6 The Labours of Waiting

The descriptions of both the situation and the activity of hustle that shape the workings of Accra's Neoplan Station I have provided thus far have a clear propensity for evoking the image of a place characterised by mesmerising levels of busyness. This image is surely not false. Everyday life in the station does abound with motion, noise, and often turmoil. Taken as a whole, the station can indeed be seen as an uninterrupted chain of events. There is always something happening somewhere inside its yard. Yet all this action notwithstanding, this image tends to be incomplete and in need of a more nuanced view. If we narrow our perspective down to the level of individual practices and experiences, we will see that life in the station – and the hustle that takes place there – involves recurring periods of inactivity, idleness, and boredom, most of which relate to prolonged periods of waiting. Passengers wait for the bus to fill and depart; drivers wait for their turn in the queue of departing vehicles; station workers wait for vehicles and passengers to come in, so that they can sell tickets; hawkers and other mobile workers wait for opportunities to peddle their goods and services, and so forth. Indeed, two of the most common expressions the station workers use for describing what they are doing are '*Metwɛn*' (I wait) and its rather euphemistic variation '*Metwɛn nkakra*' (I wait a little). People's hustling at the station is defined at least as much by venturesome activity as by the burdens of stasis and inactivity wedded to the wearing temporalities of waiting.

The abundance of waiting events at the station is to a large extent linked to the departure times of buses. Because of the 'fill and run' mode that structures the organisation of departures, the actual time of departure itself depends on different variables and is generally incalculable and unknown. Consequently, the period of waiting for departure tends to be unpredictable. On an experiential level, this unpredictability translates into temporal uncertainty. While drivers, passengers, station workers, and hawkers usually know *what* they are waiting for (departure, loading, sales opportunities, etc.), they do not know *when* it will happen. However, there are varying degrees of not knowing in respect of

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departure times and related actions. As I have shown in Chapter 5, such knowledge, or lack of knowledge, correlates with the degrees of tacit familiarity derived from perceptual engagements with the environment of the yard. The degree of tacit knowledge (and of rhythmic-temporal enskilment) is one factor that influences the ability to situate oneself within the station's temporal uncertainties in such a way as to minimise possible drawbacks, detriments, and 'delays' and to make one's hustle successful.

Another factor is the position one takes in relation to the station's waiting events. For instance, for the incoming passenger, the latitude for temporal situatedness of an opportune kind is acutely limited. At best, the passenger arrives just in time to get the last seat available, which means they have the shortest possible period of waiting. This, however, is largely a matter of chance and coincidence rather than choice. When a passenger arrives just a moment too late to get the last seat, the general incalculability of departure times may well (and regularly does) lead to a very long period spent waiting for the bus to depart; in some instances, this wait can last for a full day or even longer. The station hawkers, by contrast, whose periods of work are conditioned mainly by passengers' periods of waiting, have ample scope for aligning their position to the irregular temporalities of departures. The mobility constitutive of their trade enables them to omit 'slow' markets, or times with few potential customers, and choose 'fast' markets, when many potential customers are to be found inside the station.

What is shown by this exemplary contrast between the positioning of passengers and that of hawkers in relation to temporal uncertainties is that there are different ways in which station actors experience, endure, and try to accommodate or even capitalise on periods of waiting. On a larger scale, it indicates big differences with regard to how waiting for transport is governed and organised, especially when compared with public transport systems in which departures follow a schedule fixed according to clock time and where waiting time is (usually) predictable, especially in North Atlantic regions. While fixed departure times lend a sense of predictability, calculability, and thus regularity to people's work and travel habits, Neoplan's unscheduled departures translate into intermittent and irregular time patterns of work, travel, and, not least, waiting. In this respect, it is telling that public clocks, which have long since served as the ultimate instruments for rationing activity in travel hubs in North Atlantic regions, where, as Carlene Stephens (1989) frames it, they produce 'the most reliable time', are absent at Neoplan. Here, time appears utterly unreliable.

The temporal irregularity that underlies work relations at Neoplan implies relatively low degrees of productivity. Indeed, labour power

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and productive capacities appear to evaporate in the stop–go patterns of work. This is especially so when comparing Neoplan's 'porosity' of work time with the effectiveness ascribed to the structuring of work temporalities in industrial capitalism, as epitomised by the factory assembly line and the (European and North American) railway system – the prime centres of what E. P. Thompson (1967: 83) describes as the disciplinary calculus conveyed in an attitude of 'time-thrift'. The pacing of work and action at the Neoplan Station, by contrast, is pervaded by an abundance of what Giovanni Gasparini (1995: 29) calls 'interstitial time', the time of waiting. Standing outside the clock time rations of salaried work, the station workers are frequently caught in the dilemma of not being able to afford to wait for activity, while not being able to do more than wait for incentives to become active. On a more structural level, this dilemma means that they are inescapably enmeshed in the labour and exchange relations of a capitalist system, but positioned peripherally within the capitalist organisation of labour time and the distribution of income.

A related notion of irregularity looms large in descriptions, and definitions, of informal work and the informal economy at large (Feige 1990; Fields 2005 [1990]; ILO 2002; Portes et al. 1989). Here, the irregularity of temporal relations is usually described in terms of rather general claims about informal workers' irregular hours of operation and their similarly irregular (and low) incomes. What is not spelled out, however, is that irregular time patterns of work also inflict an irregularity of waiting time between periods of work; and that there are different ways in which people seek to accommodate themselves to the erratic temporalities of work labelled 'informal'. It is to these differences in the distribution, pace, and intervals of activity and inactivity, as well as of positionality and agency, that this chapter and Chapter 7 draw attention.

For the conceptual perspective I adopt in these chapters, I build on Laura Bear's (2014) notion of 'the labour in/of time', which she develops from Nancy Munn's (1992) analysis of temporal practices. What Bear principally aims at is to refine our understanding of human engagements with time not as mere 'shaping' (as Munn has it), but as 'an act of working … that entails experience[s] of friction, strain, and limits', as well as 'strenuous mediations' (Bear 2014: 20–1). The significance she ascribes to the human *labour* of time is set against taking at face value established temporal orders and routines without examining the creative and generative work that people invest in coordinating, tampering with, concealing, synchronising, and enduring disparate social rhythms and diverging expectations in respect of time. Following this approach to the social production, and laborious mediation, of temporality ultimately

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brings me to discuss what waiting means to the hustle at the Neoplan Station.

The task of empirically engaging with the different gradients of the practices, experiences, and effects of waiting poses a methodological challenge. As David Bissell (2007: 293) emphasises, 'events of waiting clearly do not lend themselves easily to re-narration'. Indeed, the minutiae of (non-)actions sliding into, out of, and alongside passivity appear to push common methods of empirical investigation and related presentational strategies to their limit. In both research practice and writing style, we tend to privilege *active* processes and subjects, while glossing over situations where 'nothing' happens. In this chapter, I attempt to stretch some of these limits. In so doing, I follow in particular Bissell's (ibid.: 293–4) suggestion that, in order to capture the elusive nature of mundane waiting experiences, one must adopt a 'slower-paced and non-judgemental' research practice and translate the results into more experimental presentational grammars.

Continuing in this spirit, I begin this chapter by way of a 'slow' ethnographic elaboration of the minutiae of the loading of a bus, in which I participated as a shadow passenger. Building on these descriptions, I consider the positions of the station actors in relation to the waiting temporalities at the station. In so doing, I produce a typology of waiting at the station by focusing on the perspectives of five groups whose practices and experiences evolve in line with the differently timed trajectories of – and intervals between – departures. In the latter half of this chapter, I discuss the practices of the passengers, drivers, and loading gangs, respectively. By zeroing in on the different grades of activity and inactivity that the practices of these three groups entail, I elaborate on experiences of having to endure waiting in temporal uncertainty.

In Chapter 7, I expand this waiting typology by considering two groups whose practices are related to the utilisation and exploitation of waiting, which, together, constitute what I term a *micro-economy of waiting*. To this end, I focus on the station's mobile sellers and on shadow passengers, whose work is a particularly vivid example of how waiting intersects with hustle.

Hurry Up Ghana Love!

On a Thursday morning in December 2011, I shadowed on a 46+1 seat coach loading for Kumasi. The loading gang included a bookman, three loading boys, and an initial number of five shadows (including an elderly female hawker, myself, and Alex, a full-time shadow who got me 'on board'). The driver and his mate were absent during most of the loading

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period. The bus we shadowed was a five-year-old KIA coach with no working air conditioning and a screen showing movies above the driver's seat. At the time we started loading, I counted nine other gangs loading for Kumasi in parallel. Eight gangs were loading smaller vehicles positioned closer to the main entrance and remained mostly out of our sight. The remaining gang started loading a coach just minutes after our loading began. Their coach equalled ours in seating capacity, condition, and facilities, and it was parked right opposite ours. I chose a window seat in the third row on the right, which enabled me to see the coach door and most of the activities of our loading boys and their main competitors across the yard.

The following is a shortened, slightly revised, and translated transcript of the notes I jotted down (in German) while shadowing. I expanded parts of the account after the loading ended (while I was shadowing in the next bus). The bracketed number behind the time designates the countdown of remaining empty seats (not counting the shadows).

9.00 (46): All shadows are seated, each one sits alone. The driver packs up some documents and disappears. The driver's mate turns on the screen: a Hong Kong action movie.

9.10 (46): The mate and I watch the movie. The four other shadows have fallen asleep.

9.20 (45): A first passenger: elderly woman (60-plus years) with a handbag as sole luggage. She buys the ticket in a well-practised manner; no bargain, no question. She takes the seat in front of me.

9.35 (44): A group of five passengers arrives in front of our bus. Our loading boys scramble for them with the gang from the other coach; long and loud discussions included. One of the passengers looks inside our (empty) vehicle; he directs the group to the other coach.

10.10 (40): A male passenger gets out of the bus. The bookman cautions him not to walk off. The passenger buys water from a passing hawker and re-enters the bus. No comment on the bookman's cautioning.

10.30 (37): So far, all passengers have arrived individually and all have chosen separate window seats.

10.40 (36): The bookman chases after two of the loading boys who have disappeared behind the bus (smoking?).

10.55 (35): The bookman has organised two additional shadows. He accompanies them to their seats and wakes up the other shadows by poking them. The female shadow

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grumbles at him. The 'real' passengers pay no attention to that. All appear in a state of doze; apathy reigns. Meanwhile, traffic in the yard is bustling. I count about two dozen departures within the last ten minutes. It is the Christmas period after all. But that is worlds apart from what's going on inside our bus.

11.10 (34): The movie ended some ten minutes ago. The stereo produces a rasping sound. A female passenger seated in the back shouts out 'mate'. No reaction (the mate ignores her). Half a minute later she shouts again, now calling 'driver'. The mate glances at her. She calls on him snippily, shouting 'TV'. The mate walks to the console reluctantly and starts the same movie again. He gets out of the bus. The woman appears content. This was the first notable social interaction inside our bus since we started loading.

11.25 (32): The fifteenth passenger takes the last available window seat (except one single window seat next to the driver, which is usually given to the very last passenger). The shadows 'pair up' and vacate more window seats. Alex joins me. The female shadow remains at her place alone. Some of the passengers seem to eye the swapping of seats sceptically. But all remain silent.

11.50 (28): The passengers continue trickling in one by one. The loading boys appear discouraged by the low inflow. The bookman incites them to scout for passengers. But his incitements appear diffident, almost indifferent. Most of the time, all four of them hang around idly at the bus door. The kind of quiescence appears to affect the competition between the two coach-loading gangs: it has stalled. The bookman of the other gang rests (sleeps?) in the driver's seat; his loading boys squat in the shadow of the bus.

12.05 (24): Four schoolgirls have boarded our bus. They giggle as the loading boys push each other around in front of their windows. As the boys disappear, they whisper secretly for a short while and then stop talking. Their silence underlines the general taciturnity inside our bus, all movie noises notwithstanding. Even the sporadic window transactions with a hawker are performed with a minimum of words or no words at all. One male passenger simply holds a coin out of the window; as a water-selling hawker approaches him, asking '*Nsuo*?' (water), he drops the coin and grabs a sachet.

12.15 (24): The Hong Kong movie ends for the second time. One of the shadows turns off the screen. No more movies for

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now. No reactions from the passengers. No signs of the mate or the driver.

12.25 (24): Every now and then, a loading boy shouts out 'Kumasi, Kumasi!' This incites the loading boys of the other gang to shout out their direction as well, resulting in a kind of echo of 'Kumasi, Kumasi' shouts.

12.40 (23): The heat inside the bus feels airless and increasingly oppressive. I am covered in sweat, Alex too. I see thick beads of sweat rolling down the neck of the woman in front of me. She sits firm. I struggle against progressing fatigue. Somebody snores.

13.10 (20): Hawkers circle our bus quietly. They peek at the seated passengers one by one. When they detect some movement inside the bus, the hawkers pause and try making eye contact. Goods that pass my window in order of appearance: soaps and shower cream; bottled water; sachet water; wristwatches; fried rice; perfumes; plantain chips; sachet water; bread; bread (again); toothpaste and toothbrushes; boiled eggs; detergents; apples; sack of rice (5kg); chewing gum; sachet water; oranges; phone credits; meat pies; energy drinks; sachet water; photo albums.

13.20 (18): I keep myself awake by engaging Alex in a discussion about football. Throughout, we keep up the pretence of two strangers making small talk. Some of the passengers seem to listen attentively, but no one joins in our conversation.

13.25 (17): A passenger receives a phone call. This is the first phone call since we started loading. More than four hours, by now almost 30 people, one single call. What are the odds? I wonder whether this group of passengers just happens to be an exceptionally uncommunicative bunch. Perhaps there were other calls earlier that I did not hear? The young man on the phone appears to be struggling to keep his voice low.

13.30 (16): Suddenly, three more passengers talk on their phones. Alex translates to me the phone conversation of a young male passenger (with his girlfriend or wife, we reckon): 'When will you arrive? – I don't know, sweetie. We haven't departed. But I believe we will depart soon. – How soon? – I don't know. – Make them depart faster. – Yes, darling, I try.' Two men seated behind us laugh at Alex's impersonation. Alex turns around, rebuking: 'This is no laughing matter. This is hurry up Ghana love!' The two men laugh even louder.

13.40 (16): For a short while, the atmosphere inside our bus became lively, as if in growing anticipation. Passengers began

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chatting with each other. Somebody shouted for the driver; sporadic laughter. Then, for no apparent reason, the voices calmed down. Silence again.

14.05 (13): As the thirty-third passenger enters, the number of remaining empty seats (6) is lower than the number of seated shadows (7). The first shadow should disembark now. But all shadows remain seated. I for my part would rather not leave my seat at this moment. I sense a disconcerting mixture of numbness, frustration, and tension. But I cannot decide whether this concerns my state of mind only or the general atmosphere inside our bus, or both.

14.30 (10): Three more passengers have entered the bus. Still no shadow has moved out. Only three seats remain empty. The bookman enters the bus, looks around, and leaves again without giving any sign to the shadows, however subtle.

14.50 (10): The loading boys from the other coach start announcing the last remaining seat, shouting out 'Kumasi last seat, last seat!' Their calling triggers immediate commotion inside our bus. Some five passengers from the front rows rush to the door and assault the bookman. More passengers follow. They want to return their tickets and board the other bus. The bookman tries to ignore their onslaught and the many accompanying insults. Alex directs my attention to a loading boy from the other coach who approaches the group while soliciting that alleged last ticket. 'This is pure provocation,' Alex explains with a sense of amusement. He estimates that the other gang has at least five more tickets available for sale, probably more. About half of the passengers have now stepped out of our bus. Four shadows use the opportunity and try to make off. Some passengers notice their escape and cry out in dismay. One passenger tries to grab a fleeing shadow, another even tries running after them. Thereafter, the passengers' fury seems to shift from accusing the bookman of 'fraud' (*nsisi*) and 'thieving' to accusing him of causing 'delay' (expressed in English throughout). The mob of angry passengers includes men and women, young and old. Curiously, some of the most enraged passengers have entered our bus just recently. The woman who entered first, some five hours ago, remains in her seat quietly and impassive throughout.

15.00 (8): It takes a long time for the passengers to take their seats again. Many continue cursing indignantly. A (Francophone?) woman shouts repeatedly at the bookman:

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'Go sell tickets! Go do your work!' But they all sit down again. The bookman and loading boys continue their ticket-selling efforts unimpressed, and they sell two tickets. Alex appears unbent. I feel trapped.

15.25 (6): Our female shadow disembarks and re-enters about five minutes later, now equipped with a large bowl and peddling. It is her prerogative to sell inside the bus. I expected her change of roles to cause some upset among the passengers, but she actually makes some good sales. First, she sells biscuits (this being her own trade). Then she re-enters three more times, selling cold drinks, fried rice, and meat pies (sold on commission for other hawkers). All passengers seem to be geared to departure. They buy without any apparent signs of indignation.

15.30 (3): Three new passengers enter. Alex prods me. For a moment, I wait for Alex to do something. He does not. I try getting up unobtrusively. I mumble something about having to go to the toilet before departure. I exit the bus. Alex follows suit. Together, we disappear behind the next row of vehicles and walk straight to the toilets.

I am exhausted and excited. I share a smoke with Alex and we return to the site some 15 minutes later. We see a preacher entering our departing bus. The other Kumasi-bound coach is still in place and loading. We linger for ten minutes. Alex collects his chop money from the bookman. A new coach parks in the empty spot. We enter it for our next shadowing exercise.

Six and a Half Hours, Give or Take

The loading of buses at Neoplan varies greatly in respect of the time spent waiting for departure and the intensity of activities and interactions of those who wait.[1] There are a number of identifiable factors that influence the length of the loading time: the seating capacity of the bus; its age, its condition, its facilities, and the ticket price; its position in the yard, particularly in relation to the position of other buses loading for the

[1] Waiting for departure at the Neoplan Station may last for up to a full day, but this is nothing compared to waiting in earlier times. In the early 1960s, for example, Hill (1984: 221) observed the organisation of departures from Accra's Bawku Station, which was one of the city's main stations at that time, noting that '[u]nder the shift system, which ensures that lorries are reasonably well filled, a lorry might wait here for six days before it is permitted to depart'.

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same destination; the time of day and the time of year; current meteorological conditions (especially rain or its absence); the levels of passenger inflow and hence of demand; the level of competition for the destination and the general availability of buses at the time of loading, hence the level of supply; and the skills, zest, and general 'performance' of the loading gang.

Knowledge of these factors, however, is a far cry from understanding – let along predicting – how the complexity of their interrelatedness is played out in practice. Large coaches frequently fill up much faster than small vans; vehicles that are (or appear to be) almost ready for departure may still have to wait for many hours before the last few seats are taken; vehicles that have remained empty for hours on end may fill up in an instant. Much of this seeming randomness follows from the general unpredictability of passengers' preferences and, not least, of the often heavily fluctuating numbers of incoming passengers. For many passengers, the expected promptness of departure is only one among various factors they weigh up before boarding a vehicle. Variables such as price, comfort, (assumed) safety, and reliability of the bus (or the driver), as well as 'gut decisions', frequently play a role as well. Neoplan's competition-driven involution and the number of vehicles loading in parallel add a significant element of complexity to these decision-making processes, not least by increasing available choices. The point is that, overall, temporal uncertainty is much more decisive for the practices, experiences, and affective relations that take shape during the loading of a bus than whatever kind of regularity one might try to deduce from the combination of identifiable factors that influence loading. And it is this shaping of practice, experience, and affect through temporal uncertainty that the above account of the loading of the 46+1 seat coach to Kumasi primarily demonstrates.

The description of this loading – and waiting – experience lasting six and a half hours is, of course, of limited representational value. My choice of this particular loading event (out of more than a hundred vehicles I shadowed) followed pragmatic reasons. On the one hand, this was one of my first full shadowing shifts. As I was still far from having an established routine, I could draw on a heightened and sustained level of attentiveness. Because of the physically and mentally debilitating nature of shadowing work, this attentiveness started decreasing significantly soon afterwards. On the other hand, the relatively spacious and elevated seating inside the coach provides a better opportunity for observing and writing notes than the cramped seating arrangements inside smaller buses (where I mostly shadowed), where one's view is usually obstructed and writing is exceedingly difficult.

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In this sense, the 'sample' presented here was neither fully random nor really systematic. My intention, however, is not to construct a kind of law regarding the parameters of waiting for departure, but, paraphrasing Geertz (1973: 5), to approximate some of the meanings waiting at the station evokes for those who wait. For this interpretative endeavour, the description of the loading of the Kumasi coach is of value in two main respects. First, it makes the experience of waiting for departure more tangible than simply stating that people have to wait for nearly seven hours for the bus to depart – not least by reproducing, in written form, some of the tediousness implied in the experience of an indeterminate hiatus before departure. Second, it provides initial empirical material for further explicating and substantiating the different practices and experiences related to the temporal trajectories of waiting at the station, which constitute an elementary quality of the station hustle as both situation and activity.

Passengers

In the overall organisation of waiting at the station, the position of the passenger involves a high degree of dependency and passivity. Their agency to influence the time they have to wait for departure is basically limited to the time *before* buying a ticket and boarding a bus. This is a matter of, first, longer-term timing – in that the passenger times his or her journey in such a way as to avoid particularly busy and particularly quiet periods of travel; and second, of impromptu choice – in that the passenger chooses the vehicle that promises to fill up fastest, given that choices are available. Because of the complexity of other factors on which the departure is contingent, even the seemingly best-timed journey in the best-chosen vehicle can turn into a 'temporal deadlock'.

Once the ticket has been paid for, the agency of the passenger reduces drastically. This becomes obvious in the ways in which loading gang members change their attitude to passengers. Before the purchase, conduct is usually ruled by a combination of allure, support, often persistent (at times even aggressive) pledge, and persuasion, as well as a great deal of heedfulness. From the moment the ticket has been paid for, these courtesies end abruptly. Passengers will be asked to find a seat. Henceforth, every seated passenger is treated with equal disregard. Complaints about the lack of comfort or queries about departure times are shrugged off with vague answers or simply ignored. A particular kind of egalitarian neglect sets in. Here, status-related differentiations in waiting amenities, or the lack thereof, that set apart 'plebeian' from

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'business' and 'first-class' travellers in North Atlantic travel hubs, airports in particular, are largely absent.[2]

One reason for this sudden change of conduct relates to the (often unwritten) rule not to refund tickets, which is strictly observed by all of Neoplan's branches.[3] Once the ticket has been sold, the gang is beyond blame, at least according to Neoplan's 'practical norms' (Olivier de Sardan 2015). Another reason relates to the change of dependencies and of capacities to exercise agency and, ultimately, power, which is tantamount to a change of position as regards waiting relations. As the fare money changes hands, the agency to influence the time of departure shifts from passenger to gang. Before, it was the gang that had to wait for the passenger to come in; henceforth, the passenger can 'only wait' for the gang to act.[4]

The sense of deprivation following this ending of the capacity to act is exacerbated by the state of immobility into which passengers are forced. After purchasing their tickets, passengers are obliged to remain seated inside the bus throughout the loading period (and obviously also after departure). Generally, passengers do not dispute this unwritten and longstanding rule-cum-practical norm, which is practised in all stations in Ghana (except for the formalised and clock time-scheduled boarding system at the State Transport Corporation terminals), and which also appears to be common in other West African settings (Lewis 1970: 101; Ndiaye and Tremblay 2009: 506–7; Okpara 1988: 333).[5] Passengers who leave the bus during loading usually state a clear reason (e.g. a need to go to the toilet, make a brief purchase, or pray) and they do so at their own peril. When somebody tries to disembark without stating any urgent need, the gang will vehemently urge the passenger to remain seated, usually by threatening to depart without him or her but with the loaded luggage. Sometimes, gang members make their threat concrete by

[2] The relative seating comfort provided by the larger and more expensive coaches (many of which are decorated with a 'VIP' or even 'VVIP' label on the side panel) is offset by the generally much longer periods that the loading of the coaches entails in comparison to the cramped seating in smaller vans.

[3] In exceptional cases, a bookman might agree to a refund if a new buyer is found quickly, or the passenger might manage to resell the ticket on his or her own.

[4] There are two exceptions to this. First, a passenger may precipitate a faster departure by paying for the remaining empty seats; people who consider that option are usually Western tourists. Second, a driver may decide to depart despite not being fully loaded. If he chooses to do so, however, he needs to compensate the loading gang for their lost share of ticket sales.

[5] In more rural settings, passengers will usually be allowed to wait outside the loading vehicle. Their movement, however, is similarly restricted, since they need to stay close to the vehicle throughout the loading process in order not to miss the departure.

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closing the doors of the bus. The main reason for the imperative to remain seated is that the gang does not want to 'waste time' by having to wait for passengers loitering about and that the driver wants to (and ultimately will) depart the moment the bus is full. Another reason is the competitive loading of buses, in which a filled bus is a competitive advantage and signals readiness for departure (this being the *raison d'être* of shadows). The seating rule is practised irrespective of whether or not the bus is being loaded in competition, and of whether it is already quite full (and 'almost' ready for departure) or still fairly empty. Here, custom dictates practice invariably, overruling any appeal from a passenger.

In consequence, the activities of passengers while waiting inside the bus are limited by their relative bodily stillness. The mobile technologies provided either by the bus company (movies shown on the mounted flat-screen monitors or radio broadcasts) or by the passengers themselves (e.g. mobile phones) serve as one source of diversion. Talking to fellow passengers, either 'real' ones or shadows, serves as another way of killing time. The main waiting *activity* undertaken by passengers, however, depends on hawkers and other mobile service providers, who proffer merchandise and services throughout the loading procedure. (In Chapter 7, I discuss the practicalities of this inverse form of 'window shopping' in relation to the way in which hawkers adapt to the passengers' stationary waiting.) From the perspective of the passenger, this comes in three main forms: (1) observing hawkers and scanning the goods that pass by the window; (2) making purchases, which may range from the occasional drink or food item for immediate consumption to more substantial provisions for the journey, or even a genuine 'shopping spree' during which passengers buy a range of durables; and (3) trying to avert one's gaze and ignore the many implicit and explicit offers made by hawkers, which can often amount to a demanding active engagement in itself.

This third mode of actively trying *not* to engage in interaction with the station sellers usually becomes dominant as waiting for departure exceeds the expected duration. This varies significantly, depending on each passenger's individual temporal bias and expectation, as well as on factors such as destination, number of seats, or time of day. Yet, while there is no objective way of measuring when this moment is reached, it can usually be recognised from the growing reluctance of passengers to interact, which tends to intensify through the collective waiting situation inside the bus. Hence my repeatedly expressed astonishment at the prevailing silence and atmosphere of 'apathy' during the loading of the Kumasi bus described above.

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Roadside Rage and Exultation

Another form of allusion to overly strained patience (*boasɔ* in Twi) can be found in the phrases '*mayɛ basaa*' and '*me ho yɛ basaa*', which are uttered frequently by passengers who are seated inside a bus for long periods. Both phrases basically mean 'I am bored'. They also imply a state of mental and physical dilemma, 'dryness', and confusion (*basaa*), which, by definition, necessitates an escape from this very state. These expressions of (bodily and mental) unease – fuelled by forced immobility and the general feeling of temporal uncertainty due to a lack of knowledge (or reliable information) about the time of departure – regularly herald more eruptive expressions of frustration, indignation, anger, and aggression. These outbursts, which usually involve several passengers at once, include rather emotive manifestations (tears, sobbing) as well as verbal (cursing, insulting) and physical assaults. In this regard, the incident described above of the group of angry passengers accusing and attacking the gang and chasing after the shadows is no exception. Similar scenes can be observed at the station on a regular basis. This recurrent manifestation of frustration-turned-fury can be aptly described as a site-specific form of road*side* rage.

Road rage, which is the notion I expand on here, describes particularly aggressive behaviour *on the road*, in which 'an angry driver disregards the usual notions of auto-civility and gives way to reckless and aggressive manoeuvres or chasing another car driver who is seen as perpetrator of some driving infraction or disrespectful gesture' (Featherstone 2004: 14). A central element in the enactment of road rage is the perception of the (private) vehicle as a 'cocoon of glass and metal' (Urry 2004: 31), which conveys to the driver a heightened sense of both power and invincibility. In the constitution of roadside rage at the station, the 'cocoon', usually a bus, manifests itself not as a protective shield but as a trap.[6] The feeling of being trapped effectuates a heightened sense of powerlessness and vulnerability, which here is further intensified by the fact that one is not at the wheel, hence not in control. As Maree Pardy (2009: 207–8) notes, the feeling of being stuck in waiting is prone to induce a recursiveness of frustration and rage.

As in cases of road rage, the anger of the passengers is directed at an alleged perpetrator, somebody who is to blame for their being 'stuck'. This is either the gang or an unmasked shadow. Especially telling are accusations of causing 'delay', which are among the most insistent forms

[6] As Michael (2001: 59) notes, road rage may also be caused by the experience of being trapped inside the car due to traffic jams or roadworks.

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by which passengers blame the gang and shadows. In Neoplan's non-scheduled organisation of departures, there is no point in speaking of 'late departures'. If anything, delays are systemic. Here, the accusation of delay follows a scapegoat mechanism in the sense that somebody is to blame for the troubles caused by temporally indeterminate departures, even though both gang and shadows are just as bent on an expeditious departure as the passengers.

While scapegoating serves as a mechanism of psychological relief for the passengers, it also strengthens a sense of bonding or even community among them. The effects of this bonding become particularly palpable in the moments after the last seats have been taken and when the bus is just about to depart. Especially after loading for long-distance destinations, a process that tends to last for many hours, these moments regularly give rise to exultation and applause. Reminiscent of a mundane form of collective effervescence (Durkheim 2001), these group expressions of excitement, joy, relief, and even triumph are clearly founded on the preceding collectively endured torment of waiting in temporal uncertainty. In this sense, the 'community of fate' or *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* that Gabriel Klaeger (2009: 220) ascribes to Ghanaian 'passenger-members' who together endure the 'hardships of travelling in a crammed vehicle and often on a rough road' may emerge already while waiting for departure and thus well before hitting the (rough) road. The actual departure, then, only initiates the next period of waiting: waiting for arrival.

Drivers

When drivers wait for departure, this is structurally similar to how passengers wait. Drivers, too, depend on the inflow of passengers and the filling of the bus. And, like the passengers, they have little scope for influencing the length of time they have to wait. There are also significant differences between the two groups in terms of the duration of waiting, approximate knowledge about the time of waiting, and the ability to engage in other activities, and hence disengage from the quiescence of waiting. Whereas drivers have to wait (much) longer than passengers, they also have a clearer idea of how long they will have to wait and they are relatively free to move about, outside the vehicle, while waiting (which is why, in the above description, the driver was virtually absent).

It is extremely rare for a waiting driver to fall prey to the affective vicissitudes of impatience and its collaterals – above all, roadside rage. On the face of it, this might seem not particularly surprising. After all, waiting is an integral part of their everyday work. Still, given the often agonising lengths of time drivers have to wait for their turn to go 'on

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scale' – which, in economic terms, is unaccounted for and thus lost time – the ability of most drivers to cope with recurrent periods of quiescence and remain patient appears extraordinary.

The 'remarkable talent for waiting' (Jordan 1978: 37) and patience as a 'professional obligation' (Hart 2016: 70) of Ghana's commercial drivers have been highlighted in earlier studies, especially in relation to the apparent contrast between this and their often reckless and impatient speeding when on the road.[7] James Jordan, for instance, describes this contrast as being characterised by the drivers' 'conviviality, sociability, and person-oriented interaction' while waiting for departure, whereas, while driving, they take 'a contractual perspective on interaction and the profit-motive as a guide' (Jordan 1978: 31). Jordan's argument that the drivers practise 'role segregation for fun and profit', as the title of his work has it, certainly provides some interesting insights into their distinct behaviours inside the station and on the road. The implied dichotomy, however, appears somewhat too sharply constructed, especially with regard to the supposed 'fun' of waiting for departure, which, in my experience of the drivers' compulsory hiatus at the station, is often not funny at all.

Klaeger (2014) provides a more substantial (and also more convincing) analysis of this phenomenon by framing drivers' (impatient) speeding and (patient) waiting not as two 'incompatible roles' (Jordan 1978: 31), but as alternating modes of engagement with an 'intricate economy of speed' (Klaeger 2014: 17). This comprises both a 'need for speed' and a need for slowness and standstill. In this view, waiting (as non-movement) is not opposed to movement and speed but its prerequisite. It is, as Klaeger (ibid.: 142) remarks, not a form of mere 'timepass', but a 'necessary phase of passing from suffering to success, which involves struggling – doing "foolish work", "managing" – and often actively "forcing"'.

The active 'forcing' referred to by Klaeger pertains mainly to drivers' (illegal) practice of loading passengers along the road (known as 'sweeping' or 'overlapping'), and not loading at the station. Inside the station, there is little scope for 'forcing' an early departure. A driver may in fact choose to depart before his vehicle is fully loaded. This option, however, is used in very exceptional cases only: for example, when the loading has

[7] The remarkable patience of Ghana's commercial drivers has also attracted praise in popular songs. For example, the chorus of the 1983 release '*Adwuma Yi Ye Den*' (This Work Is Hard) by highlife musician Nana Ampadu goes as follows: 'This work is hard / It requires patience / Drivers, I sympathize with you / Sympathy to you all' (transcription and translation reproduced from Hart 2011: 307–10).

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come to a standstill for what the driver and the gang perceive as an overly long period of time.[8] Even in such cases, the gang will insist on receiving its full share of the ticket sales by deducting the shortfall from the driver's share. Another form of 'forcing' is related in stories about drivers who are said to assess their waiting time in such a precise manner that, after lining up in the queue of waiting vehicles at the station, they secretly (and contrary to the branch statutes) leave to 'sweep' the road for passengers on a short-distance trip and then return to the station on time for their turn to go on scale. As this practice would imply virtuosity in reckoning the temporal uncertainties not only of loading times at the station but also of traffic on the road, it is either extremely rare or, more likely, mere lorry park lore.[9]

Apart from the rare exceptions of early departures, and the rather improbable practice of illicit sweepings, the driver has to wait, first, for his turn in the queue of loading vehicles (fixed by the roster according to the 'first come, first served' rule), and second, for the filling of his vehicle (in accordance with the 'fill and run' principle). This form of waiting appears to involve much struggling, and at times even suffering. Yet, as I argue, it is above all about *managing* waiting time in such a way as to maintain a balance between active and passive engagements and to alleviate the symptoms arising from the uncertainty of indeterminate departure. For most of the drivers I met at the Neoplan Station, this management meant structuring their waiting period according to highly routinised (even ritualised) procedures, the contours of which I will outline by portraying the station routines of owner-driver Atsu.

Atsu: The Paucity of Pause

Thirty-nine-year-old Atsu has been working as a lorry driver for 15 years, mainly on the Accra–Kumasi route. After investing in a 'fine 207' (Benz minibus) four years ago, he switched to plying the routes to Bekwai and Obuasi, located south of Kumasi, which he chose because of the relative lack of competition on them. He regularly makes three trips daily, each lasting about five hours, and he usually works throughout the week apart from Sundays. Frequently, however, he gets stranded in Obuasi on Saturday evenings and then has to make yet another trip back home on

[8] The badly timed and, in the end, incomplete loading of the large coach by the station novice Eric, as related in Chapter 5, is one example of such exceptions.

[9] Many drivers, however, combine these two modes in that they alternate between loading at the station and sweeping the road, particularly during times when the queues of vehicles waiting to load at the station are excessively long. But these modes of loading are performed separately, not simultaneously.

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Sunday. As he put it: 'I work a lot and I earn a lot.' He has a wife and two children, for whom he has built a two-room bungalow in the Accra suburb of Madina. Because of his tight work schedule, he normally sees his family on Sundays only.

Atsu's wait for departure begins with his arrival at Neoplan. Apart from Monday mornings, his arrival marks the completion of a 'full trip' (i.e. a round trip between Accra and Obuasi/Bekwai). Upon arrival, he first registers with the branch office and confirms his position in the roster. Depending on his position in the line of vehicles waiting for departure (and on the number of vehicles anticipated to load in parallel), he either parks the vehicle inside the station right away (if parking space is available) or, if he expects his waiting time before loading to be rather long, he sends his vehicle to one of the nearby car wash places. For other drivers who hire mates, these short manoeuvres are usually the mate's task, who thus gets the chance to gain driving experience.

Next, he looks for his branch colleagues to exchange news with them from and about the road and the sister stations in Obuasi and Bekwai. This kind of informal traffic reporting about road conditions, jams, accidents, police controls, and road blocks is especially important in relation to long-distance routes. Here, the main meeting spot for drivers and branch members serves as a communications centre of sorts; in the case of Atsu's branch, the meeting place is a bench in front of the branch office. Upon arrival, he updates his colleagues about the situation on the road, and later, before departure, he obtains further updates himself. More often than not, this exchange of traffic news is a mere formality. Especially when Atsu has just returned from the road, it yields no new information for him. Still, if he finds the bench empty, he routinely postpones his departure and first looks for some branch worker able to provide him with an update.

The sharing of traffic information then gives way to more informal, yet equally routinised, talk. Besides the common formalities of inquiring about other people's families and health, this necessarily comprises the trading of rumours and jokes, thus enacting what Jordan (1978: 31) describes as Ghanaian drivers' 'must' to 'preserve and practice occupational colleagueship'. Curiously, the set of actions involved in the formalised and usually lengthy exchange of greetings, jokes, and rumours between Atsu and the other drivers is restaged every time he returns to the station, even if he returns twice during the same day. Besides the proverbial greeting culture of the Akan, the main reason for this reiteration of greeting formalities (along with the retelling of the same rumours and jokes) is the general fluctuation of the people he encounters upon

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arrival, as the group comprises a different mix of branch workers and fellow drivers each time.

As the period of waiting for departure is usually the only time he spends at the station, he regularly attends during this time to business-related appointments with representatives of the office staff, as well as vehicle-related talks with the station master, TO, chief driver, and his mechanic. Notwithstanding that these appointments and talks, and the forms of socialising they necessarily comprise, include friendships and 'conviviality', as Jordan (1978: 31) would frame it, by and large they can be defined as relating to professional matters.

In addition, Atsu also looks after what can be described as 'private' matters. These include rather trivial issues, such as the paying of his 'daily *susu*' (contribution to a savings group), his bi-weekly lottery ticket, and the regular bets he makes on football matches. Towards the end of the week, he does some gift shopping and runs errands for his wife and children at home. But these 'private matters' also involve more profound, and often also more intimate, engagements.

On the one hand, many drivers serve their kin as brokers to get them into some of the ancillary station trades, mainly hawking and vending. More often than not, there will be a wife, sister, sister-in-law, niece, or some other relative, usually young and female, whom the driver has helped to become established as a trader in or near the station. In Atsu's case, these are the children of his wife's older sister, a nephew- and niece-in-law. The boy works as an apprentice in the nearby garage of a befriended mechanic. For the girl, he has arranged a position as a cook/maid in one of the larger eateries inside Neoplan. As this form of brokerage entails responsibilities, he looks after both of them on a regular basis.

The majority of Neoplan's drivers usually have further commitments to other station-based workers, female vendors in particular, which may be enacted in the form of flirtations or 'sweet talk' (see Chapter 1). One driver explained to me his profession's purported penchant for flirtations by referring to, as he termed it, 'the sailor effect' – the popular belief about seafarers having a wife in every port of call. Stories about drivers' extramarital affairs (and children) are indeed a staple topic of station gossip. Yet these usually allude to women who work along the driver's route, and not to women inside the station.[10] Inside the station, these relationships – nourished by way of compliments, coquetries, and

[10] This topic is dealt with from a different angle in the extensive literature on the role of commercial drivers in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Africa (for an overview, see Marck 1999).

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occasional gifts – serve the rather pragmatic purpose of securing social patronage by strengthening one's ties within the station community. Atsu labels these relationships, and the effortful engagements they imply, as 'social girlfriending'. Within Neoplan's station community, he has an extensive network of such 'social girlfriends', many of whom he visits at least once a day.

The point is that, although a driver usually has to endure prolonged periods of waiting for departure, his commitments to both professional and 'private' matters and relationships tend to be immensely time consuming and they regularly keep him active throughout the waiting period at the station. Besides providing distraction from the enforced inactivity of waiting – along with the implied sense of time lost to hiatus – these engagements also serve as a necessary preparation for the upcoming departure and enable the driver to consolidate his position within the station communities.

What constitutes the less obvious downside of drivers' *active* waiting routines is that they are also in urgent need of rest, relaxation, and sleep, especially after driving on a long and thus taxing route. In this regard, it is by no means a given that the many and often lengthy discussions a driver engages in (or has to engage in) with other station workers are simply mundane forms of killing waiting time through conversation. For the tired driver, they are in fact likely to turn into a burden. As Atsu's waiting time before departure at Neoplan usually lasts between two and five hours, the many relationships he maintains frequently prevent him from getting any rest at all, especially when the loading proceeds quickly. I regularly observed situations in which, after returning from Obuasi and Bekwai, he got back on the road without taking any substantial break.

In this sense, drivers' 'struggling' through the period of waiting for departure at the station means not only seeking distraction from passivity and boredom *in activity*, but necessarily also *actively seeking passivity* in the form of rest. To paraphrase Robert Snow and Dennis Brissett (1986), pause is an essential element of the driver's well-being. Consequently, the ways in which a driver 'suffers' through waiting time follow not only from the enforced standstill of his vehicle; in fact, a driver regularly also suffers due to a lack of repose. Other factors add to this paucity of pause, including the noise levels, the general absence of appropriate facilities for sleep,[11] and the lack of precise knowledge about how much time remains before departure. Ultimately, for the tired driver, the uncertainty

[11] The driver's vehicle is only of limited use here, because a driver sleeping in his seat is likely to raise suspicion on the part of potential passengers, who might consider him too tired to transport them safely.

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resulting from indeterminate departure times is likely to be experienced as a source of anguish or even torment – not because it exhausts his patience, but because it threatens to restrict his ability to recover.

Coming back to Atsu, it was only when I visited him at the sister station in Obuasi that I came to understand how he manages to recover, and to sleep. He had arranged a room for himself in an hourly hotel adjacent to the station, in which he went to sleep after every other arrival and before getting on scale again. More significant than this sleeping arrangement, however, was that while in Obuasi he deliberately refrained from socialising with the station workers. He had established his routines there as well. But, unlike in Accra, few people appeared to know him and even fewer approached him. This social distance provided him with a place of 'comfortable quiescence' (Bissell 2009b: 430).

Loading Gangs

The loading gangs do not wait for departure but work towards it. They, too, encounter periods of waiting in the sense of interstitial time characterised by enforced inactivity. But the interstices they have to deal with are far more porous and compartmentalised than those of passengers and drivers. Passengers and drivers face a temporal horizon that is divided between a period before the awaited event (the departure) and a period after it (the journey). For them, the time of waiting at the station is structured sequentially in that it is made up of a consecutive series of events, which, eventually, lead to closure. In this sense, it is principally of a linear kind and comprises one main period of waiting during which their capacity to act is temporally deferred. It is this sequential structuring of a relatively bounded waiting period that allowed the reconstruction of the passengers' and drivers' practices presented in the previous two sections. Reconstructing the gangs' waiting practices in a similar fashion would, for the most part, be a vain endeavour.

The temporal horizon of the gangs is marked by highly intermittent, erratic work patterns. Determined mainly by the inflow of passengers, which comes in fits and starts, their temporal routine is enmeshed in recurrent switching between active engagements, when passengers come in, and inactivity, when no passengers come in. Their agentive capacity is not put on relative hold during one continuous waiting period, but is subject to a plurality of intermittent discontinuations of work activity throughout their shifts. Like passengers and drivers, the gangs depend on and care about the expeditious loading and departure of the buses, not least because their income depends on the number of seats and buses they prepare for departure. Yet their caring differs in that it is geared less

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towards the fast filling of a single bus and more towards the consecutive selling of tickets for as many buses as possible. This different weighting of the relation between departure(s), work, and wait for the gangs, on the one hand, and between the different embodiments of activity and inactivity the practice of loading buses entails from their perspective, on the other hand, is key to understanding how they position themselves within Neoplan's temporal uncertainties. This positioning within the swaying timeframes of action and inaction, in turn, reveals an important element of what constitutes their hustling at the station: namely, that hustle – as a particular logic of economic activity and orientation – involves a great deal of enforced inactivity, as well as of pressures resulting from not being able to act upon one's situation.

While switching between passive and active engagements characterises the work of all gangs, it varies in intensity and frequency. The contours of this variety have oozed out of the descriptions of the work practices of particular gang members given in preceding chapters. Especially telling is the contrast between the Lagos branch's handyman Mohammed and the adroit bookman Rasford at the Kumasi branch (Chapter 4). Mohammed's non-competitive and low-frequency loading of Lagos vehicles allows for a passive orientation in that he has no need to do more than wait for passengers. More often than not, he sits down during periods when no passengers are coming in and becomes active only when his services are in demand, for which passengers regularly have to wake him up. Here, passivity and patience are the rule rather than the exception.

In the competitive setting of high-frequency Kumasi departures in which Rasford works, waiting passively for passengers would be self-defeating, especially in commercial terms. Yet, frequently, he cannot do more than wait for them to come in. While waiting for passengers, and thus activity and action, Rasford rarely sits down. Even during periods when there is no evident demand for action – in the dead of night, for instance – his waiting is still marked by 'vigilant attentiveness' (Bournes and Mitchell 2002: 62). He claims that he never sleeps during the 24-hour shifts he works. For Rasford, passivity is the exception that tests both the rule and his patience.

The cases of Mohammed and Rasford represent two extremes in the overall spectrum of passive and active orientations adopted by Neoplan's gangs when their work is brought to a halt. Here, the evocative descriptions of waiting as 'passive activity' (Crapanzano 1985: 45) and 'active passivity' (Hage 2009: 2), as presented in anthropological theorisations of waiting, can be taken as two operational definitions. In the case under discussion, the first means *having to wait passively for activity*, as in

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Mohammed's case; the second defines an alignment towards waiting time marked by a form of *passivity that is utterly active*, as in the case of Rasford.

The different ways in which Mohammed and Rasford accommodate and endure periods of waiting can be summarised in the following rule: the more intense the levels of demand and competition on the route of a gang, the more likely are its members to remain in a state of alertness and watchfulness during phases when there is a hiatus in work (hence, active passivity); and, conversely, the lower the levels of overall demand and competition (if any), the higher the chances that they will resort to passivity whenever there is a discontinuation of work (hence, passive activity).

While the variable of competition marks an important difference, other variables also play a role in the configuration of individual embodiments of activity and passivity during periods of waiting. These pertain primarily to the position of a yard staff member within the branch hierarchy, along with the different tasks and responsibilities his position entails, and the differences with regard to the income his work generates. Generally, workers at the lower end of the hierarchy are granted less latitude for inertness. This is obvious in the work relations of smaller branches, where the hierarchic duality between 'big men' and 'small boys' tends to be clear-cut (and not complicated by many middlemen; see Chapter 3).

Individual ambitions may serve as a source of self-incitement, letting the worker adopt an active orientation all on his own, without needing to receive commands. This form of self-incitement, however, is of limited duration only. Gang workers usually adopt, or attune, their individual orientation very quickly to the levels of activity required by the particular temporalities of the route they serve and the type of bus they load. These more narrowly honed forms of kinaesthetic enskilment allow them to anticipate phases of lower activity. They enable the worker to use foresight to reduce the intensity of his workload and, ultimately, to increase his latitude for waiting passively for activity. Whenever opportunity arises, more versed workers will seek to achieve the mode of passive activity that Mohammed represents.

The practices of the gang loading the big and battered coach on the competitive route to Kumasi sketched in the description above are a case in point. Here, phases of more active engagement occur only between the much more evident periods of passivity, fatigue, and even torpor. The gang members have brought their temporal orientations into conformity with the low frequency of passenger inflow. This penchant for passivity, which is characteristic of most of Neoplan's gang workers, is not to be confused with laziness. Rather, it stems from the tiring nature of their

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work and the need to balance the forms of chronic exhaustion from which they come to suffer. In order to understand the causes of this exhaustion, one needs to place their day-to-day work routines within the broader context of the shift system in which Neoplan's gangs perform their labour.

Shifts of Exhaustion

As mentioned earlier, there are two main forms of shift work: the more common one runs for 24 hours every other day, usually starting at 7 a.m.; the other comprises a shorter 'day shift' and a longer 'night shift', in which gangs work daily and usually switch between day and night shifts every other week.[12] This amounts to an average of three and a half *full* days of work per week: an 84-hour working week. Eight of Neoplan's branches, including all the bigger branches, run a 24-hour shift system. Three of these operate with a dual shift model, in which some of their destinations are worked in day and night shifts as well, while four smaller branches run solely on a day and night shift. The Lagos branch is an exception and has no shift system, as it is run by Mohammed alone, who is always present. Some yard workers, station masters, TOs, and chief drivers practise what is called 'system 24/6', in which they are present at the station on six consecutive days and nights every week and are off duty on the seventh day only. This system, however, is voluntary. When I asked members of Neoplan's gangs which system they prefer (not that they actually have much of a choice), I usually received the same answer: both are equally wicked.

The fact that the shifts are excessively long, especially the 24-hour version, is only one element that leads to exhaustion. What is more decisive is that there is no scheduled break during the shifts. Working in Neoplan's shift system means working uninterruptedly, with no holidays or additional days off. Of course, workers have days of absence because of sickness, or leave for attending funerals and, less frequently, weddings, but this is unpaid time. Moreover, there is a high risk of losing one's position because of absence, particularly for unregistered yard workers. In order to avoid displacement, many lower-ranked yard staff continue working despite being ill, which frequently aggravates their

[12] The actual lengths of day and night shifts vary between Neoplan's branches. Some branches run day shifts from 5 a.m. to 4 p.m., others from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. Common to all is that the day shift is shorter than the night shift, which relates to the idea that working during the day shift implies a higher turnover of vehicles and hence generates higher income.

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illness. Within the highly fluctuating occupational organisation of yard work, especially within the bigger branches, even temporary absence during a shift can lead to dismissal. The branch where bookman Rasford works practises a particularly relentless policy in this respect. For the unregistered members of its gangs, every absence without prior permission, however short, can be a reason for dismissal, even if it was only for going to the toilet. Tellingly, this policy does not come into effect when a worker is caught in the relative state of absence of sleep or reverie.

Writing about roadside hawkers who work amid the dense traffic in Nairobi, Amiel Bize (2017: 74, drawing on Nixon 2011) relates the exhausting nature of their labour to the exhaust fumes emitted by the vehicles they scurry between, both of which 'perform "slow violence" on their bodies'. For the workers toiling in Neoplan's gangs, the combination of constant (bodily) presence required when on duty and the endless grind of shift work induces a similar kind of 'slow violence'. (The exhaust fumes produced by the idling engines of the vehicles surrounding them add another hazard.) The question of whether their workload is low and tedious or high and strenuous at any one time is irrelevant in this regard.

Resignation is one of the main overall effects of this slowly progressing violence of exhaustion. The option of resigning is used mainly by new station recruits working as loading boys and shadows – thus, those station workers with the least latitude for creating phases of extended quiescence, which bespeaks their low positional capacity to balance exhaustion with strategic doses of passivity. During my time at Neoplan, I usually witnessed several resignations per week. Right after very busy periods of travel (mainly the Christmas and Easter breaks), the frequency of resignations increases significantly, due to the higher rate of employment that precedes these periods. While most of those who resign announce their withdrawal a day or two in advance, people also frequently quit either by not showing up or even by just walking off while on duty.

The ways in which exhaustion comes to bear on the bodies of all those who do not resign are manifold. One main effect is the disruption of circadian rhythms that shift work entails and which translates into pathological conditions, especially sleep disorders. Rasford serves as an example, albeit a rather extreme one. When he is not working, he either sleeps throughout the period between his shifts or not at all, which then adds up to three full days of sleep deprivation. Gang workers also told me about troubles they have with eating and digestion – mainly that, during shifts, they cannot eat solid food without getting diarrhoea. An even greater effect of the wearing nature of shift work, at least according to many station workers, is strain in personal and family relationships,

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marital difficulties in particular. One station master who had worked in the 24-hour shift system for more than a decade told me that shift work was the main cause of divorce among station workers. By his reckoning, resulting from his experience of three divorces, station workers' marriages have an 'expiration date' of no more than three years.

While his guesstimate should not be taken at face value, it speaks of the commitment required for sustained engagement within the yard. Tellingly, following his latest divorce, he has decided to abandon working in shifts and instead works according to the 24/6 system. Illustrative of this commitment is the proverb-like expression many station workers use when speaking of relationship problems: 'The station be my wife.' To consummate this 'marriage', one needs not only to adjust one's life course to the exertions of shift work, but also to work out an elementary attunement to the compartmentalised temporalities of everyday station work.

This brings me back to matters of waiting – or, more precisely, to the differential embodiments of activity and inactivity that define the hustle of Neoplan's gangs. The need to balance the effects of exhaustion with the broader level of shift work is paralleled by a need to create strategies to accommodate the erratic switching between working and waiting that characterises routines during shifts and that constitutes a crucial element in the hardships that inform the gangs' hustle. This strategy comes down to creating phases of relief by remaining bodily present while resorting to passivity. The balancing of presence and passivity is highly fragile, and situations in which it is troubled occur frequently. The most common instance is when a loading boy who is supposed to be scouting for passengers remains in waiting mode just a moment too long, and thereby misses his chance to approach a group of travellers who pass in front of him. While this exemplifies a balance that is troubled by lingering passivity, other situations are forms of enacted presence that are out of balance with passivity and grasp at nothing: for example, when a loading boy or bookman shouts out the destination of the bus he is loading, even though there are no passengers around to react to, or even hear, his announcement. In yet other instances, switching between passive and active engagement is not only out of balance but results in outright confusion, which then feeds into the broader situation of hustle at the station. This pertains in particular to bookmen and their gangs, who, in the course of a shift, switch between the destinations they load. In the course of this switching, they may shout out the wrong destination or sell their tickets for the wrong price.

I once shadowed on a 22+1 seat Sprinter bus on the route to Nkawkaw. Loading was exceptionally slow and tedious, with no more

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than two or three tickets sold per hour. After some five hours of mind-numbing inactivity during which only half of the seats had been taken, the remaining tickets were suddenly sold in less than ten minutes. The abrupt change in demand caught me and three other shadows unawares and a loading boy had to pull us out of the bus in order to make way for the passengers. When the bookman tried to calculate the driver's share of the ticket sales, it turned out that he and his two loading boys had confused destinations halfway through the loading. After five hours of wearisome passivity, they had begun to sell tickets to Nsawam, a town located about a hundred kilometres south of Nkawkaw, which is also served from Neoplan. Half of the passengers had boarded the wrong bus. Their subsequent unloading and refunding of fares gave rise to great agitation on the part of those who wanted to travel to Nkawkaw. The station master scolded the loading boys for their inattentiveness. The bookman, however, received no rebuke. The night before the shift, I was told, he had had a 'big fight' with his wife.

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