

**Public Authorization of an Informal Sector Activity:
Institutionalization of Motorbike Taxi in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone**

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Abstract

In post-conflict Sierra Leone, motorbike taxies emerged as in-town transportation. In the end of the civil war, in-town public transport died out because cars and vans had been destroyed. Motorbike taxi have prospered to fill the demands of city-dwellers. Nowadays, commercial riders (*okadaman*) are indispensable to move from one part to another in a city.

In parallel with its growth, motorbike taxi industry have been institutionalized for the sake of riders and passengers. At first, rider's associations had been created spontaneously in major towns. Then, they were integrated. A nation-wide body of the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union was created in 2011 by integrating the associations around the country.

The union controls commercial riders, and negotiate with police officials and government agencies such as the Sierra Leone Road Transport Authority for the sake of the industry. They functions as a public authority concerning the motorbike taxi industry.

This paper examines the growth and the institutionalization of motorbike-taxi business. Especially, I examine the process in which the associations/ union have gained public authority. Sierra Leone recovered from a failed state. The government recovered the state authority. While in functioning state, public authorities in a society converge into a central government, while in a failed state, they do not. They left scattered in the situation of state failure (Lund 2007). The recovery of the government in Sierra Leone is a process that the central government gravitate public authorities in the society which previously unconnected. By looking at how the authority of motorbike taxi industry developed and how they approached to the central government, I examine the process in which non-state public authorities become a part of the authority of a state.

The significance of this paper lies its examination on *African potential* of

voluntary associations of public purposes. African states have full of ambiguity and fluidity. Dynamics of power and domination leave room of negotiations. The voluntary association, on one hand, is absorbed into a state authority while on the other hand, it gains more power for negotiating against other public authorities.

(341 words)

Introduction

In the discussions of African politics, what is statehood have been continually discussed. This paper contributes to the discussion by examining the motorbike taxi in post-conflict Sierra Leone. Motorbike taxi emerged as new business and grew rapidly when the civil war was coming to an end (around the former part of the 2000s). Young men, especially ex-combatants, had been attracted to the business, because of easiness to enter in to the business. At first, most of taxi riders were ex-combatants, but, as time passed, wider range of young men joined in. As the business grew and as the number of taxi riders increased, interest groups for the business had been institutionalized. Associations for riders established independently in respective major towns and cities, and, then, they were integrated into a nation-wide organization, 'The Sierra Leone Commercial Motorbike Riders Union' (There after 'the union'). The union has worked for promoting interests of the riders and the business. They negotiate with governmental institutions for the benefits of those who related to the business. It means that the union emerged as a new political actor. In this paper, I examine how a new political actor emerges in a post-conflict situation, by looking at how the union had been institutionalized. This discussion would contribute to the discussion of *African potential* and peacebuilding as well, as the discussion in this paper deals with questions on how to achieve social integration.

The structure of this paper is as follows. First, I present analytical framework. I regard a state as a bundle of public authorities, which are consisted by both governmental and non-governmental institutions. These institutions, I assume, maintain social order and bear a statehood as a whole. Second, I offer descriptions on daily works of commercial riders as well as on operations for the union. Third, I explain the origin of motorbike taxi business and how motorbike taxi business began to be institutionalized. Especially, in this section, I argue how associations are organized in respective towns and cities. Fourth, I illustrate the process in which motorbike associations in various cities and towns had been integrated into the nation-wide union. Fifth, I examine a statehood and African politics based on above-mentioned arguments. Especially I point out several problems

concerning statehood which were observed in the process of the institutionalization. Then, conclude. In the conclusion, I discuss *Africa potential*.

Analytical Framework: Negotiating Statehood

In the discussion of African statehood, the difficulty to specify what is 'state' and what is not, is frequently pointed out (Ferguson 1994, Haggman and Peclard [eds.] 2011, Lund [ed.] 2007). In these discussions, a state is not regarded as a distinct organization which have clear boundary. Rather, a state is perceived as unstable bundle of public authorities, in which various institutions and organizations are subsumed. These organizations are not necessarily belongs to the bureaucratic system of a government. Non-governmental organizations are also subsumed in the bundle. Such institutions and organizations have public authorities regardless that they are governmental or non-governmental, and, then, they as a whole consist 'a statehood'. For example, Jessop mentions that the core of a state apparatus comprises a distinct ensemble of institutions and organizations whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society in the name of their common interest or general will (1990: 341).

In statehood, institutions and organizations keep conflicting. They are persistently negotiating each other trying to occupy more shares within statehood. Some might be weakened, while other might have more strength. Thus, the power relationships within statehood keep changing. Public purposes are achieved in the process of uninterrupted power struggle among institutions and organizations.

The power struggles may be harsh in a post-conflict situation. For, in post-conflict situation, a society undergoes immense transformations. Refugees and internal displaced persons repatriate. Armed groups are disbanded. National armies are downsized. NGOs, aid agencies and international organizations also keep pouring in the country in the cause of peace-building. New employments emerge and new chances for business are popping up. The government also undergoes transformations. New institutions and new systems are adapted, while older ones are disbanded. Drastic personnel reshuffling would be conducted. Thus, society encounters drastic change. In such a situation, statehood is more fluid. Political struggles among institutions and organizations should be harsh. The union of motorbike taxi can be regarded as one of newly emerged political actors in such post-conflict situation.

1. Daily Works of Riders and Operations of the Union

Within a decade, motorbike taxis have changed the streetscapes of towns and cities in Sierra Leone.

On highways and streets, motorbikes dominate. In Sierra Leone, motorbike taxis emerged and grew rapidly in the former part of the 2000s, which was a transitional period from a civil war to post-conflict. At that time, in-town transportation died out, because cars and vans had been destroyed. Motorbike taxis filled demands of city-dwellers who want to move from a part of a city to another. Nowadays, commercial riders (*okadaman*) are indispensable for in-town transportation. Most of riders are young men. Majorities of them are in twenties. As older riders tend to switch their jobs to others typically such as taxi-drivers, population of commercial riders kept young.

The general view toward the motorbike taxi business is positive. The business has been appreciated as they provide young men employments. As unemployed young men are considered as one of possible accelerating factors of armed conflicts, the motorbike taxi business are admired that it reduces risks of further violence.

I conducted a field research concerning motorbike taxis in Waterloo, a biggest suburban town of the capital city, Freetown. From Freetown to Waterloo, it takes one hour by public buses. The estimated population is 40,000 (estimated in 2013). It locate on the main highway which link Freetown to the ALL provinces (Freetown located on the tip of a peninsula. Waterloo locates on the bottom of the peninsula). Some commute to Freetown, while other workers only come back Waterloo only in weekends. The period of my fieldwork is from 19 November, 2014 to 10 December.

Within the town, motorbike taxis carry passengers with fixed price (5000 Le=1.2USD) (Sierra Leonean Leone/ 1USD=4300Le at the time of my research). If passengers want to go out of the town, they are requested to pay more. Majority of riders say, their profit per day is 50,000 to 60,000 Le if working hard throughout a day. This amount does not include what they need to expend. They need to pay 50,000 to 60,000 Le in a day for running a motorbike. The detail of the expenditure is as follows. First, they have to pay rental fee for motorbike. Majority of riders (probably more than 3 out of 4) rent a motorbike from motorbike owners who possess motorbikes for investment (profiting from renting motorbike to commercial riders). Every day, riders have to pay 30,000 to 40,000 Le depending on the quality of his motorbike¹. They also have to pay for fuel. At least, 4 liters are necessary in a day. As the price of per liter is 4,500 Le (at the time of my research), they have to spend 18,000 Le in a day. They also have to pay for insurance, 1,000 Le every day. This insurance is managed by the union. Other payments include engine oil, which need to be changed every 3-4 days.

¹ Riders are requested to pay rental fees from Monday to Sunday, but, in Sunday, riders do not need to pay. Riders can work only for themselves.

Figure 1. Map of Sierra Leone



The sum of expenditures is around 50,000 to 60,000 Le. As they can benefit 50,000 to 60,000 Le except for the expenditure, their total income should be 100,000 to 120,000 Le, which is equivalent to 20-24 passengers. Each rider should be different on how they work, but the calculation would work for reference at least.

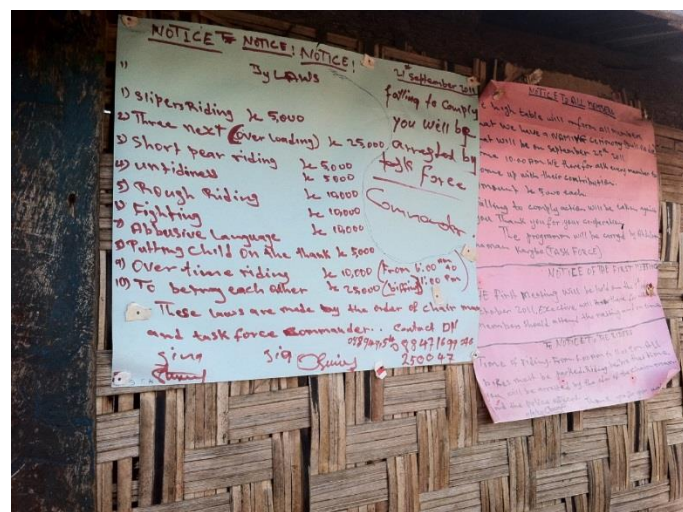
The Sierra Leone Commercial Motor Bike Riders Union works for commercial riders across Sierra Leone. According to the Union, around 189,000 riders operate across the country (Taylor 2013). In the national level, the union represents riders by publishing press releases or by lobbying for the business. Sometimes, the union works for public interest.² When looking at ground-level, a

² Recently, the union mobilized riders for sensitizing campaign against the Ebola hemorrhagic fever. UNDP, Press Release "UNDP engages bike riders in campaign against Ebola," 9 September, 2014 [cited at 31 October 2014] <<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/articles/2014/09/09/>

park-level office works for daily matters concerning motorbike taxis. A park office is the lowest branches of the union, which is responsible for ground operation. Normally, park-level office covers a part of a big city or whole part of a small town. Operations of a park office are as follows.

First is conflict resolutions between riders and others such as passengers, police officers and bike owners. The staffs of the union mediate in the cases of troubles. Second, they provide insurance for riders. It covers the cost of medical fare in the case of sickness and accidents. The insurance fee is collected daily from riders. Third, the union supervise riders. Under the cause of safe riding and disciplining riders, the union sets up rules and regulations. Riders who violate the rules would be fined. Figure 2 shows the regulations, which is displayed on the wall of a park office. The list of prohibitions includes slipper riding, overriding, and short-pants riding. The amounts of fines against respective prohibition are also shown.

Figure 2. Regulations for Riders.



The role of collecting fees of daily insurances and the role of supervising riders are owed by bike monitoring officers (BMOs), who are employed by the union (figure 3). They stand on the corners of streets. In the morning, they collect fees of daily insurance (figure 4). The cost is Le 1000 (0.2 USD). I am not certain whether the system functions or not.

In the afternoon, BMOs supervise riders. If a BMO find a rider who violate rules, he orders a rider to go to the office of the union together with him. In the office, the key of the rider is confiscated. If a rider pays the fine, the key is returned to the rider.

Figure 3. Bike Monitoring Officer**Figure 4. Insurance Ticket**

2. The Origin of the Associations

In parallel with its growth of the business, commercial riders have been institutionalized. In the beginning, independent associations were established in major towns and cities. Then, they were integrated. In 2012, associations were integrated into one nation-wide body of the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union. The union controls commercial riders, and negotiates with relating actors such as police and the Sierra Leone Road Transport Authority. They function as a public authority who negotiating with other institutions. It means that a new public authority emerged from motorbike taxi business, and participates into a bundle of public authorities of 'statehood'.

When the civil war was coming to end, the motorbike taxi business is launched by youngsters in respective towns and cities independently. Associations, that owed roles to organize these riders, were established respectively as well. In Kenema, young men began rental cycles in the late 1990s. Then, they began to lend motor bikes as well. During the war, Nigerian peacekeepers who stationed in Kenema, requested them for taxi-service. Therefore, motorbike owners employed riders. Thus, motorbike taxi service began. In Kenema, an association was organized by the owners. In Bo, young men purchased motorbikes in Guinea to sell them in Sierra Leone, but could not sell them. Therefore they employed young men and began motorbike taxies. The young men who owned motorbikes launch an association (Sawa 2011: 104). As these cases represent, some associations started as business syndicates which assumed roles to collect daily rental fees from riders. In other cases, riders organized associations by themselves in order to protect themselves against motorbike owners

(Peters 2006: 163). The example of Waterloo represents the case. In Waterloo, one young man, who knew that motorbike taxi business developed in other towns, began the business in Waterloo. Then, the number of riders increased. The original riders formed an association. As these examples show, there is no inter-city coordination for launching associations.

No matter what the origins are, associations began to work for the sake for riders. Peters (2006) notes that associations protect riders against the business men providing the bikes, and the police and road transport authority that attempted to apply traffic laws to riders by problematic and corrupt ways (164-165). I assume that following process would follow; when the business was launched, owners and riders had patron-client relations. In Sierra Leone, a patriarchal patron is expected to take care of their followers, especially in the case in trouble. Therefore, owners owed roles to take care of riders and to solve problems when riders were involved in troubles.

However, they could not maintain these personal relations when numbers of owners and riders increased. The relation between owners and riders became more business-based. Their relation were not paternalistic relationships anymore. Therefore, riders and owners needed to organize systems to support commercial riders. The insurance ticket is one of such ideas. Associations systematically collect money for helping riders.

Then, association began to work for public purpose for their legitimacy. Some associations held training courses for riders. Some held workshops for mutual understanding among those who concerning transportation such as police, riders, street vendors. Thus, associations began to work for public interest concerning traffic matters.

As associations have public roles, ex-NGO workers, who had been riders, generally involved in associations. At the time of peacebuilding boom (when just the war ended), those who have higher education had been employed in NGOs as administrative staffs. However, the boom was gone. They had been left unemployed. They had no choice but to work as motorbike taxi riders. However, as associations began to owe roles of public interests, they who had working experience in NGOs, became administrative staffs in associations. They applied to NGO grants to carry out more public projects for associations. By the fund, the associations further developed motorbike taxi business.

3. The Establishing Process of the Commercial Motorbike Riders Union

Administrative staffs of the associations that began to owe roles to pursue public interests, dreamed of establishing nation-wide union (Sawa 2011: 112). In 2009, a meeting was held in Makeni.

Respective associations sent five representatives. In this meeting, provisional executive members in a national level were elected under a scheme of establishing a nation-wide organization within 6 months. Originally, they plan to organize nation-wide organization within 6 monthes, but this process took much longer time. The process lasted by 2012, but finally the national body was set up. It is the birth of the Commercial Motorbike Riders Union.

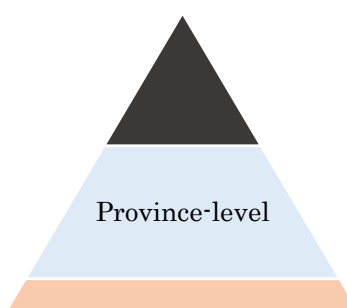
In order to launch the union, they applied a NGO grant. By using the fund, they held series of elections. Through elections, independent associations were integrated into a national-wide union. They organized the entire structure into four-levels (Figure 5). Lowest level is park-level. Park-level offices are in charge of one cities or towns (However, the capital is divided into several park-level offices). Park-level office is in parallel with an original area in which original independent associations are in charge. Above the park-level, they organize district, provincial and national-level.

Under the leadership of provisional executive members, elections were carried out step by step from the bottom to the top along the line of the pyramidal structure. First, park-level elections were held to choose member of the executive committees of the respective park office. Riders in each park could vote. Then, elections of district level were held. In the district-level election, elected members of executive committees in park-level could vote. In turn, the members of the district-level could vote for provincial-level. Then, the members of provincial level voted for the national-level.

Executive members in each level are same (Figure 6). In election, three positions (chairman, vice-chairman and secretary general) were elected. Other positions were appointed by an elected chairman. Candidates of a chairman made his 'party' consisting of other possible executive members. In the park-level, riders also joined to the 'party' as the supporters.

In my fieldwork, I researched by dual track. First, I researched the past establishing process of the union. I interviewed the present members of executive committees and past candidates in order to elucidate how the first elections for establishing the union proceeded. Second, I observed park-level elections for second term in 2013. When I visit Sierra Leone, the election in park-level drew near. Election campaigns were on their peak. I observed the campaigns in Waterloo (but, unfortunately, I have to leave Sierra Leone before the election day).

Figure 5. The Structure of the Commercial Motorbike Riders Union



National-level

Figure 6. Members of Executive Committee

- Chairman
(President in National-level)
- Vice-chairman
(Vice president in national-level)
- Secretary general
- Deputy secretary general
- Organizing secretary
- Financial secretary
- Treasurer
- Chair lady
- Deputy chairlady
- Auditor – 2 persons
- Public relation officer

4. Discussion: Statehood and African Politics

Associations had been organized into a nation-wide Commercial Motorbike Riders Union through the series of election processes. From my research I find that, within the election processes and within the union, problems specific to “African democracies” can be observed. It is as if they imitate democracy of the government in Sierra Leone, or in Africa. In this section, I introduce three of such scenes.

First, young men are possible source of violence. In park-level, ordinary riders are involved in the election process. They have to elect the park-level executive members. Candidates also try to mobilize those riders for their election campaigns. In campaigns, riders are dancing, singing, and drumming on the street. It disturbs traffic. Moreover, the campaigns sometimes lead to violence. The supporters of parties oppose each other. In the election day, police officers need to observe the elections.

Second, bigman-politics is observed in park-level election. To be a chairman is good opportunities for accumulating personal wealth. Therefore, candidates, especially wealthy candidate for chairman, distribute resources to young riders. The following is what I observed after an election campaign one day. The scene describes below is after an election campaign in which riders marched streets of Waterloo on motorbikes. In my field notes, I wrote down as follows;

In front of Christo's house [A candidate of the chairman] , riders were hanging around. Riders said, they just finished 'rally'. Candidate's wife brought several BIG BIG dishes of rice [and stew] for riders. 7-8 Riders shared one plate. At that time, I was invited to Christo to share his dish inside his house. While eating, he said *"I invested more than 5000 USD for this campaign. I think I need to apply more than two projects to recover the money. If the projects are funded, I can recover what I spent. It is hard to me, but everyone needs me. I am expected."*

The candidate, Christo, is a business man who sells parts and equipment of motorbikes. He was riders, but he began his business. First, he went and bought parts of motorbikes from Guinea, and sold them in Sierra Leone. Then, he gradually expanded his business. Christo said to me that he want to be a chairman, because everyone expected him to make thing better. It seems that he tries to meet the expectation. At the same time, he expects to accumulate personal wealth through the chairmanship. To be a chairman is one of ways to access to public funds. To divert the money is their natural choice. They do not regard diversion of funds as corrupt.

The two findings above are from what I observed in campaigns of park-level in 2013. The third one is from the past national election. Third, the election result is denied by a defeated candidate. In the national election in 2012, defeated candidate did not accept the election result. He brought the case into a court claiming void of the poll result. He told me the two reasons for illegitimacy of the election. First is the qualification of a rival candidate. He said, *"David (a rival candidate and a present national chairman) is not qualified. His education does not fulfill the criteria to be a national executive."* Similar claims are can be seen in national elections in African politics. For me, it is as if the defeated candidate is mimicking national politicians. Second is intervention of the ruling party

and ethnicization of the election. The defeated candidate claimed that a ruling party (All People's Congress: APC) intervened to the election. He said, "David is from northern part of Sierra Leone. I am from the south. APC (the ruling party) intervened in the election. They funded for David, and collected ballots through phone contacts. As the result, Northerners voted for David, and Southerner vote for me." Thus, the national election had similar problem of electoral process of national politics.

Conclusion

The associations of motorbike taxies developed national-level organization (The Union). It worked for public interests. Staffs works for public purpose. On the other hand, the negative aspects of African politics can also be observed including violence in election, patronage politics, and corruption on elections. It means that members of the motorbike union seek public interest by using existing political techniques. These techniques have been considered to disrupt sound political process. But, this paper shows that staffs of motorbike taxies works for promoting public interest by using such political techniques.

Politics is negotiating process among conflicting parties and institutions. The union negotiate with national institutions such as police and Road Transport Authority. Staffs of union can be regarded as 'new political elites'. They pursue public interests (for taxi riders and public transportation) by using existing techniques on African politics such as diversion of public funds and patronage politics.

The African potential observed in this paper is flexibility of political arena. Social integration is one of essential aspects of conflict prevention. Political arena in Sierra Leone can able to make new social segment involved into the negotiation. This means that post-conflict Sierra Leone have potential to absorb new social segment into political arena. This flexibility might work for enhancing social integration and for preventing further conflicts.

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