforce the polarizing effects of demographic and economic development. These changes give the colonial period their significance in the development of male delinquent behaviour in Lagos (Tamuno, 1993; Onoge, 1993).

These Juvenile delinquents resisted powerful attempts to inculcate conformist

modes of behaviour through indigenous and colonial agencies of control and manipulation. This resistance, in the form of theft, muggings and opposition to authority, can be viewed as delinquency and crime (Clinard and Abbott, 1973; Gugler, and Flanagan, 1978). Much juvenile crime in Lagos can be attributed to the additional temptations afforded by city life, lack of parental control, and in *some cases to the absconding of children* from their rural homes. Accentuated by the era's high mortality rate and low life expectancy of the period, relatively large numbers of children grew up without parents. Rootless children running away to a large urban area to escape this control, and needing to fend for themselves, easily drifted into hooliganism and petty theft. Many Lagos juvenile offenders came from the hinterland area, not the city itself, leaving home in search of money and excitement, as in the wave of juvenile crime of the mid-1930s caused to a large extent by "the influx into Lagos from the provinces of boys and girls seeking employment as motor boys and as domestic servants." (*Annual Report of the Police Magistrate, Lagos, 1936:2*): corroborating the above a respondents noted that:

If not for the employment opportunity in Lagos what will I be doing here? Some of my friends from the same village with me came to Lagos, and were absorbed in one of the motor parks in Lagos. I had to join him here, I am grateful today as tout in Lagos, if not Lagos where else will I get a job with education and skill in any handiwork. (28 years/Male/Oshodi).

For another, the fear of farm work was a major factor that made him come to Lagos to become a tout:

When my mother died, life became so difficult that my father could not cope and was forced to send us to my grandfather. In my grandfathers house, going to the farm was the only means of survival, it got to a stage I became fed up; after about five years I left the village to Ibadan from which i later went to Lagos with a cousin (19 years/CMS/Lagos Island)

The above excerpts from interviewees' shows that most touts are not from Lagos as usually claimed, secondly various life tragedy and the quest for survival are evident in their statement. This most responses among 72 percent of the respondent attested. Going memory lane, according to Simeon Bankole-Wright (1944), social work officer with the British government, the factors *responsible for juvenile delinquency in Lagos*:

Broken homes, imprisonment or death of the breadwinner, unemployment, bad housing that makes the home a mere den or resting place to be escaped as much as possible, the effects of drink and vice on home life, bad company and the influence of the gangs, low mentality, illiteracy, defects in the existing educational system, the quest for new experience, movement and change, wanderlust, culture shock, the failure of a community to provide suitable outlets for the instinctive life of its young ones, and certain types of physical degeneracy that are well recognized or feeble-mindedness, chronic epilepsy, congenital deaf-mutism and habitual pauperism and other unknown causes.

Images of structured gangs of delinquents with clearly defined agendas to plunder and pillage from respectable citizens were detailed by dramatic newspaper stories (Mayne, 1993). Such lurid discourse of vicious hooliganism aroused a nightmare of lawlessness among both citizens and government alike: the dispossession of propertied people. According to Hobsbawm, (1959) and Falola, (1995) delinquents in Lagos during the colonial era were not 'heroic criminals' or 'social bandits'; they were anti-social elements perpetrating crime against local citizens. They were fond of arranging themselves into an informally structured groups based on age, street and neighbourhood. Several studies have also revealed the group comradeship of these miscreants as involving touting for passengers at motor parks, pocket picking and other petty stealing (Heap, 1997; Humphries, 1981; Burton, 2001; Burton, 2005). From personal observation their activities are usually carried out

spontaneously and not necessarily with deliberate purpose, but rather because it satisfied their basic material and physical needs in an exciting and lucrative form for those wishing to take the opportunities offered by mainstream city life.

Lagos and the British Colonial rule:

The introduction of British colonial rule brought about the notion of English Liberty and personal freedom. Such traits were most observable in Lagos, where there developed a high incidence of delinquency. Second, immigration and the falling death rate led to rapid population increases. From 1861 when Lagos was formally ceded to the British the process of urbanization gathered pace with complete settlement of the Island by the turn of the century. Lagos comprised four distinct sub-communities: the Old Town of Isale-Eko, larger than the other districts put together; Olowogbowo or Saro Town; the Brazilian Quarter; and the European section. By the latter's expropriation of Ikoyi for the colonial administrative class, the people of Lagos were compelled to live in "the circumscribed area of Lagos town like herrings in a barrel." (Olukoju, 1994) Lagos is a very small piece of land. Owing to the enormous population pressure, however, many people resorted to erecting buildings even in areas ordinarily uninhabitable. In the fifty years after 1911, while the surface area of Lagos Island remained the same the population trebled, therefore achieving an incredibly high density of Lagosians: from 25,000 per square mile in 1901 to double that by 1921, reaching 58,189 by 1931, 87,492 in 1950 and approximately 125,000 by 1963. In the latter year, the density of north Lagos Island was higher than the density of Manhattan Island in New York City, though most of the former's residential buildings had only one or two storeys (Peil, 1991).

The reason for such high population densities was that Lagos Island rapidly developed into the commercial capital of Nigeria, concomitant with its leading political and administrative functions. All the leading expatriate mercantile firms and many indigenous middlemen made the southern waterfront road known as the

Marina, and Broad Street one hundred meters behind there, into the main arteries of the modern Central Business District of Lagos (Heap, 2000). Economic functions such as the break-of-bulk of imported goods, the collection point for exportable goods transported from the interior as well as banks and government offices near at hand, made Lagos Island the bustling centre of the emerging colonial economy. At first, the commercial centre consisted of numerous factories. These were large compounds enclosing in their interior a large space where most of the trading went on and traders from the interior could rest after their long journey. These factories have now been replaced by multi-storey buildings where trade and banking are conducted. Whether in the crowded native market of Jankara or Ebute Ero, the protruding annexes to houses along the narrow streets, the makeshift stalls around Tinubu bus stop, tens of thousands of Lagosians labour from dawn to dusk, welding motor parts, repairing motor vehicles, selling clothes, electronics and foodstuffs. They live in overcrowded houses or shanties with poor ventilation and at times without water or electricity. Many of them do not have houses to live in; they live in the places where they do their business. Yet the Nigerian Government of the 1970s saw those in the informal sector as a "horde of shoeshine boys, petty traders, pimps and prostitutes, whose function is largely parasitic, and whose employment is casual and intermittent with a fair leavening of illegal activities.

Earlier colonial government actions had unwittingly hastened the weakening of society: slum clearance in Central Lagos scattered kin groups (Baker, 1974). This ran counter to the equation previously espoused that physical decline hand in hand with moral degeneration, and therefore physical rehabilitation would engender moral improvement. Lagos is, in sum, a community of basic contradictions: its modernity is built on a strong base of tradition; its prosperity rests on pillars of poverty; its cosmopolitanism cloaks a society of provincial groupings. Most contradictory of all, the oldest and most solidified segment of the urban

community is, in essence, an 'urban village' which still retains the traditional characteristics of ethnic homogeneity, communal land tenure, close kinship ties, and primary group relationships (Babatunde and Walsh, 1968). In this segment of the population, the extended family remains an important social unit, "the clan tradition still survives as a rooted objection on the part of the African to setting up a new home away from his relatives. The mechanisms of familial and social cohesion contributed to social stability and well-being during the rapid growth in Lagos. There were signs, however, that these mechanisms were weakening, if not collapsing, throughout the century, resulting in a social environment conducive to anomie and its correlates of sporadic violence and delinquency, especially amongst male youths (Marris, 1961; Olukoju, 1994). It was at this time the Alikali boys, Jaguda boys; Boma boys; and Cow boys; metamorphose into a new nomenclature called 'touts' with a strong appendage to the various transport unions across most states in Nigeria, though more prominent in Lagos state.

Alikali Boys 1920s

The *Annual Report of the Police Magistrate, Lagos*, (1927:2) stated that Juvenile delinquency became such a problem in Lagos in the 1920s that it could no longer be ignored as "bands of young men collect in or parade the streets insulting women and sometimes, armed with whips and sticks, assaulting and beating peaceful citizens." Behind the Marina, Brazilians emigrants settled in the east around Campos Square, with Sierra Leoneans, or 'Saro', in the west at Olowogbowo (Lindsay, 1994). There was great rivalry between these two groups from the beginning, and in terms of their young people this was symbolically marked every Christmas and Easter when boys from Campos and Olowogbowo carried masquerades – the *carreta* – and paraded round the town dressed in brightly coloured clothes, some riding on horseback. Members of each group carried horsewhips and wherever the two groups

met they engaged in merciless, ferocious whipping of each other. The *Weekly Sunray* (1993) commented on the continuous yearly practice of such act:

the notorious 'Campos Square boys', the 'Lafiaji Boys', the 'Shomolu Boys' and the 'Mushin Boys'. Each of such group of youths had taken their identities from the localities in which they lived and which they concentrated their acts of thuggery during festivals like the 'Egungun', 'Eyo', 'Igunns' and other masquerades' outings. They had readily served as the whip wielding vanguards of such masquerades who taunted opposing masquerades and spectators, so as to foment trouble and undertake a free-for-all looting of shops and houses.

Describing the activities further, the Nigerian Daily Times 1929 noted in *clear terms the usual division of youths into groups along two districts during festive periods especially at Christmas and Easter*: those living north with the name 'Olowogbowo Alikali Society' and north-east of Tinubu Square made up of 'Lafiaji Alikali Society' The societies interpreted Boxing Day to mean the day when youths were exempted from criminal responsibility for assault:

Each society recruited fighting squads, and generally on December 26 of each year met each other in inter-district group fighting which, in actuality, was something bordering on internecine warfare...The equipment included paper headgear, mask for the face, boxing ring, 'hippo-rod' or the cat [o'nine tails] fitted with a number of nails and sharp-edged blades, daggers and any amount of charms calculated to render the combatant invisible. (P:4)

On Easter Sunday 1937, outraged Lagos residents stood in amazement at "long processions of drink-sodden rowdies parading the streets singing scared hymns whose words have been parodied into the most vulgar expressions in the native language (Nigerian Daily Telegraph 1937:4). Delinquency reappeared in 1942: "Irresponsibles armed with all sorts of dangerous weapons who use the cloak of Xmas Eve to perpetuate acts of lawlessness and violence (West African Pilot, 1942:2). The newspaper broadened out the delinquency associated with Christmas time into a condemnation of all Lagos Islanders, not just youths, slowing down Nigeria's attempts at nation-building: "it is usually the season of excesses, hooliganism, squandermania and other evidence of thoughtlessness, socially speaking... delay[ing] our social progress as members of the human race".

The number of cases coming before the two Lagos Police Magistrate Courts showed divergent trends of delinquency. At Ebute Metta on the mainland, cases remained relatively steady at around 100 annually. But at Saint Anna Court on Lagos Island the number of cases trebled in the period 1931-37. So much was the problem affecting normal court business that charges against juveniles were brought before their own separate court after November 1931. Yet *Alikali Boys* felt the soft touch of colonial law. With few options available, courts inflicted sentences of birching, hoping that it would lead to a decline in their outrageous criminal activity and have "a salutary effect on the behaviour of their comrades (Police Magistrate, 1927). But the birch was an innocuous punishment in the African context, being less severe than that applied at home. The colonial government proved unwilling to further criminalize first-time offenders with jail, however; prison was very much the last resort. First, the penal system and existing buildings were unsuited to the detention of juveniles. Second, there was no qualified staff available for the special training of juveniles. Third, and most importantly, the authorities were concerned not to put impressionable youths in jail with their older, more hardened, counterparts. The

legal system required an alternative: a reformatory. By building the Boys' Industrial Home at Yaba in 1923, the paternalistic colonial state sought to rectify some of the forces unleashed by colonialism itself.

Given the fact of rising juvenile delinquency in the inter-war years, the Home contributed to stemming an even greater tide of it on Lagos Island. The home was a corrective, not a preventive, institution, dealing with the juvenile criminal class and leaving no provision for those who had not yet fallen foul of the law. According to the West African Review (1937), It was just a sponge in a sea of juvenile delinquency as the Home coped with only a few eligible juvenile criminals each year: "Nigeria needs an institution ten times its size to deal with homeless youthful delinquents (P:6). In the later 1930s, came a change in name based on a new mode of operation and activities formerly limited to festive periods; but suddenly to a shift to the general public, thus new name Jaguda boys emerged as a replacement of Alikali boys.

Jaguda Boys 1930s

Traced to their beginnings in the late 1930s, *Jaguda Boys* roamed the main business and traffic arteries of Lagos Island looking for pockets to pick or using public menaces to get their way. They deliberately bumped into people in crowded places and then picked their pockets. Some even went so far as to hold people while others went through the victim's pockets. Heap (2000) account showed that sometimes two or more of them would engage in a seeming scuffle; an innocent man with money in his pocket unaware of the tricks and approaching as a go-between would find to his horror that he had been relieved of it all. Jaguda boys operated from the porch of Tom Jones Memorial Hall on Victoria Street or the Mosque opposite, from empty meat stalls at Ereko Market along Idumagbo Avenue every evening, at Ebute Ero's daily foodstuffs market, at Idumagbo Marina on market days and at Iddo Railway Station. Outside the Tax Office on Reclamation Road and at Jankara Market in the evening

“these heartless brute congregate, ready to attack innocent people who might come their way.”¹ Even needing the cover of darkness proved no barrier: *Jaguda Boys* along Agarawu and Ereko Streets demanded “‘gifts’ on the basis of ‘give me’ or ‘I’ll take it. With increasing numbers of Lagosians forced to live away from the built-up commercial centre of Lagos Island, commuter traffic gave further pickpocketing opportunities at bus stops and on buses themselves. As soon as the bus moved they jumped on, spotted their prey, did the deed, and then, with the bus still moving, jumped off.”² Older youths recruited young boys, enticing them with the lion’s share of their good food. Closer familiarity developed; resulting eventually in the initiation of the boys by a magical jujū incision on their bodies, instilling into them the fear of evil should they let down the gang:

[The] majority are quite young and innocently brought in contact, infested by the microbe of their perversity. Need measures to protect public from annoyance and victimisation and to safeguard the morals of innocent young people from being polluted by the baneful influence of irreclaimable scapegraces. *Jaguda Boys* committed robberies with violence and indecent assaults on young women. Gangs of a dozen *jaguda* paid daily visits to shops: half waited outside and half went inside to snatch goods at busy times of the day when the traders had their hands and eyes occupied dealing with genuine customers. “The pestilence is disheartening and beyond our control,” reported Adegbola

Ajibade, the exasperated Ereko District Traders’ Secretary.³

The Daily Service (1941) puts *Jaguda Boys* into a national context as being a threat to the colonial government in terms of law and order across the whole country:

The extraordinary proceedings reported to be taking place every evening at the Ereko meat stalls are definitely a disgrace to the capital of Nigeria and a challenge to constituted authority...to relieve the poor helpless people of so grave a menace to their limbs and property in the very heart of Lagos.

With specially selected constables on the beat of the most affected areas of the Island, one local police chief perceived the *jaguda* threat in terms of anti-citizenry, societal crime which demanded the full assistance of the law-abiding majority of Lagosians to eradicate.⁴ Rounding up of these boys was a routine activity by men of the colonial force, but many of the *Jaguda* boys hauled before the Courts on various offences had no parents or guardians. This lack of roots negated the belief of the colonialists and Native Authority that the simple solution to juvenile delinquency in the capital involved the repatriation of offenders back to their home area.⁵ Furthermore, banishment schemes operating in other towns and cities in Western Nigeria meant merely a swapping of *jaguda* personnel amongst themselves without really dealing with the recurring phenomenon in any meaningful way. In 1936, and in subsequent waves of repatriation, Lagos received pickpockets expelled from

³ NAI, COMCOL 1/2403, A. Ajibade, Secretary, Ereko District Traders, Lagos, to A. F. F. P. Newns, Commissioner of the Colony, and M. K. N. Collens, Commissioner of Police, August 21, 1942.

⁴ NAI, COMCOL 1/2403, De Boissiere to Newns, September 16, 1941.

⁵ *Ordinance no. 43 of 1933 to Prescribe the Powers and Duties of Native Authorities*, clause 12 (1).

¹ Omo *Jaguda* l’Eko [Pickpockets in Lagos],” *Yoruba News*, September 20-27, 1938, 2-3;

² Letter to the Editor, ‘Pickpockets at Bus Stops’, From E. A. Jacobs, Lagos,” *Daily Times*, August 14, 1952,

Ibadan, one hundred miles to the north. The tactic of banishment proved a short-term strategy, merely shifting the base from which *Jaguda Boys* operated (Heap, 1997). Also the mid 1930s saw the return and repatriation of some Nigerians from Sierra Leone popularly referred to as Stowaways, they operated along side the *Jaguda boys* with their operation limited to Lagos Island.

Boma Boys

At about the same time as *Jaguda Boys*, another set of juvenile delinquents added to the negative image of Lagos Island: touts or *Boma Boys*. Using 1940 as a not untypical year for *Boma Boy* activity, a litany of muggings and assaults illustrate their hooliganism. It was reported by the Nigerian Daily times that:

Twenty nine *Boma Boys* congregated opposite the French Company's premises on the Marina and rained stones on the police. Backed up with reinforcements, the police brought 8 of them to court where they were convicted of being rogues and vagabonds with no visible means of support.⁶

Their constant threat was a source of menace to European sailors, or 'John Bulls' as *bomas* called them:

Without any kind of shame or decency like vultures they batten on our visitors in the hope of getting something of them. Their methods are usually direct solicitations but at times they simply follow and follow and follow until even the most patient man is gravely tempted to take the law into his own hands.⁷

It is claimed *Boma Boys* came from Freetown, where 'bom' meant to beg. "When stowaways from Nigeria, who had mixed with the disreputable '*Boma Boys*' in Freetown, returned to Lagos," they settled along the Marina, where they came into contact with schoolboys sent home for non-payment of their fees. *Boma Boys* treated them to glamorous stories which fired their imagination; ambition to see 'life' abroad was usually all that was required for entrapment. If they could find some money they would be introduced to some one on board a ship who would take them to Europe or America as a stowaway. With Elder Dempster recruiting seamen in mid-1941, *Boma Boys* seized the opportunity to dupe schoolboys out of money on the promise of jobs onboard. Youngsters parting with their school fees only to discover they had been deceived, became afraid to go home and face punishment, began to loiter about, gradually degenerating into *Boma Boys* themselves.⁸ With no ships in harbor, *Boma Boys* took to gambling on the sandy patch on the Marina in front of the Kingsway Store. When ships docked, *Boma Boys* sprang into action: "cheeky ragamuffins who force their loathsome services on seamen and voyaging tourists at the marina."⁹ *Boma Boys* filled a necessary economic function: proprietors of hotels and bars wanted hard-drinking, free-spending customers, and sailors needed guides. *Boma Boys* guided many unwary sailors to brothels, "sordid and disreputable places.

With immigrants flocking to Lagos in search of jobs after the Second World War, the population swelled, while peacetime demobilization added to the heavy stream of job seekers, creating an unprecedented level of unemployment. With basic foodstuffs in short supply and increasingly priced beyond meagre incomes, however, more and more desperate youths resorted to deviant survival means (Olusanya, 1973; Peil, 1991). In response, the *Daily Times* laced

⁶ "Boma' Boys and the Police," *Nigerian Daily Times*, May 30, 1940, 10; "War Against 'Boma Boys,'" *Nigerian Daily Times*, May 31, 1940, 7.

⁷ "Hooliganism and Worse," 4; "European Special Constables Arrest a *Boma Boy* and He is Sentenced to Imprisonment for a Month," *West African Pilot*, August 10, 1940, 7.

⁸ "*Boma Boys*," *West African Pilot*, November 16, 1940, 4.

⁹ "The Underworld of Lagos," *Nigerian Daily Times*, September 9, 1940, 4.

its call for parental restraint in nationalist tones: “drunken and morally degenerate boys cannot help in building the new and better Nigeria about which we hear so much.”¹⁰

It is in this regard that, ... Bankole-Wright 1942 in his letter to the Ibadan Divisional Officer noted that Lagos proved an invigorating, fertile ground for the planting, growth and restocking of a deviant urban youth culture. Using environmental circumstances to explain juvenile delinquency has a great deal of merit because of its moral and physical effects of Lagos Islands’ urban environment with its temptations of bright shops and wealthy, successful citizens passing through their neighbourhoods: “Lagos at the present time is especially full of temptations for boys who are destitute.”

The above analysis and statements by various personnel and scholars about the deviant sub-cultures which existed in the colonial administration did not stop with Boma boys but rather it metamorphose into the present day areaboys and touts in the streets and transportation corridors of Lagos State. The motivation according to Omitoogun (1996) is not far fetched – the enabling environment - the frustrations and the hopes Lagos as a city create.

Touts in Today’s Nigeria

Touts are deviant youths, who seek for their daily living through coercive and persuasive requests, petty crimes and sometimes-violent offences to acquire resources, generally cash in the urban main business district and crowded areas disturbing the civil society and defying the civic authority most especially in Lagos transportation corridors (Ikuomola, 2010). The phenomena of touts according to Omitoogun (1996), in his book ‘Organized Street Violence’ is a sordid chapter of life on the streets. He stressed that the proliferation of illegal roadside markets that has come to characterized informal urban economy, have become fertile grounds for touts/area boys, thieves,

day light robberies and other nefarious activities. And, as a leading national newspaper put it, “the streets of Lagos are workshops for criminal apprenticeships for the large population of children and young adults who work and live in the streets (Guardian, 1993:7). Street children are the most vulnerable. Logically and significantly, a large number of youths who survive the apprenticeship of criminality on the streets gradually turn into touts or what is commonly called ‘area boys’. Area boys also known as *Alaayes*, *Agbero* (touts at motor parks), *omo onile* (sons of the soil) or *omo ojuina* (sons of the eye of the fire), jobless youths who subject themselves to the temptations of the street. The interview session with younger touts revealed how one of them came into touting:

I started as a helper (alagbaru) in the market carrying load/wares for traders and commuters in Oshodi-Oke¹¹ and Oshodi-Isaale¹² when I was 10 years old, first it was weekends and later after school. It then came a time, I met other boys doing the same job very close to Saudi Park, these boys usually stationed themselves at adjoining road to assist Ibadan bound passenger with their luggage that was how I joined these friends of mine. So last year I was absorbed into the National Union of Road Transport Workers (Male 16 years).

This account shows that early involvement of children in economic activities especially around motor parks can predispose them to becoming touts. The activities of children in open markets and parks was a common sight during President Babangida’s administration in the 1980s, a period which saw a turn around and difficulties in family lifestyles

¹⁰ Children at Night Clubs,” *Daily Times*, March 25, 1952, 5.

¹¹ Upper motor park In Oshodi

¹² Lower motor park in Oshodi

and economic adjustment. Couple with the massive retrenchment and job losses, the number of urban proletariat jolted; especially among inhabitants in Lagos like most city dweller more than any other. This meant that youths could no longer enjoy the good fruits of life that their cosmopolitan outlook demanded. This stimulated socio-psychological trauma. Adjustment became difficult and people reacted in different ways one of which was taking to touting (Omololu, 1987; Omitoogun, 1996).

Activities of Touts in Lagos State

Hiring of touts is a feature in Lagos metropolis. They are sometimes used by businessmen as bodyguards or intimidators (bouncers) at nightclubs, restaurants, brothels and stadium in several parts of the city. Adisa, (1997) noted that their activities take on other forms as 'loan sharks, who harass and intimidate those who take unsecured loans. This is also common between landlords and tenants, a situation where landlords use touts in cities harassing and intimidating tenants to hasten payments, or in increasing house rent. Not too common though is the situation where tenants are found using touts against landlords. Ethnic violence has also been associated with touts as in the case of OPC in Lagos state. A particular case was narrated in Lagos Island where touting took a violent format. According to Adisa (1997), touts were hired to drive out shopkeepers and crime barons of the Ita Agarawu (Ojuina) and Idumota neighbourhoods¹³, whom the landlords accused of not paying their rent, confusions was caused, this provoked confrontation, traders were beaten up, stabbed and their goods stolen. Touts were similarly involved in the street war on Martins street in the island, where they waylaid the Hausa Mallams who engaged in foreign exchange transactions, their bags of money were snatched from them and they ran away into the protection of their Oluwole hideouts. After the initial shock and havoc netted on them, the Mallams rebounded to give the area boys

who were mainly Yorubas a fight, in which screwdrivers, broken bottles and swords were among other weapons used with reckless abandon; business transactions were ceased and people were wounded (Adisa, 1997).

Area boys also engaged in gang warfare on streets to nourish their macho image. Rival outfits also engage each other in brutal fighting to demonstrate superiority; one such fight lasted for five days at Okesuna/Patey Street in Lagos in 1992, resulting into casualties and deaths. Street violence in several ways as observed in a study carried out by the People's Bank in 1994 revealed that politicians hired touts to disrupt political campaigns of their opponents and disrupt voting during elections especially in areas where their rivals have a stronghold. It is this regard touts see themselves and become proud of their activities in the event that their candidates become elected. This was a recurring statement among touts:

Successive government in Lagos state have always used and dumped us, but when it comes to election time, that's when we become more important. This they cannot do without, in campaigns and in politics generally. Despite all these we are often being labeled as criminals not only by individuals but also by the same people we have helped into government. A typical example is the Fashola's¹⁴ government which has not been fair to us. The situation of things now shows that the government is trying to do away with us (FGD/Oshodi/34years/Male)

Present Day Motivation towards Touting

Responses show that 30 percent of respondents, the majority saw the daily income from the job as the main motivation behind the job. Other reasons given were success of some individuals in the job this was specified by a quarter of the sampled respondents; followed by unemployment and friends which ranked third and fourth respectively on the frequency table. Contrary to what was expected that unemployment would rank

¹³ Suburbs in Lagos Island

¹⁴ The present Governor of Lagos State.

first, the reverse was the case. This shows that a lot of boys and men were into the job because of the financial benefits in it. Though individual responses cumulatively from the percentages, shows that 55.6 percent of the respondents saw money and successes of some individuals as a motivation in becoming a tout, nevertheless discussants in both the Focus Group Discussion and Interview sessions highlighted unemployment and the need for survival as key motivators to becoming a tout. Some of the comments are summarised below:

Before becoming a worker in this garage, I tried looking for a job in Lagos to no avail. I would have loved to get a better job (FGD/Surulere).

Supporting the above speaker, another respondent who once worked in a factory before becoming a tout, said:

It is this freedom I like most in this our job, we are all like family here, we help one another in this park. While I was working in a factory in Maza-Maza along Apapa, I saw hell, I was almost working for twelve hours inside the heat, the *Koraa* (Lebanese) people are not friendly and yet do not pay well. *Agher*¹⁵ job is much better than being a factory worker in terms of money and leisure.

29/04/09/FGD/Surulere

Another interviewee stressed the successes and flamboyant lifestyle of some senior touts in Lagos state and their involvement in politics at local, state and to some extent federal level as a major motivation especially among touts. States he:

...Some of the *Babas* (elders) in the parks apart from being rich, wield a lot of influence in the state especially during the period

of election, when they are usually reckon with. Our *Ogas* (referring to senior touts and Executives of NURTW and RTEAN) are usually invited to Alausa the seat of power in the state, they wine and dine with the high and mighty in the state, they are our mentors with them there will always be hope for us in this job.

Furthermore, similar position was presented and supported by members of a Lagos Island FGD session captured thus:

...yes these are the people we want to be like, our aspiration is to get to the level they have reached and be influential in society. They have proved to the society that it is not only through education that one can be recognised.

Male FGD/CMS/Lagos
Island/34-43 years (April 16,
2009)

The above discussion highlights unemployment as the nexus between touts, NURTW and politicians not only in Lagos but also other cities in Nigeria. Invariably, politicians have come to exploit the numerical strength of touts, drivers and conductors in state's motor parks and garages as a tool for wining election in Nigeria. This reality has trigger much debates and controversies about touting as a trade, creating a cramp between those who benefit from it and others who see the trade as a threat to national security. It has nevertheless metamorphosed into a complex, powerful, and important factor in party politics. Similarly a discussant cum residents interviewed described touts activities in politics thus:

Over the years these boys have been used by politicians to achieve their inordinate ambition and most times they are dumped and damned after their assignment has been completed. During campaign for elections

¹⁵ Local name for Touts

they are ready to beat, maim and kill anybody on the way of their paymasters they are more formidable during political rallies which also serve as their battle front, here their paymaster are quick to spray them money apart from the fact they are on their pay roll. In all these it is the masses and the innocents that suffer in the hands of areaboy. The Lagos state government must therefore take the bull by the horn and get them out of the streets, motor parks and other areas where there are found.

IDI/Island/67years/
25/06/09Male

There were several other comments and different views of the motivation to touting in Lagos state, nevertheless the question 'who benefits from touting?' shows that majority were of the opinion that the government benefits from their activities in terms of the money being generated on their behalf, while a few respondents saw transport union chairmen and touts as the beneficiary. The various submissions lay credence to literature (Momoh, 2000; 2005; Ismail, 2007) that the benefits from touting are in two ways, going by the claim that the involvement of touts in the collection of levies started in the 1990s as a result of the decision by Lagos state local government chairmen to privatise revenue collection in motor parks and bus stops. A situation which Ismail (2007) noted brought about the sharing of motor parks to political cronies on one hand and on the other led to the recruitment and proliferation of areaboy as revenue collectors in the state. Important to note from this finding among respondents age 16-25 years money was seen as a second factor after free lifestyle as a component the job guarantees as a major factor keeping them as touts; this was acclaimed by 20 percent of the respondents. Another major responses showed that Godfatherism which is related to the perceived successes of elderly men in touting of in touting trade (15.percent) was accounted for as a pull factor keeping them in the job.

An interviewee at Shomolu Local government Area affirm free lifestyle as what keep some touts in the job thus:

... Usually an outsider will think it is the money, that is keeping some of us in this job. It is not always the case, for someone like me and my friends here we are in this business because of the freedom it gives us (IDI/Shomolu)

Further, another respondent narrated the free lifestyle he enjoys as tout:

As a tout you have freedom, nobody is after you like your parents wanting to know where one is or coming from at night.... it is always fun among us, drivers and conductors, we harass one another, that is the beauty of the job.

IDI/Shomolu/06/07/09

In addition a discussant, in the focus group discussion with the National Union of Road Transport Workers (Apongbon unit) described money as important, but laid more emphasis on the free lifestyle among workers/touts as also paramount, thus

... there are other more important factors, some of these factors are the relationship we keep with our workers, we are all free with ourselves, here we eat, drink and respect ourselves, everything goes in park life, especially among the younger boys, they quarrel with one another, the next minute they are together working. Life in the park is full of freedom, CMS/Apongbon unit/14/08/09

The free lifestyles claimed by some of the respondents go a long way in explaining the high drug usage among touts in Lagos state. Commonly used as observed was the marijuana and mixed herbal drink locally called *kparaga*. The heavy substance use among touts is

corroborated by other studies (Childhope, 1990; Oliveira, 1990) and may be linked to neurological deficits (Aptekar, 1989; Hier, et. al., 1990) putting street youth at physical and mental risk. From field observation, the drinking of local gin and smoking of cigarettes are usually done in the open, while smoking of cannabis and other hard drugs were done in the hidden part of parks, bus stops or nearby bush. Smoking of marijuana and cigarette is seen as an acceptable part of touting like gang membership and a frequent activity, irrespective of one's position, when members are hanging out (Curry and Decker, 2003; Decker, 2004). Excessive smoking and involvement in drugs have been linked to some of the major reasons why touts suffer psychological and mental disturbances later in life as shown in previous studies on deviant careers, youths and drug abuse (Baron, 2003; Chapple and Hope, 2003).

Conclusion and Recommendation

A summary of the pull and push factors necessitating touting in Lagos state are myriad, as there was no one single reality or account, but many. This like most sociological phenomenon or behaviour has many possible ways to understand and interpret social phenomenon (Rodwell, 1998). This is shown in the stated account that family background, lack of education, migration, unemployment, income in touting, government insensitivity, to mention but a few, were indicators which can be used to explain some of the reasons why individuals are still motivated to become touts as well as its continuous existence overtime.

Essentially the qualitative data presented above explains some of the push and pull factors stimulating individuals, youths and adults alike, into the job of touting. The primary purpose of the majority in this occupation is the need for survival as note earlier, a platform through which members' material and non material needs would be satisfied. Thus touts form a social group or class of people who serve as an appendage to the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and Road Transport

Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN), serving the unions directly or otherwise, as well as creating a social bond for members through the exchange relations that take place. As members' material and non material needs are satisfied, they provide a sense of belonging and attachment to the Unions and the group. Togetherness and social cohesion are viewed in terms of what each member is able to give (in terms of work, meeting targets) and what each member is able to receive as an individual or group. And as members of the group interact, they continually construct and reconstruct norms and values which sustain social cohesiveness and embeddedness within the group. This point is essential, according to Moody and White, (2003) and Omobowale (2006), in group activities, and in ensuring self development where there are no adequate supports from governmental institutions.

Lastly the continuous subtle cooptation and appropriation of touts as a government resource, in the area of politics have come to empower and indirectly foster their long years of existence. It is therefore recommended that touts or area boys irrespective of the various nomenclature over historical times can be eradicated with good government and employment policies that will engage both skilled and unskilled youth roaming the streets for survival.

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