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Appraisal of Indigenous Nigeria Press in Nationalism and Renaissance (1914–1960)

Suleiman, Hassan Biodun, PhD

Abstract

The period between 1914 and 1960 was a watershed in Nigerian Press history because it was a time many Nigerian free slaves arrived at homes and began to drop their foreign names. This era also heralded the call for an indigenous press and the use of even local or indigenous languages for reading. The call for the vernacular newspaper became a reality when in 1880, Andrew Thomas established Iwe Irohin Eko. This paper was floated mainly to promote the speaking of the Yoruba language and literature. In 1922, Eko Akete owned by both Akin Adesingbin and Adeoye Deniga appeared at the newspaper stand. Mr Akintan established Eleti Ofe in 1923 while Mr Awoliyi founded Eko Igbehin. Mr Thomas Jackson floated Iwe irohin Osese in 1925. The establishment of these indigenous press revived cultural nationalism among Nigerians. The study attempted to appraise the roles of the indigenous press toward nationalism and renaissance. It tries to analyse various significant impacts of these vernacular newspapers on the consciousness of returning Nigerian slaves. The paper is exploratory in nature and it makes use of secondary material such as archival recording, published texts, recorded interviews, published articles and journals.

Keywords: indigenous press, Iwe Irohin Osese, nationalism, renaissance, Eko Akete

Introduction

The history of the Nigerian press is not completed without the roles of the early missionaries. Up until the end of World War II (1914–1918), most of the press floated were established by one Christian mission or another. Here, the phases of the press can be classified into four eras. These include missionary journalism (1849 – 1863), the era of alien-dominated press (1863-1914), the emergence of the indigenous press (1914-1960) and the new media era. Notwithstanding the indigenous press was unique in the sense that it was the period that indigenous Nigerians, who were born to Nigeria parents and schooled abroad came back to Nigeria

to float newspapers and other print media in order to educate, inform and enlighten Nigerians about the roles of colonial times and at times, the adverse effects of their laws on Nigerians.

Akitoye Ajasa was one of the early educated elites who established the *Nigeria Pioneer* (1914–1937). According to Daramola (2006), the paper was established to cater for the interest of government and the people. Daramola stated that Ajasa was born in Lagos in 1886 as Edward Macaulay. He dropped his foreign names in compliance with the yearning of the renaissance of the 19th century. Unlike other elder statesmen, Ajasa was against criticism and violent agitation against the colonial government. Rather, he believed in peaceful persuasion.

Daramola emphasized that Ajasa was an advocate of humility to justice. At the 1922 election, Ajasa forged a deep relationship with Dr. Henry Carr who equally shared his points that changes in Nigeria development can only come through constructive engagement and dialogue and not agitation. At this time also, many papers on newsstands opined that the pioneers were sponsored by Lugard. According to (Omu, 1978), others also are of the view that Walter Egerton had commissioned Ajasa to float a newspaper that would serve as the voice of the government in order to check the excesses of other indigenous papers against the colonial government. Daramola hinted further that Thomas Horatio Jackson condemned the attitudes of Ajasa to Nigerians' advancement for nationalism and freedom from colonial rule. He was regarded as a close ally of British rule. *The Pioneer* had its own printing press at CMS press, and was widely regarded as one of the best newspaper outfits around. The paper was on the newsstands until 1936, when the founder could not physically cope with the rigour of publishing due to old age.

The *African Messenger* was another press that made a remarkable impact during the indigenous press era. Ernest Sesel Ikoli established this paper on March 10, 1921. It was a weekly paper published on Thursday and sold for threepence. The headquarters of the newspaper house was located at 24 Odunlami Street, Lagos. Its editorial policy hinged on the need to remain calm even in the face of provocation and to be unbiased in controversy even when the situation forced him to take sides (Duyile, 1989). At the local election of 1922, Ikoli used *Messenger Messenger* to the establishment of the “Union of Young Nigerians.”

The Spectator was financed by Akinwande Savage on May 19, 1923. According to Duyile (1987), the paper was one of the major vehicle for sustaining nationalism and liberation of Nigerians from colonial rule. In its maiden editorial, the paper states:

... It is in those circumstances (of British West Africa) that we start our career today as a public opinion along the lines of that natural and normal advancement of the peoples of British West Africa, which we feel nothing can stop or prevent. We shall reserve to

ourselves the right of freely criticizing and suggesting without malice, but with chastity and persistence in the right.

Around 1912 and 1913, Savage, in partnership with his friend Casely Hayford, wrote many articles in *The Standard* critical of the British indirect rule policy. According to Daramola (2006), the paper was unique in that it was edited by different seasoned editors that include Anthus Williams (Later Fagbenro), Ernest Okoli and Mr Ayo Lijadu. However, the Spectator stopped being on the newsstand on December 26, 1930.

According to Omu (1978), the Lagos Daily News was the first daily newspaper in Nigeria. It was established by Victor Bababoni who was also a book seller. The paper was often referred to as *West Africa*'s first daily. The paper was unable to withstand the economic doom of the 1920 and could only exist on the paper stand for sixty-seven days (67 days). The paper as well as its press was sold to Hubert Heles Macaulay, in partnership with Dr Akinlade Caulerick. Indeed, Macaulay took over the ownership of the press in 1927. According to Omu (1978), Macaulay had founded a political party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The paper later spearheaded mass support for the party. Omu expatiated that the *Daily News* was known for its constructive criticism of government policies. Macaulay was a keen believer and supporter of African freedom and human rights. Omu hinted further that apart from Daily News, he enjoyed writing articles for almost all the press published in Lagos. He was noted to have quarreled with any editor who failed to publish his views and opinions. Omu clarified that whenever his opinions were not published, he would publish it in form of pamphlet. Indeed, Omu stated that Lagos News was involved many land mark cases in Lagos colony. These cases include the water rate agitation of 1908 the campaign for the local legislative election of 1922 and the house of Dosunmu Obaship succession. The paper was rated for its powerful editorials, flawless grammar and phrases as well as distinct page planning.

According to Duyile (1987), the *Daily Service* was founded in 1933 by Mr Ernest Ikoli who became its first editor and was later edited by Sir Ladoke Akintola. It was a weekly newspaper and served as the mouthpiece of the Nigeria Youth Movement (NYM). The paper was critical of the British colonial rule. In several of its issues, the paper urged Nigerians and not "foreigners" "to assume the leadership of the nation. It also harped in the national cohesiveness and unity. The paper succeeded in campaigning for the establishment of many branches of the youth movement in Ibadan, Zaria, Warri, Port Harcourt, Enugu, and Jos.

The *Daily Times* was founded on June, 1926 in response to the yearning of readers who are craving for a daily newspaper. The paper was financed by Ric, Richard Barrow, the Chairman of the Lagos chamber of Commerce, V. R

Osborne, W.E. Becker, L.A. Archer, P. D Doe, H. Scott-Taylor, Gottschaik and a Nigerian, Sir Adeyemo Alakija. Omu (1978) opined that aside the need to break the government domination of Reuter news, there was also the need to check the hardline posture of the Weekly Record as well as the Daily News against the colonial government. A decision was therefore reached to float a press that would give support to the colonial government and the European Community. Therefore, the Nigeria Printing and Publishing Company Ltd., publisher of the Daily News was established. In its editorial policy, the paper states thus:

We, the Daily Times are breaking new ground in local journalism. . . . It is a national newspaper and will be attached to no particular one or party. Whatever makes for the healthy progress and? advancement of Nigeria will have our hearty support.

Daramola clarified that at the inception of the paper, it did not engage in politics therefore Nigerian educated elites regarded the criticism of the paper as mild to Nigerian nationalism. The ownership of the paper changed hands twice between 1935 and 1947. It later became known as “the *Daily Mirror* of West Africa (Duyile, 1989). The Mirror group employed skilled foreign journalists and also adopted African policy of employing journalists, printers, machine operators whose skills have promoted journalism profession in Nigeria. According to Duyile (1989), this policy provided the first generation of editors of government and private own media station with quality training and techniques.

The paper later became a tabloid with salient features. According to Daramola (2006), the tenure of Babatunde Jose as the editor of the *Daily Times* (*Daily Timess* 1957-1962) heralded swift growth and production technique. Jose had taken over the from Mr Percy Roberts

The *Comet* was established by Duse Muhammed Ali, a Pan Africanist in 1933. It was a weekly newspaper. Duse was an Egyptian but settled in Lagos According to its publisher, “the paper was meant to sort the issues of Nigeria politics “The paper captured international stories as affect Nigeria as a country. The Nigerian Easterner Mail was another paper that was established in the eastern part of Nigeria in 1935 by James Vivian Clinton. According to Daramola (2006), Clinton was a Sierra Leone citizen. The paper was decent and unique in its package. It had to compete with the Western pilot owned by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. The old agerelated illness that befell the publisher contributed immensely to the demise of the paper.

Dr Nnamdi Azikwe launched the *West African Pilot* in 1937. According to Daramola (2006), the maiden editorial of the paper states thus:

. . . The West African pilot is a child of circumstance and we are cognizant of the fate of many a child of circumstance in the theatre of world’s history. Nevertheless, this new organ of public opinion is dedicated to performing its task, in concert with its contemporaries, in a spirit of humility and candour and co-operation . . . consistent with

this policy, so we shall not scruple to focus the spotlight of public opinion on any issue which affects the destiny of Africa, in the light of our sincere and honest convictions.

The *Pilot* comprised several pages such as the women, sports and editorial special feature as well as political news. The paper was constructive in his contribution on the general strike of 1945, the Richard constitution and the obnoxious ordinance of 1946. The paper became a major media platform of intimating Nigerians on the British colonial rule and its positive and negative effects. The newspaper focused on the propagation of African freedom and racial pride. Indeed, one of his associates named Coleman said of Zik: The boldness, daring and sometimes shocking direction of his editorials and news radically above those of his successor.

Gaskiyah Tafi kwabo was a newspaper founded by the colonial administration in the north on January 1, 1939. According to Duyile (1989), the paper was a weekly press sold for one penny. The paper was able to disseminate information about the 2nd World war. The round the southern and the northern protectorates of Nigeria and was actively engaged in nationalism through the use of educative editorials. The paper later emerged as the government paper under Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of the North. It also disseminated feature stories and opinions on the policies of the Northern Peoples Congress.

The *Nigeria Tribune* was another remarkable press that actually contributed to nationalist struggle against colonial imperialism. Though founded in 1949 by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, it was critical against the colonial government. The position of the Tribune on such national issues such as political crisis of 1964 as well as its fearless editorials, new stories endeared people to the paper. The period between 1912 and 1960 was a turbulent period in the history of Nigeria because the noted press above and some others were established by Nigeria educated elites who, after long sojourns in Europe and the United States came back and used their papers to propagate nationalism against British continued rule of Nigeria. It was also a period where returning Nigeria educated elites just like other Africans held together by the bonds of common language and common historic experience to assert their right to live under a government of their own making for the preservation of their political, economic and social interest. (Onwubiko, 1973).

Conceptual Clarifications

Indigenous Nigerians (1914-1960)

Historically, the first world war commenced in 1914 and ended in 1918. The aftermath of the world war had a terrible effect on the political economy of West Africa, including Nigeria. According to Onwubiko (1973), one unique political result of the war was the British and French occupation of the British

of the German colonies of Togo and Cameroon and the consequent conversion of these colonies into mandated or trusteeship territories.

Again, the first Pan African Congress held in Paris in 1918 /19 led by Williams Dubois, Blaise Diagne and other Negro leaders spearheaded the importance of Africa in the future world. This landmark event had a tremendous impact upon West African nationalists of the period. In deed the National Council of British West Africa Council (NCBWA) drew inspiration from these external developments. This event later provided the platform for those who later emerged as the indigenous educated elites as well as indigenous leaders such as Sir Herbert Macaulay, Dr Nnamdi Azikwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa among others.

Sir Herbert Macaulay was one of the early indigenous Nigerian educated elites. He was born on November 14, 1864 and was the grandson of Bishop Ajayi Crowther. According Nwobiko (1973), Macaulay was the father of Nigeria nationalism because of his various active roles in creating awareness of the adverse effects of British colonial rule and again, being able use to Daily News, the paper he founded to give constructive criticism about various nefarious rules of the British colonial government. He was an active member of the National council of British West Africa which played great impact on nationalism in West Africa. Nwobiko (1973) stated that he played a dominant role in famous Apapa land case of 1921. He was also a leading counsel on the “Eshugbayi Eleko Vs Government of Nigeria case of 1928. He also led many peaceful protests against the colonial rule over water rate, taxation, and land acquisition by government.

He was the founder of the National National Democratic Party (NNDP) which controlled Lagos politics between 1922 and 1938. His paper, the Lagos Daily News was also lucid, clear and critical of the colonial rule. He also coordinated the various market women Association in Lagos and gained the support of the House of Dosunmu for his party dominance of Lagos politics. (Nwobiko, 1973).

Nnamdi Azikwe was born in Zungeru in present Niger State of Nigeria. Azikwe was one of the few indigenous Nigeria educate elites that derived inspiration from another Ghanaian pastor, James Emmanuel Aggrey. While in United States pursuing his academic, he experienced lots of racism and discrimination. On his return to Nigeria, he became active on nationalism. He was able to published books such as Liberia in the world of Politics, Renascent Africa (1938), Land Tenure in Northern Nigeria; A study of Treaty of Rights of the Royal Niger Company (1942), Political Blueprint for Nigeria (1943), Taxation in Nigeria(1934), Suppression of the Press in British West Africa (1945), My odyssey, an autobiography, Political Reminiscences: Memoirs of an elderly statesman ; my considered opinion: Reflections of Presidential Emeritus of Nigeria(Daramola, 2006).

Obafemi Awolowo was another prominent early indigenous elite that contributed to the growth of journalism as well as good governance in Nigeria. He was a stenographer, a teacher, a journalist and later a politician. He founded the Daily Tribune on November 16, 1949. The Tribune was established as a business enterprise of a limited liability company known as African Press Limited. It is a hidden fact that Obafemi Awolowo possessed the rare quality of political organizational skill. Awolowo’s political parties (Action group of Nigeria and Unity Party of Nigeria) were known for discipline and ensuring that the manifestoes of the parties were transformed into life.

Ahmadu Bello was also another prominent elite in northern Nigeria. He was one of the founders of the Northern People’s Congress. His premiership of the northern region led to the swift growth and development of the region. He ensured that the north was adequately represented in governance and that the wellbeing of northerners is guaranteed.

Indigenous Media between 1914–1960.

Nationalism is one of the key manifestations of the roles of indigenous media between 1914–1960. According to Olunlade (2006), two indigenous papers expressed national goals. Eleti Ofe had “Ki ise fun iremi bikose fun ilumi” (Not for my personal gains but for that of my homeland) This statement is nationalist in nature. One can invariably refer to *ilu mi* (my homeland) as Nigeria. The second one, Asoye stated that it was the mouth piece of Nigeria. Papers such as the *Comet*, the *West African Pilot*, the *Tribune*, the *Daily News* were in the fore front of nationalist struggle against British colonial government. Olunlade (2006) emphasized that between 1949 and 1960, Eleti Ofe used another motto, A-n-ju won kose wi lejo (You cannot report openly that you hate a man because he is superior to you). According to him, the first motto gave firm picture of the focus of the paper. It was an evident of nationalist fervor. No doubt the emergence of nationalism predated the establishment of effective British rule over Nigeria. This is because the various areas which comprised modern Nigeria were acquired at different times and certain forces and conditions favouring the emergence of the nationalist idea were already at work before 1914 when Nigeria became an administrative unit. For example, the Sokoto Jihad led to the creation of a caliphate made up of fifteen emirates. Again, by bringing together such a large area under one single unit, the Jihad paved way for the emergence of a greater Nigeria.

Also, the Christian missionaries who had been active since the 1840 had encouraged among their brethren the idea of a creation of modern state which would take its rightful place. The bringing together of the various groups by the British within a common administrative unit fostered the spirit of oneness and a sense of unity—the unitary of common subjection. These factors combined with the underlying unity already provided among various Nigerian communities began to create a common consciousness as the basis of the new

state. Thus, when in 1914 the British brought together the two protectorates of Nigeria, they were putting the final touches to a process already going on even before their advent in the country. (Olusanya, 2012).

Aside nationalism, peaceful protests and movements also became manifest during this era. Most of the financiers of selected indigenous media spearheaded peaceful protests against colonial rule. Herbert Macaulay for instance on many occasions led peaceful protests against the crude policies of the British government. Macaulay, more often wrote which lambasted the colonial policies. For example, Daramola (2006) claimed that Macaulay wrote articles for nearly all the papers published in Lagos and he quarreled with any editor who refused to publish it. Even when his article was rejected, he would publish it as a pamphlet and circulate around Lagos. Macaulay article was considered very pungent hence was nicknamed Ejo ngoro (a rioting snake).

Birth of successful business men in the media industry. The indigenous media era also heralded the birth of business men in the area of newspaper ownership.

The era gave birth to prominent men such as Akintoye Ajasa, Ernest Sesei Ikoli, Akinwande Savage Herbert Macaulay, Adeyemo Alakija, Horatio Jackson and even Duse Muhammed investing in the newspaper industry. The papers of these businessmen created jobs for reporters, columnists, editors, newspaper page planners and an advertising who later made impact on Nigeria economy. According to Daramola (2006), prominent reporters and editors such as Areoye Oyebola, Babatunde Jose and Alade odunewu, Henry Odukomiya, Segun Osoba, Marthins Iroabuchi, Peter Enahoro enjoyed training from the early newspapers established by these business tycoons.

Politicians and Nigeria national leaders also emerged from the early indigenous educated elites. No doubt, prominent educated elites such as Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikwe, Ladoke Akintola, Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Bode Thomas, Anthony Enahoro, and a few others contributed immensely to the growth and development. The truth is that most of these leaders were formerly educated elites before venturing into politics.

Growth in printing technology was sustained in the production of newspaper during the indigenous media era. According to Akangbe (2009), the first printing press in Nigeria was established in Calabar in 1846. But this same technology was sustained by educated elites who also floated many printing presses. For instance, Daramola (2006) stated that Victor Bababomi, the first financier of Lagos Daily News had a printing press called Tanimola which was sold to Herbert Macaulay.

Birth of printing technicians is another land mark feature of this era. The availability of printing press provided job opportunities for technicians who specialized in the repairing and maintenance of these machines. Aside this,

these selected technicians also offered their skills to interns and others who crave to acquaint themselves with printing. There was production of books, manuals and bulletins in large quantity. The printing technology sustained the production of reading books in the area of literature, economy, religion and evangelism. Indeed, printers are given works by other cooperate organization, multi nationals and private organization.

Conclusion

Nigeria might not have been a nation today without the roles played by returning educated elites who out of necessity deemed it fit to float several newspapers through which they engaged in nationalist struggle culminating in 1960 Nigeria independence. While the indigenous media era lasted, the Nigeria press performed its watchdog roles creditably. Nigeria's indigenous press blazed the trail in journalism and media practice. Most of the founders of these press /outfits attained prominence as a result of their Western education and the influence they wielded during colonial rule. These prominent men played pivotal roles by participating in politics and mobilized Nigeria to partake in governance. The mentees of these political leaders later participated in the 2nd republic politics (1979-1983) and emerged as governors and technocrats in their respective states of origin.

In the area of entrepreneurship, some of these early educated elite floated newspapers which deepen their skills in business management, newspaper investments, accounting, auditing and risk venture. For instance, elder statesmen like Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamidi Azikiwe, Lateef Kayode Jakande, Aminu Kano, Waziri Ibraheem and a host of others established newspapers, magazines and other soft sell magazines that provided employment opportunities for Nigerians. Nigerian Tribune newspaper was founded by Obafemi Obafemi Awolowo, Azikiwe floated West Africa Pilot while Jakande created Micheal West publishing firm.

These set of leaders also moulded the lives of investors and businessmen that established newspapers and magazines around 1970 -1990. Business men like Sam Amuka Pemu, the founder of Vanguard, late Chief Olu Aboderin, the financier and owner of The Punch newspaper, Chief MKO Abiola, the publisher of the Concord newspaper learn the arts and crafts of newspaper investment from these elder statesmen.

Again, experienced garnered by these set of people have now been passed to youths who are into media, entertainment and even show businesses. For instance, Nduka obiagbena, the founder of Arise Television and This day newspaper, Ben Bruce, the owner of Sliverbird Company, Jimoh Ibraheem, the publisher of National Mirror newspaper, Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, the publisher of the Daily Champion newspaper, Orji Nzor Kalu, the owner of The Sun and Telegraph have invested in newspaper industries. Some of these

business men have also dabbled into politics, thereby participating in governance. Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu is a former member of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Chief Uzor Kalu is a member All Progressive Congress (APC) as well as Chief Jimoh Ibraheem.

Elder statesmen also brought with newspapers, printing technology. Herbert Macaulay, for instance owned a printing press where the copies of Daily news were published and Azikiwe too. Printing press is a booming venture now in the Nigerian publishing industries. Graphic artists, designers, copy editors, binders, distributors, book marketers now make living from book publishing.

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