Chapter 4

The Press and the Emergent Political Class in Nigeria: Media, Elections, and Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This probing thesis in this study is on how the political class in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria established, maintained, improved and controls the machinery of the state through the press. While establishing media ownership and unequal media access as key factors responsible for the emergence of the political class, the study similarly discovered that the political class emerged because they were read, advertised or packaged by the press. Robert C. North (1967:301) says “politics could not exist without communication, nor could wars be fought.” The media are also the playing field on which politics occurs” (Perloff 2014:37). They are also the strategic routes through which aspiring politicians must travel during elections. Through a case study method of analysis, this study discovered that the political class emerged because they were read, advertised, and publicized by the press. For this reason, the political class regarded the press as partners in progress.

INTRODUCTION

The role of the press in the emergent political class in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria can be discussed along the origin of the press in Nigeria. Politics has been identified as the major area of interest for the earliest Nigerian newspapers, going by their editorial contents or news reports.

According to Okoye (2012: 71) “even *Iwe Irohin*, which was a missionary newspaper, considered no political issue too sensitive to report. In fact, its founder, editor and publisher, Henry Townsend, though a priest, was a political animal to the core. As a matter of fact, he used the paper to feather his political nest”. Quoting Fred Omu (1978), Okoye (2012: 71) further, asserts that “*Iwe Irohin* was Townsend’s chief weapon in his ambitious political propaganda and shrewd maneuvering for power in England”.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9613-6.ch004
Coker (1968) equally stressed that all the newspapers which sprang up in the Lagos colony in the late 19th century and early 20th century were full of political news and commentaries. The news and commentaries were on people who have viewpoints and were willing to express them. This was the trend throughout the colonial days and this trend continued even after independence. Besides the issue of those who have viewpoint on the state of affairs in the country, a major factor which engendered the emergence of politician-publisher in Nigeria has been attributed to inaccessibility of political class to the media due to ownership pattern. As would be seen at a later stage in this study, this factor, more than any other factor was mainly responsible for the emergence of several media establishments in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the study is to reveal the role played by ownership pattern as well as unequal media access in the emergence of the political class in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the case study method. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2006:136), quoting Yin (1994), “a case study is an empirical inquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. The method affords the authors, the ability to deal with a wide spectrum of evidence, documents, and historical artifacts, among others.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does the Nigerian press play any meaningful role in the emergence of the political class in Nigeria?
2. What role did ownership pattern and unequal media access play in the emergence of politician-publishers in Nigeria?
3. Has the emergence of a class of politician-publisher advanced the cause of democracy in Nigeria?
4. Does inaccessibility of political parties and candidates to the media has to do with legislation?

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

An embarrassing and disturbing scenario in the almost 155 years history of the existence of print journalism in Nigeria, 80 years of the existence of radio and 53 years of the existence of television remains the problem of unequal access of aspiring politicians to the media. Even though, the press has played meaningful role in the emergence of the political class in Nigeria, this role tend to favour those who have the financial muscle to float a medium of information dissemination. Besides the issue of unequal media access, there is also the problem of commercialization of news by the broadcast media as well as the emergence of prohibitive advert rates by the print media, which all obstruct free access of the political class to the press.
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