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– NEO-PENTECOSTAL URBAN INFRASTRUCTURES IN LAGOS, NIGERIA: Ontology, Politics, Poetics

GARETH MILLINGTON, DAVID GARBIN AND SIMON COLEMAN

Abstract

This article examines how the urban fabric of Lagos is being transformed by neo-Pentecostal forms of Christian religiosity—a transformation not only of inner, ‘private’ lives but also of urban infrastructures and their provision. Neo-Pentecostal churches in Lagos now provide a range of infrastructures such as roads, bridges, electricity, water, healthcare, plus banking and educational facilities as well as a range of residential options. Church emblems are common features of the Lagos streetscape and can be found on buildings, vehicles and advertisement hoardings. In addition to their symbolic, moral and aesthetic register, Pentecostal urban infrastructures can be understood as a response to the crisis of social reproduction in Lagos, within the context of a postcolonial state that has adopted a position of entrenched neoliberalism. Critical questions remain, however, regarding whose interests are served by this arrangement. The article aims to understand (1) the ontological status of neo-Pentecostal infrastructures, taking seriously the production and delivery of material infrastructures that are understood by some users to also be spiritual; and (2) the novel relations between church, state, market and citizen articulated by these infrastructures. Our arguments are based on qualitative data collected in Lagos between 2018 and 2022.

Introduction

This article examines how the urban fabric of Lagos is being transformed by neo-Pentecostal forms of Christian religiosity—a transformation not only of inner, ‘private’ lives but also of the city, in particular its infrastructures. In ambitious examples of what Hovland (2016) calls ‘Christian placemaking’, neo-Pentecostal churches in and around Lagos now provide a range of infrastructures such as roads, bridges, electricity, water, healthcare, banks, educational facilities, housing and prayer camps. Church emblems are widespread features of the Lagos streetscape and can be found on buildings, vehicles and advertisement hoardings. In addition to their symbolic, moral and aesthetic registers, neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructures can be understood as a response to the crisis of social reproduction in Lagos—the paucity of necessary infrastructures and amenities (Lewis, 2009)—within the context of a postcolonial state that has adopted a position of entrenched neoliberalism (Ekanade, 2014). As Olajide and Lawanson (2022: 1769) explain, the embrace of neoliberal modes of entrepreneurial governance in Lagos has created ‘paradoxical spaces of extreme poverty and wealth, and of inclusion and exclusion driven by accumulation by dispossession’.

Castells (1977) famously saw the city as a centre for the ‘collective consumption’ of goods and services such as housing, energy, transportation, education, healthcare and so forth. For Castells, the fair provision of such services and goods was a constant source of political mobilization, spawning a variety of urban social movements that aimed to improve social conditions and contest existing patterns of collective consumption.

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Comaroff (2009) argues that in many African countries the state has relinquished responsibility for education, while health and welfare and religious organizations have increasingly assumed the role of provider. Omenyo (2014: 142) explains:

One of the appeals of the Pentecostal-charismatic movement is its ability to respond to the existential and pragmatic needs faced by modern urban congregations, including domestic and socioeconomic problems. Their emergence in most parts of Africa occurred under conditions of economic, political, and social hardship, which are accompanied by economic reforms, low wages and quality of life, the absence of social services, and the withdrawal of the welfare frontiers of the state.

While the self-presentation of such Pentecostal churches often constructs triumphalist images linked to missionary aspirations, questions remain regarding whose interests are served by neo-Pentecostal interventions in the ‘socialisation of consumption’ (Castells, 1977) and the inequalities exacerbated by these novel arrangements.

Our aims in this article are to understand (1) the ontological status of neo-Pentecostal infrastructures, taking seriously—mainly through the accounts of our respondents but also secondary sources—the production, delivery and experience of infrastructures in relation to a Pentecostal ‘cosmopolitanism of spirits, beliefs, people and objects’ (Katsaura, 2020: 516); and (2) the novel relations between church, state, market and citizen articulated by these infrastructures. Distinguishing between the material, discursive and spiritual aspects of Pentecostalite urban infrastructure, while acknowledging ways in which they are connected, is crucial to a critical understanding of neo-Pentecostalite attempts at reconfiguring Lagos. We draw on examples provided by four major churches: the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM), the Deeper Life Bible Church (commonly known as ‘Deeper Life’) and Living Faith Church Worldwide (commonly known as ‘Winners’ Chapel’). Apart from the RCCG, which was founded in the 1940s, each is an example of the ‘third wave’ of Pentecostal/charismatic churches that emerged in Africa from the 1980s onwards (for more on such waves, definitional disagreements and the distinctive features of African variants, see, *inter alia*, Marshall, 2009; McClymond, 2014; Omenyo, 2014; Obadare, 2018). We refer to these churches as examples of ‘neo-Pentecostalism’ but also point to the differing priorities and urban strategies of each church. The data used in our analysis, collected in Lagos between 2018 and 2022, are derived from ethnographic observation and over 60 semi-structured interviews with religious and non-religious actors and stakeholders (all interviewee names are pseudonyms). Deploying ethnographic methods of inquiry, we use qualitative data to allow us to understand and contextualize the categories and assumptions of our interlocutors rather than adopting *a priori* a position of secular critique. We are trying to understand neo-Pentecostalism’s complex motivations and aspirations, rather than assuming that a single set of motivations is already discernible. Such an approach attempts to understand—but also decode—Pentecostal claims, motives and intentions in a non-reductive way that accounts for both the ‘politics’ and ‘poetics’ of infrastructure (Larkin, 2013). This is necessary because neo-Pentecostal ambitions are expressed not only through spatial forms that concretize religio-political-economic relations, but also through discursive claims and aesthetic registers.

This article proceeds by reviewing existing literature, pointing to insights from recent work on neo-Pentecostalism and Nigerian politics, in addition to considering the ‘infrastructural turn’ in urban theory. The main body of the article draws on Larkin’s (2013) insistence on recognising both the ‘politics’ and the ‘poetics’ of infrastructure, critically discussing examples of urban infrastructures provided by neo-Pentecostal churches in and around Lagos. We suggest that neo-Pentecostal

infrastructures in this area represent an open-ended experiment in (principally) privatized urban governance—an example of ‘actually existing’ neoliberalism (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) that combines, at times in an obfuscatory manner, pragmatic, spiritual and aesthetic components.

Neo-Pentecostalism and religious urbanization

One of the challenges of understanding the ontology of neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructures is capturing the relations within ‘the nexus between governance, religion and capital’ (Lanz and Oosterbaan, 2016: 491) that make their existence possible. Beginning with relations between religion and governance, Marshall (2009) argues that Pentecostalism’s emergence is connected to the diffusion of a spiritual, ethical and strategic programme that responds to and engages with the insecurity of life in postcolonial Nigeria. The institutions, modes of thought and disciplines instituted by colonialism cannot manage or explain the ‘ordeal of the present’ (*ibid.*: 2). This crisis of governmentality—and the insecurity it continually (re)creates—provide a context for the ‘born again’ revival, lending it conditions of plausibility. But religious revival should not be understood purely in terms of the failure of modern institutions and political rationality. For Marshall, recourse to the supernatural is a technique or practice of *power*, ‘a form of socio-political action on the world’ (*ibid.*: 105). Pentecostalism stages a ‘break with the past’ (*ibid.*: 91) as a condition for renewal and redemption. However, the break never ultimately ameliorates the crisis and its ongoing performance is evidence of the Pentecostal *necessity* for rupture and struggle. In the decades since the neo-Pentecostal revival began in Nigeria, the social and political crisis has only deepened (*ibid.*: 239). Pentecostalism gains its force from the perceived inadequacies of postcolonial government but, for Marshall, it is itself a barrier to more democratic and accountable forms of governance.

Neo-Pentecostal churches do not necessarily compete for authority against the state. Rather, the former have become closely intertwined with the latter, as suggested by Obadare (2018), who argues that the democratic process in Nigeria post-1999 cannot be understood without recourse to the emergent political power of Pentecostal pastors (a ‘theocratic class’) and/or the commensurate popular tendency to view socio-political (and urban) problems in spiritual terms. Obadare is interested in ‘the deep imbrication of politics and spirituality and the contradictions that arise [from this]’ (*ibid.*: 2). Such Pentecostalism often shies away from direct criticism of the state. For example, RCCG is political but in a generalized sense. Pastor Enoch Adeboye, the general overseer of RCCG (also known as ‘Daddy G.O.’), advises members to take part in democratic elections, to join or vote for any party they choose. RCCG’s goal is to ensure that the church is represented by members within whichever party gains power (at city, state and national levels). To make certain that RCCG is adequately represented in all future political scenarios, the church has set up a ‘Directorate of Politics and Governance’, encouraging members to enter politics, providing them with training to be as successful as possible¹ but also signalling to political actors the willingness (and capacity) of the church to rally voters during elections.

Neo-Pentecostal forms of urban citizenship often run counter to class-based political demands for better public infrastructure and services (Osinulu, 2014). Marshall (2014) explains how in a city where economic hardship and frustrations with infrastructure compound each other daily, Pentecostalism posits a material and spiritual ‘elsewhere’, resulting in ‘new social and ethico-political topographies, and new ways of thinking about community and citizenship in the polis’ (*ibid.*: 92). For the neo-Pentecostals, ‘the community of the church still exists as a reference, but is

1 Bolanle Olabimtan, ‘Politics directorate: I’ve never told RCCG members who to vote for, says Adeboye’, *The Cable*, 3 April 2022 [WWW document], URL <https://www.thecable.ng/politics-directorate-ive-never-told-rccg-members-who-to-vote-for-says-adeboye> (accessed 21 December 2023).

transformed from a place of praise and cohesion to a “show place” [*lieu de spectacle*] where deliverance and divine healing are staged’ (*ibid.*: 94). Endless instantiations of renewal lead, on the one hand, to the production of redeemed individuals and, on the other, to ‘a life-and-death struggle to wrest people, places and destinies from the satanic enemy’ (*ibid.*: 95). However, in Marshall’s view, an outcome of this ‘war’ entails ‘new topographies of inequality, violence and exclusion through the obligation to identify and eliminate the “enemy”’ (*ibid.*: 96). Pentecostalism implies hope but there is little prospect that this can take the form of a collective, emancipatory project. At the same time, Pentecostalism produces its own forms of insecurity and exploitation, creating new forms of dependencies and relying on the construction of an unstable ‘born-gain condition’ under ‘constant stress’ (Pype, 2011: 281), perhaps to justify ‘reintroducing the kinds of social pressures and exclusionist communitarianisms one is trying to escape from in the first place’ (De Boeck and Plissart, 2014: 112).

It is also necessary to consider relations between governance, religion and the marketization of infrastructures and public goods in Nigeria. Lanz and Oosterbaan (2016: 494) propose analysing ‘urban-religious configurations in the field of tension between entrepreneurial religion and neoliberal urbanism’. Their suggestion is that entrepreneurial religion is not a form of resistance or a shelter against a retreating state but a creative, constitutive force of both urban modernity and neoliberalism. As Csordas (2009) argues, global religious activity is not determined by economic globalization; rather, globalization is a process that intertwines religion, popular culture, politics and economics.

One concrete way of understanding the relationship between neo-Pentecostalism, neoliberalism and urbanization is to chart the rise of RCCG, given that the latter’s expansion in the 1980s was so dependent on developing a plan for using cities as a medium for growth. Ukah (2011) helpfully outlines this process in detail, beginning with when Enoch Adeboye—a university lecturer with a PhD in mathematics—took over leadership of RCCG in 1981. RCCG reconstructed its identity from a small, backstreet ‘tribal church’ with a poor, elderly following (and with no collection of offerings during services) to an expanded church that included ‘model parishes’ consciously appealing to young, well-educated, media-savvy and upwardly mobile professionals. By the 1990s, as the economic situation in Nigeria worsened, more churches appeared in cities ‘contesting for the souls and pockets of the suffering urban masses’ (*ibid.*: 194). In 1990 Adeboye introduced campus fellowship groups and an elite group of members, composed of bankers, lawyers, academics and medical doctors, called the Christ the Redeemer’s Friends Universal. Product packaging, branding, delivery of message, skills in sales and creative media use also became more important. Whereas the original RCCG parish emphasized holiness and demanded piety, the new ‘model’ parishes monetized obligations ‘in the form of tithes, fees and levies, offerings of many kinds ... and donations’ (*ibid.*: 195). Having had authority over just 39 parishes in 1981, Adeboye now oversees more than 40,000 churches in 186 nations,² most of which are of the ‘model’ variety. RCCG’s corporate links range from endorsements, sponsorships and advertisements involving international corporations such as Proctor & Gamble, Nestlé Foods, Coca-Cola and 7 Up, as well as banks and cellphone providers. Ukah (*ibid.*: 210) concludes: ‘RCCG is market-friendly and compliant; ... as in other similar groups in Nigeria, there exists the uncanny juxtaposition of commercial shrewdness and popular religiosity.’

Neo-Pentecostal churches in Lagos should therefore not be understood as ‘responses’ to neoliberal transformation (Comaroff, 2009: 24), or as ‘syndromes’ of neoliberalism (Lanz and Oosterbaan, 2016: 502). Born-again faiths accept or propagate the spirit of neoliberalism at least as much as they counter or oppose it; indeed, ‘they

2 Bill Nunnelley, ‘Adeboye, head of worldwide RCCG church, to speak at Samford’, *Samford University News*, 4 October 2018 [WWW document], URL <https://www.samford.edu/news/2018/10/Adeboye-Head-of-Worldwide-RCCG-Church-To-Speak-at-Samford> (accessed 21 December 2023).

see the creativity of God as immanent in the creativity of capitalism' (Comoroff, 2009: 26). Their growth is an active moment in the production of neoliberal reform, both materially and discursively. This modernization is hailed as redemptive and aspirational by churches, but it clearly also hinges on capital accumulation and the capture of socio-spatial resources (Ukah, 2011).

The ontological questions posed in this article are inspired in part by what Amin (2014) has called the 'infrastructural turn' in urban theory. Much of this 'turn' has concerned a re-evaluation of what infrastructures *are* and what their place might be in the fluctuating constitution of cities, thereby representing a concerted move away from a focus on political-economic production to consider the engagements and perceptions through which infrastructures are lived and known (Graham and McFarlane, 2014). Amin (2014: 139) is enthused by notions of 'lively infrastructure' and/or 'sociotechnical assemblages' which promise 'an exciting anthropology ... that foregrounds the urban backstage to reveal the sociality of roads, pipes, cables, broadband, code and classification and the enrolments of the socio-technical systems that they are part of'. In a similar vein, Bennett (2010) highlights the agency of materials invoked by the dynamic interplay between human and non-human actors. She reminds us that infrastructures are never inert or neutral, that we inhabit social worlds replete with 'enchanted materialities' and the 'vitality of things'. Recognition of the liveliness and vitality of infrastructure is especially germane when discussing infrastructures created vis-à-vis religious urbanization. But in themselves such notions lack geographical and historical analytical content and context. Brenner *et al.* (2011: 251) argue that renewed concern with 'networks' of material objects resembles a 'naïve objectivism' that fails to consider the 'context of contexts' in which urban spaces and locally embedded social forces are positioned: 'While the assemblage ontology focuses on the materials themselves, it is [still] essential to consider the political-economic structures and institutions in which they are embedded.'

We too are mindful of the dangers of celebratory and decontextualized accounts of 'lively' or 'enchanted' infrastructure, especially as our data make it clear that Pentecostalist 'socio-technical infrastructures' create, reproduce and exacerbate divisions and inequalities (Graham and Marvin, 2002) in addition to maintaining imbalanced citizenship rights (Lemanski, 2020). Understanding evolving relations between religion, state, economy and citizenship must therefore be paramount to any critical understanding of Pentecostalist urban infrastructure. As Larkin (2013) suggests, infrastructures reveal the forms of political rationality that underlie technological projects. Infrastructures, for Larkin, are both 'things' and the 'relations between things' (*ibid.*: 329). They are objects that create the grounds upon which other objects operate; and when they do so, they operate as *systems*. In seeking to answer ontological questions about infrastructures that providers and (many) users believe exist 'by faith of God', we are mindful not to reduce neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructures to either the material or the affective. It is instructive, we suggest—following Jensen and Morita (2017)—to view neo-Pentecostal infrastructures as 'open-ended experimental systems' (*ibid.*: 620) and/or emergent systems that produce 'novel configurations' (*ibid.*: 618) of the city and urban life. In our account, we do not claim to cover all of the urban infrastructures highlighted by the denominations to which we refer. Rather, we discuss specific examples, drawn from projects located within but also on the periphery of the city, to illustrate the entangled political, ethical and symbolic registers associated with a variety of projects of construction.

The politics of neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructures

Lagos is a city where infrastructural inconsistency and inequality are a part of everyday life (see, *inter alia*, Gandy, 2005; 2006; Adama, 2018). As Onuche, a Lagos-based urban activist, explained to us:

Lagos is a very hard city, it is not easy to live here and there are so many problems, on a daily basis, with power, with transport, with job security ... there is a big divide between rich and poor ... it's very hard, it is a very hard city to manoeuvre. Lagos State don't have the capacity to manage a city with this number of people, and when I say capacity, it is not just about money, but also the knowledge, the understanding.

It is in this context that expansive, often infrastructurally ambitious, neo-Pentecostal prayer camps have flourished in the environs of, or broadly adjacent to, Lagos. MFM runs a 'Prayer City' along the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway, and regularly busses members there from its premises in Lagos. The Deeper Life Camp is situated on the same road, between land owned by MFM and RCCG. Living Faith owns over 500 acres of land on the periphery of Ota, to the north-west of Lagos, which it calls 'Canaanland'. The RCCG Camp, which has recently been renamed 'Redemption City', is the oldest of these locations. Redemption City offers members housing, prayer auditoriums, a health/maternity centre, electricity, relative security, shops and banks, among other services. While reflecting the socio-economic inequalities of the nearby megalopolis (Osinulu, 2014) and despite evidence of petty criminality and informality, Redemption City has been promoted as a kind of 'alter-city'—an 'anti-Lagos', hailed as ordered, safe and crimeless by the leaders and members we interviewed. Its development started in the 1980s, when church leader Pastor Adeboye had a divine call to 'redeem the sins of Lagos' (Ukah, 2014: 183) by establishing a 'city of the living God', a New Jerusalem where people 'will be worshipping God forever' (Osinulu, 2014: 132). Although situated in Ogun State, along the Lagos–Ibadan Expressway (like many other large neo-Pentecostal and Muslim prayer sites), Redemption City is only a 50-minute drive from Lagos (on a good day) and is regularly visited by Lagos-based worshippers. Conversely, as an RCCG urban planner told us, many Redemption City residents commute to work in Lagos.

– Lively and enchanted infrastructures

The following quotes from interviews with pastors and a health worker at Redemption City provide a sense of the spiritual and ethical dimensions of not merely having access to, but also claiming to be able to provide, reliable infrastructures crucial to social reproduction:

We have our own water. God used our own members to build the water resource, the water dam. God has blessed this mission with great resources (Pastor Osayi, RCCG).

God is so faithful ... Prepaid meter here is about what you use you pay for, it is very sincere. You could pay 1,000 naira for your electricity for one week here, while someone outside the camp could use that for just one day. The mission has its own electricity facility. We are not connected to the national grid (Pastor Stephen, RCCG).

We have Redemption Camp Maternity, powered by the RCCG generator. Even complications in delivery, complicated gynaecology and obstetrics cases are being managed by us over there. Even with the paediatrics, God is helping us, we are doing quite well (Dr Awoniyi, RCCG Health Centre, Redemption City).

In the discourse of leaders and members a recurrent theme is the conviction that the infrastructures of Redemption City are made available as a result of God's faithfulness: God has *blessed*; God is *faithful*; God is *helping us*. Human and spiritual agencies are

conjoined, with results that can take on powerful and consequential forms. These infrastructures are both enchanted and lively. Reminiscent of the Pentecostal belief that the Holy Spirit both connects and is highly diffused, Larkin (2013: 329) notes that ‘infrastructures are matter that enable the movement of other matter’, which in these cases implies the movement of electricity and water in addition to (or in accompaniment with) God’s Spirit. Infrastructures are thus reconfigured as dispersed sites of encounter with the sacred; for neo-Pentecostal churches, ‘the life of the spirit extends ... tangibly to profane realms beyond the space of the sanctuary and the time of worship’ (Comaroff, 2009: 20). The materiality and spirituality of infrastructures—in this case, water dams, electricity meters, a maternity centre—are not mutually isolated; they arrive and accumulate together as a proto-system. To members and/or those sympathetic with the churches, an improved city seems possible because of these infrastructures, demonstrating Lefebvre’s (2003) argument that the utopic is not something that belongs wholly to the future but is something already present in the urban landscape, appearing as if it were already incorporated, as is the case with the proto-systems of Pentecostal infrastructure explored here.

– Church and state

If infrastructures express ‘the relation between things’ (Larkin, 2013: 329), the infrastructures discussed here can be understood as articulating novel relations between the church and its members (most notably those members who can afford to live in the camp) with water, energy, healthcare and God. As Simone and Pieterse (2017: 179) explain, ‘There is a tendency on the part of conventional urban politics to call for the state to do “its job”, to guarantee rights [and] basic provisioning’. This assumption runs through much academic work on the ‘postcolonial African state’ as well as in many of the lay accounts we encountered, all of which tend to see divergence from the conventional as an example of state ‘failure’ (see Young, 2012). Like Onuche, whose quote opened this section, Samuel—an urban planner with a private practice in Lagos—provides an account that partially adheres to this argument, while also pointing to a complementary relation emerging between state and church. This relation, he argues, is having a significant impact on the city:

The problem of Lagos lies in the area of governance, to really deliver to the residents of the city. In the context of the state not being able to meet its responsibilities, the private sector have been trying to pursue market-oriented systems, like make a profit and walk away ... but there are some institutional challenges too for the private sector to move forward. I think faith-based organizations have equally made a tremendous contribution to the city of Lagos. Religious organizations have tried to fill in the gap in the area of infrastructure especially when it comes to school, healthcare delivery services and water and sanitation. Religious organizations are coming in to complement government efforts, so they really have done a lot in that regard.

Although Samuel refers to a ‘gap in the area of infrastructure’, he does not go so far as to suggest that church ‘replaces’ the state (and, interestingly, he does not perceive faith-based organizations as coterminous with the private sector). He implies a relation that renders the state ‘a pre-eminent space of experimentation’ (Simone and Pieterse, 2017: 180). It may often be assumed that state and neo-Pentecostal churches are at odds or in competition—and sometimes they are—but here, ‘the simultaneity of the existence of these institutions does entail a mode of co-ordination’ (*ibid.*). This coordination is not articulated explicitly. Rather, it rests on an ambivalent situation where, as Obadare (2018) explains, there is no longer a Nigerian or Lagos state that is autonomous from neo-Pentecostal churches and pastors. Rather than opposing the state, Pentecostal interventions can, in a manner that contradicts Marshall’s (2009) view discussed earlier,

provide ‘a ballast that gives Nigerian democracy stability’ (Obadare, 2018: 164). Obadare may be indulging in a degree of exaggeration here, given, for instance, that just over half the Nigerian population is Muslim, but he does point to the aspiration—cultivated by neo-Pentecostals themselves—of achieving influence beyond denominational enclaves.

Such an orientation between neo-Pentecostals and government brings with it certain costs. Aminu, a Muslim urban planner who runs an independent consultancy in Lagos, explains the situation thus:

[The church] is supposed to say the truth to power, but they’ve all been compromised ... [W]ith due respect, how could a G.O. [general overseer of a neo-Pentecostal church] antagonize a president that came to kneel before him, before the G.O. himself says, ‘Everything I give to you’? And if the G.O. cannot do that, the pastors at the local level will also be cautious.

Aminu points to how neo-Pentecostal churches and government (at both national and local levels) are rarely critical of one another since they provide each other with legitimacy and credibility. Urban activist Onuche describes how the convergence of the interests of state and religion limits rather than increases the potential influence of the latter:

They [neo-Pentecostal churches] have political power, they just don’t use it, and if they actually used it, they could do a lot more. So my opinion is that they should stop doing all this provision of private facilities, and work with the public sector, to make sure that those facilities are at a better standard.

In this critique, churches locate their primary actions in the private sphere at the cost of cultivating a more civic orientation. The key point, however, is that such action is *not* at odds with the interests of the state, whose representatives increasingly rely on the popular appeal and endorsement of leading figures within the largest neo-Pentecostal churches. Obadare (2018: 164) denotes this exchange as an ‘entente between the ruling class and theological elite’. Reflecting this sentiment, an RCCG medical doctor contends that neo-Pentecostal infrastructure aims to improve the overall provision of public goods and services in Lagos: ‘We don’t come to destroy systems, we come to improve on systems’.

Rather than limiting our discussion of neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructure to the crisis or failure of the state, we may instead speak of Lagos as an ‘institutionally thick’ city (Simone and Pieterse, 2017: 181). Pentecostalite infrastructures manifest an emerging relation between things that, while sharing an affinity with neoliberal norms of widening responsibility for the provision of infrastructures and public services, conveys to some (but certainly not all) the promise, if not the reality, of an improved ‘system’ of delivering energy, water and healthcare (among other infrastructures and services). This proto-system is viewed by the church pastors and members we spoke to as a blessing from God, in addition to being seen as an institutional accomplishment.

– ‘Government by condolence’

In addition to establishing prayer camps or peri-urban satellite towns like Redemption City, neo-Pentecostals use the existing city as a ‘medium’ (Kittler and Griffin, 1996) through which to establish their infrastructural provision; repurposing, renovating, and/or demolishing and rebuilding existing infrastructures and buildings. As Anand *et al.* (2018: 7) put it, ‘any given future is built on a past’. This utilization of the ‘legacy’ city provokes discussions and dialogue regarding who is responsible for permitting and then maintaining Pentecostalite infrastructures. One example, revealed

by an interviewee in the MFM enclave in Onike, in central Lagos, concerns a busy road leading to the church's auditorium. MFM purchased a single plot of land in 1994 and has since grown to become the largest landowner in Onike, appropriating 28 plots (36.8%) of the neighbourhood (Lawanson and Millington, 2022). The road was tarred by the church only up to its entrance, making it easier for members to access the church but causing heavier traffic, parking problems and flooding in adjacent areas, while also creating a division between visiting church members and locals whose stretch of the road was not tarred.

When the tarred road came to be, they did not extend it to our side. They just stopped it over there by their car park. So now they all drive on this road. They use it to disturb us. We don't have a choice (Ngozi, Onike resident).

An alternative view, offered by another resident, Kelechi, is that 'the government is not worried about problems when it comes to [Onike] because of MFM's input'. In other words, the state no longer needs to worry about what happens in Onike because MFM is maintaining the area, tarring the roads, renovating properties, and so forth. Representatives of the state are, however, not entirely happy with this 'arrangement'. As one Lagos State planner informed us:

Some religious groups think [that] because their vision is driven by God, earthly laws don't apply to them—they are above such laws, for instance planning laws, and that God will give them strength to move over obstacles.

The regulatory landscape in relation to the enforcement of planning codes in Lagos is relaxed enough for Pentecostal churches to take advantage of its many 'bureaucratic gaps' (Lawanson and Millington, 2022: 120) in order to create 'expansive enclaves' (Coleman and Chattoo, 2019: 90) in the centre and on the edge of the city. Planning permission is often sought retrospectively for church-led developments. As Aminu, a Lagos-based planning consultant, warned us:

I am foreseeing a situation where there could be turmoil ... the point is, we are running a government by condolence. It's like when people die you want to go bid them sorry, but you can't prevent it from happening, and that's happening at the state level. You can imagine a plan comes up and they put it in the paper today and say we should submit all objections by tomorrow.

As Aminu suggests, bureaucratic gaps in the planning process mean that the state is rarely able to prevent neo-Pentecostal churches from making their alterations to the city. The state's stance, which is what Aminu implies in the phrase 'government by condolence', is as if to say, 'We're sorry, it's too late, but what could we do?'

Neo-Pentecostalite infrastructures are, however, sometimes proclaimed by the state as successful examples of a partnership approach. The Deeper Life bridge in the Gbagada-Ifako neighbourhood opened in 2018, alongside traffic lights and a multi-storey car park as the 'public good' condition of the church's development of a new 40,000-capacity auditorium. Construction of the auditorium took 13 years and involved the purchase of dozens of residential properties, impacting community life and land/property prices. At the opening, the commissioner for energy of Lagos State referred to the bridge as 'an epochal development', praising the church's alignment with the state's 'drive towards the rebuilding and renewal of Lagos'.³ In this case, the state did not

3 Mary Ekah, 'Deeper Life builds bridge in Lagos', *This Day*, 16 March 2018 [WWW document], URL <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2018/03/16/deeper-life-builds-bridge-in-lagos/> (accessed 21 December 2023).

conceal or apologize for Pentecostal intervention in infrastructure provision; in fact, similar ‘reciprocal’ agreements were promised for the future. However, examples such as this—where the private interests of the church are balanced with some form of ‘public’ compensation (which in turn is presented as an achievement of the state)—are rare. The examples in this section point to the inconsistent, opportunistic and often *ex post facto* managing of neo-Pentecostal urban ambitions by the state.

– Neo-Pentecostalism and ‘actually existing neoliberalism’

Healthcare, education and housing provided by neo-Pentecostal churches in Lagos are marketized. Generally, they are available only to those who can afford them. Inequalities in infrastructural access and use are not ameliorated when these faith-based organizations oversee provision. The intertwining of neo-Pentecostal churches with privatized, segmented infrastructural provision represents an example of what Brenner and Theodore (2002) call ‘actually existing neoliberalism’, which, as opposed to ideological neoliberalism, places emphasis on the *embeddedness* of neoliberal restructuring processes within the environments of work, home and leisure (and in this case, revivalist forms of Christianity). Here is Dr Awoniyi talking about the health centre at RCCG’s Redemption City:

The health centre was originally for camp dwellers but this has changed. Everybody, outsiders come here now. What we do is life before money. So, if you come and want to do a surgical procedure, we go ahead and do it. After[wards] we talk about the money. The comparison of price should be with a private level because we are a private facility. It is not worth comparing with a public hospital because the effectiveness and efficiency is not there, it is almost zero.

What Dr Awoniyi describes is an explicitly private (and expensive) system of healthcare, but one that is represented as having become an important resource for a wider ‘public’ of non-resident members, provided they eventually pay.

Another stark example of the Pentecostal privatization of potentially public infrastructure and service provision is provided by Living Faith Church’s Covenant University (part of the Canaanland complex), where tuition costs around 977,500 naira (£1,750) per session (based on figures for 2020/21), making it the most expensive university in the country.⁴ Moreover, these fees are considerably higher than fees charged by federal universities. An example in the same vein is the luxury private housing offered by RCCG to its wealthiest members. One Lagos State planner told us, ‘They [the Pentecostal churches] are creating colonies’, echoing the view of Alsayyad and Roy (2006), who present religious urbanization primarily as the development of quasi-feudal enclaves. Many RCCG homes situated on or adjacent to Redemption City are bought by overseas members as investments and are rarely occupied (told to us by Pastor Osayi). Elsewhere in Nigeria, RCCG-affiliated private housing schemes have been accused of defrauding buyers by taking deposits but not delivering homes.⁵

According to Larkin (2018), infrastructures always imply a definition of community. However, the solidarities created by neo-Pentecostal infrastructures are fractured since they are ‘woven into the [existing] wider social and spatial inequalities’ of the city (Graham and Marvin, 2002: 195). Neo-Pentecostal churches

4 Covenant University, ‘Covenant University 2021/2021 school fees for new students’, *Nairaland Forum*, 5 December 2020 [WWW document], URL <https://www.nairaland.com/6298546/covenant-university-2020-2021-school> (accessed 21 December 2023).

5 Ayodamola Owoseye, ‘Investigation: how Redeemed Church officials allegedly duped members of millions in housing scheme’, *Premium Times*, 11 July 2017 [WWW document], URL <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/236425-investigation-redeemed-church-officials-allegedly-duped-members-millions-housing-scheme.html?tztc=1> (accessed 21 December 2023).

in Lagos are implicated in the ‘urbanization of neoliberalism’ (Brenner and Theodore, 2002) within Lagos to the extent that (1) churches are active agents in marketizing public goods such as energy, healthcare, education and housing; and (2) the perceived weakening of the state and the instabilities and inequalities caused by neoliberal policies—some of which are enacted by churches themselves—become a justification for the message of Pentecostalism as well as providing a fertile, accommodating terrain for the growth of congregations in terms of members and expansion within urban space itself.

To summarize this section on the politics of neo-Pentecostal infrastructure, the following aspects should be emphasized. First, the existence of neo-Pentecostal provision cannot be disentangled from the ‘Castellsian’ problematic posed at the beginning of the article concerning the materialist problem of the socialization of collective consumption—the distribution of access to energy, transport infrastructures, education, healthcare and housing. Second, the realization of these infrastructures is represented by churches and their members as the result of divine blessings. Third, neo-Pentecostal churches instigate such infrastructure through two expansionist strategies: (a) territorializing land on the periphery of the city in the form of large camps; and (b) utilizing and adapting the existing fabric of the city. Both strategies are not only pragmatic but also aim to circulate and create more encounters with the Holy Spirit while closely associating each church with the promise of future material prosperity. Fourth, while the existence of neo-Pentecostal infrastructures in Lagos is often explained in relation to the absence, withdrawal or failure of the state, the relationship between church and state is more accurately characterized as one of accommodation, with occasional instances of cooperation. Citizens therefore must navigate an inconsistent, unevenly developed and expensive infrastructural terrain. Fifth, these arrangements are concomitant with neoliberal forms of urban restructuring that rely on the privatization and marketization of what might once have been considered public goods. The neo-Pentecostal provision of urban infrastructures and the implicit state support for this are presented here as examples of actually existing neoliberalism.

The poetics of neo-Pentecostal infrastructures

Infrastructures have technical functionality but they can also be excessive, fantastical objects. As such, infrastructures are caught up with a sense of the promise of modern society, offering a sign of the realization of that promise (Larkin, 2013). The infrastructures examined in this article signify Lagos’s *Pentecostalite* urban modernity; they are evidence—for members at least—that the future in which they invest (spiritually, socially and financially) is on its way. The key point is that neo-Pentecostal infrastructures are not necessarily perceived as confirmation of a failed city or a failed modernity. For members and believers, they are both a sign of *progress made* and of the Pentecostal ‘city yet to come’ (Simone, 2004).

– Electricity, modernity and progress

The electricity generator shown in Figure 1 is the first generator used at RCCG’s Redemption City. It provides an origin story for Enoch Adeboye’s city and, in its current surroundings close to the camp museum, imparts evidence of progress. The generator has long ceased to provide energy for the vastly expanded camp and so is now ‘loosened’ from its technical function. It is no longer *useful* in a camp whose energy needs are supplied by a state-of-the-art power plant (see Figure 2).

The original generator has become a metapragmatic object—a sign of modernity, but one whose meaning is derived from its obsolescence:



FIGURE 1 The first generating plant used in Redemption City (photo by Gareth Millington, June 2018)

It's a machine. It is a fact that this is the first generator that gave them a sense of belonging when they [Daddy G.O. and the first residents] moved in. Do you know what it means to have only his house inside a bush? It would be so dark at night. So, when they now had a generator, by the grace of God, and they were able to put it on and have light, there would have been much excitement. But having it there is not because it is a deity. No. God forbids. It is not that it is extremely important, but seeing that it is well kept, they think it is worth people seeing it, that this generator is part of history (Pastor Nnadozie, RCCG Redemption Camp).

As the pastor explains, the generator brought light to the earliest incarnation of the camp in scrubland believed to be occupied by bandits and malevolent spirits. Its existence and the energy it provided is evidence of God's support for Adeboye's urban vision. Larkin (2013: 329) explains how infrastructures can 'store within them forms of desire and fantasy and can take on fetish-like aspects'. While charismatic leaders and pastors could be seen as 'deified' by members, material mediation remains problematic in dominant Pentecostal narratives, which is why in the pastor's account the generator confusingly sits somewhere between an object that is not 'extremely important' and something that is 'worth people seeing' and a 'part of history'. This ambivalence is compounded further by the pile of sand in front of the encased generator, which suggests that the labour of building Adeboye's city is ongoing and that, in the world of RCCG, *the city to come* takes precedence over objects from the past.

The current Redemption City power plant (Figure 2) is a different signifier of modernity. It suggests reliability, autonomy and confidence in the camp's future, while offering a physical reminder—to interested publics such as residents and visiting



FIGURE 2 The current Redemption City power plant (photo by Gareth Millington, June 2018)

members—of what has been accomplished by the church since the original generator was installed. Neo-Pentecostal infrastructure is symbolically redolent with future-oriented themes such as path clearing and unblocking movement. If circulation is intrinsically linked not only to modernity but also to spatial order and political power (see Adams, 2019) then it becomes possible for leaders, pastors and believers to imagine a future in which the ordered and powerful Redemption City assumes the role of centre, and Lagos the underdeveloped, unregulated periphery:

This camp has more light than Nigeria as a whole. I mean in terms of consistency, not amount generated (Dr Ohale, Redemption Camp Health Centre).

Consistent, circulating energy smooths out urban experience. Infrastructures are ‘a mechanism to control time’ (Graham and Marvin, 2002: 42)—in this instance, to break from the past (and from the city) and envision an alternative, more prosperous future. This perceived spiritual dimension of electricity places God firmly within the realm of the modern.

– The neo-Pentecostal politics of ‘as if’

For Larkin (2013), the ‘doubling’ of infrastructure refers to how infrastructural systems and practices may also operate in variance with their purported objectives. Infrastructural objects retain a technical function but are implicated in the creation of an aesthetic order, a politics of ‘as if’. The so-called 3 x 3 km auditorium at Redemption City, opened (but not completed) in 2016, is one in a series of RCCG auditoriums that charts the expansion of the church: from the first auditorium to a 1 x 1 km auditorium⁶

6 Both of which are still in existence.



FIGURE 3 The 3 x 3 km auditorium at RCCG Redemption Camp (photo by David Garbin, June 2018)

and now a vast auditorium that is at least said to have a capacity of well over one million (see Figure 3).

The auditorium is controversial owing to reports of the displacement of the residents of nine villages during its construction. Hundreds of homes as well as schools, markets, churches, crops and electricity lines were said to have been violently seized and destroyed by the church as they exceeded the boundaries of the land sold to them.⁷ As Olajide and Lawanson (2022) argue, the state in Nigeria often acts as an enabler of accumulation by dispossession. Writing prior to the unveiling of the auditorium, Ukah (2014: 179) stated that RCCG's prayer camp 'is no longer simply a ritual site; it represents a formidable strategy of spatial and territorial domination and resource capture'.

Although some have questioned the veracity of the claim that it extends to 3 x 3 km in size, the auditorium's enormous scale does generate awe among members; it appears to confirm the faithfulness of God, the vision and drive of Enoch Adeboye, and the moral discipline and financial resources of RCCG. Although it attracts many thousands of worshippers for monthly 'Holy Ghost' services, it is unlikely ever to make use of its full capacity. However, more importantly, the successive rescaling of the RCCG auditorium over the years communicates a fantastical teleology of progress and growth:

It [Redemption City] is still expanding, yes, until the Lord comes, until Jesus comes. The type of vision God gave him [Daddy G.O.] is a city without boundaries (Pastor Stephen, RCCG).

The expansionist drive of neo-Pentecostal Christianity is indeed its *raison d'être* and is projected onto the geographical, symbolic and social space of a moral community 'called' to transcend a whole range of earthly boundaries. But the size of the new auditorium introduces an element of jeopardy. It poses a question: what if RCCG decided against

7 Daniels Ekugo, 'Villagers cry out as RCCG seizes 2100 hectares, destroys property', *PM News*, 14 July 2015 [WWW document], URL <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2015/07/14/villagers-cry-out-as-rccg-seizes-2100-hectares-destroys-property/> (accessed 21 December 2023).



FIGURE 4 Covenant University: '1 of 10 in 10' (source: Tweet by Covenant University, 13 August 2015, <https://twitter.com/cuhebron/status/631758094985465856>)

taking the next step, a 5 x 5 km auditorium? Would that decision communicate that the church is no longer growing, that it has reached its limits?

Similar potential dilemmas regarding the relationship between measurable materiality and the largesse of the Pentecostalite imagination are evident in other neo-Pentecostal churches. Covenant University is a private institution situated in Ogun State, approximately 45 km from Lagos. It is affiliated with Living Faith Church. In a further example of infrastructural 'doubling', Covenant University pledged 'to be one of the top ten leading world class universities' by 2022. Figure 4 shows how the university ambitiously positioned its emblem alongside those of Harvard, Oxford and MIT 'as if' these institutions were already equals in global academic terms. According to Covenant's chancellor, Dr David Oyedepo, it is a case of daring to 'deliver the unthinkable', of encouraging staff and students to adopt a 'possibility mentality'.⁸ 'Mentality' is not a bland corporate ideology here. Rather, it expresses a neo-Pentecostal, prosperity-oriented dedication to *being committed*, to orienting one's ambition to expansion. It therefore speaks to the aim to organize infrastructures and management structures in ways that extend a sense of growing power and influence into the future, and to represent this through the object of the university itself. From the perspective of 2023, Covenant has not in fact achieved its stated aim of being ranked among a 'top ten' of institutions. Nonetheless, the university has inserted itself into global fields of academic reckoning. The Times Higher Education's inaugural Sub-Saharan University Rankings (2023) places it at number seven, the top Nigerian provider of higher education.⁹ Stated goals and commitments change relatively swiftly in prosperity contexts; what remains more constant is the cultivation of permanent striving as an ideal.

Both the Redemption City auditorium and Covenant University demonstrate how neo-Pentecostalite infrastructures are not simply functional; they also operate on an aesthetic level that communicates to members (and prospective members) a vision of ambitious and ongoing expansion. Pastors, church members and the city itself are interpellated by these materialized visions. Even if members and/or the public remain sceptical about whether their size or ambition is justified, they cannot deny that such

8 Covenant University, 'Vision "One of Ten in Ten" is a cheap possibility - chancellor', *Newsflash*, 3-7 August 2015 [WWW document], URL <https://www.covenantuniversity.edu.ng/News/Vision-One-of-Ten-in-Ten-is-a-Cheap-Possibility-Chancellor#.YKeD5S2ZNR0> (accessed 21 December 2023).

9 <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/sub-saharan-africa-university-rankings>.

objectives exist (to some extent, the infrastructures ‘speak for themselves’). Nor can they say for certain that ambitions will never be realized, because the landscapes the churches seek to appropriate are symbolic as well as material. From an observer’s perspective expansion can of course never be limitless, but the transcendence of human boundaries is always at the centre of neo-Pentecostal rhetoric.

– Serenity and/or authoritarianism?

Aesthetics concerns not only representation but also implies an embodied experience. In this way, neo-Pentecostal infrastructures help to create the everyday experience and ambience of everyday life. For example, the feelings of serenity and security that are claimed to exist inside Redemption City, as described below, are connected to the role played by its infrastructures:

It’s rare, you can’t hear generator noise in the camp (Pastor Osayi, Redemption Camp).

We enjoy peace here, a steady supply of lights, water and good roads (Pastor Stephen, Redemption Camp).

What the camp provides is the spiritual, serene and secured environment that members come from all walks of life to build (Mr Olayinka, Redemption Camp Medical Centre).

The multi-sensorial ambience of Redemption City is compared and contrasted with the atmosphere of Lagos. And, as Mr Olayinka implies, those who ‘leave’ the city and come to the camp are those choosing to participate in (and pay for) the building and enlarging of an environment that is different from the megacity but can only ever be understood in relation to it. However, it could be suggested that these claims of serenity and order are performative in the sense that they ignore the enforced, authoritarian pacification of social and moral life that occurs in neo-Pentecostal spaces, often carried out by combinations of private security forces and state police. (Examples include strict orders on appropriate clothing and sexual conduct, with obvious offenders sent to RCCG rehabilitation centres, all relayed to us during interviews with pastors.) Also ignored are reports of the persistence of crime and disorder in Redemption City, especially after large services when wanted criminals are said to take refuge in the city in an attempt to avoid arrest.¹⁰ Nevertheless, infrastructures are integral to how neo-Pentecostal churches attempt to link claims of tranquillity with statements regarding order and progress.

Such discursive claims, always constructed and experienced through neo-Pentecostal modes of comprehending the world, must be juxtaposed with the perspectives of those who do not share such commitments. According to respondents not attached to churches, neo-Pentecostal infrastructures in Lagos itself cause disruption to residents’ lives and create conflict over appropriate land use. An interesting example is Onike, the residential Lagos neighbourhood discussed in the previous section, where MFM is now the dominant spatial presence. Many buildings, including shops and auditoriums, are painted in the distinctive MFM colours of purple and green, and the MFM logo is a ubiquitous presence in this enclave. As Lawanson and Millington (2022) explain, MFM has appropriated public space in addition to acquiring existing properties. For example, Remi Abuah Street no longer exists because the church auditorium was built there, a situation that exacerbated flood vulnerability by blocking a drainage

10 Danielle Ogbeche, ‘Police arrest 236 at Redemption Camp, say criminals now use church as hideout’, *Daily Post*, 17 June 2016 [WWW document], URL <https://dailypost.ng/2016/06/17/police-arrest-236-at-redemption-camp-say-criminals-now-use-church-as-hideout/> (accessed 21 December 2023).

pathway. Nearby Ajanaku Street has also ceased to exist because the church acquired four plots for the MFM car park and fenced off the pedestrian pathway through which residents would access their homes. In the early days of the enclave, worshippers who could not enter the auditorium participated in services from the streets, listening through loudspeakers. This restricted residents' movements during those periods, while creating a sonic event that was impossible to ignore or escape.

The intensity of such Pentecostal occupation of this part of the city prompted other residents and businesses to relocate, driven out by what they saw as excessive noise and disruption. A local estate surveyor explains:

Many people left the area when the church newly started. At that time, some landlords did not want to sell, but when the noise pollution was too much they were just forced to sell. So many people sold their properties because of the noise.

In addition, the church has prevented free movement through the neighbourhood of Onike by installing security gates at the ends of the three streets where church activities are concentrated. The justification for this is crime prevention, but such measures reinforce neo-Pentecostal enclaving (see Figure 5). The disruptive ambience created by



FIGURE 5 MFM security gates in Onike (photo by David Garbin, November 2022)

neo-Pentecostal infrastructure hastens the residential displacement that paves the way for subsequent acquisition, densification and aesthetic/sonic transformation by MFM.

– Neo-Pentecostal street style

Neo-Pentecostal expressive style is widespread throughout Lagos, in the form of posters, billboards, stickers, church buildings and church symbols, offering a ‘narrative structure’ (Meyer, 2004: 105) through which urban experience might be interpreted. Even outside the prayer camps, neo-Pentecostal churches seek to influence the look and feel of the city. As Nathaniel, a city planner, told us:

I have a joke: if you’re driving and you see a signboard as large as three feet by four feet, it’s likely to be [advertising] a church. There are so many of them!

Ukah (2008) points to a ‘roadside Pentecostalism’ that he argues is instrumental in creating a ‘mass public’ for the variety of Pentecostal goods and services available in the spiritual economy of Lagos. The existing infrastructures of Lagos, including roads and vehicles (see Figure 6), offer a medium through which neo-Pentecostal styles can circulate, just like advertisements for popular consumer products. Such styling helps to make sense of and is best construed within the dynamic environment of the city. Through signage, symbols and messaging, neo-Pentecostal style narrates the personal and social struggles of the urban space—especially those relating to the socialization of collective consumption—and creates a perception of the possibility of emerging successfully from these struggles and breaking with the past. As Meyer (2004: 106) puts it, ‘If Pentecostalism appears to conquer the public sphere, it does so as a cultural style disseminating its forms of representation and affirming existing moods. It proliferates in space like a film of oil, losing depth, yet dispersing into wider and still wider realms’.

This section on the poetics of neo-Pentecostal infrastructure has focused on the expressive and aesthetic qualities and desires associated with their ontology. The key



FIGURE 6 Pentecostalite street aesthetics (photo by David Garbin, April 2018)

point is that infrastructures can be both fantastical as well as functional objects. Much emphasis has been placed here on the aspirations of those deploying neo-Pentecostal infrastructure to create and/or convey senses of awe, serenity and prosperity. Yet, such intentions are viewed by many non-believers as performative gestures that do not cohere with reality, or they are objected to on the grounds that (1) neo-Pentecostal interventions are often experienced as disruptive to urban life, as *one more* aspect of what makes Lagos ‘a very hard city’; and (2) if a sense of order has been created, it is likely the result of excessive and authoritarian neo-Pentecostal policing of private and public life. Finally, this section has considered the pervasive presence of churches such as RCCG and MFM in Lagos, and the ways in which neo-Pentecostalite style is articulated in public, once again using the city as a medium through which to circulate religious forms.

Conclusion

The first aim of this article was to understand the ontological status of neo-Pentecostal urban infrastructures. To do this we have considered not only the politics but also the poetics of infrastructures. Such a move is especially necessary in a realm where infrastructures are laden with discursive claims derived from a prosperity-oriented imagination. From the outside, such claims appear to conflate ambition with reality. Drawing on a selection of empirical examples, we argue that they exist on a materialist level as a pragmatic response to problems relating to the quality and unequal distribution of basic infrastructures and goods such as energy, water, housing, healthcare and education. They are an example of how the socialization of collective consumption does not necessarily have to be managed by the state, as argued by Castells (1977). However, our investigations point to how neo-Pentecostal interventions have fed upon and exacerbated many social divisions and inequalities in the city, not least due to aggressive privatization of healthcare, education, security and energy supply. Neo-Pentecostal infrastructures also have a spiritual dimension that relates to belief in the circulation of the Holy Spirit and the distribution of encounters with the Spirit. This proliferation of the sacred within the everyday is crucial to the moral dimension of infrastructures, which exists not only in terms of regulating usage and/or behaviour but also by being invoked through the individual and organizational *discipline* required to marshal the resources that can *produce* and *maintain* infrastructure—to build a camp, roads that are passable, medical institutions that can cure you or safely deliver babies. The opportunity to display such discipline, such moral conviction, is not equally open to all. Much depends on material resources—supplied by church members in the form of tithes and donations—and political connections. Infrastructures contain this capacity to justify themselves; to contribute to a discursive reality through which urban experience in Lagos may be apprehended. The neo-Pentecostal city projected via (or imagined through) its infrastructures is a space of moral order and uninterrupted flows. The ‘old city’, in contrast, is presented by neo-Pentecostals as a chaotic, lawless site of multiple material and spiritual blockages, a ‘fallen’ place in need of redemption but also reappropriation, as the MFM Onike case study suggests.

The second aim was to understand the novel relations between church, state, market and citizen articulated by neo-Pentecostal infrastructures. While scholars and residents alike may view the existence of such infrastructures as filling the void created by a failing state, the evidence presented here suggests, despite appearances that imply dysfunctionality, a relation of accommodation and occasional cooperation that is closely aligned with Lanz and Oosterbaan’s (2016: 489) claim that ‘urban religion should be defined less as pockets of resistance and shelter against retreating states under neoliberal restructuring programmes than regarded as a constitutive force of ... neoliberal urbanism’. As such, the involvement of neo-Pentecostals with infrastructural provision advances rather than hinders the privatization and marketization of public goods and services, providing Lagosians with choice, but only if they can afford it. Furthermore,

neo-Pentecostal infrastructural expansion often increases rather than decreases claims on limited state resources. In addition to the seizing of land and the construction of autonomous camps (or alter-cities), the process of religious urbanization outlined here involves the threading of material/spiritual infrastructure through the existing urban fabric, resulting in the increasing pervasiveness of—but also scepticism and opposition towards—neo-Pentecostal-led urban transformations. Such infrastructures in Lagos and surrounding areas should be considered a potentially transformational (and yet always resisted) experiment in privatized urban governance. It constitutes an example of ‘actually existing neoliberalism’ that evades easy definition, blurring boundaries between the pragmatic, political, spiritual and aesthetic.

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