

**MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES IN THE VANGUARD FOR POLITICAL
DECOLONIZATION OF AFRICAN STATES**

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ABSTRACT

It was the Europeans that started the campaign for decolonization of Africa by introducing foreign media technologies to Africans who later used them as weaponry for political emancipation. After attaining freedom in the 1950s and 1960s Satellites and the Internet were introduced to Africans in order to make the media technologies truly global in which information are passed across borders within seconds. Then, Americanization of the media system brought cultural colonization. All these aforementioned phenomena have not been given adequate attention in the content of African journals and this has, however, created a yawning gap in knowledge. It is a vacuum that the study attempts to fill. Using Nigeria as a case study, this study established that an indigenous language newspaper: IweIrohin was the first to be launched into Nigerian media space in 1859 by Rev. Henry Townsend; a British born missionary. It was the first medium of communication to fan the embers of decolonization probably in black Africa when it became sufficiently political to attract a protest to the colonial office in 1862. In 1932 a National Radio Station was established in Nigeria by the colonial government as a counterbalance to the rising profile of indigenous print media. A television station, first in the whole of Africa, was established in 1959 by the Western Nigerian government as a cry of protest after a prominent Nigerian politician was denied the use of the National Radio Station to rebut an allegation leveled against him by the colonial office. These various media establishments played significant roles in the campaigns for the new independent Nigeria on October 1, 1960

Key Words: Foreign media, Political emancipation, Media technologies, Media system, Media space.

INTRODUCTION

Decolonization is the process by which African states under colonial bondage became independent of the colonizing countries. The process was gradual and peaceful for some British colonies largely settled by expatriates, but violent for others where native rebellion were energized by nationalism after World War II. In the process print media became industries that specialized in the production and dissemination of news to undo colonialism. The print media were channels through which information that can sensitize local Africans about political

freedom were disseminated by Africans who had been trained, encouraged and fossilized by the 'European Political Freedom Enthusiasts' in Africa. In fact, it was 'European Political Freedom Enthusiasts' that started the campaign for **political decolonization** of Africa by introducing new media technologies to Africans who later used them as weaponry for their political emancipation in the 1960s. However, from 1945 after World War II to the 1960s Satellites and the Internet were introduced to Africans in order to make the new media technologies truly global in which information can be passed across borders within seconds.

Notable scholars who have recorded varied perspectives on the subject of decolonization include: Guest (1991), Morrissey and War (1997), Wimmer and Dominick (2000), Kohn (2012), Rehfeld (2013), Widdowson (2013), Brennam (2015), Elliot (2016), Carlson et al (2017), Gluck (2018), Mirzoeff and Halberstain (2018) and Thomas and Curless (2018). All these aforementioned scholars have offered insight into some of the most significant subject-matters in the field of decolonization. They addressed a number of important issues such as: Imperial policing, Modernization and the Colonial legacy. Their offerings and propositions have marked a major push in human perception of the war against European colonization of developing countries and they have covered a greater number of insurrection situations that occurred in the colonized states across the world. Their discourses have close-gapped a deep space in recent debates relating to decolonization period of war by providing captivating case studies and vivid historiographical and intellectual point of view.

The basic concept of theory for this study was organized around *Political Theory of Decolonization*, which stressed that western power political thought had served either openly or covertly to justify two things: (1) the methods they have been using to displace weaker nations of their possessions and (2) their belief in predestination authority over the colonized nations. This same political theory of decolonization assumed another discursive dimension in which it was stressed that the colonized nations have, overtime, been able to annex and transmute the decolonization theoretical postulations to advocate for struggle over their land and freedom and indeed they succeeded, but the fact remains that after independence, most of these nations are unable to comprehend contemporary political life and global political dynamics.

Data for this study were collected through two basic methods of data gathering: primary and secondary. The primary data were obtained through *case study* method. The secondary data were existing information collected from books, journals, magazines and the Internet. The case study was based on (1) an in-depth investigation of media activities during colonization and decolonization (2) myriads of strategy adopted to decolonize African peoples and (3) exploration of the causes for the underlying principles in the process of African decolonization with focus on Nigeria's political emancipation.

FINDINGS

Using Nigeria as a case study, it is established that it was the Europeans that started the campaign for decolonization of Africa by introducing new media technologies to Africans who later used them as weaponry for political emancipation. For example, "an indigenous **Yoruba language** newspaper: *IweIrohin* was the first to be launched into the country's media space in 1859 by Rev. Henry Townsend; a British born missionary" (Duyile, 1987:89). The *IweIrohin* started as a harmless publication of obituary notices, and the goings and comings of missionaries

and traditional rulers. It sought to promote a reading culture among the natives, but it soon broadened its responsibility and became an organ for the criticism of social vices, notably the slave trade and the colonial rule. It soon became sufficiently political to “attract a protest to the colonial office in 1862 and in 1864 Governor Freeman accused the publication of obstructing his foreign policies” (Abati, 1999:71). The initial chief gain of the newspaper was the inspiration it gave to educated Africans. It was the first medium of communication to fan the embers of decolonization in Nigeria. The newspaper “anticipated the use in Nigeria of the press as a weapon to define the scope and limits of official power and authority, and as a forum for public enlightenment and advocacy” (Abati, 1999:72). The newspaper died in 1867.

The first English language newspaper in Nigeria: *Anglo-African* was founded in 1863 by a Jamaican of mixed blood, Robert Campbell. “This newspaper”, according to Ekpu (1999:55), “had a limited scope to only promote the interest and welfare of Lagos residents”. In 1880, *Lagos Times* was published fortnightly by Richard Beale Blaze. It established itself as a major forum for criticizing the colonial government. In November 11, 1880, The *Lagos Times* accused colonial government of extravagant spending. The government did all it could to kill the publication by denying it advertisement patronage and eventually it died in 1883. The style of journalism introduced by *Lagos Times* became the pattern to be followed by other newspapers of the time. This style was exemplified by J.B. Benjamin in the *Lagos Observer* that he established in 1882. After this newspaper came another indigenous **Yoruba Newspaper** called *IweIrohinEko* that was published by Andrew Thomas in 1888.

In the year 1890, John Payne Jackson established *The Weekly Times* and *Lagos Weekly Record*. The latter tabloid gained prominence for its efforts in raising the political consciousness of Nigerians and in sensitizing electorate during the first ever national election conducted under the Clifford Constitution later in the year 1922. The newspaper galvanized Nigerian peoples for the elections by insultingly pulling down the colonial government and raising the political awareness of Nigerian citizens. The “gagging of indigenous Nigerian press with obnoxious laws began in early part of 20th century, most especially, the local press was prevented from expressing opinion freely and the dictatorial colonists started to enact draconian laws to suppress the truth” (Elebute, 2015:207).

In 1912, *Lagos Weekly Record* in its editorial comments opposed the introduction of British **Land Tenure** to Nigeria. This resulted in a legal action against the son of John Payne Jackson, Thomas Horatio Jackson, who was acting in his father’s stead, by persuading the Nigerian public to place no confidence in the court system “since judges were afraid to pass true judgment against the colonial government” (Elebute, 2015:208). In its reaction to the political confrontation on the pages of newspaper, the colonial government alleged that Horatio Jackson’s article brought disrepute that amounted to contempt of court.

A court action was instituted by the colonial government requesting that punitive damages should be awarded to it in order to punish the publisher of *Lagos Weekly Record* for a serious wrong. Using the principle of what the *Yorùbá* people in Nigeria called *IdajoOwu* that is, **visiting the sins of the father on the son**, Horatio Jackson: a foreigner in Nigeria was mandated to “Pay for the sin committed by his father”. He was charged with contempt of court, convicted, imprisoned and fined. This action was seen as a way of suppressing the truth because “what is meted out as punishment for Jackson was too harsh: he forfeited his freedom, was imprisoned, paid huge fine and went through mental torture” (Duyile, 1987:45). These politico-legal issues

that are being discussed within the context of newspapers published at that time presuppose the fact that the pre-independent era of Africans featured the growth of socio-political agitations through the use of new media technologies with the aid of foreigners. Probably, the measures that were meted out as Horatio Jackson punishment made the aforementioned Europeans/foreigners to back out of Nigerian political struggle in the early part of 20th century.

Other newspapers that emerged during this struggle for political emancipation of Nigerian state include the *Standard* (1894), *Lagos Echo* (1894), *The Lagos Reporter* (1898), *Chronicle* (1908), *Nigerian Times* (1910), *Nigerian Pioneer* (1914), *African Messenger* (1921), *Nigerian Spectator* (1923), *Nigerian Advocate* (1923), *Lagos Daily News* (1925), *Nigerian Daily Times* (1926), *Nigerian Daily Mail* (1930), *The Comet* (1933), *Daily Service* (1933), *West African Pilot* (1937) and *Nigerian Tribune* (1949). It is worthy of note that the emergence of *West African Pilot* in the year 1937 marked a turning point in Nigerian media history in terms of how the newspaper revolutionized the press. In short, this indigenous nationalist newspaper sprang up to wage a dogged war against socio-political and economic injustices of the colonialists.

It is noticeable that the indigenous nationalist newspapers that were established, beginning from 1925, started operation to steer a safe course for political freedom of Africans. For example, the *Lagos Daily Times*: a tabloid that was established under the editorship of Herbert Macaulay, the father of Nigerian nationalism drew the battle line between the colonial government and the press. The *Nigerian Daily Times* was established by a business community in collaboration with the colonial government based in Lagos and it was edited by Ernest Ikoli to steer a safe course between the agitations for political freedom and the need to safeguard the interests of its publishers, the 'colonial government and its collaborators'.

As indicated earlier, *The West African Pilot* established by Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe was a militant and trenchant broadsheet used to mobilize Nigerians for political activities and to oppose the colonial administration. The motto of the newspaper was "show the light and the people will find the way". The newspaper set for itself the pursuit of the interests of the people and sought to set agenda for popular action and mobilization. It brought a new force and a combative stance targeted at the myth of white supremacy and an insistence on the value of the black race. The average man on the street found in the *West African Pilot* his voice and representative and the publication was rewarded with commercial success.

Azikwe became political celebrity after he went to Ghana to establish newspapers that replicated his media voice. He did so to convince other Africans that they needed to use the media to intensify their struggles against colonialism and to make African intelligentsia see the reality of political decolonization. It behooved Azikwe to establish media outfits in other parts of Africa as a political necessity and as an international demonstration of African sovereignty and as a way of consolidating African unity and his media outfits actually assisted in developing and encouraging a feeling of black identity far back to decolonization time. His media houses have remained symbols of political independence, tools of cohesion and purveyors of development to Nigerians. Also, the indigenous nationalist newspapers such as *Daily Service* and *Nigerian Tribune* were later merged under the aegis of amalgamated press owned by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. These two tabloids were edited by politically-minded Nigerians in the wake of 20th century agitations to march the country towards political freedom.

In 1932 "Nigeria was chosen as a BBC listening post and *National Radio Station* was established by the imperialists as an experiment and instrument equipped with counterbalances;

to equipoise between the interacting newspapers and the national radio” (Bedu, 1999:162). In a renewed action along the same vein, an indigenous radio-vision station was proposed by the Western Nigerian government after Chief Anthony Enahoro, the regional Minister of Information, was denied the use of the colonial radio to give rebuttal to an allegation leveled against him by the colonial office via this imperialist-owned *National Radio Station*.

In order to accomplish the dream of establishing an indigenous electronic media, “a motion was passed by Chief Anthony Enahoro during a plenary session on the floor of the federal house of representatives with a plea to grant license for the establishment of the first electronic media station, ‘in Africa’, that will serve as an alternative to the colonist’s monopolistic and hegemonic control of broadcast media” (Duyile, 1987:56). The motion was supported and the bill was signed before a modality was worked out for the take-off of the station in the year 1959 at Agodi area of Ibadan the capital of Western Nigeria. This media station has been pronounced as the first of its kind in the entire African nations. The aftermath of this pioneering effort is that other regional governments in Nigeria and most especially other African nations started to take a cue from *Action Group* initiative: the *Action Group* (AG) was apolitical group that promoted the establishment of *Western Nigerian Television/Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service* (WNTV/WNBS).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is that all the aforementioned media of communication: newspapers, radios and televisions had played significant roles in the political campaigns and electioneering programmes of the late 1950s that brought about the lowering of the colonists’ *Union Jack* flag and the hoisting of the *Green-White-Green* flag of the new independent Nigeria on October 1, 1960. It is a fact that Nigeria is one of the earliest colonies of Europeans to gain freedom in West Africa, but after this political emancipation Nigeria, like other African states, was systematically lured into ideological, cultural and economic imperialisms through these same new media technologies.

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