MEDIA IN COLONIAL NORTHERN NIGERIA:THE DILEMMA OF A PIONEER HAUSA EDITOR

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Abstract
This paper traces the 'Journey' of Abubakar Imam, the pioneer Hausa Editor of Gaskiya Ta fi Kwabo from class room in Katsina, to News room in Zaria, after being informed by the then Emir of Katsina that 'His Excellency the Governor has asked me to release you to go to Zaria and start an important work on a newspaper production', Issues such as his relationship and clashes with his employers, readers, and critics were highlighted and commented upon. How Imam managed to serve and survived as editor of thepaper from 1939 to 1952 without training in the art of journalism formed the concluding part of the paper. The paper relies heavily on two impeccable sources; the Imam's Memoirs and some editions of Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that the Hausas had been in contact with Islamic civilization in all its facets, hundreds of years before the colonial invasion of Hausa land in 19thcentury. It is also a known fact that the Hausas had produced some prolific and celebrated authors known and revered both at home and abroad especially at Magrib and Hijaz. But the idea and initiative to produce and establish a newspaper in Hausa land seems to be a recent phenomenon, which can easily be traced and linked to colonialists.

"Jaridar Nigeria Ta Arewa" is according to the available record, the first newspaper in Northern Nigeria. The first cepy of the monthly edition probably came out in early 1932 as pointed out by Yahaya (1988:14). The paper appeared in three languages namely English, Hausa and Arabic, in three separate columns. It was not, a full pledged (Hausa) newspaper. The first wholly Hausa newspaper was *Gaskiya TaFiKwabo* which made its first appearance in January 1939 and which from all intents and purpose was established to replace *Jaridar Nigeria Ta Arewa* which is also the subject of this paper.

Why Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo?

Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo, or henceforth referred to as GTK, was set up according to R.M. East as stated by Imam (1989.31) in his Memoirs, among other reasons to counter hostile German propaganda, to extol the virtues of Britain and its allies, and to above all else reassure Hausas that they have no better protector and mentor than the British. Whether the paper can be objective and fair in its coverage of events and reporting with this outlook is better imagined than analysed while the credit for coining the name GTK goes to Abubakar Imam, the idea to set up the paper belongs to R.M. East as acknowledged by Imam himself in his Memoirs (1989:3 1). L.C.Giles, Imam's editor had suggested names such"*Kwabo-Kwabo"*(Penny, Penny), "Kawo Kudi" (Bring Money) and "Dacfm Nazari (1989:33). To be fair to Giles, he had somehow conceded and informed Imam while proposing a name for the paper that 'you will easily think of

some good title," and that Imam did without any difficulty. He proposed the name *"Gaskiya TaFiKwabo* "(Truth is worth more than penny) and this coinage was accepted.

"I Suggested "Gaskiya TaFi Kwabo" (1989:33) as a name for the paper. The first edition of the paper was printed in January 1939 at the Niger Press, Jos which was owned by the Sudan Interior Mission, an American Missionary Organization.

But to digress a little, let us say a word or two on Imam, before discussing his adventure. There is no better source of information on him than what GTK and his Memoirs said (1989:XIV). And this is how it is stated "Abubakar Imam once said to his eldest grandson, Dr. Mohammed Saifuddin Mora, "If anybody asks you about my history and origin say that my family history is traceable in Borno, my origin is Sokoto, my birth place is Kagara, my town is Katsina and my place of residence is Zaria"

Search for an Editor

When Imam was informed by East in Katsina of a plan to start a monthly Hausa paper, he readily agreed to be a contributor. Unknown to him, as providence will have it, he was to be the Editor of the paper for over thirteen years: Thejourney to the editorial room started with a summon by the then Emir of Katsina to his palace one morning in November 1939. Imam recalled this episode, narrating what Emir of Katsina said: (1989:29).

> "His Excellency the Governor has asked me to release you to go to Zaria and start an important work on a newspaper production. His Excellency said that they had looked all over the North but could not find a better person than you. I am pleased that it is in my domain that the best was found"

At that time' Imam was an English teacher with Katsina Native Authority Middle School. The tone of the directive from His Excellency did not give Imam any room to maneuver. The Emir was not asking a question let alone expecting an answer. He was rather celebrating that one of his-subjects was the one chosen, and the Emir was not alone in this festive mood East seems to have shown his pleasure much more forcefully if not more elegantly. But why not, you may ask? He has to be happy because he made a big catch.

Last and most important, " he wrote, (1989.30)

> the fact that it was possible to obtain for the post of the Hausa editor of the Gaskiya Ta il Kwabo the one who is capable of filling it. Malam Abubakar is a young Higher College graduate. He is one of the few who has not lost, through an intensive education in English the power to express himself in his own language and has already written a number of excellent books of fiction. He has in fact a natural genius -for writing and exactly the livery temperament, which is needed for this kind of work. He can make the most unpromising material into a readable and witty article.

The Job: The Dilemma

It was on this promising note that Imam left the Katsina Native Authority job to Zaria to assume duty. He was neither a director of the Bureau nor was East his editor as claimed by Alabi in Issues in Nigerian Media History (2003:25). It is also not correct as claimed by Ahmad

(2006:102) that he was the first editor "while Mr. L.C. Giles, a colonial officer was appointed his deputy" Imam worked directly under the supervision of Giles!. If Imam was up-rooted from home, the conscription was not without its positive side. On arrival in Zaria, he was given the title of "Hausa Editor" and his salary adjusted commensurately to his new title; it was increased from Six pounds ten shillings to eight pounds a month. He worked directly under L.C. Giles who had the "honorary" title of the English Editor of GTK. But, it appears Imam has to do all the donkey work' He was only answerable to someone else in theory or when things went wrong. Giles admitted that Imam knows how to run the paper better than him. In fact, even before the later assumed duty, Giles had outlined Imam's schedule of work (1989:33).

> "I think that as soon as you come, it would be useful for you towrite out instructions to the Local correspondents on how to getnews, what news, how to sell the paper, how to duplicate localnews and so on... Do you think we should have any world news in
> the paper?"

From the above quotation, it is clear that Imam was to serve as the Editor of GTK' He was from the onset the paper's News editor, circulation manager, the Print manager, and of course, the Proof-reader.

The initial editions of the paper paid attention to reporting Government activities. Each local correspondent was assigned to, and expected to send news on major activities at his emirate. But more importantly of course, news and reports from Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy were countered. The masses were equally mobilized to contribute towards the war, in cash and in kind" It was not until in 1941 that ordinary letters from readers began to appear.

Hitherto, readers had no say; theirs was to read, they could not air their views! It was doubtful if the Editor himself had any. The Memoirs (1989:35) confirmed this:

> "In January, 1941 we decided to introduce a specific editorial .column called Gaskiya Sunanta Gaskiya" (translated as Truth is Truth) in which I present ideas on the general welfare of the society and as a guidance to the people as a whole. Column introduced Takardun Masu Karatu (Translated as Readers letters) was an invitation to readers .to write freely and comment on articles published in the paper or anything that required Government attention".

Even this humble attempt to practice journalism as it should be was met with resistance on so many occasions, while on the other hand some of the readers were of the opinion that Imam was a sell-out. Prior to the installation, of a printing machine at Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria in 1948, the paper had to be published somewhere else. From 1939-1941, GTK was printed at a Missionary printing press in Jos. The multi-graph machine could not produce good quality work even though its charges were moderate' But Imam soon found himself at loggerhead with the printers. They believed they have to have a say in what they print! Imam complained that the missionaries objected to a lot of phrases he had wanted used in the paper (1989:33).

> "They would not let me write "Annabi Isa ", meaning Prophet Jesus. To them Isa was more than a prophet. He was "The son of God" As a

> Muslim I could not write that because in the teachings of Islam God has no son... "

May be this editorial "consultancy" offered free of charge by the printers had its negative side. It brought to an end when printing the paper was transferred from the Missionary press to Government press at Kaduna. But whether that transfer and escape from interference from the printers alone was enough to make GTK an independent paper, and the Editor contented, remains debatable. When Lord Luggard asked Imam when the latter paid him a courtesy call while on a visit to England if he could express the views the two of them had just discussed, Imam replied (1989:86).

> "I could not, Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo was entirely a government organ, though they call it semi-official... The administrative officers have not yet made up their minds as to what to do about us, or about the paper. They do not bring us near them or ask our views, which are the views of the people, and they do not give us the freedom to- write those views in the paper. So whether we are regarded as story-tellers or a public enlightenment agency we do not know. We have no definite policy. The only policy we are made to understand is to write in support of the Government always whether we like it or not"

Coverage of events at the war front, and at home during the world war, must have been a trying period for Imam. GTK was meant to mobilize people to join the rank and file of the army, to encourage farmers to produce food that will be used by the military, to sensitize the general public to give all the support, psychological and otherwise to any potential recruit, and to discourage rumour mongering and spreading any talk that can weaken the morale and spirit of the army and their families. But above all else, the paper was also instructed to eulogize and praise the death of any fallen hero. It is the belief of the colonial masters that any soldier killed at the front should be regarded as a martyr. Imam couldn't reconcile his perception and belief at what constitutes martyrdom in Islam, and dying while serving and fighting, for and on behalf of the British army.

Imam relied on his mastery of the language to accommodate his publishers' demand that all those killed at the battle be call martyrs, while at the same time satisfying his conscience and belief. Only those with absolute control of the language will realize that despite the entire palliative on the dead in the stories from the war front, Imam never declared their heroic deeds as martyrdom. This is how the paper carried one of such stories.

Allah ya sa mu yi mutuwar shahada,

> "Ga Labarin da Gwamna ya aiko mana na yana'uwamu da suka mutu a Isafirka. Lalle ne muna yi wa iyayensu gaisuwa amma wannan ba mutuwa ba ce wadda ya kamata mu yi ta kuka dominta. Da farko dai mun tabbata ko sun tail yaici ko ba su tafi ba, rai ba ya wuce ajalinsa. Ashe wannan'yanzu ya zama abin takama ne da godiya tunda yake wadannan ya'uwa namu a kan Rokarin su tsare mu suka mutu ... Sun yi mutuwa wadda ake so, ba mutuwar da ba rai ba girma ba. Allah ya kar6i aikinsu, ya yi mana gafara baki daya amin"

A critical look at this quotation will reveal how Imam succeeded in putting the message according to his taste and faith, while at the same time convincing many, that the fallen heroes were considered as martyrs.

Martyrdom to a Muslim (in case it has to be stated) is the highest honour, anyone will yearn to achieve, as it guarantees one a place in paradise (in the hereafter). According to Sahih Al-Bukhari (1996/1417:1086-7).

> Jihad is a great deed indeed. There is no deed whose reward or blessing is as that of it, and for this reason, it is the best thing that one can volunteer for. All the Muslim religious scholars unanimously agree that Jihad is superior to Hajj, and Umra (pilgrimage), and also superior to non-obligatory salat (prayer) and saum (fasting) as mentioned in the Qur'an and Prophets As sunna.

In a hadith narrated by Abu-Hurairah (1996/1417:1087) may Allah be pleased with him. He said:

> I heard Allah's Messenger (SAW) saying By Him in whose Hands my soul is! Were it not for some men amongst the believers who dislike to be left behind me, and whom I cannot provide with means of conveyance, I would certainly never remain behind any sariya (army unit) going out for Jihad in Allah's cause. By Him in whose Hands my life is! I would love to be martyred in Allah's cause and then come back to life and then be martyred and thencome back to life again and then be martyred and then come back to life again and then be martyred.

By saying "Allah ya sa mu yi mutuwar shahada" (May Allah give us martyrdom) as the title of the story put it, the implication is that the dead did not die as martyrs. The statement was (a kind of) a prayer, a hope, and longing. If not wishful thinking! May we die the death of martyrdom? But most casual readers will understand the title to mean that the dead had actually died as martyrs, and those of us remaining are also hoping to do the same.

Nowhere in the text of the story did Imam commit himself to declare the fallen heroes as martyrs, despite the parade of high sounding words and phrases assembled. Let's translate the story.

"This is not the kind of death for which we will cry". Because as he puts it "we are certain whether they go to war or not, no soul will exceed its prescribed time. In other words, this is a source of pride and contentment since these brothers of ours, died in the struggle to protect us... they died, as everybody will wished to die, not the type of death in which there is no life nor honour. May Allah accept their deeds, and forgive all of us amen."

But is it true that, it is the wish of everyone to die in East Africa, while fighting for the colonialists? Again, it should be noted that Muslims have been forbidden to cry over the death of someone no matter how dear the deceased was to him. According to a hadith in Riyadis Saliheen (2003:645) "the deceased is punished for the wailing of his relatives over him". A Muslim is only expected to shed tears for the death of a beloved one. There should be no wailing, slapping the face, tearing of clothes or throwing dust on one's head. Another hadith (2003:1092) from the same source reported by Abu Hurairah linked wailing to unbelief.

The Messenger of Allah (SAW) said: There are two traits prevailing among people and they lead to unbelief; defaming other's lineage and mourning on the dead".

And while it is true that all souls shall experience death at the appointed time, how true is it that the deceased died in the struggle to protect us? Yet as earlier suggested, this (Imam's) story would have been regarded as reassuring and complimentary enough by the colonial officers, including Imam's editor L.C. Giles.

The death of Luggard is another occasion to see how witty and evasive Imam could be in his reporting. While the sad event was given all the prominence it deserves, it was carried out not only on the front page of the paper, but was made the only story on that page, yet it was all hot air. This was howImam put it in the paper's edition of April 24, 1945. Nigeriya Ta Arewa Mun Yi Babban Rashi, Gwamna Lugga Ya Rasu.

> "Mutuwa iri-iri ce, da mutuwar da ake wa dangi, da wadda ake wa gari da wadda ake wa £asa duka, Irin wannan mutuwa ta Gwamna Lugga Lalle babban rashi ne.... HaRifca mun dai yi babban rashi. Ingila ma ta vi babban rashi! Muna kuwa yi wa iyalansa duka, mace da namiji ta'aziyya, muna ro£an musu kyakkyawan halcuri da dangana ".

Despite the claim in this story that the North had lost someone important (by the death of Governor Luggard) the paper couldn't offer the normal prayer for the repose of the soul (as done by Hausas) It simply concluded "we have lost someone important or dear to us just like England. We are consoling his family both male and female ..."

The Hausas normally pray to Almighty Allah to forgive the dead, arid grant him paradise. But if the dead is not a Muslim such requests are hardly offered even if the victim was a former governor general. Imam was too smart and too conscious not to have forgotten that format if not tradition.
Realizing that readers reactions are not published in the paper, Imam tried, as expected to as much as possible to get views of those that mattered whenever any serious issues cropped up, and in most cases those consulted responded positively. This allowed him to put a more balanced and richer editorial that often reflected the views of all and sundry.

In 1946, GTK was allowed to start a "Special column" discussing what was known as the three C's that bedeviled the North namely, Lalaci (Lazyness) Zalunci (Injustice) and Jahilci (Ignorance). It was an opportunity for Imam to call a spade a spade.

Despite occasional criticisms by Northern politicians on what Imam has done or refused to do, such as the criticism he faced for his refusal to sign the document called "Atlantic Charter" drafted by Azikiwe and signed £y some of his colleagues during their trip to United Kingdom for a conference in 1943, One of such was Aminu Kano, who in his 'long article' told Imam that "all your reasons are not worth saying, and they do not convince me or any person like me..." (1989:72). Imam stuck to his gun and remained focused. The fact that they were sharing the same room with Azikiwe, during the London conference did not influence him to change his mind. As if to popularize his views and to show how consistent he was, he told the gathering while addressing West African Students' Union members at UK, during the trip as published in Memoirs as follows: (1989:59)

> "There are 11 million Northerners, but we have only one college. This turns out about 12 educated boys a year at most 15 or 20, In the South there are many schools of this grade, The former Governor, Sir Bernard Bourdillon told me that much more public money is devoted to education in the South than in the North. But still the 'Southerners are not satisfied, Last year they started a controversy demanding that they should be allowed to share the only college that we have",

Imam didn't stop at that. He forged ahead and concluded with what must have sounded like a bomb shell to many Nigerian nationalists who were in the forefront of the agitation for independence.

> "Now members of WASU, to tell you the plain truth, the common people of the North put more confidence in the white man, than in their black southern brothers ..."

While the Southerners were busy debating what Arthur Richards had thrown to the nation as the proposed constitution, only two Northerners namely A. B. Dikko and Jumare have written to GTK on the subject. This nonchalant attitude forced Imam to sensitize the readers. He wrote an editorial on 26th September 1945 on the proposed constitutional review. The editorial worked magic. It was well received, according to the Memoirs Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, then a student at the Institute of Education, University of London translated it for B.B.C. Mr. J. Grenfell Williams "found it a suitable material for broadcasting over the Africa Service of the BBC read by Tafawa Balewa on Sunday 4th November, 1945.: (1989:104).

As fate will have it, East, Imam's mentor and the brain behind his conscription, became the chairman of Gaskiya Corporation, Publishers of GTK One will ordinarily assume that Imam should have every reason to celebrate recalling how highly East rated him and how he suffered to get him transferred to Zaria. But one will be making a mistake to make such conclusion. There are so many reasons for saying this (1989:116).

One, Imam's nominees as members of the Board (Gaskiya Corporation) Sultan Abubakar III, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, and Adamu B. Dikko were all rejected, and instead East's nominees, LH. Goble, Secretary of Northern Nigeria, and J. A.E Silver of Church Missionary Society, Bida were appointed.

Two, Imam was neither a member of the management nor part of the workers union (Gaskiya African Staff Union), and yet he finds himself blamed by themanagement and considered the mouth piece of the Union when the relationship between staff and management went bad.

Three, and the most critical Imam complained that "he had noticed a certain reserve and aloofness in the manner of Dr. East towards me personally since he became chairman". At a stage, East responded by calling Imam's accusation "provocative and bad mannered letter, calculated to give offence not only to me but to the members of the Board" (1989:121).

Relationship between Imam and his chairman continued to deteriorate on daily basis. Two years later, on 14th February 1948 to be precise, Imam addressed the chairman in this tone (1989:130). "Your last paragraph coupled with what had happened last year and what you wrote that I was the mouth piece, if not the leader of the discounted elements in the corporation leave me in doubt as to whether you are not preparing the way to victimizing me in the future." But, Imam has not

finished -there is a rider. “Perhaps, my ten years stay with you have served the purpose for which I was seconded here, if so, I shall have no ill-feeling if I was taken back to where I came from”. In the same month after this exchanges between Imam and his Chairman, Imam and the other senior managers of the African staff were given the lashes of their lives by two selected members of the Board, and given a marching order out of the hall, disgraced. Imam considered that encounter the highest form of ridicule that should not be allowed to repeat itself He planned and opted for a way out. His letter dated “11th February 1948 stated it all (1989:134). “.... I beg to ask the Corporation to consider terminating may service with it, as from the 2nd of March 1948, and sending me back to where I was seconded from I have given fourteen days’ notice in accordance with the labour code “.

Now seeing the writing on the wall, East the chairman, had to pipe down. His reply to Imam’s resignation letter was devoid of the earlier assertiveness and verbosity. The Daily Comet came out with a screaming headline on the event. It declared, “Gaskiya Editor Resigns North shocked”. East was forced to swallow his pride if not arrogance. His reply to his Editor read as follows (1989:135).

> “If you have decided on such a course I cannot prevent you ... But you are shouldering a heavy responsibility which no one but you could shoulder (sic). It is not wise, just because of certain difficulties, or because you are angry that someone has abusedyou a person you hardly know, to decide to throw away this responsibility! What should now be done is for you and me to forget what has happened and forgive each other so that we can face the task ahead”.

It was a season for forgiveness: East promised to make amends. They should forget and forgive, and forge ahead. It seems East had so much confidence in Imam, to the extent of believing that he cannot succeed without him. He was indispensable. His letter elaborated on that. “Whatever effort I put into the job unless you show sufficient interest, the work will not succeed. You should also remember that we are all learners”.

But also East had his joker to flash (to Imam) in case all else failed and it did not fail him. He continued (1989: 136) “You are aware that all the things provided for these young men since they joined, be it improved knowledge, higher salary or better housing came through me, in future so long as I remain here such things will continue”.

And who said that East would not like to remain in charge to continue dishing out the goodies, were he to leave the good things will cease. East is a believer in the power of prayers. And he knows how to do it. He implored (1989: 136) Imam in the name of Allah “I implore you in the name of Allah and the spirit of our long association to look at this matter carefully without sentiment and find a way out of his predicament”.

What else will Imam demand from the chairman? There is no more reservation or aloofness, nor threat of victimization. No more insults. As if to start honouring his words that better things will continue to follow as long as he is in charge, Imam was given the (new) title of Editor Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo instead of Hausa Editor. He is no longer under tutelage. The era of apprentice was over He is now to report directly to the chairman! But that was not all. His salary was also increased to 360 pounds. What a coincidence!

Imam must have stayed comfortably since then as the Editor of GTK until when he decided on his own volition to leave to represent Zaria in the House of Representatives in Lagos in 1950. He finally retired from Gaskiya Corporation in 1952. He was, by all standards, one of the finest editors to edit the paper, unfortunately at the most turbulent period.

Conclusion

Despite the acceptance by East that Intern was the only one fit for the job, he was not given the free hand to do it. He was not even a fully fledged Editor, but the Hausa Editor who was answerable to another superior editor-the English Editor, L.C. Giles (and not R.M. East as Alabi, S. erroneously believed) Imam became a bonailde editor after so much hassle and buzzle. He was never allowed to air his views either in the form of editorial or article until much later. The paper had no room for other people's views either, until after too much pressure. Yet, Imam was not meant to serve either as a story teller or public relations officer or both!

It was to Imam's credit that he survived all his years as editor without offending his employers to the extent that it may warrant his sack, deployment to another organ at Gaskiya Corporation, or even taken back to his Katsina College. On the one hand, he survived without writing what may have offended his conscience and sensibility, or that of the majority of his readers. Only an intelligent, foresighted, and balanced mind could have done that, without any basic training in the art of journalism, successfully for that long.

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