



Hegemony and Spatial Politics: The Press and the Struggle for Lagos in Colonial Nigeria

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Abstract

Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic politics are inherent in most human groupings, particularly where such politics are geared toward the appropriation of space. Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to explain how an elite and counter-elite dichotomy in a social formation arose in the struggle for power. Contentious micro-politics in Lagos, the capital city in colonial Nigeria, with the attendant pull and push of elite bargaining for power and prominence, is examined, particularly as the dual claims to consent and dissent were reflected in the nationalist newspapers of the era.

Résumé

La pratique d'une politique de type hégémonique et contre-hégémonique est inhérente à la plupart des groupements humains, particulièrement lorsque ces politiques portent sur l'appropriation de l'espace. C'est dans ce contexte que cette contribution se propose d'expliquer la manière dont la dichotomie élite/contre-élite au sein d'une formation sociale conduit à une lutte pour le pouvoir. La pratique d'une forme de micro-politique controversée à Lagos, la capitale du Nigeria colonial, ainsi que les manœuvres de l'élite intéressée par le pouvoir sont examinées, particulièrement au moment où les manifestations de contentement et de frustration étaient véhiculées dans les journaux nationalistes de l'époque.

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Introduction

To study affiliation is to study and to recreate the bonds between texts and the world... To recreate the affiliative network is therefore to make visible, to give materiality back to, the strands holding the text to society, author, and culture...(Edward Said 1983).

Space, the attendant inscription of space with meaning and its imbrication in power relations have very interesting implications which have come to be described as spatiality. Spatiality – the politics of space – can produce important consequences for local, national and international politics. Sometimes the contest over the meaning, importance and appropriation of space at one level have important consequences for other levels. The status of Lagos and the implications of this status for national politics in Nigeria have always been a contentious issue. The city, therefore, as the capital of colonial – and later post-colonial – Nigeria was imbricated in the struggle for hegemony and domination by ethnic groups, which was folded into the struggle against colonial rule, the struggle for independence, and later, the struggle for national cohesion. Barely five years after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, with Lagos becoming the capital city, interested elements in the new colony and protectorates of Nigeria began a move to hedge Lagos out of its ‘central status’ and replace it with another capital, perhaps more fitted to the political goals of such elements.

The ‘anti-Lagos’ elements presented what they considered important points against the retention of Lagos as capital city – or ‘Administrative Headquarters’ as it was then known – and the removal of the capital to ‘an uninhabited spot in Kaduna, 570 miles away from Lagos’, somewhere behind Lokoja, perhaps near Abuja, the present Federal Capital Territory.² The ‘anti-Lagos’ elements had described Lagos as ‘the nerve-centre of political agitation and the grave of official reputations’ (*The Lagos Weekly Record*, 14 February, 1920:1). *The Lagos Weekly Record* described as ‘unauthorized and fallacious’ the claim in some quarters that the then Governor-General of Colonial Nigeria had ordered that:

the Headquarters of the Governor-General and the central seat of Government would be the high plateau immediately behind Lokoja known as Mount Patte, situated in the *very centre* of the Protectorate, commanding the Niger and the Benue, within easy (reach) of Baro the starting-point of the central railway, and linked up with the western railway by a branch line to Osogbo (ibid).

Consequent upon the agitation and rumours of the impending shift in the capital, the Governor-General, Sir Hugh Clifford, toured the Southern and

Northern Provinces, and addressed the Nigerian Council on the matter on Monday, 29 December 1919. Clifford declared to the Council:

After giving this question the most careful consideration, I have arrived at the conclusion that, at any rate, for a great many years to come, the only possible place at which the principal seat of Government can be located is Lagos. I have said that Nigeria is today standing on the threshold of great commercial expansion and development; and experience gained in other new and undeveloped countries in the Tropics shows that during the initial stages, so much depends upon the inspiration and initiative of Government and upon *its close cooperation with those sections of the public which are actively engaged in the promotion of trade and of business enterprises*, that is essential that the administrative Headquarters should itself be the great radiating centre of energy, innovation and progress (ibid).

Clifford's reasons for remaining in Lagos transcended commercial reasons – even though, as he acknowledged, these were supposed to lead to the radiation of ‘energy, innovation and progress’. Curiously, for a foreign imposition at its infancy, Clifford was also concerned about the government moving too far away from the articulation of dissent. The Governor-General argued that the functions of the colonial government would suffer in its execution if it moved away from the critical appraisal that was evident in Lagos:

This is a function which (we) can hardly hope to fulfil unless the principal operations of the Government are carried on in the *midst of the most active life and thought of the country*, whence it is able to maintain the closest touch with every section of the community, and where *its activities are exposed to the closest scrutiny and criticism*. Such things, I contend, are aids to good government with which no administration can safely afford to dispense (ibid).

Clifford did not stop there. He argued further against the agitation to take the capital to what would appear to be the present day Abuja or even Kaduna, affirming that such a move had been ‘definitely abandoned’ and hoping that it would not be revived for many decades:

(I)f the seat of Government be situated in some position of comparable isolation it must inevitably tend to become *increasingly bureaucratic, and automatically deprive itself of the assistance in the framing of its measures which articulate public opinion* of those whose affairs are its charge can alone efficiently supply (ibid).

Contrary to Clifford's hope, the matter again came up in the 1940s and 1950s Nigeria as the nationalist struggle increased in tempo, and as the dynamics of the concomitant political calculations for the appropriation of space and power

in the lead up to independence, took on a new life. But first, the debate began in terms of the rightful and also constitutional 'ownership' of the space, and consequently deteriorated into the propriety or otherwise of moving the capital to another part of the country.

This paper analyses the structure, nature and dynamics of this struggle for hegemony over a city that was seen by some of the 'gladiators' as the social and political – perhaps also, the economic – equivalent of the rest, if not the whole, of Nigeria. As one of the leading nationalists of that era, H.O. Davies, captured this sentiment, the city contained 'the genius of the country' (Awolowo 1960:154). Obafemi Awolowo, who was also one of the leading activists of that era, but resident in Ibadan, accused the nationalists in Lagos of seeing the city as 'the alpha and omega of political sagacity and wisdom', believing that 'only those who lived within its confines should essay to lead the country' (ibid).

The foregoing descriptions of the centrality and assumed primacy of Lagos explained why it was important in the (ethnic) hegemonic and counter-hegemonic politics of the period, particularly in the context of how this politics was geared toward the appropriation of space – within that particular socio-political formation – as explicated in the newspaper press of the period. Two rival newspapers – *The West African Pilot* and *The Daily Service* – are used in this paper, as they represent rival claims to 'ownership' and 'primacy' in spatial politics, to explicate a theoretical position that captures these struggles within the framework of the creation and institutionalisation of a 'pattern of group activity' in which idealised forms that cohere with the interests of the (ethnic) group are leveraged into 'commonsensical' ideas in the pursuit of the group's political, economic and social interests (Laitin 1986:19).

The City and the structure of elaboration and affiliation

Intellectuals exercise hegemony over particular locations, not only because they create particular ways of life and particular conceptions of the world, but also because they are able to translate the interests and values of specific social formations into general and 'common' values and interests. One way in which this can be done is through the text – which propagates these ways of life and conceptions of the world. Here, hegemony, which resides in civil society, is translated into a bulwark in support of political society (ibid:105). Hegemony is here conceived as involving the 'creation and institutionalization of a pattern of group activity in a state with a concomitant espousal of an idealized framework that strives to present itself as "common sense"' (ibid:19). It is a 'vehicle' with which the dominant social groups establish a system of 'permanent consent' that legitimates a prevailing social order by encompassing

a complex network of mutually reinforcing and interwoven ideas affirmed and articulated by intellectuals (Fontana 1993:141).

The intellectuals, in the context of the empirical situation here, are the activists and partisans – what David Laitin (1986:100) calls ‘political entrepreneurs’ – who were using the newspapers to legitimate or de-legitimate the prevailing social order in colonial Lagos. The conflict that is inherent in the logic of hegemony, which produces counter-hegemony, is captured well by Laitin who argues that a successful hegemony does not necessarily yield ‘order’, but rather it ‘yields a set of conflicts that automatically and common-sensically stands at the top of the political agenda’ (ibid:107). I proceed to examine here an empirical situation which explicates the foregoing argument.

Lagos as a centre of struggle

It can be argued that the modern history of Lagos – which is also called Eko – began in 1851 when the British forced the King of Lagos, Kosoko, from the throne on the grounds of his slave-raiding activities. His more pliant uncle, Akitoye, replaced him. As Michael Crowder (1962:120) argues, the installation of a king who was not only sympathetic to British interests but also depended on the British for survival, in place of a hostile one, was ‘a classic example of nineteenth century colonial expansion’. Britain, on 30 July 1961 annexed the ‘internally stable’ Lagos because of her need for a base from which it could regulate trade with the interior (ibid:133). With the ‘cession’ of Lagos to the British by King Dosumu, who succeeded Akitoye, and the subsequent annexation, a new era began ‘in the history of British relations with that part of the coast, an era which inaugurated the new territory of Nigeria’ (ibid:136).

With the annexation of Lagos came debilitating conditions in the Yoruba hinterland as the Ijaye war flared up again. Eventually, the troubles in the interior boiled down to competition between the Egba and Ibadan to exert control over access to Lagos. So, while Lagos enjoyed relative peace and centrality in trade, the parts of the interior were either engaged in war or bitter rivalry.

Against this background, Lagos became the hub of economic and social activities, with the attendant political significance of such an emerging centre of modernity. The dynamics and intensity of the politics of Lagos was so strong as to even trap and impede the nationalist fervour that was being generated by Herbert Macaulay over the 1923 elections in which the ‘natives’ were allowed to elect four people to the legislative assembly – three representing Lagos and one representing Calabar in the east of Nigeria. It was not until the 1930s that a new generation of Nigerians looking beyond the ‘narrow political horizons of the capital’ seized control of the nationalist movement from the generation of the Macaulays (ibid:217).

The political history of Lagos in the period between 1923-1938 revolved around the quinquennial elections for the Legislative Council and the triennial election for the Lagos Town Council – the latter which had the elective principle partially extended to it in 1920 – and the long-running issue of the status and headship of the House of Docemo, the ruling house in Lagos (Coleman 1986:197). Macaulay, who is regarded as the father of Nigerian (anti-colonial) nationalism, threw himself at all of these, using his newspaper, the *Lagos Daily News*, market women, the House of Docemo and its supporters, and ‘his unique ability to fire the imagination of the semiliterate and illiterate masses of Lagos’ to advantage (ibid).

The competition for the elective posts in Lagos increased political awakening in the city, with the number of newspapers (five) surpassing the number of parties (two) (ibid; 198). However, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), led by Macaulay, emerged as the most powerful party, returning candidates to the Legislative Council in 1923, 1928, and 1933. Even though it claimed to be ‘national’, the NNDP was a Lagos affair, notwithstanding the fact that it took a ‘national’ stand on crucial issues, reminding Lagosians of their linkage with a larger territory called Nigeria (ibid:199).

Until the 1930s, most educated Nigerians who invariably led the nationalist movement and controlled the press were from Yoruba or Creole families who had been in long contact with Europeans (Crowder 1962:217). This ‘closed aristocracy’ of the Yoruba and the *Yorubalised* Creoles was only intellectually challenged, in a serious and sustained manner, from the 1930s (ibid). With this challenge came concrete developments in nationalist organisation.

The Ibo, as they were then called, now Igbo, constituted the largest ethnic category that challenged this ‘closed aristocracy’. But this challenge was only possible when it was organised around the towering image and figure of Nnamdi Azikiwe, who then had just returned with a string of degrees from America. By the early 1950s, the Ibo constituted 44.6 percent of the population of Lagos (Coleman 1986).

From 1934 to 1949, Azikiwe, popularly called Zik, was ‘the most important and celebrated nationalist leader’ on the West Coast of Africa, if not in all tropical Africa (ibid:220). He initiated a new era in journalism upon his return from America, first in Ghana and later in Nigeria. With bold, daring and sometimes shocking directness in his editorials and news, Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* displaced other newspapers, emerging as a commercial success (ibid:222-3). As the author of one of the most cited works on Nigerian history, James Coleman, stated, Azikiwe's

Combative and provocative journalism was the principal source of his fame and power, and the most crucial single precipitant of the Nigerian

awakening. Although Azikiwe's power and influence resulted partly from his fresh and militant approach (to the issue of freedom and independence), they also reflected the fact that he was the first non-Yoruba Nigerian (apart from Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw) to emerge into prominence (ibid:223-4).

Before the emergence and ascendancy of Azikiwe in Nigerian journalism and politics – which were meshed in those days (Adebanwi 2002) – the Ibo had been on the periphery of politics, lacking a symbol and a spokesman, even while exhibiting an unprecedented passion to catch up with their main southern rival, the Yoruba, particularly in the area of education and modernity.

With the pressure exerted in the main by Azikiwe through his papers, the issue of Lagos became very salient. After the dissolution of the activist Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), an off-shoot of the Lagos Youth Movement, due to internal wrangling over the choice of the Movement for the Legislative Council, in which Azikiwe and Samuel Akinsanya were pitched against Ernest Ikoli and Obafemi Awolowo with the attendant press war between the Zik-owned *West African Pilot* and NYM-owned *Daily Service*, the emergent parties, the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroons, NCNC (later National Council for Nigerian Citizens) and the Action Group engaged in a battle over the status of Lagos.

Azikiwe had earlier protested the domination of Lagos politics by the Yoruba who were also discriminating against non-Yorubas particularly in the area of housing (Coleman 1986:340); but his presidency of the Ibo State Union did not help matters. He had said while addressing his Ibo constituents that 'It would appear that the God of Africa had created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages...' (Crowder 1962:228).

Zik's main rival, Obafemi Awolowo, in his autobiography, concedes that 'the Ibo had never had a share in newspaper publicity before the advent of the (Zik's) *Pilot*', but argues that 'no Yoruba man of *the class of Ibos* publicised in the *Pilot* ever had a share of publicity in any paper either' (Awolowo 1960:139, emphasis added). Even though it is difficult to determine what Awolowo meant by 'the class of Ibos', he also conceded that 'the Ibos needed all the boosting they could get', ostensibly through Zik's medium. But even here, Awolowo queries the actual practice of this 'ethnic boosting' (Coleman 1962:342-3). This bears extensive quotation:

But, Dr. Azikiwe went about it in a manner which disgusted those of us who were used to describing citizens of Nigeria as Nigerians or Africans, and regarding their achievement as reflecting on Nigeria, indeed Africa, as a whole... But as against these, the achievement of Yorubas and in particular, the academic laurels of their scholars received, if at all, inconspicuous notice in the *Pilot*. When an Ibo did or was about to do

something praiseworthy, he was invariably given a two-column headline and report in the *Pilot*, and was always described by his ethnic origin in the headlines. But when the Ph.D. degree of London University, indeed of any university for that matter, was conferred on the first Nigerian ever, the historic news was given a small single-space in the *Pilot*, and the headline read: 'Nigerian Economist Passes Ph.D. in London'. The scholar concerned was Dr. Fadipe, a Yoruba... Apart from failing to give publicity to the achievements of the Yoruba, and holding their public men to obloquy, the *Pilot* always made sure that all their misdoings received the publicity (Awolowo 1960:140-1).

Awolowo fails to note that given the prior advantage enjoyed by the Yoruba in the press, the *Pilot's* attitude to 'Yoruba achievement' might only have been an attempt to 'balance out' years of publicity enjoyed by the Yoruba. Even while this will not excuse the attitude as detailed by Awolowo, it can partly explain the urge for the Ibo in this era to 'equal' or 'balance out' the Yoruba who had a head start. This was eventually achieved, as the Yoruba later started complaining of 'Ibo domination' in metropolitan (Lagos) and even national politics.

With the creation, and subsequent activities, of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a Yoruba socio-cultural organisation, the Yoruba-Ibo tension rose in Lagos, as the creation of the *Egbe* heightened tribal antagonism between the Yoruba and the Ibo (Sklar 1968:68-70). Prior to the creation of the *Egbe*, the immediate past years had witnessed the establishment of Ibo's ideological leadership of the pan-Nigeria movement, which also ran alongside the pursuit of Ibo 'cultural supremacy' organised around the Ibo State Union (*ibid*). The *Egbe* seemed to have unveiled this bifacial hegemony, which the West African *Pilot* was to deride as 'Ibo domination stunt'. By 1948, Oluwole Alakija, a leading member of the *Egbe*, made a statement which was not untypical of the rivalry and passion against Azikiwe, and by extension, the Ibo:

We were bunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew the Ibos, but since we came to know them, we have tried to be friendly and neighbourly. Then came the Arch Devil [meaning, Azikiwe] to sow the seeds of distrust and hatred... We have tolerated enough from a class of Ibos and addle-brained Yorubas who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings (Coleman 1986:346).

The Ibos responded in kind to this intemperate statement leading to a press (civil) war which preceded a near descent into physical violence between the two groups, as gladiators descended on the local markets to purchase machetes (*ibid*). Mahmood Mamdani's concept of 'civil war' captures this event. Mamdani (1993:292) argues that, in the context of tribalism in Africa, a civil

war constitutes 'a continuum along which muted tensions co-exist long before they break out into open confrontation'.

A mass meeting of Ibos in Lagos resolved that any further personal attacks on Azikiwe would be seen as attacks on the 'Ibo nation', because 'if a hen were killed, the chickens would be exposed to danger' (Coleman 1986:346). In the middle of all this, the *Pilot* affirmed that:

Henceforth, the cry must be one of battle against the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, its leaders at home and abroad, up hill and down dale in the streets of Nigeria and in the residences of its advocate... It is the enemy of Nigeria; it must be crushed to the earth... There is no going back, until the Fascist Organization of Sir Adeyemo [leader of the Egbe] has been dismembered (ibid).

It was against this backdrop of civil war that the struggle for Lagos was enacted. The NCNC and mainly Ibo, led by Azikiwe, argued for the administrative separation of Lagos, as federal capital, from the rest of the West, while the Action Group, mainly Yoruba, led by Obafemi Awolowo, rooted for the retention of Lagos with the Yoruba West. While the *West African Pilot* represented the position of the former, the *Daily Service* represented the position of the latter in a passionate tussle for hegemony in the increasingly multi-cultural city. To use Mamdani's (1996:292) phrases, while the *Service* sought to 'flatten the ethnic diversity' of Lagos, the *Pilot* attempted to turn a 'simple fact of heterogeneity into a source of ethnic tension'.

The press and the construction of hegemony

In the push and pull toward hegemony and counter-hegemony by the rival ethnic/political groups over the status and 'ownership' of Lagos, the newspapers representing the opposing camps gave vent to the ideas, ideals, interests and values of the groups. The Yoruba elite in the AG and Igbo elite in the NCNC saw themselves as a 'determinate hegemonic force' (Fontana 1993:32), which could transform the position, power and privilege of their groups. The consequence of such consciousness, Fontana (ibid) argues, 'is the transformation of a subordinate, particularistic mass of disaggregated individuals into a leading and hegemonic subject whose thought and values have become the prevailing conception of the world'.

In the 1940s and early 1950s Nigeria, the North was largely indifferent to the status of Lagos. Therefore, it was a straight fight between the East (NCNC) and the West (AG).

The reforms in the Lagos Town Council (LTC) removed the independent status of Lagos, which was then largely controlled by the NCNC, which had produced an Ibo mayor for the city, and merged it with the Western Region.

The *Pilot* argued in this context that changes in the status of Lagos must be conceived along with the *essence* of the city:

If Lagos is still assumed to be the capital of Nigeria, surely in all its phases, institutions must exist to act as unifying media so that the centric force created will be Nigerian, neither entirely Yoruba, nor Ibo, nor Hausa. It is in this light that the proposed LTC reforms must again be examined.³

The paper makes the case that it is in the 'common' interest of all Nigerians to make Lagos free of any regional control. At the start of this debate, the *Pilot* comes across as if it were a dispassionate observer of the trend, speaking to the seemingly 'transcendental' significance of a 'multi-cultural' city for all:

If we succeed in making Lagos Nigeria's capital, where all tribes of the nation can live without feeling themselves ostracised, where the government system of the city will not be biased in *nature* but based on *progressive formula*, if we can indeed make Lagos a sort of London, or New York, where all citizens from all parts can commingle and inhabit without animosity, then surely we would have succeeded in cementing the Nigerian ideal...⁴.

What *Pilot* calls 'nature' could be seen as the claim of the Yoruba to the 'natural ownership' of Lagos, which explains why the newspaper then makes a case for the determination of the status of Lagos based on a 'progressive formula'. Such a formula, 'for the sake of unity', the paper argues further, will 'determine for centuries to come the graph line of peace among the people of Nigeria'. The paper therefore urges Nigerians to make this Atlantic City a truly worthy capital of Nigeria. One that will serve as a unifying force to make three warring *Nigerias* impossible. And the NCNC is dedicated to this *magnificent obsession*⁵.

The theme of 'unity' is one that resonates in any hegemonic process as the hegemonic group attempts to unify all, or at least, the majority around an organising idea, which, at base, only serves the interest of the group. Lagos, for the *Pilot*, is no longer just another town, but a centre of unity, a 'cosmopolitan city inhabited by a more politically advanced people drawn from all sections of a federated Nigeria'.⁶ The decision by the colonial government to incorporate Lagos into the Western Region, which would then rule the city indirectly, was consequently condemned by the paper as gratifying the 'personal ambition of certain disgruntled and interested individuals'⁷ through the introduction of 'a decadent and contemptible indirect rule system (which) will retard the progress of this metropolis'.⁸

Pilot challenged Lagosians to oppose the move whose actualisation would mean that Lagos 'has lost its status':

Shall Lagos citizens allow this retrogressive Action Group policy to jeopardise their communal interest on account of party politics? Lagos has lost its

homogeneous character and should any attempt be made to revive that *lost heritage*, then the Central Government will be admitting our plea that Lagos is no longer the capital of a federated Nigeria⁹.

The case of Lagos was very contentious in this battle for hegemony for a number of reasons, both economic and political. The West needed Lagos to add to her size, population and influence, as well as for economic reasons, as Awolowo repeatedly stated (Adebanwi 2002b:258). Again, the AG did not have political control of the Lagos Town Council (LTC), but would control the council indirectly if the city were merged with the Western Region. For the NCNC, Lagos was one of its major areas of support and it did not desire to lose it to the AG. Related to this was the rising population of the Ibo in Lagos. The NCNC obviously preferred not to place them under (rival) Yoruba control. This is apart from the economic benefits that would accrue to the West only if the city was placed under the Western Regional Government.

A *Pilot* popular columnist and member of the NCNC, Mbonu Ojike, in his 'Weekend Catechism', argued that the 'history' of federal capital all over the world supported the position of his party.¹⁰ He cited Canada, where Ottawa was independent of provincial control; Australia, where Canberra was independent of the control of any state; and US, where Washington D.C. enjoyed 'political freedom', to emphasise that the Action Group's terms were unacceptable:

And what is worse is that Nigerians are expected to sign away to Action Group ambition the city of Lagos which for three quarters of a century or more was developed with Eastern, Western and Northern funds...¹¹

When the Macpherson Constitution eventually merged Lagos with the Western Region, the *Pilot* stated that colonial Nigeria no longer had a capital:

The Macpherson Constitution has given us a country without a capital. Lagos though theoretically recognized as the capital of Nigeria, really belongs to the West and *henceforth* she will be subject to legislations from the Western House of Assembly. What impudence. What a degradation of status!¹²

The paper further argues that the Macpherson constitution, by making the position of Lagos 'anomalous', unsheathed one of its 'greatest weaknesses'. 'It is a weakness, which, perhaps, the unity of the country hinges. Theoretically, the municipality is ward and responsibility of the Western Region, but in practice the Central Governments estimates make several provisions for special expenditure for Lagos. This is because of the dual position of Lagos. Sooner or later matters are bound to come to a head in the first real test of the Macpherson Constitution over this matter of where Lagos stands'.¹³

This remained one of the important reasons why the paper fought the Macpherson Constitution, described as a 'perfect monster',¹⁴ until it was abandoned.

The fears of the NCNC elements were to begin to come to light shortly after the merger. The Western Regional Government set up the Storey Commission of Inquiry to look into the affairs of the LTC, which was controlled by the NCNC. The Commission's report was to form the basis of the dissolution of the LTC. The *Service* was as ecstatic about this dissolution as it was full of condemnation for the dissolved NCNC-controlled LTC:

The dissolution of the Lagos Town Council, following the findings of the Storey Commission, is just, timely and expedient. The *NCNC rascals who dominated the council since 1950* had proved themselves to be wholly incompetent, irresponsible, corrupt, shameless and utterly devoid of all sense of decency and of proportion... They had (...) exposed Lagos to ridicule not only of the rest of Nigeria but of the whole civilised world. Lagos Town Council under the NCNC had long become a bedlam and a disgrace to the good name of Lagos.¹⁵

The *Service* then congratulated the regional government, 'especially the Minister of Local Government (Hon. Obafemi Awolowo) ... for taking action so promptly' on the findings of the commission.¹⁶ For the *Pilot* the situation foretells 'the encircling gloom of a not distant future ahead of Lagos' unless '*all true patriots lead the isle of Nigeria's destiny out of Pharaoh's land (emphasis added)*'.¹⁷ The paper presents the position of the NCNC as that of 'true patriots' who were concerned with the 'collective destiny' of a Nigeria ostensibly trapped in the 'land of Pharaoh' (the Western Region).

The *Pilot* asks, in the absence of the will for a reversal of the status of Lagos, for a new capital to be created:

We are no alarmists, neither do we intend to precipitate an unholy rivalry for supremacy among the three states that now constitute Nigeria. *The only solution* lies in the creation of a new capital unfettered by regional legislations. Meanwhile *Nigeria* remains without a capital.¹⁸

This was strictly in line with the paper's earlier warning, in which it declared the 'irrevocable' position of the NCNC:

The NCNC (...) irrevocably maintains that if Lagos is to remain the capital of Nigeria, it must also be placed on a status exactly similar to what obtains in many capitals all over the world; so that any *mischievous attempt* to merge Lagos with the West must be *vehemently opposed* as that would *automatically strip* Lagos of the *glory and privilege* it had hitherto enjoyed as capital of Nigeria.¹⁹

This 'glory and privilege' which Lagos had – metaphors for the political, economic and even social significance of the city – appeared to be the main reason while both sides wanted to keep Lagos within their sphere of influence. The *Pilot* described as 'shameless gossippers' those canvassing 'Lagos for Yorubas'²⁰, including the *Service*, while the *Service* described those engaging in the 'stupid talk' of de-linking Lagos from the West as 'ne'er-do-wells'.²¹

When the Secretary of State for the Colonies in the immediate past Labour Government expressed surprise that the matter of Lagos merger was alive when he met the representatives of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, *Service* avers that the paper would have been surprised too but for the fact that it knows 'who has been holding the question in the air' – ostensibly, Azikiwe, through the *Pilot*. In what would appear a pointer to how the capital could be moved out of Lagos to elsewhere – as it eventually happened when the capital was moved to Abuja, a move which, incidentally, the Yoruba West opposed – the *Service* stated:

The people of the Western Region are not compelling the whole country to make Lagos their capital. But, at least, it is the duty of the Governor to make it clear that the only alternative to the present situation of Lagos is for the people of Nigeria to buy a piece of land and establish on it a federal capital independent of the three regions.²²

The two papers entered a period of 'détente' when the two parties began working together on the subject of the date of independence. They then turned on the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), which became 'the imperialist stooge' (Adebanwi 2002b:262). Both the NCNC and the AG were committed to 1956 as the year of independence for Nigeria while the leaders of the NPC entered a caveat, described as 'as soon as possible'. This 'united front' however could not be sustained beyond mid-1953 when the party leaders met in London for constitutional talks with the British Government. When the issue of Lagos came up at the conference, Awolowo and his AG colleagues staged a walk out. Against this backdrop, the *Service* argued:

What should be the position of Lagos in a federal Nigeria? ... The people of Nigeria have a right to say that their capital (not necessarily Lagos) should be independent. But neither the NCNC nor the NPC has any right to say that the town of Lagos should be truncated from the region to which it naturally belongs. All they can do is to demand that the capital of Nigeria *be removed from Lagos to say, Kaduna or Port-Harcourt, which was bought with the money of Nigeria* and which, in fact, should not belong to any one Region.²³

The *Service* then presented the reasons why the West would not agree to the severance of Lagos from it:

To submit to the severance of Lagos from the West would amount to economic and fiscal suicide on the part of the people and Government of

the Western Region ...²⁴ The *population and revenue* (will be) cut down by 270,000 people and millions of pounds.²⁵

The *Service* stated that the decision of the Colonial Secretary in London, Mr. Lyttleton, to 'dismember' the Western Region for the sake of the 'future of Nigeria' was not only unfair but also indefensible (Adebanwi 2002b:265). The newspaper added that:

Lagos, an indisputable Yoruba City owned by the West, is to remain a lone star... And in arriving at his decision, Mr. Lyttleton disregards all historical facts and constitutional precedent (ibid).

But the *Pilot* contested this. What was indisputable for the paper was the 'joint-ownership' of the city:

There is hardly any Nigerian who does not regard Lagos with special sentimental feelings. To the Binis,²⁶ it is part of their ancient empire; to the Northerner, it is not only *a capital developed with the revenue from their tin, groundnuts and cotton* but the *life-blood of their economic existence* with particular reference to their export and import trade. Similarly, Easterners feel that Lagos has been developed not only from their revenue but through *their blood, sweat and tears* as well; while a *section of Westerners* feel that they have an *exclusive attachment* to the city because of historical and *geographical connections*. The truth, in short, is that Lagos is very dear to all sections of the country.²⁷

I have noted elsewhere that this narrative is very interesting in the way it negotiates the interests of the *Pilot* on the Lagos issue (Adebanwi 2002b:266). While the *Pilot's* Binis could claim Lagos as 'part of their ancient empire' and therefore a 'lost possession', the North, whose inadequate resources necessitated amalgamation with the South, for the paper, *suddenly* had enough resources part of which was used in developing Lagos. The *Pilot's* East was bound to Lagos with 'blood, tears and toil', while only a section of the West feel 'exclusive attachment' – not ownership – of the city.

The *Service*, affronted by this, disclaimed the connections of the other parts of Nigeria:

The development of Lagos dates as far as the days before the amalgamation of 1924 and even from that date the contribution of which the North and East have made (...) is infinitesimal.²⁸

A front-page story in The *Service* even uses what Azikiwe wrote in the *Pilot* on 14 May 1940 to back the claim of the Yoruba to Lagos. The *Service* claimed that Zik had written that:

When we speak of the Oba of Lagos, we refer to the paramount Native Ruler of Lagos Township, although Lagos is peopled mainly by the Yoruba-speaking peoples and Lagos is part of Yoruba land. And since Yoruba is

part of the Western Region, Lagos should remain in Yoruba land which is part of the West.²⁹

The *Pilot* praised the decision of Her Majesty's Government which it believed tallied with the 'wishes of the majority' that 'Lagos should serve as the central bound of unity'.³⁰ The paper averred that the city had, by its severance from the Western Region, been elevated to 'an exalted position'. This wish, for the *Service*, was unreasonable, and a reflection of the 'pet(ty) jealousy and covetousness of certain malcontents'.³¹

The *Service* declared that rather than that Lagos should lose its status as federal capital, the West was prepared to contribute to building an 'independent federal capital', so that while Lagos remained the commercial centre, the political capital could move elsewhere to allow the West claim ownership over Lagos.

But to compel the West to surrender Lagos as a federal capital is to sow the seed of permanent disunity and bitterness between the West and the other regions ... the other Regions are not prepared to allow *their federal capital to remain* in the Western Region, they can remove the capital to any other place...³² (emphasis added).

But for the *Pilot* Lagos must remain the political, as well as the, commercial capital of colonial Nigeria and future independent Nigeria:

The political capital of any country should also be its commercial capital as well as the principal mirror of its cultural and social progress.³³

By this time it was obvious that the alliance constructed over the date of independence between NCNC-*Pilot* and AG-*Service* had broken down. While the *Service* deplored the 'underhand tricks' and 'stab in the back' by the ally of AG in the London talks, which proved that the 'NCNC is not being true to the spirit in which the (alliance) was born';³⁴ *Pilot* claimed that the AG was 'unfortunately back to the tribal shrine from which it emerged (with) the ugly old days of hate, rancour and disunity'.³⁵

Conclusion

The newspapers in their support for hegemonic and counter-hegemony groups not only tried, as explicated here, to create a way of life and a conception of the world, but they also attempted to translate the interests and values of the groups they represent into the 'common' values and interests of the wider society (Fontana 1993:140-1).

As 'experts in legitimation', they attempted to render existing power structures – where such structures favoured the group they represented – acceptable; and where they were otherwise, unacceptable. They attempted to *universalise* the values of the social group which they represented. The

hegemonic and counter-hegemonic moves of the two ethnic groups, Ibo and Yoruba, and the ethnic entrepreneurs on both sides show that, to paraphrase Mamdani (1996:8), ethnicity can be both a dimension of power and resistance – as it can be a problem and a solution.

In the case examined here, given the centrality, the political, economic, social and symbolic value of the city at stake, the press became a practical means of securing and resisting power as well as a tool of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the city. The case shows the centrality of discursive, non-material and non-forcible construction of consent, dissent and consensus as crucial ways of understanding hegemony in a contentious context.

Notes

1. This was achieved by the 1930s and 1940s when the Igbo in fact bested the Yorubas in educational attainment. Coleman (1986:224 & 226).
2. 'The Evil Gospel Spreads', *Pilot*, 4 February, 1952.
3. 'Symbol of Nigeria', *Pilot*, 16 July, 1952.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. 'Native Authority in Lagos', *Pilot*, 16 July, 1952.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. 'Lagos Merger Issue', 'Weekend Catechism', *Pilot*, 19 July 1952.
11. Ibid.
12. 'Country Without Capital', *Pilot*, 11 February 1953.
13. 'The Anomalous Position of Lagos', *Pilot*, 11 October, 1952.
14. 'The Perfect Monster', *Pilot*, 14 October, 1952.
15. 'The Nuisance if Removed', *Service*, 7 February, 1953.
16. Ibid.
17. 'Lagos Loses Its Temper Again!' *Pilot*, 11 October, 1952.
18. 'Country Without a Capital', *Pilot*, 11 February 1953.
19. 'The Bone of Contention', *Pilot*, 4 August, 1952.
20. 'Lagos Belongs to All Alike', *Pilot*, 14 January, 1952.
21. 'Facing Facts', *Service*, 12 January, 1953.
22. Ibid.
23. 'Lagos', *Service*, 20 August, 1953.
24. 'West Cannot Submit to Separating Lagos', *Service*, 21 August, 1953; 'Economic Suicide', *Service*, 25 August, 1953.
25. 'Nigeria's Cinderella', *Service*, 21 August, 1953.
26. In fact a letter published in the 'Public Opinion' column of *Pilot*, written by one D.V. Edebwin, argues that 'the Binis are by historical fact, the owners of Lagos, and naturally they should be the most interested in the question of its future state'. 'We Own Lagos', *Pilot*, September 15, 1953.

27. 'Lagos is Dear to All', *Pilot*, 10 September, 1953.
28. 'Nigeria Funds in Lagos', *Service*, 8 September, 1953.
29. 'Zik Supports Lagos-West Merger - Odebiyi', *Service*, 17 October, 1953.
30. 'Lagos is Dear to All', *Pilot*, 10 September, 1953.
31. 'Nigeria's Cinderella', *Service*, 1953.
32. 'A Neutral Capital', *Service*, 24 August, 1953.
33. 'Action Group Fails Again', *Pilot*, 2 September, 1953.
34. 'Action Group-NCNC Alliance', *Service*, 10 September, 1953.
35. 'Secret of *Daily Times* Drive to Break the NCNC Revealed. Action Group Enters Its Trap', *Pilot*, 21 September, 1953.

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