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The Memory Process in the Commemorations of the Dead in West African Newspapers

Abstract: This chapter considers the memory process in the commemorations of the dead in a sample of newspapers from Nigeria and Liberia from the 1940s to 1960s. At its centre are the obituaries and in-memoriams of middle- to upper-class citizens published by family members and the state. The chapter homes in on how a number of journalistic processes, from “signalling” to “masking” to “controlling,” were used to capture specific elements of the past and, more significantly, to guide the present and future self-fashioning of the African elite.

As a fitting part of this *Gedenkschrift*, itself a technology of death culture, this chapter explores practices surrounding death as performed in West African newspapers of the 1940s to 1960s. We examine the printing of death notices and obituaries both as a historically dynamic process and as one of multiple interrelated modes of (both textual and non-textual) social communication and memory-making in Africa. With its emergence in the nineteenth century, the West African press has been at the forefront of forming and reinforcing identities, helping both individuals and institutions to present themselves to a wider audience. In recent times, studies of the practices of self-fashioning in print culture have attracted much attention in Africanist historiography and beyond.¹ This chapter explores the social and political signalling accompanying announcements of death in newspapers. Herein we compare two forms of publicising death, namely in-memoriams and obituaries. In line with Jan-Georg Deutsch's interest in the study of social relations in shaping history, we demonstrate the commemoration expressed in these West African advertisements of death as promoting the solidification of sociopolitical relationships.

For the purpose of this examination of print media, we draw evidence from Nigerian and Liberian newspapers. After the Second World War, both states en-

1 Derek R. Peterson, Emma Hunter, and Stephanie Newell, eds., *African Print Cultures: Newspapers and Their Publics in the Twentieth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016); Mamadou Diawara, Bernard C. Lategan, and Jörn Rüsen, eds., *Historical Memory in Africa: Dealing with the Past, Reaching for the Future in an Intercultural Context* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010).

tered a phase of rapid transformation. Nationalism heightened and urbanisation swelled amidst growth in population and prosperity. Yet, significant differences persisted. In the Nigerian example, on a surface level, in-memoriams published by private citizens in privately-owned dailies are used as a means to broadcast bereavement to a closed circle of family and friends. However, if viewed with a more critical eye, it becomes evident that these death notices, which only reflected the shell of a life lived, had a larger radius of transmission, namely to members of social groups to which the deceased belonged. In the case of Liberia, we analyse obituaries printed by the state in one of its official vehicles, the *Liberia Official Gazette*. At first glance, this case study demonstrates how the state kept alive the memory of purportedly remarkable citizens. However, this veneer of a state-individual relationship simply cloaks acts of elite self-fashioning and communication to promote an idealised vision of the group's identity. Indeed, in journalism and more broadly, control (selection, exclusion, fragmentation) of memory served a critical function when it came to creating these continuity-building, identity-affirming, and future-oriented histories of deceased individuals.²

Elite actors in both the independent Liberian state and decolonising Nigerian society promoted at best fragmentary and highly curated pillars of identity in printed advertisements of death. Therefore, in this chapter we argue that these notices commemorating a member of the elite deployed symbolic markers to articulate relationships with state and society directed toward the future, and especially the maintenance of power structures in elite society. Photographs, such as the studio-images used for in-memoriams, added a layer of visual enhancement in such social communication.

These practices of commemoration highlight the agency of different publics, as well as the importance of African political ideologies beyond the state.³ In spite of the urgency of national politics in the African press during this era, an announcement in commemoration of the dead took up newspaper space serving a purpose apart from disseminating colonial, anticolonial, or nationalist sentiments.⁴ Therefore, published by the state (in Liberia) and by journalists and

² For a discussion on the community-building aspects of the different “modes” of the memory process, see, for example, Mamadou Diawara, Bernard C. Lategan, and Jörn Rüsen, “Introduction,” in Diawara, Lategan, and Rüsen, *Historical Memory in Africa*, 3.

³ Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Miles Larmer and Baz Lecocq, “Historicising Nationalism in Africa,” *Nations and Nationalism* 24, no. 4 (October 2018): 893–917.

⁴ Stephanie Newell, “From Corpse to Corpus: The Printing of Death in Colonial West Africa,” in Peterson, Hunter, and Newell, *African Print Cultures*, 389–424.

private citizens (in Nigeria), printed advertisements of death allow us to draw further attention to the contested nature and multiple dimensions of nationalist identities as well as to shed light on the crystallisation of new (at times, gendered) professional ideals in the mid-twentieth century. The chapter underlines the value of placing a historical analysis of memory and media at the conjunction of state, society, and individual relationships.

Printing Industries and Journalism in Nigeria and Liberia between the 1940s and 1960s

Beginning in the 1940s, Liberia and Nigeria were two West African states experiencing fast-paced socio-political and economic transformation. Whereas the economic hardship that resulted from the Second World War had propelled political activism among those living in the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, leaders in the long independent state of Liberia entered a new phase of nation-building facilitated by rubber wealth. The press added further stimulus to processes of change in both states. As part of this change, remembering the dead in newspapers became part of the self-fashioning of individuals and typically elite social groups.

The Liberian press was founded with the establishment of the *Liberia Herald* in 1830. With an estimated circulation of 500 copies, it became Africa's fifth oldest newspaper.⁵ Death notices contributed to the fabric of the *Herald* from the very start, together with announcements of births, marriages, and shipping news. Run by well-educated, religious Caribbean and North American emigrants during its first two decades of its existence, the Liberian press was largely dedicated to supporting the local colonial project by promoting it to black settler families from the African Diaspora. During this time, newspapers published by missionary groups praised religious education and distributed ethnographic reports from the surrounding rural areas. Indeed, a marker of the broader Liberian press was its orientation toward the African diaspora "evident in the inclu-

⁵ The *Liberian Herald* was preceded by Francophone periodicals published in Egypt during the Napoleonic occupation of 1797; the South African *Cape Town Gazette* (1800); *The Royal Gazette* and *Sierra Leone Advertiser* (1801); and *The Royal Gold Coast Gazette* (1822). Carl Patrick Burrows, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia, 1830–1970: The Impact of Globalization and Civil Society on Media-Government Relations* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 23, 54, 101.

sion of African exotica.”⁶ Poems were also routinely printed on the pages of the local press.

Leading into the era of independence in 1847, the campaign in favour of black leadership for the state rose significantly on press agendas. Appeals for more secure avenues of commerce (given tough competition from European traders and foreign political powers) and greater economic, especially agricultural, productivity were weaved into the lines of various articles. According to the scholar of Liberia Carl Patrick Burrowes, during the Republican era between 1847 and 1907, debates concerning civic virtue and citizenship, for instance as they were conditioned upon ownership of property, dominated the Liberian press. These arguments arose in response to the growing number of manumitted slaves with little or no education sent to Liberia directly from their former plantations in the American South. Overall, journalistic opinions tended to align with the outlook of government on the issue of class divisions as they aimed to appeal to “skilled” individuals in the Diaspora in the United States and the Caribbean. The *Liberia Gazette* (later *Liberia Official Gazette*) was first published in 1892.

By the turn of the twentieth century, changes in international relations brought on by European imperialism pushed the discussion further in the way of nation-building. This new internal orientation was strengthened by the first generation of Liberian-born politicians who entered the national stage during this era, and who had close regional allegiances to preserve. Rural development rose on the agenda. Increasingly, a process of modernisation dependent on global integration also became the norm. In particular, after the 1940s, members of the press had to play along in the government’s seduction of Western states and corporations for investments, or face harsh consequences, including long-term imprisonment. In spite of these tactics, the public and private Liberian press maintained a discourse about the significance of sovereignty, patriotism and ardour that had been produced with the country’s independence. The Liberian government’s own newspapers were also deployed for such purposes.⁷

The circulation of newspapers in the 1840s reflected Liberia’s small, literate population. Around 2,388 settlers, of whom only 32 percent were literate, resided primarily in settlements along the coast, or on the St. Paul River. *The Weekly Spy* (1898–1902) became the country’s first weekly,⁸ and, on 22 May 1950, journalists launched Liberia’s first daily newspaper, *The Listener*.⁹ But while the press was blooming, as late as the 1980s national literacy rates remained largely stagnant.

⁶ Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia*, 23.

⁷ See, for instance: *Ibid*, 59.

⁸ *Ibid*, 65.

⁹ *Ibid*, 190.

In Nigeria, early newspapers were strictly missionary endeavours. On 23 November 1859 in Abeokuta, Reverend Henry Townsend from Exeter in England founded the *Iwe Irohin*, a newspaper published in Yoruba with the help of converts. It was published on a bi-weekly basis for eight consecutive years.¹⁰ By the early twentieth century, members of Saro, who were freed slaves from Latin America who reached affluent status in Sierra Leone, and elite families in coastal cities such as Lagos or Port Hartcourt published weeklies.¹¹ In 1926, the *Daily Times of Nigeria* became the first daily newspaper and from the mid-1930s onwards daily newspapers spread across the country when Nnamdi Azikiwe established the *West African Pilot* and his newspaper group Zik's Press Limited. Other dailies followed and in 1949, the *Nigerian Tribune*, which is still in print today, was launched.¹² Journalists working for these newspapers often addressed the political struggle against the colonial administration by challenging newly introduced constitutions or competing political parties. Individual editions included editorials, feature articles, letters to the editors, and regular columns in which politics were of outmost importance. In addition, topics of daily concerns, from fashion advice to the topical debate about soldiers' resettlement schemes, made up part of the coverage.

The circulation of these newspapers grew significantly between the 1940s and the 1960s. The *Daily Times'* circulation alone increased from 25,000 in 1951 to 55,000 in 1955 and to 96,000 in 1959.¹³ Initially, the *WAP* had a circulation of 6,000 in 1937 reaching 9,000 a year later. In 1950, the *WAP* printed 20,000 issues daily.¹⁴ However, there were more readers than issues. Not only did literate

10 Fred I.A. Omu, "The 'Iwe Irohin', 1859–1867," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 4, no. 1 (1967): 35–44; Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, "Iwe Irohin and the Representation of the Universal in Nineteenth-Century Egbaland," *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 295–305.

11 David Pratten, "Creole Pioneers in the Nigerian Provincial Press," in Peterson, Hunter, and Newell, *African Print Cultures*, 75–101; Wale Adebani, "Colonial Modernity and Tradition: Herbert Macaulay, the Newspaper Press, and the (Re)Production of Engaged Publics in Colonial Lagos," in Peterson, Hunter, and Newell, *African Print Cultures*, 125–150; Omu, "The 'Iwe Irohin', 1859–1867"; Karin Barber, *Print Culture and the First Yoruba Novel: I.B. Thomas's 'Life Story of Me, Segilola' and Other Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

12 We would like to thank the staff at the *Nigerian Tribune* for their assistance and permission to reproduce the images in this chapter.

13 Rosalyn Ainslie, *The Press in Africa: Communications Past and Present* (London: Gollancz, 1966), 57.

14 Nnamdi Azikiwe, *My Odyssey: An Autobiography* (London: Hurst, 1970), 300–303.

members in cities and villages alike consume newspapers, but they were also known to read them out loud to others.¹⁵

With the devolution of power, the rise of political parties, and the substantial increase of education in Nigeria, new intellectual and vocationally trained experts, e.g. teachers, lawyers, engineers, and doctors, joined and challenged the established Saro families and those groups who traditionally held prestigious positions in association with the colonial state, such as government clerks.¹⁶ In Liberia, unprecedented economic growth leading into the 1950s and 1960s resulted in more widespread education and professionalisation for many as well. However, the press by and large remained in the hands of educated elite urbanites of black American and Caribbean heritage (disparate communities often lumped together as “Americo-Liberians” in the historiography). And they continued to struggle to gain substantial freedom from government control.¹⁷

Printing Death in (West) Africa: A Brief overview of the Literature

In this chapter we purposefully distinguish between the obituary and the in-memorial. Although most of the same information can be contained in both, Lawuyi has contended that burial arrangements are only ever listed in the obituary.¹⁸ Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 5, obituaries were published shortly before the funeral, while in-memoriams were published years after death.¹⁹ Based on the source material under investigation, we note that the obituaries published by the Liberian state were much more extensive than Nigerian in-memoriams as they included biographical information about the deceased at particular stages of life, such as place of birth, education, and career path. As becomes evident in the following sections, these discrepancies carry important implications for conducting historical analysis with such sources. The privately commissioned

¹⁵ Leonhard Harding, *Geschichte Afrikas im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013), 74.

¹⁶ James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 289.

¹⁷ Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia*, 267.

¹⁸ Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, “The Story about Life: Biography in the Yoruba Obituaries,” *Diogenes* 37, no. 148 (1989): 93.

¹⁹ This was also the case for Rachel Tinu Adebimpe’s in-memorial, which commemorated her death on 6 October 1948, six years later. *Daily Times*, 6 October 1954 (Fig. 5.).

in-memoriams and obituaries published in Nigerian newspapers were shorter. They were also more eye-catching as many included old photographs of the deceased appearing alive and in good health. What connects these forms of printing death are the community-reinforcing processes deriving from their publication. This included the self-fashioning of elite groups by disseminating messages about their past, present, and future.

The important relationship between past, present, and future in public death rituals in Africa, as well as their intermedial and changing nature, has been discussed by a number of Africanist historians. In Thomas C. McCaskie's study of the burial of Asante kings during the nineteenth century, he contended that "the future of society itself depended upon the rigorous enactment of appropriate mortuary rituals," since the death of the *Asantehene* was interlinked with matters of social reproduction and general prosperity.²⁰ The death and mortuary rituals of an *Asantehene* were about cultural referencing, affirmation, and renewal.²¹ A key part of this memory process for participants concerned "reviewing and debating the history of power" and "the shape of [their] future."²² This defence or critical reflection on the status quo was also visible at broader levels of society. Describing the transforming death rituals of "ordinary" Akan people during the twentieth century, Kwame Arhin portrays the melding of chronologies as follows: "Funeral rites are meant to consolidate a status already enjoyed, or to lay claim to a higher one believed to be attained through higher education, successful business activities or involvement in politics, the three means of social mobility in Ghana."²³ In their participation in the rite, the community "reaffirms its norms and values."²⁴ Speaking to the idea of ritualistic practices surrounding death as creating space for not only socio-political affirmation, but also contention, John Parker exhibits the Ga (Accra) harvest festival of *Homowo*, which celebrates ancestors who died during a famine, as permitting increasingly potent forms of political contestation by social groups marginal to society by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁵ Furthermore, in his 2021-monograph, Parker specifically addresses the writing of death as he describes how between

20 Thomas C. McCaskie, "Death and the Asantehene: A Historical Meditation," *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 3 (1989): 428.

21 Ibid., 430.

22 Ibid.

23 Kwame Arhin, "The Economic Implications of Transformations in Akan Funeral Rites," *Africa* 64, no. 3 (1994): 317.

24 Ibid.

25 John Parker, "The Cultural Politics of Death and Burial in Early Colonial Accra," in *Africa's Urban Past*, eds. David Anderson and Richard Rathbone (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 216.

1874 and 1901 Gold Coast newspapers inscribed practices of writing about death within the public sphere as part of a burgeoning cultural nationalism.²⁶ Obituaries, Parker finds, became a ‘formalized genre which sought to publicly record and celebrate the achievements of individuals’ in the backdrop of grief and loss.²⁷

The memorialisation of the death of individuals in Africa evolved over time next to shifts in urbanisation, understandings of property rights, cross-border migration, new technologies, and appearances of different cadres of national rulers. McCaskie places the emergence of advertisements of death as well as their incorporation into a deep-rooted funeral rite in a sphere of ritualistic and aspirational modernity. According to him, “[t]hey evidenced participation in or aspiration to modernity, but they also built upon a legacy of customary oral practice.”²⁸ One of these tools of mediation was the photograph, appearing in obituaries in Nigerian newspapers since the 1940s, much earlier than in neighbouring Ghana for which Tom McCaskie explains that “[f]ull-page obituaries emerged in the 1960s, and photographs of the deceased became common during the 1970s.”²⁹

Nozomi Sawada focuses on the period from the 1880s to the 1920s to analyse single instances of portraits of important dignitaries, such as E.W. Blyden, that were placed in public places such as Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos.³⁰ Newspaper photography in post-war Nigerian newspapers developed a different dynamic since they went out to a diverse readership. Continuing from Sawada’s work, the examples of the obituaries in the Nigerian newspapers and the *Liberia Official Gazette* demonstrate how journalism constantly evoked the past to inform the present and the future. This relationship between “what was” and “what could be” was one facet in the dynamic memory process in these advertisements commemorating the dead.

In-memoriams and obituaries also disseminated political ideologies. As Stephanie Newell informs us, these types of announcements have a compelling

26 John Parker, *In My Time of Dying: A History of Death and the Dead in West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 228–244.

27 *Ibid.*, 241.

28 Thomas C. McCaskie, “Writing, Reading, and Printing Death: Obituaries and Commemoration in Asante,” in *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 349.

29 *Ibid.*, 358.

30 Nozomi Sawada, “Selecting Those ‘Worthy’ of Remembering: Memorialization in Early Lagos Newspapers,” *Journal of West African History* 2, no. 2 (2016): 79–108.

function of mediation that a focus on death further brings to the fore.³¹ A dead person's eternalised representation in print provides access points to the spaces of mediation and highlights how bodies are represented by devices such as "genre, narrative perspective, language, and style."³² The serial nature of the format and its eventual mass production extended existing practices of remembrance. Moreover, in her work, cultural theorist Aleida Assmann describes a similar process specifically for political and cultural forms of memory, which are designed as transgenerational.³³ This relation of spatiality and temporality constitutes a collective memory. From a journalistic perspective, we can also conceive of advertisements of death in newspapers as fragments of history changing through time and in specific locations.

Death notices and obituaries disseminated social identities to a wide audience. As Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan have pointed out, mourning helped the grieving to carry on. Proper mourning relegated the dead to the realm of ancestors, as opposed to turning them into "vengeful ghosts."³⁴ Amongst other steps, the action of "registering", that is inscribing the personal experience of death into the public sphere via broadcasting it in newspapers, addressed the social group to which the deceased belonged.³⁵ Printing in-memoriams and obituaries can thus be categorised as one step in a multipronged operation described as the registration of death. Hence, the selected newspapers offered spaces for commemoration, signalling, and the fortifying of communities who sought to associate with the (colonial) state in terms of status, but not necessarily for the purpose of upholding official nationalism.

In-memoriams and Obituaries in Nigerian Newspapers

Nigerian newspapers printed obituaries in different sections but most prominently in a designated space with the title "In Memoriam."³⁶ In-memoriams appeared

³¹ Newell, "From Corpse to Corpus," 390.

³² Ibid.

³³ Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual, and Collective," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, eds. Robert Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216.

³⁴ Rebekah Lee and Megan Vaughan, "Death and Dying in the History of Africa since 1800," *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 3 (2008): 342.

³⁵ Lee and Vaughan, "Death and Dying," 342.

³⁶ E.g. *WAP*, *Daily Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*.

side by side on a single page. From the late 1940s onwards, obituaries and in-memoriams often included a photograph of the deceased. These portrait photographs, typically taken several years prior to death, showed the deceased in a healthy state of appearance.³⁷ Captions and text beneath them completed the obituary. The text below the photograph described the circumstances of the death and illuminated specific stages in the life the person had led. The written text expressed the grief of relatives, friends, and colleagues but also praised the achievements of the deceased. In certain cases, obituaries were entirely self-referential: depicting a living relative instead of the deceased, describing the depicted person's achievements while only briefly mentioning the dead person. Prominent identity markers, such as profession, religion, or public offices held, joined the expressions of regret about the circumstances of death and wishes for the afterlife. These personal messages composed by mourning relatives and friends provide a point of contrast to the more levelled state-centred advertisements of death published in the *Liberia Official Gazette*.

As mentioned above, printing in-memoriams was part of a process of registering death within a given social community. Indeed, it was in its indication of the social relationships of the community that the in-memoriams entered the public sphere.³⁸ Since they were typically designed by and for an elite public, in-memoriams and other advertisements of death included symbols that represented a "ruling class hegemony in a Gramscian sense."³⁹

By marking relevant individual achievements, the author attempted to assign meaning to the lived experiences of the deceased, while also signifying values for the present and future in front of the deceased's social group. Put differently, the registration of death in the public sphere mutually informed and reassured the writer as well as intended readers that social and cultural conventions would be maintained. This affirmation of identities involved a variety of practices, such as hiding, masking, displaying, revealing, explaining, and informing, as outlined with the help of examples in the following section.⁴⁰

37 Also see: Stephen F. Sprague, "Yoruba Photography: How the Yoruba See Themselves," *African Arts* 12, no. 1 (1978): 52–59, 107; Charles Gore, "African Photography," *African Arts* 48, no. 3 (2015): 1–5; Charles Gore, "Commemoration, Memory, and Ownership: Some Social Contexts of Contemporary Photography in Benin City, Nigeria," *Visual Anthropology* 14, no. 3 (2001): 321–342.

38 Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, "The Social Marketing of Elites: The Advertised Self in Obituaries and Congratulations in Some Nigerian Dailies," *Africa* 61, no. 2 (April 1991): 247–263.

39 Karin Barber, "Popular Arts in Africa," *African Studies Review* 30, no. 3 (1987): 1–78; Lawuyi, "The Social Marketing of Elites," 247.

40 Lawuyi, *Story about Life*, 109.

Most of these practices were affirmations of identities that manifested via the fusion of two different forms of media, namely photographs and text, which journalists merged to design the layout of the in-memoriams and obituaries more generally. Photographs published in Nigerian newspapers in the 1940s and early 1950s were often full-length portrait photographs of the deceased. These portrait photographs became a central element in commemorative discourse in newspapers. As will be shown in the examples that follow, as part of this undertaking of shaping and reinforcing of social identities, distinct values and achievements, such as piety and career paths, qualified as contributing to identity formation and aspirational outlooks.

On 7 November 1949, the *West African Pilot* (WAP) reported on the memorial service marking the anniversary of the death of a wealthy Lagosian businessman: J.H. Doherty. Instead of an image of J.H. Doherty, however, the WAP printed a portrait photograph of his son, as demonstrated in Fig. 1. The image of R. Ade Doherty, who was a member of the young educated elite, being a lawyer sitting on the Crown Counsel in the Western Provinces, overshadows his father's representation in the newspapers. The transgenerational memory process reflected in this in-memoriam builds on the business success of the father – entrepreneurship being a well-respected career path in the interwar and postwar periods – as well as the son's career in law. While both professions were prestigious, the career in law and his position as Senior Crown Counsel in the Western Provinces unequivocally identified the son as part of the colonial state apparatus. A professional identification with the colonial state, which served as a catalyst for careers in business and public administration, is a repeated subject in obituaries, and stands in contrast to other parts of the newspaper, such as the editorial and feature articles, where journalists directly challenged colonial officials with regularity.

Obituaries did not exclusively reveal or obscure. Rather, they projected a complex relationship between masking and concealing. While the printing of the son's photograph and the caption credits the son's own achievements, the WAP simultaneously celebrated Doherty senior, the one-time clerk who had emerged as founder of a large trading enterprise. The high social status of the Doherty family was disseminated to readers by illuminating the combination of entrepreneurial success and legal experience held within this single family unit. The location of the memorial service at the cemetery on Ikoyi Island, one of the most affluent areas of Lagos, further expressed the Dohertys' social ranking.

A successful career, especially in business, carried much weight within the Lagos community. For example, on 3 March 1953, the *Nigerian Tribune* printed the image with caption of Tjiani Badaru on a page reserved for announcements,

Fig. 1: *West African Pilot*, 7 November 1949.

such as celebrations and festivals, where in-memoriams were also published. Apparently, he was a “salesman of the G.B. Ollivant”, one of Nigeria’s largest trading companies and a subsidiary of the United Africa Company of Nigeria. His photograph appeared next to an article describing how Badaru arranged a “funeral party” to honour his mother’s death.⁴¹ While any references to the particular Muslim burial ritual practices of his immediate family were absent – his religious adherence amongst other things being made visible through his style of dress, as seen in Fig. 2 – the announcement broadcasted issues of broader relevance to Baradu’s social class, including the extent of his wealth and his adherence to social norms, as seen in the fact that he entertained a large number of guests to honour his deceased mother.⁴² Informing others about the profession of deceased family members and showing evidence of their purported wealth were common practices in Nigerian obituaries across different newspapers.

In-memoriams were descriptive but also carried strong sentiments of grief. While most deaths were of natural causes associated with old age, precise details of how death arrived could be concealed. This act of veiling the sad or troubling particulars created suspense for the reader, but also emphasised a feeling of respect and of great loss. Combined with a soft voice of outrage, grief was evermore fervently expressed when the successful and diligent had unexpectedly passed away, that is without having adequately benefited from life’s drudgery, or so it was contended. The *WAP* marked the death of Michael Obiora Emodi

⁴¹ *Nigerian Tribune*, 3 March 1953.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Mr. Femi Emodi, spokesman of the O.B. Citizens' Union, is overheard a large number of people on Sunday last at his brother's funeral in Lagos at his late mother, Madam Adeniyi Akin.

Fig. 2: *Nigerian Tribune*, 3 March 1953.

on 10 September 1965 (Fig. 3) with the following words: “Your Labour ended, but you never enjoy the fruit of your Labour. The wicked have done their worst [sic.] Never in [sic.] thousand years will there be another you.”⁴³ Presumably Emodi had encountered death before his retirement. As shown in Fig. 4, another obituary printed just months later used virtually identical phrasing to describe the premature demise of another individual.⁴⁴

Whereas a peaceful afterlife was conditioned upon a successful life, an unexpected death often caused particularly strong expressions of grief. Expressing both diligence and prosperity as motives and achievements of deceased formed an essential part of the commemoration in obituaries and in-memoriams. There were conditions to the display of prosperity and wealth. In the previous examples, family members showed their own wealth when commemorating their late relatives. The commemoration became a platform of display for continued success. In the case that follows, namely that of a person who died before their time (so to speak), those left behind did not seem to be required to display the person’s wealth.

While the information given in the previous examples is introspective, not actually appealing to the readership, other writers used obituaries to directly express misdeeds that had occurred within the community. Take for instance the obituary of Ibironke Akanke Akibola published in the *WAP* on 5 September 1965, which stated the following: “We pray that God may protect us from FRIENDS because it is easy to defend ourselves from our enemies. We could spend eternity mourning thee and yet not do justice to our sense of loss [...]. Only those who have suffered the like would realise the silent pains and

⁴³ *WAP*, 10 September 1965.

⁴⁴ *WAP*, 1 October 1965.

In Memoriam

In evergreen memory of our dearly beloved father and husband.

MICHAEL OBIORA EMODI
who passed away suddenly on September 10th 1964 by 3.12 a.m. also-Lagos.

Your Labour ended, but you never enjoy the fruit of your Labour. The wicked have done their worst Never in thousand years will there be another you.

Contact fails but memory lingers. Rest in Peace.

WIFE:- Mrs P. A. Emodi

DAUGHTERS:-
Roseline Emodi, Amaka Emodi, Ogo Emodi.

SONS:-
Nnamdi Emodi, Ikechukwu Emodi, Chukwuka Emodi.

His memorial service will take place at St. Marks Anglican Church Idi-Araba S/Lere Lagos near University Teaching Hos, pital on the 12th of September 1965 at 3 p.m.

In Memoriam

IN ever green memory of our dearly beloved father, brother, relative and meeting President.

EGWUONWU ODIM
who slept suddenly on the 1st October, 1964.

You worked hard and died early without enjoying the fruit of your good labour. You have gone for ever. Contact fails but memory lingers.

Rest in peace.

Children: Ifegwu Egwuonwu and Ola Egwuonwu.

A Brother and Relatives: O. Odim, Aso Anya Kalu, Oghonaya Nkele, Atanda Ajibade, Egwerike Ifegwu and Chukwu Ifegwu.

Meeting: Amala Nkporo Improvement Union.

Fig. 3: WAP, 10 September 1965. Fig. 4: WAP, 1 October 1965.

agony of parting without good-bye.”⁴⁵ Outsiders to Akibola’s community were left to fill in the gaps surrounding the cause of her death which was well-known to those with insider status within her community. The reference to her “friends” implicated close acquaintances in Akibola’s death.

The previous examples consist of obituaries published in English. However, further masking and signalling could occur with the deployment of indigenous

⁴⁵ WAP, 5 September 1965.

Fig. 5: *Daily Times*, 6 October 1954.

[Reads]

In Memoriam

In evergreen and loving memory of our dearly beloved mother.

MADAM RACHEL
TINU ADEBIMPE

who slept in Christ Jesus on October 6, 1948. Six years have rolled since we missed your motherly care. Rest in peace.

[Names of members of the Adebimpe family]

language. In contrast to in-memoriams, Yoruba was scarcely used in the obituaries printed in English-language newspapers. However, specific phrases received frequent mention. One of these was “*Orun re o*” – a variation of “rest in peace.”⁴⁶ Captions in Yoruba were common for registering the dead by informing readers, in particular insiders to the community, about the deceased. Signalling to Yoruba middle-class audiences was achieved by publishing half of the obituary’s text in vernacular. Figurative and literal references to character traits passed on in the family demonstrated the deceased’s value to the community. For example, the in-memoriam of Mrs. Asimowu O. Anigbalawo (Fig. 6), published in the *Nigerian Tribune* on 16 January 1953, pointed to her industriousness, leadership, and carefulness. The translated caption reads:

To the memory of my beloved mother Asimowu Oladebo Anigbalawo, the child of the one that arrives and everywhere is filled up, the child of the one that fills carriage up with loads, the child of a pacesetter may your heaven be well with you. The child of the neat

⁴⁶ “*Orun re o*” translates to “Do have good heaven or May you have a good heaven.” Another expression was “*Omo Alaiye Ode Lafose Orun re o*,” which is one of the few ancestral references and means: “The Child of King of Ode Remo land, the Lafose, do have good heaven.” See: *Daily Times*, 2 September 1965 and 26 August 1965.

one that walks in the market with gales. It is the dirty ones that walk carelessly in the market. Sleep on well.⁴⁷

A deeper identification with the Yoruba community was created in the incorporation of family praise songs that highlighted the amalgamation of past and newer aspirational rituals of death. These praise songs were figurative and referred to character traits passed down through a lineage. One announcement, for instance, informed readers that the whole family excelled at debate.⁴⁸ As in the example of Asimowu O. Anigbalawo, appeals to a wider community and to a tradition of positive qualities dominated Yoruba language in-memoriams. In spite of the few aforementioned phrases in Yoruba, obituaries published entirely in Yoruba are missing from the English language newspapers and they tended not to include any references to ancestral spirits.

Fig. 6: *Nigerian Tribune*, 16 January 1953.

In spite of the temporal difference between obituaries, published shortly after the death, and in-memoriams, published one to several years later, they both represent a genre which brings together trajectories of the state, society, and individual. Obituaries and in-memoriams therefore helped to create spaces beyond the paradigmatic reading of the colonial public sphere as a purely na-

⁴⁷ Thanks to Joseph Ayodokun who assisted with the translations.

⁴⁸ *Daily Times*, 5 January 1952, 11.

tionalist or anticolonial space.⁴⁹ Within this space, status gained from careers built on the security and welfare offered to servants of the colonial state fashioned the commemorated individual while associating them with characteristics proffered by his or her community members, such as employability, industriousness, dependability, and ambition leading to prosperity. The process of registering the dead not only shaped and reaffirmed the identity of the deceased, but it also signalled and informed their social group about their relation to society and to the state.

Reading and Printing of Death: The Case of the *Liberia Official Gazette*

For the case of the United States Janice Hume contends that obituaries reinforced myths about the nation in addition to their function for collective memory.⁵⁰ However, when we observe Liberia where no more than a third of the population had immediate access to these announcements, because they could read them, such a grand claim would be mere exaggeration. As this section shows, state officials in Liberia habitually used dead patriots as a means of elite identity-making. The Liberian government entered into journalism in September 1892 with the first publication of the *Liberia Gazette*.⁵¹ Officials used this central organ of the state legislature to publicise the obituaries of prominent public figures with particular professional traits, e.g. those who contributed to politics, education (particularly in the case of women), and the advancement of state-sanctioned religion, reflecting the values of the small population of an educated elite. Obituaries printed in the *Gazette* of the 1950s and 1960s affirm this group's self-fashioning of displaying the proximity to the power of the state.

Known as the *Liberia Official Gazette*, the paper was initially released as a bi-monthly periodical. "The *Gazette* carried no news stories or commentaries and consisted entirely of reports on government revenue, high-level government appointments, [...] passports issued, patents granted, and maritime traffic."⁵² Information for the *Gazette* regularly streamed in from a number of governmental de-

⁴⁹ For a discussion of "beyond spaces" and "paracolonial networks," see Stephanie Newell, "'Paracolonial' Networks: Some Speculations on Local Readerships in Colonial West Africa," *Interventions* 3, no. 3 (2001): 336–354.

⁵⁰ Janice Hume, *Obituaries in American Culture* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 9.

⁵¹ Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia*, 143.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 65.

partments.⁵³ In contrast, state-orchestrated obituaries in the *Liberia Official Gazette* were advertisements that were promptly printed, immediately following the death of a purportedly remarkable public figure. Obituaries in the *Gazette* comprised single- or multiple-page special issues (i.e. *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*). They were printed on demand to minimise the gap between a person's death and the spread of news about the event. These obituaries consisted solely of text; images of the deceased did not feature. However, lengthy, formulaic biography compensated for the absence of visual stimuli. While family members likely related to some of the finer biographical details, these announcements of death were products of the upper class who dominated the administration. The actual authorship behind these obituaries is not entirely clear. A low-level office in the State Department prepared them, however, the signature of the secretary of state (Momolu Dukuly from 1954 until 1960 and Joseph Rudolph Grimes thereafter) gave them official importance.

Special issues of the *Gazette* announced the death of prominent Liberian patriots. Information about the lives of these individuals was compiled in a standardised format and sent to the president's desk after passing the State Department. The next step was circulation.⁵⁴ However, the *Gazette* contained no commercial advertisements and was not expected to turn a profit. Copies were not sold, but rather distributed to the media and political officials, such as the superintendents in the counties surrounding the capital. In 1949, for instance, a superintendent reportedly would be given 50 copies, which he handed out to his subordinates and friends.⁵⁵ An initial audience consisted of government employees and their networks in the urban capital, the coastal areas and selected districts in the interior. There was only limited effort to attract a broad and diverse readership. Spot news reporting events as they occurred and visual images were entirely absent from these periodicals, which had more in common with a colonial Blue Book than a popular journalistic format. In terms of function, the *Gazette* itself intended only to collect and display state affairs to those in immediate proximity of the power of the state. However, in a

⁵³ For instance, in 1916 the clerk of the Supreme Court was reported to have sent a docket containing a summary of the proceedings to be reprinted in it. L.M. Ferguson to N.K. Gibson, Assistant Secretary of State, 10 April 1916.

⁵⁴ See, for example, Journal of the 118th Day's Sitting of the Honourable the Liberian Senate, First Session of the Legislature, Wednesday, 24 July 1968. Legislative/ Senate Journal/ 22 July-7 August 1968.

⁵⁵ Fifty copies were sent to the Superintendent in Grand Cape Mount in 1949. See, for example, Christie W. Doe, Chief Departmental Clerk, to Superintendent of Grand Cape Mount County, 29 July 1949, Executive/ Executive Mansion/ Grand Cape Mount 1945–1951.

second step, some of the information contained in these periodicals would be reprinted in commercial newspapers accessed by a broader audience. Furthermore, while it is difficult to estimate precisely when this tradition started, the reading out aloud of obituaries at funerals continues in urban areas today.⁵⁶

In contrast to the Nigerian case that was characterised by journalists who reported on death working for privately-owned newspapers, in Liberia, the state recorded the loss. These obituaries were formulaic in terms of content. Each dispatch followed the same progression, typically beginning with the government's "deep regrets" about a sad or tragic event, including the date, time and place of the death. This rehearsal was followed by details about the individual's birthplace, and further social and political genealogy of the deceased. Next came information about their education, memberships in various fraternities and churches, and honours received from the state, such as the Medal of Distinguished Order of Services, Knight officials of the Order of the Star of Africa, amongst others, followed by the names of surviving family members. Details describing the funeral rites, burial location, and procedures of governmental commemoration completed the passage. An understanding of the relationship between the state and these communities as unshakeable thereby entered the public arena.

Collective memories location between history and myth has been addressed by scholars such as Avishai Margalit and Jeffrey Blustein, whose work bears important insights for the study of obituaries.⁵⁷ Margalit portrays what he calls "shared memories" as overlapping between "scientific" and "common sense" worldviews. He states that, "Myth, as an embodiment of the enchanted worldview, is populated with wondrous animals, supernatural interventions in nature and history, heroes and gods, and heroes on the way to becoming gods: all charmed and charming in the literal sense of the word."⁵⁸ In giving thanks to and simultaneously broadcasting the feats of the dead patriots to the literate Liberian population, officials and elites could further a selective and almost fantastical portrait of their community; one that celebrated concrete narratives of citizenship and civic values. In other words, as with the Nigerian death announcements, the "registering" of death involved appealing to a social strata af-

⁵⁶ Carl Patrick Burrowes, *Between the Kola Forest and the Salty Sea: A History of the Liberian People before 1800* (Monrovia: Know Yourself Press, 2016), 1.

⁵⁷ Avishai Margalit, *Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 63–65; Jeffrey Blustein, *The Moral Demands of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 188–198.

⁵⁸ Margalit, *Ethics of Memory*, 63.

filiated with the deceased.⁵⁹ As also shown in the Nigerian examples, these death notices included symbols that represented a ruling ideology.⁶⁰ Unequal relationships of wealth and power and the values of elite groups were on full display during this ritual of death. Advertisements of death spoke to the signifiers of social influence, revealing important insights into a process of elite identity formation. In addition, the state affirmed this identity through a variety of practices, such as hiding, masking, displaying, revealing, and concealing.⁶¹

Journalists exhibited deceased elites' value to and identification with the state in a select number of ways, as will be demonstrated in the following examples. Atop the list were public service, religion, education and rural-urban integration. Still, distinctions were drawn between "important" and "very important" patriots when it came to the state's tributes of respect. The flag of the Republic was flown at half-mast on all public buildings for the duration of one day after a prominent public figure had died. On rare occasions and to signal even greater importance, the flag remained lowered for up to 15 days. Another unmistakable distinction is seen in the different lengths of published obituaries, typically ranging from one to two pages.

Julius Cecil Jones' 1963 obituary referenced his relationship with multiple Liberian presidents. It stated that President Edwin Barclay appointed him Collector of Internal Revenues for Grand Cape Mount county and noted that, "President Tubman was pleased to commission him as Superintendent of Grand Cape Mount County in 1944."⁶² Other commemorated professionals included judges and military men, educators, and religious leaders. The wives of government officials were often publicly remembered, signalling both a familial ideal as well as the inherently public nature of their status. The obituary of Mrs. Malvenia Nazarene Harmon-Brewer, for example, described her as the widow of former senator George T. Brewer as well as "a loyal member of the National True Whig Party."⁶³ Speaking to a notion of aspiration, Burrowes has put forward that in Liberia, "Although valor and patriotism were associated with manhood, those virtues were particularly celebrated when displayed by women."⁶⁴ Still, during

⁵⁹ Lee and Vaughan, "Death and Dying," 342.

⁶⁰ Barber, "Popular Arts in Africa," 9.

⁶¹ Lawuyi, *Story about Life*, 109.

⁶² "Obituary of Julius Cecil Jones," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVIII, no. 7, 18 July 1963.

⁶³ The National True Whig Party was the dominant political organisation in the country at the time "Obituary of Malvenia Nazarene Harmon-Brewer," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, XLVII, no. 8, 22 August 1960.

⁶⁴ Burrowes, *Power and Press Freedom in Liberia*, 138.

the period under investigation, in contrast to the Nigerian case where women were frequently represented in the privately commissioned obituaries, by far most state-sponsored obituaries featured stories of successful men. These were typically members of the educated urban elite, in particular those with roots in the United States, the Caribbean, or in the original settlements.

Another key difference to the Nigerian examples was the celebration of business acumen. When compared with political and public service, this characteristic was decidedly devalued in the Liberian advertisements of death. Career-paths associated with the independent state, especially legal careers, received most prominent mention. After having received a bachelor's degree, Edwin Alford Morgan went on to study law and began a career as County Attorney for the County of Grand Bassa.⁶⁵ Eugene Himie Shannon also studied law "under the late Chief Justice Louis A. Grimes" and later "he continued his study of law under the tutorship of former Chief Justice M. Nemle Russell of Grand Bassa County."⁶⁶ In 1926, he was admitted to the Bar of Bassa County. Born in the former settlement of Brewersville in Montserrado county, Emmanuel Wilmot Williams was a former circuit judge of the Sixth Judicial Circuit in Montserrado County.⁶⁷ Unsurprisingly, a social identification with the state in Liberia was predicated on coming from the "right" background.

As in the Nigerian examples, the Liberian obituaries also reveal insights into the correlation between genealogies (both social and political identities) and access to power and wealth. By analysing the obituaries it becomes evident that in contrast to rural Liberians, those with roots in the original settlements experienced their elementary education in a familial setting. Take for example Edwin Alford Morgan, former Senior Senator for Grand Bassa County and President *pro tempore* of the Liberian Senate, who died at the Presbyterian Hospital in New York City in the United States. He was born in Hartford, Connecticut, on the St. John River and received his elementary education "under the tutorship of his parents," who were clearly well-trained enough to competently provide such an education. Eugene Himie Shannon, former chief justice of the supreme court of Liberia, born on 6 December 1893, died at his own farm in Barrake, Maryland County. He also began his education under a family member, his grandfather Reverend O.E.A. Hime Shannon, former Rector of the Protestant

65 "Obituary of Edwin Alford Morgan," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 10, 8 October 1959.

66 "Obituary of Reverend O.E.A. Hime Shannon," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 5, 30 May 1959.

67 "Obituary of Emmanuel Wilmot Williams," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 12, 17 October 1959.

Episcopal Church of Harper, Maryland County.⁶⁸ A person's manner and place of acquiring early and secondary education implicitly informed the public about the belonging of the deceased to a distinguished social group.

The period after the Second World War reignited the official policy of rural integration for the sake of nation-building, and nation-building for the sake of global integration.⁶⁹ Obituaries from the 1950s and 1960s decisively included indigenous elites in this past, present, and future narration of the state. A close examination of these documents makes visible the narrow pathways of social and professional mobility that existed for the indigenous population. As discussed below, the obituaries of Edward Seku King, Counsellor of the Department of State, who died at the age of 41 in 1959; Kolli Selleh Tamba, also a former Counsellor of the Department of State, who passed away at the age of 53 in 1959; Boima Zinnah, former Member of the House of Representative (Western Province), who reached his end at the age of 80 in 1961; and Momo Passawe, former paramount chief of the Teewo (or Tawoh) Chiefdom, and member of the House of Representatives (Grand Cape Mount), who died at 83 in 1963, demonstrate a slightly more precarious path of migration and familial disruption as being necessary to climb social and occupational ladders.

As in other parts of West Africa, some local chiefs showed interest in at least one of their children receiving a missionary education, a path generally encouraged by the state. Edward Seku King, the son of late Clan Chief Boima Kartumu and Madam Karnor had been sent to a mission school as a child and eventually completed a Bachelor of Arts from Liberia College (later, the University of Liberia) in 1942. Following a decade of high school teaching, he was hired as Chief of the Bureau of Archives for the Department of State.⁷⁰ Boima Zinnah's obituary celebrated him as a scholar of indigenous Vai ethnic origin. This marked the rare occasion where ethnic identity explicitly featured in an obituary. Furthermore, he was the son of the paramount chief, Bamu Kolli Kamara, and the great-grandson of King Sao Boso Kamara (King Boatswain). Zinnah had received a religious education, having been educated by Reverend and Mrs. John Ricks in the township of Clay-Ashland, about a day's walk from his home in Bo-

68 "Obituary of Reverend O.E.A. Hime Shannon," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 5, 30 May 1959.

69 See, for example, Cassandra Mark-Thiesen, "Of Vagrants and Volunteers During Liberia's Operation Production, 1963–1969," *African Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2018): 147–172.

70 "Obituary of Edward Seku King," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVI, no. 9, 19 August 1959.

polu District.⁷¹ Tamba attended St. John's Mission School at Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, moving from his home in Gawular district to do so.⁷² For individuals with deep indigenous roots, signalling the experience of a mission education and related internal migration was a way to emphasise one's proximity to official nationalist power, while demonstrating a linkage to a chiefly family indicated the adherence to an alternative nationalist system nonetheless.⁷³

In the Liberian historiography, the year 1944 is also often referred to as a watershed moment for women, with their gaining unprecedented voting rights. However, the *Gazette* promoted a very specific image of Liberian womanhood. Commemorated Liberian women were either the politically notable wives of prominent public figures or female educators, affirming a role of women as nurturers of the body politic and mind. For instance, in the case of Augusta Beatrice Padmore, the deceased wife of Honourable Jerome Padmore, it was her religious activities that "singled her out as an outstanding devoted Christian and Civic worker."⁷⁴ Bertha Ninga Bishop, who died at 88, was engaged in "home missionary work and reared many young men and women." In addition, she had been a "faithful member" of Trinity Cathedral in Monrovia.⁷⁵ Fragments of the female identity that did not fit this mould received no mention in these death announcements.

Conclusion

Obituaries and in-memoriams stand out as fragments of a local mediascape in which past, present, and future converge to shape the identities of the deceased and the bereaved. In terms of ritualistic practice, these commemorations put death either descriptively or figuratively into the printed public sphere.⁷⁶ Practices

71 "Obituary of Bioma Zinnah," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVIII, no. 1, 4 January 1961.

72 "Obituary of Kolli Selleh Tamba," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 5, 6 May 1959.

73 Momo Passawe was an exception in that he attended an "Arabic School," or Koranic school, in Sierra Leone, and later returned to his hometown of Mambo in Liberia where he educated local students in a similar manner. "Obituary of Momo Passawe," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLIX, no. 1, 23 January 1962.

74 "Obituary of Augusta Beatrice Padmore," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVII, no. 10, 9 October 1959.

75 "Obituary of Bertha Ninga Bishop," *The Liberia Official Gazette: EXTRAORDINARY*, vol. XLVIII, no. 12, 26 December 1963.

76 Newell, "From Corpse to Corpus," 389–424.

of revealing, hiding, masking, displaying, and concealing mediated the eternalisation of the deceased for multiple purposes. Registering death consoled the bereaved and gave them a platform to solidify and shape the public identity of their loved ones and his or her social group; initially before reading publics, later in front of listening ones. Obituaries and death notices also demonstrated how distinctions between state, individual, and society could conflate when printing the life of the deceased. In both the state-owned Liberian newspapers and in the privately-owned Nigerian newspapers, death announcements highlighted specific achievements of the deceased that elite communities perceived as being worthy of replication in the future. These more figurative commemorations in fact illustrate how not just industry, but also the state functioned as a source of authority; this, even in the late colonial period in Nigeria where political tensions were growing. Hence, through the relationship between society and the individual shone the subliminal prominence of the relationship between the bereaved and the state, in most cases as a provider of social security and professional stability, and not as an object of contestation for members of the elite. This observation situates in-memoriams and obituaries outside of a framework of contemporary newspapers being strictly attentive to the level of official politics. While many editorials and feature articles widely articulated anticolonialism, in obituaries the colonial past simmered to create group identity defined by profession and class. In that sense, both cases show how the shaping and reconfiguring of memory concentrated and fixed the flow of imaginations and social representations at various levels of society and politics in the printed public sphere. In this vortex, time – past, present, future –, (communication) space – textual, visual, acoustic –, as well the aspirations and achievements of individuals, groups, and society converged.

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