

A Book Review

“African Language Media: Development, Economics and Management”
edited by Abiodun Salawu. Routledge: London, 2021. Pp. i-293. £96.00
(ISBN 978-0-3674-0840-4).

The introduction of this edited volume begins that “Publishing newspapers in indigenous African languages has largely been a precarious business, as many of such newspapers disappear no sooner than they appear on the newsstands” (p. 1). This revelation cannot be more accurate. The book goes on to explore the origin, development and political economy of these media. It also significantly expounds on the challenges the indigenous language press faces. Only a few indigenous languages media in Africa survive and flourish today. Thus, it is arguable that the situation of African language media is not entirely bleak.

Nonetheless, the 15 chapters concentrate primarily on cases in Southern Africa and West Africa. As a Nigerian working in a South African university, it is apparent that the editor is adequately aware of the situation in this largely understudied, overlooked aspect in mass communication studies in these two sub-regions of Africa. He penned the last chapter himself. The remaining were written by other contributors, using several theoretical and empirical research methodologies to analyse selected newspapers and two radio stations.

Despite being a “pathway to development” (p. 21), indigenous African languages media barely function in many countries. Their problems range from a “lack of investors” (p. 22), “domination by English language newspapers” (p. 38), meagre or declining patronage (p. 56), lack of focus within the media companies (p. 63), absence of

professional staff members (p. 82; p. 220), to lack of broader coverage in their reportage (p. 137). Moreover, the media are generally “viewed as subsidiaries and are given less attention and resources” (p. 237). Although the problems are inexhaustible, some contributors proffered ways to tackle most of them. Writing on the situation in Zimbabwe, Munoriyarwa suggests that

There should be concerted efforts led by the government and other public-sphere-supporting institutions to provide grants to indigenous language press publishers. Grants would go a long way to stimulate the indigenous language press (p. 65).

Others suggest that the indigenous African language press could employ experts to devise better means to compete with the hegemonic English language media. They could also attract more readers and more patronage with high-quality content. The experts and their assistants can also develop better marketing and distribution strategies to stay afloat in offline and online marketplaces. Some of the contributors cite examples of a few relatively successful newspapers in South Africa (e.g. *Isolezwe*), Nigeria (e.g. *Alaroye*) and a radio station in Ghana (Peace FM). With grants, professionals and promising innovations, the indigenous press in Africa would stay alive.

Although the editor has published widely and has carved a niche in the field, the book is not without some issues. The title suggests that it covers Africa. However, all its contributions come from Southern African (South Africa, Zimbabwe and Eswatini) or West African (Nigeria, Ghana and Burkina Faso) countries. The coverage should be more comprehensive. The editor should have sought contributions from eastern, central and northern parts of the continent.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, 7 and 9 are wordy, repetitive and somewhat alike, thanks to their similar theme, focus and setting. Moreover, there are also typographical errors and grammatical slips. For instance, the names of Hausa newspapers were wrongly written again and again (see pages 122, 123 141 and 170). Related to this, some contributors erroneously claim that *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* newspaper still exists (p. 141, 170 and 267). In truth, the *New Nigerian* took over *Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* as far back as 1966 and ceased publication entirely in 2012.

Without a doubt, the empirical data used is impressive. Nevertheless, some theoretical frameworks could be enhanced as some were merely ‘used’ even where none was needed. Others arguably misapplied their theories to meet some research works ‘requirement’. Notwithstanding, the book is a welcome contribution to the field. Its publication should pave the way for more academics to consider writing about the problems from broader perspectives and using better approaches.

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