

Article

Headloading, Mobility, and Art: Perspective on socioeconomic condition and transformation in Africa

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Abstract

This study provides a perspective on Africa's socioeconomic condition and transformation through the periscope of its age-long intermediate mobility practice of headloading. The place of headloading as metaphorizing Africa's socioeconomic reality, perhaps, is shrouded in many forms of contemporary isms especially as induced by the political. In this study, I use visual images as primary data to elicit discourse while articulating relevant historical perspectives to foreground my thesis. The visual images are drawn from various sources as markers and metaphors for the social conditions they mirror. My interpretations of the visual data and discourse are framed using the class theory of power to show the status to which most Africans or Nigerians have been hierarchized. Headloading is not a leisurely and optional sociocultural practice but a compulsory contemporary necessity and socioeconomic reflection of many Africans.

Keywords: Headloading, Africa's socioeconomic condition, mobility, art

Introduction

The visual culture of the 21st century has opened up a vast possibility for imaging and reimaging abstract ideas and ideologies. This reality has continued to afford rare interdisciplinary intersections across various social practices. It is out of this intersection of subjects that I think of headloading, mobility, and art. Yet it is noteworthy that ethnographic and cultural practices have continued to be of great interest in visual research, as artists have been interested to explore and express people's lived experiences.

Art is known to connect with every aspect of society. It cannot be divorced from issues of society, and exploring one's cultural practice would, as it were, "help to provide an interpretation of it to the larger society, and to clarify its relationship to social structure and power relations" (Ferro & Poveda, 2019; Morgan & Arbuckle, 2022, p. 2). Beyond aesthetics, the generic goal of art is to provide interpretation and meaning around human life and practices on either side of the artist or the audience.

It is this standpoint that underscores the interdisciplinary connection between the social practice of headloading, its primary function as an intermediate mobility, its visualization in art practice, and the critical position of this study that headloading continues to define and portend a socioeconomic position Nigerians and Africans may not want to embrace hurriedly. The idea of headloading is widely known among its practitioners in Africa, Asia, and other parts of the Global South as a mobility process for the socioeconomic low, whose principal percentage is made up of women and youth (Porter, 2008; Porter, Blaufuss, & Acheampong, 2007).



Although the origin of headloading is not identifiable, its origin seems to date back to the prehistoric pursuit of subsistence by early men.

Few authors have tried to provide possible histories of the backgrounds of headloading. For this study, I give an extended summary of two key authors of historic headloading: Ogunremi (1975) and Osborn (2018). This is in order to contextualize headloading as a socioeconomic practice and as a form of indigenous mobility. Ogunremi (1975) provides one of the earliest indigenous accounts of the practice of headloading as rooted in human portage. Of headloading as a form of human portage, he wrote that it is “the oldest and most widespread traditional form of transport, not only in Nigeria but also in many other parts of Africa” (p.1).

Ogunremi firmly positioned the practice around the socioeconomic life of the people when he linked it to the pre-colonial economy of Africa, which was a means through which rural agricultural products were moved to collation points and marketplaces. I am aware of the complexity there is in defining the term ‘socio-economics,’ but as I use it in this study, it refers to the interaction between economic activities and social processes, or put differently, it refers to how economic activities reflect, affect and are shaped by the condition and experience of the society (Eatwell, Milgate, & Newman, 1989). This back-and-forth interaction between economics and social processes manifests in the people’s lived experiences and prosperity level. Here, I describe the social class in terms of a person’s wealth, education, and occupational status compared to others (Van Doesum, Van Lange, Tybur, Leal, & Van Dijk, 2022).

One could think of headloading as first a personal and domestic effort before it graduated to become a paid service. Following the lack of developed means of transportation at the time, headloading was a means of moving farm produce to their point of sale (POS). When it became a paid system, children were mainly involved, and this predisposed the practice to be labelled as a social evil and child labour by many European merchants. This practice was also connected to the slave trade:

Even traders who used canoes had to buy slaves so that they might carry traders’ loads over land routes. Sometimes, traders sold off their slaves as soon as their loads were disposed of. But under normal circumstances, it is unlikely that faithful and obedient slaves would be so treated. Nineteenth-century producers and traders who made local and long-distance exchanges possible relied largely on slaves as carriers (Ogunremi, 1975, p. 42).

One would question if the ‘slavery’ connected with headloading has changed today. On the other hand, if one connects headloading with animals which served as ‘beasts of burdens,’ then the headloader becomes a ‘being of burden’ as Europeans uncannily considered African women (Ogunremi, 1975; Porter et al., 2007).

Headloading as a packing process of agricultural products connects strongly with the account given by Osborn (2018), in which he underpins the idea of headloading

with the notion of containerization, packaging, and storage. Whether it is packing, packaging, or containerization, they are all bound together by the central idea of trade and socioeconomic practice. Goods are moved around, transportation businesses thrive, and warehousing is established. All these are economic and commercial terminologies that have continued to exist in contemporary times. For Africa or Nigeria, one can easily think of the modern-day commercial shipments of goods from Asia especially China, through waterways. The idea of 'containers' is now synonymous with commerce, large-scale economics, and intercontinental trading. Through headloading mobility, business rings were established through the Sahara desert.

Osborn argues that "one adaptation that people devised to contend with the challenges created by West Africa's pathogens and environment is the practice of headloading" (p.22). By this assertion, he insists that originally beast of burden plied West African routes, but the climatic and ecological conditions of the region predisposed these beasts to pathogenic attack and sicknesses, thereby retarding their use. This led to harnessing the capacity of dexterous headloaders and articulating the proper packing system for the best of the trafficking. Such packaging systems included the use of baskets, jugs, calabashes, and ceramic pots. He wrote, "headloading helped to drive a widely dispersed market for containerization" (2018, p. 24). So it is clear how the writer connected headloading with trade and mobility of goods and services.

Women and youth in headloading practice

Available studies point to headloading as a practice primarily upheld by women and the youth (Porter, 2008; Porter et al., 2007; Porter et al., 2013). Women were at the centre of headloading culture and still are. Apart from raising money through portage, for which youths were mostly known, women's loads usually consisted of water supplies, firewood fetching, and carriage of farm produce primarily for family sustenance. Calvo (1994) suggested that domestic subsistence accounted for most of the reasons for headloading among women. However, it is obvious today how many women have taken to street hawking to support themselves and their families.

Headloading is generally classified as part of family obligations or as paid portage, all of which reflect the socioeconomic condition among Africans. Porter et al. (2007) drew a strong connection between youths seeking livelihood and headloading, which is common in the rural setting. Beyond domestic functions, the desire for financial liberty informs why many youths, especially, boys, engage in portage and hawking by headloading.

An additional reason for women's prevalence in headloading is underscored by Ogunremi when he wrote that "the main reason for women predominating in headloading, locally, was probably that 'when men armed for defence against animals and enemies went on unfettered and free for combat, women followed, loaded with their belongings and offspring'" (1975, p. 41). His account further

shows that women's dominance in headloading resulted from the fact that they were more involved in the local exchange of farm produce.

Beyond the involvement of youths and women in headloading, a few societies are known to engage the social practice in traditional and ceremonial events, which are not within the scope of this study. The hawking business is another aspect of headloading, where women and youths are well known. The socioeconomic dimension is the main thrust of this piece; hence, I begin to explore the connection between headloading and commerce using related visual representations of the practice in social media, photography, and art.

This study, therefore, holds that headloading as a social practice signifies Africa's socioeconomic reality, which is connected and induced by several political incongruities. This falls on the backdrop of the observable reality that families and nations significantly or altogether drop headloading as a socioeconomic practice as they grow and develop. I, therefore, position this study with a focus on Nigeria deriving from extant literature and visual images.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative one thriving on an interpretivist paradigm. It has sought to construct meaning around the entangled subjects of headloading, mobility, and art. According to Davis (2014, p. 14), a qualitative study seeks to "understand, explore or to describe people's behaviour; themes in behaviours, attitudes and trends; or relations between people's actions." The trajectory of this study is to explore the meaning of the visual representation of headloading with a focus on socioeconomic realities in Nigeria Africa.

Visual Data

The data I use in this study include visual images such as illustrations and photographs. These visual data are primarily images of artworks and photographs. They are drawn from several sources – exhibition catalogues, and Facebook, which provide access to relevant photographs. These images are purposively selected as relevant to the study's central focus.

The images I engage with in this study serve dual functions. While some are used in descriptive ways to foreground the socioeconomic dimension of the subject of headloading, others were used to provide analysis and discourse around the ideological and immaterial concepts of class and power as espoused in this study. As part of an earlier study, the images' artworks belong to selected artists which include Obiora Udechukwu and Ifediora Dike, photographer Victor Politis. At the same time, other images are variously accessible on social media and the Nigerian naira note.

Literature from books and journal articles and those from internet sources are secondary data needed to contextualize and articulate meanings around the social practice of headloading and the subject of mobility. It is essential to establish that a kind of reflexivity or auto-ethnographic understanding is used in this study as I have participated in the headloading culture. Growing up in Nigeria, I saw both

young and older people carrying loads on their heads. I was also a participant in the headload culture. I carried farm produce, firewood, and water containers for a few kilometres and did some hawking in rural markets. My idea around headloading is framed in this study using the class theory of power.

Theoretical Framing

In this study, I have chosen to examine the socioeconomic dimension of headloading within the framework of class power theory. Class theory of power has its roots in Marxism from Karl Marx (Engels, 1845; Marx, 1847, 1955; Marx & Engels, 1950). This theory holds that people's role in the process of production is determined by their position within a class hierarchy and that class determines an individual's ideological consciousness

The social theory of class defines power in two social classes – the low and the high, the haves and have-nots, the rich and the poor. The 'lower class' are low-income earners who, in many ways, have been conditioned to dwell on the lower rung of society's ladder. The haves and the rich dominate the low and the poor because of their economic power and ownership of the means of wealth production.

The idea of ownership of means of production opens up the concept of capitalism and capitalist class propounded by Karl Marx whose theory on historical materialism positions "that class relations are grounded in relations of production" (Jakopovich, 2014). Ownership of the means of producing wealth then becomes one of the defining factors for social classification, although there are other non-economic factors, such as sociocultural processes. Beyond the Marxian class power theory, Michael Foucault's theory argues that power transcends politics and that it is an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. Foucault holds that everyone in their capacity and relationship wields a certain level of power, hence the possibility of resistance (Michel Foucault, 1972; Michael Foucault, 1991; Hamilton & Sharma, 1996; Lynch, 2014).

The Foucauldian position is substantiated by Comaroff and Comaroff (1991, p. 17) when he insisted that power is no longer left to "the formal bounds of 'political' institutions" but "has diffused and proliferated into hitherto uncharted terrains." It exists and manifests in everyday life. Yet, my recourse to the Marxian standpoint is particularly to underpin the understanding of socioeconomic and political contexts and dimensions of the social practice of headloading. It is to isolate and define the position of headloading towards providing a perspective capable of establishing and explaining the class dynamics signified by its practice in African society.

Generally, relevant points are taken in framing with the class theory analytical tool. One is identifying the class structure and the economic relations adduced by socioeconomic headloading. This is followed by underscoring the sociopolitical influence portended through these headloading images. The evaluation of social and cultural power inherent in the practice is covered. Such power includes the values, education, and social support, among others. This is followed by the question of understanding to what extent the class under discussion is aware of the social power. Ultimately, I consider the intersectionality between the social class of

headloaders and the others while drawing conclusions on the power dynamics and play.

In working with images, the following areas of the analysis are covered: contextualizing the images of headloading selected by understanding the social, economic and historical perspectives. Possible clues of class representation in the images are identified, while the power dynamics are shown by drawing from visual indicators of power in the images. Such visual indications include the subjects' poses, gestures, and overall composition. Symbolisms, ideological elements, and messages conveyed by the images are identified and discussed, while cultural references and intended messages are proffered. In the end, general interpretation, critique and implications are given.

Interpretation and Analysis

The economics of Headloading in selected visual culture

My attention was drawn to the connection between Nigerian headloading and economics through a Facebook conversation, the Lazy Nigerian Youth, in 2018. This social media conversation was birthed as a result of Nigeria's ex-President Muhammadu Buhari's speech at the Commonwealth Business Forum in London the same year, suggesting the Nigerian youth were lazy (Amah & Adebayo, 2018). Following this conversation, various social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were agog with image posts of different sorts, one of which was posts of headloading hawkers on the streets. In the ironic visual statement of those posts, the young people wanted to prove to the government that they could not be labelled 'lazy' in their hustling and struggling spirit. This episode directs understanding to the fact that headloading is not just sociocultural practice but that which is (socio)-economically laden and enthused.



Figure 1: "Lagos 2007" series, Victor Politis, 2008. Photograph



Figure 2: Facebook, March 13, 2019, posted by NIGERIANS. Retrieved on June 24, 2019 from: [facebook.com/1857605687787496/photos/a.1857609827787082/2229584773922917/?type=3&theatre].

Generally, this idea of ‘headloading economics’ concerns primarily the involvement in trading and distribution of goods and services. One of the most important aspects of headloading economics is hawking. Hawking by headloading is well-known in Nigeria and Africa, especially among rural and semi-rural residents who trade in the suburbs, towns, or cities and among several other low-income urban dwellers. Several items are hawked in streets and markets by women and young people. Still, the most outstanding items of headload hawking are edible materials (see Figures 1 and 2)—the hawking of edible items in the service of food delivery functions for those in transit. Nigeria is a very populous country whose citizens always seem caught up in the tension of a busy lifestyle. This may inform the need to purchase items in transit from headloading hawkers.

Images of headloading also appear on two of Nigeria’s banknotes: the Ten Naira and Hundred Naira notes. I am aware that the subjects of currency designs are important national emblems for any country (Morgan, 2016). Representing headloading on banknotes suggests some kind of appreciation of the practice. It is also a political signature to whatever the social practice signifies. On the other hand, the representation, perhaps, is a celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit for which Nigerians are known, or it may be a means of honouring the industry of women (Morgan, 2014).

Nigeria’s Ten Naira note captures an example of the entrepreneurial direction in headloading. Here, the Fulani Milkmaids, who mostly go about northern Nigeria to sell local dairy products, are represented carrying their goods in calabash containers. This representation has lasted on the Naira design since its first design in 1979 (Morgan, 2016). However, the romantic imagery of the women on the Naira designs (Figs 3 and 4) is complex and may elicit various interpretations. Perhaps the representation seeks to draw a link between the product and its producer, the milk and the milkmaid.



Figure 3: Ten Naira note. Fulani Milkmaids, 2007. Banknote.

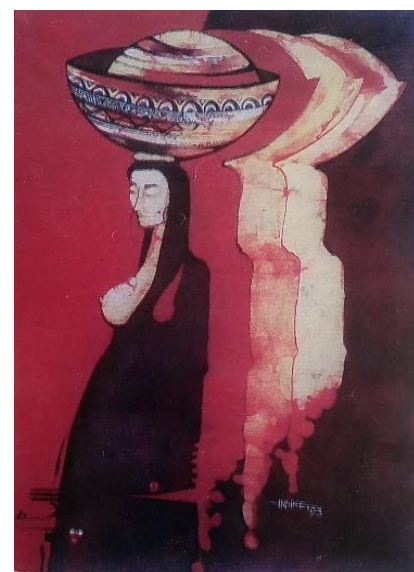


Figure 4: Fura de Nunu I, 1993. Dike Ifedioramma. Fabric ink, batik on cotton, 75x50cm

The representation of Fulani milkmaids is repeated in Ifediora's batik work (Figure 4) with the title 'Fura de nunu'. The phrase 'Fura de Nunu' defines a Fulani food composed of 'locally fermented milk and millet gruel' (Idoko, 2018). This artwork continues the emphasis on women who find means of subsistence under economic burden. In this piece, the linking of womanhood and fertility is also evident in the romantic visualisation of the breast, which in the two figures (Figures 3 and 4) represent production, reproduction, and productivity.

So, the rationale for the government's inclusion of headloading subjects in this object of national identity is still a matter of further argument. Yet, for me, it might signal an affirmation of a practice that, in several ways, may not gratify the headload practitioner psychologically and socially. The representation of women in the banknote headloading further buttresses the reputation, strength, and resilience of women's socioeconomic headloading.

Headloading as a socio-political metaphor for class

Here, I have engaged selected images in my analysis to show how headloading is a sign of social class. Several illustrations depict teenagers and women trailing the roads and streets in search of water, carrying pots and buckets atop their heads (see Figs 5-7). These are visual metaphors for lived experiences. Clues of class representation in the images are shown and such visual clues are drawn from the images' subjects, poses and overall organization, among others.

Udechukwu's (1981) exhibition titled, "No Water" holds illustrations in which he explored water scarcity as a biting social condition of the time. In the drawings are represented headloaders in search of water. "Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes" (Figure 5); and "The Search Continues" (Figure 6) are titles in "No Water" in which headloading appeared. These illustrations present the condition, the containers, and the common approaches used in the search for survival: the search for the basic need for water. In a literal sense, he addressed water shortage as an endemic social problem in Nigeria. Yet, the lack of water here is a metaphor for various conditions everyday Nigerians live in. No Water references endemic situations such as poor power supply, inflation, increased cost of living, and corruption and bribery, among many others. There is still no water to assuage these problems and quench the thirst and desire for a better society. There is no potent leadership and a sound system of governance yet.

Rendered in ink wash, Udechukwu presents silhouetted figures of mostly young people in their groups searching for water carrying diverse kinds of containers and types of mobility. Here, headloading manifests as a mobility option, buttressing the social practice as an intermediate means of transport in sub-Saharan Africa (Ogunremi, 1975; Porter, 2008; Porter et al., 2007). Headloading thus unambiguously links the socioeconomic situation in Nigeria with the politics of survival and leadership challenges in Nigeria (Chabal, 2009).

“Pattern for vassals” (Figure 7), is a critical visual metaphor of socioeconomic disorder expressed in headload representation. This representation goes beyond a search for water to other kinds of searches. A typical search among Nigerians today is for greener pasture, rationalised by many socio-political deficiencies. This piece refers to the dated feudal system of the medieval period that classed lords over vassals. Vassals are variously under socioeconomic servitude controlled by their lords. This servile conditioning includes the exploited, the labourers, and more ‘nigerianly’, the hustlers and the ‘masses’, largely contrasted with the politicians who are colossal partakers of the national cake (Enahoro, 2019; Nche, 2011).



Fig. 5: The Search continues, Obiora Udechuckwu, 1980. Ink & wash

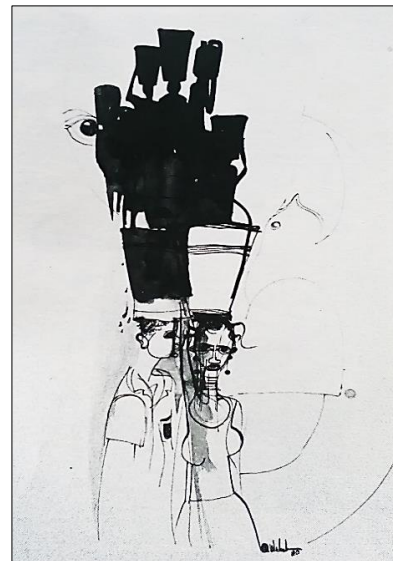


Fig. 6: Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes, Obiora Udechuckwu, 1980. Ink & wash

A key ideological clue in Figs: 5-7 is suffering, poverty, and repression expressed by the idea of ‘carrying (on the head) and hanging (on hand at the same time)’. More precisely, the artist expressed and metaphorised common Nigerians’ socioeconomic predicament within this ideological representation of dual burdens as compelled on vassals. This alludes to the different ways the government has positioned the lower class through a feudal socio-political architecture while providing aids and palliatives. Those who provide aid emasculate the vassals in socioeconomic weights too heavy to bear.

In Nigeria, for instance, the forces against the survival of a common people are convoluted, coming from different social strata and parastatals. The metal bucket and assortment of containers in Udechukwu’s pieces majorly define rurality and the economic status of the people. There is a connection between headloading and rurality (or underdevelopment). It is commonplace that the provision of several basic and social amenities in Nigeria is now in the hands of individuals. Individuals and households sink their own boreholes to provide their own water while the poor scout around the community for assistance.

The metaphor for the socio-political condition in Nigeria is further expressed in “Water Fetchers: portraits and silhouettes” (Figure 6). The artist explores the principle of repetition—and, more absurdly, people carrying people in their containers instead of water. The idea of ‘people carrying people’ perhaps references the several cases of inhuman kidnapping Nigeria has witnessed within the last decades. Economic abduction, as it were, might as well be a consequence of protracted suffering, poverty, and a lack of social welfare for the masses. On the other hand, the representation of human clusters in these images illustrates how suffering brings people together.

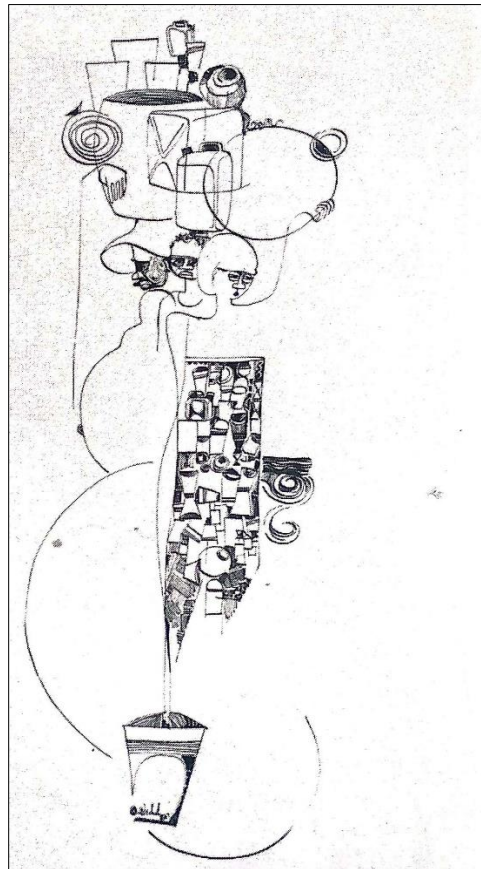


Fig 7: Pattern of Vassals, 1980;
Obiora Udechukwu: pen and ink

In experimenting with the idea of pain as a social glue, Bastian, Jetten, and Ferris (2014, p. 6) argued that “pain promotes cooperation because of its well-demonstrated capacity to capture attention and focus awareness on the immediate painful event.” This position seemingly substantiates the artist’s illustration of the water fetchers in groups. In Nigeria today, several clusters and unions are formed in anticipation of possible socio-political highhandedness. These social, religious, and academic associations are intended to assuage socioeconomic challenges orchestrated by the ruling class.

To support their family financially, children are seen carrying weight in the street hawking during school hours. In this sense, headloading is still slavery involving

child labour. This erodes the child's right to education. From a reflexive viewpoint, I understand that continuous headloading can result in stunted growth for the child. One must understand the social realities that headloading representation portends in Nigeria. When young people between the ages of 6 and 17 are involved in headload hawking, it becomes unsettling to think about their future. This age range is the interval between primary and post-primary education in Nigeria. UNICEF (2012, p. 39) insists that owing to the scarcity of family resources, "some of the children are withdrawn from school and made to learn some trades or to participate in the family business such as farming, hawking, street trading, begging, etc." these young people occupy the streets and parks with heavy loads, hawking while others are pursuing careers in schools.

Porter et al. (2007), therefore, characterised headloading as a rustic means of sustenance, affecting young people's educational productivity. In "Youth, Mobility and Rural Livelihoods in Sub-Saharan Africa" they write:

At an off-road village, both boys and girls from the age of about 10 regularly carry large loads of firewood to the district headquarters for sale before they go to school, a journey of around 10 km in total. ... interviews with teachers and children indicated the likelihood that educational opportunities for some girls, in particular, are substantially affected by their head-loading duties through late arrival at school, tiredness and headaches (2007, pp. 426,427).

Discourse and Conclusion

From the foregoing, the connections between headloading, mobility and art with socioeconomic conditioning in Nigeria have been established. Headloading was hugely connected with the indigenous economy in the past as young people combined walking and carrying loads on their heads at a fee. It was to move agricultural produce in bits from local and rural settings as a means of mobility. The inability to afford motorised mobilities in rural settings, as well as the quantities of goods moved, are all indicators of socioeconomic limitations of the time (Ogunremi, 1975; Osborn, 2018; Ubogu, 2016).

Rurality formed a key aspect of the prevalence of headloading, which was characterised by unskilled labour. The socioeconomic dimension of the practice becomes more visible in connection with labour. In a more commercial instance, people still do assorted kinds of headloading to eke out a living, such as carrying concrete mixture during building construction and moving bags of cement, among others. Then, headloading is linked to insufficiency, lack, and minimalism. Minimalism, here, suggests that when people are looking for ways to cut the cost of their transportation or construction service, they resort to headloading as a way out. This does not in any way make the headloader richer (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2011).

The connection between headloading, rurality, poverty, and the struggle for survival is pinned down in Osborn (2018, p. 29) when she writes about the containerisation practices of West Africa:

This reflection does not mean that we should ignore or overlook the poverty and hardship that continue to drive some of West Africa's containerization practices: there is nothing glorious in the labour of West African women who are compelled, in the twenty-first century, to headload water to their households on a daily basis to use for washing and cooking.

The author draws attention to the connection between headloading, hardship, women, and the West African population, especially in need of several basic amenities. Osborn's position reminds me of one of the notions raised by Chouliaraki, Orwicz, and Greeley (2019, p. 203) when they speak of "images that pose new challenges to the visual communication of human misfortune." At this point, it is difficult to conclude that headloading is an utter misfortune.

Since women and youth are common headloaders, one can define them as being at the lower rung of the social class. Notwithstanding the rigour and socioeconomic condition experienced, many headloaders are still oblivious to the socio-political dynamics and control that have continued to leave loads on their heads, as it were. This then agrees with the prevalent ideology about Africans as 'suffering and smiling' and struggling for survival, as expressed in Chabal (2009); Miracle Obeta (2010); Taylor (2009).

Women's domination in headloading business may be informed by the possibility that men possess more socioeconomic power and dominate women. So, in this sense, men could be thought of as belonging to a higher class. Another reason for the prevalence of women in headloading practice, especially in entrepreneurial headloading, could be informed by what Van Doesum et al. (2022) referred to as prosociality, which is a feeling of empathy, help, and sharing from others. Women and youth who are mostly in the lower class have a higher capacity to elicit prosociality, while the reverse is still true that the haves and higher class garner lesser prosociality (Van Doesum, Tybur, & Van Lange, 2017)

The concomitant power and social structure remain: the poor carry headloads, and the rich carry headlines. The rich have the better means of education, and the poor do not. Many youths and women who trade by headloading might be lacking educational or professional qualifications. The lack of formal or proper training usually leads to menial pursuits for livelihood. In other words, the Foucaudian standpoint of knowledge as power is substantiated (Michel Foucault, 1972).

This visual discourse has expressed the social classification and politics of suffering through the instrumentality of headloading practice. It has been established that the socioeconomic power of the headloading class, which consists mainly of women and children, is low. However, the Foucauldian power dimension is represented on the reverse here, that the headloader holds certain power against those who might need headloading services. This may include those on a journey who might need to satisfy their present thirst or hunger, those who want to exercise their purchasing power, or minimalists who need headloaders in building construction and loading and offloading activities.

While this study is not an advocacy to bring an end to the social practice of headloading or offer direct human alleviation to the issues surrounding the practice, it has raised political, socioeconomic, and institutional awareness and makes a general claim to the truth and politics of survival in Africa and Nigeria (Chabal, 2009; Chouliaraki et al., 2019). A question of de-humanization of vulnerable others and their probable re-humanization is set forth, and interventions will not be excluded. In all, this study has shown how headloading straddles the politics of visibility and humanity while providing a platform for social, economic and political discourse.

It has been established that headloading is a compelling practice for many Nigerians and Africans who must make their daily sustenance through this practice. This is because their socioeconomic system is built around headloading practices conditioned by socio-political infringements and reckless abandonment, accentuating the dichotomy between social classes.

Data Availability Statement: Data are available as used in this paper.

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