O ta ale ni’ pa: Obituaries and Elite Image-Crafting in Lagos, Nigeria 1880-1920
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HIS 480, Senior Research Seminar
On Sunday, March 12, 1915, news spread like wildfire though Lagos, Nigeria that Sapara Williams, a Saro lawyer and long-time Lagosian resident, had passed.\(^2\) Famous among native Lagosians for defending those who could not afford the cost of defending themselves, Sapara Williams’s death sent shockwaves through the community that night.\(^3\) By 4:00 p.m. the next day, a crowd of 4,000-5,000 Yoruba, Saros, Amaros, British, Christians, and Muslims had gathered on Custom House Street near Tinubu Church for his funeral procession.\(^4\) By that evening, Sapara Williams had been laid to rest at Old Cemetery Ajele Street, next to fellow members of the Freemasons. His life’s work and this story of overwhelming support from Africans and British colonial officials after his death were captured in his March 19, 1915 obituary in *The Nigerian Chronicle*.

A number of these obituaries, published in Lagos, Nigeria between 1880-1920, have been previously overlooked by scholars. However, they are immensely rich sources, revealing how the new, distinct elite class of Lagosians—of which Sapara Williams was a member of—navigated shifting identities and created their own spaces under the British colonial regime. During this time period, Lagos experienced drastic social change, resulting from economic and colonial policy shifts in the region. As a result of these changes, a group of Lagosian elites consisting of Saros, Amaros, Yoruba, and American ex-pats formed (fig. 1).\(^5\) Because these elites were new, they needed to carve out a space in Lagos society for themselves—one that was separate from the

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1 *O ta ale ni’ pa* is a common Yoruba euphemism for death that translates into "he kicked the ground"
5 In my thesis, I am using Kristin Mann’s definition of elite because hers is the most precise. Her study uses ‘educated elite’ to refer to men and women at the top of the growing population of educated Africans in early Lagos. They include all professionals (doctors, lawyers, ministers, headmasters, surveyors, and engineers), colonial servants of the rank First Class Clerk or above, and Western-educated import-export merchants who lived or regularly worked in the colony” during my time period. From Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos*. (African Studies Series 47. London, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
other Lagosians and the British colonial officials. Obituaries provided one way in which the elites could declare their presence, differentiate themselves from other social groups in Lagos, and perpetuate their own image of themselves to the public. The Lagosian elites later become the torchbearers for the Nigerian nationalist movement—a movement that eventually led to the nation’s independence in 1960. Consequently, these obituaries provide a wealth of information about how this important group utilized a new form of memorialization and about the social marketing of Lagosian elites in this tumultuous period of Nigerian history. Using obituaries, the Lagosian elites deliberately defined themselves as Western-educated, Christian, Victorian-mannered individuals. Moreover, the obituaries also indirectly reveal that these elites ran in patriarchal social milieus and struggled to balance growing national sentiments and remaining safe in the colonial city.

Between 1880 and 1920, Lagos had a robust, African-owned print culture, making it particularly well-suited for a study that centers around newspapers. In the 1850s, Rev. Henry Townsend, the founder of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Yoruba mission, established a press in Abeokuta in order to produce hymns and service sheets. He printed in Yoruba, adding an English supplement in 1860—the first of its kind in Nigeria. Following Henry Townsend’s lead, Robert Campbell began printing his own newspaper in Lagos in 1863. The Anglo-African became the first African-American owned newspaper in Lagos, and it is worth noting that subsequent newspapers followed its organization; The Anglo-African set the precedent for the other four newspapers I analyze in this thesis. Michael Echeruo explains the rise and importance

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7 Robert Campbell was a West Indian mulatto who settled in Lagos in 1859/1860. He was a merchant, manufacturer, and journalist. From Boniface Obichere, Studies in Southern Nigerian History: A Festschrift for Joseph Christopher Okwudili Anene 1918-68 (Routledge, 2005), 104.
of Lagos’s press culture perfectly, writing that “the 1880s saw a rapid growth of the Lagos Press. [...] This development was to be expected, given the rapid growth of the Lagos economy and the gradual emergence of a Lagos ethos.”9 In other words, the who, when and where of my thesis are all connected—in Lagos, a native press culture, elite class, and elite identity arose between 1880-1920.

The who and the when of my thesis are inextricably linked, as the social and economic changes that began in the 1880s created a distinct class of educated African elites. Two shifts occurred that led to the creation of this new elite class. The first of these shifts was an economic one. Prior to the 1860s, Lagos had a slave-based economy.10 In 1833, Britain abolished slavery, and while the policy took nearly two decades years to trickle down to Nigeria, the Lagos economy had to shift to a different, “legitimate” trade in response.11 As such, by the 1860s, the port city became a massive hub for the palm oil trade; Lagos exported thousands of pounds of palm oil and palm kernels (fig. 2). This economic shift is important for two main reasons. First, the palm oil trade allowed Africans to accumulate capital—African palm merchants got rich, fast.12 Second, the growth in the Lagosian economy due to the palm oil trade attracted individuals from all over—Saros, Amaros, Europeans, and even African American ex-slaves came to Lagos for economic opportunity.

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11 For a robust history of Lagos, see Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007). Chapters 1-2 explain the city’s connection to the slave trade. Chapter 3 discusses early colonial rule, chapter 4 describes the economic shift from slave-trade to “legitimate” palm trade, and chapters 5-8 explain the turmoil resulting from the turbulent economic changes under colonial rule.
The second shift was a shift in colonial policy, mostly due to Frederick Lugard’s new policy of Indirect Rule. Under Indirect Rule, Britain withdrew human and financial resources from Nigeria and simultaneously delegated more responsibilities to natives. Consequently, new channels of social mobilization opened up for Africans in Lagos. As figure 1 illustrates, more natives assumed positions within the colonial government because indirect rule pulled many British workers out of bureaucratic positions, replacing them with natives. In the end, these two shifts gave rise to a new class of African elites in Lagos. Because they comprised a new social class, they desired to carve out a space for themselves in the Lagosian social fabric, and obituaries were one space in which this new class could declare their presence, define what it meant to be an African elite, and differentiate themselves from other Lagosians and British colonial officials.

To develop my argument, I utilize obituaries from four newspapers, all of which were African-owned and printed weekly or bi-weekly in Lagos, Nigeria. Overall, over 400 obituaries were published in these four Lagosian newspapers between 1880-1920. Of these 400, I utilize about 50 to form the arguments in my study. The four newspapers include The Lagos Observer (LO), The Lagos Weekly Record (LWR), The Lagos Standard (LS), and The Nigerian

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13 Frederick Lugard was the British Governor General of Lagos 1914-1919. Frederick Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1922).

14 According to African Newspapers Database I used for research, 444 hits arose from key word searching “Obituary” (OR:) “Obituaries” (OR:) “Memorial” between the years 1880-1914 in the Lagos Standard, Lagos Weekly Record, Lagos Observer, and the Nigerian Chronicle.

15 The Lagos Observer was owned by JB Benjamin, a liberated African. LO was published weekly, and, according to Nozomi Sawada, had a circulation of 100-480, depending on the week. Benjamin, and the two men who supported the newspaper financially were anglophiles; as such, the language and format of the newspaper reflects those in circulation in England. Nonetheless, it was a reform-minded newspaper, which led to the arrest of its editor in 1892. It was the most successful Lagosian newspaper of the 19th century. From Boniface Obichere, Studies in Southern Nigerian History: A Festschrift for Joseph Christopher Okwudili Anene 1918-68 (Routledge, 2005), 104-105.

16 The Lagos Weekly Record was owned and edited by J. Payne Jackson and began publishing in 1891. Jackson was Liberian, which was an unusual nationality in Lagos at the time; most elites were of Saro, Amaro, or Nigerian descent. His father migrated from Maryland. His newspaper ran for over 40 years (1891-1930).

17 The LS was started by G. A Williams, a Western-educated businessman of Egba origin. It was published between 1895-1920, and it often had the most readership of all newspapers discussed in this thesis: between 300-1,000 copies weekly. From Nozomi Sawada, “The Educated Elite and Associational Life in Early Lagos
The first two were published earlier—in the 1880s and 1890s. *The Lagos Weekly Record* had a more political slant than *The Lagos Observer*, as the owner of LWR, J. Payne Jackson believed that the “native press” was “a needed though feeble instrument for voicing the Native side of matters under the aegis of an absolute system of government.” The LS and NC ran after the turn of the twentieth century. These newspapers assumed a more nationalist tone, for the Amalgamation of Nigeria occurred in 1914, combining the Southern and Northern protectorates to form modern-day Nigeria, which encouraged Nigerian nationalist thinking. Furthermore, pan-African sentiments grew in Lagos, mostly due to Herbert Macauley’s activism and advocacy. Consequently, these newspapers describe Nigerians and Africans, rather than Lagosians or Christians. Pan-Africanism is even evident in the newspaper titles—the earlier newspapers are geographically centered in Lagos, while the latter *Nigerian Chronicle* addresses the new-formed country as a whole, appealing to a wider geographic area and audience. Consequently, each newspaper contains different biases and slants, which are critical to consider when utilizing the articles in primary source research.

While it is nearly impossible to identify exactly who read the obituaries, it is possible to make assumptions about the demographics of the newspapers’ audience. All four newspapers printed articles in English, so only English-speaking Africans and Europeans could read the papers. In addition, each paper sold for 3-10 pence, so only individuals with enough disposable income could afford to purchase them.

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*Nicholas Thompson,* *Chronicle (NC).*

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18 The NC was a culture-oriented newspaper founded in 1908 and ran until 1915. It was owned by Josephus and Emmanuel Johnson, two Western-educated brothers. Rather than report news, per se, the newspaper devoted space to “current affairs, criticism toward the colonial government, and […] Yoruba history, religion, and customs” (Sawada, 67).


21 Pan-Africanism is a worldwide political ideology that strengthens the bonds between all people of African descent; it ties the struggle of a single group of people of African descent to the struggle of all peoples of African descent.
income could purchase the newspapers.\(^{22}\) In other words, Lagosians had to overcome both educational and economic boundaries in order to read the newspapers. As such, the audience for these newspapers were most likely wealthy, Western-educated men—typically, women did not receive extensive educations.\(^{23}\) Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that elite male Africans and Europeans read the obituaries.

The identities of the writers are harder to decipher than the identities of the readers. Only two of the fifty obituaries I analyze in this study cited their respective author. In a January 31, 1884 obituary for the late Robert Campbell appearing in *The Lagos Observer*, J.A Payne is credited for supplying the necessary information about Campbell at the bottom of the obituary. It reads, “N.B. We are greatly indebted to Mr. J.A. Payne of Orange House, Lagos, for supplying the above information.—Ed. L.O.”\(^{24}\) Interestingly enough, J.A Payne was the editor of another newspaper in town, *The Lagos Weekly Record*. As such, it appears that the editors of the newspapers were in charge of writing obituaries, but, when necessary, they sought outside help. Nonetheless, the question of authorship remains problematic, as the majority of the obituaries I utilize were written anonymously. Kathryn Burns sheds light upon the issues of authorship and agency in her monograph, *Into the Archive*. She writes, historians “cannot take our archives at face value,” particularly in an oppressive, colonial setting.\(^{25}\) Therefore, historians must dive into archives “to look for the patterns behind the construction” of the historical documents and “read the archive’s silences” for indigenous agency.\(^{26}\) Consequently, the specific author is not as important as the patterns present in the archives. These patterns illustrate what facts and stories

\(^{24}\) “Obituary The Late Robert Campbell,” *The Lagos Observer*, January 31, 1884.
the authors deemed important enough to withstand the test of time. Consequently, when reading my corpus of obituaries, I identified patterns—patterns of adjectives utilized to describe the deceased, patterns of personal facts that are included (such as salary, occupation, or family genealogy), and patterns that reveal the rules governing elite women and men in Lagos. By doing so, I avoid making unsubstantiated assumptions about the obituary’s authorship, while still gleaning important information to make claims.

My thesis bridges three distinct and robust historical discourses, creating an interdisciplinary study of Lagosian elites, press culture, and memorialization practices. Numerous scholars have explored African elites in Lagos. Many Africanists have analyzed press culture, particularly Lagosian newspapers, in the time frame within which I work in. Furthermore, another distinct group of academics have studied memorialization practices in other African countries, particularly Ghana. As a result, my paper brings these three areas to understand how African elites utilized obituaries to memorialize individuals, craft the image of a new African elite, and perpetuate their heightened social status.

Michael Echeruo’s seminal monograph, *Victorian Lagos*, published in 1977, opened the floodgates to a new group to study: Lagosian elites.27 To craft a social history, Echeruo analyzes Lagosian newspapers including the *Anglo-African, Eagle and Lagos Critic, Lagos Observer*, and *Lagos Times*. Trained as a literary critic, Echeruo gleans the editorial sections of these newspapers to conclude that the manners, tastes, and opinions of the Lagosian elite were imported from and influenced by England and Black America. However, Echeruo’s conclusions do not afford the Lagosian elites much agency; instead, he argues that the elites who wrote editorials in Lagosian newspapers often borrowed from the press in England and Black America.

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Nonetheless, subsequent studies of Lagosian elites almost always cite Echeruo’s monograph, indicating the large impact his study had on the field.

Writing in 2000, Philip Zachernuk draws upon Michel Echeruo’s *Victorian Lagos*, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, and Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic* to identify pan-Africanist elements in Lagosian press culture. In his work, Zachernuk is interested in how Africans defined “African” at different moments of time. He desires to break free from dualistic historical studies of the intelligentsia that “judge the intelligentsia either for converting or for failing to convert effectively from the African to the Western.” Consequently, his study of the African intelligentsia expresses the diversity and heterogeneity of these colonial subjects; he refuses to categorize these individuals as strictly “African” or “European.” Zachernuk’s chapter, “The Sphinx Must Solve Her Own Riddle,” was particularly helpful to my study, as it provides a lengthy overview of Lagosian newspapers and the elite men who operated or provided the capital for them between 1880-1920. As such, I utilize this chapter to better understand who owned, edited, and distributed the four newspapers I analyze in my thesis.

While Echeruo and Zachernuk study elites via newspaper analysis, Kristin Mann studies the Lagosian elites through the lens of two institutions: Lagosian marriage and the British Colonial judiciary. Rather than utilizing newspapers, Mann uses British colonial documents, British court cases, and Lagosian governmental records to glean information about elites.

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30 Another hefty group of academics have approached the study of elites via biographical means. I categorize these articles and monographs as “case studies” because they analyze an individual or group of individuals to draw conclusions about the greater elite population. While I will not discuss these authors in this section, their work has nonetheless helped me gain a better understanding of Lagos during the time period I am exploring. These works include, Olutayo Adesina, “Adebisi Sanusi Giwa (? - 1938): The Life and Career of an Ibadan Entrepreneur and Community Leader,” *Lagos Notes and Records* 12, no. 1 (May 2006); Adelola Adeloye, “Some Early Nigerian Doctors and Their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa,” *Medical History: London* 18, no. 3 (July 1, 1974); Rina Okonwko, "A Jamaican Export to Nigeria! The Life of Amos Stanley Wynter Shackleford," *Caribbean Quarterly: Mona, Jamaica* 30, no. 2 (June 1, 1984); O. Adewoye, “Sapara Williams: The Lawyer and the Public Servant,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 1 (1971).
Although Mann has written numerous influential pieces about Lagos, two of her monographs were useful in my own research. First, *Marrying Well*, published in 1985, provides a detailed profile of the elites throughout its chapters, and it contains an extensive appendix of educated elite males in Lagos Colony 1880-1915, which I relied on heavily to construct my *who* (fig. 3). Her second, most recent, monograph, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City*, studies Lagos, starting with its modest beginning as a slave port and ending after palm oil and Indirect Rule ushered in a new era of legitimate trade. Mann analyzes how Lagosian elites controlled the local population through the slave and palm oil trades. As such, any well-rounded study of Lagosian elites must understand the economic background in which these elites existed and how this group navigated various institutions like marriage, court, and business groups. By understanding the subjects of my thesis better, I gain better insight into why these individuals might have been interested in writing and publishing obituaries. Without understanding the *who*, a historian can rarely understand the *why* and *how*. In the end, Echeruo, Zachernuk, and Mann are linked by their interest in the new, distinct group of African elites in Lagos around the turn of the 20th century despite their different approaches to studying them.

Lagosian press culture has been studied extensively as a way to capture African “words” and African “voices” throughout history.31 Luise White, in *African Words, African Voices*, explores how historians have tried to capture African “words” and “voices.”32 In the introduction, White divides African historiographies into two overlapping eras: the 1960s and the 1990s.33 During the first era “African history was hardly concerned at all with African lives” and

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33 It is impossible to provide an account of African historiography without mentioning Jan Vansina, who wrote *Oral Tradition as History* (1961). His book defends oral tradition as a legitimate historical source, and he was one of the first historians to provide a real framework on how to read, interpret, and utilize oral tradition as history. However, many modern (1980s and on) historians find Vansina’s proposed methodology problematic, mainly
“oral sources [were] read and tested critically in the light of diverse bodies of evidence from documents.”34 The Africanists of the 1960s overvalued words, ignoring voices. By the 1990s, “life history had become […] a much practiced mode of historical scholarship” and “oral testimonies had achieved a transcendent status by which they could stand by themselves as authoritative accounts of lived experience.”35 During this era, scholars overvalued voice, ignoring words. White’s history of African historiography stops in the 1990s, and, since then, I believe a third era of African historiography has begun.

I would like to propose a third era to White’s historiographical account: the 2000s. Historians in this era are reading African “words” with a new approach, granting them a revived legitimacy among African scholars. Unlike the 1960s, however, African textual documents are not being treated as authoritative accounts of African history. Rather, documents, such as court cases, newspapers, diaries, and letters, provide a subjective view on events. Moreover, Africanists in this era do not consider oral accounts and testimonies to be the only purely “African” source, and, consequently, they return to written African history. Olufunke Adeboye is one such new-era scholar. In her article, “Reading the Diary of Akinpelu Obisesan in Colonial Africa,” Adeboye analyzes Obisesan’s diary to explore his shifting identity as a member of the colonial intelligentsia.36 Rather than reading Obisesan’s diary as an authoritative account about elite life in Ibadan, Adeboye interprets the diary as “a symbolic cultural creation with

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sociological and psychological dimensions.”

In other words, she cares less about what the diary says and more about the ritual of diary-keeping as an attempt “of the diarist at self-representation and negotiation of his multiple identities.” By reading the diary in this way, Adeboye can explore and draw conclusions about Obisesan that can be corroborated— not based upon— textual evidence within the diary. My thesis will use this same analytical framework to explore newspapers; I am concerned with the act of writing and publishing an article just as much as I am concerned with the words appearing in them.

_African Print Cultures_, an anthology edited by leading African historians, provides a framework to read newspapers published under oppressive circumstances (i.e. colonial rule). During this period, Britain controlled Lagos and “press in colonial Africa was never free.” In the past, newspapers have been read “as barometers of changing political opinion,” but _African Print Cultures_ reimagines that narrative. The authors suggest that African newspapers were the “infrastructure for public culture,” and not simply “vehicles for protest against autocratic rule.” Reading obituaries as infrastructure, rather than a means of protest or piece of strictly textual evidence, expands my analysis. With this framework, I can better recognize how obituaries created and expanded small social circles, for it created a space, metaphorically and physically, in which elite Lagosians could interact. In her chapter in _African Print Cultures_, Stephanie Newell explores how memorialization in the press gave people’s lives “historicity and meaning

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by others in the colonial period.” Newell’s chapter is most similar to this thesis, but her research spans a much wider geographic scope. Consequently, much of Newell’s analysis is divorced from its context. Nonetheless, *African Print Cultures* provides great guidance on how to glean information beyond just textual evidence from articles. Newell’s guidance is particularly necessary for obituaries because they are not simply an article but also a medium in which to convey one’s social status, a vehicle to perpetuate a certain image of the deceased and bereaved, and a space to memorialize important individuals.

Samuel Bonsu’s study of memorialization rituals in modern Ghana provides me with the vocabulary with which to engage other scholars studying memorialization practices. Bonsu, a marketing professor at York University, introduces the concept of “consuming the dead,” which refers to how “the living makes meaning of death and its associated rituals toward self-identification.” Furthermore, Bonsu describes this process of self-identification as “impression management” or “self-presentation,” borrowing heavily from Erving Goffman. Overall, Bonsu “perceives obituaries as cultural texts that appropriate social symbols to facilitate the presentation of the dead as part of the bereaved’s identity projects.” Bonsu’s vocabulary provides a way to conceptualize and summarize important, complex social processes that occur when an obituary is written and read. Furthermore, Bonsu’s assumption that writing an obituary is a conscious act of social memorialization underscores my argument that African elites utilized obituaries in the Lagosian press to convey messages beyond memorialization.

43 Stephanie Newell "From Corpse to Corpus" in *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (University of Michigan Press, 2016), 414.
45 Self-presentation refers to when an individual appears before others, he consciously or subconsciously projects a definition of that situation, of which a conception of him/herself is a large part. Impression Management refers to the ongoing, coordinated attempt to control self-perceptions. From Samuel Bonsu “The Presentation of Dead Selves in Everyday Life: Obituaries and Impression Management,” *Symbolic Interaction; Hoboken* 30, no. 2 (Spring 2007).
This thesis is divided into two main parts. The first section will argue that obituaries were a container for memories—they claimed space metaphorically and physically in Lagos. Overall, the first section is more concerned with the obituary as an artifact and socio-cultural ritual—I investigate the act of creating this memory container. Here, I will argue that the new class of African elites in Lagos utilized an obituary’s physical and metaphorical space to announce their new presence in Lagosian society and highlight their wealth, social clout, and political power without threatening the British officials stationed in Lagos. Then, the subsequent sections will analyze what things are in these memory containers. Here, I will analyze what actions are memorialized, the adjectives employed to describe the deceased, and what messages the authors conveyed via obituaries to the public.

**Crafting the Container: Claiming Space in Colonial Lagos**

Memorialization comes in many forms and serves numerous functions. An obituary is just one type of written memorialization. Obituaries are containers because the author, with the help of family and friends, fills them with words and stories about the deceased. As a container for memory, it is passed down over the years, preserved in print. In other words, rather than passing down memories through a human vehicle (i.e. oral tradition), an obituary guarantees that an individual’s memory withstands the years in print form. Obituaries allow others to remember the deceased physically (by reading about him or her in print) and metaphorically (by creating their own image of the deceased in their mind). In the Lagosian context, obituaries became a way to claim and create space in a metaphorical, social, and physical sense, which allowed Lagosian elites to carve out a place for themselves in the city’s social fabric.

The length and location of Lagosian obituaries varied based upon its subject, indicating that the more important an individual, the more physical space they could claim in a newspaper.
The Lagos Observer, in circulation from 1882 to 1890, was typically four to five pages long.\textsuperscript{47} The first page was often covered in advertisements, the second through penultimate pages filled with news, and short announcements covered the final page. The middle pages held the juiciest news pieces and editorials. Consequently, individuals with the most clout would have obituaries in the middle of the newspapers. Robert Campbell had such wealth and social clout.\textsuperscript{48} He died in 1884, and his obituary appears in the January 31, 1884 issue of The Lagos Observer. It is on the second page, conspicuously located among other important news articles, including correspondence from Abeokuta, and a report regarding the new Baptist Elementary School. It has a section header, reading “Obituary of the Late Robert Campbell” (fig. 4).\textsuperscript{49} Campbell’s conspicuous and long obituary contrasts sharply with Richard Horn’s short death announcement (fig. 5). The two men’s deaths are recorded in the same January 31 issue of The Lagos Observer, but Campbell’s is given a much more prominent position and is significantly longer. This illustrates that, even in the world of obituaries, there is a hierarchy—one in which social status gave more to those who had and less to those who did not.\textsuperscript{50} The broader implication of this hierarchy is clear: obituaries are more than the words—they are containers of memories in which the deceased and the bereaved could jockey for a place in society. The more important you were, the more physical space you or your family could claim.

The obituaries also became a medium in which Lagosian elites claimed metaphorical space within the Lagosian social scene by gloating about their wealth. In obituaries, the bereaved


\textsuperscript{48} Born in Jamaica, Campbell ventured to Abeokuta in 1857 to establish an American settlement, which subsequently failed. Rather than return to Jamaica or the Americas, Campbell moved to Lagos, Nigeria and established the first local newspaper there, the Anglo-African. An article in another local paper, the Eagle, described Campbell as “one of Lagos’ greatest intellectuals;” British colonial officials and elite Lagosians alike admired Campbell.

\textsuperscript{49} “Obituary of the Late Robert Campbell,” The Lagos Observer, January 31, 1884.

\textsuperscript{50} Other small obituaries include: The Lagos Observer, September 17, 1885, 5; “Obituary,” The Lagos Observer, August 30, 1883; “Obituary,” The Lagos Observer, October 11, 1883.
elites highlighted their wealth, differentiating their socio-economic position from less-wealthy Lagosians. For example, in 1919, *The Lagos Weekly Record* published Daniel Akitoye’s obituary. Akitoye was a western-educated colonial official and the grandson of the previous *oba* of Lagos, King Akitoye.51 The author lays out Akitoye’s economic standing: before his death, Akitoye became a Chief Clerk, earning £300 per annum. Prior to his promotion to Chief Clerk in 1915, he was a First-Class Clerk with a salary of £150 per annum. Robert Campbell’s 1884 obituary also reads like a resume. It lists his business ventures, including founding the “Lagos Steam Sawing and Ginning Company, Ltd.,” joining the “Niger Valley Exploring Party,” becoming editor of the *Anglo-African*, and accepting posts as “Colonial Surveyor, acting Stipendiary Magistrate, and acting Chief Clerk and Warehouse keeper at the Customs.”52 In both instances, the deceased’s obituary became a place to assert the family’s wealth and financial security to the public, claiming an elite socio-economic space in Lagos.

The obituaries also created a lacuna in which elites differentiated themselves based on their social connections. An obituary from 1919 for Chief Ajaiyi Ojoka illustrates how families could use obituaries to display or exaggerate their social status. Ojoka’s obituary comprises less than 1/16th of a page in *The Lagos Weekly Record*. However, in the few words the family purchased, the author recounts all the attendees of the chief’s memorial. He writes that Chief Ojoka was buried “in the presence of a large concourse of sympathizers from Lagos and other adjacent towns. Notable amongst whom were Prince Eleko’s representatives, Henry Carr, Esq., and others.”53 The family and author prioritized *who* was at the memorial service rather than

Ojoka’s characteristics. As such, the obituary served as a vehicle to flaunt the family’s influential social connections—Ojoka’s surviving family marked their territory on the social ladder.54

Within the obituaries, the Lagosian elites also positioned themselves as mediators between the British colonial officials and Lagosian natives who were not part of the elite. Many obituaries praise the deceased for having garnered the respect of both natives and European inhabitants. For example, the obituary for Dr. J. A Horton explains that “he commanded the esteem of all white and black without toadying the former.”55 Moreover, another obituary for George Hoare, applauds how he won “the respect of both Natives and Europeans.”56 These obituaries indicate that the Lagosian elites and the authors who wrote the obituaries viewed the elite class as a group separate from the rest—they were their own entity, neither belonging among the other natives nor among the European inhabitants. The obituary for Dr. Nathanial King, a prominent physician in Lagos, underscores this point. The author explains that Dr. King won “the respect, confidence, and esteem of all classes of persons alike, Native and European, in and beyond our community alike.”57 This sentence highlights two things. First, Lagosian elites were separate from Natives and Europeans in the city, which we already concluded above. Second, it reveals that commanding the respect of both colonial officials and natives was the ultimate marker of elite status. Obituaries claimed physical and metaphorical space for the new elites, and they created a new, hybrid place in society for the elites to occupy—a space between native and European. Later on, I will highlight what these elites did in this unique space.

Obituaries were not the only kind of politicized memorialization present in Southwest Nigeria; oriki have a long, storied history in the region as well. Oriki are a category of poetry, originating among Yoruba-speaking peoples, that praise, celebrate, or simply acknowledge its

54 See also “Obituary Mr. Abraham Benjamin Cole,” The Lagos Weekly Record, October 1, 1904.
55 “Obituary Dr. J. A. B. Horton,” The Lagos Observer, November 8, 1883.
56 “Obituary Death of Mr. George Nicholas Hoare,” The Lagos Weekly Record, March 16, 1895.
57 “Obituary Dr. Nathanial King, The Lagos Observer, October 8, 1885.
subject. This subject could be human, animal, or a divine being. As Karin Barber suggests in her monograph, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow*, *oriki* “evoke the essence of their subjects” to “enhance their standing” in the their hometown or village. Trained specialists performed *oriki* at public celebrations and meetings. In these performances, the singer captures the ears and eyes of a crowd at a public event, thereby claiming a public space for the song’s subject. Just how the obituaries forced readers to think about and craft an image of the deceased elite, *oriki* forces its subject into the consciousness of the onlookers, causing them to think about the subject and walk away from the performance with their own conceptions. Furthermore, the singer could mark the subject’s social claim in the community by name-dropping and highlighting important facts.

For example, a Sango cult member sings about the death of fellow cult member, Efuntahun, in this section of *oriki* that was performed at a funeral in Okuku:

“She was not an untried member of the Sango cult
She was there at the time of Okeyebi
She was there together with Kudomi
She was there with Oyeniran
And Okeyiola Efunjoke
And the Iyalase Sango [a senior female title in the cult]
And the child of Oyagelu, a child of one who has a hoe of brass
And Ogundapo my father
He owed the butcher money, son of one who pounded indigo in huge quantities
And Ogunwole Ogunfonna Makanjuola
All of them will bring horses to meet our mother, child of one who has both beer and palm-wine”

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58 For this section, I lean heavily on Karin Barber’s *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (International African Library 7. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). The monograph takes place in the small Nigerian town of Okuku. By analyzing *oriki*, Barber makes numerous, important arguments: *Oriki* are historical “in the sense that they are one of the ways in which the relationship of the present with the past is constituted” (25), *oriki* addresses the dead, calling them back to the world of living, and *oriki* plays a “crucial part” in self-aggrandizement (184).
Here, the singer highlights Efuntohun’s important membership in the Sango cult by explaining that “she was not an untried member of the Sango cult.” Furthermore, the singer lists other prominent members of the cult, who Efuntohun interacted with during her life, essentially name-dropping. Unlike obituaries, however, oriki is performed in-person, and its subject is not always dead. In fact, more often than not, the subject is alive, present at the event, and takes part in the oriki dialogue. Despite these differences, the connection between the tradition of oriki and the obituaries that appeared in Southwest Nigeria the late 19th century is clear: both mediums memorialized an important individual, highlighted his or her social status and connections, and claimed physical and metaphorical spaces in the subject’s respective community. Perhaps because of this connection, Lagosian elites were comfortable with the memorializing genre, so they quickly utilized Western-style obituaries to inject themselves into the Lagosian social fabric.

Some of the obituaries actually contain poems eulogizing the deceased, paralleling oriki’s tradition of oral praise poetry. One obituary for Etubom Abassi Eke Ese contains a two short poems that read:

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“To bear the uneven contention
And carry the struggles within
Since death which put an end to vitals
Will put an end to sin.”62
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“Dear dying monarch
Say farewell to guilty tears
All thy dealings prove
Fruits of thy paternal love.”63
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The poems for Etubom Abassi Eke Ese have a distinctly Christian tone, particularly when they describe “sin” and guilt. Furthermore, it is complementary of Etubom Abassi Eke Ese, describing him as a “monarch.” Moreover, a “In Memoriam” poem prefaces Dr. Nathanial King’s two-page

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61 Sango (also called Shango or Chango) is a major deity in the Yoruba religious tradition. Shango is both a deified ancestor and a divine force. The ancestral Shango was the fourth king of Oyo, which explains why this oriki references the ancient town. Shango came to the “New World” in the 18th and 19th centuries due to the influx of African slaves; he was worshipped in Haiti (voudou), Cuba (Santeria) and Trinidad (Shango Baptists). From Laird Scranton, “Shango: Yoruba Deity” (Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, inc.), November 1, 2016.
long obituary in a June 1884 issue of *The Lagos Obituary* (fig. 6). Among other things, the poem praises King’s character. Its author writes that Dr. King “proved himself in truth a very *King*. Art, Music, Literature, and health-giving powers, a love to country and his fellow kind.[ …] Where shall we look? Another such to find.”

Dr. King’s poem more clearly compliments his upstanding character and social position in Lagos. His “love to country” is celebrated and his “loving memory” is promised to be preserved “midst his fellow men.” In both instances, the authors utilize the technology of writing to construct praise poems about the deceased. These poems apply certain characteristics of *oriki* to a written medium—rather than singing about Dr. King or Etubom Ese’s upstanding character, the author writes it in prose. Overall, a connection between *oriki* and these poems exists. These authors utilized a new technology for the same reasons their ancestors, family, and friends performed *oriki*—to memorialize, praise, and define important individuals in a community.

In a city oppressed by colonial rule and government, Lagosian elites had to claim and create a space of their own. They did so physically with obituaries that became literal containers for memory, which were bigger for those who had more clout in the city. They also did so socially, positioning themselves as richer, better-connected Lagosians who became arbiters between nonelite natives and British colonial officials. Obituaries helped carve out a space in which a new class of elites could occupy, as they were similar to the long-standing practice of *oriki* with which many Lagosians were familiar. Now that obituaries have been identified as containers, we will discern their meaning and see what actions, traits, and individuals the Lagosian elites wished to memorialize.

“Thus Saith the Lord”

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64 “In Memoriam,” *The Lagos Observer*, June 19, 1884.
66 See also “In Memoriam,” *The Nigerian Chronicle*, November 22, 1912.
The obituaries reveal unique characteristics of the elite Lagosian society at the turn of the twentieth century. They provide a small glimpse into the educational and religious lives of elites and the massive Christian influence in Lagos at the time. One of the first things to jump out of these memory containers is the importance of Western education and Christianity to the elites. Almost every obituary describes the deceased elites as Western-educated and Christian, most starting in the CMS Grammar school in Freetown, Sierra Leone. After that, many of them were recruited into Christian professions, either as reverends or missionaries. Those who did not join the clergy nonetheless became part of the Christian machine by supporting the church monetarily.

Nearly all of the individuals memorialized in obituaries were Western-educated, indicating that to run with the upper echelon, one had to be well-educated. Most of the male obituaries mentioned the schooling the deceased received. Many men began their ascent of the social ladder at the CMS Grammar School in Freetown. As Kristin Mann points out, of the nearly 200 elite males during this time period, “80% of these men had attended secondary school, and roughly 30% had received advanced education in England.” After that, some earned advanced degrees at Universities in England, at Fourah Bay College, or at the University of Fez. Upon returning to Lagos or, sometimes, to Abeokuta, these educated men became merchants, journalists, lawyers, and doctors. A vast amount of them became missionaries, clergymen, or Bishops within the Christian church. Kristin Mann provides a clear picture of the influence of Christianity on the elite population. She explains, one-half of the elite Lagosian


population “belonged to the Church of England, one-third attended one of the other European churches, one-sixth were members of one of the African churches that split from the European churches in the late 19th century;” all of them professed Christianity.\footnote{Kristin Mann, “Marriage Choices among the Educated African Elite in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915,” \textit{The International Journal of African Historical Studies} 14, no. 2 (1981): 204.} These Christian elites spread Christianity in and around Lagos, effectively becoming a cog in the behemoth Christian evangelizing-machine.

The corpus of obituaries captures how African elites served the church beyond simply attending worship once a week. Because most elites first passed through the CMS Grammar School or other Western institutions, they were exposed at an early age to the doctrine of Christianity. Kristian Mann succinctly explains why Anglicans were grossly overrepresented among the Lagosian elite, writing “the CMS operated more and better schools than the other religious organizations.”\footnote{Kristin Mann, \textit{Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos} (African Studies Series 47. London, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 27.} However, the CMS Grammar Schools were used for a more insidious reason: recruiting Africans to help with the Christian cause. For example, H. Johnson’s obituary explains that the Saro displayed “such mental power and aptitude for languages that he was selected for special training” at the CMS institute in England and, later, at the CMS college of Islington.\footnote{“Death of the Venerable Archdeacon H. Johnson,” \textit{The Lagos Weekly Record}, August 2, 1901.} There, he received theological training before settling in Lagos. In this instance, the church utilized CMS lower schools to recruit top talent into their ranks. As time went on, this became a vicious cycle, as almost all elites started at a CMS grammar school, were trained to preach the Gospel, then sent back to Lagos to evangelize natives. An obituary of Rev. J.A Lamb reveals this Christian machine at work. Lamb was the secretary of the Yoruba Mission for eight years. During his tenure, he worked ceaselessly to “raise the tone of the sacred ministry by
getting young men sent from this place to England through the CMS.”73 This process resulted in a growing chasm between the elites who practiced a monotheistic religion and those who did not.

This deep-seated tension between monotheistic elites and irreligious natives is patently clear in a number of obituaries. Because so many of the elites began their career at a CMS grammar school and finished it at a Western institution, they became fairly active evangelists after returning to Lagos. For example, James Cole, a Saro, employed his vast wealth to further the Christian cause; he “was one of the founders and principal supports of the United Native African Church.”74 Moreover, the obituary for Rev. Bishop Johnson praises him for his life of service in the church, writing that “he was born of pagan parents” and later “became a convert to Christianity at the early age of nine.”75 Armed with his Christian training from the CMS Grammar School in Freetown, he was able to “win his parents from their pagan faith.”76 After receiving an advanced degree in Divinity from Fourah Bay College, Johnson was sent to Lagos “to go amongst the heathen and preach the gospel of salvation,” eventually obtaining the nickname, “Holy Johnson,” in town.77 As illustrated, the church secured both monetary and human support by educating the elite at a young age. This education incentivized Lagosians to work tirelessly to inculcate natives with monotheistic, usually Christian, beliefs.

The obituaries of clergymen provide insight on the inner workings of the CMS–how they recruited, who they recruited, and the methods in which they garnered support from natives. It appears that the CMS recruitment process began with enrolling the children of African elites into the CMS Grammar School. After that, the schoolmaster sent the brightest students to the West to earn advanced degrees in theology or divinity. Post-graduation, these African elites would return

74 “Obituary Mr. James William Cole,” The Lagos Weekly Record, March 27, 1897.
from the West and spread the gospel in Lagos or Abeokuta; they became advocates not only for Christianity but also for Victorian ideals and gender roles. Oftentimes, missionaries—Lagosian and European—encouraged (or in many cases coerced) other elite Lagosian men and women to enter monogamous, Christian marriages. Kristin Mann, in many of her essays regarding marriage practices among Yoruba in and around Lagos between 1880-1913, explains how missionaries taught natives Victorian values about the “proper relationship between and roles of Christian husbands and wives.”

Here, it is important to note that most of these Western-educated, Christian elites were male. Women were largely absent from CMS Grammar Schools and higher education, indicating that schooling, especially advanced schooling, was a predominantly male process. As Kristin Mann puts it, “missionaries portrayed husbands as leaders in the public sphere and wives as moral exemplars—guardians of the family’s and society’s moral values.”

The influence of Christianity on Lagosian elites is important to understand, as it almost single-handedly spread Victorian gender ideals and roles—with an end goal of creating a Christian, “civilized” Nigeria. The adjectives and language used in obituaries reveal what traits “the perfect gentleman,” who exemplified these Victorian ideals, had, highlighting how the CMS’s evangelizing efforts education influenced how members of the elite acted and wanted to be remembered.

“The perfect gentleman”

Obituaries are space-constrained; families, friends, or in some instances the editor must pay for the newspaper area consumed by the obituary. The author must distill an individual’s life

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into a few hundred words—sometimes less. Consequently, the author chooses certain facts, traits, or stories over others. Stephanie Newell utilizes an aphorism to describe this phenomenon: “from corpse to corpus.”83 The dead (corpse) “becomes” the corpus because the authors of obituaries create and perpetuate a certain identity of the deceased. Because obituaries are products of “certain principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation concerning death and the values of a particular life,” they provide a “small window” into the culture at the time.84 Consequently, the new African elites utilized obituaries in Lagosian newspapers as a medium to define which traits were necessary be a member of the upper echelon.

The obituaries published in Lagosian newspapers between 1880-1920 employed a similar repertoire of adjectives to describe professional men, revealing how the bereaved wished to define this certain demographic of deceased elites. For example, the obituary of al Hadj Haroun al Raschid in an 1897 issue of The Lagos Weekly Record describes him as “a very unpretentious gentleman” and that “all who have met him were struck with his humility.”85 An obituary in the same issue reports the death of Caleb Edwin, who had a record of “unflinching integrity and unswerving attention to duty.”86 Other adjectives describing these gentlemen include “punctual,” “modest,” and “courteous” 87 All these men were professionals— in this paragraph I ignored obituaries of clergy, chiefs, and individuals in the military because those utilized different adjectives. That being said, in almost all the obituaries of these professional men, the perfect gentleman prescribed to Victorian male gender ideals of utility, duty, and manliness, highlighting

83 Stephanie Newell, "From Corpse to Corpus" in African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century (University of Michigan Press, 2016), 396.
84 James W Green, Beyond the Good Death (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 161. Chapter 6 of Green’s Beyond the Good Death provides a great overview of anthropological studies of obituaries. One of the scholars he profiles is Janice Hume, who studied over 5,000 North American obituaries between 1818-1930. Hume was the first scholar to employ the “small window” metaphor that is still prevalent today.
86 “Mr. Caleb Edwin,” The Lagos Weekly Record, May 8, 1897.
how European gender ideals, spread via the church and Western-education, influenced this sector of the male Lagosian elite.

Numerous Africanists have traced the influence and evolution of male Victorian ideals in Lagos, Nigeria. It is important to note here that the Lagosian elites bore most of the responsibility to uphold, spread, and define these hybrid Victorian-Nigerian ideals. Elite Lagosian men, particularly those in professional roles laid out above, had a distinct social identity. Kristin Mann explains that “educated Africans who aspired to preeminence within colonial society recognized that most Europeans regarded Yoruba culture as inferior. These individuals believed they could win favor with influential whites and blacks by demonstrating they had assimilated into Western culture.”

Furthermore, in her article, Olufunke Adeboye explains that professional men “had a distinct life style, which embraced Western ways and values in addition to their own African heritage and culture.” In early twentieth-century Lagos, an elite man was Western-educated, employed, and could read and write in English.

Interestingly, obituaries that praised chiefs and military men employed different adjectives, celebrating these men for their bravery rather than their prescription to Victorian gender ideals. An obituary for Chief Okenla in a September 14, 1882 issue of The Lagos Observer describes the chief as a hero. The author begins with “the Christians of Abeokuta and ourselves have sustained an irreparable loss in the death of their hero, Chief Okenla.” The subsequent obituary indicates what a Lagosian hero, in the eyes of the elite, looks like. Chief Okenla “thoroughly routed the Dahomians who were going to destroy the prosperous village of

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90 “Obituary,” The Lagos Observer, September 12, 1882.
the *oba.*”

He also kept order “and discipline at the Christian farm village […] where he resided” and was “firm and steadfast” in his religious faith. In the end, it appears that the Lagosian elite culture celebrated bravery, military prowess, and unwavering (usually Christian) faith in their military leaders.

The obituaries of Christian leaders highlighted their prolific missionary work through Lagos and West Africa rather than solely spotlighting their admirable traits. The obituary of J.A Lamb praised him for “inaugurating mission operations on this island in the year 1852” and went on to describe the “tedious journey” he took to Ibadan and Abeokuta (in the interior of Lagos) in 1862. Similarly, the 1917 obituary for Rev. Bishop Johnson applauds his work among “heathens” in Lagos, writing that he was “sent down to Lagos which opened a way for him to go amongst the heathen and preach the gospel of true salvation.” He was “like a prophet of old” and would go down “in the historical pages of West African evangelical endeavors.” In 1877, Archdeacon Johnson moved from Lagos to take over the Breadfruit Station, where he was tasked with finishing the construction of St. Paul’s church. In his obituary, the author explains that “the late Archdeacon, with great energy and determination and an irresistible winsome way

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91 “Obituary,” *The Lagos Observer*, September 12, 1882. Dahomey was located west of Lagos on the Bight of Benin. Founded at the turn of the 18th century, the kingdom aspired to expand its territory. It invaded and conquered the smaller Yoruba states of Allada and Ouidah in the 1700s. This Dohomian conquest disrupted trade routes and forced thousands of Yoruba refugees to flee east towards Lagos. The Dahomey kingdom was highly active in the slave trade until the 19th century. The conquest led to Lagos’s rise as a city because it was far enough east to avoid the Dohomian conquest. From Kristin Mann *Slavery and the Birth of an African City* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 34-52.


94 It should be noted that very few low-level missionaries got obituaries—they were not part of the elite, as they often did not have enough money to join their ranks. However, bishops, archdeacons, and certain reverends were often eulogized, and this paragraph will center on those individuals who had a lot of social clout and often a lot of money too. For a complete history of CMS activity in Nigeria see J. F Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite*, Longman, 1965.


overcame all difficulties and succeeded in the completion of a work which had been regarded as hopeless by many."

These obituaries reveal that evangelizing natives was a central job for clergymen in the CMS, and the Lagosian elite played a large role in this process due to their extensive education and lofty social and economic statuses. In all, the obituaries of clergy were quick to highlight the evangelical work of clergymen, indicating that this was not only a part of being a Christian leader but an expectation. While the adjectives and actions that memorialized men altered based upon their profession, the adjectives and roles attributed to the few females eulogized in obituaries all avoided transgressing Victorian female ideals.

Obituaries that memorialized elite women before the twentieth century praised them for stereotypically-Victorian feminine traits. In an 1883 obituary for Miss Elfrida Esther Thomas, the author describes her as “unobtrusive,” “gentle,” and full of “self-denial,” praising her “devotion” to teaching. In a similar obituary, published in 1900, for Lady Denton, the author describes her as devoted “to her husband and her family” with a “gentle” manner. Overall, the adjectives in these female obituaries contrast sharply with the adjectives used in the male obituaries we explored above—they are placed in a position of subordination to the family’s needs. This “helper” theme continues when the obituaries described the kind of work in which that elite women participated. For example, the author of Lady Denton’s obituary praises her service and dedication to helping the native cause. He writes:

“she was of the class of those who know the natives, who sympathize with them and have learned to love them; who look upon themselves as the servants of those whom they rule, and rule by serving them; who do everything that in them lies to bridge over the yawning gulf which still separates colour [sic] from colour [sic], race from race, and creed from creed.”

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100 “Obituary,” The Lagos Observer, September 13, 1883.
Similarly, Miss Elfrida Esther Thomas is credited for founding a “Dorcas Society,” and being an active member in the Young Abstainer’s Union Association in her obituary.\textsuperscript{103} In both instances, Elfrida Thomas and Lady Denton are active in helping roles—typically ones that help the Natives in and around Lagos. Furthermore, there are only four obituaries for women before 1900, indicating that most elite women were not as active in the public sphere as lawyers, doctors, or merchants like the elite African men.\textsuperscript{104} Instead, they were in the private sphere, taking care of the family and doing charity work. In the end, it is clear that in the 1880s and early 1900s, the obituaries perpetuated a specifically crafted image of elite women—one that adhered to Victorian gender ideals and placed women in a “helping” position within Lagosian society.

The observations about women gleaned from obituaries substantiate previous scholarship about womanhood and girlhood in Lagos, most of which concludes that Victorian gender roles deeply shaped and influenced elite Lagosian women. Abosede George provides a portrait of the elite Lagosian girl, explaining that a “Christian girl growing up in Lagos at the turn of the twentieth century would have lived much like her middle-class contemporaries in London;” she would have played piano, gone to a local church to in the morning, and worn dresses imported from Europe.\textsuperscript{105} Kristin Mann expands on elite Lagosian women in an article about Christian marriage in Lagos, writing, “by the 1880s, most elite women aspired to the Victorian ideal, and many achieved it. These women devoted themselves to running homes, socializing with friends,

\textsuperscript{103} “Obituary,” \textit{The Lagos Observer}, September 13, 1883. A Dorcas society is a collection of local church members, usually women, who provide clothing for the poor. Dorcas is a character described in Acts of the Apostles (Chapter 9, v. 36).
\textsuperscript{104} See also “Obituary Miss Mary Jackson,” \textit{The Lagos Weekly Record}, May 18, 1907; “Funeral of Mrs. Blaize, \textit{The Lagos Weekly Record}, October 12, 1895.
and improving the community through good works, not to pursuing independence
economic activities.”¹⁰⁶ Due to their Christian upbringing, their husbands who prescribed
to Victorian notions of gender roles, and the influence of their British colonial
oppressors, many elite Lagosian women acted according to Victorian gender
expectations. As the obituaries above illustrated, many elite women were proud that they
lived according to Victorian values, happily demonstrating in their obituaries they had
“assimilated to Western culture.”¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, as World War I wrapped up, growing
notions of nationalism would vilify these same Victorian, Western influences; a shift that
I will explore in the next section.

The obituaries that eulogized Lagosian elite during this time allow us to
understand how the various sects of the elite population wished to be remembered—the
bereaved deliberately chose what traits and components went into these memory
containers. The adjectives for men loosely divide into three categories: professionals,
chiefs, and clergymen. On one hand, authors utilized adjectives and actions that
prescribed to male Victorian roles to eulogize lawyers, doctors, or merchants. Here,
authors emphasized utility, sense of duty, and Christian manners. On the other hand,
authors emphasized military prowess and bravery when memorializing career military
men or chiefs. Lastly, authors emphasized the piety of clergymen, and recorded the
evangelizing efforts of the deceased. Overall, a man’s profession defined the traits in
one’s obituary, as Lagosian elites employed different measures of success depending on a
male’s occupations: a successful professional elite typified a “Black Englishman,” a
successful chief or military figure was action-oriented, and a successful clergyman

zealously evangelized natives. Elite female obituaries starkly contrast this construction; no matter who or what they did, they were praised for their gentle manner, the number of kids they birthed, and their charity work among natives. For the most part, their obituaries homogenize them into a single “helper” category, and do not include any adjectives or actions that might transgress Victorian ideals for females.

“A practical patriot”

After the amalgamation of Lagos in 1914, which combined the Northern and Southern protectorates of West Africa into the single area known as Nigeria today, an increasing number of Lagosians identified as Nigerians or Africans. Historian Fred Omu at the University of Lagos explains that “in the absence of political parties, […] newspapers were the only significant vehicle of public opinion.” Furthermore, the distinguished political scientist, James Smoot Coleman, said, “the most potent instrument used in the propagation of nationalist ideas and racial consciousness has been the African-owned nationalist press.” As such, numerous historians have studied this rise of Nigerian nationalism in newspapers, often looking at editorials and opinion pieces– obituaries have been overlooked as a medium for nationalist advocacy. Consequently, this section will show how obituaries capture a cultural shift among the authors of these obituaries, highlighting how these containers for memories also became platforms for a growing Nigerian nationalist movement.

After 1900, some female obituaries shift tone, celebrating women who practiced a “civilised native” lifestyle, indicating a change among elite women that encouraged them to take pride in their apparent African roots. Mammy Rebecca Phillipia Johnson passed away in the early hours of a Tuesday. Days later, her obituary was published in *The Lagos Weekly Record*. In it, the writer eulogized Mammy Johnson for her ability to bridge the “civilised” life with her native life, writing “Mammy Johnson’s clear perception of what the civilised native life is and what it portends impressed many who had the privilege of her society. [She was] obliged to conform to some extent to the fashion of the life in which she found herself.”112 Rather than completely shed her native past, Mammy Johnson retained bits and pieces of it, while simultaneously assuming certain traits of a civilized woman. Her obituary praised her because she balanced being wholly civilized and wholly Nigerian simultaneously.113 In prior years, she might have been called a “heathen” or one of the natives that Lady Denton had to help. However, by the time her obituary appeared, there seemed to be a newfound respect for native roots and traditions. By 1907, it appears that part of the Lagosian elite recognized the value in a “civilised native life,” tying into the growing Nigerian nationalist sentiment in Lagos at the time. In general, some of the bereaved appeared less ashamed of their African roots than before and deemed some aspects of the “native life” worthy memorialization.

Numerous obituaries published after 1900 utilize the term “patriot” to describe the deceased, but some of these obituaries also describe the deceased as “passive” or “unobtrusive,” revealing that there might have been a tension between Nigerian nationalism and remaining non-threatening to British colonial officials. Before the early 1900s, this term really did not appear in

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obituaries. Five obituaries in my corpus of 50 (10%) use the term “patriot.” Four out of five (80%) of those obituaries are from 1903 or later. They are from 1903, 1906, 1911, and 1919. The only obituary that uses “patriot” before the turn of the twentieth century is for Dr. J.A.B. Horton, who is described as a “practical patriot.” By attaching the qualifier “practical,” the author highlights a tension between two identities. On the one hand, the deceased elite desires to be proud to his Lagosian origins. On the other hand, Horton also had to be non-threatening to their British colonial leaders in Lagos at the time. To reconcile the two identities, the author described him as a practical patriot—one who would not go to too much trouble to defend his countrymen. Moving to post-1900, the obituary for Hon. C.J. George explains that “his patriotism was national” but he “assume[d] an attitude of passive acquiescence” in life. Similarly, the obituary for Prince Ademuyiwa Haastrup commends his “patriotism and public spiritedness” while also describing him as “quiet and unobtrusive.” Both of these obituaries indicate that the identity struggle for Horton in the 1880s was still happening; it seems the Lagosian elites spent decades finding a balance between being proud of their African descent and maintaining a safe relationship with their colonial oppressors.

Many obituaries were published first in Lagosian newspapers and later in Saro newspapers, revealing that the deaths of important Lagosian elites transcended the boundaries of national identities. After R.B. Blaize passed away in 1904, his obituary appeared first in a Lagosian newspaper, and then again in a Sierra Leonean newspaper. On September 14, 1904,

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114 Digital text analysis (DTA) would be perfect to underscore this claim. However, I did not have the time to digitize the obituaries in order to run DTA. Consequently, I had to sort through the obituaries by hand, so there is certainly room for human error in this analysis.
117 See also “Obituary The Late Rev. D. O. Williams,” The Lagos Weekly Record, March 25, 1911; “Obituary Notice The Late Mr. G. A. Williams, The Lagos Weekly Record, June 14, 1919.
118 “Obituary The Late Honoroble C. J. George J.P., The Lagos Weekly Record, September 15, 1906.
119 “Obituary The Late Prince Ademuyiwa Haastrup,” The Lagos Weekly Record, October 17, 1903.
The Lagos Weekly Record printed Blaize’s obituary.\textsuperscript{120} On October 22, 1904, The Weekly News, a newspaper printed and distributed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, printed the same obituary.\textsuperscript{121} The obituary for Alphonso Macauley was first published in The Sierra Leon Guardian on December 13, 1918.\textsuperscript{122} On January 1, 1919, The Lagos Standard reprinted the same obituary. Blaize and Macauley’s obituary illustrate that newspapers—at least in Sierra Leone and Nigeria—interacted with each other. The authors and editors exchanged ideas, honoring individuals who the elites deemed important. In 1919, the obituary for Dr. Charles Jenkins Lumpkin was published in The Lagos Weekly Record.\textsuperscript{123} He was a Saro doctor who served a decade-long stint as assistant Colonial Surgeon in Lagos before returning to Sierra Leone where he ended his career. Despite spending most of his life in Sierra Leone, his obituary was published in a Lagosian newspaper; his importance cut across national borders. In the end, Blaize, Macauley, Jenkins, and so many others were no longer deceased Lagosians or Saros. Instead, their deaths transcended borders.\textsuperscript{124} Here, the obituaries were not only used a space to house nationalist or pan-African opinions and beliefs. The containers were also physically passed around West Africa—in this instance, shared between Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

In many ways, these obituaries are a microcosm for the larger Nigerian nationalism movement in Lagos. Lagosian elites were the torchbearers of a new national identity for Nigeria, and they had to navigate between “the categories of Yoruba, West African, African, and Negro” in order to establish themselves in society.\textsuperscript{125} Saro and Lagosian newspapers celebrated many of the same individuals because they were deemed important West Africans— not just important

\textsuperscript{120} “Obituary Mr. Richard Beale Blaize,” The Lagos Weekly Record, September 24, 1904.
\textsuperscript{121} “Obituary Mr. Richard Beale Blaize,” The Weekly News, October 22, 1904.
\textsuperscript{122} “Obituary Alphonso Macauley,” The Sierra Leone Guardian, December 12, 1918.
\textsuperscript{123} “Obituary Alphonso Macauley,” The Lagos Standard, January 1, 1919.
\textsuperscript{124} See also “Obituary Death of Venerable Archdeaon H. Johnson,” The Lagos Weekly Record, August 2, 1901; “Obituary Death of the Ex-King of Dahomey,” The Lagos Weekly Record, December 15, 1906.
Lagosians or Saros. Moreover, some of the female obituaries indicate that, at least after 1900, the Lagosian elites valued native traditions. However, that native life was qualified with “civilized,” indicating that their brand of native tradition was more refined than the “typical” native lifestyle. Similarly, the Lagosian elites utilized the term patriot, while qualifying it with words such as “practical” or “unobtrusive” to make it less threatening. Intellectual historian Philip Zachernuk describes this complex, sometimes contradictory identity navigation, in *Colonial Subjects*, writing that “the intelligentsia of the 1920s were caught between the demands of their civilizing mission […] and pride in their ‘African personality’” even though race identity was still “pertinent in the context of white domination and racism.” Overall, these obituaries encapsulate the elite’s changing identities by capturing the moment when a “civilized” native life became admirable, recording when Saro and Lagosian newspapers exchanged ideas, and revealing the tension between patriotic fervor and remaining non-threatening to a colonial power.

In the Lagosian context, the obituary served numerous purposes beyond memorializing the dead. It was a vehicle in which members of the elite could claim space, physically and socially, praise those disseminating Christianity, define the different traits each gender and profession should have in order to be part of the top echelon, and a medium for early experiments with Nigerian nationalism. Obituaries empowered Lagosians. The deceased, memorialized in obituaries, were permanently preserved in history; as long as their stories were written and printed, they could not be forgotten. The living elites used obituaries to define who they were and who could join their elite club. Friends and family of the deceased could brag

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127 Philip S. Zachernuk’s *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideals*, investigates these questions of identity from 1880 through 1920. He investigates how Lagosian’s defined “Nigerian,” using print, namely newspapers and pamphlets.
about their social status, economic power, or political standing to other readers, reaching a wide audience. Obituaries empowered Lagosians to think beyond borders—important Lagosians were honored in Nigerian and Sierra Leonean obituaries alike. As such, obituaries encouraged Lagosians to think nationally and begin to realize that being Lagosian, Nigerian, or African is not synonymous with being uncivilized, heathen, or uncultured. Using these obituaries, elite Lagosians explored and experimented with identity and nationalism, sowing seeds for future Nigerian nationalist and independence movements.
Figures and Illustrations

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Table 1.2 Estimated Slave Departures from Lagos by Five-Year Periods, 1761–1851 (in thousands)


Kristin Mann, Slavery and the Birth of an African City
The Lagos Observer, January 31, 1884.

Figure 4: Obituary for Robert Campbell

From The Lagos Observer, January 31, 1884.
From The Lagos Observer, January 31, 1884.
IN MEMORIAM.

The passionate grief beside the dying bed;
The passionate longing for the one we miss;
The passionate yearning for the spirit fled;
Of each we ask, “Can life bear worse than this?”
Yes! answer weary lips and tired eyes,
To violent sorrows, smiles Nature grants;
Worse than the world’s supremest agonies,
Are all its empty vanities;—its hopeless want.

When vivid lightnings flame and thunder crash,
When the strong winds lash the fierce sea to storms,
We see the beacons by the lurid flash,
The harbor’s lighthouse-sea-shot form;
But when below the sullen drip of rain,
The waters sob along the hollow shore,
’Tis hard to think the sun can shine again,
The dull waves gleam to living light once more.

When time saps slowly strength and hope away,
And the black gulf yawns by the lonely path,
When silent night creeps on the empty day,
And the one shade of all is held by death;
Look not to faded joy or lingering love,
To wake the powers youth and faith had given,
Take patiently the lot we all must prove,
Till the great gate swings back, and shows us, Heaven.

He’s gone! what tribute from my pen,
Can I round his loving memory ring;
To him who, living, midst his fellow men,
Did prove himself in truth a very king;
Art, Music, Literature, and health-giving power,
A love to country, and his fellow kind;
All in his bosom shined as in a bower,
Where shall we look? another such to find.
His seal for good! we all may imitate,
His love to country! so be our patriot’s love;
His patient loving labours! his generosity, how great!
Be every one’s example, ’till we meet above.

Figure 6: In Memoriam Poem for Dr. Nathaniel King

From “In Memoriam,” The Lagos Observer, June 19 1884.
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Primary


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Secondary


