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URBAN IDENTITY AND THE ATLANTIC WORLD

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80. Pedro M. Arcaya, *Insurrección de los negros de la serranía de Coro* (Caracas: Ministerio de Educación de Venezuela, 1949), 32–33.
81. *Ibid.*, 33.
82. Federico Brito Figueroa, *El problema de tierra y esclavos en Venezuela* (Caracas: Universidad Central de Venezuela, 1985), 226.
83. Manuel Vicente Magallanes, *Luchas e insurrecciones de la Venezuela colonial* (Caracas: Academia Nacional de la Historia, 1982), 193.
84. Favret links the image of snow to the ongoing nature of war expressed in the word “still,” which “emerges as these questions about distant imperial warfare hang in the air.” *War at a Distance*, 105.

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IMPERIAL COSMOPOLITANISM AND
THE MAKING OF AN INDIGENOUS
INTELLIGENTSIA

AFRICAN LAWYERS IN
COLONIAL URBAN LAGOS

Bonny Ibhawoh

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization was the central instrument with which colonial peripheries were incorporated into metropolitan cores. In Africa, colonial urbanization involved both the establishment of new cities and the transformation and expansion of old indigenous cities. The new cities that emerged were mainly located at seaports and at strategic points in the interior where they served as centers of commerce and administration. European powers viewed the African colonies essentially as sources of raw materials and as outlets for the export of manufactured goods. Consequently, the spatial structure of most African economies centered on a small number of commercial hubs and mercantile port cities where indigenous migrants flocked from the hinterland.¹ This became the foundation of colonial urban systems that linked metropolitan capitals and the port cities of Europe to a network of colonial port cities.²

Colonial cities were, however, more than just commercial and administrative hubs of Empire. In Africa, they also constituted the crucibles for the development of a modern indigenous intelligentsia. Colonial urban spaces provided new opportunities for social and commercial interactions between Europeans and Africans, and among Africans from varied ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds.

The result was a distinctive colonial cosmopolitanism characterized by new cultural formations and new identities arising from the cross-fertilization of language, ideas, and customs. This emergent class of urbanized and European-educated Africans was the product of a colonial cosmopolitanism that inserted them into circuits of knowledge about Britain and about Africa that were not previously open to them.

Focusing on the activities of African lawyers in Lagos, the capital port city of British colonialized Nigeria, this chapter examines the development of the modern African intelligentsia within the context of colonial urban cosmopolitanism. It argues that British-educated African lawyers, whose roles in the colonial society have been frequently analyzed in terms of nationalist anticolonial activism, played a more complex role within the colonial urban space. They exemplify the unsettled cosmopolitanism of colonial urbanization—one based as much on contested visions as on inclusive moralities. They also reflect the tensions between cultural authenticity, diversity, and modernity in colonial cosmopolitanism.

Indigenous lawyers were at the forefront of anticolonial struggles to assert and reclaim indigenous autonomy, yet they were deeply vested in maintaining the apparatus of the colonial sociological order. Urban space and the possibilities for cross-cultural interactions that it offered was crucial to the ability of African lawyers to play the multiple roles that they came to play in the colonial society. At one moment, they could be agitators and dissenters who challenged colonial authorities; at other moments they were “gentlemen of culture and knowledge,” purveyors of high European ethos who endeared themselves to British colonial officials.

THE RISE OF AN URBAN INTELLIGENTSIA

The early twentieth century marked the rise of a vocal Western-educated class of urbanized Africans clustered in the coastal commercial and administrative city of Lagos. Many among these new African elites were Western-trained lawyers for whom the urban space provided new opportunities for economic and political influence that they did not enjoy in the more traditional communities of the interior. Lagos provided a metropolitan setting that allowed for the development of a uniquely cosmopolitan African intelligentsia. But to understand how colonial Lagos shaped the development of this group of African elites, it is necessary to begin with an excursion into the historical circumstances under which the city emerged.

During the nineteenth century, Lagos developed from a small seaside settlement into one of the leading commercial and administrative towns on the West African coast. Much of this change was the direct result of the Atlantic slave trade, which peaked in the region in the early nineteenth century. Following the abolition of the slave trade, the city came under the control of Britain through a process of military conquests and treaty agreements with indigenous rulers. The end of the slave trade eroded the economic base of traditional chiefly power, weakened social ties within the community, and generated social and political unrest.³ With the establishment of British rule, a “legitimate trade” in textiles and palm produce replaced the trade in slaves. The growth of international sea commerce created new wealth and gradually concentrated it in new hands. Britain’s annexation of Lagos in 1861 also created a new political order that concentrated power and authority in the hands of Europeans and their African partners. Africans, mainly of the Yoruba ethnic group, which dominated this part of the West African coast, flocked to Lagos from the interior in search of economic opportunities, swelling the city’s population from 5,000 in 1800 to 74,000 by 1911.⁴

Among the growing number of Africans who moved to Lagos during this period were a small but important number of liberated Yoruba slaves returning from Brazil and Sierra Leone following the abolition of the slave trade. Some of these returnees from Sierra Leone were Africans liberated from slave ships on the high seas by British Naval Squadrons charged with enforcing the abolition of the slave trade. Called the *Saro*, these repatriates who had lived in Sierra Leone were mainly Western-educated Christians, teachers, traders, and skilled artisans.⁵ Many of them served as educators and missionaries throughout West Africa. One British missionary referred to them as “the better class of Africans” well suited for the task of propagating Christianity and European “civilization” in Africa.⁶

Indeed, the *Saro* played a significant role in the spread of Christianity and Western education in Lagos from the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s, an educated Christian subculture existed, centered on churches, schools and government establishments, and including a growing community of indigenous African elites and British repatriates.⁷ The *Saro* became very influential in the economic and political life of Lagos and other coastal cities, operating as the bridge between African and European society. They not only desired to be relevant within the colonial government but were also fiercely protective of indigenous autonomy. They constituted a Westernized and cosmopolitan African elite class that gained

a reputation within colonial officialdom for their sophistication and shrewd negotiations.⁸

This educated urban African community stood at the intersection of the African, European, and Atlantic worlds, and sought to define itself within an emergent Nigerian society. As privileged Africans in a colonial society they did not merely reproduce a Victorian ethos but used them to serve their own goals.⁹ They operated in a very competitive society where variable identities could be useful. For instance, when politicking in Lagos, an elite Lagosian might invoke his rights as a "subject of her Britannic majesty" and be very English. Yet, when settling family disputes or politicking in the countryside, the same person might appeal to "customary rights" and be more Yoruba. The African intelligentsia thus attempted to adapt European discourses in and about Africa to their needs—to render from imposed categories something more suited to their medial position between imperial discourse and African realities.¹⁰

Beyond Europe and Africa, these elites were also engaged with the intellectual currents of the Atlantic world in the colonial era. Their engagement with the black Atlantic race discourse internationalized and invigorated concerns about racial prejudices, African/black identity, and the inadequacies of colonial rule. By drawing diaspora affinities and connections between the Atlantic Pan-Africanist race discourse and their own concerns about segregation and racial discrimination at home, Nigerian intellectuals found universal themes that reinforced their own positions. The writings of African American black nationalists like W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey struck a chord with many educated Nigerians, and the message of emancipation and empowerment resonated in local anticolonial discourses. Garveyism was particularly popular with the Lagos intelligentsia. There was an active branch of the Garvey movement in Lagos in the 1920s and 1930s. There were also branches of organizations such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and African Communities League (ACL), which were affiliated with organizations in the United States.¹¹ J. Osho-Davies, an African lawyer, was the vice president of the Garvey organization in Lagos, while another prominent African lawyer, Egerton Shyngle, served as attorney for the UNIA.¹² These Africans drew connections between their own colonial situations and the broader black Atlantic experience. There were frequent references in local newspapers to "Jim Crow colonial policies"¹³ and comparisons of racial segregation in Lagos with the experiences of the American Negro in the "ghettos of Harlem."¹⁴ The Atlantic context not only inspired anticolonial sentiments but also

reinforced the basis of the assertion of African rights by the Nigerian intelligentsia.

LAW AND RESISTANCE

By the 1930s, Africans from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds congregated in the growing urban and commercial centers in West Africa such as Lagos, Calabar, Accra, Freetown, and Banjul.¹⁵ These cities became crucial spaces for the interaction and intermingling of ideas, serving to weaken traditional social ties, loosening the hold of traditional beliefs and values, and promoting a new social ethos.¹⁶ One result of colonial urban cosmopolitanism was the development of a new legal culture, which like so much else in modern Africa, resulted from contact with Europeans in a colonial setting.¹⁷

The increasingly cosmopolitan nature of Lagos and the thriving commercial concerns by both colonialists and an emergent class of Western-educated Africans made the establishment of an English-style legal system a compelling need. The colonial administration found it necessary to introduce English law and legal institutions for the purpose of administering the colony of Lagos in 1861. British-style courts were constituted to meet the social and economic needs of a growing, increasingly sophisticated urban population.¹⁸

Bustling commercial activities in Lagos provided fertile ground for civil suits. Contracts were broken, claims were made for goods sold and delivered, outstanding debts were being recovered, and ownership of land and property were constantly contested. In all these activities, the services of lawyers were required, and lawyering proved an attractive field for many among the growing class of educated Africans in Lagos. Because British colonial rule was not completely authoritarian, the legal challenges of the government provided occasions when educated Nigerians, through the instrumentality of indigenous lawyers, could call the colonial state into question. With indigenous lawyers, Africans could stand up to their European overlords. Confidence led to contempt for the colonial regime. The realization that the power of the regime was not absolute was an important factor in the development of political consciousness among the indigenous intelligentsia.¹⁹

African lawyers in Lagos struggled to establish their reputation in a professional landscape initially dominated by expatriate English, Scottish, and Irish lawyers. Sapara Williams, the first fully qualified African legal practitioner in Lagos typified the profile of these African lawyers. Born in Sierra Leone, he studied law in London and

established the first private practice of an African lawyer in Lagos in 1889. Like many first-generation African lawyers, he trod the fine line between maintaining favor with the colonial government and retaining popularity with the people. He spoke out frequently against the excesses of the colonial government, yet strongly identified with English legal culture and desired throughout his career to be appointed King's Counsel.²⁰ Other early Lagos lawyers such as Nash Williams, Joseph Egerton Shyngle, Eric Moore, G. H. Savage, and Kitoyi Ajasa shared the same characteristics—at once epitomes of British conservative elitism and passionate advocates of African rights and autonomy.

This small but vocal group of Western-educated Africans could challenge European and colonial authorities in the arena that they had mastered—that of colonial law. They called to question virtually all legal powers of the state, and the state's use of those powers, in appeals before local colonial courts and the King's Privy Council in London. To them, it was clear that the legal arena, particularly that beyond the direct influence of local officials, was one in which colonial power could be very successfully defied. It was an arena that could and did lead to the private and public embarrassment of colonial officials both in Whitehall and in the colonies.²¹ Little wonder, then, that to colonial authorities charged with British "pacification" agendas in the early twentieth century, this group of Western-educated Africans constituted something of a menace. These were the "trousered negros of the coast," and "professional agitators" keen on inciting excitable native populations to resist and defy order and tranquility in the colonial societies.²²

Such resentment of the vocal native lawyer masked a deep fear among colonial authorities that was well founded. When confidence in traditional authority was eroded, nonelite Africans were inclined to look to these lawyers and intellectuals as a counterpoise to the alien administration. Lawyers could enjoy popular support and a high media profile, filling the vacuum left when the legitimacy of traditional authorities was questioned. Sometimes popularly imagined to be more powerful than the British political heads themselves, indigenous lawyers seemed threatening to colonial officials.²³ The fear of indigenous lawyers manifested in sustained antagonism towards the legal profession and restrictions on their professional activities.

Colonial officials were particularly wary about allowing African lawyers to ply their trade beyond Lagos and a few coastal cities.²⁴ Lawyers were prohibited from going into hinterland regions out of fear that they might undermine the peace in areas governed by the

indirect rule of local chiefs.²⁵ These restrictions on the professional activities of African lawyers in Lagos came to define the tension between them and the British colonial officials. The tension centered on two issues. The first was the concern of chiefly authorities and their supporters among the Western-educated elite about the erosion of their political power under British rule. For the most part, educated Africans opposed British intervention in local politics and sought to defend the rights of chiefs against imperialist excesses. Putting aside their sometimes-acrimonious differences, educated Africans allied with traditional rulers to promote the political rights and interests of the latter as the reach of British power expanded.²⁶ A second issue that rallied the urban-based educated Africans was their exclusion from colonial administration, which was an explicit policy of British colonial administration up to the late 1930s. This policy was based on the principle enunciated by the colonial Governor Frederick Lugard that "the interest of the large native population shall not be subject to the will of a small minority of educated and Europeanized natives who have nothing in common with them, and whose interests are often opposed to theirs."²⁷

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Lagos lawyers came to be at the forefront of what has been described as the "phase of radical nationalism" in colonial politics—a phase marked by numerous anticolonial protests of post-World War II political and economic conditions.²⁸ These lawyers challenged the colonial government both within and outside the courtroom, opposing policies that they saw as detrimental to the interests of the people. Egerton Shyngle, one of the most vocal of the Lagos lawyers, went to court in 1911 on behalf of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Rights Protection Society to challenge the government's attempt to expropriate indigenous lands based on British treaty agreements with local rulers.²⁹ Egerton Shyngle, Eric Moore, and other prominent Lagos lawyers also took the lead in challenging the colonial government in several high-profile legal battles. Perhaps the most celebrated of these battles was the case of Eshugbayi Eleko.

The Eshugbayi Eleko case arose out of the decision by the colonial government to depose and deport the traditional ruler of Lagos, Eshugbayi Eleko, who was perceived to be uncooperative with the government. Supported by a number of Lagos lawyers, Eleko challenged his deposition in the colonial courts. This touched off one of the most hard-fought battles in West African legal history culminating in two appeals to the British Privy Council in London. The Privy Council ultimately ruled against the colonial government and in favor

of Eshugbayi Eleko who was subsequently reinstated to his throne and granted compensation. The outcome of the Eleko case was seen by many Africans as a victory for the Lagos intelligentsia and a devastating blow to the colonial authority. When the news of the decision in the Eleko case reached Lagos from London in 1928, spontaneous celebrations broke out throughout the city. Thousands went about the streets singing and merrymaking. The demonstrations were no mere indication of the popular support for Eshugbayi Eleko's case. Underlying them was a feeling of triumph over the policy of a colonial government. The defeat suffered by the administration in this legal case led to confidence on the part of the opposing African elites. This proved to be an important factor in the development of political consciousness among the intelligentsia, particularly in Lagos. Cases like these also intensified official panic over the role of lawyers in public affairs, which tended to cast the administration in a negative light. Indigenous lawyers, officials feared, could penetrate even to traditional chiefs who appeared to enjoy the confidence of the colonial masters.³⁰

NEWSPAPER AGITATORS

Outside the courtroom, African lawyers pushed their advocacy through the nascent indigenous newspaper press. Newspapers such as the *Lagos Standard*, the *Lagos Weekly Record*, and the *Daily Times* were important forums for political debates and activism. Some of these newspapers were owned and managed by lawyers. Others retained prominent lawyers as editorial contributors and as attorneys. The prominent Lagos lawyer Adeyemo Alakija was the proprietor of the *Daily Times*.³¹ Although these newspapers enjoyed limited readership, which hardly went beyond urban centers like Lagos and neighboring Calabar, they exerted considerable influence on the policies of the colonial government and the attitudes of the growing class of literate Africans.

The educated Africans who ran these newspapers saw themselves as the "moral guardians of the rights and liberties of the people, as well as the interpreters of their ideals and aspirations."³² The tension and hostility between the Lagos press and the colonial administration went beyond the general demands for representation in government and self-rule. Here, too, the contentious issue appeared to be the revulsion of the educated elites (who controlled the press) at their deliberate exclusion from government. What the educated elites consistently demanded was something like careers open to talents, the removal of arbitrary laws restricting their freedom, and broader political

representation in the government geared toward eventual independence.³³ For example, the *Lagos Weekly Record* championed the cause of African legal clerks whose applications to take the examination that would enable them to become solicitors were denied by the Supreme Court. The newspaper protested that the exclusion amounted to discrimination against locally trained lawyers. It called for provisions for African candidates who could not go to England to study law.³⁴

The indigenous newspaper press in Lagos was a thorn in the side of the colonial government. It was much easier for the government to control lawyers' activities in the courtrooms than in the press, which also provided a forum of expression for a vocal African intelligentsia. Although the colonial government was cautious in its handling of the indigenous press, it was constantly confronted with the challenge of maintaining a balance between upholding the trumpeted British ideals of free speech and accommodating the relentless attacks from the indigenous press. One of government's responses to this challenge was the enactment in 1909 of two laws, which outlined its strategy for curtailing the activities of the press. These were the Newspaper Ordinance of 1903 and the Seditious Offences Ordinance of 1909. Although both laws were conceived as early as 1843, their promulgation was delayed because of the initial reluctance of the Colonial Office in London to approve them. While these laws did not seek outright censorship of the local press, they were intended to impose restrictions and strict regulations that would ultimately curtail its activities. The strategy here was akin to the policy of restricting the professional activities of lawyers to Lagos. If strict regulations could be placed on the publication of newspapers, the influence of a critical indigenous elite could be confined to the urban centers and away from the hinterland where they could do even more harm to the reputation of the colonial government among the natives.

In seeking official approval from the Colonial Office to restrict press freedom in the colony, Governor Frederick Lugard argued that the "unrestrained license" that the indigenous press enjoyed undermined the government's authority and had increasingly negative impacts on public order.³⁵ The local newspaper press, he argued, had become too militant to be tolerated and that "every week, scurrilous articles full of abuse for the King's local representative were published."³⁶ Lugard's exasperation with the Lagos intelligentsia is well captured in a private correspondence written in 1919:

There is the chronic and abiding trouble of the secret sedition and disloyalty of Lagos...they are masters of secret intrigue and they

have been plotting against the Government ceaselessly. I could show you that Lagos has for 20 years past opposed every governor and has fomented strife and bloodshed in the hinterland... I have spent the better part of my life in Africa; my aim has been the betterment of the Natives for whom I have been ready to give my life. But after 29 years and after nearly 12 years as Governor here, I am free to say that the people of Lagos are the lowest, the most seditious and disloyal, the most prompted by purely self-seeking money activities of any people I have ever met.³⁷

Governor Egerton also expressed similar frustration with the Lagos press. He argued the need to punish publications designed to inflame "an excitable and ignorant populace, the bulk of whom are under the control of Headmen and Chiefs who themselves have only recently emerged from barbarism and the old traditions of their race."³⁸ The *Seditious Offences Ordinance* and the *Newspaper Ordinance* were expected to check this trend; protecting naive natives in the interior from "treacherous and conniving" urbanized educated Africans. But while the colonial administrators sought to justify the enactment of these restrictive press laws as an attempt to check libelous and seditious publications, local opponents of the censorship law argued that it was unnecessary because actual cases of libel in the colony were rare. They argued that the real object of the ordinance was to restrict press freedom and limit the right to free speech.

In spite of stiff opposition from the Nigerian elites both within and outside the government, the Newspaper Ordinance was passed as law in 1903. Under the ordinance, a number of restrictions and administrative regulations were placed on the publication of newspapers. This included a £250 "libel bond" that was prescribed as condition for publishing a newspaper in the colony. Since many of the early newspapers were small, privately run businesses, the law made the newspaper business that had thrived in Lagos more expensive and effectively checked the tendency toward the proliferation of newspapers. The acting chief justice of the colony, E. A. Speed, subsequently justified the new ordinance on the grounds that "it is rare to find an absolutely free press anywhere in the world."³⁹

African elites vigorously opposed and protested both the Seditious Offences Ordinance and the Newspapers Ordinance, which were based on the Indian Penal Code. They questioned the appropriateness of applying in Nigeria a law that had originally been drafted in Britain for the colony of India. Opposition against the law was not limited to Africans. Criticism against the ordinance also erupted in the British

parliament where some members of parliament described the law as unsuitable and inappropriate.⁴⁰ Concerted opposition against the Seditious Offences Ordinance reached a climax in 1909 when there were a series of public demonstrations against the law in Lagos. Rather than stem the tide of criticism of the government from African elites, the restrictive newspaper laws only served to intensify them.

The antiestablishment activities of the Lagos lawyers both in the courts and the press cast lawyers in a heroic role in the public imagination. It positioned them as dependable defenders of cultural institutions and authority, and worthy champions of the independence and decolonization struggles that were unfolding. The victories against the colonial government that indigenous lawyers won both in the courts and the press highlight the peculiar strategic position they assumed in the absence of an indigenous political leadership. This gap in leadership presented an opportunity for lawyers acting as professionals, politicians, and cultural agents to take on a role as the "fighting brigade of the people."⁴¹

CONSERVATIVES AND COLLABORATORS

Most studies on the role of African intellectuals in the late colonial period have tended to focus on their antiestablishment activism. There is a longstanding tendency to see them mainly as opponents of the government and in terms of the difficulties that their activities posed for the colonial state. What hasn't been sufficiently explored is how these African intellectuals were at times also deeply vested in the colonial order as a modernizing project. African lawyers constituted more than just a "fighting brigade of the people" in terms of their anticolonial activities. Sometimes, their interests aligned with those of colonial authorities. Because of their public profile and influence among the people, colonial officials could not entirely ignore the Lagos lawyers. Even though mostly seen as dissenters and agitators, colonial officials also sought to court and co-opt the more conservative-educated Africans into the government to serve as a bridge between European society and the African population.

Some African lawyers in Lagos found favor with the government and were willing to collaborate with colonial officials for a variety of personally and politically expedient reasons. One of such lawyers was Adeyemo Alakija, a Saro lawyer of Brazilian émigré parentage who was highly regarded within colonial officialdom. He was a leading member of the first indigenous political party in Nigeria, the Nigerian National Democratic Party. Unlike many African politicians, Alakija

was not opposed to working with European officials and the colonial state. In the Eshugbayi Eleko case, for example, he was one of a few indigenous lawyers who joined the anti-Eshugbayi party, which advocated unreserved support for the colonial government. He was subsequently rewarded with nomination to the Lagos Legislative Council, a British knighthood, and other perquisites.⁴² Alakija also worked to break the monopoly that Africans had enjoyed over the Lagos newspaper industry by forming a consortium made up mainly of European merchants to publish the *Nigerian Daily Times*, which gained a reputation as a pro-government newspaper.

On their part, colonial officials were eager to work with supportive African elites like Alakija. Governor Donald Cameron in particular took such educated Africans into his confidence to a degree never before demonstrated by any colonial chief executive. To him, "reasonable" educated Africans were partners in the colonial enterprise who were crucial to the future development of the country as a modern nation-state.⁴³ Cameron initiated wide-ranging judicial reforms in 1933 aimed at easing some of the restrictions that the government had placed on the professional activities of African lawyers. Under these changes, lawyers were permitted to practice in courts outside the urban centers.

Other indigenous lawyers in Lagos such as Eric Moore, Sir Kitoyi Ajasa, and Henry Carr served in the colonial legislature, which by the 1930s allowed for wider African representation in the colonial government.⁴⁴ Like most African lawyers at that time, Moore, Ajasa, and Carr all received their education in England. They were not only schooled in the best of English legal traditions but were also firmly grounded in local culture and politics. Margery Perham, a British scholar who had great influence on official and academic thinking on British rule in Africa, described Kitoyi Ajasa as "a distinguished lawyer," a man with "all the voice and manner of an English gentleman" and a "strong supporter of the government."⁴⁵ Moore was similarly extolled. His father and grandfather were ordained ministers of the Church of England and his daughter became the first African woman to graduate from Oxford University.⁴⁶ The engagement of these lawyers with colonial administration was premised on their belief that Africans who had acquired high Western education and culture ought to be entitled to the same rights and privileges as Europeans.

Even within the framework of the institutional prejudices and inequities of the colonial state, colonial officials reposed much confidence in these men. Moore and Ajasa were both appointed into important government agencies and commissions while Carr was

appointed commissioner (and later renamed resident) of Lagos. This made him the highest-ranking Nigerian in the colonial administration. Carr was the quintessential "Europeanized" African. He was said to have amassed a personal library of eighteen thousand volumes, the largest collection, public or private, in West Africa at the time and employed two servants full time to keep it dusted.⁴⁷ He was a particular favorite of British officials. One senior administrator described him as "a gentleman of great culture and vast knowledge, courteous enough to treat the most junior of his colleagues as he would the most senior."⁴⁸ Another official described Carr and Ajasa as men "who with great moral courage have not feared to point the true way to their countrymen."⁴⁹

Earlier studies of indigenous intelligentsia in the colonial state tended to portray African elites such as Alakija, Carr, and Ajasa as sycophants and collaborators with European rulers. It was argued that the intelligentsia's adherence to European worldviews took away from their African roots and personalities.⁵⁰ Educated-African elites who collaborated with the colonial state were seen as having abandoned traditional philosophies and cultures for European institutions. One historian described them rather derisively as "anglophile collaborators" and "deluded hybrids"—hybrids in the cultural and sociological sense that while black in their skin with African blood, they were superficially and artificially white in their cultural and social ambitions.⁵¹ Some of Carr's contemporaries within the African intelligentsia portrayed him in ways similar to what Malcolm X termed a "house Negro" in the United States. One African critic described him as a man under the influence of "servile and futile adulation of a certain class of men," and asked, "When will Carr learn to think like a Negro?"⁵²

However, some scholars have cautioned against seeing urban-African elites like Moor, Carr, and Alakija simply as collaborators. Since World War II, the term "collaborator" has assumed pejorative connotations and the argument has been made that it stands in the way of fully understanding the multifaceted roles that these African elites played within colonial societies.⁵³ The simple categories of colonial collaborators and opponents reduce the elite's complexity. Far from being simple collaborators, Lagos lawyers like Moore, Carr, and Alakija followed their own agendas. By cooperating with the government at one moment and vigorously opposing it at another, they established a certain privileged in-between space of their own within the colonial society.⁵⁴ Their willingness to work with the colonial state was not always detrimental to the interests of their African constituencies;

rather, in some cases such engagements won them important concessions that benefited the intelligentsia and the broader public.

CONCLUSION

By the 1940s, African lawyers working with and against the government had expanded their privileged positions of influence in the colonial society. As colonial rule drew to a close, it became apparent that this emergent group of educated Africans, rather than traditional rulers, would succeed colonial authority. Officials became more receptive to working with these African elites. More African lawyers were appointed as senior administrators and judges in the colonial government. In the 1940s and 1950s, these lawyers played important and decisive role in the decolonization process, leading many of the new political parties that emerged in the country.⁵⁵ By 1960 when Nigeria attained independence from British colonial rule, the privileged position that urban lawyers had carved for themselves in the colonial society had been fully consolidated.

Cosmopolitanism often connotes privileged status and involves certain kinds of competence in or mastery of alien codes.⁵⁶ The urban cosmopolitanism of the Lagos lawyers was a function of their paradoxically privileged and disadvantaged position in the colonial society. They were not only a marginalized class of colonial subjects, but they also constituted an influential group of indigenous elites. They were not only vocal opponents of the state in anticolonial struggles, but they were also sophisticated agents of Westernization and European legal culture. The indigenous lawyers who emerged within the colonial urban setting mastered not only the alien codes of their European overlords but also mastered how to navigate the tensions and contradictions between these alien codes and the indigenous codes. Theirs was a unique urban cosmopolitanism that reflected the complexities of political belonging in a world of multiple identities.

NOTES

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5. For a detailed discussion of the history of the Saros, see Mac Dixon-Fyle, *A Saro Community in the Niger Delta, 1912–1984: The Potts-Johnsons of Port Harcourt and Their Heirs* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999).
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7. Mann, "The Dangers of Dependence," 38.
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