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Los Angeles

Utilitarian Pleasures:

Print Culture and the Development of a Reading Public in Southwestern Nigeria

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

Regan Buck Bardeen

2013

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Utilitarian Pleasures: The Production of Literature and the Development of a Reading
Public in Southwestern Nigeria

by

Regan Buck Bardeen

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2013

Professor Edward Alpers, Co-chair

Professor Andrew Apter, Co-chair

Beginning with Christian missionary efforts to create a standardized Yoruba print language in the mid-nineteenth century, the Yoruba-speaking region of southwestern Nigeria was rapidly integrated into a network of print production that spanned the Atlantic Ocean. The emergence of a local reading public engendered the desire of administrative and religious stakeholder agencies to dictate the development of a print culture in southwestern Nigeria. These agencies saw their work on the production and dissemination of literature as a political and moral investment in the region, one that would pay dividends with the development of a Yoruba reading public whose worldview aligned with their own. This dissertation examines the strategies used by missionaries, philanthropists and government administrators to control how and what Nigerians read,

from the colonial period through independent rule and up to the economic collapse of the 1980s. It argues that independent Nigerian governments echoed the desires of earlier agencies that literature be used to teach moral lessons or practical skills, with the aim being the education of a nationalized citizenry. Utilizing missionary and government archives, along with publisher interviews and library records, I show the extensive human and monetary resources invested in influencing a Nigerian reading public under both colonial and independent rule. The dissertation concludes that the readers of English and Yoruba literature who composed this localized public accepted the instructional agenda being disseminated through print and ultimately embraced the utilitarian pleasures of their books.

The dissertation of Regan Buck Bardeen is approved.

Steven Nelson

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University of California, Los Angeles

2013

To the memory of my mom
Karen Jeffrey Buck,
who remains a source of strength

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Abbreviations

CMS	Church Missionary Society
DLMS	Dike Library Manuscripts Section, University of Ibadan
GCA	Girton College Archive, University of Cambridge
LSE	London School of Economics Library Special Collections
NAI	National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan
NAUK	National Archives of the United Kingdom
OA	Ogunsheye Archive, Ibadan
RCS	Royal Commonwealth Society Library, University of Cambridge
SOAS	School of Oriental and African Studies Library Archives and Special Collections, University of London
URSC	University of Reading, Special Collections

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_____. “Fifty Years of the Nigerian Publishing Industry, 1960-2010.” Invited presentation. Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique, Ibadan, Nigeria, July 5-7, 2010.

_____. “‘To encourage the reading of suitable books’: Production of Books for the Nigerian Market, 1945-1980.” Presented at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting, San Francisco, November 18-21, 2010.

_____. “The Politics of Reading in Colonial Nigeria's Transition to Independence, 1940-1960.” Colloquium talk. UCLA Department of History, June 6, 2013.

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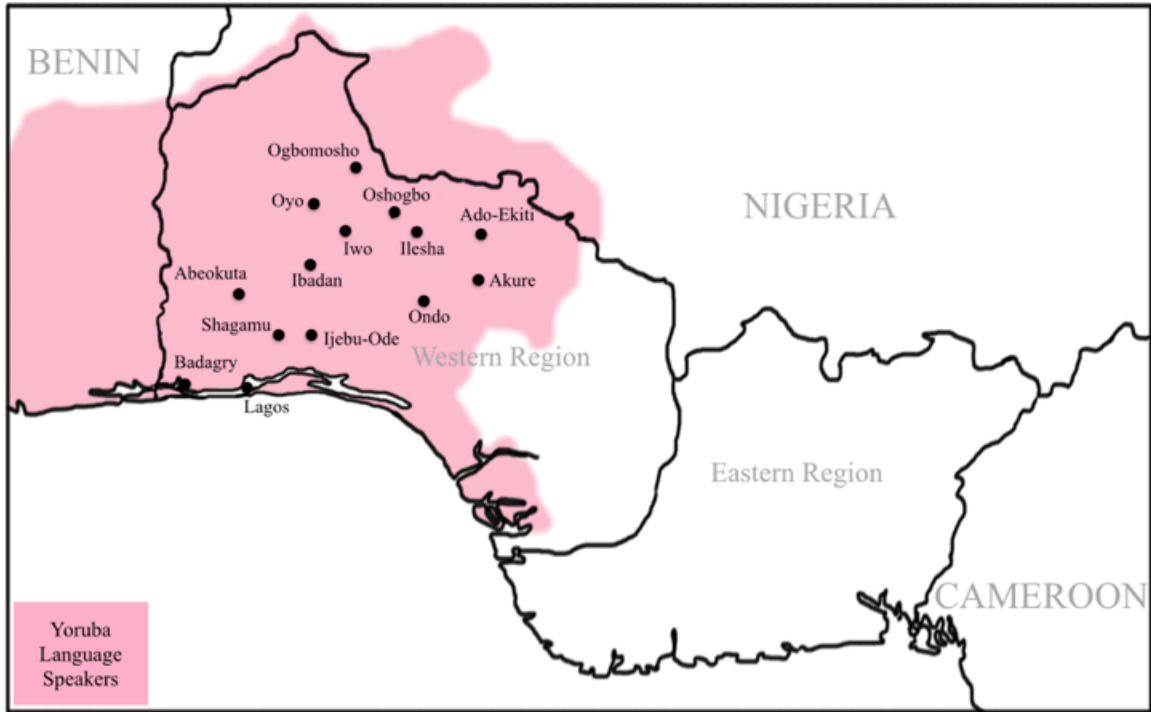


Figure 1

Introduction

This dissertation examines the historical development of a reading public in southwestern Nigeria, including the attendant creation of a print industry and formal reading spaces. I approach the topic from many different angles – readers, authors, publishers, booksellers and librarians – to try to work around the limitations of my sources and illuminate the place of Nigerians in a history that has been so dominated by foreign agents. My research was predicated on the common assertion that Nigerians are not readers; the most rudimentary analysis within this dissertation refutes that point, showing that a Nigerian reading public has developed over the course of a century of proactive interventions by people interested in having an influence on that culture. I argue that nearly everyone involved in the production, dissemination and consuming of books justified their participation by asserting the spiritual or educational utility of these objects.

Literacy is a complicated and mutable concept; at its most basic, it refers to an interaction with the world around the ‘reader,’ an ability to know things by examination. This dissertation looks at one type of literacy – the reading of the printed word – and asks why it was so highly valued in a particular time and place, how it spread and what it was used for. More broadly, it argues that there was a politics of reading in southwestern Nigeria that was negotiated at an institutional level and adopted by the individual readers

who participated in a local print culture. Additionally, this dissertation traces the “literary transfer” that took place between Western agencies and southwestern Nigeria.¹

I argue that the creation of a Western-controlled literary system, including literacy education and literature provision, in Nigeria was part-and-parcel of the colonization process, just like building roads and regulating schools. I trace the development of print culture beyond the initial work of missionaries to explore the involvement of international organizations, which often functioned in concert with or aligned with the agendas of state governments, in promoting a civilizing and moralizing agenda through print. I also examine the politics of print culture in southwestern Nigeria, arguing that the Nigerian government (post-1952), like its predecessors, extolled the practical uses of literacy to train readers as good citizens. Finally, I study how Nigerians struggled in the post-Independence era to remake this system to function more beneficially in the Nigerian context, ending in the generally perceived failure in the project to educate and perpetuate a vibrant politically participatory reading public that would serve as the basis of a civil society.

Through this research I aim to address the wider question of how state agencies, Christian missions and businesses play a role in shaping individual conceptions of identity, morality and social mores. Helen Tilley’s introduction to a volume on anthropology and imperialism deftly distills the scholarship on the topic into a series of questions: “Who took part in the goal of ‘knowing the native’, how did they participate,

¹ Evelyn Ellerman, “The Literature Bureau: African Influence in Papua New Guinea,” *Research in African Literatures* 26, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 214.

what exactly did they want to know, and, perhaps most important, why?"² She points out that the operations carried out to know and control African subjects belied the claim of colonialists that they ruled a 'simple' people. This dissertation takes the view that literature (specifically, book production and provision) was an important tool in the project of knowing and controlling Nigerians. The literature project was a complicated and costly effort to "know the native," despite the constant claims by participants that they were producing literature for a people so simple that they needed moral guidance from their rulers. Resources were poured into literacy education and literature provision by missionaries and then colonial administrators, Western philanthropists, competing government powers and finally, the independent African government because they saw books as an opportunity, through their durability, transportability, and social value, to have a permanent and continuing influence on Nigerian readers.

The dissertation further focuses on the development of a print culture in southwestern Nigeria because a single language, Yoruba, dominates the region. Although the Yoruba linguistic community extends across national borders, a political boundary was set fairly early in this case. By looking at one area of one country, I am able to examine the local specificity of experience with print culture. In addition, much of the official policy dictated by mission societies, and then the colonial government, and even the Nigerian government post-1960, only carried the weight of recommendations. It was up to local officials to implement their own versions of the policies. Therefore, it is necessary to look at one region - in this case, a territory defined first by missionaries, then

² Helen Tilley, "Africa, Imperialism and Anthropology," in *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Helen Tilley and Robert Gordon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 2.

what would become part of Southern Nigeria, then Western Nigeria, then split by state - to see how the larger policies actually played out.

Historiography

The body of historical scholarship on the material culture of the book is vast, encompassing theoretical and archival work on the book as object and its production, dissemination and readership. D.F. McKenzie has captured the expansiveness of such a subject, describing text (written, printed or oral) as “always incomplete, and therefore open, unstable, subject to a perpetual re-making by its readers, performers, or audience.”³ Although individual readers invest texts with meaning, I argue in this dissertation that expectations about literacy and printed texts were culturally constructed so as to shape how a particular reading public interacted with texts.⁴

Historians have also detailed the subjects of printing and print culture more specifically, covering everything from the rise of the printing press in fifteenth century Europe to print as international imperialism during the twentieth century. In her seminal work on print culture, Elizabeth Eisenstein argues that the high volume of books available to literate elites in sixteenth century Europe allowed people to systematically study a wide range of ideas, eventually leading to “the creation of entirely new systems of thought.”⁵ She goes on to assert that the circulation of the standardized and reproducible

³ D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55.

⁴ For an early compendium of the area of study encompassing all of these subjects, see Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?,” *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (Summer 1982): 65–83.

⁵ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 44.

format of the print medium also allowed people to experience the diversity of cultural practices, and so encouraged them to develop a sense of individualistic identity.⁶ Much of the subsequent scholarship departs from here, exploring what kind of impact print had on individual and community identity, particularly as played out in the creation of public spheres. Benedict Anderson famously argued that print capitalism from the seventeenth century onward provided the portable technology to connect people in a nationalized public sphere through the common identifier of a vernacular language.⁷ Scholars have examined the spread of print culture, or perhaps more specifically – print capitalism, to other parts of the world, but again Africa is featured only peripherally, since publications within Africa were tied more closely to a religious tradition than to the imperial project, as they were in these other places.⁸ These scholars have described print culture as integral to the functioning of a public sphere, which helps to explain why governments and other agencies hoping to exercise authority over a public would be so keen to dictate literacy practices.

However, their works have little to say about print and Africa, because print industries generally developed later in most of the continent than in Europe. Early research that did encompass Africa often treated the circulation of print as a one-way flow from Western sources to African customers. Philip Altbach described a dependent relationship between former colonies and industrialized nations when it came to

⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 134.

⁸ Miles Ogborn, *India Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 271. Ogborn describes print as an “imperial technology” in late eighteenth-century Bengal. Also see Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937*.

intellectual products like books, dictated by the use of European languages and the fact that the apparatus of publishing was set up for those languages, which in turn excluded a large part of the African population.⁹ It is true that some publishers saw no reason to produce Yoruba-language literature. However, creating books in Yoruba indeed occupied much of the effort of those trying to reach a wider audience in southwestern Nigeria, although those efforts were overridden by the fact that readers eventually had to function in English in order to access higher levels of education or better paying jobs. Nigerian readers, authors and publishers were simultaneously requesting and publishing their own literature. This complexity within the print culture of southwestern Nigeria indicates that both Western and African participants were generating intellectual production.

An area of scholarship where African subjects more often take center stage is the study of oral cultures, their organization and their incorporation of writing and print. Walter Ong, one of the early theorists who described orality and written literacy elements on a continuum of development, argued that the technology of print allowed the creation of a word to become, in itself, the basis of a manufacturing process. In the letterpress method, each word is a commodity, produced on a printing assembly line.¹⁰ The commoditization of print as a major factor in print culture spread from Europe to Africa, and so print culture on these continents shared a number of characteristics. However, the situation in southwestern Nigeria and other parts of Africa was unique in that communities adopted print without first participating directly in the production and trade

⁹ Philip Altbach, "Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World," *Harvard Educational Review* 45, no. 2 (May 1975): 228.

¹⁰ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982), 118.

of manuscripts.¹¹ This dissertation looks at southwestern Nigeria as a case study because its prior experience with literacy is representative of much of the region. By the late eighteenth century, Islam stretched from the interior of West Africa to the coastal forest belt, bringing with it a class of professional scholars literate in Arabic. These Muslim scholars served as consultants and scribes for the African ruling classes. They owned libraries of Arabic manuscripts and maintained contact with other scholars through extensive written communication. This written literacy remained a skill of the scholars, but rulers and residents recognized the power of writing to extend arenas of communication and gain knowledge. Where Islam had a presence a manuscript culture existed, but elsewhere oral culture encountered print literacy in a more direct way; for the first time that writing knowledge and material was available, it could reach a relatively large number of people.¹²

Recently, scholars of Africa have detailed a far more complex relationship between spoken and written literacy practices and their functions within societies. As the earliest practitioners of print in much of West Africa, nineteenth-century missionaries carried print capitalism's conviction that text was a commodity to the field, where the economy of words always had to be considered in terms of their usefulness to the evangelical project. Local West African print cultures, therefore, were heavily shaped by

¹¹ This was not the case in regions that were more firmly integrated into the Islamic world. See Graziano Kratli and Ghislaine Lydon, eds., *The Trans-Saharan Book Trade: Manuscript Culture, Arabic Literacy and Intellectual History in Muslim Africa* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹² A substantial body of scholarship examines the interplay between oral and written literacies in various societies. For a seminal early work, see Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Later critics include Brian Street, ed., *Cross-cultural Approaches to Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) and Ruth Finnegan, *The Oral and Beyond: Doing Things with Words in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2007). More recent entries include Michael Cole and Jennifer Cole, "Rethinking the Goody Myth," in *Technology, Literacy and the Evolution of Society: Implications of the Work of Jack Goody*, ed. David Olson and Michael Cole (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 305–324.

the moralizing objectives of missionaries. Patrick Harries describes the thinking of a Swiss Protestant missionary in southern Africa who believed that “literacy would ensure that written rules and precedent rather than changing human relations or physical force would determine the morality of society. Order, rigour and self-control would replace the flexibility, impermanence and instability associated with orality.”¹³ Following closely on the heels of missionaries, the new colonial rulers adapted local African print cultures to their own uses, reserving education and literacy for a favored few and investing in a print industry only so far as it reinforced the integration of African subjects into the colonial bureaucracy. This dissertation draws on the work of scholars who have considered the economic and social conventions and desires that drove these foreign interventions in Africa and shaped how colonizer and colonized interacted through the medium of print.¹⁴

Other historians and anthropologists have utilized oral sources and non-conventional written archives to move away from the study of large agencies and institutions and examine the roles of individual Africans in the development of print cultures instead. They aim to highlight African readerships and historically situate the concept of a popular culture and its public in an African context.¹⁵ Karin Barber has led the way in explicating these connections between popular mediums of communication

¹³ Patrick Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries and Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa*, 1st ed. (Ohio University Press, 2007), 186.

¹⁴ See Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Leslie Howsam, *Cheap Bibles: Nineteenth-century Publishing and the British and Foreign Bible Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) and Isabel Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan: A Transnational History of The Pilgrim's Progress* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2004).

¹⁵ See Wendy Griswold, *Bearing Witness: Readers, Writers, and the Novel in Nigeria* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002) and Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and cultural practices. She writes that purpose of literary history is to “ask why, at a certain time and place, we find *these* textual forms and not others; and how specific textual forms participate in constituting specific historical forms of consciousness.”¹⁶ In the midst of tracing the interventions of foreign and state agencies in the development of a reading public in southwestern Nigeria, this dissertation attempts such an analysis by highlighting the choices made by local readers as they navigated the literature available in their day-to-day lives.

In a 2012 review article on African book history, Elizabeth le Roux observes that, “there is some information available on what has been published, but little attention has been paid to the material forms of books and other texts, their distribution channels, publicity and marketing, pricing, readership, and impact (except from a literary point of view).”¹⁷ Le Roux highlights newspapers as the foundation of African indigenous publishing, but makes the case that the industry in general and book publishing in particular must be historicized. My own research departs from studies that look at newspapers and ephemeral print production to focus primarily on book production and provision. Within the agencies concerned with shaping the contours of a reading public in southwestern Nigeria, books were viewed as more powerful tools to assert and maintain influence. They were the basis for public and private libraries; they were totems of civilization. My dissertation takes up the book as an object of interest and study because it had a specific meaning and represented different things than did newspapers and other ephemeral literature.

¹⁶ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 41.

¹⁷ Elizabeth le Roux, “Book History in the African World: The State of the Discipline,” *Book History* 15 (2012): 250.

Sources and Methodology

This dissertation is based on archival research conducted in England (July – August 2009) and Nigeria (October 2009 – July 2010). The time spent in both countries allowed me to gather a unique set of documents that speak to the complexity of print culture and reading practices in southwestern Nigeria. In England I collected materials on Christian missions, philanthropies and scholarly organizations, publishers and Colonial Office policies from the University of London School of African and Oriental Studies Special Collections, the London School of Economics Archives, the Archive of British Publishing and Printing at the University of Reading, the Girton College Archive at the University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Library Special Collections and the National Archives of the United Kingdom.

In Nigeria I was based in Ibadan, where I had easy access to the Nigerian National Archives, the University of Ibadan Dike Library manuscripts section and Dr. F.A. Ogunsheye's personal archive. The National Archives hold a wealth of material on local administration in the colonial Western Region that is not available in Britain. Materials from Dr. Ogunsheye's archive also feature prominently in the dissertation; she was a librarian at the University of Ibadan, a vocal advocate for public library access in Nigeria and a consummate chronicler of library work from the 1960s onward. I had the opportunity to interview Dr. Ogunsheye as well as a number of publishers, scholars and other informants concerning the local book industry. These interviewees provided insight into the print culture of southwestern Nigeria in the more recent past, a view that is often missing in the formal archives. As I develop this research further, I will incorporate the material from informants into my existing analysis.

For the period to 1940, my dissertation relies heavily on missionary sources to document the importing of a British literary system into Yoruba-speaking Nigeria. Noting that such reports, letters and memos are fraught with the political and spiritual agendas of their producers, I take into account that missionaries had to portray Africans as people who *needed* the intervention of outsiders. Missionaries often described Africans as encountering literacy and literature with awe and wonder, an exaggerated response that served to create the illusion of a need that the missionaries could justify their evangelical mission to fulfill. During the early twentieth century, missionaries (along with some anthropologists) “began to see Christianity as having a potential social ‘function’ in a situation where widening geographical horizons were likely to make traditional religions redundant.”¹⁸ They assigned themselves the task of imposing Christian practice, with its saving moral code, on Africans through literacy education. Leaving aside the fact that Yoruba religious practice retained an important place in social organization, missionary sources contain abundant evidence of the profound changes that took place as a reading public emerged in southwestern Nigeria between 1840 and 1940. In the following decades, the colonial government and its Nigerian successor assumed control of education and literature provision and generated reams of documents to record their bureaucratic decisions. The second half of the dissertation utilizes these sources.

Scope of the Study

The dissertation is divided into five chapters that follow a chronological order, with some overlaps in periods of time to allow for different thematic explorations.

¹⁸ Peter Forster, *T. Cullen Young: Missionary and Anthropologist* (Blantyre: Department of Theology and Religious Studies of the University of Malawi, 2003), 2.

Chapter 1 traces the creation of a standardized, print-ready Yoruba language by Christian missionaries, a process that began in the 1820s, even before missions were established in southwestern Nigeria in the 1840s. I discuss the growth of missions in southwestern Nigeria and the introduction of print literacy there. I then explore the connection between Yoruba ethnogenesis and the growth of a print culture. The chapter concludes with an overview of education and reading practices in southwestern Nigeria before the consolidation of colonial rule in 1914. In this early period, I argue, the British colonial government was happy to leave expensive literature work to the missionaries because it was not interested in courting the support of the Yoruba elite who constituted the local reading public.

Chapter 2 documents the increasing number of individuals and official entities interested in providing reading material for Nigerians in order to have an influence on the reading public between the First and Second World Wars. After discussing changes in language education under colonial rule, I show that the colonial government's main impact on reading practices in this period was their support of agencies such as the International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa and the International Association of African Languages and Cultures. I analyze the work of the ICCLA and IAALC and their impact on the provision of literature in southwestern Nigeria, as well as missions' response to their diminished influence over readers. These agencies described their imposition of particular books and reading practices as a way to protect the unsullied morality of African societies under the threat of civilization.

Chapter 3 is the first of two chapters that looks at the period from the Second World War to Nigeria's first decade of independence in the 1960s, a time of especially

vigorous intervention in the developing literary system of southwestern Nigeria. In Chapter 3, I focus on official responses to the rapid expansion of the reading public that occurred between the 1940s and 1960s. I describe the building of reading rooms throughout southwestern Nigeria, carried out through an alliance between local and central government officials and philanthropic organizations. I then look at the work of the British Council, the Carnegie Corporation and the missions to respond to the burgeoning movement for political sovereignty in Nigeria. I argue that this was the first time the colonial government was truly invested in understanding and contributing to the reading culture in Nigeria because it wanted to ensure influence with Nigerian readers after its political rule had come to an end.

The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 signaled the British government's begrudging willingness to invest in its colonies instead of expecting financial self-sufficiency within those territories. Chapter 4 traces how this new investment translated on a local Nigerian level to more intensive government involvement in literacy issues and a reformulation of the politics of reading for colonial subjects. To understand the cultural specificity of the reading public in southwestern Nigeria, I examine the local reading tastes in this period of international attention. Like Chapter 3, this chapter bridges the political transition to independent rule in Nigeria in order to explore its impact on the Yoruba-speaking reading public. In the decade before Nigeria's independence from Great Britain, the colonial power busily laid the groundwork for maintaining a strategic presence in the country. I argue that literature was identified as an avenue to inundate the wider Nigerian public with a pro-British message

that would benefit British businesses, education services and government policies, even after the colonial period hastened to an end.

Chapter 5 examines the ways in which political independence shaped literature production and reading practices in southwestern Nigeria. I discuss how the government and foreign donor agencies viewed mass literacy as a means of ensuring development and inculcating national identity, further validating the utilitarianism of reading practices in the country. Because private papers and library records are the main sources currently available to study investments being made in the Nigerian literary system between 1960 and 1980, I utilize these in an attempt to understand the bureaucracy that supported a reading public and the politics behind the implementation of literacy programs. I then outline the growth of multinational and Nigerian publishers and the indigenization decrees of the 1970s, arguing that the reading public suffered from a lack of book variety because the education-based market fueled a fierce competition between publishers that resulted in a near monopoly of textbooks in the local bookshops.

Utilitarian Pleasures: Print Culture and the Development of a Reading Public in Southwestern Nigeria traces reading and publishing practices in the Yoruba-speaking region of Nigeria over the course of one hundred and fifty years. With the broad scope of this dissertation, I aim to provide a clear picture of the long process by which a reading public came into being in southwestern Nigeria. I also endeavor to consider the totality of social change that occurred as the result of the presence of a print-based literary system there, ultimately arguing that the development of a local Yoruba-identified reading public is the most significant result of the region's encounter with print. Beginning with the creation of a standardized Yoruba print language in the 1820s and ending with Nigeria's

contracting print industry in the early 1980s, I establish the many adaptations and modifications made by a Yoruba-language reading public, but also show the continuity of literacy education, print production and reading practices that are the foundation of the utilitarian political and religious dictates that drive contemporary Nigerian print culture.

1 The Good Book: Religion and Literacy in Southwestern Nigeria, 1840-1910

In southwestern Nigeria, the beginnings of a standardized print language were rooted in the political and social upheavals of the nineteenth century. As densely populated cultural centers came in closer contact through waves of migration caused by the Fulani jihads and slave raiding of the early 1800s, the languages of “the children of Oduduwa” influenced each other to a greater degree than they had previously.¹ However, only the concerted efforts of missionaries, who needed a language to carry out their evangelization of the region, spurred the grammatical and vocabulary standardization of a print-ready dialect that came to be known as Yoruba. Missionaries, both European and African, viewed African languages as an instrument to access and preserve the morality of African societies and used it to counteract the pernicious influences of modern secularism. This evangelism was only possible through giving the languages written form and teaching the speakers written literacy, because writing and reading provided order and permanence to a society.

The missionaries’ ability to exert their influence was put to the test in the Yoruba-speaking region of Nigeria. This chapter will trace the creation of a written Yoruba language and the early work of the Christian missions with regard to the introduction of English- and Yoruba-language literacy in southwestern Nigeria between 1840 and 1910. It will show how a new African elite, composed of African missionaries, mission school students and African returnees from abroad, emerged out of the interaction between the

¹ J. Gbenga Fagborun, *Yoruba Koine: Its History and Linguistics Innovations* (Munich: Lincom Europa, 1994), 12.

missions, the kingdoms of southwestern Nigeria and the British colonial government. Since the 1880s, these Yoruba elites had struggled to reconcile their conception of personal identity as intertwined with local political identities and the Christian missions' promotion of a Yoruba consciousness. Finally, this chapter will examine how these elites participated in the creation of a reading culture and how they practiced literacy in the period up to the First World War.

Samuel Crowther was the author of the first comprehensive vocabulary of the Yoruba language, a former slave-turned Bishop in the Anglican Church and a major figure among the Western-educated African elite of the nineteenth century.² Because he was both a member of the powerful new African coastal elite of the nineteenth century and a devoted missionary who believed in the civilizing influence of Western Christianity, his work serves as a template for examining the establishment of a reading culture in southwestern Nigeria through the introduction of literacy education and moralizing literature. Crowther arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1822, at the age of 17, after a British ship intercepted the Brazilian slave vessel on which he was imprisoned and landed the captives on the West African coast. The Church Missionary Society (CMS), under the authority of the British government, ran a network of villages surrounding Freetown for the settlement of the so-called recaptives and quickly gained power in the colony, ruling in tandem with the nascent government.³ Crowther, who had been taken as a war captive from the Oyo region in the southwestern part of present-day

² For a detailed biography, see Jesse Page, *The Black Bishop: Samuel Adjai Crowther* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1909).

³ David Northrup, "Becoming African: Identity Formation among Liberated Slaves in Nineteenth-Century Sierra Leone," *Slavery and Abolition* 27, no. 1 (April 2006): 6; Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

Nigeria just a year earlier, moved into Leopold Village. Missionaries had set up a Western-style education system and were working on curriculum development and language studies that would allow them to expand their mission within Africa.⁴ Crowther enrolled in the CMS-run school and showed himself to be a brilliant student, quickly learning to read and write in English. After a brief period of schooling in London, he moved back to Freetown and joined the first class of students at Fourah Bay College in 1827. Here he began his formal study of Yoruba, the language of Oyo. Crowther joined a dedicated group of missionaries and linguists in West Africa and Europe who felt that creating written scripts for African languages would lead to the civilizing of the continent.⁵

Samuel Crowther's story elucidates the complex relationship between Africans audiences and Christian missionaries that sparked the development of a reading culture in southwestern Nigeria. He learned to read and write under the tutelage of missionaries, gaining literacy first in English and then contributing to the creation of a standardized literary Yoruba language. Later authors and publishers who created a multi-lingual print culture would duplicate his mobility between the languages, working in English and publishing original works and translations in Yoruba. European missionaries invested time and resources into Crowther's education with the belief that his literacy would allow

⁴ Members of the evangelical Clapham sect of the Anglican Church established the Church Missionary Society in London in 1799. Until 1812, it was called the Society for Missions to Africa and the East. Deeply influenced by the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s, members of the CMS were devoted to individual education through Sunday schools and Bible societies. See Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its Environment, Its Men and Its Work* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899).

⁵ T. O. Beidelman, "Social Theory and the Study of Christian Missions in Africa," *Africa* 44, no. 3 (1974): 244. Beidelman explains that missionaries advertised Christianity and other aspects of Western culture - such as print literacy - as one and the same, "as though the kind of minds that theologized about sin and salvation were necessarily those which could develop vaccines, lead conquering troops, or organize a productive textile mill."

him to find salvation through Christianity and its concomitant civilization. This conviction in the power of the civilizing mission drove missionaries to uphold education and the written word as their greatest tools and to promote their use among Christians and non-Christians alike. Like many Africans who came after him, Crowther studied to be a leader but remained subjugated to European masters. His story reflects a larger struggle in the late nineteenth century that led to the development of a new African elite class outside of the European Church hierarchy. This group utilized the written language created by Crowther and the literacy skills taught by his colleagues to create an elite Christian Yoruba identity that embraced literacy as a central tenet of belonging. While educated Christian elites enjoyed both financial and social rewards in the first decades of British rule in Lagos, competition from other groups and mistrust by colonial administrators undermined their position after 1890.⁶ Western-educated elites laid the foundation for a reading public in southwestern Nigeria, yet their gradual marginalization within both the African and European ruling classes between 1840 and 1910 resulted in the isolation of reading culture during this period.

The Mission to Civilize

The history of the written Yoruba language began with T.E. Bowdich, a British civil servant in the Gold Coast, who gathered and recorded the first Yoruba wordlist while on a mission to Kumasi.⁷ When he published it in 1819, the language was not yet associated with a distinct cultural group. A more concerted effort to study the language

⁶ Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 19, 24.

⁷ That Bowdich collected his wordlist in the Asante capital is indicative of the spread of a Yoruba-speaking diaspora in West Africa.

identified as “Hio” (or “Oyo”) by Bowdich began in Freetown in the late 1820s. The earliest proponents of creating a standardized and written Yoruba language were Christian missionaries working there. The CMS-run Fourah Bay College provided a space for the formal study of African languages on the continent. The staff of English Anglicans and German Lutherans from Basel Seminary aimed to train the African students to be their scholarly assistants and leaders within African communities and the Church. The Lutherans, in particular, were skilled linguists and supported the CMS objective of instructing students in their native languages by reducing these languages to writing in the Latin alphabet with the help of Africans enrolled at Fourah Bay College. They studied the local languages of Sierra Leone, such as Temne, Bullom and Susu, more intensively than others until the direction of evangelism changed in the early 1840s.

In an effort to expand their educational work, both the CMS and the Methodist Mission looked further east to the Bight of Benin, encouraged that the region (which encompasses southwestern Nigeria) had a great deal of potential for conversion. The CMS in Sierra Leone had additional incentive for supporting the creation of a written, printable Yoruba language. Many of the captives populating the CMS schools around Freetown came from southwestern Nigeria and encouraged the missionaries to expand the mission field into their homeland.⁸ This Aku community, so-called because of their form of greeting, even raised funds to support missionaries in their expansion along the Bight of Benin.⁹ In the 1840s, a large number of Yoruba-speakers travelled from Sierra

⁸ Michel Doortmont, “Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History” (PhD, University of Rotterdam, 1994), 48.

⁹ P.E.H. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages: Essays and Bibliographies*, by P.E.H. Hair (London: Cambridge University Press in association with the West African Languages Survey and the Institute of African Studies, Ibadan, 1967), 13.

Leone to Abeokuta and gained the permission of the Alafin to settle in their own district on the outskirts of town. They were known as the Saro in their new home. Historians have closely studied the impact of missionaries and African immigrants in southwestern Nigeria; they generally agree that the Saro and mission-educated Africans who lived in Lagos, Abeokuta and Ibadan were deeply involved in local politics, with varying degrees of successful infiltration.¹⁰ These educated elites had to negotiate with both the current ruling class and the missionaries who represented the British presence in the interior. The result is a complicated story of conflict and shifting alliances.

In 1841, the CMS sponsored its first Niger Expedition to lay out a mission field in the Muslim-controlled Hausa/Fulani states of present-day northern Nigeria. Samuel Crowther was sent on the mission to gather material and refine his Hausa language skills. Upon their return, his partner, missionary J.F. Schön, suggested to the home office that they establish a separate mission in ‘the Yoruba country’ to the west of the river Niger. While he recognized Crowther’s work among the Hausa, Schön recommended that the CMS appoint Crowther to the Yoruba Mission and urged that more recaptives be trained as mission agents in order to take advantage of their language skills.¹¹ The home office took Schön’s suggestion and recruited new African mission agents. The African missionaries assigned to southwestern Nigeria included recaptives like Crowther and Thomas King and Sierra Leoneans, as the children of recaptives were known, including

¹⁰ Saro and Aguda immigrants generally settled in these three towns. Local populations did not welcome them elsewhere. See Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria: The “Sierra Leonians” in Yoruba, 1830-1890* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965). Mac Dixon-Fyle, *A Saro Community in the Niger Delta, 1912-1984: The Potts-Johnsons of Port Harcourt and Their Heirs* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1999) provides an account of Saro migration to eastern Nigeria.

¹¹ K. Onwuka Dike, “Origins of the Niger Mission 1841-1891” (CMS Niger Mission, 1962).

Andrew Wilhelm, James White and Thomas B. Macaulay.¹² These African missionaries constituted the largest part of the mission team in southwestern Nigeria because European missionaries tended to move behind the scenes and into management positions once they had developed a workforce to carry out the difficult day-to-day tasks. Yoruba-speaking missionaries had the advantage of language skills in a class that valued literacy as an identifier of civilization.

Christian missionaries initially traveled to southwestern Nigeria in 1842, landing at the coastal town of Badagry, sixty kilometers west of Lagos, and establishing a temporary base there. The Anglo-African Methodist missionary Thomas Birch Freeman, with the assistance of William de Graft and de Graft's wife, built a mission house and chapel. After returning from a brief trip to Abeokuta, where they eventually established a station, they met a CMS committee led by Henry Townsend and Andrew Wilhelm in Badagry.¹³ The CMS set up headquarters in Abeokuta in 1846. In 1850 the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States sent Thomas Jefferson Bowen to initiate their mission in Nigeria; he established the main station at Ogbomoso in 1855.

Political conditions in the region facilitated the missionaries' entrance into these towns because the warring governments of powerful city-states were willing to accept newcomers who might become useful allies. Missionaries found a region in political upheaval as a result of the collapse of the Oyo Empire, beginning in 1796. Oyo, centered

¹² Crowther remained the most prolific of these Yoruba scholars in his writing and translation; he eventually published a Yoruba-language school primer in 1849, followed by an expanded vocabulary and grammar, the first complete dictionary and translations of the Gospels, the New Testament Epistles, Acts and eventually the entire Old and New Testaments. Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages*, 14; F. Adetowun Ogunshẹye, *Bibliographical Survey of Sources for Early Yoruba Language and Literature Studies, 1820-1970* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 2001).

¹³ J.F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria, 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 31.

in the savannah just north of the forest belt of present-day western Nigeria, had dominated the political and economic affairs of surrounding states since the mid-seventeenth century. As Oyo disintegrated, feuding leaders carried their struggles for political power southward into the forest belt.¹⁴ More than a century of military conflict followed as the population of southwestern Nigeria struggled to reconstitute social and political structures in the face of internal and external pressures. The region was further destabilized by the growth of the transatlantic slave trade in the Bight of Benin. Although Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807, ships continued to carry their human cargo across the Atlantic until the 1880s. The Bight of Benin, including southwestern Nigeria, served as a major source for slaves during this latter period of the transatlantic slave trade. Whether demand from passing slave ships increased supply from the region and the corresponding violence, or political warfare resulted in more slaves for sale along the coast, the trade in slaves prolonged the volatility of the region.¹⁵

The geo-political pressures faced by the kingdoms of southwestern Nigeria in the second half of the nineteenth century, coming from the Sokoto Caliphate in the north, the British in the south and the French/Dahomey in the west, were not new since the area had long been surrounded by powerful states and tied into transatlantic and trans-Saharan trade networks. However, the nineteenth century in Yorubaland was exceptional as an

¹⁴ A strong cavalry gave Oyo a military advantage over areas to its south, because horses could not survive in the forests between the savannah and the coast. As the Benin and Nupe kingdoms became more powerful from the 1780s, they cut off Oyo's access to the much-needed horses. A concurrent constitutional crisis furthered weakened the disintegrating empire. This subject has received a great deal of scholarly attention. For a detailed account, see Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Plc, 1998).

¹⁵ Olatunji Ojo, "The Organization of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Yorubaland, C. 1777 to C. 1856," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41, no. 1 (2008): 80; Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 87.

“age of confusion.”¹⁶ Vulnerable communities had to protect themselves from slave-raiders and the political aggression of city-states vying to replace Oyo as the center of power. They were also being threatened by the Sokoto Caliphate, which was continuing its expansion through the jihad begun by Usman dan Fodio in 1804. In the early nineteenth century, the Egba kingdom fell apart under the pressure of political infighting over succession and sent waves of refugees towards the coast. Egba refugees established Abeokuta as their new home in the 1830s. This town rose to prominence as a contender in the fight for control of the large region left leaderless after the collapse of Oyo. Abeokuta’s power was quickly contested by the political rulers of Ibadan, a town established in 1829 to serve as a base for military commanders fleeing south from Oyo. Ibadan quickly gained prominence as an aggressor state, conquering the lands between Abeokuta and the Ijebu region. After defeating the Sokoto Caliphate’s armies in their jihad just south of Ilorin, the city-state of Ibadan emerged as the new imperial power of the region.¹⁷

In 1851, the missionaries assisted the Egba army in repulsing an attack by Dahomey with arms provided by the British navy. Crowther described how the Oòni of Ife sent what he called a “symbolic letter” to the CMS missionaries at Abeokuta after the battle. The message, based on a system of signs used by Ogboni societies, was made of two cords bound together with three knots. Crowther explained how the two cords represented the Egba and English nations and that two of the knots illustrated their unity, with the third knot a symbolic request that Ife be allowed to join the alliance. Crowther

¹⁶ J.D.Y Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 48.

¹⁷ S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893: Ibadan Expansion and the Rise of Ekitiparapo* (New York: Humanities Press, 1971), 37.

interpreted the letter as the Ife people “calling to Missionaries to come over into their country, and help them, and to England particularly, to whom God has given the power and the means to evangelize and civilize Africa.”¹⁸ Crowther’s description of the event privileges a spiritual dimension over the political request of the Oòni, who saw that the missionaries were practical allies with their connection to the British on the coast, their tools of literacy and their influence among the immigrant elite. Crowther did not acknowledge that, without a written script, the Oòni had created a text in order to record and communicate information. Crowther and his fellow missionaries fervently believed that the missions to evangelize and to civilize were one and the same – and that they both required the use of written literacy.

“Missionaries,” states historian E.A. Ayandele, “were the pathfinders of British influence” in Nigeria.¹⁹ They encouraged the British Gold Coast government to establish a new base at Lagos. Despite protestations to the contrary, the British government seemed to insert itself willingly into the political morass of southwestern Nigeria. Claiming a desire to stop the slave trade by deposing Kosoko, the oba (or king) of Lagos, the British bombarded the kingdom from the sea in 1851. By 1861, they had annexed Lagos and incorporated it into the Gold Coast Colony. British merchants in Lagos took advantage of their government’s objections to the constant wars and the attendant slave trading to insist on a greater imperial presence in the interior, hoping that it would protect their trade routes. The new Lagos colonial government obliged, but maintained that it was only trying to end the slave trade. However, British colonization was actually a bold

¹⁸ Samuel Crowther, *A Grammar of the Yoruba Language* (London: Seeleys, 1852), iv.

¹⁹ Emmanuel A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longmans, 1966), 29.

attempt to assert control over the lucrative trade in palm oil from the interior.²⁰ Political colonization quickly followed where economic imperialism led, with the establishment of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906. The Christian missions supported the colonial conquest of Nigeria, believing that the civilizing influence of British rule would lead to the conversion of the subject masses.²¹

The Creation of Written Yoruba

As was the ambition of missionaries the world over, evangelists in southwestern Nigeria planned to teach potential converts to read the Bible in their own languages and thereby attain eternal Christian salvation. It must be noted that the missionaries' targeted audience was familiar with written scripts and printed documents before the advent of the Christian missions. Educated Muslims, who traveled throughout the region and often settled in towns at the invitation of political leaders, were literate in Arabic and collected and traded manuscripts with colleagues across West Africa. Even in non-Muslim areas, these men served as scribes in the palaces and bookkeepers for wealthy traders. People venerated written script for its perceived transformative power. Babalawos and other religious practitioners drew on this power by prescribing bits of writing as talismans, making written language a tool available to most of the population.²² Printed documents started appearing along the coast and were traded into the hinterland from the early

²⁰ J.F. Ade Ajayi, "The British Occupation of Lagos, 1851–1861: A Critical Review," *Nigeria Magazine* no. 6a (1961). For a more recent study of the colonial politics of Lagos, see Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos, 1760-1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

²¹ John A. Grigg, "'How This Shall Be Brought About': The Development of the SSPCK's American Policy," *Itinerario* 32, no. 3 (November 2008): 43. Missionaries and their European backers also thought that Christian converts would be politically loyal to their benefactors.

²² Lamin O. Sanneh, *The Crown and the Turban: Muslims and West African Pluralism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 43.

nineteenth century, when missionaries established printing ventures in Freetown, Sierra Leone and Calabar in eastern Nigeria. In addition, Brazilian and Cuban returnees and Sierra Leonean immigrants brought print literature from their residences and from Europe. With the arrival of Christian missionaries, however, the accessibility and purpose of literacy and print changed.

Missionaries wanted to build on the success of earlier projects in Asia and the Americas in which schools and educational work served as the main conduit to reach foreign audiences.²³ Therefore, language translation and literature production were key tenets of the Christian missionizing ideology in southwestern Nigeria. Missionaries considered the utilization of ‘native’ languages a key component of proselytizing to the masses. In 1853, Sarah Tucker, a CMS missionary, wrote *Abeokuta; or Sunrise within the Tropics*. The account of the CMS’ early work noted, “our missionaries longed to receive printed copies of [the Yoruba-language Liturgy] from England, that the congregation might join more effectually in the service.”²⁴ For the missionaries who first arrived at the coast and then established mission stations in the hinterland, this meant completing the process started in Sierra Leone of adapting a number of related dialects into a written Yoruba language.²⁵

In the Bight of Benin, a large population of people traced their origin to the city of Ife, practiced similar forms of spiritual worship and spoke related dialects of a common

²³ For an example of a mission focus on education, see W.O.B. Allen and Edmund McClure, *Two Hundred Years: The History of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1698-1898* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1898).

²⁴ S. Tucker, *Abeokuta; or Sunrise within the Tropics* (London: James Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1853), 155.

²⁵ Timothy Adedeji Awóniyi, *Yoruba Language in Education, 1846-1974: A Historical Survey* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1978), 20–21. When referring to language, the Oyo variant was considered the closest to standardized Yoruba.

language. By the mid-nineteenth century, scholars had settled on the name “Yariba” or “Yourriba” for the family of languages found it useful to apply the label to the inhabitants of that area.²⁶ However, individuals identified as members of separate kingdoms that were connected only by geographical and spiritual origin. They maintained unique practices relating to religion, trade, jurisprudence, education and social organization. S.W. Koelle wrote in his *Polyglotta Africana* (1854), “if you call an Idséban or a Yágban a Yórūban, he will always tell you, “Don’t call me by that name, I am not a Yórūban.”²⁷ Even European missionaries recognized the importance of this distinction. In the aforementioned *Sunrise within the Tropics* Tucker differentiates between the Egba people of Abeokuta and residents of Badagry, Ife and Ibadan, whom she calls “other Yorubas.”²⁸

Despite the best efforts of CMS, Methodist, Baptist and Catholic missionaries, in the nineteenth century the general populace of southwestern Nigeria was indifferent to their evangelical message and the affiliated print culture. Eugene Stock, Editorial Secretary of the CMS, estimated the number of African Christians in the Yoruba Mission, the largest one present in the region, at 2,000 in 1860.²⁹ These Christians had to attain some nominal skills in Yoruba literacy in order to fulfill the requirements for conversion.

²⁶ Hair, *The Early Study of Nigerian Languages*, 4, 6.

²⁷ S.W. Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana, with a New Introduction by P.E.H. Hair*, reprint (Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1963), 5.

²⁸ Tucker, *Abeokuta; or Sunrise within the Tropics*. Missionaries produced many ethnographic studies and recorded general observations about life in Yorubaland in order to effectively proselytize to local inhabitants; these writings were the earliest publications to come out of the region.

²⁹ Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society, Vol. II* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 434. E.A.D. Apeji estimates a population of 3,000 school graduates (and therefore, readers) in southern Nigeria by the later nineteenth century, although he does not cite a source for this number. See E.A.D. Apeji, “The Contributions of Multinational Publishers to the Provision of Books in Nigeria” (PhD dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1995), 68.

Beyond the narrow confines of the mission yard, though, Africans had little reason to read the available religious literature. The reason for this disinterest in the work of the missions can be attributed to the inaccessibility of literacy education and reading materials to the general populace. Although local political leaders initially welcomed missionaries as potential allies, they isolated the foreigners and refused to send their children to mission schools, particularly after they linked missionaries to the appearance of the British government in Lagos. Therefore, most people had little access to any print material and the circulation of books remained quite small. Nevertheless, literacy was the most visible manifestation of the missionary presence in southwestern Nigeria.

Missionaries felt that they had to educate and monitor their small community of converts carefully to be a model of European Christian civilization. To this end, providing education and literature was a critical component of their evangelical civilizing agenda. Sunday school provided the perfect opportunity for missionaries to teach “religious literacy,” conducting reading lessons in between morning and evening worship.³⁰ Church leaders found that the literate and non-literate persons were not far removed from one another, their only difference being the ways they utilized texts for worship. As a field report in an 1850 issue of the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* exulted:

[T]he Yorubas are most anxious to [learn to read]. Some Yoruba Primers were prepared by the Missionaries lately visiting England, and were recently sent out; and Mr. Crowther tells us, at the end of September last, how gladly they were received by children as well as adults . . . No sooner was the Yoruba Primer introduced than they caught it with such pleasure and interest, that in a few weeks the first and second classes . . . not only got through in reading it with facility and understanding, but could repeat the whole Primer from memory as a play lesson.³¹

³⁰ Jack Goody, “Literacy and the Non-Literate,” *Times Literary Supplement* (May 12, 1972): 539.

³¹ Samuel Crowther, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 1, no. 11 (March 1850): 252.

The report inadvertently suggests the way in which inhabitants of an oral culture consumed the text differently than envisioned by the print-focused missionaries. While it is doubtful that new students were reading “with facility and understanding” within a few weeks, these churchgoers had taken the written text and transformed it into an oral text that they could then study and dissect.³² The missionaries trying to establish their churches in southwestern Nigeria hoped that they could secure literate converts who would promote the religion by virtue of the skills it endowed.

To accomplish this goal, missionaries used some English language material that had been prepared for other mission fields, ordering various types of literature from their presses in Great Britain.³³ They also worked diligently to create a body of Yoruba language literature. Anglican missionary Henry Townsend was a key figure in developing standardized Yoruba into a print language, not just a written language. From the 1840s he advocated for a simplified Yoruba orthography to reduce printing costs and make production easier. Townsend was the main proponent of removing the diacriticals that were proposed by many other scholars to accurately represent Yoruba sounds, but that would have greatly complicated printing.³⁴ Townsend and his allies saw no use in developing a written Yoruba language if it could not then be easily printed and widely distributed. German missionaries, who continued to occupy key roles in the CMS Nigeria

³² For examples from Southern Africa of the ways of reading in an oral culture, see Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians*, 190–191.

³³ Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 139.

³⁴ Samuel Johnson unintentionally illustrated the conflict between grammarian and printer in his famous *History of the Yorubas*. His description of how the Yoruba sh sound should be indicated with a diacritical (^) over the s was immediately followed with a note from the publisher: “It must be noted, however, that in printing this work s has been used throughout to represent the sh sound.” Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CMS (Nigeria) Bookshops, 1921), xxv.

mission into the 1870s, proposed a number of innovations relating to tone markings, double consonants and vowel construction. Many people contributed to constructing Standardized Yoruba as a viable print language; Henry Venn, the General Secretary of the CMS from 1841 to 1872 coordinated the work of missionaries and scholars across Europe and the African mission fields with the objective of creating a language that could be easily translated into text.

Historian J.F. Ade Ajayi has traced the international collaborative project to establish a useful Yoruba orthography, and he highlights the motivation of those involved in the project. In a letter from Rev. W. Knight, a CMS secretary, to Crowther after the latter chose to simplify the text of his Prayer Book by leaving out the accents, Knight opined that “all marks not indispensable cannot fail considerably to increase the difficulties in the way of a native’s acquiring the art of reading, and to teach them to read is our great aim.”³⁵ According to Ajayi, it was finally at an 1875 conference that scholars augmented earlier orthographical rules and established the guidelines for Yoruba writing and printing.³⁶ Ultimately, although there was controversy over Yoruba orthography, putting the written language into practice allowed contributors to negotiate a set of rules that made the language truly useful for reading and writing.

³⁵ W. Knight to Crowther, 23 December 1852 (CMS CA2/045) in J.F. Ade Ajayi, “How Yoruba Was Reduced to Writing,” *Odu: A Journal of Yoruba, Edo and Related Studies* 8 (1960): 52. Crowther continuously updated his Yoruba translations from the 1840s onwards. He adopted the innovations of tone markings that were formalized during this conference to edit his earlier Bible translations. See Fagborun, *Yoruba Koine*, 22.

³⁶ It is interesting to note that writers were still debating matters of Yoruba orthography more than a century later. During a meeting of the Franklin Advisory Board, a book publishing charity, Chief H.M.B Somade “remarked that the training of authors for Yoruba books was going to be handicapped by the lack of agreement among Yoruba experts on a common Yoruba orthography, and expressed hopes that an agreement would eventually be reached.” See “Minutes of the Franklin Advisory Board for Lagos and Western Nigeria,” June 19, 1964, 6, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

The Bible, church liturgies and reading manuals were the first books to be translated into Yoruba and published. Converts to Christianity quickly purchased a Bible and often a hymnal for their home, even if they could not read these books. Hymnals and songbooks were particularly popular among African Christians because the form of text they contained could be easily memorized, a different kind of reading from the skill promoted by the European missionaries.³⁷ In fact, missionaries were so closely associated with these printed materials that they were called *onibuku*, a Yoruba-English language morphological hybrid meaning ‘people of the book.’

While the Bible and other religious texts were central to the missionaries’ identity as ‘book-people,’ grammars and reading primers were of no less importance because they were the tools by which missionaries introduced Yoruba converts to their vision of a new Africa.³⁸ Various African and European missionaries wrote their own Yoruba-language textbooks and had them printed in England, allowing the sponsoring missions to earn a small profit from book sales and control the types of materials seen by their students.³⁹ The CMS published the earliest textbook, Crowther’s *Iwe Ekini, on ni fun awon ara Egba ati awon ara Yoruba (Book One for Egba and Yoruba People)*, in 1849. *A grammar of*

³⁷ Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians*, 192.

³⁸ Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 223. Missionaries in southwestern Nigeria relied on a number of books besides the Bible for their evangelization efforts, which suggests that the *onibuku* label goes beyond the Abrahamic reference to more generally acknowledge the print culture of the missions. Additionally, as Peel notes, the Yoruba word for book is *iwe*; therefore, the word *buku* has a different etymology.

³⁹ The nineteenth century also saw a flowering of Nigerian writing in Arabic, particularly within the Sokoto Caliphate. Scholars produced texts on topics of religion, jurisprudence, history and politics. Ali Abubakar argues that there was decline in this literary production during the twentieth century because of an influx of printed Arabic from Egypt and the introduction of British rule in Northern Nigeria. See Ali Abubakar, “Arabic education in Nigeria 1750-1960” (PhD dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1972), cited by Murata Aderemi, “Arabic Writing in Nigeria: A Critical Study of Style in Selected Arabic Prose by Nigerians” (PhD dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1988), 10.

the Yoruba language, also by Crowther, was published by Seeleys of London for the CMS in 1852. Thomas J. Bowen, a missionary with the Southern Baptist Convention, published *Grammar and dictionary of the country and people of Yoruba* as part of the United States Smithsonian's *Contribution to Knowledge* series in 1858. The CMS did not have any competition for its textbooks series until the Wesleyan Missionary Society published *Iwe Ekini ti ede Yoruba (Book One of the Yoruba Language)* in 1871. In 1884, Seminaire des Missions Africaines scholar Noel Baudin authored *Essai de grammaire de langue Yoruba*.⁴⁰

While most print material was produced in Great Britain and imported to Yorubaland between 1840 and 1910, missions also established local printing presses that allowed them to turn out small-scale news sheets, church agendas and other items for their communities. They were anxious to control every facet of the print culture of southwestern Nigeria as it developed. Henry Townsend shipped the first printing press in Yorubaland to Abeokuta with the assistance of his brother, the printer James Townsend, around 1854.⁴¹ Henry, who did not have any training on the machine, figured out how to put together the small hand press and began turning out religious pamphlets and invitations ordered by the mission community. He had the assistance of Nigerian acolytes like James Ede, who learned to use the printing press alongside Townsend.⁴²

⁴⁰ All of the bibliographic data is found in Ogunshẹyẹ, *Bibliographical Survey of Sources*, 100, 116. Ogunshẹyẹ lists three more Yoruba grammars, published in 1896, 1898 and 1908.

⁴¹ George Townsend, ed., *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Townsend* (Exeter: James Townsend, 1887), 86. Rev. Hope Waddell and Samuel Edgerley have the distinction of establishing the first press in Nigeria. They used the press to produce *First Book of Spelling and Reading Lessons for the Old Calabar Mission Schools* by Waddell and *Miqua Usuana Esup Nwed [School Closing Songs]* by Edgerley, in 1846. Other early presses included the Niger Delta Mission Press, established at Bonny in 1856, the Qua Ibo Mission Press at Ibuno, and the Niger Mission Press at Shonga.

⁴² O.G. Tamuno, "Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey," *Nigerian Libraries* 9, no. 1–2 (1973): 2.

In the early stages of Yoruba-language writing and printing, Townsend and other missionaries focused almost exclusively on producing educational texts so that converts and potential adherents could read the ‘good news’. Townsend was the strongest proponent among the early missionaries of producing print literature within Yorubaland; he believed that the development of a print culture was key to missionizing efforts, because reading was a civilizing practice that allowed converts to educate themselves and others in the ways of Christian living. His primary project was to publish a Yoruba-language newspaper from his station at Abeokuta. *Iwe Irohin fun awon ara Egba ati Yoruba (Newspaper for the Egba and Yoruba Peoples)* was first issued in 1859 and included articles in both English and Yoruba.⁴³ It predictably included a significant amount of church news, such as the transfers of missionaries and notes on baptisms, marriages and deaths among Anglican congregants. News from Britain, carried to the West African coast by traders, missionaries and civil servants, featured prominently, as did the frequent educational articles covering political and geographical topics. Once a month, *Iwe Irohin* provided readers with information on the trade values for items in Abeokuta and the coastal ports.⁴⁴

The newspaper also reported on conflicts in the ongoing Egba-Dahomey wars and the intricacies of local politics. Missionaries were inexorably drawn into the politics of their host communities when they began establishing missions in different towns. The

⁴³ Like Tucker’s description of the Egba, Townsend’s choice of newspaper title acknowledges multiplicity of Yoruba identities. The title distinguishes the residents of Abeokuta from other people of the region, although the newspaper connected them through their shared use of the written language. Further, Townsend’s editorializing in *Iwe Irohin* points to his involvement in local politics; he vocally supported the Egba coalition in their conflicts with Dahomey and other Yoruba states.

⁴⁴ Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, “Iwe Irohin and the Representation of the Universal in Nineteenth-Century Egbaland,” *History in Africa* 32, no. 1 (2005): 299.

CMS, for example, had missionaries posted at Abeokuta, Ijaye and Ibadan and when war broke out between Ibadan and Ijaye in 1860, the Europeans generated print propaganda that took the sides of the particular communities they were evangelizing. As a number of strong militaries fought for dominance, missionaries and their agents served as pawns in the complex political maneuvering.⁴⁵ Townsend advocated for the Egba in the Ijaye War after Abeokuta joined against Ibadan, publishing editorials in *Iwe Irohin* and going so far as to send letters to the CMS headquarters in London to plead their case.⁴⁶

In his memoirs, compiled by his brother George, Henry Townsend says of the newspaper: “My object is to get the people to read, i.e., to beget the habit of seeking for information by reading. It is very difficult.”⁴⁷ Townsend’s frustration with the lack of a reading culture stemmed from his reliance on print material as a conduit of the civilizing and evangelizing mission. Karin Barber argues that African oral genres are constructed to be quotable and to require exegesis. In these ways, oral texts are made “objects of attention and recognition.”⁴⁸ Missionaries, contrary to their belief, were not teaching their African converts a new way of interacting with texts just because they provided a written document. Townsend did not understand that African oral genres contained the same ability to engage, inform and stimulate an audience. The author of *Brief Sketches of C.M.S. Workers* credited Townsend with teaching over three thousand people to read during his two decades in Abeokuta, but he could not teach them to purchase his

⁴⁵ J.F. Ade Ajayi, “A New Christian Politics? The Mission-Educated Elite in West African Politics,” in *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 251.

⁴⁶ Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 133.

⁴⁷ Townsend, *Memoir of the Rev. Henry Townsend*, 85.

⁴⁸ Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*, 76.

recommended reading material or to rely on it solely as their mode of information and communication.⁴⁹

Although missions had always faced subdued hostility to their evangelical work, their continual interference in local politics eventually led to more vocal opposition to their presence. When physical protestation flared up against missionaries in Abeokuta in 1867, demonstrators drove the CMS missionaries and their Christian congregants from the town. The multi-day action, called the Ifole (“house breaking”), included the destruction of the CMS printing press, bookshop, school building and library.⁵⁰ Participants dismantled the physical components of the Christians’ literary mission, taking down fences, walls and roof supports and stripping the buildings of their belongings – the accouterments of ‘civilization.’⁵¹ Townsend had continued to publish *Iwe Irohin*, despite the tenuous position of the mission, until this event. As a result of the Ifole, all missionaries were temporarily expelled from Abeokuta. Under the threat of continued violence, most of their converts followed. By targeting the institution of mission print culture, the Egbas expressed their displeasure with the interference of the isolated Christian faction within the larger community by destroying its visible physical presence.

In the years following the Ifole, those who were against the Christian presence continued to protest, as the churches in Abeokuta were still operating under native agents.

⁴⁹ Emily Headland, *Brief Sketches of C.M.S. Workers* (London: James Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1897), 9. Headland also claimed that Townsend knew nothing about printing prior to assembling and using his own press, likely a bit of mythologizing considering his brother was a well-known printer in England.

⁵⁰ Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 12–13.

⁵¹ Anonymous, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 4 (1868): 61. The author described how thoroughly demonstrators dismantled the physical objects of the missions, even removing the hats from missionaries’ heads as they stood and watched the destruction.

Mission schools also continued their classes. It seems that the CMS focused on literacy projects with renewed vigor in the wake of the Ifole. Members of the CMS Yoruba Mission first proposed establishing a more central printing press and bookshop in Lagos in 1868. The next year, the Yoruba Executive Committee appropriated £25 to construct a bookshop next to the Lagos Anglican cathedral. A Corporal Smith, an officer who had been discharged from the West India Regiment, initially ran the bookshop. According to CMS missionary H.B. Thomas, who later researched the history of Nigerian bookshops, a printing press was operational in Lagos from this early date; he noted that the CMS Yoruba Executive Committee had difficulty obtaining ink and Yoruba type in order to run it.⁵²

⁵² H.B. Thomas, "History of Nigeria Bookshops," manuscript, n.d., 1, RCMS 144, RCS. Thomas, a CMS missionary and literature worker who had been stationed in Uganda for many years, conducted interviews and collected archival materials throughout Nigeria in preparation of the manuscript cited here.



Figure 2. From the National Archives of Nigeria, Ibadan. This late-nineteenth century photograph of a CMS bookshop in Lagos indicates the various groups taking part in the local print culture: Christian missionaries, elites (represented by one M. da Costa, likely an Afro-Brazilian) and the Yoruba-speaking public (represented by the man on the far left, Ojo).

In Abeokuta, an 1869 court case was brought before the chiefs to ban the use of Yoruba-language texts in the mission schools because the books were termed “Yoruba” rather than “Egba.” The Reverend W. Moore is quoted as defending the texts by saying,

By the term Yoruba, the good people of England intended the whole of the tribes who understand each others’ language in this part of Africa, although their dialects may somewhat differ . . . and that it was quite open to each tribe, if so they pleased, to call the translation by its own name: the Atas might call it the Ata book, the Egbas the Egba book, &c.⁵³

Thus, despite the protest against Christian interference (and, consequently, British government interference), these outsiders were eventually accepted back into local communities. As the above example illustrates, Yoruba speakers were not protesting

⁵³ Anonymous, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 5 (1869): 39.

because they opposed the Christians' books, but because they wanted to have input in the production of such important texts. They recognized the social implications of the imposition of a print culture. In response to the reactions of local inhabitants, Christian missionaries had to negotiate the terrain of identity formation, creating and promoting their own ideas of ethnicity through literature.

The Making of a New Elite

Despite their small numbers, mission-educated students and African missionaries, literate in both Yoruba and English, became a new elite – a community of self-identified Yoruba Christians who felt empowered to take a role in politics and make demands of the new colonial government. This process began in the early 1840s when most Africans re-entering the region through Lagos had their roots in Yoruba-speaking areas. Having been forcibly taken from their homelands, they found themselves being identified as cohesive ethnic units abroad. Within the kingdoms of southwestern Nigeria, individuals valued their identities as residents of particular towns or kingdoms above a connection with the wider region. Despite their shared origins and language family, towns/kingdoms had divergent religious, social and language practices. In places like Brazil, Cuba and Sierra Leone, foreigners overlooked these distinctions in favor of the commonalities of language and geographical origin. The individuals whom they labeled as Aku or Nagô, therefore, found it expedient to claim membership in a larger Yoruba ethnic group because it raised their political status and enlarged their community abroad.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ J. Lorand Matory, "The English Professors of Brazil: On the Diasporic Roots of the Yorùbá Nation," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 01 (1999): 72–103.

Once in Nigeria, these Yoruba men and women often remained connected to the church, even serving as missionaries and pastors, but used their literacy skills and publishing opportunities to begin developing their own cultural identity. Christian converts watched missionaries harness the ‘magic’ of writing through their reliance on books and letters; special spiritual powers were often attributed to missionaries, who were said to be able to access them through these texts.⁵⁵ Recognizing the power of print to connect people and spread messages, the literate elite utilized writing as a passageway to greater social influence. This is not to say that Yoruba-language writing and publishing was an overt effort at resistance against colonial rule, since the Yoruba participants in this print culture were typically highly integrated into colonial culture by their mission educations. Instead, Yoruba writers, printer/publishers and readers were attempting both to preserve cultural practices that seemed under the threat of regulation and to celebrate Yoruba histories before they were lost to missionary or colonial revision.

An “educated Christian subculture” existed by the 1880s.⁵⁶ Its members were concentrated in Lagos, Badagry and Abeokuta, close to the coast, because they could easily maintain their trade and social contacts within the Atlantic world network from these towns. Also, most returnees settled in the same towns as their traveling partners rather than going back to their places of origin.⁵⁷ The rulers of the Yoruba states tolerated the Saro and their Christian practice, but demanded the continued allegiance of their own citizens. Until the 1880s, the chiefly class associated conversion to Christianity with the

⁵⁵ Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 223.

⁵⁶ Kristin Mann, “The Dangers of Dependence: Christian Marriage among Elite Women in Lagos Colony, 1880-1915,” *The Journal of African History* 24, no. 1 (1983): 39.

⁵⁷ In many cases, political leaders refused to allow returnees to settle in their kingdoms, for fear that they would serve as agents of the British.

rejection of their religious and political authority and the avoidance of social obligations to the convert's community. While the conflating of Christianity and rebellion may not have been accurate, and there is little record of religious converts causing political trouble, it served to keep the Western educated elite relatively isolated until the late nineteenth century.

It is through these elites that the emergence of a writing—and reading—culture from 1840 to 1910 is inextricably tied to one of the most salient changes to social practice during this period: the construction of a Yoruba ethnic identity.⁵⁸ Yoruba ethnogenesis, driven by the reformulation of regional politics and the emergence of this new elite, intersected with the development of the reading/writing culture that emerged out of the mission schools.⁵⁹ Literacy became an important negotiating tool and a marker of identity for the African elites and British officials who would rule throughout Nigeria's colonial period. As the growing power of the British colonial administration in the 1880s, coupled with the development of scientific racism, threatened their economic and social authority, traditional and new elites sought partly to resist British encroachment together by mobilizing under a common Yoruba identity.⁶⁰ They began to form alliances after they

⁵⁸ Christopher Fennell provides a useful definition of ethnogenesis: “The term ethnogenesis refers to the general process by which members of a population form a shared meaning system and a related social order that transform them in a new, identifiable culture group.” Christopher Fennell, *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 2.

⁵⁹ It is important to note that the process of ethnogenesis began in the nineteenth century but took place over many decades and was ultimately concluded by the necessity of utilizing a majority ethnic identity to compete for resources in independent Nigeria from 1954 onward.

⁶⁰ Michel Doortmont, “The Invention of the Yorubas: Regional and Pan-African Nationalism versus Ethnic Provincialism,” in *Self-Assertion and Brokerage: Early Cultural Nationalism in West Africa*, ed. P.F. de Moraes Farias (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, 1990), 103.

recognized their shared interest in protecting their privilege within the British hierarchy, in which white missionaries and administrators automatically held the upper hand.

The Yoruba identity was manifested most visibly through the use of the Yoruba koiné, as recorded in the CMS Bible translation. In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Christian converts and those educated in mission schools could speak this Yoruba dialect, and so it was positioned as the language of the elite.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the position of the missions remained tenuous despite their success in building schools and printing presses throughout Yorubaland; inhabitants of southwestern Nigeria accepted their offering of literacy skills and publishing know-how while remaining skeptical of their religion.⁶² While many of the Yoruba elite embraced Christianity as a central component of their identity, they began to view missionaries (both European and African) negatively as imperialist representatives of the British government. As Christian converts grew in financial and political strength, even though they remained outside of traditional power structures, they turned away from political affiliations with missionaries.⁶³ The rapport cultivated between these groups deteriorated by the 1880s, when members of the elite began to see the latter as limiting their potential for political and economic power.

⁶¹ Fagborun, *Yoruba Koine*, 33.

⁶² Ostracized mission schools were unsuccessful in recruiting students from among the African political elite. Their students came mostly from the lower classes.

⁶³ Lamin O. Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 162. Sanneh argues that because “Protestant missions in their translation work made mother tongues the centerpiece of mission,” they encouraged independence of African Christian practice rather than close adherence to Western religious dictates.

During the nineteenth century, missionaries insisted that their schools teach in “the mother tongue” because it proved an effective tool of evangelization.⁶⁴ However, by the turn of the century, the status of the Yoruba language changed as colonial penetration into Yorubaland made English a more advantageous language. The use of Yoruba was so interwoven with missionary endeavors that by the early twentieth-century it began to be viewed as limiting. Most of the educated Yoruba elite instead considered English the language of commerce, education, and upward mobility in the colonial world; they utilized it for recording news and maintaining records, as well as communication. Nevertheless, mission schools continued to teach the language because it helped to define their Yoruba mission field. As a marker of ethnic identity, the Yoruba language was also important to the British colonial administration, which was attempting to conduct its rule indirectly through the people it had identified as the ‘traditional’ ruling class.

Although much of the scholarly literature revolves around the Christian returnees and the converts who joined their ranks in Yorubaland, they were not the exclusive authorial voice of a Yoruba identity. Muslim returnees also played a role in the process of Yoruba ethnogenesis. A significant number of slaves exported through Lagos during the nineteenth century were Muslim Hausas from the states to the north of Old Oyo; they returned in large numbers to Lagos after 1835.⁶⁵ Just as Christian elites used print to record an ethnic history and represent themselves to the colonial rulers, these Muslims

⁶⁴ Timothy Adedeji Awóníyí, “The Yoruba Language and the Formal School System: A Study of Colonial Language Policy in Nigeria, 1882-1952,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 1 (1975): 53.

⁶⁵ Paul Lovejoy, “The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 46.

often had literacy skills that they used to produce their own literature.⁶⁶ Although their Christian counterparts in coastal Nigeria outnumbered Muslim elites, they vocally opposed the Christianization of the Yorubaland colonial administration. For example, Muslim scholars in Nigeria continued to protest the imposition of the Latin alphabet for written Yoruba even after the government determined that the standardization of the Yoruba language had been finalized.⁶⁷ These scholars attached great importance to the use of an Arabic alphabet for writing in Yoruba because they recognized that print practices could shape social discourse taking place in that language. In an age in which, as Peel argues, Christianity literally “wrote itself” into the emerging concept of Yoruba ethnicity through mission involvement in creating the language, Muslim scholars were attempting to preserve some sense of self within a Yoruba ethnic identity.⁶⁸

Advocating cultural nationalism alongside Christianity, the local Nigerian press became a powerful force in the 1890s, reflecting the growing independence of the Yoruba elite from their mission origins. Publishing helped to consolidate a new elite community by creating a print literature used by the group to demonstrate membership through ownership, reading and discussion. During the late nineteenth century, the import and export of paper and printed materials in Nigeria had not reached a high enough volume to

⁶⁶ The Muslim Literary Society and the Juvenile Muslim Society, two Lagos organizations made up of educated young men, established a branch of the Ahmadiyya Movement in 1916. The Ahmadiyya encouraged the growth of their religious community through modern schooling. They sponsored the translation of the Quran into Yoruba and the publication of religious literature in both Yoruba and English. Stefan Reichmuth, “Education and the Growth of Religious Associations among Yoruba Muslims: The Ansar-Ud-Deen Society of Nigeria,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 26, no. 4 (November 1996): 371–372.

⁶⁷ Isaac A. Ogunbiyi, “The Search for a Yoruba Orthography Since the 1840s: Obstacles to the Choice of the Arabic Script,” *Sudanic Africa* 14 (2003): 77.

⁶⁸ Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, 289; Reichmuth argues that Muslim leaders entered into the business of education later than Christians because they were less isolated by virtue of their ties to the business and political networks of the Yoruba chiefly class and so saw formal schooling as unnecessary. See Reichmuth, “Education and the Growth of Religious Associations,” 366.

be noted in *Payne's Lagos Almanack and Diary*.⁶⁹ However, a number of such products must have been entering the colony, since they were specifically exempted from tariffs if imported with the permission of the colonial administration.⁷⁰ Nigerian-owned printing operations began to compete with the dominant mission presses for local work. They generally did not take large, complicated jobs, instead focusing on the production of pamphlets, magazines, posters, invitation cards, bills of sale and other shop material. The 1878 *Almanack* lists the commercial presses operating in Lagos, two of which were owned by Nigerians: Richard B. Blaize of Breadfruit Street, Thomas King & Co. in the Marina and the Church Missionary Society Printing Press.

The Lagos press provided a forum for the African Christian elite to air their grievances. Cut off from wider society by their Europeanized aspirations and considered by Europeans to be culturally inferior, they sought support in the pages of newspapers. Early newspapers included *The Anglo-African*, founded by Jamaican immigrant Robert Campbell in 1863, and the *Lagos Times*, founded by Richard Beale Blaize in 1880.⁷¹ Both of these men established printing presses to produce their newspapers and took on private jobs to earn additional income. They were able to utilize the skills of young Nigerian printers who had received training in the mission presses and were migrating to Lagos to find work with the growing colonial and business administration based there.

⁶⁹ John A. Payne, *Payne's Lagos Almanack and Diary for 1878* (London: W.J. Johnson, 1894), 65. It is interesting to note that J. Otunba Payne's *Almanack* was itself printed in London. However, Andrew M. Thomas of Lagos did publish Payne's *Table of Principal Events in Yoruba History* in 1893.

⁷⁰ Tamuno, "Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey," 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3; Campbell hired Yoruba printers from Abeokuta and Blaize was trained at Campbell's press. Blaize had also worked as a government printer from 1865 to 1875. *Ibid.*, 5.

Not only were newspapers easier than books to produce locally, they proved popular in the growing urban market and production was inexpensive enough to allow proprietors to turn a profit.⁷² Local newspapers published editorials criticizing the colonial administration and church leaders alike, histories of Yoruba places and practices and essays exploring cultural traditions. Newspapers gave these writers the space to begin lively debates about matters concerning their unique experiences, even as they were self-consciously trying on a “Yoruba” ethnic identity. The Saro and Aguda journalists who wrote and published the early newspapers in southwestern Nigeria played a major role in the process of Yoruba ethnogenesis. When these Africans returned to southwestern Nigeria, they carried this collective identity with them. The newspapers reflected their viewpoint and projected it to an expanding audience.

In addition to newspapers, the Yoruba intelligentsia popularized the concept of a singular Yoruba identity through non-religious pamphlets and books such as Samuel Johnson’s English-language *History of the Yorubas*. Johnson, an Anglican priest, first approached the CMS with his completed work in 1898, but was discouraged from pursuing publication by the Yoruba Mission Finance Committee. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), based in London, also refused to publish such a lengthy work. A CMS committee in London had the final say, asking Johnson to transform his historical manuscript into a schoolbook by shortening it and translating it into Yoruba. Publishers wanted books that, first and foremost, would be profitable. Yoruba-related books had a relatively small but rather captive audience, so publishers in both Nigeria and Britain looked for Yoruba-language manuscripts with potential for profit. Johnson

⁷² E.A.D. Apeji credits newspapers with stimulating the growth of reading audiences in Nigeria, since they were more easily attainable than books. See Apeji, “The Contributions of Multinational Publishers,” 69.

did not comply and it was only after his death that his brother, Obadiah, finally contracted with a British publisher to have it printed in 1921.⁷³ The book came to serve as a major source in Yoruba historiography.

Despite the mission origins of a standardized Yoruba language, market forces were at work in the production of the Yoruba printed literature from its inception. Michel Doortmont argues that the CMS Press, perhaps the most prolific of the presses in Nigeria during the period, chose projects based heavily on potential profitability, rather than religious concerns. After all, “ideology and good business practice can go hand in hand.”⁷⁴ Early producers of Yoruba-language literature for Nigeria focused their efforts on religious and education publishing and found relatively prosperous markets among mission school pupils and graduates. Since Yoruba served as the language of Christianity, as taught within the exclusively mission-run schools of the nineteenth century, there was little need for these publishers to commission literature in English specifically for Yoruba (or Nigerian) audiences. Teachers of English assigned textbooks that were written for British students as well as simplified ‘Basic English’ versions of British novels and drama that were produced especially for the colonial market. Language teachers had Yoruba textbooks available for instruction, but little other material apart from religious texts.

Then, as the community of readers and writers expanded, particularly in urban areas, print became less of a missionary endeavor because individual authors and private publishers saw the benefits of participating in a print culture. Akintunde Adesigbin

⁷³ Doortmont, “Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History,” 50–51.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

established Tika-Tore Printing Works in 1910, when he left his job in the Government Printing and Stationery Department.⁷⁵ Located in Lagos, it was the first African-owned commercial press that was not tied directly to the newspaper business.⁷⁶ Adesigbin's success with Tika-Tore encouraged growth in the Lagos print industry. He was able to open a branch in 1918, complete with a new printing press.⁷⁷ Other early presses included Ife-Olu Printing Works, Lisabi Press and Kash and Klare. With the expansion of the reading market and the growth of these Nigerian presses, authors began publishing regional histories like M.C. Adeyemi's Yoruba language *Iwe Itan Oyo (History of Oyo)* in the 1910s.⁷⁸ A group of mission-educated men in Ibadan established the *Egbe Agba-o-Tan (Association of "Elders Still Exist")* in 1913-14 and immediately formed a publications committee commission works that documented regional history and oral knowledge in the Yoruba language. They sponsored the publication of *Iwe Itan Ibadan (History of Ibadan)* and *Iwe Itan Oyo*. These producers expanded the vocabulary of standardized Yoruba through loan translations and thereby made it more useful for general literature. Fagborun suggests that this period (1900-1959) was when writers first considered the benefits of Yoruba as a "metalanguage."⁷⁹ And with new ways to publish their works, Yoruba authors were able to find local audiences to support their writing in greater numbers. While English-language publications were available throughout Nigeria,

⁷⁵ Tamuno, "Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey," 5.

⁷⁶ C.C. Aguolu, "The Foundations of Modern Libraries in Nigeria," *International Library Review* 9 (1977): 472.

⁷⁷ Tamuno, "Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey," 4.

⁷⁸ Toyin Falola and Michel Doortmont, "Iwe Itan Oyo: A Traditional Yoruba History and Its Author," *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 2 (1989): 301-329.

⁷⁹ Fagborun, *Yoruba Koine*, 41.

the volume of Yoruba-language material that was also in circulation indicates a substantial community in the process of creating its own print culture. The students who gained literacy through these materials became the reading audience of the early twentieth century.

Literacy and Print Culture

With little interference from the British or local leaders, Christian missions were running more than fifty schools throughout southwestern Nigeria by the end of the nineteenth century. Small mission staffs utilized the Lancasterian education system, so popular in Britain at the time, to teach large numbers of students; older students who had been trained as “monitors” conducted the lessons of younger students. Following the pedagogy they developed in Sierra Leone, missionaries taught the lower classes in Yoruba and then switched to English for the more advanced classes.⁸⁰ Missionaries believed that teaching younger students in the “vernacular” was the most effective way of producing literate pupils who would be able to read their Bibles and other religious instructional literature. However, this system allowed for untrained pupils to teach in Yoruba, while the best teachers and the brightest students advanced to higher levels where they studied English.⁸¹ Students at the upper primary and secondary levels needed English in order to train for colonial administration jobs and religious leadership roles.

Mission education boards set the school curriculum and missionaries themselves wrote or

⁸⁰ Mora Dickson, *The Powerful Bond: Hannah Kilham, 1774-1832* (London: Dobson Books Limited, 1980), 210. Kilham, an African language advocate and missionary to Sierra Leone, wrote, “Let each one who can read these lessons teach another to read” at the top of her language lessons. In August 1831, she received a group of Aku girls at the mission and was excited to give them reading lessons in Yoruba. See p. 233.

⁸¹ Awóniyi, “The Yoruba Language and the Formal School System,” 65, 69–70.

commissioned the textbooks. In this way, missionaries dictated who would receive a Western education and what those students would read; the Christian missions exclusively controlled the means of literacy in Yorubaland during the nineteenth century.

When the Lagos government passed its 1881 Education Bill, the first attempt at regulating the education system in the Yoruba interior, the various missions universally opposed it. They had made reading in the Yoruba language a key component of their curricula, but the Education Bill stated that all teaching should be conducted in English. Because primary school education was the largest and most expensive tool of evangelization for the missions, individuals who had previously welcomed British infiltration of Yorubaland decried the intrusion of the Lagos government. Missionaries focused on Yoruba-language literacy in order to raise congregations of Bible readers and they viewed the government's demand for a new English-language curriculum as an attempt to usurp their influence and use the school to train workers rather than Christians.⁸² The two sides compromised by arranging the curriculum so that teachers instructed students in Yoruba for the first three years of schooling and in English thereafter.

Even after much of Yorubaland had been incorporated into the Lagos Colony by 1886, the majority of schools remained under missionary organizations until the colonial government was able to assert more institutional control. Government officials viewed Yoruba-language education as pragmatic for young students, but they also wanted to train English-speaking workers. While "mother tongue" teaching was emphasized in the lower classes, it appears to have been ineffective. Students were confused by the unregulated

⁸² Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, 257, 290.

teaching methods and they rarely received effective Yoruba-writing instruction. School authorities added to this confusion. For example, Metcalf Sunter, the first European Inspector of Schools of the West African Settlements, stated in an 1884 report that “the native must and will know English in spite of all well-meaning but diseased notions [to teach Yoruba].”⁸³ On the other hand, a series of government-commissioned reports criticized the state of Yoruba-language education, a result of the tendency to de-emphasize Yoruba speech and writing in favor of English-language work because they were considered “natural” skills of the students. Furthermore, it was reported that students did not enjoy reading Yoruba-language books.⁸⁴

References made to ‘the classics’ of English literature by African authors in the British colonies indicate that they focused on these works in school, rather than any creative or philosophical books by Africans.⁸⁵ This type of education, driven by a common European colonial ideology, was intended to train low-ranking civil servants as “not-quite-natives.”⁸⁶ The schizophrenic nature of this colonial education policy was the result of its dual goals: to ‘modernize’ Yorubaland and, at the same time, preserve difference so as to maintain cultural separation between colony and metropole. As a result, students had difficulty reading deeply in either English or Yoruba. Henry Carr, the Inspector of Schools, reported: “As to reading with intelligence there is much yet to be

⁸³ Awóniyì, “The Yoruba Language and the Formal School System,” 65.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

⁸⁵ Stephanie Newell, “Entering the Territory of Elites: Literacy Activity in Colonial Ghana,” in *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 219.

⁸⁶ Mikihiro Moriyama, *Sundanese Print Culture and Modernity in 19th-Century West Java* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2005), 62.

done. The rendering of English into Yoruba has in many cases been the rendering of English words – not ideas – into the vernacular.”⁸⁷

The 1887 Education Ordinance, which applied only to the Colony of Lagos, established the grants-in-aid system, in which schools could voluntarily join, be inspected by the government and receive funds if they passed the inspection. Mission schools could simply opt out of the grant-in-aid scheme and not have to undergo inspection. The curriculum of the primary schools paralleled that taught in Britain; students studied arithmetic and English, along with history, geography, spelling, grammar, drawing and Yoruba. The Education Proclamation of 1903 created a Board of Education, a Director of Education and a staff for the Southern Protectorate. It also instituted a general syllabus for all assisted schools.⁸⁸ Following this new legislation, the government established additional schools. Nevertheless, it continued to serve education needs in only a limited capacity. A new Education Ordinance was passed in 1908, merging the various rules and proclamations that dictated education policy throughout southern Nigeria into a single grants-in-aid program.⁸⁹ The Yoruba educated elites who enrolled in these schools in order to obtain the qualifications of education and reading literacy that were so highly prized by their British rulers believed that they were equipping themselves to become the next generation of political and economic leaders. However, by the 1910s the British colonial government had articulated a policy of intentionally barring educated Africans

⁸⁷ Henry Carr, *General Report for the Year 1894 on the Schools in the Colony of Lagos* (Lagos: Education Office, 1895), 3, cited in C. O. Taiwo, *Henry Carr: An African Contribution to Education* (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1975), 22.

⁸⁸ Taiwo, *Henry Carr*, 53.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

from local government administrations.⁹⁰ When the colonial administration combined the North and South Nigerian Protectorates in 1914 and continued to consolidate its rule through the use of British officials in the higher ranks of the civil service, western-educated elites had to pursue other outlets for their ideas about progress and development in their communities.⁹¹

Conclusion

Most Yoruba authors came out of the missionary-education system torn between being a part of the civilizing mission and a desire to maintain practices designated as traditional. Before writing local histories or other works they often served a “literary apprenticeship” in missionary organizations, writing religious and educational material for mission publications.⁹² Similarly, the reading public of southwestern Nigeria in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was composed of the graduates of the mission schools. As the principal providers of formal education, these missionaries directed literacy education and the provision of literature as an extension of their evangelical project. Missionaries to Yorubaland never intended to provide more comprehensive education to their African subjects; literacy and the reading materials provided to literate Africans were meant to support the narrow function of Christian instruction. Although challenged by the educated Africans who would emerge out of their schools and the

⁹⁰ Ruth Watson, “‘What Is Our Intelligence, Our School Going and Our Reading of Books without Getting Money?’ Akinpelu Obisesan and His Diary,” in *Africa’s Hidden Histories: Everyday Literacy and Making the Self*, ed. Karin Barber (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 65.

⁹¹ Jeremy White, *Central Administration in Nigeria, 1914-1948: The Problem of Polarity* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981), 21.

⁹² Ruth Compton Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men: The Changing Missions of Three Professional Women in Asia and Africa, 1902-69* (University of British Columbia Press, 2002), 98.

growing power of the British colonial government, they dictated the terms of literacy in southwestern Nigeria.

As missionaries committed the Yoruba language to paper, imposing on it a constellation of grammatical structures, they believed it contained knowledge about what it meant to be Yoruba. The CMS missionary J.B. Wood wrote that “a careful study of this class of words [Yoruba adverbs], especially in their connection with the words they are used to qualify, would, like the study of Yoruba substantives, compound verbs, and it may be added, of prepositions, help greatly towards obtaining an insight into the operations of Yoruba mind.”⁹³ Education in the Yoruba language was supposed to preserve and inculcate in the students some measure of ‘native morality’ that had been saved from a culture untainted by European debauchery. The English language, meanwhile, promised both power and uncertainty. At a meeting of the Anglican leadership in Lagos in 1907, the bishops noted that “[English education] has not developed much originality, a taste for reading, a courageous, manly and patriotic spirit, nor a desire for, and love of Manual Labour and Mechanical Toil. It has not influenced to any great extent the moral character of the people...”⁹⁴ The politics of language were playing out in these negotiations over language education and in the work of building up a publishing industry in southwestern Nigeria. The local reading public that had emerged by the early twentieth century became the focus of external missionary, government and philanthropic agencies that targeted it through the provision of literature.

⁹³ He also writes, “Yoruba prepositions are interesting, in that they illustrate the mental attitude of the Yoruban in his contemplation of the bearing of one object in its relation to another.” See J.B. Wood, *Notes on the Construction of the Yoruba Language* (Exeter: James Townsend, 1879), 41, 44.

⁹⁴ Report of the Proceedings of the First and Second Sessions of the First Synod of the Diocese of Western Equatorial Africa, held at Lagos, July 1906 and May 1907, p. 136 in Taiwo, *Henry Carr*, 89.

2 Composition by Committee: Literature and Book Provision between the World Wars

Scholars of the early twentieth century considered Yoruba one of the African languages worthy of study, “that the African mind and soul may reach their highest development through these.”¹ They believed that the language was widely spoken and contained enough richness of meaning and expression to be labeled sufficient for literary development. This chapter focuses on the agencies that produced books for Nigeria, but the archives are also windows into the reading lives of Africans, including much commentary on the audience that Europeans were aiming to woo. Books were not simply imposed on the Nigerian reading public. Faced with “an aggressively extractive external economic system,” a description that strongly applies to the book market, African book producers, distributors and readers negotiated what and how they would read.² The fervor with which European officials went about creating and promoting particular types of literature between the First and Second World Wars suggests that they were responding to the strong preferences and practices of African readers, who were *not* necessarily doing as Europeans wished.

As the British colonial government consolidated power in southwestern Nigeria during the opening decades of the twentieth century, and attempted to do the same throughout the region, it exposed the area to a new set of actors for whom the work of molding African social life became a kind of mission. This group, which was made up of

¹ Canon F. Rowling, “The Mother Tongue for African Readers,” *African Affairs* XXXVIII, no. CL (January 1, 1939): 134.

² Richard J. Reid, *A History of Modern Africa: 1800 to the Present* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 3.

academics, scientists, politicians and philanthropists, created both formal and informal networks through which they peddled their influence in Africa and Europe. I will examine the creation of the systems that stimulated the growth of a reading public in southwestern Nigeria. Colonial actors felt that they had a responsibility to provide suitable literature to Nigerians, through both the production and provision of texts. This chapter also explores the responses of readers in southwestern Nigeria to these literature schemes.

First, I will outline the implementation of colonial rule in southern Nigeria, including the development of an official education system and the textbook industry that accompanied it. The reading community in southwestern Nigeria was confined almost exclusively to schools during the period under consideration. I will then survey the work of the civil associations that began to take an interest in African languages and literatures as colonial rule became firmly established there between the First and Second World Wars. I will trace the continuing efforts of mission societies to direct the production and propagation of literature in Africa, again taking up the case of southwestern Nigeria specifically. The CMS, in particular, was loath to give up their place as the arbiter of appropriate literature for readers in southwestern Nigeria. I will argue that the colonial system of Indirect Rule, with its decentralized organization and focus on localized governance, made it possible for these civil associations to dictate the agenda for literature production and provision in colonial Nigeria. The emergence of the International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa (ICCLA) and the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IILAC) was an important factor in the

creation and development of new reading communities in southwestern Nigeria, and in Africa as a whole.

Under the colonial system of Indirect Rule, the ICCLA and IIALC took an interest in the development of the Yoruba language for education and literature production. The concept of a Yoruba identity became politically useful in this period because it defined a unified community in which such Western-controlled associations could invest resources of philanthropy and scholarship. I will argue that participants in these associations were motivated by a desire to preserve the particularities of the cultures and languages they encountered, which they equated with an innocence and connate morality in African societies.

Finally, mindful that “the very analytic framework of colonialism tends to privilege the effects of external interventions over intrinsic dynamics,” I will explore the actions and reactions of Nigerians as they encountered and participated in “the literature project.”³ While it is difficult to ascertain accurate literacy rates in early twentieth century southwestern Nigeria, a report in the February 1914 *Church Missionary Intelligencer* suggests “that nearly 60,000 reading primers were sold, indicating something like that number of persons learning to read.”⁴ The same report indicates that 38,000 out of an estimated two million Yoruba people were Christians, suggesting that the reading audience was already expanding outside the confines of Christian influence. The building of a reading audience in southwestern Nigeria was a process that was both a continuously external and internal one; Nigerian readers appropriated the tools of literacy for their own

³ Tilley, “Africa, Imperialism and Anthropology,” 4.

⁴ *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 65 (1914): 90.

means – for education, religious practice, career advancement – even as those tools were being developed and evaluated by outside entities.

Language Education and Textbook Provision

In 1914, Britain amalgamated the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria with the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. Until then, Lagos had maintained a unique status as a colony, meaning that its inhabitants were subjects of the British Crown while Africans who resided in the Protectorates remained subjects of their own rulers. The Colonial Office in London was reluctant to get further involved in the administration of the interior and to take on any kind of financial obligations there. However, driven by French interest in extending their control of the hinterland region and by colonial officers who believed it would be pragmatic to connect Lagos to the valuable city of Kaduna, the British government intensified its campaign to claim the entire colony as its own.

After the Amalgamation, the territory outside of Lagos was divided into Northern and Southern Provinces that corresponded with the pre-1914 boundaries. The two lieutenant governors of the North and South reported to Frederick Lugard, who had been appointed Governor-General of Nigeria in 1912. Lugard had served as High Commissioner of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria from 1900 to 1906, where he utilized the system of government already in place under the Sokoto Caliphate to claim sovereignty for the British Crown over the territory and extract taxes and other revenue.⁵

The method of Indirect Rule worked well in Northern Nigeria because the structure of the

⁵ James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958), 45–51. Lugard’s administrative positions in India and Uganda influenced his philosophy of colonial rule. Through the course of his work, Lugard developed the idea of the “dual mandate” of colonial rule, meaning that Britain brought civilization to its colonies, and as a corollary expanded its economic interests in these places.

emirate states could be maintained, with African government officials simply reporting to their new British superiors.⁶ However, the effectiveness of Lugard's order to apply Indirect Rule to the entire Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was uneven at best. Every province was administered separately in an attempt to take advantage of the local systems of governance in the application of Indirect Rule. British Residents, who operated with little oversight from the central government, supervised the smaller areas that had been assigned to Native Administrations. This system ensured Nigerian disunity, because colonial officials conducted their governmental affairs based on methods of rule established prior to 1914, which had been negotiated within the strictures of local pre-existing political organization. Societies without hierarchal political structures were assigned warrants chiefs and some with their own chiefs were amalgamated into single political units. As a result of the inconsistent application of Indirect Rule, even subjects of a unified Nigerian Colony and Protectorate experienced vastly different forms of British colonial rule. Furthermore, Christian missions and other organizations were able to have a great deal of influence with little interference from the colonial government.

The application of Indirect Rule to southwestern Nigeria occurred more fluidly than it did in the eastern part of the Southern Protectorate because the British-run government could integrate obas, the heads of councils of chiefs who collectively ruled municipalities throughout the region, into their hierarchical organization. In eastern Nigeria, on the other hand, British officials had a more difficult time identifying leaders in the widespread acephalous political systems. The British residents and district officers who made up the colonial bureaucracy relied on the Native Administrations to carry out

⁶ White, *Central Administration in Nigeria, 1914-1948*, 27.

the daily business of rule. During the colonial period, the presence of European missionaries and administrators added new layers of complexity to social negotiation in the public sphere of Nigerian life. While African leaders in Nigeria were generally dismayed by the interventions of colonialists, relationships between Africans and British were defined by expediency for both sides. According to the historian A.I. Asiwaju, inhabitants of the Yoruba communities under British jurisdiction were generally satisfied with the division boundaries introduced between 1889 and 1914 because they protected smaller municipalities from the unwanted influence of former centers of political power.⁷ The largest organizational entities within the Southern Province were these divisions, followed by smaller districts. The district boundaries were more controversial because they established rigidity in the political system of southwestern Nigeria that had not existed before. Previously, skilled political and military leaders could raise chiefdoms to prominence in a mutable hierarchy. After 1900, when Southern Nigeria became a British protectorate, the chiefdoms in towns that served as district headquarters attained authority over all other chiefdoms. Nevertheless, this organizational scheme allowed the British colonial government to operate a relatively decentralized system that was consistent with Lugard's philosophy of Indirect Rule.⁸

British Residents in the Southern Nigeria Protectorate served directly under the Lieutenant-Governor of the region. They presided over the smaller provinces, where District Officers and Assistant District Officers aided in the day-to-day administration. All of these officials worked in relative independence from the Colonial Office in

⁷ A. I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889-1945: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1976), 62.

⁸ See Frederick Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 96.

London, the overseeing body of the colonial administration. The paramount chiefs, district chiefs and sub-chiefs of the local Native Administrations, the colonial government's terms for the localized African leadership within each district, composed the lowest ranks of this decentralized hierarchy. Under the system of Indirect Rule, British colonial officers served in an advisory role for the Native Administrations, although they had the power to overturn chiefs' decisions or have them deposed.⁹ Because the Colonial Office expected these various authorities to act autonomously, they had the flexibility to implement government policies in a variety of ways.

Government agencies began to displace the mission societies, once the most powerful representatives of Europe on the African coast, as governing bodies, because these agencies incorporated African leaders into policy implementation, even if the Africans were granted little power beyond their districts. Native Administrations provided a place for the British government to quarantine the ruling elite. Under Indirect Rule, the British Colonial Office codified systems of authority in a way that favored administrations already in place. The burgeoning class of educated elites had no place in these systems. Sometimes they became part of the hierarchy of the mission organizations that had educated them or formed their own progressive unions, but they were – for the most part – excluded from government avenues of power.¹⁰

Native Administrations throughout the newly united Nigerian colony had to carry out their work with the little funding that was provided by taxation. They received almost no financial support from the central government in Lagos, which was working on a slim

⁹ Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, 72.

¹⁰ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 29. Often called “youngmens” associations, these groups were not organized by age, but by a common concern about the limitations placed on their social promotion.

budget allocated by the Colonial Office in London. Local officials established tax collection systems at their own discretion, retaining fifty percent of the income for their community programs and handing over the rest to the central government.¹¹ This funding did not amount to much. Therefore, although these colonial Native Administrations were the final authorities in all civil matters for their districts, they continued to rely on mission societies in the areas of education and book provision because those organizations were well placed to do the work and benefited from overseas funding.

As the colonial government endeavored to establish itself as the highest ruling body in Nigeria, it demonstrated legitimacy by exerting greater oversight in civil, ecclesiastical and political affairs. While the government created an Education Department in 1903, it ran very few of its own schools, instead distributing funds to and regulating mission schools. By 1912, the Southern Nigeria Colony and Protectorate had an estimated 5,682 students in government schools, 15,426 students in assisted schools and 30,000 students in unassisted schools.¹² After unification in 1914, missionaries in southwestern Nigeria pushed back against colonial government initiatives in an attempt to exercise control over what they viewed as their most important sphere of influence—education. In fact, missions began investing even more heavily in their schools after the First World War in an effort to ensure the continued relevancy of their religion in the face of growing criticism of colonial rule.¹³ Christian denominations oversaw most of the schools in southwestern Nigeria, which they had been building since the 1840s. As of

¹¹ Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, 121.

¹² Taiwo, *Henry Carr*, 69.

¹³ Ogbu Uke Kalu, “Nthangata: African Christianity in the World Wars, 1914-1945,” in *Christian Missions in Africa: Success, Ferment and Trauma*, ed. Wilhelmina Kalu, Nimi Wariboko, and Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2010), 129.

1923, there were 43 government schools, 178 assisted schools and over 2,000 unassisted schools in Lagos and the Southern Provinces.¹⁴ Once missionaries had gained entrance into the region, towns began recruiting various denominations to establish missions in their areas, not for their evangelical message, but because these outsiders were viewed as “agencies of literacy.”¹⁵ Revered F. Melville Jones described an encounter in Southern Nigeria during which a man was asked if he was a Christian and his affirmative proof was “Why, it is six months since I bought a slate!”¹⁶ For Christian converts in Nigeria during the early twentieth century, education and religion were one and the same. Therefore, communities volunteered labor and materials in order to attract mission stations, with their promise of creating a literate class who could participate in church, private business or colonial administration.¹⁷

Under British rule, schools in southwestern Nigeria operated relatively independently of the provincial government’s Education Department. With little central oversight, standards of proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics in these schools varied widely. Southern Nigeria’s Education Department approved the reading lists for all grade levels and administered exit exams, but did little else to control the type and quality of literacy education that Nigerian students received. The central government ran a few schools, most notably King’s College, established in 1909 in Lagos. Mission

¹⁴ *The Independent Nigeria: October 1, 1960* (Pacific Printers, 1960), 19.

¹⁵ Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*, 240.

¹⁶ F. Melville Jones, “The Mass Movement to Christianity in Southern Nigeria,” *CMS Intelligencer* LXV (February 1914): 91.

¹⁷ Johannes Fabian, *Language and Colonial Power: The Appropriation of Swahili in the Former Belgian Congo, 1880-1938* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 70. Fabian describes how the colonial administration of the Belgian Congo desired to control the development of such a “middle class.” In the Congo, as in Nigeria, this was accomplished in part through language policies.

schools, meanwhile, continued to educate most of the Nigerians enrolled in formal schools through the grant-in-aid system. Missions came to increasingly rely on this government funding, which was reluctantly allocated, in order to meet the demand for Western education.

Education policy, and therefore the contours of the reading public, was shaped by a utilitarian philosophy, i.e. that Africans needed a practical education more than a literary one. Lugard explained: “The primary function of education should in my judgment be to fit the ordinary individual to fill a useful part in his environment with happiness to himself, and to ensure that the exceptional individual shall use his abilities for the advancement of the community, and not to its detriment, or to the subversion of constituted authority.”¹⁸ For Lugard and other colonial officials, an African’s “useful part” was also subordinate to a European manager. They promoted a utilitarian technical education because they thought that literary education resulted in Africans ‘above their station,’ a way of being illustrated for these Europeans by the Lagos press, who were critical of the colonial government. These writers, editors and publishers were using the tools of literacy to record and broadcast their dissatisfaction. Technical education, on the other hand, would produce mechanics, blacksmiths, drivers and the myriad other workers needed to industrialize Nigeria. Gaurav Desai observes, “It is clear that the discourses on black rationality and mental ability were often propagated against the backdrop of the pedagogical project.”¹⁹

¹⁸ Frederick Lugard, *Political Memoranda, 1913-1918* (London, 1919), Memo No. 4, paragraph 9, in Taiwo, *Henry Carr*, 81–82.

¹⁹ Gaurav Gajanan Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 27.

African demands for British schooling grew after the formalization of Nigeria's colony status. The British Colonial Office recognized that it needed to spend money on education in Africa if it was to create a stable workforce that would make returns on the colonial investment. Therefore, in 1924 it established an Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa to create a cohesive education policy for its African colonies. *Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa*, a memorandum issued by the Advisory Committee in 1925, relied heavily on the work of the American Phelps-Stokes Education Commission. The Phelps-Stokes Fund formed its African Education Commission in 1920, to build on the groundwork laid by their 1917 study of education for African-Americans. Members of the Commission traveled along the west coast of Africa, from Sierra Leone to South Africa, for nearly a year. The final report of their survey promoted agricultural and practical industrial training over a classical literary education, parroting the recommendations they had made for African-Americans.²⁰ These recommendations ran counter to the desires expressed by many Africans, who recognized classical British schooling as the key to entering powerful working relationships with the British. Although colonial governments did not implement specific advice in the Commission's report, such as the adoption of certain vocational curricula, increased supervision of schools and differentiation in types of schooling for social classes, the Phelps-Stokes Commission greatly influenced the formulation of the Colonial Office's education policy, as stated in *Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa*.²¹

²⁰ Edward Berman, "American Influence on African Education: The Role of the Phelps-Stokes Fund's Education Commissions," *Comparative Education Review* 15, no. 2 (June 1971): 134. Berman also observes that popular opinion had crystallized in Britain, viewing the education of Africans and African-Americans as one-in-the-same.

²¹ *Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936), 7.

The Christian missions advocated for a bilingual education system because they believed that the use of African languages would allow them to install cultural values in young students that aligned with Christian teachings. Canon F. Rowling, co-author of the *Bibliography of African Christian Literature*, suggested that “mere book learning ... when it is in the mind only [i.e. in a second language], cannot produce the character and right conduct which should be the aim of all true education.”²² In order to provide ‘true education,’ mission teachers in southwestern Nigeria conducted their classes exclusively in Yoruba during the first two years of formal schooling; English instruction began in the third year, during Standard One, and it became the primary language of instruction in Standard Four. Upon reaching the rarified highest levels of education, mission educators believed that Yoruba students needed the English language in order to have access to greater economic opportunities and a more complex moral universe that they felt could not be understood in the Yoruba language.²³

The Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa issued its draft memorandum on ‘The Place of the Vernacular in Native Education’ in 1925 and published the official version in 1927. Missionaries had parsed the role of languages in their education systems, and in southwestern Nigeria they had come to the conclusion that Yoruba should be used exclusively for the early years of school and English thereafter. The Advisory Committee, however, stated that the very purpose of education was “to preserve and develop a vernacular as the medium of expression and of

²² Rowling, “The Mother Tongue for African Readers,” 134.

²³ Awóniyi, “The Yoruba Language and the Formal School System,” 68, 75.

communication in adult life and as the vehicle of native thought and culture.”²⁴ They recommended that educators use African languages until the upper levels of secondary schools, which few students would actually reach, with English taught only as a subject.

When asked to provide feedback on these recommendations, educators working in Yoruba-speaking areas rejected the Advisory Committee’s plan. The Education Committee of the Wesleyan Methodist Nigeria District Synod provided a host of reasons for utilizing English as the language of instruction for older students in Yoruba-speaking area schools. They argued that Yoruba was inadequate for use in subjects such as geography and mathematics, that English could not be taught properly in a few hours per week, and that it was difficult for European teachers to learn Yoruba well enough to give instruction in it. Their more compelling case appealed to the relationship between Britain and its African colonial dependents; the Wesleyan Education Committee asserted that an official policy of teaching in the vernacular would create a minuscule class of privileged English speakers and impede development in the colonies by failing to train Africans who could participate in British-run government and commerce, thereby weakening the “bond of Empire.”²⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the Education Committee observed that Yoruba speakers, and Africans more generally, *wanted* to speak English, seeing it as “the door of opportunity.” The Advisory Committee’s recommendation to teach exclusively in African languages “seems on the surface to slam the door in [their] face.”²⁶

²⁴ Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, “Memorandum No. 3, ‘The Place of the Vernacular in Native Education,’” July 1925, 203, CO 879/121, NAUK.

²⁵ “Enclosure in ‘Memorandum from the Education Committee of the Nigeria District Synod of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society,’” March 15, 1926, 547, CO 879/121, NAUK.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 548.

At the March 1927 Education Conference of the Northern Provinces, the Lieutenant-Governor gave an address on languages. He singled out Yoruba, Hausa and Kanuri as the languages “sufficiently valuable and developed that they ought to endure ... with a view to spiritual and moral progress.”²⁷ By preserving those languages through teaching them in schools and developing literatures in them, he argued, students would be exposed to the benefits of the attendant civilizations. As noted above, in colonial discourse there is a moral value attached to languages that are labeled ‘rich’ enough to support a *written* literature. The Lieutenant-Governor suggested that the hundreds of other languages spoken in Nigeria could simply be subsumed by these three. He goes on to make the case that, despite the social value of certain African languages, English and Arabic are the only languages used in Nigeria that are sufficient for expressing the more complicated ideas and complex literature of higher education and the ruling class. The Lieutenant-Governor was expressing the same idea proposed by missionaries, that African languages preserved a rich culture heritage and lessons of morality, but were not sufficient for expressing complex ideas. The resultant practice was that producers of literature in Yoruba focused on the book markets for children, students and newly literate adults because these were considered simpler and they reserved English for more complicated projects.

Reverend F. Melville Jones, the Anglican Bishop of Lagos, also responded to the enquiry of the Advisory Committee on Native Education. Relating an anecdote in which a Yoruba speaker asked him for an English translation of a Yoruba-language book so that the reader might understand it better, the bishop cited “the poverty of vernaculars in West

²⁷ “Educational Conference, Northern Provinces Nigeria,” n.d., 3, GCPP Fegan 3/1, GCA.

Africa” as a reason for teaching in English.²⁸ He believed that African languages did not contain the richness of vocabulary necessary to support a meaningful literature. This conflict over the use of English, as opposed to African languages, centered on the perceived ability of languages to serve different purposes. Even proponents of teaching in African languages believed those languages suffered from a paucity of meaning; therefore, they assumed that at more advanced levels, students would need to utilize European languages. However, they believed in a richness of culture inherent in African languages that was worth preserving, particularly by writing down the so-called best ones.

Beginning in the 1930s, the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures commissioned a series of surveys on textbooks for African students “in order to provide material which will be helpful in the preparation of new books and will also show what additional books are most needed.”²⁹ The authors of the surveys concluded that each language group needed their own text and – following the Phelps-Stokes philosophy – these texts should be of a practical nature. A consequent focus on agricultural and industrial training is reflected in the literature published by Christian missions for the African market during the period. Their literature production was shaped by this philosophy of ‘practical learning’ rather than ‘literary learning’ for Africans, who were considered unable to handle the demands of more rigorous academic training.

Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa stated that the purpose of African education was to “promote the advancement of the community as a whole through the improvement

²⁸ F. Melville Jones, “Enclosure 2 in No. 44: Abbreviated Reply of the Right Reverend F. Melville Jones, The Bishop of Lagos,” 1926, CO 879/121, NAUK.

²⁹ D. G. Brackett and M. Wrong, “Some Notes on History and Geography Text-Books Used in Africa,” *Africa* 7, no. 02 (1934): 199.

of agriculture, the development of native industries, and the improvement of health.”³⁰ Educators felt that textbooks written specifically for Africans were important tools for achieving these goals.

While a generalized book market existed in southwestern Nigeria, it consisted mostly of textbooks in Yoruba and general literature in English. British publishers provided almost all of these books, including some abridged and simplified versions of English novels that were created for the export market. A 1924 report on the CMS Lagos bookshop lists the sale of 90,000 reading textbooks, 10,000 Yoruba-language Bibles and 9,000 prayer books, with an increase by over 2,000 in sales of Yoruba-language Bibles and hymnals from the previous year. The store only sold 769 town histories and other non-religious texts during the same period.³¹ Yoruba language textbooks also included transcribed oral tales and poems that provided lessons on local history and cultural norms.³²

Despite the emphasis of missionaries and colonial administrators on ‘practical knowledge,’ Nigerians wanted the end goal of their education to be literacy in English and access to British corridors of power. So great was the Nigerian focus on English language learning that, beginning in the 1920s, there was growing discussion amongst Europeans in newspapers and missionary journals about how to promote Yoruba language usage. A missionary’s editorial in the CMS journal *In Leisure Hours* expressed

³⁰ Colonial Office Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies, *Educational Policy in British Tropical Africa: Memorandum Submitted to the Secretary of State for the Colonies* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1925), 4.

³¹ Anonymous, *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 76 (1925): 95.

³² Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1999), 18. Alawiye, the most famous Yoruba language textbook series, was begun by J.F. Odunjo in 1943.

consternation about what was perceived as a preference by Yoruba speakers for English over their “mother tongue.”³³ Western-educated Yoruba speakers viewed the situation from a different perspective, protesting that school administrators’ reluctance to teach English was a form of oppression because it limited African elevation within the colonial hierarchy. Without a strong command of English, these students would never graduate to the most lucrative careers in colonial administration. They understood that the English language had a material value that influenced social relations. The Nigerian students who demanded an English language education recognized that language was a gateway to economic resources, services and social position.³⁴ In the same manner, the missionaries seemed to imbue the Yoruba language, translated into written text, as a physical barrier to the immoral aspects of ‘the civilized world.’

The International Institute in Nigeria

The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IIALC) was established in 1926 in close partnership with the London School of Economics. University of Berlin professor of linguistics Diedrich Westermann served as its first director, along with French ethnographer and colonial administrator Maurice Delafosse.³⁵ They headed a board of distinguished scholars and colonial administrators; Frederick Lugard was appointed Chairman and Hanns Vischer, Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Education in British Tropical Africa, was Secretary-General. The

³³ Awóniyì, *Yoruba Language in Education, 1846-1974*, 90.

³⁴ Judith T. Irvine, “When Talk Isn’t Cheap: Language and Political Economy,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 2 (May 1989): 249, 255.

³⁵ Delafosse died later that year and was replaced by his compatriot Henri Labouret, another colonial government official. In 1945, the organization changed its name to the International Africa Institute.

anthropologists Charles Seligman and Bronislaw Malinowski were among its renowned members. The Institute's development occurred in tandem with the proliferation of ethnographic fieldwork in Africa, between 1920 and 1960.³⁶ The IALC was tasked with coordinating scholarly work on Africa and serving as a clearinghouse for the resultant research through the medium of the journal *Africa*. Vischer, who had played a vital role in its foundation, viewed the IALC as an agency that could support the practical implementation of the Advisory Committee on Education's recommendations.³⁷ For him, that most importantly meant adopting a common orthography for African languages that would allow interested parties to coordinate and produce a greater amount of literature.

Based on the Institute's initial five-year plan, administrators hoped more generally that the IALC would promote the use of social science research in colonial policy-making. The IALC sought funding through individual and company subscriptions, government grants from Europe and its colonies and Christian mission support. In 1931, it received a large grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation later provided support. Although the Institute was firmly grounded in the elite academic circles of Europe, it initially aimed to partner with organizations already working in Africa, particularly missionaries who were conducting practical language study for evangelization. It was founded as a pan-European consortium, actively supported by British, German and French members. These scholars and government administrators were already powerful proponents of an African agenda, in which they advocated for European political and philanthropic involvement in the

³⁶ Tilley, "Africa, Imperialism and Anthropology," 4.

³⁷ Clive Whitehead, *Colonial Educators: The British Indian and Colonial Education Service 1858-1983* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2003), 129.

continent, when they joined the IALC. Therefore, upon its creation, governments and other organizations began consulting the Institute for guidance in policy creation. After all, “ethnographic knowledge was . . . central to the construction of colonial states.”³⁸

Members’ interests in language systems and social anthropology aligned with the agenda of the missionary societies who influenced the early work of the IALC.³⁹ By the late 1920s, missionaries had already been running schools and integrating themselves into the colonial politics of Africa for a century. They had much at stake, in terms of both spiritual and financial investment, in the creation and formalization of African colonial states. The IALC served as a forum for promoting an agenda to the increasingly powerful colonial governments that emphasized education and the formation of a participatory African reading public. Westermann advocated for expanding the availability of education to produce African students who could read in their own languages, because “the spiritual heritage of the African is to a large extent preserved in and transmitted through the language, and it intimately bound up with it.”⁴⁰ He and his missionary allies believed that, in the midst of the turbulence of colonialism, Africans could best find their moral grounding through the maintenance of proverbs, parables and other spiritual wisdom in their mother tongues.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the IALC was an effective means of promoting these ideas.

³⁸ Tilley, “Africa, Imperialism and Anthropology,” 7.

³⁹ Westermann himself had been a missionary in Togoland.

⁴⁰ Diedrich Westermann, *The African: Today and Tomorrow* (London: International Institute of African Languages and Cultures, 1939), 252.

⁴¹ The British Colonial Office subscribed to the same view. In its 1925 memorandum on *The Place of the Vernacular in Native Education*, it stated that “African mothers teach their children to speak by singing to them nursery rhymes and songs, or telling them riddles and stories which reflect their inmost feelings; carrying on the history and tradition of the family and the tribe from which the child unconsciously receives

It is telling that the first orders of business for the Institute were the creation of a standard orthography for African languages and the collection of African-language textbooks for the London office.⁴² The Executive Committee, on Westermann's suggestion, planned to study the books in order to create guidelines for publishing African-language works on functional topics such as hygiene, agriculture and forestry. This type of output, including practical texts in English and French for free translation into African languages, was intended to court the interest of the colonial government in their work. They also planned to support the publication of manuscripts that recorded oral traditions and ethnographic information. Works in African languages utilized Westermann's *Orthography*, which had been issued in 1927 as the first in a series of Memoranda from the IALC. During a visit to West Africa in 1934, Methodist missionary W.J. Platt promoted use of the IALC orthography, promising that it "aims at simplicity, utility, exactitude."⁴³ He seemed displeased to report, "Nigeria, however, does not take kindly to it."⁴⁴ The cost of transcribing and republishing all of the literature already available in Yoruba would have been too high. Those working in Igbo also refuse to use the new orthography, basically dictating that Southern Nigeria would not participate in the program.

Mission stations in Africa and their home offices had sponsored the writing and publication of most of the early books for African markets and they wanted to maintain

his outlook on life." See Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa, "Memorandum No. 3, 'The Place of the Vernacular in Native Education,'" 201.

⁴² "Minutes of Meeting of 6th Executive Council," December 19, 1928, 6, IAI 1/3, LSE.

⁴³ "Report of the Visit of the Rev. W.J. Platt to West Africa," 1934, 12, ICCLA Box 17 (520), SOAS.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

their position as the providers of literature on the continent. The IALC supported that ambition, working hand-in-hand with mission organizations on projects in orthography, African-language writing and publishing. However, the scholars of the IALC also expanded this agenda to include scientific anthropology studies of African subjects, which colonial governments desired to gather as a component of their development of imperial rule. Isaac Schapera's *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (1938) for example, was commissioned by the Bechuanaland Protectorate Administration and published by the IALC.⁴⁵ A review of the book in *Africa* opened with the proclamation that "one of the most important ways in which anthropology can be used in the service of African administration is by the systematic investigation of the customary law of the African peoples."⁴⁶ The scholars who so ardently advocated for the scientific study of the continent, while dismissive of Africans' capability to participate in such work, saw themselves as a bulwark against a more pernicious racism that insisted Africans were biologically determined to remain uncivilized.⁴⁷

The minutes of early Executive Board meetings, held annually in venues across Europe, indicate that IALC members viewed their own anthropological interests in African cultures as intersecting with practical government policy-making particularly in the arena of 'native' education. Members focused on identifying African languages that could be taught over a relatively wide geographic area, standardizing African languages orthography, collecting textbooks already being produced in African languages and

⁴⁵ See Isaac Schapera, *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 1994), the International African Institute's reissue of the classic text, with a new introduction by Simon Roberts.

⁴⁶ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, "Review of A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom by I. Schapera," *Africa*, July 1938, 11, no. 3 edition, 364.

⁴⁷ Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, 25.

creating model texts for use by colonial education boards. In a 1927 memorandum by Westermann on textbooks in African schools, he called for attention to the “serious and urgent problem” of textbooks that are not “adapted to the life and mind of the people who they are intended to teach.”⁴⁸ Unlike the Christian missions, who hoped to shape the education agenda through their control of schools and textbook production, Westermann identified colonial governments to be the leading partners in addressing this issue. This period was a tipping point into the establishment of powerful colonial governments. The IALC carried favor with metropolitan and colonial governments by taking over where missions left off, providing the tools and justifications for imperial exploitation. The IALC, as articulated by Westermann, believed that education must inculcate Africans with a working knowledge of European languages, and therefore European cultures, even as it preserved the moral framework of their own cultures. Colonial governments needed therefore to take a stronger role in enforcing centralized education policies. In 1929, the Nigerian government invited Westermann to undertake extensive travels throughout the colony in order to advise them on linguistic matters. The trip was fully sponsored by the government.

To identify particularly African practices of the “life and mind”— this was the intention of the IALC. Scholars and administrators shared a desire to describe and then dictate the physical and moral concerns of their subjects, so as to preserve that which they deemed important to the African utilitarian and spiritual worlds. Westermann’s memorandum on the Institute’s program to publish a series of scholarly monographs made the case for this work:

⁴⁸ “Textbooks for Africa,” n.d., 1, IAI 1/8, LSE.

Also in the interest of the Africans themselves it is of greatest importance that this [research] material should be collected, as in many cases it will be the only witness of their past and the most essential heritage of their racial genius. Most of this heritage is in danger of being lost under the new order of things, and we should do what we can to prevent this.⁴⁹

Westermann's own book, *The African Today and Tomorrow*, was an introduction to the series. In it, he traces the changes wrought by colonial intervention on African societies and encourages social scientists, missionaries and colonial administrators to collaborate on solutions to stabilize these societies.⁵⁰ That Frederick Lugard, Governor-General of Nigeria, wrote the preface, served as a kind of political endorsement for the book, signifying Westermann's agenda as both scholarly and practical. The book functioned as an early policy statement of the IALC. Decrying the destruction of African cultures by Europeans, Westermann argued that their beneficial aspects could be identified and preserved through the study of African languages.

The IALC rarely included Africans in administration, scholarship or policy making, but recognized their usefulness as ethnographic informants, with their intimate knowledge of social customs and their language capabilities. To this end, the Institute announced an annual competition for African-language literature beginning in 1929.

Administrators claimed that they had established it "with a view to interesting Natives in the study of their own languages, and encouraging them to become authors."⁵¹ However,

⁴⁹ Diedrich Westermann, "Proposals for the Publication of Monographs," Memorandum, May 1927, 3, IAI 1/8, LSE.

⁵⁰ Benoît de L'Estoile ascribes this concern to a particularly British practice of social anthropology, which "offered a language for a redefinition in cultural terms of Indirect Rule." African societies in the midst of disintegration, after all, demanded colonial intervention. See Benoit de l' Estoile, "Internationalization and Scientific Nationalism: The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IALC) Between the Wars," in *Ordering Africa: Anthropology, European Imperialism and the Politics of Knowledge*, ed. Helen Tilley and Robert Gordon (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 96–97.

⁵¹ "1928 Executive Board Meeting Minutes," n.d., 6, IAI 1/8, LSE.

African scholars and writers had long participated in the creation of new orthographies and publications in African languages. Samuel Crowther and his African colleagues produced much of the Yoruba language literature, as discussed in the previous chapter. The IALC's call-to-action for African writers ignored the history of African contributions to orthography, grammar and literature development. There seems to be an element of disingenuousness to the IALC's contest announcement, since the literature it generated had a clear ethnographic value for European scholars and provided the institute with a great deal of material for publication.

Missions had sponsored much of that work, and the IALC relied heavily on them to coordinate the collection of manuscripts for the competition. The Executive Committee recognized that missionaries were the vanguard for education and literacy development in Africa, having long promoted reading and writing as keys to civilization and Christianity. The IALC reframed this task to promote literacy as a way for educated Africans to take part in the study of their own people. "It is our duty," Westermann wrote, "to let the Native speak for himself where this is possible, in order to see his way of expression, to understand his reasoning, and to pay attention to his explanation of facts and views."⁵² African converts and those seeking education opportunities in mission schools had played key roles in the development of reading publics through the early twentieth century and now the IALC wished to mobilize these people to record their cultural practices and beliefs in African languages.

The annual competition was intended to generate manuscripts that could be published in order to increase the amount of vernacular literature available to African

⁵² Westermann, *The African*, 14.

readers. The Institute also planned to retain the submissions for language and ethnographic study temporarily at their headquarters in London.⁵³ In their initial call for submissions to the Prizes for Books in African Languages, the IALC postulated that “it is the pride of every nation to possess a literature in its own language.”⁵⁴ The Executive Committee and anthropologists more generally surmised that reading publics were defined through their belonging to a particular ‘nation’ of people who spoke the same language. At the same time, the orthography and grammar systems for Yoruba and other African languages were often constructed in isolation from the people speaking them; many languages were simply disregarded by scholars as being ineffectual for writing literature. IALC members seemed to ignore the complicated relationship between languages and the social identities that could extend beyond or exist apart from them. For these reasons, the IALC’s effort to mobilize reading audiences through the singling out of particular languages, with a focus on languages that were ethnographically valuable, was bound to be ineffective.

The first competition, set for 1930, solicited manuscripts of 15,000 to 50,000 words in the Xhosa, Swahili, Hova (i.e. Malagasy), Kongo and Akan languages. The IALC received 45 entries. In subsequent years, the Executive Committee chose from two to five different African languages for the annual contest with a total of 36 languages judged between 1930 and 1940. Although the IALC did not have the funds to publish any of the winning manuscripts itself, it hoped to stimulate the production of African-language literature that could be published within the continent. Manuscripts were sent to

⁵³ “IALC Minutes of 16th Meeting of the Executive Council,” n.d., 13, IAI 1/16, LSE.

⁵⁴ IALC, “Prizes for Books in African Languages,” announcement, n.d., ICCLA Box 13 (515), SOAS.

London, where experts – European and African – in the competition’s languages examined them and reported to the panel of judges, made up of IALC members. Judges could award first, second and consolation prizes, with the stated purpose of making awards “of such a character that they will assist in raising the standard of work in the future.”⁵⁵

The Executive Committee sought entries that they deemed to be authentically African, by virtue of their language competence and subject matter. They accepted both translations and original works, especially rewarding those submissions that showed “any originality or touch of imagination.”⁵⁶ Although IALC members were particularly keen to see creative manuscripts, they believed that translation work was an important measure in the production of literature in new languages. They also prized historical works, of which they received a number, for their anthropological information. Margaret Wrong, an Executive Committee member, even suggested that “it is obviously desirable that [African writers] should be encouraged in this [writing of local histories] and should be given training and assistance needed for the work.”⁵⁷ Entries included histories, folklore, translations of biblical parables and original fiction. It is striking that, by 1940, none of the manuscripts had achieved a First Prize; the judges’ panel instead handed out a number

⁵⁵ *IALC Competition for Books in African Languages*, Report on Eighth Competition, May 1938, IAI 1/23, LSE.

⁵⁶ “IALC Minutes of 8th Executive Council Meeting,” n.d., 8, IAI 1/3, LSE.

⁵⁷ Brackett and Wrong, “Some Notes on History and Geography Text-Books Used in Africa,” 203.

of cash awards for Second Prize and consolation prizes of books, which were chosen by the recipients.⁵⁸

The Executive Committee selected Yoruba as one of the eligible languages for the fourth competition, in 1933. They received eighteen manuscripts, the most by far for the three languages under consideration. However, they awarded only one Second Prize in Yoruba, for the Reverend T.A.J. Ogunbiyi's *Yoruba Oracles and Their Modes of Divination*.⁵⁹ The CMS (Lagos) Bookshop published Ogunbiyi's manuscript under the same title in 1940. His study was one of a number published between 1920 and 1960 that documented and interpreted the Ifá corpus.⁶⁰ It serves as an example of exactly the type of output the IALC hoped to generate through their competition; an African author wrote *Yoruba Oracles* in his so-called mother tongue, the manuscript recorded local African cultural practices and it was eventually published, without any financial support from the IALC.

However, Ogunbiyi's book raises the question of to what extent the reading public demanded literature in African languages, since the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop – a foundational part of the Anglican Yoruba-language mission – published it in a translated English form. IALC competition participant J.D. Chikwel, in a letter asking the Institute to assist in publishing his Igbo-language manuscript, stated “the book will be very popular if printed, and there will be a great demand especially if it is printed in

⁵⁸ “So often one would like to give a consolation prize but we have to avoid giving the impression that everybody who sends in an entry gets a prize of some sort.” D.S. Brackett, letter to E.D. Earthy, June 6, 1936, IAI 8/3, LSE.

⁵⁹ “1934 Executive Board Meeting Minutes,” n.d., 16, IAI 1/16, LSE.

⁶⁰ Jacob Olupona calls these authors “religious nationalists” who were responding to interpretations of Ifá by Christian missionaries in the early twentieth century. See Jacob K. Olupona, “The Study of Yoruba Religious Tradition in Historical Perspective,” *Numen* 40, no. 3 (September 1993): 246.

English.”⁶¹ The IALC prioritized the Competition for Books in African Languages in their agenda because it was supposed to foster a literature that they were convinced would help to preserve and promote positive ‘native’ morals. Westermann, in making a case for their work, attributed this way of thinking to Africans themselves, who he said believed that “language is a valuable possession the loss of which would impair the individuality and integrity of the group.”⁶² These policy-makers felt that African students would gain both a solid foundation in literacy through the study of their mother tongues *and* a moral grounding in a time of upheaval. Yet, the many African demands for literacy in English suggest that these new readers did not subscribe to the belief that their cultures could only be preserved in their own languages.

Westermann captured the tension, felt by European colonialists, between the desire to preserve “beneficial” aspects of African cultures and the hope that they would be irrevocably transformed for the better by colonial rule: “The introduction of students into the full realm of European culture loses all its meaning if it implies a neglect of the African’s own life and language and thus isolates him from his own people.”⁶³ Members of IALC resolved this tension by dividing Africans into two groups. The educated elite were supposed to conduct their lives in European languages and serve as independent ethnographic informants for scholars. Everyone else was to be educated in African languages, with their training consisting of agriculture, home care, hygiene and other practical topics. It was this second group whose moral uprightness would be protected by the production of a literature in African languages for them.

⁶¹ J.D. Chikwel, Letter to IALC, November 7, 1933, IAI 13/1, LSE.

⁶² Westermann, *The African*, 252.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 262.

Mission Efforts Expanded

Christian missions remained at the forefront of efforts to produce a corpus of suitable literature for African reading audiences, even as they entered into coalitions with secular organizations and the colonial governments who had consolidated their rule throughout the continent. In areas where they had a hand in the development of written scripts and the publication of early manuscripts, such as Yorubaland, the missions especially aspired to maintain their influence over reading audiences. The CMS (Lagos) Bookshop, for example, acquired an industrial printing press in 1913 in order to increase its production quality and capacity within the colony.⁶⁴ It became the principal press to serve southern Nigeria, particularly the colonial government and business interests in Lagos. A three-story building replaced the original CMS Lagos bookshop in 1917. The streets radiating out from the Bookshop building even became known as the ‘CMS Bookshop’ area, an appellation that remains to the present day. It should be noted that despite the CMS Bookshop’s dominance of the local market, the mission’s administration continued to contract with printers back in London to produce their longer and more important books.

The CMS Bookshop press drew Nigerian printers to its Lagos neighborhood and attracted so many orders that it passed some off to the small commercial presses surrounding it. In the early twentieth century, local Yoruba printers installed second-hand presses in shops throughout the neighborhood to take advantage of the centralization of

⁶⁴ Doortmont, “Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of Yoruba History,” 44.

the print industry.⁶⁵ However, because mission presses had a long reputation within southwestern Nigeria and an established partnership with the colonial government and because they could rely on financial support from their religious constituents, they had important advantages over their local secular competition. Mission presses had better equipment and a greater capacity for print work. They were able to compete successfully for contract jobs from various colonial government offices, which accounted for the majority of print commerce in Nigeria.

Given their advantageous position in the Nigerian market, it is not surprising that the Christian mission societies continued to see themselves as responsible for the provision of morally uplifting literature for African reading publics. Reverend C.E. Wilson suggested in his bibliography of African languages, which served as the starting point for a new Christian literature scheme, that commissioning more works of fiction from African authors “would probably be valuable not only in enriching native literature generally, but as a contribution to Folk Lore and the study of the African mind.”⁶⁶ Christian literature workers thought of their project as a two-way street: it would expose African readers to a civilizing influence and allow the project managers to gain insight into “the African mind” by studying African writing and reading preferences.

In 1920, the Conference of Missionary Societies in Great Britain and Ireland (also known as the CBMS) began discussions to form an organization that would foster the production of literature for African audiences. Their goal came out of the movement of

⁶⁵ Local printers relied more heavily on freelance work, which might include self-published pamphlets or local newspapers. The congregation of so many printers in a single neighborhood may have stimulated print production because it provided a resource for local authors to self-publish their manuscripts.

⁶⁶ *Christian Literature in African Languages*, April 1920, 3, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

“liberal missionary reformism” that was transforming Protestant attitudes towards the mission field in the early twentieth century.⁶⁷ These missionaries, having accomplished their goal of educating and converting a flock, recognized that they needed to maintain a partnership with the educated elite in order to have continuing influence in the colonial state. Part of this effort was to engage converts in creating suitable literature for African readers. Missionaries wanted to control the content of all religious and secular reading material. Wilson’s survey of the available literature in African languages concluded:

[A] few very useful books have been produced by native authors, and there is here a wide field hardly touched as yet. Even if the limitations of the writers made such books suitable only for cognate tribes, yet their value would be great as expressing ideas from the native point of view.⁶⁸

This statement outlines the driving philosophy of the Christian literature movement in Africa: a desire to identify an essentialist African point of view that corroborated the Christian evangelical education mission. This project included both the economic and moral uplift of the people. It is important to note that the demand for a literature that conformed to Christian moral sensibilities did not come exclusively from outside the continent, but was generated in part by African readers. The missionaries, colonial government officials and laypeople who supported the growth of Christian literature especially aimed to produce reading material that would describe their program of “suitable” Christian living in African languages.

The CBMS’s Sub-Committee on Christian Literature in Africa was established in 1920 and given the assignment of cultivating a general literature for Africa, which would be suitable for the students and graduates of the many mission schools. Its strategy was to

⁶⁷ Brouwer, *Modern Women Modernizing Men*, 98.

⁶⁸ Secretary Canon F. Rowling, letter, n.d., 2, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

find or commission texts in English, French and Portuguese that missions could then translate into African languages. To begin the project, it tasked C.E. Wilson, assisted by Reverend Canon F. Rowling, with compiling the previously mentioned survey. The *Bibliography of African Christian Literature*, first published in 1923 and updated yearly through surveys to the various missions around the continent, eventually came to comprise 95 languages, including Yoruba. Wilson's report to the CBMS, made while he was still compiling information from survey responses, lists the religious works that he found most frequently in translation throughout the bibliography. *Peep of Day* and its sequels, *Line Upon Line* and *More About Jesus*, were popular children's devotionals published by the Religious Tract Society in the 1830s. They translated *Peep of Day* into Yoruba and published it as *Kutukutu Owurò Ọjọ tabi Èkọ́ t inọ Iwe Mimó Olọrun* in 1872. Missions across Africa also promoted the reading of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *The Holy War*, in both European and African languages. CMS missionary David Hinderer had translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Yoruba in 1866.⁶⁹ It was one of the most widely disseminated texts, religious or otherwise, within Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Both mission and government-run schools in West Africa used the African-language translations as required reading.

The report also listed books that could be distributed in European languages and translated for the benefit of teachers, preachers and church members. Wilson specified that some books were for "the more advanced and thoughtful of the African Christian Church" and others for the (presumably) less literate, including a Yoruba language *Tract*

⁶⁹ Hofmeyr, *The Portable Bunyan*, 35, 242. Hofmeyr traces the transnational circulation of Bunyan's book, arguing that its popularity with African readers was distasteful to British admirers of the author, who wanted to promote him as a "universal" writer without suggesting equality between his various audiences. CMS missionary David Hinderer translated *Pilgrim's Progress* into Yoruba in 1866.

on *Polygamy*.⁷⁰ In his section on books for use in mission schools, Wilson highlighted the dearth of literature in general and church history, arithmetic, geography, natural science and texts for post-primary students. Taking into consideration Wilson's initial observations, the Sub-Committee on Christian Literature in Africa focused on developing 'polyglot' texts, with European and African languages on facing pages, which could be used for new literates. Rather than funding the publication of books, they worked with mission presses, tract and literature societies such as the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and the Religious Tract Society to produce useful texts that they then promoted to mission societies within the continent.⁷¹ These objectives gained momentum when the CBMS began cooperation with the American Sub-Committee on Christian Literature in Africa in 1924. The coalition aimed to accomplish two main goals: first, the preparation of "basic texts" for African readers in Europeans languages and second, the identification of "major [African] languages" for further literature development.⁷²

Westermann, addressing the Sub-Committee as a representative of the IALC in 1926, reiterated these goals. He stated that literature in "major languages" needed to be systematically developed and promoted to educated African readers. His address served as a reminder that "adaptation to African life and conditions is essential in all literature."⁷³ The Sub-Committee initially envisioned an organization that would replicate many of the goals of the IALC: studying languages and folklore, supporting production

⁷⁰ *Christian Literature in African Languages*, 2.

⁷¹ "Minutes of Meeting," December 15, 1920, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

⁷² *A Statement Regarding the Plans and Purposes of the Sub-Committee*, Minutes of Meeting, September 17, 1924, 2, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

⁷³ "Minutes," December 21, 1926, 2, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

of vernacular literature, serving as a central repository for information on languages and literature. However, mission societies, and especially their workers within Africa, were leery of the reach of such an organization, worrying that it could interfere to the detriment of local literature work. The Sub-Committee seemed to finally find its footing as an advisory board. Mission and education officials, who were often one-in-the-same, began to rely on it for book recommendations.

The Sub-Committee on African Literature did not view their undertaking as a simple case of charity work; they believed that the production of literature in African languages was a wise investment that would return a profit to publishers, copyright holders and booksellers. Turning to outside organizations for assistance in promoting their agenda also made financial sense as the missions came under increasing strain from their obligations to support their networks of schools in partnership with colonial governments.⁷⁴ Mission societies needed ever increasing numbers of textbooks to fuel education, and they were loath to give up their part as the education sponsors in a government alliance, as it allowed them to play important roles in colonial administrations. Therefore, they needed help to meet the book demands of African readers. However, missionaries in the field were suspicious of their long-standing work being interfered with by what they viewed as newcomers. J.N. Cheetham, of the CMS (Onitsha) Bookshop, described the tension surrounding literature production in a 1927 letter to H.D. Hooper, CMS Secretary for Africa. He notes that mission societies in Africa feared the interference of the IALC in their work and then chides the home

⁷⁴ “Conference of Missionary Societies of Great Britain – Proposed Scheme for African Literature Memorandum,” n.d., 2, ICCLA Box 1 (500), African Literature Sub-Committee Minutes (1920-29) Folder, SOAS.

societies in Britain for so blithely entering into partnership with colonial governments: “Whenever Government officials work in co-operation with missionaries (in West Africa at least) they expect to lead, and to be more or less slavishly followed.”⁷⁵ The Sub-Committee believed that the solution lay in creating a Christian literature coalition that would secure mission societies’ role in the African literature field by allowing them to pool resources and coordinate book production across the continent.

The idea of creating a dedicated agency for the production of literature for Africa was resurrected at the 1926 International Missionary Council Conference on the Christian Mission in Africa, at Le Zoute, Belgium. Participants observed that there was an increasing demand for books in Africa, corresponding to the growing number of students in mission and government schools. They also appear to have been driven to action by the establishment of the IALC, desiring a Christian means to utilize the findings of the Institute for evangelical ends.⁷⁶ As an outcome of the Le Zoute conference, the British and American Sub-Committees on Christian Literature in Africa coordinated the establishment of the African Christian Literature Bureau, soon after re-named the International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa (ICCLA), in 1929. The ICCLA was organized into British, European continental and American sectional committees under the auspices of the International Missionary Council, with its main headquarters at the Edinburgh House in London, in close proximity to the CBMS.

Even so, it endeavored to be an international organization that could draw support from a variety of mission societies; American mission societies provided fully half of the

⁷⁵ Mr. J.N. Cheetham, Letter to Rev. H.D. Hooper, August 13, 1927, ICCLA Box 1 (500), Folder E, SOAS.

⁷⁶ *Foreign Mission Conference Bulletin*, no. 2, August 1, 1927, 2–3, ICCLA Box 1 (500), SOAS.

projected annual budget of £1200 during its early years. With the approval of both the British and American mission conferences, Margaret Wrong was immediately hired as Secretary of the ICCLA for an initial appointment of three years. Wrong brought a great deal of experience and an international pedigree to her position. She was Canadian, held degrees in History, spoke German and French, had worked for the World Student Christian Federation (1921-25) and served as Secretary of the British Student Christian Movement (1926-29). She had completed a six-month tour of Africa in 1926 and her previous work brought her into regular contact with the Edinburgh House and international missionary boards. Wrong was part of a new group of young university graduates who entered foreign missions between the world wars, driven by an international outlook and a desire to be part of the domestication of Christian practices – a project carried out most visibly in the arena of literature.⁷⁷

The ICCLA's task was to ensure an adequate supply of literature in Africa that was appropriate for Christians and to promote that literature to missionaries for use in schools and among the general public.⁷⁸ They planned to carry out this extensive work across the continent on a limited budget by passing on the costs of manuscript publication to other entities. The Executive Committee hoped to generate some income from copyrights for the manuscripts they had developed, although in practice the publishers retained all copyrights. Secretary Wrong served as a liaison between the missions, governments and private agencies that the ICCLA looked to for financial support. She

⁷⁷ Kalu, "Nthangata: African Christianity in the World Wars, 1914-1945," 128.

⁷⁸ The task of providing Christian evangelical literature for African Muslims fell to the Central Literature Committee for Moslems, headquartered in Cairo and run by CMS missionary Constance Padwick. The ICCLA focused instead on generating literature for Christian converts and mission school students. However, Padwick and Wrong worked closely together, sharing information on literature development. See C. Padwick, *Africa, Paper 9*, 1931, ICCLA Box 13 (515), SOAS.

raised funds from mission societies, religious publishers and Christian tract societies, as well as securing grants from the Phelps-Stokes Fund and the Carnegie Corporation. Wrong envisioned the ICCLA as a guardian of moral uprightness at a time when the influence of Christianity seemed to be increasingly threatened.⁷⁹ She and her fellow literature workers would play this role through the powerful medium of print.

Although Christian missions had spent decades pursuing individual programs of literature production, by the 1920s they recognized the growing power of colonial governments and began to collaborate willingly with other entities under the guidance of the ICCLA so as to retain their influence. Wrong was able to build on the work of the CBMS Sub-Committee for Christian Literature and literature committees within Africa, which had already begun identifying and evaluating manuscripts in African languages to be translated into English, French and Portuguese and then distributed to missions for translation into local languages. Like the IALC, the ICCLA was keen to identify the African languages in which it would be most useful to develop an output of literature. They focused on languages with a large population of speakers, an established reading community and an (in their view) advanced vocabulary. In Nigeria, both organizations focused on Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and sometimes Efik, as key languages. This meant that attention and funding was spread thin; a central committee had already been established to coordinate literature in the Hausa language, so work was accomplished more quickly in Northern Nigeria. In 1932, the very first year the ICCLA periodical *Listen* was published, a Hausa-language periodical using its contents in translation was established.

⁷⁹ Ruth Compton Brouwer, "Books for Africans: Margaret Wrong and the Gendering of African Writing, 1929-1963," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 31, no. 1 (1998): 55-56. Brouwer argues that Wrong and the ICCLA allied with "modernizing African men" to achieve their mutual goal of gaining influence, whether for individual or community betterment. As a result, African women were excluded from the writing community. See p. 71.

Responses in Yoruba to the work of the ICCLA were much slower. Mission societies, led by the CMS, had continued their literature work in southwestern Nigeria into the 1930s. The popularity of such publications was reflected in the introduction to *Iwe Itan Ijo Enia Olorun Akobere (A History of Christianity)*, which was both published and printed by the CMS Bookshop in Lagos in 1932. Authors M.C. Adeyemi and S.V. Latunde described the excellent reception of their first book on church history as the reason for a sequel and expressed hope that this book would quickly sell out so that they “can again try to publish another book for people’s use.”⁸⁰ The market for religious texts such as *Iwe Itan Ijo* was strong because the population of readers and of Christians almost completely overlapped in early twentieth-century Yorubaland. Even if missionary publications reached only a small subset of people, they had completed a great deal of Yoruba translation and established a bookshop network and central press. Therefore, they were unconvinced that non-Yoruba specialists could improve upon their efforts. In a 1927 letter sent to Edinburgh House, C.W. Wakeman, manager of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop, requested that workers in the field be better kept abreast of new developments in literature for Africa. He expressed concern that the large and powerful home societies might make decisions that could be a detriment to his network of CMS Bookshops, which “had practically control of the literature in Nigeria.”⁸¹

Despite some skepticism concerning the Christian literature project, Wrong assembled an effective organization by establishing working relationships with colonial governments, demanding inter-mission cooperation and promoting the ICCLA’s agenda

⁸⁰ Rev. M.C. Adeyemi and Canon S.V. Latunde, *Iwe Itan Ijo Enia Olorun Akobere* (Lagos: CMS Bookshop, 1932), 1.

⁸¹ Unsigned Memo, December 9, 1927, ICCLA Box 1 (500), SOAS.

and approved literature through the periodical *Books for Africa*. The ICCLA did a host of additional work, including the preparation of detailed bibliographies for literature in Africans in all major languages, consulting with educational publishing houses, missionaries and government officials to establish working partnerships, promoting the use of Basic English, a simplified version of the language, for translation of the Bible and other books, coordinating production of literature for adult literacy education and encouraging book distribution through partnership with “approved secular agencies” and tactics such as colportage. They also compiled an extensive collection of African-language literature and maintained a library at their Edinburgh House headquarters; beginning in the 1930s, they created recommended book lists for libraries, customizing them for each colony.⁸²

These myriad activities served the purpose of getting the ‘appropriate’ literature into the hands of African readers. Margaret Wrong clearly stated her concern with the increasing competition: “In many urban areas Africans have access to European literature, good, bad and indifferent. Africans are ordering books by post from overseas. Christian forces are faced with the task of making good and attractive literature available.”⁸³ Christian literature producers did not want to lose the advantage of their head start in the market; they also needed to generate *new* literature that would attract customers who were now not only mission school graduates, but also readers from government schools and adult literacy programs. The ICCLA insisted that this reading audience needed *Christian* literature (even as they acknowledged the importance of the

⁸² Margaret Wrong, *ICCLA Report*, July 1937, ICCLA Box 13, Misc Folder, SOAS.

⁸³ Margaret Wrong, “Christian Literature for Africa,” *The International Review of Missions* 27, no. 107 (July 1938): 514.

IIALC's secular work on African languages), or the education work of the missions and the scientific studies of the IALC would be for naught.⁸⁴ The work of the ICCLA, therefore, served to maintain and expand Christian influence.

Books for Africa, which began publication in January 1931, was the ICCLA's main conduit for reaching education and literature professionals outside of the Christian mission field. It served to coordinate the work of literature committees in Africa and other literature workers in the international community while maintaining a Christian influence within the discourse on literature for Africans. It had an initial circulation of 2,100 that grew steadily to 4,950 in 1958. The ICCLA heavily subsidized the periodical; the yearly report for 1950 mentions that paying customers took only 96 out of the 3,490 subscriptions. The Inter-Board Committee of Women's Missionary Societies in Canada provided the majority of funding, which the *Books for Africa* also used to sponsor translation and publication of booklets it felt especially important to make accessible. In 1939, the periodical included an update to the *Bibliography of African Christian Literature* that noted thirty-four works of Christian literature, nineteen textbooks and twenty-six works of general literature published in Yoruba from 1927 to 1937, a production matched only by Hausa in West Africa.⁸⁵

The ICCLA solicited manuscripts from both European and African authors, in order to create a literature for popular consumption that retained a Christian perspective. They received over 500 manuscripts between 1935 and 1955.⁸⁶ However, publishing

⁸⁴ "Conference of Missionary Societies of Great Britain – Proposed Scheme for African Literature Memorandum," 2.

⁸⁵ Anonymous, *Books for Africa* 9, no. 1 (January 1939).

⁸⁶ List of Manuscripts Received, n.d., ICCLA Box 20 (523), SOAS.

quality works in longer formats that would appeal to African customers was an expensive undertaking. Manuscripts deemed suitable for publication were either sent out to amenable secular publishers such as Longmans, mission publishers or literature societies like the SPCK. The ICCLA also encouraged presses in Africa to expand their capacity for printing in local languages so that more publishing could be kept on the continent. They secured coverage for shorter manuscripts by serializing them in the pages of *Listen*, a bi-monthly ICCLA periodical for African readers.

Wrong kept in close touch with her contacts in the education and book fields across Africa, to determine how to utilize the small budget of the ICCLA most effectively. She traveled a great deal, visiting mission stations, schools and government education offices from Senegal to Ethiopia to South Africa. By the late 1930s, Nigeria had emerged as a key cite for literature production. It had a large population, the concentrated activity of well-established missions, an increasing responsiveness of missions and government to the work of the ICCLA and, beginning in 1932, the interest of the Carnegie Corporation. Wrong made her fourth African tour as Secretary of the ICCLA in 1939, touring Nigeria extensively in all three provinces. In Western Nigeria, she visited the towns of Akure, Ado-Ekiti, Ilesha, Osogbo, Ogbomoso, Oyo, Ibadan, Ife, Ijebu-Ode, Shagamu, Abeokuta and Lagos, consulting with Africans and Europeans in missions, schools, bookshops and government offices. Wrong found that, despite the high demand for schooling, the education system was woefully underfunded and libraries and other means of book distribution were underdeveloped; for these reasons, there was a lack of what she termed “reading sense” among the population.⁸⁷ This sense, which she

⁸⁷ Margaret Wrong, Memorandum VI, Eastern Provinces, Nigeria, May 25, 1939, 3, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

identified as a crucial qualifier of civilization, lay in reading beyond the “practical considerations of an economic nature, the wish to qualify for baptism, the wish to write letters, the wish for specific information and the desire to get news.”⁸⁸ From this list, it is clear that Nigerians were reading; they were just not choosing the literature that Wrong wanted them to read. She praised educators and other leaders, however, for recognizing the importance of developing an African literature in line with her own vision of suitability.⁸⁹ According to Wrong, they believed a Nigeria-specific literature program would make books accessible as functional tools for learning about agriculture, health, relationships and other topics.

To encourage reading in African languages, Nigerian Education Department officer R.F.G. Adams suggested to Wrong that the ICCLA focus on producing periodicals in those languages, although he believed that the cost would have to be subsidized to persuade people to buy them. Wrong heeded his advice and in 1931, the ICCLA began publishing *Listen: News From Near and Far*, “the paper for the village people, teachers and school children of Africa.”⁹⁰ The bi-monthly periodical was intended to provide material for missions and education departments to translate into African languages. However, in practice, *Listen* often served as supplemental English reading material in school and adult literacy classes. While some of the *Listen* articles

⁸⁸ Margaret Wrong, Memorandum V, Eastern Provinces, Nigeria, May 2, 1939, 4, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

⁸⁹ In her visit to the Eastern Province, Wrong described what happened when she was unable to travel to Calabar: “A group of teachers from Calabar, determined to discuss literature questions, traveled by launch to the Church of Scotland leper settlement at Itu where we were spending the week-end, and for an afternoon we tackled the need of books, the troubles of authors, and steps that should be taken to supply reading matter—a library for every rural school being a not too ambitious objective.” Margaret Wrong, *West African Journey* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1946), 46.

⁹⁰ This description appears on the final page of every issue of *Listen*.

were translated by missions for use in their own periodicals or became booklets in African languages, it appears that most of the material published in booklet form remained in English. For example, the African Home Library series, published by Sheldon Press for the ICCLA, included booklets made up of material from *Listen*. Although the ICCLA supported other organizations in publishing longer pamphlets and books in order to build up more permanent libraries, Wrong recognized that few African readers could afford books and that a periodical would be an efficient way of reaching their audience with *suitable* materials. The ICCLA committed to subsidizing *Listen* for this purpose.

By the end of its first year in publication, *Listen* had a distribution of 3,500. Although there is a distinct evangelizing tone to much of the content, the periodical also contained a great deal of information about topics such as health, hygiene and nutrition. Wrong envisioned *Listen* as a source of literature for villagers, rather than the urban secondary school graduates who had access to literature through libraries and bookstores. The editors intentionally chose simple informational articles and stories that could be easily read aloud and translated. They also encouraged African contributions to the magazine by running essay competitions such as “Why Do You Read ‘Listen’?” and “How to Keep Christmas” and publishing the winning entries. Wrong said that competitions had the double advantage of prompting contributions from Africans and promoting books, which were sent to the winners. Southern Nigerians constituted the largest part of *Listen*’s readership, based on the reports of contest entries and winners

listed throughout the periodical's annual reports. It is interesting to note that *Aggrey of Africa* was their most oft-requested prize book.⁹¹

The ICCLA also tried to attract readers by commissioning colored illustrations that would appeal to African readers and hoped to inspire African artists whose work they could include. Encouraging the development of skill sets that would support the publishing industry in Africa was one of the most important goals of these early periodicals.⁹² Wrong justified the ICCLA's investment in *Listen* as a necessary expenditure for encouraging literacy, stating that people "will undoubtedly learn to read and it will be a tragic thing if when they have learned [to read,] there is nothing for them to read which deals with their life and interests."⁹³ The yearly reports for *Listen* include feedback from readers across the continent, and although it is uniformly positive, considering the source, the letter writers provide a rare view of their experiences and desires. In the 1939-1940 report, the two quoted Nigerian readers praise *Listen* for providing news of the war.⁹⁴ They valued the periodical for its timely news, rather than as a source of more general literature. Subsequent letters make it clear that issues of *Listen* were regularly shared between readers, many who were students. Even after the war ended, readers praised the periodical for providing information on current events. *Listen*

⁹¹ *Listen: News from Near and Far*, Volumes 1-4 (Jan 1932-Dec 1935), ICCLA. Aggrey had traveled throughout Nigeria, to great acclaim, as a member of the Phelps Stokes Commission on Education. In a 4 July 1920 letter to his wife concerning his appointment to the Commission, Aggrey wrote, "I am to interpret the soul, the longings, the wishes, the desires and the possibilities of the Negroes to the White Governments. I am to get all the truth and act as mediator between the two." From Edwin Smith, *Aggrey of Africa: A Study in Black and White* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1929), 148. Aggrey, a Ghanaian, was widely admired for his educational accomplishments and for his work in presenting African concerns to American audiences.

⁹² "MW on Listen," Report, n.d., ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

⁹³ Margaret Wrong, Report, April 23, 1934, 2, ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

⁹⁴ 1939-1940 Listen Report, n.d., ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

also carried the regular column, “Books to Read.” Many books reviewed therein came from mission publishers such as the Sheldon Press, Edinburgh House and SPCK, but the column also recommended non-religious books covering a variety of topics. It also relied on a small but valuable income from publishers advertising their books.

The circulation of *Listen* peaked at 12,500, in 1949.⁹⁵ Most copies were distributed through inclusion in local mission periodicals. In 1957, the last year of its publication, fully half of the 8,000 *Listens* were distributed in Nigeria, as part of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop’s magazine *In Leisure Hours*.⁹⁶ Due to competition from other periodicals, the ICCLA had to provide *Listen* cheaply to readers. Reading audiences had access to a wider variety of literature by the 1950s and impacted the material available through their buying power. They no longer had to rely on the large mission organizations for subsidized literature. The ICCLA conducted a survey in 1957 in order to understand the reasons for the falling circulation of their principal publication. The author of the resultant report described *Listen* as “a Magazine with an academic educational bias, and an intellectually religious interest” and suggested that its tone drove away readers. *Listen* was produced in Britain and utilized mostly European writers, and “Africans are becoming very sensitive to what they consider a condescending and patronizing attitude.”⁹⁷ The popularity of *Listen* was tested by magazines like *Challenge*, which was seen as less educational and more religiously partisan than *Listen* by members

⁹⁵ “Report on ‘Listen’, 1948-1949,” n.d., 1, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 530, AF g 026/1, CMS. “A magazine which circulates over so wide an area and which is intended for readers of such varied educational standards is bound to receive much criticism. Letters suggest that we are too East African in our interests, too West African in our interests, too mixed in our matter, too difficult in our language, too Anglo-Saxon in our approach.”

⁹⁶ Anonymous report, n.d., ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

⁹⁷ Listen report B/130, n.d., 2, ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

of the ICCLA. By the 1950s, the Nigerian reading public had grown large enough that their buying power had an effect on the subject matter of literature. *Challenge* and other local periodicals catered to Nigerian tastes and even took the step of advertising their magazines.⁹⁸ The ICCLA, however, chose not to market *Listen* and instead relied on school and religious leaders to endorse it to their followers. They awarded a book prize to readers who collected enough new subscriptions.⁹⁹

The ICCLA ceased publication of *Listen* in December 1957 as the organization itself was dissolving and transferring responsibilities to committees in Africa. Leaders of the Christian literature movement in Nigeria struggled with this transition. The ICCLA looked to the Christian Council of Nigeria to continue coordinating literature work, but the Christian Council was ineffective in dictating policy for the entire colony. Literature production and distribution continued separately in the North and South, as it had previously. Furthermore, Rev. W.J. Wood, Secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria, describing a literature-planning meeting that was supposed to be attended exclusively by “representatives of the indigenous church,” bemoaned the African lack of technical expertise in literature production that would forestall anything being accomplished.¹⁰⁰

The absence of Africans involved in literature work, especially the well funded and government-allied literature work of Christian organizations, is apparent throughout the

⁹⁸ Listen questionnaire, n.d., 2, ICCLA Box 14 (517), SOAS.

⁹⁹ Gladys Hobbs, Letter to Margaret Wrong, January 5, 1939, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS. Mr. E.A. Owotomo of Ijebu Ode was praised in a letter from headquarters for collecting 54 new subscriptions. He wrote to the CMS Bookshop, Lagos, “You will be good enough to make the editor of ‘Listen’ understand that my incessant efforts to get new subscribers every year is not so much for the prizes offered to the collectors as for the little service I am doing my readers by spreading among them the doctrines ‘Listen’ preaches.”

¹⁰⁰ Rev. W.J. Wood, Letter to de Mestral, Secretary of the ICCLA, October 6, 1957, ICCLA Box 29 (532), SOAS.

archives. Very few Africans appear as employees and it is the European missionaries whose opinions are sought – not Africans. European missionaries even authored the majority of manuscripts submitted to the ICCLA for publication, although a small number of African writers were represented.

Conclusion

Despite the increasingly large reading audience and the advocacy of literature workers in Nigeria, the British colonial government did not want to invest in the infrastructure necessary for the wider distribution of books during the 1920s and 1930s. The Secretary of State for the Colonies wrote a letter to Nigerian Governor-General Bernard Bourdillon regarding the Carnegie Corporation's interest in building libraries in Nigeria. He stated: "I do not wish to give the impression that I would desire colonial governments to incur themselves more than a small outlay upon the subject at the moment."¹⁰¹ As this chapter has shown, the government's attitude opened the door for other agencies to control the agenda for literature provision in the colony. In the period of high colonialism, religious and educational concerns drove literature policy.

In the following decade, politics in Nigeria became more nationalist, with the educated elite taking the leading role from the colony-appointed native administrations. These nationalists no longer desired integration into the British colonial system but rather demanded more and more independence in political decision-making. In his study of newspapers published in Abeokuta in the 1940s, Oluwatoyin Oduntan observes that readers considered newspapers to be "reactionary" if they supported the alliance between

¹⁰¹ Cited by G.O. Alegbeleye, "The Non-Use of Nigeria Public Libraries by the Silent Majority: A Historical Survey and Discursus," 1984, in Apeji, "The Contributions of Multinational Publishers," 137.

the native administration and the colonial government. “Ideologically incapable of responding to the forays of nationalism,” he says of one such newspaper, “[it] was mostly silent on the engaging politics of this period, filling up space with morals.”¹⁰² This observation is equally applicable to the majority of books published during this period. Missionaries and philanthropic literature workers, who were heavily invested in the colonial system, controlled the production of literature for southwestern Nigeria. They focused unremittingly on moralizing topics and practical education, to the exclusion of the sweeping political and social changes looming in the foreground.

The following chapter takes up this political momentum. Where the colonial administration had previously avoided expenditures on education and literacy, they began to see the importance of investment in these areas as a way of courting public approval. Between the First and Second World Wars, the agencies that directed literacy education and literature production had dictated not only what books were available to the Nigerian reading public, but also the very kinds of discourse those books contained. They dismissed African writing “as useful raw material, data from the “native” perspective.”¹⁰³ New sources of funding brought change to the literacy landscape. In the run-up to the Second World War, Margaret Wrong observed “indications of increasing competition with regard to literature production on the part of commercial firms, both with regard to production and distribution. It seems likely that before very long situation may arise where the control of policy may no longer be in the hands of the religious and educational

¹⁰² Oluwatoyin B. Oduntan, “‘Para-Colonial’ Newspapers and the Shaping of Modernity in Colonial Abeokuta,” Paper (Department of History, Dalhousie University, n.d.), 22.

¹⁰³ Desai, *Subject to Colonialism*, 119.

bodies.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Wrong, “Secretary’s Tour in Africa: Notes on Some Aspects of Literature Policy Arising out of the Tour,” n.d., 5, CO 875/58/4, NAUK.

3 Books From Abroad: The Provision of Knowledge in Colonial Nigeria

The provisioning of literature in Africa was an expensive project, requiring staff to create orthographies for spoken languages, produce translated and original texts, educate a reading public, and market and distribute materials, all while continually revising materials to meet new orthographic standards. Although Christian missions wanted to retain control over the content of literature produced for African audiences, they welcomed the financial and logistical support of government, business and philanthropic organizations. From the beginning of the Second World War up to the formal independence of Nigeria in 1960, new participants entered the print market in greater numbers. These actors were concerned with maintaining or gaining an influence in Nigeria at a time when world powers were re-aligning.

This chapter traces the efforts of local government administrations, foreign philanthropies and missions to gain traction in the public sector through their literature work as Nigeria moved towards independence. I describe the ways in which the colonial government invited agencies that utilized literature as cultural propaganda into Nigeria. The British Council and the Carnegie Corporation, international donor agencies representing the cultural missions of Britain and the United States, had a major impact on where and what Nigerians read. Focusing once again on the Western Region, I then document the foundation of, and provision for, the colonial government's reading room program. Such rooms maintained a small collection and were run by an attendant with minimal qualifications, allowing their establishment in all regions of Nigeria for service of a large population despite constant under-funding. By patronizing reading rooms,

Western-educated Nigerians demonstrated their literacy to the wider public and marked themselves as part of the newly established colonial elite class. However, they were not the only people to utilize reading rooms; located in central urban areas and inside village markets, these rooms held broader appeal as community gathering places for those who wished to obtain - or associate with - literacy in English and African languages. Finally, I trace the reaction of missions to competition from foreign agencies. Missions wanted to ensure that their literature was more accessible and more appealing to Nigerian readers than the morally suspect products that were hitting the markets. They recognized a need to increase the breadth and depth of their literature distribution networks.

Book Provision as Cultural Mission

Although the British government did not embrace the idea of cultural propaganda during the early twentieth century, organizations like the British National Council of the All Peoples Association and Anglophile societies advocated for the provision of British books to spread the English language and promote British culture in other countries.¹ These groups worked individually and with very little support from the government. In the meantime, European countries such as Germany and France were investing significant amounts of money in programs that developed cultural relationships around the world. After the Great Depression, however, Great Britain recognized the political and economic sense of promoting British culture in dependent and untapped markets. In 1934, R.A. Leeper of the British Foreign Office wrote a memo describing a centralized committee that could oversee the promotion of British values abroad. The British Council

¹ Douglas Coombs, *Spreading the Word: The Library Work of the British Council* (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1988), 1–3.

met for the first time in December 1934 and began work with a £5,000 grant from the Foreign Office.² Lord Lloyd, Chairman of the British Council from 1936 to 1941, was also the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Still, the Council was supposed to operate as autonomously as possible from the Foreign Office as it tried to run cultural programs that would also promote trade.³

A Books and Periodicals Committee was quickly established to make recommendations on literature for British institutions overseas and steer the Council's most visible program, the building of libraries to carry out "cultural projection by way of the printed word."⁴ Despite the supposed division between the British Council and the Foreign Office, the Council almost immediately initiated additional library programs in the colonies, in part to disseminate propaganda about the advancing war.⁵ The work of the British Council in the pre-war era was limited by a lack of funding; its literature work focused mainly on provisioning libraries that were attached to English language institutes, or otherwise supported by another organization. During the war, however, it opened a library in conjunction with each new Council office. The first Nigerian British Council office opened in Lagos in December 1943 with a reading room at the Exhibition Centre on the Marina. Weekly activities at the reading room included elocution lessons, drama readings and classical music record presentations. F.C. Ekpe points out that this slate of programs was part of "a policy of catering for a cultural minority, and it was

² Ibid., 4.

³ Mary Niles Maaek, "Books and Libraries as Instruments of Cultural Diplomacy in Francophone Africa during the Cold War," *Libraries and Culture* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 63.

⁴ Coombs, *Spreading the Word: The Library Work of the British Council*, 272.

⁵ F.C. Ekpe, "The Colonial Situation and Library Development in Nigeria," *International Library Review* 11 (1979): 17.

doing its work as part of the British government war propaganda machinery.”⁶ The Council was mainly concerned with reaching an audience that was already educated and could quickly tap into the literature that, they felt, reflected British cultural mores.

WWII was a catalyst for the development of an information system in the British colonies. Britain needed the manpower of the colonies during the war, and so needed to keep people informed about what was going on and to convince them that they should contribute lives and labor. It became clear through this process that public libraries could serve a useful role as clearinghouses for information. After the war, the British Council committed funding to public libraries, and worked with the Lagos Town Council to open a library in 1946. They opened a library in Ibadan the next year. However, support for information services dissipated as the immediacy of the war faded and economic concerns dominated once again. In 1950, the British Council withdrew all funding for public libraries in order to align with its Definition Document, which stated that British Council libraries should not be a general information service, but promote British cultural ideals.

In the early twentieth century, less than ten percent of the Nigerian population could read and write in English, though such skills were highly valued within the colonial system. Literacy skills provided access to employment and political influence in the formal sector, but also served to establish social status that further encouraged the embrace of the British colonial hierarchy. At this time, neither the Colonial Office in London nor the colonial administration in Lagos were interested in spending money on libraries for Nigerians, despite advocates arguing that the libraries were crucial to the

⁶ Ibid.

development of a civilized society – an accomplishment they believed the colony had not yet achieved.⁷ Sir Alan Burns, as Deputy Chief Secretary to the Colonial Government of Nigeria, was one such advocate; after being denied support elsewhere, he made a personal appeal to the trustees of Carnegie Corporation of New York for a grant to jumpstart library work.⁸

As early as 1932, the Carnegie Corporation had awarded \$6,000 to the Nigerian government for the general goal of library development.⁹ A special committee, chaired by Burns and including Henry Carr, allocated the money to establish the Lagos Public Library.¹⁰ This subscription library, however, did not spark any larger movement to make library services available to the Nigerian reading public or to encourage further growth of that public through the development of a local print industry. Rather than purchasing local books or encouraging Nigerian writers, the government, British Council and Carnegie imported all reading materials from abroad. They were not interested in supporting a Nigerian print industry, which would rely on Nigerian writers. Foreign

⁷ British rulers were, however, willing to provide institutional support to special research libraries that would support the efforts of British scholars. A law library was created in Lagos in 1900 to collect the colonial administration's legal documents. In 1909, the Medical Research Institute in Lagos established a library. The library supported the research of British scientists studying tropical diseases. Other early libraries were also founded to serve British research interests included the British Cotton Growers Association Research Station library (Ibadan, 1905), the Nigerian Geological Survey library (Kaduna, 1919) and the Samaru Research Station library (Zaria, 1925). See Aguolu, "The Foundations of Modern Libraries in Nigeria," 475–476.

⁸ A. Burns, Letter to Ward-Price, October 3, 1933, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, NAI.

⁹ Aguolu, "The Foundations of Modern Libraries in Nigeria," 478.

¹⁰ Henry Carr studied at Fourah Bay College in the 1870s before transferring to the University of Durham and earning a B.A. in 1882. He was appointed the first African Commissioner of the Lagos Colony in 1920. Carr was a voracious book collector, amassing a library of 18,000 volumes during his lifetime. He planned for his collection to become the nucleus of a Nigerian national library. See John Harris, "Libraries and Librarianship in Nigeria at Mid-Century," *Nigerian Libraries* 6 (1970): 29.

fundes of book projects in Nigeria seemed to engage with Nigerians themselves superficially, and their services rarely reached larger non-elite publics in these years.

The Carnegie Corporation, interested in expanding its mission to English-speaking West Africa, had commissioned a report by Hanns Vischer and Margaret Wrong on libraries in the region in 1939. The report concluded that Carnegie should continue its investment in British West African libraries. The next year, the foundation granted over \$30,000 to Nigeria; \$3,000 was to be spent on textbooks, \$1,412 on a Lagos Public Library book purchase and \$27,000 for the development of libraries and reading rooms.¹¹ A centralized Standing Committee to Advise Government on Provision of Libraries was created in Lagos in 1940, to make use of these funds. Henry Carr was one of only two Nigerian members of the committee.¹² Despite the interest of the Carnegie Corporation, however, library service remained sporadic and regionalized until after independence. In response to the news that Carnegie was planning another grant to Nigeria, the Lagos government said that African reading practices were “too limited and too closely associated with personal advancement to justify expenditure on reading materials of broader scope.”¹³

The intensifying Second World War led Carnegie to suspend its operations in Nigeria just after awarding the 1940 grant. Still, Ethel Fegan, librarian of the University of Cambridge’s Girton College and later a staff member of the Department of Education

¹¹ Florence Anderson, *Carnegie Corporation Library Program, 1911-1961* (New York: Carnegie Corporation, 1963), 9. Future research in the Carnegie Corporation archive in New York will hopefully provide additional insight into the American administration of these grants.

¹² Journal, December 5, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

¹³ Lagos Secretariat, letter to the Colonial Office, 12 April, 1940, quoted in Carl White, *The National Library of Nigeria: Growth of the Idea, Problems and Progress* (Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, 1964), 1.

in Northern Nigeria, conducted a tour of British West Africa in 1941 as a representative of the Carnegie Corporation. Her personal notebooks provide a snapshot of the library system present in Nigeria before an influx of foreign funding wrought significant change. Fegan's observations during her travels around southwestern Nigeria indicate that there was a small but persistent demand for literature from a reading public, and Nigerians themselves were attempting to meet it. The funds to build and stock a public library in Lagos had been bequeathed by the Nigerian merchant Tom Jones and the namesake library was opened sometime between 1910 and 1920. However, the library languished after Jones's relatives disputed the will in a lawsuit.¹⁴ When Fegan visited the Tom Jones Library, it was still functioning, but she wrote that "very few people seem to know of, care about, or use it."¹⁵ The library only stayed open because it occupied a two-story building that was rented out to pay the caretaker.

On a more positive note, Fegan particularly praised the Ahmadiyya Moslem Library in Lagos for their well-maintained facilities and collection of three hundred books.¹⁶ She also noted that fifty people (mostly teachers) attended a meeting about the Abeokuta Town Library, a project supported by the Alake.¹⁷ Fegan held a series of well-attended meetings with teachers' unions, youth organization, government clerks and literature societies to discuss the usage of the Carnegie grant. The original plans called

¹⁴ Ethel Fegan, "Libraries, Present and Potential, in West Africa," *The East and West Review* 8, no. 3 (July 1942): 163.

¹⁵ Journal, July 25, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

¹⁶ Ibid. Lagos Muslims established a branch of the India-based Ahmadiyya mission in 1916. They sponsored schools that taught both Islamic and secular subjects. The growth of the Ahmadiyya was closely tied to the coalescing of an elite Muslim Yoruba political identity within the confines of the colonial state. This Lagos library would have been an important community meeting-place and a resource for students in the city. Reichmuth, "Education and the Growth of Religious Associations," 371.

¹⁷ Journal, August 2, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

for a central library at Ibadan that would serve as a distribution center for a network of reading rooms around southwestern Nigeria, but meeting participants insisted each town have its own library. The Ijebu-Ode Town Library already had three or four branches and held lectures and question nights to attract patrons.¹⁸ The Ilorin Town Library housed 100-150 books and made new purchases annually, based on recommendations by the Education Officer.¹⁹

Despite the apparent enthusiasm of meeting attendants, however, libraries in southwestern Nigeria did not have the support of a large reading public. The Ibadan Town Library, housed in the Oluibadan's court, had not received any new books since 1935. Fegan recorded that only one new reader had subscribed to the library in 1941.²⁰ It is interesting to note that the library had been located elsewhere before being moved into the palace, where it languished. By the 1930s, the Oluibadan struggled to control the resources that indicated and funded his political authority. His physical command of the library would have given him some measure of control over such publically accessible knowledge.²¹ School libraries generally consisted of a large cabinet filled with books and periodicals and kept under lock and key by the headmaster. Sometimes classrooms had a "reading corner" that held books donated by students for the use of the class; at the end of the school year, they would take their books home.²² Although the development of such

¹⁸ Journal, November 21, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA. The library committee, consisting of education workers and a few chiefs, received a budget of 40 pounds per annum from the Native Administration.

¹⁹ Journal, August 13, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

²⁰ Journal, August 8, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

²¹ J.D.Y. Peel, "Olaju: A Yorba Concept of Development," *Journal of Development Studies* 14, no. 2 (1978): 146.

²² J.O. Ogunmilade, "School Library Development in Ondo State," 1986, 2, OGFAD/00014: 90/1/63, OA.

libraries were driven by African initiative, the books were relegated to elite spaces, accessible only to higher education students and readers who could navigate the equally formidable formalities of the registration desk or the palace.

After the yearlong tour, Fegan laid out her recommendations on libraries and a book service for West Africa in a widely circulated report. She suggested that a central lending library be built up in Lagos and that a temporary training institute be established in the Gold Coast for librarians from each of the British West African colonies. Fegan, like many in her profession, believed that “the library should be the centre of the intellectual life of the town” and a space for activity “which helps the moral and intellectual life of its citizens.”²³ Libraries were not simply a resource for leisure activities; the literature they provided was a civilizing force in a world fraught with moral dangers. Fegan suggested that the propaganda reading rooms springing up at the time could eventually be developed into full-fledge libraries.²⁴

The Carnegie Corporation acted immediately on some of Fegan’s recommendations. She advised the funding of a temporary training institute for African library assistants in Achimota, the Gold Coast. It was indeed opened in 1944, attended by four Nigerian students on scholarship from the colonial government. The school was supposed to run for a trial period of three years but shut down after just one year because the managing committee decided that the students would return to towns with no proper libraries to run. She also convinced Carnegie to support the reading room program then taking hold in Nigeria. However, her ambitious vision for a library system in Nigeria,

²³ Ethel Fegan, *Libraries in Africa* (London: The Sheldon Press, 1944), 12–13.

²⁴ Fegan, “Libraries, Present and Potential, in West Africa,” 162.

including a central national library and book distribution system, an increase in school and hospital libraries, programs for young readers, training for local librarians, new permanent and mobile bookshops, colporteur training and support for increasing African and English-language publications, remained stalled.²⁵

Government Reading Rooms in the Western Region

Reading rooms were established around Nigeria from the 1930s onward through the initiative of individuals within local British colonial administrations and Native Authorities. In her study of civic culture in Ibadan, Ruth Watson notes the work of the Ibadan Progressive Union [IPU], founded in 1930 by educated young men of the city. Their first project was the establishment of an Ibadan Reading and Social Club, which was to meet in the premises of a new reading room. The club opened on March 18, 1931. When the British District Officer suggested that the reading room house games and other recreational activities, however, the African club members protested, voicing their opinions that it should serve the functions of a library above all else.²⁶ Victor Esan, one of the founding members of the IPU, described the work of their group “to raise the status of social life in this town” as a contribution towards “the advancement of a people, a town, or a race.”²⁷ Reading rooms were understood by both Nigerian and British proponents as spaces that signified the progress of the local community towards their

²⁵ Ethel Fegan, “A Library System in Nigeria” (Africa Committee Precise, April 28, 1942), 1–5, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 532, CMS.

²⁶ Letter from Victor Esan to Sammy Oloko, May 1930, in Ibadan Progressive Union, *Fifty Years of its Founding 1930-1989 Exhibition Programme*, 13, quoted in Ruth Watson, *Civil Disorder Is the Disease of Ibadan: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Oxford: James Currey, 2003), 123.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122.

ideal, a culture shaped by literate practices and striving towards British social norms. They were also spaces that allowed Nigerians to make individual progress towards this ideal. To this end, it is especially interesting to note an interview conducted by Watson with Daniel Akinbiyi, another IPU founding member, in which he recalled that John Stuart Mill and Thomas Paine were the most popular authors in the reading room.²⁸

As educated Nigerians became more outspoken in their demands for political power during the 1930s, the British Colonial Office recognized the pragmatism of providing both educational and cultural support to develop a leading class of citizens who would be sympathetic to British concerns. The Second World War and their changing imperial fortunes further prompted British administrators to invest in programs that would prepare the Nigerian public for political independence, although they believed that eventuality was decades away. However, the Colonial Office felt the pressure of African educated elites on their newly formed legislative councils, who were demanding more immediate independence. It viewed the Native Administrations and local government as a bulwark against immoderate political change and so, in the post-war era, expanded the political role of these groups.²⁹ Nevertheless, Nigerians' demands drove the expansion of education and book provision from the 1940s onward. They wanted schools (and churches) in their own communities because "the presence of a school and church became an instrument of communal rivalry, a cultural signifier of development."³⁰ The reading room was closely related to these two institutions as a means and symbol of

²⁸ Ibid., 123.

²⁹ A.N. Porter and A.J. Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-64*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan Press, Ltd., 1987), 68.

³⁰ Kalu, "Nthangata: African Christianity in the World Wars, 1914-1945," 136.

progress. Both Nigerian and British leaders viewed literacy, taught in church and school, as a necessary skill for developing civil society.

The economic depression and social upheaval of turn-of-the-century Britain gave rise to this notion that literature was an essential means of civilizing the previously uneducated masses. The British government began sponsoring libraries to make uplifting literature available to those entering the new schools. From the 1930s onward, both mission and government agencies studied the possibilities of building on the nascent literature structure of the colony. Evelyn Ellerman describes the process succinctly: “An array of supposedly temporary structures were set in place as a means of demonstrating, or transferring, a Western-style cultural system to colonized people.”³¹ Margaret Wrong was part of the group advocating the transfer of a library system between Britain and Nigeria. She made a 1939 tour of the colony for the ICCLA to report on existing libraries.³² The organization wanted to know how to effect the provision of literature to the reading public. Literature organizations such as the ICCLA focused their attentions on what they called libraries, rather than the African-centered reading rooms, because European-oriented spaces were more easily professionalized; these advocates planned to recreate a system that was finding success in Britain. In correspondence of the period, it seems the main distinction between a reading room and a library was that a library had European sponsors and tended to hold more books, while a reading room also served an additional function as a lecture hall. Wrong and other European administrators tended to

³¹ Ellerman, “The Literature Bureau: African Influence in Papua New Guinea,” 213.

³² Wrong, May 25, 1939, May 25, 1939, 3.

think of reading rooms as underdeveloped libraries that might eventually attain that higher status.³³

In southwestern Nigeria, Wrong observed widespread efforts to open and expand school libraries at all education levels, but none that were adequate to supply the demand for books. Community libraries, she said, were almost nonexistent outside of Lagos. The previous public library in Ibadan had all but disappeared, although she suggested that Ibadan could serve as the pilot location for a general library that would serve the whole region. Wrong imagined that the Ibadan library would serve as a headquarters for the professionalization of the literature system in Nigeria, with a European director and Africans as librarians-in-training. In Lagos, the central library, fortified by a Carnegie grant, was pronounced adequate by Wrong. She reported a large collection of English language books, available to members for a monthly fee. However, the Lagos Library had only ten African members, while 145 Europeans, or 10% of the European population of Lagos, were subscribers. Wrong was clearly frustrated with the state of book provisioning in Nigeria, especially since she believed that the ability and opportunity to read was the path to both individual and community progress. She wanted libraries to do more than provide books of interest to local readers; these institutions had a higher calling to be “agencies for fostering a reading sense.”³⁴

The timing of Wrong’s report, barely preceding Britain’s declaration of war against Germany in September 1939, meant that her recommendations did not come to fruition. The ICCLA continued to publish its Africa periodicals and kept up advocacy

³³ For example, Wrong reported that Ibadan had just one, barely-function library in 1939, but there had been two reading rooms, at Iddo Gate and Mapo Hall, in 1935.

³⁴ Wrong, May 2, 1939, 5.

work during the war, but funding for library building and book purchases quickly dried up. From the late 1930s, colonial administrators recognized the impracticality of importing the British library concept wholesale into Nigeria. They instead adopted the African-run reading room model and began to sponsor the opening of more of these spaces throughout Nigeria, with the hope that their investment would influence the tastes of the reading public far into the future. A British administrator is quoted in the minutes of the Ife Native Authority Advisory Council as saying that “he considered it most important that a Reading Room should be established where literature could be made available for those whose intellectual food was all too frequently limited only to the Daily Press. Reading played a most important part in the widening of mental outlook.”³⁵ The reading rooms were intended to support continuing education for primary- and secondary-school graduates and to provide resources for new adult literates who were participating in mass education schemes of the 1940s and 1950s.

In 1940, the ICCLA hired Fegan to prepare lists of recommended books and an instructional pamphlet on the care of libraries for Africa.³⁶ The ICCLA and Christian missions wanted to be a part of the Colonial Office’s new push to professionalize the book industry. Moreover, they believed that their involvement would ensure the continued transformation of African readers from ignorant and uncomprehending to educated and civilized:

It may well be that some future historian, looking back to our own day, will see beneath our own political pre-occupations a movement more tremendous than any

³⁵ “Extract from Minutes of a Special Meeting of the NA Advisory Council, Ife,” May 21, 1945, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

³⁶ “ICCLA Meeting Minutes,” July 12, 1940, 2, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 531, CMS. Fegan already had extensive experience in West Africa. She carried out research there in 1928-29 and taught at the first government-run girls’ school in Northern Nigeria from 1930 to 1935.

we can discern, and mark the twentieth century as the century of the emancipation of the African. In that process of emancipation those who provide the *right* books for emerging Africa may bear an inconspicuous but not insignificant part.³⁷

Despite the lack of funding available, there was an increasing sense of urgency in Britain and Nigeria that colonial subjects needed access to the proper books and other media materials to continue the civilizing process.

Even so, making books accessible to Nigerian readers outside of the schools remained a local concern. Reading rooms were built, staffed and provisioned for the most part by local inhabitants. The outbreak of the Second World War and the British enlistment of Nigerian soldiers generated an increasing amount of public interest in events happening in Europe and the other theaters of war. The British government responded by opening an Information Center in Lagos in 1942. Harold Cooper was sent from London's Central Office of Information to run a propaganda program.³⁸ A War Information Office was established in the colony in 1943 and hired African publicity officers, including the journalists Anthony Enahoro and Cyprian Ekwensi, to write propaganda pieces.³⁹ The colonial government began opening propaganda reading rooms around Nigeria soon after. Initially, most rooms served only to house periodicals and bulletins put out by the War Information Office and the Public Relations Office [PRO] in London, a government bureau charged with circulating information throughout the colonies. One Information Officer wrote that these reading rooms should be available to

³⁷ *1950-51 ICCLA Annual Report*, n.d., 11, ICCLA Box 13, SOAS. Emphasis mine.

³⁸ Olutayo Otubanjo, Olusanmi Amujo, and T.C. Melewar, "150 Years of Modern Public Relations Practices in Nigeria," August 2009, 13, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1372704>.

³⁹ Ehahoro became an important political figure and an outspoken advocate for Nigerian independence. Ekwensi authored *People of the City* and other well-known books; he also served as first director of the Federal Ministry of Information.

people “who are profoundly interested in the progress of the war and desire enlightenment and education.”⁴⁰ Unlike later British Council and United States Information Service libraries, these wartime reading rooms were supposed to serve a mass reading public. British officials wanted to make to their own propaganda material accessible to eager readers, who otherwise relied on the local press. They also hoped that the reading room program would serve as the nucleus for the permanent libraries that Carnegie was looking to sponsor in Nigeria.⁴¹

Reading rooms were categorized as A, B or C class, based on the size of the town and perceived demand for a room, and funded accordingly. The central government granted funds for furniture and reading material and Native Administrations paid for the spaces and staff. Reading room managing committees were made up of Nigerian community leaders, but a British officer always had veto power over their decisions. The reading rooms were often housed in temporary structures or shared space with post offices, courtrooms or government rest houses. They usually consisted of a few shelves for books and periodicals and benches that served as display surface and seating for patrons. Books were often kept locked up, although readers could check them out, sometimes for a small fee. Propaganda posters and maps hung on the walls. Larger reading rooms had separate reading and recreation spaces. Fegan praised the reading rooms as “places where people could go for quiet reading.”⁴² Literature workers often emphasized the need for a quiet place to read, in stark contrast to the noise and busy-ness

⁴⁰ D.C. Fletcher, Letter to Secretary, Western Province, Ibadan, April 3, 1941, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Fegan, “A Library System in Nigeria,” 1.

of Nigeria communal space. Reading was a skill to be practiced indoors and in silence. The rooms might include a space for meetings and programs, but the act of reading was imagined to be solitary. In fact, reading room sponsors were heavily invested in the idea of readers practicing “personal choice and individual responsibility” through their usage of the space.⁴³

Attendants of the Ibadan and Ilesha reading rooms described the popularity of war-related material such as *War in Pictures*, a monthly magazine published by the British Ministry of Information and issued in a Yoruba language version, *Àwòran Ogun*.⁴⁴ Information officers and prominent town citizens also procured general interest books or donated from their own libraries to the rooms. Wartime reading room committees further outfitted the spaces with battery-powered radios, because they recognized the need to combine their advocacy of literacy with the use of technology in order to reach and interest greater numbers of people. The committees welcomed the mobile film units traveling throughout the colony during the war for the same reason.⁴⁵

In 1945, Lagos government released funds to open or improve on reading rooms throughout the colony. The grants were just large enough to furnish and stock a reading room, with the building costs and maintenance coming from local budgets. British administrators in Oyo Province were discussing possible locations for new reading rooms in their territory when the Resident wrote, “my experience has been that after the opening

⁴³ Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians*, 187, 190; See Robert Darnton, “History of Reading,” in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 157–186.

⁴⁴ Information Officer, Lagos, Letter to Oyo Resident, April 22, 1943, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

⁴⁵ The Colonial Film Unit was established in 1939 to produce propaganda films to rally African support for the Second World War. See Tom Rice, “From the Inside: The Colonial Film Unit and the Beginning of the End,” in *Film and the End of Empire*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Colin MacCabe (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 135.

ceremony the people's interest in their Reading Room usually declines rapidly."⁴⁶ The Ibadan District Officer agreed and a more ambitious reading room program, in Oyo Province at least, was scaled back by the British administrators.

In the decade following the Second World War, the reading room program was validated as a larger collaborative project of the central colonial government, local administrations and outside funding agencies. Galvanized by the public's favorable response to PRO publications and the additional propaganda reading rooms that were opened in Nigeria during the war, officials expanded the project as more money became available to fund social projects in the post-war period. London's Central Office of Information retained a domestic function after the war, and information services passed to agencies within the colonies. A Public Relations Office was opened in Lagos and then in other cities, including Ibadan in 1947.⁴⁷ The colonial government tasked these offices with rallying support for Britain as Nigeria moved towards independence, especially after the adoption of the 1946 Richards Constitution. Reading rooms, as extensions of the PRO, were first and foremost intended to provide a connection to Britain through literature and other forms of media.

It is not clear how effective the reading rooms were as spaces for the dissemination of cultural propaganda for colonial rule. However, African educators, government staff and chiefs advocated for these reading rooms, as both a concession to the demands of constituents and a stopgap measure to provide books for the ever-increasing number of students. Between 1944 and 1952, reading rooms were established

⁴⁶ Oyo Province Resident, Letter to to Ibadan DO, October 4, 1945, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

⁴⁷ Otubanjo, Amujo, and Melewar, "150 Years of Modern Public Relations Practices in Nigeria," 16.

in all regions of Nigeria and their resources were made available to a large population. Local government administrations that expressed interest in sponsoring a reading room had to pledge to pay for a librarian's annual salary and building maintenance in order to receive other funding. Because the Native Administrations had the power to collect local taxes, they were more financially solvent than the central government from the 1930s, and an increasing amount of responsibility for public works projects was handed over to them.⁴⁸ This funding arrangement differs from the proposal made at the 1954 Ibadan Seminar on the Development of Public Libraries in Africa, where it was suggested that national and state agencies needed to accept sole responsibility for library services because local authorities were not yet equipped to pay the costs.⁴⁹ Native Administrations in even small towns could hypothetically sponsor reading rooms, with their restricted space and necessarily smaller book collections; even so, they were still expensive projects and required the financial support of outside agencies to get off the ground.

The British Council, with the initial assistance of the Carnegie Corporation, was the major grant provider for the Nigerian reading room program during and after the war. Officials within these organizations promoted the reading rooms because they believed that they would encourage informal education and serve as a civilizing space for local communities. Furthermore, propaganda reading rooms conspicuously fulfilled the British Council's mission to foster good relations with foreign countries through cultural and educational programs. The Council began their Nigerian grant program in the belief that they were building the infrastructure for a full-scale national library system. The Second

⁴⁸ White, *Central Administration in Nigeria, 1914-1948*, 229.

⁴⁹ *Development of Public Libraries in Africa: The Ibadan Seminar* (Paris: UNESCO, 1954), 23.

World War, despite spurring the opening of propaganda reading rooms and the development of a Public Relations Office to create new literature for Nigerians, also put a damper on funding for such programs. The British Council had assumed that local administrations and the Nigerian educated elite class would embrace their philosophy of library building but eventually abandoned their plans for lack of funding and discouragement regarding the ability of a reading public to utilize it. In its place, the colonial government hoped that Native Administrations would continue to support reading rooms so that they might provide suitable literature and model British social views for Nigerian patrons.

Colonial Literacy Efforts in the Post-War Era

After the war, the Colonial Office again broached the subject of funding with Carnegie in order to jump-start the beleaguered reading room program for local communities. Nearly half of the 1940 grant had not yet been dispersed and government officials in London and Lagos had plans for the money. While the British Council insisted on channeling resources into a series of Council libraries that could eventually be integrated into a national library system, the Carnegie grant was made available for direct use by local governments. In 1947, the Carnegie Corporation released the remainder of the grant. Following the example set by the earlier PRO and propaganda reading rooms, additional towns throughout the Western Region built their own rooms; traveling librarians were appointed to check on and provide guidance for these rooms. Although it encouraged the initiative of the Native Authorities, the central government in Lagos

provided little continuing support for the reading rooms. It was left to local leaders to designate money for upkeep and expansion of the material collections.

A full fifty towns and villages throughout the Western Region claimed reading rooms in 1950, although eleven of these were without an attendant.⁵⁰ Joan Parkes, Travelling Librarian for the Western Region, completed a tour in 1949 and sent reports of each reading room she visited to the Deputy Director of Education and Regional Public Relations Officer in Ibadan. These reports suggest that the newly reinvigorated program was hamstrung by a lack of books and training for the room attendants. As Parkes traveled the countryside, she presented some of the reading rooms with a gift of thirty books selected by the British Council. A special committee, located in London, chose these books to fulfill the Council's mission of promoting British culture abroad. In some places, these books comprised the entire stock of the reading room. Other rooms held an odd assortment of books and out-of-date journals and newspapers donated by the Public Relations Office in Lagos. Parkes reported that the materials were often in tatters, as the reading rooms were bedeviled by bugs and mold.

Parkes suggested that reading rooms could be improved by sending out-of-date materials to local schools to supplement their reading collections. She believed that readers would not patronize reading rooms that were so poorly stocked and organized. She also bemoaned the unattractive appearance of the rooms. Those that had been established as propaganda rooms during the war were still covered in flags and maps showing troop movements and European battlefields.⁵¹ Parkes requested that attendants

⁵⁰ "Reading Rooms – Western Provinces, Revised List," n.d., 122, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I, NAI.

⁵¹ Joan Parkes, "Shagamu Reading Room," n.d., 68, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, Vol. I, NAI. Parkes complained, "Festoons of tattered Union Jacks do not contribute to the appearance of the room."

hang a few well-chosen current maps and book jackets. Reading room attendants, who were often decommissioned soldiers, were untrained and under-salaried. Parkes' reports evince the lack of interest most of them took in the reading rooms. She claimed that they took long breaks during open hours and closed down the rooms for unannounced periods of time when they traveled. Native Administrations sometimes delegated the responsibility of requisitioning new resources to these attendants – and then complained at their inability to obtain the appropriate books.

Nevertheless, when Parkes visited the Ilesha reading room in 1949, she noted that 692 patrons had visited the library in August, although she thought that number was “poor.”⁵² The Ife reading room reportedly received 40 to 50 visitors each day and attendance at the Ibadan room at Mapo Hall was 70 people per day.⁵³ The patrons usually had few short hours in which to use the reading rooms, which were open from two and six hours per day and always closed by dusk. Residents utilized the resources of the rooms to check out hard-to-get books, read periodicals that would otherwise be too expensive to purchase and find a quiet place to study. They also used the spaces to play games and hold meetings. The Shagamu Reading Room, for example, also served as the town meeting hall and the doors of the bookcases could not be opened for all of the benches filling the interior.⁵⁴ Other rooms provided meeting space for local clubs and

⁵² Joan Parkes, “Ilesha – Reading Room,” n.d., 1, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI.

⁵³ “Ife Reading Room,” n.d., 64, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI, and Agodi, “Ibadan Reading Room,” n.d., 90, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI.

⁵⁴ Parkes, “Shagamu Reading Room,” 68.

literary societies. At the Akure Reading Room, located in the central market, clerks came inside and sat at the tables to write out their sales records.⁵⁵

The books supplied for public consumption within the reading rooms were not placed there arbitrarily. The British government and non-governmental organizations had a large stake in the program, but reading rooms functioned with relative independence, directed by local committees rather than colony-wide bodies. Even so, committees had limited options for stocking the rooms. Reading room inventories were composed mostly of donations. The Public Relations Office, which was largely responsible for directing donated books to reading rooms, was described as out-of-touch with its African subjects. The Assistant District Officer in Northern Ibadan submitted a scathing memo to his Resident in which he accused the Public Relations Office of “controlling the reading material [sent to reading rooms] and moulding the protectorate taste.”⁵⁶ Even as the PRO dictated what books would be made available to Nigerian readers, he pointed out that it failed to consult any local officials or Nigerian members of reading room committees or literature societies. In the same manner, the District Officer in Oyo lamented that “there is a dead mass of literature poured out by the Public Relations Office which I personally consider a waste of funds that are badly needed for books of other sorts.”⁵⁷ He gave examples such as *Meatless Dishes*, *Fitness without Fuss* and *Colour Harmony for Beginners*.

⁵⁵ “Akure Reading Room,” n.d., 54, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI.

⁵⁶ Ibadan Northern District Assistant DO, Letter to Oyo Province Resident, September 23, 1946, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, vol. III, NAI.

⁵⁷ Oyo Division DO, Letter to Oyo Province Resident, September 5, 1946, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, vol. III, NAI.

It seems that readers themselves were not allowed much input in the stocking of reading rooms. When the Ibadan District Officer wrote that the local literature society had requested more “books of a technological nature” for their reading room, the Resident replied in the margins of the letter with a curt “No.”⁵⁸ This attempt to control the types of books available to reading room patrons reflects the desire of Western stakeholders to create ‘suitable’ libraries for their subjects. The colonial government and the British Council wanted to provide books that encouraged self-improvement and the promotion of British values. In Oyo and Ijebu-Ode, reading room patrons could write suggestions for book purchases in a ledger that was periodically reviewed by the managing committee. This was an unusual practice, however, as the traveling librarian also singled out Ijebu-Ode as “the best reading room yet seen in the Western Provinces.”⁵⁹ The Ijebu-Ode reading room was supported by prominent townspeople and benefited from an active librarian who maintained a well-organized stock of books. The room served a dual function as a small library and a community center, hosting lectures and group discussions. Most reading rooms, however, relied on external sources for their stocks, which remained small and unfocused.

Reading room committees could order books through the British Council, which ran an extensive book-box lending service in the colony. The British Council felt that funding such a service was a good value because it ensured Nigerians would be reading books that aligned with the Council’s interpretation of British culture. The professional librarians employed by the Council for work in Nigeria deplored the stacks of dusty

⁵⁸ Ibadan Northern District Assistant DO, September 23, 1946.

⁵⁹ Joan Parkes, “Ijebu-Ode Reading Room,” n.d., *IbMinEd* 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI.

periodicals and out-of-date books covering reading room benches, as these did not conform to their expectation that the reading rooms would be places of self-improvement. For five pounds, subscribing reading rooms received a large wooden box full of pre-selected books from the British Council headquarters in Lagos. The book-box scheme began in 1945 and grew so quickly that Ferguson had to plead for additional support only a few months later.⁶⁰ When the British Council decided not to renew support for the program in 1951, the Nigerian Public Relations Department took charge of it, making the book-box scheme the first library service to be conducted by a central government agency.⁶¹ This, despite a later observation by the manager of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop that “the lending out of books is a risky thing in Africa.”⁶²



Figure 2. British Council Centre, Lagos. From the personal collection of Jean-Luc Martineau.

⁶⁰ Coombs, *Spreading the Word: The Library Work of the British Council*, 94.

⁶¹ White, *The National Library of Nigeria: Growth of the Idea, Problems and Progress*, 3.

⁶² “Minutes of Discussion on Book Distribution,” July 19, 1949, 13, ICCLA Box 17 (520), SOAS.

After an initial donation of books by the British Council which many rooms received, a reading room supervising committee would order materials from a bookshop using their share of the budget vote by the local Native Authority. Annual budgets ranged from £5 up to £200. Until the 1950s, the Church Missionary Society (Lagos) Bookshop ran the principal book ordering service for the region. The CMS counted the provision of appropriate Christian-based literature to African readers as an important component of their evangelism. Reading room committees and trained reading room were forced to purchase books through the CMS Bookshop because they did not have the publishers' catalogs or the hard currency to order directly from Britain. Moreover, the local publishing industry was still in its infancy and few of the houses were producing book length works of general reading interest. Nigerian periodicals were approved reading room material, but not the locally produced literature that was beginning to appear in town and village markets.

The staff of the Lagos CMS Bookshop acknowledged that the increasing demand for books after the war brought them new competition in provisioning reading rooms. They expressed concern in private correspondence that the government would not protect the "high standards in good literature" which they had established in Nigeria.⁶³ Literature workers in the British African colonies universally proclaimed that they had an obligation to provide impressionable readers with literature that was of a high standard; suitable choices included textbooks promoting Western educational goals, instructional guides and scientific texts, histories, and older British novels. The CMS Bookshop and British Council therefore limited their available books to these categories. Reading room

⁶³ Thomas, "History of Nigeria Bookshops," 44.

catalogs, as well as recommended book lists created by British Council librarians, give us a clearer picture of the books made available to Nigerians in this period. Although Parkes' 1950 booklist for reading rooms recommended a number of novels, these were published almost exclusively before the twentieth century. She suggested books like Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Rob Roy*, George Eliot's *Silas Marner* and Alexandre Dumas' *Black Tulip*. She also provided titles under the headings of 'Adventure and Travel,' 'Africa,' 'Biography,' 'Citizenship,' 'History and Politics,' 'Literature and Languages,' 'Natural History,' and 'Reference Books.' The question remains whether any of these books were actually available for purchase by reading room committees. Parkes wrote in her report of the Western Province reading rooms that "whoever is responsible for [buying books] has no access to a well-stocked book shop or even to publishers' catalogs. The usual procedure is to visit the local C.M.S. book shop and buy at random – some extraordinary collections result from this method."⁶⁴

To fill empty shelves, committees more often spent their annual budget allotment on less expensive periodicals and kept all back issues. This practice bothered Parkes; she constantly admonished room attendants to burn their stacks of old periodicals. With minimal amounts voted from Native Administration budgets for the support of reading rooms, even committees that were organized enough to purchase books only selected a few to add to their library each year. Nevertheless, Nigerian reading room committees managed to cause consternation among both British government and Council officials. In Oshogbo, for example, their list of requested "Literature" books included eight by Marie Corelli, the wildly popular but critically derided British author, along with Longfellow,

⁶⁴ Joan Parkes, *Reading Rooms in the Western Provinces – Report*, February 15, 1950, 1, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. 1 (p. 119), NAI.

Austen and Thackeray.⁶⁵ A separate column was made for “Fiction (Novels, Crime, etc.)” This section included sixty books (out of 143 requested), from authors such as Anthony Hope and Eden Phillpotts.⁶⁶ They also wanted *Mein Kampf*, Malcolm Hailey’s *An African Survey* and Nnamdi Azikiwe’s *Liberia in World Politics*.⁶⁷ Parkes visited the reading room five years later and reported “the need for the [Oshogbo Reading Room] Committee to have guidance in its book selection is urgent, for the books they have bought so far are utter trash.”⁶⁸

A 1944 letter from the Ife-Ilesha Division District Officer to the Resident in Oyo preserves a rare catalog of books actually present in a reading room during this period. The District Officer reported that adventure and detective novels, history books and “particularly books about the Empire” were popular among the patrons of the Ilesha Reading Room.⁶⁹ In his estimation, they were not as interested in reading poetry, essays and other “Belles lettres” literature. Of the 174 books and booklets catalogued in the room, I was able to categorize 127 of them. Fourteen were novels and twelve were histories. Fifteen of the books referenced the British Empire, while eighteen books

⁶⁵ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 98–118. Newell provides an instructive discussion of Corelli’s popularity throughout the colonies. She suggests that West African readers loved Corelli novels “because she assisted them to comprehend the moral obligations and ethical foundations of ‘modern’, colonial and Christian social formations.” See p. 102.

⁶⁶ Both Hope and Phillpotts were British male authors, published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of their works were set in contemporary England.

⁶⁷ Ibadan Northern District DO, Letter to Oyo Province Resident, September 11, 1944, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, vol. II, NAI. The local Native Administration first established the Oshogbo Reading Room in 1936, but by 1940 it had fallen into disuse and the building was given to the African Club. However, an Oshogbo Literary Circle was still active in the town. They evidently hoped to restart a reading room after the war, preparing a list of books for purchase in 1944.

⁶⁸ Joan Parkes, “Oshogbo – Reading Room,” n.d., 50, IbMinEd 1/1: 257, vol. I., NAI.

⁶⁹ DO, Ife-Ilesha Division, Letter to Resident, Oyo Province, August 30, 1944, 132, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

addressed African subject matter. The reading room held a single book in the Yoruba language, a translation of the Bible. The Oyo Reading Room Committee requested mostly books relating to Africa and colonial politics in a 1944 letter to the British Council representative in Lagos. Committee Secretary J.O. Alabi wrote that they wanted *An African Survey* and Diedrich Westermann's *The African Today and Tomorrow*, among other scholarship.⁷⁰ They asked for only three works of fiction: Shakespeare's *Collected Works*, *Paradise Lost* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Two years later, an Oyo Division District Officer, in reference to the reading rooms at Oyo and Iseyin, said patrons frequently consulted books for new readers and textbooks on English composition and Commercial Correspondence.⁷¹ The Nigerian readers who frequented the reading rooms seemed to have valued the availability of textbooks and other instructional material above all else. In 1948, a British tutor "found that Nigerian students were often well acquainted with the standard text-book material on History Economics and Co. to an extent which English adults normally are not."⁷² Whether reading room catalogs reflected the interests of local readers or the proclivities of the buying committee, it seems that there was an attempt, within the strictures of the civilizing mission, to create libraries that were both appropriate and popular with readers.

The case of the Akure Reading Room provides an instructive example of the difficulty in establishing such spaces. The Akure Improvement Society initially petitioned the local British colonial officer for a reading room for their town. These

⁷⁰ J.O. Alabi, Letter to F.N.L. Williams, June 19, 1944, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. II, NAI.

⁷¹ Oyo Division DO, Letter to Oyo Province Resident, September 5, 1946, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. III, NAI.

⁷² Nigeria Union of Teachers File No. 182, University of Oxford, Delegacy for Extra-Mural Studies, Reports for the period 1 October 1947-31 July 1948. Quoted in Michael Omolewa, "Adult Readers in Nigerian Libraries," *Nigerian Libraries* 10, no. 1 (1974): 34.

Akure residents emphasized their “preparedness” in supporting a local reading room.⁷³ They viewed the acquisition of a reading room as an important developmental step for their town. Its presence indicated a level of educational attainment among town inhabitants and the channeling of financial and intellectual resources. Their request, coming at a moment of expanded wartime funding for reading rooms to house propaganda, was granted. A Managing Committee was appointed to oversee the daily operations; leading citizens of Akure likely belonged to both groups. It appears that a dedicated building for a reading room was completed in early 1944.

On June 24 of the same year, the Managing Committee of the Akure Public Reading Room announced their decision to withdraw their support from the project and hand over responsibility to the Public Relations Office in Lagos.⁷⁴ J.B. Arifalo and A. Komolafe, the Chairman and Secretary of the Committee, gave the reasons for the abdication of their positions in the meeting minutes, stating that the public was not properly informed of the responsibilities that came with a reading room and was not prepared to give the required support. The location of the room was said to be too noisy and congested. The managing committee believed that the reading room would not succeed in a time of war, when local and central government funding was scarce and events in the theaters of war were diverting peoples’ attention. Plans for a reading room had not even been announced to the community prior to the completion of the building. More to the point, the committee was concerned that they would be blamed if the reading room did not succeed. Members of the committee were educated and powerful people

⁷³ Akure Youths’ Association, Letter to the Registrar, Co-operative Societies, Ondo Province, July 13, 1944, Ondo Prof 1/1: 1541/3, NAI.

⁷⁴ “Minutes of the Committee Meeting Akure Public Reading Room,” June 24, 1944, Ondo Prof 1/1: 1541/3, NAI.

within Akure and they desired the reading room as an important civic feature that would allow the town to measure up to other places in the competition for colonial resources. At the same time, they did not want their reputations tied to the fate of the experimental reading room project. “When failure comes,” they wrote in their resignation memo, “the educated elements of the town will be charged for lack of interest in matters affecting the progress of the town.”⁷⁵

The Assistant Registrar for Co-operative Societies, a British officer, expressed great displeasure with the committee’s decision, condemning the “intransigent attitude” of the “self-styled educated elements.”⁷⁶ In his account of the situation, the Akure Improvement Society, “who were most anxious for a reading room,” petitioned him for assistance and then inexplicably turned against the project. He dismissed their concern over the site of the reading room and threatened to have the building dismantled and moved to Ado-Ekiti. Just a few days later, a group of self-described “Akure educated young men” wrote to the Ondo Resident and announced their intention to take over care of the reading room themselves. They said that it was the non-native members of the Managing Committee who had failed to take an interest in the Akure Reading Room and that the committee would be reconvened with only Akure natives.⁷⁷ From the subsequent letters in the archives, it is apparent that the Reading Room Managing Committee was deeply divided over whether the reading room could be successful. The Akure Youths’ Association met with the Registrar, who was serving as President of the Committee, and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Assistant Registrar, Letter to the Resident, Ondo Province, July 1, 1944, Ondo Prof 1/1: 1541/3, NAI.

⁷⁷ J.B. Arifalo and others, Letter to the Resident, Ondo Province, July 11, 1944, Ondo Prof 1/1: 1541/3, NAI.

offered to look after the room until the Managing Committee could be reorganized. J.B. Arifalo had penned the original letter of dissolution in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, but as a member of the Akure Improvement Society, he opposed the plan to withdraw from the reading room.

The Akure Improvement Society and Youths' Association succeeded in retaining the reading room for their town and reorganizing the management. The new Managing Committee was elected during a meeting of the Akure Educated Youngmen, another elite social group within the town. The four officers were Nigerian residents of Akure, including S.O. Abiodun, the Headmaster of St. David's School, the Anglican primary school. This swift change in leadership and the flood of pledges to maintain the reading room were driven by the Assistant Registrar's threat to move the reading room to Ado-Ekiti, fifty kilometers to the north, where he expressed the belief that the local community was more prepared to support it financially.

Public support was key to the success of a reading room, but it seems that in Akure, as in other towns, the educated elites were the only people to see a reading room as crucial to the status of their town within the colonial hierarchy. While the managing committee viewed the reading room as project benefiting the entire town, and therefore a collective responsibility of the public, it would become clear that the majority of inhabitants did not adopt the room as part of the community space. British Council librarian Kate Ferguson later visited the room to make recommendations. She promised to secure a new supply of periodicals and perhaps a book donation, in order to support local efforts. Ferguson also suggested that the Reading Room begin charging a small subscription fee for membership to the "library club." By January 1945, the Committee

had taken Ferguson's recommendations and started a Library Club. Thirty members paid 6d per month for the privilege of using a reserved clubroom in which to read. Their subscriptions paid a small salary to the attendant and supported a book fund. However, users were not allowed to check out books. The reading room stock remained small, despite appeals for donations from the community. Mr. Ladapo Adegbola, an Akure native and employee of the Education Department in Lagos, had donated a bound set of periodicals and the British Council contributed forty books to the permanent collection. Beyond that, the reading room struggled by without support from the Native Administration or the Public Relations Office. Like other reading rooms, the one in Akure relied heavily on community intervention when officials were unresponsive to pleas for help. The town, in turn, did little to assist the venture.

The opening ceremony for the Akure Reading Room, however, featured a cast of powerful figures, indicating its status as a legitimating space within the community. The Ondo Resident, the Akure Deji, the CMS Bishop, British officials and local chiefs all attended the ceremony on May 31, 1945. It is unknown what local residents thought of the pomp. Fortunately, we do have a description of the reading room from 1951 that reveals how it fared. Joan Parkes, the Traveling Librarian, reported that the reading room attendant kept the place "untidy and badly organised."⁷⁸ The book collection was still small, but patrons could check out books for two weeks at a time. The reading room subscribed to the British Council book box program, although the books remained sitting in their box rather than being displayed for the use of patrons. Parkes did not record attendance numbers or other statistics, but the reading room she describes does not appear

⁷⁸ Joan Parkes, "Akure Reading Room," January 24, 1951, Ondo Prof 1/1: 1541/3, NAI.

to be a vital space within the community. Without the necessary financial support, the reading room's growth was stunted. Parkes wrote, "No Reading Room can flourish on charity."⁷⁹

As momentum for a public library system increased within the colony during the 1940s, some officials in the government and the British Council in Lagos opined that reading rooms and their book collections should be preserved for the "truly literate" by charging subscription fees to those eager enough to pay.⁸⁰ The Lagos-based British Council librarian, Kate Ferguson, and others supported this view, arguing that subscriptions would deter the 'inevitable' theft of books. A few district officers and library committee members countered that Nigerians would only be enticed into the reading rooms by providing free services. In all cases, Nigerian readers were demeaned by the conviction of colonial administrators that they would not use books properly.

Reading rooms served an aspirational function for patrons and investors. For Europeans, the reading rooms were repositories of Western knowledge, filled with books and other reading material that promulgated their own views on appropriate ways of living. They contained civilizing literature that would assist Africans in becoming (in their view) more technologically and morally competent. Perhaps more importantly, the reading rooms served as Western-oriented community spaces that could be easily observed, studied and controlled by colonial agencies. With their shelves full of British publications, reading rooms encouraged new African readers to strengthen their engagement with the colonial metropole through increased literacy skills. Nigerians, on

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Coombs, *Spreading the Word: The Library Work of the British Council*, 95.

the other hand, seemed to have impeded official plans by using the rooms in ways not dictated by outside agencies. Like the Ibadan Reading and Social club of the early 1930s, reading rooms opened during and after the war were intended as spaces to cultivate individual progress, as signified by literacy practices. Western-educated Nigerians read books and periodicals that they would not otherwise have had access to. In the open space of the reading room, with its chairs and tables already in place, they organized meetings and lectures. Other members of the public utilized the non-text resources of the rooms by playing games, listening to phonographs and tuning into radio programs.⁸¹ For these users, literature provision was only a secondary function of the reading room.

Missions and the Economy of Bookselling

As secular publishers entered the Nigerian book market, they took over textbook production, which left the mission organizations to focus on more general interest books. Missions in Nigeria acknowledged that they would not be able to compete with private publishers in the textbook market, and perhaps even encouraged other enterprises to take over that expensive project. As early as 1927, a Scottish Presbyterian mission leader expressed the hope, with reference to Nigeria, “that in increasing degree the Government Educational Authorities and private enterprise may take up the work [of producing school books].”⁸² Mission-based publishers then had more funds available to develop general literature in African languages. Although the Nigerian missions provided education in

⁸¹ Scholars have begun to document the role of radio broadcasting in African societies. See Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss, eds., *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Liz Gunner, Dina Ligaga, and Dumisani Moyo, eds., *Radio in Africa: Publics, Cultures, Communities* (Oxford: James Currey, 2012).

⁸² *Report of the Foreign Mission Committee of the United Free Church of Scotland*, December 20, 1927, ICCLA Box 1 (500), Folder E, SOAS.

English and African languages, they viewed African-language literature as a better tool with which to reach African converts.

H.D. Hooper, CMS Secretary for Africa, issued a circular to missionaries on the continent on April 1, 1940 in which he stated:

One direction in which I believe we shall have to give much more intensive thought is that of literature; for not only is the number of your literates growing very rapidly but the value of the underdeveloped market in Africa has not escaped the attention of the big publishing houses in this country ... No policy of segregation and no attempt to keep the control of literature in our own hands is likely to succeed in face of the forces which are being employed. But it still remains for us to determine how the Christian Gospel and motive can most effectively influence the trend which literature takes in this new stage of its expansion.⁸³

The ICCLA and other Christian organizations certainly did not withdraw from the Nigerian market in the face of stiffening competition. In fact, this turn of events may have benefitted their work by forcing them to become more responsive to the desires of their Nigerian customers. The publications of the African Home Library had proven extremely popular, although these books required a fairly strong command of the English language. Those who could read Yoruba or simplified English, however, found little literature available to them. After decades of work with the Nigerian educated elite and the development of Standard Yoruba through this partnership, the ICCLA and mission organizations now began to view Yoruba as a language that was being left behind and re-focused their attention accordingly.

Michael Davidson's 1947 report to ICCLA headquarters from Nigeria stated that "many people are aware of the needs of the schools – the O.U.P., Longmans, Nelsons and others are all interested in providing material to meet these needs ... On the other hand

⁸³ HD Hooper, Circular, April 1, 1940, 2, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 531, AF g o26/2, 1935-1940, CMS.

there are hundreds of thousands of church members and other who will never get beyond the vernacular or very simple English stage, and for them ... I feel a deep concern, because the material at their disposal is almost negligible.”⁸⁴ The multi-national publishers’ textbooks provided targeted instruction for Nigerian students, including Yoruba-language instruction, but this audience was only a small section of the wider reading public that emerged in southwestern Nigeria after the Second World War.

Mission and multinational publishers often expressed their willingness to cooperate on literature production for African markets, but there was certainly tension between the two. C.W. Wakeman, manager of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop complained in a letter to H.D. Hooper, CMS Secretary for Africa, that multinational publishers would face difficulties in the untested markets of Africa and then “come to us to get them out of their troubles as though they had been out to help us – instead of themselves – all the time. Being a Mission we, on our part, are expected to be humbly grateful for the privilege they give us of helping them!”⁸⁵ Wakeman suggested that the missions could only compete with the better-equipped and financed publishing companies if they concentrated on the production of literature in Yoruba. However, simplified English material was often more profitable than literature in African languages. A.E. Wyatt, a staff member of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop, noted that their publications often had a limited appeal for their immediate audience within Nigeria, but that the CMS continued to send manuscripts for publication in Britain because those products could be distributed

⁸⁴ Michael Davidson, *Report to the ICCLA*, February 21, 1947, 4, ICCLA Box 13 (515), SOAS.

⁸⁵ C.W. Wakeman, letter to H.D. Hooper, July 12, 1940, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 531, AF g o26/2, 1935-1940, CMS.

to other African markets such as the Gold Coast, Tanganyika and Uganda.⁸⁶ By catering to a more general reading public across British Africa, mission publishers (and soon, multinationals) could justify the production cost of books for that specific market.

Observations by the missionary T. Cullen Young at the “All Day Conference on Christian Literature” provide insight into how Christian literature interests had changed in Africa by the early 1950s.⁸⁷ He had long advocated missionary-run education and literature provision as the best means to produce “a conviction of sin” in potential African converts and shape their character development in a missionary-approved direction.⁸⁸ Africans needed easy access to Christian literature to develop their faith.⁸⁹ The mission bookshops, Young charged, had lost sight of this purpose and instead had “vested interests” in turning a profit. They no longer focused on providing cheaper and less profitable literature for the purpose of evangelism. He suggested that “specialist societies” should be in charge of the missionary literature work and let mission bookshops continue to earn profits by selling other material.

Since the early twentieth century, the CMS (Yoruba) Mission had relied on the profits of the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop to fund evangelical projects. The CMS ran bookshop branches throughout southern Nigeria, with a heavy concentration in the Western Region. Branches were established in Ilorin (1937), Akure (1937) and Ijebu-Ode before 1945. In order to oversee this larger network, a Lagos Bookshop Management

⁸⁶ “Minutes of Discussion on Book Distribution,” 10.

⁸⁷ Young was the General Secretary of the United Society for Christian Literature and the driving force behind its creation. He had been a missionary in Nyasaland since 1904. See Forster, *T. Cullen Young: Missionary and Anthropologist*, 33.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁹ “All Day Conference on Christian Literature,” n.d., 2, ICCLA Box 13 (515), SOAS.

Committee was established in 1938. European missionaries remained in the top bookshop management positions, while African missionaries staffed the stores and wrote literature. The Lagos headquarters kept a Yoruba translator on the Publications staff and intermittently sponsored a Yoruba Translation Committee.

An Overseas Bookshops Managing Committee, based in Britain, was appointed in 1948 to be the central buying committee for the CMS bookshops in West Africa. Mission leaders argued that they needed centralization to order a higher volume of books as the market grew.⁹⁰ More than this, however, placing the responsibility of stocking the bookshops with a committee in London allowed the CMS to retain more control over the type of literature available to Nigerian readers. In a supplement to the *Daily Times*, a Lagos newspaper, celebrating one hundred years of the CMS bookshop organization in Nigeria, Bishop Seth Kale reminisced, “Fifty years ago there were in the country no rival bookshops as we know today. If you wanted a book you almost invariably had to turn to the CMS Bookshops, and in this way there was a healthy influence on the choice of literature imported into the country.”⁹¹

The CMS bookshops continued to dominate the book trade in Nigeria after the Second World War. Although a few small bookshops existed in the larger Yoruba towns as early as the 1930s, they could not compete with the centralized and mission-oriented network of the CMS. Relative to the work of book distributors in other British West African colonies, the CMS bookshops had a greater reach and were able to expand their

⁹⁰ C.O. Odugbesan, *Daily Times*, March 20, 1969, sec. Special Supplement, 10–12.

⁹¹ Seth Kale, *Daily Times*, March 20, 1969, sec. Special Supplement, 9.

market through the promotion of new literature.⁹² Wrong noted during her 1939 tour, “the Lagos Bookshop is still the centre for planning literature production as well as for distribution.”⁹³ As an example, from July to December, 1944, the CMS Press in Lagos made a profit of £172, while the Bookshop made £13,300.⁹⁴ When the various branch bookshops of the CMS were incorporated as CMS (Nigeria) Bookshops in 1950, profits for the year totaled £200,000 in Lagos and £100,000 in Port Harcourt, their two largest shops.⁹⁵ This money sponsored other areas of CMS work in Nigeria, but the mission booksellers’ domination of the market came at the expense of Nigerian readers, who had a more narrow range of options for their book purchases. F. Ward of the CMS (Freetown) Bookshop, commenting on the need for cooperation between mission bookshops and the ICCLA to make more books available in West Africa, said, “I have found on frequent occasions that a customer could produce a publisher’s up-to-date list when our own was obsolete and dogeared.”⁹⁶ Nevertheless, mission literature workers felt that quality – of a civilizing kind – was better than quantity when it came to books for African readers.

The CMS Yoruba mission struggled to support and expand their bookshops in ways that benefited their constituents. They at least paid lip service to the idea of accepting competition from local booksellers in order to encourage development. W.K. Lowther Clarke’s observations of the bookshops of the SPCK, which opened in Southern

⁹² Margaret Wrong, Notes on a conversation with R.F.G. Adams, October 20, 1938, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS. “If the [CMS] bookshops take up a book they push it.”

⁹³ Wrong, “Secretary’s Tour in Africa: Notes on Some Aspects of Literature Policy Arising out of the Tour.”

⁹⁴ H.B. Thomas, Papers of H.B. Thomas, n.d., 18, RCMS 150, RCMS 150/1/4/2/2, RCS.

⁹⁵ “Celebrating the CMS Centenary,” *New Nigerian*, June 20, 1969, sec. Special Supplement, 15.

⁹⁶ F. Ward, Letter to U.H.S. Snow (Acting Sec of ICCLA), September 6, 1949, ICCLA Box 17, SOAS.

and East Africa in the late 1930s, are applicable here: “The problem of making a Church bookshop pay its way, in a far off land remote from London, is very difficult.”⁹⁷ He draws attention to the need to train literature workers, to set prices for the local population and to provide a selection of general-interest books that will attract customers, while remaining true to the evangelical mission of the shop. Evangelical literature, although it seems to have sold well, did not provide a large profit because missions demanded that it be inexpensive for consumers. In addition, the shortage in paper brought about by the Second World War greatly affected book prices even among missionary societies. Mission bookshops had to subsidize their literature work even more heavily than in the past by selling stationary supplies and other lines of goods. The CMS bookshops throughout the region sold textbooks, notebooks, pens and loose paper to compensate for the poor sales of other books.

In 1952, the Colonial Office initiated a project to improve the distribution of literature in Africa by funding book vans through a Colonial Development and Welfare grant. After much discussion about the strengths and ineptitudes of various literature organizations throughout the continent, the Information Department decided to start the program in Nigeria and Uganda by building on the work of the CMS bookshops in those colonies. Fisher, in a dig to bookshops elsewhere on the continent, noted that they would work with the CMS in Nigeria and Uganda because the Information Department “would not rule out subsidising any mission that sold books competently.”⁹⁸ Despite the many

⁹⁷ W.K. Lowther Clarke, *A History of the SPCK* (London: SPCK, 1959), 129.

⁹⁸ Mary Fisher, Memo, March 18, 1952, 15, CO 859/6/1, NAUK.

complaints about the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop and its satellites, this endorsement suggests that it was relatively successful in providing books for the region.

Distribution became a central problem of the book industry operating in Nigeria in the post-war period. For the first time, literature workers began talking about creating consumers, “educating a generation of book-buying readers, not only of so-called “literates.””⁹⁹ Literates, in the view of education and publishing agencies, did not fully utilize their skills; they only purchased books required for education or religion.

Consumers, on the other hand, would take part in the book market independently and with fervor for the civilizing light contained within their new purchases. Even though there was a demand for books, it was difficult for publishers to get the appropriate books to Nigerian booksellers, who faced many obstacles in finding customers. Because of slim profit margins and the seasonality of the bulk of the book market, they did not want to maintain a large stock without confidence that the books would eventually sell.

Additionally, most of these sellers were dependent on textbook sales, with the end result that many other genres of books were advertised but not easily available to customers.

In the late 1940s, multi-national publishers began issuing more books specifically for African readers and publishers within Nigeria had more and more manuscript material to work with, but growth in the market was slow because the channels for distribution had not been established. Missions, after their long-held monopoly over the creation and distribution of literature, seemed reluctant to allow new sellers into the market. Marjorie Stewart expressed her frustration with the Christian missions in a 1949 letter, writing “the time has come for them to face up to the full implications of salesmanship – either they

⁹⁹ *Distribution*, n.d., ICCLA Box 13, ICCLA 1949-50, SOAS.

retain their virtual monopoly of sales, or they restrict their activities to certain essential lines ... while other agencies, realizing the opportunity for retail business, step in and organise distribution.”¹⁰⁰ Missions were notorious for their failure to market books, simply expecting that readers would search out material and assuming that these customers were only interested in a limited range of books, namely religious ones. Since the earliest reading public in southwestern Nigeria consisted of mission-educated African converts, missions sold books simply by requiring their catechists to own them or by having them available in a tiny church bookshop. Eighty years on, the reading public had expanded far beyond the boundaries of the churchyard, but they had difficulty finding new material to read.

In 1949, the ICCLA convened a meeting at their London headquarters of mission bookshop managers, missionaries and mission press representatives to discuss book distribution problems in West Africa. The organization had identified book distribution as a critical issue in their quest to promote the *right* kind of literature to African audiences, but these groups were at odds over how to create a distribution network. A letter seeking a Chairman for the meeting described the position as “somewhat ticklish” because “it may be a difficult meeting to handle.”¹⁰¹ The meeting participants began with a discussion of the increasing competition among booksellers after the Second World War; they agreed that it was beneficial to the reading public in West Africa. Wyatt reported that the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop stocked a different selection of books than those sold by the University College Ibadan bookshop. He welcomed the commercial rivalry because,

¹⁰⁰ Marjorie Stewart, Letter, July 4, 1949, 2, ICCLA Box 17, SOAS.

¹⁰¹ Letter, July 11, 1949, ICCLA Box 17, SOAS.

in his words, Christian bookshops “would always be needed to safeguard the provision of the right type of Christian literature.”¹⁰²

Mr. Pickard, a bookshop manager in the Gold Coast, exhorted his colleagues to be especially aware of the needs of “the more advance educated student” because up until that time “we [the missions] have decided what books they must read, but the time is coming for them to decide what books they should read themselves.”¹⁰³ As political independence for British West African colonies gained plausibility, it appears that mission literature workers recognized their waning influence. Even so, they were not truly prepared to give up their role as gatekeepers for the African reading public. He went on to warn that secular bookshops could not be relied on to provide good Christian literature to these discerning readers. Christian literature organizations seem to have accepted that they could no longer control access to *all* literature in African markets, but believed that they remained a bulwark against the tide of unprincipled literature flowing in.

The British colonial administration’s growing interest in the matter was signaled by the work of L.J. Lewis, a Professor of Education at the University College of the Gold Coast who was sent to West Africa at the behest of the Directors of Education in the British West African colonies. They were considering the possibility of establishing a West Africa Literature Bureau and needed a detailed report on the current situation in each of the colonies. From November 3, 1949 to January 16, 1950, Lewis toured the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, visiting schools, bookstores, libraries and presses and

¹⁰² “Minutes of Discussion on Book Distribution,” 3.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 12.

meeting with political leaders and other policy makers. He was charged with determining the systems of literature distribution and considering the usefulness of a literature bureau in each colony. Upon returning to Britain, he issued “A Report on Literature Production and Distribution in British West Africa.” London was hesitant to spend too much money in the West African colonies as they negotiated the transition to political independence and so colonial officers had to carefully plan and justify expenditures. Lewis’ report was a valuable tool for making decisions about funding the production of literature.

Lewis faulted the poor sales acumen of distributors, in part, for the public’s dismal (as he viewed it) lack of interest in books. Private traders and bookshop clerks are described as incompetent, unable to interact with potential readers or promote books. Managers were not willing to spend profits on advertising or training clerks. With most of the literature being channeled through mission bookshops, little material that was not directly related to religious or school instruction ever reached the market. These shops earned enough profit on stationary and other sundries to subsidize their evangelical literature work that they did not need to expand their book offerings in order to stay afloat. Private sellers followed their example, relying on non-book goods to drive their sales. Customers, according to Lewis, did not bother to look at the literature on offer since nothing new or unique was advertised as a valuable read.

In his report, Lewis promotes “itinerating sales techniques” as the future of book distribution in British West Africa.¹⁰⁴ He cites the experiences of missionaries traveling throughout the region with car trunks full of books, which they easily sold to eager customers who did not have regular access to literature. Lewis believed that people

¹⁰⁴ L.J. Lewis, *Report on Literature Production and Distribution in British West Africa*, 1950, 29.

desired books but could not always reach the towns and large villages where they were available. An additional benefit of itinerant distributors was their direct sales approach; Lewis reported that people were more likely to buy books when a seller personally recommended them. While this model of book distribution had great potential because it fit into commonplace strategies of direct-to-customer marketing, it required a heavy capital investment. Traders of books, including individuals and bookstores, would need well-equipped vans to transport material and large stocks to give customers a variety of options. Lewis' report describes some traders who had recognized the business potential of itinerant sales, but did not have the capital to carry out their plans; even the mission bookstores were not capable of expanding beyond their guaranteed school-church market because of a lack of capital.

Between 1940 and 1960, there was a great deal of discussion in religious and secular publishing circles about having prices printed on the books exported from Britain to Nigeria. This seemingly minor detail was a major concern for those at the terminus of the book supply chain, who faced a complicated task of pricing books so as to turn a profit while ensuring that the products were within reach of customers. A so-called 'English published price' printed on a book cover could allow sellers to charge a higher price than they might have otherwise, or it could make the book too expensive for buyers. At least one government official suggested that English published prices were fine in Nigeria, as long as the wholesale price was low enough to allow bookshops to sell books to customers for below cover price and still make a profit, since it allowed a buyer to think "he had got a particularly good bargain."¹⁰⁵ Wyatt reported at the ICCLA meeting

¹⁰⁵ T.S. Tull, "Top Secret Memo to the Colonial Office," June 30, 1952, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

that he sold books in Lagos for the English published prices, but books ‘up country’ were marked at a higher price to account for transportation costs.¹⁰⁶

Participants in the ICCLA meeting agreed that that a trade association was necessary in order to negotiate favorably with British publishers. They planned to ask for an initial discount of 40% from publishers in order to sell books at the English published prices in West Africa. After negotiations with the multinational publishers, they figured that they would receive a 33.3% discount because publishers were willing to cut deals with book distributors in West Africa in order to access new markets. The mission booksellers were anxious to secure a partnership with multinationals because they faced competition from both African booksellers and mail-order companies in their home markets.¹⁰⁷

In contrast to mission bookshop managers, who had to work within the parameters set by publishers and their own home societies, African booksellers, including mission and school employees who sold books on the side, set their own prices based on supply and demand. They were typically able to charge more than the English published price because they carried books to markets not reached by the main bookshops. Since publishers in Nigeria could not produce the volume of books need for the market, all of these sellers relied on receiving imports from Britain. The mission bookshops that bore the heaviest costs in this business model resented playing the complicated economic guessing game about how much Nigerians could and *should* pay for their literature instead of being able to rely on the supply-and-demand model so prized in the era.

¹⁰⁶ “Minutes of Discussion on Book Distribution,” 2.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

The debate over English published prices that took place during the ICCLA meeting illustrates a changing understanding of the role of literature in colonial societies. There were those who, following the older model, believed that literature should be subsidized in order to make it available to as many people as possible, and those who supported a newer model and viewed literature as a trade good to be regulated by the market. Many Nigeria-based missionaries fell into the first camp because the lackluster economic growth of Nigeria between the Second World War and Independence meant that books remained a luxury good for most colonial subjects. In contrast, books were far more accessible to inhabitants of the Gold Coast.

Sunday W. Chianakwalam, a staff member of the Eastern Region Literature Bureau, conducted a mass education literature distribution experiment in Owerri Province in 1949. His report hints at the general feelings of missionaries and government officials regarding the practice of book subsidization. He described it as “a temporary measure to overcome illiteracy. It should not be given encouragement because if the newly Nigerian literate readers are born with the idea that books cost only a halfpenny or a penny, they might grow with it.”¹⁰⁸ His observation reflects the paternalistic attitude of literature workers towards Nigerians. These people held the keys to literacy in Nigeria, through their control of education and book provision, and they believed that Nigerians needed to be taught *how* to be readers and not led astray with unrealistic expectations about the accessibility of books.

An anonymous report on book distribution for the CMS indicates nostalgia for the “early days” of the reading public in Nigeria, when the mission-based book distribution

¹⁰⁸ Sunday W. Chianakwalam, *The Problems of Book Distribution in Eastern Nigeria*, November 19, 1949, 2, ICCLA Box 17 (520), SOAS.

system created a close relationship between literacy and Christianity.¹⁰⁹ The CMS fought to maintain that relationship even as new competitors entered the market, giving church leaders a discount ('landed cost plus 10%') on books purchased from CMS shops; the sellers were allowed to keep the profits from sales for the use of their missions. The report's author acknowledged, however, that this limited distribution system could no longer meet the demands of customers. The CMS in Nigeria still hoped to manage book provisioning throughout the colony as far as it was possible by supporting a centralized distribution system with bookshops receiving their wares from a port-adjacent CMS-controlled depot. The CMS book depot would allow that organization to regulate the availability and price of imported literature.

The CMS began looking beyond missionaries and catechists for new sources of distribution for their material. Like the colonial government, they advocated the idea of utilizing colporteurs and traveling salesmen, who would carry mostly teaching literature and advertise newer publications available at the larger bookshops. They also recognized the need to incorporate African booksellers into their system by providing them with wholesale books. The 1949 report is quite ambitious, suggesting that the CMS provide reading rooms within each bookshop to display the wares and make reading copies available because "past experience has shown that reading rooms fill a real need and that through them bookshop sales have been encouraged."¹¹⁰ It also advocates the opening of a bookstall in every public market, selling educational and vernacular literature, and church, selling Christian literature. It advises that the CMS seek permission from the

¹⁰⁹ Report on book distribution, 1949, 2, ICCLA Box 17, SOAS.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

government to open bookstalls in train stations, “otherwise another agency will be before us and we will lose a fine opportunity of distributing literature of *the right kind*.”¹¹¹ Every type of public space is seemingly covered in the report, with the goal of saturating the market with “the right kind” of books – those that fit with the CMS message of Christianity and civilization.

In southwestern Nigeria, the CMS (Lagos) Bookshop pioneered efforts to centralize and professionalize the bookselling industry in order to increase product distribution and thwart competition from smaller African sellers. Based in the capital of colonial Nigeria, they had access to a major port and a small but well-established consumer base to support such work. The CMS and other mission-led bookshops obtained most of their books directly from British publishers, and Nigerian booksellers relied in turn on the mission shops to serve as wholesale suppliers. These Nigerian traders were not bound by any agreement with publishers to sell books at the cover price, so they could charge what the market allowed – which was often a higher price. Mission bookshop managers accused the traders of creating a black market for books. They viewed the proliferation of Nigerian booksellers as a problem because, they claimed, the upstart sellers were siphoning away profits from the larger bookshops that would have been used to develop a greater variety of literature for the reading public. Wyatt attempted to combat the problem by maintaining a selective list of booksellers who were authorized to receive a trade discount through the Bookshop. African booksellers joined the list by filling out a form that recorded other products they sold in their shop, their pricing policy and a testimonial of their business from a schoolmaster or a church leader.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 3. Emphasis mine.

Sellers who were caught violating their pricing policy, as endorsed by the CMS, were stricken from the authorization list.¹¹² Nigerian traders, who did not deal strictly in books and related materials, irritated those who viewed themselves as professional booksellers.

The effort to combat book sales outside of bookshops went still further. In order to put an end to what they viewed as a “black market” in church literature, the CMS distributed 50,000 Yoruba-language Bibles throughout the Lagos Diocese in 1949 and 1950.¹¹³ The CMS Bookshop administration hoped that African sellers would be driven out of the trade in Yoruba Bibles, prayer books and hymnals if the books were widely available in authorized bookshops. The existence of such a vigorous informal market for the books indicates the high level of customer demand for this kind of reading material.

For those individuals who did enter the book trade, the sparse distribution of the population in much of Nigeria made it more difficult for booksellers to reach rural customers. Distribution was a hands-on job and the selling of all types of reading materials required intensive labor. For example, the *Drum* magazine staff had to conduct promotional tours of Nigeria to find readers, carrying the magazines to towns and villages in the back of lorries.¹¹⁴ They also used an extensive network of individual Nigerian distributors who were responsible for soliciting customers in their areas.

Moreover, booksellers could only hope for a thin profit margin in the best of times. Mission bookshops had an inestimable advantage over Nigerian booksellers because they could access trade discounts and command customers from their church

¹¹² “Minutes of Discussion on Book Distribution,” 2. It is not known when this list was started or for how long it was maintained.

¹¹³ *The C.M.S. Bookshop*, n.d., 1, Ransome-Kuti Papers, Box 80, DLMS.

¹¹⁴ Anthony Smith, “West African Roll,” in *The Beat of Drum*, ed. Angela Caccia (Braamfontein, South Africa: Ravan Press, Ltd., 1982), 34.

networks. Even so, these large bookshops survived only by selling other paper and supply goods in addition to their books. Nevertheless, British officials often made the complaint that “Africans who go in for bookselling do not necessarily stick to the trade and may be in a quite different line a few months hence.”¹¹⁵ They also found it frustrating that so many sellers carried books as only one part of a general goods business. These criticisms seem particularly shortsighted, considering the many obstacles facing the book market after the Second World War. Carrying books only during the selling high season that coincided with the start of the school year, and stocking books as only one line in a shop, were both smart business strategies for dealing with the vagaries of the book market, even if they led to a smaller variety of books for sale.

With their slim profit margins, Nigerian booksellers did not have much hard currency to purchase stock. Typically, British publishers sent books on consignment to larger booksellers, like the CMS and Methodist Bookshops, in Nigeria. These bookshops kept some of the books to sell and also acted as central distributors who sent books to secondary sellers on a “sale or return” basis. Nigerian sellers usually spent their currency on books that had a guaranteed customer base, such as textbooks. These secondary sellers could return unsold books to the central depot bookshop, which often took a large loss within this system because the returned books were unfit for re-sale. Useable unsold stock could be returned, less the shipping costs, to the original publisher in Britain. Participants in this distribution system took on a great deal of risk, because books could easily be ruined in the climate of southern Nigeria before they were sold.

¹¹⁵ Tull, “Top Secret Memo to the Colonial Office.”

The book distribution experiment conducted by Chianakwalam—with the assistance of Marjorie Stewart, organizer of the Eastern Regional Literature Bureau—highlighted other difficulties in bookselling that were applicable to all of southern Nigeria. When they tried to improve the availability and variety of books in rural areas by offering local schoolteachers a commission on books sold, Chianakwalam and Stewart found that the teachers did not have the time to promote or sell books beyond the immediate market of their own students. Furthermore, the books became unavailable when the teachers went on break. Privately hired colporteurs faced similar difficulties; relying on public transportation, they could only cover a small market area. Also, they could only carry a small and unvaried stock of books and therefore lost the interest of customers with each subsequent visit.¹¹⁶ As this experiment indicates, colonial officials had placed much hope in colporteurs and other sellers who would report back to a central distribution point to obtain their wares and then do the job of taking the commodity to the customer. Stewart, a highly educated librarian, also wanted these individual distributors to receive some kind of official training for their role in book handling. Such education, however, was prohibitively expensive for the number of colporteurs needed to cover the colony. Stewart and Chianakwalam concluded that the introduction of mobile bookselling units, more bookshops and a network of distribution through individuals working on commission were the answers to Nigerian book provision woes.

During the 1949 ICCLA meeting attendees signaled that they could not afford any costly experiments in book distribution, such as the outfitting of mobile bookshop vans. Those innovations would have to come from the government and philanthropy

¹¹⁶ Chianakwalam, *The Problems of Book Distribution in Eastern Nigeria*, 1.

administrators who were advocating for them. The ICCLA administration instead offered itself as a clearinghouse for information on book distribution techniques that had been tested throughout Africa. The refusal of mission bookshops to spend too heavily on new book distribution systems signaled the handing over of leadership in the development of a reading public to other stakeholders.

Conclusion

When the Nigerian colonial government began opening village reading rooms in the late 1930s in partnership with local authorities and the British Council, few Nigerians were literate in English, although residents of towns certainly recognized the economic advantages of such skills. Educators promoted Yoruba literacy as well because it served as a tool for furthering the government's agenda in areas such as healthcare and agriculture. The colonial government, up to that time, had shown little interest in funding primary education or other literacy training opportunities. Moreover, according to John Harris, the first head librarian at University College, Ibadan, "the colonial government frequently argues that African reading interests were too limited and closely associated with personal advancement to justify expenditure on reading material of broader scope."¹¹⁷ British officials were reluctant even to support the development of literature for a Nigerian reading public, ignoring the fact that Nigerian readers did not have many options beyond educational and self-improvement texts.

¹¹⁷ Quoted without identification of source in Olaniyi Olatunde Oladoyin, "The Reading Interests of Literate Adults and the Use of State Public Library in Ilorin, Kwara State" (MLS Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1979), 20.

The Second World War marked a turning point in the politics of colonial rule and therefore in British attitudes towards education and literacy initiatives in Nigeria. The British Colonial Office changed its ruling tactics as the war intensified, because it needed to garner support within the colonies for the war effort. The Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 signaled the British government's willingness to invest in its colonies instead of expecting financial self-sufficiency within those territories. This new investment, along with the psychological and economic repercussions of the war, brought changes to British Africa. The following chapter traces these changes, from a more intensive government involvement in literacy issues to the reformulation of the politics of reading for colonial subjects.

4 Books for the Masses: Nigerian Readers Under Colonial Rule

During the Second World War and in the political realignments of its aftermath, the Colonial Office transitioned from voicing a philosophy of benevolent governance over its African possessions to one of partnership and mutual progress.¹ Such rhetoric initially referred to a slow march towards independence for Britain's African colonies, but as protest against colonial rule grew, it came to include practical measures that indicated the colonial government's readiness to hand administration over to African leaders. In Nigeria, the colonial government began to court the young educated elite, who it had previously pushed aside in favor of the chiefly class, to take up powerful administrative positions.² Great Britain's revision in their timeline for withdrawal from their colonies was a matter of self-preservation. The British government needed the raw materials available in Africa to fuel the sluggish post-war economy at home, but it did not have the hard currency to invest in colonial infrastructure and maintain rule around the globe. By transferring governmental authority, difficult and expensive issues like education provision would belong to African administrations. The British government, although it wanted to meet the demands of colonial subjects for educational opportunities in order to generate goodwill, desired to get out of such an expensive business.

¹ Clive Whitehead, "The Impact of the Second World War on Education in Britain's Colonial Empire," in *Education and the Second World War: Studies in Schooling and Social Change*, ed. Roy Lowe (London: Routledge, 2012), 152. Partnership and progress were also more palatable concepts in the eyes of the United States government, Great Britain's most important ally.

² John E. Flint, "'Managing Nationalism': The Colonial Office and Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1932-43," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 27, no. 2 (May 1999): 151.

By the early 1950s, these new Nigerian leaders had gained the power to demand increased funding for education as they attained higher positions within the colonial administration.³ In the Western Region, children enrolled in school in unexpectedly high numbers and adults had new opportunities to join mass literacy programs. The resultant burgeoning student population needed textbooks and general interest literature to support their schooling. Although publishers tried their hand at fiction and other types of pleasure reading, educational texts were their best material. The philosophy of literature suppliers was exemplified by C.L.M. Clauson, a colonial official who noted in a discussion of the provision of literature that the government should “consider the possibility of creating and financing a literature producing machine, the object of which would of course be to provide secular literature of a type suitable for adult education, i.e. not ostensibly education, but having that effect, [especially] books on agricultural practice and so on.”⁴ Clauson wanted the government to subsidize literature production, but only in an educational capacity. New adult literates were supposed to be motivated to read by educational books that masqueraded as general literature. Readers simply did not have access to a great selection of books beyond the “improving” literature that was available in church-run bookshops and government-sponsored reading rooms and libraries. They likely obtained their entertainment literature through local printer/publishers, who were issuing pamphlets in English and Yoruba, and in newspapers.

³ The percentage of total government expenditure used for education in Nigeria grew from 4.3% to 16.9% between 1939 and 1951/52. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 126.

⁴ C.L.M Clauson, memo, August 8, 1939, CO 875/58/4, NAUK. Examples published by a government committee in 1938 include *Agricultural Problems for Africans* and *Agriculture for Village Teachers, About our Bodies*, and *A Handbook for Dressers and Nurses*.

In this chapter, I identify various efforts that were made to expand the reading public and create profitable English and Yoruba language literature to sell to new customers. I show that attempts by regional governments to institute mass literacy programs and to develop local and regional library systems failed to create the kind of reading public they had envisioned. Instead, the direction and growth of the local book market was shaped by the tastes of Nigerian readers in this post-war era. I then discuss the multinational and local publishers who vied for shares of the book market. Recognizing the value placed by outside agencies on dictating the content and distribution of literature in Nigeria, I conclude the chapter with an exploration of the colonial government's propaganda efforts, which became more urgent as the colonial period came to an end and the British attempted to protect their influence within Nigeria through the provisioning of literature. I argue that the covert distribution of British propaganda, along with less surreptitious propagandizing – such as the government support for British publishers and paper subsidies – was a logical step in the efforts by external agencies to insert themselves into the practices of a Nigerian reading culture.

Mass Education and Government Investment in Book Provision

In the course of the nineteenth century, British parliamentarians came to recognize the value of having an educated populace that could be held responsible for the increasing demands being placed on them as citizens of the British state.⁵ Mass education served to incorporate individuals, as “loci of sovereignty and loyalty, production and

⁵ The British Education Act of 1870 created locally elected and funded school boards that were charged with running free primary schools in every county of Great Britain. Previously, voluntary schools run by religious institutions that charged tuition, were the only option for students. In their colonies, however, the British government saw no need to ensure that the general public had access to education until circumstances compelled them to change.

consumption, faith and obedience,” into society, where their successes contributed to the development of the state.⁶ The 1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act first signaled the British government’s willingness to commit funds to the expansion of education in its colonies, but only in order to better access the profitable resources available in Africa and to counteract the increasingly vocal opposition to colonial rule from educated Africans using the press to publicize their grievances. Historian John Iliffe has called this policy “the new colonialism,” which was characterized by “combined altruism and self-interest.”⁷ While the British government was forced to plan a transition to Nigerian independence in the wake of the Second World War, it also wanted to maintain a presence that would economically benefit its British constituents, which it could do by ensuring that an educated Nigerian public viewed its former rulers approvingly. The post-war financial crisis, which came to a head in 1947, prompted the government to lean more heavily on the colonies to aid its economy and kicked off a new round of development, including for schools, in search of exportable profit.⁸ Although the relatively brief period of active British rule was coming to an end, the following years would be a continuation of the ever-present “civilizing mission” in Nigeria.

The Foreign Office articulated the relationship between economic growth and its desire to cultivate a large reading public overseas: “The distribution abroad of British books and periodicals not only provides a medium through which British policy and our way of life can be projected to a wide public and thus reinforce our officially sponsored

⁶ John Boli, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John W. Meyer, “Explaining the Origins and Expansion of Mass Education,” *Comparative Education Review* 29, no. 2 (May 1985): 156.

⁷ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 437.

⁸ Porter and Stockwell, *British Imperial Policy and Decolonization, 1938-64*, 1:48.

information activity, but also creates a favourable climate for the sale of other British products and so benefits the community as a whole.”⁹ British government administrators were convinced that investing in mass education, and therefore the expansion of the colonial reading public, was an economic boon for them. Nigerian politicians supported the expansion of their education system, too, seeing it as an acquisition of political significance. The colonial government had enacted the Richards Constitution in 1946, creating Houses of Assembly for the Northern, Eastern and Western Provinces and a central legislature in Lagos, although these bodies had only advisory powers. Therefore, Nigerian politicians were looking to exercise some authority, although this was difficult to do in the arena of education because its management remained centralized in Lagos, even as politics became quickly regionalized.

Again, one of the major obstacles faced by the government officials charged with creating education policy was deciding which languages to use for instruction. Mission-sponsored schools in southwestern Nigeria had long used Yoruba as the language of instruction for primary students, and English thereafter. The colonial government’s language policy followed suit, although it was not without controversy; matters of language were hotly debated. A 1943 Memorandum of Language in African Education from the Colonial Office said that English should not be introduced until Primary 4 and not used as a language of instruction until Primary 6. A later recommendation reverted to the previous practice of teaching English beginning in Primary 3. By 1945, an advisory committee on education in Nigeria had developed a language policy for the colonial government. The two main tenets were first, “education should begin in the vernacular of

⁹ “Note by the Foreign Office to the Overseas Negotiations Committee of the British Book Export Scheme for Turkey,” October 21, 1957, BT 258/279, NAUK.

the child” and second, “the teaching of English is essential.”¹⁰ Educators and administrators in southwestern Nigeria were in full support of this policy because they oversaw a relatively homogenous Yoruba-speaking population and had access to a comparably large body of Yoruba literature.

Since literacy was considered a key component of civilization, colonial leaders wanted to ensure that a ‘civilized’ populace stood ready as political power was handed over to Nigerians. The government and missions recognized that the post-school age population would be excluded from the reading public unless they had opportunities to take part in literacy education, too. *Mass Education in African Society* (1943), a report of the Colonial Office’s Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, promoted the idea of literacy as an aid to development by recommending the creation of adult education services in African colonies.¹¹ The British home government had come to view education reform as a unifying experience for its own populace, although widespread literacy and a body of national literature, rather than universal education, was supposedly the key to imposing a national ideology.

In Nigeria during the 1940s and 1950s, “the original “civilizing” or “humanizing” use of literature in education [in Britain] was translated to accommodate a decolonizing ideology.”¹² Colonial governments in British West Africa, if they could not stall the process of decolonization, wanted to control it as far as that was possible. They had begun to view the African educated elite as dangerous to their continued influence, and

¹⁰ “Memorandum on Language in African School Education from the Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies (Report of the NUT Conference),” *Nigerian Daily Times*, January 5, 1945.

¹¹ See Christopher William Machell Cox, *Mass Education in African Society* (Great Britain Colonial Office: Advisory Committee on Education in the Colonies, 1943).

¹² Ellerman, “The Literature Bureau: African Influence in Papua New Guinea,” 207.

therefore claimed that these Africans were a threat to the non-educated population, feeding them false information; thus, mass education was more than a nationalizing project; it was necessary to counteract the pernicious influence of the educated elite.¹³ Government administrators and missionaries recognized the utility of having a vibrant reading public through which they could dispense information in a controlled manner. These agents, who would soon be leaving their positions of power in Nigeria, viewed their investment in literacy education and reading materials as a development venture with either an economic or spiritual end goal.

Their project was carried out in part by the Literature Committee of the Adult Education Committee, which came to be known as the Yoruba Literature Committee. The committee held its inaugural meeting in Ibadan in 1944. E.A.L. Gaskin, the Senior Education Officer for the Western Provinces, served as the Chairman, but almost all of the other members were Nigerian community leaders. The committee was tasked with supervising the “production of cheap and suitable literature for adults who had learned to read and write in the vernacular.”¹⁴ This suitable literature included pamphlets from the Sheldon Press such as “The Cooperative Movement,” “How to Grow Bananas” and “Brave Deeds of the War,” which the committee requested permission to translate into Yoruba. They also hoped to quickly produce a book of fables and an agricultural primer. Later meeting minutes show that the Yoruba Literature Committee deemed parables, proverbs, folk stories and fables particularly worthy of publication and believed that they would be of interest to their audience. Gaskin suggested that they translate Longman’s

¹³ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 93.

¹⁴ “Notes on the First Meeting of the Literature Committee of the Adult Education Committee,” August 22, 1944, IbMinEd 1/9: WG 1297A, Vol. I, NAI.

African Folk Tales into Yoruba.¹⁵ Plans were made to advertise for material via radio, asking listeners to send in their Yoruba proverbs and stories. The committee appears to have published literature that utilized oral genres to cultivate a body of ideal cultural practices that were supposedly innate to its Yoruba reading audience.

The Yoruba Literature Committee became an essential part of the mass education program in the Western Provinces. General education textbooks and books for use in the program were approved, in English, by the Deputy Director of Education and the Mass Education Officer and then given to the Yoruba Literature Committee for review and translation before being printed. The regional government requested that local printers, such as the Tanimihin-old Press in Ijebu-Ode, be given the contracts for all literature used in the mass education program.¹⁶ The committee also offered its services to British publishers, who could submit Yoruba language manuscripts to it for review and language advice. Additionally, the committee sought out manuscripts that it thought would be good for textbooks to bring to the attention of publishers. Multinational publishers and the colonial education department found the Yoruba Literature Committee especially useful because it helped them to gauge if a book would sell well.

For all of the rhetoric surrounding the importance of mass education, the vaunted program was never fully implemented in Nigeria. A.J. Carpenter, a British former army officer, was appointed the sole Mass Education Officer for Nigeria in 1946. He initiated a mass education program with the goal of achieving comprehensive literacy throughout the colony. It centered on adult education classes; local African instructors taught basic

¹⁵ "Notes of a Meeting of the Yoruba Literature Committee," March 29, 1945, IbMinEd 1/9: WG 1297A, Vol. I, NAI.

¹⁶ W.K. Mackell, letter to the Director of Education, Lagos, April 6, 1951, Med(Fed) 1/6: CDE 541, NAI.

literacy classes with support from Carpenter and British district officers. Additional short courses were meant to prepare customers for certificate exams or University of London matriculation exams. While the Yoruba language reading classes filled quickly, with women being noted as especially enthusiastic students, adults faced many obstacles to participation. They were typically busy with work in town or travel to and from farms. The classes themselves often lacked continuity, with a number of teachers working around holiday, farming and market schedules. Usually located in central markets, the classes would have been noisy and lessons difficult to follow. While Yoruba language teaching materials addressing practical matters such as farming techniques, health and homecare were created exclusively for the use of mass education classes in the Western Region, the assigned materials were inaccessible to many students. Moreover, the Nigerian mass literacy programs were designed to teach functional literacy in African languages, but many students wanted to learn English instead. Nigerian soldiers who had learned English while in the army joined the growing number of voices who called for English literacy education.¹⁷

To meet the needs of adult education, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies at University College Ibadan opened in 1949 following the publication of the Asquith and Elliot Report on Higher Education in West Africa. The Asquith Commission had recommended that each colony establish such a department to develop targeted adult education strategies. In its first incarnation, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies focused on providing support and continuing education to post-secondary students and university graduates. This objective was in keeping with the colonial government's

¹⁷ Margaret Wrong, report, July 25, 1944, 1, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

recognition that an educated workforce would be necessary in the approaching transition to political independence. To meet the goal of “disseminating knowledge and thus helping to create an informed public opinion,” the Department organized lectures, seminars and residential courses on political, economic and cultural topics.¹⁸ In order to participate in these activities, extra-mural students had to be already literate and formally educated. While the Department of Extra-Mural Studies did not provide widespread continuing education for adults, it did coordinate the study of literacy education in Nigeria.

British colonial governments and other foreign agencies worked from the premise that a civilized society was formally literate and they embarked on an intensified campaign to stimulate an interest in reading through the building of civic spaces for book provision and reading support. A parallel concern over the distribution of literature developed as the reading population increased in size. The Colonial Office made its first foray into organized literature provision with the opening of an East African Literature Bureau in 1947. The idea of a Nigerian counterpart was broached in that same year, when Michael Davidson traveled to the colony under the aegis of the ICCLA to research literature needs there. The Western and Eastern Regional Committees of the Nigerian Christian Council, the main partnering agency of the ICCLA, voiced their opinion that there should be two separate literature bureaus to address the differing conditions and needs on either side of the Niger.¹⁹ Davidson and a group of mission representatives met with the colonial Director of Education in Lagos, but no definitive plan was made during

¹⁸ J.A. Akinpelu and S.N. Osuji, “The Department at Forty: An Overview,” in *Forty Years of Adult Education at Ibadan (1949-1989)*, ed. J.A. Akinpelu and M.A. Omolewa (Ibadan: Department of Adult Education, 1989), 7.

¹⁹ Davidson, *Report to the ICCLA*, 2.

that visit. Missionaries were hesitant to support the establishment of a government-run literature bureau because they worried it would curtail their ability to dictate the production and distribution of religious literature.²⁰

Lewis, author of the *Report on Literature Production and Distribution in British West Africa* recommended that literature work be regionally focused. Rather than establishing a central bureau to oversee the production of literature for all of British West Africa, Lewis suggested an advisory board that would issue an annual survey and consult on matters of common interest, such as linguistic policy. Stakeholders agreed that literature policies would be more effective if decision-makers worked within local communities. Lewis and his contemporaries recognized that the huge number of languages spoken in West Africa complicated the process of literature production and distribution. In his report, Lewis indicated that even by 1950 colonial government departments saw little value in promoting the growth of African language literacy. Apart from a few motivated individuals within the government who ran literacy programs, churches continued to carry out the majority of the work.²¹ Missionaries and graduates of the mission schools wrote books that they deemed useful for academic curricula; some of these manuscripts were also published with government support. Lewis noted, however, that this process resulted in a “haphazard” reading program for students, devoid of basic subjects such as local history, geography, economics, health and social practices.²²

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Lewis, *Report on Literature Production and Distribution in British West Africa*, 22.

²² Ibid., 19. Schools still had to order textbooks in these basic subjects, largely written for British school children, from multinational publishers.

Lewis introduced his discussion of southwestern Nigeria with a more positive outlook than he had done for any other area of British West Africa. He enthused that “there are clear indications of an upgrowth of genuine creativity in vernacular literature ... of distinctive quality.”²³ He opined that the relative lack of disagreement over Yoruba orthography allowed missionary and local writers to produce a coherent body of literature. African-owned and British presses were publishing these Yoruba-language works for a reading public that was growing thanks to primary and adult education programs. He also praised the work of the Yoruba Literature Committee at Ibadan, which advised publishers and authors regarding the production of books in Yoruba. Even the proper distribution of this literature, Lewis proclaimed, was possible in the southwestern region of the colony through the network of missionary bookshops and the addition of book vans for itinerant sales.

The 1951 Macpherson Constitution transferred decision-making power to the regional Deputy Directors of Education, allowing them to develop regionally tailored policies. However, with inadequate funding, the Departments of Education were unequipped to provide the requisite education to more students. School resources were in such short supply that as of 1953, two-thirds of Nigeria’s primary school teachers had not received any training beyond their own primary education.²⁴ There was little real progress in expanding education until African-led provisional governments instituted Universal Primary Education (UPE) programs, beginning with the Western Region in 1955. School enrollment that year nearly doubled, from 457,000 to 811,000 primary

²³ Ibid., 44.

²⁴ Segun Adesina, *Growth Without Development: Nigeria’s Educational Experience Between 1914-2004* (Abeokuta: Educational Industries Nigeria, Ltd., 2005), 24.

students.²⁵ Sponsors of UPE faced opposition from colonial administrators who were concerned that the Western Region legislative council was racing to be the first body to implement such a comprehensive education program. Objectors to UPE were at least partially correct; without enough schools and teachers, the regional government was in danger of being swamped with students and had to revise the program so that it offered a primary education that was free and universal, but no longer compulsory. Nevertheless, with the high profits of cocoa exports from the Western Region in the 1950s, the government was able to increase investment in primary education to meet the new enrollment demands. In 1959, 1,080,000 children attended 6,518 primary schools throughout the Western Region.²⁶

Despite the flurry of literacy activity in the Western Provinces, the Nigerian mass education program had come to a virtual standstill by 1952 because there was disagreement within the education bureaucracy about whether universal literacy, in African languages or in English, was a useful and practical goal. W.T. Mackell, the Deputy Director of Education for the Western Provinces, supported Carpenter's program, but others felt that universal literacy was impossible to achieve in Nigeria and not worth the investment.²⁷ According to the 1952 population census for the Western Region, 18%

²⁵ Marg Csapo, "Universal Primary Education in Nigeria: Its Problems and Implications," *African Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (March 1983): 92. The federal government did not institute a nation-wide Universal Primary Education scheme until 1976. The scheme was supposed to correct the imbalance of educational and economic opportunities between South and North, urban and rural, male and female.

²⁶ S.A. Akangbou, "Educational Management Policies and Programmes, 1951-84," in *Nigeria Since Independence: The First 25 Years: Education*, vol. III (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Ltd., 1989), 140.

²⁷ Michael Omolewa, "Programmed for Failure? The Colonial Factor in the Mass Literacy Campaign in Nigeria, 1946-1956," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 1 (2008): 115.

of the 6.35 million people were literate.²⁸ Faced with the reality of providing education to such a large population, administrators had gradually shifted their focus from universal to an adult and voluntary student groups, with the idea that, once educated, the beneficiaries would go on to spread the gospel of literacy to their communities. Even so, the program did not live up to its name; it never had the funding to offer classes to more than a tiny percentage of the population. Michael Omolewa, Nigeria's permanent representative to UNESCO and its foremost historian of adult education, has described the colonial government's mass education program as

an admission of the limitations of literacy education in effecting change in society ... Literacy was expected to transform society. A literate citizen was expected to improve his productivity, to share the burden of his community, to be loyal and patriotic, and to be honest. He was expected to provide leadership in the society and thus to be informed and enlightened about issues ... Literacy failed to perform the trick expected of it.²⁹

Mass education was supposed to go beyond the teaching of reading and writing to ensure the continuation of so-called traditional values that would inculcate morality in a society exposed to the negative features of the Western world. British and Nigerian officials alike embraced literacy instruction in African languages as the main strategy to retain what they saw as the inherent virtuousness of the African past. It was believed that the community and country overall would benefit from a literate population, as long as they remained connected to a system of moral guidance. At the same time, literacy could be a deterrent to a moral way of living. Omolewa notes that a common Yoruba adage was

²⁸ Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, 135.

²⁹ Michael Omolewa, "The Failure of Mass Education Experiment in Nigeria, 1940-1952," in *Issues in Nigerian Adult and Community Development Education*, ed. Akpovire Oduaran and Benjamin Eheazu (Ibadan: Nigerian National Council for Adult Education, 1987), 14.

“Mi o mowe ni, mom o ogbon ori mi” (I am not literate but I have common sense, and possess good judgment).”³⁰

Throughout this period of transition, the central colonial government persisted in making higher education its focus. British officials seemed to care about primary education only as far as it exposed Nigerian subjects to literature that inculcated a proper sense of awe for and desire to follow a British code of behavior. Describing his education in 1950s Nigeria, Ime Ikiddeh wrote, “Since we could not live too close to white people, except for the luck of having a few as teachers, it was the books in addition to the spoken word which led us to the cultural gates of Europe and left us staring at the riches inside the storehouse.”³¹ Colonial education officials intended these books to be both a symbol and a means of achieving civilization.

To this end, a Western Regional Literature Committee [WRLC] was established in 1952 to “sponsor the production, improve the distribution, and stimulate the reading of general reading matter both English and vernacular in the Western Region.”³² With the transition to political independence in sight, the Committee resolved to make universal literacy their goal. In contrast, previous government committees had lamented the lack of a reading population in the region, but accepted that it would be confined to graduates of missionary schools. In the early 1950s, the WRLC recognized a more urgent need to expand the Nigerian reading public so that they might fully participate in the political

³⁰ Ibid., 15.

³¹ Ime Ikiddeh, *Historic Essays on African Literature, Language, and Culture* (Lagos: Minder International, 2005), 413–414.

³² Secretary of the WRLC, letter, February 1952, ICCLA Box 29 (532), SOAS.

processes of an independent Nigerian state. Their strategy for accomplishing this goal was to produce more literature in Yoruba, to be made available to new literates.

Educational, publishing and bookselling representatives served on the WRLC Executive Committee. They proposed a slew of ambitious projects, including developing mobile bookshops, overseeing libraries and reading rooms and coordinating the publication of general interest literature and other, more expensive books that commercial publishers would not touch. The Executive Committee also decided to seek out and review Yoruba manuscripts for publication and write reviews of new books for the region. Furthermore, they imagined the WRLC as a link between publishers and the Education Department, the largest book customer in the region. They secured a prominent position within the literature market right away by working out an agreement with the CMS and Roman Catholic bookshops that those places would stock all books recommended by the WRLC.

The success of literature programs, however, was still driven by individuals at the local and regional levels. The Northern Region's Zaria Literature Bureau, for example, was transformed into the Gaskiya Corporation in 1945 through the advocacy of two men, Rupert East and Abubakar Imam.³³ Gaskiya published books in the Hausa language, but also served as a training center for all aspects of book production. It continued as the longest running of the regional bureaus; it eventually became the Northern Region Literacy Agency and then a semi-governmental agency that worked closely with Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, Ltd. to continue publishing Hausa language literature for its constituents in Northern Nigeria. In Southern Nigeria, the administrators of the

³³ Graham Furniss, "On Engendering Liberal Values in the Nigerian Colonial State: The Idea behind the Gaskiya Corporation," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 1 (March 2011): 103.

literature bureaus found it more difficult to navigate the complexities of multiple languages and large urban populations in order to produce African-language literature. Literacy advocates began to look for other means of book provision within local communities.

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, promoted libraries to fill the high demand for books that was a consequence of mass education movements. It held a series of international seminars on public library development beginning in 1948; the 1953 Ibadan Seminar was the fourth, and the first in Africa. The seminar organizers identified library service organization, materials acquisition and librarian training as the three main topics to discuss, especially in terms of the unique challenges faced in Africa. Participants spent four weeks meeting for discussion, viewing educational films and creating reports.³⁴ They focused particularly on the ways that social conditions and cultural patterns might shape how Africans used library resources. Members of the seminar believed that professionally run libraries would help coalesce new national identities in Africa: “[African librarians] will have to give their libraries and collections the character best suited to the fundamental trends of their culture and best fitted to meet the needs of their community.”³⁵ The primary result was a call for governments to pass legislation that would specifically require library development.

³⁴ The seminar included a diverse group of participants: fourteen men and fifteen women, with eight Africans among them. Eugénie R. Dorce, for example, was the daughter of Haitian immigrants to the United States and a professor of home economics at Barber-Scotia College in North Carolina. She was a Fulbright recipient, working at the Women’s Training Centre and Government College in Kano when she attended the conference. See Lulu Jones Garrett, “Gadabouting in the U.S.A.,” *Washington Afro-American*, February 10, 1953, 10.

³⁵ *Development of Public Libraries in Africa: The Ibadan Seminar*, 6.

During the course of the Ibadan Seminar, representatives from Nigeria, Gold Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone formulated a plan for the West African Library Association with John Harris, Head Librarian of the University College Ibadan, as president. In the following years, however, WALA became ineffective as its members turned their focus to national organizations, spurred on by the ascendant nationalism of the late 1950s and early 1960s in West Africa.³⁶ The Nigerian branch of WALA issued a National Library Policy document in 1955, advocating for library legislation at the regional and federal levels, librarian training, a national book deposit and national services relating to research and book preservation.³⁷ It also helped to found the Library Advisory Committee of Nigeria in 1958.³⁸ While there were attempts at creating a legislative impetus for library development and book promotion, little funding was made available to carry out such ambitious programs; as a result, the reading public remained underserved.

The colonial government also looked to set up and fortify public libraries in order to have an influence on reading materials for the more educated citizens of the new Nigeria. The Western Region established a public library service in 1956, although it did not yet have a permanent headquarters. The regional library functioned as an arm of the Ministry of Education. Growth was slow because there was no governing authority to make funding and purchasing decisions. There was a lending service, based in Ibadan,

³⁶ F. Adetowun Ogunshẹyẹ, “‘21 Years of Library Service,’ Keynote Address of the Nigerian Library Association 21st Annual Conference,” n.d., 10, OGFAD/00019: 98/1/88, Vol. IV, OA. Ogunshẹyẹ also suggests that the Association dissolved, in part, because of anger in Ghana over an \$88,000 grant awarded by the Carnegie Corporation to the University of Ibadan to fund a school of librarianship.

³⁷ Ogunshẹyẹ, “21 Years of Library Service.”

³⁸ Kalu Okorie, “Problems of Public Library Development in Nigeria,” *The Library World* 50, no. 705 (March 1959): 161.

with approximately 23,000 books.³⁹ It sent book boxes to schools in the region. In comparison, the Eastern Region's new central library in Enugu had 20,000 volumes and the Northern Region's central library at Kaduna housed almost 45,000 volumes. The Eastern Region Library Board, established in 1955, quickly developed into the most prolific and efficient library service in the country.

Individuals also attempted to extend library provision to new segments of the population. R.E. Crookall, the provincial education officer, established a children's library in the garage of his office in Ibadan in 1953. He also prevailed on the reading room committees in Ibadan, Oyo and Ijebu Ode to open children's sections and provided training for the attendants and/or librarians.⁴⁰ These sections did not fare well and, apart from a collection in Ibadan, deteriorated over the following decade. Lagos Municipal Library librarian Kalu Okorie noted the obstacles facing the creation of a national library service at the moment of independence in 1960; beyond the typical complaints of harsh climate, lack of funding and little skilled labor, he attributed the difficulties of establishing a network of libraries to "apathy on the part of both the public and state, including local authorities, with regard to the absence of a good library service."⁴¹ It seems that individual enthusiasm for government involvement in the project of book provision could not counteract the lack of organizational support.

³⁹ Ibid., 163.

⁴⁰ F. Adetowun Ogunshẹyẹ, *A Brief Survey of Children's School Libraries in Nigeria* (University of Ibadan, Institute of Librarianship, c 1965), 1, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

⁴¹ Okorie, "Problems of Public Library Development in Nigeria," 164.

Tastes of the Reading Public

It is difficult to find sources about Nigerian readers' responses to the literature available to them during the colonial period. The literate population was relatively small prior to the implementation of universal primary education in 1976. In addition, there was not a particularly wide range of material available in Yoruba and even the English-language book selection was limited by the financial interests of publishers and sellers. The archives rarely reveal the reading tastes and practices of the general public and interviews provide little beyond personal anecdotes. By the 1930s, a sharp divide existed between the well-educated (almost exclusively male) readers graduating from the highest levels of Nigerian schools and separating themselves from the mission origins of their predecessors and the partially literate graduates of the vast network of barely regulated primary schools. Even a missionary from across the continent could observe the gulf between "young intellectuals whom the Christian movement is not very much in touch with" and other readers in Nigeria.⁴²

Highly educated Nigerians wanted to read books in English. Wrong reported that the Penguin and Pelican series were especially popular among educated readers.⁴³ According to newspaper publisher Nnamdi Azikiwe, who owned a bookshop in Lagos, customers often requested books on politics, and he had accordingly ordered 200 copies

⁴² Rev. HS Kulp, Letter to Margaret Wrong, July 9, 1937, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

⁴³ Allen Lane founded Penguin Books in 1935 with the goal of selling good quality, inexpensive literature to the expanding reading public in Britain. The publisher achieved success quickly and, despite the apparent interest in Penguin books in Africa, chose not to open operations there. Penguin did begin publishing an African subject series in the 1950s, but produced it in Britain. J.E. Morpurgo, *Allen Lane: King Penguin* (London: Hutchinson & Co., Ltd., 1979), 236.

of the English translation of *Mein Kampf*.⁴⁴ These readers, viewed by those in London as provincial and relatively uninformed, were in fact incredibly aware of their position in relation to world political powers and made aspirational reading choices. They had little interest in books in African languages, unless perhaps those works contained practical information.⁴⁵ New and semi-literate readers, on the other hand, had begun their education in Yoruba and therefore read books in Yoruba, while recognizing that English literacy would give them the potential for upward economic mobility. Nevertheless, those in the literature field continued to focus on the need for more vernacular literature that they believed would entice new literates to read. The manager of the CMS Lagos Bookshop, which served as the central distributor for books to southwestern Nigeria, told Wrong that his primary concern was to expand the amount of “vernacular” (not English) literature available to African readers.⁴⁶

Scattered evidence suggests that Nigerian readers of the 1940s and 1950s desired religious books and more general educational material, much like their predecessors in the pre-war era. However, because of the growing market presence of a reading public, readers could get these books and pamphlets from a wider variety of sources. Moreover, they wanted new reading material that reflected African involvement in its production. In a 1940 letter, CMS (Lagos) Bookshop manager C.W. Wakeman complained that “the value of our [British] literary heritage is not recognised by the majority of Africans here,

⁴⁴ Wrong, May 25, 1939, May 25, 1939, 2. In a letter from the same trip, Wrong noted that the most recent book ordered by the Oni of Ife in English was *Mein Kampf*. See Margaret Wrong, Letter to ICCLA Headquarters, May 25, 1939, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 531, AF g o26/2, 1935-1940, CMS.

⁴⁵ Margaret Wrong, Notes, October 20, 1938, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

⁴⁶ Wrong, May 25, 1939, May 25, 1939. Other missions in Southern Nigeria sent manuscripts to the CMS Bookshop for publishing consideration; the store maintained the largest press and book stock in the region. Therefore, the CMS Lagos Bookshop and its manager had a great deal of control over what books were available to Nigerian readers.

and they are most anxious, increasingly anxious, to show that they can do things by themselves.”⁴⁷ His agitation points to the ability of the reading public to demand particular literature that was produced specifically for them.

The CMS and other missions in southwestern Nigeria had advocated the use of Standard Yoruba in religious and secular writing since the 1840s, when they developed the alphabet and orthography. Christian pastors and educators believed that the lessons of salvation were most easily learned when taught in the “mother tongue.” However, evidence shows that the Yoruba-speakers who entered schools and joined mass education classes between 1940 and 1960 wanted literacy education and the accompanying reading material in English, not in Yoruba. Margaret Wrong noted “a protracted and animated discussion in English on the relative merits of using English or Yoruba as languages of literature” with the ruler of Ado and government officials during her 1939 tour of Western Nigeria.⁴⁸ She does not say if they arrived at any conclusions. The next year, Wakeman, who was a staunch proponent of the production of Yoruba-language literature, wrote to his supervisor, “in the Yoruba country, there is a far greater demand for English than for vernacular.”⁴⁹ Students in the upper primary schools studied English and adults in mass education classes often requested English lessons, too. Along with religious literature such as Sunday school booklets, they had simplified English novels to read and practice their English literacy skills.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Wakeman, July 12, 1940.

⁴⁸ Wrong, May 25, 1939, May 25, 1939.

⁴⁹ Wakeman, July 12, 1940.

⁵⁰ This demand for English language education and literature was common across the continent. Reverend J.R. Shaw of the Lusaka Bookshop provided the ICCLA with feedback on book demand for Zambia in a 1955 letter. He reported that customers at a sale held in the Lusaka railway station were interested in

Ethel Fegan observed on her twelve-month tour of West Africa in 1942 that the books in greatest demand covered the subjects of civics, economics, psychology, biography “and books of an ‘improving’ nature.”⁵¹ At St. Gregory’s School in Lagos, the library consisted of books of “the usual type, textbooks, and some adventure, true stories, Dickens, etc.”⁵² Marjorie Stewart of the Eastern Regional Literature Bureau vividly described the demand for books by students at a village school, writing, “we were literally mobbed, I had tried to keep back the religious lit. by request, but was beseeched for any Af. H. Lib [African Home Library]. They yearned to buy our samples – Longmans, Nelson, Arnold, etc. – I have now placed an order.”⁵³ Stewart and Chianakwalam had traveled to the village for their book distribution experiment, intending to only sell a few publications from the African Home Library and display the textbooks from multinational publishers, but the students took the rare opportunity to buy up their entire stock. Chianakwalam’s report from the tour states that readers desired simplified Bibles and religious pamphlets, information on foreign cultural practices and domestic government policies and biographies of eminent Nigerians.⁵⁴

In 1952, the Western Regional Literature Committee’s Secretary stated that “the main demand in the Western Region is at present for text-books on the English language,

African language books, but he also observed that “everywhere a great desire to understand and to master the English language” existed. 309 out of the 618 books sold at the Lusaka railway station during June 1955 were in African languages. Customers purchased 82 English language instructional books in the same period. J.R. Shaw, “Reports from Africa,” 1955, 1, ICCLA Box 17 (520), SOAS.

⁵¹ Ethel Fegan, “Address to Africa Committee,” April 28, 1942, Section IV, Part 26, Reel 532, AF g O 26/2, CMS.

⁵² Ethel Fegan, journal entry, July 28, 1941, GCPP Fegan 3/14, GCA.

⁵³ Marjorie Stewart, letter, June 29, 1949, ICCLA Box 17 (520), SOAS. Abbreviations in original.

⁵⁴ Chianakwalam, *The Problems of Book Distribution in Eastern Nigeria*.

texts prescribed for local or overseas examinations, and for books whose title suggests that comprehensive knowledge and immediate self-improvement are to be gained by their reading.”⁵⁵ These book types fall perfectly in line with the literature that had been promoted so heavily by missions since the 1840s. As described previously, missionaries taught that reading was a tool for self-improvement, salvation and companionship, not a form of entertainment. In *About Books*, a 1949 installment of the popular African Home Library series that was widely available in southern Nigeria, Mary Senior writes that “they will enrich our lives in more ways than one, for while from books we may learn many useful arts, from them too we may get wise advice, and the happiness that comes from having a good friend.”⁵⁶ The Nigerian reading public, therefore, would have purchased books that contributed to these aims.

Following the Second World War, readers in southwestern Nigeria had the option of borrowing books from a reading room or library, purchasing them from a bookshop or seeking them out directly from local printers. Mission presses, which had once controlled literature production and distribution throughout Nigeria, bristled at the resultant secularization of the market. The South African novelist and journalist Peter Abrahams’ keynote speech at the ICCLA’s Silver Jubilee Dinner in 1954 suggests the trepidation missionaries felt regarding the literature choices being made by African readers. He singled out *Drum* magazine as emblematic of Africans’ reading tastes:

First, you know this very great need for reading matter, which I do not think the Christian has satisfied. I will tell you of the magazine “The African Drum,” a pretty nasty sort of thing, in places, with painted girls, emphasis on violence and crime, suggestion of sex; with a talented man doing a series on “The Chief”,

⁵⁵ Secretary, Western Regional Literature Committee, letter, February 1952, ICCLA Box 29 (532), SOAS.

⁵⁶ Mary Senior, *About Books* (London: Sheldon Press, 1949), no. 112, p. 16.

which glorifies violence. But “Drum” is written by Africans, produced by Africans, and Africans have taken it to their hearts as they have taken no other magazine on the African Continent ... There is a lot that is nasty, but people buy it and are reading it. There is obviously the need, and the fact that this thing is produced by Africans counts for so much too.⁵⁷

Magazines such as *Drum*, which was only one of many periodicals being published locally throughout the continent, met a desire for reading material that was specific to Africa. The South African-based *Drum* magazine began publication in early 1951 and was being distributed in Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone by the end of that year. It had reached a circulation of 60,000 per month by 1953, with readers throughout the continent.⁵⁸ At the time of Abrahams’ speech, there was not a unique Nigerian edition. But, according to Jurgen Schadeburg, *Drum*’s head photographer, readers in Nigeria bought the magazine because it was produced in Africa and aimed at an African audience. It also heavily featured photo essays, making it accessible to customers who were not formally literate.⁵⁹

In 1957, *Drum* management opened a permanent office in Lagos to take advantage of the density of urban readers who made up the magazine’s customer base. The South African owners began publishing a unique West African edition of the magazine around 1960. The reading public was being attracted away from the literature put out by mission and multi-national publishers because *Drum* was written by Africans and for Africans, but also because it entertained non-readers. The Nigerian *Drum* reached its peak circulation in the early 1960s, when, under editor Nelson Ottah, an Igbo man and

⁵⁷ Peter Abrahams, speech, August 10, 1954, ICCLA Box 13 (515), SOAS.

⁵⁸ Tyler Fleming and Toyin Falola, “Africa’s Media Empire: Drum’s Expansion to Nigeria,” *History in Africa* 32 (2005): 138.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 142, 151.

the only African to lead a *Drum* subsidiary, the magazine expanded its political coverage. Nigerian *Drum*'s popularity in this format confirms other sources, such as Chianakwalam's 1949 report, which suggest that Nigerians wanted both to be entertained and to read about politics at home and abroad while the colony was undergoing massive political reorganization.

Ottah's *Drum* also included draws like Nigerian cover girls and crime reporting. Sex and crime, two topics assuredly not covered by mission and multinational book publishers hoping to promote civilizing literature to Nigerian readers, sold a great deal of locally-produced literature. Literature workers tended to ignore the popularity of this sector of the book economy because they considered it uneducated and informal. Onitsha market literature, the label given to long-format pamphlets published by private presses in southeast Nigeria beginning in the 1940s, is the most studied area of production on local presses.⁶⁰ Authors came from the masses of people migrating from rural areas to the market town of Onitsha after the Second World War. They tended to be men who had achieved a primary-school level of education; their pamphlets appeared in English and were typically fewer than eighty pages in length.⁶¹ Most pamphlets were issued in single runs of 1,000 to 2,000, but the most popular ones could merit up to 40,000 copies.⁶² The

⁶⁰ These dates are approximate. In 1947, Cyprian Ekwensi published *When Love Whispers* and *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Igbo Tales* in Onitsha. The number of pamphlets published each year grew steadily after that, until the early 1960s, when hundreds of titles were available in Onitsha and the surrounding markets.

⁶¹ Local printers who had obtained old printing presses from defunct newspaper operations and mission stations produced the Onitsha market literature. Their printing business sold cards, calendars, and fliers, but they were also ready and willing to cater to the growing literate population who moved within the markets. Aspiring authors wrote their pamphlets and sold them to the printers for a nominal fee, with the hope that they would gain status and recognition for their work. Once they purchased the manuscripts, these printers had creative control; they could make any changes, even listing themselves as authors. See Emmanuel Obiechina, *Onitsha Market Literature* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1972), 7.

⁶² Nancy Schmidt, "Nigeria: Fiction for the Average Man," *Africa Report* 10, no. 8 (August 1, 1965): 40.

Onitsha writers used plays, speeches, moral tales, letters and advice columns to advise their young male readers on relationships, acquiring money and excelling in education. Sex and urban danger drove the plots of bestsellers like *The African Bachelor's Guide and Lady's Guide* and *They Died in the Game of Love*.⁶³ This market literature was massively popular because it was accessible to people with basic reading skills and because it told the stories of an urbanizing population that did not appear in the more formal publishing world.

Adegoke Adelabu was part of the educated elite who entered the ranks of public service as a politician. He decided to turn one of his political speeches into a book, titled *Africa in Ebullition*, in order to increase his exposure. He contracted with Union Press in Ibadan to print 5,000 copies of the book for £187.⁶⁴ That cost did not include paper or cardboard for the book covers, suggesting that the press would have had difficulty obtaining the raw materials. As it turns out, printing of the book was delayed because Adelabu could not purchase enough paper initially. When *Africa in Ebullition* was finally issued, Adelabu was only able to sell a total of 720 copies.⁶⁵ Ibadan's Rational Bookshop bought one hundred copies and most of the others would have been distributed privately. In southwestern Nigeria, local publishers and printers were producing their own market literature in English and Yoruba. Market literature likely found its way into secondary schools and university campuses, although highly educated readers would not have

⁶³ Cy Diala, *The African Bachelor's Guide and Lady's Guide* (Onitsha: Njoku and Sons Bookshop, 1964?) and Cyril Umunnah, *They Died in the Game of Love* (Onitsha: Njoku and Sons Bookshop, 196?).

⁶⁴ Ken Post and George Jenkins, *The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 146. Tika-Tore Press had offered to print 10,000 copies for £687, but Adelabu could not afford such a large amount. It is likely that Tika-Tore calculated that they could not make a profit if they printed a smaller quantity.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

considered the pamphlets to be part of their personal libraries. A 1958 survey on the reading habits of undergraduates by Martin Banham, a lecturer at the University College of Ibadan, indicates what they considered appropriate reading material.⁶⁶ Banham combined the results with information gathered from informal interviews and the University Bookshop to compile a list of favorite authors and types of books. After stipulating that few undergraduates actually had time for pleasure reading, he found that the most popular authors were, in order, William Shakespeare, George Bernard Shaw, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Marie Corelli and Thomas Hardy. Students named detective fiction as their favorite type of light reading. Nineteenth century British authors, led by Jane Austen and Charles Dickens, were also widely read. Banham argued that Shakespeare led

⁶⁶ Banham was closely involved in the establishment of “The Horn,” the UCI student literary magazine and has been variously accused of oppressing and encouraging young Nigerian writers on that campus.

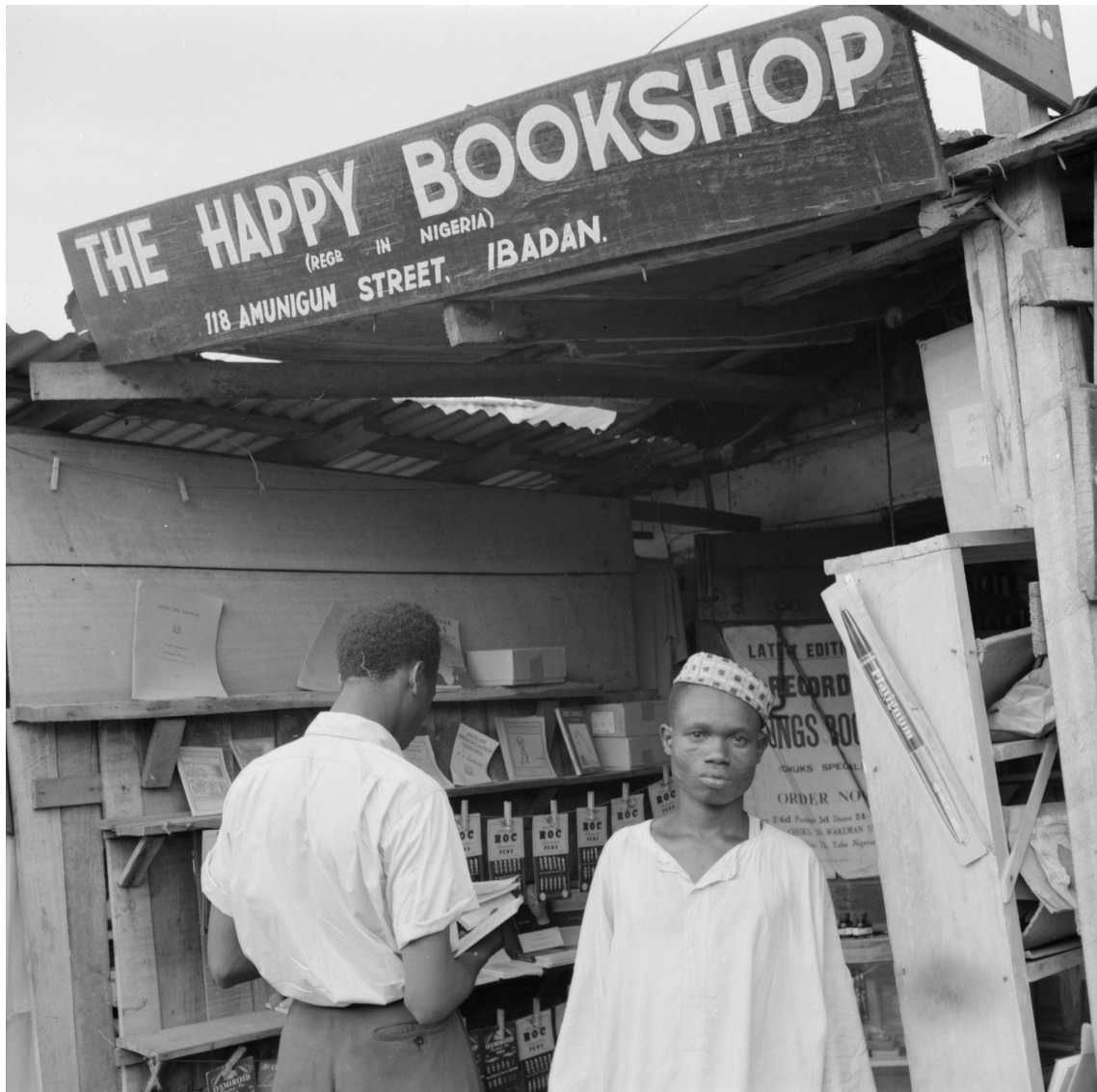


Figure 4. A typical locally owned bookshop in Ibadan, c. 1950. From the American Geographical Society Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries.

the list because university students genuinely enjoyed his use of rhetoric, “a factor admired and practised in vernacular languages.”⁶⁷ Likewise, Banham suggested that students had named Shaw for his witty yet critical views on English society; both Shaw and his colonial readers were outsiders to this society that they read so much about. Banham also notes that many survey respondents complained that they had little time for pleasure reading, while others expressed little desire to read outside of their fields of study. One student answered the survey by telling Banham to “concern yourself with something that is useful to us.”⁶⁸ That anonymous student captured the common sentiment of the reading public in southern Nigeria: the value of books was measured by their utility and to invest meaning in them beyond their instructional functionality had little purpose.

In a 1972 *Times Literary Supplement* article, Chinua Achebe, who had worked with Banham at UCI, recalled “a little crude research” he had carried out fifteen years earlier. Reviewing the checkout log at the British Council library in Enugu, he observed that Europeans tended to check out fiction, poetry and drama while Africans took history, economics and mathematics texts. “It was clear that the Africans who went to that library did not go in search of literary pleasure,” wrote Achebe.⁶⁹ When Nigerians did read for pleasure, according to Achebe, they turned to Peter Cheyney, Agatha Christie, Bertha Clay and, above all, Marie Corelli. He did not acknowledge that Europeans probably already had access to all of the instructional texts that they needed outside of the library,

⁶⁷ Martin Banham, “Students’ Reading Habits,” *Ibadan*, June 1958, 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁹ Chinua Achebe, “What Do African Intellectuals Read?,” *The Times Literary Supplement*, May 12, 1972, 547.

whereas the African readers did not. As a student in the 1940s, Achebe recalled having little access to books until he began attending a government-run school. When he later became a teacher at a private school, he “discovered that the school “library” consisted of a dusty cupboard containing one copy of the Holy Bible, five pamphlets entitled *The Adventures of Tarzan*, and one copy of a popular novel called *The Sorrows of Satan*.”⁷⁰ While the aforementioned book was one of Corelli’s bestsellers, the paucity of books in Achebe’s school library illustrates the lack of options most Nigerian readers had if they did want to read something outside of religious or educational material.

As these varied pieces of evidence suggest, capturing a sense of reading taste is difficult to do. It is a nebulous concept that a reading public would share certain opinions or relate to books in ways that were shaped by some shared cultural sensitivities. If we accept that readers in southwestern Nigeria, who shared a Yoruba language and ethnic identity by 1940, preferred books that had instructional value to them, then we can argue that the taste of this reading public was shaped by the vibrant Yoruba oral culture in which it existed. Readers did not necessarily *have* to look to books for entertainment because they had access to a highly developed oral literature that provided both information and entertainment. Even written literature harnessed the power of oral tropes that clearly remained in common usage for Yoruba readers. As Stephanie Newell, in her study of the reading public in colonial Ghana, observed,

These readers have been trained to regard all ‘good’ literature as self-helping, moral and useful... This ethical reading mode overlaps in many ways with the responses encouraged by ‘traditional’ folktales and dilemma tales, where audiences are invited to participate in the tale, making moral interventions and drawing personal lessons from the actions of characters.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana*, 90.

The same connection between ways of reading printed texts and ways of interacting with oral literature occurred in southern Nigeria. Indeed, a Yoruba oral culture shaped both what (literature with a moral component) and how (by extracting and adapting personal lessons) people read.

The Expansion of the Publishing Industry

Both new and continuing participants in the Nigerian print market benefited from the numbers of customers joining the reading public as formal education became more widely available. After a long period of domination by Christian organizations, these entities began to secularize the market. However, there was still a proselytizing air to the print sector, as these organizations hoped to have a civilizing influence on Nigerian readers and because they found it necessary to partner with the mission societies, who knew the market so well.

The Second World War had temporarily hindered the print industry for and within Africa. A severe shortage of paper caused by the war made it difficult to print the number of books, particularly school textbooks, needed for these markets. After the war, however, publishers eager for new customers looked to Africa for expansion. They found a willing market where they could successfully compete with local mission publishers for the customers who were steadily purchasing textbooks. Much of the earlier literature for African reading publics had to be subsidized in order to find an audience, but by the 1940s there was a potential for profit in books for Africa. Whereas the provision of literature to Africa was once an act of philanthropy by international organizations, in this period it became a business venture. Wrong anticipated this entrance of multi-national

publishers into the African book market during her 1939 tour. She suggested that they could make a great contribution to the production of books in English, but that their costs were too high to publish African-language books at an appropriate price-point.⁷² She believed that vernacular literature would only sell at a low price, with minimal costs for production and advertising – a feat that could only be accomplished by missions, philanthropies, or government bodies.

By 1944, Wrong was reporting that, “publishers are increasingly alive to the possibilities of the African market.”⁷³ The publishers referenced by Wrong were all British owned, and they enjoyed notable support from their home government in the form of paper subsidies, currency exchange and publicity through government information networks in Nigeria. When multinational publishers identified a potentially lucrative book market in British-ruled Africa due to the spread of primary education, they eagerly sought ways to introduce their own products. In this period, they would be more accurately labeled book exporters, since they did little publishing specifically for African readers. Even so, they eventually came to dominate the textbook market and left Christian mission publishers to focus on other forms of literature production in African languages. The decision by multinationals to concentrate their efforts on educational publishing was a savvy one. School students made up the vast majority of the reading public and the African-led government in Nigeria prioritized their education, meaning that the situation would remain that way. Furthermore, the demand for textbooks was

⁷² Margaret Wrong, “Notes on Some Aspects of Literature Policy Arising out of the Tour,” 1939, 4, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

⁷³ Margaret Wrong, “Questions Relating to Literature and Literacy to Be Investigated in West Africa,” July 25, 1944, 4, ICCLA Box 8 (509), SOAS.

stabilized by the education sector's reliance on backlists of publishing titles.⁷⁴ This was a boon for publishers looking to develop a roster of products that could be guaranteed a reliable market.

At the beginning of the Second World War, British publishers were exporting approximately thirty percent of their books to foreign markets. Government officials hoped to reach and then exceed this volume of book exportation after the war.⁷⁵ In 1948, the Great Britain Publishers Association Export-Research Service provided an analysis of individual export markets in relation to the whole volume of British book exports. By sampling a cross-section of publishing and bookselling firms for the period from July to December 1947, they found that books for British Africa (excluding South Africa) accounted for 2.328 percent of the publishing trade and nearly 17 percent of the export trade.⁷⁶ Multinational publishers, hoping to increase their share of the book export trade by accessing the relatively untapped Nigerian market, initially set up sales departments in the colony. Only after they had identified a feasible market did they establish editorial departments there. Doing so allowed these publishers to embed themselves in the Nigerian market and not only dominate educational book provision, but also have a say in what was being assigned and taught in Nigerian schools.⁷⁷

Six multinational publishing houses dominated the Nigerian market. Oxford University Press (OUP) first sent a representative to survey the Nigerian book market in

⁷⁴ M.O. Akinleye, "Review of Publishing in Nigeria," *The Book Nigeria* 1, no. 1 (December 1980): 11.

⁷⁵ Australia, the United States, South Africa and New Zealand comprised their largest markets.

⁷⁶ *Where Our Book Exports Go* (Publishers' Association Export Research Services, n.d.), BT 64/3887, NAUK.

⁷⁷ Caroline Davis, "The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing: Oxford University Press's Three Crowns Series 1962-1976," *Book History* 8 (2005): 228.

1928. The publisher adapted its *Oxford English Course* for Nigerian customers and began marketing it to school in the colony in 1936. British education officials were already familiar with the textbooks and readily adopted them, providing OUP with a steady profit. The publishing house went on to produce a number of successful Nigerian textbook series in English. Between 1947 and 1954, it also published a series of Yoruba language textbooks called *Iwe Oxford fun Ode Oni*; D.O. Fagunwa authored the final book of the series. OUP established a full publishing house in Ibadan in 1949 and hired a Nigerian general manager, T.T. Solaru. With the opening of their book warehouse in Nigeria in 1959, they had the advantage of storing a large stock of books for immediate distribution. Despite its early start in Nigeria, Oxford did not issue its first locally edited and produced book, *Ijala Are Ode* [Hunting Ballads] by Ladipo Yemitan, until 1963.

By the 1950s, even multinational publishers without offices in Nigeria had added textbooks to their catalogs to appeal to African customers.⁷⁸ Harrap's 'Readers of Today' textbooks, for example, included *Episodes from "Aggrey of Africa"* edited by Edwin W. Smith and *Episodes from "The Road to Timbuktu"* edited by Dorothy Mills. Amos Tutuola could not find a publisher in Nigeria or abroad for his first novel, *The Palmwine Drinkard*, and so sent it to the United Society for Christian Literature in 1948. They told him that it was outside the scope of what they published, but helped connect him to Faber and Faber, who published the novel in 1952.⁷⁹ *The Palmwine Drinkard* received critical praise from European writers and Tutuola went on to publish a number of books inspired

⁷⁸ In the same period, however, educated West Africans expressed concern that any modifications made to the school system under British rule (including the creation of different textbooks) would leave African students "saddled with a second-class education." Mary Dillard, "Examinations Standards, Educational Assessments, and Globalizing Elites: The Case of the West African Examinations Council," *The Journal of African American History* 88, no. 4 (Autumn 2003): 420.

⁷⁹ Amos Tutuola, "Author Interview," *Books* 1, no. 2 (April 1988): 16.

by the catalog of oral tales in the Yoruba language. However, his work was met with a certain amount of derision by Nigerian writers like Wole Soyinka, who charged that Tutuola “was taken into the literary bosom of the European coterie, a rather jaded bosom which rings responses most readily to quaint and exotic courtier.”⁸⁰ Nigerian writers and educated readers felt that Tutuola borrowed too freely from oral sources and that his English usage was uneducated rather than free-spirited.⁸¹ The controversy surrounding *The Palmwine Drinkard* raises many questions about the kind of African literature that multinationals were looking for and what they thought would do well in European markets, as opposed to African markets.

Thomas Nelson was one of the earliest British companies to publish specifically for African markets. It first advertised in Nigeria around 1945.⁸² D.O. Fagunwa published *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmole* with Thomas Nelson in 1949; the book was profitable, in part, because it was assigned in schools throughout the Western Provinces. The publisher became known for its local language textbooks, including *Igbo Olodumare* and *Aditu Olodumare* in Yoruba. It incorporated as Thomas Nelson Nigeria Limited in 1968 and established its headquarters in Lagos. Evans Brothers sent representative H.J. Larcombe to explore the book market in West Africa in 1947. Recognizing the size of its market, Noel Evans toured Nigeria for the publisher in 1949. They opened their first office, managed by Joop Berkhout, in Ibadan in the 1950s. The company became Evans Brothers Nigeria Limited in 1966. Longman Nigeria incorporated in 1961 with a sales

⁸⁰ Quoted by Lewis Nkosi, “African Literature: Part II,” *Africa Report* 7, no. 11 (December 1962): 15.

⁸¹ Oladele Taiwo, *Culture and the Nigerian Novel* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1976), 79.

⁸² H. C. Otokunefor and C. O. Nwodo, “The Coming of Age of Book Publishing and Indexing in Nigeria,” *Library Review* 39, no. 4 (December 31, 1990): 34.

branch in Lagos. It led the market for tertiary educational publishing with the Ibadan University History Series, among other Africa-specific texts. Macmillan Group, eager to promote its educational books to the Nigerian market, appointed two representatives in the country in 1963. Two years later, Macmillan Nigeria Publishers Plc was incorporated in Lagos and Ibadan and began to produce literature specifically for the Nigerian market.⁸³ The Nigerian subsidiaries of all of these multinational publishers were semi-autonomous, maintaining close ties to home offices in Britain and deferring to an international coordinator for decisions on what to publish and when.

Heinemann Educational Books is perhaps the best-known multinational publisher for its work in Nigeria. It opened a distribution branch in Ibadan in 1961, hiring D.O. Fagunwa to serve as general manager. When he passed away unexpectedly in 1965, the British parent company hired another Nigerian, Aigboje Higo, to replace Fagunwa. Under Higo, Heinemann began producing books specifically for the Nigerian market. The business incorporated as Heinemann Educational Books (Nigeria) Limited in 1969. Higo was a leader in the industry and vigorously espoused a philosophy of incorporating Nigerian culture into both fiction and nonfiction books. In a 1988 interview, he said “If you want to know the truly African man, if you pick up a Heinemann book, you can see him in the novel, chemistry and biology books.”⁸⁴ All of the foregoing multinational publishers retooled their educational series and developed new books that would better reflect a Nigerian readership, always with the goal of having them assigned in schools so as to guarantee sales.

⁸³ Apeji, “The Contributions of Multinational Publishers,” 113–118.

⁸⁴ Aigboje Higo, “Personality Profile,” in *Book: Selling the Nation's Books*, vol. 1, 3, 1988, 26; quoted in Otokunefor and Nwodo, “The Coming of Age of Book Publishing and Indexing in Nigeria,” 33.

The close relationship between regional education departments and multinational publishers impeded the growth of a more diverse roster of authors and manuscripts for the Nigerian reading public. The phenomenal growth in school enrollment in the 1950s meant that many of these students were the first in their families to participate in formal education. In this setting, their first exposure to books was as instructional tools above all other purposes they might have served.⁸⁵ Consequently, most of the new books produced to meet the demands of the upsurge in readers were textbooks and other instructional literature. The book market was also limited by the system put in place by multinationals to get their products to Nigerian customers. Rather than relying on a book distribution service such as the CMS Bookshop, publishers formed an association in Nigeria that managed a large warehouse at the Lagos docks.⁸⁶ Their storage facility allowed the publishers to maintain a book stock within the colony and more easily sell directly to customers such as the reading room committees and education departments. Because the warehouse was stocked almost exclusively with textbooks and other instructional literature, this system did nothing to increase the variety of books available for purchase in Nigeria.

In the late 1950s, multinational publishers began to produce books for Nigerian, rather than West African, readers.⁸⁷ Literature producers were becoming more sensitive to the demands of their African markets, as both profits and competition increased. W.K. Lowther Clarke, in his 1959 history of the SPCK, stated that “Africans are apt to be

⁸⁵ However, they had certainly been exposed to print, such as newspapers, and other forms of literacy in their day-to-day lives.

⁸⁶ “WH Smith: ‘Book Distributing Centre in Nigeria,’ Meeting at Strand House,” August 15, 1961, AUC 925/6, URSC.

⁸⁷ Apeji, “The Contributions of Multinational Publishers,” 111.

suspicious of attempts to write down to their assumed intellectual level . . . increasingly, collaboration between Europeans and Nationals is seen to be necessary in the preparation of new books, so as to ensure that the material is presented in a form relevant to the local need.”⁸⁸ Clarke’s rather high-handed suggestion ignores the fact that Africans and Europeans had been working together from the mid-nineteenth century to produce Yoruba language literature. Along the same lines, missionary Cullen Young suggested that *Books for Africa* be increased in price and published in a higher quality format because, he noted, “the African was very sensitive about the standard of what was offered to him.”⁸⁹ As these quotes illustrate, mission and secular publishing houses were coming to the realization that they could not sell just anything to African customers. In order to produce profitable books for the market in southwestern Nigeria, these publishers often sent manuscripts to the Chief Inspector of Education for the Western Provinces, who would pass them on to local individuals for review.⁹⁰

A number of African-owned publishers began operating during this period in order to cater to the student population. They initially produced mainly pamphlets and study books for school exams. Western Province presses included Ilesanmi Press (1955) and Fatiregun Publishers in Ilesha, and Fakunle Major Service in Oshogbo. Gabriel Onibonoje established Onibonoje Press and Book Industries Limited in Ibadan in 1958 and published his first title in 1962.⁹¹ Onibonoje was a teacher who decided to enter publishing after experiencing the acute shortage of books in Nigerian schools. He was

⁸⁸ W.K. Lowther Clarke, *The History of the SPCK* (London: SPCK, 1959), 130-131.

⁸⁹ “All Day Conference on Christian Literature,” 2.

⁹⁰ Mackell, April 6, 1951.

⁹¹ Tamuno, “Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey,” 6.

joined by his two brothers and eventually employed a staff of about 80. The successful publishing company, which still operates today, was built on exam-study books, but eventually branched out into fiction and textbooks.⁹²

British Propaganda and Government Book Subsidies

British colonial officials were confident that it would take some time after their political handover to a Nigerian government for communism to have any real impact there and in other colonial possessions; even so, the specter of Cold War challenges to Western hegemony made them anxious to fortify a pro-British contingent in the country. Up until the moment of their departure from Nigeria, these officials were devising ways to ensure that pro-British literature filled library and bookshop shelves. This effort was an intensification of work begun by the government in propaganda reading rooms during the Second World War. While the literature they introduced into Nigeria in the 1950s and 1960s seems to have addressed a threat that existed mostly in their minds, it shaped how and what Nigerians were reading during that period by limiting the types of books available and reinforcing the idea that all literature had a moralizing purpose.

Before the 1950s, Britain's main concern lay with nationalist agitation and therefore their propaganda countered that so-called enemy, which existed most visibly in the local press. Colonial administrators had also observed the popularity of local newspapers, like Nnamdi Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* and *Eastern Nigerian Guardian*, which could easily be read aloud in order to share a nationalist viewpoint on colonial rule

⁹² Apeji, "The Contributions of Multinational Publishers," 193–194. Onibonoje listed 430 titles in their 1990 catalog.

with a mass audience of non-readers.⁹³ Public Relations Officers were instructed to respond to the nationalist message by touring their areas and personally distributing government-approved literature to local readers. An Oyo regional officer declared, “the very fact that this action was taken would do much to counteract the anti-gov’t press which is, I am convinced, read largely because no other source of information or political comment exists.”⁹⁴ Such an attitude downplayed the agency of Nigerian readers in choosing locally produced literature. It also reflected British notions about Nigerian readers, who the colonial rulers believed to be uncritical consumers of literature.

Until the mid-1950s, the British government regarded its African colonial territory as “firmly in the Western orbit by virtue of its colonial and post-colonial ties to metropolitan Europe.”⁹⁵ However, increasingly vocal proponents of non-alignment and Nigeria’s looming independence gave Britain reason to be concerned with the influence the Soviet Union and the United States might have within the new country. Those two leading powers of the Cold War developed propaganda programs targeting West Africa in the late 1950s, indicating that they also saw the region as a new battleground in their evolving conflict.

In response, C.G. Eastwood, the Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, posited “the best defence [sic] against hostile political penetration by the printed word is *to form the reading habits of the newly literate* and direct them towards

⁹³ Flint, “The Colonial Office and Nnamdi Azikiwe,” 146; For East Africa, where a vibrant African language press promoted nationalist causes, see James F. Scotton, “The First African Press in East Africa: Protest and Nationalism in Uganda in the 1920s,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 2 (1973): 211–228.

⁹⁴ Anonymous, Private memo, September 15, 1946, Oyo Prof 1: 3140, Vol. III, NAI.

⁹⁵ Fred Marte, *Political Cycles in International Relations: The Cold War and Africa, 1945-1990* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 49.

British sources while we are still in a position to bring influence directly to bear on the situation.”⁹⁶ British government officials and other proponents of literacy education and publishing in Africa aspired to move beyond the provision of literature and actually shape the *ways* that Nigerians thought and read. With little time to prepare for the transition to independence, the colonial government wanted to set systems in place that would feed inexpensive and/or subsidized reading material through commercial publishers to the Nigerian market. The colonial government also looked to set up and fortify public libraries in order to have an influence on reading materials for the more educated citizens of the new Nigeria.

The development and distribution of literature was a key global political strategy in the post-war era for Great Britain. Books and pamphlets, along with other types of media, were meant to promote British political and social norms even as the nation’s direct global political power waned. In a brief for the Minister of State, the cabinet of the Committee on Oversea Information Services (COIS) argued “our journals and books carry British ideas and prestige abroad and are worth a great deal more to us than the value of the foreign exchange they earn as exports.”⁹⁷ As communist doctrine gained currency among the African coastal elite, these British administrators, as well as missionaries, expanded their concern about the moral dangers of literature to include the political danger of certain books to African readers. The colonial government began subsidizing book and paper imports and encouraging propaganda production to counteract such pernicious influences, whereas in the past they had mostly left literature

⁹⁶ C.G. Eastwood, Secret and Personal Memo to James Robertson, January 16, 1959, CO 1027/215, NAUK. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁷ Cabinet of Committee on Oversea Information Services, “Government Assistance for Commercially Published Books, Periodicals and Similar Material,” secret brief, April 12, 1957, 1, BT 258/279, NAUK.

provision to private entities such as the Christian missions. This strategy was heavily utilized in Nigeria, especially as the Cold War escalated in the mid-1950s. Suddenly, ensuring that Nigerians had access to particular reading material became a matter of state security.

During this period, the Nigerian government's relationship with the USSR was characterized by mistrust and skepticism, since Britain had in fact "succeeded in imprinting this concern [alleged communist infiltration] in the minds of those local leaders who were to carry the country into the postcolonial era."⁹⁸ Within the Action Group, the ruling party of the Western Region from 1952, leaders Obafemi Awolowo and Samuel Akintola both opposed any Soviet assistance.⁹⁹ The Soviet Union was equally critical of the Western Region, describing the Action Group as "feudal marionette princes of Yorubaland committed to monarchical institutions" who only represented "the upper strata of the bourgeoisie in the Western Region and the Yoruba feudalists."¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, after Josef Stalin's death, the USSR had developed a policy of cultivating positive diplomatic relationships with African governments, seeing their professed neutrality as an invitation to Soviet assistance.¹⁰¹ In order to counteract what they viewed as the monarchical tendencies of the African educated elite political leadership, the Soviet government increased their propaganda efforts in the region.

⁹⁸ Maxim Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe: Ideology and Pragmatism in Nigerian-Soviet Relations, 1960-1991* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 2003), 57.

⁹⁹ Eventually, Awolowo came around to argue for support from the Soviet Bloc as a response to his antagonism towards the policies of Akintola.

¹⁰⁰ V. Rybakov, "Nigeria Na Poroge Nezavisimosti," *Mirovaya Ekonomika I Mezhdunarodnye Otnoshenia* 2 (1960): 85; quoted in Matusevich, *No Easy Row for a Russian Hoe*, 61.

¹⁰¹ Sergey Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010), 13.

The COIS brief elaborated on the importance of providing government financial support for the British publishing industry's exports to critical markets: "Despite our general distaste for any forms of State subsidy to commercial activities oversea, we suggest that this is a case which may have to be carefully considered in the light of other countries' practice."¹⁰² The British government was aware that both the Soviet Union and the United States had programs to support literature distribution in markets where they were trying to consolidate their influence. The United States Information Agency (USIA) had first assigned an Information Service officer to Lagos in 1951 and opened United States Information Service (USIS) centers in Ibadan, Kano and Enugu during that decade. It operated libraries and produced and placed print, radio and film media in local markets throughout Nigeria. In 1949, the U.S. government had begun the Informational Media Guaranty Program to allow countries without much U.S. currency to purchase books from American publishers. The program was eventually extended to Nigeria; a book purchaser could place an order with an American publisher and then deposit the payment in naira at the local USIS office. The naira remained in a USIS account while the publisher was paid in dollars by the IMG program.¹⁰³ Further, the U.S. established a Bureau of African Affairs within the Department of State in 1958 to develop and regularize government policies regarding newly independent African states.¹⁰⁴ The

¹⁰² Cabinet of Committee on Oversea Information Services, "Government Assistance for Commercially Published Books, Periodicals and Similar Material," 3.

¹⁰³ Jody Sussman, *United States Information Service Libraries*, Occasional Papers (University of Illinois Graduate School of Library Science, December 1973), 11. The U.S. Congress did not renew the IMG Program when it expired in 1967. However, they continued to subsidize the translation of books from American publishers.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. strategists believed that Africans were particularly vulnerable to communist propaganda because they tended to live in agrarian communities "and receive their social services from a traditional system that emphasizes sharing rather than individual acquisition." From United States Draft Paper on Africa, January

influence of U.S. government policy on the services of USIS made the libraries and information centers a target of foreign protests in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰⁵ In Nigeria, however, it seems that the conflict was between foreign powers and not with the Nigerian public. The Soviet Union, which dedicated most literature propaganda resources to librarian training, Great Britain and the United States, which both focused their money on model libraries and library technology, worried about how each of the others was using book provision and library/librarian training to exert their influence.

Beginning in 1951, Britain's Foreign Office explored the possibility of a propaganda campaign to counter Soviet Communist influence in West Africa. The perception that communism was increasingly attractive to West Africans worried officials. In Nigeria, they cited the "tone" of Nigerian newspapers as evidence for their concern, blaming newspaper editors for publicizing communist ideology. One such newspaper editor was described as "a potential Communist since he feels that the world's goods are not properly distributed."¹⁰⁶ The Foreign Office counter-communism strategy covertly supplied the West African book market with literature that promoted British policies and social practices; they would do this by distributing the literature 'under plain cover' to individuals – initially religious leaders, and later booksellers. These individuals were to serve as the middlemen between the government and the wider reading public. Colonial governors from Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Nigeria sent literature

8, 1959, p. 5, cited in Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, 31–32.

¹⁰⁵ Pamela Spence Richards, "Cold War Librarianship: Soviet and American Library Activities in Support of National Foreign Policy, 1946-1991," *Libraries and Culture* 36, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 200.

¹⁰⁶ "Extracted from Eastern Region Regpin, No. 4, 20 December 1952-14 January 1953," n.d., CO 537/7783, NAUK.

distribution lists, which included missionaries, pastors, politicians and journalists, to the Secretary of State in London. The governor of Sierra Leone, however, hesitated to participate, stating that anti-Communist literature would only arouse interest in an ideology that had otherwise attracted little attention in the colony.¹⁰⁷ His reluctance suggests that ‘the Communist threat’ was more imagined than real. Even so, most British officials held to the view that “it does not need the presence of communist propaganda in a colony to make education about communism and Russian Imperialism desirable” but “the education is better not done directly by [the British government].”¹⁰⁸

Although the Soviet Union later focused its attention on the Horn of Africa, between 1956 and 1964 it conducted a propaganda campaign to win the alliance of West African nations in the period of decolonization.¹⁰⁹ A 1957 report by the British Council Executive Committee stated that Soviet publications in English and local languages were appearing for low prices in markets in South East Asia and Nigeria, “with very dangerous possibilities.”¹¹⁰ Both the British and Soviet governments considered these places effective targets for their propaganda. The Nigerian government had already committed to a proactive response to Soviet overtures to Africans within the colony. However, their first plan – to send pro-British literature to individuals – was scrapped when officials in the British West Africa colonies raised the concern that the propaganda campaign would

¹⁰⁷ The Governor, Sierra Leone, “Anti-Communist Literature: Special Distribution Lists,” top secret telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, December 6, 1951, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

¹⁰⁸ W.H. Ingrams, memo, January 2, 1951, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

¹⁰⁹ Mazov, *A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964*, 2. Soviet Booklets, the USSR’s English-language propaganda distributor, shared quarters with the Soviet Consulate at #3 Rosary Gardens, London.

¹¹⁰ The British Council Executive Committee, *British and American Books and Periodicals Overseas*, confidential report, 1957, 1, BT 258/279, NAUK.

no longer be covert when boxes of books arrived anonymously on the people's doorsteps. Nigerian officials, however, liked the scheme and willingly submitted lists of booksellers who could be used to disseminate such literature. There seems to have been a number of sellers who would accept any saleable material.

Officials at the Nigerian Secretariat in Lagos felt that there were enough booksellers that they did not have to rely on people outside of the trade to carry out the program. The list sent to London divided sellers into "respectable agents" and "tainted agents" who "dabbled in Communist literature but are probably ready to take booklets from any source, provided they can see a profit in it."¹¹¹ The former included forty-two bookshops, twenty-seven in Lagos and the Western Province. Eight of the ten latter shops were located in Lagos. Using these contacts, the Ministry of Defense and External Affairs initiated the program in 1952, providing "counter-material" such as *This is Soviet Russia* to the booksellers.¹¹² Publishers of additional government-approved material began sending literature directly to booksellers in Nigeria by July of the same year.

C.Y. Carstairs, the Director of Information Services in the Colonial Office, expressed concern that the "purely 'anti' stuff" being sent from publishers to booksellers in Nigeria "might do more harm than good."¹¹³ He believed that ninety percent of the propaganda literature should promote British political and social practices, while ten percent was dedicated to denigrating communism, but his philosophy was at odds with

¹¹¹ M.J. Bennion, top secret memo to C.Y. Carstairs, February 23, 1952, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

¹¹² Ibid.. This pamphlet is a particularly interesting example of anti-Soviet propaganda, consisting of a series of primary source documents that illustrated communist views on religion, which were meant to appall African readers.

¹¹³ C.Y. Carstairs, "Anti-Communist Propaganda," memo to J.S. Dudding (Secretariat, Lagos), August 11, 1952, 2, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

the strategy of the Foreign Office, which focused almost exclusively on distributing anti-communist propaganda from 1951 onwards.¹¹⁴ Despite his conflict with the Foreign Office, in 1952 Carstairs arranged for Stephen Watts, a former MI5 officer and editor of the Foreign Office Information Research Department's 'Background Books' series, to tour West Africa – including Nigeria – under the pretense of investigating the potential book market for Batchworth Press.¹¹⁵ In reality, Watts was to visit booksellers and assess who might be willing to knowingly disseminate anti-communist and pro-British literature for the government.¹¹⁶

Carstairs agreed to the secretive mission because he was frustrated that the Colonial Office did not have more control over the content of literature appearing in Nigerian bookshops, in spite of Britain's privileged position in the country. Watts' Background books were blatantly anti-communist, but they were also cheap and widely available. Carstairs, in line with the Foreign Office, thought that they would be an effective means of promoting Western values because they could be circulated through local shops, rather than obviously handed out by the government. Based on Carstairs' concern with finding a more unobtrusive way of getting propaganda into Nigerian hands, it seems that the Nigerian reading public had given the Colonial Office reason to think that they did not simply accept the message of British propaganda at face value.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda, 1945-53: The Information Research Department* (London: Routledge, 2004), 171.

¹¹⁵ C.Y. Carstairs, top secret memo to J.S. Dudding, December 22, 1952, CO 537/7783, NAUK. Batchworth Press, followed by Phoenix House and Bodley Head, published nearly 100 titles in the series between the late 1940s and 1970. See Defty, *Britain, America and Anti-Communist Propaganda*, 165.

¹¹⁶ C.Y. Carstairs, secret memo to M.F. Wentworth, December 22, 1952, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

Immediately following Watts' tour, Batchworth Press shipped boxes packed with their offerings to a number of West African booksellers. This action was in keeping with the Colonial Office's strategy of encouraging the distribution of pro-British literature without linking the action to the British government.¹¹⁷ Batchworth Press claimed to be sending the book only to introduce their wares to the market and elicit new clients. A rare glimpse of the actual responses of booksellers indicates that this was a trade system still in the process of being codified. Many sellers took the books without acknowledgement, while a few requested additional copies or advertising material. One bookseller in Abeokuta seemed to be pleased with the goods and opened negotiations with Batchworth by "offer[ing] cocoa, palm kernels, timber, rubber and alligator in return."¹¹⁸ The offer to barter, as an example of the cash-poor state of most bookshops, makes it clear that both importing books to Nigeria and selling them there involved financial risk. The Colonial Office recognized that it would have to continue subsidizing the book market if it wanted to accomplish the wide distribution of British literature.

That same year, the Nigerian Co-operative Supply Association received a Colonial Development and Welfare (CD&W) grant of £4,200 to improve literature distribution throughout the colony. Colonial officials hoped that private industry would eventually take an interest in providing books for African markets that promoted British ideals, but they realized that they would have to fund the growth of distribution networks in the interim. W.H. Ingrams, the Secretary of State's Adviser on Overseas Information, had toured Nigeria in 1951 and determined "one of the reasons why undesirable

¹¹⁷ Mary Fisher, "Note on Meeting between Foreign Office and Colonial Office," 1951, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

¹¹⁸ Mary Fisher, "Approach to Booksellers in West Africa," 1952, CO 537/7783, NAUK.

(including subversive) literature found a ready public was because the distribution of good books was so inadequate.”¹¹⁹ The terms of the grant stated that all book purchases, therefore, had to be approved by the Nigerian Education Department, which served as a gatekeeper of sorts.¹²⁰ As evidenced by Ingrams’ report, the parameters for literature deemed appropriate for African consumption were narrow, excluding a body of work that extended far beyond the subversive Communist literature so feared by the colonial government.

In order to distribute suitable books over the widest area and combat the infiltration of non-approved literature, it was decided that the CD&W grant would be used to fund the expansion of an experimental book van project already being run by the Co-operative Supply Association in Western Nigeria. The specially outfitted van traveled between villages and towns of the Southwest, displaying books, stationary, games and art material for sale. Officials planned to use the CD&W grant to add a second van and a permanent bookstall and then conduct an efficacy study, in the hope of expanding their enterprise to other parts of the colony. The first book van had not been turning a profit and they anticipated that the additional sources of revenue would allow the project to eventually become self-supporting; all profits from books sales were to be used for promotion of the project. In a memo collating the responses of the regional PROs to the proposal to open a bookstall, however, their feedback was universally negative. “The unanimous opinion is that street bookstalls would not pay in this country,” wrote Ibadan PRO G.W.P. Thorn. “There is not yet sufficient demand for books. Existing reading-

¹¹⁹ *Nigeria: Improvement of Literature Distribution*, Colonial Office report, July 9, 1952, CO 859/6/1, NAUK.

¹²⁰ Anonymous, Extract from note of discussion with Treasury Department, July 24, 1952, CO 859/6/1, NAUK.

rooms are not well patronised and the small bookshops, which do exist in the towns, barely pay their way.”¹²¹ Their response trivializes the existence of those reading rooms and bookshops in every town and village. It also highlights the contradictory messages that Nigerian readers received from workers in literature development and book distribution, that Nigerians were not really reading *and* that they were reading the wrong material.

Officials invested the CD&W grant in an experimental project that was supposed to help develop strategies for book distribution specific to the geography and desires of the Nigerian reading public. A profitable program would be self-perpetuating and could be relied on to make pro-British literature available to readers after the political handover of the colony. However, initial feedback from the Co-operative Supply Association showed that stationary and other non-book materials were the project’s main source of revenue, making officials wary of opening further bookselling venues. In the decade prior to Nigerian independence, the British government was finding that the lack of a book distribution network made it difficult to depend as heavily as they would have liked on literature as a source of influence. It should also be noted that the failure of the Co-operative Supply Association to sell many books could be ascribed, in part, to their subject matter. A 1964 brief from Britain’s Overseas Information Office Book Export Committee stated, “Experience has shown that it is very seldom that a book can be found which both projects Britain and sells well.”¹²²

¹²¹ G.W.P. Thorn, memo, n.d., CO 859/6/1, NAUK.

¹²² “Brief for Meeting of Book Export Committee due to Be Held on 10 September, 1964,” n.d., FO 953/2200, NAUK.

The British government had long relied on its position as the administrative power in Nigeria to eclipse the influence of the other countries that were trying to generate a positive relationship with Nigerians through the use of propaganda. The Low-Priced Books Scheme, the most successful British program in terms of length and number of British-published books distributed to Nigerian readers, was in fact instituted long after colonial rule had come to an end. It had begun in 1959/60 in India and Pakistan. The English Language Book Society (ELBS), a partnership between the government's Book Development Council and the British Publishers Association, expanded its program of providing low-priced books to African nations, including Nigeria, in 1965 "to maintain British influence in countries in which English is the language of communication and where it is threatened by the supply of foreign government-aided books."¹²³ The British government was well aware of Soviet, Chinese and American efforts to provide subsidized books in the English language to areas of British influence.

A policy document for the Low-Priced Books Scheme described its target markets as "in the early stages of political evolution, in need of and responsive to the influence of maturer countries, but sensitive about the way in which it is exerted."¹²⁴ Although the original program was intended to distribute general literature and textbooks promoting British achievements and practices, the ELBS eventually focused its resources on providing tertiary-level textbooks. A report by the Central Office of Information (COI) reasoned that customers in target countries read only for education and examination purposes and not for pleasure, which would have necessitated subsidies for general

¹²³ "Low-Priced Books Scheme," report, March 31, 1965, 1, CO 1027/643, NAUK.

¹²⁴ Book Exports Committee, "Advisory Committee on the Selection of Low-Priced Books for Overseas' Background Note," n.d., INF 12/1449, NAUK.

literature.¹²⁵ The report also emphasized the importance of subsidizing tertiary textbooks and not books for the primary and secondary school levels, in a pointed effort to influence the educated elite members of target countries.

The British Council in Nigeria assisted the COI in determining the books to be included in the Low-Priced Books Scheme, which typically made them available in participating markets for about one-third of the normal price. The COI report reveals the frustration felt by government officials regarding their lack of control in the book markets of territories that had so recently belonged to them. While administrators acknowledged that the scheme would undercut the sale of other British books in these markets, they countered that “it is better that one or some British books shall be available at a competitive price than none at all.”¹²⁶ And in response to the point that the scheme would create expectations for artificially low-priced books in all areas of literature, the report simply stated that the British government was not the only entity flooding the market with subsidized books. In light of the propaganda being distributed by other world powers in Nigeria and recognizing their diminished capacity to have an influence in the newly independent country, British officials called the subsidy program “an indispensable weapon in the battle” to make sure that Africans were reading British books.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Central Office of Information, report, March 15, 1965, 3, CO 1027/643, NAUK.

¹²⁶ “Low-Priced Books Scheme,” 4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. The British government continued to fund the Educational Low Priced Book Scheme until 1995, with Nigeria being a major recipient.

Conclusion

During the 1940s and 1950s, there was a major shift in the practice of print capitalism in Nigeria. The British colonial government transitioned from allowing private enterprise, both mission and publisher, to run the literature program to investing in it themselves. While these outside agencies were successful in influencing the reading tastes of Nigerians, they were irritated by many of the books favored by Nigerian readers. They also worried constantly about losing their ability to promote their own agendas through literature production and provision.

The report of UNESCO's Ibadan Seminar on libraries in Africa stated, "throughout Africa people are being helped by mass education programmes to emerge from illiteracy and ignorance, and they need continued access to suitable publications, stimulation of their reading interests and expert reading guidance to sharpen their new skill into an effective instrument of self-education."¹²⁸ This is clearly a continuation of earlier mission work to create a reading public that could be more easily saved/civilized. The governments and other agencies that took over the literature program still associated illiteracy with ignorance. Moreover, they believed that Africans needed guidance to make use of their literacy skills and that there should be someone overseeing the kinds of literature available to Africans. From the early 1950s, however, the colonial government had to turn over the role of literature tsar, at least nominally, to a Nigerian-run government. The final chapter examines the self-regulation of a Nigerian print culture and the politics of reading in independent Nigeria.

¹²⁸ *Development of Public Libraries in Africa: The Ibadan Seminar* (Paris: UNESCO, 1954), 14.

5 Print Culture in Independent Nigeria: “Books Are Your Best Companion”¹

Nigeria retained its regional organization when it gained independence on October 1, 1960. Under the parliamentary government, the Western, Eastern and Northern Regions had a great deal of autonomy, including that in the administration of separate education systems. This political regionalization caused great strain within the federal government as the various parties, with their localized support bases, maneuvered to access economic and commodity resources. Western Region politics were particularly turbulent. Obafemi Awolowo and Samuel Akintola led opposing factions that disagreed about the role that the Action Group, the Yoruba-dominated party, should play within the federal government. The subsequent imprisonment of Awolowo in 1963 and realignment of regional political parties was an indicator of the dismal functioning of the national government and its fragile party alliances. In 1966, two consecutive military coups attempted to revise the balance of power, particularly between the largest Northern Region and their sometime allies in the Eastern Region. Northern army officer Yakubu Gowon was appointed Head of State under the new military government and declared the division of the three regions into twelve states in 1967 in order to forestall the secession of the Eastern Region. The tactic did not work; military governor C.O. Ojukwu declared the old Eastern Region to be the independent Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967 and civil war quickly followed.

¹ This is the title given to the prize-winning essay by Bakare Muideen, in a contest run by the Nigerian School Library Association in 1980. “Newsletter of the Nigerian School Library Association, 3, No. 1-2 (April/May 1980),” n.d., 8, OGFAD/00014: 98/1/60, OA.

The civil war ended in 1970 with the reunification of Biafra and Nigeria. An estimated three million Nigerians died as a result of the war and the reincorporated states were exploited ever more heavily by the federal government for their oil reserves. The skyrocketing price of oil after 1973 made huge profits for the government, but little of that money was invested in civic endeavors. Gowon continued to rule until he was overthrown by a coup in 1975. Decades of political instability followed, with Nigeria veering between military and civilian rule. Having squandered its oil revenue, the government was forced to accept the International Monetary Fund's Structural Adjustment Program in 1986. This chapter considers changes in the Nigerian book industry and the shape of a Nigerian reading public from 1960 until the collapse of the national economy in the 1980s, when publishing came to a virtual standstill and books fell outside the purchasing power of the majority of readers.

I show that political independence wrought economic transformation within the Nigerian book industry, yet the general contours of the publishing sector and the reading market remained the same. Education and a national literature were supposed to have a unifying effect in a country being undermined by the intractable impact of colonization, militarization and sudden wealth. Yet, books could not carry such heavy responsibility. As I discuss in the chapter's first section, the Nigerian government adopted a pattern set by missionaries and colonialists by promoting reading as a duty – now, for good citizens of the new nation. Evelyn Ellerman argues that as British African colonies gained their independence, “reading and writing transferred from a Christian duty to a civic duty. Good citizens were well-informed readers, and good writers served their country.”² The

² Ellerman, “The Literature Bureau: African Influence in Papua New Guinea,” 207.

idea of the book as a tool of development and a way of inculcating national identity was solidified in this period. Both official agencies and individual Nigerian readers made this linkage. In a 1965 lecture to an Educational Writers' Workshop, Managing Director of the Franklin Books Programme Lagos office Femi Oyewole said that books published in Nigeria were supposed "to enhance self-reliance and self-respect and make Nigerian Independence more meaningful."³ However, federal and local government administrations were reluctant to invest in the book industry, despite the general view that a literate population was key to national development.

In the chapter's second section, I outline the multinational publishing business in Nigeria under the new government. The demand for Nigerian textbooks grew precipitously after 1960, as the school curriculum changed to reflect the independent status of the nation and as new Nigerian subject matter was developed. Multinational publishers were well positioned to take advantage and fill the new orders for textbooks that came pouring in. They also undertook the production of so-called "prestige" lines of fiction that provided a wider range of African writers to local readers but allowed the businesses to continue coordinating their publishing decisions in London. Therefore, despite the Nigerian government's efforts to indigenize the publishing industry, the reading public continued to be shaped by external forces even in the first decades of independence.

The third section examines the Nigerian-owned publishing industry, and through the business decisions made by these companies tries to assess any changes to the demands of the reading public through the period. The final section discusses the library

³ Femi Oyewole, "Lecture Delivered to the Educational Writers' Workshop, University of Ibadan," April 21, 1965, 15, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

system in Western Nigeria and the country as a whole in the early decades of independence.

“Torrents of Books”

A call went out to the Nigerian book industry in 1968 for “books, torrents of books, books of all kinds—texts at the various levels for schools, self-help books, cultural books, foreign and local” to serve the educational and civic needs of the new nation.⁴ A reoccurring appeal for books rings through Nigeria’s early national history. Politicians, educators, religious leaders and readers themselves bemoaned the lack of books as a serious detriment to national progress. They had to develop various strategies for obtaining the torrents of books that were being requested throughout the nation. Stakeholders in literature provision acknowledged that the first associated step was to increase literacy, but how or whether they should try to aim for universal literacy was still being debated. The literacy rate for the country probably stood at approximately twenty percent.⁵ After 1960, the Nigerian federal government expanded on the earlier work of regional administrations by passing an education policy that focused on providing primary schooling to every child. Although the government also sponsored the opening of new tertiary institutions in all regions of Nigeria, it continued to dedicate the vast bulk of the education budget to primary schooling, a focus begun by missionaries in the nineteenth century.

⁴ *A Book Development Project in Nigeria, 1964-1968* (Franklin Book Programs, June 15, 1968), 3–4, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDAAS104.pdf.

⁵ Omolewa, “The Failure of Mass Education Experiment in Nigeria, 1940-1952,” 20.

In 1961, about 78% of primary and secondary school students were still enrolled in mission-run institutions.⁶ As the government gradually took over the responsibility of education from missionary organizations, it had to centralize these scattered operations and select a smaller number of languages in which to conduct primary education. The choice was relatively straightforward in the Western Region, where Yoruba remained the teaching language for the first years of primary school, followed by English. By 1969, 45.6% of primary school-aged children were enrolled in school in the Western states.⁷ A federal Universal Primary Education scheme was finally launched in 1976, but fell apart just three years later, with the federal government struggling to transition from military to civilian rule and the subsequent economic troubles. Nigeria actually recorded a decline in the enrollment of children in primary school between 1980 and 1990.⁸

It seems that expansion of primary education became the default strategy to make a larger percentage of the population literate. This policy did not work, as administrations struggled to provide schooling for such a large number of students. Creating and managing classes for all school-age children proved extremely difficult. Local, regional and federal government administrators relied on expatriate experts to run examination councils, create national education syllabuses and write textbooks. Expats, and British professionals in particular, were well placed to do these jobs because they were trained in and helped to perpetuate an education system that had been imported almost wholesale

⁶ Adesina, *Growth Without Development: Nigeria's Educational Experience Between 1914-2004*, 38.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 33. In comparison, 87.2% of Lagos children and 74% of Mid-Western State children were enrolled. In North-Western State, just 4.9% of children were enrolled in primary school.

⁸ *Education for All: Status and Trends* (Paris: UNESCO, 1993), 15.

from Britain during the colonial era.⁹ These education and publishing professionals also had the force of major funding through multinational organizations behind them. As a result, foreign influence was entrenched in the education and publishing systems of the new Nigerian nation.

The Nigerian government continued the colonial-era practice of allowing foreign agencies to work in the country, in order to try to make up for deficiencies in education and book provision. This authorization in turn gave wealthy countries, through their philanthropic organizations, an opportunity to impact what books were available to the Nigerian reading public. The Franklin Books Program, for example, was a United States-based nonprofit organization that worked on international book publishing development.¹⁰ It declared its mission to be an effort to develop publishing and book selling infrastructure that would benefit local citizens by supporting education and, through civic preparedness, democratic governance. These goals fell perfectly in line with the United States government's post-World War II foreign policy objective of cultivating favor through public diplomacy.¹¹ But Franklin administrators also viewed it as a bonus that their work would create a bigger market for American books abroad.¹²

⁹ For a detailed discussion of foreign influence within the West African examination system see Dillard, "The Case of the West African Examinations Council."

¹⁰ Louise S. Robbins, "Publishing American Values: The Franklin Book Programs and Cold War Cultural Diplomacy," *Library Trends* 55, no. 3 (Winter 2007): 639. Originally called Franklin Publications, it was founded in 1952 as a joint project of the American Library Association and the American Book Publishers Council. Franklin initially focused on providing Arabic translations of American books to Middle Eastern countries, but expanded quickly into other languages, regions and training projects.

¹¹ Justin Hart, *Empire of Ideas: The Origins of Public Diplomacy and the Transformation of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 164.

¹² Robbins, "Publishing American Values: The Franklin Book Programs and Cold War Cultural Diplomacy," 641.

Franklin first conducted a survey on Nigerian book needs in 1962 and found that local publishers could benefit from technical assistance. This survey also highlighted the need for African language literature for younger readers. The non-profit organization opened an office in Lagos in 1964, with a large grant from the Ford Foundation and additional assistance from the Nigerian and United States governments. Program offices were quickly established in Enugu and Kaduna. Following Franklin protocol, Nigerians staffed and managed the country's program. Franklin provided technical assistance to local publishers and ran training programs on various aspects of book production and provision in Nigeria. It also sent Nigerian editors, artists, writers and publishers, including pioneers of the indigenous publishing industry such as Mabel Segun and G.O. Onibonoje, to the United States for educational tours and training. Franklin ensured its influence by taking an interest in local book production, from writing to publication, at a time when Nigerian government ministries did not. For example, together with the British Book Development Council, it conducted a three-week workshop on educational writing at the University of Ibadan in 1965. Twenty-eight Nigerian writers, including twelve from Lagos and the Western Region, developed manuscripts with the guidance of a slate of American and British experts.¹³

While there were positive outcomes to Franklin's efforts to improve local book production in Nigeria, "foreign aid, particularly intellectual assistance, cannot be separated from the policy goals of the donor country or, from that matter, from the policies and orientation of the recipient nation's government."¹⁴ Franklin sponsored the

¹³ Franklin Book Programmes, *Report of the Educational Writers' Workshop, April 20 - May 13, 1965* (University of Ibadan: Institute of Education, n.d.), 4, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

¹⁴ Altbach, "Literary Colonialism: Books in the Third World," 232–233.

publication of books that it found to be “educationally sound and answer definite book needs.”¹⁵ In 1965, that included one book in Yoruba, J.F. Odunjo’s *Kadara ati Egbon Re*. Following Franklin’s policy, the book was guided to publication by the organization but put into print by the local Onibonoje Press. The organization worked with publishers like Onibonoje, Sun Publishing Co. in Lagos and Fola Publishers in Abeokuta. Franklin administrators spotlighted this commitment to local production; a 1962 report on their work in Africa stated, “The policy of Franklin Publications rests on the conviction that a healthy and creative indigenous book industry is basic to educational and economic advance in any country. Furthermore, it is recognized that new nations are in special need of rapid development of such industries to consolidate their independence and manifest their own culture and personality.”¹⁶ Regardless of such lofty intentions, Franklin Books Program put its own spin on the kinds of books the Nigerian reading public had access to, only sponsoring work that they approved of and found to be “educationally sound.” The Nigerian book industry, as shaped by foreign agencies, was all the less likely to manifest a localized identity.

In order to make books an effective tool for encouraging a Nigerian cultural identity, Ayo Ogunseye and other members of the federal government’s Extra-Mural Studies Board recognized the need for increasing literacy rates through education programs specifically suited to adult learners. However, the independent Nigerian government had as little regard for adult education as did the colonial government before it; after 1960, relatively miniscule amounts of funding were appropriated for adult

¹⁵ *Franklin Book Programmes Advisory Board for Lagos and Western Nigeria*, November 3, 1965, 4, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

¹⁶ *Franklin Publications in Africa*, September 18, 1962, 1, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/69, OA.

education. The Extra-Mural Studies Board turned to UNESCO, and successfully recruited the organization's Institute of African Adult Education (IAAE) to the University of Ibadan in 1963.¹⁷ The IAAE's objective was the development of education programs for non-literate adults; but beyond achieving mass literacy, which they saw as essential to economic and political development, they wanted to create readers who read with a purpose. Mushtaq Ahmed, the UNESCO expert on Adult Literacy in the Extra-Mural Department at UI stated that, "books published must inculcate in the new adult literates the feeling of pride of belonging to one nation."¹⁸ Staff members began their work with a survey of the Western Region government's adult literacy programs that had been conducted between 1957 and 1964, but essentially abandoned.¹⁹ S.H.O. Tomori, a member of the UI Extra-Mural Studies Department and leading scholar in adult education, believed that the IAAE needed to develop new textbooks targeted at a specific, Yoruba audience in order to stimulate any interest in literacy education. He produced a Yoruba language primer for adult literacy students in 1966 and it was used on an experimental basis within the IAAE programs throughout the Western Region.²⁰

After UNESCO ended their funding of the Institute, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies continued the work of developing functional literacy programs for Nigerian workers. In the late 1960s, staff members conducted a practical literacy

¹⁷ M.A.L. Omole and Gbolagade Adekanmbi, "Literacy Efforts at Ibadan," in *Forty Years of Adult Education at Ibadan (1949-1989)*, ed. J.A. Akinpelu and M.A. Omolewa (Ibadan: Department of Adult Education, 1989), 98.

¹⁸ *A Book Development Project in Nigeria, 1964-1968*, Appendix N: Meeting of the National Committee for New Adult Literate Readers (Franklin Book Programs, June 15, 1968).

¹⁹ Omole and Adekanmbi, "Literacy Efforts at Ibadan," 99.

²⁰ A.D. Braimoh, O.A. Adeola, and G. Adekanmbi, "Research and Service in the Department of Adult Education," in *Forty Years of Adult Education at Ibadan (1949-1989)*, ed. J.A. Akinpelu and M.A. Omolewa (Ibadan: Department of Adult Education, 1989), 123.

experiment among tobacco farmers in the Oyo North region. They created a Yoruba-language series titled *Iwe Kika fun Awon Agbe Onitaba [Reading Books for Tobacco Farmers]*, consisting of fourteen technical primers on tobacco growing to use with the farmer-students.²¹ The production of these farming manuals allowed scholars to demonstrate that the Yoruba language could be used for technical publications by incorporating newly created words.

The literacy classes were deemed a success by measures such as improved productivity and living standards of the participating farmers. Encouraged by their findings, the Department of Extra-Mural Studies went on to produce a new set of primers in Hausa for use with millet farmers in northern Nigeria. As the Department's offerings expanded with new literacy and general education classes, students began to demand more "exam-oriented" courses. Seventy-five percent of the classes offered in 1969-1970 were exam preparations.²² This course schedule aligns with the widespread observation that readers mostly purchased exam-preparation and educational literature. The reading public demanded education and literature that was goal oriented.

Government Hesitancy in Literature Development

Nigeria faced a different situation regarding their literate population than African nations with smaller populations. Enough Nigerians spoke Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and Igala, among other languages, that multinational and local publishers had the financial incentive to produce books specifically for these audiences. The national government

²¹ Omole and Adekanmbi, "Literacy Efforts at Ibadan," 109.

²² Akinpelu and Osuji, "The Department at Forty: An Overview," 11.

could afford to be less involved in stimulating book production, leaving much of the work to publishers. In many African countries in the 1960s, governments either sponsored or oversaw centralized agencies to ensure the production of literature for local markets. For example, the Sierra Leone Provincial Literature Bureau was a government-subsidized “mass literacy publishing unit.”²³ Ethiopia had an Instructional Materials Production Centre as part of the Ministry of Education and the Sudanese government ran a Publications Bureau, both charged with producing textbooks and literacy readers. Nigeria had no such organizations; the government’s main part in book production was its setting of educational syllabuses and matriculation exams, which assigned particular books and therefore dictated what would be profitable to publishers.

The efficient distribution of books remained an intractable problem in Nigeria. Readers had an easier time obtaining books in the southern states because they had the greatest concentration of bookshops. However, many booksellers were reluctant to carry locally published books because the publishers did not offer the sale-or-return system used by multinationals, making the sellers’ initial investment more risky, unless the book had already shown itself to be a success. Because booksellers had little capital, they had to arrange a credit agreement to take books from local publishers. Local publishers sometimes considered focusing on direct sales to schools and individuals and bypassing bookshops, which would not stock their products, altogether.

The situation of the bookshops themselves did not improve dramatically after Nigeria’s independence. Bookshops expanded in size and number during this period, but remained confined to urban areas. Ibadan hosted a number of shops, including Odusote

²³ Clifford Fyle, “The Production and Flow of Books in Africa,” in *Books for the Developing Countries*, ed. Clifford Fyle and Om Prakash (Paris: UNESCO, 1965), 22–23.

Bookshop, which opened branches throughout the western states. Individual traders continued to provide books in rural markets. These businesses operated with narrow profit margins, were slow to obtain new stock and found it impossible to keep up with the changing textbook requirements put in place by education ministries.²⁴ If shops placed a large outlay in stocking one textbook that was then replaced with another, they risked losing a great deal of money.

The CMS (Nigeria) Bookshops were transferred to the authority of the Nigerian Anglican Church on July 27, 1961, ending a century of control by Salisbury Square, the CMS London headquarters. Soon after, the CMS Bookshop organization was rebranded as Church and School Supply [CSS] in order to stay current with market demands for general paper goods and non-denominational education books. Religious organizations' stores, like CSS and Challenge, Sudan Interior Mission and Muslim Bookshops, continued to dominate the literature market. S.O. Olanlokun, a librarian at the University of Lagos, credited them with knowing the needs of their local communities, having the ability to distribute books over a wide region through their affiliated clergy and encouraging Nigerian authorship.²⁵ These indeed were accomplishments of the religious bookshops, but a major repercussion of a book market run by such a select group was the severe restriction of the types of books available to Nigerian readers.

During the period under consideration, Nigeria did not possess the printing capacity to produce the amount of books needed in schools and for the general public. There were simply not enough printing presses in the country. The federal and regional

²⁴ C.M. Kershaw, Letter to C. Furth, September 5, 1964, AUC 1032/1, URSC.

²⁵ S.O. Olanlokun, "Nigerian Book Trade," *International Library Review* 11 (1979): 70.

government ministries owned the best equipment, but these machines were occupied with producing government documents. In addition, importing paper was expensive and the country did not produce enough to meet demand. The federal government established a pulp/paper factory, the Nigerian Paper Mill, at Jebba in 1969, but could not produce publishing grade paper and it never functioned at full capacity.²⁶

In the 1960s, most local publishers and printers still operated old bed-and-platen presses, which utilized a simple mechanism to press a sheet of paper against a flat bed of type. These machines were not efficient enough to produce large-scale works and it was easy to make mistakes in the hand setting of type and printing placement. However, they were widely available, relatively inexpensive, heavy duty and easier to fix than the newer technology. For these reasons, Nigerian publishers continued to use the more inefficient machines. Meanwhile, foreign and multinational publishers ran rotary presses attached to linotype or monotype machines, allowing them to print thousands more sheets per hour. As a result, education ministries and schools contracted with the multinationals because they could produce more of the books needed for the education market. As the economy improved in the 1970s, local publishers were able to purchase new equipment in order to compete, but even so could not turn out books fast enough.

General Gowon and the Supreme Military Council introduced the first Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree (Decree No. 4) in 1972 as part of a long-running legislative process of business expropriation, with the aim of ensuring African control of the Nigerian economy. To comply, 'Schedule 1' enterprises had to be wholly owned and

²⁶ The government did not make a second attempt to generate paper production until it opened Iwopin Pulp and Paper Company in 1994. Iwopin was supposed to produce book-grade paper to support the local publishing industry but, like the Jebba mill, it never ramped up to full capacity.

operated by Nigerians. ‘Schedule 2’ enterprises worth more than £200,000 could only have a minority foreign ownership.²⁷ A repercussion of Gowon’s order was the gradual indigenization of the multinational publishing houses. In 1977, the second Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree re-affirmed the goals of the 1972 law and ensured that all publishing enterprises were at least 60 percent Nigerian-owned.²⁸ These laws were a boon to Nigerian investors but they did not change the general organization and philosophy of the publishing industry, just the majority owners. Beyond indigenizing the most profitable sectors of the economy, the federal government seemed unconcerned with the publishing industry’s struggle to produce enough books for Nigerian readers.

As oil prices began to drop in 1977-78, the Nigerian government could not pay its foreign debts and as a result, began to cut public expenditures and look for income elsewhere. In 1979, the national government introduced a 40% tariff on paper imports and restricted their volume; this action drove prices up so steeply that publishers working within Nigeria could not compete with publishers who imported their books into the country.²⁹ Additionally, the Fourth National Development Plan, for the years 1981 to 1985, decreed that all primary and secondary school textbooks had to be authored by Nigerians, meaning that more and more of the publishing industry’s meager resources had to be channeled into educational production.³⁰ The World Bank’s Structural Adjustment Program, which took effect in Nigeria in 1986, initiated the final collapse of

²⁷ Chibuike U. Uche, “British Government, British Businesses, and the Indigenization Exercise in Post-Independence Nigeria,” *Business History Review* 86 (Winter 2012): 751, 754.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 766.

²⁹ Nkechi Mercy E. Uwalaka, “Book Publishing Performance in the Nigerian Economic Environment” (PhD thesis, University of Ibadan, 2000), 52.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

the publishing industry; book production fell steeply over the course of the decade. F.A. Ogunsheye opened the Nigerian School Library Association's annual conference in 1981 by stating that, "a nation which depends on the intellectual products of other nations is a deprived nation. It is transmitting the values and attitudes of other nations and by this action is destroying its own cultural identity."³¹ As government support disintegrated and the interest of the reading public eroded with the economy, Nigerian book advocates faced an ever more difficult struggle to promote reading.

Multinational Publishers

By 1960, a reading culture had developed in Nigeria that was practical, goal-oriented and dedicated to educational ends; it was shaped by outside agencies but ultimately prescribed by Nigerian readers themselves. In a 1965 report on book provision in Africa for UNESCO, Clifford Fyle quoted a Nigerian bookseller who observed that, "to a large extent Nigeria is at present only interested in books which help a student to get ahead (textbooks, private study etc.), although this is gradually changing as a middle class begins to emerge."³² For a brief period in the 1960s and 1970s, the Nigerian reading public expanded as more readers could afford to buy books for pleasure, whether those titles were educational or literary. Booksellers imported a larger variety of books and multinational publishers responded by adding to their product lines for a specifically Nigerian audience. However, the mechanism for distribution continued to limit the reach of such literature. Even if multinational publishers had the will to produce books of

³¹ F. Adetowun Ogunsheye, "Presidential Address, 4th Annual Conference of the Nigerian School Library Association," 1981, 4, OGFAD/00014: 98/1/60, OA.

³² Fyle, "The Production and Flow of Books in Africa," 21.

interest for a general audience, they did not have the capacity to distribute them outside of the regionalized education system.

When the federal government implemented its UPE program in 1976, the educational book market received a further boost. Publishers in Nigeria focused on the education market to the exclusion of almost all other areas because it was in their financial best interest to do so. The market was large; it remained fairly constant as it was based on standard syllabuses and the education system – and therefore the demand for educational books – enjoyed government funding.³³ Because publishers were able to make a profit on textbooks, they had little reason to invest money in the publication of fiction, children’s books and other types of literature that would be difficult to sell. Educators, writers and other literature workers looked to the state and federal governments to rectify this situation. They wanted the government to sponsor the publication of these varieties of literature.³⁴ However, the government was not interested in getting involved in publishing beyond producing African language readers for local schools. Politicians seemed to view publishing as charity work, waiting for foreign agencies to continue their efforts by supporting local publishers and subsidizing literature for the Nigerian reading public.

After 1960, multinationals touted their Nigerian qualifications, with local staff and production offices. John Nottingham, director of the Nairobi-based East African Publishing House, accused British publishers of continued economic imperialism in the

³³ Akinleye, “Review of Publishing in Nigeria,” 11.

³⁴ For example, the Nigerian Children’s Writers Association passed a resolution that “the publication of books written in minority languages should be sponsored by both the Federal and State Governments where the language is spoken.” “Minutes of Workshop for Writers of Children’s Books,” May 6, 1979, 2, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/62, OA.

wake of political independence for African nations. He described “a deep attachment to the British educational legacy” that led to “a British monopoly publishing position securely rooted in a British-type educational system, which seemed almost impregnable.”³⁵ This dedication to British-style education and the concomitant usage of British-published textbooks was evident in Nigeria, too. Although multinationals followed the letter of the law by recruiting Nigerian investors and staff, they were still intimately connected to home offices in London and therefore had advantages in capital investment, access to lending institutions and advanced printing technology over local publishers. It appears that their work restricted the growth of a truly indigenous Nigerian publishing industry.

The first decades of Nigerian independence were lucrative ones for multinational publishers. As much as both publishers and the federal government emphasized the role of local books in Nigerian development, multinationals were making major profits. The Nigerian branch of OUP, for example, improved its earnings from a £1,000 net loss in 1962 to a £137,000 net profit in 1974.³⁶ One of their innovations from the period was the introduction of African authors into their Three Crowns series, which had previously only published books about Africa. Editor Rex Collings added Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance in the Forest* and *The Lion and the Jewel* to the Three Crowns list in 1963 and three more by 1967. These titles sold well in Nigeria. While trying to convince OUP to option these books for publication, Collings provided a clear rationale for multinational presses looking to publish African-authored fiction, drama and poetry:

³⁵ John Nottingham, “Establishing an African Publishing Industry: A Study in Decolonization,” *African Affairs* 68, no. 271 (April 1969): 140.

³⁶ Davis, “The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing,” 230. OUP changed its name to University Press, Plc. when it became majority Nigerian-owned.

I am convinced also that there is still a place for us in African publishing if we can plainly show that we are not in fact only interested in selling enormous quantities of primary school books by expatriate authors. This is quite commonly felt and believed although it is not altogether true in fact. Politically therefore it is also important that we should publish. If we don't, I think we will have missed the bus.³⁷

Collings pointed out that his own OUP and other multinationals needed to have this type of literature on their publishing lists to appease those in Nigeria who were agitating for greater indigenous control of publishing. A conference paper presented by another OUP representative in the early 1970s mirrored this concern that Nigerian readers were becoming critical of the multinational publishing system, with its continued invitation for input from London. That paper countered the common complaint that OUP gave preference to non-Nigerian authors by pointing out that 90% of the books published by OUP from April 1972 to March 1973 were authored or co-authored by Nigerians.³⁸ Even as the author list was Nigerianized, however, publishing in Nigeria was too profitable to allow the industry to be completely transferred to the new nation.

Publishing Nigerian creative writers was good for public relations. It was an effective means of publicizing a press's cultural contributions to the Nigerian nation, rather than the commercial successes.³⁹ In addition to OUP's Three Crowns, African literature series from this period included Heinemann's African Writers Series, Longman's Forum and Drumbeat, and Macmillan's Pacesetters, which all boasted catalogs heavy with Nigerian authors. The African Writers Series [AWS] in particular

³⁷ Collings to Neale, 4 July 1962, file name: Wole Soyinka, The Lion and the Jewel, File 911083, Ref 012161, Box OP1619, Archives of Oxford University Press, quoted in Davis, 227.

³⁸ Anonymous, "Publishing in Nigeria from the Aspect of the Non-Indigenous Publishing House," n.d., 8, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/66, OA.

³⁹ Davis, "The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing," 232.

gained international fame for promoting new authors from the continent. It began in 1962 with Chinua Achebe as editorial advisor and is often held up as an extraordinary example of success in African-authored fiction publishing.

Nevertheless, James Currey, who was a founding editor of the AWS, noted in his review of the series that it “has always been a general market series although *most of the sales are made through educational institutions.*”⁴⁰ AWS books were profitable because they were assigned in schools; Graham Huggan describes the AWS and other literature series as part “a neocolonial knowledge industry.”⁴¹ He argues that African writers were convinced that multinational publishers would produce a better book for a wider audience, and so they and the local reading public were “persuaded to believe that cultural value, as well as economic power, is located and arbitrated elsewhere.”⁴² Moreover, not only was cultural value of Nigerian-authored literature defined outside of the national borders, but the physical production of these books was allocated so as to distinguish their relative value. The books assigned greatest literary/cultural value were produced abroad while those in the educational/low literature category were delegated to subsidiary branches in Africa.⁴³ An anonymous OUP editor also made a case for why multinational publishers had to preserve the editorial role of the British home office and produce some of their titles abroad. According to him, they could only produce books at a low enough price point for Nigerian consumers by printing on an economy of scale, and

⁴⁰ James Currey, “African Writers Series—21 Years on,” *The African Book Publishing Record* 11, no. 1 (January 1985): 11. Emphasis mine.

⁴¹ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London: Routledge, 2001), 51.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gail Low, “In Pursuit of Publishing: Heinemann’s African Writers Series,” *Wasafiri* 17, no. 37 (2002): 34.

so the literature had to appeal to a larger market that typically extended throughout Anglophone Africa.⁴⁴

In her study of the AWS, Gail Low attributes this upsurge in the publishing of African and other British Commonwealth authors in the 1950s and 1960s to a “potent combination of curiosity, liberal altruism and hard-nosed commerce.”⁴⁵ Multinationals wanted to publish profitable books, above all else. This goal was accomplished by catering to the education market, making sure that books were assigned to a school examination list or syllabus. For example, Caroline Davis notes that OUP pushed through approval of J.C. de Graft’s *Sons and Daughters* when it heard that the book would be assigned for the School Certificate exam in Ghana, if published in time.⁴⁶ C.M. Kershaw, an editor for the British publisher George Allen & Unwin, toured Nigeria in 1964 to check on the firm’s interests there. Warning that he was “the bearer of bad news,” Kershaw reported to his manager that the West African Examinations Council [WAEC] had revised the 1966 English Literature syllabus and replaced their book, *Tell Freedom* by Peter Abrahams, with Heinemann’s *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe.⁴⁷ He hinted that the switch might not have been “completely above board” and promised to find out who might help Allen & Unwin get *Tell Freedom* reinstated by WAEC. This episode

⁴⁴ Anonymous, “Publishing in Nigeria from the Aspect of the Non-Indigenous Publishing House,” 3–4. The author, in discussing the problem of producing books for the Nigerian tertiary education market, mentions the “radical” possibility of abandoning formal publishing altogether and instead typing manuscripts and then cyclostyling copies for students – a practice he said was already being carried out across Nigerian campuses. Such a solution would mean abandoning copyright laws. University students overcome the present-day book shortage in much the same way. Photocopy shops cater to students who bring a book borrowed from a friend or the library and can have the entire thing reproduced in an afternoon. See Anonymous, 6.

⁴⁵ Low, “In Pursuit of Publishing: Heinemann’s African Writers Series,” 32.

⁴⁶ Davis, “The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing,” 235.

⁴⁷ C.M. Kershaw, Letter to C. Furth, August 7, 1964, AUC 1032/1, URSC.

illustrates how multinationals manipulated the book market and imposed a particular vision of what constituted African culture through the literature that was taught and made available for purchase within Nigeria.

Macmillan began publishing Pacesetter books in 1977 as “a series of popular fiction by African authors for African readers.”⁴⁸ 130 novels were published over the following decade. A large percentage of the authors came from Nigeria, where Macmillan was trying to access the large market of young readers who were enrolled in school (now by legislative mandate) and wanted books to read for entertainment. Pacesetter books often became bestsellers, but scholars classed them as “para-literature” that “feeds itself on the expansion of cities, on increasing mass literacy, and on the desire of those masses for entertainment and titillation.”⁴⁹ They had much in common with the cheaper locally produced literature that was still widely available across southern Nigeria. However, unlike the Onitsha market authors, they wrote stories that featured the Nigeria nation. Author Kalu Okpi gained fame for books such as *The Smugglers*, which told the story of a Nigerian crime syndicate and its harm to the nation.⁵⁰ The fact that Macmillan established the Pacesetter series indicates that a market for “entertainment and titillation” existed, because multinational publishers would not have sanctioned the project unless they thought it could be profitable.

A 1966 policy paper described the value of the Three Crowns series to OUP: “The Three Crowns books in particular do give an impression that the OUP is not just

⁴⁸ Virginia Coulon, “Onitsha Goes National: Nigerian Writing in Macmillan’s Pacesetter Series,” *Research in African Literatures* 18, no. 3 (1987): 304. This description comes from Macmillan’s 1982-83 catalog.

⁴⁹ Charles Nnolim, “Trends in the Nigerian Novel,” in *Literature and National Consciousness*, ed. Ebele Eko and Ernest N. Emenyonu, vol. 4 (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1989), 57–58.

⁵⁰ Coulon, “Onitsha Goes National: Nigerian Writing in Macmillan’s Pacesetter Series,” 312–313.

publishing in the branch areas for what it can get out of them in the way of large sales of school books.”⁵¹ This candid assessment reveals that multinational publishers added African authors to their catalogs so that they would be allowed to continue their highly profitable mining of the Nigerian publishing sector. Hans Zell, a leading scholar of African publishing, reflected the views of many people when he attributed its development to the work of multinational publishers.⁵² Another scholar, writing about the production output of multinational publishers in Africa, suggested, “if the price was an increase in the earnings of some foreign houses and a small addition to the foreign exchange bills, it was a cheap one for the service rendered.”⁵³ But did the Nigerian reading public pay a small price? The production and provision of books provided a space for the continuation of cultural imperialism by foreign agencies from the colonial era into the 1980s.

Nigerian Publishers

Because the federal government was reluctant to extend the same credit opportunities to printers and publishers that they did to other commercial industries, most Nigerian printers had to work with outdated equipment and publishers did not have the capital to take a chance on new book production. They did not lack for Nigerian-authored manuscripts, but often had all of their capital tied up in earlier books and so could not

⁵¹ “Three Crowns: Towards a Definition of Policy,” September 19, 1966, p. 6, Three Crowns Series file 1967-71, LOGE 000221, Archives of Oxford University Press, quoted in Davis, “The Politics of Postcolonial Publishing,” 235.

⁵² Hans Zell, cite source.

⁵³ Julian Rea, “Aspects of African Publishing 1945-74,” *The African Book Publishing Record* 1, no. 2 (April 1975): 147.

publish any new products until those sold. Before confronting more cerebral matters of language, moral obligation or reading taste, these local producers had to deal with basic supply issues. Paper shortages so severely hampered book production throughout Africa that in 1965, one administrator suggested paper donation be recognized as a form of international aid.⁵⁴ Paper constitutes the largest cost of printing a book. Because multinationals could afford to import large quantities of paper, and could claim an exemption from import taxes by showing that the paper was for educational use through the printing of textbooks, only 30% of the costs of their textbooks came from the paper supply. Meanwhile, Nigerian publishers had to purchase paper in smaller quantities from importers in the country who folded the cost of non-exempt import taxes into the cost, making it much more expensive. Paper accounted for at least 60% of the cost of a book for these local publishers.⁵⁵

John Nottingham estimated that a new African-owned and staffed publishing firm would have to produce an average of four books per month, at an initial investment of £2,000 per book, with no expectation of profit in the first year, to financially establish itself.⁵⁶ Advocates for investment in the Nigerian book industry claimed that indigenous publishers, as opposed to the multinationals that still had at least partial foreign ownership, would be more responsive to the needs and demands of the local population and therefore produce books that Nigerian wanted to read. However, it was estimated that

⁵⁴ Fyle, "The Production and Flow of Books in Africa," 26.

⁵⁵ Apeji, "The Contributions of Multinational Publishers," 269.

⁵⁶ Nottingham, "Establishing an African Publishing Industry," 141.

local publishers were only able to produce about twenty percent of the books needed for consumption by the reading public during the 1960s.⁵⁷

Much of the contemporary coverage of the Nigerian publishing industry treated indigenous publishing as a new development, instead of acknowledging the importance of local publications from the early twentieth century onwards. Local publisher-printers received little recognition from government leaders, educators, religious leaders and editors for their long decades of work. The books produced by these local companies were not seen as fulfilling the book needs of an upwardly mobile population. As a result, even as the industry expanded from the 1960s, Nigerian-owned publishing companies had to convince African authors to publish with them instead of signing with multinationals.

With the establishment of a university in Ibadan, the city had quickly become a center for the Nigerian publishing industry. It had a high concentration of readers because people migrated to the city for economic and education opportunities. Located a short drive from Lagos, it also had a sizable administrative population.⁵⁸ A list of all the publishers and/or printers who placed a book with the Ibadan University Library, the national depository for all new publications between 1950 and 1965, indicates the heavy concentration of those businesses in Ibadan. Twenty-one publishers and sixty-four printers were located in Ibadan. Five more publishers were located elsewhere in the Western Region, sixteen publishers hailed from the Eastern Region, nine from the

⁵⁷ O.G. Tamuno, *Twenty Years of Publishing and Printing in Nigeria* (University of Ibadan Library, 1970), 15, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/66, OA.

⁵⁸ In the late 1960s, there were approximately 650 Nigerians and 150 expatriates at the highest administration level; over half of them were assigned to Ibadan. Peter Cutt Lloyd, Akin L. Mabogunje, and Bolanle Awe, eds., *The City of Ibadan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 131.

Northern Region and two from the Mid-Western Region. Only Lagos, with thirty publishers and fifty-four printers, hosted a larger print industry than the one in Ibadan.⁵⁹ Nigerians, many of them trained at the University of Ibadan, would have largely staffed these printers and publishers. The first Nigerian university press opened at the university in 1949; it produced university stationery, reports, journals and books on a second-hand press.⁶⁰ It became a fully operating academic press in 1955.⁶¹

Between 1952, the year Faber and Faber published Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and 1970, sixty Nigerian-authored novels were published. Perhaps the most famous example of an indigenous publishing house from this period is Mbari Publications, established in 1961 as the publishing branch of the Mbari Artists' and Writers' Club of Ibadan. The Mbari Club emerged out of the artistic ferment of 1940s and 1950s Ibadan, where artists, writers and dramatists had been drawing on forms of Yoruba oral expression to create a vibrant theater culture. Ibadan seemed to be a natural setting for such a venture, with a university and an educated book-buying audience looking for new forms of entertainment.⁶² The Club supported creative production and provided a cultural center for members and Ibadan citizens alike. Many of the founding members had come to Ibadan to study at the university, including Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Mabel Aig-Imoukuede and J.P. Clark. Their Club sponsors, Ulli Beier and

⁵⁹ "List of Printers and Publishers of Works Received Under the Publications Laws During the Years 1950-1965," n.d., OGFAD/00015: 98/1/66, OA.

⁶⁰ Tamuno, "Printing and Publishing in Nigeria: A Historical Survey," 6.

⁶¹ S.O. Olanlokun, "Textbook Publishing in Nigeria," *International Library Review* 14 (1982): 86. Ibadan University Press continued to be the most prolific of the university presses in Nigeria, averaging twelve titles per year during the 1960s and 1970s.

⁶² See Robert M. Wren, *Those Magical Years: The Making of Nigerian Literature at Ibadan: 1948-1966* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1991).

Ezekiel Mphahlele, were both lecturers in UI's Department of Extra-Mural Studies.⁶³ Under the leadership of Beier and Mphahlele, the various ventures of the Mbari Club were so influential that branches of the club were soon opened in Osogbo, run by the dramatist Duro Ladipo, and in Enugu.⁶⁴ The Mbari Club was extremely proactive in meeting its goals, leasing a building with the support of the Paris Congress for Cultural Freedom and holding three art exhibits, a music festival and two artist training programs during their first year.⁶⁵ The building housed an exhibition space, a theater and a library of Africana literature. The Club began publishing poetry and other short works in the quarterly journal *Black Orpheus*, which was sponsored by the Ministry of Education and co-edited by Beier.

The editors of Mbari Publications wanted to promote the longer works of new African writers and make African literature less expensive and more accessible to the reading public. They contracted with the Caxton Press in Ibadan to print their books, rather than sending the work abroad. Previously, African literary publishing was done in London and Paris. Between 1961 and 1965, Mbari Publications released 27 titles by writers from all over Africa.⁶⁶ Nigerian John Pepper Clark's *The Song of a Goat* and South African-in-exile Alex la Guma's *A Walk in the Night* were some of their better-

⁶³ On Beier, a German-born scholar of English phonetics and literature, see Peter Benson, "'Border Operators': Black Orpheus and the Genesis of Modern African Art and Literature," *Research in African Literatures* 14, no. 4 (Winter 1983): 431–473; Mphahlele was also an immigrant to Nigeria, having left South Africa in exile for his political activism. For more information on the teacher and writer, see N. Chabani Manganyi, *Exiles and Homecomings: A Biography of Es'kia Mphahlele* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, Ltd., 1983).

⁶⁴ Jeanne N. Dingome, "Mbari," in *European-Language Writing in Sub-Saharan Africa*, vol. 2 (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1986), 686.

⁶⁵ Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Mbari – First Anniversary," *Africa Report* 7, no. 11 (December 1962): 17.

⁶⁶ Abdul R. Yesufu, "Mbari Publications: A Pioneer Anglophone African Publishing House," *The African Book Publishing Record* 8, no. 2 (January 1982): 55.

known offerings. Besides publishing fiction, drama and poetry by authors from a number of African countries, they released three works in 1964 that were translations from Yoruba: *Oriki*, a collection by Bakare Gbadamosi, *Three Plays: Oba Waja, Oba Koso and Oba Moro*, written by Ladipo and translated by Beier and *The Moon Cannot Fight*, an adaptation of Yoruba children's songs by Beier and Gbadamosi.⁶⁷ The publishing branch of the Mbari Club was moved from Ibadan to Oshogbo by Ulli Beier in 1965 and then ceased to function during the civil war. In its short life, however, it succeeded in encouraging new African writers. Mbari wanted to make such literature available to the African public and to promote it internationally. It focused on fiction, drama and poetry in English, but also published translations from French and books of art, as well as books of scores of Yoruba music. It was "a time when the question of how to ensure a large African readership for works written by Africans was broached by the concerned intellectual elite."⁶⁸ Mbari's answer was to make publishing local. Nigerian fiction writing, led by Mbari and those in Ibadan, was flourishing – but their writing did not necessarily incentivize the Nigerian public to expand their reading preferences.

In the aftermath of the civil war, the conditions existed for a further expansion of the indigenous publishing industry. The economy was improving on the strength of oil exports, the federal government was preparing to pass national education and library legislation and the reading public was more aware of the work of Nigerian authors. Additionally, the infrastructure was in place to support book publishing. Seventy-nine

⁶⁷ Dingome, "Mbari," 684.

⁶⁸ Yesufu, "Mbari Publications," 55.

printing firms in Nigeria in 1965 had more than twenty employees.⁶⁹ Twenty-six of those were located in Lagos and twenty-two in the Western Region. Smaller printing business proliferated; one scholar counted 111 printers in Ibadan in 1963. These small print shops, often run by one or two men, used hand-set type and hand- or treadle-powered presses.⁷⁰ The large firms could handle book production, while smaller operations turned out pamphlets and other print materials.

Nigerian publishing houses established in this period include John West Publications Ltd., opened in 1964 and headquartered first in Lagos and then Ibadan. It specialized in reference books and biographies and had become one of the major players in the industry by the early 1970s. Daystar Press, established in Ibadan in 1966 by the Christian Council of Nigeria and headed by Modupe Oduyoye, was a religious press, but it published a range of books, including Yoruba topics such as *The Vocabulary of Yoruba Religious Discourse* and *Yoruba Names*. It was particularly prolific, adding 104 books to its catalog by 1980.⁷¹

After the civil war, a number of new publishing houses, including Fountain Publications, Kraft Books and Spectrum Books opened in Ibadan. Spectrum Books began in 1968, “founded on the belief that there is a large number of Nigerians who have to read books, and not necessarily for examination purposes.”⁷² They and other publishers, including the multinationals, were represented by the Nigerian Publishers’ Association

⁶⁹ John Harris, *Nigerian Enterprise in the Printing Industry* (Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1968), 216.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷¹ Daystar Press Price List, 1980, OGFAD/00015: 98/1/62, OA.

⁷² Apeji, “The Contributions of Multinational Publishers,” 135; cited from *Spectrum at Ten: A Special Anniversary Publication* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1978), 7.

(NPA), which had been established in 1965 and had twenty-five members by 1968. Despite the advocacy of Aigboje Higo, the first president, and Femi Oyewole, the first secretary, the NPA was ineffectual during this time period. It operated with little funding and support and did not have a permanent headquarters until 1982. The NPA attempted to negotiate with the federal government concerning issues such as copyright regulations and paper import duties, but did little to improve the situation of its constituents. Here the tension becomes apparent; while there was a florescence of publishing for a Nigerian reading public from 1960 onward, it never lived up to the expectations that it would have a nationalizing influence or have some other kind of economic or moral impact on the country. In 1975, a Nigerian scholar described the country's publishing industry as being in an "embryonic state" when it had clearly grown over the course of nearly a century.⁷³

The National and State Library System

The Nigerian federal government began considering its role in library development in the early 1960s, although it was not willing to put much financial or intellectual investment into the project. As a result, the Nigerian government-run library system borrowed heavily from Western models in terms of architecture, organization and holdings and failed to address local realities such as the continuing importance of oral literatures or the relatively low literacy rates.⁷⁴ Libraries were supposed to be a piece of the puzzle in building a civil society by fostering a more vibrant reading culture through

⁷³ C.C. Aguolu, "The School Library as an Instrument of Education in Nigeria," *International Library Review* 7, no. 1 (1975): 49. He also complained that most of the available books were not of interest to Nigerian students.

⁷⁴ Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Manufacturing and Consuming Knowledge: African Libraries and Publishing," *Development in Practice* 6, no. 4 (November 1996): 294.

the provision of literature to entire communities. They were also supposed to create book users who would go on to purchase their own books and thereby support a flourishing publishing industry.

In the early years of independence, the government moved quickly to put library development on the books, so to speak. A National Library Advisory Committee was established in 1959 within the Ministry of Information. The creation of a national library was imbued with nationalistic importance – it represented a call to embrace an Africanist past and find unity in the present. However, the First National Development Plan (1962-68) contained no provision for a national library. Separate legislation was passed to provide funding, and development began in late 1962 with technical and financial support from the Ford Foundation. The National Library was established in 1963 and a National Library Act passed the following year. When the National Library first opened, all five librarians were Americans from the Ford Foundation.⁷⁵ The services of the National Library were initially restricted to the Federal Territory of Lagos and the legislation did not mandate a federal book depository. The University of Ibadan continued to serve as the federal book depository until 1970, when the federal government revised the act and appointed the National Library to take over that function. Decree Number 29, the National Library Decree of 1970, also extended the National Library’s services to the twelve states.⁷⁶ At the same time, the federal government was reticent to provide the

⁷⁵ C.C. Aguolu and I.E. Aguolu, *Libraries and Information Management in Nigeria* (Maiduguri, Nigeria: Ed-Linform Services, 2002), 118.

⁷⁶ Nassir Bello, “The 1970 Decree of the National Library of Nigeria: A Reassessment,” *International Library Review* 15, no. 4 (1983): 379.

funding necessary to provide library services throughout the country. Just 1.1% of the national budget for 1970-75 was allocated for “information,” which included libraries.⁷⁷

At the international level, the West African Library Association dissolved and its Nigerian national division was transformed into the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962. The NLA promoted the interests of professional librarianship and advocated for library development and government library legislation. The first librarianship degree program in Nigeria was opened at UCI in 1960, funded by the Carnegie Corporation. It was to train new workers for the inevitable expansion of libraries throughout the nation. While the independent Nigerian government questioned many of the institutions put in place by their former rulers, they accepted without reservation the wisdom of creating a national library system that the British had bequeathed to them. However, there was controversy over how library practices should be adopted from the West and implemented in Nigeria. A proposal to make the NLA a professional body was defeated by members in 1965. The organization was divided over whether librarianship should be professionalized, the view championed by John Harris, or whether it was more important to train a high volume of workers through an apprenticeship program. The Harris group eventually won, but official recognition of librarianship was delayed until 1982.⁷⁸ The NLA implemented other practices in an effort to serve the specific needs of Nigerian readers, eventually moving away from the vestiges of a colonial system. Librarians expressed special interest in recording and preserving oral knowledge and making non-

⁷⁷ J.H. Wynter, “Some Problems in Nigerian Library Development since 1960,” *International Library Review* 11, no. 1 (1979): 20.

⁷⁸ Ogunshẹye, “21 Years of Library Service,” 1.

book resources available to the non-literate population. It is unclear if this goal was accomplished.

Government officials and their advisers, from the local up to the federal level, looked to books as both a symbol and a means of development, as indicated by Carl White, the Ford Foundation's Nigeria Library Adviser: "A National Library, once established on firm footing, is going to be a valuable instrument of national progress."⁷⁹ However, Nigerian libraries in 1960 were scarce and poorly equipped. A 1961 report on education in the Western Region notes:

Some of the secondary schools and training colleges feature small [book] collections, but only a few of them had anything that looked like a library, either in collection or accommodation. The primary schools not only were without libraries, but were remarkable for their bareness... Often even at university level one hears that complaint that students do not know how to use books even when, with great difficulty, they succeed in finding them.⁸⁰

Town councils throughout the Western Region allocated minimal amounts of the budget to support local public and school libraries. Regional library service was only beginning to expand outside of Ibadan in 1960.

The Western Region government set up a number of commissions in the 1960s to examine the problems plaguing the UPE system, including overcrowding and lack of resources. Issues of book provision appeared throughout the reports, from the unsuitability of government-assigned syllabuses to textbook scarcity. The 1961 Banjo Commission and 1968 Taiwo Commission reported similar findings in both secondary and primary schools: library facilities were basically non-existent and nothing was being

⁷⁹ Carl White, "The National Library of Nigeria," *Nigerian Libraries* 1 (1964): 124.

⁸⁰ *Report of the Commission Appointed to Review the Educational System of Western Nigeria* (Ibadan: Government Printer, 1961), 74; in Aguolu, "The School Library as an Instrument of Education in Nigeria," 51.

done to rectify the lack of books.⁸¹ In the rush to provide classroom space for as many children as possible, little money was left for school libraries. They were viewed as dispensable and were therefore overlooked in the development of operational guidelines or special funding. When schools did have libraries, they were staffed by teachers with no specialized training, “their only qualification being that they happen to be senior English teachers, as if a library is designed to stock only books in English language.”⁸²

A permanent building for the Western State regional library was finally begun in 1972, financed by the British Council. At that time, the headquarters were in a rented house and the reading room was located on the third floor of the Finance Corporation building on Lebanon Street in Ibadan.⁸³

When the country was split into twelve states by military decree in 1976, the resulting smaller governments had to take over library planning. Oyo State, with Ibadan as its capital, made some library efforts. The government established a book depot to serve as a distribution center for school and public libraries in 1977. The following year, it partnered with the Department of Library Science at the University of Ibadan to open the Abadina Media Resource Centre, a well-stocked library for primary and secondary school students. The center served as a research laboratory for the university and stimulated new scrutiny of library policies and general reading practices. Still, by the end of the Second Republic in 1983, Oyo State did not yet have a Library Board or a clear sense of direction for the expansion of library provision.

⁸¹ I.O. Fagbeja, *The State of School Library Development in Oyo State, Nigeria*, c 1984, 9–10, OGFAD/00014: 90/1/63, OA.

⁸² Aguolu, “The School Library as an Instrument of Education in Nigeria,” 48.

⁸³ Fagbeja, *The State of School Library Development in Oyo State, Nigeria*, 7.

While local and state governments established libraries, they remained underfunded and unregulated by any administrative authority. For example, the Kwara State Public Library, established in Ilorin in 1966, functioned on an average annual budget of 4,000 Naira between 1968 and 1977, an inadequate fund to provide books for the population.⁸⁴ Having studied patrons' usage of the library, O.O. Oladoyin unhappily concluded that it "has not made any substantial impact on the reading habit of the public in the town. Few people patronize the library and even those that patronize the library are mainly students who go there to do more of functional reading than leisure reading."⁸⁵ Although politicians, educators and philanthropists celebrated libraries, with their shelves of books and intellectual meeting spaces, these policy-makers' ability to implement an effective library program seemed to be impeded by their belief that Nigerians did not make use of libraries in the right way.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted a preliminary exploration of the reshaping of book provision and practices of reading as Nigeria grappled with its status as a new nation. The federal and regional governments vacillated in their support of education, the publishing industry and the library system, each an important component of developing a reading culture. Despite the lack of funding for such institutions, the adult illiteracy rate for

⁸⁴ Olaniyi Olatunde Oladoyin, "The Reading Interests of Literate Adults and the Use of State Public Library in Ilorin Kwara State of Nigeria" (MLS Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1979), 17.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

Nigeria gradually decreased from 89.7% in 1970 to 59.2% in 1985.⁸⁶ However, a Lagos State Library Board member observed in 1986 that, “Nigeria as a whole is not a reading society. The social set-up militates against reading and libraries are used purely for utilitarian purposes.”⁸⁷ Reading was, in fact, a utilitarian pursuit for many. However, this did not negate the fact that, regardless of Nigerians’ reading preferences a reading culture had indeed been born. As this chapter has shown, in the face of great odds, presses emerged and a library system was established. These things happened precisely because there were Nigerian readers with needs to meet.

⁸⁶ Felicia Oyekanmi, “Language, Culture and National Development,” in *Literature, Language and National Consciousness*, ed. T.A. Ezeigbo and K.K. Aribisala (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2006), 99. The adult illiteracy rate stood at 48.5% in 1995.

⁸⁷ S.Y. Akinsemoyin, “School Library Development in Lagos State,” 1986, 4, OGFAD/00014: 90/1/63, OA.

Conclusion: Nigerian Readers in the Sterile Season

The aim of this dissertation has been to identify and describe the many components that were part of the historical development of a reading public in southwestern Nigeria. The most important factor in the process of shaping how, what and why people read was the readers—and their own smaller listening audiences—who both consumed and produced literature in Yoruba and English. Having traced the creation of a Standard Yoruba for use in print, this dissertation first described how Christian missionaries zealously set a precedent for producing and providing their acolytes with access to books that had a solely moral purpose, whether that was to instill lessons of Christianity or Western civilization more generally. Missionaries and those who controlled literature production continued to measure the success of books in Yoruba and English within this paradigm. Despite their advantage in training and funding, however, missionaries conceded at least part of the print market to African authors and publishers from the 1910s onwards.

The middle chapters of the dissertation demonstrated that foreign agencies became more heavily invested in controlling what Nigerians read between the 1920s and the 1940s, even though the Yoruba reading public remained quite small relative to the total population into the mid-century. Through the provision of literature, these missionary, government and philanthropic groups found that they had easier access to the Yoruba educated elite, who wielded increasing political and social influence throughout the period. The final chapters of the dissertation provided new information about the transfer of policy and funding responsibility for Nigeria's literature system from the colonial government to the African administration. This handing-over led to new regional

efforts to increase the size of the Yoruba reading public in order to meet Nigerian demands for greater access to education. Projects conducted in order to improve the literature system from the 1940s through the 1970s were part of a larger effort to demonstrate that colonial and then independent rule was beneficial to the subject classes. However, the infrastructure for literature production and distribution, an enterprise that had mostly been taken care of by non-government entities under colonial rule, continued to be underfunded, hindering the development of a literature system and the reading public.

As my project continues to develop, I plan to conduct further research on the work of Nigerian-owned publishers, particularly as they expanded in response to the competition of multinational publishing houses. Little information exists on these Nigerian agents of print culture and what does exist is often repeated from manuscript to manuscript. Access to the archives of the publishers will perhaps tell us more about their early growth and how the indigenization regulations of the 1970s affected publishing outputs; this vein of research would also provide insight into any differences in publishing practices or reading preferences from the Yoruba-speaking area of Nigeria to other parts of the country. Another avenue of enquiry is oral history research on reading preferences and practices; while I conducted interviews with Nigerian publishers and booksellers for the dissertation, their input deserves more careful attention. The voices of booksellers, in particular, are rarely heard apart from the note that it is a difficult business. Lastly, in my effort to provide a comprehensive history of the Yoruba reading public, this dissertation prematurely dropped the thread of enquiry about the process of entextualization in that society. In the future, I plan to examine how the public, presented

with new varieties of written texts, constituted and encoded meaning in them through the changing practices of reading.

Scholars have amply demonstrated that literacy and literature were key tools of the civilizing mission, and that they also became contested spaces and practices; my dissertation fits into this literature by elaborating on the links from mission to school to business and government and the common thread of morally righteous purposefulness that drove these literature workers. This dissertation has traced the impact of Christian evangelization, formal education systems, philanthropic initiatives and British and Nigerian government policies on the development of a print culture in southwestern Nigeria. It has shown the trajectory of discomfort of those in power with regard to the Yoruba reading public, as that body expanded through the colonial period and beyond. This dissertation has been ambitious with regard to the scope of time it covers, in order to examine the historical origins of and impact made by a print culture in southwestern Nigeria. It uniquely contributes to an Africanist historiography concerned with social identity, education and text production by describing the evolution of a literature system, including the programs of literacy education, book production and literature distribution conducted by organizations in Nigeria and particularly among a Yoruba language reading audience.

The dissertation demonstrates that the agencies in charge of book provision, whether by appointment of the government or voluntarily, wanted to dictate every part of the process, from the writing of manuscripts to publishing to stocking libraries and bookshops. They deemed control of the production and dissemination of literature an essential part of their larger civilizing missions and invested their work with a redemptive

purpose. The books they made available to Nigerian readers had a moral and/or educational utility that imparted a carefully crafted message about the readers' duty to be productive workers and contributing citizens. Finally, the dissertation moves beyond the more commonly studied colonial period to describe the intricacies of the nationalization of the literature project and to show that independent Nigerian governments did not have the funding to demand the divestment of foreign organizations and therefore had to preserve the older infrastructure of literature publication and distribution, while making efforts to expand the reading public through education and increased access to books.

The utilitarianism of literature programs reverberates into the present, as Nigerian readers often stand accused of buying and reading books only to pass exams, or more recently, to support their pastors' authorial ambitions. Femi Osofisan, a Nigerian author and social commentator, described the period between 1980 and 2000 as "the sterile season" for literature and writing in Nigeria because the book market experienced decreasing incomes, higher book prices and unproductive publishers.¹ Meanwhile, Osofisan argued, the country suffered from a rise in violence and in response, increased religiosity. He accused Nigerians of reading only religious books and promptly dismissed their choices as shallow. Osofisan's case culminated with this charge against a society that (in his opinion) did not read real literature: "Very few people care now for morality, or for the ideals of truth, justice and concern for the health of their neighbour."² This concern with morality – and the belief that the right kind of literature and the ability to read it are necessary components of a moral society – has filtered through this

¹ Femi Osofisan, "Opon Ifa's Rebirth: Chaos and Creativity in Our Literary Compound," in *Literature, Language and National Consciousness*, ed. T.A. Ezeigbo and K.K. Aribisala (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2006), 72.

² *Ibid.*, 73.

dissertation and into the present day. In the Nigerian media, on university campuses and in government corridors, people express grave concern that Nigerians do not read the right kinds of books.

During the twentieth century there was, in fact, a shortage of books for the nation's readers. E.A.D. Apeji calculated that publishers in Nigeria produced 220,700,000 primary school books between 1963 and 1990, or 58.7 percent of the required number of primary school texts for 1990 *alone*.³ By the 1990s, educational texts made up 95% of the publishing output in Nigeria.⁴ A 2000 study found that 80% of publishers and 77% of booksellers concentrated almost exclusively on producing and distributing textbooks from the primary through tertiary levels.⁵ Although there has been diversification in the types of books produced in Nigeria since the 1960s, especially in recent years, education publishing still dominates the market. Current publishers do not have the assets to pay authors or develop new projects when they rely so heavily on selling to the education sector. I have shown in the preceding chapters that a parade of local and foreign agencies, including missionaries, philanthropists and government administrators, tried to shape a print culture in southwestern Nigeria that celebrated instructional reading practices above all else. They accomplished this goal by controlling access to literacy education, dictating the parameters of inclusion in the reading public, managing book provision and determining what counted as worthwhile literature. With the resultant scarcity of books and difficulty of obtaining an education in English and

³ Apeji, "The Contributions of Multinational Publishers," 210–211.

⁴ Uwalaka, "Book Publishing Performance in the Nigerian Economic Environment," 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

Yoruba, readers in southwestern Nigeria emulate their predecessors in measuring the worth of books by the utilitarian pleasure they might contain.

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