Claiming the right to the city: the politics of urban reform coalitions in Lagos

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ABSTRACT This paper examines how grassroots coalitions mobilize for the right to the city, the politics they encounter and the extent to which their actions result in urban reforms benefiting marginalized communities. The paper invokes a discourse on the right to the city as the mobilizing frame for grassroots social movement encounters against exclusionary development and displacement. Drawing on interviews and documents, we situate this discourse within two case studies of forced eviction in Lagos, Nigeria. To ground the investigation and highlight the tactics and politics of coalitions, the paper applies the conceptual framework of the invited–invented space of encounter. Our findings reveal that state-led neoliberal urban restructuring and spatial displacement in Lagos have triggered grassroots movements and the formation of coalitions, which, depending on the politics encountered, have both enhanced and constrained the struggle for transformative urban reforms that enable the right to the city for marginalized communities.

KEYWORDS collaboration / empowerment / invited–invented space / power relations / right to the city / social movements / urban reform coalitions

I. INTRODUCTION

With the ongoing neoliberal structuring of urban governance, the associated exclusionary development and the failure of the state to deliver urban development benefits to marginalized communities, grassroots social movement coalitions assume greater importance.(1) This is not only to demand the right to urban development benefits but also to address governance gaps and deficits in social services and infrastructure provision. Coalitions are increasingly considered essential for urban reform promoting inclusive development.(2) However, there remains an ongoing debate about whether these coalitions can lead to reforms that enable the right to the city and development benefits for marginalized communities, particularly in the global South.(3) In Lagos, little has been documented about the reform outcomes of social movements coalitions, especially for marginalized communities claiming their right to the city.(4) Also not visible is the politics the coalitions encounter in their pursuit of reform.(5) Scholars have called for an in-depth understanding of politics and the practicalities through which grassroots social movements

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coalesce in global South cities.[6] This paper contributes to this discourse empirically and theoretically.

The paper contributes to emerging research on the dynamics and politics of urban reform coalitions[7] by asking the following questions: *How do marginalized communities mobilize coalitions to claim their right to the city? What forms of politics happen within the space of these urban reform coalitions? To what extent do coalition tactics and politics result in reforms that enable the right to the city for marginalized communities?* To answer these questions, the paper draws on the combined theoretical discourse of social movement coalitions and the right to the city,[8] complemented by the analytical discourse on invited and invented spaces of citizenship.[9]

The paper draws also on two empirical cases of forced eviction and displacement in Lagos: Badia-East, where eviction occurred in 2013, resulting in the birth of the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation; and Oworonshoki community, where residents were evicted in 2023, having already mobilized and asserted their right to the city. The intention is not to engage in comparative analysis of these cases but to discuss them in ways that demonstrate coalition mobilizing tactics, the politics that happen within the space of coalitions and the implications for the right to the city for marginalized communities.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section situates the paper within the concept of the right to the city. Rather than extensively introducing this widely discussed concept,[10] we briefly contextualize its specific application as a mobilizing frame for urban reform coalitions confronting exclusionary development and displacement. Section III extends Miraftab's notion of 'invited' and 'invented' spaces of citizenship,[11] introducing the conceptual frame of the 'invited–invented spaces of encounter'. Following this, we describe our research methods and then, in Section V, present the political economy of urban development in Lagos as a trigger for urban reform coalitions and the right to the city struggle. Drawing on the two case studies, Section VI presents the politics of invited–invented spaces of encounters of urban reform coalitions and the right to the city in Lagos. The final section concludes.

II. CONTEXTUALIZING THE RIGHT TO THE CITY AS A MOBILIZING FRAMEWORK FOR URBAN REFORM COALITIONS

In this paper, we understand the right to the city as a mobilizing framework for urban reform coalitions that not only contest exclusionary urban governance and planning practices but also strategically seek collaboration to co-produce alternative urban visions beyond neoliberal urban restructuring.[12] The right to the city struggles, as faced by marginalized communities in Lagos, encompass a wide range of issues including socioeconomic, housing, civil, political, environmental, social justice, cultural and asset ownership concerns.[13] The urban struggles of marginalized communities express their desire for a variety of rights relevant to belonging in the city, including the right to participate in and enjoy the benefits of urban development[14] beyond the putative benefits of neoliberal urban development.[15]

Neoliberalism manifests not only as a bundle of economic policies but as a broad set of values and rationalities that prioritize profit-driven urban transformation over community needs.[16] In Lagos, urban reform coalitions

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1. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).
2. Bitusikova (2015); Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001); Purcell (2003).
3. Domaradzka (2018); Mitlin (2013).
4. Olajide and Lawanson (2022).
5. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).
6. Mitlin (2018).
7. Mitlin (2022); Paller (2021).
8. Lefebvre (1996 [1968]); Harvey (2008); Marcuse (2009).
9. Miraftab (2004, 2009).
10. E.g. Domaradzka (2018); Harvey (2003, 2008, 2011, 2015); Huchzermeyer (2014, 2018); Kuymulu (2013); Olajide and Lawanson (2023), United Nations (2017).
11. Miraftab (2004, 2009).

and the right to the city struggles are directly linked to neoliberal urban restructuring and its development paradoxes, which disproportionately affect the urban poor.[17] In response, various community movements have emerged and formed coalitions with civil society organizations (CSOs) and NGOs.[18]

We understand urban reform coalitions as diverse groups of stakeholders, which may include grassroots social movements, NGOs, CSOs, private enterprises and government agencies, which recognize benefits in building alliances, whether temporary or long-term, to achieve shared objectives.[19] Mizrahi and Rosenthal define a coalition as *"an organization of organizations whose members commit to an agreed-on purpose and shared decision making to influence an external institution or target, while these member organizations maintain their autonomy"*.[20] Coalition members are driven by the shared understanding that building alliances can enhance their individual goals for promoting a more prosperous, inclusive and equitable city.[21] As Locke et al.[22] argue, coalitions serve as tools for collective mobilization for dialogue, negotiation, collaboration and empowerment as well as spaces for contestation and resistance, especially in efforts to address the state's top-down approaches and exclusionary urban development practices, exacerbated by neoliberal urbanism. Urban reform coalitions function as a civic space where struggles are defined, articulated and sometimes either alleviated or exacerbated.[23] The mobilization of collective actions is often determined by the intensity of the urban challenges and contradictions driving them.[24] Therefore, coalitions serve as platforms through which the urban poor may seek to participate in the development process,[25] counter neoliberal restructuring contradictions, and co-develop alternative plans that advance the right to the city.[26]

This multifaceted function is evident in our Lagos case studies. For marginalized communities, a primary goal of urban reform coalitions is to address urban challenges and pursue collective aspirations for inclusion and community infrastructure upgrades. In the case of the Bahia-East response, the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation was spawned. Supported by NGOs such as Justice and Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) and Slum Dwellers International (SDI), the Federation has advocated for the dignity and inclusive development of urban poor communities. Its activities are structured around practices aimed at community empowerment and urban improvement, needs assessment and community-led planning for incremental settlement upgrades. Through this, they facilitate partnerships with government agencies and development partners, creating pathways for engagement that seek to elevate the living conditions and rights of marginalized communities to urban development benefits. The Oworonshoki community, as part of a coalition that included NGOs and civil society groups, has pursued similar goals, contested their forced eviction and advocated for better urban services. This represents both Lefevbre's *"cry"* and *"demand"* for a transformed and renewed right to urban life and a signifier for urban development reform.[27] It calls for a departure from top-down development approaches and challenges the dominance of state-led neoliberal restructuring, which shapes the production of urban space.[28]

Central to the notion of the right to the city is the linked right to participate in and appropriate urban space, as well as the concerns over the production of urban space and the struggles to inhabit urban space.[29]

12. Blokland et al. (2015); Mitlin (2018); Olajide and Lawanson (2023).
13. Domaradzka (2018).
14. da Silva and de Vries (2022); Marcuse (2009).
15. Olajide and Lawanson (2022).
16. Brown (2013); Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2012); Olajide and Lawanson (2022).
17. Olajide and Lawanson (2022).
18. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).
19. Mitlin (2022); Tarrow (2005).
20. Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001), pages 63–64.
21. Mitlin (2022).
22. Locke et al. (2021).
23. Alexander (2006).
24. Castells (1983).
25. Pruijt (2007).
26. Hamel (2014).
27. Lefebvre (1996 [1968]).
28. de Vries (2016).
29. Lefebvre (1996 [1968], 1976, 1991).

With our case studies, we empirically engage with these concerns. The right to participation asserts that urban residents should play a key role in decision-making processes that influence the creation of urban space. The right to appropriation involves their right to access, occupy and use existing urban space and to produce urban space that serves the needs of the residents. The right to the city, thus, represents struggles for the use value rather than the exchange value of a city and against the capitalist mode of social reproduction. The production of urban space extends beyond physical planning to encompass the creation and maintenance of every aspect of urban life.[30] The prevailing urban development aspiration of the state influences the production of urban space and who can inhabit and appropriate that space. The right to the city framework, as interpreted through our Lagos case studies, aligns with mobilization efforts in which the right to participate in the urban development process and the politics of the production, appropriation and inhabitation of urban space are central to the objectives of urban reform coalitions. In pursuit of these objectives, these coalitions operate within 'invited–invented spaces of encounter', a conceptual term we expand upon in the following section.

30. Purcell (2002).

III. INVITED–INVENTED SPACES OF ENCOUNTER

Here we extend Miraftab's notion of invited and invented spaces of citizenship[31] by introducing the conceptual framing of 'invited–invented spaces of encounter'. We define this as an expanded notion of the range of tactics that urban reform coalitions mobilize and the politics they encounter as they demand their right to the city and negotiate for access to urban resources. As demonstrated in our case studies, the invited and invented spaces of encounters of urban coalitions emerge in response to urban challenges, including marginalization, exclusionary urban development process and the paradox of neoliberal urban restructuring.[32]

31. Miraftab (2004, 2009).

32. Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2012); Miraftab (2004); Olajide and Lawanson (2022).

We articulate invited spaces to denote the spaces of mobilization where grassroots social movements and their supporting CSOs interact with the state and development organizations for participatory governance. Invited spaces can be initiated by either the state or social movements and their supporting NGOs and CSOs. The state, however, has a key role in mediating the nature of dialogue and negotiation and whether these encounters facilitate co-production of urban policy reforms that either enhance or constrain the agency of the marginalized communities to advance alternatives beyond the neoliberal structuring logic.[33] The opportunities available to social movements within the invited space of encounter depend on the convening powers and influence of both the state and social movement. This is related to the position, power and tactics of the state – the rights holder – often manifest through its prevailing political economy and developmental aspiration; as well as the position, power and tactics of the counter-hegemonic movements – the rights claimant – often expressed in the politics of collective action.[34]

33. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).

34. Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2012); Hoelscher at al. (2023).

The invited space of encounters is generally legitimized by the state with promises of inclusion and emancipatory ideals. These promises have generally not translated into significant benefits for marginalized communities.[35] They often encounter the messy reality of power relations which can challenge the inclusive promise of collaboration and end up perpetuating and legitimizing the exclusionary developmental agenda of

35. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).

the state. We contend with the state's assumption that their invitation to social movements to participate in and co-produce urban development processes will result in inclusive urban reforms, without removing the power inequalities.

Invented spaces, on the other hand, are those occupied by the grassroots and claimed by their collective action, while directly confronting the authorities and the status quo.[36] While invited space encounters mainly aim to provide coping mechanisms and support for the marginalized communities (as opposed to genuinely including them), invented space encounters, as forms of both contentious and non-contentious politics,[37] seek to challenge and change the prevailing power dynamics[38] and to disrupt the hegemony of development ideologies that promote inequality, exclusion, displacement and dispossession.[39]

As seen in different contexts, the contentious politics of invented space can include protests, petitions, campaigns, demonstrations, media engagement and lawsuits.[40] Tarrow[41] emphasizes that contentious politics has been a key tactic of social movements to draw the state's attention to negotiation when invited spaces for negotiation, dialogue and collaboration to advance their goals break down. While contentious politics remain a key mobilizing tactic for social movements, we also see non-contentious but empowering politics within the invented space of encounters. This aspect, which we make visible in our case studies, has received less attention.

The various tactics deployed across the invited–invented space of encounters are not mutually exclusive.[42] As we have put it elsewhere, marginalized communities move between them, and, at different points in their struggles, adopt different tactics to pursue their goals.[43] Ballard et al.[44] note that social movements draw on multiple and complex politics of encounters, which shift between invited spaces of dialogue and collaboration and invented spaces of insurgency, resistance, contention as well as non-contentious politics.[45] This range of tactics aims to challenge socio-spatial inequalities of exclusionary development and to improve opportunities for co-production and negotiation for greater political inclusion and urban policy reform.[46]

36. Miraftab (2004).

37. Crossley (2002); McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001); Tarrow (1998, 2005).

38. Miraftab (2004).

39. Miraftab (2009).

40. Olajide and Lawanson (2023); Tarrow (1998); Tilly (2004).

41. Tarrow (1998, 2005).

42. Miraftab (2004).

43. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).

44. Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006).

45. Miraftab (2004); Goldstone (2004).

46. Mitlin and Mogaladi (2013).

IV. METHODS

Over the past 10 years, the research of the authors has tracked the urban development policy and actions of the Lagos State government, examining the resulting spatial displacement, its impact on the livelihoods of marginalized communities, and how these communities mobilize collective actions against spatial displacement. We have also worked with community members, supporting their efforts at mobilization and organizing, though not in an embedded capacity. Through interviews and workshops, we have engaged over the course of our research with actors from CSOs, marginalized communities and grassroots social movements, as well as with policy makers, urban development experts and academics on issues of urban development and spatial displacement in Lagos. Specific projects include the following:

- In 2013 and 2015 we engaged with different actors around forced eviction in Badia-East and subsequent redevelopment projects.

Interviews were conducted with community members and the staff of Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency.
- In 2017 we facilitated a multi-stakeholder workshop on forced eviction and co-creating a liveable Lagos. Participants were drawn from civil society, the Federation of Informal Workers Organization of Nigeria, the Nigeria Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency and leaders of the Lagos chapter of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners, to name a few.
- In 2021, we conducted online interviews with Federation members to understand how they navigate the governance space to claim their right to adequate housing in post-COVID times.
- In 2024 we engaged in interviews and focus groups with Federation members, forcibly evicted residents of Oworonshoki community and their supporting NGOs and academic partners.

Over the years, in addition to Badia-East and Oworonshoki communities, we have engaged with other marginalized communities including Maroko and Otodo Gbame, which have also suffered evictions. However, the two case studies presented here were selected primarily because: Badia-East's experience of forced eviction in 2013 triggered large-scale grassroots social movement mobilization against forced eviction, which later birthed the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation. Oworonshoki community was selected because it was the most recent case of displacement at the time of writing this paper. Members of the community had already been mobilized prior to the evictions that occurred in 2023.

We also draw for this paper on a range of secondary sources (media coverage, policy documents, research reports and peer-reviewed literature) that document cases of forced eviction, spatial displacement and mobilizing actions of marginalized communities and social movement coalitions.

V. THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF URBAN DEVELOPMENT: SETTING THE CONTEXT FOR COALITIONS AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY STRUGGLE IN LAGOS

In Lagos, urban neoliberal restructuring and associated exclusionary development often intersect with and trigger urban reform coalitions for the right to the city. This brief political economy provides some context.

Lagos, as Nigeria's commercial hub, accommodates about 65 per cent of the country's industrial establishments, more than 65 per cent of all commercial activities and around 60 per cent of Nigeria's non-oil economy. With a population of over 20 million people, Lagos faces numerous urban development challenges including poverty, the proliferation of slums,[47] a lack of infrastructure, housing deficits and housing precarity, and environmental degradation.[48]

Since returning to democracy in 1999, successive governments in Lagos have pursued a neoliberal restructuring ideology to address these enduring challenges, leading to major reforms in its governance and development policy.[49] The central vision, and the dominant driver of public policy and programme formulation, is to transform Lagos into an African model megacity, global financial hub and world-class city through infrastructure renewal and city beautification projects.[50]

47. The term 'slum' usually has derogatory connotations and can suggest that a settlement needs replacement or can legitimate the eviction of its residents. However, it is a difficult term to avoid for at least three reasons. First, some networks of neighbourhood organizations choose to identify themselves with a positive use of the term, partly to neutralize these negative connotations; one of the most successful is the National Slum Dwellers Federation in India. Second, the only global estimates for housing deficiencies, collected by the United Nations, are for what they term 'slums'. And third, in some nations, there are advantages for residents of informal settlements if their settlement is recognized officially as a 'slum'; indeed, the residents may lobby to get their settlement classified as a 'notified slum'. Where the term is used in this journal, it refers to settlements characterized by at least some of the following features: a lack of formal recognition on the part of local government of the settlement and its residents; the absence of secure tenure for residents; inadequacies in provision for infrastructure and services; overcrowded and substandard dwellings; and location on land less than suitable for occupation. For a discussion of more precise ways to classify the range of housing sub-markets through which those with limited incomes buy, rent or build accommodation, see *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 1, No 2 (1989), available at http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/eau/1/2.

48. Olajide (2015).

49. Adama (2020); Olajide and Lawanson (2022).

50. Lagos State Government (2013, 2022).

The vision emphasizes attracting global capital and foreign direct investments for urban redevelopment and the implementation of associated mega flagship projects. With this, the state urban development interventions have become more deeply integrated with the modernist capitalist development approach which promotes what Brenner et al.[51] refer to as the city for profit and not for people.

The imperatives of this kind of urban restructuring often disenfranchise marginalized communities from involvement in governance and urban development decisions that mediate and shape their livelihoods and cities.[52] The actualization of the vision is largely antithetical to the agency and informal entrepreneurialism of the urban poor.[53] Thus, the urban poor bear most of the negative externalities of the state-driven or state-endorsed urban transformation initiatives.[54]

As Lagos State continues to undergo urban policy reforms and spatial development to enhance its aesthetics and position the city as a key investment destination, urban land and the production of space are critical. Prime locations hitherto occupied by the urban poor become critical sites of land appropriation and urban contestation, targeted for beautification and mega urban (re)development projects. Other studies also note that neoliberal urban restructuring can lead to rapid urban transformation, resulting in spatial displacement, the destruction of the city's social fabric, livelihood insecurities for marginalized communities[55] and urban contestation.[56] We illustrate this with the two specific cases of Badia-East and Oworonshoki.

51. Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer (2012).

52. Olajide (2015); Purcell (2002).

53. Olajide (2015); Olajide, Agunbiade and Bishi (2018).

54. Olajide and Lawanson (2022).

55. Duckett (2020); Fernandez and Aalbers (2016); Harvey (2007).

56. Olajide and Lawanson (2022, 2023).

a. Case study 1: Badia-East community

Badia-East, a low-income community in the heart of Lagos, was part of the Ijora-Badia community – one of nine slum settlements selected as beneficiaries for the World Bank-funded Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project (LMDGP). The core objective was to increase sustainable access to basic urban services. Between 2013 and 2017, Badia-East suffered multiple forced evictions. In 2013, over 9,000 residents were forcibly evicted by the state government in the name of urban regeneration. In 2015, another section of Badia was demolished, displacing an estimated 10,000 residents, including many who had relocated there after the 2013 evictions. In 2017, thousands of residents of Badia-East – many of whom had already endured the previous two evictions – were once again forcibly displaced. The 2013 forced eviction, which resulted in large-scale protest and contestation from the residents, led to the formation of the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation (hereafter the Federation), one of the earlier grassroots social movements. The Federation, supported by various NGOs over time, has played a sustained role in the struggle against exclusionary state-led development. The Federation became a platform for marginalized communities to mobilize collective actions for capacity-building, participate in urban development processes and struggle for the right to the city. Through the assistance of a local CSO – the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) – some of the marginalized communities in different areas across Lagos organized themselves into saving groups, which were later brought together by SERAC to form the Lagos Marginalized Community Forum (LAMCOFO). Under SERAC, this coalition later became known as the

Rural and Urban Development Initiative and subsequently as the Nigerian Slum/Informal Settlement Federation, an affiliate of SDI. Although the initiative later spread to other parts of Nigeria, the branch in Lagos, where evictions are most frequent, remains the most active.

After falling out with SERAC, the Federation allied with Justice and Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) to continue their urban struggles. JEI, a non-profit NGO, defines its role as supporting poor and marginalized individuals and communities to lead change in their own communities and participate in urban redevelopment decision-making. Its support to the Federation involved developing a range of tactics to articulate their experience of the legacy of socioeconomic injustices from the state's development aspirations. These ranged from active street protests to sit-outs at government buildings, online campaigns and lawsuits – all primarily invented spaces of resistance to government action.

Over time, the Federation had a disagreement with JEI, ultimately leading to the formation of a more independent coalition that partnered with other organizations,[57] including university research centres and the government-recognized Community Development Advisory Council, for the common goal of mobilizing collective actions against exclusionary development and spatial displacement and to enable the right to the city for marginalized communities. This coalition embodies what Mizrahi and Rosenthal describe as an *"organization of organizations"*, [58] where members commit to a shared purpose to influence external institutions, while each organization retains its independence. One benefit of this coalition was that it amplified the voices and urban struggles of the Federation and provided opportunity for dialogue with the Lagos State government agencies for co-production of the transformation they desire to see in their communities. First, they collaborated with the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency to commence slum profiling and identification, and then engaged with the Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Women Affairs to receive economic empowerment and vocational training kits for their members. They have also partnered with the State Resilience Office to access government interventions in the areas of health, education and access to justice.

57. Olajide and Lawanson (2023).

58. Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001), page 63.

b. Case study 2: Oworonshoki community

Oworonshoki, a waterfront community, is strategically located at the foot of the Third Mainland Bridge which connects the mainland and Lagos Island. Oworonshoki consists of numerous neighbourhoods, including Idi Araba, Oke-Eri, Oluwaseyi, Cornerstone, Ogo-Oluwa and Precious Seeds. Its location makes it important for the state's megacity aspirations. In line with these aspirations, the state government seeks to transform what it considers the blighted areas of Oworonshoki waterfront to improve aesthetics and security. The plan was to attract new investments in a range of infrastructure development including transportation, entertainment, tourism, real estate and housing.[59] There have been numerous plans to upgrade Oworonshoki, and the community participated actively in the preparation of the government-led Kosofe Model City Plan[60] between 2020 and 2022, evidencing the invited spaces of urban reform. The community collaborated with project consultants to prepare an inclusive structure plan designed to catalyse local economic development by leveraging the community's unique comparative advantages.

59. Oyewole (2017).

60. Kosofe is the local government area to which Oworonshoki belongs.

However, the production of space for the state's transformative initiatives triggered Oworonshoki's demolition. Between July and August 2023, thousands of residents were forcibly evicted and more than 7,000 homes and structures demolished.(61) The forced eviction (in the guise of protecting the state's wetlands by the Ministry of Environment) was enabled by the cooperation of the traditional ruler, who plays an important role in community governance. However, this environmental rationale concealed the real reason for the eviction, as noted by a member of an NGO that supports marginalized communities in Lagos:

61. Fabulous Urban (2023).

> "If the reason for the demolition of Oworonshoki is to protect the wetland, the action of the state government sand-filling the same wetland for development purposes contradicts this. Part of the main reasons for the demolition of Oworonshoki was to enable the siting of a commercial jetty and a proposed private gated community – The Elite Villa – and other development purposes." (Interview, 2024)

Before 2023, some NGOs, including Rethinking Cities, hFactor Collective, Federation of Informal Workers Organisations of Nigeria, Lagos Urban Development Initiative and Fabulous Urban Nigeria Foundation, had been working with the community in delivering infrastructure, and capacity-building for women and youth, coordinated by the Oworo Youth Forum. In response to the 2023 forced eviction, the affected communities mobilized protests under the names of Mosafejo, Idi Araba Peoples' Front and Oworonshoki Eviction Campaign to contest what they considered the illegal and inhuman demolition of their communities. The protests amplified their demand and attracted the attention of CSOs and NGOs. Fabulous Urban Nigeria Foundation in coalition with other NGOs and CSOs, including CEE-Hope, Oworo Youth Forum, Lot5 Charity Foundation, Lagos Urban Development Initiative and Heinrich Böll Stiftung Abuja, developed an advocacy campaign, requesting compensation, the return of land, an end to forced eviction and spatial displacement and the opportunity for the community to dialogue with the government.(62) The coalition, led by Fabulous Urban Nigeria Foundation, is engaging and collaborating with the community in creating a redevelopment plan for one of its neighbourhoods – Precious Seeds. Our discussion does not cover this redevelopment plan as the process was still in its early stages when we were collecting our data.

62. Gbonegun (2023).

VI. THE POLITICS OF INVITED–INVENTED SPACES OF ENCOUNTERS OF URBAN REFORM COALITIONS AND THE RIGHT TO THE CITY IN LAGOS

This section presents and discusses our empirical findings under the notion of invited–invented spaces of encounter. As our case studies show, coalitions mobilize different tactics to pursue their goal of influencing urban development processes. They concurrently deploy both the invited spaces of dialogue and collaboration and invented spaces of insurgency, resistance, contention and non-contentious politics in pursuit of their

63. Mitlin (2018).

coalition objectives. This aligns with Mitlin's assertion[63] that the mobilizing tactics of contention, collaboration and subversion are deployed simultaneously and iteratively by urban social movements in their urban struggles. To ground our notion of invited–invented spaces of encounter in a way that integrates the discussion of the different coalition mobilizing tactics with the politics they encounter, and the extent to which they result or not in urban reforms for the case study communities, we discuss our findings under four broad themes: *protest, conflicts, contestation and resistance; dialogue, negotiation, collaboration; empowerment; power struggles and polarization*.

a. Protest, conflicts, contestation and resistance

Cities are places of conflict, resistance and contested development aspirations.[64] As Lagos continued on the trajectory of modernist urban development aspiration, the production of space and urban land appropriation became a key challenge. The Lagos State government increasingly sought to appropriate land originally inhabited by the marginalized communities for urban upgrading projects and infrastructure reforms or expansion. The state's urban development aspirations parallel the capitalist mode of accumulation by dispossession on many fronts. For example, the forced evictions of Oworonshoki and Badia-East and of other similar marginalized communities across Lagos have generally been a precursor to elite takeover for private gated estates and other commercial activities with marginal benefit at best for the local community. This has been repeatedly observed in various studies.[65]

On the one hand, conflict and contestation over Oworonshoki and Badia-East communities intensified because they were considered prime locations for the state's modernist development aspirations. Oworonshoki's waterfront was especially attractive. Despite the waterfront being the main source of livelihood for many who live along the lagoon, the state's globalizing vision often took precedence over the economic survival of its residents. For example, as noted in the Mainland Central Model City Plan document:

> "Many great cities around the world are represented through their waterfront or riverfront. Sydney, Hong Kong, Singapore, Vancouver and San Francisco are just a few examples of cities where successful waterfront regeneration programmes have improved the physical fabric of the city, established a strong and distinct urban character and acted as a catalyst for economic development and tourism. Lagos lagoon waterfront has the potential to compete with these global cities through an ambitious and carefully planned waterfront development strategy."[66]

The statement of a government officer we interviewed on the demolition of Badia-East community also encapsulates the importance of its location to actualizing the Lagos megacity aspiration:

> "No serious government with a megacity status like Lagos who wants to attract world-class city development will allow slums to take over

64. Gunder and Hillier (2009); Watson (2003).

65. Olajide and Lawanson (2022, 2023); Olajide, Agunbiade and Bishi (2018).

66. Lagos State Government (2012), page 54.

> its city centre and waterfront. So, to allow slums to remain here is not acceptable." (Interview, November 2013)

Urban land appropriation by marginalized communities, outside the state's planning regulations, is a form of resistance to the governance failures of housing and serviced land provision. In both Oworonshoki and Badia-East, affected residents mobilized and deployed tactics of street and media protest, contestation and legal redress, as well as active on-site resistance to oppose the demolition of their communities. A resident of Oworonshoki whose home was forcibly demolished stated that:

> "No retreat, no surrender. We have protested and we will continue to challenge the action of the government as they demolish our houses. Where do they want us to go? We are going nowhere. We will be here to fight it to the end. With cooperation with the CDA [community development association], the community and our supporters, we will fight the government to regain our land and rebuild our houses." (Interview, May 2024)

This statement offers a useful snapshot of the politics of community resistance and contestation against exclusionary development aspirations of the state. It typifies the inherent confidence displayed in the coalition of displaced residents with the CDA, other neighbourhoods in the community and supporters (in this case, NGOs and media organizations sympathetic to the community's dilemma). While residents have started rebuilding some parts of the community, Oworonshoki remains a critical site for the politics of resistance and contestation in which the state and the residents contest for inhabitation and land appropriation to meet different needs. Badia-East remains a site of accumulation by dispossession(67) in which the urban poor were permanently displaced for elite capital accumulation. The Federation, which resulted from the protest and contestation of the residents of Badia-East community, became a platform for urban struggles and coalition building for urban reforms across Lagos.

67. Harvey (2004).

b. Dialogue, negotiation, collaboration

Dialogue between different actors in a coalition can facilitate effective negotiation and collaboration to co-produce urban reform. Coalitions are vital for marginalized communities, providing a platform for expression and leveraging invited spaces of encounter to promote dialogue, negotiation and collaboration with various actors.(68) This is evident in our case studies. For example, while the evictees of Badia-East communities contested their forced eviction and the state appropriation of space for modernist urban development, they also strategically sought coalition with CSOs, academia, NGOs and CDAs to dialogue with the state. The government did not willingly and readily accept the resulting Federation as a planning partner until the Centre for Housing and Sustainable Development (CHSD) intervened, acting as an arbiter. The Lagos State government primarily engages with local communities

68. Ramirez et al. (2020).

through community development associations (CDAs), many of which, while not officially part of the state, function as political extensions of the prevailing government structure.[69] They generally offer only tokenistic public participation opportunities, designed primarily to reinforce existing political agendas, providing little chance for social movements to engage in the urban development process and advocate for their aspirations for inclusion. However, as noted by a senior academic at CHSD, an effort is ongoing to enhance the capacity of CDAs and their relationship with grassroots social movements:

> "Currently, through the Urban Governance Lab programme of the CHSD, CDAs are being trained on developing charters of demands and becoming more autonomous entities; while many Federation members have been encouraged to join and seek leadership positions in the CDAs in order to participate more actively in decision making." (Interview, May 2024)

Moving beyond the notion of a monolithic state, the coalition of actors convened by the Federation to contest displacement and exclusionary urban development achieved a measure of success, particularly by creating a platform for the Federation to participate in the urban development process. This was highlighted by one of the Federation's leaders:

> "One of our major barriers has been the inability to get the government to listen to us or to want to be on the round table talk to have dialogue with us. That barrier, we are already crossing it gradually. Thanks to our partners who provided access to the dialogue table with the government to discuss our issues and what they think should be done. The barrier is a bit broken, though not totally broken. Now, we have some of the government agencies who are ready to engage and work with us. For example, Lagos State Urban Renewal Authority (LASURA)." (Interview, May 2024)

Through invited spaces, some of the Lagos State government agencies have recently engaged more effectively with the Federation. First, Federation members were invited to the Lagos State Technical Committee on slum identification, social housing and housing finance. They have also been invited to participate as speakers at various government forums, including most recently at the 2024 Lagos Resilience Forum session on social inclusion and vulnerable groups organized by the Lagos State Resilience Office. In 2021, the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency partnered with members of the Federation to co-design a community profiling template that is now in use across the state. Furthermore, the Agency engaged the Federation to carry out community profiling activities. Through this collaboration, they identified and prioritized local challenges in 10 communities, collectively brainstormed solutions, and co-developed inclusive strategies for slum upgrading. The process of community profiling was stalled due to the changing priorities of the Agency. However, the Federation is considered the preferred partner to engage with for this purpose – a clear departure from earlier situations where the Federation was persona non grata to all Lagos State government agencies.

69. Olajide (2015).

With regard to Oworonshoki, prior to the forced eviction, various community groups – including women, men, the Oworo Youth Forum and CDAs – participated actively in the Co-Design and Envisioning Workshop held for the Kosofe Model City Plan. The plan aims to transform the area into a key growth pole that will support Lagos State and guide its development for future generations. Based on community participation in the planning process, residents of Oworonshoki were confident that their livelihood aspirations were effectively captured and integrated into the development plan. However, the 2023 forced eviction debunked this understanding. Though the Lagos State Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development led the co-design, the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources was responsible for the forced evictions.

Our two case studies demonstrate that, while the invited spaces of encounter offered opportunities for dialogue, negotiation and collaboration aimed at inclusive urban development, the outcomes were marred by challenges. In particular, they were threatened by the lack of communication between different institutional authorities with conflicting priorities. For example, the environment ministry's hostile forced eviction in Oworonshoki undermined the community goodwill that had been encouraged by the planning ministry's participatory planning for the Kosofe Model City Plan. Similarly, in Badia-East in 2013, while the Lagos State Urban Renewal Agency was carrying out community infrastructure upgrading under the World Bank-funded LMDGP programme, the Ministry of Housing demolished homes to make room for its public–private partnership-led housing estate.

Although government agencies may have very different agendas, unfortunately, to the average person on the street, 'government is one'. While some government agencies, such as the Urban Renewal Authority, are anti-displacement and willing to collaborate with local communities to achieve their mandates, other agencies, like the Lagos State Building Control Agency and the Kick Against Indiscipline unit within the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources, have overtly anti-poor policies and frequently engage in violent forced eviction and spatial displacement of the marginalized communities. This pattern of violence has been widely observed in other studies on governance and planning policy. Knapp et al.(70) observed a persistent issue of false promises in planning and public policy making, where the government frequently pledges to act ethically but fails to follow through, taking public stances without implementing the necessary actions. Despite such constraints, marginalized communities continue to mobilize collective action through urban coalitions to develop empowerment strategies for dialogue and urban development interventions with willing public agencies, while deploying protests and more combative engagement with hostile ones.

70. Knapp, Poe and Forester (2022).

c. Empowerment

In the face of exclusionary urban development and inadequate state support, coalitions have become a crucial means for marginalized communities to access resources and address governance gaps. Through invented spaces of encounters Oworonshoki community, with support from CSOs, created strategies to address urban challenges and secure infrastructure by mobilizing funds and collaborating with various partners.

Their efforts led to essential projects in Oworonshoki such as Mobile Dry Diversion Toilets, a mobile clinic, allotment gardens and a local building code. Oworonshoki's youth also partnered with NGOs like Rethinking Cities and hFACTOR to organize dance festivals and were featured in a documentary titled 'Dispossessed' which amplified community struggles against forced eviction and other forms of spatial displacement. These initiatives empowered the community by providing vital infrastructure and helping residents gain livelihood skills.

In the case of the Federation, the coalition with JEI provided capacity-building and training on multimedia documentation, media advocacy, social media engagement and diagnostic capacities, enabling them to map both their assets and vulnerabilities. Through community profiling, the Federation carries out periodic 'Know Your City' profiling exercises in which they gather comprehensive data on socioeconomic characteristics, infrastructure and basic services in their communities. This became instrumental to the Federation's engagement by LASURA for community profiling. Through the JEI coalition, the Federation was able to institute and win legal action against the state government to redress forced evictions and spatial displacement of the deprived and marginalized communities of Badia-East and Otodogbame. A similar court order was made on behalf of Oworonshoki community in the wake of the 2023 evictions. Sadly, there is often a blatant disregard of court judgements by the state government regarding the cessation of forced eviction.

d. Power struggles and polarization

Our research found a prevailing sense of powerlessness among residents of marginalized communities, contrary to Mizrahi and Rosenthal's view[71] that the actual power of coalitions resides in the collective power derived from member organizations. Instead, we found real decision-making authority tending to lie with the state and supporting NGOs. While marginalized communities were able to create 'invented spaces' for gathering, they lacked the power to drive lasting change, largely due to tokenistic government engagement. Lagos's urban development agenda often ignores marginalized communities' contributions, prioritizing a top-down approach that disregards their agency. Consequently, these communities engage with the government from a vulnerable position, limiting their ability to influence decisions that impact their lives. Thus, they tend to remain at the margins of development. Oworonshoki's involvement in the Kosofe Model City Plan (2021–2022), followed by forced eviction in 2023, exemplifies this marginalization.

71. Mizrahi and Rosenthal (2001).

These contentious power dynamics extend beyond interactions with state structures, often emerging within the community itself and in its relationships with supporting NGOs. As one Federation member noted:

> "Our problem is not only with the government but also within ourselves and the supporting NGOs. There is internal conflict, division and power within us and the NGOs. We have had to move from one NGO to another and currently, we are having a discussion with another NGO, and we are also considering registering an NGO. The leader of one of our former NGOs was at one point getting involved in the state government politics and that caused distraction

> for the advancement of our goals. The current NGO does not want our voices to be heard, except theirs and what they say on our behalf. But we think this is essentially to control and profit through us." (Interview, March 2021)

Federation members note that NGOs use data as a means of control, with JEI reportedly restricting public access to data obtained through the Federation's various community profiling activities and the SDI-supported 'Know Your City' exercise. The Federation also claimed that profiling had been conducted in more communities than the 41 listed on the SDI website.

Beyond this contention, the Federation has faced internal conflicts at community level, with members accusing each other of prioritizing personal interests over group goals. One coordinator was said to have registered an independent NGO while still in a leadership role. A senior academic in Lagos, who supports NGOs and the Federation, corroborated these issues of power struggles and polarization:

> "My hope and aspiration are that they [the Federation] will be able to drive positive change in the governance and urban development space, through their various empowerment and resistance strategies. This has been a journey for them but with little progress, contrary to expectation. But I think for them to progress rapidly, beyond negotiating with or resisting the government, they need to put their house in order and agree more, avoid division and personal interests." (Interview, March 2021)

Members noted that the Federation experienced significant conflicts and power imbalances within its coalition with NGOs like SERAC and JEI. What was meant to be a collective effort to resist marginalizing urban development practices evolved into a space marked by internal disputes and competition between marginalized communities, NGOs and CSOs. The coalition, intended for social transformation and justice, became an arena for pursuing personal interests, political recognition and economic gains. For example, the Federation felt exploited when the leader of SERAC, formerly a supporting NGO, focused on personal political ambitions, aiming for government appointments or elected positions, using the Federation's struggles for political bargaining.

The Federation's relationship with JEI initially yielded some positive outcomes, particularly in amplifying and consolidating its struggles and helping them build empowerment in areas such as community profiling and media advocacy. However, the rift between them intensified in 2020, lingering until the eventual parting of ways in 2023. The Federation accused JEI's leadership of using their privileged position to pursue an agenda that was often not well aligned with that of the Federation. They expressed concerns about JEI's lack of transparency especially as it related to fund management (including members' group savings) and engagement with external actors, including government. They also noted JEI's totalitarian operational structure and that they were often treated as staff, rather than an independent partner organization. They noted that the relationship differed significantly from the partnerships between slum federations and NGOs in other West African countries. For example, one Federation leader stated that:

> "The Federation in Accra and their NGO work as partners. Not like us that are like workers for JEI. You could imagine if we came even a few minutes late to meetings, we would be denied our transport stipend." (Interview, February 2021)

Federation leaders criticized JEI for limiting their direct interaction with state government agencies or project sponsors, leaving the Federation minimally represented. The benefits and legitimacy of such negotiations are called into question if marginalized communities, who have the legitimacy to articulate their needs and priorities, are largely excluded from the process. JEI's combative approach in meetings was also seen as conflicting with the Federation's goals of social inclusion and recognition.

As tensions between the Federation and JEI intensified, the coalition seemed to shift its focus from addressing urban struggles to navigating a power struggle both between the Federation and its supporting NGOs, and among Federation leadership. Some leaders used the Federation platform to start their own NGOs and gain resources and prominence. Less-educated members accused those more-educated of using their education and social privileges to dominate decision-making. Socioeconomic status and interests created unequal power relations, mediating interactions within the coalition. Even among members, the Federation mobilizes from a position of unequal power relations and resources.

Interestingly, Oworonshoki community approached post-eviction mobilization differently. A leader of the community youth forum, who had a close relationship with Oworonshoki's traditional leader (believed to be complicit in the evictions and proposed gated community), chose to step back from planning or protesting to avoid distracting from the key issues. This decision, which came out of internal discussion and negotiation, was respected by the community, and the leader has since successfully continued to represent the community in other infrastructure and advocacy projects.

VII. CONCLUSION

This paper has explored how marginalized communities in Lagos have mobilized coalitions to claim their right to the city. It examined the various forms of politics that emerged within these coalitions and analysed the effectiveness of their tactics and strategies in achieving urban reforms. Our findings highlight the impact these coalitions can have in advancing the right to the city for marginalized populations, demonstrating their potential to drive urban reforms. But while coalitions hold promising liberatory potential for marginalized communities, they are not necessarily a panacea for urban struggles. Their efforts can be constrained and undermined by inequality, power relations and deep power imbalances across and within partnering organizations. In some instances, as demonstrated by the case of the Federation and its previous supporting NGO, these coalitions may also serve to inadvertently maintain the marginalization and oppression of marginalized communities and reproduce new forms of power domination and exclusion. This aligns with findings by Pimentel Walker and Friendly[72] that while participation is beneficial, it often faces challenges such as bureaucratic resistance, power imbalances and resource constraints, which can limit its effectiveness.

72. Pimentel Walker and Friendly (2021).

Despite the mixed results regarding the successes and failures presented here, coalitions can provide the needed platforms for marginalized communities to pursue urban reforms and advance the right to the city struggles. Achieving a power balance in the invited–invented spaces of encounter is essential for any coalition to drive inclusive urban reforms. To overcome the inequities and deep power imbalances that currently constrain coalition collaboration and the co-production of alternative development approaches, it is essential to embed principles and actions that promote more equitable collaboration. Recognizing the agency and livelihoods of marginalized communities, rather than viewing them as obstacles to development, is fundamental. Collaboration among marginalized communities, NGOs and the state, grounded in a shared ideology and well-defined goals, objectives and deliverables, can significantly advance the right to the city for marginalized populations and can be more effective than pursuing individual agendas. Yet it is likely that open-ended coalitions without well-structured plans will be taken over by the personal interests of more influential partners and get in the way of the opportunity for urban reform coalition efforts to co-create development interventions that ensure communities' needs and perspectives are prioritized.

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