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Introduction

In Nigeria, people say that “every household is its own local government.” What they mean is that politicians and state institutions have not delivered—and cannot be trusted to ensure—even the most basic infrastructure that people expect as citizens of Africa’s richest and most populous country. Individuals, households, communities, and businesses have to fend for themselves. Nigeria is a place where, for many people, water must be purchased daily from vendors carting jerrycans filled from boreholes dug in wealthier neighbors’ compounds. Small businesses rely on mini-generators for electricity because the national grid supplies power only sporadically. “Public transportation” depends mostly on networks of privately owned buses and armies of independent motorcycle-taxi drivers. Security in the face of rising crime requires neighborhood vigilantism because police are ill-equipped and often suspected of colluding with criminals. Even relatively poor families pay for tutors to teach their children outside of school because state-run education is perceived as inadequate to the task of preparing for promotion to the next grade level, much less admission to university. The hopes created by independence sixty years ago, the anticipated benefits of being one of the world’s leading oil-producing nations, and the promises put forward when civilian rule was reestablished in 1999 after decades of military dictatorship have all been dashed in the eyes of average citizens.

The provision of infrastructure, the projection of state power, and the experience of citizenship are deeply intertwined in all the world’s nations. Everywhere, the success of governments and the satisfaction of the people

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are closely connected to the reach and effectiveness of basic social services. Nigeria is not alone in facing these challenges. But while its citizens are profoundly disappointed by their government's failures, a whole system has been forged in response to these infrastructural deficiencies. Innovative entrepreneurs and ordinary citizens manage to survive by creating vibrant informal economies that provide fundamental infrastructure where the government does not. On the surface, it appears that Nigerians' self-reliance and sheer hustle render the state irrelevant. In reality, all of these ostensibly private efforts to address infrastructural shortcomings involve regular state-society interaction. These dealings have contributed to forms and practices of infrastructural power and everyday citizenship that ironically thrive on official dysfunction and tragically perpetuate the very inequalities and injustices that struggling Nigerians most lament.

In this book, I examine the ways that Nigerians across multiple social strata develop technologies, businesses, social networks, political ties, cultural strategies, and everyday habits to cope with the constant failure of government-provided infrastructure. But the state is not so much absent as complicit. Political and economic elites benefit from the government's deficiencies, and they steer the state accordingly. While Nigerians' ingenuity and resilience in the face of extreme challenges can and should be celebrated, these (only apparently) state-absent solutions come at great cost, including fueling corruption, perpetuating social disparities, and deflecting attention away from more sustainable paths forward.

Over the past thirty years, I have observed the ways that Nigerians adapt to and try to improve the country's woeful infrastructure. Although my research has focused on southeastern Nigeria, the same situation prevails across much of the nation. In what follows, I describe and explain how—and with what consequences—Nigerians create and maintain basic infrastructure in the domains of water, power, transportation, security, communication, and education. This scope enables me to draw out important patterns and intersections. While recent anthropological scholarship on infrastructure has examined single examples such as water, electricity, or transportation in various settings in Africa and around the world, comparing multiple domains in one country allows me to explore more comprehensively the consequences for citizenship, political culture, and state power. In an era when governments and governance around the world face rising popular skepticism, understanding the consequences of infrastructure created and maintained without effective state support—indeed, often marked

by deliberate state neglect—offers lessons relevant not only in Nigeria and Africa but also globally.

A Household as a Local Government

When Nigerians employ the expression “every household is its own local government” to describe the country’s infrastructural problems, as they often do, they typically have in mind two alternative images. One is of the country’s political and economic elite. In this image, people envision the compounds of Nigeria’s rich, in which all desired infrastructure and amenities are contained within their walls, impervious to the deprivation outside. A gigantic generator provides reliable electricity. A deep borehole pumps clean water. Towering masts and shiny satellite dishes assure constant internet and hundreds of TV channels. Security is symbolized by fortification: massive metal gates and high walls topped by razor wire, supplemented by uniformed watchmen. Among the several fancy cars parked inside are four-wheel-drive SUVs that navigate Nigeria’s heavily potholed roads with relatively little passenger discomfort. These personal “local governments” are not the figments of less-privileged Nigerians’ imaginations. In fact, everyone has seen many of them in each city and town, and in countless villages across the country. Officially, Nigeria has 36 states and 774 local governments. Unofficially, there are many, many thousands of these fully equipped, elite local governments—powerful people’s residences that have everything one could dream of.

The other image is of a more typical Nigerian household: not impervious to the failures of state-provided infrastructure and social services, but instead constantly struggling to cope with shortages, blackouts, and numerous other everyday obstacles to surviving, much less thriving. Nigerians are acutely aware of the two meanings of their common expression and the disparities involved. Following the second meaning, Nigeria has literally millions of local governments. For people in every one of these households-cum-local-governments, daily routines revolve around addressing chronic infrastructural deficiencies. And yet as Nigerians try to circumvent their government’s failures, the state is always present, exerting its authority in its willful absence. The infrastructural woes of Nigeria’s masses are politically and economically intertwined with the infrastructural comforts of the elite. A combination of deliberate state dysfunction engineered at the top and unwitting collaboration from below creates a situation in which Nigerians

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from all walks of life contribute to the perpetuation of a system that serves the interests of the powerful and undermines the aspirations of the rest.

I introduce the world of informal economic and entrepreneurially created infrastructure and services in response to calculated state neglect through a single ethnographic case: one household in Umuahia, a small city of about 350,000 people in Igbo-speaking southeastern Nigeria. The case begins with Ogechi, an eighteen-year-old secondary-school student.¹ She is the oldest of four children. Her father, Nwigwe, runs a small shop in Umuahia's main market. Her mother, Mercy, is a housewife, though she occasionally engages in small-scale trading. All three of Ogechi's junior siblings are also students. Hers is a relatively poor family, but one that has middle-class desires, a situation now common in urban Nigeria. While there is no such thing as a prototypical Nigerian household, the brief description of how Ogechi's family addresses its infrastructural needs and aspirations reflects much wider patterns and raises many of the questions and issues I examine throughout this book.

WATER

Every morning, before the sun rises and well before she walks to school, Ogechi begins the hour-long chore of filling her family's plastic buckets, basins, and barrels with water. The water she collects will be used for all the day's drinking, cooking, bathing, and toilet-flushing needs in a household of seven, which includes her parents, her three younger siblings, and a cousin on her father's side who lives with them. Her task involves making three trips to a neighbor's nearby borehole. To the neighbor, she pays the equivalent of about five US cents to fill one plastic fifty-liter container.² On each trip she fills two containers, which she pushes back to her family's compound in a wheelbarrow. She then carries them upstairs, one at a time, to a two-bedroom flat on the second floor, where she pours the water into several larger vessels located in the kitchen and the bathroom.

An elderly couple that lives in one of the flats on the first floor of Ogechi's building, with no young bodies in their household capable of toting fifty-liter jerrycans, buys water several times a week from Kalu, a young man whose livelihood depends on carting water, six jerrycans at a time, around the neighborhood every morning and evening. Kalu the water seller transports his product in a large cart that a local welder fabricated to his specifications. For his door-to-door delivery, Kalu charges the equivalent of eight US cents per fifty liters. Like Ogechi, he also buys his water from local vendors with boreholes.

In a bungalow in the compound next door to Ogechi's building lives a somewhat wealthier family. On the roof of their two-story house are two very large plastic tanks, each with a capacity to store about fifteen hundred liters. As with many houses in the neighborhood—and across Nigeria—the concrete platform to support water tanks was an elemental feature in the design and construction of the building. Ogechi's neighbors' tanks are refilled about once a month by a tanker truck. The price of refilling a tank depends on the source of the water. The tanker-truck driver offers water that is from a local river, which is cheaper, and which some people believe is adequate for flushing toilets and washing clothes, but not for cooking and drinking, or water from boreholes, which is believed to be more potable, but is also more expensive. When in doubt about the quality of water, every Nigerian has the option of buying ubiquitous small plastic sachets of drinking water, sold by vendors on every street corner, known colloquially as "pure water." But the provenance—and actual quality—of pure water is a topic of great debate.

In this urban Nigerian neighborhood in Umuahia, an extensive informal economy has evolved to meet the community's basic need for water. The irony is that the neighborhood's complex, entrepreneurially created, informal water economy unfolds in a space where many residents have indoor plumbing connected to the city's water system. But in Ogechi's neighborhood, the water hasn't run for over a year. In other Umuahia neighborhoods, it might run once or twice a week, but no one knows when or for how long. Many people leave their taps open, plugging bathtubs in hopes of catching unpredictable flows—though this can be a risky practice if the water runs for a long time when no one is home. In older neighborhoods like Ogechi's, with infrastructure built during Nigeria's oil boom of the 1970s or even during the colonial period, people lament that city pipes mostly produce no water. But in the urban sprawl that has developed in the last few decades, few neighborhoods have municipal water and sewer infrastructure at all. Yet nearly everyone builds houses with indoor plumbing. The juxtaposition of flush toilets and no running water epitomizes the contradictions and stark realities associated with infrastructure in contemporary Nigeria: people have (or at least want) many modern amenities, but the state largely fails to deliver the infrastructure to support them, and much of what ordinary citizens can access through the informal economy seems substandard or even fake. When it comes to infrastructure, nothing ever works as it should, and yet somehow everything works just enough to get by—sort of. A flush toilet without running water often stinks.

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ELECTRICITY

The situation with water is but one example of the ways in which fundamental infrastructure and basic social services in Nigeria are cobbled together through everyday entrepreneurialism and informal economic enterprise. Further, the different spheres of infrastructure, each jerry-rigged in its own complex way, are in fact highly interpenetrating and interdependent, much like more formal systems and services. For example, the water that Ogechi buys from the neighbor's borehole can be pumped only when there is electricity. The national power grid, however, is anemic and unpredictable. In Ogechi's neighborhood, electricity comes sometimes for a few hours a day, but other times not at all for a week or two. Consequently, the neighbors with the borehole own a small diesel-powered generator that is typically used many hours daily to pump water. When that generator breaks down, Ogechi must fetch water from a vendor farther away. As with so many people in Nigeria when faced with such infrastructural challenges, Ogechi's reactions include anger, frustration, cynicism, resignation, determination, and an enduring hope that in the future things will get better. About the intertwined problems of water and electricity, she said, "Every day, I tote these heavy containers upstairs only to meet blackout. Our leaders enjoy while we suffer. But what can we do? We can only manage. One day it will all be better. Nigeria will be delivered from this darkness."

Ogechi's father, Nwigwe, makes a living selling drinks—alcoholic and soft—in a small shop on the periphery of Umuahia's main market. The drinks he sells in bulk by crate or by carton need not be cold. But for drinks he sells one by one, mostly to shoppers in the market, he has a refrigerator to chill the beer, malted drinks, Coca-Cola products, and, of course, pure water. Few people want to buy warm drinks retail. For blackouts, Nwigwe has a small generator that he uses to light up his shop at night—the bright lights attract more customers than a kerosene lantern, he says. But the generator is not strong enough to power a refrigerator. On special occasions, such as during the Christmas season or when Nigeria is playing in an international soccer tournament, Nwigwe will tote his generator to the family flat, but usually they resort to lanterns during the regular nighttime outages.

Most evenings, whether at Nwigwe's shop near the market or in the family's apartment, the loud whirr of nearby generators is a reminder of the failures of Nigeria's power infrastructure and of Nigerians' capacity to adapt. But the humming generators also expose the situation's social inequalities. In much of urban Nigeria, unlike in some other parts of Africa, the wealthy

and the poor typically live, more or less, cheek by jowl. Consequently, when there is no light, a cacophony of different droning sounds reveals everything from the huge generators of the rich that support refrigerators and air conditioners, and start automatically when the grid fails, to now-common small portable Chinese models known in Nigerian Pidgin English as “*I pass my neighbor*” (“I’m better than my neighbor”) to mark the social status associated with being able to turn on the lights at night.

Nearly every small enterprise in Nigeria depends on electricity generators to make the business viable, whether it is artisans and service providers like barbers and carpenters or shop owners selling food, clothing, or medicine. Electricity from the national parastatal is so sporadic and unreliable that even a blind man would know when it comes on at night because whole neighborhoods erupt with the cheers of children who shout, “*NEPA done come!*” and “*Up NEPA*”—NEPA being the acronym for the old name for the national power company, which was the National Electric Power Authority. The NEPA acronym was the butt of many jokes, with people saying it stood for “Never Electric Power Anytime” and other variants on the theme.

The failures of infrastructure and basic social services provoke not only humor but also rumors, speculation, and popular analysis about the intersection of politics and money in Nigerian society. With regard to electricity, as with other domains, Nigerians believe—and, in many instances, they know firsthand—that someone is benefiting from the situation. For instance, it is commonly said that the elites who import generators worth hundreds of millions of dollars to Nigeria are in collusion with NEPA officials and politicians to assure that they continue to get rich through ordinary people’s suffering. In other words, many people believe that the power grid fails on purpose. As I will show in the chapters that follow, the realities of how the elites steer the state in Nigeria are at least as incredible as the sometimes apocryphal stories that circulate in popular rumors.

SECURITY

The failure to provide electricity not only contributes to problems with water supply and to the most basic economic struggles of average Nigerians, it also fuels crime and fears of insecurity. At night, in total darkness, thieves operate more easily. In Ogechi’s Umuahia neighborhood, security is another arena of infrastructure in which the community musters a *mélange* of efforts to address what people perceive as the state’s failure to protect them. At each end of the long street on which the family lives are large iron gates that are

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lowered and locked at eleven o'clock at night by a watchman whom residents jointly pay to patrol the neighborhood throughout the night. So that people know he is not sleeping on the job, the watchman clangs together two pieces of metal that chime almost like a bell, every hour, on the hour. People say that the fear of armed robbers makes them "sleep with one eye open," and that the hourly clanging is somehow reassuring.

Urban household compounds are now commonly surrounded by a wall or fence. The social class of the occupants can be reasonably judged by the characteristics of the wall, especially whether it is topped by razor wire (the elite) or broken glass (the aspiring middle class). The greater the wealth, the higher the fear (and the wall)—though even relatively poor people fear crime. In fact, Nigeria is like most of the world: the main victims of crimes committed by desperately poor people are other poor people. Thus, most houses and flats, even in poor neighborhoods, have iron bars securing the windows and second metal doors or gates to fortify each entrance. Many people keep dogs to discourage intruders, and in recent years new businesses have opened to train guard dogs for the wealthy, importing breeds previously unknown in Nigeria. During especially bad spates of crime, communities have formed armed vigilante groups, but these have waxed and waned, in part because the vigilantes are often suspected of evolving into criminals themselves.

As in other domains of infrastructure and basic social services, the offices and officials of the state who are supposed to help are typically perceived to be part of the problem. With regard to crime and security, Nigerians commonly believe that the police are worse than merely ill-equipped, unsympathetic, nonresponsive, and incompetent; people frequently say that the police are partners in crime, colluding with criminals rather than trying to catch them. Like many rumors in Nigeria, stories about corrupt police are sometimes exaggerated and even apocryphal, but often they are true. Many people are loath to report a crime to the police for fear that they will get caught up in something worse.

TRANSPORTATION

Police are a potent presence in another domain of basic infrastructure and social service that Nigerians manage with little effective state support: transportation. Ogechi and her family walk most places they have to go in Umuahia. She and her siblings trek about three-quarters of a mile to their school. Nwigwe walks a slightly shorter distance to his shop. His wife, Mercy,

walks to the main market several days a week to buy foodstuffs and other household necessities. But on the way back, when her load is heavy, she travels by *keke napep*, the local slang for the three-wheeled auto rickshaws that became popular in Umuahia after the state government banned *okada*, the once-ubiquitous motorcycle taxis. Other family members also take kekes if they are in a hurry, if they have a load, if it is nighttime and a long walk seems dangerous, or if they have a little spare cash and feel a bit lazy.

For longer journeys outside Umuahia—for example, when Nwigwe travels to the commercial city of Aba to wholesale markets to restock his shop, or when family members travel to their ancestral village for a wedding, a funeral, or the traditional Christmas visit—the most common mode of transportation is by bus. A huge range of types of buses ply various routes in and out of Umuahia, from minibuses known as *danfo* that make multiple stops carrying commuters and shoppers to nearby communities, all the way to large luxury buses that travel “express” from Umuahia to faraway cities like Lagos, Abuja, and Kano. Some of the bus companies are so large that their brand names are familiar to everyone in southeastern Nigeria—companies like The Young Shall Grow, *Ekene Dili Chukwu* (which means “all praise to God” in Igbo), and ABC Transport. Although some state governments, most recently especially in Lagos, have begun to develop mass transit systems, one of the characteristic features of “public transportation” in Nigeria is that it is mostly privately owned and operated.

But like other arenas of infrastructure in which Nigerians address basic needs with little effective state support, the private nature of public transportation must not obscure the fact that the government—and its politics—is deeply intertwined in the current situation. Nigerians plying the country’s roads and highways bemoan the role of the state in perpetuating transportation problems. As an illustration, Nwigwe told me about a typical journey back from Aba after purchasing drinks to replenish his shop.

We left Aba at half past two. Immediately we joined the express [the dual carriage highway that runs between Umuahia and Aba], the police had mounted a checkpoint where they began asking for various receipts and licenses. To pass, I had to dash [bribe] them 500 naira [then about US\$3].³ Further up the road, we were stopped by Road Safety [officials who check vehicle worthiness]. They too needed to eat, demanding money from our driver because he could not produce a red warning triangle [a required item for all vehicles]. The driver only stopped because the huge potholes made speeding through their roadblock impossible

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[unlike the police, Road Safety officials are not armed, so drivers sometimes try to evade their attempts to stop them]. Halfway home, we had a puncture [flat tire]. When some of the passengers complained about the threadbare tires, the driver said all the police and Road Safety harassment left him little money to maintain his vehicle. And he didn't need to remind us of the condition of the roads. We all felt that on our backsides. We reached Umuahia at 6:00 p.m. [what should be a forty-five-minute journey took over three hours].

Nwigwe's experience was common, both in the delays, challenges, and real dangers posed to travelers by Nigeria's poor transportation infrastructure, and in the way that ordinary citizens see the nefarious presence of government, even in its conspicuous absence as the provider of basic infrastructure and services. Gigantic potholes purportedly left unfilled so that police and Road Safety officials can easily stop passing vehicles to collect bribes are akin to stories of electricity generator importers who are in cahoots with NEPA officials, or rumors of administrators at the municipal water authority who own tanker trucks that sell the very water they are supposed to pipe throughout the town, or (as I will explain below) teachers who withhold key lessons in school so that they can be paid as private tutors. Although not every story of corruption is true, these anecdotes have enough credence for Nigerians to be extremely cynical about the state's role in the country's infrastructural deficiencies. The cause, Nigerians believe, is not simply negligence, incapacity, or incompetence; it is willful deceit and greedy profiteering.

The situation is even more complicated when the adaptive, resilient, entrepreneurial responses of Nigeria's struggling poor are taken into account—responses that can perpetuate the unhappy status quo for the same people who rail against it. For example, while one sometimes sees local boys with shovels from villages along the highway filling in potholes with dirt—and beckoning passing drivers for a donation—it is also common to see people from nearby communities taking advantage of the potholes and the police roadblocks to sell fruit and vegetables, fresh snails, bread, cold drinks, or cell phone recharge cards to passing motorists who have been forced to stop. In Nigeria's larger cities like Lagos, the notorious “go slows” (traffic jams) result in—and many say are partly caused by—legions of small-scale vendors hawking everything from laundry detergent to rat poison. Even vulcanizers, the people who repair flat tires, seem to be strategically located after patches of bad roads that produce the need for their services. In order to survive, relatively poor Nigerians frequently take advantage of,

and can become invested in preserving, the same infrastructural failures that create so much discontent. The point is not to blame ordinary people for infrastructural deficiencies, but it is important to see how the obvious victims can themselves become participants in the social reproduction of a problematic system.

COMMUNICATION

While Nigerian citizens routinely lament that the country's infrastructure has been deteriorating for decades, one bright spot has been the advent of mobile phone technology. Before cell phones, the whole of Nigeria had approximately half a million landlines. By 2018, cell phone subscriptions in Nigeria exceeded 172 million, while the country's current population was approaching 200 million (Statista 2020a). Many elites own three or four different handsets, each with a unique SIM card. Although some of Nigeria's poorest people still do not have phones or network access, it is nevertheless fair to say that the average Nigerian now has a cell phone—man or woman, rural or urban, rich or poor. Both symbolically and practically, they have come to be seen as necessities of contemporary life.

Nwigwe purchased his first cell phone in 2006, about five years after mobile phone companies began operating in Nigeria, during the period when phone ownership transitioned from being an elite luxury to a marker of aspiring middle-class modernity that almost everyone could afford. Nwigwe's wife, Mercy, acquired her first phone a couple of years later. In 2010, reliable network service reached Nwigwe's natal village, and he bought phones for his parents. After he bought one for them to share, his mother insisted that she have her own. As the oldest child, Ogechi finally convinced her parents she needed a phone when she was seventeen and in her penultimate year of secondary school. She was the first in her family to get a smartphone and to be able to take advantage of 4G networks, Wi-Fi, and so on. She texts her friends, has a Facebook account, and uses social media applications like Instagram and WhatsApp. At least until recently, her parents and grandparents used their phones only for calls. Her younger siblings do not yet have phones, but they have been clamoring for them.

Like most Nigerians, Ogechi and her family have adapted the new technology in ways that maximize utility for the least amount of money. Two features are crucial. First, most people adopt "pay-as-you-go" plans, which means no contracts or recurring fees. One simply adds credit to the SIM card by entering codes from "top-up" cards that can be purchased ubiquitously

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in Nigeria, in varying (and quite small) amounts. As long as one makes a call at least every thirty days, purchased credit typically does not expire. Second, and most attractive to people with limited means, one is charged only for initiated calls; receiving calls is free. Such a system enables people to maintain service and be in communication with others for very little money, if necessary.

Nigeria's cell phone companies are mostly subsidiaries of large multinational corporations. Although the advent and spread of cell phone technology appears to be an instance of the formal economy successfully addressing one of the country's major infrastructural challenges, the mobile phone revolution has also spurred a flourishing informal economy. Countless itinerant vendors walk urban streets selling top-up cards. Small shops with generators will recharge phones for a very small fee, even if their main business has nothing to do with phones. This is because, besides paying for credit, keeping batteries charged is a phone owner's most challenging task. In addition, many small businesses have emerged that specialize in cell phone repair; they also sell various accessories such as cases, cords, batteries, and earphones. In Umuahia alone, there are dozens of these cell phone-related small businesses.

It is hard not to see cell phones as an infrastructural success story in Nigeria, especially when compared to other domains. Nigerians certainly see it that way—mostly. But perhaps not surprisingly, cell phone services also get caught up in Nigerian discourses of complaint about inequality and the role of the state in stymieing effective infrastructure. A series of rumors and scandals associated with cell phones—everything from fantastic stories about “killer phone numbers” (answer the call and one will eventually die as a result) to charges of corruption in the awarding of company licenses and in the setting of call tariff rates—has continuously trailed the expansion of the industry. Even the country's most successful infrastructural innovation has been dogged by allegations of greed, corruption, and intentional mismanagement.

EDUCATION

To most Nigerians, the greatest hopes for the future are pinned on education and its promise of better economic prospects, and in particular the potential for members of the next generation to learn (and credential) their way into better jobs and more prosperous lives. While Nigerians are mostly left to their own devices to assure access to water, electricity, transportation, security, and other basic infrastructural services and amenities, the state

is by far the largest provider of education. Yet even in this most governmental of infrastructural arenas, privatization is proliferating, and many of the informal economic and entrepreneurial practices characteristic of other domains also occur.

Ogechi attends a state-government secondary school. She had hoped to attend a more prestigious federal-government school, but her score on the national entrance exam was below the cutoff mark, and her family did not have the political/social connections, or enough money (for a bribe), to arrange her admission despite her score. Her immediate junior brother attends the same state-government secondary school, and her two youngest siblings are still in primary school. Educational institutions in Nigeria at all levels—primary, secondary, and tertiary—are of three kinds: federal, state (as in Nigeria’s thirty-six states), and private. In general, at every level, federal schools are the most selective, the highest quality, and the most prestigious. Perhaps ironically, given that children of elites are more likely to attend federal schools, they also have the cheapest school fees. While federal schools are generally the best, the relative quality of state-government versus private institutions varies widely. Some private schools—usually very expensive and catering to the elite—are quite good and can rival the best federal schools. But other private schools are terrible and often exploitive enterprises, taking advantage of the huge appetite for formal education in Nigeria by offering last-ditch options to those unable to enter government-supported schools. Starting and running schools, from nurseries to full-fledged universities, has become a major business in Nigeria.

The quality of infrastructure in Nigerian schools is generally woeful. Where I work in southeastern Nigeria, most primary and secondary schools are little more than concrete shells, and classrooms offer few amenities besides desks and blackboards. Uniforms are required, but books are rarer, and expensive equipment like computers and supplies needed for science labs are the exception rather than the rule. The sporadic delivery of electricity is just one of many challenges. Even at the university level, it remains common for instructors to rely on “handouts” (compilations of lecture notes, photocopied sections of textbooks, etc.) rather than actual books. Nigeria’s demography alone poses enormous challenges for the state to meet the rising demand for schooling at all levels. Approximately 43 percent of Nigeria’s overall population of more than 200 million is younger than 15 years old. The median age is 18.3 years, and the estimated population growth rate is 2.54 percent (Index Mundi 2019). By 2100, the country’s population is projected to reach a staggering 733 million (Pew Research Center 2019).

Ordinary citizens like Ogechi and her family regularly lament the state of formal education in Nigeria, even as they do everything possible to advance their own prospects. For example, Ogechi and her siblings all take private lessons after school from tutors whose instruction is geared toward preparing their pupils for the national entrance exams that determine, at least officially, admission to secondary school and university. Private tutoring has become extremely common in Nigeria, especially in urban areas, not only among children of the elite but also among working-class and aspiring middle-class families like Ogechi's. People recognize this need as a symptom of state failure, and worse, as the result of the deliberate actions of state officials to create difficult circumstances from which they benefit. Mercy, Ogechi's mother, said about the tutoring: "The teachers purposely withhold the knowledge that students need for their exams so that they can be paid as tutors. But what can we do? If our children can't learn, they will remain in poverty."

Over the years, I've heard countless Nigerians voice their recognition of and frustration with this situation. Even as citizens do everything they can to create and sustain crucial infrastructure and basic social services that the government mostly fails to provide, people also recognize that the problems result not simply from state incapacity, but from an often deliberately perpetuated, systematically reproduced set of circumstances. That every household is its own local government is not the reality most Nigerians would prefer. People want the state to do better.

Infrastructure, Everyday Citizenship, and State Power

Ogechi's family offers an ethnographic snapshot of the ways that Nigerians cope with infrastructural deficiencies in the twenty-first century. Their situation is emblematic of what many poor and aspiring middle-class Nigerians are referencing when they say that "every household is its own local government." In addition to the practical ingenuity and hard work that these entrepreneurial actions evince, the account of how Ogechi's family manages the basic tasks of modern life hints at how challenges with infrastructure and people's attempts to cope with them are also central to the relationship between state and society in Nigeria.

In urban studies and in human and cultural geography—disciplines in which infrastructure has been a focus of research and scholarship for a long time—over the past two decades, scholars have increasingly turned away from accounts that focus mainly on infrastructure's technological

entailments to explore the intertwining of the material and the social (Angelo and Hentschel 2015). This work has highlighted the degree to which infrastructural provision is central to the production and reproduction of social inequality (Graham and Marvin 2001), part and parcel of processes of political inclusion and exclusion (Gandy 2006; Kooy and Bakker 2008), and fundamental in shaping everyday habits and experiences in the contemporary world (Amin 2014; Graham and McFarlane 2015). In anthropology, infrastructure has become an important arena of inquiry only relatively recently (Anand 2011, 2017; Appel 2012a, 2012b; Larkin 2008; Maines 2012, 2019). But already a productive body of scholarship has shown that it is about much more than buildings, roads, wires, and pipes (Anand 2012, 2015; Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018; Simone 2004a, 2004b). All of this literature points to how humans' relationship to infrastructure invokes and involves politics and morality (Larkin 2013: 328; Chalfin 2014, 2017). It illustrates the ways that people depend on multiple and complex social ties to navigate technology's uneven economic effects (Simone 2004a, 2015). Further, it demonstrates that experiences with infrastructure are elemental to the substance of citizenship and the nature of state power (Fredericks 2018; Lemanski 2019a, 2020; von Schnitzler 2016; Wafer 2012).

Geographer Charlotte Lemanski's articulation of the concept of "infrastructural citizenship" provides a generative foundation for the argument I develop about the central place of infrastructure in the experience of everyday citizenship and the exercise of state power in Nigeria. Drawing specifically on research regarding public housing provision in postapartheid South Africa, Lemanski sets forth a more general framework that suggests that ordinary people's relationship to the state, and therefore their sense of recognition, belonging, and relative empowerment, is highly determined by their experiences with government-provided infrastructure. For South Africa's urban poor, citizenship is, in Lemanski's framework, less a formal status and more the result of their cumulative experiences and interpretations of ongoing processes and practices, especially with regard to infrastructure and basic services (2019: 9).

As Dennis Rodgers explains in his foreword to Lemanski's recent edited volume on the topic, "the notion of infrastructural citizenship highlights how infrastructure is not a 'neutral' phenomenon, but both shapes and is shaped by the political, and also points directly to the fact that articulations of citizenship are not abstract processes, but have very material bases" (2019: x). While Lemanski highlights the significance of public housing for people's sense of citizenship in South Africa, as does Alex Wafer (2012), other scholars

have developed similar arguments regarding a range of infrastructural services in South Africa, albeit without necessarily employing the concept of infrastructural citizenship. For example, Antina von Schnitzler (2016) has analyzed the political effects of prepaid meters for water services in South Africa's townships, connecting popular protests and the country's transition to democracy to contestation over infrastructure and basic services.

Elsewhere, anthropologists have recently examined the intersection between governance and infrastructure in various domains. For example, Daniel Mains (2012, 2019) has shown how national projects to build roads and a hydroelectric power dam in Ethiopia contributed to and symbolized citizens' expectations of and experiences with their government, a relationship marked by both cynicism and hope. Focusing on waste removal in Dakar, Senegal, Rosalind Fredericks (2018) demonstrates how the city's residents' response to garbage infrastructure energized political action and contributed to collective identities. In his study of the complex material and political dynamics of water provision in Mumbai, India, Nikhil Anand (2017) argues convincingly that the efforts of people in informal urban settlements to connect to the municipal water system and maintain services are central to the political project of securing citizenship in the city.

All of these studies—and many others—have persuasively established the salience of infrastructure in the relationship between state and society. They show the significance of government-provided infrastructural services for people's experiences of citizenship as well as the political import that underlies states' delivery (or lack thereof) of basic social services to different segments of their populations. The ethnographic cases that follow about water, electricity, transportation, education, communication, and security in Nigeria augment this mounting evidence pointing to the social and political significance of infrastructure. But most of the extant literature connecting infrastructure and citizenship privileges the successes and failures of public service delivery. Further, work that focuses on situations where private and informal economic enterprises provide infrastructure suggests that in these circumstances the state is weak, absent, or failing. In contrast, in Nigeria the state is in fact highly present in its apparent absence. The entrepreneurs and other actors in the informal economy who provide so much of Nigeria's basic infrastructure regularly encounter the state, which is at once failing and powerful. As ordinary Nigerians hustle to survive, the substance of citizenship is concretized in their efforts to address infrastructural deficiencies and through the interactions with the state required in all of these seemingly private, informal struggles.

State Presence in Its Absence

In Nigeria, municipal water is sold to private tanker-truck drivers and manufacturers of “pure-water” sachets rather than piped to citizens’ homes. Elite neighborhoods where politicians live receive regular electricity while the masses rely on Chinese-made generators, kerosene lanterns, and candles. People pay night watchmen to protect them from criminals, who are said to collude with the police. Petrol and diesel are routinely sold at black-market prices because government officials and their private-sector cronies profit from real and artificial scarcities, as well as from a massive fuel importation and subsidy program. As Brian Larkin has noted, “At these moments the state is simultaneously both present and absent” (2013: 336).

Ordinary citizens are well aware of the state’s complicity. Nigerians commonly blame the state and political elites for the country’s infrastructural shortcomings. Complaints about state failure mix with accusations of elite collusion. Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria’s first-elected president after the transition to a civilian administration in 1999, was frequently the target of popular ire, in part because his perceived failures represented the shattered hopes of infrastructural improvements pinned to democracy. Ulrika and Eric Trovalla note that when “a crudely made battery-operated lamp consisting of LEDs, which used a CD as a reflector” became widely available in markets in the city of Jos, where they do their research, “the lamp was read as a sign indicating the President’s shortcomings and was accordingly named ‘Obasanjo ya kasa’—‘Obasanjo failed’” (2015a: 50). While shoddy battery-powered lamps symbolized state failure, ubiquitous mini-generators were interpreted in more sinister political terms. In and around Umuahia, I heard many rumors about “generator mafias” similar to what Trovalla and Trovalla report from Joseph, one of their interlocutors in Jos:

The big men all had their high-capacity generators and had no real interest in improving the situation. Many of them, he suspected, were even involved in the importation of generators and deeply invested in seeing that NEPA did not work as intended. Indicating the existence of a “generator mafia”, sucking the Nigerian nation dry, the generators have for many people become signs of the greed of the people in power. As Joseph concluded, every year new promises are made and more money spent—“but we never see neither the light nor the money. With all the money spent we should have constant light, but as soon as some money is given, somebody eats it.” (2015a: 50)

It is difficult to conclusively document the collusion of politicians and state officials at the highest levels of the federal government in generator mafias and other deliberate schemes to deprive ordinary people of basic infrastructure. But Nigerians believe that elites benefit by monopolizing the sale of products that enable people to cope with the hardships that result from purposeful state neglect. Citizens see evidence all around them, including multiple legislative probes and commissions of inquiry that revealed multibillion-dollar conspiracies to defraud the nation—through bogus contracts, huge loans never repaid, and elaborate arrangements to siphon money from the country’s massive fuel importation and subsidy programs (Agbibo 2014; Akov 2015). The Nigerian media regularly exposes high-level corruption in infrastructural projects.

The fact that countless official probes and unending media-exposed scandals relating to infrastructure projects almost never result in prosecution, much less improved basic services, is evidence enough for most Nigerians that corruption emanates from the top and corrupt officials are powerful and protected. The powerful protect their own through patronage networks that are at the core of the Nigerian state. As Laurent Fourchard notes, following Jean-François Bayart (1993) and Béatrice Hibou (2004), “patron–client relationships and the outsourcing of state functions to various political, religious and associational entrepreneurs (vigilante groups, market associations, union leaders and so on) are part of an ongoing process of state formation rather than the manifestation of state decline in Nigeria” (2011: 44). Even from the perspective of ordinary Nigerians, for whom the state’s failure to provide basic infrastructure creates daily hardships, the resulting situation is not so much evidence of a weak state as it is of a state hijacked by elites for their own interests.

While popular awareness of state capture by elites is manifested in everyday discourse and highlighted in the many conspiracy theories that circulate about the machinery of corruption at the highest levels of government, it is equally true that Nigerians regularly experience state complicity in the country’s infrastructural failures through their encounters with lower-level bureaucrats and officials. To fully explain the nature, scope, and consequences of state complicity in infrastructural deficiencies as it shapes the experience of citizenship and contributes to the constitution of state power, it is necessary to understand the centrality of these more routine, seemingly mundane dealings with government. Interactions between ordinary citizens and low-level officials that at first pass appear to be primarily administrative—rather than political—are in fact significant arenas where state-society relations are forged (Chatterjee 2004, 2011; von Schnitzler

2013). As I will illustrate in each of the ensuing chapters, it is paradoxically in Nigerians' ostensibly private, entrepreneurial, and informal economic efforts to address infrastructural failures that average citizens have many of their most direct, formative, and politically meaningful encounters with the state. In these interactions, the complex interplay of formal and informal and official and unofficial rules and their associated moral economies are revealed, navigated, and often reinscribed. Although Nigerians' cynical assessments of the country's political elites may be quite accurate, it is through more routine administration—in which government bureaucrats and ordinary citizens interact, negotiate, cooperate, and even collude—that much of the work of reproducing state power is accomplished. All of this means that as Nigerians pursue their needs and desires for better infrastructure, they often unwittingly further enable the power of an only apparently absent state.

Visible and Invisible Infrastructure: Anticipation, Imagination, and Everyday Habits

When and whether the water will run, the electricity will come, and the petrol stations will sell fuel—these are the stuff of daily speculation in Nigeria. Average citizens constantly seek to predict when the country's unpredictable infrastructure will and won't perform. In societies where infrastructure works more flawlessly, one of its ostensible characteristics is its seeming invisibility. If the water always runs, if the light is constant, if the fuel stations never run dry, one hardly notices the pipes, wires, tanker trucks, and everything else that makes it all possible. In Nigeria, by contrast, people are endlessly preoccupied with the country's infrastructural woes—not just working to circumvent its failures and address basic needs, but also trying to discern the invisible forces that explain infrastructure's haphazard performance. In popular political imagination, infrastructure is as central symbolically as it is sporadic materially. In his overview of anthropological scholarship on infrastructure, Larkin (who also works in Nigeria) observes, “Invisibility is certainly one aspect of infrastructure, but it is only one at the extreme edge of a range of visibilities that move from unseen to grand spectacles and everything in between” (2013: 336).

Drawing on their work in Jos, Trovalla and Trovalla have analyzed ordinary citizens' attempts to understand unpredictable infrastructure in terms of the state, its politics, and the workings of power. In their view:

infrastructure is turned into a tool for envisioning the unknown, through which citizens try to grasp the past, present and future of an elusive

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nation. . . . The uncertain infrastructure not only becomes a highly visible and present part of people's everyday life, but also brings other things into view. As people struggle to figure out the hidden mechanisms that lead water to their taps, electricity to their outlets, or that govern the meandering of fuel queues in the streets, clues to larger questions are uncovered. The connections and disconnections become signs that are read, revealing matters beyond the infrastructure itself. Instead of being hidden underneath, infrastructure transcends its own boundaries, opening channels to otherwise hidden truths. It turns into a suprastructure—a divination tool that gives clues about the Nigerian nation. (2015a: 44)

Similarly, in the communities where I have lived and worked in southeastern Nigeria, infrastructural performance was constantly interpreted in political terms that suggested—and in many instances purportedly revealed—an invisible world of politics and power. The idea that hidden realities are often at work beneath the surface of the visible is common in Nigeria, as in much of West Africa (Ellis 1999, 2016; Ferme 2001). So, too, is the belief that invisible forces are often more powerful and more real than the visible, and that much of the apparently real world is better explained if these powers can be discerned, properly interpreted, and even addressed or appeased. While Nigerians' propensity to divine the truths behind infrastructural failures may draw on notions more commonly associated with spiritual or religious realms such as witchcraft (Geschiere 1997) or popular Pentecostalism (Marshall 2009; Wariboko 2014; Ukah 2016), as I will illustrate, the relationships among power, politics, and the realities of infrastructure in Nigeria are inextricably material and symbolic. As Nigerians interpret the invisible world of infrastructure, they are in fact engaged in astute projects of political analysis. Though not every rumor is true, popular political diagnoses of the country's underlying problems are remarkably incisive overall.

In Owerri, the capital of Imo State, where I lived for three years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and where I have continued to conduct research, sudden improvements in electricity supply were frequently interpreted in political terms, such as a not-so-coincidental visit of a top military official, or an upcoming election—inciting speculation that the incumbent officeholders provided more electricity (and running water) ahead of votes to impress or appease their constituents. Conversely, long blackouts were sometimes seen as retaliation for voters electing local or state politicians not favored by more powerful political elites and state officials. Frequently, people's power analytics were even more straightforward. For example, if a local elite was

marrying off one of his children or burying one of his parents, the 24/7 electricity in his neighborhood was attributed to his political clout, or to a bribe he paid to someone at the power company to keep the lights on.

In Umuahia, home of Ogechi and her family, and the town on whose outskirts I have lived and worked, on and off, since 1994, similar speculation is common. Shortages of petrol, diesel, and kerosene provoke animated conversations about what is “really” going on. Perhaps the president neglected to “settle” the leaders of the union to which tanker-truck drivers belong, and they ordered their “boys” to strike. Or maybe rumors are true that the federal government will soon attempt to remove—or at least decrease—the subsidy on domestic fuel, and station owners are hoarding their stocks (and feigning shortages) in anticipation of possible increases in profits by selling reserves purchased at the old subsidized price once the new official price has been announced. Popular analyses of fuel shortages range from the global (such as speculation that super-rich politicians and former generals, who purportedly own fleets of tanker ships, have failed to pay their bills in Europe or the Middle East) to the local (such as assessments of the moral character of neighborhood fuel station proprietors in order to predict or explain which businesses will dilute their product or manipulate pump gauges to inflate their profits).

All of this suggests that in Nigeria infrastructure is not only vital to social life and economic livelihoods; it is also enmeshed in everyday politics. As such, it is not surprising that popular discourse about politics and power frequently dwells on stories about infrastructure to diagnose and debate the real (and often seemingly invisible) causes of Nigeria’s woes. Rather than viewing Nigerians’ obsession with the hidden meanings of the country’s infrastructural deficiencies as distracting citizens from the truth, in this book I show how all these interpretations, stories, and rumors reveal many of the “real” causes of Nigeria’s infrastructural problems.

Infrastructural Woes: Deficiency as Opportunity?

While infrastructure as a topic of popular imagination and political discourse is an illuminating window into Nigerian society in general, and the exercise of state power and the experience of citizenship in particular, attention to the insights possible through such a perspective should not diminish the very real struggles that Nigerians face—and the ingenious solutions they concoct—when it comes to coping with the country’s infrastructural deficiencies. As Trovalla and Trovalla note, “divining infrastructure is not so much about

abstract speculation or passive reflection. It is inextricably linked to actions, to making moves—to choose a petrol queue, buy into a particular technology, stay at home to wait for water or enter a potentially hostile street—to invest in a particular version of the future” (2015b: 341). In his seminal work on “people as infrastructure” in Johannesburg, AbdouMaliq Simone similarly observes “urban residents’ constant state of preparedness” (2004a: 424). Perhaps not coincidentally, the most prominent population in Simone’s Johannesburg research and analysis was the city’s Nigerian immigrants. In Nigeria itself, a common everyday Pidgin English expression—“*Nigeria na war-o!*”—alludes to the perception that the daily hustle to survive sometimes feels like being at war. It requires a special readiness.

In their everyday efforts to cope in the face of the failures of fundamental infrastructure and basic social services, Nigerians constantly find ways to convert deficiency into opportunity. Scholars have increasingly paid attention to the ways that poor people turn formal obstacles into informal economic enterprises. More than a decade ago, James Ferguson noted a general shift in expert understandings of urban poverty: “Informalities that not long ago were automatically identified as symptoms, problems or monstrosities are today increasingly likely to be reinterpreted as assets, capacities, or opportunities” (2007: 74–75). In anthropology, too, there has been a move to examine and appreciate the resilience, agency, and efficacy demonstrated in so-called informal economies and their entrepreneurially created infrastructures. Many of the most influential anthropological analyses of the problems of urban African infrastructure and their associated informal economies include attention to these more positive dimensions (De Boeck 2011; De Boeck and Plissart 2014; Larkin 2008; Simone 2004a, 2004b). But these scholars also recognize and try to explain the inequalities and injustices that are revealed and sometimes reproduced through the very enterprises created to cope with them. The antinomies of resilience and defeatism, optimism and pessimism, and hope and despair reverberate in how Nigerians manage everyday problems of infrastructure, but so, too, do the blurry boundaries between these seemingly opposed positions.

What Filip De Boeck says about Kinshasa would be familiar to most people in urban Nigeria: “Potholes or pools of water on a public road, to give but one example, may become infrastructural elements in themselves, because they create thickenings of publics, and offer the possibility of assembling people, or of slowing them down (so that one might sell something to them along the road, for example)” (2012). It is hard to overestimate the fraction of Nigeria’s urban workforce that makes a living by pursuing

informal economic enterprises and entrepreneurially creative businesses that are designed to address and take advantage of Nigeria's infrastructural woes. From the individual water sellers who cart jerrycans around Ogechi's neighborhood in Umuahia to the rich tycoons who make millions of dollars importing Chinese generators, countless Nigerians survive—and sometimes thrive—by exploiting the country's infrastructural problems.

Indeed, in many cases Nigerians suspect—or have observed—that infrastructural deficiencies are intentionally created, exacerbated, or at the very least purposely unremedied precisely to enable some kind of income-generating activity to thrive. Examples span a wide spectrum, from grand conspiracy theories—like that the government deliberately fails to repair the country's oil refineries so that super-rich politicians and current and former senior military officers can profit by controlling the importation of refined petroleum products—to mundane hustles like selling black-market petrol by the gallon during a fuel shortage (in which case, many people would suspect that the seller is in cahoots with the station owner who supposedly has no fuel). Despite the resilience exhibited by entrepreneurs at all levels, and the way that society always seems to manage to survive one shortage after another, in Nigerians' own accounts they exhibit a deep awareness of the underlying politics at work, including the resulting inequalities and human suffering.

Scholars examining Nigerian statecraft, and particularly the problem of corruption, have observed how disorder often functions as a kind of political instrument (see Apter 1999; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Gore and Pratten 2003; and Smith 2007). Notable in all of these accounts is the extent to which it is the political and economic elites who benefit most from the workings of such a system, even as its social reproduction depends on some degree of participation by regular people. Poor and aspiring middle-class Nigerians become participants in practices of which they are also the main victims and the loudest critics. In this book, I make a similar argument about Nigerians' relationship to infrastructure. As people manage the chronic deficiencies in everyday infrastructure and basic social services through resilient, entrepreneurial hustles and improvised, innovative enterprises, these same practices contribute to a national political economy in which the very problems people lament and struggle to overcome are perpetuated. In the process, the substance of everyday citizenship and the nature of state power in Nigeria are created and reproduced.

But the story of infrastructure, citizenship, and state power in Nigeria is not simply one of inexorable exploitation and an intractable cycle of citizens'

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capitulation (albeit unhappily) to the inequality-reproducing means of survival made available to them by the state's deliberate failures. In Nigerians' entrepreneurial efforts to cobble together basic infrastructure, one sees at least some evidence of what Asef Bayat has described as "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary" (2010). Drawing on his research in urban Iran, Bayat is interested in understanding the implicit political ramifications of the efforts of ordinary people—what he has also termed "informal people" (1997)—to survive. For Bayat:

Quiet encroachment refers to noncollective but prolonged direct actions of dispersed individuals and families to acquire the basic necessities of their lives (land for shelter, urban collective consumption or urban services, informal work, business opportunities, and public space) in a quiet and unassuming illegal fashion. (2010: 45; emphasis in original)

While Nigerians may not be "quiet and unassuming" in their efforts to survive, Bayat's larger point is nonetheless applicable. He goes on to argue that as ordinary people pursue their livelihoods, they gradually create facts of everyday life that advance their interests vis-à-vis the powerful. Further, even as these "encroachments" do not typically take the form of overt, collective resistance, people defend their hard-fought gains. It is too soon to know whether Nigerians' everyday efforts to address their basic infrastructural needs will ultimately help catalyze wider political change. But there is no doubt that as people manage to improve their circumstances their expectations for the state will be heightened.

About the Research for This Book

I began working in Nigeria in 1989 as the advisor to a public health project jointly run by an American nongovernmental organization (NGO) and the Imo State Ministry of Health. Based in Owerri, the state capital, then a relatively sleepy town of less than half a million people, I experienced Nigeria's infrastructural woes firsthand. Periodic power outages affected both my home and office. Water ran unpredictably. Local transportation was crowded, and much of Owerri was not served at all. One of my work colleagues was the victim of a home invasion, but his experience with the police turned out to be even more exasperating than the armed robbery. I met countless young people whose dreams of attending university were rendered impossible because there were so few spots. Almost no one I knew owned a telephone.

I lived in Owerri for three years. At the time, I would have characterized Nigeria's infrastructural situation as difficult and challenging. I could not have predicted that over the next thirty years it would only get worse—much worse. With the exception of the now-ubiquitous ownership of mobile phones, every arena of infrastructure I examine in this book has deteriorated progressively and drastically. Electricity is off far more often than it is on. Many neighborhoods that once had running water daily now have none at all—ever. Roads are in a constant state of disrepair. Kidnapping for ransom has become so prevalent that it is no longer a remarkable occurrence. The boom in private universities has not nearly kept pace with the burgeoning number of aspiring students.

I began a PhD program in anthropology in 1992. Thereafter, when in southeastern Nigeria, I switched my main residence to Ubakala, a semirural but quickly peri-urbanizing community of about twenty-five thousand people on the outskirts of Umuahia, the capital of Abia State, which was created by the federal government in 1991. Also beginning in 1992, for almost twenty-five years I was married to a Nigerian. Ubakala was her natal community. Over these last decades, I have spent many research stints—both long and relatively short—based in Ubakala, including two years (1995–97) for my dissertation research, extended stays during several subsequent sabbatical years, and many shorter visits in the summers in between. All totaled, I have been physically present in southeastern Nigeria for about eight years. I conducted my research projects mainly in Ubakala, Umuahia, and Owerri. During most of that time, of course, I was not studying infrastructure. But as is the case for Nigerians, the country's infrastructural deficiencies were always the nagging backdrop to my everyday life, affecting everything from minor tasks to major plans. In addition to my own daily efforts to cope with infrastructural failures, I constantly observed and heard Nigerians talk about their own frustrations and experiences.

In 2017, I decided to study infrastructure explicitly. Reflecting my career-long preferences as an ethnographer, I relied mostly on a combination of participant observation and relatively informal interviews to amass my data. I also reviewed field notes and interview transcriptions from previous projects about other topics and was able to find considerable material related to infrastructure. Most of the work for the infrastructure project was undertaken in Umuahia—dozens of interviews, months of participant observation, and nearly fifty case studies of particular households and specific informal economic enterprises. I also supplemented the findings from Umuahia with pertinent examples from Ubakala and Owerri.

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Because the scope of the project was ambitious, examining six distinct infrastructural domains, I needed, depended on, and was greatly aided by the excellent work of six Nigerian research assistants. In order to facilitate a degree of individual specialization and a level of team expertise, each research assistant was permanently assigned to a particular infrastructural domain: one each for water, electricity, transportation, communication, education, and security. In addition to building cumulative individual expertise, this also contributed to developing familiarity, trust, and rapport with the entrepreneurs and workers in the various enterprises we studied. While each research assistant focused on one arena of infrastructure as I tried to assemble an overall picture, they also helped me follow up with households I wanted to observe over time; they sometimes assisted me with interviews of different kinds; and they collected material from various media in Nigeria about infrastructure. Finally, they brought to the project many years of personal experience and interpretations regarding Nigeria's infrastructural deficiencies, the state's complicity, and citizens' everyday efforts to survive and thrive in the face of these challenges. Each chapter that follows focuses on a specific infrastructural domain. Together, they reveal the centrality of infrastructure in the overall scope of state-society relations, the substance of citizenship, and the constitution of state power in Nigeria.

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