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# A Re-examination of Pioneering Newspaper Enterprises in 1860s and 1880s Southwestern Nigeria<sup>1)</sup>

SAWADA, Nozomi

## 0. Introduction

Literacy in indigenous and English languages, as well as the technique of printing, came to many parts of Africa with the arrival of Christian missionaries, whose purpose was to disseminate the dogma of biblical texts, as encouraged by the establishment of the British colonial governments in Anglophone sub-Saharan Africa from the early nineteenth century. The British missionary schools and the colonial governments' regimes produced the first generation of educated Africans, who often served as middlemen between the British Government and the illiterate indigenous people (Gérard 1986; Boahen 1990: 221; Griffiths 2000: 54).

The different political, economic and social histories of each British colony of Africa influenced the development of writing and print culture. African-initiated newspaper production began in the 1850s on the west coast of Africa, in the 1880s in South Africa, and in the 1920s in East Africa<sup>2)</sup>. On the west coast of Africa, where fewer Europeans settled than in South and East Africa, and where, from the early nineteenth century, liberated slaves and their descendants acquired a Western education, local people had relatively more autonomy in publishing (Gérard 1986: 26). In 1857, the *Accra Herald* (later re-titled the *West African Herald*)<sup>3)</sup>, the first African-initiated newspaper in the British colonies of sub-Saharan Africa, was founded in the Gold Coast by Charles Bannerman (Omu 1978: 5-10).

Regarding the historical context of southwestern Nigeria, Christian missionaries introduced the technique of writing and publishing in the 1850s. The colonial governmental gazette and mission-run newspapers, established from the 1860s, provided examples that later

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<sup>2)</sup> In South Africa, white dominance of press activities delayed literary responses from Africans. It was not until 1884 that John Tengo Jabavu published the first African-owned paper, *Imvo Zabantsundu* (Ainslie 1966: 47-48). In British East Africa, printing by Africans was delayed because it had been a white settler colony from 1895 and there were far fewer educated Africans than in the West African coastal areas (Griffiths 2000: 42). In December 1920, a monthly Luganda language newspaper, *Sekanyola*, was established for the Baganda in Uganda and Kenya.

<sup>3)</sup> The first press in sub-Saharan Africa to be initiated by a black person was the *Liberia Herald* published in Monrovia in 1826 by an African American immigrant, Charles Force (Ainslie 1966: 21-22).

generations of educated Africans were to follow<sup>4)</sup>. Literacy was an important way of acquiring educated elite status in colonial southwestern Nigeria, especially in the proximities of Lagos Island, as it enabled local people to seek opportunities in the formal sectors<sup>5)</sup> as well as middlemen positions (between European companies and interior illiterate people) in trade. Until the 1920s in Lagos, literacy entrenched the stratification of society by giving the privileged educated African access to power and wealth. However, urbanisation and the spread of primary education fostered social mobility, which assisted the emergence of new, less-educated, literate generations. The proliferation of Yoruba-English bilingual newspapers in the 1920s also encouraged the expansion of a less-educated readership (Ajayi 1969; Barber 2005).

The period between 1880 and 1920 marks the initial stage of the history of the African press in Nigeria with the publication of twenty-two newspapers. It began with the launch of the first newspaper published by Africans in Lagos, the *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser* (hereafter the *Lagos Times*), and ended just before the expansion of readership resulting from the establishment of several Yoruba-English language newspapers in the 1920s. This was a time when all English language newspapers, except for the *Aurora*, published weekly in Calabar from 1914 to 1917, were printed in Lagos, the centre of the literate community in the territory now called Nigeria (Omu 1978; Falola and Heaton 2008). The early Lagos newspapers were published monthly, fortnightly or weekly, and the inauguration of the daily newspapers was not realised until 1925, when Victor Babamuboni, a former book seller, launched the *Lagos Daily News*. Although distribution was mostly confined to the Lagos literary society, the annual circulation of Lagos newspapers rose from 6,490 on average in the 1880s, to 28,884 in the second decade of the twentieth century<sup>6)</sup>.

Lagos newspapers in the above-mentioned period were published by the educated African elite<sup>7)</sup>, mostly “*Saro*”<sup>8)</sup>; returnees from Sierra Leone. They were “recaptives” of

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<sup>4)</sup> For the Church Missionary Society printing establishment and local publication enterprises in nineteenth-century southwest Nigeria, see footnote 31 in Sawada (2012: 14-15).

<sup>5)</sup> Aspirants for primary education continued to grow in accordance with British imperial expansion, especially following the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern colonies and the establishment of the Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. “By 1901 over 1,100 civil servants and commercial clerks worked in Lagos. This number rose to over 5,300 by 1921” (Zachernuk 2000: 48-49).

<sup>6)</sup> It is uncertain whether this is the total number of Lagos newspaper copies printed or sold. For the annual circulation registered and listed as “The Circulations of the Principal Publications” in the *Blue Books* of the colony between 1880 and 1920 see Appendix 7 in Sawada (2012: 322-23).

<sup>7)</sup> For detailed discussion on the usage of the term “educated elite”, see Sawada (2012: 17-21).

<sup>8)</sup> “*Saro*” was used as a contraction of Sierra Leonean in the Yoruba language. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, many “recaptives” – Africans liberated from slave ships – settled in Sierra Leone. Educated at schools run by Christian missionaries, most converted to Christianity and acquired the English language. They formed the earliest educated African elite in British West Africa. By 1872, the *Saros* are estimated to have formed 2.56% (1,533) of the population of Lagos and its vicinity (60,000)

Yoruba descent who returned to Lagos and its hinterland from Sierra Leone from the 1850s onwards. With their command of English and their connection to the interior regions, *Saro* and their descendants became active members of communities in Lagos, Abeokuta and other outlying towns, as clergies, colonial civil servants, traders, lawyers, doctors, and other professions (Brown 1964; Kopytoff 1965; Falola 1999: 8-10). They also played leading roles in the early print culture in southern Nigeria as translators, print editors and authors of English and Yoruba publications.

Although the period between 1880 and 1920 provides continuity and a coherent linguistic environment as a topic of research on early newspapers in southwestern Nigeria, this article will focus on the 1860s and 1880s newspapers, which have been researched to a lesser degree previously, in order to re-examine the contents of each newspaper and the pioneering enterprises of the African-owned press. Previous studies have treated the Lagos press as an organ exclusively for the African educated elite, and have examined editors' views as an important factor defining the stands of each press, focusing attention on the impact of the press on the rise of nationalist movements from the twentieth century (Coker 1968; Omu 1978; Duyile 1987). However, the examination in this article will show that Lagos newspapers were not the result of the single efforts of their editors. Not only did they contain news and editorial articles written by the editor(s), but also letters from readers and reports from their own correspondents in the hinterland of Lagos and other British colonies of West Africa and, occasionally, from England.

This research adopts the historical research method that uses and interprets information within primary and secondary sources for understanding past events. As this paper focuses on the specific language used in early Nigerian newspapers to describe their printing enterprises, the newspapers provide an important primary source of information. Other primary sources include private papers of educated elites, the Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS) records and British colonial government publications. This article illustrates not only a chronological overview of five newspapers published in southwestern Nigeria in the 1860s and 1880s, but also seeks to present new perspectives on the characteristics and roles of newspapers, the visions of journalists behind their ambitious but often unprofitable press enterprises, and active interactions between the Lagos press and newspapers in other parts of British West Africa.

The introductory section has presented an overview of the early print culture in colonial Anglophone Africa and a literary review of early newspaper history in southwestern Nigeria,

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(Kopytoff 1965: 171).

which leads to the author's research question. Sections 2 and 3 examine the earliest newspapers of the 1860s, especially the *Anglo-African*, which had a literary and experimental approach to its content, as well as three 1880s newspapers – the *Lagos Times*, the *Lagos Observer* and the *Eagle and Lagos Critic*. Section 4 discusses the position of newspapers in the historical context of Lagos society, such as literacy rates, living costs and earnings of the population. Lastly, section 5 summarises and provides an overview of the production of newspaper texts in colonial southwestern Nigeria between the 1860s and 1880s.

## 1. Missionary Pioneers' Printing Press

Publication history in southwestern Nigeria began in 1854, when Rev. Henry Townsend (1815-66) of CMS set up a press at Abeokuta and began distributing religious pamphlets. His brother was a newspaper publisher and printer in Exeter, and Henry had brought an old hand printing-press to Abeokuta as part of his efforts to launch industrial training<sup>9</sup>. In 1859, Rev. Henry Townsend founded *Iwe Irohin Fun Awon ara Egba ati Yoruba* (meaning newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba people, hereafter *Iwe Irohin*), with the collaboration of bilingual *Saros*, and sold it for 120 cowries per copy. *Iwe Irohin* was a fortnightly newspaper, which began as a vernacular paper in the Yoruba language only. The English supplement was added the following year, and from 1866 it became Africa's first bilingual newspaper when it began publishing separate editions in English and Yoruba. It usually included eight-page reports on religious matters, such as the movement of ministers, as well as on political developments of the time, including expeditions and inter-tribal wars. It ceased publication in 1867 due to civil disruption between the Ibadan and Egba traders at Abeokuta, which eventually led to the expulsion of all Europeans from Egbaland (Coker 1968: 1-4; Ajayi 1969: 158-59; Omu 1978: 7).

Before the destruction of Townsend's press during the Egba Rising of 1867, another newspaper, the *Anglo-African*, appeared in Lagos. This was owned and edited by Robert Campbell (1829-84)<sup>10</sup>, a West Indian who had settled in Lagos. He invited printers from the CMS press at Abeokuta and sold his fortnightly newspaper for threepence from June 1863 until December 1865 (Ajayi 1969: 158-59; Duyile 1987: 29-33). The *Anglo-African* contained

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<sup>9</sup> The Presbyterian Church of Scotland mission was the first to bring a printing press to Nigeria, arriving in Calabar (East Nigeria) in 1846 and publishing elementary arithmetic sheets, primers and other religious pamphlets, both in Efik and English (Ajayi 1969: 158-59; Omu 1978: 7).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Campbell was born in Jamaica of a multiracial mother and a Scottish father. He worked as an apprentice printer for five years and entered the teachers' training institute to become a schoolteacher in his hometown. In 1859-60, he joined Dr. Martin R. Delany's Yorubaland tour with the aim of founding a "Negro colony", and settled in Lagos for the next 22 years as a journalist, manufacturer, merchant and administrator (Coker 1968: 91-94; Omu 1978: 19-21).

an average of four pages and included news from Lagos, Abeokuta and overseas, such as England and America. In consideration of its format, one page was vertically divided into three parts, a method that most of the subsequent 1880-1920 Lagos newspapers adopted. The front page contained a few legal- and Government-related notices, whereas the last page often carried private death notices and advertisements from local import retailers. The paper also carried various excerpts from foreign publications, which showed Campbell's extensive reading (Brown 1964: 273-75). Despite the fact that previous studies have paid only passing attention to the *Anglo-African* as the forerunner of the Nigerian press, its contents have the distinguishing feature of devoting significant space – one or two pages out of four – to stories and at least one poem per issue, which were occasionally instructive or religious, but which were usually intended for the mere entertainment of the readers<sup>11)</sup>.

For instance, Campbell serialised a tale entitled, "We Four Villagers", which was inserted from 18 July 1863 for at least five months<sup>12)</sup>. This didactic and retrospective tale was narrated by Mrs. Dorothy Dorane. Mrs. Dorane, along with her three best friends, had lived in a small village called Silveryville in America, and reported on the suffering and distress of Minnie Emgreen, one of her best friends, whose husband turned out to be an alcoholic. Campbell was conscious of the newspaper's mission, not only as a medium for furnishing information, but as an educator of the masses. Although some subscribers complained that local news was of more importance than this serialised tale, the editor, nevertheless, actively stressed its merit as "presenting, in vivid colours, the evils of intemperance... for the sake of our young men", also arguing that it would provide for readers "a most lucid insight of life in America" (12 September 1863: 3).

## 2. The Forerunner of African-Owned Lagos Newspapers

### 2.1. Designing the Formats

Between 1867, when publication of the *Iwe Irohin* ceased, and 1880, no newspaper was published in the territory known today as Nigeria. After a twelve-year lull in terms of journalistic activity, one newspaper, the *Lagos Times*, led to the re-blossoming of the Nigerian press. This particular paper was launched by Richard Beale Blaize (1845-1906), one of the most prominent and wealthy businessmen in nineteenth-century Lagos. Like other editors in

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<sup>11)</sup> Apart from issues published in the last half of 1865, almost all copies of the *Anglo-African* carried stories, such as "Power of Kindness" (19 September 1863), "The Cost-Guardian's Tale" (30 July 1863), "An Unpleasant Dream" (31 December 1865).

<sup>12)</sup> "We Four Villagers" appeared up to Chapter 16 on 5 December 1863, and the story was to be continued; however, no copy of the *Anglo-African* between 5 December 1863 and 30 July 1864 is available today.

the advent period of the Lagos press, he was a *Saro*, born in Sierra Leone of Oyo and Egba parents. He came to Lagos in 1862 and was employed the following year as a workman in the office of the *Anglo-African*. Following the discontinuance of its publication in 1865, Blaize became a government printer in Lagos until 1874 and eventually established his own Caxton Printing Press in 1875. The *Lagos Times* appeared twice a month and was sold to subscribers for sixpence and to non-subscribers for ninepence between the period of 10 November 1880 and 24 October 1883. It was edited and printed at its own printing establishment on Broad Street by Andrew M. Thomas, who, from 1888, began publishing his own newspaper, *Iwe Irohin Eko* (The Newspaper of Lagos)<sup>13</sup>. Although the words “Gold Coast” appeared in its title,

the paper focused, almost exclusively, on Lagos affairs (Kopytoff 1965: 283-84; Echeruo 1977: 6; Omu 1978: 23 & 29-30)<sup>14</sup>.



Figure 1: The *Lagos Times*, front page (10 November 1880)

The paper was, on average, four pages long, and half of the space was occupied by advertisements and notices. It had an editorial article followed by “Correspondence”, which included 2-5 letters from readers and a “Local News” column<sup>15</sup>. The *Lagos Times* set the standard in design for Lagos newspapers. The format of dedicating the front and back pages to

advertisements was applied to all Lagos newspapers until 1926, when the *Nigerian Daily Times* broke this tradition and moved advertisements to the inside pages (Omu 1978: 87).

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Mojola Agbebi (D. B. Vincent) (1860-1917), a Baptist minister, occasionally assisted in editing the *Lagos Times*. He assisted several Lagos newspapers as editor and correspondent, including the *Lagos Times*, the *Lagos Observer*, *Iwe Irohin Eko*, and the *Lagos Weekly Record* (Omu 1978).

<sup>14</sup> Since its annexation in 1861, the government of Lagos colony had been placed under West African Settlements between 1866 and 1873, then subsequently, from 1874 to 1885, under the Gold Coast Colony. During the publication period of the *Lagos Times*, Lagos Colony was politically and administratively incorporated with the Gold Coast. In January 1886, the Colony of Lagos was detached from the Gold Coast (Coleman 1958: 42).

<sup>15</sup> News of the arrival and departure of “important figures” and notices of entertainments were included in special columns; such as “Miscellaneous” or “Local News” in the *Lagos Times*, “News Items” or “General News” in the *Lagos Observer*, and “De Omnibus Rebus” in the *Eagle and Lagos Critics*.

As well as news on education, commerce, conflicts in Yorubaland, and the political administration of Lagos, the *Lagos Times* always accorded religion (and church affairs) an important place in its columns, believing that it was “the chief instrument that should be employed to promote the advancement of a nation, and that God honours the people that honour Him” (LT, 9 November 1881: 2).<sup>16)</sup> The first issue of this paper in 1880 highlighted editors’ strong sense of duty, which remained fundamental for the self-perception of all early newspapermen in Lagos:

The Press is the safeguard of public rights: it is the messenger of truth – the herald of science – the interpreter of letters – the amanuensis of history – and the teacher of futurity. Like the sun, it illuminates the gloom of Gothic night – irradiates the shades of ignorance – and pours a flood of knowledge in the world – It dilates the perceptions of man – extends his intellectual vision – inspires his heart with sensibility and mind with thought – and endows him with past and present omniscience (LT, 10 November 1880: 2).

Blaize began publication of his paper with the high hope of influencing not only the literate portions of the community but also local traditional rulers and people in the interior (LT, 9 November 1881: 2). The paper had commercial agencies in London, Cape Coast, Little Popo, Benin and Fernando Po, and a circulation of 250 fortnightly (6,500 annually); however, it encountered financial difficulties from increased competition, and briefly ended its run in 1883. In spite of the fact that the paper reappeared again in December 1890, it finally ceased publication in October 1891.

## 2.2 Enriching the Contents

The second paper of the 1880s was the *Lagos Observer*, which was established in February 1882 by J. Blackall Benjamin, a liberated African who originally worked as an assistant agent for a British firm, Walsh & Brothers, and then as an auctioneer. His journalistic enterprise was assisted by Dr. N. T. King and Robert Campbell, Chairman of the Editorial Supervision Committee, until the death of both in 1884. The paper was printed at the *Lagos Observer*’s printing office on Bishop Street. The *Lagos Observer* had three agents in England: London, Manchester and Liverpool; and seven in West Africa: Cape Coast, Elmina, Accra,

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<sup>16)</sup> The following abbreviations will be used in parenthetical references throughout this article: LT for the *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser*; E&LC; the *Eagle and Lagos Critic*; LO for the *Lagos Observer*; LS for the *Lagos Standard*; LWR for the *Lagos Weekly Record*; NP for the *Nigerian Pioneer*.



Addah, Quitta, Fernando Po and Porto Novo (LO, 12 April 1883: 1)<sup>17</sup>). Between 100 and 480 copies were sold fortnightly at a price of fivepence each until 12 July 1890; the longest period of circulation amongst all nineteenth-century Lagos newspapers. This comprised six pages on average and was more politically aggressive than its contemporaries. Rather than balancing “radicalism with decorum”, the *Lagos Observer* often inserted criticisms of (or proposals for) the colonial government in its editorials (Omu 1978: 30; Sawada 2012: 37 & 41-42).

The *Lagos Observer* introduced columns providing characteristics of contemporary Lagos society, which are of interest from an ethnographical perspective. The columns were called “By the Way” and “Tit Bits”, designed by the editor to be “new features in journalism on the West Coast”. “By the Way” was a column written in the first person about small news items in Lagos that had already been shared with readers (LO, 20 July 1882: 4). “Tit-Bits” encompassed more experimental aspects. It was normally situated at the end of all the news articles, and just before back-page advertisements. It contained criticisms of the colonial government in the form of questions, advice to individuals, didactic knowledge and proverbs, as well as comments on certain issues that every reader already seemed to be familiar with, meaning there was no necessity for detailed explanation:

WILLIAM – Why quarrel and perjure yourself on a bit of land? “The Earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (*ibid*).

Mozart – Why did you run away from the baptism of your newly born infant?

B – Your ambition knows no bounds; persevere, for success will always lead to success (LO, 29 March 1883: 4).

Using nicknames, initials or first names of particular individuals, “Tit-Bits” appears to have commented on information or news that had already been shared with readers, so they could easily assume to whom the sentence was referring. The first sentence to “William” suggests that biblical knowledge was either something that had been shared by readers, or was considered essential for readers. Reading these submissions would enable readers to recall particular individuals with a land problem (“William”), a family problem (“Mozart”), and perhaps someone considered too voracious in his business at the time (“B”).

This column also served as the editor’s communicative tool for the readers of Lagos and, sometimes, those of other British West African territories (LO, 6 April 1882: 4; 29 March 1883: 4). The educated elite in southern Nigeria often had blood relations, namely, extended

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<sup>17</sup>) The fact that a member of parliament cited the *Lagos Observer*’s report on the Royal Niger Company at the House of Commons meeting showed that it had certain readership in England (The *Morning Post* (London), 26 April 1887: 2).

families, in the coastal areas of West Africa, and subscription to newspapers retained their intellectual ties with these areas.

In addition, the column was occasionally used to mediate communication with newspapers in other parts of British West Africa, such as Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. In 1882, for instance, it requested a correction of one article in the *Gold Coast Times* and wrote: “My dear Correspondent of the *Gold Coast Times*. The Chiefs never did nor say [sic] anything of the sort to the Governor in Chief. Come, draw it mild: The *Gold Coast Times* is a respectable journal, let your informations [sic] then be accurate” (LO, 4 May 1882: 4).

Another experimental column of the *Lagos Observer* was “Keep Your Own Side of the Way”, which was written by its Lagos correspondent. Colloquial expressions were frequently used to appeal to the readers. On the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria, for example, the writer attempted to create interest amongst the people in Lagos by exhorting them to think seriously about their reaction to the Jubilee:

What! Is the jubilee of the reign of Her Most gracious Majesty Queen Victoria to pass unheeded? And are we to remain hopelessly inactive when other colonies are vigorously contesting the celebration of the jubilee of Her Majesty’s reign in the most belittling manner? Will Lagos be content in receiving an everlasting reproach for want of reciprocation in this universal move, and can she be content to remain on the background in the celebration of the jubilee of a reign, under which she arose from chaotic heathenism and superstitions right to the summit of that prominence whence to-day the world looks admirably upon her promising and fair proportions? O! Lagosians and people of the Lagos Colony, dare we be silent and remain inactive? Can we suppress the exuberance of spirits which the coming event promises to afford? It would be impossible, absolutely impossible! The jubilee should be celebrated (LO, 18 September & 2 October 1886: 2).

The writer of this column pointed out the shameful indifference of Lagosians to the Jubilee, comparing them with other colonies of the British Empire, and tried to invoke the readers’ pride as Lagosians who could improve their status amongst other civilised societies.

The *Lagos Observer* was the first newspaper to have paved the way to enriching contents of newspapers during early colonial Lagos. The paper contained not only the news and editorial articles as written by its editor, but also experimental columns written by various other contributors. The *Lagos Observer* had its special correspondents in Ondo, Abeokuta, Addah, Freetown, Cape Coast, Quittah, Port Novo, Accra and Little Popo. Articles on

entertainment were written by reporters under the name of “REMESES” or “CHERUBINO”. The editor of the *Lagos Observer* also inserted excerpts from other newspapers in West Africa and Britain<sup>18)</sup> – such as the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, the *Gold Coast Times*, the *London Gazette*, the *African Times* and *The Times* – and letters from readers on local events and foreign affairs, using pseudonyms such as “Africanus”, “Owuyeh”, “A Native” and “An Aku Man”.

Despite its high hopes, the *Lagos Observer*, in 1887, lamented the paucity of people’s awareness of the “importance” of newspapers in Lagos, which was a gauge of the “intelligence of people” and the “civilization” of a society, and wrote: “Whereas in Europe the poorest beggar would be happy to spend his penny in order to be informed on passing events of the day, in Lagos and other portions of this coast, many men in shame, would be most unwilling to subscribe to local periodicals” (LO, 2 & 16 April 1887: 2). Three years later, in 1890, the *Lagos Observer* was ultimately forced to cease publication after eight years in the running<sup>19)</sup>.

### 2.3 “Eagle” without the Eyes

The *Eagle and Lagos Critic*, which was published monthly and sometimes fortnightly on Odunlami Street with a cover price of sixpence for subscribers and sevenpence for non-subscribers, followed. It started printing in March 1883 and ended its run in October 1888. During its five-year run, it was patronised by Government-related advertisements and had a pro-governmental approach. The paper was edited and owned by Owen Emerick Macaulay, grandson of Ajayi Crowther and brother of Herbert Macaulay. Owen Macaulay considered newspapers to be “the legitimate and recognized mouth-piece of the community” (E&LC, 31 May 1884: 3), and he accordingly established his own paper with “a desideratum to express the other side of a question” and “requisite to balance opinions when they are in opposition” as the third newspaper in Lagos (E&LC, 31 March 1883: 1). The paper was entitled *Eagle and Lagos Critic*, and had the high hope of being fearless and acutely observant, like an eagle. However, it often expressed pro-British Government tendencies as it was partly supported by income from advertisements inserted by the Lagos colonial government, and rarely had “the attributes of an eagle or the resources of a critic” (Omu 1978: 30; Sawada 2012: 41-42).

The *Eagle and Lagos Critic* provides us with accurate descriptions of elite social life in

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<sup>18)</sup> For instance, in the issue of 13 March 1884, the *Lagos Observer* cited the article of the *Gold Coast Times* that praised memorial activities in Lagos, and on 29 December 1888 it published extracts from the *Manchester Guardian* of November 11, on the House of Commons meeting on the Niger River trade.

<sup>19)</sup> In 1894, Benjamin revived the *Lagos Observer* under the name of the *Lagos Echo*. Although information on the newspaper is scant, *Lagos Blue Book* reported its circulation from 1894-97 as 400-520 weekly (20,800 to 27,040 annually).

late nineteenth-century Lagos, with depictions of “fashionable” weddings, “fancy” balls, concerts, picnics, tea parties and sports. The ratio of articles on particular individuals is higher than in the later period. Due to the limited readership and contributors (mostly educated Africans in British West Africa), it often served as a repository for the recording of the cultural events of the Lagos educated elite. For instance, one can find several commemorative activities for T. B. Macaulay, Owen’s father (E&LC, 30 June 1883: 2)<sup>20</sup>. Readers were also encouraged to send letters to the editor, with excerpts from foreign newspapers and reports of social events in Lagos to share with community members. Some of the contributors even reported their own journeys abroad, as can be seen in the serialised articles on John Otonba Payne (1839-1906), who travelled to Senegal, Sierra Leone, Brazil, England and France between 1886 and 1887 (Sawada 2012: 222-35). By providing detailed descriptions of the educated elite’s social lives, the newspaper could satisfy readers’ desires to publicise their respectability and wealth.

Another feature of the *Eagle and Lagos Critic* is that it retained a significantly optimistic view of newspapers’ possibilities and their futures, although the consensus of contemporary editors was based on unsatisfactory sales, their limited sphere of influence, and the unfavourable attitude of people towards the press. In 1885, Owen Macaulay was pleased to note that “the influence of literature is continually increasing; through the Press and the spread of education its sphere is becoming indefinitely enlarged”. “Journalists and Editors” were “the royal rulers of their fellowmen” who would be praised as “the truest benefactors of mankind” in the near future like “all civilized countries”. The press was, for Macaulay, an essential instrument to lead improvements “in social order, in domestic life, in public feeling and enterprise, and in the value of religion...which must contribute to the purity, happiness, and glory of our colony” (E&LC, 14 March 1885: 4).

## 2.4 Writing Styles and Attitudes towards the Yoruba Language

The three Lagos newspapers launched in the 1880s<sup>21</sup>), as mentioned above, seem to have some common characteristics. One is their “pompous and long-winded” writing style: for instance, papers were occupied by tremendous amounts of “deliberately and self-consciously elaborate” essays on weddings, concerts and “at homes” by the educated elite (Echeruo 1977: 8-9). The *Lagos Observer* in 1882 recommended that correspondents write in a simple and

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<sup>20</sup>) For detailed discussion on commemorative associations in the late nineteenth century, see chapter 4 in Sawada (2012).

<sup>21</sup>) Another English language newspaper launched in the 1880s was the *Mirror*, a weekly paper, owned and edited by P. Adolphus Marke between 17 December 1887 and 24 November 1888. It was sold for threepence and printed by Marke’s “Commercial Printing Press” at Marina, Lagos (*Mirror*, 3 November 1888: 1). This article does not provide extensive cover of the *Mirror* due to its short duration.

clear style, as simplicity in a composition “is far more elegant than an elaborate straining at rhetorical effect” (LO, 28 September 1882: 2). The letter from “AMICUS” to the *Eagle and Lagos Critic* also suggested that readers agreed with the view on simplicity of writing because their community, whose majority was illiterate or partly literate, would “be enlightened and benefited not by any high bombastic style...not by its wearisome and lengthy articles, but a short and compact form is preferable” (E&LC, 28 April 1883: 3).

Despite these claims, the nineteenth-century press nevertheless retained its decorative and elaborate style, and even the most trivial of events were described as grand and dramatic matters in the society. We can see the verbose description in the article below on the Macaulay Memorial Concert in 1883. Before reporting the actual concert, the writer included a long introduction:

The votaries of the Muses can hardly be debarred now-a-days from doing homage to that source of infinite pleasure in their merry moments, of consolation, when the heart is sad, of inspiration, when the mind is inclined to better things – however inclement the day, people will go to witness indifferent performances, much more readily will they go, when they have reasons to expect something good, like that at the Breadfruit School-room, on the evening of the 8<sup>th</sup> instant, for the purpose of raising funds to create a memorial worthy of the late Rev. T. B. Macaulay, on whom devolved the sublime task of inaugurating the higher education of the future generation of this island, and who performed his task faithfully and devotedly (LO, 21 June 1883: 3).

Secondly, there had been constant claims in early Lagos newspapers that encouraged vernacular education and publications, especially after the cultural revival of the 1880s. After Yoruba orthography had been established by the collaborative work of European and *Saro* missionaries, as well as linguists in England and Germany from the early 1840s<sup>22)</sup>, the Yoruba alphabet gradually became commonly used in 1860s Lagos (Brown 1964: 272; Ajayi 1969: 126-28). From the early colonial period, the necessity for publications in the vernacular was recognised, and a “Publications Committee [of the CMS] was established in 1879 to promote the printing of useful books” in the Yoruba language (Brown 1964: 275).

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<sup>22)</sup> The development of Yoruba orthography was initiated by European missionaries such as the Revs. Henry Townsend, Henry Venn, J. F. Schön, John Raban, and C. A. Gollmer, with the significant assistance of *Saro* missionaries like Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (c.1806/09-91) and Thomas King (?-1862). Crowther translated parts of the New Testament into Yoruba with the assistance of Thomas King and published *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* in 1843 (Ajayi 1969: 126-28; Falola 1999: 6-7).

Consequently, there was an upsurge in debates surrounding vernacular education in 1882 when the educational code became a vital topic for the Lagos press<sup>23)</sup>. Both Yoruba and English language education were held to be equally important, but in different ways. While acquisition of English language was necessary in formal sectors and in commerce, Yoruba was the “mother tongue” of many Lagosians (LO, 16 August 1883: 2). According to one letter to the *Lagos Observer*, the “English language is the language of civilisation: it is the language of books, and the Yoruba is the language of the land” (LO, 8 November 1883: 3). What should be pointed out, however, is that not all the educated elite had high literacy in Yoruba. Discussions on Yoruba language education and the rehabilitation of Yoruba culture were held among limited numbers of cultural nationalist educated elite in early colonial Lagos, and others sought opportunities for acquiring the English language<sup>24)</sup>.

Nevertheless, as there had been no vernacular newspaper following the collapse of the *Iwe Irohin* in 1867, from the early 1880s there were constant debates about the necessity for a Yoruba language newspaper. For instance, a letter by “Aborigines” in 1882 suggested the reason for the *Lagos Times*’ failure “to wield any influence on ourselves the mass of Lagos people”, was that the paper merely wrote “wholly and solely in English”, which “has very little or no power over *Native minds*”. The writer continued:

so we must acknowledge that it is only in our mother tongue that our hearts can be moved. The time is now come, when, as in India and other countries, the “Anglo-vernacular,” if not entirely Vernacular, should be recognized to be the leading power which can wield any influence and ensure success in this country;... If even you cannot give us the whole Paper in Yoruba, give us, I beg of you, *two* of the *six* inner columns to inform our Native reading community of great concerns in political matters...and of what is transpiring in our country (LT, 9 August 1882: 2)<sup>25)</sup>.

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<sup>23)</sup> The Education Ordinance in 1882 was for systematising grant-in-aid to mission schools and received financial assistance from the colonial government. It stated that special stipends would be awarded to organisations on the basis of enrolment and the results of examinations in the English language (Awoniyi 1975). The lack of a vernacular language in the curriculum provoked strong opposition within Lagos society (Cole 1975: 51-52; Echeruo 1977: 55-56; Omu 1978: 107).

<sup>24)</sup> For instance, in 1886, a letter by “Hamlet” to the *Lagos Observer* exposed people’s unsatisfactory command of their “mother tongue” (LO, 7 August 1886: 3). In addition, there were said to be certain feelings of contempt toward the Yoruba language amongst educated Africans in the first few decades of colonial Lagos: the Yoruba language was regarded as inappropriate for “respectable society”, and speaking Yoruba in public was regarded as “uncivilised” (Omu 1978: 110).

<sup>25)</sup> In 1883, a letter from a “Native” also demanded that at least one of three Lagos newspapers should be published in the Yoruba language so that the press could address their messages to the masses who were “all neglected and left to suffer from intellectual starvation” (LT, 22 August 1883: 3).

In response to the growing demand for a vernacular language newspaper, *Iwe Irohin Eko* was launched by Andrew M. Thomas, the former editor of the *Lagos Times*. It was a Yoruba-English bilingual newspaper published on the first and third Saturday of each month with a circulation of 5,000-6,650 annually and sold at a price of twopence from 1888. This “new venture in the field of Lagos Journalism” was hailed “with joy” because it was considered to be an attempt to save “Yoruba Literature, our Folklore, Legends, Histories, Parables, Aphorisms, Allegories, &c.” from oblivion (LO, 27 October & 3 November 1888: 2); however, it ceased publication four years later in 1892. Although there were a few indigenous attempts to publish vernacular or bilingual newspapers following *Iwe Irohin Eko*, such as the newspaper established in 1906 at Ijebu-Ode by J. Odomosu (LS, 28 November 1906: 3), and the *In Leisure Hours* published by the CMS in Ibadan between 1910 and the 1940s (Omu 1978: 256), it was in the 1920s that successive attempts of the Yoruba bilingual newspapers effloresced<sup>26)</sup>.

### 3. Treading a Thorny Path? Early Newspaper Ventures in Lagos

As already shown, the journalists in Lagos launched their newspapers with high motivations and hopes for constructing a better future. The Lagos press was considered to be the media for furnishing information, educator of the masses, recorder of local history and culture. It was also the critic of authorities in order to prevent “autocracy and anarchy”, as the press constituted the chief instrument of opposition to the colonial government until 1922, when three African representatives were elected as members of the Legislative Council<sup>27)</sup>. The press was an effective organ for galvanising its readers to protest against the colonial administration on issues such as policies relating to water tax, land rights, and newspaper ordinances (Echeruo 1977; Omu 1978; Duyile 1987).

Despite its crucial roles in Lagos society from the early period, it seems that the press

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<sup>26)</sup> The political environment and grant of the franchise in 1922 assisted the proliferation of newspapers and six Yoruba weekly newspapers were subsequently founded in the 1920s: *Eko Akete* by Adeoye Deniga, 1922-29 & 1937; *Eletí-Ofe* (The Eavesdropper) by E. A. Akintan, 1923-28; the *Yoruba News* published in Ibadan by Denrele A. Obasa in 1924; *Iwe Irohin Osose* (The Weekly Newspaper) by T. H. Jackson, 1925-27; *Eko Igbehin* (The Latter-day Lagos) by E. M. Awobiyi, 1926-27; and *Akede Eko* (The Lagos Herald) by I. B. Thomas, 1928-53 (Coker 1968: 16; Alabi 2003; Barber 2005). *Eko Akete* literally means “Lagos the bed”. However, as these words come from the opening phrase of the oriki (praise poetry) of Eko (Lagos) – *Eko akete, ile ogbon* (Lagos, where one learns the seamy side of life), it is difficult to present an appropriate translation in English for this newspaper title. I would like to express my appreciation to Prof. Karin Barber for her helpful suggestions relating to the above Yoruba bilingual newspapers.

<sup>27)</sup> In 1922, the colonial government set up a new constitution creating a Legislative Council of 46 members, 27 officials, and 19 non-officials. Of the non-officials, three were to be elected by adult propertied males in Lagos and one in Calabar. This was the first instance of elected African representation on a Legislative Council in British Africa.

was a short-lived (see Table 1) and unprofitable enterprise. The *Lagos Times* noted in 1882 that its proprietor was glad that he had not entered into this business with a commercial speculation, otherwise they “might have begun to think whether we had not better give it up as an unprofitable and unpromising concern” (LT, 11 January 1882: 3). As a result, “the average lease of life” of early Lagos newspapers did “not ordinarily extend beyond a few months or years at the most”, and “not a few ventures both here” and on the West Coast of Africa had “sprung up, flourished a while, and become extinct” (LS, 26 September 1900: 3).

**Table 1: The Life-Spans of 1880s Lagos Newspapers**

	<b>LT</b>	<b>LO</b>	<b>E&amp;LC</b>
<b>Beginning-</b>	Nov. 1880-Oct. 1883	Feb. 1882-	Mar. 1883-
<b>End</b>	Dec. 1890-Oct. 1891	Jul. 1890	Oct. 1888
<b>Duration</b>	4 yrs	8 yrs 5 m	5 yrs 6 m

(Omu 1978: 252-53)

There were at least four reasons for the difficulties and lack of profitability experienced by the newspaper business. First was the shortage of an English reading population in early colonial Lagos: this lack of a reading public was frequently noted in early Lagos newspapers. There were growing numbers of literate groups on Lagos Island and its proximities. The census of Lagos in 1891 shows that out of a total “Blacks and Mulattoes” population of 85,457, 5.5% (4,714) were reported to be literate or partly literate in the English language (*Lagos Annual Report* 1891). This number rose to approximately 10,000 in 1914 (NP, 29 May 1914: 6); however, taking into consideration the whole of Nigeria, the majority of the population was illiterate in English<sup>28</sup>).

The second reason for the difficulties encountered by the Lagos press was the insufficient appreciation of the importance of newspapers. The reading community in early colonial Lagos was so small that the news transmitted “by word of mouth” made the people reluctant to patronise newspapers (Omu 1978: 83). In response to the letter of appreciation from Dr. Africanus Horton (1835-83), the *Lagos Times* pointed out that it was rare to receive such warm encouragement as “Journalism here” was “a thankless task”. Although the paper

<sup>28</sup>) In 1921, 10% of the population of Lagos was able to read and write (either in English or vernacular), whilst 20% was able only to read (Baker 1974: 76). In 1952, only 8.5% of the total population over the age of seven was categorised as literate in Roman script in the whole of Nigeria, but this percentage went up to 64% in Lagos. In Western, Eastern and Northern regions of Nigeria, 18%, 16% and 2% were literate in Roman script respectively in 1952 (Coleman 1958: 135). For the history of Yoruba literacy and educational policy in Nigeria, see Awoniyi (1975).



served the interests of “the country and race generally”, the editor was met with the “cold indifference” of the people (LT, 11 January 1882: 3).

Thirdly, literate people in Lagos were reluctant to purchase their own copy of a newspaper but instead opted to share with “three or four” friends. If the numbers of those borrowing newspapers from friends increased, the income of the press would never grow. The editors sincerely hoped that each reader would start to buy their own copy so that the Lagos press would not suffer from the unprofitability of business (LS, 26 September 1900: 3; LWR, 7 June 1919: 3).

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it is useful to provide the cost of a newspaper in relation to different income groups in Lagos. In the 1880s, each newspaper cost five-sixpence for subscribers and seven-ninepence for non-subscribers (see Table 2). In 1898, African civil servants of the lowest rank (sixth-class) earned between £24 and £36 per annum, while first-class clerks earned £200-250 in the Lagos colonial government, which was equivalent to white officials in Britain (Gann and Duignan 1978: 260-61)<sup>29)</sup>. On the other hand, the wage for artisans, which remained largely unchanged between the 1880s and 1920s, was £36-66 per annum (2-4s. per day) for carpenters, £36-72 (1s.6d.-5s. per day) for blacksmiths, £36-60 (1s.6d.-5s. per day) for printers<sup>30)</sup>.

It would also be useful to look at the average price of daily commodities and groceries so that we can then compare their prices with the subscription costs of newspapers. In the 1880s, instead of purchasing a copy of a newspaper, people could purchase 5 kg of cassava or a bunch of plantain, both of which cost sixpence; or even luxury items like 1 lb of tea or sugar, which were sixpence and fivepence respectively. Furthermore, 1 lb of pork, mutton or beef, which were sevenpence and ninepence respectively, could have been purchased (*Lagos Blue Book* 1884: 96)<sup>31)</sup>. We can therefore conclude that, when compared with the prices of daily commodities, and when considering the average income of different earning groups in Lagos, newspapers were not considered to be economical items, except for those people who were

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<sup>29)</sup> The basic administrative unit in colonial government was the department. This was usually composed of senior grade clerks, middle and junior grade clerks. In 1898, the annual salary for the senior grade clerks, such as the chief clerk, first- and second-class clerks were £300, £200-250 and £108-150 respectively (note that salaries quoted refer to Africans and not European clerks). These senior grade clerks were in charge of the intellectual (consultative and inspective) work of the department. Middle grade clerks (third- and fourth-class clerks earning £54-96) were often required to do subordinate inspective work. Technical or manual jobs were carried out by junior clerks (fifth- and sixth-class clerks earning £24-48). In 1899, the Lagos colonial administration employed 107 Africans out of a total of 183 civil servants (*Lagos Blue Book* 1898: 42-55; Gann and Duignan 1978: 253-62).

<sup>30)</sup> For the wages of artisans in colonial Nigeria, see *Lagos Blue Book* 1884: 95; *Blue Book of Colony of Southern Nigeria* 1912: Y2; *Blue Book of Nigeria Colony and Protectorate* 1924: 516.

<sup>31)</sup> For details of changes in the living costs in colonial Lagos, see Olukoju (2000: 126-43). Food prices remained remarkably steady between 1880 and 1910 (Hopkins 1966: 148).

well-paid or part of white-collar occupations.

**Table 2: Price of 1880s Lagos Newspapers**

<b>Title</b>	<b>LT</b>	<b>LO</b>	<b>E&amp;LC</b>
<b>Subscription (per annum)</b>	10 shillings	8s. 6d.	8s. 6d.
<b>Single copy for non-subscriber</b>	9 pence (6d. for subscriber)	7d. (5d.)	7d. (6d.)

The fourth reason for the difficulties experienced was that revenue rarely exceeded the necessary expenditure for publishing newspapers. The major source of income was newspaper sales and paid advertisements<sup>32)</sup>, and this was supplemented by donations (Omu 1978: 80-81) and by several other businesses, such as printing, book-binding and sales of commodities (Sawada 2012: 84). There is no precise data on the revenue of 1880s newspapers, but it should be less than £303, the average estimated annual revenue of the *Lagos Standard* (1894-1920) from 1895 to 1918 (Omu 1978: 92), as the 1880s newspapers had fewer advertisements and subscribers than those of early twentieth-century papers.

Furthermore, even if the revenues stated above were equivalent to the income of chief clerks in British colonial administration, the cost of publishing newspapers appears to have been a huge burden for press proprietors as they often employed staff such as printers, typists, compositors, bookkeepers and sales clerks. The *Lagos Times*, for instance, advertised for a clerk at a wage of £50 per annum (LT, 14 September 1881: 1). Despite the limited information on the wages of each staff member in the print offices, it seems reasonable to assume that expenditure on newsprint – wages for staff, rent for the offices, cost of printing newspapers and sometimes court fines – often exceeded revenue.

The four above-mentioned points suggest that journalism was not generally a successful commercial enterprise in Nigeria in the 1880s. Despite the financial difficulties, the Lagos newspapers had a strong sense of mission, assuming responsibility as “representatives” of “civilised” Lagosians and educators of the people, for leading society in its quest for “progress” (Sawada 2012). This sense of mission (and some expectations of gaining name-recognition for themselves) provided the motivation for subsequent newspapermen to continue their business.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article has provided a chronological overview of five newspapers published in

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<sup>32)</sup> In the 1880s, it cost three shillings and sixpence to insert one advertisement of under twelve lines in both the *Eagle* and *Lagos Critic* and the *Lagos Observer*.

southwestern Nigeria between the 1860s and 1880s, and has examined characteristics of each newspaper, visions of journalists behind their newspaper enterprises and the position of newspapers in the historical context of Lagos society. The 1860s missionary newspaper laid the groundwork for later African-initiated press. In the 1880s, the *Lagos Times* formed standard formats for succeeding Lagos newspapers; the *Lagos Observer* enriched the contents of the paper as well as demonstrating the oppositional attitude to the British colonial government; and the *Eagle and Lagos Critic* was a pro-British paper, with more personal news relating to the editor and his relatives and acquaintances in Lagos elite society. A “multitude of genres” could be found in one issue (Newell 2013: 48): news on current affairs, such as conflicts in Yorubaland, the British parliament agenda relating to West Africa, births and deaths, changes of name (English to Yoruba), a request for a “wife”, travel writings, memorial verses, quizzes, biblical essays, and didactic tales.

Research for this article has demonstrated that there are two important points for understanding early newspapers in southwestern Nigeria. Firstly, as outlined in this article, newspaper texts were not produced by the single efforts of editors but were, more accurately, the joint collaborative works of editors, correspondents and readers – sometimes anonymous using pseudonyms – in Lagos, the interior of Nigeria, other British West African territories and, in rare cases, England (although this network was comprised mainly of English-speaking educated African elite of these areas). In addition, there were active interactions between the Lagos press and newspapers in other parts of the world; not only did Lagos newspapers consistently quote articles from newspapers in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, England, and occasionally, in other European countries and America, but the editors of Lagos newspapers also attempted to communicate with envisioned readers outside Lagos and sent messages to newspapers in Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast through their articles and columns, like the “Tit-bits” in the *Lagos Observer*.

Secondly, throughout the initial period of Nigerian newspapers, newspaper enterprises were often unprofitable, and editors lamented the paucity of public interest in the press and lack of readership. Although the newspaper market expanded as a result of improvements in transportation and communication following the amalgamation of Lagos Colony and the Southern Nigeria Protectorate in 1906, in addition to the establishment of press distribution agencies in all parts of the territory now called Nigeria, it appears that revenues from newspaper enterprises did not always exceed expenses prior to the popularisation and advanced capitalisation of newspaper in the latter half of the 1920s. Nevertheless, journalism continued to attract new participants who believed in the “Newspapermen’s Burden” of influencing the trend of events, improving society and realising racial unity (LWR, 7 June

1919: 3).

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