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Publishing and Literacy Development in Africa's Indigenous Languages: The Igbo Example in Nigeria[1]

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Abstract
Language is not just a vehicle of cultural expression, but an important symbol of social and political identity of any group. Without doubt, publishing provides a dominant signifier of such language. Publishing in Africa has been dominated by the colonial languages—notably English and French. Thus, colonial enterprise and legacies have resulted in the subjugation of publishing in Africa's indigenous languages. Yet, there is a consensus among scholars that literacy and associated publication in first languages not only influences the nature of education but also promotes cultural identity. This paper examines the historical dynamism of literacy and publishing in Igbo language—one of the three major languages and cultural groups of Nigeria, in the context of the social and political developments in 20th century Nigeria. It argues that the fragility and problems of publishing in Igbo language was responsible to the dwindling interest in reading, writing and speaking of the language.
Keywords: African Publishing, Colonialism, indigenous languages, Literacy Development

1. Introduction

There is a wide held assumption among some book historians that book history in Africa started with the advent of printing presses introduced by European missionaries and colonists. According to this school of interpretation, African publishing history is essentially the study of the print efforts of the missionaries in their evangelical works and the colonists in their administrative enterprise.[2] This perception is not just narrow in its conceptualization, but presents Africa as a "bookless" society prior to the encounter with Europeans. None the less, since book history is concerned with a wider history of reading and writing, and the interplay of circumstances that shape literacy, then Africa's book history goes beyond the introduction of print culture. Without doubt, colonialism was a crucial phenomenon that shaped the political and social history of Africa and has remained recurrent in major discussions in the continent. This has been a subject of varied political and economic debates among scholars and political commentators who sought to deconstruct colonial constructions and legacies in African societies. Understandably, immediate post-independence African scholars embarked on intellectual decolonization efforts aimed at reconstructing a new history of the African society devoid of colonial or neocolonial appendages. Joseph Conrad in his classic work, *Hearts of Darkness* posits that the evil of imperialism (and colonialism) on Africa will continue to disturb the people even long after their demise .[3] This does not just demonstrate the centrality of colonialism in major discourses and activities of post-colonial Africa but suggest its continued influence. Hence, colonial agencies have continued to gain stronghold in almost every facets of African societies of which publishing and book trade were no exception. In order words, the historical development of book publishing in Africa is integrally linked with the political and economic developments in the continent.

Beginning from the late Nineteenth century, Africa witnessed a proliferation of various forms of printed works ranging from serialized novels, newspapers, religious pamphlets, which were brought for the emerging reading public. However, educational publishing for schools—colonial elementary schools, was the dominant sector of the continent's book industry in the first half of the 20th Century. Consequently, transnational publishing companies of the colonists stormed the various colonies in the mid-20th Century and established monopoly of this market. Not surprisingly, with most African States attainment of political independence in the 1960s, these transnational firms continued to wield influence and control over the postcolonial book industry in Africa.

A fundamental concern in African publishing enterprise during the colonial era, and to a larger extent post-colonial era, has been the question of Africa's Indigenous language literacy development. In most African countries literacy developed when African indigenous languages were reduced to print and their numerous dialects standardized. This resulted in the emergence of local elites who began to read and write.[4] One would

[1] The initial version of this paper was presented at the "History of the Book Conference" organized by the Department of History, University of Windsor, Canada on 30 November, 2011. My special appreciation goes to all contributors whose suggestions shaped this revised version.
[2] Elizabeth Le Roux, "Book History in the African World: The State of the Discipline", *Book History* Vol. 15, (2012); 248-300. See also Robert P. Armstrong, " Book Publishing in Nigeria: Industry with a Future", *Africa Report* (April 1 1966); 114
[3] Jonah Raskin, (Review)"Imperialism; Conrad's Heart of Darkness", *Journal of contemporary History*, Vol. 2, No 2 (April 1967); 119
[4] Roux, "Book History",249

have expected that books should be made available in this indigenous languages—spoken by large proportion of Africa's population, Yet, publishing in Africa during the colonial, and to some extent, post-colonial era had basically been on the colonial languages—notably English and French. Relatively little attention was paid to publishing in indigenous languages let alone their literacy development in colonial Africa. In post-colonial period, foreign languages continued to dominate publishing and have remained the medium of educational instruction while the indigenous languages were only taught and examined subjects.[1] The paucity of published materials in these languages has resulted in gross decline in their literacy level.

The study uses the case of Igbo—a language spoken by Igbo people, one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, to locate the challenges of publishing in Africa's indigenous languages and their literacy development in historical context. The Igbo of southeastern Nigeria have enjoyed considerable scholarly attention in their history, culture and achievements, especially with the failed attempt at secession under the auspices of the Republic of Biafra and the eventual 30-months civil war which had projected them on the global scene. However, little attention has been given to the development of their language—which is presently experiencing retarded growth in its literacy and usage. Contemporary Igbo parents would rather speak English to the children as their first language and send them to school to learn English than train them to speak, read or write in Igbo. Consequently, literacy in Igbo language has drastically decline. This paper therefore argues that publishing reading materials in Igbo language, as well as other African languages, is a gateway towards enhancing literacy in these indigenous languages, thus achieving sustainable cultural production and national development. The paper interrogates the distinction between indigenous publishing in Africa and publishing in African languages. It recognizes the various challenges that confront indigenous language publishing in Africa, such as lack of clear-cut language policy in most African countries, multiplicity of languages and dialects and limited markets for published material in the indigenous languages. It posits that addressing these problems and embracing the opportunities in indigenous language publishing and literacy development will contribute in understanding the dynamics of Africa's intellectual history.

What this study hopes to do here is to attempt an application of Sydney Shed's argument on center/periphery, metropole/colony model of transnational book history in the context of the consequences of colonial publishing in Africa's indigenous language development[2] Thus, it demonstrates a book history of 'contact zones' where the center and metropole influence book development at their colonies and former colonies.[3] The paper presents colonial publishing as a pivot for understanding historical development of Africa's literacy study

2. Historical Landscape: East and West Africa

The foundation of East and West African publishing was laid primarily by the 19th Century activities of Christian missions mostly from Great Britain and France. The trajectories of these missions on the continent were significant in entrenching print culture and readership in these societies where printing had hitherto been unknown. In the efforts to propagate Christianity through the education of their community of adherents, they introduced printing presses. As I stated earlier, educational publishing was paramount in the publishing efforts in Africa, thus a cursory look at the educational contributions of these missions will demonstrate their centrality in colonial book industry. In Anglophone West Africa, Church Missionary Society established a number of printing presses such as the Baptist press in Nigeria, Holy Fathers press in Ghana, which generally focused on education development of their local converts.[4] The earliest missionary presses in East Africa include White Fathers press Uganda, Evangelicals press in Kenya and Alpha press in Tanzania. These presses printed and provided Christian literatures, prayer books, hymns and outline of church history to their local converts.[5] Ivan Page in assessing the significant role of *White Father's press* to Ugandan publishing remarked;

> This press revolutionized the academic work of the seminary and made a great impact on the entire church and society in Uganda. Henceforth the seminary textbooks were printed here……The

[1] Nathan Ogechi and Emily Ogechi, "Educational Publishing in African Languages, With a Focus on Swahili in Kenya" *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 11, 7 (2002); 173; See also B.C Chitsike, "Publishing in Indigenous Languages in Zimbabwe: *African Publishing Review* 5, 4 (1996); 5-6

[2] Sydney J. Shed. "Books Without Borders; The Transnational Turn in Book History" in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond (eds.) *Books Without Borders,* Vol. 1*; The Cross-National Dimension in Print Culture,*,(Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).28

[3] Leslie Howsam, *Old Books and New Histories; An Orientation to Studies in Book and print (*Toronto; University of Toronto press, 2006);30,36)

[4] Keith Smith. "Who Controls Publishing in Anglophone Middle Africa?" *The Annals of American Academy of political and Social Sciences. 421 (Sept.1975.143*

[5] Ivan Page, "Origin and Growth of the White Fathers' Press at Bukalasa, Uganda", in Robert Fraser and Mary Hammond (eds.) *Books without Borders Vol.1; The cross Nation Dimension in Print Culture.*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 114

basic books for catholic teachings , catechism, prayer book, lives of saints ….were fully revised[1]

Page further notes that "the press was not primarily a commercial venture, rather was founded as an aid to the apostolate."[2] However, the major publishing concerns of these mission presses that are of paramount importance are the issue of language and translation. The languages of missionary instruction undoubtedly were English and French and most Africans were not literate enough during this period on these languages. This was also worsened by the proliferation of local languages in these African regions .The challenge then for the missions was to study and record these indigenous languages to develop their orthographies. With the encoding of these languages, mission presses took to translations of world canonical texts into these African languages.. Besides the translation of Bible, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* was among the earliest books that were translated in various African languages. Hofineyr Isabel provided a detailed analysis of the many examples of the translations and consumption of this book across Africa.[3] She argues that the book enjoyed steady sale in almost every African vernacular into which it was translated.[4] The success of this evangelical fiction thus provides an illustration of transnational text that accommodated a seemingly endless number of interpretations in colonial Africa. This provided the platform for Africans such as D. O Fagunwa in Nigeria, Odunjo in Uganda and Nwapa in Ghana, who in mid 1940s embarked on translations of bible into native languages and also published Christian stories in these languages. This perhaps indicated the early involvement of Africans in the publishing domain. These translated books were thus perceived by the local converts as necessary apparatus for Christian life which explains the reasons for their wide markets. Apparently, publishing in this early 20th Century was pursued on the context of its role in advancing the Christian cause.

The mid decades of the twentieth century witnessed increased missionary activities on education in East and West Africa. For instance, Church Missionary Society in West Africa pressured the various colonial administrations in the region to support its efforts on education. This invariably resulted in cooperation with the colonial administrations in providing book needs of the region. Thus books were provided by the missionary presses to both colonial and mission schools.

However, with the emergence of a reading culture and in response to increased demands for quality education in the 1950s, French and British administrations intensified the efforts on importation of books in East and West Africa. This marked a turning point in the regions publishing industry as transnational publishing corporations stormed the various colonies to establish markets for their published school books. The most prominent in Anglophone East and West Africa were Macmillan, Heinemann Educational Books, Oxford University press, Nelson Publishers, Evans brothers and Longman. In Francophone colonies *Editans CLE* and *Nouvette Editans* were the most active.[5] These publishers who established sales offices at the regions issued books by French and English authors for the African schools. Hence, school books originally published for European markets were imported to these regions. However, books on general subjects especially on African social lives were neglected, thereby justifying the assertion by most scholars that colonial publishing and book trade in Africa was foreign- oriented and unsuited for Africa's book needs as they were not written with African environment in mind,

By 1960s, most East and West African colonies got their political independence from their former colonists. However, it had been argued by several studies that the independence were just on paper as the colonists continued to use their agencies to exercise control and influence over their former colonies. This perhaps explains the continued dominance of publishing in these regions by the transnational publishers in postcolonial Africa. One can clearly assert that the political and economic structures bequeathed by these former colonists were ill-suited for the realities of African social terrain.. Thus, at the wake of this independence, political instability, crises and protracted conflicts characterized most of these new African States which consequently weakened their capacities for book development. Such States that were bedeviled by such internal civil conflicts include Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda, Sudan in East Africa and Liberia, Burkina Faso, Togo and Benin in West Africa to mention but a few. The result of this development was a total dependence on transnational publishers for the book needs of these crises-ridden zones. To worsen this situation the more, most of these States were so poor that they lacked the resource base to ensure the continued importation of books, let alone develop indigenous ones.

Transnational publishing companies become more deeply entrenched in publishing in East and West Africa with the exit of official colonization. They were quick to convert their previously Sales offices to publishing branches. Several political factors worked to their successful expansion and control of the thriving market. In the first instance, various States in the regions saw the need to invest heavily on education as a way to

[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., 122
[3] Isabel Hofineyr. "Potable Texts: Bunyan , Translation, and Trans-nationality, "Introduction to the portable Bunyan; A transnational history of the Pilgrim's Progress (Princeton University press, 2004)p. 11-41
[4] Ibid.
[5] Phillip Afibech, "Perspectives on Publishing in Africa", *Publishing Research Quarterly* 9, 1 (1993),*56-79*

develop the human resources of the new nations. This however was an advantage to the transnational publishers who controlled education publishing. In Tanzania for instance, the government introduced programs in the early 1970s which were aimed at rural education development. Kenya, on the other hand made primary school education compulsory by 1976. .James Curry in explaining the success of Heinemann Educational Books in Nigeria states

> The expansion was just to time to take advantages of the growth of Nigeria's oil industry which enabled the government to spend 25 per cent of Nigeria's GDP on education. There was investment in Universal Primary Education and a phenomenal expansion of secondary schools and Universities.[1]

The success of these transnational publishing companies was also occasioned by the expatriate control of the various ministries of Education in these countries who drew school syllabus. It is not surprising that they recommended textbooks written by European authors. The outcome was thus, rapid sales and high profit margin for the transnational publishers that served the East and West African markets.

Some States made concerted efforts towards establishment of State publishing houses to provide educational books to its citizens. In some cases, joint ventures with the transnational publishing houses were entered. For instance, by 1970, Macmillan entered into partnership with Ghana Publishing Corporation, Northern Nigerian Publishing Corporation and Uganda Publishing, which were all established in the late 1960s to contribute in book provisions of the States. However, financial constraints and ineffective management impeded these efforts as political corruption and inefficiencies were the order of the day within these State's publishing houses. On the other hand, indigenous private publishing were undermined as they lacked the potentials to compete with transnationals This was further increased by the fact that publishing in the immediate post-colonial era remained textbook oriented and that the medium of instruction in schools were mainly English and French..

Although transnational Publishers remained central in East and West African publishing, they were criticized for not publishing on social and political matters of the African regions, and the most part for not publishing African writers, Hence, the hallmark publication of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apar*t with William Heinemann, a renowned British publishing firm in 1956 became an eye opener for African writers that they could get published by transnational publishers.. This however resulted in considerate competition among British publishers, who suddenly became interested in Africa's society, to obtain manuscripts from novelists, poets and dramatists. To this end, Series were established for the purpose of collecting manuscripts on Africa The main literary series in Anglophone East and West Africa were Heinemann Educational Books' African writers Series, Longman's Drumbeat Series, and Macmillan's Pacesetters, A brief survey of African Writers Series will demonstrate how the involvement of African authors introduced another dimension to publishing in the regions under discourse. This Series was launched by Heinemann in 1962 in order to paperback African fictions appearing in London publishing companies. The primary objective was to offer African writers the opportunity to write on African social and political issues, and to get published in Britain.
In describing the significance of this breakthrough, Achebe declared'

> The launching of the Heinemann's African Writers Series was like the umpire signal for which African writers had been waiting on the standing line. In one short generation in immense library of writing had sprung into being from all over the continent, and for the first time in history, Africa's future generation of readers and writers –youngsters in school and college began to read, not only David Copperfield and other English classics that I and my generation had read but also works by their own writers about their own people.[2]

Within a space of five years, the Series had published more than 100 titles by Africans.[3] The efforts of few individuals are worth mentioning for the success of the Series, Alan Hills, who was the pioneer publisher and James Currey, editorial director of Heinemann Educational Books between 1967 and 1984 and manager of the Series. The individual ingenuities of these two publishers contributed immensely to the success of the Series. They teamed up with Achebe who was the pioneer editorial advisor in encouraging subsequent African writers. It were the efforts of these individual publishers and Chinua Achebe that developed writing from East and West Africa which dominated the first decades of the Series.

In spite the fact that these series brought the opportunities of publishing African writers on the continent's affairs, their places of publication was another issue of concern for the regions publishing industry. The Series were edited and controlled by the metropolitan publishing houses, though some were published at their African branch offices. To the African writers, it was a display of prestige and honor to be published abroad

[1] James Currey. A*frica Writes Back: The African Writers Series and the Launch of African Literature* (Johannesburg: Writs University press, 2008) xv1

[2] Chinua Achebe. *Home and Exile*(New York; Oxford University press, 2000)p. 51 quoted in James Currey " African Writes Back; The African writers Series and the launch of African Literature' 1

[3] Keith Smith. "Who Controls Publishing in Anglophone Middle Africa?" *The Annals of American Academy of political and Social Sciences. 421 (Sept.1975); 143*

as most of them sought legitimacy for their works through recognition in foreign market, Some others went after the better loyalties offered by these transnational publishers.. African writers during this period thus turned to wider western audience rather than the readers in their own countries The implication of this was that the interests of the transnational publishers determined what was published about African, not based on African market but on International market forces.. A good illustration of this was the successful market of Chinua Achebe\ *Things Fall Apart* in European and North American markets, which explains its translation into several European languages. Nonetheless, scholarly and non-fiction books by Africans, though published outside Africa had large markets in Africa as a result of the growing number of schools and universities in the 1970s.

It will be pertinent at this point to examine the socio-linguistic context of post-colonial publishing to ascertain how it affected writing and reading in East and West Africa. The concern on language that featured in colonial publishing also continued in postcolonial East and West African publishing. Only a few number of the African population could speak English or French with a good number of them not literate enough to read books on these foreign languages,. However, a greater number of Africans showed their preference to publishing on local languages and versions of these foreign languages which they had been accustomed to. In West Africa Pidgin English which developed during the commercial relations with Portuguese traders in the 17th Century, became common in daily communication. This was also the case with Swahili language which had developed as a *lingua franca* in countries of East Africa. These local languages and the versions of the foreign languages were not developed for the interest of the general readership rather French and English were maintained in postcolonial publishing. Perhaps this linguistic issue could not have been unrelated to the policies of the ex-colonial metropolitan countries to retain these languages as a way to exercise control over the ex-colonies. The implication thus was a slow development of reading culture in these regions which ultimately undermined publishing of non-educational books

Some anti-colonial writers and publishers however made concerted efforts towards publishing in indigenous languages to meet the yearnings of the greater population of the people and to reflect the cultural dimension of African publishing. Worthy of note are Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, a distinguished Kenyan writer and Henry Chakava a renowned publisher in East Africa, who developed publishing in the Swahili local language. In making his case for the relation of African writers to the ex-colonial languages and the local languages, Ngugi asserts;

> As a writer who believes in the utilization of African ideas, African philosophy and African folklore and images to the fullest extent possible, I am of the opinion that the only way to use them effectively is to translate them almost literary from the African languages , native to the writer into whatever European languages'[1]

He further remarked

> There are American, West Indies, Australian and New Zealand's versions of English which add life and vigor to their language while reflecting their own respective cultures. Why shouldn't there be a Nigerian or West African English which we can use to express our own ideas and thinking?[2]

Ngugi is an example of a handful of authors who wrote successfully in native languages. His ability to convince Henry Chakava, a publisher of the reputed East African Publishing House, on publishing on local language demonstrates the level to which an author's philosophy could shape publishing domain.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that Africa's involvement in publishing industry was fairly passive in the 1970s. Not only was it foreign controlled but also basically schoolbooks-focused. The earlier established indigenous publishing firms collapsed as a result of the lack of strong financial base and the inability to compete or challenge the transnational publishers. There were considerable concerns by a number of African publishers on promoting autonomous indigenous publishing. In 1984 a seminar was called at Arusha, Tanzania to discuss the development of autonomous publishing capacity in East and West Africa. This seminar was organized by the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation. Publishers who participated at the seminar reiterated the fact that the lack of access to financial capital was the greatest impediment to the development of autonomous indigenous publishing at the regions. Consequent upon that, the Dag Hammarskjold Foundation offered loan guarantee scheme to make bank loans accessible to private indigenous publishers in order to strengthen existing companies, and encourage new ones.

It was at this point that many African entrepreneurs generally became increased in publishing. .Private indigenous publishing companies were resuscitated and developed. Examples include Fourth Dimension Publishers, Snnaps Publishers, and a number of other publishing houses that were established within this period in Nigeria. Kenya and Uganda also experienced this dramatic upsurge in indigenous publishing. Several factors were responsible for this emergence of indigenous publishing firms. First, the economic crises of the 1980s

[1] Ngugi Wa Thong 'O, Decolo*nizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature,* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd,1986) 8
[2] Ibid.

resulted in the departure of many transnational publishing companies as the profits on book trade declined. Also many anti-imperial African authors and publishers challenged the continued foreign domination of African publishing by setting up their own companies. Most importantly was the indigenization policy of most East and West African countries in the late 1980s. In Kenya for instance, two transnational companies, Heinemann and Longman, were bought over by a group of indigenous publishers.. Their names changed from Heinemann to East African Educational Publishers and Longman to Longhorn. In Nigeria, the government also introduced indigenization policy in 1982, which ultimately transferred ownership and control of the various transnational publishing houses to Nigerians. The argument thus is that this invariably increased the volume of publishing and turnover. This demonstrates the thesis of this study on control and domination of book industry. More writers from the regions thus had greater publishing opportunities not just on educational publishing, but on general and academic publishing. Indigenization of publishing on the other hand, increased reading in the regions as books on virtually all fields became easily accessible.

However, the greatest challenge that confronted the growing indigenous publishing was the lack of international markets especially in Europe and North America of their locally published books.. Previous efforts by individual booksellers did very little to promote these books. Thus, a number of East and West African publishers came together in 1986 to launch the African Books Collective (ABC) which was an organization that would sell and promote their books overseas. The ABC operated from Oxford, UK and organized book fairs at various European countries, which ultimately increased sales and popularized books from the regions. This apparently illustrates the dependence of the region's publishing on foreign markets, as these markets provided veritable source of profits to the local publishers. The activities of this organization portrayed an example of indigenous publishers who strived to sustain publishing under challenging socio-economic conditions.

Perhaps the most significant step in the development of African publishing was the establishment of the African Publishers Network (APNET) in 1992. The rationale behind the formation of this forum was the need to coordinate efforts on a regional basis to address the practical problems that faced African publishing. To this end, individual countries that had relatively improved publishing capacities were to assist the weaker ones. In West Africa, for instance, Nigeria and Ghana merged their human, financial resources and organizational capacities in order to strengthened themselves and assist nations like Liberia, Togo, Benin that suffered protracted civil crises.. In East Africa, Kenya and Tanzania introduced strategies for book policy in their region. APNET's priority was to foster coordination and exchange of experiences among publishers in African countries,. The role of Walter Bgoya in this regard is worth mentioning who as a publisher in Tanzania took it upon himself to coordinate these efforts on collaborations.[1]

None the less, in spite of these considerable achievements in indigenous publishing, economic crises that bedeviled countries in these regions by the late 1990s gave rise to an overall decline in publishing and book trade. The inabilities of various nations in the two African regions to resolve the continued deteriorating effects of this problem on education necessitated the intervention of World Bank on provision of schoolbooks. Between the mid-1990s till the end of the century, educational books were supplied in their numbers to the countries of these regions. This undoubtedly gave foreign publishers, who were mostly given the contracts; the opportunity to control the market once again thus undermined local publishing. The foregoing has attempted an account of publishing enterprise in Africa, with particular focus on East and West Africa. It demonstrates the efforts at indigenous publishing in the two regions—that share similar historical experience of colonial activities and the attendant consequences. Thus, indigenous publishing is concerned with the efforts at reclaiming the book industry from the transnational companies that hitherto had dominated the industry. This is not the same as the history of publishing in Africa's indigenous languages, as had erroneously been inter-switched in some literatures.

3. Publishing in Igbo Language

As in other African societies, the Igbo group in present southeast Nigeria had traditionally been structured in orality as a medium of communication. People had passed information on history, customs and tradition from generation to another through oral means. Thus, Igbo literacy has its root in oral communication and performances which took the form of folktales and folk songs. Literacy in Igbo language is therefore as old as the Igbo society and is very much earlier than the time their language was reduced to writing. There was however a paradigm shifts from orality to scribal culture in some societies in Africa around the 16th century. [2]

[1]Ruth Makoisi and Lily Mariki, *Publishing and Book Trade in Kenya*. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1997)

[2] J.S.Du Toit, 'The Publication of Children Bibles in Indigenous South African Language; An Investigation into the Current State of Affairs'. *Journal for Semitics* 16, 4. (2001) 291-311; See also Ivan Page "Origin and growth of the White Father's Press in Bukalasa, Uganda." In Fraser, Robert and Hammond, Mary. (eds) *Books without Borders Vol 1*.New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

The Igbo people had developed an ideogram known as *Nshibidi* for their basic written communication. Some studies have shown that this scribal culture was invented by the *Ekoi* people in the present Cross River region of Nigeria.[1] Though *Nsibidi* was not a well-developed writing system, it captured the basic encoded communication in Igbo language. This goes a long way to demonstrate that Igboland was not static or "bookless" as had often been alluded by Eurocentric writers. None the less, one crucial feature that had shaped the development of Igbo literacy is the existence of a variety of spoken dialects which made the later efforts at developing a standard orthography difficult. There are about twelve identified dialects of the Igbo language. These include, the Onitsha Igbo, Anioma Igbo, Cross River Igbo, Abakaliki Igbo, Nsukka Igbo, Owerri/Isuama Igbo to mention but a few. [2]Despite this challenge, it was to the credit of the Christian missionaries who came to the shores of Igboland from the 1840s, that literacy in Igbo language became more structured.[3] They made concerted efforts to select dialects for the standardization of Igbo as well as identification and marking Igbo tones, and eventual designing of a comprehensive Igbo orthography. The Christian Missionary Society (CMS) of England, the Francophone Catholic Missionaries and the Scottish Mission were the main European missionaries that worked in Igboland and contributed significantly to the development of Igbo language and literacy.

The CMS were the first missionaries that worked among the Igbo. Between 1857 when they first established their station and 1884 when the Catholic missions joined in the evangelization work, they made efforts at employing education as a central instrument of converting the Igbo. And the major tool of this education was reducing Igbo language to readable script and publishing materials on the language.[4] By 1860, the CMS published the first Igbo language book *Ibo Primer*—which was a translation guide for missionaries in understanding the Igbo terrain and the language, using the Isuama dialect.[5] By 1870, J. C. Taylor, a Sierra Leonne Missionary came up with the first publication of translated Igbo hymns and prayer book. On the other hand, sections of the Bible were translated into Igbo in Bonny and Onitsha dialects between 1870 and 1905. It was however, in 1906 that CT. J. Dennis published the first complete Igbo translated Bible.[6] In addition, the Catholic Francophone missionaries that worked among the Igbo published three important reference books on Igbo language namely; *An Igbo Grammar* Published in 1899), *An English, Ibo and French Dictionary* (Published in 1904) and *An Ibo-French Dictionary* (Published in 1907).[7] Although these works were not intended for Igbo readership, but for French missionaries, yet, they contributed immensely in developing subsequent literacy among the emergent Igbo readership.

The point advanced from the above is that the missionaries through their activities in Igboland played significantly in the development of Igbo language, but more importantly to the development of reading and writing in the language. By introducing published materials in Igbo language, first to their field workers, and indirectly for public consumption, the missionaries paved way for the emergence of the first wave of Igbo language readership and literate membership of this cultural-linguistic group. Again, it could be argued that these published works were not mainly set for religious purposes but for the social transformation of the entire group. The use of the translated Bible and prayer books were limited to church services but were extended to the educational sector. The missionaries, especially the CMS, made Igbo reading and writing compulsory in their primary schools. They achieved this to a great deal since they employed education as an instrument of conversion and the colonial government's ill attitude to indigenous language development. Thus, instead of speaking different local dialects, Christian Igbo of the early and mid-20th century adopted the 'Bible Igbo' as a standard language of communication both in church and in school.

Developments in Igbo literacy took a new turn by the 1930s when the colonial administration changed their policy on indigenous language literacy in Nigeria. They began to take interest in the promotion and development of reading and writing in these languages. However, this 'sudden interest' in Igbo case was hampered by the limited number of published reading materials in the language,, which were even basically Christian literature. To this end, a call was made for literary competition in the publication of works in indigenous language in Nigeria. In response, the first Igbo novel *Omenuko* was published in 1933. The author, Pita Nwana used the narration of the life history of the main character—Omenuko to portray the richness of Igbo culture and traditions. [8]The publication of *Omenuko* marked a turning point in the development of Igbo literacy. Not only was the novel introduced to missionary and government primary schools in Igboland, Nwana's

[1]See V.C.Uchendu,. *The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965). And A.E.Afigbo,. *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*. Ibadan: University Press with Oxford: University Press, 1981.
[2] Afigbo,. *Ropes of Sand:*
[3] D. Van der Bersselaar, . 'Creating Union Ibo; Missionaries and the Igbo Language'. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 67, 2 (1997); 275.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid. 276
[6] Ibid., 276-278
[7] Eddie Okafor, "Francophone Achievements in Igboland, 1883-1905," *History in Africa.* Vol. 32, (2005); 307-319
[8] I.U.Nwadike, Igbo language in Education: A historical study. (Obasi: Pacific Publishers,2002);8-11

pioneering effort was followed by D. N. Achara's *Ala Bingo—a* work of fantasy published in the same year. These publications suggest a breakthrough in efforts at adopting standard literary language among the Igbo. Consequently, by 1949, the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture was formed to further encourage publications in Igbo language. However, the controversy of Igbo orthography resulted in a long period of inactivity in Igbo publishing till 1961 when Dr. S.E. Onwu's committee came up with a standard orthography.[1] Other works written between 1961 and the end of the civil war include: *Nkapị Anya Ukwu* (1950) by Chinakwalam, *Ije Odumodu Jere* (1952) by Leopold Belgam, *Ọsọndụ* (1951) by T.K. Oguamana, *Okuku Agbasa Okpesị* (1964) by J.U.T. Nzeako.[2]

There were also notable African writers whose works, though published in English, contributed in no small measure in projecting the Igbo society. The novels of Chinua Achebe, especially his first fiction, *Things Fall Apart,* Cyprian Ekwensi, John Munonye and others, which have wider global readership were set on Igbo society and projected the Igbo culture and tradition. In addition, a genre of literature emerged in southeastern Nigeria the 1960s popularly known as the 'Onitsha Market Literature.' This was a collection of short stories, plays and pamphlets published by local publishers in the commercial city of Onitsha (in Igboland). Again, these works were published in English but mostly concerned in projecting Igbo ideas on morality gender and marriage.

A landmark achievement was recorded in 1972 by the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture. A standardized literary Igbo language was developed, which was all-inclusive, central and generally accepted.[3] This gave rise to increased publication in Igbo language and literacy rate in the language. The 1970s therefore witnessed an explosion in Igbo publications. Tony Ubesie was prominent in this regard and contributed significantly in Igbo novel writing after the civil war. Some of his works include *Ụkwa Ruo Oge Y*a (1973),and *Isi Akwụ Dara n'Ala* (1979). Other Igbo contributors include Chinedu Ofomata who wrote *Onye na Uche Ya, Anụ Gbaa Ajọ Ọsọ*, A. B. Chukwuezi *Udo ka Mma* (1974); B.I.N. Osuagwu – *Nwa Ngwii Puo Eze* (1977), *Ọjaadịlị* (1977), G. O. Onyekaonwu – *Nwata Rie Awọ* (1974),and a host of others.[4] Between 1980 and 1990s, Igbo literacy has grown enormously as a result of these materials which were properly utilized in teaching Igbo Language and Literature in primary and secondary schools in Igboland. Igbo language became a taught and examined subject in primary and secondary schools in southeast Nigeria. Syllabus were introduced by Igbo scholars and notable Igbo enthusiasts. Titles such as *Utoasusu Igbo, Mbido Igbo* were used in schools. Reading and writing in Igbo language were on high increase and people took deep interest not only in school textbooks but in general works on Igbo language. No doubt, the forgoing lays credence to Elizabeth Eisenstein's argument in *The Printing Press as Agent of Change.* According to her, the advent of printing press in Europe in late 15th century brought about the various transformations that it experienced.[5] Locating this standpoint in Igbo context, it is safe to argue that the introduction of published materials in Igbo language during the missionaries and colonial era was pivotal in structuring Igbo group identities and literacy development.

However, by the end of the 20th century, there were noticeable decline in the interest in reading and writing in Igbo language. The output of Igbo literature began to decline. ,when it was no longer compulsory to take language subjects in schools—especially with the proliferation of private schools and the death of public schools in Nigeria. On the other hand, general communication in spoken Igbo began to disappear in social sphere. The situation became worst when general works in Igbo language were hardly seen at bookshops, Publishers found it difficult to market published works on Igbo and frown at its production. Consequently, authors became discouraged to write A field study conducted in Onitsha, a major commercial city in southeast Nigeria, demonstrates the retarded state of Igbo literacy development and the urgency of revamping the factors that once aided the growth of the language in order to avoid its extinction among the next generations. Personal Interviews were conducted in 30 schools in Onitsha metropolis—in primary and secondary schools, to understand students/pupils appreciation and usage of Igbo language and literature. The response shows that there is a high level of negligence on the side of proprietors of private school in engaging Igbo teachers. Again, only a few of the public schools has Igbo reading materials in the libraries. Mr. Gabriel Okoye, a proprietor, lamented that it was the attitude of parents that gave rise to this regrettable situation. According to him, Igbo parents, who send their children to them frown at any attempt to teach their children how to read and write in Igbo. They prefer instructing them in English language, which they believe will equip them to compete in life.[6] Anayo Igwebuike,

[1] Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture. Recommendations of the Igbo Standardization Committee. (Onitsha: Varsity Industrial Press Limited, 1976).
[2]Nwadike, "Igbo Language", 14. See also Ikechukwu Okudo, "The Need for Teaching Igbo Literature as a Full-Fledged Subject in Nigerian Secondary School," *Internet Afrev.* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2012); 61-69
[3] Society for Promoting,
[4] Cited in Ikechukwu Okudo, "The Need for Teaching Igbo Literature as a Full-Fledged Subject in Nigerian Secondary School," *Internet Afrev.* Vol. 1, No. 2 (2012); 61-69
[5] Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communication and Cultural Transformations in Early Modern Europe.*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979)
[6] Gabriel Okoye, 56, Proprietor. "Personal Interview" Onitsha, 24/09/2015

a teacher in public primary school, recalled how a parent withdrew his ward from their school on the allegation that the school could not teach his ward how to speak fluent English, rather, they taught him "Igbo and BK" Igbo language and Bible Knowledge —two subjects that most Igbo parents often looked down upon. [1] Ifeoma Anyika, a teacher maintains that the prohibition of speaking Igbo in most primary and secondary schools was responsible to the challenge of teaching Igbo language and literature. In her words, "how do you expect them to pay attention to a subject that is looked down on? While school authorities strongly feel that the speaking of the language reduces students speed in learning English."[2] Perhaps, a possible explanation to this development is that Igbo people do not see any prospects in the teaching and speaking of the language and would rather embrace the global languages.

In a similar development, published materials in Igbo language are also disappearing in churches in Igboland. Since the 1990s, churches in Igboland no longer find it fashionable to conduct services in Igbo language. Among the new generation churches—or the so-called Pentecostal churches, English language is basically used in their services, except in few cases where they provide interpreters. However, the frontline churches—Catholics, Anglican, Methodist and the likes, hold separate services in English and Igbo languages. Responses gathered from interviewing church leaders in these denominations show that most of them embarked on holding English services in order to entice the youth population, which already are being swayed by the new generational churches. In order words, Igbo services have mostly been conducted for the older population. As a result, the 21st century Igbo children have now turned to code-mixing the speaking of Igbo language with English and find it difficult to read and write in the Igbo language.

4. Challenges and Prospects of Indigenous Publishing in Africa

It is apparent that the major problems that confronted indigenous publishing in Africa were centered on three inter-related factors; an absence of clear-cut language policy among African countries, availability of markets and poor funding of the book industry. The language situation in Nigeria shows the existence of about 200 indigenous languages spoken alongside English—the lingua Franca. Conservatively, only about 20 of them have orthography and developed curriculum. The rest are mainly used for communication within the ethnic boundary. [3]It is, however, surprising that the government in Nigeria have not come out with a clear-cut policy in the development of these indigenous languages. The interests shown to the three major language groups—Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo have not been marched with continuity actions. Clearly pursued educational policy on indigenous languages is very crucial for national development. Nigerian government had since 1970s made its three major languages taught and examined subjects at the primary and secondary levels. However, things have been different in practice. Indigenous languages were not compulsory examination subjects in primary leaving and secondary examinations.. This has discouraged the teaching of these indigenous languages especially among the private schools who drill pupils and students for end-of-the-school exam purposes. There are similar cases in other African countries, especially in East and West Africa.

On the other hand, the argument on marketability of published materials in Africa's indigenous languages has also been challenging. There are expressed concerns among publishers on the availability of market for indigenous language publication since they are not global languages and in some cases at most regional. It would seem obvious that authors and publishers are most likely to invest where there is available readership, but this has not been the case in Africa. Although most African languages are spoken by large proportions of the continent's population, yet relatively few readerships exists outside school textbooks. However, there are strong indications of improvement in marketability of African's indigenous publications. For instance, there is a move by Igbo in Diaspora to resuscitate the teaching of Igbo language to children of Igbo parentage abroad and foreign (non-Igbo) researchers working among the Igbo group. This is in addition to the efforts being made by some agencies to reintroduce Igbo newspapers and books of general interests. No doubt, this will widen the markets and increase the prospects of Igbo publishing.

The economic situation in Africa is another crucial factor that contributed to the pitiable condition of indigenous language publishing. A significant number of the African population finds it challenging to adequately feed themselves let alone buy books for their reading pleasure. Hence, even when publishers produce materials in these languages, they are confronted with the challenge of selling their works. This is where support agencies could come in. Government agencies have failed in marching their words of indigenous language development with action—corresponding funding of the indigenous book industry. Non-Governmental and donor agencies have the potentials of reviving the state of indigenous language publishing in Africa. Greater efforts should be made to subsidize the costs of materials in indigenous languages to encourage their readership.

[1] Anayo Igwebuike, 42. Teacher, "Personal Interview," Onitsha, 11/09/2015
[2] Ifeoma Anyika, 39, Teacher, "Personal Interview," Onitsha, 08/11/2015
[3] Federal Republic of Nigeria (Fourth Edition) National Policy on Education: Lagos: NERDC Press, 2004.

This will not only build cultural and group identity, but will contribute in national development.

5. Conclusion

The history of publishing in Africa has largely been discussed on the framework of external contacts—especially colonialism and its legacies. Transnational publishers and African writers unfortunately focused their attention on the international market and the development of colonial languages among Africans and paid less attention to the development of the wider language of communication—the indigenous languages. Thus, the cultural context of publishing was absent in colonial and postcolonial publishing in Africa. The failures of indigenous language publishing in the Africa reflect how socio-economic and political developments shaped publishing in the continent.

Historical evidence shows that the Christian missionaries and colonial administration were largely responsible to the growth and development of African's language literacy, as was demonstrated in the Igbo example. However, the loss of interests or withdrawal by these two agencies to the development of these indigenous languages from the last decades of the 20th centuries had resulted in the gradual decline in the development of these languages and subsequently the retarded development of their literacy. It is evident from the above analysis that publishing in Africa's indigenous languages not only influences the nature of the education and literacy, but also promotes cultural identity and unification.

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