Fast Money, Slow Survival: Cybercrime Economies and the Temporal Politics of Housing in Osogbo, Nigeria

Abstract

Across many African cities, housing has increasingly become a site where wider socio-economic anxieties, informal economies, and contested notions of responsibility are negotiated. In Osogbo, a rapidly urbanising city in southwestern Nigeria, a new and underexplored housing dynamic has emerged around the activities of internet fraud actors, popularly known as "Yahoo Yahoo" or "Yahoo Plus" boys. These actors, enabled by access to fast and often illicit digital wealth, routinely pay inflated rents and agency fees for residential properties without contesting exploitative pricing structures or poor housing quality. In turn, landlords and housing agents increasingly prioritise these high-paying tenants while excluding salaried workers, civil servants, artisans, and other legitimate low- and middle-income earners from the urban rental market. The consequence is the gradual restructuring of housing access around speculative and morally contested economies, producing what this paper conceptualises as the temporal politics of housing, a condition in which accelerated wealth accumulation by digital underground economies collides with the slow and predictable income cycles of legitimate labour.

This paper argues that the housing crisis in Osogbo cannot be adequately understood through conventional explanations centred solely on urbanisation, population growth, inflation, or housing shortages. Rather, the study demonstrates how cybercrime economies are reshaping local housing relations, redefining social legitimacy, and generating new socio-ecological conflicts over access to shelter, dignity, and urban belonging. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's conception of the right to the city and Hartmut Rosa's theory of social acceleration, the study develops the notion of *accelerated rent capitalism* to explain how digital-era informal wealth distorts local housing markets and compresses the survival possibilities of ordinary residents whose earnings operate within slower economic temporalities.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative case-study design rooted in urban political ethnography. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with tenants, landlords, housing agents, community leaders, students, and public sector workers in selected neighbourhoods within Osogbo, where rent inflation linked to cybercrime wealth is reportedly prevalent. The study also employed participant observation, informal conversations, key informant

interviews and digital ethnography through the analysis of online youth performances of wealth on social media platforms. In addition, relevant newspaper reports, housing advertisements, and rental records are analysed to trace changing rental patterns and discourses around preferred tenants. Thematic analysis is therefore used to identify recurring narratives around housing exclusion, temporality, morality, survival, and urban responsibility.

The paper contributes to emerging debates on responsible cities and contested housing futures by shifting attention away from the Global North and toward secondary African cities where digital economies, informality, and everyday survival intersect in complex ways. It introduces a novel analytical lens for understanding how illicit digital economies shape urban housing systems in contexts marked by weak regulation, unemployment, and deepening socio-economic precarity. Empirically, the study offers one of the first scholarly examinations of how cybercrime-induced rent inflation affects urban residents in contemporary Nigeria. Conceptually, it expands debates on socio-ecological housing conflicts by foregrounding temporality, not merely space or affordability, as a central axis of urban inequality. Ultimately, the paper argues that housing in Osogbo has become a battlefield between fast money and slow survival, where the ethical foundations of urban coexistence are increasingly under strain.

Keywords: Cybercrime economies; Housing inequality; Temporal politics; Urban informality; Osogbo Nigeria