

## A Diachronic Survey of Creative Writing and Publishing in Nigeria.

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### Abstract

*Most studies on the growth and evolution of Nigerian literature overlook the importance of the publishing firms in the making of this fast-growing corpus of literature. Without the role of publishers, literary voices would remain unheard. Yet, Nigerian literary space continues to experience the dearth of a comprehensive examination of the contribution of publishers in the emergence and sustenance of this literature. The aim of this study is to bring to the fore the growth and evolution of literary publishing in Nigeria. The study begins with a survey of publishing by the missionary and early nationalists, to the evolution and impacts of multinational literary publishing firms in Nigerian literature, and then, to the rise of indigenous literary publishing houses in Nigeria. It is the intention of this study to foreground the inextricable bond between publishing and creative writing; and thus, placing literary publishing in a visible position in Nigerian literary space.*

### Introduction

There are many accounts about the development of Nigerian literature. These are available in books, dissertations, journals and other publications. Many of these studies have traced the origin of this literature, its defining features, its major writers and its relationship with other aspects of Nigerian intellectual production. Nigerian literature has come of age and Nigerian writers have won important laurels (including the Nobel Prize for Literature). However, no serious and comprehensive attention has been given to the role of publishing and publishers in the growth and development of Nigerian literature. Norridge, Baker and Boehmer (2013), state that the distribution and marketing of paper and electronic books seem essential to the visibility of African literatures. The same is true about Nigerian literature, for the history of creative writing is inextricably linked with the history of publishing in any society. But many studies have tended to just gloss over the roles of

publishing and publishers in Nigerian literature, forgetting that, if publishers like Heinemann had not shown faith and belief in the quality of Nigerian literature and the ability of Nigerian writers, Nigerian literature would probably still be languishing in the doldrums, and many stories would simply not have been told. It is inconceivable that the story of Nigerian literature can be told without a comprehensive examination of the contribution of publishers in the emergence and sustenance of this literature. Therefore, this study is designed to address this gap in scholarship. The examination is necessary because of the sense of incompleteness that gnaws at one's consciousness when the story of modern Nigerian literature is told without the contribution of publishers being given any serious consideration.

### **The emergence of publishing in Nigeria: the religious and the political forces**

We cannot discuss writing and publishing in Nigeria without talking about the evolution of printing and the publishing industry in Europe, most especially England. The growth of publishing in England is central to the Nigerian publishing industry, because Nigeria was a British colony and many of the publishing companies like Longman, Heinemann and Macmillan, which have dominated the Nigerian publishing industry for the past several decades, were established as subsidiaries of British publishing companies.

The history of publishing in Nigeria is traceable to the first press in Nigeria, which the Presbyterian Mission established in Calabar in 1846. The press was set up with the primary aim of providing Christian literature to the new converts. We can safely assert that publishing in Nigeria started with the coming of the missionaries.

Publishing played a significant role in spreading Christianity and, by extension, Western civilisation in Nigeria. However, it also helped in mobilising Nigerians to resist colonialism, which the early nationalists saw as oppressive and an assault on the indigenous cultures of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups. According to Aigboje Higo, Henry Townsend, of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), established another printing press in Abeokuta in 1859 (2008:19). The press published the first newspaper in Nigeria: *Iwe Iroyin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba*. The missionary press outfits were not only used for publishing religious literature, but also as instruments of political propaganda in the hand of the colony.

Determined to sensitise his people regarding the implications of colonial rule, Herbert Macaulay established the first indigenous newspaper called *Lagos Daily News* in 1926. The same year, the *Daily Times of Nigeria* made its debut. It could be said, therefore, that newspaper publishing

heralded book publishing in Nigeria (Higo, 1996). As the CMS press was publishing *Iwe Iroyin fun Awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* fortnightly, it was also publishing Yoruba Primers and Nigerian Primers and Readers Books 1-5 at the same time. The Yoruba alphabet, which Bishop Ajayi Crowder created, was first taught with Yoruba primers which the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) press published (Higo 1996; Adesanoye 1999; Oso and Biobaku, 2009).

Karin Barber (2012) asserts that there was an explosion of press activity at the beginning of the 1920s in Lagos. She also notes that the print culture had been established for over sixty years in the colony and that numerous English language newspapers had enjoyed longer or shorter runs since the first Lagosian paper, the *Anglo-African*, started in 1863, and the Yoruba language press went back even further, to the CMS' paper *Iwe Irohin* – published from 1859 to 1867 in Abeokuta, and which was also available for sale in Lagos and along the coast to Freetown.

From the 1880s onwards, there was a flourishing intellectual print culture. During this period, several newspapers, pamphlets and books on Yoruba history, religion, and literature were published in both English and Yoruba. But in the 1920s, the press expanded greatly and, for the first time, began to reach out to a popular readership (Barber, 2012:28). The decade started with three weekly English language newspapers (or four, if we include the *Lagos Standard*, which folded up a few weeks into 1920) with none using the Yoruba language, apart from the CMS monthly missionary magazine: *In Leisure Hours*. Also, by the end of 1930, eleven new English language papers had been launched; including, for the first time, a number of daily papers, and no less than five Yoruba-English bilingual weeklies – usually called *Yoruba newspapers* – with a sixth in Ibadan. Print runs increased, and new printing presses were established: four in 1923 alone, and others later before the end of the decade.

Throughout the 1920s, Lagos witnessed political activities revolving around the Eleko (the then Oba of Lagos) and Herbert Macaulay. Electoral issues were gaining prominence, though the franchise was very limited. I.B. Thomas was the last and youngest of the innovators who set up a company as an editor-proprietor of Yoruba language newspapers in the 1920s. He was born in Lagos in 1896. He was tireless in his efforts to get recognition in the form of fitting memorials for prominent friends who had died; he also created such monuments in words, both for the dead and the living. Two of his extended writings were biographical sketches, paying tribute to his friend, the Rev. S. M. Abiodun, who died in May 1923, and to his admired leader, Herbert Macaulay, who celebrated his 60th birthday in November, 1924.

Thomas' travel narratives show him as someone who easily made friends along the way and was always terribly sad to be parted from them and delighted to see them again. One can view an image of an energetic, emotional, affectionate person emerged from his voluminous writings. I.B. Thomas started writing for the Lagos press from 1919 onwards, when he first became a primary school headmaster. He wrote mostly in Yoruba, but could also turn out an elegant letter or commentary in English. His first contributions were to the CMS monthly magazine, *In Leisure Hours*.

Also, another new bilingual paper, *Eko Igbihin*, started the previous year by E. M. Awobiyi, who was a Lagosian editor-proprietor. He was an autodidact who had learnt publishing skills by working as a printer. *Eko Igbihin* apparently struggled to attract readers. After a year, Awobiyi changed the format and appealed for shareholders to invest in it. Then, in July 1927, after he died suddenly, Thomas took over as editor and kept the paper going until the end of November, 1927. For over one hundred years (1846-1950), this kind of newspapers reflected the activities of the colonial administrators and the local Nigerian elite who agitated for the emancipation of the Nigerian nation from the yoke of colonialism.

#### **The influence of education on publishing in Nigeria**

With the introduction of free education in the southern part of Nigeria in 1954, school enrolment increased phenomenally. Higo (1996:7) states that "secondary modern schools, trade schools, commercial schools, technical schools, and others, were established to absorb students who could not go into the normal grammar schools, or who had aptitude for practical trade subjects". New syllabuses were hastily devised for these new post-primary institutions. Most of the existing post-primary school books were really not suitable or only partly suitable. The western part of southern Nigeria witnessed a number of vibrant teachers who took up the challenge. They produced books for the new syllabuses overnight, and got them printed by roadside printers. The sales were so good that most of them bought printing presses, and began to write, print, publish and even sell their own books. Among the publishing houses that emerged from this phenomenon were Onibonjo Book and Press Industries, L.J.P Ogunsanya Press, Fatiregun Press, Aromolaran Press, Ilesanmi Press, Agbo Areo Press and Tabansi Press in Eastern Nigeria (Higo 1996:7).

Ibadan was the centre of educational explosion in Western Nigeria in the 1940s and 1950s. However, Onitsha, in Eastern Nigeria, had become a famous town. Almost everything was available or produced in the market, even if piracy was rife within the market, printing presses, and bookstores.

Open roadside booksellers were also available. There was a boom in the sale of light, cheap, racy, popular pamphlets. Cyprian Ekwensi, for example, made his writing debut in 1947 with two of these pamphlets. From pamphleteering, it was a short leap to educational and general publishing.

In the wake of this explosion in education, the Ministry of Education and Government Press, Western Region, Ibadan, began to produce and publish a literature magazine in Yoruba for adult education classes all over the Yoruba speaking region. It looked as if southern Nigeria was set for a mass revolution in adult literacy and book production. According to Higo (1996:8) “the writers as well as the press crew were present; and the books were readily available; and, indeed cheap. Publishers and organisations and individuals had a choice print to suit their purse and task. For example, Mbari Publication, Ibadan, was printing either at Caxton Press (W.A) Limited, Ibadan or the Nigerian National Press, Apapa, Lagos where Okigbo’s *Heaven’s Gate* was printed in 1962”. However, by the 1980s, publishing in Africa was largely in crisis owing to a number of economic trends. In Nigeria, for example, the lucrative oil bubble burst between 1981 and 1982 as a worldwide glut in oil production caused prices to fall. The nation also experienced changes in 1986 in its foreign exchange market as an element in an overall Structural Adjustment Programme imposed by the International Monetary Fund.

### **Creative writing and publishing in Nigeria: the multinational publishing companies**

Caroline Davis (2013) credits Western publishers with the development and growth of publishing in Africa and with working toward creating a literate culture in Africa. Praises are showered on Heinemann, in particular, for the African Writers Series and the fact that the company indigenised at the right time. The AWS provides an important insight into the complex motivations behind British involvement in African literary publishing in this era. It was a platform that gave an international profile and market to African dramatists, poets and novelists and which also provided an insight into the politics of post-colonial literary publishing houses.

According to Adesanoye (2005), Heinemann, Oxford University Press and the others represented a direct continuation of economic and cultural hegemony of colonisation. As Heinemann continued the African Writers Series through the 1970s and the 1980s, it was expanding its publishing empire and contribution to the centripetal forces of canonicity that were working to establish a new canon – that of Anglophone African literature. Maja Pearce, former editor, claims that the titles include “almost

all the leading names of African literature” from Chinua Achebe to Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Alex La Guma and Wole Soyinka (Maja Pearce, 126). “These are also the leading names of African literature made accessible to an international audience largely because these were the writers chosen to be published, and reviewed, and acclaimed by companies with the capital and the prestige to do so” (Higo, 10).

The African Writers Series was edited from England and ultimately controlled by the home office, even while Heinemann began to publish books from its African branch offices, and appointed African editorial staff. The first sales representative of Heinemann in Nigeria was D.O. Fagunwa, the notable Nigerian writer and educationist who was appointed in 1963 (Adesanoye, 2005). Following his untimely death in 1964, a new sales representative, Aigboje Higo, was employed by Heinemann in 1965. Higo, a graduate of English from the University College, Ibadan, (UCI) became the company’s first Managing Director, after the government of Nigeria promulgated the indigenisation policy in the early 1970s ( Adesanoye, 2005).

According to Han Zell, Nigeria’s reputation, sometime ago, as the most prominent fiction-producing nation in Africa, owes more to Heinemann’s literary output than to any other publishing house (374). It is saddening that the African Writers Series has been so adversely affected by the current stagnation in the book publishing industry, the direct consequence of the downturn in the nation’s economy. With over 500 titles as backlist, Heinemann, now HEBN, regularly reprints only about 100 titles. With regards to another foremost publishing company in Nigeria, Longman, Adesanoye, asserts that Longman, Green and Company, the parent body of the Nigerian company, was a leading publisher in England before it established the Nigerian branch in 1961. F.A. Iwerebon joined the company in 1961 as the first indigenous educational representative with the responsibility for the Eastern Region and parts of northern Nigeria. Shortly after returning from a training course in book publishing in the United Kingdom in 1972, he became the Managing Director.

Adesanoye notes that 1963-1968 witnessed a very impressive expansion of the company and today it has area offices and depots all over the country; and, like most other Nigerian publishers, Longman specialises in educational publishing. It has well over 1000 books to show for its dynamism and productive publishing efforts. By the mid-1950s, officials of Macmillan and Company Limited in the United Kingdom started making occasional business trips to Nigeria. Such trips were undertaken principally to explore the book market in Nigeria for the growth of the British company. In January 1963, the first step towards establishing Macmillan Nigeria was

taken when two men, Messrs Ette and Anulopo, were given the responsibilities of marketing books published by the British company for the Nigerian market in the Eastern and Western Regions of the country while the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company was signed on to do the marketing of Macmillan books in the Northern part of the country (Adesanoye, 2005:118).

In 1965, Macmillan and Company (Nigeria) was incorporated; and, in 1968, the name was duly changed to Macmillan Nigeria Company Limited. It later assumed its present name, Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited, to fully reflect its business nature. The years 1965-1970 could be regarded as the formative years of Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited. These years witnessed the expansion and growth of the company, as more departments, area offices and depots were established. In the early years of the company, it operated from two locations: 16 Wharf Road, Apapa, Lagos; and Ibadan, a two-room office, opposite Veterinary Clinic, Mokola, from where it later moved to an office apartment along Ijebu Bypass, Molete. In 1967 Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Limited moved from its Apapa office to its present location at 4 Industrial Avenue, Ilupeju Estate, Lagos, which currently houses the head office and the main warehouse. In 1979, an office complex was opened in Ibadan. Macmillan has some 500 titles, out of which at least 150 are regularly reprinted (Adesanoye, 2005).

The first contact made by Evans Brothers U.K with Nigeria was through its educational representative, Dr D.H Lacombe, in 1945. Dr Lacombe's mission was to conduct a marketing survey. His findings and recommendations led to the publishing of the famous Lacombe Progressive Arithmetic Series, which became popular in the annals of Nigerian publishing. The encouraging and impressive business returns from the successful publishing of the book led to deeper interest of Evans Brothers in establishing its presence in the country. In 1956, the company acquired a property on 13 Akinola Maja Avenue, Jericho, Ibadan, where it set up its business, offering limited services. Evans Brothers U.K Limited started full operations in Nigeria in 1961, with the appointment of Mr. Joop Berkhout as the first General Manager of Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited, which was incorporated in December 1966. Evans Brothers' early publishing efforts resulted in the following books: *Evans Primary English Course*, *Universal Primary Mathematics*, *Universal Primary Dictionary*, *Evans Primary Social Studies*, *Effective English*, *Modern Secondary School Mathematics* and *Administrative Practice for Teachers*. The Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree in 1972 introduced a major change in the company. This led to the appointment of Mr. Layi Bolodeoku as the General

Manager in 1973. In 1978, indigenous equity in the company rose to 60%, with the U.K Company left with 40%.

In 1949, Oxford University Press (OUP) also established a sales outstation in Nigeria. After the World War II in 1945, the clamour for self-rule (independence) became increasingly felt throughout the colonies. India became independent in 1947, followed by Ghana in 1957 and Nigeria in October 1960. Oxford University Press OUP (now University Press Plc.) was the first publishing house to establish a West African branch in Ibadan in 1948. Other publishing companies, all of them transitional, followed suit. Late T.T. Solaru was the first Nigerian representative of OUP, in Nigeria. He grew to become the Manager of OUP, West Africa; and operated single-handedly in 1949 from a little shop at Oke-Ado, Ibadan. By 1988, OUP (UP Plc) had over 600 titles as backlist (Higo, 5).

By 1956, indigenous authors and printers had taken advantage of the free primary education programme introduced by Obafemi Awolowo's government in the old Western region and the establishment of modern schools to publish their curriculum books and pamphlets, which they distributed themselves. Lai-Oso and Biobaku note that the first evidence of publishing in Nigeria by the foreign publishing houses was in 1963 when the local branch of OUP published *Ijala Are Ode*, a Yoruba poetry genre by Yemitan (20). From then on, the Nigerian branches of the international publishing houses started publishing in Nigeria until the promulgation of the Nigeria Enterprises Promotion Act of 1972 (Indigenous Decree) which stipulated that any company operating in Nigeria must also name Nigerians as directors. The publishing houses discussed above, though old, are referred to as the "big five" and the pre-eminent educational publishers in the country. They have, since the 1970s, all become indigenous or, more accurately, indigenised Nigerian enterprises, and continue to retain their pre-eminent position as the nation's successful publishers.

Ibadan University Press (IUP) was also a major player in the publishing industry in the 1970s and, at a point, was regarded as the sixth of the titans. IUP was referred to as a scholar publisher in the group of major publishers in the 1970s, when it was regarded as Nigeria's best-known scholarly press and, arguably, the foremost in sub-Saharan Africa. IUP's reputation, at this period was richly deserved, as it experienced several years of qualitative production and solid visible achievements. Very few people would contest the assertion that the IUP Press has "remained solidly of the most important scholarly works in English-speaking Africa and has brought immense respect to the University of Ibadan for its scholarly books and monographs" (Adesanoye, 125). There is a very real sense in which IUP



could be described as a child of necessity – in the original meaning of this much abused metaphorical expression. That this is clearly the case is attested to in this account of its origin provided by Kenneth Mellanby, the first Principal of the University College, Ibadan:

Most journals which were found in the Higher College Library (newly transferred) to the University College as its library on the recommendation of the Fyfe Delegation were either unbound, or were amateurishly contained between pieces of cardboard. It was very expensive and liable to delays of a year or longer. There was also a good deal of repair work to be done, to cope with the repair work to be done, to cope with the ravages of moulds and insects. The college, therefore, set up a bindery, entirely staffed by Africans, which was able to deal with 1000 or more volumes a year for the college, and even to do some outside work at times. It was not easy to get reasonably good printing done in Nigeria in the early days of the college... (and so) the University Press was a useful development... originally it was intended to be an ancillary department of the Library, able to help with their printing and some of the work of the College, but it grew and tackled much more important works (qtd. in Adesanoye, 121).

Adesanoye (2005) states that it was the need to solve the problems created by the destruction of books, either by insects or moulds, that first necessitated the setting up of a bindery in the library. This was followed by the acquisition and installation of a small second-hand two-page-pattern press at a cost of £40 in 1949. The machine printed the University Inaugural Lectures and, *Nigerian Publications*, a current national bibliography of works published in Nigeria, formerly compiled by the Ibadan Library, and now by the National Library of Nigeria. Adesanoye further avers that: This modest beginning thus formed the nucleus of Ibadan University Press, an outfit originally comprising two divisions, namely, the printing press and the publishing house (I.U.P). The printing press is currently managed as part of U.I Ventures Limited, and is located near the premises of the University Maintenance Yard while the publishing house, which is now the officially designated "Ibadan University Press", is housed behind the University Library, near the Faculty of Education Complex of the University. Currently, Ibadan University Press has published close to 500 titles, excluding several editions of many international journals. (123)

### **The rise of indigenous literary publishing houses in Nigeria**

Peter Jenninson identifies many common factors affecting the growth of book publishing in African countries (512). These factors include massive illiteracy, low consumer purchasing power, inadequate publishing capital,

lack of institutional markets, shortage of paper and other materials, and insufficient trained personnel. The introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 by General Ibrahim Babangida had unsavoury effects on the nation's economy, in general, and the publishing industry, in particular, with many publishing outfits disappearing from the market and many writers unable to meet the high financial requirements to have their works published. Consequently, many writers resorted to self-publishing, while others depended on the few publishing houses that were still in business to get their works published. Some writers' works were returned, not because they were not publishable but because there were too many manuscripts piled up by the publishers.

It was around this period, the 1980s that many indigenous publishing companies were established, and they continue to thrive today. Some of these outstanding publishing firms are Kraft Books Limited, Kachifo Limited and Cassava Republic Press. Founded over two decades ago Kraft's major vision is to produce high quality literary, tertiary and general interest books for the purpose of knowledge, research and scholarship. The company's books are produced and printed in Nigeria. Kraft Books is driven by the passion to publish emerging voices and create a platform for young writers.

Kraft Books Limited has also published award-winning literary texts. These include Vincent Egbuson's *Womandela* (winner of the 2006 ANA/NDDC Ken Saro-Wiwa Prose Prize), Vincent Egbuson's *Love my Planet* (winner of the 2008 ANA/NDDC Ken Saro-Wiwa Prose Prize), Ozioma Izuora's *Dreams Deferred* (winner for the 2009 ANA/NDDC Ken Saro-Wiwa Prose Prize), Razinat Mohammed's *A Love Like a Woman's and Other Stories* (winner for 2005/ANA/Lantern Books Prize), Ifeanyi Ajaegbo's *Dead Man Walking and Other Stories* (winner for the African Regional Prize and the Commonwealth Short Story Competition in 2005). It also won the 2006 ANA/Lantern Prize for Short Prose. Kraft Books has one award for the children literature category. Lizi Ashimole's *Tales by the Fluorescent* was the winner of the 2007 ANA/Atiku Abubakar Prize for Children's Literature.

Kachifo Books, one of the 21st century Nigerian publishing firms based in Lagos, emerged as strong force in the industry, especially with the publishing of the Nigerian editions of Chimamanda Adichie's award-winning first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, and Sefi Atta's novel *Everything Good Will Come*, in 2004 and 2005, respectively. According to its Managing Director, Eghosa Imasuen, Farafina is an imprint of Kachifo Limited. Kachifo Limited was founded 2004 by Muhtar Bakare. The first of several imprints, our first Farafina book, *Purple Hibiscus* was published in 2004. Since then, we have

expanded our imprint list by including Farafina Educational, Prestige (which also offers publishing services), Kamsi (for non-fiction, lifestyle and poetry), Breeze (for genre fiction), and Tuuti (for children's books) (Aiyetoro, *Nigerian Publishers Speak...* 2016).

Based in Abuja, Cassava Republic Press found for itself a space in the Nigerian publishing industry in 2006. Like Kraft and Farafina, Cassava's focus is on literary or creative works. The vision of Cassava Republic Press is to change the general opinion that Nigerian authors are better known in Europe and United States than at home. It aims at bringing new Nigerian authors to Nigerian readers and reconfiguring the boundaries of what African literature might be. Cassava Republic Press has a patriotic passion to celebrate Nigerian new and emerging voices, without necessarily placing great emphasis on financial rewards. Its interest lies in giving a platform to new visions and emerging voices. Two of the major works churned out by this company include Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* and *Waiting for an Angel* and Diana Evans' *26A*.

Other contemporary publishers came on board with different visions, missions, aims and objectives. Today, many of the known or famous literary publishers in Nigeria are Lagos-based and Ibadan-based. They include Bookcraft and Kraft Books, Ibadan. In children's literature, Lantern Books, Lagos, has also emerged as a famous publishing house. Although all the publishing outfits mentioned above have contributed significantly to the growth of modern Nigerian literature, their specific contributions have not been given adequate attention. Consequently, I have examined these contributions elsewhere (see Aiyetoro 2016).

### **Conclusion**

This study has given attention to the origin, development and impacts of literary publishing in creative writing in Nigeria. It has emphasised, through the contributions of publishers to the fruition of Nigerian literature, the link between literary production and publishing in any literary tradition. The invaluable roles played by the missionaries, nationalists, and the multinational publishing companies cannot be divorced from the success story of Nigerian literature. Similarly, indigenous Nigerian publishers trace their origin to the seeds sown by these multinationals. It is the view of the researcher that more studies should be carried out on the contributions of various publishers to Nigerian literature, as this will enrich the history of this literary tradition.

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