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# A CONTESTED SPACE: DIVISIONS, CONFLICTS AND COMPLEXITIES OF KOFAR RUWA MOTOR PARK, KANO



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**A CONTESTED SPACE: DIVISIONS, CONFLICTS AND  
COMPLEXITIES OF KOFAR RUWA MOTOR PARK,  
KANO**

**Abstract:**

Divisions, conflicts and power struggles are some of the complexities that threaten the effective governance of public urban spaces especially motor parks in Nigeria. This paper examines the governance of motor parks in Kano Metropolis. The study focused on Kofar Ruwa Motor Park, reputed to be the largest in Kano. It is located around the ancient city gate of Kofar Ruwa in Dala Local Government Council. The methodology adopted consists of in-depth interview, observations and secondary data. The analysis is exploratory and qualitative. The findings of the study show that, though the local government is the statutory owner of the motor park, unobvious divisions, complexities and conflicts involving the different actors and interests are at play in the governance and operations of this strategic public space. Its socio-cultural and economic significance in the inter-state and national passenger movements, as revealed in the findings, attests to the position of Kofar Ruwa Motor Park. The quest for space acquisition by the Local Government Council at the expense of parking spaces in the motor park for the erection of shops for revenue drive and the constant change of power of revenue collection between different competing parties and the associated multiple taxations on this

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socio-economic space due to power play and politics reconfigures Kofar Ruwa Motor Park into a precarious entity of uncertainty of a mixture of landuses.

. Key words: **Motor Park, Politics, Unions, Local government, revenues, taxation.**

## **Introduction**

The management of urban public spaces has not been without problems and contentions especially in most urban centres in Nigeria. This is more pronounced in motor parks where studies show that politics, power relations and struggles, and governance have resulted in conflicts leading to loss of lives and properties especially in Ibadan, Ilorin and other urban centres across the country. Agbiboa (2017) and Albert (2007) further argue that operators of urban transport especially drivers are subjected to different exploitations and often experience precarity of lives and labour. The nature and forms of this exploitation differ from one region to another. In Lagos, motorists are subjected to different forms of exploitation by the major union, the National Union of Roads Transport Workers (NURTW), police agents and tax collectors known as *agberos* (Agbiboa, 2017), unlike in Kano where NURTW influence is subsumed under the powers of the Local Government Council.

In Kano metropolis, there is an upsurge in the number of illegal motor parks arising from discontents and contestations amongst motor parks' operators, drivers and unions (Abdullahi 2018). At Kofar Ruwa motor park, there is a 'constructed' peace and structure (Clammer 2014). However, beneath this appearance is a groundswell of conflicts, mistrust, power play and divisions

involving different actors and stakeholders. This triangular intersection of issues changes the configuration and operations of a motor park to a contested space of precarity amongst the major stakeholders. The key actors include the Local Government Council as the Motor Park owner, the dominant transport union and other private sector operators including but not limited to traders, private truck operators and other economic actors.

Kofar Ruwa motor park which moved to its present location in 1980 is reputed to be the biggest in Kano metropolis with different sections including direct transport services (tricycles, taxi cabs, buses, and trucks), allied transport service providers like mechanics, car wash centres, auto parts dealers and fuel stations, and traders dealing in different items and merchandise. The Kofar Ruwa Motor Park is an intra and international motor park that marks it as an international point of transaction of socio-economic and cultural exchanges between Nigeria, West Africa and even North Africa. The presence of other economic actors most significantly a large market with thousands of shops run by local government officials aside transporters signifies the entity as a park beyond the influence of only NURTW. Moreover, other stakeholders including private truck operators in the park have no affiliation to NURTW<sup>4</sup>. This study is divided into two parts. The first section examines the unobvious, complexities, conflict and dynamics of governance in Kofar Ruwa motor park. Part two focuses on the uneven place of NURTW in the governance of the motor park.

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Garba Sani, Chairman, NUTW, Kofar Ruwa, June 2018

**Broken covenant: Neglect and Challenges of Governance at Kofar Ruwa motor park**

The motor park is under the direct control of Dala Local Government Council “...the revenue generated from the park constitutes forty percent of the total revenue generated by the Council” <sup>5</sup>. This is done through the issuance of tickets to various categories of vehicles at the gate as well as sundry levies paid by other service providers in the motor park. (see Plate 1). Kofar Ruwa is designated as a motor park but it is dotted with other socio-economic activities on its landscape.



**Plate 1: Coupon of transport levy and Harmonised Revenue and Levy in Kano Metropolis**

Revenues are collected on behalf of the Council by an appointed concessionaire, NSB Management Services<sup>6</sup>, since May, 8, 2018, (see Plate 2)

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Revenue Officer, Dala Local Government Area, Bilal Danjuma Abdullahi, June 2018

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Revenue officer officer, Bilal Danjuma Abdullahi , June 2018



**Plate 2: NSB official at Kofar Ruwa Motor Park, June, 2018**

The local government's system of revenue collection has not been consistent as it regularly concedes revenue collections to private operators. Though aimed at driving revenue generation, the concessionaires are frequently changed and, political patronages and unsatisfactory performances are often cited as reasons for the frequent changes but NURTW contends it is better positioned to collect revenue levies on behalf of the Local Government Council having done so in the past under a previous administration<sup>7</sup>. Despite designating Kofar Ruwa as a motor park and its significance as a passenger transfer terminal, the appropriation and conversion of the vehicular operational space into shops by successive local Government administrations have continued to threaten the smooth operation of the motor park and the motive behind this parking space conversion is attributable to aggressive revenue generation drive by Local Government Council.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with Garba Abdullahi, Chairman NURTW, Kofar Ruwa branch, June 2018

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

NURTW Chairman, Garba Abdullahi clamours for the takeover of motor parks by the state government.

The study shows, that despite, the collection of heavy levies by the Local Government Council, it has failed to provide necessary infrastructure and social amenities such as good road network, electricity, modern shops, and parking lots amongst others within the motor park, and has neglected the aspect of sanitation in the park thus leaving traders and operators vulnerable to health hazards. (see Plate 3)



**Plate 3: unsanitary environment of Kofar Ruwa Market**



## **NURTW; Imagined Power, Diminished Influence**

The National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) is the umbrella body for all transport operators in the park. Today, the NURTW is the principle union organisation, acting as an arbiter between the stakeholders - the passengers, the drivers, and the owners. The unions are an important component of the road transport industry in Kano. In addition to the unions' traditional functions of protecting and improving the working conditions of their members, they have taken on some of the roles, which are normally filled by government, principally the control of transport services and the discipline of the operators and their employees (Kano State Transport Policy, 2013). The transport section of the park is made up of the taxi, bus, heavy trucks units with the consolidated executive body consisting of executives of the different units. There are



**Plate 4: Kofar Ruwa Motor Park**

currently 120 executive members on the NURTW at the Kofar Ruwa Park. These executive members receive monthly stipend

from the revenue generated from motor bookings (*kudin lamba*), issuance of daily entry receipts and other levies.<sup>9</sup> Despite, their allegation that the Local Government Council has usurped its function, a debatable question on how they manage to accommodate an appeared over bloated executives on their pay roll leaves a question mark of credibility and transparency.

A private truck operator in Kofar Ruwa Motor Park is of the opinion that despite their company's (*Son Allah yafi taron Dangi*) presence in the motor park, it has no connection with NURTW. The company had parted ways with the union and accuses NURTW officials of corruption, exploitation and extortion. He alleged that they are reaping from where they have not sown "*...they do not have vehicles, they are not drivers, but it is always extortion and extortion from their registered member drivers*"<sup>10</sup>

Though, the motor park is controlled by the Local Government, NURTW enjoys semi autonomy and regulates the activities of transport operators in the park and serves as a viable source of employment opportunities for different people in this economic space. It charges transport operators between 5-10% levies on vehicles as this constitutes a substantial component of its intra union revenue generation.

The relationship between NURTW and other government formations in the transportation sector forms its cornerstone and its unfettered recognition and organisational standing. The union covers some form of liabilities to passengers involved in accidents especially those properly captured in the boarding manifest, protect

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Garba Abdullahi

<sup>10</sup> Rabi'u Sani Ibrahim, Director, Son Allah yafi taron Dangi, a private truck operating company, June 2018.

the interest of passengers in transit and works with the police in the compensation of accident victims and related issues<sup>11</sup>.



**Plate 5: shed of the NURTW, Kofar Ruwa Motor Park**

According to the Chairman of NURTW, Alhaji Garba Abdullahi

Over 2,000 people are employed as porters in this park and we have different categories of workers including *Mai Lambas...Mai Tsawatarwa* and this marks the economic significance of this park to many families.

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<sup>11</sup> Garba Abdullahi



**Plate 6: NURTW officials and IFRA  
Reseachers**

There are other socio-economic activities involving mechanics, food sellers, merchants, private trucks, trailer operators, fuel stations, car wash amongst others in the park.

There is a cold war of discontent between NURTW and the Local Government Council. This division stems from the perceived overbearing influence of the Council especially the proliferation of shops by the council in the park. This arbitrary certification and erection of structures has led to the reduction in available operational space for drivers and passengers in the park. Conversely, there are allegations of NURTW officials benefitting from such allocations and multiple payments for acquired space are recurrent decimals associated with any change of Local Government Council administration.

“We decided to leave the NURTW because we were not getting any values from being there. The leaders are corrupt,

conniving with the Council to exploit us instead of protecting us. We decided to hold our destiny in our hands”<sup>12</sup>.

Competing for space access has been a major issue at Kofar Ruwa motor park where a legal operator paid for the same shop space more than three times with every new Local Government Council requesting to be settle by the operator to avoid forceful takeover of the space by the Local Authority<sup>13</sup>. On taking over of such spaces, the NURTW collaborates with the Dala Authority to build shops for themselves at the expense of vehicles parking space (their operation space) at the park, a disconnection of their allegation on Local Council to an existing invisible informal symbiotic/financial arrangement with NURTW and Dala Local government Council in the dark, and the union as sole beneficiaries of repossessed shop space particularly the NURTW Executives.



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<sup>12</sup> Rabi’u Sani

<sup>13</sup> Rabi’u Sani Ibrahim, Director, Son Allah yafi taron Dangi, a private truck operating company, June 2018.

**Plate 7: Private Truck Operator with IFRA  
researchers**

**Conclusion**

The socio-economic significance of Kofar Ruwa Motor Park is undermined by the administrative lapses and structural divisions that have turned this important public space into a theatre of contestations and disputes amongst the various stakeholders. Unlike what transpires in Motor parks in other parts of Nigeria, the arrangement at Kofar Ruwa Motor Park creates unique narrative of accommodation and relationship management premised on an internal mechanism that gives a façade of a constructed peace amongst contending stakeholders and conflicting interests. The fact that the Local Government Council and the public authorities are not better than NURTW in providing the services for the amenities in a motor, the motor park should be empowered to assume the role of motor park's custodian in ensuring the provision of needed enabling environment for motor park operations.

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Bilal Danjuma Abdullahi, Revenue Officer, Dala Local  
Government, Kano State

Garba Abdullahi, Chairman Taxi B, Kofar Ruwa Motor Park

Nasiru Ya'u, Bus section, Kofar Ruwa Motor Park

Rabi'u Sani Ibrahim, Director (Son Allah yafi Taron Dangi)  
Private Trailer Operator, Kofar Ruwa Motor Park

Sa'idu Hassan, Chairman (Bazata Tricycles Association), Kofar  
Ruwa Motor Park