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LOCAL AND GLOBAL DYNAMICS IN THE TRANSFORMATION *OF THE PORT-CITY OF LAGOS SINCE THE NINETEENTH CENTURY*

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This paper outlines the local and global dynamics in the emergence of Lagos as the leading maritime, commercial and industrial city in West Africa. A combination of official policy, ecology, retail and maritime trade, and technology underpinned the transformation of the city. British colonial rule, the return of the "Saro" and "Aguda," the establishment of newspapers, educational and other institutions that promoted literacy and civic pride, and the rise of the professions (law, medicine, journalism and teaching) promoted social development and political participation. The city exhibits a blend of indigenous and external cultural traditions, local music and festivals, and modern popular culture and is long regarded as the pace-setter and harbinger of 'civilisation' and innovation. Like Mumbai in India, Lagos benefited from extensive port development and flourishing maritime trade since the nineteenth century. Glasgow-Bombay imperial and maritime links resonate with those between Lagos and Liverpool. But Mumbai had the advantage of the antiquity and strength of indigenous Indian mercantile enterprise.

LAGOS: A SPATIAL AND HISTORICAL PROFILE

The port-city of Lagos, originally a fishing settlement and, subsequently, an outpost of the Benin Empire up till the late eighteenth century (Aderibigbe, 1975; Lawal, 1994), has been defined and shaped by a variety of factors: geography (location and terrain) and historical forces (the trans-Atlantic slave trade, British colonialism, Christian missionary activity, indigenous culture, religious beliefs and Islam, port development and maritime trade). This paper analyzes the interaction of these dynamics in their spatial and historical contexts. Informed by archival, newspaper and oral sources, it seeks to deepen our understanding of the forces that shaped and continue to influence the fortunes of West Africa's premier port, industrial and commercial centre.

Lagos grew out of its core on Lagos Island, the surrounding plains at Ikoyi and Oto and Victoria islands. Its boundary was extended to the Mainland (Yaba and Ebute Metta) in 1911, fifty years after British colonization in 1861. The next major landmark was the creation of Lagos State in 1967. This extended the metropolitan area into the Ajeromi, Mushin, Oshodi and Ikeja areas on the Mainland, which had been part of the old Western Region of Nigeria.

Following British colonization in 1861, Lagos was the first city to experience Crown Colony and modern municipal administration and, together with Calabar, also pioneered qualified male suffrage in Nigeria. It also had the trappings of modernity – urban amenities, Western medical facilities, British judicial and legislative institutions, newspapers, political parties and pressure groups, and the first set of Christian Mission schools. It was Nigeria's capital from 1914 till 1991.

THE EMERGENCE OF A PREMIER PORT

Lagos was rapidly transformed by the expansion of trade and the growth of shipping. By 1880, it was nicknamed 'the "Liverpool" of West Africa' on account of its regional pre-eminence. But the bar at the mouth of the harbour kept out ocean liners, necessitating the use of lighters. However, railway and road development complemented extensive and expensive harbour works, which opened the port to

ocean shipping by 1914. Modern banking and a unified currency system facilitated trade in an economy dominated by expatriate interests (Ogundana, 1961; Hopkins, 1964; Olukoju, 1992, 2004).

Port development took a new turn in the immediate aftermath of World War I with the alignment of rail and maritime transport. The focus of port development shifted from Lagos Island to Apapa, thus underscoring the importance of the railway to port development. The extension of the railway to Kano in Northern Nigeria in 1912 facilitated a phenomenal rise in groundnut production in the Kano region. Paradoxically, as the port and its hinterland developed, Lagos earned the unsavoury reputation as an "expensive port." High port tariffs discouraged shipping without freeing port operations from fiscal deficits (Olukoju, 1994). Still, Lagos remained critical to colonial port development policy, which oscillated between port diffusion and concentration. The collaboration of imperial/colonial governments with metropolitan and local business pressure groups ensured the growth of the colonial economy – in spite of the intervention of global and local adversities, such as the world wars and the Great Depression.

THE MAKING OF THE COSMOPOLITAN CITY

The imposition of colonial law and order, the growth of produce exports and the rising profile of Lagos as a leading commercial centre attracted migrants from the Yoruba hinterland. The in-migrants included fugitive slaves and demobilized soldiers, upon the conclusion of the inter-state wars in Yorubaland in 1893 (Aderibigbe, 1975). By this time, Lagos had become cosmopolitan with a racially and socially diverse population. In addition to the majority indigenous Lagosians, the descendants of slaves of West African, mainly Yoruba, origins had flocked to Lagos from Sierra Leone, Brazil and Cuba (Echeruo, 1977).

The Sierra Leonean émigrés (known as "Saro") and their "Brazilian" counterparts (who bore the generic name "Aguda" – though a good number of them were Muslims) soon occupied particular areas on Lagos Island – the "Saro" at Olowogbowo and the Brazilians at Popo Aguda – distinct from the other quarters in the African section of the city. The "Aguda" pioneered various artisanal occupations, especially, masonry and carpentry while the "Saro" were the leaders in the professions of medicine, law, journalism and teaching. Various hinterland peoples – mainly, Yoruba, Hausa, and Nupe – also settled in Lagos at different times and for various reasons (Aderibigbe, 1975; Echeruo, 1977).

A major challenge of colonial urbanization was the violation of town planning laws by the unregulated development of the overcrowded indigenous quarters on the Island and mainland of Lagos. The bubonic plague of 1924-30 ravaged the city and prompted the establishment of the Lagos Executive Development Board (LEDB) in 1928. The consequent demolition of squalid structures, evacuation and resettlement of slum dwellers, and enforcement of town planning simply transferred unregulated development to the Lagos suburbs of Mushin and Ikeja (Olukoju, 2003a, 2004). An unsavoury dimension of town planning was the colonial policy of residential segregation, which created a separate European Quarters on Victoria Island and Ikoyi with an enclosing *cordon sanitaire* to ward off pestilence which was feared to emanate from the indigenous settlement on Lagos Island (Olukoju, 2003b, 2004). However, the colonial government transplanted some metropolitan landmarks to Lagos – The Marina (cf. *Nigerian Pioneer* [Lagos], 20 March 1931), the Supreme Court, Race Course and other public buildings. These were sited in the European section of the port-city.

Rising population aggravated housing and food supplies, two key indices of cost of living in colonial Lagos. The Great Depression compounded the woes of the city dwellers as did World War II exigencies – epitomized by salt, *gari* (processed cassava flour) and petroleum scarcity – and rising cost of living (Olukoju, 2000). These developments generated labour militancy and culminated in the World War II-era cost of living (COLA) wars, which also aligned with late-1940s nationalist politics (Oyemakinde, 1970). Lagos was the hotbed of Nigerian nationalism, not simply because it was the national capital and economic hub. The newspapers and the Legislative Council were outlets for anti-colonial activities.

Lagos experienced unprecedented, phenomenal growth during the second half of the twentieth century thanks to the post-war boom and the port-city's increasing political, social and economic significance. The population of the city rose dramatically from some 250,000 in 1950 to 10 million by 1991, the year in which the national capital was transferred to Abuja. By the close of the century, the mega-city had a population in excess of 12 million in spite of the loss of national capital city status (Mabogunje, 2007). Paradoxically, this has merely encouraged a greater influx of people from other parts of Nigeria, especially Igboland in Eastern Nigeria. Late colonial-era import substitution light industrialization occurred in the Ikeja and Apapa axes of the metropolis. Mercantile and industrial organizations as well as government bureaucracy were major employers of labour. In addition, Lagos had the largest retail market structure in West Africa but street trading compounded the problems of sanitation, town planning and traffic control. This still poses the same challenges today (Lawal, 2003).

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND DYNAMICS

Mid-nineteenth century Lagos already exhibited considerable racial, cultural and social diversity. Each group contributed to the mix of foreign and indigenous cultures. In spite of foreign influences, the indigenous fabric of Lagos social life and culture proved resilient. The latter combined Yoruba, Edo (Bini) and Nupe traditions, reflecting the evolution of the people and society. The indigenous social system was woven around the political structure comprising the *Oba* (king) and the various categories of land-owning chieftaincy families. These institutions produced their own social idioms and lore, which made Lagos a peculiar Yoruba kingdom with Edo, Nupe and Western flavour. Indigenous festivals depicting the political history and maritime roots of the city have survived substantially but with inescapable changes over time (Aderibigbe, 1975).

The socio-political order was hierarchical though the people retained a certain measure of autonomy. Dissent was ventilated through songs and aphorisms, as demonstrated in the city's major twentieth century crises – the water rate agitation, the deposition of Eshugbayi Eleko, the schism in the Lagos Muslim Community, the acquisition of Ikoyi for European settlement and the demolition of houses in the wake of the bubonic plague (Cole, 1975). Songs in support of rival factions in chieftaincy disputes, party politics, land and related matters are still recalled in contemporary Lagos, where the tradition continues in the context of modern local politics (Dimeji Ajikobi, oral communication).

Traditional and contemporary culture in Lagos reflects social class and power relations, and the changing demographic structure of an emergent mega-city. Still, Lagos is famous for its peculiar festivals (*Eyo* and *Igunnu*) and street carnivals, a lasting legacy of the "Saro" and "Aguda." The Muslim majority too asserted its dominance in the social and political life of the city during the annual Muslim festivals since the colonial period. Display of opulence during major Muslim festivals, epitomized by long convoys of motor cars in street parades, was common during the period (Olukoju, 2004). The African business and professional elite too left its mark through intra-class marriage, social values and tastes. Generally, affluent Lagosians indulged in conspicuous consumption, opulent housing, expensive cars, an aristocratic lifestyle and elaborate marriage ceremonies. Dress for Muslim and Christian Lagosians was designed to reflect social status (Euba, 1987), though this was taken to an extreme in two respects: the aso ebi (uniform apparel) practice (which was roundly condemned by contemporary newspapers) and the tendency to show off literally in borrowed robes (Olukoju, 2004).

The extravagance that defined Lagos spread to many other Nigerian communities, where moderation or modesty was part of the indigenous moral code. Lagos, however, remains Nigeria's culture capital in terms of new fashions. Its cultural cosmopolitanism is typified by the coexistence of indigenous, Western and Afro-Brazilian architecture, cuisine, music and dress. Christian missionary activities – exemplified by the credo of "the Bible and the Plough" and the establishment of primary and secondary schools – the rise of the professions and the newspaper industry since the nineteenth century have exerted a most profound impact on Lagos and Nigeria.

URBAN RENEWAL AND WATERFRONT DEVELOPMENT SINCE 1967

The creation of Lagos State in 1967 conferred on the city the dual status of Federal and State capital. The State capital was relocated to Ikeja on the mainland in 1975 while the Federal capital was moved to Abuja in 1991. Lagos is the only State in Nigeria where the Federal government still retains control of some territory, and this has bred contentious inter-governmental relations. Still, the Federal government invested heavily in road, aviation and maritime transport infrastructure in Lagos during the oil boom years of the 1970s. Increasing population pressure has however caused infrastructure decay arising from overuse and poor maintenance. Heavy port traffic has also damaged the roads and polluted the environment. Extensive port development took place at Apapa and Tin Can Island, consequent upon a protracted port congestion occasioned by the "cement armada" of the mid-1970s resulting from massive cement imports. Expansion of port facilities attracted heavy shipping (including container) traffic and aided industrialization in the vicinity of the port. Increasing economic activities precipitated a greater influx of in-migrants to Lagos, which grew rapidly into a mega-city by the early 1990s.

Federal government investment has been complemented by infrastructure development through the State and local governments (Olowu, 1990, Olukoju, 2003a). Waterfront development has been promoted since the late 1990s even with the occasional disputes between the State Government and Federal Government agencies, such as the Nigerian Inland Waterways Authority (NIWA), Nigerian Ports Authority (NPA) and the Federal Roads Maintenance Agency (FERMA). Those disputes underscore the crisis of inter-governmental relations under an imperfect federal system of government and the need for a special dispensation for the mega city.

The development of the Lagos waterfront has proceeded in the face of pressure on land from sand dredgers and real estate developers. The administration of Government Bola Tinubu (1999-2007) established in 2000 an administrative agency for waterfront development – The Lagos State Waterfront and Tourism Development Corporation. Tinubu's successor, Governor Fashola upgraded the Corporation to a State Ministry with the aim of achieving a synergy of waterfront development and tourism. In 2008, the State House of Assembly considered a bill for the regulation of waterfront infrastructure development (*The Punch* [Lagos], September 1, 2008:80).

Two major issues in the management of the Lagos waterfront are sand dredging and land reclamation. Both pose a serious threat to the waterfront environment and have elicited mixed reactions from the government and civil society (*Businessday* [Lagos], July 25-27, 2008: 19). Property owners fear that unregulated sand dredging and reclamation would imperil their assets through erosion and flooding, two natural processes which have been aggravated by human activity in recent times. Residents of upper scale areas of Ikoyi (Park View Estate), Victoria Island and the Lekki Peninsula have formed pressure groups to oppose the unregulated alteration of the waterfront and to prevent long term environmental risks to their assets (*The Guardian* [Lagos], July 14, 2008: 35). Experts too have warned of the possibility of "major environmental disasters" if the situation was not well managed (*The Punch*, September 1, 2008: 53).

Although the initiative is still in its infancy, some progress has been made in curbing the abuse of the waterfront and harnessing it for tourism. The State government is implementing a major infrastructure plan (including a free trade zone and an airport) for the strategic Lekki Corridor, which has been divided into five development zones (*The Guardian*, August 18, 2008: 29). The development of the Lagos waterfront through the reclamation of the foreshore is expected to generate annual revenues of some N34billion (*The Nation* [Lagos], May 22, 2008). Old landmarks, such as Tinubu Square (named after an influential 19th-Century Lagos woman), the Central Business District and the Marina have been given a significant facelift for aesthetic and planning purposes. The sustenance of the ongoing massive work all over the metropolis promises to transform Lagos into a progressive mega city. Physical reconstruction has been complemented by a wholesale beautification of the city, including tree and flower planting, modern and standard street direction finders and the transformation of previous black spots and dumpsites into recreational and aesthetically appealing places.

The ongoing urban renewal, infrastructure upgrade and waterfront development have rekindled civic pride in a people who had longed for the restoration of Lagos to its past glory. But continued success will depend upon the continued support of the people, adequate funding, involvement of the private sector and sustained focus by the government.

However, party politics and inter-governmental relations have often frustrated laudable plans proposed by the State government. First, the ambitious urban commuter train (metro line) project proposed by the Lateef Jakande administration (1979-83) was frustrated by political differences between the governor's Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and President Shehu Shagari's National Party of Nigeria (NPN). The project was finally scrapped by the military government of General Muhammadu Buhari (1984-85).

Second, the Federal Government of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007) frustrated similar efforts by the Bola Tinubu administration in a show of muscle flexing that left Lagosians groaning while urban roads (controlled by the Federal and State governments) deteriorated into craters. A power project that could have ameliorated the erratic power supply situation in Lagos became a major victim of political brinkmanship. The situation degenerated to the point that the Federal Government illegally withheld the statutory allocation of funds from the Federation Account to local governments in Lagos even in defiance of a Supreme Court ruling. Though the situation has improved remarkably under President Umoru Musa Yar'Adua (2007-), volatile inter-governmental relations persist on the issue of waterfront development and local government creation. For instance, NIWA still contests the control of the inland waterways within the city limits with the State government.

CONCLUSION

Lagos owes its emergence as the leading maritime, commercial and industrial city in West Africa to the interplay of local and global dynamics – official policy, politics and inter-governmental relations, ecology, retail and maritime trade, and technology. British colonial rule, the return of the "Saro" and "Aguda," the establishment of newspapers, educational and other institutions and the rise of the professions (law, medicine, journalism and teaching) promoted literacy, civic pride, social development and political participation. The city exhibits a blend of indigenous and external cultural traditions, local music and festivals, and modern popular culture. Long regarded as the pace-setter and harbinger of 'civilisation,' Lagos has been the city of the savvy ("Eko Akete, Ilu Ogbon"), and innovators in dress, social practices, cuisine and recreation. As the hub of the leading mega churches, the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Deeper Life Bible Church and Mountain of Fire and Miracles, it is also a major religious centre in West Africa.

Lagos is comparable with similar port-cities in the Global South, notably, Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay) in India. Both rose as colonial port-cities in the wake of extensive port development and flourishing maritime trade in the nineteenth century. Mumbai owed its emergence to a synergy of indigenous Indian enterprise and Scottish capital, technology in port construction, managerial capacity and maritime enterprise (Hazareesingh, 2009:21-29). Glasgow-Bombay imperial and maritime links resonate with those between Lagos and Liverpool. Lagos and Mumbai continue to grapple with the consequences of maritime enterprise and urban development, and the legacy of British colonial rule. But Mumbai has had a critical edge over Lagos in the antiquity and strength of indigenous Indian mercantile enterprise. It has thereby made a greater success of the development of its port and maritime trade.

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