Colonial Systems of Control

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INTRODUCTION

The reflections presented in this chapter emerge from a daily journal I kept during my time as a community organizer and activist inside Nigerian prisons. The experiences I had were inundated with visual brutality, mental stimulation, and political conversation. In attempting to keep myself grounded, and in trying to grasp the larger picture, I found myself creating mental snapshots of the details that eventually combined to form a mosaic that made sense to me, according to the things I saw, heard, and thought while I sat inside prison yards and conversed with Nigerian prisoners. These words are an attempt to present that mosaic.

From October 2000 to November 2002 I lived in Onipanu, Lagos, Nigeria, and worked as a community organizer and activist with Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) through Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). Leaving Nigeria was one of the most difficult things I have had to do. My culture shock was greater upon returning to the West than it was upon arriving in Nigeria. For two years I lived and worked in a country that was extreme at all levels; it was an incredible learning experience, a discovery mission that changed my life. I discovered more about my own and other people’s boundaries than anything else. When a person who has grown up in the
privileged world of the West lives in Nigeria, where people are suffering and struggling to get the most basic things in life, one cannot help but learn from that struggle.

I saw people struggle to get nutritious food and clean drinking water. I saw people go to work every day on roads full of potholes and on buses packed with people. I saw people work in offices and banks without access to telephones, other communication equipment, or constant electricity. I saw people of all ages struggle all day in the scorching sun to sell what they could so they could take food home to their families. I saw elderly people get killed crossing the expressway because there are no crosswalks. I saw children gathered around a single kerosene lantern at night because there was no other light to do homework by, and I saw too many children who did no homework because their parents could not afford to send them to school. I saw the same children on the streets working day and night to sell what they could so their families could survive. I saw babies die of malaria because their parents could not afford inexpensive medication. I saw young people who were physically disabled because they did not receive polio vaccinations. They were living on the streets, and they were using handmade skateboards to mobilize themselves just enough to beg for money. I saw people persevere and struggle just to get by. Yet I saw a lot of smiles and joy throughout that process of survival, along with the frustrations and the despair. I saw the basic human soul make the best of unnecessarily harsh living conditions in one of the most fertile, oil-producing nations on the African continent. In Lagos, my home for two years, the basic infrastructure is simply not functioning—and it is home to more than fifteen million people.

The things that people did to help me, the tolerance levels I saw them exhibit for each other’s struggles and for my struggles, were massive. The identification of struggle as a collective phenomenon was immense. There were times when people piled in on each other’s laps on buses because there was a fuel shortage in Lagos, the most populated state in an oil-producing nation. During these fuel shortages the number of buses on the road for
public transportation was never enough to accommodate the number of people needing to get to work or go home or just go, so people piled in on top of each other. I remember my first few months in Nigeria when I watched in awe and kept a silent but defensive air on the bus: "Try and get on my lap, and I will 'deal with you-o'"! But as the months went by and I understood more about the struggle to get by and the need for collective efforts in accessing basic resources, I saw myself changing. That change became conscious when a woman I sat beside on the bus one day explained to me how selfish I was for putting my comfort level above the need for someone's mother, father, son, or daughter to get home before dark. I quickly realized that the Western outlook on life is self-centred and self-prioritized. I realized that not allowing a complete stranger to sit on my lap on the bus meant that one less person made it home before the Lagos streets became dangerous at night, and I quickly learned that this little inconvenience for me was nothing in comparison to that of the person who got stranded on the street. The journey of learning had begun.

The little things that I saw changing in my thought patterns grew beyond everyday life and brought me into a whole new mindset. That mindset looked at the larger political scheme and opened my eyes to the self-interests and self-promotion of Euro-supremacist systems of governance and resource control in relations with the global South. It got to a point where I was dreading a return to a world that is so sufficient and so convenient and so gluttonous with the consumption of everything that on the surface it is able to revolve around a delusional, extremely introspective, individualistic mentality. And I got to a point where I became very conscious of the imperialist fact that those comforts for the minority in the world are built on the backs and discomforts of the millions who comprise the majority. I came to realize and experience the fact that most of the people on this planet live in violent poverty so that the minority can (not should) live in excess.
My work inside the prisons enabled me to meet people who have been “rejected and neglected,” as prisoners used to tell me, and I came to see on a new level that the ideals and ways of the West are now ingrained in the control institutions and economic structures in Africa. The criminal justice system that functions in the self-promoting West is the same system that is being forced upon black people in Africa. It is foreign, and it is dehumanizing, and it is malfunctioning: people wait in prison for years before they go to court, medical care is almost non-existent, malnutrition and disease are killing people every day. The Western world, the same world that colonized Africa and other continents, is putting money into penal, social, and political reforms, and into what is called human rights work: these reforms maintain colonial systems on African soil, and the work of human rights as implemented through European and American governments and corporations ensures that the West remains well within its comfortable role of the patriarch in Africa. I came to the harsh realization that colonization still exists within the strong structures of global economic control and resource exploitation. Slavery continues in the degradation of African cultures, in the exploitation of African resources, and inside the cells of European prisons in Africa. Meanwhile, genocide among ethnic groups is being promoted by the national boundaries and the capitalist global economies that the Western world has implemented.

Living and working in Nigeria, and coming to these realizations, forced me to admit that the so-called civilized segments of the world of today are more dangerous in their illusions of political correctness and assumed universal moral schemes than the uncivilized, slave-producing, colonial world of not so many years ago. If this is civilization, I continue to fail to see civility. If this is justice, I continue to see the criminality of justice in criminal justice institutions. The state we are in now, as a global community, is oppressed and broken, much like the state that our global society was in hundreds of years ago, but at least in the past people knew what they were up against, people knew what and whom to fight against: they were the colonial
governments and their arrogant white employees, they were the slave catchers and the slave traders, they were the white men who researched Africa and named it primitive, tribal, underdeveloped, and barbaric, and they were the white-robed missionaries who demonized African spirituality. In today’s world the oppressors are your friends and allies: Western funding agencies, international diplomatic allies, European colleagues who control organizational agendas, and fellow human rights activists who work to reinforce European economic and political structures and institutions. In the meantime, as this beast they call civilization works to abstract oppression and blur the boundaries of freedom, the majority of people in Africa (and on all continents recovering from European occupation through colonialism) continue to struggle; unfortunately, most can no longer see on a concrete level what exactly it is they are struggling against. The white-robed missionaries now have black skin underneath those white robes. The government that maintains the European exploitation of Africa now gives public speeches wearing expensive agbada and asoke (African clothes), carrying African last names. Gone are the European top hats and straight trousers, but not gone are the European systems of control that continue to allow the West to rob Africa blind.

Financial and political corruption is rampant in the non-governmental, non-profit, human rights world. I came to learn that this corruption is intimately linked with the continued imposition of Western structures, institutions, attitudes, and financial regulations upon Nigeria. The quest for human rights in Nigeria is still defined and controlled by Western governments and European institutions and structures at the root of the upheavals that Africa continues to face. Also at the root of this human rights discourse and work is the assumption that Africans can get life and dignity from Europeans—a fallacy that has strong foundations in savage European slavery and colonialism. The commodification of all that is human is exemplified in this human rights discourse, which assumes that humanity can be “given” and “taken.”
While the West continues to flourish and grow, Africa continues to struggle, and leaving Nigeria knowing that was difficult. I felt torn between worlds. I knew I was coming back to a capitalist, corporate, imperialist North American reality, and I knew that this reality is built on the backs of entire nations and millions of people of colour. I did not know if I could handle coming back to the West, but I also knew that in Nigeria I was oyeebo, baturia, and enyatcha ("a foreigner"). In North America, as an immigrant, I often feel like a stranger. People may not call me "foreigner" to my face, but there are many ways for them to reinforce my separate category as a woman of colour. I belong to a large generation of people who have been displaced from the South and placed in the West—involuntarily forced to live in the belly of the beast, no longer belonging in Africa (because my family was forced out), yet never being "included" in the West.

So what is home for me, and what is home for most people in this miserable, corporate, forced migration existence? I found myself questioning many things that people in positions of white privilege, economic superiority, and Western citizenship often take for granted. Am I pretending to come back home? How do I walk away from the people I have struggled beside for two years? In the grander scheme of oppression, how does one not just survive but also fight back and maintain self-dignity through that fight? How can people of privilege come to understand the implications of their privilege for the underprivileged? And as I got ready to leave Nigeria, I could not reconcile myself with the fact that, despite the struggles and the hardships, Nigeria had become home to me, more so than any Western society in which I had lived. The same people who called me oyeebo in Nigeria embraced me as one of their own. Being different in Nigeria is not degrading, as being different in the West is. I had never felt more at home than I did in Lagos. Why was I leaving? Did I join the Nigerian world temporarily so I could test myself, all the while knowing deep inside that this immediate struggle would not be a permanent reality for me? And what is more important,
the physical comforts of the West or the emotional comforts of inclusion that I experienced for the first time in Africa? Why is it that in this fragmented and broken world so many of us are forced to have one or the other? Why are so many black people living such broken and incomplete lives?

In the West people have the option to ignore the harsh realities of oppression. In Nigeria I did not meet a single Nigerian who had that privilege. Even if someone lived in a privileged compound with generators to supply electricity during NEPA outages, and even if someone had an air-conditioned car with a driver, and even if someone maintained a high income, that person still had to confront the realities of those who did not have any of those things. Nigerian society has not yet developed the ability to hide its problems and to completely segregate those who have from those who have not.

As I witnessed and experienced these social realities, questions continued to engulf my thoughts. Why is the distribution of resources, opportunities, and comforts so unbalanced? Is this form of capitalist imperialism going to go on for much longer? Forget about whether it is “fair”—is it sustainable for so few to have so much while so many have so little? Can the minority who own so much sustain that wealth? And at what cost will they fight to maintain the global monopoly of resources? I know it cannot last forever, and I know this only because change is the only constant element of this global existence. I found comfort in that understanding, but I also felt anxiety: will change bring about equality and freedom, or will it continue to promote and abstract and reinforce the same inequalities? What has my being in Nigeria really done in the grander scheme of the world and oppression? I know it has done more for me as a human being than anyone else. I have learned so much, and I console myself with this thought: now I know more, and, yes, this knowledge is violent and painful, but I still prefer to know rather than never to have had the opportunity to learn.

Here I present some of the experiences I had while in Nigeria. These experiences shaped my understanding of the world, and
for the first time I began to feel as if I had access to something real. It was not sugar-coated. It was not commercial. It was not an adventure that could be commodified. It was real life for millions and billions of people. And I am grateful to have accessed it, even if for just a moment. And I am responsible for spreading it as far and as wide as I can: I leave Nigeria with a readiness to share this knowledge with whoever is willing to learn it.

Nigeria has shown me that life is about survival. For some it is physical survival; for others it is emotional, cultural, and spiritual survival. For me it became a combination of all those things. There were times when I feared for my physical safety, but those times were few and insignificant. The most significant experiences for me were the times when my belief systems and perceptions of life were put in question, when my thoughts no longer made sense, when my priorities were drastically challenged and renumbered. Nigeria was a place of growth and truth for me, and that has been survival. In that survival I found moments of freedom. In a place where the leaders are lying and the average person is dying, I had to search for truth and ways to keep growing, and I learned that, even in the midst of upheaval and struggle, the human spirit prevails. I left Nigeria with a sense of hopelessness for the world as we know it, but with a renewed sense of hope in the human capacity to collectively resist and survive through community.

**PENAL INTERACTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY**

A criminal justice system that was not made by or for West African societies continues to be imposed upon Nigeria—it’s inefficiency reflects the inefficiency that rules the country’s general state. This state reflects the injustice that Western social structures impose upon all societies “structured” by them. The end result? People get caught in a grinding machine that destroys all that it touches. I have come to see the penal system as a tool by which colonial structures are implemented among those whom the national and international corporations cannot “employ.” The more time
I spent working with Nigerian prisoners, and the more I was confronted with open police brutality on the streets of Lagos, the more convinced I became that the penal system in Nigeria is the most visible symbol of the continued colonial presence in the Nigerian mental state and the Nigerian governmental structure.

My Nigerian journey became a time when I had to ask a lot of questions and engage in a lot of discussions to make sense of my surroundings, and, at times, to survive in those surroundings. Those questions, discussions, witnessed events, and experienced moments were pivotal in creating an awareness that continues to challenge how I perceive the penal system and society in general. In Nigeria I did not learn just about Nigeria, I learned about the foundations of all criminal justice institutions, and I learned about the functions and behaviours of all criminal justice agents.

GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION: THE ISSUE OF PAYING SALARIES

It would be unfair to present my interactions with the Nigerian penal system without presenting the situations with which Nigerian governmental agents are faced. When discussing corruption and brutality with prisoners, prison guards, police officers, and community members, many in Nigeria understand that the government does not pay its employees salaries for many months at a time. It is believed that the money is kept to accumulate interest in private bank accounts. Many claim that this lack of constant and reliable income is the main cause of theft and corruption among prison guards and police officers in Nigeria. Corruption extends beyond the penal system, and affects schoolteachers, local government staff, court-appointed magistrates, doctors, nurses, and so on. Demanding bribes for services becomes the main method of earning money for many government employees. In Nigeria the infectious nature of state brutality is visible and constantly observed. I preferred this openness to the delusional propaganda that promotes state institutions as existing to “serve and protect” the people.
The political, economic, and penal structures in Nigeria have turned many groups in society against each other, and thus play a large role in the functions of social control: confusion and animosity are powerful modes of divide-and-conquer frameworks. Benefits for the state are both financial and political. While money is accumulating in private bank accounts, the people struggle against each other to survive; the community breaks down; unity and solidarity are weakened; and organized resistance to the situation becomes more and more difficult. While salaries are used as a method of social control in Nigeria, and while the lack of consistent salaries seems to result in increased corruption, the lesson I learned was that this specific situation in Nigeria only illustrates the modes through which the state divides, oppresses, and conquers.

Police brutality and prison guard sadism occur in all criminal justice institutions, and they are not a function of a few bad seeds. Such violence is a function of the criminal forms of justice that penal structures impose. This violence is not limited to Nigeria. It just happens that in Nigeria the dysfunctioning of bureaucracy disqualifies justifications for criminal justice, making the problematic and violent nature of criminal justice more visible.

THE MEDIA

In Nigeria the national newspapers often gave accounts of police brutality and government corruption. The prisons, being less visible, did not make the headlines as often, although when they did the accounts were critical and exposed the brutality that takes place. My experiences with the media in Nigeria came primarily through reading newspapers, several television interviews I participated in, and interactions with newspaper journalists. Every morning I read the national newspapers, and every morning I had the same reaction: too many rich people buy up too many pages to advertise their birthdays, anniversaries, retirements, graduations, or promotions. The space left for
news was generally critical of the government, and critical of the economic situation in Nigeria, but rarely looked to the international forces that support, encourage, and benefit from Nigerian corruption.

The portrayal of people engaged in street crime demonized and vilified them. The escalation of "jungle justice" (violent means employed by community members to kill people caught stealing) was rarely portrayed in a critical manner. It was often accepted as a necessary means of protecting one's community. On a more political level, articles that supported and glorified high-level politicians were read with a grain of salt.

My discussions with many Nigerians illustrated such attitudes. In a society where corruption is openly practised people were free to assume that bribes and gifts inspired such articles. This level of transparency in relation to corruption in Nigeria allowed the masses to function in a more critical and socially aware mindset. At the same time, journalists whom I met were, like most of the people, struggling to survive. They wrote about such struggles, and when they got incentives (i.e., bribes) for writing otherwise the public understood why. In relation to the penal structure the media in Nigeria presented a skeptical and weary picture. It is my opinion that such portrayals were made possible through the above-mentioned inability of the criminal justice system in Nigeria to mask its oppressive realities and functions.

**GENERAL ATTITUDES TO CRIME IN NIGERIA**

In Nigeria the worst crime a person can commit is armed robbery. If a person is identified and labelled as an armed robber, the chances that he or she will survive street justice, police raids, or prison time are slim. Those who do survive are rarely given a chance to re-enter society. My discussions with many Nigerians (including taxi drivers, university professors, market women, youth on the streets, people sitting next to me on the bus, neighbours, doormen, heads of human rights organizations, students, and others) on
their views of the penal system, and specifically the institution of imprisonment, showed me that on the surface they support it, but any discussions beyond superficial slogans revealed an understanding that incorporated the economic context. Some of the facts shared as common knowledge among the public included the following. Armed robbers generally rent guns from the police force and use them to rob the community. The average person in prison for armed robbery is violent because he or she was pushed to rob to survive. The minority who are given the opportunity to attend and graduate from university will most likely have a very hard time finding a job, let alone one that will pay enough to sustain them or their families. That is why some of the armed robbers in Lagos are university students trying to pay school fees or university graduates who are unable to find work.

The myth behind justice through a criminal justice system has been largely revealed in Nigeria, but too many are too busy trying to survive to work against it. While demonization of armed robbers, and open verbal and physical attacks on them, were common, I did not meet a single person who discussed such attitudes without placing them within the proper social and political context of Nigeria at the end of that discussion. It was those discussions that formed my views and understandings of crime in Nigeria. Many whom I spoke to understood this: if they are robbed, there is a chance they won't eat that month. They cannot trust the police to protect them, and therefore they turn to vigilante justice for protection; if they do not adequately address the possibility of an armed robbery, or deal with the experience of being robbed, they can end up in severe financial trouble, along with the families they have to support and the neighbours who also got robbed. Because armed robbers generally worked through neighbourhoods in Lagos, when one home suffered it usually suffered with the homes around it. It was understandable why armed robbers were so feared and so hated: they represented the most visible and most immediate threat of the short-term loss of money or life. They were less predictable than the government,
which has established a traditional method of extorting money from the country. The lack of stability in Nigerian socioeconomic structures does not present people with many options for safety. These circumstances, in my opinion, naturally lead to an extremely angry outlook toward armed robbers.

This hatred, and the increasingly violent reactions from community members and vigilante groups toward armed robbers, have led to an increasingly violent method of robbing. Awaiting-trial and convicted armed robbers whom I spoke to in Kirikiri medium and maximum security prisons explained that, to ensure survival of street justice (what is often called jungle justice), which ultimately leads to a horrific death by burning, armed robbers began adopting a more violent approach to robbing. While the initial purpose was to steal money, more and more armed robberies now end in violence. The armed robbery suspects and convicts I discussed this with explained that leaving survivors who may recognize them only increased their risk of getting caught and likely killed. This cycle of violence is vicious and one of the many contributing factors in a reported increase in the number of deaths related to street crime in Lagos State (among other states).

When the people have little or no faith in the police or the government they work for, violence often becomes a reaction that appears to be necessary for survival, not because there are no peaceful means of resolving these conflicts, but because Nigerians continue to live within the penal and corrupt structures that colonialism imposed. When penal structures reinforce state behaviours that encourage revenge as a mode of addressing conflict, such structures also encourage revenge as an acceptable method through which those people whom the state has failed should address conflict. In Westernized nations the state has been able to monopolize the right to avenge, punish, and brutalize. In Nigeria the state's inability to do so has aided in exposing the consequences that criminal justice and imperialist economic practices bring to a society. While citizens of Westernized nations continue to blame each other for social problems, Nigerians
appeared to be more aware of the larger issues and were more able to identify the roots of their problems as residing in state (in)actions.

**RELIGION AND COLONIAL CONTROLS**

The vast majority of Nigerians identify themselves with either the Christian or the Muslim religion. I came to understand that a large number of Nigerians still have ties to the traditional religions of their ancestors, but such ties are shunned and viewed as demonic. It was ironic to note that so many religious people relied on colonial religions as protection against black magic, also referred to as *juju*. The irony lies in the contemporary colonial mindset, which seems to have a strong spiritual hold on the country. Colonial religions continue to be perceived as pure, while West African spirituality is viewed as black and evil. Aside from reinforcing missionary and colonial degradation of African spirituality, the institution of religion also plays a key role in distorting the international understanding of Nigerian society.

Conflicts in Nigeria are often presented in the international media in a highly simplified form: they are often referred to as religious conflicts or clashes. The historical and political contexts of conflict are rarely illustrated. I came to learn that religious conflicts are primarily conflicts between ethnic groups and are almost always linked to a political or economic cause. In addition to the simplification of historical and contemporary ethnic relations, the international media have little understanding of the upheavals that European colonial boundaries impose upon African nations: the lines drawn by colonialists now define African nation-states, not according to precolonial African kingdoms and empires, and not according to ethnic affiliations to specific land spaces, but according to coastal land spaces, primarily created for European trading purposes. “The Berlin Conference [1884] was Africa’s undoing in more ways than one. The colonial powers superimposed their domains on the African
continent. By the time independence returned to Africa in 1950, the realm had acquired a legacy of political fragmentation that could neither be eliminated nor made to operate satisfactorily” (Rosenberg 2004). In colonizing Africa, European nation-states created African nation-states according to European agreements that allowed European access initially to trading ports along the coast and eventually to interior land spaces on the continent: “What ultimately resulted was a hodgepodge of geometric boundaries that divided Africa into fifty irregular countries. This new map of the continent was superimposed over the one thousand indigenous cultures and regions of Africa. The new countries lacked rhyme or reason and divided coherent groups of people and merged together disparate groups who really did not get along” (Rosenberg 2004). Many of the religious conflicts occurring in Nigeria today are intimately linked with these colonial measures of exploitation. Conveniently, such recent acts of oppression are not publicized in the international media. All the global community learns about are the religious clashes that take place.

The only religious element of such clashes is associated with the imposition of missionary inquisitions on the continent. In addition, the highly publicized religious conflicts are often used to divert attention away from the roots of these problems, not only by diverting attention away from the war crimes that Europeans participated in during colonialism, but also by directing attention toward these colonially introduced religions and the tensions that arise as a result of their divisions. In the end the Western corporate exploitation of African resources is not in the limelight, and neither are the criminal actions of European nation-states. The focal point, conveniently for the West, becomes the actions of people in Nigeria who continue to struggle with the consequences of colonialism, missionary impositions, and globalization.

The use of religion inside prison played a key role in social control. The prison, a colonial institution, imposed mandatory identification with colonial versions of religion. Several ex-
prisoners informed me of the signing-in process that required
them to check off on their entry form their association with either
Christianity or Islam. Those who did not officially associate
themselves with either religion were assigned one; those who
did not participate in religious ceremonies prescribed by the
prison did not gain access to the donations of food and medicine
provided through churches and mosques.

Two ex-prisoners whom I worked with as colleagues in the
PRAWA office spoke to me in detail about their experiences
with religion inside Nigerian prisons. Both had dreadlocks upon
entry, and both practised traditional religions. Once imprisoned,
they were forcibly shaved bald and made to choose from one of
the two available religions: Christianity or Islam. Upon choosing
Christianity, they were identified as Christians in prison records
and for the remainder of their imprisonment attended church
services and listened to sermons. They celebrated Christian
holidays and special occasions, and occasionally received food or
medicine through church donations. Both returned to practising
their traditional religions upon release. In a few instances, ex-
prisoners who established strong religious affiliations (both
Christian and Muslim) while in prison received community
support from churches or mosques upon release. These
conditions and circumstances, often reinforced through colonial
penal structures, highlight the intrinsic need to associate with
colonial religions in order to survive.

Inside Kirikiri medium security prison, the first prison in
which I implemented the Prisoners Support Circle Programme,
I was told by both prisoners and guards that it was the
first programme that did not have religious and/or legal
notations. It was the only programme that did not start
and end in prayer, and it was the first programme that did not
require religious affiliation for participants. Many prison guards
and staff in Nigeria emphasized religion as an essential part of
the rehabilitative procedure. There were many prisoners who
benefited spiritually from these religious programmes and were
happy to participate in them, but there were many prisoners who
felt coerced and exploited.
The prevalent attitude of prison guards and prisoners' rights activists toward prisoners who practise any form of traditional Nigerian spirituality is compliant with the missionary attitude that colonizing nations exported to Africa: these prisoners are demonized and ostracized. These attitudes also mirror the outspoken opinion of the general public as I came to hear it. Often, when conversing with prison guards and church organizations inside prisons, I was told that "souls need to be saved," and I often found myself silently and sarcastically thinking "and what better place to do such saving than in a colonial prison institution where people have few options or choices and where they are struggling to survive?" I still have images of hundreds of malnourished awaiting-trial prisoners crouched in tight neat rows on the dirt of the prison yard, chanting and praying as missionaries in white robes led them in song, standing over them, clapping and preaching in English, often in a loud manner that consisted of shouting religious "truths." Sitting beside the missionaries on the floor were large bags of rice and garri.

I still have memories of some circle programmes I ran that were disrupted by loud missionary and other church group preachers, and louder songs in reply by hungry prisoners. Sitting in a colonial prison yard, built to maintain a colonial criminal justice system, listening to colonial religious chants, while black men and women in colonial prison uniforms guarded over all proceedings, and witnessing Africans maintain all these colonial structures felt tragic, to say the least.

INSTITUTIONALIZED POVERTY

Criminalization of the poor is not a secret or disputed topic of debate in Nigeria. It is an accepted fact. Within the Nigerian prison and police cells one rarely found people whose families had money. Those who had money were efficiently bailed out; those who did not remained inside. In the streets of Lagos poverty and homelessness were rampant. Unlike in North America and most Western nations, where the poor are segregated within
certain neighbourhoods, and generally kept out of view of the middle and upper classes, in Nigeria one found poverty everywhere one looked. The state in which I witnessed the most extreme levels of poverty was, ironically enough, Bayelsa. This state, in the southeastern region of Nigeria, is one of the richest states in terms of resources. When one defines wealth through natural resources, Bayelsa State is crucial in the provision and production of oil. I visited a remote village called Eniwari. It was located far into the Delta River region and could only be accessed by boat. To the governor of the state it was made accessible by helicopter. To the people it was made accessible through different types of boats—smaller ones with engines for those who could afford them and larger, much slower, boats for those who had very little money.

Along the river, on the way to Eniwari, I was struck by the level of poverty in the villages. I was further struck by the unavailability of fuel for boats. I was angered by the natural gas flares of the oil refineries that burned twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, depriving the surrounding villages of clean air to breathe, clean water in the Delta River (the only access to water in the region), and the comforts of a dark nightfall. Frustrating was the fact that the majority of these villages had no electricity or access to phone lines. I began to wonder why the natural gas flares were not being transformed into a source of power for these villages and quickly came to this conclusion: hook-up costs for electrical connections cannot be that high, but the human potential to organize can be. If people are left to struggle to find food and clean drinking water in the oil-polluted fields and rivers, they will have less energy to organize and struggle against oppressive economic and international corporate oil structures.

Despite such obstacles, there is a strong movement developing in the area among the people in protest of their living conditions. Oil pipes are visible everywhere. These pipes have been built through villages, homes, schools, whatever is in their way: oil pipes are built over the ground for economic reasons, as opposed to underground for safety purposes, and instead of
diverting their course any building or vegetation on the closest and most convenient path is destroyed. These visible oil pipes are often vandalized, and international oil company workers face kidnappings for the purpose of ransom collection. It has become so common that major oil companies, such as Shell, Chevron, and Mobil, have set aside specific amounts of money to deal with ransom demands. It has been found that paying ransoms is cheaper than following safety regulations in extracting oil. Unfortunately for the people, the amount of money set aside by these companies is far less than the amount of money they stand to lose if organized resistance attacked and shut down the oil-producing process in Nigeria. Their attempts, while inconveniencing these corporations, do not threaten corporate existence or divert corporate actions away from the destructive consequences faced by the people who have lived in that region for generations.

A stronger, more visible police and military presence exists in this area of Nigeria, more than I found in other states. This was yet another clear connection between the suffering of the people and the use of the penal structure's personnel to protect and maintain colonial structures that benefit from a status quo that sustains Western corporations and their monopoly over African resources. Under such conditions one cannot help but see the immense economic gains that the powerful minority accumulate on the backs of the vast powerless majority. One also cannot help but see the clear role that the penal system's mechanisms play in assisting the powerful by oppressing the powerless within the context of economy, finances, and armed control.

THE POLICE

My knowledge about the Nigerian police force comes mainly through direct contact with the police through my work with (ex-) prisoners, through my contact with the police while commuting around Lagos, or through stories prisoners and ex-prisoners told
me about their experiences with the police. This section outlines some of my direct interactions, the stories passed on to me, and some of my thoughts and conclusions about what I witnessed, heard, and experienced.

**My Experiences with the Ajegunle Police**

To present the situation with the police in Nigeria and their interactions with the average (and poor) Nigerian, I will share an experience I had, starting on July 19, 2001. An ex-prisoner, Florence, whom I had been working with since my arrival in 2000, was living in the poorest neighbourhood in Lagos. It is called Ajegunle and is referred to by Lagosians as “jungle city.” It is an overcrowded, concrete, urban jungle with very few running water facilities, very sparse electricity, and dilapidated buildings as homes. Florence worked hard to find rent money, and this neighbourhood was the only one she could afford to live in. One night she got into an argument with her neighbour and was making a lot of noise. Another neighbour got involved, and in his attempts to reduce the noise level he beat her severely. That night (July 18, 2001) she was taken to the police station and put in a police cell for the night.

The next morning Florence’s husband asked for my assistance in bailing her out. In Nigeria, bail is not legally supposed to include the transfer of money. All police stations have posted notices stating that bail is free. Bail is granted when a responsible person signs on behalf of the person being held. When that person signs bail forms he or she is admitting responsibility for the released prisoner. Should that person not appear in court at the appointed time, the police have the right to arrest and imprison the person who signed the bail forms.

Upon arrival at the police station in Ajegunle I was met with screams and shouts from inside the interrogation room. There was only one room, and that was where I was taken to meet with the investigating officer for Florence’s case. Upon entering the room I found a young teenager topless and handcuffed on
the floor, being beaten with wooden rods by a policeman. The policeman was hovering over the trembling teenager screaming, "Are you ready to speak yet?" As we walked in, the policeman motioned for his suspect to take a seat on the bench beside me. He was facing his investigating police officer, and I was facing Florence’s. I could feel his shoulders trembling beside me. As they discussed his case, Florence was brought into the room. There was an open wound on her head, and blood was dripping down her face. This, she explained to me, was from the beating her neighbour had given her the night before.

As she sat down beside me, the teenager’s family entered the room and began discussing his case with the police officer. Ironically, that officer was sitting directly beneath the “BAIL IS FREE” sign. He had an open copy of the Nigerian Criminal Code in front of him, and was eating *moimoi* and porridge for lunch as they discussed details of the case. The police officer claimed that he had arrested the teenager for the theft of a fridge from under a bridge in Lagos. The teenager insisted that the policeman had picked him up off the street randomly. The policeman ignored him, and continued explaining to the teenager’s family that he had arrested “this boy” and was charging him with theft of the fridge. This crime carried a sentence of up to seven years, he stated, but he added that he believed the boy had stolen the fridge at night, which could lead to a life sentence. I do not know if this is the case in Nigerian law, but the policeman seemed to be confident that it was. He proceeded to tell the teenager’s family that, if they had N5,000 (approximately CA$ 50), he was willing to forget the entire matter. The family discussed the situation among themselves and concluded that they had no means of gathering such a large sum of money. They had no choice but to leave. The teenager sitting beside me broke down crying, and the policeman continued to eat his lunch.

As all this was happening, I was trying to convince the investigating policeman for Florence’s case that he should release her from custody because he did not have a charge against her.
His responses to my questions and comments were not related to the case at all: he wanted to know if I was married and what I was doing in Nigeria. To my surprise the policeman who had been dealing with the teenager and his family in such a brutal and corrupt manner stood up in my defence, and asked his colleague to be reasonable and to show me some respect. It was concluded that, if a resolution could be reached among the neighbours, the police would let Florence go. The neighbours all gathered, and we reached a resolution, but the police refused to sign any papers or release anybody until I left the station.

They delayed the procedure for days, and after I had travelled out of Lagos for (ironically) an Access to Justice workshop in the middle belt region of Nigeria, they released Florence. A few steps out of the police station two women screaming “Thief!” grabbed Florence. The police arrested her again, and put her in a cell with the property she had allegedly stolen (clothes) and the tools she had allegedly used to break into the home of the supposed victims. They took her picture with the evidence and told her she was going to pay for bringing a foreigner into the police station to help her out. “Are you trying to get us stripped of our badges?” they asked her.

Upon my return to Lagos I was informed that Florence had been taken to Kirikiri prison for women to serve time as an awaiting-trial prisoner on theft charges. After hiring a lawyer, and bribing several officials and officers, she was released on July 27, 2001, before a holding charge could be imposed upon her. This was the only time during my stay in Nigeria that I succumbed to the pressure to bribe somebody, and I did it because I felt personally responsible for her false imprisonment. The experience showed me how quickly and efficiently imprisonment can be used and reversed in Nigeria. As for the teenager they were torturing when I arrived at the police station, I never found out what happened to him. Like so many others, he was likely either shot by the police or imprisoned indefinitely as an awaiting-trial prisoner.
Illegal Raids
An ex-prisoner named Uche, whom I was working with at the PRAWA office (he is a sculptor and artist, and trained ex-prisoners and youth at risk through our trades and skills work programme), disappeared for a week. No one knew where he was, and, knowing the situation with the police and illegal raids in Lagos, I was worried. He eventually showed up on March 2, 2001, and told me what had happened.

He was in the market the prior week and was picked up by the police. He did not have enough money to give them, so they arrested him. They threw him into the back of a van, and one of the policemen took his trousers. He was left exposed from the waist down in the van. Another policeman commented on how savage he was, walking the streets naked, and would not accept any explanation about the missing pants, even though his colleague was standing beside him holding them. Uche and about fifty others were taken to a local police cell, where they stayed for a few days. They were not given any food and had to beg for water, which they were given sparingly. One of the other detainees managed to get the message out to his family that he was in that particular police cell—he had convinced the police officers that if his family found him they would be able to pay for his release. When the family arrived Uche was able to convince them to help him too. They helped as many as they could and took messages out to the families of the rest of the people being held there. Those whose families were contacted and had the money to pay for release were taken home; the rest were taken to prison on awaiting-trial charges.

In the two years I spent in Nigeria there were three separate incidents of jaywalking that resulted in the imprisonment of people I knew either through work or through my community. I went to the local government’s holding cells in Onipanu, a place where all jaywalkers were kept until they paid their fine of N500 (CA$ 5). At N500 a head, these government workers were making quite a bit of money; they told me they picked up hundreds of
people a day. I managed to talk to the local government staff who had arrested these people, and because I was a foreigner they humoured me and released them without taking money from me.

I took my time with the discussions and learned that the people I was talking to were not police officers. They were local government staff who used this as a means of making money to subsidize themselves while they were waiting for their salaries to be paid. They had built cells in their offices (complete with bars). They were in charge of the main highway (Ikorodu road) near my home and office. Ikorodu road has overhead foot bridges that can be used for crossing the road, but they are few and far between. It was a long walk to the overhead bridges, and most people just crossed the main road by running to avoid the fast-moving vehicles. A problem with using the foot bridges was that they were not well maintained and thus not safe; they were made of thin metal and often had large holes (sometimes covered with large rocks to help people avoid stepping into them) that one had to walk around to avoid tripping. Thousands of people used them to cross the main road every day.

While I was living in Onipanu, one of the overhead bridges broke and sent many people to their deaths, either from the impact of the fall or from the traffic below. The number of people who died was never officially reported. I remember discussing this incident with the local government staff who were arresting people who did not use the bridges, and the response I got was simple: it is our job to make the main road safer, and we must arrest people who insist on running across the road instead of using the overhead bridges. The dangers that the poorly maintained overhead bridges posed were not their concern—that was another government department's responsibility.

To provide some perspective on the safety of these foot bridges, I present an experience I had using one to cross the Ikorodu road one afternoon in the middle of August 2001. The foot bridge nearest to my home was beside a gas station. While I
was crossing the bridge, the police had come to use the gas station to fill up their vehicles. They were transporting money (which included special armoured cars and many armed escorts), and to scare away any potential armed robbers they started to fire (while in the gas station) rounds of ammunition into the air. All of us on the bridge had to run for safety. I remember the people around me, the racing cars below me, the sound of gunshots, and the sight of smoke. It was surreal to me but so normal and expected to those around me. It is what the police do, and all those who get in their way must learn to move fast or suffer.

**Bribes: Happy Weekend!**

Often in Lagos, and many other parts of Nigeria, the police set up traffic check points where they flag cars down and “check to see if all is well.” What generally happens is that they ask for money, take what they can get, and move on to the next car. On the weekends this request is verbalized through a widely known and understood phrase: leaning into each car’s window, holding his gun, the police officer, with a smile, exclaims “Happy weekend!” I came to understand this as meaning “Make it a good weekend for me by giving me money.” These police check points, set up both on the weekends and during the week, usually led to many traffic jams and sometimes ended in violent confrontations.

Aside from police check points on the road, the police also take over almost all major bus stops in Lagos and request bribes from all taxis, buses, or *okadas* (motorbikes used for public transportation) passing through. There were many violent incidents in Lagos related to this police presence at public bus stops and motor parks. There were countless accounts of public transportation bus drivers or *okada* drivers being shot and killed by the police for failing to give them bribes at the bus stations. There were several times when all public transportation workers went on strike to protest the police bribes they had to pay at each bus stop. These strikes have not succeeded in stopping the police from violently robbing bus drivers in Lagos.
From a Military State to a Police State: A Cab Driver’s Incident

My experiences with the police check points involved a lot of discussion and many questions. Generally, when they found that I did not respond with money quickly enough they asked me to move on. I always felt that my foreign status kept me safe from violent confrontations. Contemporary global power dynamics put people with European or North American identifications in positions of privilege, and in Nigeria I came to experience such privilege. While in the West, as a person of colour, I am constantly struggling to achieve recognition, respect, and benefit of the doubt, in Nigeria the global elements of oppression played out in my favour.

On the night of March 22, 2002, I did experience one incident that was not so peaceful. I was alone in a taxi around 9 p.m. after a concert in Ikeja, on the Lagos mainland. My taxi driver had tried to avoid a police check point (to avoid giving them money) by doing a U-turn, but was spotted by the police. Four of them surrounded the car, and one started to whip the taxi driver’s hands on the steering wheel. These actions succeeded in immobilizing the car. Policemen with batons, whips, and guns surrounded the car. While one policeman was whipping the taxi driver’s hands (resulting in cuts and open wounds), another stuck the barrel of his gun inside the car against the driver’s head. The policeman was shouting angrily, threatening to kill the taxi driver. We immediately pulled over to the side of the road, and the taxi driver was taken to the side and surrounded by several policemen.

I stepped out of the car and initiated a discussion with the police officers standing nearby. I wanted to talk about what had just happened and what we were going to do to resolve it. I tried to convince them to let us go. My argument was that it was late and that the streets were getting more dangerous, as armed robbers may be nearby (in my silent opinion, the streets were getting more dangerous because of the heavily armed and volatile
policemen). During our discussion one policeman turned to me and said, “This is not a democratic state, the military regime is gone: the police are now in charge. If you want democracy, go back to your country, let us deal with this man.” I was constantly aware that Nigeria had been transformed into a police state after the military regimes were removed. I was surprised to hear this thought verbalized by a policeman in uniform. Besides, he reminded me, everyone in Nigeria still remembers Olusegun Obasanjo (the current democratic president) when he ran the country as a military tyrant. It became clear to me that a change in appearance (i.e., uniform) rarely means a change in structure. The president of Nigeria now wears plain clothes instead of a military uniform; the streets are now terrorized by armed men in black police uniforms instead of armed men in green military ones.

In North America the masses tend to believe otherwise. In North America people put a lot of faith in appearance and political correctness. Presidents and leaders of nation-states may have corporate backgrounds, but they are not viewed as businessmen, since they make decisions on behalf of the state. In Nigeria the situation does not allow any segment of the population to live in such superficial comforts. In Nigeria, I discovered, the vast majority of the people do not live within an illusion of democracy and rights. It is understood that the state functions to control its citizens, to subdue them so that the rich can get richer, while the poor continue to struggle. A policeman, armed and dressed in uniform, explained these things to me. Despite my anger at the situation, and my fear for the taxi driver, I respected his honesty, and was struck by his political awareness and understanding of society. He did not need a university degree to understand issues of power and institutional affiliation to historical oppression.

That night I had several short political discussions with police officers who were not directly involved in the argument with the taxi driver. This kept me occupied until the taxi driver was able to give the rest of the policemen enough money to let us
go. In the car the taxi driver thanked me for staying with him—had I left and taken another taxi, he did not know what would have happened to him or if he would still be alive. It is a sad and scary state of affairs—the police control the streets with guns and intimidation. Aside from the threat of death or grievous bodily injury, there is always the threat of prison and awaiting-trial prisoner status.

**Torture: Stories from a Nigerian Prison Yard**

A lot of my knowledge of police brutality in Nigeria came through experiences I heard from prisoners who were tortured in police cells prior to being taken to prison. I met prisoners who had both arms broken as a result of being hung by their arms from the ceiling for weeks. The pressure from their bodies resulted in bone fractures in their arms. Once taken to prison, these prisoners rarely received medical attention; all the prisoners I met in this condition were awaiting-trial prisoners. Most of them had been held in the notorious SAS (special armed robbery squad) detention centre, known to be one of the most brutal and violent detention centres in the country. I met many prisoners who had been shot and tortured by the police prior to being taken to prison. My work with those who had experienced police brutality before being imprisoned helped me to understand how health is managed in prison, while raising my awareness in relation to police brutality. The two issues are intertwined: police brutality usually results in injuries for which the prisons, after receiving prisoners from police cells, do not provide medical attention.

One awaiting-trial prisoner named Enmeka was nineteen years old when I met him inside Kirikiri medium security prison. He had been arrested early in December 2000 (at age eighteen), and shot in the back of the leg while being made to lie down on the floor in a police cell beside seven others who had been arrested with him. The police had shot four of them; two had died instantly. Enmeka had received no medical attention for his wounds; occasionally he was given painkillers. I met him
on September 5, 2001, eight months after he had been shot. The bullet had hit the bone in his upper thigh, causing it to splinter; he had been in prison the entire time, and the bone fragments in his right thigh were causing an infection and resulting in immense amounts of pain. When I met him he was lying on the dirt in the prison yard verbally wishing death upon himself. After talking to him I tried to bring in doctors to see him and to buy antibiotics for his infection. I quickly learned that the prison medical staff was unwilling to help him because he was suspected of being an armed robber and thus considered unworthy of their limited resources. He was in Kirikiri medium security prison located on the same grounds as Kirikiri maximum security prison in Lagos. The maximum security prison had a hospital, while the medium security prison had painkillers donated by a church.

The medical staffs of the two prisons refused to cooperate with each other. The maximum security prison staff refused to take Enmeka into their cleaner hospital without access to painkillers (which they did not have), and the medium security prison staff, who did not have access to the cleaner environment of a prison hospital (they had only a small clinic), did have access to painkillers, but were not willing to give any to the maximum security prison hospital. They were low on supplies already. As a result Enmeka was held in solitary confinement in the medium security prison, occasionally receiving painkillers when his complaints of pain got too vocal. He was in solitary confinement not for humane but for practical reasons. Putting him in the overcongested awaiting-trial cells was impossible because he was unable to squat or stand for long periods of time due to his injuries. He was sharing a cell built for two with five other prisoners, and in his opinion this was a luxury; at least he was not in a cell built for twenty with seventy-six other prisoners.

On September 7, 2001, I spent the entire day discussing and negotiating Enmeka’s situation with both the medium and the maximum security prison guards. We finally reached a compromise: the medium security prison guards agreed to give
Enmeka painkiller pills (not injections) to take with him, and the maximum security guards agreed to admit him to their hospital. This compromise was reached after the wardens of each prison persuaded their staffs to comply. When it came time to transport Enmeka from the medium security prison to the maximum security prison I was informed that there were no vehicles available. I was told that “There are rotting corpses in the prison vehicle, which we have not taken to the mortuary yet, and so he will have to wait until tomorrow to be transferred.” Not wanting to risk a change in anyone’s mind, I suggested we move him in the PRAWA office vehicle. The prison guards were disgusted, and told me that he had scabies and would most likely infect the car. I asked for blankets to place on the seat for him, and they informed me that all blankets available for prisoners’ use were infected with scabies as well. I decided to continue with the transfer nonetheless. Two convicted prisoners were assigned the task of carrying him to the car (which we drove into the prison yard), since he was unable to walk and the guards did not want direct contact with him. An armed prison guard accompanied us in the car, and we drove down the street on the prison grounds to the maximum security prison, where convicted prisoners carried him into the hospital.

When we arrived at the clinic they did not have a bed ready for him, and Enmeka was dumped onto the concrete floor while they prepared one. Over the next few months I worked hard to raise money for him to buy medication and antibiotics for the infection, but his injury was not in my expected and planned budget. After raising money and finding authentic medication, I took it in to Enmeka.

On November 14, 2001, I learned that half of the medication had been confiscated by the prison medical staff (who are all uniformed and thus prison medical guards), and sold for their own profit. Since Enmeka received only half of the medication he needed, his infection took much longer to heal. Eventually I was able to raise enough money to subsidize an x-ray for him.
and learned then that the bullet was not in his leg (it had gone right through), that the bone fragments were the cause of his infection, and that the antibiotics were helping his body to expel them one by one: they were being released in the pus that was forming around his wounds. Enmeka would gather the bone fragments and save them in a tissue each day. He kept count of how many pieces were exiting his wound each day, and would show them to me and share with excitement the proof of not only his injury (prison staff had often told him that there were no bone fragments in his leg) but also healing. He stayed in the maximum security hospital for many months, and before his wounds completely healed he was sent back to the medium security prison, much to my protest: his wounds had not healed properly and in the medium security prison environment would only become infected again. My protests were futile.

By the time I left Nigeria Enmeka was able to walk while applying partial pressure on his leg. He was still wearing bandages and hoping that he could keep the wound clean outside the hospital setting. I was able to get a lawyer to take on his case (since he had no legal representation when I met him, like so many awaiting-trial prisoners). I hope that one day he can at least be taken to court and, if not released, then sentenced so that he has a definite number of years to serve and thus a chance of being released from prison one day. However, as far as I know, and from what people released from Kirikiri maximum and medium security prisons have told me, the lawyer whom I knew and had worked with in PRAWA did very little for Enmeka after I left the country.

Recently I was informed by some prisoners who managed to be released from Kirikiri maximum security prison that Enmeka was transferred back to the maximum security prison because he had been involved in riots protesting living conditions in the medium security prison. His leg has completely healed, and he is happy to have resisted the amputation that the hospital staff had constantly threatened him with during his first year in prison. As for his case, he continues to await trial.
THE COURTS

The court system in Nigeria is backlogged and inefficient. It remains foreign to most of the people in the country. The logic of English common law has failed to implant itself upon the consciousness of this African nation. While I view that failure as a triumph against colonialism, I also saw the impact that such disconnection between the people and the social structures they are forced to live within can have. It is an oppressive reality that not only enforces dysfunction but also works to degrade a population already alienated through poverty.

Language

On June 27, 2002, during an Alternatives to Violence Programme (AVP) training workshop in Lagos, I met a court magistrate who was a participant in the workshop with me. We struck up a conversation about the cultural dynamics of the Nigerian criminal justice system. She told me about the tensions that lead to violence in Nigeria and the language barriers that exist between ethnic groups. She explained that often, in her Lagos-mainland-based courtroom, defendants do not speak formal English, and generally do not understand the basic tenets of European legal codes and procedures.

She mentioned a specific case that she had encountered. The man (defendant) standing before her spoke very little English and had no understanding of how the court or the criminal justice system works. He had spent years in prison awaiting trial. On his court date his family managed to get enough money together to get him a lawyer. He was acquitted of all charges. When the magistrate made her decision and announced it in court the defendant standing before her did not understand. She had to translate the court’s legal jargon (acquittal) into pidgin English, commonly used in Lagos (“You are free, make you dey go”), so that he knew it was time for him to leave the courtroom. At first this story surprised me. In the west, we are bombarded
with criminal justice knowledge in the media. As I spent more time in Nigeria I realized that the irrelevance and inefficiency of the court system in Nigeria were topics of discussion mainly among lawyers and judges. While inaccessibility to language is a visible disconnection between people and the criminal justice system, it is symbolic of a much larger disconnection: the logic of criminalization, community separation, and stigma is incongruent with most cultures in Nigeria. Conflict is not commonly dealt with through such degrading and barbaric rituals. Conflict is generally addressed through communication, representation, and solutions/problem-solving models.

Inefficiency: Technology, Funding, and a Backlogged Bureaucracy

All records in the Nigerian penal system, at all levels, are kept manually. Computers and recording devices are inaccessible, not only due to expense but also due to the lack of constant electricity. All records are handwritten and filed. If an awaiting-trial prisoner's file goes missing, the chances that prisoner has of ever going to court or leaving prison are almost non-existent. I met many prisoners and ex-prisoners whose life circumstances have been greatly affected by such inefficiencies. I came to see that, while the Western industrialized world has been able to adjust its penal bureaucracies to a level that gives an air of functionality, in Nigeria that functionality is constantly challenged, and in that challenge lies the true dysfunctions of the penal system. I often wonder what it is about the penal system that keeps it so strong. I find that a lot of the bureaucratic jargon flogged at us in the West allows the institutionalization of brutality to hide behind segments of processes and procedures.

In Nigeria these processes and procedures in no way justify criminal justice; instead, their inefficiency exposes the weakness of penalty as social control. So where does the justification for the penal system come within the West African context? I came to understand that the West continues to flog cultural supremacy
and assume criminal justice civility that suggests superiority in its dysfunctional bureaucratic systems of control. It is in the expectation that a more efficient system may implement more justice that Africa maintains penal systems irrelevant to its societies. Colonial powers continue to exert control over the continent through assumed superiority in implanting systems of social and crime control. The penal system in Western societies assumes a monopoly in conflict resolution and harm-defining roles. In Africa, colonialism brought in such monopolies, and imposed its penal institutions and mindsets upon nation-states and citizens. Despite the failure of penal systems to produce safety and crime reduction in Western societies, the colonial mindset of superiority continues to justify attempts to make the penal system work in Africa. As justifications fail, and as the penal system continues to implement a criminal form of justice the average African continues to bear the brunt of such practices.

A Man Shares His Story: Prison and Court Brutalities
On April 30, 2001, late in the afternoon, an elderly man named Felix who had been released from Kirikiri maximum security prison that morning came to the PRAWA office. He told me that he had just come from the courthouse, where he had been informed, after nine years of awaiting trial in prison, that his case had been thrown out of court three years ago. "No one told you?" the judge had asked him. He had been free to go for three years, but no one had noticed or told him. Upon hearing what he called the bittersweet truth, he had been released. The prisons and the courts had not given him enough money to pay for transportation off the prison grounds. He had walked all day and eventually found his way to the PRAWA office. He was seeking assistance. Felix explained that too many people released from prison after many years behind bars are not given any money for transportation home, and often have to steal to get themselves home to their families or friends.
The majority of ex-prisoners often have no home to go to: the stigma attached to imprisonment is so strong that it does not differentiate between awaiting-trial and convicted prisoners. Nigerians are aware of the problems that push people to break the law or expose people to police brutality and wrongful imprisonment, but at the same time they see prison as a mysterious and scary place, so, despite the reasons that led a person there, upon release that person also becomes mysterious and scary. Many ex-prisoners end up living on the streets and eventually go back to prison. Felix had lost all contact with his family and had nowhere to go. My office did have a home for ex-prisoners to use as a transition point after prison, but the rooms were never enough for the number of people who needed them. We did have a room for him at the time, and he stayed there for the entire time I was in Nigeria. I am not sure what will happen to him if that home can no longer be sustained by PRAWA. Felix’s experiences and the time we spent discussing them during my stay in Nigeria illustrated firsthand how imprisonment breaks up a community, not only stigmatizing prisoners but also separating them from families and friends for extended periods of time. This process weakens community strength and reinforces a divide-and-conquer mechanism of social control. Now when I read or speak about security and criminal justice, I put them within that context. The state secures its status quo and strengthens itself at the expense of the community, which becomes fragmented and weakened.

THE PENAL SYSTEM QUESTIONS AND EXPOSES ITSELF

The penal conditions presented, while brutal for those who suffer from them, illustrate that the penal system does not just make mistakes occasionally but is built on a foundation that is vengeful and dangerous. While the human casualties in Nigeria continue to mount, I found that these problems prompted discussions that allowed Nigerians working in criminal justice to question this system and its relevance to their society.
Awaiting-Trial Prisoners: Bureaucratic Finger-Pointing

As stated above, most prisoners in Nigeria are awaiting trial. I had the opportunity to discuss this specific issue during several DFID-funded Access to Justice workshops held in July 2001 in Makurdi, Benue State. These workshops were attended by the police force, the prison service, the Nigerian Bar Association, judges, magistrates, and community members. Upon attempting to find the root cause of the disproportionately high prisoner population that had not been taken to court for years, it became clear that a criminal justice system with a weak infrastructure does not provide shelter from the bureaucratic administrative legitimizations of inhumanity that take place in Western-based criminal justice institutions functioning within more rigid and defined infrastructures. Blame for the large awaiting-trial prisoner population in Nigeria was passed from one sector to the next. The bureaucratic reality set in as it became clear that the root cause of this problem is not linked to a specific segment of the criminal justice system in Nigeria, but results from the collective efforts of all branches involved. Unfortunately, within the context of bureaucracy, responsibility for shortcomings gets distributed into an ambiguous, insoluble, unfortunate situation.

The magistrates and lawyers who work in the courts openly blamed the police for arresting too many people indiscriminately and unjustly, while at the same time pointing fingers at the government’s refusal to provide them with proper resources (technological recording devices, non-payment of salaries, and so on) to deal with such high numbers. The prison guards also blamed the police for such misconduct, while pointing fingers at the courts for their inability to speed up the entire process. The police pointed fingers at the lawyers and the court officials, who, they claimed, are not working efficiently enough and thus causing a backlog in the penal structure, which results in a large awaiting-trial prisoner population. A large number of the prison staff who participated in these Access to Justice workshops openly stated that they believed the prisons are dumping grounds for the penal
system's inefficiency and injustice. The police force claimed that society has become so violent that they have no choice but to arrest as many people as they do. The prison guards, lawyers, and magistrates disagreed with them. The magistrates and lawyers stated that they are the scapegoats for inefficient structures and inappropriate police actions. The community continues to suffer at great expense, and the penal structure continues to expose itself through the constant failures and degradations it imposes upon all those whose lives it touches. Community leaders who participated in these workshops pointed fingers at all branches of the inefficient and criminal justice system.

"Jungle Justice": A Violent Solution within a Violent State of Penalty

One disturbing and rigorous reaction to such tensions and failures in the criminal justice system has caused many to turn away from the penal structure. These issues were also discussed in the Makurdi workshops in July 2001. Unfortunately the justice most visibly utilized throughout the country maintains the penal structure's violent and revenge-oriented mentality. This is what many Nigerians have come to refer to as "jungle justice." The mistrust that so many feel toward the penal system's official structures has caused people to turn to pockets of organized political groups who serve as neighbourhood watchers.

These groups have resorted to violent means of dealing with armed robbers in certain neighbourhoods. Because most Nigerians do not have access to guns, the concept of necklacing has been introduced. When an (alleged) armed robber is caught, a tire is thrown around his or her neck and brought down to his or her arms. The vigilante group proceeds to douse the person with kerosene and set the person on fire. The bodies are usually left on the streets as warnings to others that they have entered a community that does not tolerate armed robbers. It was unanimously stated by community participants in the Access to Justice workshops that this has been the only way communities
can protect themselves. If they choose to take the people they caught robbing them to the police, they fear that the police will be bribed, and the released armed robber will come back to find them and most likely kill them. On the other hand, those charged with and convicted of armed robbery in prison have stated to me that this jungle justice has resulted in their need to use more violence while robbing. They fear that leaving people alive can result in their getting caught and their inevitable necklacing. The cycle of violence grows larger and more dangerous under these conditions. In addition to such factors, the politics involved with these organized neighbourhood watchmen are violent. Many are organized based on ethnic groups and various political party affiliations.

As discussions progressed in these workshops in Makurdi, I learned that both the community members present and the police agreed that jungle justice is necessary and just. Discussions went as far as to suggest that the police should seek the assistance of such groups in dealing with the violent situations now overwhelming the nation. In responding to this violence, the police officers present at the workshop pointed fingers at the government for its refusal to provide them with proper resources to do their job, stating that an alliance with such political and violent groups may be their only chance to deal with the violence they face every day. They complained that they lacked access to functioning guns, proper vehicles, and working telephone and communication services. Even uniforms have to be bought by police officers who want to wear them while on duty. As these discussions progressed between different agents of criminal justice, the use of violence to address problems was natural and expected, not because the people who work for the system are violent but because violence to address conflicts has been normalized in Nigeria through the implementation of criminal justice. The culture of criminal justice and the institutionalization of penality have resulted in a reliance on violence and dehumanization to address conflicts and social ills.
THE PRISONS

My most direct contact with criminal justice while in Nigeria was with the prison system. Prison guards were more accessible to me, and were less confrontational and violent than the police I confronted on the streets. In conferences and workshops the Nigerian Prison Service representatives were the most progressive in their attitudes toward prisoners, possibly due to increased contact with prisoners over longer periods of time. While I found that prison guards who hold high positions in the Nigerian Prison Service were progressive in their politics, I also found that those prison guards who worked directly with prisoners often mistreated and brutalized them.

Health in Prison: A Religious Experience

Inside Kirikiri medium security prison the convicted prisoners' cell blocks hold up to twenty prisoners, while the awaiting-trial prisoners' cell blocks (they are approximately the same size) hold seventy-seven. These blocks consist of one cement room with small windows on either side of the walls. In other parts of Nigeria such windows do not exist, and ventilation is much worse than it is in the dilapidated conditions in Kirikiri medium security prison. The awaiting-trial prisoners do not have beds or mats to sleep on, and the conditions are so congested that they must take turns sleeping on the floor. On all occasions I had to visit the health clinic in Kirikiri medium security prison I saw an overwhelming majority of the awaiting-trial prisoners seeking medical attention. I was told by an awaiting-trial prisoner that each day only one prisoner per cell block is allowed to seek medical attention. Prisoners allow whomever they think is in the most need to emerge for help. Those who make it to the clinic are made to sit on the ground outside the clinic as they wait for access to health care. Those prisoners who do not come in time for prayers are not allowed to visit the clinic that day.

On several occasions I witnessed prison officers herding a group of ill prisoners with sticks and beating those who did not move fast enough, and most of the time I saw them beating
prisoners on the head. I heard those prisoners seeking medical
attention being made to shout and scream their amens and
hallelujahs prior to seeing the nurses. It is those prisoners who
look like walking skeletons, half-naked and sitting on the ground,
who are made to sing, clap, and chant as they wait to be seen by
the nurse.

Inside the clinic, where I spent an entire day (September 7,
2001), I noticed that the medical staff do very little assessment of
sick prisoners. Several convicted prisoners (serving as medical
assistants) were made to check if the ailments existed (if there
were complaints of visible illness), and one medical staff nurse,
upon the order from the matron (head nurse), gave a shot of
painkillers to a prisoner, who was made to drop his pants in front
of everybody. Any prisoner who showed any fear of the needle
or hesitated in dropping his pants was ridiculed and threatened
by the prison's medical guards.

**Food and Water in Prison**

Because an official budget does not exist for awaiting-
trial prisoners, there are no budgetary provisions for their
imprisonment. Convicted prisoners wear blue uniforms, while
awaiting-trial prisoners are made to wear the clothes in which
they were arrested. Most of them no longer fit those clothes due
to the overwhelming weight loss and malnutrition they suffer
during their imprisonment. Upon discussing the issue of food
with some of the convicted prisoners, they explained to me in a
letter how the system works. They explained that the Nigerian
Prison Service hires a contractor who supplies the food to the
prison. Before supplying the food the contractor takes his or
her cut and then passes the food on to prison headquarters in
Abuja, the federal capital. In Abuja prison officials take their cut
and then pass the food down to each of the state controllers of
prison, who in turn take their cut and then pass the food down
to the controllers of each prison, who of course take their cut and
then pass the food down to the yard, where the chief of the yard
takes his cut and then passes the food down to the kitchen, where
the guards in charge there help themselves to their cut and then
pass the food down to the convicted prisoners who cook it, and
who admitted to serving themselves and their friends bigger
portions. What is left of the food then gets distributed to the rest
of the prisoners in the yard, first to the convicted and then to
the awaiting-trial prisoners. Some prisoners also explained in a
letter that, during a prison visit by Obasanjo’s special assistant
on prisons to assess living conditions in Nigeria’s prisons, prison
officers brought in twelve extra bags of garri for him to see as
available food for prisoners, and after he left they took back
thirteen bags.

These accounts and stories helped me to better understand
how prisoners in Nigeria have come to experience such
malnourishment. On an ironic note, prisoners have pointed out
that the car used to move dead bodies from the prison yard to
the mortuary is the same car that prison officers use to move the
food from the prison yard to their homes.

In addition to malnutrition, other factors contribute to the
poor health of prisoners. In the majority of the prisons there is no
access to clean water to drink: wells are dug into the ground and
are not properly maintained. Upon looking inside the wells, one
can often see the insects and the worms that live inside and around
them. In the overwhelming majority of the prisons those wells
are the only source of water for drinking and for bathing. They
are also a breeding ground for mosquitoes, among other insects,
and this has created an increase in the number of prisoners who
suffer from malaria. While diagnosis and treatment of malaria
are cheap and readily available in Nigeria, it has been stated
that untreated malaria is one of the main causes of death in the
country. In prison testing and medication for malaria are not
readily available, and, since there are very few official records
outlining cause of death for the many who die inside prison, the
number of people affected is not available.

**Tuberculosis in Prison**
Another problem prisoners face is the lack of medicine for
diseases such as tuberculosis (TB). In Kirikiri medium security
prison in 2002 there were eighty-three prisoners suffering from
TB. These prisoners were segregated into the TB cell because it is a contagious and lethal disease. They were given medicine when it was available (mainly through donations from churches or other charitable organizations), and when they ran out of medicine the treatments stopped until the next batch of medicine was bought or donated. This inconsistent treatment has created a group of prisoners who have developed a form of TB that is immune to medication. If released alive from prison, they will spread this form of TB among the community. Considering that TB is a highly contagious disease spread by sharing the same air space, the possibilities for disaster are massive.

The ironic detail here is that in Lagos State, where Kirikiri medium security prison is located, TB medication is free. This was one of the promises that Governor Tinubu made to the people when he was elected in 1998. The problem in receiving the medication is that proof has to be given that the patient is suffering from TB, and the tests are very expensive. The high cost of these tests (along with the minimal prison health care budget) results in prisoners being moved to the TB cell without proper testing and diagnosis. Any loud coughing may result in transfer to the TB cell. After entering this cell most prisoners are never released back into the general population because (1) they almost never get the full dose of treatment and thus rarely recover to full health and because (2) the few who do get the full dose, through friends or family members who provide the medication, cannot be sent back to the general cells, since other prisoners fear contracting TB and do not trust the authorities to have treated infected prisoners properly. Prisoners who enter the TB cells rarely leave them alive; those who are discharged during their confinement in TB cells leave the prison very sick and rarely survive, due to lack of money or the immunity they have built up to TB medication while in prison.

**Beatings in Prison**

While most of my knowledge of torture came from the stories I heard from prisoners, and from their visible scars, there were several occasions when I witnessed beatings of prisoners by
prison guards. Beatings often took place in front of the chief officer's office in the prison yard, where all prisoners could see and hear exactly what was happening. Discussions with and questions to the prison guards about these beatings led me to learn that they were over infractions of prison rules, and were almost always linked to drug-trafficking in prison. One of the most horrific beatings I saw a prisoner get was given by the chief guard in charge of the yard himself. He was teaching his officers how to beat a prisoner properly.

On a hot Wednesday afternoon, May 16, 2001, I witnessed a highly disturbing and degrading moment. It happened during a programme I ran beneath a tree in the yard with convicted prisoners. Two awaiting-trial prisoners were allegedly caught dealing drugs inside the prison, and the guards felt they had to make examples of them. Within sight of the majority of prisoners in the yard, they were made to kneel handcuffed, shackled, and topless in the burning sun for hours. They were stripped down to their underwear. The kneeling was followed by brutal beatings with wooden sticks and whippings with leather whips. The handcuffed and shackled men were then forced to stand up and hop from the guard's office to the white-painted doorway leading to solitary confinement, a section in the yard that prisoners refer to as Angola. As the prisoners were made to hop to Angola, guards were mimicking them, hovering around them, imitating their actions and their postures, walking as they were walking with the shackles and hopping around behind them as they hopped their way to solitary confinement. The scene was degrading, horrific, and violent on physical, mental, and emotional levels. This was one of several times I witnessed prisoners being beaten by guards in Kirikiri medium security prison.

I did not witness a lot of violence between prisoners. The only incident of violence among prisoners that I did see occurred on September 10, 2001. The chief of the yard called me into his office to show me what two mentally challenged prisoners had done to each other. One had given the other an open head wound; the wounded one was shackled, and the assailant looked
very confused. The chief was leading them with a stick to the clinic. He explained to me that they had six mentally ill prisoners and that he was seeking funds to have them transferred to the Yaba psychiatric hospital. Despite the beatings I saw him inflict upon prisoners, I also witnessed him providing his own home for ex-prisoners who did not have a home upon release, and I witnessed several occasions when he personally bought clothes for those who did not have sufficient clothing upon release. The contradictions in the prison system in Nigeria once again illustrated that, despite the brutal structures of this violent system, there were a few times when humanity and a sense of African community managed to prevail.

The beatings that I witnessed inside prison generally occurred while I was running the Prisoners Support Circle Programme in the prison yard, and I often discussed with the prisoners who witnessed the beatings with me what could be done in that situation. I was told that going to the guards and interrupting them would result in harsher beatings for the prisoner after I left. I had to resort to talking to the prison guards about it after they finished, when I was on my way out of the prison. Discussion had to be carefully worded. I did not want to put the prisoners at risk of further torture and punishment. The overwhelming response from the prison guards who did engage me in discussion fell back on the penal system's crime and punishment rhetoric. Once again the Nigerian penal system succeeded in illustrating the violent and degrading potentials that the people who work within it can reach, while emphasizing the justifications that allow and encourage the institution of violence.

Overcrowding: Baroness Helena Kennedy's Visit to Kirikiri

On April 26, 2001, Baroness Helena Kennedy was in Nigeria for a visit organized by the British Council. During this visit she spent some time in the Kirikiri prisons in Lagos. Inside the medium security prison we walked through the convicted and awaiting-
trial sections of the yard. The awaiting-trial section had been cleaned up for her visit, yet what we saw was horrific. Inside each cell block holding over seventy prisoners each were half-naked, skeleton-like men staring at us through the bars. Some tried to get her attention, pleading for help. The entire scene made me angry, both at the inhumanity of the conditions and at the power differentials exhibited. Most prisoners in this section of the yard rarely see people from the outside, and thus any chance to be seen or heard represents the chance to briefly exist. In addition, many prisoners thought that, if white people saw what was happening to them in this white institution, brutality would cease.

The smell in this section of the yard was overwhelming. Unclean water holes were left exposed, and people had been locked up for days, maybe weeks. There are no words I can find to describe the sensation. The baroness and the British Council’s executive director for West Africa (at the time) were mortified by their prison visit. Upon returning home, I was informed by my Nigerian colleagues, the foreign visitors were physically ill and vomited after seeing the prisons that day — and they saw the prison yard in its best, cleaned-up condition. I wondered that night if the foreigners who entered Nigeria’s prisons thought about colonialism and why such institutions exist in Africa as they sat back in their comfortable first-class seats back to Britain.

Women and Children in Prison
There is only one prison in Nigeria that exclusively imprisons women. It is located on the Kirikiri prison grounds between the medium and maximum security prisons. The Kirikiri female prison incarcerates on average 150 to 200 females. I met some prisoners who were fifteen years old and others who looked even younger. On average there were between eleven and fifteen convicted women, while the rest were awaiting trial. The Kirikiri female prison has only female guards working in it, and it is not as overcrowded as the neighbouring male prisons. It is also the prison that I had the hardest time gaining access to, and the
prison where I saw some of the most brutal forms of punishment being imposed.

Maintaining the stereotypes of how women are expected to behave, most of the punishments and oppressive tactics involved emotional manipulation and degradation, while physical torture was kept to a minimum. I witnessed women being made to kneel on the ground in the scorching sun for hours in the prison yard. They were being punished for being involved romantically with each other. I met women who were in prison with their babies—they were either pregnant upon arrest or had their children with them at the time of arrest and did not have anywhere to leave them before the police took them to prison. Some of the babies I met in this prison had never seen a man. The women told me about an Amnesty International visit that included several male visitors. One of the toddlers was so confused and scared by the sight of a man that she cried for hours.

The female prison was the only prison in Nigeria that did not allow me to donate food directly to prisoners; I had to leave all donations with the prison guards, which they distributed after I left; prisoners reported not receiving full portions of what was left for them. The level of disrespect and resistance I received from the female prison warden was so immense that I had a hard time working with the women prisoners, and thus cannot say that I fully comprehend what takes place in that prison. I was able to visit the death row section several times. On March 1, 2001, I saw two prisoners who were severely developmentally challenged awaiting execution. One sat naked in her cell in a trance, and the other knelt when she saw me and told me about her hallucinations and fears.

Women arrested and imprisoned outside Lagos State are held in male prisons in compartments built within the male prison yard for them. Upon visiting Makurdi prison on July 25, 2001, I asked the prison guards what happens when women get sick and are in need of medical attention. The clinic is located in the male section of the prison yard. The response I got was short and simple: "Women are hygienically cleaner than men and do
not need to go to the clinic to heal; they can stay in their cells and heal there.”

Women also become pregnant in these prisons, and it was unofficially reported that these pregnancies are the result of rapes by prison guards or male prisoners for whom the prison guards were doing favours. This prison held twenty women, eighteen of whom were awaiting trial. Of the two who were convicted one talked about the “insurance system” that resulted in her conviction.

After leaving Makurdi prison, and before heading back to Lagos to further investigate the “insurance” policy, we stopped at a new model prison, built just outside the boundaries of Makurdi in Benue State. It was an eerie sight for me; this building resembled North American prisons, right down to the type of bricks used for outdoor hallways and the colour of the paint inside the reception area. Apparently a blueprint of modern Western prisons had been sold to Nigeria, I assume, along with the building supplies. I was not able to confirm if this was done through private prison industry or government means. I was able to confirm that the prison was not in use, though construction was complete, due to a conflict between the building contractors and the Nigerian government. Our tour guide, a Nigerian guard, stated that the government did not pay the contractor in full, so in retaliation the contractor kept the keys. In this one instance I could say that government corruption served the people.

Whenever I had access to the Kirikiri female prison, I inquired about the reasons for women’s imprisonment and eventually came to learn more about the “insurance” policy as it gets implemented by the Nigerian police force. I consulted with several lawyers for more details and learned that, if a male crime suspect cannot be located by the police during an investigation, the police arrest the first woman they find who has connections to him (mother, wife, girlfriend, daughter, niece, or other) and proceed to take her into custody for “insurance” purposes. If the man does not present himself to the police within a certain period of time, the woman gets sent to prison to await trial for his crime.
Many of the women I spoke to in Nigerian prisons were being held under such circumstances; some had been sentenced on conspiracy charges as a result of these “insurance” policies. Other women I spoke to who had been imprisoned for crimes not related to the “insurance” policy were serving time for crimes (mainly drug-trafficking offences) that they had committed for their husbands. Many spoke about the financial situations they were in and the reasons behind their decisions to help their husbands support their families.

CONCLUSION: FEAR, POVERTY, AND CONTROL

The awaiting-trial situation in Nigeria puts people in fear of the police. For those who are not well-connected or who do not have money, it is an everyday reality that they can be picked up by the police and can disappear into a prison for years or forever. Many prisoners gave me notes to pass on to their families; many prisoners had been missing for years, and their families presumed they had died. The amount of power the police command through these imposed fears is immense. It puts the penal system in a position of power that is not only unquestionable to the average citizen but also almost undeniable to the homeless population in Nigeria. Because they have no homes to sleep in at night, they are easier targets for the police. This level of power, so openly displayed against the poorest people in the country, is publicly acknowledged by most citizens. In Nigeria, the connections between poverty and crime are clear, and so are the connections between poverty and vulnerability to penal brutality.

NOTES

1 PRAWA is a Nigerian non-governmental human rights organization with headquarters in Lagos, and branch offices in Enugu, Nigeria, and Accra, Ghana. I was placed to work with PRAWA through the Canadian Voluntary Service Overseas [VSO] office. VSO is a non-governmental organization that places individuals from Canada,
India, Uganda, France, the Philippines, the Netherlands, Britain, and the United States in the global south to promote “development” while strengthening cross-national global experiences and connectivity. VSO volunteers are paid salaries in currencies and sums that are average to the general public residing in the host nation. As a VSO, I was encouraged to affiliate with the Lagosian community as my primary source of support, understanding, and security.

2 They were dangerous because of armed robbers but also because of the infamous police check points.

3 I specify Nigerian because I did meet Europeans and Americans who are in Nigeria as expatriots and businessmen/women. They flew into the country and were whisked away in air-conditioned SUVs with tinted windows to their American or European living compounds and only emerged to go back to the airport to visit their “home nations.” Those people did not have to face the realities of oppression in Nigeria. The Chevron compound in Lekki, Lagos, for example, has its own school, movie theatre, grocery store, swimming pools, tennis courts, offices, and homes. People are paid in foreign currency and only interact with those Nigerians who have been hired to serve them.

4 NEP A stands for Nigerian Electric Power Authority, better known among Nigerians as “never expect power always.”

5 Civilians against police officers, police officers against prison guards, prison guards against court magistrates, those who can pay the demanded bribes against those who cannot.

6 Moimoi is a dish of ground beans, steamed and often eaten with porridge or rice.

7 The dispersion of responsibility through colonial bureaucracies is in plain view in Nigeria. The inefficiency of colonial nation-state bureaucracies is also highly visible.

8 Women on the police force are not allowed to carry guns.

9 There are many fake pills in the markets in Nigeria that are sold as medicine to the people.

10 As far as I know, official funding for that home was not available. It was sustained through various donations and efforts by the PRAWA staff reaching out to the community for help. The home has closed since my departure.

11 Department For International Development, the development and foreign aid branch of the British government.

12 Olusegun Obasanjo was the president of Nigeria while I was there.

13 Many of the malnourished and half-starved prisoners die inside Nigerian prisons.
REFERENCE