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Checkpoints and the Management of Insecurity in Southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract

In the face of growing insecurity, checkpoints have become vital instruments in management of insecurity in Nigeria. Security checkpoints are best understood as designated areas, lines, or points of contact along a road or border where individuals and vehicles are subject to checks. Extant studies concentrate more on the politics of checkpoints mounted by non-state actors, particularly in northern Nigeria. Checkpoints manned by state security forces have received minimal research interest. This pilot study focuses on checkpoints mounted by state security agents in Southwestern Nigeria. It investigates forms of relationships that emerge in the checkpoints and their implications for managing insecurity in southwestern Nigeria. The study relied on in depth interviews and the non-participant observation technique. Data was elicited from state security personnels in three checkpoint locations (Mamu – Ogun State, Ondo-Owenna – Osun/Akure, and Saki-Ogboro - Ibadan). Findings from this study uncovers a broader relational economy at checkpoint, where transactions are also sexual or service-based. Interactions between security personnel, drivers, and hawkers often include euphemised exchanges laden with bribery, sexual and erotic undertones. It concludes that rather than providing a sense of safety, checkpoint space serves as entrepreneurial, legalisation and institutionalisation of diverse forms of corrupt practices.

Keywords: Checkpoints, Insecurity Management, checkpoints relationships, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Introduction

In recent years, the security situation in Nigeria has significantly deteriorated. Once considered peaceful, the nation now experiences increased rate of insurgency, armed banditry, and political instability (Eme & Olise, 2021). Kidnappings for ransom and armed robberies have not only complicated existing security challenges but placed additional burden on the nation's security resources. In response to this alarming rate of insecurity, checkpoints have become one of the major strategies deployed by the Nigerian government to manage insecurity (Emelife & Obi, 2024). Despite the preponderance of checkpoints, insecurity has remained unabated in Nigeria, thus raising concerns about the extent to which checkpoints serve the purpose for which they were established.

Checkpoints have been defined as designated spaces, terrain, lines or points, roads or borders, etc, where travellers and vehicles are subject to security examinations (Agbibo, 2022). Fundamentally, checkpoints are spatial systems of power located explicitly at strategic points of passage, articulating landscapes of negotiated stoppage and motion (Schouten *et al.*, 2024). Their physical establishment may range from the most rudimentary – a rope across a road with an armed guard on a plastic chair – to a large building with dogs and metal detectors (Schouten *et al.*, 2024). They may be fixed or mobile, cross a highway, dirt track, an urban artery, small side street, or river, and may be operated by governmental officials, secessionist armed personnel, clan militias, village or community volunteers (Schouten *et al.*, 2024).

There is a mushrooming literature on checkpoints; studies have explored the political sociology of roadblocks and checkpoints in the Democratic Republic (DR) of Congo, investigated the political economy of checkpoints, examined the politics of passage at checkpoints in the West Bank, explored the interface of checkpoints, transnational trade and conflict and the effects of checkpoints on political and social order in Somalia (Bernard, 2014; Verweijen *et al.*, 2024; Schouten, 2019; Griffiths & Repo, 2020; Schouten, 2023; Schouten *et al.*, 2024; Abdirahman *et al.*, 2024; Schouten, 2025). Most of these studies concentrate on checkpoints mounted and manned by non-state actors, criminal gangs, armed militias and terrorists groups. Nigerian studies seem to follow the same trajectory. In this connection, Agbibo (2022) has explored how extortion, discontents, and the pursuit of survival have permeated the checkpoint state in Northeast Nigeria.

However, the very few studies on checkpoints established and controlled by state agents documented the nature and pattern of police extortion and its significant effects on drivers and society (Ifeanyichukwu *et al.*, 2023), critical analysis of coaxing and coercion in roadblocks encounters on Nigerian highways (Mele & Bello, 2007), economic valuation of military checkpoints and its impacts on travel time variability in Abuja between 2012-2017, and nature, pattern, and manner of hawking at checkpoint in Northern Nigeria (Yaks, 2018). This notwithstanding, the forms of relationships that emerge in state-controlled checkpoints and their implications for managing insecurity

have received even fewer research attention. Herein lies the gap this study seeks to fill.

The paper unfolds in five sections. After the introduction, the first section details the data and methods used in eliciting information from the participants. The second section explores the literature on the nature and dynamics of checkpoint interactions and relationships. The third section discusses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which serves as the paper's main theoretical anchorage. Fieldwork findings on the forms of relationship that emerge at checkpoints are presented, discussed, and analysed in the fourth section. The fifth section concludes the discussion and provides recommendations based on the identified problems discussed in the paper.

Data & Methods

Study Design & Study Area

This research employed an exploratory cross-sectional design methodology. Pilot research was executed at three critical checkpoints along highways: two police checkpoints and one military checkpoint, located at Ondo-Owenna (Igbara-Oke) in Ifedore Local Government Area, Ondo State (Southwest Nigeria); Mamu in Ogun State; and Saki-Ogboro in Oyo State. Igbara-Oke holds historical significance and is situated along the Ondo-Owenna Road, a crucial transit route linking Ondo with Osun and Ekiti states, hence establishing it as an essential commercial and transport hub since the inauguration of the Akure-Ilesa-Igbara-Oke economic corridor (World Bank, 2012). This place is frequently designated as a reference point for interstate travel and economic trade due to its elevation and strategic position along the main road.

The Mamu Checkpoint, also known as the Mamu Security Checkpoint, is situated near Mamu village along the Sagamu Motorway in Ogun State. The region is characterised by dense forests that have historically posed challenges due to crimes such as highway robbery and abductions. The Saki-Ogboro Checkpoint is situated along the Saki-Ogboro Road in the Saki West Local Government Area, adjacent to the Nigerian border with the Republic of Benin. The Saki-Ogboro Checkpoint is crucial for overseeing cross-border traffic and enforcing regulations on customs, immigration, and anti-smuggling measures. The Saki-Ogboro corridor is identified as a persistent smuggling route, characterised by porous borders, inadequate enforcement, and substantial informal trade, particularly in petroleum and agricultural goods (ICIR Nigeria, 2020; The Sun Nigeria, 2020). Minimal empirical evidence was utilised to determine these spots, and both regions have been classified as “Black Spot” areas for criminal activities, notably kidnapping, banditry, and armed smuggling (Oloniniran, 2024; Babajide, 2024).

Study Population and Methods of Data Collection

The research sample comprised law enforcement and military officers holding the rank of Corporal, Inspector, or above. The inclusion of security

professionals in this study was justified, since they are the principal agents and executors of security protocols at checkpoints, and their activities will directly or indirectly influence public opinions of insecurity management in the region.

A qualitative methodology employing in-depth interviews (IDI) was predominantly utilised to gather data for the study project. Specifically, in-depth interviews were conducted with six (6) distinct security officials from all three research study locations. This pilot study aims not to achieve saturation, but to identify significant themes that can inform larger regional or national research on checkpoint governance and state performance in Nigeria and beyond. This technique aligns with the overarching goals of exploratory and interpretative research, which aims to reveal the meaning-making processes and symbolic routines associated with security performance and its inconsistencies.

This research addresses a delicate subject, and, given the uniqueness of each participant's work experience, safeguarding their privacy and vested interests took precedence over utilising a tape recorder for data collection. The predominant data was acquired through casual dialogues and observations. Casual discussions yielded direct insights from security officers concerning their perceptions of working circumstances. The non-participant observational method was employed to record physical attributes, exchanges, and interactions between drivers and security officers involved a total of 2 hours on-site during the day.

Data Analysis & Ethical Consideration

At the analysis stage, recorded information recorded were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis involving identifying, coding, and analysing themes. This procedure commenced with transcription of the audio files, identification of codes from the transcripts generated, and systematically reviewed, refined, and arrangement of codes into potentially useful themes. Before initiating the research, all participants received a comprehensive overview of the study, its objectives, potential applications of their contributions, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the research at any time, in relation to the public benefit derived from the study. The research undertaken in the study adhered to all established international and national ethical standards for social research. No participant experienced any type of coercion or intimidation before, during, or after data collection.

Nature and Dynamics of Checkpoints Relationships

The literature on the forms of relationships that exist at checkpoints, how such relationships are interpreted, and their implications for the management of insecurity has received less attention. Although studies have tried to position the relationships that exist at checkpoints within the framework of the politics of passage and roadblocks and checkpoints taxation, our argument in this paper is to move beyond the argument of the reviewed works, asserting that relationships at checkpoints are not necessarily monetary. Even when

checkpoints collectively harness billions of USD yearly from traders and other users of checkpoints to the pockets of rebels and soldiers globally, yet payments at checkpoints are not always in cash, they may also be in kind, or take the form of labour or sexual services (Musa, 2018, Schouten, 2019, Bjarnegard *et al.*, 2024).

In many checkpoints, interactions and exchanges are relatively ephemeral. They do not entail much drama, aggression, or tension. However, they consist of a sequence of routine activities (Verweijen *et al.*, 2024). Regulating the movements of people and goods through space is a defining feature by which authorities (state or non-state actors) exercise sovereignty and dominance over people, place, and resources (Herbst, 2000; Mann, 1984; Schouten *et al.*, 2019). According to Schouten *et al.* (2024), the rules that influence the terms of mobility and trade through checkpoints support claims over people and territory and are often expressed through localised order-making. The process of negotiating passage conveys to the roadblock operator the recognition of his or her authority over navigation (Lombard, 2013). This authority can then be engineered into several forms of power: political, symbolic, or financial (Schouten, 2022; Mampilly & Thakur, 2024). If these are parlayed into different activities, what are the relational dimensions to this politics of mobility? According to Verweijen *et al.* (2024), relational dimensions to this passage are often monetary. In some cases, interactions that exist at checkpoints are routinised, and the amount of payment required to pass through them is predictable, so that a kind of ‘fiscal contract’ can occur, which renders *de facto* authority¹ on operators (Schouten *et al.*, 2024; Baaz *et al.*, 2018).

Expounding on the relational dimensions of checkpoints, evidence from available literature further theorises these dimensions into two levels. First, the burden imposed by taxation and regulation at checkpoints can have effect on the livelihoods of communities (Fairhed, 1992; Schouten, 2022). Most importantly, in contexts of volatility and conflicts, livelihoods are often built around profiting from what Cantens and Raballand (2017) refer to as ‘price differentiation across space’. Imposing checkpoints on vital roads and subjecting people and goods to heavy taxation and/or potentially violent harassment can thus promote demand for brokers to assume these risks. On the other hand, the severity of taxation and harassment encountered at checkpoints can also prompt households and communities to reorganise their lives, livelihoods, and agricultural practices entirely to bypass these sites of extraction (Broomley & Foltz, 2011).

¹*De facto* authority of checkpoint or roadblock operators refers to the practical control of checkpoints or roadblocks by rebel or militia groups, or criminal gangs. They are groups of individuals that exercise power at checkpoints regardless of whether they have legal or formal authority. This concept is often relevant, particularly in conflict zones, areas with weak state control, or where non-state actors operate.

The second aspect of the relational dimension of checkpoints also lies in the societal-relational effect and is intimately tied to the symbiotic spatial dynamic that checkpoint activities produce. One such relationship is an intimate sexual relationship. An available study by Merkle *et al.* (2017) on gender and corruption in forced and irregular migration reveals how illegal migrants used sex to negotiate passage. In this vein, the victims of sexual corruption may not have the legal right or permission to cross the border, but the border control personnel grant them passage in exchange for sex. Echoing this view, an underground investigation carried out by Lam (2018) reveals how an officer at the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority of Singapore (ICA) obtained sexual favours from women who had been arrested for immigration offences, offering them (unwarranted) extensions of their Special Passes to allow them to remain in Singapore after their cases concluded. Migration, especially irregular migration, can be facilitated by several forms of corruption (Merkle *et al.*, 2017). Common examples include bribing administrative employees and immigration officials to obtain travel documents or to be able to dwell in the host country; border security officials to allow border crossings; and law enforcement officers to prevent investigation or prosecution (OECD, 2015). In comparison, women seem to encounter more challenges during migration, particularly at checkpoints, than men (Ghosh, 2009).

In a study conducted by Ghosh (2009) on migration and gender empowerment, evidence abounds that female migrants often report exploitative fees being charged, as well as being abused physically and sexually by middlemen, recruiters, police officers, border officers, and other authorities. Samuel *et al.* (2012) also report that as part of the migration process, Indian middlemen organise for Bangladeshi migrant women to offer sexual favours to border guards without their prior knowledge or consent. Supporting this view, Amnesty International (2016) notes that female refugees experience violence, assault, exploitation, and sexual harassment at every stage of their journey, including on European soil. It has been documented that in most transit countries, they have experienced physical abuse and financial exploitation, being grouped or pressured to have sex by smugglers, security staff, or personnel at checkpoints (Amnesty International, 2016).

If all these activities (monetary or sexual relationships) take place at checkpoints, what then is the specific role or function of the checkpoint within these encounters? We contend that checkpoints are more than mere settings for financial extortion, even though they play a crucial role in the sustainability and supplementing meagre and delayed salaries of security agents at checkpoints (Agbiboa, 2022). Instead, the checkpoint is integral to the checkpoint encounter through its performative effects (Verweijen *et al.*, 2024). These effects lie on the one hand, in how they are imbued with meanings that provoke the enactment of particular social practices, and on the other hand, in how they impose physical restraint, thereby governing the movement of bodies and objects (Hammami, 2019). As such, checkpoints constitute an essential part of the performance of public authority. Indeed, because they are

historically associated with the exercise of public authority, they have become a powerful signifier of authority in and of themselves (Verweijen *et al.*, 2024).

Previous studies have shown that predation is a common form of extracting economic rents from the population through modes of governance (Evans, 1989; Hibou, 1999; Bayart, 1993); however, what is less known are the various tactics devised to negotiate this predatory power of the state. Even when considerable attention has been devoted to checkpoints manned by non-state agents, as aptly captured in the foregoing analysis, state security checkpoints have become problematic for the daily survival of road users and for security management, especially in conflict-ridden zones (Agbiboa, 2022). Insights from northeast Nigeria show that the protracted crisis of Boko Haram insurgency has afforded unbridled opportunities for checkpoints extortion,² and violence by agents of the state (soldiers, police officers, and progovernment militias) in the guise of filtering out enemies of the state and forging relationships that transcend the borders of security. In this pilot study, we explore the nature of these relationships and their implications for the management of security and security checkpoints in the Southwest. This is needed for the purpose of bridging the identified gaps in the literature.

Theoretical Anchorage: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

This section is anchored on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of van Dijk (2015). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a discourse-analytical research approach that focuses on how text and language in social and political contexts enact, reproduce, legitimise, and oppose social power abuse and inequality. Critical discourse analysts seek to comprehend, reveal, and ultimately combat social inequity by taking an outspoken stance in such dissident research. According to van Dijk (2015), CDA is the study and analysis of “the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality, and the position of the discourse analyst in such social relationships”. According to van Dijk, CDA addresses the problems of power abuse, domination, inequality, etc., that are mirrored in the creation of discourse in social contexts. The primary goal of CDA, according to van Dijk, is to “uncover, reveal, or disclose” the hidden structures, characteristics, tactics, and expressions of social power, dominance, inequality, discrimination, bias, etc. that the elite use and exercise over the dominated groups. Summarising the social and philosophical definitions of power, van Dijk conceived power as the ability of one group to control the minds and actions of the other group members.

² Extortion is the practice of receiving something through force or threats, thus, clearly involving coercion. In extortion, a threat toward the extorted party is always involved, and the payment, whichever form it takes, is thus coerced (Bjarnegard *et al.*, 2023). When a person with entrusted authority engages in extortion, it means that there is an implicit or explicit threat to be extorted person to receive worse than fair treatment unless a payment of some kind is made (Rose-Ackerman, 2013).

He notes that, through various linguistic and discursive strategies, the dominated groups attempt to justify, uphold, and hide expressions of control, domination, and power. When addressing power concerns, van Dijk (1995) typically takes a cognitive approach. According to him, the ultimate goal of any weapon employed in the exercise of power is to control, alter, and steer others' thoughts and beliefs to benefit the more powerful, dominating individuals. Consequently, he believes that the cognitive interface of various mental information, beliefs, and attitudes both shapes and is shaped by discourse and social interaction (van Dijk, 2015). According to van Dijk (2015), influential individuals can manipulate at least some aspects of the recipients' brains for their own benefit. This capacity is predicated on various mental models of actors that “embody social knowledge and attitudes” and directly or indirectly impact other people's behaviour. In general, van Dijk (2015) proposes two aspects of the CDA framework: Discourse, Cognition, and Society, and Micro and Macro Levels of Analysis.

These two dimensions are connected and interactive rather than isolated. Discourse, communication, verbal interaction, and language use are all included in the micro level of analysis, whilst social order, power manifestation, dominance hierarchy, and inequality among the various interaction participants are all included in the macro level. According to van Dijk (2015), there are two ways that discourse and society interact: first, through the presentation of the relationships between society's members and its structure; and second, through the two levels of micro and macro situations. Van Dijk's suggested analysis includes several components, including:

1. Group members. Language users participate in discourse as members of various institutions, organisations, and social groupings; on the other hand, groups may act “by” or “through” their members.
2. The process of actions. Individual actors' social activities are therefore components of collective action and societal processes.
3. Social structure and context. Discursive interaction situations are also a component of social structure.
4. Social and personal cognition. As social actors, language users possess both social and personal cognition (personal memories, knowledge, and attitudes) and cognition shared with other members of their group or culture.

While the theory has been criticised for its overemphasis on how power is enshrouded in language and exhibited within a specific social context, at the expense of the physical environment's influence on power relations, it remains relevant for explaining how power is expressed in discourses among security personnel at checkpoints. Checkpoint remains a site where diverse forms of predatory power relations are exhibited. These predatory powers are reflected in the directives used during vehicle and passenger inspection. With these directives, users are expected to adhere to the structure and norms that guide

such an environment. In summary, the checkpoint is an environment in which security personnel instil fear in passersby through the infiltration of discourse.

Results and Discussion

Forms of Relationships at Checkpoints

This section aims to document the forms of relationships that exist at checkpoints and the reasons underlying them. Based on the available evidence, the significant forms of relationships (that is, the interactions between security agents and others, including pedestrians, drivers, hawkers, and vendors) at the three checkpoints promote hawking, bribing, extortion, and farming activities. Some extracts derived from the fieldwork to support the above view are as follows:

At the checkpoint, there is normally a gala seller, bottled water, pure water, minerals, even a car radio, charging access, and whatever else. Even shaving stick, they do sell them at that point. That kind of point will be located where the road is not good, where the road is dilapidated. So, when motorists are coming, they will ask them to slow down. And a policeman is there to check them at the same time. So those people are coming there to come and hawk, sell, gala, or other materials. So, they are using the opportunity because the place is bad, one, and the policemen are there at the same time. Pure water, bottled water, minerals, gala, whatever they are selling there, even the recharge card on the road. If you find that kind of area, it's only the police at that checking point that have that type of relationship with people; they are selling something on the road. Most especially express. It's only a police checkpoint. We don't find it with a soldier. We don't find it with customs, because they do not relate to people in the community, like police. (IDI/Police/Inspector/Saki-Ogboro/23 Years)

Another view shared by one of the soldiers in Igbara-Oke, who averred the main reasons why they allow hawking at the checkpoint, is as follows:

You see these people that sell things here, normally we are not supposed to allow them to sell things because the rules of establishing a checkpoint forbid that, because of all the forms of hazard that come with it, especially during cross-firing. But we allow them to do so as a way of helping them because it is this hawking that most of them use to feed their families. Aside from that, this checkpoint lacks a lot of facilities – to buy things or wash our clothes, we have to go to the community. To lessen this burden, most of these women assist us in getting some of these items or sometimes bring them here for us. What we do is that we do not allow them to move close to the barricade. (IDI/Soldier/Sergeant/Ondo-Owenna/20 Years)

In a similar vein, an exchange³ between security personnel and some Hausa passengers in Mamu, revealed how extortion is being executed under the pretence of curbing illegal immigrants, is as follows:

Extract A

1. **Officer** – [Stop! Stop! [Peep through the bus to observe the faces of passengers]
2. **Officer** - *Sauko, kuukunnaku Sauko* {Come Down, The Three of You should come Down}
3. **Officer** - *Daga inakukafitokumainazaku?* {Where are you coming from and where are you going?}
4. **Hausa Passengers** - *Zamu je jahar Sokoto ne, daga nan mu daukiwatamotazuwaNijar* {We are going to Sokoto state, to take another motor going to Niger}
5. **Officer** - *Ina takardariziniku* {Where is your pass?}
6. **Hausa Passengers** - *Ba mudatakardariziniyallabai. Mun zo nan ne ta watababbarmotantirela* {We don't have pass *Oga*. We came here in a trailer truck.
7. **Officer** - *Toh shikena, tundakuukunbaku da takardunizini, bazanbarkukutafi bah. Amma zankyalessauran* {Okay, since three of you didn't have a pass, I won't allow you to go. But I will allow the rest}.
8. **Hausa Passengers** - *Yallabai dan Allah* {*Oga*, please}.
9. **Officer** - *Toh, kowannenkuzaibadadubugomagoma* {Okay, each of you should bring 10K}.
10. **Hausa Passengers** - *Dan Allah yallabai, bamu da wannaadadin a hannu mu, dubu uku ne kawaidamu* {Please sir, we don't have up to that amount, we only have 3000 naira with us}.
11. **Officer** - *Ku dubaaljihunkukufito da shiwaje, bazankarbiwannakudidagawurinkuba* {Open your pocket and bring out, I won't collect that money from you}.
12. **Hausa Passengers** – [#Symbols - Started pulling out their pocket to show the officer the money on them].
13. **Officer** - *Zan iyakarbandububiyar din sabodakuncebakudakudikumakunnuna min* {I can only collect 5K because you said you don't have money, and you have shown me}.
14. **Hausa Passengers** - *Gashi yallabai* {Take *Oga*}.

³ All the conversations that ensued between the security personnel and the three identified passengers were done in Hausa. It was made easier through the assistance of a vendor at the checkpoint who translated their conversation in English while further translator of the conversation was done by a research assistant. It should also be noted that *Oga* as used in this context refers to as boss. Similarly, “pass” in this context refers to “travel documents” – most often referring to either pass, travel permit or valid means of identification.

The above encounters between passengers and security personnel are typically covert and coercive. While “pass” is mandatory for neighbouring countries like Niger, Mali, and Lake Chad, it is worth noting that the officer exploited the situation to extort them, candidly stating the amount he intended to collect. While this could be termed as corrupt practices, the enormous effect it will have relative to delay in travel time of other passengers, the stress and limited chances of boarding another vehicle at the checkpoint and the financial implication on the driver (especially if the security personnel demand that the three passengers should alight) outweigh the benefit; thus, making most of the passengers to see such bribe as “*mala prohibita*”. In most cases, during such encounters, passengers advise the driver or the person concerned to settle with the security personnel; otherwise, it may lead to unnecessary delays in travel time and requests for unattainable documents. This suggests that even when passengers know what the game is, they still prefer to play it safe by not terming such demands a bribe. In the same light, another conversation that ensued between a security personnel and a bus driver from the same checkpoint is as follows:

Extract B

1. **Officer** – [Stop! Stop!] ...
2. **Driver** – [Slow down a bit]
3. **Driver** – *Ògá, motifúnèkejìyìnlowó* {Ògá, I have given the second officer money}
4. **Officer** – Okay! Okay! *Máalọọ, kọjá! kọjá!* {be going, pass}
5. **Driver** – *Wọn ò tífúnminí number ooooo* {they have not given me a number}
6. **Officer** – *Máalọọ, a dà ẹ mọ, máalọọ* {be going, we have already identified your face}

The above discussion reveals that while drivers know what the game entails, both parties (security personnel and drivers) adopt a strategy of assigning numbers to vehicles that meet the necessary financial obligations. Because many vehicles pass through this checkpoint daily, identifying those that have fulfilled their obligations can be complex; therefore, to avoid confusion, drivers are often asked to present their assigned number. The presentation of this number serves as evidence of payment and prevents the driver from paying another fee for that particular day. While it is evident from the above extract that payment of fees seems mandatory for drivers passing through this checkpoint, observational evidence reveals that sometimes drivers avoid this payment through over-speeding. Due to the fact that there is an absence of speed bumps and humps in this checkpoint (with fewer wood planks placed on both sides of the roads) and security personnel at this space would not want to risk their life confronting a speeding vehicle, it makes it easier for drivers to easily avoid this payment. Beyond the financial extortion perpetuated at these three checkpoints, observational evidence deduced between a hawker and a

senior officer at the Mamu checkpoint reveals some amorous conversation as follows:

Extract C

1. **Hawker** –*Oga! Oga! ... E pẹlẹooooo* {Boss, well done sir!!!}
2. **Officer** –*Pẹlẹ báwoni, o tì ẹ bèrèrè mi* {How are you doing, you didn't even ask of me}
3. **Hawker** –*Mo beereyii sir, wònni ẹ nsunlọwọ* {I asked of you, I was told you were sleeping}
4. **Officer** –*Bawonitibítibítímokó lánàá, sé o ti practice ẹẹẹ*{How is that thing I taught you yesterday, I hope you have been practising it?}
5. **Hawker** –*Bẹ̀nì sir, moti practice ẹẹẹ, sebiteleyinti ẹ kọ mi* {Yes sir, I have started practising it, is it not the back one you taught me?}
6. **Officer** - *Okay, tí ọ bátìsetán, kó o wásíbí, káwá* continue class wa, imititunwanilẹtimo ma kọ ẹ {Okay, once you are free, come here and let us continue our class, there is a new one on the ground that I will teach you again}
7. **Hawker** – Okay, *motigbọ* sir {Okay, I have heard you, sir}

Most of the words/expressions in the above extract are ambiguous in this context because they can be understood literally or metaphorically. For instance, a meticulous observation of lines 4 and 5 in the extract above may seem literal: “tibítibí”, which means “this thing or this particular thing”, and “teleyin”, which means “back”. However, they have deeper connotative meaning which could symbolically be termed as sexual practices with “tibítibí” meaning sex and “teleyin” tacitly meaning “doggy style”⁴. Their meanings always serve as cover-ups or back-ups to prevent any form of eventuality.

The findings of this study reveal that security checkpoints in Southwestern Nigeria are far more than passive infrastructures for regulating movement. They are deeply performative, socio-political spaces shaped by complex relationships, routines, and structural challenges. While existing scholarship (Schouten *et al.*, 2024; Verweijen *et al.*, 2024; Agbibo, 2022) has established the notion of checkpoints as spaces where sovereignty and power are enacted, the present study reinforces and extends this understanding by providing qualitative evidence that shows how public authority at checkpoints dramatised and normalised relationships. These scripts, in which drivers initiate interactions with greetings and implicit bribery rituals, reproduce a sense of mutual expectation and complicity between checkpoint operators and users, aligning with Goffman's (1959) theory of “impression management.”

Impression management suggests that aspects of our aims and purposes are revealed through our behaviour, appearance, and involvement.

⁴ Doggy style, or doggie style, is a sex-from-behind position. The person penetrating stands or kneels behind their partner by putting their penis into their partner's vagina or anus.

While some of these impressions are unintentional, others are intentional. According to Goffman, individuals can either facilitate, obstruct, or even mislead this revelation. Therefore, impression management assumes that individuals have some control over how their audience perceives them. According to Goffman, impression management analysis seeks to identify the tactics people use to influence or change how their audiences view them during public interactions. Here power is not merely exercised but performed, sustained by rehearsed actions that lend legitimacy to what would otherwise be illegitimate.

The findings further deepen existing literature by revealing the functional convergence of economic survival, social exchange, and security performance at these checkpoints. Previous studies (Schouten, 2019; Musa, 2018; Fairhead, 1992) have discussed the economic dimensions of checkpoints, primarily focusing on monetary extortion. However, this study uncovers a broader relational economy, where transactions are also sexual or service-based. Interactions between security personnel and hawkers often include euphemised exchanges laden with sexual and erotic undertones, suggesting that the checkpoint is also a site where gendered power dynamics are negotiated. This substantiates but also expands on Merkle *et al.* (2017), Amnesty International (2016), and Bjarnegard *et al.* (2024), who documented sexual exploitation in migratory and militarised contexts. Here, the exploitative dynamics are shown to be regularised, woven into the everyday fabric of checkpoint operations, rather than merely incidental or exceptional.

Moreover, the study's findings illustrate how hawking at checkpoints, though officially prohibited, is tacitly permitted and even welcomed by officers due to its dual utility: it provides essential goods and services to poorly resourced personnel while also supporting local economies. This corroborates the perspective of Yaks (2018), who identified hawking as both a security risk and an economic coping strategy. Yet, this study adds a critical nuance by showing that hawkers are not only tolerated but also integrated into the checkpoint's informal governance network. Such interactions further blur the boundary between civilian and security spaces, turning checkpoints into symbiotic micro-economies and undermining their original function as neutral enforcement zones.

Notably, the findings also highlight the relational complicity of road users in sustaining checkpoint extortion. Many passengers and drivers comply with bribery demands not out of consent but from pragmatic necessity. These acts are governed by what Verweijen (2015; 2024) calls "practical norms"—deeply embedded expectations of behaviours under coercive conditions. It also aligns with van Dijk's (1995) CDA theory, which posited that influential individuals can manipulate aspects of an individual's cognition for their own aggrandisement. This ability is predicated on the presumption that an individual controlling other people's cognitive processes does so on the basis of legitimate power conferred on them. In this vein, the power that security personnel at the checkpoint assumed, coupled with the structure of the

environment and the arms and ammunition they possessed, embodied and re-legitimised their position by bringing to the consciousness of checkpoint users the need to adhere to every demand made and every directive given. Even when individuals disapprove of the system, they participate in it to avoid delays, harassment, or further loss, or with a popular notion of “giving what belongs to Caesar to Caesar.”

In this context, the officers at checkpoints were Cesar, and the need to fulfil what they demanded to avoid serious traffic or social offences. This aligns with Mele and Bello’s (2007) concept of “blame heaping,” in which officers invoke guilt or fabricate infractions to justify extortion. By documenting the institutional inadequacies, exploitative relationships, and performative routines at these sites, this study reinforces Pardo’s (2004) and Roitman’s (2006) argument that in corrupt systems, the boundary between legality and illegality collapses. In this light, the checkpoint becomes a mirror of Nigeria’s fractured fiscal federalism (Agbiboa, 2022), in which security agents are both guardians and predators, navigating roles shaped more by survival than by public service. Ultimately, while checkpoints are designed as countermeasures to insecurity, the findings of this study show that in their current form, they often reproduce the very vulnerabilities they aim to eliminate, undermining trust in state institutions and weakening the legitimacy of public authority.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has filled a critical gap in the literature by contributing to a nuanced understanding of the relationships that checkpoints produce and their implications for the management of insecurity. While earlier research has extensively examined checkpoints in Northeast Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Horn of Africa, the experiences of security personnel and civilians in Southwestern Nigeria have mainly remained underexplored. This study provides critical empirical evidence that not only extends the geographical scope of checkpoint studies but also underscores that the dysfunction and informalities characterising Northern checkpoints are equally entrenched in the South. This complicates the notion that such practices are merely symptomatic of insurgency zones and instead suggests they are embedded features of Nigerian statecraft and everyday governance. Discussions about Nigerian checkpoints reflect the socioeconomic realities of the country’s security system. Illegal activities are disguised in discourses and often expressed in actions emanating from them. The discourse, which has both implicit and explicit meanings, reflects how extortion and intimate relationships are discussed in a coded language. While these forms of extortion may affect drivers, from another perspective, drivers lose only part of their earnings, which they can recover with more work.

Nevertheless, the acts reveal a far more serious predicament in Nigeria’s security system: the entrepreneurial nature of checkpoints amid the legalisation and institutionalisation of corrupt practices. This paper therefore recommends that regular training of security personnel on effective checkpoint and border

governance is needed to strengthen the operational framework of the checkpoint system. This will help to equip security personnel the skills needed to effectively and efficiently manned a checkpoint particularly on the need to keep abreast of the modern security surveillance and intelligence gathering. In addition, it will also promote a modest security system devoid of any form of unethical behaviour that may serve as inimical to the realisation of checkpoint objectives. Lastly, there should be improvement in the welfare system of security personnel through improvement in wages, allowances, arms and ammunition. This will help to promote a transparent security system and deter personnel from engaging in illicit behaviour that are detrimental to the security management of the checkpoint.

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