

The Spatiality of Governance: Social Spaces and Privatization of Solid Waste Services in Abuja, Nigeria

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Introduction

Actively promoted by the World Bank, *good governance* entered the discourse on third world development in the late 1980s. It remains a contentious concept with no agreed definition. Most see it as involving networks spanning across the traditional public-private divide (Jessop, 1997). In service provision, devolution to lower levels of government and formation of partnerships have become hallmarks. Through this, privatization, essentially a partnership between the state and market, remains a common feature of governance, ensuring the continued interests of capital.¹ Privatization of solid waste management is increasingly becoming attractive to governments in developing countries, where most municipal budgets go on waste management (Schubeler, 1996). With no specific policy on privatization of solid waste management in Nigeria at the moment, current efforts in the sector can be seen as part of an overall plan of the Federal government to privatize public utilities which started in July, 1988 with the promulgation of the Privatization and Commercialization Decree No. 25. The benefits of privatization, notably increased efficiency and effectiveness have been acknowledged by many but not its shortcomings. Writing on privatization of waste collection in Accra, Nairobi and Hyderabad, Post et al., (2005) observe that privatization is not a neutral process. Exclusion is now seen as an unintended result of privatization in most third world cities. The reasons for this vary. Income differential appears to be a major factor since the poor are most likely to be excluded due to their inability to pay for services. Another is that historically, state policies and practices favour particular classes. What has also become of interest to geographers is that exclusion is also spatial. The high visibility of solid waste management, especially when it fails makes spatial inequality obvious. This paper examines not only how privatization reinforces exclusionary/inclusionary processes but the role played by specific state practices and space. Solid waste management in Abuja, Nigeria is used for the analysis. In Abuja, privatization is one element in a chain of discriminatory practices against certain classes of people and areas. Also, who you are and where you live play crucial roles in the quality of services you receive.

Data Collection and Analysis

The primary data used is based on field trips between 2002 and 2005. Semi-structured and in-depth interviews were held with state officials from the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB), the agency responsible for solid waste management in Abuja and those from the Federal Ministry of Environment as well as private contractors. Traditional rulers and elites in Nyanya, a low-income settlement were also interviewed and a structured interview was administered on 60 households. In the analysis, a major aim is to show that while privatization is implicated in the processes of exclusion and inclusion, this has to be seen in a broader context. To do this, I start with a brief historical account of how certain state actions

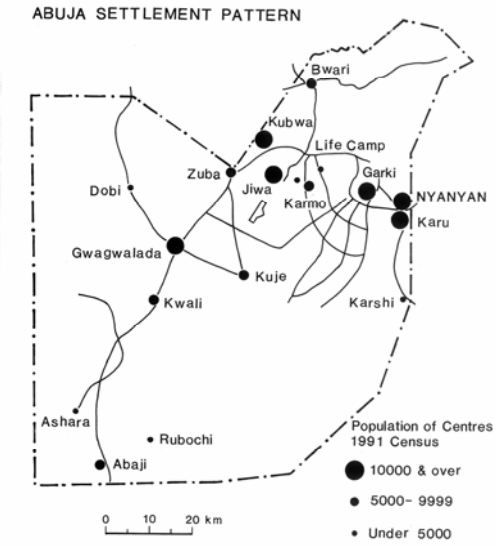
¹ Implicit in the good governance agenda is a 'shift' from the market dominated policies of the Structural Adjustment Programme to one where civil society groups are supposed to play a greater role.

and inactions over the years contributed to the emergence of slums in Abuja. This is highlighted in the theoretical discussion as the production of social spaces, that is, spaces with lower value. One of the reasons given for excluding some areas from privatization by most governments including that of Abuja is that such areas lack the appropriate facilities especially good roads. The question is, why don't they have good roads? This reinforces the spatial context. With a spatial hierarchy already in place, privatization only reinforces an existing situation. The discussion on privatization then specifically documents how it is widening the gap between people and places. The role of income and location is brought in to illustrate this.

A few limitations need to be pointed out. In data collection, frequent changes of staff and direction by the AEPB made it difficult for follow-ups and made the reassessment of data a continuous exercise. Also, the paper focuses primarily on the role of the state but there are other actors involved in governance. However, this reflects the system of governance in Abuja, a system dominated by the state.

The Setting

Abuja became Nigeria's official capital on December 12, 1992 but the relocation process started much earlier in the early and mid-1980s. Before this, Lagos was the capital. Abuja is located in the geographic centre of Nigeria in an area designated as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). There are no current reliable population figures but the 1991 census puts the figure at 378 671 while more recent estimates are in millions, ranging from 1.2 to 2 million.



Source: Ukwu (2001)

Map 1- Showing the location of some satellite settlements including Nyanya and Karu and Garki, the central city area

Abuja is divided into four phases, 1 to 4. Construction work started in the early 1980s. Phase 1 consisting of the Central Area and four residential districts has witnessed most of the development. Some has taken place in phase 2 but most of the infrastructure is not yet in

place. The plans for phases 3 and 4 have not yet been drawn up. The FCT is divided into six area councils. Much of the discussion here relates to the Abuja Municipal Area Council.

The State and Space Production

The state produces space in different ways. Lefebvre, a frequently cited source cites three, territorial, social and mental (Lefebvre, 1977). The process of spatial differentiation is said to start with the production of social spaces, a process whereby residential spaces of the elite, bourgeoisie, middle classes are distinguished from those of blue-collar and working class. Lefebvre points to a centre-periphery relation as a necessary outcome of spatial differentiation. In time, social hierarchy transforms into a spatial hierarchy.

Inequalities are a necessary outcome of the exchange of spaces...Places are arranged unequally in relation to the centres, which are themselves unequal – from commercial centres to administrative centres. State action exacerbates this situation: (Lefebvre, 1977: 94).

As Simonsen (1996) points out, social spaces can be constructed by planners, architects or social engineers. In the same vein, Brenner (1997) cites regional and urban planning policies as spatial tactics that can be used by the state to regulate, produce or reproduce configurations of social space. The reference to regulation draws attention to another process implicated in spatial differentiation. The state and its regulatory practices are being linked to growing inequality in cities. Goodwin and Painter (1997) see the processes of regulation as being constituted through unevenly developed social practices especially that of urban governance. They cite two areas which implicate the state; patchy administrative coverage and uneven levels of service provision. Brenner (2004) emphasizes the spatial dimension. His basic argument is that the state not only privileges certain classes and interests but these have a spatial dimension. Brenner comes up with *state spatial strategies* which are said to emerge as attempts to impose particular forms of socioeconomic intervention and are articulated through a range of policy instruments. Privatization can be seen as a state spatial strategy in this context.² Brenner adds that while some strategies do explicitly promote uneven development of regulation, it may also be an unintended outcome.

Privatization and Spatial differentiation

In solid waste management, privatization is seen as a way of addressing the major shortfalls in urban services, increasing efficiency and lowering costs (Cointreau-Levine, 1994). Privatization is not by any means well established in many African cities where it does exist, it is for areas with predominantly high-income households, industrial and commercial establishments (ibid.). In South Africa, it is said to be “the new apartheid, an instrument of exclusion, not just from a better life, but even the very basics” (Rostron, 2002 cited in Stokke and Oldfield, 2004: 135).³ The problem of exclusion has been attributed to various reasons. Coolidge et al., (1993) accuse urban governments in Africa of being elitist, concerned primarily with providing services to those who are well off. Kendie (1999) in a study on waste disposal in Ghana confirms that faced with limited budgets, the metropolitan authority handles the rich less badly than the poor. In Hyderabad, India, the state does not recognize

² Brenner further argues that state spatial strategies are embodied in the territorial differentiation of policy regimes and in the differential place and scale-specific effects of those policies with the possible outcome of spatial selectivity.

³ This is confirmed in a study on waste management in Cape Town and Johannesburg by Qotole, Xali and Barchiesi (undated) who observe that commercialization of waste services have come with troubling outcomes, with predominantly black areas left out of services.

slums, hence they are simply disregarded (Post et al., 2005). In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Kironde (1999) reports that the Central Area was privatized first because the government believed the charges were more likely to be accepted in those areas. This proves that cost recovery is a major factor. Areas inhabited by the poor are not likely to be attractive to businesses. This brief discussion draws attention to two major factors; the tendency of the state to favour a particular classes and areas as well as the primacy given to cost recovery.

Producing Social Spaces in Abuja

Abuja is a city primarily built on “virgin” land, giving the government many opportunities to leave its “footprint”. A Master Plan was designed detailing the design of the city and its implementation. However, the core concept of the design and certain practices of the state have over the years contributed to spatial differentiation in infrastructure and services. The discussion below highlights these two issues and the implications for solid waste management.

The Plan emphasized a Central Area Design. The result was a crescent-shaped urban form designated into four phases with phase 1 in the centre and the others radiating outwards. Phase 1 is further subdivided into districts. The central area houses major government offices and the business district. This is followed by the residential districts of Maitama, Asokoro, Wuse and Garki officially differentiated on the basis of density but which now clearly reflect income differentials. The first two are high-income areas and the latter two low-income. Phase 2 contains some peripheral settlements including Nyanya. What the planners probably did not realise is that emphasizing a centre inevitably creates a periphery. Over the years, infrastructure and services have been concentrated in the centre leading to huge spatial disparities. For example, in sewage and electricity, the government admits that these have been concentrated in the Central Area and phase 1 part of the city (Department of Planning, Research and Statistics, 2001). This bias also extends to water, roads and solid waste services. Figures 1 and 2 show what can be described as the two faces of Abuja.

Historically, certain areas of Abuja have indeed enjoyed better services than others.

The surrounding areas of the capital city, regarded as its administrative territory must reflect the sophistication and modernity of the city being built to international standard. The contrast and disparity between phase 1 area of the city and the settlements of Jabi, Kado, Mabushi, Durumi and Kabusa, is an embarrassing clear illustration. The settlements of Idu, Karmo and Gwagwa have become sprawling urban slums, a horrifying eyesore close to the ultra-modern city. (Abanobi, 2001: 186).

The above is traceable to specific actions/inactions of government over the years. While the decision to relocate the capital was welcomed by most Nigerians, its implementation has been riddled with controversies (see Adama-Ajonye, 2005). The Plan recommended a four-phased growth which aligned population growth and infrastructure (The Federal Capital Development Authority, 1979). The expectation was that relocation from Lagos to Abuja would be done in phases with the incoming population balanced against existing infrastructure and services. What followed was mainly dictated by the political climate in the country. Relocation became a major campaign issue in the 1979 elections. The presidential candidate of the National Party of Nigeria, promised that if elected, he would expedite work on Abuja (Ministry of Federal Capital Territory, 1998). He won the elections and took the decision to shift the movement date forward to 1982/83 from the 1986 target set by the Plan. A major aspect highlighted by Mabogunje (2001) is the decision to house incoming civil

servants in the “Accelerated District” meant for construction workers.⁴ With the district taken over by civil servants, alternative accommodation had to be found. A decision was made by government to build a labour camp in Nyanya. This proved inadequate and was followed by the emergence of shantytowns. These settlements developed rapidly and were generally unplanned, overcrowded and lacking basic amenities (ibid.). The result was severe stress on facilities, environmental degradation, uncollected solid wastes, inadequate power and water supply (Adejuwon, 2001). Other contributory factors include the delay by government in resettling the indigenous population.⁵ For example, Nyanya was to be relocated to a new location called “New Nyanya” but this has not been done. Today, it is described as the fastest growing slum in the country.⁶



Figure 1: a Boulevard in Asokoro
Source: Author, 2004



Figure 2: a major road in Nyanya
Source: Author, 2004

Solid waste management consists of different components; storage, collection, transportation and disposal. Discrimination can come at any point. Appropriate storage of waste is considered relevant not only to the health of household members but that of the community. In Abuja, there is a recommended waste storage equipment for households, a green heavy-duty bin and it is the duty of the AEPB to provide the bins. The bins are visible in the central parts of the city and the immediate residential districts like Maitama and Asokoro but non-existent in peripheral settlements (see figures 3 and 4). In the latter case, residents use buckets, cartons, baskets and plastic bags not designed for waste storage.⁷ Coupled with the absence of functioning dumpsites, the result is illegal dumping.

The system of waste collection also differs between places. The rich and medium income neighbourhoods enjoy house to house collection while in low-income peripheral settlements, waste is collected from central communal bins. Frequency of waste collection may be the most noticeable aspect of preferential treatment by government. Frequency of collection in Abuja varies from thrice, twice to once a week or none at all. The “*none at all*” mainly refers to the low-income satellite settlements.

⁴ The idea of this accelerated district was a move aimed at preventing the emergence of shanty towns.

⁵ The initial policy of the federal government aimed at moving all the villages numbering 845 out of the territory. However, the government later realized this would be too costly and limited relocation and compensation to only those within the immediate capital city area.

⁶ Based on interview with a director in the Federal Ministry of Environment in 2002.

⁷ A survey of 60 households in 2004 in Nyanya showed that 27 (45%) use buckets to store waste while 29 (48%) use plastic bags not designed for waste storage and the rest use cartons or baskets.



Figure 3. A Street in Asokoro showing garbage bins on kerbs



Figure 4. A road in Nyanya showing blocked drainage sources (no bins)

The official line from the AEPB, explaining differences in waste collection is that they are a reflection of differences in population density, amount of waste generated and land use. However, closer observation revealed that this is not entirely true. A study conducted by a firm observed that,

...the high population density districts of Garki and Wuse are provided with AEPB dustbins that usually overflowed with refuse whereas the low population density districts of Maitama and Asokoro do not have this problem. Nyanya and Karu, which are satellite towns at the outskirts of Abuja metropolis belong to the very high population density area and are littered with refuse. (LAGA International Limited, 2001).

The study explains that Maitama and Asokoro districts house top government and political functionaries. To reaffirm this, while waste services are generally better in phase 1 compared to the peripheral settlements, there are differences within phase 1 as the above excerpt shows. Garki, Wuse, Maitama and Asokoro are all in phase 1 but the latter two receive better services. Garki and Wuse were planned as medium density areas but have become high-density districts. They are more central and closer to government offices but this has not translated into better services. Asokoro and Maitama, farther away receive better services. Furthermore, as highlighted by the study and based on my investigations, the most highly populated areas such as Nyanya are the ones that lack services the most, contrary to the declaration by the board that population density is a major factor influencing the frequency of waste collection. In a survey of 60 households in Nyanya in 2004, 61% rated the board very low and 31% low confirming the poor performance of AEPB.

The above confirms a history of discriminatory practices against peripheral settlements and their inhabitants, mainly the poor in Abuja. Privatization of waste services in recent years is reinforcing the problem of inequality.

The Role of Privatization

Privatization of solid waste services in Abuja, albeit in different forms date back to when construction work started in the city in the early 1980s. A notable difference between then and

now is that today, residents are expected to pay for services. Waste collection had been seen as a social service and provided free even when contractors were hired. Services were therefore extended to most areas. Things began to change in the mid-1990s when the AEPB decided to commercialize waste services in response to dwindling finances. A decision was taken to provide services only to commercial institutions and residents willing to pay. This effectively limited services to the main city districts. Today, there is renewed effort by the government to involve the private sector in waste collection. In 2003, a pilot privatization programme was launched which ‘metamorphosed’ into a full-scale exercise in 2004. The discussion below is based on how these current exercises are promoting inequality in solid waste services.

Common private sector participation methods include contracting, franchise, concession and open competition. The different methods assign different roles to public and private parties. In contracting, which is the type adopted in Abuja, private firms provide collection service under contract with the government and are paid from general revenues or through monies raised by direct user charges (Cointreau-Levine, 1994). In Abuja, contractors are responsible for waste collection and disposal, sweeping of streets, litter control and cutting of grass along streets while government retains responsibility for maintenance of waste dumps and revenue collection.⁸ In 2003, AEPB embarked on a pilot project limited to the central area and immediate residential districts of Maitama, Asokoro and Wuse. Life Camp and Lugbe were notable areas located outside phase 1 that were included but generally peripheral settlements were not. These two probably featured because they contain huge housing estates. The desire to reduce the state’s financial burden, broaden participation and ensure sustainability was specifically cited by AEPB as the reasons for privatizing solid waste services in Abuja. More importantly for this discussion, the expectation was that privatization would also extend coverage to most people. How this was to be achieved was not clearly stated but some contractors confirmed that they were told by AEPB to provide services even to those who could not pay. Since contractors are in business to make money, as later events proved, they did not honour this obligation.

In Abuja, both state officials and contractors complained of a lack of willingness of most residents to pay user fees. Fees charged are based on the number of rooms per household, a system which does not take income differential into consideration. While, revenue collection was a problem, its magnitude varied between places. In an assessment of the project after one year, a contractor indicated that a major concern of his was the way certain parts of the city were being neglected. He gave the example of Kado in phase 2, as one of the areas whose residents received poor services due to poor revenue generation. Table 1 below confirms that some areas generated better revenue. AEPB acknowledged the resultant bias in services in a report. It noted the concentration of waste collection on “juicy” customers rather than covering all areas (Mohammed, 2004: 9, emphasis in original). Maitama and Asokoro, high-income areas, generated the highest revenue while the medium-income area of Kubwa generated much lower revenue. It is not surprising that at the end of the project period, the contractors that covered Maitama and Asokoro were judged by AEPB to have performed best, finishing first and second while the contractor that covered Lugbe is said to have performed so badly that he was subsequently dropped. What we are not told is that the contractors that performed best covered the rich areas that generated the most revenue and got more support

⁸ The contract period is five years and a fixed amount is to be paid to contractors. The sum of N50 million, the equivalent of \$357 000) was set aside to be paid to the 13 contractors every month.

from AEPB. In an interview, during the project, the contractor handling Lugbe complained that the failure of AEPB to provide bins was causing many problems for his operations including the refusal of residents to pay fees. Residents were given plastic bags but no bins to put them in. They complained that it was easy for dogs to tear the bags and litter the surroundings, making their efforts counterproductive. Lugbe is a settlement located about 15 kilometres from the city centre. Its case probably demonstrates the role of physical distance in spatial differentiation.⁹ While it was included in the programme for reasons alluded to earlier, it did not receive the same attention residential neighbourhoods closer to the city got.

Table 1 Revenue collected between January and November 2003.

Source: Annexure I Evaluation on Solid Waste Management Pilot Scheme in Abuja (Mohammed, 2004).

District	Revenue Collected (Naira)	Equivalent in USD
Kubwa	3, 469, 270.00	25, 139.6
Asokoro	24, 146, 330.00	172, 473.7
Maitama	30, 903, 635.00	220, 740.25
Total	58, 519, 235.00	417, 994.45

Following the pilot project, the government launched a major privatization exercise on July 1st 2004. Once again coverage is limited to specific parts of the city. The low-income peripheral settlements were not included. A year after its commencement revenue collection remains a problem, according to state officials and contractors.¹⁰ Commercial and cooperate organizations are said to be better at paying fees since they already have provisions for such expenses. In all, AEPB believes waste collection has increased but acknowledges that coverage is still low. For now, a lot of attention is being given to the privatization exercise but not much to those areas not under coverage. The new tempo being witnessed can in part be attributed to a change in leadership.¹¹ In Nyanya, a community-based solid waste project had been launched in 2001 but four years after, only skeletal services were being provided.¹² According to AEPB, there are plans to privatize solid waste management in satellite settlements like Nyanya.¹³ The mode of privatization would however differ. There would be no door to door collection. Communal bins would be used instead. When asked how the government would fund the programme noting the problem of cost recovery that exists even in the rich areas, the response was that mobile courts would be strengthened to deal with offenders. This 'solution' does not address the specific problem of funding.

⁹ Lugbe is administered by the Federal Capital Development Authority whose offices are far away in the city centre. The roads are poorly maintained, there is no pipe borne water and no representative in the form of a councillor.

¹⁰ Civil servants are said to be reluctant arguing that it has not been worked into their salaries.

¹¹ The minister of the territory who launched this latest exercise was formerly in charge of the country's privatization programme at the Bureau of Public Enterprises (BPE).

¹² A project management committee had been formed under the project to handle day-to-day solid waste services in the settlement. However, according to the secretary of the committee, it could only offer ad-hoc services with revenue from public toilets. AEPB intervenes to evacuate waste from the community but is few and far between.

¹³ Adverts were said to have been placed in newspapers telling interested parties to indicate interest.

At the broadest level, the link between privatization and exclusion/inclusion in Abuja is two-fold. First, not all areas are being covered and secondly, among those being covered, the level and quality of services is based on the amount of revenue generated.

Promoting Inclusion in Solid Waste Services

Exclusion is not limited to solid waste services but it does have far reaching consequences due to the nature of the service. Solid waste management is often viewed as both a public and private good. As a public good, it is seen as nonexclusive, nonrival and essential and the primary responsibility of municipalities (Cointreau-Levine, 1994).¹⁴ In this context, public health is paramount but it also points to the issue of social justice and equity. Lately, it is being promoted as a private good by governments who are increasingly finding it difficult to fund public services. Privatization is a result of that process. The challenge for the state is how to balance the need to protect public health, its traditional responsibility and still ensure private companies recover their investments. There is no simple answer since in practice, governance is embedded in particular political, social and economic contexts. However certain measures that have been tried in solid waste management, albeit with mixed results. In Accra, Ghana, areas are classed into four and charged different fees (Post et al., 2005). The problem is that people in rich areas resist this “robbing Peter to pay Paul” scenario. Another is to offer contractors incentives to extend services to poor areas. This includes tax incentives and special lines of credit. Another possible solution is to encourage contractors to take on income-generating activities such as recycling for additional revenue. The implication is that less dependence on user fees will help lessen the tendency to see poor areas as economically unviable. In Abuja, as this paper has shown, inequality in solid waste services does exist. However, the government has not come up with any mechanisms to address the problem. None of the possible ‘solutions’ mentioned above have been tried. The absence of a policy on privatization is a contributory factor. A policy provides the opportunity to address specific issues including that of inequality or spatial differentiation. A related issue in Abuja is the consistent practice of the government not to give enough attention to cost recovery. While it appears to have inadvertently acknowledged that solid waste management is a public good by telling contractors to extend services to everyone, it did not follow up with mechanisms as to how any shortfall in revenue would be accommodated. The result as we saw was that the contractors simply ignored this directive. The habit of neglecting poor peripheral settlements in terms of infrastructure and services is another factor. The government blames the absence of good roads in peripheral settlements as a major reason for its inability to provide efficient waste services or include such areas in the privatization exercises. It is the same government that failed to provide the roads.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated that who you are and where you live play some role in determining your accessibility as well as the quality of waste services you receive in Abuja. The biased conduct of the state over the years helped lay the foundation for the discriminatory practices that accompanied privatization. In relation to privatization, income

¹⁴ It is said to be nonexclusive because once provided to some, it benefits everyone in the community and not just the resident that receives the service; nonrival since anyone can enjoy the service without diminishing the benefit to others; essential because it is not feasible to deny those who do not pay since public health and cleanliness would be endangered.

differential and location are major determinants. The poor are more likely to live in certain parts of cities. While the paper acknowledges that generally rich neighbourhoods, often closer to the seat of government receive better services than poor peripheral settlements, sometimes the picture is much more complex. The intersection of income and location does not always follow this pattern. In some cases, as we have seen, districts closer to the city centre may receive poorer services on the basis of income. To sum up, this paper shows that the problem of exclusion/inclusion has to be understood against the historical background of established discriminatory practices against the poor.

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