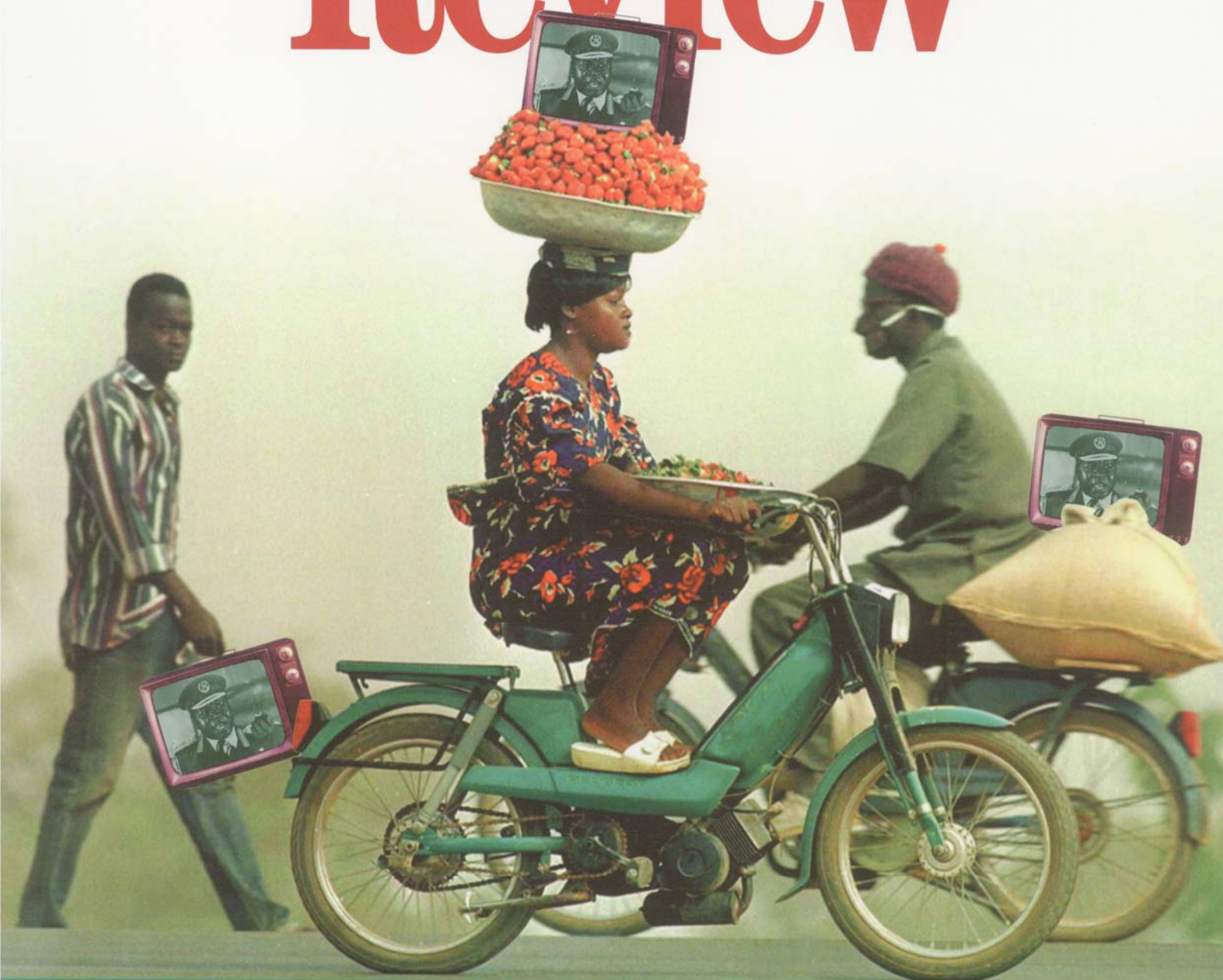


Rhodes ● Journalism

Review



AFRICAN MEDIA DEBATES

• MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY • WOMEN AND GENDER • REPORTING CONFLICT • REPRESENTING AFRICA
• AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Founding Editor: Kerry Swift
Editor: Anthea Garman

Guest Editor: Melissa Baumann

Design: Sarah-Anne Raynham

Administration: Chloe O'Keeffe,
Sonwabo Niwa

Advertising: Ntombi Mhangwani

Cover photograph: Juda Nguenya, Reuters
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Illustrations: Jonathan Shapiro,
Chip Snaddon, Tania Bester,
James Mills-Hicks

All correspondence to:
The Editor, Rhodes Journalism Review
Department of Journalism and Media Studies
Rhodes University, Box 94
Grahamstown 6140
South Africa

Contact us at
Tel: 046-6038336/7 or 046-6224577
Fax: 046-6228447
Editorial email: a.garman@ru.ac.za
Advertising email: n.mhangwani@ru.ac.za

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CONTENTS

5 Editor's Note: A Rallying Cry



Media and Democracy

- 6** Cultures of Secrecy: *Tawana Kupe* argues for the urgency of replacing Official Secrets Acts with Freedom of Information legislation.
- 8** Still a Dangerous Landscape: Most of Africa's constitutions resemble minefields when it comes to protecting press freedom, writes *Njonjo Mue*.
- 10** A Fine Line: Where do we draw the line between press freedom and national security? *The Times of Zambia* and *The Post's* editor *Fred M'membe* stand on either side of the line.
- 11** Cracking the Mirror: Journalists *Trevor Ncube*, *Basildon Peta* and *Raymond Louw* sound the alarm on the future of the independent press in Zimbabwe.
- 12** The Winds of Windhoek: How far have we come in the eight years since the Windhoek Declaration in establishing an independent and pluralistic press? *Jeannette Minnie* reflects...
- 14** Who Pays the Piper? *John Barker* looks at the precarious future of broadcasting in southern Africa, calling for serious policy reform.
- 15** Reality Check: What does 'community' mean for community radio? *Zane Ibrahim* provocatively surveys the field.
- 16** Methods to the Madness: *Amina Frense* gives a behind-the-scenes account of the SABC's television coverage of South Africa's June elections, with the spotlight on public participation.
- 17** Giving Access: SABC radio's *Franz Kruger* tells how town-hall meetings and other tactics brought South Africans into the election process.
- 18** Reporting Transition: Nigeria's media covered their local elections in February-March this year with a focus on transition from military to civilian rule, writes *Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng*. Women and certain minorities got lost along the way.
- 18** Media Mutations: Coverage of Malawi's June elections amounted to praise-singing for the politicians, writes *Raphael Tenthani*.
- 20** Abused Freedoms: Zambian journalist *Francis P. Kasoma* argues why journalists need a formalised code of ethics.
- 21** Le Prix Suprême: Algerian journalists have paid the highest price – their lives – in the country's struggle for democracy, writes *Lazhari Labter*. But in some senses, they've won.
- 22** The Sanlam Community Press Awards: Selections from this year's winners.



Women and Gender

- 24** The Least-Reported Crime: *Gabrielle Le Roux* suggests ways to make coverage of violence against women count.
- 27** 'So What?' typifies the attitude of much of the African media towards issues related to women and their rights. *Wilma Randle* offers a host of reasons why 'women and gender' should be more central to news agendas.
- 28** Reporting Taboos: Female circumcision is a highly controversial issue on the continent. *Dr. Augustin Hatar* suggests ways to report it more intelligently.
- 29** Alternative Rites: The cultural significance of female circumcision is being honoured by other means, writes *Malik Stan Reaves*.
- 30** Recognising Women: Hats off to *Charlene Smith* and *Pamela Mulumby*, winners of this year's top journalism awards.



Reporting Conflict

- 32** Messengers of Morbidity: *Rob Manoff* suggests ways of extending our repertoire in covering conflict, moving beyond reiterated narratives of violence.
- 35** A Reporter's Lament: African and foreign journalists face many structural constraints in covering war. *John Matshikiza* shares his recent sojourn in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- 38** On the Borderline: Journalists don't belong on the sidelines of conflict, but rather "on the border where conflict is most intense," argue *Hannes Siebert* and *Melissa Baumann*. They offer tools for the trip.
- 39** Made Visible: A participatory video project in Egypt is empowering women and helping defuse local conflict.
- 40** Out of Sight: *Peter Andrews'* reticence to shoot a gruesome scene in Kinshasa may have saved his life.
- 40** Witnessing Trauma: Journalists both cover trauma and communicate it. *Anthea Garman* taps into the knowledge and experience of Dr. Gordon Isaacs with some advice on how to cope.
- 42** The Unholy Alliance: *Helge Ronning* challenges the often unhealthy relationship between journalists and aid agencies in the midst of reporting crises.



Representing Africa

- 44** Against the Tide: Africa is often represented as a continent of victims and disasters. *Patricia Made* tells how the Inter Press Service provides alternative stories of Africa and its development.
- 47** Reporting for the West: *Nixon Kariithi* argues that certain international wire services merely mouthed the foreign policies of Western governments during the fall of Mobutu in the former Zaire.
- 49** The Communication Thing: *Werner Vogt* describes how foreign correspondents in South Africa must shift between being praise-singers and mudslingers.
- 50** Beyond Stereotype: Images and words from four photographers looking beyond the overused representations of Africa.



Africa in the 21st Century

- 52** Globalisation Good and Bad: It is easy to give 'globalisation' a 'Western imperialist' tag. But the accelerating process has both negative and positive implications for Africa, writes *Larry Strelitz*.
- 54** Africa Online: *Roland Stanbridge* documents several innovative uses of the Internet across the continent.
- 57** Confidence Trick?: Eight journalists debate whether Africa needs the Internet.
- 58** Pooled Resources: *Snuki Zikalala* gives an update on the SABC's move into bi-media.
- 59** The Lying Lens: More and more photographs are being digitally manipulated before being published. *Angie Lazaro* reflects local photographers' thoughts on the ethics and meaning of such practice.

A rallying cry

From the editor's desk



Ninety journalists killed in five years – the death toll in just one African country, Algeria, where between 1993 and 1997 Islamic fundamentalists wreaked terror. Typing up 'les assassinats' the other evening – name, date killed, place killed – felt like multiple inscriptions on some veiled memorial. In fact, Lazhari Labter's article (p. 21), against this background of deaths, is meant as commemoration.

It became startlingly clear in typing up these Algerian journalists' names: being a journalist in Africa is, for many, a matter of life and death. So that if we present an issue, as this is, on 'African Media Debates', we dare not stay in the realm of the abstract. We can champion the values of a free press, but must stay grounded in the realities of media ownership and political control in Africa. We can disparage self-censorship, but cannot claim we'd do differently if standing in the place of a journalist threatened with imprisonment or worse. We can chastise foreign media for their 'unfair' coverage of the continent, but cannot ignore the major structural obstacles to covering Africa well, or our own part, as local journalists, in its misrepresentation.

At the same time, we journalists covering Africa cannot resign ourselves to the status quo. We cannot continually blame our governments, our bureaucracies, our infrastructures, our resources, the foreigners or each other for mediocre or otherwise inadequate reportage. In this special issue of the *Rhodes Journalism Review*, for the most part, we don't.

The articles published here – authored by more than 40 journalists from 10 African countries – represent an uninhibited challenge to media and journalists across Africa. They are courageous, often confrontational – and rather than running down other members of the profession, most act as a rallying cry for journalists around the continent to 'push the envelope' of what's possible in

reporting Africa and revolutionising many of its newsrooms. The issue is framed by five areas of debate.

In 'Media and Democracy' we look at core concerns: the tensions between freedom of information and state security; the changing legal regime around press freedom, and the loopholes in the laws; questions around ownership and 'democratisation' of the media; covering elections and the democratic process; and the arguable need for a journalists' code of ethics. A recurring theme summons journalists to handle their 'freedoms' more responsibly.

'Women and Gender' makes a point that needs to be made again and again: women account for more than half of Africa's population, but are seriously underrepresented in the media, both in production and in the product. These articles not only document some of the 'sins of omission' and unhelpful coverage; they also suggest ways to better cover these issues, among them violence against women and traditional practices such as female circumcision.

Conflict is all too common in Africa, much of it deadly. 'Reporting Conflict' looks at the constraints we face in covering conflict here, but also offers new 'repertoires' for covering conflict more constructively. The question of intervening as a journalist in conflict is a central one. Other articles deal with the trauma that many journalists witness and experience in their reportage – and how to cope.

Africans are generally dissatisfied with the way the international media represents Africa around the world, and back to them. In 'Representing Africa' we look at some of the sources of this dissatisfaction, and some of the reasons for this particular production of images. We also consider how we do (and could) represent Africa to ourselves.

The Internet is upon us, like it or not. 'Africa in the 21st Century' looks at the current use and potential impact of the Internet

and other aspects of globalisation in Africa. Is such technology a 'Western imperialist threat' or a critical catalyst to launch us into the new millennium?

It means a lot to us at the Media Peace Centre in Cape Town to be co-publishing this special edition of *Review* with the Rhodes Journalism Department. For more than a decade we have been developing different approaches to covering conflict, drawing largely from the conflict resolution field. One of our current projects, 'Strengthening African Media', which runs workshops around the continent to improve coverage in particular contexts, will greatly profit from the learnings offered in these debates. We are also busy with a book on covering conflict, and hope to engage many of you – readers and contributors – in that endeavour.

This publication represents a remarkable collective effort. These voices from around the continent speak to the tenacity and thoughtfulness that many African journalists bring to their work. We have much to contend with in terms of political and material obstacles, and some much more than others, but Africa is also an opportunity. A continent in flux, it is a place to rethink our journalistic paradigms and approaches – to break new ground in reporting conflict, in restorying and reimagining Africa and in further redistributing access and power in its media.

– Melissa Baumann, Guest Editor
Cape Town

MELISSA BAUMANN is Co-Director of the Media Peace Centre. A journalist for more than 25 years, she has covered conflict in southern Africa, the Middle East and the United States. Baumann is currently working on a book on covering conflict and developing a documentary series on conflict resolution around the world. Email: melissasbaumann@hotmail.com

Letters to Come

THE LAST EDITION of *Review* sparked some strong reaction. In addition to the *Sunday Times*' anger with our story on their coverage of gay issues (which they have declined to debate further with us), we had letters from Sam Kiley, *The Times*' African Foreign Correspondent, and Lizeka Mda of *The Star*.

Both letters are long and deal in detail with points raised by Charlene Smith and Ferial Haffajee in their stories. Because of the focused nature of this edition of *Review* (which is a collaboration with the Media Peace Centre) we will carry the letters in the next edition with a response.

Anthea Garman,
Editor

Cover Photo, Cover Art



JUDA NGWENYA of Reuters, Johannesburg, took an engaging photo of street traffic in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso. But for *Review*'s purposes, we needed a 'media' aspect for the cover of this issue. Enter Geoff Grundlingh of the South African Centre for Photography, University of Cape Town. Geoff brought in the televisions with the face of the ubiquitous 'Big Brother'-dictatorial politician on the screen – representing 'the powers-that-be' which all media in Africa must confront. We'd like to think that this doesn't count as 'digital manipulation' (see Angie Lazaro's article, p. 59) – we're coming clean about our 'embellishments'. Thanks to Juda, Geoff and graphic artist Tania Bester for a joint production.

Building African Partnerships

A CORE AIM of the Media Peace Centre and Rhodes Journalism Department's Africa media projects is to strengthen media throughout the continent and build lasting partnerships. Media is a critical force for change – for development, for democratisation, for building civil society. By drawing in programme makers, media workers and journalists from around Africa we aim to support a more open, assertive and constructive media.

This joint Special Edition on the Media in Africa with the *Rhodes Journalism Review* is an initiative funded from the Media Peace Centre's 'Strengthening African Media' and 'Media and Conflict Publications' projects. These projects are funded by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Germany) and Afrika Gruppen (Sweden). Contact: mpc@iafrica.com
P.O. Box 23744, Claremont, 7735, Cape Town, South Africa



MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

'PRESS FREEDOM' HAS LONG BEEN A RESOUNDING BATTLE CRY THROUGHOUT THE AFRICAN CONTINENT, IN THE MIDST OF SOME OF THE WORLD'S WORST MEDIA REPRESSION. BUT IN A HEALTHY SPATE OF SELF-SCRUTINY, MANY AFRICAN JOURNALISTS ARE CHALLENGING THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER ON WIDESPREAD ABUSE OF THOSE FREEDOMS. IN MANY CASES, AFRICAN MEDIA ARE NO MORE DEMOCRATIC - AND NO CLOSER TO SERVING THE PUBLIC - THAN THE 'OPPRESSORS' THEY CRITICISE...



Photo: Howard Benoit/Reuters/Africa

Denying access to information weakens the media and the state

cultures of **Secrecy**



Invoking Official Secrets Acts abusively and indiscriminately across Africa has had negative repercussions for journalists, governments and the public at large. **Tawana Kupe** argues that democracy and journalism itself would benefit if such Acts were replaced by Freedom of Information legislation...

Harare, Zimbabwe,
February 1999.
Journalists protesting
the arrest and torture
of fellow journalists
allegedly threatening
national security.
Who's threatening
whom?



for journalists to perform their expected watchdog role they must have access to information. Unfortunately, most African countries do not have a Freedom of Information Act written into their constitutions. Most have, rather, Official Secrets Acts so vaguely worded that they can be interpreted liberally by officials who wish to hide something or avoid scrutiny of their actions. Such Acts also prevent individuals or groups from verifying information held about them by powerful social institutions.

In addition to Official Secrets Acts there exist provisions in other legislation like the Law and Order Maintenance Acts or Public Order Acts that can be used to deny the media access to information, arrest and detain journalists or search a media organisation's premises and confiscate material. Ironically, most of these Acts were inherited from colonial regimes but not repealed at independence.

Official Secrets Acts are often justified on grounds of state security – or the protection of information that has implications for state security. While it is legitimate for any government to protect national security – and governments even in Western democracies have such Acts – African governments (and others) often fail to distinguish between state secrets and information that has no implications for that security.

While the link between a democratic dispensation and economic and social development has not been conclusively made, it is clear that societies where citizens' rights are severely curtailed do not enjoy the same rates and levels of development as societies where citizens enjoy their rights. The late 20th century and the 21st century have been labelled 'the Information Age' – it is therefore incongruous that African societies do not actively embrace mechanisms which promote access to and dissemination of information.

The media is a key institution in dissemination of information in a modern society – one of the major links between the governors and the governed. Lack of access to information for the media effectively means lack of communication between the two components of society. It effectively means that public institutions take on a life of their own and become self-serving. It follows that the media must have access to all kinds of information without undue hindrance.

If a society maintains a culture of secrecy instead of a culture of openness based on access to all kinds of information, the role of the media is curtailed. Further, it often means that powerful institutions in a society can operate outside the scrutiny of the media to the detriment of the citizenry. Lack of access hinders the free flow of information and promotes rumour-mongering among the citizenry and speculation within the press. The result is to promote tendencies towards sensationalism instead of in-depth reporting and analysis of issues and processes. Ultimately, therefore, lack of access to information sustains bad governance and hinders the democratisation process.

Denial of access promotes a lack of accountability from the powers-that-be; abuse of citizens' rights and corruption easily set in, and in fact characterise many

Access to information in Africa – for instance to the independent press – is denied in various ways. One way is to delay official comment until the publication has to run the story without comment or has to drop the story altogether to avoid publishing one-sided or unsubstantiated stories. Secretiveness also hinders the journalistic ethic of checking and double-checking sources and facts. Another tactic is to refer the media to the government information ministry which requires all questions in writing only to pass them on to the relevant ministry and department and then back again through the same route to the media. This tactic hits directly at the way media works, because a news story cannot wait forever. In cases where there are answers these are often either evasions, bare denials or simply a 'no comment'. In most cases there is just no response to the written questions. Journalists and the public have no institutionalised means to compel officials or institutions to answer questions or provide information.

On the other hand the government-owned and controlled media is rewarded for its loyalty by being given better (but still selective) access to public officials and public institutions. Ultimately, it is not just the media that suffers in the denial of access to information but the general public – which is entitled to information. One could argue that denial of access to information amounts to hindering democracy and – dare I say – one of the worst threats to national security.

THE DIRE CONSEQUENCES

Clearly, then, lack of access to information and the use of official secrets have a counter-productive effect on the media, public officials and institutions and the general public. Much of this counter-productiveness derives from this failure to draw the line between what information is legitimately

of the nation and what needs to be in the public domain as a matter of accountability of those empowered to carry out decisions using public funds and in the public interest.

Circumstances often arise where, on the information available to them, journalists believe that public officials in charge of state security appear to be acting in violation of the public trust and to be using secrecy and state security as a way of dodging accountability. In some cases there are rumours of war or foiled coup attempts. In the absence of a Freedom of Information Act or institutionalised forms of access to information, the decision to publish a story is then based on the journalist's belief that, firstly, their sources are credible. Secondly, it is based on their judgment that securing the public interest, informing the public and bringing officials to account is of paramount importance and an institutional responsibility.

The problem, however, is that in such a situation the possibility of checking and double-checking a story is greatly reduced. The danger of publishing information actually prejudicial to public security and safety is heightened. If journalists decide to publish, authorities might then act against the journalists or the media in a manner which also infringes on their editorial independence. Although prosecuting the media organisation in this case can be judged as a violation of press freedom and inimical to notions of open and democratic societies, journalists will have undeniably broken the law.

Further, for a journalist who publishes information which has security implications and which can actually be harmful, accusations of irresponsibility and conniving with enemies of the state, real or imagined, can appear credible to the general public. Such a situation also allows journalists who do not adhere to professional ethics or who tend to

What has happened in many African countries is a meeting of **two cultures of secrecy**: one inherited from the **colonial regimes** and one from the **nationalist movements** which waged struggles for national liberation.

African societies. Corruption on a massive scale has seen the plunder of public resources by successive regimes from colonial times to the post-colonial era. Private corporations, including transnational corporations, have been able to operate in Africa in ways they would never get away with in societies where openness is the norm.

In essence what has happened in many African countries is a meeting of two cultures of secrecy: one inherited from the colonial regimes and one from the nationalist movements which waged struggles for national liberation. Because secrecy rather than openness is the norm, a culture of control of information has been allowed to develop. Public officials routinely deny information to the media, especially to the privately owned media that often has to play the watchdog role.

deemed 'classified' and which is not.

Official Secrets Acts, for instance, are frequently invoked when issues that the media wants to report are most pertinent. A major example is during war situations or in relation to the military and executive branch of government. Issues related to a country's defence and security are rightly recognised as sensitive because they affect the safety and security of the entire nation. If military secrets and strategies are made available to enemies or potential enemies, the harm to the nation can be immense.

However, issues of military spending and even preparedness should not be totally beyond scrutiny and in blanket fashion covered by an Official Secrets Act. A balance needs to be struck between what should remain secret for fear that other parties might use the information to the detriment

sensationalise for commercial gain to compromise the profession. Issues of national security have an emotional dimension which can resonate with the public and discredit journalists and the media.

It is therefore in the interests of journalists and the media that Freedom of Information Acts become law. Access to information will enable journalists to 'dig deeper' while remaining on the side of the law and not appearing to be above the law. Professionally, it will assist journalists to be able to better practice self-regulation. Institutionally, it will enable journalists to fulfil the best ideals of journalism, to pro-



PHOTO: ERIC MILLER/AFRIKA

to page 61 ►

Press freedom's changing legal regime

still

a dangerous landscape

the right to freedom of expression, including media freedom, in Africa has always been the first victim of dictatorship. It first fell victim during the colonial era when foreign powers imposed strict limits on expression in the name of national security. It then suffered during the succeeding one-party regimes which, shortly after independence, quickly consolidated their power by continuing the clampdown on expression in the name of national unity.

But the winds of change that Harold Macmillan spoke of in Cape Town in the sixties would finally seem to be upon the African continent. In the nine years since 1990, all the countries of southern Africa have undergone far-reaching political transformation, replacing former one-party and apartheid minority regimes with multi-party democracies. With this 'second liberation' of the nineties, in which open political competition returned to many countries, freedom of expression seems to have obtained a new lease on life – or has it?

While it cannot be denied that many countries in the region have undergone a political metamorphosis with the introduction of party political competition, the landscape where the media operates in most of these countries remains treacherous and hostile, the course they navigate full of legal landmines and booby-traps.

The main reason for this is that Africa's so-called 'second liberation', with the notable exception of South Africa and Namibia, saw the establishment of nominal democracies through superficial constitutional amendments which

allowed a form of political competition while denying its substance. In particular, those celebrated constitutional amendments did not establish structures that supported democracy – such as an independent judiciary – to enforce fundamental rights and a free and independent press.

At a media lawyers' conference in 1998 it was noted that many of Africa's transitional democracies were characterised by a dominant ruling party which held a majority in Parliament and continued to preside over a monolithic hegemony akin to the one-party days. Such ruling parties were able to keep in place most of the restrictive legislation inherited from the days of dictatorship.

CONSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION?

The constitutions of all the countries in the region guarantee the right to freedom of expression, with a number – namely South Africa, Namibia and Mozambique – expressly guaranteeing the right to freedom of the press. But these same constitutions permit a wide scope for limitations on this fundamental right. This, coupled with the absence of truly independent judiciaries, has made the bill of rights virtually unenforceable in most countries in the region.

The exceptions are South Africa and Namibia, where the courts have declared several laws unconstitutional for violating the freedom of expression clause. Zimbabwe also has a fiercely independent judiciary. However, the efficacy of the Supreme Court's power of constitutional review has greatly been undermined by the alacrity with which the government has introduced constitutional amendments –

The constitutions of all the countries in the region guarantee the right to freedom of expression ... But these same constitutions permit a wide scope for limitations on this fundamental right.

Many African countries have gone through political transformation, with the advent of multi-party democracies across the continent. But the course their media must navigate remains a minefield, writes

Njonjo Mue...



easily passed into law by the ruling party's huge Parliamentary majority – after the court has made an adverse judgment. There have been no fewer than 14 constitutional amendments in Zimbabwe since 1980, many of which have whittled away at the bill of rights and the power of the courts to enforce it.

Enforceability of the bill of rights is also a contentious issue in Zambia. Each successive government in that country has left behind its own set of laws detrimental to freedom of expression. Most recently, the entire editorial staff of the independent *Post* newspaper were arrested and charged with espionage. This followed the publication of a front-page article questioning Zambia's military capacity to withstand an incursion from neighbouring Angola, which had threatened to retaliate following Zambia's alleged involvement in its civil war on the side of the rebel UNITA movement (see story on p. 10).

The task of cleaning up the statute books has been left to the judiciary, who have to discharge it under the watchful eye of a powerful executive. What's more, the judiciary cannot change the law of its own accord and has to wait until a provision is challenged for unconstitutionality. Most Zambians are impoverished and too busy with bread and butter issues to spearhead law reform through constitutional challenges. This is the reality not just in Zambia but throughout the region.

TROUBLESOME LAWS

The most problematic laws for working journalists come under the rubric of national security legislation. This includes the offences of sedition; publishing false news likely to cause fear, alarm or despondency among the public; possession of secret documents and so on. With much of the region still engulfed in conflict, governments have been quick to resort to these archaic provisions to muzzle the press and discourage it from publishing unsavoury stories.

Recently, journalists in Zimbabwe and Uganda have fallen foul of false news provisions; several journalists have been detained or jailed in the Democratic Republic of Congo for rubbing the authorities in that war-torn country the wrong way. In Angola, a private radio station was recently shut down and several of its journalists arrested for re-broadcasting an interview with rebel leader Jonas Savimbi. It was not clear what law they had violated. Even in South Africa, by far the safest country for journalists in the region, Swiss journalist Jean-Philip Ceppi was arrested for allegedly being in possession of a secret document. He was subsequently released.

Ceppi's arrest demonstrates the danger presented by allowing repressive laws to lie fallow rather than repealing them soon after the advent of a new dispensation. Such laws are easily revived to muzzle the press whenever the government feels cornered. What is more, even when they are not actively applied, such laws cause a chilling effect on the media by causing insidious self-censorship among journalists fearing reprisals. ARTICLE 19's policy is therefore to call for a comprehensive legal audit in all transitional democracies to ensure that their laws are in line with constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

One such audit was done in Malawi at the end of 1997 by the Malawi Law Commission with the help of ARTICLE 19 and the Civil Liberties Committee of Malawi. A 200-page document was produced outlining laws that abridged the freedom of expression guarantees in the Malawi Constitution. The document was then discussed by representatives of civil society who produced a report to be tabled by Cabinet and from there sent to Parliament. It was a laudable effort, but the recommendations that came out of the process are still making their way through the pipeline and it is not yet known how many of them will see the light of day.

PROTECTION OF JOURNALISTIC SOURCES

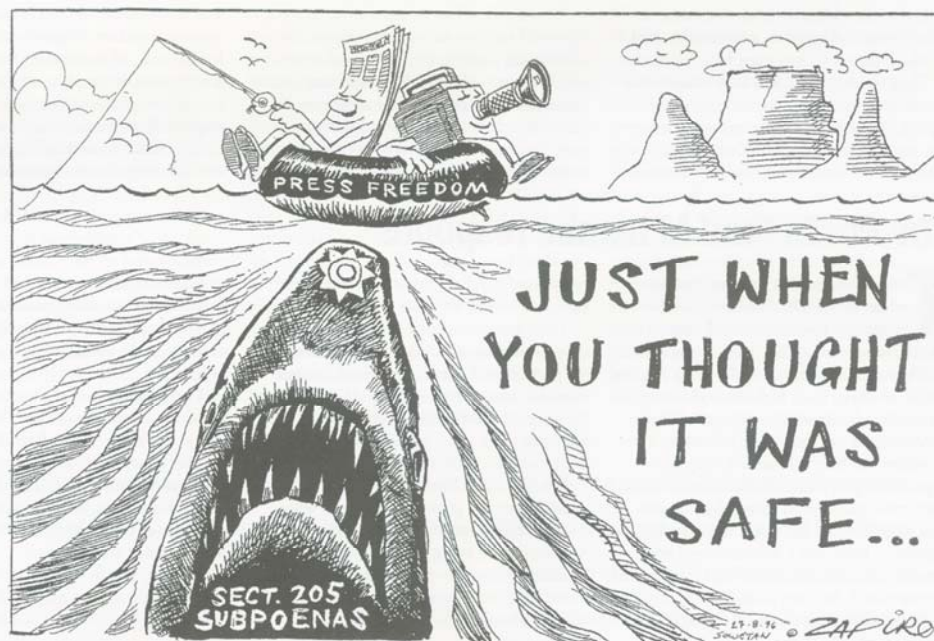
Another thorn in the side of the media in the region is the lack of recognition of the importance of journalist confidentiality. An extreme example of this is the arrest, detention and torture by military authorities of Zimbabwean journalists Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto in January.

Although eventually charged with publishing false news, what caused the furor was the illegal arrest and detention by military authorities who sought to know the source of the story carried by *The Standard* newspaper alleging that there was a coup plot in the offing against President Robert Mugabe. Mugabe himself publicly supported the military's illegal action against the press. He subsequently refused to assent to a new Public Order and Security Bill because, he claimed, it did not go far enough in checking the activities of the press.

In South Africa, section 205 of the Criminal Procedures Act provides for compelling any person who is likely to have material or relevant information of an alleged offence to give evidence of such offence in a court of law. No exception is made of journalists who obtain information or material in the course of their work. Security forces frequently abused this provision during the apartheid era to force journalists to reveal the sources of sensitive stories.

More recently, section 205 was invoked to compel journalists to hand over photographic material taken during the killing of gang leader Rashaad Staggie in Cape Town in 1996, which was captured on T.V. and by still cameras and made headlines worldwide. The journalists refused to do so and the ensuing dispute between the state and the media continues in the courts.

ARTICLE 19's position is that while all citizens have a duty to ensure that law and order is maintained, forcing journalists to reveal their sources is inimical to press freedom as it exposes individual journalists to potential danger once they are labelled police informers. It also causes crucial sources to dry up once they know that their confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This interferes with the free flow of information, press freedom and free expression.



The right balance between freedom of the press and free expression on the one hand and maintaining law and order on the other needs to be identified without compromising either of the two societal interests. In South Africa, a step was taken in that direction in early 1999 when a memorandum of understanding was signed between, on the one hand, the South African National Editors' Forum and, on the other, the Ministers of Justice and of Safety and Security and the National Director of Public Prosecutions, laying guidelines for how, if at all, section 205 was to be applied to the media. This recognition of the special role played by the media is a first step, but it needs to be enshrined in law sooner rather than later.

ARTICLE 19's policy is to call for a comprehensive legal audit in all transitional democracies to ensure that their laws are in line with constitutional guarantees and international human rights standards.

Forcing journalists to reveal their sources is inimical to press freedom as it exposes individual journalists to potential danger once they are labelled police informers.

to page 61 ►

A fine line

A March 9, 1999 article published on the front page of Zambia's *Post* newspaper caused seismic reactions among government circles, including the government-owned newspaper, *The Times of Zambia*. Warning of the Zambian army's vulnerability to a possible attack from Angola, the article raised critical issues of national security. The *Times'* editors slammed *The Post*, the government cracked down and now the entire *Post* staff faces espionage charges.

Where's the line between 'the people's right to know' and protecting

security of state? We print the

Times editorial and *Post* Editor

Fred M'membe's reply:



FINDING THE BORDER BETWEEN PRESS FREEDOM AND A SECURE STATE

'Post Newspaper Has Overstepped its Limits'

The Times of Zambia
March 11, 1999

Lusaka – *The Post* newspaper without any doubt has breached and overstepped its limits.

Plainly and simply, by displaying in detail the state of Zambia's defence arsenal, the newspaper has undressed the republic before the region, let alone the world at large, to borrow an expression used in Parliament by Mr. Christopher Chawinga. Pressmen and women do not function in their own world, an insulated territory in which their deeds are unquestionable and in which they are their own law.

They function in a world in which their desires and interests must be balanced against the hopes and aspirations of others. The point is that press freedom is not absolute and boundless. Media profession-

als and their organisations do not have the absolute right to publish and be damned. Rather, they bear on their shoulders the responsibility to aid and preserve, not dismantle, society.

Because society should be preserved and not dismantled, there are laws against exposing Zambia's defence capacity anyhow – even to citizens themselves. To expose a nation's defence resource as *The Post* has done is to aid the enemy, and therefore to dismantle and disgrace the nation.

Every nation has its security to protect. National security everywhere on earth is sacrosanct. Even in the developed world this is so strongly upheld that in war situations, military censors must clear news material before it is made public. It happens because a journalist may consider crucially newsworthy a certain discovery or

development which if published may actually equip and forearm enemy forces.

In Britain, for instance, Gerry Adams – leader of Sinn Féin, the political arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) – for years was deprived of voice advantage when it came to television broadcasts. He would be televised speaking at some event but his voice would always be closed out.

It has to be learnt from the coverage of war situations by the media in Britain and America that when national pride, posterity and heritage are at stake, newsmen and women stand by the government of the day for the sake of the nation. Even when the government of the day may be undesirable or even worthless in the view of a media organisation, nationhood counts first.

Our head of state has to be commended for enduring floods of personal offence,

injury and insult all in the interest of building our young democracy, which includes freedom of the press and freedom of speech. In other countries within the region papers like *The Post* would have closed years ago.

Censorship in times of war, or threat of war, is international practice even in advanced democracies. A careless comment or report could easily throw a country into flames. However, *The Post* has reported not carelessly but diligently, studiously and deliberately. It looks like the editors simply decided to dare government and see what would happen. That behaviour is simply outside the perimeters of journalism, and nobody should sympathise with newsmen and women who themselves do not care about endangering their own country.

The Post's Fred M'membe responds

This is not the first time we are being criticised by *The Times of Zambia* when our journalists have been arrested over some story *The Post* has published.

They did the same in 1996 when the late Bright Mwape, Lucy Sichone and I were arrested and indefinitely imprisoned for criticising, in our respective columns, Vice-President Godfrey Miyanda's criticism of Supreme Court judges in Parliament where they could not defend themselves. Again that year they did the same when Bright, Masautso Phiri and I were arrested and detained for publishing a story exposing the government's decision to hold a snap referendum over the constitution – said to be a violation of state secrets.

In both these cases, different High Court judges ruled in our favour. In the case with Parliament, the state has appealed to the Supreme Court and judgment is yet to be delivered.

We pay a lot of attention to criticism, trying to find out what earned us the criticism. Criticism sometimes can be very painful, but we have learned to welcome it.

Of course those who don't like us are always on the lookout for our mistakes. If we don't confront our own errors, those who don't like us will turn them against us. That is why we deal with our own errors seriously and forthrightly. Since the paper was launched on July 26, 1991, we have

considered carefully what we have done well, and where we have gone astray.

Ours has never been 'journalism for the sake of journalism'. The idea of 'journalism for journalism's sake' is as strange in our times as 'wealth for wealth's sake', 'science for science's sake' and so forth. All human activities must serve humankind if they are not to remain useless and idle occupations.

The Times of Zambia editorial accuses us of daring the government to see what would happen over the story of the Angolan army being stronger than the Zambian army. They say our behaviour is outside the perimeters of journalism and nobody should sympathise with us for endangering our country.

For those who judge the facts in this way it is well to remember that the current Zambian government has never needed pretexts to perpetrate its villainy on any of its citizens. Government's efforts to smash *The Post* began early in 1992, less than three months after it had assumed power, when the newspaper started to question its political decisions, especially its appointments.

Exposure of the comparative weaknesses of the Zambian army might be used as a pretext, but shall never be the sole factor behind the Zambian government's efforts to annihilate *The Post*. Not informing the Zambian people about the consequences of war breaking out between their country

and Angola, so that they can influence their political leaders wisely, amounts to ostrich-like journalism. It has nothing to do with enhancing the threat of war, as the *Times* argues.

Our journalists have been arrested and detained several times over the past eight years. But none of this frightens us. We are revolutionary journalists pursuing progressive journalism; we act out of principle, not out of fear. Eight years of hardship and struggle, of unyielding tenacity and experience, are not worthless.

Many times in history revolutionary processes have been preceded by adverse episodes. South African journalists went to jail for opposing and exposing the apartheid warmongers – but today they triumph with the revelations made before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

In all ages and under all circumstances there will always exist abundant reasons not to oppose the powerful. But that will be the only way not to advance liberties and peace in our countries and region.

With all certainty our *Times of Zambia* critics – with their cowardice and eternal lack of action – will survive to evidence their own stupidity. We thank them for their advice, but we don't intend to take it. We cannot be led by empty heads with narrow, chauvinist outlooks.

Moreover, the senior Zambia army offi-

cers helped us alert people to information already available on at least two websites and in a similar article published in an African magazine in 1978.

The truth is we are not prepared to let our people live with false hopes, thinking their government can do this or that when the reality is different. What would be gained from that?

We sincerely believe that our duty of telling our people the truth stands above all considerations of convenience. We believe there's no better tactic or strategy in our efforts to contribute to the building of a more open and peaceful society in our country and region than to fight with clean hands, with the truth. We believe these are the only weapons that inspire confidence, faith and dignity.

It is only through this critical journalism – based on reason, morality, truth and our ability to defend ideas, positions and proposals – that we will be able to make best use of our journalistic skills to contribute to the building of a better world, a world with more justice, a world that is truly more humane and for which it is our duty to struggle. We will always behave as journalists who are aware of their task and a new stage in the history of humanity.

FRED M'MEMBE is Editor of *The Post*.

Is Zimbabwe's independent press a SCAPEGOAT, or does it deserve the RAP?

TREVOR NCUBE:

Recent attacks on the press are a result of a government that has serious problems of its own, a government which refuses to accept reality and instead looks to the independent press as the author of all its problems. The sudden deterioration in circumstances can be attributed to years of government economic mismanagement, high levels of corruption and constitutional breakdown.

The result has been declining standards of living and growing dissatisfaction among the people over the past 19 years of ZANU-Patriotic Front rule. People are saying 'Enough is enough. We cannot go on living under these conditions'.

The people's dissatisfaction with government has allowed for the rapid growth of the independent press in the last two years. It is this independent press that is ventilating the frustrations of the people. The government sees those that are calling for the well-being of the people as challenging its authority. This is why the independent press has become such an irritant as far as the government is concerned.

The government of Robert Mugabe has never hidden its hate for the private press. He himself constantly criticises the independent press, labelling it "gutter press" and "yellow press".

The government has become richer and richer, dipping their hands into the national till, while the ordinary man is living below the poverty line. Unemployment and inflation, both lying above 45 percent, are the contributing factors for the bad publicity that ZANU-PF receives – not the independent media.

The government-controlled press never criticises the government. We say things that under normal circumstances would be said by opposition political parties. But we don't see ourselves as an opposition press. We are independent.

Despite the growing conflict between the Zimbabwean government and the independent press, we have vowed not to crumble under the government's bullying tactics.

BASILDON PETA:

The media in Zimbabwe is under siege. This government cannot take responsibility for the problems it has created. It is looking for a scapegoat – and the scapegoat is the independent press.

Because the independent press criticises the government while television, radio and other government-owned media do not, the government blames the press as the author of all its problems. Yet it has created the problems on its own.

The government can't accept this, which is why it is blaming the independent press, using it as a scapegoat. But the independent press isn't going to take it.

What we specifically want is a constitution that will guarantee the freedom of the press. Zimbabwean journalists working with various civic bodies are now calling for a revision of the current constitution and the establishment of an independent broadcasting authority to look into the issuing of broadcast licences.

When there were protests at the National Constitutional Assembly in Harare, the SABC covered the story while the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation ignored the issue. It is wholly controlled by the government. There is a crucial need for private broadcasters.

Tight bureaucratic procedures have made it difficult, almost impossible, for journalists to access information. Journalists are also barred by the Official Secrets Act which limits access to official news and access to information. Legislation like the Communications Bill has been put forward as a strategic mechanism for keeping the press in check.

The Law and Order Maintenance Act, used by the colonial government to detain Mugabe, is now being used by him against our journalists. It makes it a criminal act to publish information that causes alarm and despondency. Although Choto and Chavunduka were arrested for false reporting, their interrogators asked about their sources and never once denied the truth of the story.

The bureaucratic inefficiency, when dealing with the independent media, is frustrating, to say the least. Questions have to be directed to the Ministry of Information. They are forwarded to the Deputy Secretary of the department concerned, followed by the Permanent Secretary and Deputy Minister. The questions are referred back to the Minister, then the Vice-President and finally the President. Four weeks to six months go by before a response becomes available, if at all.

Copies of the draft Communications Bill were so scarce they became a status symbol, like a cellphone. These are the factors that have led to a conflict between the government and the independent press – a conflict which the government thinks it can control and win. But the power of the independent press cannot be underestimated.

RAYMOND LOUW:

Events in Zimbabwe show the spread of a catching disease. The attacks by Mugabe against black journalists, accusing them of acting as puppets of their white owners, mirror criticisms of South African journalists from former President Mandela.

In Namibia, President Nujoma has launched similar attacks. It shows how this whole thread of attacks on the media spreads rapidly around the region. We believe that threats to journalists anywhere are threats to press freedom.

We are concerned that the South African government has not responded to the events in Zimbabwe. A government pledged to protect democracy and freedom of expression must uphold these ideals. Here we have a clear-cut example right on our borders, with all the implications that has for an anti-media mania – and we have taken not one step.

TREVOR NCUBE is Editor of Zimbabwe's *Independent*; BASILDON PETA is Secretary-General of the Zimbabwean Union of Journalists (ZUJ); RAYMOND LOUW represents the S A National Editors' Forum.

On the other hand, some framed the core issue as 'unprofessionalism':

"Regrettably the newspaper (Chavunduka and Chota's *Standard*) did little or nothing to confirm the rumour it picked up. Subsequent inquiries have shown no corroborating evidence. If indeed the story was only published because of sloppy and promiscuous journalism, we hope that the ZUJ will be as equal and vociferous in its condemnation of unprofessional behaviour as it was over the arrest."
(*The Herald*, January 29, 1999)

"A regulatory response by the government would be in order only if the problem emanated from criminal intent. What is required is a self-regulatory mechanism by the media to address the growing problem of unprofessionalism in media practice. Journalists are or should be trained professionals belonging to professional bodies with defined standards of ethics and practice. The problem in Zimbabwe is that media has become a free-for-all. While this is fine in terms of the expansion of the space for free expression, the development brings with it the challenge for those in the media to be the first to seek ways of promoting and enforcing high professional and ethical standards in their professions, [to] regulate themselves as a mechanism of self-protection.

It is a pity that in the political frenzy surrounding the aftermath of the illegal arrest and torture of the two *Standard* newspaper journalists, no attention has been paid to the fact that the offending story was wholly lacking from a professional point of view. The time has come for the media in Zimbabwe to take the lead in protecting its interests by insisting that its members adhere to professional and ethical standards and by sanctioning those members who fail to do so. As for the state, it should forget about strengthening libel law because the problem at hand is not criminal but professional."

(JONATHAN MOYO, *Zimbabwe Mirror*)

Zimbabwe's independent press is a mirror reflecting an image of government that President Robert Mugabe does not like. But cracking the mirror will only bring more misfortune to the country, journalists argue. In the wake of reports earlier this year of how Zimbabwean editor Mark Chavunduka and reporter Ray Choto

were arrested and tortured by the military for reporting on an alleged coup, Trevor Ncube, Basildon Peta and Raymond Louw sound the alarm....

Top:
Raymond Louw,
Trevor Ncube
Bottom:
Basildon Peta



Cracking the mirror

How far have we blown in eight years?

The 1991 Windhoek Declaration was hailed as one of the world's most progressive steps towards press freedom.

But to what extent is African media practicing its principles?

Jeannette Minnie
reports...



the Winds of Windhoek

On May 3, 1991 African journalists and representatives of the world's leading press freedom organisations met in Windhoek, Namibia and declared:

1. *Consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development.*
2. *By an independent press, we mean a press independent of governmental, political or economic control, or from control of materials and infrastructure essential for the production and dissemination of newspapers, magazines and periodicals.*
3. *By a pluralistic press, we mean the end of monopolies of any kind and the existence of the greatest possible number of newspapers, magazines and periodicals reflecting the widest possible range of opinion within the community.*

The Windhoek Declaration on "Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press" is an historical document. It arguably contains the most precise and simply formulated definitions on media freedom and pluralism to be found among the plethora of international press freedom declarations.

The Declaration contains many more clauses, but the first three, quoted above, provide the principles for free, independent and pluralistic media in both the public and the private sector.

It was quickly recognised as groundbreaking stuff, and sincere supporters of press freedom as well as those seeking to capitalise from political gain fell over each other with endorsements. The scramble included UNESCO; all the

We know that little Franksteins have been born under the guise of so-called 'free and independent' media. Apparently our training and nurturing of media managers has been so successful that a few media enterprises (admittedly only a handful) are fast approaching the status of monopolies in their respective countries.

member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC); and many more governments in Africa. The enthusiasm didn't stop there. The declaration spawned many copies adapted to the needs of journalists in other regions of the world. Eventually it received the Oscar award of International Instruments when the United Nations proclaimed May 3 as World Press Freedom Day.

An obvious question: Are journalists now conforming to the principles set forth in the Declaration? At the time of its formulation Africa was celebrating the shift from one-party states to multi-party democracies. At that time state-owned media constituted the media monopolies. Privately owned and community-owned media were a rarity in the SADC region (South Africa being the only exception).

The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), the flagbearer of the Windhoek Declaration in the SADC region, put its shoulder to the wheel after its formation in 1992 and based its regional working programme on the practical recommendations of the Declaration. Examples include developing cooperation between private African (SADC) newspapers; developing non-governmental codes of ethics for journalists; supporting the creation of regional African press enterprises; monitoring attacks on press freedom; creating a data bank for the independent African press; identifying economic and legal impediments to a free and independent media; and training of journalists and media managers.

On the eve of the millennium, we now have to assess what we have achieved. This will be done at another (hopefully) groundbreaking conference on World Press Freedom Day in Windhoek next year (May 3, 2000). It is not our intention to reflect only on our achievements, but also to

contemplate the dark side of the moon. For instance, we know that little Frankenstein has been born under the guise of so-called 'free and independent' media.

Apparently our training and nurturing of media managers has been so successful that a few media enterprises (admittedly only a handful) are fast approaching the status of monopolies in their respective countries. Should they continue their dramatic increases in fortune they will no doubt be in violation of the second and third clauses of the Windhoek Declaration. So now we have begun the difficult road of telling our members that it is not good to be *too good* at being a media entrepreneur.

This is not an easy message to spread. The overwhelming majority of our members consist of newspapers which survive week by week. They scarcely generate enough income to keep their heads above water. They frequently operate in marginal economies where much of the private sector (not only the public sector) is controlled by the state through ownership of parastatal companies or companies owned by government ministers, their wives and relatives and high-ranking civil servants. These companies are understandably in the habit of denying advertising to our members because they cheekily reserve their constitutional right to freedom of speech.

Trying to preach the dangers of media monopolies in such circumstances is a bit like trying to sell cake to Queen Marie Antoinette. And when a few of them actually make it – and become economically strong enough to really withstand the state – it sounds petty to begrudge them their success. After all, we do encourage self-sufficiency in MISA. It's virtually gospel that every effort has to be made to wean ourselves off donors. How else are we to become proud and independent Africans and masters of our fate?

The essential problem with media monopolies is that they erode diversity and pluralism by publishing one view to a big audience. They fill the space which should be occupied by a number of small media enterprises publishing differing views and news. The lack of differing views and news is a direct threat to the growth of genuine multi-party democracy and the practice of genuine human rights.

But there are also other little Frankensteins out there – media owned privately by political parties or politicians in their personal capacities. Aida Opuka-Mensah, a friend and professional colleague from the Ford Foundation in Lagos and previously the Director of the Panos Institute in Lusaka, told me the following story. As an expert on community radio she once extolled the virtues of this medium to a Member of Parliament in an African country. She explained about community empowerment, media by the people for the people and so on. At the end of her lengthy and inspired talk, the politician said: "My god, I never thought of this. If I had a community radio station I could be an MP for life!"

Malawi is the SADC country most infamous for political ownership of the private media. Hordes of small newspapers were established just before the first multi-party election in 1994 (which removed former President Kamuzu Banda from power). This phenomenon also characterised the country's most recent election. Most of these are privately owned by opposition parties, the state, government ministers or other politicians in their personal capacities. Their only task is to smear the government and rival parties. Ironically, one of the two consistently best papers is owned privately by a government minister; the other is truly owned independently of vested political interests.

As a general rule, sources of information are 'confidential' in Malawi – mainly because their sources are the thumbs of journalists or their proprietors or gossip in the

pub. This is despite any number of workshops in Malawi on ethical codes for journalists over the last few years. Individual journalists, who by virtue of holding down middle-class jobs in a desperately poor country, do not as a rule challenge the instructions of their editors or proprietors. Jobs are hard to find in Malawi.

One of the solutions is to introduce an editorial charter which guarantees the editorial independence of the editor and her staff. On a small newspaper, this is not so easily done. For one thing, sometimes the editor is also the owner or part-owner. Even when this is not the case, the proprietor is an integral part of the daily functioning of a small paper and since she is the person who has invested the cash, she calls the tunes.

Furthermore, on a social level, small numbers of people do not usually relate to each other in terms of formalised agreements. Relationships are based on everyday interaction, and in Africa everyone knows their place. It can be


perilous to step out of it.

There has been remarkable growth in the number of non state-owned media in SADC countries since the adoption of the Windhoek Declaration in 1991. MISA's 1999 Southern African Media Directory contains well over 400 privately owned media listings in 11 countries (excluding ISPs, advertising agencies and printers/publishers). Although statistics are not available, a generous estimate for 1991 would have been less by half, if not more. We have undoubtedly played a significant role in providing moral and material support for this development. The challenge for the new millennium, however, is to foster true professionalism in terms of achieving genuine media independence and pluralism.

Based in Windhoek, JEANETTE MINNIE is the Executive Director of MISA.

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Broadcasting's Precarious Future

Who pays the piper?

John Barker makes a strong case for reform in African broadcasting

to render it truly a public service...



We are constantly bombarded by talk of the 'African renaissance' and economic liberalisation'. These are seductive terms, conjuring visions of freedom, equality and Africa finding its true place in the world, finally breaking the chains of slavery.

I, too, was seduced – by all the talk of the 'liberalisation of broadcasting', until one day I realised that 'liberalisation' really meant 'privatisation'. I was being sold a repackaged form of the Thatcher and Reagan dream of a free market based on individual materialistic values.

What I was looking for was the promotion of a broadcasting environment that provided comprehensive, in-depth and impartial news and information coverage – one that ensured access to minorities and provided culturally relevant programming in local languages. What the politicians and organisations such as the World Trade Organisation were selling was the chance for overseas companies to infiltrate our markets and make a profit. In short, they were offering a broadcasting system primarily focused on providing a narrowcast service for an elite audience.

The outcome of 'liberalisation' in southern Africa has been an opening up of the broadcasting market to private enterprise. This has often occurred in a complete policy vacuum, with no regard for the promotion of diversity or pluralism. Simultaneously, we have seen the removal of subsidies from the established national or state broadcasters, forcing them to become more and more commercially orientated. This has happened at a time when we should have been focused on transforming these ageing government mouthpieces into independent and public service-orientated broadcasters.

The Zimbabwean government, for instance, funds only a small percentage of the Zimbabwean Broadcasting Corporation's budget and still owes millions of dollars in back payments. In Zambia anyone with the resources can place prime-time broadcast programmes on the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation's Services. What does this mean for the broadcaster's editorial integrity? Our governments say that they cannot afford to subsidise broadcasting, while they seem to have no trouble in paying to go to war in neighbouring states. If we really want broadcasting in the region to meet its true potential, publicly funded broadcasting still has an important place.

The transformation of our national broadcasting corporations into broadcasters dedicated to the principles of public service and editorial independence is indeed an important component of broadcasting reform. This transformation can be achieved only if we find ways to ensure editorial and programming independence. Editorial staff

must abandon self-censorship and be enabled to do their jobs without fear of reprisals. In Malawi recently, at least four senior employees of the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation were fired, apparently because they were opposition supporters. We can go a long way in putting mechanisms in place to stop this type of harassment, but nothing will be fully adequate unless editorial staff are prepared to stand together to protect editorial principles.

Funding is a stumbling block to editorial independence, with many in the region believing in the old adage, 'he who pays the piper, calls the tune'. It is hard for people to imagine that a government can pay for something without controlling it. Financial self-reliance would help to ensure independence, but the gate-keeping system found in our national broadcasters makes the situation much more complex. There is a strong argument that suggests, for a number of reasons, that commercially dependent public broadcasters would not be able to develop the local and culturally relevant programming we are seeking. This is backed up by the fact that public service broadcasting is subsidised in many countries throughout the world.

What is needed are safeguards incorporated into the funding process that ensure editorial independence. One way of doing



The outcome of 'liberalisation' in southern Africa has been an opening up of the broadcasting market to private enterprise. This has often occurred in a complete policy vacuum, with no regard for the promotion of diversity or pluralism.

this is through multi-party consensus voting on public broadcasting subsidies. We should also ensure that public servants, members of Parliament and political party office bearers do not sit on the boards of broadcasters or the bodies that regulate broadcasting.

The 'liberalisation of broadcasting' has also brought us a proliferation of commercial music radio stations. The majority of these broadcasters' only concession to news and current affairs is rebroadcasting 'Voice of America' or reading the headlines of the national newspapers. These broadcasters are currently using terms such as 'freedom of expression' and the 'right to choice' to argue for re-broadcast licences. The re-broadcasting licences are a means of reaching additional audiences for advertising without investing in new studios or staff. None of these licences cover rural areas.

We need to urgently consider the conditions under which private broadcasting licences are issued. Should commercial broadcasters be under some public broadcasting obligations, for example? Should they be required to provide local news and information or programming in local languages?

The existence and role of community broadcasting is another issue. A lot of damage has already been done to this sector by over-zealous donors attempting to set up community broadcasting without proper consultation or even by developing community stations hand-in-hand with government. The definition and role of community broadcasting is an essential component of any broadcasting policy. How does it integrate into the overall broadcasting environment? A true policy challenge: the sustainable co-existence of public, commercial and community broadcasters.

Our aim should be to develop a stable and sustainable broadcasting system that serves the needs of all our citizens, promoting democracy and cultural diversity. The policy issues involved in this are numerous and many will be unique to particular national circumstances. But I believe that it is possible to persuade our often-secretive governments to adopt an open and transparent broadcasting policy process – one that gives us an opportunity not only to promote the need for policy reform, but also to take an active role in its formulation. All this, however, will require mobilising the active support of civil society representatives and media professionals in the region. Who is prepared to stand up and be counted?

JOHN BARKER is Coordinator of Broadcast Campaigning at MISA in Windhoek.

What does
'community'
mean for
community
radio?

reality check

Bush Radio's
Zane Ibrahim takes
a ruthless look at
who's wearing
the stamp...



every time I hear that "the community radio sector is in its infancy" I think to myself, "Yeah, right, this sector has yet to get the results of the pregnancy test, let alone be born!" What's the rush? Why do we need a Caesarian?

I've heard of fast-tracking but this is ridiculous – the sector's standards and skills are frighteningly low. We have to think seriously whether we want to make this thing fly or not. If we want it to fly, we have to stop all the crap, right now. We need to do a reality check to see who has been milking this sector for all it's worth, and who has been knocking themselves out trying to define their roles and, more importantly, genuinely trying to ask, "What is community radio?"

It's clear to me that our 'development' is the fastest growing industry. Unless we stand up now and put a stop to this scam, we could find ourselves the laughing stock of the world. As it is we're flooded with unqualified and unctuous 'consultants' falling over each other for the chance to show us, for a fat fee, how to squeeze money out of willing government agencies and naive foreign funders.

(What the foreign funders do not seem to realise is that Tarzan doesn't live here any more. We kicked his bare ass out of here long ago. Last we heard he was living in the South of France off the profits he made from the sale of ivory and rhino horn. Apparently, he's popping lots of Viagra and giving poor Jane a rough time.)

I'm astonished to see that we can expect 200 community radio stations in the near future (to cite Clive Emdon in the March '99 *Review*). I can see it now – 150 altars of the airwaves or government P.A. systems with the rest coming across as cheap jukeboxes (at best).

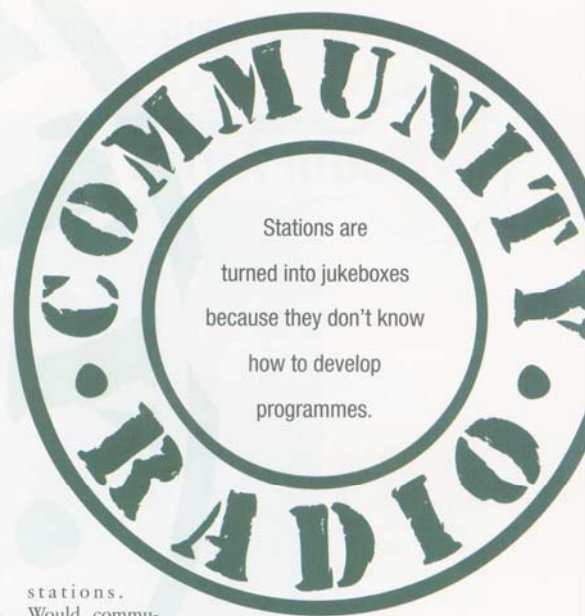
We don't need more stations now. We need more people on the ground who are honest and have half a brain. I am not referring to those former 'media activists' who were just the other day toying for the right to 'give the community a voice' and are now enriching themselves on the sweat of those very communities. To them I say, SHAME.

Those who have the most to gain from this flurry of stations to be established are the 'consultants' and the many new broadcast equipment supply companies that have suddenly popped up out of nowhere. The people on the ground will be staring blankly at all this new digital technology while the DJs are happily selling the latest Michael Jackson CD, with the consultants and equipment guys laughing all the way to the bank.

The ministry responsible for handing out contracts for the equipment to these new stations should remember companies like Globecom in the Western Cape. Globecom grew out of the community radio sector and probably knows more about its technological needs than all those other fly-by-night companies, who think that giving their companies African-sounding names will get them access to the trough filled with Danish taxpayers' sweat. Do I hear the word 'kickbacks' in the background?

If I sound skeptical and disappointed it's because I am.

I'm skeptical, for example, about the state getting directly involved with the funding of certain community radio



stations.

Would communities not overly friendly with the ruling party of the day be granted a station? Would the ruling party of the day expect the station to be its mouthpiece?

I'm skeptical of the dream of having 200 stations in the country. What percentage would be religious? What percentage would operate under the guise of a community radio station but, in fact, simply be a pulpit or mimbar on the air? How many of the different religious denominations are going to be granted a licence, and who decides on which denomination gets licenced?

Stations such as Bush Radio or Soweto Community Radio should be able to accommodate all the various interest groups in the community they serve. There is no need for every special interest group in the community to have a station. This will only lead to a sort of broadcasting apartheid. We are, in fact, going back to the situation we fought so hard to escape.

I'm skeptical about the incredible amount of money many of these 'community' stations are making. Most of them have simply received a licence to run a commercial venture on an inexpensive community radio licence. If they want to make that kind of money, let them apply for commercial licences.

I'm skeptical about the development of the sector when we don't have a single institution where a potential broadcaster can complete a full programme that will prepare them to enter the broadcast industry. Institutions like the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism (IAJ) and Ulwazi/Classic Fm are doing a great job with their short intensive courses, but it's not enough. What happens is that stations are turned into jukeboxes because they don't know how to develop programmes.

I've always been a skeptic. When I smell roses, I look for a coffin.

I'm disappointed because we have a 'can do' nation which deserves better as far as community radio is concerned. As practitioners in this field, we have a golden opportunity to truly give our people a voice. A voice filled with vibrancy and hope. A voice that, for too long, has been crying to be heard.

I would like to suggest that everyone involved in community radio ask themselves at the start of each day, "What can I do to make my community's life just a little better than it was yesterday?"

ZANE IBRAHIM is Managing Director of Bush Radio, a community radio station based in Salt River, outside Cape Town.

There is no need for every special interest group in the community to have a station. This will only lead to a sort of broadcasting apartheid.

DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS ARE A FAIRLY NEW PHENOMENON ACROSS MUCH OF THE AFRICAN CONTINENT. THESE ELECTIONS IS ANYTHING BUT. IN ELECTIONS THIS YEAR SOUTH AFRICA SCORED REASONABLY WELL ON



South Africa



FNB Stadium, Johannesburg, May 1999. The anticipated handover from Mandela to Mbeki - much of the public participated in the elections with similar enthusiasm.

PHOTO: PETER ANDREWS/REUTERS

Methods to the Madness

Strategies behind SABC coverage of election '99



Amina Frense
tells how South
Africa's public
broadcaster coped
with its biggest
assignment ever...

missionary zeal, madness just short of 'certified' and a well of understanding - that's what it takes to cover elections in post-apartheid South Africa. Coverage of this year's elections in June was the biggest event ever undertaken by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). We couldn't secure all the prime time slots we wanted, but we developed a variety of pre-election programming enabling the voter to make an informed choice.

ON PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

We drew people in in various ways. The more formal "Face the Nation" current affairs format put political parties on the spot. More participatory was "Two Way," a popular public participation talk show which elicited emotional responses from participants and viewers, dispelling many fearful predictions of voter apathy. Topics ranged from party lists to 'what makes a nation?' and reached a cross-section of society.

Other engaging programmes included

"Off The Record," political satire which captured many imaginations and wide support. It evolved as the election campaign unfolded, with more and more political parties calling in and demanding to be part of the programme - i.e., ridiculed. Some of the existing programmes - such as "Focus met Freek" (normally in Afrikaans and viewed by a preponderance of 35-year-old women) - had to shape a bit; the show hosted by Freek Robinson became "Election Focus," broadcast in English and aiming for a broader, more representative national appeal covering topics in all parts of the country.

We needed the public to actively participate and they did: by fax, by phone, in rural and urban vox pops, broadcast on "The Midnight Connection," a 15-minute slot for 'the discerning viewer'. The international community took a keen interest in our first post-liberation election and we invited their responses, too. This went down well, but it also meant more eyes and ears watching and listening - we had to get it right first time round.

ON WHO SETS THE AGENDA:

From my point of view mainly the media - that is, after the government of the day establishes the 'when' and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) implements the 'how'. All stakeholders play a part, but the media must do it well and timeously.

Very early in our pre-election programming we publicised our plans and intentions to all the political parties, big and small. We were complimented on our openness; it seemed to help establish trust. We also developed good working relationships with the IEC and other stakeholders such as EISA, the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and others. For everyone it was a learning curve all over again as we grappled with the election process.

Setting the agenda is one thing; fine-tuning it is another. There was not the same need for voter education this time round, and anyway there was no time. We needed to ascertain many things, such as voter support for political personalities and parties and the demographics of the voting popula-

IN FACT IN MANY PLACES PURPORTING TO HAVE ELECTIONS 'FREE AND FAIR', THE MEDIA COVERING REPRESENTATIVE AND ENGAGING MEDIA COVERAGE – NIGERIA AND MALAWI, LESS SO. LOCAL JOURNALISTS REPORT:

tion whose concerns were big issues like jobs, education, housing and crime. We were assisted by Opinion '99, one of the biggest opinion polls in S.A. history and a joint venture between the SABC, Idasa and Markinor. The poll yielded material which served as working documents for the political parties, business and the international community in the run-up to the elections.

We stood to lose too much as television broadcaster if we did not deliver – especially with a new player on the block, e-tv. We spent considerable resources on setting up regional stations to broadcast in the other official languages. The SABC took its public mandate by the letter and tried to make regional voices for democracy heard as loudly as possible.

ON COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S AND GENDER ISSUES:

In all our programming we are gender-sensitive, and we found a higher level of interest amongst women viewers. One of the "Two Way" programmes at the time dealt specifically with our liberal constitution and its implications for South African women today. The feedback was overwhelming, asking for more of that kind of programming.

We have had no complaints of bias or issues being underreported, so I would like

to believe we did not do too badly under the circumstances.

ON COVERING THE SMALLER PARTIES:

There were two complaints by smaller parties of inadequate coverage but they got sorted out. In one instance it was clearly a case of too few resources to cover an event (which was not newsworthy in any case,

politically mature environment – working with others to get politicians to sign a code of conduct before the campaign – particularly in Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape, potential hotspots. This did not come about overnight but through a lot of hard workshopping, out of the public eye.

We pretty much rose to the occasion when it came to the technology and logistics

stay on air – a near-impossibility. We didn't have the staff; people were already doing extra-long hours. No amount of money could have changed that at such short notice.

By then we did not have enough fresh programming and had to repeat broadcast some material. A 30-minute documentary on the election process called "Woza

We basically had to transform a concrete floor into an election mothership in the most functional, cost-effective way, and my SABC airtime colleagues delivered.

because of low attendance). The other complainant had more than his equitable share of coverage and was pushing his luck. We had many compliments of fair coverage from most of the parties.

ON OUR OVERALL STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES:

Strengths included good leadership, team effort and including all stakeholders in an assertive but non-compromising way. We continually discussed and redefined roles cooperatively. This applied to business units within the SABC as well as all stakeholders outside. We also managed to establish a

side, one of our biggest challenges. From carrying a zip-zip machine on a donkey cart in the Eastern Cape where running water is still a dream to the bits and bytes of the latest state-of-the-art IT technology merging with broadcast technology at the election results centre, we can boast about the software results. In setting up a temporary studio at the IEC, we basically had to transform a concrete floor into an election mothership in the most functional, cost-effective way, and my SABC airtime colleagues delivered.

We didn't, however, meet every challenge. On June 2, election day, we were asked by our boss, the Rev. Hawu Mbatha, to please

Democracy," featuring Brigalia Bam, was shown twice but we had no complaints as far as I know. Another glitch: the Northern Cape felt like the black sheep when one of their regional broadcasts went out to the soundtrack of "Three's Company"!

This will probably be the last time the SABC can afford to broadcast so extensively. The next time round we will all need to be far more multi-skilled and digitised to make sense to the electorate.

AMINA FRENSE is SABC Television News Editor for special assignments and elections.

Giving Access

Franz Kruger reports...



How SABC radio brought people into the election process

For around ten days some 700 T.V. and radio staff worked out of the election centre. There were several days for rehearsals, some programmes in the build-up, then virtually non-stop coverage on election day, which moved into results coverage on the days following the closing of the polls. Twelve temporary radio studios were set up, and each station had a full production team, working shifts to cover the extended hours.

Technical facilities were set up to allow a full range of programme elements. The election shows included live crossings to reporters around the country; interviews with newsmakers and analysts; studio discussions; pre-packaged items; live crossings to key IEC and party briefings; and much else. Key input came from a strong team of researchers and analysts, who helped make sense of trends as they emerged.

The decision to set up such a wide range of broadcasting facilities at election centre meant significant costs and logistical effort. But the benefits were huge. Many of our news producers struggle to overcome the relative disadvantage of working from the provinces, and in languages other than English – despite often having millions of listeners. Bringing them all to the election centre sent a clear signal that we treat all

our languages equally. They all had similarly easy access to IEC officials, political leaders and commentators. There was a great deal of cross-fertilisation of editorial ideas between teams. As many commented, it was great to be where the action was.

Broadcasting the results was the high point of election coverage, but major effort went into coverage of the election campaign. Besides coverage of politicians' activities, we also made extensive use of 'access programming' to create platforms for citizens to participate in the process. Some 60 hours of broadcast time were devoted to this programming, mostly in the form of town-hall meetings.

The recipe for these is simple: you take your equipment into a suitable venue, invite an audience, put politicians on the stage and broadcast the resulting debate live. It can be a sloppy form of broadcasting, but if the participants and the subject are well chosen, and the debate chaired with fairness and care, it can offer real insights to listeners. It evidently provides a viable platform for ordinary people to voice their concerns, participate in policy discussions and hold their (aspirant) representatives to account.

Town-hall meetings are hugely popular with the participating community. One of our first, arranged on the seTswana lan-

guage station Motswedding FM in a village outside Mafikeng, attracted some 4,000 people. Another, in the Eastern Free State, was held inside a farmer's shed, staged on a tractor's trailer with farmworkers and farmers debating issues in seSotho. Other formats included citizen panels quizzing candidates, phone-in programmes and panel discussions by party leaders.

The Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) expressed "a slight concern about the tendency of broadcasters to cover events and not to focus on political parties' positions on issues of concern to the public". Similar criticism came from the Media Monitoring Project (MMP). The question of covering issues rather than events warrants more discussion than there is space for here, but a few points can be made.

Firstly, monitoring techniques by both bodies focused on a quantitative analysis of selected bulletins and programmes. These are mainly driven by a hard news agenda; they ask the question, what's happened? The special access programming described above, which offered real opportunities to focus on issues and to facilitate citizens' participation in policy debates, was not monitored.

In addition, the SABC made extensive use of opinion polls in an effort to make our coverage less reactive. Through the Opinion '99 consortium with Idasa and Markinor, popular views of a range of

issues were regularly polled. This exercise undoubtedly helped shape our coverage, and even the course of the campaign.

For instance, Opinion '99 gave us independent data on the extent of voter registration at an early stage, which gave us headline news and was well used in the print media, too. The polls also clearly indicated that crime and jobs were far and away the most important issues to South Africans, and these two issues dominated the campaign. Again, neither the IBA nor the MMP took this initiative into account.

Finally, the nature of the election itself needs to be considered. Among the big stories of the election were the race for second place, the IEC's arrangements for voting, the behaviour of minority voters and others. Various commentators have commented on the comparatively small differences in policy between the parties.

Undoubtedly, the media must cover elections in a way that facilitates citizens' active involvement in the democratic process. But it's a complex role, and reducing it to a question of 'issues versus events' doesn't do it justice. As the SABC, we set ourselves the aim of delivering fast, fair, insightful and interesting coverage. I wouldn't pretend to claim complete success, but we gave it our best shot.

FRANZ KRUGER is the National Editor of news and current affairs for SABC Radio.

The main issue for the media covering Nigeria's elections in February-March this year was the volatile shift from military to civilian rule. Yet while political power dynamics changed, the media did little to alter the status quo of women and minorities' political engagement.

Kwasi Gyan-Apenteng reports:

The legislative and presidential elections held in Nigeria in February-March 1999 were significant for a number of reasons. Obviously, they marked the end of a long period of military rule and the beginning of what may prove to be an enduring phase in the development of civilian rule. Less obviously, the elections were significant in that media coverage and civic participation indicated a new and emergent correlation of power in the country.

The Nigerian media has a long tradition of vibrant activism in the country's political process through its watchdog and advocacy roles. In the context of Nigeria's history, the proactive role of journalists was a natural consequence of developments leading up to the political transition.

In 1993 an earlier transition under former military President Ibrahim Babangida came to a sudden and uncertain end with the annulment of the presidential election that would have ushered in a new civilian administration after eight years of military rule. A short-lived, military-controlled interim civilian government was replaced by direct military rule again with General Sani Abacha at the helm. The winner of the annulled election, Chief Moshood Abiola, was jailed by the junta for attempting to claim the Presidency.

The first casualty of this move was any

reporting transition

Power shifts and status quos



Nigeria



semblance of national unity. Chief Abiola was a Muslim from the southwest while the military chiefs who jailed him were mostly from the north. Thus, the leadership of the political protest came mostly from the Southwest but was not limited to that area.

The repression unleashed by Abacha gave a sense of purpose to the political class, especially the activists within civil society and the media across the vast country. Many people went to jail, many more into exile and some, like Ken Saro-Wiwa, lost their lives. At the height of powers just before he died, Abacha was ranked by the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists as number

one in a list of the top ten enemies of the press: he had jailed 21 journalists on trumped-up charges and scores were in exile or operating underground within the country.

Themes and agendas in the transition and the elections were dominated by the fallout from the country's recent history. The two overriding issues were the need to preserve national unity and restore civilian control over all levers of power and government. Abacha's death had removed the most virulent supporters of military rule from contention. But even with consensus among the politicians and the people on the need to end military rule, there was no agreement on the

nature and source of power in the new dispensation.

Ideology itself was never an issue among the politicians – nor was it made one by the media. The three main political parties were created more or less along ethnic lines, and what passed for ideology were the specific historical characteristics of the leadership of the three main ethnic/political areas of the federation. Media reports and analyses were dominated by personalities in the absence of any clear ideological differences because that is the way of Nigerian politics. Personalities embody more than the individual; they make a statement of the past and the future.

Praise-singing for the politicians

In its coverage of Malawi's June elections, the country's media transformed journalism into something between politicking and public relations,

writes Raphael Tenthani...



Malawi



media Mutations

Much of Malawi's sizeable rural population was excluded from the election process by absent or indifferent media coverage.

PHOTO: DREW FINDLAY/H-AFRICA

The truth, according to the Malawian media, depends on where you are on the political spectrum. The June 15 elections in Malawi, the second round since the curtain fell on the country's veteran atavistic ruler of 30 years, Hastings Kamuzu Banda, exposed the media as a bunch of praise-singers ready to bleat according to the whims of their political masters.

Felix Mponda, a stringer for the Agence France Presse (AFP), believes that both print and the largely state-controlled electronic media in Malawi failed to articulate issues for the country's roughly 10 million people. "We do not have an independent media in Malawi," he says. "Almost all papers in

Malawi are either owned or controlled by politicians."

Mponda's assessment is not far-fetched. The country's most influential reads, its two dailies – *The Nation* and the *Daily Times* – are controlled by big shots in the country's two main political parties, the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) and the former ruling, now main opposition party, the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The MCP's most powerful politician, party vice-president John Tembo, chairs the all-important board of Blantyre Newspapers, which publishes the *Daily Times* and its weekend sister paper, the *Malawi News*.

Mabvuto Banda, a senior reporter at the *Daily Times*, admits journalists at the paper would like to be more independent. But it is all about who is feeding you. "We can't write anything good about the government – otherwise we will be fired," he told a round-table debate chaired by BBC's Josephine Hazeley recently.

But journalists-cum-PROs work not only for the opposition. Anderson Fumulani, director of the Media Council of Malawi, says higher-ups in the UDF hierarchy, including the President, pooled resources together to fund campaign tabloids whose only mission was to portray the government as achievers and the opposition as villains up to no good. "We had a bunch of characters masquerading as journalists who could only go up to their offices, cook up just about



PHOTO: CORIANE DUPAN/REUTERS

Lagos, Nigeria, February 1999. In covering the elections, the media touted 'inclusiveness' but women were displaced from the political scene and most of the media kept mute on the subject.

The one issue on which the media appeared to have taken the lead was the suitability of former head of state, retired General Olusegun Obasanjo, as a civilian head of state. Gen. Obasanjo had been imprisoned by Abacha and was released only upon the dictator's death. The media reflected a general feeling that he would play a leading role in the country, but perhaps as an elder statesman, befitting a former head of state.

When Obasanjo eventually made up his mind and joined the People's Democratic Party (PDP), sections of the Lagos media concluded that his move revealed two signif-

icant things: one, that the PDP was the party of the northern generals; and two, that Obasanjo would be a pawn in the hands of those same generals. This became the defining issue of the election campaign.

Lagos hosts the majority of the Nigerian media; Lagos was the seat of the pro-democracy and anti-military campaigns during military rule. Lagos politicians and journalists generally expected the first President of the post-Abacha civilian government to be as different from Abacha (and Babangida) as was humanly possible. But in one respect Obasanjo reminded them of their arch-enemies: he was a soldier. However, in the context of the national unity consensus the Obasanjo factor presented a particular difficulty that called for subtlety on the part of the media.

Obasanjo comes from the south, from where the next President was to emerge, the northern leaders having ceded or 'zoned' the Presidency away from their dominance as a gesture to national unity. Even more crucially, he was from the southwest, the seat of the clamouring for 'power shift', the code for demanding a southwestern President. How could they reject Obasanjo when he satisfied that one critical condition?

This theme of 'civilians vs. military', under the umbrella of national unity, remained the primary media focus throughout the election process, with 'north vs. south' as its subtext since the north was equated generally with control of military power. The media's justification appeared to be the need for 'inclusiveness', to help ensure that power was not monopolised forever by

In spite of the fact that women outnumber men in Nigeria, there were few women contestants for political office... Despite the best efforts of women journalists this virtual exclusion of women was never an issue.

the military in civilian garb.

But the 'inclusiveness' argument cannot be sustained, because there was scant mention of the need to include other groups within the civilian population that had been excluded from power since independence. The most glaring case is the virtual absence of women from the political scene. In spite of the fact that women outnumber men in Nigeria, there were few women contestants for political office. In an article published in *African Topics* magazine, Raheem Momodu, a former executive member of the Nigerian Association of Women Journalists, bemoaned the fact that no woman was elected a state governor and out of 36 deputy governors there were only two women.

Yet despite the best efforts of women journalists this virtual exclusion of women was never an issue. The majority of Nigerian editors and producers are men, who were more concerned with the possible undermining of national unity by one of the major ethnic regions or the military than with the non-representation of women – and certain minority groups – in the political process. So women and minorities never moved to the media's centre stage. This wasn't a male conspiracy – merely a sad reflection of prevailing socio-cultural attitudes which the media reinforced.

KWASI GYAN-APENTENG is Editor of *African Topics* in London. He was a facilitator at a recent workshop on reporting elections organised by the Independent Journalism Centre in Lagos and funded by the Ford Foundation.

anything and about anybody to advance their masters' electoral chances," Fumulani says. He adds that at the end of the day it was the reader, the end user of the product, who suffered – subjected to untruths which they were expected to use when making their choices on election day.

ise of protecting press and other freedoms, so if it started jailing scribes its credibility could have been tainted.

While all these electoral gymnastics were going on minority groups were suffering. AFP's Mponda says small parties, numbering more than ten, went to the polls without

country's women's rights activists started buying time on national radio to promote women in the election campaign that women's issues came to the fore.

Stella Mhura, president of the Media Women Association of Malawi, says female journalists mobilised among themselves to

journalists have no excuse for not being professional.

Fumulani says that the Media Council wants to organise a series of workshops to sensitise journalists on the need to keep up with ethical tenets. "The Media Council cannot stop anybody from practising journalism because the democratic dispensation we are enjoying upholds freedom of expression," he says. "But we are saying that we must exercise that freedom with responsibility."

But, Mponda argues, as long as politicians control media houses most journalists will continue to bring the profession into disrepute if that is what their masters want them to do. "We are in a situation where we do not have enough outlets for our journalists, so if one gets fired for not conforming to the master's whims, one will not feed his family," he says.

Practicing journalism in Malawi has thus become a bread-and-butter issue with little regard for media ethics. When it comes to election reporting, as evidenced in the election in June, journalism in Malawi mutates from journalism into something between politicking and public relations.

RAPHAEL TENTHANI is the Blantyre correspondent for the Panafican News Agency (PANA) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). He also strings for the Associated Press (AP) and the German News Agency (DPA).

Many commentators **forgave** Malawian journalists **for going off track** soon after the first multi-party elections in 1994.

But **now**, five years into democracy, Malawian journalists have **no excuse** for **not being professional**.

The government funded a sizeable number of papers, most of whom have gone into hibernation, perhaps sharpening their daggers in readiness for the next elections in 2004. These papers included the *Weekly Times*, *The Citizen*, *Malawi Today*, the *Saturday Post* and a horde of others.

But government was not the only culprit in this 'misinformation campaign', according to the Media Council's Fumulani. The opposition had its own weapon, *The National Agenda*, which thrived on sleaze. As with the government propaganda papers, *The National Agenda* writers hid behind pseudonyms. D.D. Phiri, Malawi's most notable political and social commentator, says that while what these papers printed was outright libelous, government was caught in a web: it took office on the prom-

enough media coverage of their policies. "It was a question of who has the money," says Mponda. "The big three parties (the UDF, the MCP and its alliance partners, the Alliance for Democracy, or AFORD) had the money and the people to sing their praises while most of these small parties had none."

Women, a largely trampled-upon group of people, suffered most. Malawi is a male-dominated society, despite women making up more than 52 percent of the population. Penelope Paliani, who writes a weekly column on gender issues in the *Daily Times*, says newspapers gave women a raw deal in the run-up to the elections. "Because most editors, and indeed journalists, in Malawi are male, a newsworthy women's article has to do with women involved in scandal," she says. Paliani adds that it wasn't until the

fight for a fair shake for women candidates. But according to Mhura, female journalists discovered too late that male politicians were using underhanded tactics – manufacturing sordid 'scandals' and peddling them to the tabloids – to knock their female competitors out of the campaign. "We discovered too late into the campaign – otherwise we could have devised a counter-attack," Mhura says.

The elections are over and done with. But the soul-searching among journalists has just begun. Many commentators forgave Malawian journalists for going off track soon after the first multi-party elections in 1994. They were, after all, just coming out of a 30-year dictatorship under Banda who did not tolerate an independent press. But now, five years into democracy, Malawian

Why journalists
need
a code of ethics

abused freedoms

Irresponsible journalism
invites repression – which is why
'independent' journalists require more
self-regulation, argues

Francis P. Kasoma...



The widespread unprofessionalism practiced by journalists in Africa's independent press is responsible for a large part of governmental action to limit press freedom. Some government interference is based on genuine concern that such freedom is being abused.

Unprofessional practices by journalists from Africa's independent press have included: (1) the use of newspapers as political opposition; (2) bad advocacy journalism; and (3) the overuse of anonymous sources.

THE PRESS AS POLITICAL OPPOSITION

The degree of truth reported in African newspapers, particularly those acting as political opposition, is extremely low. These 'opposition' newspapers are full of exaggerations; base their reports on hearsay; make headlines 'cry wolf'; quote sources out of context; deny 'the accused' a fair hearing; print downright biased reporting; publish smear-campaign columns based more on the writer's emotions than on reasoned opinion; run illogically written editorials and so forth. Too many editors are prepared to publish a story based on one flimsy source without bothering to check that the information they are getting is factual. Numerous newspapers in Africa have committed many of these offences.

ADVOCACY JOURNALISM AND SENSATIONALISM

Another common professional transgression by 'independent' journalists is practicing bad advocacy journalism, often accompanied by sensationalism. To journalists and newspapers involved in sensational reporting, nothing seems illogical: a single incident is universalised and a few isolated incidents are made to represent a trend.

Advocacy journalism turns sour when those practicing it ignore basic journalistic norms. When a newspaper constantly refers to a head of state as "childish", "immature", "criminal", "a fool" or "a scoundrel" – as the *Post of Zambia* has repeatedly done in describing President Frederick Chiluba – the newspaper's motives may not be honest and honourable. There is a big distinction between being critical of a head of state and insulting him.

The bias of Africa's independent newspapers is even more conspicuous during election time, when they endorse their favourite candidates whose images they present in the most slanted, advantageous manner to the electorate.

Africa's independent newspapers cannot behave in this way and still call themselves 'independent'. They should not cheat members of the public by posing as independent newspapers when they are, *ipso facto*, party newspapers. The independence of a newspaper is determined not only by its private ownership but also by its editorial policy.

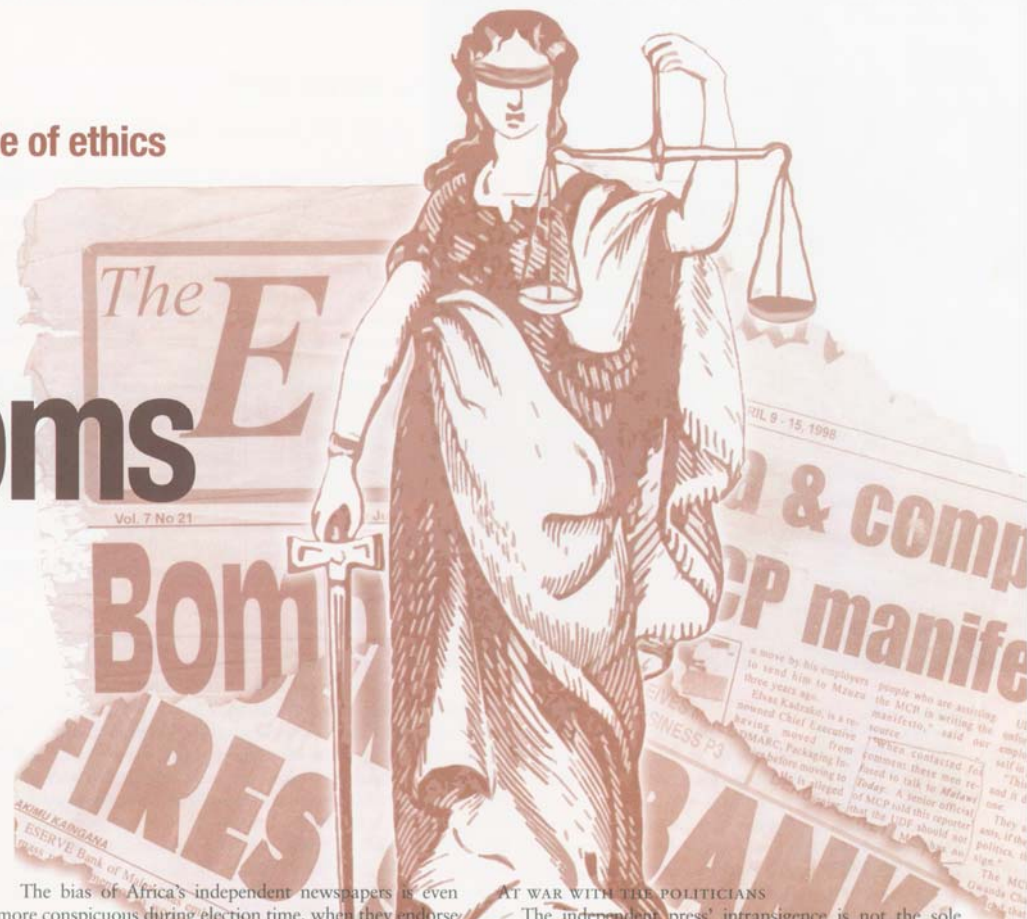
A newspaper that has taken a permanent political side by uncritically supporting one political party, no matter what that party does, forfeits its independence. An independent newspaper that takes a political side consistently and uncritically without giving space to opposing information and views is but a dishonest political organ doing a disservice to democracy.

The watchdog role is not about the press propagating political vendettas against those in government which cannot be supported by facts. The majority of bad journalists are hiding behind the cloak of press freedom. Some even unashamedly claim that freedom of the press should also protect bad journalism.

ANONYMOUS SOURCES

A third ill-conceived practice by journalists from independent newspapers is the misuse of anonymous sources, which has become very common in Africa. When pressed to name a source, journalists often hide behind the confidentiality argument. But they apparently disregard the often irreparable damage done to the reputations of the people against whom allegations are made. Such journalists are, obviously, happy that their political enemies have been 'fixed'.

The independent press in Africa seems to have thrown cardinal ethical norms to the wind. It is time African journalists started telling their sources that if they are prepared to make the charge against others, then they should be brave enough to prove their allegations publicly.



AT WAR WITH THE POLITICIANS

The independent press' intransigence is not the sole cause of the 'state of war' between the press and African governments – far from it. Sometimes governments and ruling parties are to blame because of their overreaction to what the press does or is presumed to be doing.

Yet the serious conflicts between government and the independent press which have rocked Africa could be eased if journalists created responsible bodies to enforce journalism ethics. It is the absence of journalists' associations or the weakness of existing ones in many African countries that has exacerbated the situation and made governments want to impose journalistic regulatory bodies such as state-sponsored media councils. The contention by some African governments which have taken this path is that if the journalists cannot regulate themselves, they have to step in and regulate them.

Unless the press conducts itself responsibly and puts self-regulation measures in place whenever it makes mistakes, government has a duty to impose certain regulations intended to make journalists more responsible. Unfortunately, the measures that governments usually impose are harsh and often result in the reduction of press freedom. When this happens, the independent press in Africa should not so much blame government as blame itself for causing the mess by its unprofessional conduct.

In Africa today even the limited press freedom which many independent newspapers enjoy may be drastically curtailed if they continue to flout basic journalism ethics. When this happens, the irresponsible independent press will be as much to blame as the governments taking draconian measures to curtail them.

PROFESSOR FRANCIS P. KASOMA is Head of the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Zambia in Lusaka. This is an abridged version of a paper written for publication in the special *Gazette* issue on Africa in April 1997.

The majority of **bad journalists** are **hiding** behind the **cloak** of **press freedom**.

Some even unashamedly claim that **freedom of the press** should also **protect bad journalism**.

For almost 40 years, Algerians living under a one-party regime knew only one-party newspapers, radio and television. It was only after the violence that shook the country in October 1988 – nationwide youth protest against that regime – that an ever-widening crack was opened in a system based on the rigid and oppressive ideology of ‘unique thought’.

The 1989 constitution, adopted just after the events of that violent October, paved the way for a multi-party system and the information laws which followed. It shattered the state's monopoly over information and politics and allowed hundreds of journalists, freed from administrative and political restrictions, to create their own media enterprises. From 1990 until 1992, dozens of independent papers were created. It was the spring of the independent press. One could count up to 800 papers in less than ten years; there were not more than 20 independents during one-party rule. Many, though, were lost to the laws of the marketplace.

Set in motion a decade ago, this dynamic continues: new private papers see the light of day each month. At present one can count nearly 200 papers, of which 35 are French and Arabic dailies, whose combined editions exceed one million – and could be multiplied two- or three-fold if distribution channels, privately held, were more efficient.

THE CURRENT MEDIA CLIMATE

In Algeria today there coexist two sectors of the print media: a sector of the press said to be public, amounting to a dozen newspapers with limited editions in French and Arabic, and a sector of the private press with dozens of newspapers publishing strong editions for the hundreds of thousands of readers in the two languages. The recent closure of some state-owned papers (such as the famous *Algérie Actualité*), which have become financial burdens for the state and its taxpayers, has challenged the future of the press inherited from one-party rule. The public sector newspapers, controlled by the state, no longer monopolise the press. They have been rattled on their old pedestals by the private papers, whose dynamism is equalled only by their boldness, which has made them popular with hundreds of thousands of Arab, French and bilingual readers. Independent papers such as *El Watan*, *Le Soir d'Algérie*, *El Khabar*, *Liberté*, *Le Matin* and others have in a few years become credible institutions and thriving enterprises.

In the mere ten years of its existence, the independent press has captured by its quality and credibility a vast readership in Algeria and other countries. This was not done easily. From its birth, this press – created by organised journalists and societies of editors – found itself confronted with repeated pressure from the authorities.

Pressure soon came from other quarters. After the Islamicists were denied a potential election victory in late 1991, all hell broke loose. The year 1992, named ‘the black year’, was particularly trying for journalists

and their young press. The assassination of journalists by fundamentalist terrorists and the death threats that weighed so heavily on them from 1993 to 1997 profoundly shook the members of a profession which played and continues to play a vanguard role in the country's struggle for democracy, freedom of expression and universal human rights values.

CENSORSHIP: AN OLD MEMORY

Except for the security information controlled by the state (newspapers were allowed to publish only news coming from military sources or from the official press agency), newspapers did not submit to any other form of censorship.

From the end of 1997, which saw the lifting of the security information stamp, censorship became only a bad memory. No subject is now taboo; all issues are tackled, including secularism and multilingualism in a country where Islam is the state religion and Arabic is the official language. Recently, a famous columnist for the daily newspaper *Le Matin* raised a general outcry among the Islamic nationalistic chauvinist communities when he wrote that Muslim fundamentalism was only a screen for the problem which Islam as a religion poses to society.

Often, the private press publishes investigations into socio-economic problems, bad management and corruption. It doesn't hesitate to hold leaders accountable. Last summer, the private press led to the downfall of one of the most powerful public figures and a minister of justice. Its forthright and ruthless critique, especially concern-

to page 61 ►

The Algerian media, particularly the independent press, has become in a relatively short time a true opposition.

Le Prix suprême

The mortally high cost of a free press in Algeria



Few countries, if any, have lost so many journalists to the democratic struggle – in Algeria's case against a repressive regime and Islamic fundamentalist terrorism. In the background on this page we print the names of those assassinated. Journalist **Lazhari Labter** himself has had many close encounters with death.

Here he recounts the remarkable growth of the country's independent press, where journalists daily experience “an apprenticeship in democracy”...



The Sanlam Community Press Awards



1. 'Waarheen Nou?' by Susan Botha, *Paarl Post*
2. 'Waar's die Land?' by Hennie Homann, *Die Daller, Groblersdal*
3. 'The Heat is On' by Carolyn Koopman, *District Mail, Somerset West*
4. 'Night Alight' by Carolyn Koopman, *District Mail*
5. 'Vuurwagters' by Carolyn Koopman, *District Mail*
6. 'Vlammezee' by Anne Kruger, *Paarl Post*
7. 'Eye to Eye' by Carolyn Koopman, *District Mail*

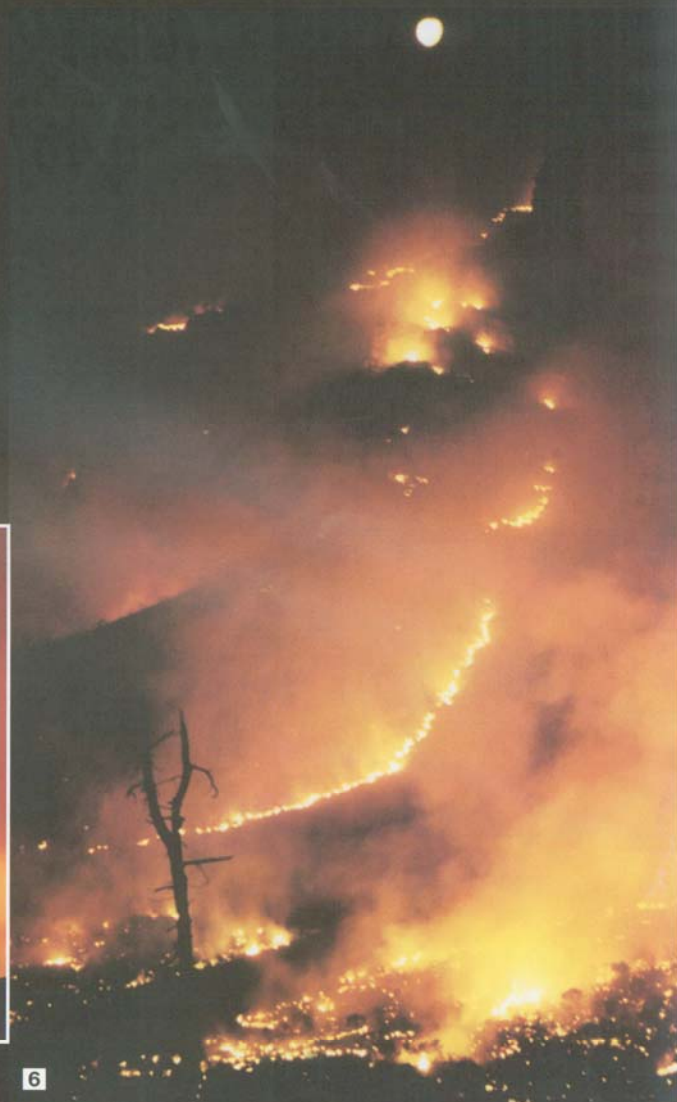


People working for community newspapers are to be congratulated for their courage and commitment to the communities they serve. It is not easy in a small community to take to task local leaders and institutions. Were it not for these community papers and their staffs, out there watching and reporting, communities would be much poorer places.

The Sanlam Community Press Awards honour the work of these community newspaper journalists, photographers and designers. Now in its ninth year, it is the biggest competition of its kind in southern Africa.

The competition has four categories: writing; advertisements; layout; and photography. This year a total of 1,143 entries were received from 302 journalists. More than 100 newspapers participated, and 404 photographs competed. Total prize money amounted to R60, 000, with Journalist of the Year and Photographer of the Year winning R3,000 and R2, 000 respectively.

Hennie Homann of *Die Daller* in Groblersdal won the Photographer of the Year title and Carolyn Koopman of *The District Mail* in Somerset West took the Photo Image of the Year Award. Here we publish their winning photographs and some other entries, chosen for their community spirit.



WOMEN AND GENDER

WOMEN AND GENDER ISSUES ARE BLATANTLY UNDERREPORTED IN AFRICA – AS THEY ARE IN THE REST OF THE WORLD. BUT HERE WE'RE DEALING WITH RECORD-BREAKING STATISTICS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND MEDIA COVERAGE THAT DOESN'T BEGIN TO CONFRONT THE PROBLEM. THERE'S ALSO THE QUESTION OF HOW TO COVER 'SENSITIVE ISSUES' – SUCH AS FEMALE CIRCUMCISION – MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY. WOULD IT HELP TO HAVE MORE WOMEN IN THE NEWSROOM? ANOTHER HURDLE IN ITSELF...

Making coverage of violence against women count

The least-reported Crime



Domestic violence is the least-reported crime in South Africa. Reporting on rape is inadequate and distorted.

Gabrielle Le Roux urges the media to make some strides in writing women – and the violation of their rights and persons – into “the first draft of history”...

Women are still virtually absent from the history that our children learn today in school. Women are also underrepresented as newsmakers, opinion-givers and ‘experts’ in the news. American writer Naomi Wolf said recently that news is the first draft of history – so the logic follows that if they are written out of the present, they are bound to be written out of history.

In South Africa, the central role that women played in the liberation struggle has remained fairly invisible in the media. Given that women make up more than half the country's population, and that in its constitution the ideals of non-sexism and non-racism stand side by side, this invisibility of women needs to be looked at critically. While ‘gender’ is always noted as being important, it is remarkable how few qualitative changes we have seen in the representation of women – seldomly regarded as sig-

nificant as race issues. Racism has become ‘uncool’ in a way that sexism has not; sexism is, to a large extent, still regarded as the status quo.

In beginning to address this we have seen the term ‘women's issues’ becoming current. Most of the so-called ‘women's issues’ – such as rape, domestic violence, child abuse or maintenance defaulting – are human rights abuses perpetrated by men. The term, then, is a misnomer.

There is a link between what is not regarded as newsworthy and what is not regarded as political. Crimes against women, particularly domestic violence, were not until recently recognised as being political; rather, they were generally cast as belonging to the private domain.

The current news paradigm includes a notion of journalistic objectivity that needs to be taken apart. “We cannot escape the fact that objectivity is always influenced by ongoing subjective decisions – decisions of

what issues are important, who to interview, who NOT to interview, what facts to include in a story or to exclude, what quote to use, how we create the context of the story, our language, the pictures we use – all very subjective choices,” says journalist and Media Peace Centre Co-Director Hannes Siebert. The set of very subjective assumptions about the divide between the private and the public spheres is nowhere more evident than in the treatment of violence against women in the media.

Domestic violence is the most common yet least reported crime in South Africa – as a news priority ranking lower than crimes against property. In a country where the media focuses heavily on crime, this is an eloquent silence. This silence has a lot to say about how unremarkable it is that women are not safe in their homes. It is so commonplace that it is not noteworthy. Dog bites man is not news; man bites dog is news. This is how journalists are trained – the result is that when a woman beats her husband it is regarded as news, and not vice versa.

The laws regarding violence against women have changed considerably. Legislation on domestic violence, maintenance, customary marriage and rape is in the process of being redefined. These new laws are very good news for women grappling with any of these issues. One of the greatest challenges to the media is to keep people abreast of their rights so that they know how to claim them.

Who is bringing about these progressive changes? If the official recognition of women's rights is to be entrenched enough so that it becomes less fragile, we need to raise the profile of people working very hard to get these issues prioritised in the face of tough opposition. Movers and shakers like ANC MP Pregs Govender, chair of the Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women, should be a household name, and the Committee's ground-breaking work mined for its potential stories.

Many myths and stereotypes exist around violence against women, and anyone reporting on the subject will intentionally or unintentionally either perpetuate or debunk these. Many distortions appear in the media around rape. Firstly, the rapes that get reported tend to be high-profile cases or cases where a woman is raped by a complete stranger in a particularly violent way. Incidences of rape where the rapist is known to the woman – the most common form of rape – get less play; date-rape barely features.

Women who are raped or abused still carry a heavy stigma, one that the media can

do a lot to dispel. The 'whore's stigma is the home of many double standards, signifying strong societal resistance to granting women sexual autonomy. If a woman is depicted as 'loose' or a 'bad girl', then she logically 'deserves what she gets'. By making sex-workers the 'other', a lot of space is opened up for abuse.

Who is responsible for stereotyping? This question has no easy answer and often it is in the quest for easy answers and fast understanding that we use stereotypes. With the limited space and time that journalists usually have to get information and news across, they often tend to use a form of shorthand, readily understood by their audiences, which can be dangerous. For instance, if a journalist includes in their description of a rape a phrase like "she was wearing a miniskirt" it cues the reader to draw a mental picture of someone whose provocative clothing might have been responsible for the attack. This

obviously works against the reader's outrage at the violation the woman suffered.

Journalists grapple with how to tell the story of domestic abuse or rape. Very often it is only after the woman has left the situation and recovered a bit that the story can be told. These stories – about women who escape abusive relationships – are inspirational to women still caught in the cycle of abuse.

Many women leave relationships on the strength of articles or radio programmes that tell the story of a woman they can relate to who leaves. Most often these women do not tell the journalist that their article was a life-line; perhaps journalists need more positive feedback to write other, similar stories.

Things are changing. When well-known journalist Charlene Smith was raped and bravely told her story, she was well placed to push for the issue to be taken more seriously in a variety of sectors. When Nomangezi Matokazi courageously pressed rape charges against cricketer Makhaya Ntini and won, some journalists took the opportunity to give her a voice and did not succumb to pressure from the United Cricket Board boys' club to side with the rapist. Sadly, the ruling was later reversed on a technicality and arguments derived from antiquated laws.

The South African National Editor's Forum (SANEF), whose members include a wide range of editors from various media across the country, after a recent conference released this resolution to the media:

"The conference heard that recent studies indicated that 17,000 women are killed and raped every year in this country. This is 7,000 more than the death toll for the Kosovo conflict. South African women are not killed by strangers. Every six days a South African woman is murdered by her male partner. South Africa is the only country in the world where children are present with HIV because they have been raped

in the misguided belief that this will cure the rapist of the disease.

[We have] resolved to mobilise the media to address this crisis by breaking the silence which has sanctioned the slaughter and abuse of women and children. The forum also pledged to guard against stereotyping of all kinds, including sexism and racism which perpetuate this problem."

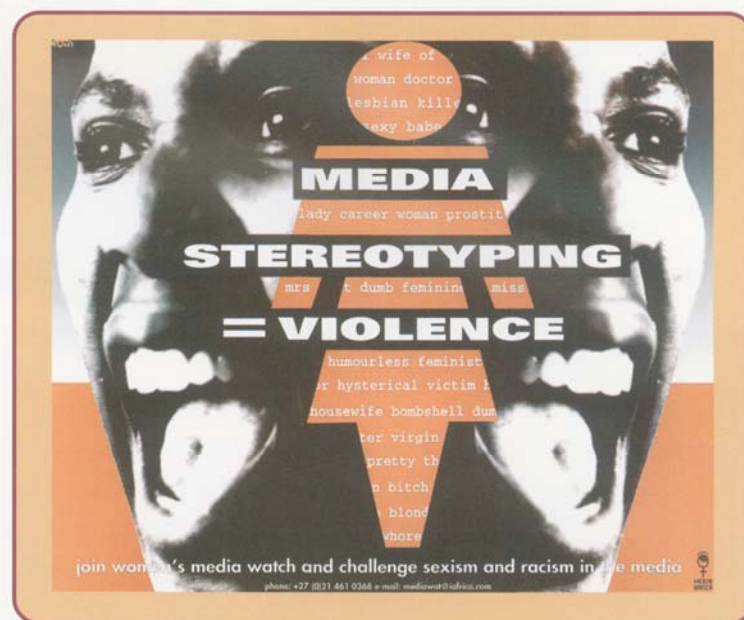
This is good news. If this commitment is implemented we will see a complete makeover of the media and it will truly play a responsible part in creating outrage over the endemic disrespect of and violence against women.

Men also need more space to express themselves feelingly. Justice Malala wrote in an article for *Femina* (May 1998) magazine: "We men are trapped in a dark and secret

world called Men Talk, where we swap tales of conquest and plunder but never of failure or perceived failure." He then told a sad story: "Joe once confessed to having enjoyed himself holding hands and cuddling with a girlfriend. The guys were aghast: You did nothing! All night?"

How many times do we see men being regarded as newsworthy for breaking their own stereotypes? How many kind, caring, responsible men are portrayed in a positive way? The paradigm around what and who is news needs to shift – radically.

GABRIELLE LE ROUX is a feminist activist who has worked in the field of women's rights since returning to South Africa in 1992. She is currently Head of the Women's Media Watch.



What is Women's Media Watch?

Journalists grapple with how to tell the story of domestic abuse or rape. Very often it is only after the woman has left the situation and recovered a bit that the story can be told.

Women's Media Watch challenges sexism, racism, classism and homophobia in the media and works for greater access to the channels of communication for the least-heard voices. The group is based in Cape Town and has members nationally, regionally and internationally. Members include domestic workers, Parliamentarians, journalists, sex-workers, women with disabilities, feminist academics, community workers, crisis workers, lesbian activists, women who have been homeless, writers and independent filmmakers. Women's Media Watch membership is open to all people and organisations with a commitment to using the media to deepen democracy.

Women and gender in the African media

In basic journalism classes one learns that the 'so what graf' generally appears four or five paragraphs into the story and answers for the reader: Why is this story important, why should I keep reading, why should I care?

When talking about women and gender the question can be asked: What is the 'so what' for the media around these issues?

The question can be answered from a number of different perspectives. There's the 'journalism mission' viewpoint. If the purpose of journalism is to report the news and if news is defined as that which is current, significant and of interest, then women and gender issues have to be on the media agenda because they clearly meet those criteria. Women and gender issues are being widely discussed, by governments and non-governmental organisations, by men and women.

This discussion has been fueled in large part by the spillover from the momentum gained during the U.N.'s Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China in 1995. Section J of the conference's final document, the Beijing Platform for Action, addressed the representation of women in and by the media. Post-Beijing there have been various studies and gatherings around the world focusing on issues relating to women. In Africa, debate about women and their role and representation in the media is alive and well. From a strictly news perspective 'women and gender'

is clearly a 'hot' topic.

Then there is the business side of journalism. We journalists may exist to tell stories that cast light into the darkness and make the world a better place for all living kind, but our media organisations exist mainly to make money. This is done primarily by selling things – namely the news product and the advertisements the stories

are wrapped around. Marketing specialists have begun to note not just the purchasing power of women, but also the influence they wield, particularly in household purchasing decisions. Producing a product to attract this influential consumer-customer makes good business sense.

There is also the sociological point of view which acknowledges the existence of women and addresses their status in society. Women account for at least half of the human population. So how can that which concerns half of society continue to be dismissed, ignored or so stereotypically and generally negatively represented?

These changes in consciousness and coverage must take place inside and outside the industry. From the outside by media monitoring and talking back to media outlets about the various types of coverage. From the inside by those who make the news – the journalists, photographers and artists – and



PHOTO: SAGHA KUALI/AFRICA

Whether protesting in the name of PAGAD in Cape Town (left) or working the fields in Rwanda (below), women deserve more of a presence in African media.

those who decide what is news – lobbying for and enforcing changes.

To the surprise of many, African women have long been media activists. They continue to be. Current statistics estimate that women hold about 25 per-

cent of all media jobs in Africa. Yet most of these are low- to mid-level posts. The higher one goes up the management chain, the fewer women are to be found.

Female journalists continue to face certain issues and challenges in the workplace that their male colleagues do not. Among them are access to jobs and training; equitable wages; discrimination and sexual harassment; and balancing work and family. As do many other professional African women, women journalists also face family and societal pressures stemming from long-held beliefs about the roles and images of women in their cultures and societies.

These interpersonal and professional matters are issues that media organisations must address. I've often been asked whether I believe that having more women in decision-making posts in the media will guarantee improved – more equitable and balanced – coverage of women's issues in the media.

Will it guarantee improved workplace climates for women journalists? I'm tempted to say confidently, "of course." But a more realistic response is, "Let's get a critical mass in place and find out." The other reality is that any change for the better will be the result of the work of both genders, male and female.

Since its launch in December 1997 the African Women's Media Centre (AWMC) in Dakar has been working to establish an information and training programme for women journalists across the continent. The centre works collaboratively with various media organisations and associations to promote the training and professional development of women in the media.

Perhaps as we go hurling forward into the next millennium what we need is a rephrasing of this discussion, this concept. What if instead of 'women and gender' (the latter having become a code-word for 'women') we begin to talk about 'covering societal issues', with women factored in more consciously as part of the social equation. Perhaps then the importance of addressing this sector of society will be more easily grasped and acted upon.

A former business reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and various other newspapers, WILMA J.E. RANDLE is now Director of the African Women's Media Centre in Dakar, Senegal.

so what?



Wilma J.E. Randle
argues why journalists
should care...

the taboos of reporting female circumcision

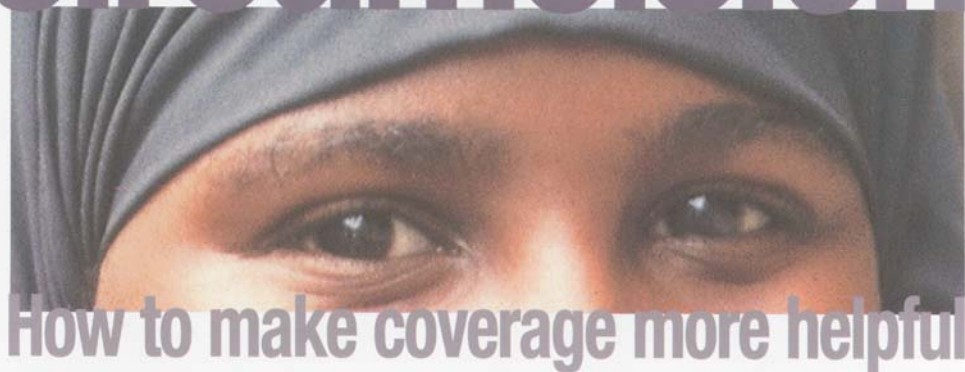


PHOTO: JENNIFER STERN/AFRIKA

How to make coverage more helpful

Most media coverage of female circumcision in Africa imposes a Western or 'cosmopolitan' framework that is, in the end, not productive, argues **Dr. Augustin Hatar...**

Perhaps no issue is being debated with so much heat among feminists as is female circumcision. Though the practice occurs worldwide in varying degrees, the heat for the moment is on Africa, where it is automatically coupled with the 'backwardness' of the societies practicing it and the need to redeem them from such evil in the spirit of missionary zeal.

Debates around the issue have tended to be confrontational, polarising those that practice female circumcision and those that want to save them from it. Armed with arguments from the long history of the women's emancipation movement, many regard female circumcision as another frontier that women have to cross – and soon. It is seen as an act that dehumanises the woman for the self-indulgence of the male, who then sits back and 'collects' as many by-products of the circumcision as he can lay his hands on.

In this struggle between 'good' and 'evil' female circumcision has taken on a highly negative connotation, in the term 'female genital mutilation' – a phrase non-existent in the communities where it is practiced. The irony begins there: perhaps when these 'new missionaries' go to these communities to 'save' women, they are already talking about different things and are therefore unlikely to strike common ground from which both can move forward.

The truth is that both sides need to move forward together. History is replete with customs or traditions that may have been popular at a certain time, but are now obsolete. One can cite, for example, weddings which used to be lavish affairs and are now in many cases moving towards minimalism, with only seven people – the couple, two witnesses on each side and the official uniting them – attending the ceremony.

But female circumcision is a serious matter, which cannot and should not be easily compared to weddings, where (at least initially!) the by-product is happiness. Female cir-

cumcision kills, maims, is extremely painful and results in many other problems such as difficult delivery – one cannot sit back and wait for it to disappear. For all the cases of women suffering through circumcision rituals documented in the medical literature, there are probably thousands of unreported cases. Let us help devise better strategies with which to engage our brothers and sisters still practicing female circumcision so that they can perhaps develop new ways to deal with the issue.

In a recent report done by the Legal and Human Rights Centre in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on the extent and practice of female circumcision in the country, researchers noted that most of those groups practicing it still strongly support the practice. Although a law against such sexual offences was enacted by the Tanzanian Parliament in 1998, punishing those who circumcise their daughters, the report noted that the practice has gone underground. Many even talked about the unfairness of such a law undermining parents who are being 'culturally correct' in raising their daughters.

In our work with the Barbaig community in northern Tanzania, again the same theme comes through: the 'cultural obligation' of female circumcision has been handed down from generation to generation, without anyone knowing its origins and hence no one taking particular responsibility for ending the practice.

The practice as such has gained a certain mystique in societies where much remains unknown, where the channels between the ancestors and the living are still active and few dare to offend the dead. In such communities laws are perceived as negative interventions because, as the Barbaig pointed out to us, they are made by cultural outsiders who do not understand local tradition and would care less if their society disintegrated.

These societies see female circumcision as 'fulfillment', a kind of cross that should be borne to ensure a sense of cultural accomplishment and belonging. It graduates a

We have not had the patience to understand these people, and have instead jumped to name calling.

Journalists, therefore, should uncover new stories coming from these people themselves.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR REPORTERS:

- Avoid the term 'mutilation'. Those who practice it don't see it that way, and terming it such adds an emotional slant to the reporting.
- Report on the reasons/beliefs underlying the practice, to deepen understanding of its social significance. Refrain from superficial catch phrases.
- Represent the different forms of female circumcision and the different rationales for it; they are not uniform.
- Cover any events dealing with the subject in an illuminating way (seminars, etc.). It would be wonderful if local videos on female circumcision could be produced and screened in the communities themselves.
- Engage men (as well as women) from communities practicing female circumcision in an ongoing dialogue about the practice.

girl/woman from being just anyone to being a fully respected member of society with all the attendant rights and privileges. Her father is happy, her mother is happy, the other relatives are happy and the young woman anticipates having her own set-up within the same parameters as everyone else.

This is when we usually come in and say, "It is all right NOT to be like everyone else." But most indications suggest that our view has been largely rejected. Our technical explanations, medical evidence and volumes of 'women's lib' do not provide answers for these people. For them, belonging to their community has no alternative.

This sense of belonging is just as key in more 'cosmopolitan' societies. Those of us living in such societies have developed and adopted mannerisms which keep us blended in the social set-ups to which we belong. Although we are mobile and can 'belong' in many settings, we still tend to cling to certain ones we are more comfortable with and will often go to enormous expense to be seen to belong properly. We can move and start somewhere else if things go wrong. This is the difference: for many societies, such as the Barbaig, such luxury is totally unavailable. They have to belong there, with their people and their customs.

In my view we have failed to address this painful dilemma. We have not had the patience to understand these people, and have instead jumped to name calling. We have not tried to see them as we see ourselves, and we have adopted a 'wicked them' and 'good us' attitude. We have not taken enough time for dialogue with them; rather we have prescribed drugs for a disease we see, but that they do not.

Naturally, they have not taken the medicine.

Our work among the Barbaig raised questions we failed to answer. Yes, they, too, do not want their children to die. They, too, do not want to cause pain to their wives and daughters. But what can they replace such practices with, how and who will lead the way?

One obvious opening was that the Barbaig who were educated and therefore mobile were less enthusiastic about circumcising their daughters. Education, therefore, seemed one sure way of dealing with the problem.

This education, however, itself needs reform. The Barbaig told us that when their daughters finish standard seven (elementary school) they end up going to wash dishes for rich people in towns as domestic staff, which the Barbaig find humiliating. Education should rather empower these girls to go on and be 'somebodies', women who will come back and show the way forward.

To be able to do that, we shall need to invest in structures that can prevail on the Barbaig to release their girls to go to school. These are places where the nearest source of water may be 15 kilometres away, and yet the woman has to fetch water two to three times a day to give the calves water to drink, in addition to the normal usage of water. She has to fetch firewood, cook for her husband and chil-

dren and perform many other household tasks.

Such tasks require that she keep all her daughters near so that they can help. The workload also implies that as the cattle increase, a woman would rather have a co-wife to share in the work, and so on and so on, with even more co-wives. The

man sitting around there with ten wives will be interested in anything that will keep their sexuality low. The women themselves will not have a chance to bathe for long periods, will get skin rashes (*lawalawa*) and will gladly do anything that they are told reduces the risk of such *lawalawa*. These young girls, in a polygamous compound, will be glad to get married and go somewhere else. And they will not go to another ethnic group for marriage, as no young man from another ethnic group will have been there to admire her.

So there they are, caught in a circle leading back to themselves – one we mistakenly think we can break simply with information, statistics and medical reports. Anyone interested in the fate of female circumcision – and in the women it touches – needs to talk more to these communities. Journalists, therefore, should uncover new stories coming from these people themselves, and help us move forward together with a better understanding that could bring an end to this pain.

DR. AUGUSTIN HATAR is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Fine and Performing Arts at the University of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. He is also a media consultant.

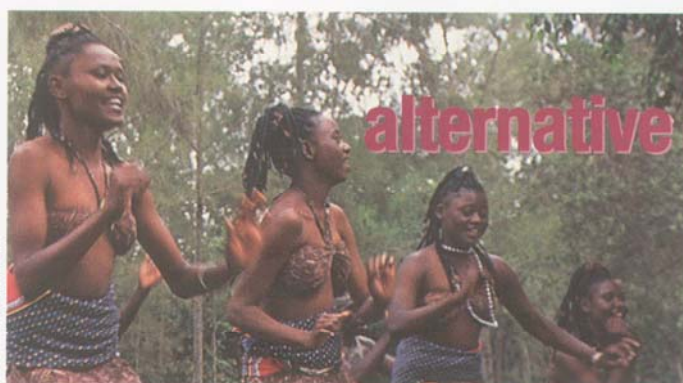


PHOTO: ERIC MULLEN/AFRICA

alternative Rites

Female 'circumcision' by other means By Malik Stan Reaves

a growing number of rural Kenyan families are turning to an alternative to the rite of female circumcision for their daughters.

The new rite is known as 'Ntanira na Mugambo', or 'Circumcision through Words'. It comprises a week-long programme of counseling, capped by community celebration and affirmation, in place of the contentious practice often known as 'female genital mutilation' (FGM).

The first Circumcision through Words occurred in August 1996, when 30 families in the tiny village of Gatunga, not far from Mount Kenya, ushered their daughters through the new programme. Some 50 additional families participated in the programme in December, followed by dozens of other families.

Circumcision through Words grows out of collaborations between rural families and the Kenyan national women's group,

Maendeleo ya Wanawake Organisation (MYWO), committed to ending FGM in Kenya. It follows years of research and discussion with villagers by MYWO field workers with the close cooperation of the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH), a non-profit, non-governmental, international organisation which seeks to improve the health of women and children. Headquartered in Seattle, Washington in the U.S., PATH has served as technical facilitator for MYWO's FGM programme.

FGM is practiced in about half of the rural districts of Kenya, part of a larger international population of more than 100 million women believed to be subject to varying forms of FGM across Africa and parts of Asia. The practice is generally grouped into three categories: incision, the cutting of the hood of the clitoris; excision, the cutting of the clitoris and all or part of

the labia minora; and infibulation, the removal of the clitoris, the adjacent labia (majora and minora), and the sewing of the scraped sides of the vulva across the vagina, except for a small opening.

In rural areas, circumcision rites are usually carried out by traditional practitioners using crude instruments and little or no anesthetics. Urban dwellers and the more affluent are more likely to seek out professional health care providers. While in some cultures the circumcised include infants a few days old, most of the affected girls are between the ages of 4 and 12.

The health consequences of FGM can range from serious to deadly. "Short-term complications include severe pain, shock, hemorrhage, urine retention, ulceration of the genital region and injury to adjacent tissue," according to the U.N. release.

"Hemorrhage and infection can cause death. Long-term complications include cysts and abscesses, keloid scar formation, damage to the urethra resulting in urinary incontinence, dyspareunia (painful sexual intercourse), sexual dysfunction, urinary tract infection, infertility and childbirth complications."

Yet female circumcision encompasses more than the practice itself. It is often deeply entrenched in the local culture, wrapped in a complex shroud of assumptions, taboos and beliefs that impact on a woman's social status and personal identity. Indeed, the central defining achievement of Circumcision through Words is not that it saves young women from the dangers of FGM, but that it captures the cultural significance of female circumcision while doing away with the dangerous practice itself.

The central defining achievement of Circumcision through Words is not that it saves young women from the dangers of FGM, but that it captures the cultural significance of female circumcision while doing away with the dangerous practice itself.

Recognising women

Two award-winning African journalists

share their struggles to make an impact

“People think of the traditions as themselves,” said Leah Muuya of MYWO in “Secret and Sacred,” a MYWO-produced video, distributed by PATH, which explores the personal dangers and harmful social consequences of FGM. The video explains that female circumcision has traditionally signaled a young woman’s readiness for the responsibilities of adulthood.

In response, Circumcision through Words brings the young candidates together for a week of seclusion during which they learn traditional teachings about their coming roles as women, parents and adults in the community, as well as more modern messages about personal health, reproductive issues, hygiene, communications skills, self-esteem and peer pressure. The week ends with a community celebration of song, dancing, and feasting which affirms the girls and their new place in the community.

The original proponents of the new rite have since incorporated and are seeking support from international donors in order to continue and expand their efforts. Funding has come from several international donors including the Ford Foundation, the Moriah Fund, Population Action International (PAI)/Wallace Global Fund, Public Welfare Foundation and Save the Children – Canada.

MYWO and PATH have also developed public awareness campaigns that spread information on the harmful effects of female genital mutilation. According to Dr. Asha Mohamud, a PATH Senior Program Officer focusing on FGM, the two organisations agree that information, education and public discussion are more effective tools against FGM than direct, prohibitive action.

That became clear when Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi declared his intent to abolish the practice. “It led to a terrific backlash,” she said, including circumcisions in the middle of the night and a rush to circumcise girls at a younger-than-usual age in an effort to beat the ban.

Accompanying this Kenyan initiative is an international effort to increase global pressure on the issue. In April 1997 the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the U.N. Population Fund announced a joint plan to significantly curb female genital mutilation over the next decade and completely eliminate the practice within three generations. Many governments have outlawed the practice in their own territories.

Efforts like Circumcision through Words offer a promising approach to resolving this controversial issue, at least within practicing communities, said Dr. Mohamud, since there are many people who would like to end the practice yet are not able to face the social ostracism that would entail. Yet, despite the continuing successes of Circumcision through Words, proponents of traditional circumcision are still numerous in many areas. As many have pointed out, ‘culture’ doesn’t change overnight.

Managing Emotional Distance



After South African journalist **Charlene Smith** was raped she used her writing to become an outspoken activist on violence against women. In September she received the South African Award for Courageous Journalism from the Ruth First Memorial Trust. Here she reflects on this combination of journalism and activism:

I loathe the ‘me’ school of journalism. But perhaps once in our lives, something will have a profound impact on us, and we may believe that we can help generate positive change. Then, I believe, we have a responsibility to share, in as constructive a manner as possible, our experience with society.

I had a powerful sense on the night of the rape that I had to turn a bad incident into something good. My primary skill is as a writer. The initial article [in the *Mail and Guardian*], and those that have followed, have changed rape counselling techniques from San Diego to Namibia, Singapore to Uganda. It has seen the first research into the relationship between rape, HIV and anti-retrovirals. The articles have influenced steps with regard to rape legislation in this country and in Namibia, as well as the rewriting of rape protocols, police training, insurance policies, life skills training in schools and so on.

The first time I covered conflict was in 1976 – I was 17 and *The Star*’s first woman crime reporter. It taught me that nothing is more important than the story, the story comes first and when that is done I can deal with my emotions. We have a duty, particularly when confronted with horror, to record in as straightforward a manner as possible what happened – horror needs no embellishment – so that those who suffered or died, did not do so in vain. Our duty is to tell the world, so that it, hopefully, acts against barbarity.

I find it traumatic and emotionally draining to write about rape. Should I be writing about rape? Shouldn’t journalists keep an emotional distance? In reporting apartheid many of us did not lose emotional distance, we managed it. This was a crime against humanity so acute that we could not fail to be moved by it. We had to see for ourselves. The truth is rarely self-evident.

Breaking through in male-dominated Africa

Being a young, female journalist in Africa is no easy feat. Pamela Mulumby, this year’s 24-year-old winner of the prestigious African Journalist of the Year award, can definitely attest to that. She has been sidelined, had her credibility questioned and even been accused of sleeping her way to the top at her newspaper, Kenya’s *East African Standard*.

Mulumby knocked 14 other contestants from across the continent out of the running. She was awarded the prize for a series of articles published about the plight of slum and squatter dwellers in Nairobi and nearby villages. The win catapulted her to instant stardom but she still faces much criticism in the wake of her success.

“Some men thought I was climbing the ladder too fast and felt their positions were threatened,” Mulumby says, alluding to the male-dominated journalism world in Kenya. Other men questioned her credibility and insisted a woman could not win such an award unless she was sleeping with one of the officials, she says.

Women also voiced their disapproval. “They thought I was too positive about life and wouldn’t fit in my shoes.”

She accuses female journalists of being as corrupt as their male counterparts. “When journalists are corrupt,” Mulumby says,

Journalists who are young and female in Africa – like much of the world – have much to contend with in advancing their careers. Rhodes University journalism student **Trusha Reddy** interviews African Journalist of the Year award-winner **Pamela Mulumby**...



“they will not sweep corruption under the carpet, but they will deny the people of the country the services of a free press.”

Tribal politics also played a role in her treatment at the paper. Her first encounter with tribal prejudice was from a female editor who did not assign her any stories for two months because she was from a different tribe. “I was left with little option but to be creative and nosy,” Mulumby says. “I had to smell news and gate-crash whether there was already a reporter there or not.”

Eventually her stories were published, but she was relegated to the traditional female beat, fashion. “Men do not trust women with covering certain issues,” Mulumby says. “They cover politics while women cover light stuff like fashion and beauty contests.”

Aside from pushing for gender equality, Mulumby names the challenges facing African journalists as embracing new technologies; engaging in further training; resisting government manipulation; and developing a voluntary ethics code.

Mulumby’s message to women is simple: “Women are their own enemies. We must be ready to fight. We still have hope.”

REPORTING CONFLICT

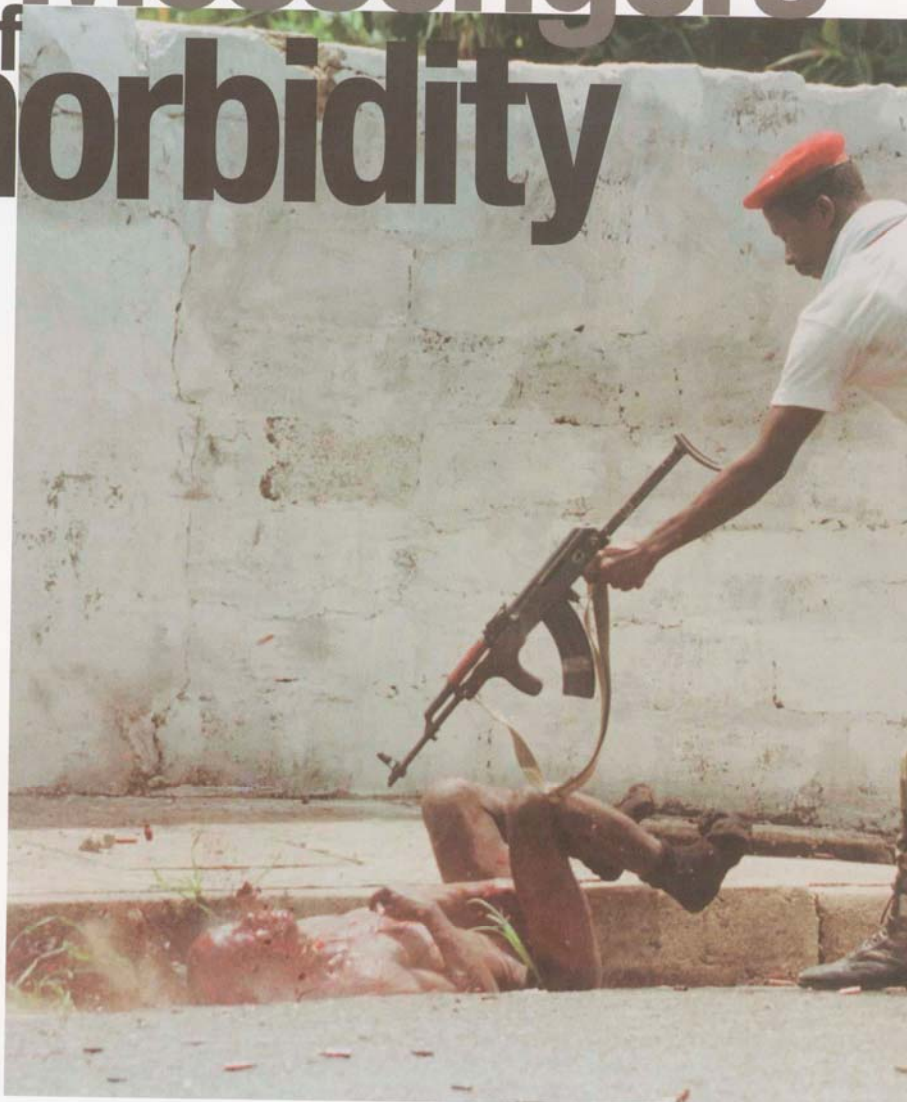
AFRICA, IF ONE BELIEVES THE MEDIA, IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST VIOLENT PLACES. BUT WHAT COMES OF THESE REPEATED NARRATIVES OF WAR AND OTHER VIOLENCE, FAMINE, COUPS AND DISASTERS? HOW CAN AFRICAN JOURNALISTS COVER THEIR OWN CONFLICTS MORE CONSTRUCTIVELY – WITHOUT BUYING TOTALLY INTO THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS VERSIONS OF WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THEIR OWN COUNTRIES, AT THE EXPENSE OF LOCAL COVERAGE? AND HOW CAN THEY MERELY SURVIVE THE PERSECUTION AND TRAUMA THAT COMES WITH THE TERRITORY?

Expanding our repertoire in covering conflict

Rob Manoff unpacks 'objective' journalism
and articulates a wide range of media roles
– moving beyond reiterated narratives of violence...

Messengers of morbidity

PHOTO: /REUTERS/AFRICA



Execution, Liberia. More than 30 wars have been waged in Africa since 1970. What has the media done to help?

Objectivity is in some sense both necessary and impossible. It is a 'vital illusion' – and perhaps even a tragic one.

Our century has been characterised by organised group violence on an extraordinary scale. In roughly 250 significant armed conflicts, more than 110 million people have been killed, and many times that number wounded, crippled and mutilated.

Much of the violence has happened on African soil. According to a report issued by U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, more than 30 wars have occurred in Africa since 1970. In 1996 alone, 26 percent of the continent's nations were engaged in armed conflict, and these African wars accounted for more than half of all casualties worldwide.

We have become so used to these numbers and the human suffering they represent

that it is easy to forget how much more violence we live with than did our ancestors, and how much more deadly it has become. Indeed, mass violence on a previously unimaginable scale has become universalised, industrialised and routinised. At this very moment, the escalation of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has caused the Horn of Africa to become the deadliest conflict cluster in the world. Yet we have become all too complacent about such facts, and all too often ignore such situations.

With this in mind, and for realpolitik, humanitarian and moral reasons, the international community has at last seriously begun to ask what more can be done to reduce and prevent such conflict and the suffering that attends it. The question is all

the more urgent in Africa, where widespread warfare has often prevented countries from converting their diversity into an asset for development.

For these reasons, it is critical that the international community begin to explore the potential of the media to prevent conflict. Taken together, the diverse mass media technologies, institutions, professionals, norms and practices constitute one of the most powerful forces now shaping the lives of individuals and the fate of peoples and nations. The media constitute a major human resource whose potential to help prevent and moderate social violence begs to be discussed, evaluated and, where appropriate, mobilised.

In asking what the media's preventive potential might be, much more than journalism must be on the table. In fact, in speaking about 'the media' I mean any and all mass media forms distributed to mass audiences by any technology whatsoever. The international community needs to understand and fully develop the potential of popular music; journalism; soap operas; advertising and public relations; T.V. and radio dramas and comedies; interactive video dialogues; talk shows and call-in shows; social marketing; wall posters; matchbooks; and the World Wide Web, among other mass media forms and formats. This focus on media content must be supplemented by the development of initiatives designed to explore the institutional dimension of the media by addressing professional codes and guidelines; government and multilateral policies; the interests of media personnel or the economic stakes of their employers; and the potential of training programmes and journalist and management exchanges.

Having said this, it must be admitted that in a number of countries no single issue has so bedeviled the discussion of media and conflict as the deeply held belief on the part of many journalists that the very idea of media-based preventive action violates the norm of 'objectivity' – whose corollary, disinterestedness with respect to the events being reported, is an essential element of the professional creed. There are more or less sophisticated variants of this creed, and 'nonpartisanship' or 'fairness' is sometimes substituted for 'objectivity' as the desirable norm. But whenever in recent years events such as the genocidal violence in Rwanda have provoked discussions concerning the role of the media, the conversation-stopper has been the passionate assertion by many journalists that such concerns lie beyond the pale of legitimate journalism.

Because this question so frequently becomes the fulcrum of debate for media and conflict issues in journalism settings, I would like to offer a small number of propositions that, I hope, may contribute to the clarification of such issues:

- It is important to stipulate that objectivity and related norms are fundamental core values in many journalism systems, and

that these norms are believed to be inviolable because they are essential to the profession's commitment to discovering and reporting the truth.

- Objectivity is, at the same time, an unobtainable ideal, as both philosophies of science and the post-modern emphasis on the genesis of narratives have made clear. A growing body of evidence points to the fact that there is an irreducible contingency in all accounts of the world (journalism's included) that belies the claim that they can, in fact, report 'the truth'.
- Objectivity is therefore in some sense both necessary and impossible. It is a 'vital illusion' – and perhaps even a tragic one. Objectivity is unobtainable, but the effort to achieve it is much of what gives the practice of journalism its social utility and sense of *noblesse oblige*.
- Yet 'objective' journalism may be faulted on the grounds that its epistemological strength as a truth-seeking technique is also the source of a fundamental moral weakness. For it is an article of faith for those who practice objectivity that they can neither intervene in events they are covering nor take responsibility for the consequences of their decision to abstain from doing so. Critics of this point of view make the case that the professional norms of journalism do not trump fundamental human moral obligations. To my knowledge, this argument has not been successfully refuted.
- Debates about media and conflict most often proceed without recognising that much of the world does not practice objectivity-based journalism, nor does it necessarily aspire to do so. While the rejection of objectivity in the name of 'The New World Information Order' or 'development journalism' has often in the past been a smokescreen for rationalising state control, it is nevertheless true that other forms of journalism possess excellent pedigrees and histories of accomplishment. Traditions of literary journalism, which emphasise a strong personal voice, or traditions of engagement, which express belief in the importance of defending the values and ambitions of communities (or even particular political parties or points of view), render the ideal of objectivity often irrelevant or undesirable to journalists operating within other cultures and media systems.
- Such journalists may have a point – or, again, they may not. We don't really know, inasmuch as the journalism profession as a whole has yet to carefully examine the nature of the epistemological foundations of its craft. To do so would be to ask whether objectivity-based journalism is an invention with universal validity, or whether it is a particularistic accomplishment which merely answers to the needs of particular societies or historical moments.
- Having raised this question, however, it must also be stipulated that no matter



how particularistic such journalism, in the end, might be determined to be, under no circumstances is propaganda a valid alternative to objective journalism, no matter how such propaganda may be rationalised.

- Objectivity-based journalism has proven to be an effective technique for seeking 'the truth' which human beings as a species so keenly need to understand. But objectivity may be only that: a particular technique, a time- and culture-bound solution to a species-wide compulsion.
- This should serve to remind us of the obvious point that journalism is a specific social practice that has a history, and that this history is one of unending social invention. Consider that only 100 years ago the interview – which today we

since, as already noted, journalism is a particular social practice whose principal tenets are both relatively recent and currently in flux. It does not seem unreasonable to imagine that the history of this profession will not be frozen in its present form. Indeed, the urgency of the task of preventing genocidal violence should shape the evolution of journalistic paradigms in ways that will make it possible for the profession to contribute to the prevention and resolution of conflict more effectively in the future.

I say this not as a representative of a humanitarian NGO, a multi-lateral assistance organisation or a victim of violence. I speak as a journalist, as someone who honours the profession's values and norms and who understands the way it serves its read-

extensive theoretical and practical foundation in the conflict resolution tradition, and each, we felt, opened up possibilities for media activity that could readily be imagined. The point was to identify the conflict-preventing functions that the media can perform, and then to develop media-based activities (as appropriate to diverse conflict circumstances, media technologies and media systems) by means of which such functions can be fulfilled. With this schema in mind, we began to develop an inventory of such roles.

We discovered that the media were in some cases already performing some of these roles as a by-product of what they do for purely journalistic reasons. In such cases, the question then becomes whether the media can more self-consciously and

• **Counteracting misperceptions:** Related to the confidence-building role above, journalists can come to see the misconceptions of the parties as a story in and of itself, and by reporting this story can encourage the parties to revise such views, moving closer to the prevention or resolution of a conflict in the process.

• **Analysing conflict:** This differs from conventional conflict reporting in that the media would self-consciously apply analytical frameworks derived from conflict resolution and related fields to systematically enhance the public's understanding of key aspects of the situation, as well as the dynamics of the efforts to manage it.

• **Deobjectifying the protagonists for each other:** Sophisticated journalism, by revealing peoples' complexity, can already do this, but the question is whether some of what journalists already do ad hoc can be developed into a systematic repertoire which they will be able to employ by virtue of an enhanced conception of journalism influenced by conflict-prevention considerations.

• **Identifying the interests underlying the issues:** This is standard conflict resolution practice, but it is surprising how infrequently journalists address this question in stories. As one media scholar has remarked, in the case of U.S. journalism, instead of answering "Why?" with a sophisticated analysis of underlying group interests, "Explanation in American journalism is a kind of long-distance mind reading in which the journalist elucidates the motives, intentions,

In **intervening** in a country in conflict, we need what advertising people call a '**good media mix**' in which journalism is but one of the constituent ingredients.

would consider the primordial journalistic act – was regarded as an unacceptable invasion of privacy, a mindless waste of good reportorial energy (and, by Europeans, a particularly American outrage). What is more, such taken-for-granted journalistic staples as the sports page, science journalism, investigative reporting and business journalism are all recent journalistic inventions that answered to the needs of a particular moment. In other words, in discussing media and conflict issues, it is important not to fall prey to an ahistorical essentialism that presumes that today's form of journalism is, or ought to be, tomorrow's.

- Last, in the final analysis, objectivity – and, indeed, journalism itself – is only one of the media tools available to local actors and the international community for conflict resolution purposes. There is ample evidence that objective, fair, accurate and timely journalism is an effective way to help prevent or manage conflicts. But at the same time there is compelling evidence that there are a wide variety of media-based strategies that have nothing whatsoever to do with journalism that may be strikingly effective in their turn. We need to recognise that in intervening in a country in conflict, we need what advertising people call a 'good media mix' in which journalism is but one of the constituent ingredients.

In light of the foregoing stipulations, when it comes to examining the potential function of journalism, it seems to me that we need to operate analytically on both the operational and the paradigmatic levels. At the operational level, we need to consider what can be done right now to prevent and resolve conflict through activities consistent with existing journalistic practices in each region of the world.

But even as we consider what more might be done at the operational level, I believe that it is also incumbent upon us to work on the paradigmatic level, in order to develop entirely new ways for journalism to participate in the prevention and resolution of conflict. By doing so we free ourselves of the fetters imposed by journalists' conceptions of what it may be now possible to do

ers and viewers every day in every corner of the globe. This is, in other words, a call from within the profession, and I am offering it in the knowledge that it will be considered unacceptable in many quarters, where the defense of journalism-as-it-is-practiced is motivated by an essentialist vision of the profession as somehow always remaining in the future what it has already become today. That view, I believe, is profoundly in error on both historical and moral grounds.

The **urgency** of preventing **genocidal violence** should shape the evolution of journalistic paradigms in ways that will make it possible for the profession to contribute to the **prevention** and **resolution** of conflict more effectively in the future.

Accordingly, we at the Center for War, Peace and the News Media have been asking ourselves if we could turn the usual question about media and conflict around. In lieu of asking, "What is possible for the media to do to prevent conflict?" we'd pose the question, "What does conflict resolution theory and practice tell us needs to be done to prevent conflict?" Instead of starting with the media's understanding of their own possibilities, as determined by current paradigms, we have decided to begin by establishing the desiderata for media action on the basis of the work of the negotiators, diplomats, Track Two practitioners and protagonists who have participated in the resolution of conflict, studied the process and/or developed a body of theory about it.

This shift of perspective makes it possible first and foremost to address the question of what conflict prevention and management require of the media. This is rather different from other discussions of media and conflict, which tend to accept at the outset what media professionals judge would be practical or possible according to the standards currently dominant in their fields.

When we began to examine conflict resolution theory and practice several years ago, we quickly identified a number of potential 'media roles' in conflict prevention that emerged from this literature and experience. Each one of these 'roles' has an

more completely take on the burden of preventing deadly conflict, whether within current paradigms or through the elaboration of new ones over the years to come.

In Africa we found that conflict resolution NGOs and, in some cases, international multi-lateral organisations had undertaken media initiatives that performed some of the roles. Among such projects have been the Video Dialogues projects coordinated by South Africa's Media Peace Centre in several townships; Radio Umwizero in

Burundi; Studio Ijambo, also in Burundi; Star Radio in Liberia; and perhaps a half-dozen other related initiatives. Meanwhile, as a small sample of the repertoire of potential journalistic roles that I believe the media can and must play in the future, let me offer the following:

POTENTIAL MEDIA ROLES IN CONFLICT PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

- **Channelling communication between parties:** The media not infrequently play this role ad hoc in domestic and international politics as it is; the point would be to heighten the appreciation and systematic performance of this dialogical role in the ethno-political context.
- **Educating:** Simply changing the information environment in which the parties operate can have a marked impact on the dynamics of conflict; it is particularly useful to promote appreciation of the complex factors impinging on the conflict situation, and to create appreciation of and tolerance for the negotiation process itself.
- **Confidence building:** Lack of trust between parties is a major factor contributing to conflict. The media can help to reduce suspicion through their reporting of contested issues, and increase trust through reporting of stories that suggest or illustrate that accommodation is possible.

purposes, and hidden agendas which guide individuals in their actions."¹

- **Providing emotional outlets:** Conflicts may escalate or explode in part because the parties have no adequate outlets for expression of their grievances. Conflict can be fought out in the media rather than in the streets. Already prone to report conflict, journalists could better serve their readers and viewers, as well as the cause of preventive diplomacy, by more fully understanding this role and perhaps pursuing it self-consciously.
- **Encouraging a balance of power:** This helps get parties to the negotiating table. A media report can weaken a stronger party or strengthen a weaker party in the eyes of public, thereby encouraging parties to negotiate when they otherwise might not have out of concern for the perception of their relative positions.
- **Framing and defining the conflict:** This is nothing but good journalism practiced on the right occasions. The media can help frame the issues and interests in such a way that they become more susceptible to management. The media can be particularly attentive to the concessions made by the parties, the common ground that exists between them, the solutions they have considered, and so on.
- **Face saving and consensus building:** Similarly, when, in the course of negotia-

to page 62 ►

how do you cover conflict when you don't have money, up-to-date equipment or transport to get you to the scene of the crime or even access to your own government and its thinking? Africa's journalists are a gung-ho crew, but for the most part their ability to report the vital matters of the day is hampered by historical disadvantages, and the overwhelming logistics of news gathering in a continent famous for its lack of infrastructure.

You could take it back as far as Henry Morton Stanley's famous foray, on behalf of the *New York Daily Herald*, to find Dr. Livingstone in 1871. News was being invented from the shores of the industrialised West, while the Africans on whose territory this news was happening were mere bystanders. How could the bemused porters

who carried Stanley across the uncharted continent imagine that this meeting with a tired old white man on the shores of Lake Tanganyika was of any importance? And yet that meeting became a news event that reverberated across the globe, and transformed the image of the Dark Continent forever.

Africa is still being reported in much the same way today. Heavily equipped mini-armies of European and American journalists swarm like flies to centres of conflict, bringing added chaos to already beleaguered regions. A famine in Ethiopia transforms the economy of Addis Ababa for the brief period that the story holds the interest of a Western readership. In the Ugandan capital of Kampala, the Equatorial Hotel experiences an unexpected revival of its faded colonial glory when the cream of the world press takes occupation to observe the rise and fall of Idi Amin from the safety of its colonnaded balcony. When the war leaves,

or the famine becomes another boring African disaster, the scribes and scribbettes of the West pull out, taking their computers, their fax machines, their hunting jackets and their 4x4s with them, riding high towards another foreign crisis.

South Africa, a relatively developed part of the continent, is no exception to the faddishness of the Western media. In the 1980s, South Africa's burning townships was the place to be. Today, although the issues are even more complex than they were 15 years ago, South Africa is barely newsworthy in the outside world.

Down here on the ground, meanwhile, Africa's journalists struggle to keep the issues of conflict alive for a homegrown readership. In South Africa, with its computerised newsrooms and rapid access to most parts of the sub-region, conflict reporting is relatively easy. The problem is deciding what constitutes conflict, and how we make

On a recent assignment taking him into the ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo – the former Zaire –



John Matshikiza brought back the sad reality

of structural constraints facing African journalists.

The question is: what to do about them?

A Reporter's Lament

The crazy logistics of war reporting in Africa

Kinshasa, former Zaire, August 1998. An angry mob drags the burned body of an alleged Tutsi rebel through the streets. When the graphic horror show subsides, is anyone still watching?

Photo: PETER ANDREWS/REUTERS





People in **Bukavu** are likely to have **relatives in Kinshasa**, and vice versa, but **neither side** will have **any idea** of how the other is **faring**.

the complicated issues behind the various conflicts in the region comprehensible – including our own. The government and its spokespersons go out of their way to keep us in the dark, sensitive about regional diplomacy and embarrassed about their own blind fumbblings as the new superpower on the block.

In other African countries, the problems are even deeper. African newsrooms remain poorly equipped. Television stations are almost comically inefficient. The bottom line is money. Pointing primitive cameras at their own reality, African journalists can do little more than relay to their audiences the bitter truth that they live in the Third World – evidenced by the poor quality of the images they are seeing on the T.V.

As a result, most African media rely on foreign news services to report their own conflicts. Access to information is difficult. Your own government is probably more likely to grant an interview to Robert Fisk than to journalists from its own back yard, because the local chaps might want to complicate the story with questions about internal human rights abuses, corruption scandals and lack of policy. The end result is a stand-off in which local journalists decide on a policy of self-censorship, in order to get Government House to say anything at all. The African audience remains baffled as to the course and causes of the conflict it is paying for with its hard-earned taxes.

The war in the Congo – the former Zaire – is a case in point.

I entered the Congo by road through the Rwandan border-post that leads directly into Bukavu, on the southeastern shores of Lake Kivu. Bukavu is the capital of the province of South Kivu. It is an important area, due to its proximity to the eastern borders where the Interahamwe rebel eruptions take place, and where pursuit and counter-pursuit by the Rwandan and Burundian armies occur as a result. There is a huge population of refugees and internally displaced communities, all depending on the protection of the Rwandan and Congolese military

garrison, and the civilian governor and his team, who report to the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD) leadership in Goma – the political grouping trying to unseat their former ally, Laurent Kabila.

Kinshasa, the Congolese capital, is far away, on the other side of the country. Although in most countries the daily news of the capital tends to dominate the national agenda, here it is not so. The only news out of Kinshasa is rumour and speculation. From Bukavu, Kinshasa could be as far away as Kosovo – with the difference that, thanks to the radio, Kosovo is more real than Kinshasa, with blow-by-blow accounts of its turmoil broadcast every hour on the hour from London, Paris and Johannesburg.

Bukavu and Kinshasa are effectively in two separate countries, with each half cen-

soring out information about the other as part of the war strategy. People in Bukavu are likely to have relatives in Kinshasa, and vice versa, but neither side will have any idea of how the other is faring.

Arriving in a new town, the journalist's instinct is to look out for likely sources of information. It struck me on my second day in Bukavu that a newspaper office or a news bureau would be a great place to hang out and discover what the trends might be in this confusing scenario of civil war.

My host, a representative of one of the dozens of international aid agencies that operate in the area, was surprised that I was even asking. No one had ever thought of the idea of a local news agency, and Bukavu is too unstable for an international agency to want to have a permanent presence. When an interesting flare-up occurs, Reuters, AFP, the BBC and a number of others will send in someone from Kigali or Nairobi, perhaps, to hang around on the terrace of the Orchid Hotel and see what they can glean from the odd expatriate who might still take their sundowners there.

This had, in fact, been the scenario just a week before I had arrived, following an incident in which an RCD official had been howled down and stoned by the people in the market area when he had ventured into Bukavu from Goma to hold a political rally. By the time the foreign journalists had arrived, the RCD leader had long retreated back to Goma, and there was nothing but a sullen silence reigning over Bukavu. Sullen silence, for all its eloquence about the level of popular feeling against the war, is not news. The foreign correspondents blew a few hundred dollars on the Orchid's inflated menu and left town.

A week later I arrived in Goma, at the northern end of Lake Kivu. Goma lies in the area of a number of active volcanoes. The last eruption took place in 1969. The town is built out of black volcanic rock, and there is a permanent whiff of sulphur in the air, as if the devil has just passed through, and might well be back at any moment.

At Goma, as at Bukavu, the ordinary people hang on every scrap of news that a traveller might bring regarding the course of the war and the possibility of the signing of a peace accord. Although I feel like a local, identifying with the plight of my fellow Africans, I have already attained the status of a foreign celebrity. I am known as 'le journaliste sud-africain'. In the absence of the BBC and the AFP, a South African journalist will do. I am not only expected to take down detailed information from every source who can get to me – politicians, taxi drivers, soldiers and fruit sellers – but am looked to as a source of hope. What is happening in Kinshasa? What is Kabila's next move? When will the South African army come and save us from all this nonsense?

People emerge out of nowhere to seek me out at the obscure hotel I have checked into. To be sure, I am one of only three guests in occupation in the 30-room establishment whose construction has been halted by the onset of the second war of liberation to hit the unsuspecting Congolese in the last few years. But how did all these people know that I was a journalist? And what difference can a journalist make, anyway?

The foreign journalist, of whatever colour, is the 'gringo'. The gringo comes with dollars, information, a tape recorder and Camel cigarettes – all precious commodities in the war zone. As the only foreign journalist in the area at the time, I was the only thing that was keeping the hotel alive. My usefulness as a bearer and taker of news was almost eclipsed by my new role as the sole support for a whole infrastructure of Congolese families, from the manager to the apprentice waiter. The manager was slightly more reticent about making me personally responsible for his woes than were the apprentice waiter and his immediate superior in the restaurant, but everybody found it hard to keep the whine of desperation out of their voices. Any tip was welcome.

It seemed that all this information I was being plied with, none of it very substantial, was a prelude to the real business at hand: a way of getting hold of some hard cash. I don't know how other journalists live with this oppressive responsibility for years at a time, from one theatre of desperation to another.

Whereas in Bukavu there appeared to be no journalists (apart from members of tiny NGOs working alongside aid agencies to provide some sort of information to their communities, along with medical and other support), in Goma I did catch a glimpse of the Congolese press. My key contact, a senior man in the RCD, phoned late in the afternoon to tell me that President Ilunga, the leader of the movement, would be giving a press conference on his arrival from a visit to the President of Gabon. I was to make my way to the Presidency, along the shores of the lake a few kilometres to the north, and be there promptly at 4:30.

He had not left me much time. The head waiter hailed a motorcycle taxi at the top of the road and I jumped on the back, notebook in hand, camera slung round my neck.

When we got to the Presidency, the slit-eyed soldiers knew nothing of any press con-



No one had ever thought of the idea of a local news agency, and Bukavu is too unstable for an international agency to want to have a permanent presence. When an interesting flare-up occurs, Reuters, AFP, the BBC and a number of others will send in someone from Kigali or Nairobi, perhaps, to hang around on the terrace of the Orchid Hotel and see what they can glean from the odd expatriate who might still take their sundowners there.



Refugees leaving the former Zaire, November 1996. Often those at the heart of the conflict, those suffering most, are least considered - "onlookers in the charade of war".

ference. They made it clear that I was not welcome. Fortunately, I had not sent the motorcyclist away. As I walked back to where he had posted himself at a safe distance from the military men, a voice hailed from inside the grounds of the Presidency. A young man in white trousers, a gaudy red shirt with an equally gaudy tie that didn't match, and cheap, gold-framed spectacles with plain glass rather than prescription lenses on his nose was rushing up to the guard house. This was the head of protocol, and he had just been advised that the Presidential press conference was on its way. The soldiers reluctantly let me through into the grounds of the Presidency.

I waited, along with the peculiar protocol officer, in the desperately kitsch reception room of what had once been General and Mrs. Mobutu's North Kivu palace. The building had been looted during the war of 1994, and only a couple of fake Chinese vases and porcelain statuettes survived. The protocol man and I sat staring past each other in the empty mausoleum.

After half an hour, my senior RCD man showed up, smiling broadly and clutching two cellphones - one for each of the net-

works that sporadically make communication possible in the eastern Congo. There had been a misunderstanding, he said. President Ilunga would not be coming to the Presidency, but would be giving the press conference at his private house. Would I please accompany him in his 4x4? So off we went, back across the volcanic town in search of an elusive press conference.

On the back porch of the President's residence, I finally came face to face with members of the Congolese press corps. There were four of them - one carrying a VHS video camera, one carrying a Nagra and two holding pieces of paper filled with handwritten questions. After another delay, with the sun almost gone, the President finally emerged. He had in his hand an identical list of questions, seemingly hand-written by the same blue ballpoint pen. This whole thing had obviously been very carefully set up.

I watched and listened as the President made a lengthy statement about his trip to brief President Bongo on the current situation. Then he invited the members of the press to ask questions. The two journalists with the pages in their hands took it in turn to read out questions to his excellency,

My usefulness as a bearer and taker of news was almost eclipsed by my new role as the sole support for a whole infrastructure of Congolese families.

speaking loudly in ornate French. The President replied with equally theatrical eloquence, referring to the pages in his hand to make sure that neither he nor his questioners were deviating from the carefully arranged scenario.

The President's bland statements, putting no new flesh on the bones of the story of the war, would go out on local television within a few hours. The only items from Kinshasa that would go out on the same channel that night would be bootlegged music videos. The sexy gyrations of the dancing girls of Kinshasa would be the only moment of excitement and insight into what was happening in the rest of the country for the citizens of eastern Congo.

When I arrived in Kisangani the next day, two pale young foreign journalists were already on the scene, smoking cigarettes on the balcony of the governor's offices as the Zambian and South African ministers negotiated with some of the warring factions inside. One was a Frenchman working for Agence France-Presse (AFP), the other a Croatian, reporting for Associated Press (AP).

"Croatia?" I said to the AP man. "Isn't that a case of 'out of the frying pan and into the fire'?" "It's a change," he replied, grinning in that war-crazy way that war correspondents have.

They had been sitting in Kisangani for five days. They would probably sit there for another five days, maybe a week or two weeks, on the off-chance that something might happen. This last weekend, although they hadn't seen much, there had been a confrontation between the Rwandan and Ugandan armies. Soldiers and civilians had been killed. Maybe there'd be more shooting in days to come. That was news. So they hung out, in this dead town where nothing much happens.

That night, as I sat in the company of some of the RCD people in a commandeered house on the outskirts of Kisangani, I watched them listen intently on portable short-wave radios to the AFP man's report on the day's events in the city. He was speaking for the benefit of his French audience, trying to make the banality of the day's happenings sound like exciting news. The RCD men were satisfied that he was giving the right kind of spin to their endeavours.

The AFP man was performing his heart out, via satellite phone, convincing his executives in Paris that his job continued to be worthwhile.

The RCD men, sitting in the same town, glued to his voice being beamed back to them by satellite from Paris, were satisfied that he was continuing to make their own jobs seem equally important to the outside world. "L'AFP," one said, "c'est la vérité" ("AFP is the truth").

Meanwhile, the people of the Congo, the heart of the conflict, sat it out, onlookers in the charade of war.

JOHN MATSHIKIZA is Associate Editor of the *Mail and Guardian*.

PHOTO: PETER ANDREWS/REUTERS

Where does one stand, as a journalist, in relation to conflict? Surely we all have different answers. The Media Peace Centre's **Hannes Siebert** and **Melissa Baumann** argue that journalists should locate themselves "on the border where conflict is most intense"...

on the borderline of conflict

Standing in the thick of it



On the frontline: One of the world's most violent conflicts rages on between Eritrea and Ethiopia – the next site of the Media Peace Centre's training.

- Who might care about the process?
- Who might be affected by either?
- Who might want to be perceived as having been involved?
- To whom are the people involved accountable?
- Whose authorisation might be necessary?
- Whose support is critical?
- Who might be able to sabotage the process?
- Who might prevent the implementation of an agreement?
- Are the parties worried about the short term or the long term?
- Are there concerns about violence, safety, reputation, precedent, services, jobs, intangibles?
- Listen to the solutions they propose and ask, "Why do you favour that?"
- As you probe for interests underlying bargaining positions, make it clear that you are not asking parties to announce concessions.
- Ask actors to describe their 'pie in the sky' ideal outcomes and their worst nightmares. Derive their interests from these scenarios.
- Speculate about things they might be interested in, worried about or afraid of. Ask them to correct your perceptions and add to them.

PHOTO: SAMI SALINEN/REUTERS

Dealing with Perceptions

Many journalists we know have never subscribed to the 'objectivity' doctrine promoted by the Western liberal model of journalism. 'Objectivity' goes out the window when one lives in a society, as most Africans do, where historically the media have offered many different versions of 'the truth'; 'objectivity' becomes just another mask for one of those many 'versions'.

Instead of reporting from 'the sidelines of conflict', as objectivity might suggest, we'd argue that to truly understand a conflict, and to report it fairly and in all its complexity, journalists must place themselves dead centre. We don't mean, necessarily, in the midst of the violence, but at the interface of conflict between the antagonists – where it may become clear what the conflict really means.

In order to do this, journalists have to intervene. We argue that they already do, whether they admit to doing so. We also suggest that journalism, like mediation, is, or should be, an ethical intervention – we are there to help the different parties manage, perhaps resolve, the conflict, and to support peace and justice. Why else are we journalists? To just provide titillating 'entertainment' to people miles away whose lives are not at stake?!

Over the past decade the Media Peace Centre has run workshops for journalists in South Africa and abroad on covering conflict more constructively. The Mediation Project for Journalists (MPJ) and related workshops draw from conflict resolution theory and skills, to equip journalists with better understanding of conflict and better tools to cover it. We are currently running

workshops across the continent for our "Strengthening African Media" project.

Training borrows from the theory and practice of various conflict resolution organisations around the world, including Harvard University's Conflict Management Group (CMG). Here are several of the CMG tools for covering conflict used in our workshops:

A Framework for Analysing Conflict

Interests

- Define the interests of the parties (needs, fears, hopes, goals/objectives)
- How are they dealing with their interests?
- Are they focusing only on demands and positions?
- Do they see interests as opposed/in conflict?
- Do they act as though it's an adversarial, zero-sum game?
- Do they see any common interests?

Options

- What options are under discussion, if any?
- Are the parties likely to develop options on their own?
- Are there options that might satisfy the parties' interests?

Alternatives

- What will the parties do to attain their goals if there is no negotiated or mediated settlement (if there is no agreed settlement)?
- What people or organisations might be able to affect the alternatives of the parties?

Criteria

- Are there applicable standards (locally or further afield) that bear on this case?

- How do the parties measure fairness in this case?
- Do they perceive each other as legitimate?
- Do they feel fairly treated?
- Is it a contest of wills? Threats? How are they using/discussing criteria?

Communication

- Are the parties able to communicate with each other?
- Has there been significant miscommunication?
- How have they communicated? Through what channels?
- How do they perceive each other? Is there significant misperception?
- Are there cultural differences that might account for communication problems?

Relationship

- How are the parties currently dealing with each other? Coercion? Understanding? Acceptance as people?
- How does the history of the parties affect how they currently deal with each other?
- What are the perceived power relationships?

Commitment

- Who are the relevant decision makers or opinion leaders?
- Do they, or anyone else, have the authority to make commitments on behalf of others?
- To what degree might they be able to commit?
- How durable might that commitment be?

Interest Analysis

Consider:

- Who might care about the outcome?

Conflicts often start, continue and escalate because of perceptions, or rather, misperceptions that different parties to the conflict hold of each other. It is critical for journalists to identify these perceptions and integrate them into the reporting process. Here is a simple tool to do so, whether in a workshop or adapted for interviews ('A' and 'B' are the antagonistic parties in a conflict; the text in each category is hypothetical, offered as example):

Partisan Perceptions

Important 'facts' that A sees as crucial

- 1) Our land was stolen
- 2) It is our right to get it back
- 3) Our ancestors hold claim to the land
- 4) No other land will substitute

How B sees the important 'facts' of A

- 1) Their land was lawfully appropriated
- 2) They have no rights to it now
- 3) The 'ancestors' are a feeble excuse to reclaim the land
- 4) Other 'better' land is more than adequate compensation

When this process is finished, the 'terms' are then reversed: Important 'facts' that B sees as crucial; How A sees the important 'facts' of B. Ideally one gets to the underlying assumptions, attitudes and belief systems which feed these perceptions, so that one can offer a deeper analysis of the conflict and even help facilitate its transformation.

HANNES SIEBERT and MELISSA BAUMANN are Co-Directors of the Media Peace Centre in Cape Town. mpc@iafrica.com

The power of participatory video

A participatory video project with Egyptian women is taking on controversial health care issues, with the women filming their own stories.

The women are gaining more presence in the community, and helping defuse potential social conflicts.

Project coordinator **Sara Stuart** reports:

made visible



Self-representation is profoundly linked with **self-determination**. As individuals and communities become self-determining, they gain a greater capacity to obtain social and economic justice. They develop the strength to demand that their governments and other authorities be responsive and responsible in their policies and decision making.

during the last three years Neama Mohamed, mother and housewife, has become a health educator, an outspoken advocate for girls and a leader in her community. Through her work she is helping to change the attitudes and actions of her neighbours with regard to literacy, girls' education, sanitation and female genital mutilation (FGM), a nearly universal practice in her Egyptian community. Once Neama would have hesitated to confront such issues; after gaining communication skills and learning to effectively use media tools, her confidence as a spokesperson has soared. At the same time she has earned the respect of her peers.

Neama lives in Tellal Zenhom, a slum in the southeastern section of Cairo. CEOSS, the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services, an Egyptian non-governmental organisation, has worked in Tellal Zenhom on a range of local development issues for over seven years. Neama became familiar with the organisation as a young mother; later, she was recruited to serve as a nutrition teacher for groups of women.

Then she agreed to lead New Horizons classes, which promote self-empowerment among adolescent girls through training in life skills, education and health. The classes covered a wide range of sensitive issues – from the basics of reproductive biology to sexually transmitted diseases, from breastfeeding to the harmful traditional practices of FGM and 'the virginity proof'. For many Egyptian girls living in villages and slums, adolescence is a time of increasing restrictions; education beyond the elementary level is deemed unnecessary. So these classes were particularly empowering in that context.

In February 1998, Neama and three other New Horizons leaders from Tellal Zenhom learned to use a home video camcorder and to make simple tapes (edited in-camera) about issues in their communities. The training was provided by Communication for Change as a part of the New Horizons project. This participatory video training was intended to strengthen the voice of women at the local level and to extend the reach of the New Horizons curriculum.

At first, the group was afraid to be seen carrying the camera in the streets and filming in their community. Although the community agreed to the video activity and the trainees were eager to learn, the support of their parents, husbands, fiancés and in-laws had to be reconfirmed on many occasions. As Neama and the others began to gain confidence in operating the camcorder and interviewing, they progressed from recording inside CEOSS's office and people's homes to shooting in the streets.

With each step they overcame fear and the capacity of the team grew. Within ten days they began showing their first tapes to members of the community. These tapes were about the importance of literacy, good nutrition and a local

woman who is doing exemplary service as a teacher of disabled children. These screenings allowed the team members to facilitate and lead discussions about the issues the tapes present. Various audiences included friends and family members, girls in the New Horizons classes, the project committee and groups that were more intimidating to the team members such as men and community leaders.

The team feels that its greatest achievement has been making a programme on female excision. It is significant that the team took up this issue only after honing their production abilities and gaining general community approbation for their work. Careful planning preceded shooting. There was consensus among team members that the perspective of a religious leader was absolutely necessary, as well as that of a doctor, so that religious views would complement the 'scientific' arguments against the practice.

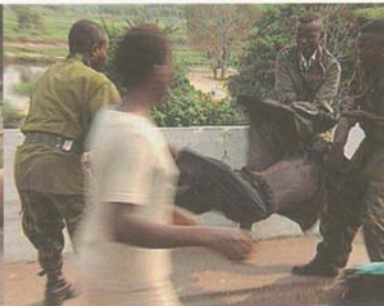
The Zenhom team members were anxious about the first showing of the tape, which was held among community women. Although some members of the audience expressed continued support for the practice, most recognised its detrimental effects; a few women indeed announced their intention to discontinue the practice. The tape has since been shown to diverse groups, including young girls, a wide range of men and local leaders. Both video team members and community members have expressed the feeling that the programme has helped to break the silence that once surrounded this topic.

In the 18 months following Neama's training, levels of participation in the Zenhom project have remained high. With a new visibility, team members have helped to break down stereotypical concepts of what women can and cannot do. Community members, the local council and officials are expressing support for the team's work, often suggesting ideas for video programmes. The video team's tapes are being used to spark discussion and promote the search for local solutions.

This experience demonstrates the power of media that is not 'mediated' by outside forces, but rather conceived and produced by individuals determined to depict their own reality and effect change. Self-representation is profoundly linked with self-determination. As individuals and communities become self-determining, they gain a greater capacity to obtain social and economic justice. They develop the strength to demand that their governments and other authorities be responsive and responsible in their policies and decision making. Clearly, participatory communication approaches can be powerful assets in achieving peaceful social change and participatory democracy.

SARA STUART is Director of Communication for Change in New York, an NGO doing participatory video training around the world.

Kinshasa, former Zaire, August 1998. The scenes Andrews chose not to shoot: "I feared for my life."



Out of sight

Many photographers and camerapersons covering violent conflict develop a dangerous bravado and illusion that the camera somehow protects them.

Reuters photographer
Peter Andrews shares
his survival instincts...

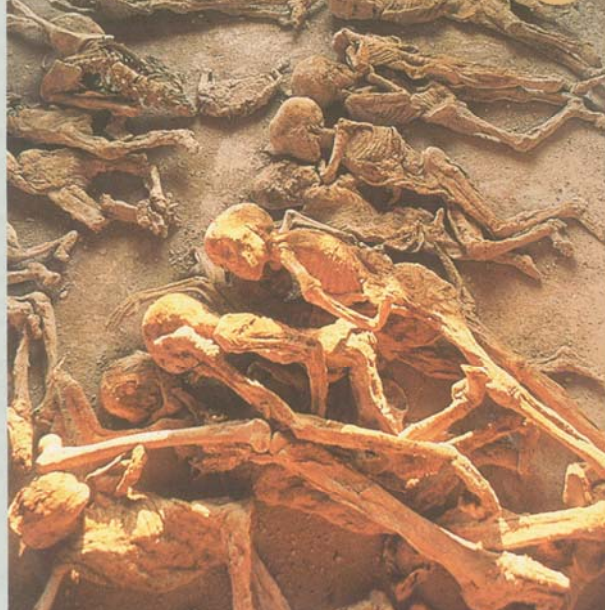
A photographer's story
of self-preservation

On the 27th of August last year rebels opposing President Laurent Kabila were advancing on Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The city had been tense for quite a few weeks and our work as journalists was becoming almost impossible. Reporters, cameramen and especially still photographers were constantly harassed by local soldiers, secret police and even the local population, who seemed to have totally accepted government propaganda calling every foreign newsperson an imperialist or spy.

It was especially bad for white journalists, who stuck out like sore thumbs in the midst of the turmoil. Reuters Television news cameraman Siphon Maseko and I were arrested and beaten up a few times and I even had my film confiscated personally by the Minister of Information himself, which seemed a bit ridiculous since the film was of small children carrying water. It seemed to me a clear indication that the situation in Kinshasa was deteriorating by the hour.

On the day of the rebels' advance towards the city, a Belgian journalist managed to arrange a trip with a military escort throughout the capital. There were four of us: the Belgian, a woman from Radio France International, Siphon and I. We had one soldier with us with an AK-47 assault rifle and a man who said he was the deputy military com-

witnessing



trauma

The communication of stress

During World War II doctors realised that people caught up in terrible violence could suffer from a barrage of images that kept on returning long after the events were over. They saw this not only among soldiers, but among priests, doctors and reporters who had been with those fighting the war. This after-attack of stress, anxiety and reliving the terrible events has come to be known in psychological terminology as 'post-traumatic stress syndrome' (PTSS).

Dr. Gordon Isaacs, of Cape Town's Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture, witnessed substantial evidence of this syndrome in his work with those testifying before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Isaacs says he has also seen journalists in this country suffering from PTSS.

People suffer trauma when they go through a life-threatening event. But often – and particularly in the case of journalists – an 'event' has a double nature: not only is one's own life in danger; one is often witnessing others in danger. Journalists, too, play a double role: not only do they witness danger; they convey it to millions when then them-

Journalists not only witness trauma such as this in Rwanda; themselves traumatised, they pass it on to their audiences in their reportage.



PHOTOS: SIPHON MASEKO/REUTERS

mander of Kinshasa, though he had a red cross on his uniform and no other military insignia.

First we went to the army barracks, where we picked up a further truckload of soldiers to bolster our escort. We had to hide our cameras all the time because the soldiers seemed to be in a volatile mood, apparently paranoid, drunk or possibly drugged. All of them walked with open uniforms, carrying their automatic weapons with up to five magazines taped to each other and all with a finger permanently on the trigger, something I have not seen in any other military conflict situation.

From the barracks, we went for a drive through the city streets. As we tried to film for the first time, we were confronted by other soldiers, who appeared not to believe that our commander was indeed a commander, or that we journalists were indeed journalists. They seemed keen to shoot us on the spot. After a heated discussion in which our commander apparently legitimised our identities, we were allowed to leave the scene, but without filming.

Five minutes later we came upon a mob of people run-

ning through the streets, dragging the body of a burned man who they said was a Tutsi rebel caught by the local population. At first the crowd seemed not to notice us, so we quickly took our pictures and film, but after a few minutes we could hear questions about who we were and why we were there and whether we should be allowed to record

While he was shooting, the camera

seemed to have shielded him from the reality of what he was seeing. He could have been easily shot and no one would have done anything to stop it.

another 'happy crowd' with another burned body, a member of the crowd came up to me and said: "I know where you live - Memling 106."

I was terrified. I was 45 minutes from the hotel and yet he knew my hotel and even my room number. We quickly stopped filming and left to return to the military base. That was when I noticed two soldiers trying to throw a struggling man over a bridge.

I shouted to Siphon, but it seemed dangerous to try to

film the scene. Siphon seemed to be able to work more easily with the black crowd. We stopped the car and Siphon stepped out and started filming. The two soldiers ignored us and carried on with their brutality. After they had thrown the man over the bridge, they leaned over the side and shot him in the water below as he tried to scramble ashore.

The three of us who were white were horrified. The commander with the red cross kept telling us: "Every Tutsi should die." As Siphon got back into the car he was shaking with fear and shock. But while he was shooting, the camera seemed to have shielded him from the reality of what he was seeing. He could have been easily shot and no one would have done anything to stop it.

I did not shoot the scene because I feared for my life. I have worked in Africa for three years, Sarajevo for two years and Russia for five, covering small and bigger wars, including Chechnya. I think I have developed an instinctive sense of danger and I trust that instinct to keep me out of trouble. I also had in my mind the image of Somalia and a crowd turning on four of my colleagues; three died. I simply stayed out of sight.

Hopefully my story will help you.

PETER ANDREWS works for Reuters out of Nairobi.

only experience post-traumatic stress syndrome – they often help spread it.

Anthea Garman spoke to



Dr. Gordon Isaacs
on how to cope...

selves become traumatised witnesses.

This might be why many South Africans turn away from crime as a media story and want to shut it out: they are too traumatised by its pervasiveness in society to cope with the reports as well. Even if they haven't been directly affected by a crime event they could be experiencing 'vicarious traumatisation'.

Isaacs points out – and again this experience relates to working with survivors of apartheid atrocities – that the act of giving testimony or reliving an experience may be as powerful psychologically as having gone through it in the first place. "Trauma resurrects the feelings and they are very powerful," he says.

It is vital that journalists working in high-intensity environments not only watch their own exposure to trauma but become aware of how they convey this to their audiences.

Isaacs recommends that journalists ask questions like:

- Why are we reporting this?
- What do we own around this?
- What kind of outcome is this going to produce?

He offers the following guidelines for dealing with PTSS:

Guidelines for dealing with PTSS:

Signs of post-traumatic stress:

- You feel guilty because you survived
- You block your emotions
- You feel helpless
- Your work is affected
- Your relationships are affected
- You suffer sleep disturbances
- You have nightmares
- You drink more alcohol than usual or start to rely on drugs
- You become aggressive and angry
- You take on more work
- You lose your idealism and start to despair about the violence and cruelty in society
- You lower your belief in the value of your work

The Trauma Centre for Survivors of Violence and Torture can be contacted at: tel 021-4657373; fax: 021-4623143. Dr. Gordon Isaacs is head of community mental health and counselling services. Email: gordon@trauma.org.za

How to cope:

- Know your own limits
- Talk to your colleagues
- Exercise
- Avoid abusing alcohol and drugs
- Draw boundaries around your work and put in place rituals of decompression
- Explore reasons to believe in your work
- Reaffirm your belief in life and find areas in which you can affirm this belief
- Revisit your past successes and rethink your goals
- Do relaxing and positive activities

Employers can help by offering:

- Logistical support
- Organised group debriefings
- Time off
- Acknowledgement of their work
- Rotation of assignments (so that you are not the only competent war specialist!)

ANTHEA GARMAN is Editor of the *Rhodes Journalism Review*.

Helge Ronning gives a tough critique

of 'disaster reporting' and the media-aid organisation partnership...

the Unholy Alliance

We've all seen pictures of a white nurse holding a starving black child in her arms, trying to feed it in the midst of other women and children desperately waiting to be fed, to be helped, to receive what may keep them alive one more day. With a tired smile the nurse turns to the camera and appeals for more support. The reporter then enters the picture and gives a harrowing description of the suffering, interspersed by images of death, famine, war and more death. The white nurse and white reporter are active, the black 'victims' are passive – objects of both charity and journalism.

Western relief workers in Third World disasters have become symbols of the fundamental decency of international aid and the work done by international non-governmental organisations (NGOs). They are often portrayed as modern-day saints, possessing an immense knowledge of what they are doing and of the areas in which they work. But the Northern relief workers get the coverage; local people doing most of the menial work – like burying the dead or disinfecting mass graves – and experiencing the suffering firsthand receive scant attention. They are portrayed as part of the suffering, the passive recipients of Northern charity.

The big charities are institutions that maintain sizeable bureaucracies. They have permanent staffs and operate as part of international networks which have to be maintained and financed. As cynical as it may sound, disasters are good for the NGO business – a key source of income generation. To put it misanthropically: there seems to be an increasing need for new crises to maintain the organisational levels and apparatus of the aid organisations.

The charitable NGOs are surrounded by such an aura of sanctity that to question their role is tantamount to sacrilege. This attitude, however, stifles analysis of how the money is being used and who benefits from what.

Since the end of the Cold War, international NGOs have become important policy makers in many of the crises-ridden parts of the world. When the superpowers pulled out the aid agencies went in. Their activities and interpretations have tended to shape the understanding of conflicts, offering international journalists 'access' to seemingly impenetrable and complex issues. The NGO analysis, in many cases, has become the accepted truth.

Often the only way for media personnel to get into the disaster areas is courtesy of the aid organisations. They travel on their planes, in their convoys and with their officials as guides and primary sources. The reporters get powerful stories, dramatic pictures. The NGOs get their message about the suffering through to millions of viewers and readers in the North, which again generates millions of dollars for the NGOs and their operations. This symbiotic relationship between the world's media and the international aid organisations is a serious threat to the principle of independent journalism and a critical challenge to fundamental journalistic ethics.



PHOTO: (REUTERS)/AFRICA

International media and the NGOs

The majority of foreign reporters covering Africa's crises know too little. They rely on each other and on what the aid workers and Northern diplomats tell them, rather than on the people who live and die in African societies.

in the midst of the suffering, and then they are lifted out with a story which is strong on human interest and emotional appeal but lacking in insight and context. Who are the players in the conflict? Who is responsible for what? What are the familiar patterns?

In all disasters, even those caused by nature, there is the politics and business of aid involved. But the majority of foreign reporters covering Africa's crises know too little. They rely on each other and on what the aid workers and Northern diplomats tell them, rather than on the people who live and die in African societies. It is not surprising, then, how remarkably few African journalists cover the continent for the international media.

This 'unholy alliance' amounts to competition between the aid organisations over prestige and size, and to journalists competing for the 'best' and most striking story, even though 'getting it' may cause increased suffering.

HELGE RONNING is a Professor with the Department of Media and Communication, University of Oslo, Norway. He has been a reporter working for various Norwegian media organisations. This article is adapted from a speech he gave at the recent "Reporting Africa" conference at the University of Cardiff, Wales.

Although many are well intentioned, many relief workers from the North steal the media limelight and become dubious 'authorities' on a given conflict.

REPRESENTING AFRICA

THE 'SOLDIER AND THE STARVING CHILD', TO BORROW FROM ONE PHOTOGRAPHER, IS THE PAIR OF IMAGES WIDELY CIRCULATED TO REPRESENT THE CONTINENT. AFRICANS ARE REGULARLY REDUCED TO PERPETRATORS AND VICTIMS, A DICHOTOMY WHICH FAILS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THEIR INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SPIRIT. THE CHALLENGE TO ALL OF US COVERING AFRICA IS TO ADDRESS ITS MANY PROBLEMS, BUT ALSO TO HOLD UP THE VALUES, EVENTS AND ENDEAVOURS THAT DRAW OR KEEP US HERE.



Countering the chronicles of

Inter Press Service's **Patricia Made** considers how to keep African development on the international media's agenda...

The notion of keeping Africa on the international media's agenda might sound odd to those who perceive that the media constantly focuses on African conflicts, coups and famines. A little less coverage, critics say, might help Africa shake its image of the 'lost continent'.

But during the Kosovo crisis in Europe, it became apparent that the media is not so enamoured of Africa's dilemmas anymore. Inter Press Service (IPS) journalists writing from Washington and New York during the Kosovo crisis interviewed media analysts who pointed to stark differences between the American media coverage of conflict in the former Yugoslavia and of other wars in

which the United States has been involved. The same media analysts also noted that during the time of Kosovo, there was a virtual silence in the coverage of wars in Africa.

When the bombing of Kosovo began on March 24 this year, an international media frenzy began. According to media analysts, Kosovo dominated U.S. television news more than any other story since 1991. But while the media was focused on Kosovo, the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea – in which about 50,000 ethnic Eritreans were expelled from Ethiopia – was largely ignored.

"No one cares about tens of thousands of people in Africa dying," Manning Marable, director of the Institute for Research in African-American Studies at New York's

Refugees are a favourite media subject, belying the widespread lack of genuine concern for the tens of thousands dying in Africa's wars. A contrasting image: people building homes in South Africa's Eastern Cape – "the story of development is still the most important media story to be told from Africa."

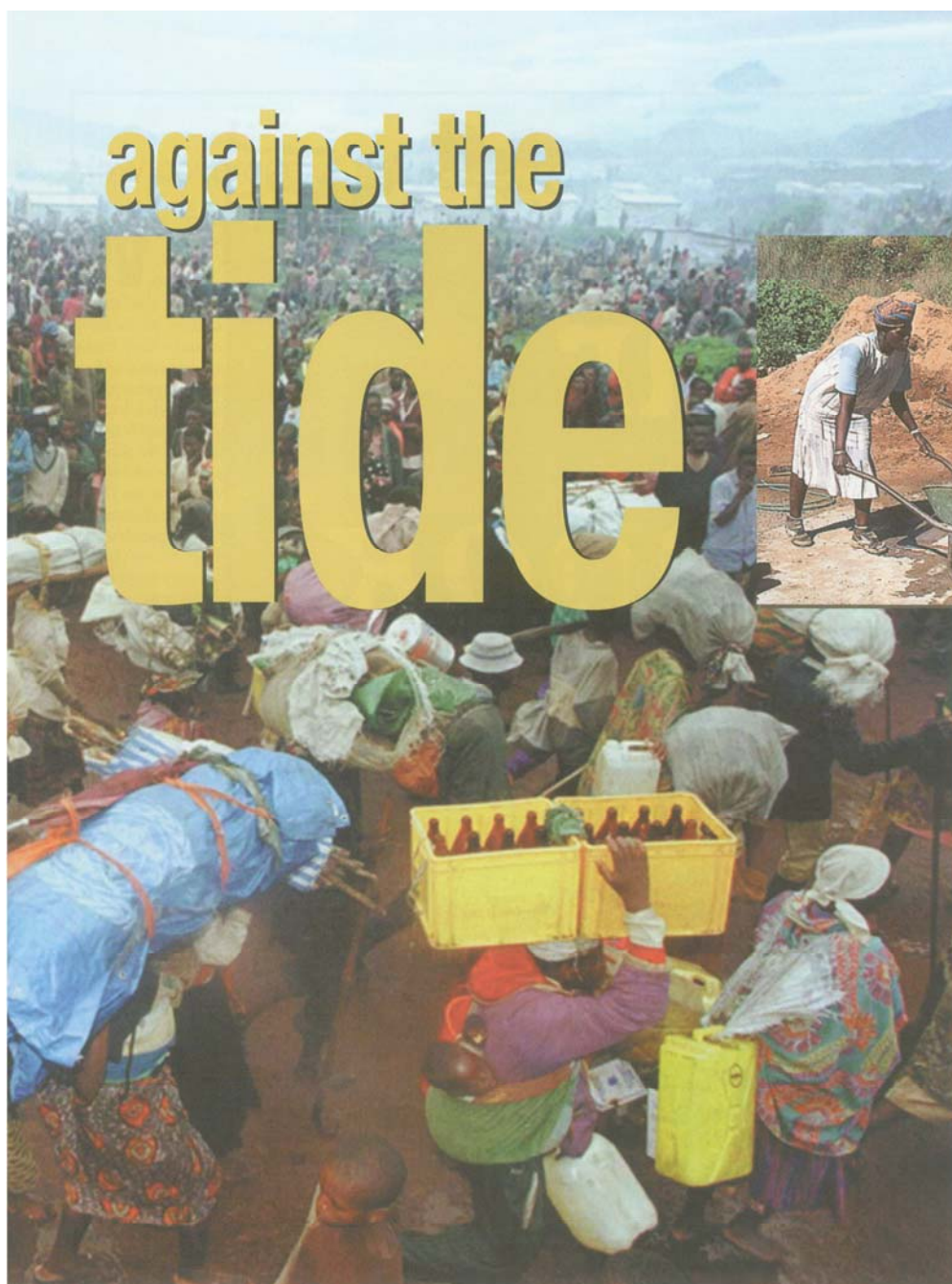


PHOTO: ERIC MILLER/AFRIKA

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFRIKA

against the tide

This is a tall order: to tell more urgently than ever the stories of people's development and aspirations when the world is much more attuned to issues of economic growth, prosperity, foreign investment, movement of capital, emerging markets and global trade.

Columbia University, told IPS journalists. The conflict in the Horn of Africa has barely been mentioned in the mainstream media. The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has directly involved at least seven African nations, "is still on the back pages" of Western newspapers, Marable added. Angola was also a lost story.

Inter Press Service has been trying to tell these 'lost stories' for more than 30 years now. It regards this mission even more important at a time when the world is being governed by a new political hegemony firmly rooted in the notions of winners and losers.

IPS is the world's leading alternative international information provider. It was established in 1964 by a cooperative of journalists who saw the need for an alternative to the Western-led news agenda that dominated the global media.

Today, the agency is an international not-for-profit association of journalists worldwide, with satellite communication links to 1,200 outlets. The agency holds Consultative Status Category I at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

IPS specialises in process-oriented reporting on global issues, and it has become a major information service with an innovative system for inter-cultural communication. The agency promotes a global communication strategy that aims to bring together civil society, policy makers at national and international level and the media. In addition to its main services in English and Spanish, news bulletins are produced in other languages, some of which include Bengali, Dutch, Finnish, French (Africa), German, Hindi, Kiswahili, Mandarin, Nepali, Norwegian, Sinhala, Swedish, Tamil, Thai and Urdu.

While 'globalisation' may be a relatively new term, some argue that the process began when the explorer Christopher Columbus set foot on North American territory in 1492. This planted the seeds of a process which today is moving at incredible speed and changing the political, economic and social fabric of countries worldwide.

IPS seeks to provide in the global information market products such as news features, analyses and expert commentaries on the events and global processes affecting the economic, social and political development of peoples and nations in the South. This is a tall order: to tell more urgently than ever the stories of people's development and aspirations when the world is much more attuned to issues of economic growth, prosperity, foreign investment, movement of capital, emerging markets and global trade. Yet with this growing divide between the 'haves' and the 'have nots', the story of 'development' is still the most important media story to be told from Africa.

STAYING CLASSIC AMIDST THE TRENDS

At a time when the media seems to be interested only in global politics and global economics, any information agency that still talks about 'development' appears to be out of fashion and out of step with the times. Bad news is still good news.

But in a set of training manuals on reporting on 'children and women' produced by the United Nations Children Fund with the Thompson Foundation, journalists are reminded that 'development' still provides a window to new angles and untold stories which capture the lives of people. These manuals define development journalism as: seeking "to report a country's progress and setbacks in both urban and rural areas in a factual and accessible way. It should create an information bridge between the authorities and the public, between urban and rural communities. Long-term, it aims to contribute to improvements in people's lifestyles."

For IPS staying true to the ideals and tenets of reporting development also has meant explaining what goes on in the world to its readers by increasing its editors' and journalists' capacities to analyse and contextualise the changes

How coverage of the Zairean civil war toed the policy lines of Western governments

War reporting is arguably one of journalism's most challenging genres. As pointed out by such veteran war journalists as John Pilger and Martha Gellhorn, contradictions between the journalistic practice of forthright reporting and the demands of national security make it difficult to decide which truth to seek out and tell.

The scenario becomes exceedingly complex if journalists are reporting on a war involving their own country: questions of nationalism and patriotism arise against the professional commitment to balanced reporting. Undoubtedly, patriotic reporting inhibits balanced reporting and may also induce silence, a clear manifestation of self-censorship.

All too often the media remain mute about, or minimise, the human costs of war. Even worse, the sacrifice of human rights during war or other armed conflict is often legitimised by the media, which in many cases serve as a mouthpiece or amplifier of government policy. The media, in some cases, legitimise the war itself.

Repeatedly the media glorify war, trivialise human suffering and produce heroes in situations where there are no winners. They latch onto simplistic, often static, conflict narratives which do not reflect war's complexities or mutations. They represent a war – usually on foreign soil, and often on Africa's – through a grid familiar at home, but alien and inappropriate to the conflict at hand. The coverage by two prominent international wire services of the former Zaire's civil war is a case in point.

Before looking at that coverage, let me offer some of the complexities of that conflict.

The storyline discernible in the early reporting of the crisis in Goma was the threat of continuing genocide. As the Rwandan genocide of 1994 was brought to an end by a Tutsi-led rebel army operating from Uganda, government forces and millions of Hutu civilians fled into eastern Zaire to escape retribution by the new regime. Once inside Zaire, the ousted Rwandese government forces regrouped and began launching cross-border incursions into Rwanda. They also conducted pogroms against the indigenous Zairean Tutsi – cousins of the Rwandan Tutsis who have lived in south-eastern Zaire for several centuries – using money and supplies siphoned off from the U.N.-sponsored refugee programme.

The attacks by Hutu *genocidaires* in early and mid-1996 were overtly aided by Mobutu Sese Seko's government, and the small Zairean Tutsi population – the Banyamulenge – found itself fighting for survival for a second time. The first offensive, launched by Mobutu's rubber-stamp Parliament, had stripped the Banyamulenge of Zairean citizenship and ordered them to leave the country, presumably for Rwanda or Burundi. The large-scale massacres by the *genocidaires* came soon after.

The Banyamulenge formed an alliance with pockets of rebels that had waged small on-off battles against the government troops for decades. A previously unknown Laurent Kabila led the new Alliance of Democratic Forces. The alliance's main objective was to protect the Banyamulenge from Mobutu's armies, resolve the refugee crisis, close the refugee camps to quash incursions by Hutu *genocidaires* and create a 'buffer state' along the eastern border.

Fast-forward for a different storyline: a power shift in Zaire's leadership and a reconfiguration of Western support. The alliance's popularity grew exponentially in late 1996 after the Tutsi-led Rwandan government began openly arming it. The alliance's objectives also broadened – to ousting Mobutu – after Zairean government forces failed to put up a fight. Suddenly, what had started as a low-key defence initiative by an insignificant minority metamorphosed into an ambitious offensive for national power. Within nine months, the rebel alliance was set to take Kinshasa after capturing large sections of the country. With

reporting for the West

In war and other conflict situations, journalists often shape their reportage to conform with the foreign



policies of their home countries, argues **Nixon Kariithi**. He uses wire service coverage of the war in the former Zaire to make his point...



PHOTO: REUTERS



PHOTO: HOWARD BURRITT/REUTERS
Shifts in Western loyalties were reflected in media coverage. Mobutu Sese Seko (left), once depicted as a stubborn but approachable leader, became a "systematic plunderer" as Laurent Kabila (right) gained the upper hand. Kabila himself, once slated as "a rebel" by the media, started being praised for his pragmatism.



Refugees fleeing the former Zaire, November 1996: agency correspondents generally failed to take the rebels to task on the refugees' fate as the civil war raged.

PHOTO: PETER ANDREWS/REUTERS

little chance for success, Mobutu fled the country and Kabila declared himself President on May 12, 1997. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was born.

Two of the world's largest wire agencies, Associated Press (AP) and Agence France Presse (AFP), filed more than 5,000 articles on the civil war between September 1996 when the Kabila alliance emerged and Mobutu's downfall in May 1997. There is little doubt that covering the Zairean conflict was one of their biggest assignments in Africa during that period: each agency deployed at least two dozen journalists, with some journalists reporting daily for up to three weeks. Between October and December 1996, the stories had far-flung international datelines as the world,

The sacrifice of human rights during war or other armed conflict is often legitimised by the media, which in many cases serve as a mouthpiece or amplifier of government policy.

ashamed by its failure to stop the Rwandan genocide, braced itself for another shocker from the African Great Lakes region.

In these three months alone, nearly 2,500 stories were moved by the two agencies, capturing debate in Europe and the United States about how to get involved without getting involved. Indeed, two-thirds of the articles filed in November were about the abortive U.N. intervention force that the West whipped out.

But when the idea of a Western-backed peacekeeping operation vaporised faster than it had appeared, the intense media spotlight on Zaire faded. The number of articles on the conflict moved by AP and AFP dropped sevenfold, and the datelines also constricted; stories filed over the ensuing five months were predominantly from the battlefield in eastern Zaire, or the capital city of Kinshasa from where the beleaguered Mobutu government mounted feeble propaganda initiatives. A third common dateline was the French chateau hillside where reporters kept vigil on Mobutu's deteriorating health. Datelines from Western capitals re-emerged as Kabila closed in on Kinshasa and increased marginally after the U.N. began investigating the fate of thousands of Hutu civilian refugees.

In November 1996, coverage shifted emphasis to the seeming inevitability of a Western-led intervention initiative to pre-

empt an imminent genocide or a disintegration of the state in the Great Lakes region. The reluctance of the G-7 countries to commit their troops or resources – for fear of a repeat of the embarrassing Somalia debacle in 1993 – was equated to the non-committal stance of African countries neighbouring the troubled region.

Eventually in early December, the amnesiac coverage settled down to the engagements between Kabila's rebel alliance and government forces. In a flash, the annihilation threat for hundreds of thousands of refugees – so real only a few weeks earlier – vanished. Stories from Goma and the outlying rural settlements, now consumed by serious combat, suggested that the UN-led intervention force was unnecessary since the refugees were voluntarily returning home. With the refugees out of sight, AP and AFP coverage focused on the rebel alliances and their ambition of ending Mobutu's three-decade rule.

Between December 1996 and February 1997, coverage highlighted the dire implications imminent in the failure of peace initiatives from the U.N. Security Council and several African countries led by South Africa. Kabila's terms for a cease-fire and his often unreasonable ultimatums were spelt out but hardly ever interrogated.

to page 62 ►



On weekends do sportsmen not think of sport?
Do musicians not think of music?
Do gardeners not think of gardening?
And artists not think of art?
So what then, do businesspeople think of
on weekends?



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How foreign correspondents shift between praise-singer and mudslinger

The task is big, so is the exposure. As a foreign correspondent in South Africa you are expected to assess the politics, the economy and the social development of a country as big as Britain, France and Germany together – and consequently present a fair and balanced picture. Most of us deal, moreover, with the neighbouring countries as well; many of us even write about the whole of sub-saharan Africa. What is done by dozens of colleagues in a local newspaper group has to be condensed into a one-man show in the office of a foreign correspondent.

Millions consume the foreign coverage produced by a limited number of people. Although not the main audience, the diplomatic corps and department of foreign affairs here are the parties most interested in – and sometimes most concerned about – the foreign correspondents' work. After all, they stand a lot to lose or gain from the way press coverage swings. Yet while reporting about a certain country or region of the world certainly has some influence on the decisions of overseas business leaders, it's a false assumption that major investment decisions depend on the goodwill of the foreign press. Apartheid South Africa was hammered daily in the foreign press, yet many countries like the United Kingdom decided not to propagate disinvestment, because according to the former ambassador to Pretoria, Sir Robin Renwick (today the Lord Renwick of Clifton), it is comparatively easy to drive a company out of Africa, and much more difficult to persuade it to return.

In South Africa there is an interesting difference in the government's interaction with the local press and its relations with the foreign press. Any harsh comment in a South

Covering South Africa fairly, argues **Werner Vogt**, means striking a balance between recognising both the country's "successes and failures". It also means addressing officials' perceptions of bad press, and waiting for them to answer the phone...

African newspaper is immediately countered by a letter to the editor by the minister in question or one of his key officials. Moreover, in the more than 1,000 days I have lived in this country I have witnessed several vitriolic attacks on the local media by the most important representatives of the state and its ruling party, up to the former President, Nelson Mandela.

It is thus surprising that the foreign press is hardly ever criticised by the same government. Yet surely the government or the African National Congress as a party does not agree with certain aspects of our judgment. Every now and then we do, however, discern a degree of dissatisfaction. Former Minister of Education and new ambassador to Berlin, Prof. Sibusiso Bengu, is quoted in *The Star* (September 2, 1999) as blaming the media for the – in his view – exaggerated focus on crime in the German business community.

I do not know what German language newspapers Mr. Bengu reads regularly but I challenge him to come up with evidence of his alleged exaggeration of the crime problem by the German language media. I read the most prestigious daily of the Bundesrepublik, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, on a daily basis – as do thousands of executives in Germany. There has certainly

not been any trace of disproportionate reporting on crime in South Africa in this publication. Mr. Bengu is obviously not aware of the fact that the South African subsidiaries of German companies cannot help touching on the crime question in their annual reporting. When, for instance, the entire stock of personal computers in a German company in Johannesburg is stolen not once but twice in a row, it will not go unnoticed in head office.

President Thabo Mbeki is more nimble in his language. During the Durban summit of the World Economic Forum and the Southern African Development Community, Mr. Mbeki mentioned problems with 'this communication thing', meaning the allegedly wrong overseas notions (allegedly gleaned from media reports) about the attractiveness of Southern Africa from an investment perspective. In November 1998 the then-Deputy President asked with an expression of bewilderment: "What in God's name have we done wrong to create these unfavourable perceptions about South Africa in Europe?"

I was not without empathy for Mr. Mbeki. He must have heard foreign complaints about the crime problem on scores of occasions. Yet the only realistic way forward for South Africa is to attack the real problems of this country rather than the

unfavourable comments about it. The best a foreign correspondent can do is to strike a balance between reports of success and reports of failure.

Coming back to the relationship between the South African government and the media, the picture is a varied one. Mainstream events like the Parliamentary briefing weeks in Cape Town or important state visits are well organised by the Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS). The same cannot be said about media relations officers and spokespeople of various ministries, including the Office of the President. While it is obvious that the President of any country does not have time to talk to all the journalists who would wish to interview him, it is equally clear that in his unofficial function as his country's chief marketing officer he should try and accommodate as many media contingents as he can. In requesting such an 'audience', even collectively, Foreign Correspondent Association representatives are usually confronted with one-way communication for months on end, whereby faxes are lost not only once but several times and potential reservations for big enough venues expire one after the other.

Endless fights against red tape are not likely to create a more favourable picture of the country. If the South African government is serious about marketing, about tackling 'the communication thing', key officials whose only task is to communicate should perhaps start returning phone calls.

WERNER VOGT is Chairman of the Foreign Correspondents' Association, South Africa.

beyond stereotype

Africa is much more than refugee hordes, famine victims, rebel armies in camouflage and fanatical despots. Yet often the international media reduces it, in words and pictures, to these identities. We asked several photographers who have made pictures around the continent to choose one of their photographs that somehow runs counter to popular African stereotypes. From their comments, all four photographers represented here are committed to showing Africa in all its complexity. One photographer questioned the nature of stereotype itself.

Africa's Catch 22

They say perception is reality. Certainly with regard to how the mainstream media internationally reports Africa, this is true. The general perceptions of Africa revolve around guns and starving children, revolution and corruption.

From many quarters in Africa these truisms and perceptions are being challenged and confronted. Fingers are being pointed at journalists and publications and accusations of tunnel vision, bias and racism thrown about.

One reality is that there is no shortage of horror stories from Africa, and the media would be at least negligent, at worst complicit, if they did not report these stories. It is the duty of the media to report them, and the responsibility of the media to highlight failures in social systems. It is also a reality that the media generally never have and probably never will reflect the broad range of social activity – they focus on aberration.

Another reality is that there is no shortage of journalists or publications writing about the many good and human stories that happen in Africa. For many '1st worlders' there is an abundance of positive stories from the continent which for the interested and open-minded can provide some balance to the negative stereotypes. These often appear not only in the mainstream press, but also in a variety of easily available progressive publications.

Over the last few years I have travelled

Images of Africa should reflect

both its horror and its inspiration, writes

photographer **Eric Miller**. Fortunately, a significant number of media

organisations want the pictures of drive and development, and not just despair...

extensively around Africa with a variety of correspondents for different West European and Scandinavian publications. We have covered the consequences of war and famine, but looking beyond these we have also found stories of human resilience, compassion and positivity.

In South Sudan last year, in two weeks of travelling through various areas under rebel control, I shot images of death and hunger in Bar el Ghazal province, as well as reconstruction and growth in Yei County. The latter area had earlier been liberated by SPLA rebels from government control. In Yei County we found a growing community focusing on rebuilding normal civil life – stable functioning markets, small businesses, developing agriculture. Several of these 'reconstruction' images were used recently in a major piece in a leading Danish newspaper highlighting the 'normalisation' of the region.

Colleagues of mine have recently reported on advances in countries like Burkina Faso, Eritrea, Uganda and Zimbabwe on women's issues such as female circumcision, following the Beijing Women's conference. Greater awareness and openness on issues like family planning and women's reproductive health care also received a boost in the aftermath of the Cairo Population Conference, and were reported quite widely by European media.

In Zimbabwe strides have been made with courts dealing with rape and abuse,

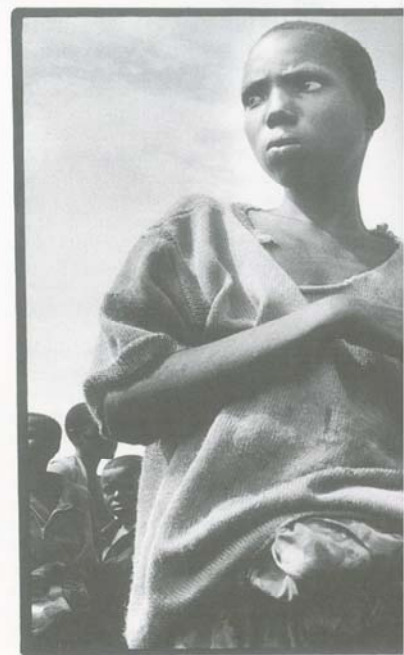
especially regarding children; in Nigeria democratisation inches forward and gains are made on human rights issues. Similarly, Tanzania moves forward towards democracy. These are stories that have been documented in words and pictures.

In many cases in Africa, people prosper despite the excesses and iniquities of their (often elitist) governments. They make much out of very limited resources and very often, despite perceptions to the contrary, often manifest the supportiveness and humanity embodied in their cultures in ways that have been lost to many First World communities.

A majority of the pictures I have published, both through my agency in South Africa and agencies I work with overseas, have reflected the demand in a wide range of publications for coverage of developmental issues and other aspects of African life, both traditional and transitional, which do not focus on the death and deprivation. Very often the guns and hunger images are used uncritically to reinforce preconceptions or promote partisan interest.

A strong example of this was a pre-election request in South Africa by the National Party for any image showing starving children in Africa. One wonders at the use they planned for such a picture. On this occasion, there were none available.

ERIC MILLER runs the i-Afrika photo agency in Cape Town.



We have a right, perhaps even a duty, to be interested and informed of events, whether banal or diabolical. And though there is no easy way of looking at suffering, stereotypes go a long way towards softening the blow, ultimately alienating the viewer through their relentless sameness.

Stereotypes do not ask questions of themselves, but present a view they expect to be corroborated. They are easily forged, simply understood. They are currency and are traded. An image presented as a *fait accompli*, legitimised as fact and form on your printed page, can, as stereotype, become an insult, with a presumption that you understand the reference and

May 1998, bush hospital, Katigiri, South Sudan. A hernia operation is in progress on a bamboo operating table. The two medics have been trained by foreign doctors to assist them in operations at a clinic in a village about a day's walk from their own.

These volunteer doctors travel on foot to assist their community by performing basic surgery. Hernia operations are common; many people suffer from hernias as a result of poor diet combined with strenuous physical labour.

The importance of the pic for me lies in the concern these two medics had for their community, the amount of effort they were willing to put into helping their community and how this is reflected in the nurses mopping their sweaty brows.

All this in a region that has suffered through one of the longest civil wars Africa has ever seen, as well as repeated famines.

—Eric Miller, Cape Town



Young boys in Guguletu township, Cape Town, enjoy the simple pleasure of play. Despite the harsh environment and other hardships, the enduring qualities this image celebrates are curiosity, ingenuity, resourcefulness and warmth of welcome. It is indicative of the positive nature and spirit of ordinary people in most of Africa.

—Orde Eliason, Link Picture Agency, London

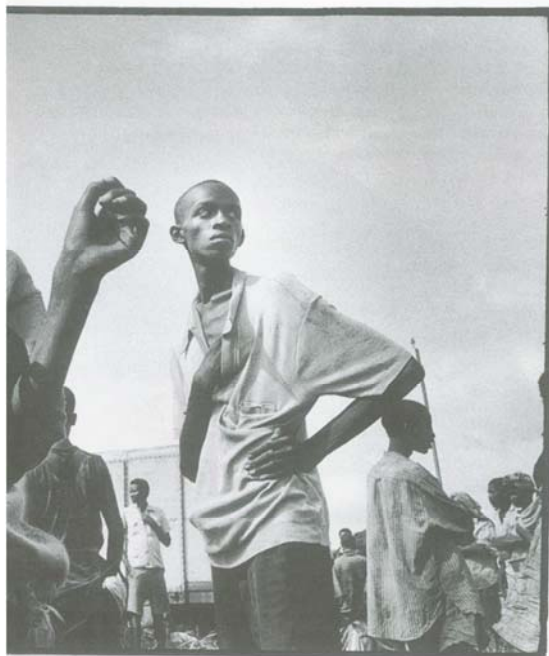
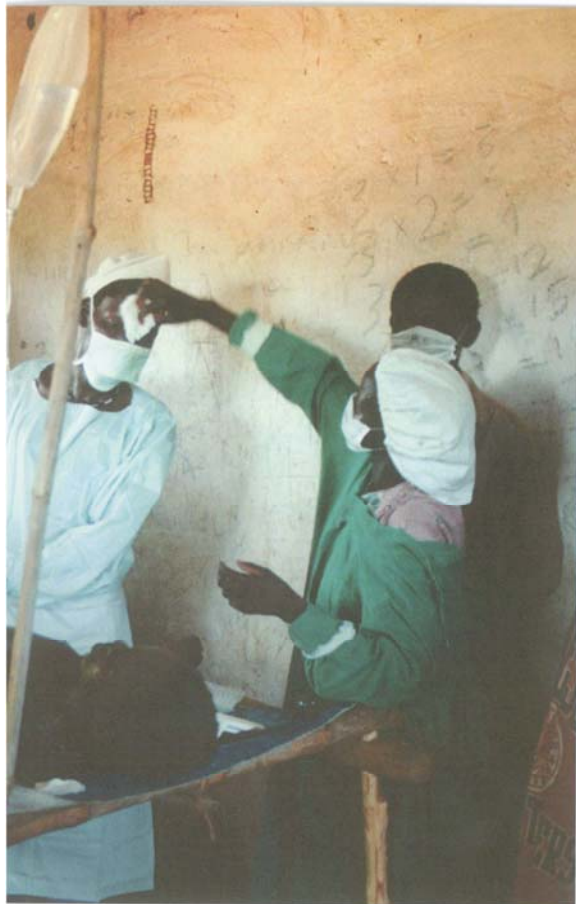


I was in Burkina Faso in January 1998, my first time in West Africa, to cover the African Cup of Nations soccer match. I was in a taxi driving to my hotel, and I saw this picture of this woman with the strawberries. I couldn't communicate with the driver, he spoke French, so I tickled his shoulder and he stopped. I jumped out and got the picture, and got back into the taxi. The driver smiled. It was nearly 45 degrees (centigrade).

I sent the photo to London and they sent it all over. What it says to me is how African people, even starving, work for a living by whatever means possible — particularly the women. All over Africa you find it is the women who work the hardest. This woman has a look of desperation, maybe for the responsibility she feels for her children.

These women are all over the place there. There are lots of strawberries, it's so hot, and they're not expensive. But you never see a man riding with strawberries on top of his head. They're too busy doing something else.

—Juda Ngwenya, Reuters, Johannesburg



are beguiled by its superficiality.

A stereotype places the viewer outside an experience or event, saying: "Look how different this is from your world." A non-stereotype does the opposite; it tries to say, "Look how much this is the same." A choice of stage, whether a music hall in Lagos or a Zairean jungle, is incidental. Photographers need to communicate, in a gesture, in a look, and all within the mysterious wiles of composition, what is common amongst us. The coining of a stereotype is not in the stage that is chosen, but the way in which what happens on it is shown.

Though most of us don't understand the deprivations shown in this scene from northeastern Zaire, a photographer should try to find within himself and illicit in the viewer an understanding of what is shown that is sympathetic, caring and fearless. This is a better way to challenge stereotypes, better than simply changing the focus and, inevitably, creating others.

—Guy Tillim, Cape Town

AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

WITH THE ADVENT OF THE NEXT CENTURY, THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY AND GLOBALISATION ON THE CONTINENT WILL BE INCREASINGLY DEBATED. THE INTERNET ALREADY HAS A STRONG PRESENCE HERE. DOES IT OFFER A POTENTIAL COUNTER-OFFENSIVE AGAINST GOVERNMENT SECRECY, OR IS ITS COMING JUST ANOTHER INVASION FROM THE WEST? THE TRUTH IS THAT THE INTERNET – AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF GLOBALISATION – CUT BOTH WAYS.

Creating a new mix of media messages

Globalisation Good and Bad



Globalisation is the phenomenon on everyone's lips. What is it, how does it connect to the media and what is it doing to us? Media studies lecturer **Larry Strelitz** sheds some light on the issue...

According to media critic Douglas Kellner, those of us in the industrialised world are increasingly living in a media culture, "in which images, sounds and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life ... providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities".

If globalisation can be described as having the following features:

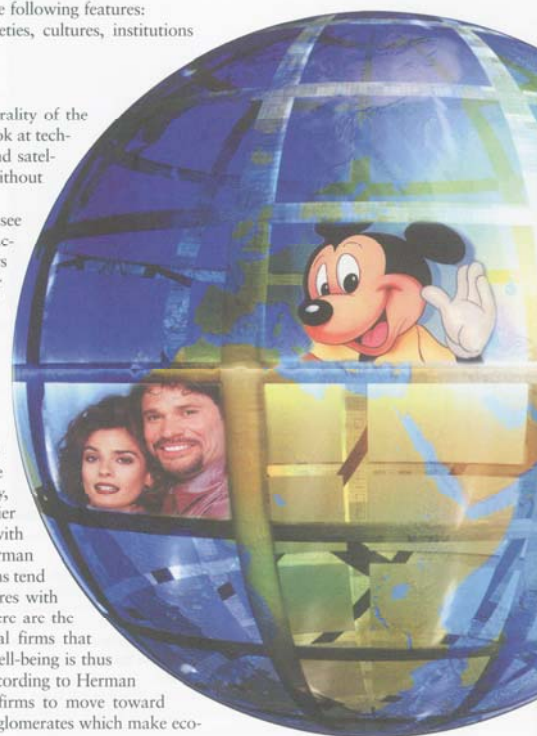
- the worldwide interconnection between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals
- the compression of time and space
- the loss of national sovereignty

then it is not difficult to appreciate the centrality of the media to these processes, especially when you look at technological developments such as digitalisation and satellite transmission. Globalisation is not possible without a particular kind of media environment.

What kind of environment? The one we see emerging increasingly across the world is characterised by the consolidation of media providers into the hands of an increasingly smaller number of transnational conglomerates. Media economists Herman and McChesney write about the "unprecedented wave of mergers and acquisitions among global media giants" in the 1990s and point out that there is a three-tiered global market.

In the first tier they identify ten huge vertically integrated media conglomerates with annual sales in the R100-250 billion range. These include News Corporation, Time Warner, Disney, Bertelsmann, Viacom and TCL. The second tier comprises approximately 36 large media firms with annual sales in the R20-100 billion range. Herman and McChesney point out that most of these firms tend to have working agreements and/or joint ventures with one or more of the first-tier giants. Finally, there are the thousands of relatively small national and local firms that provide services to the large firms and whose well-being is thus dependent on the choices of the large firms. According to Herman and McChesney, the market forces all media firms to move toward becoming large, global, vertically integrated conglomerates which make economic sense.

For these large, capitalist enterprises, economic considerations are the primary determi-



Globalisation 'bad': the homogenisation of culture and creation of a worldwide 'MacDonald's society'.
Globalisation 'good': a creative hybrid of indigenous and global cultures, reflected in the work of Nigeria's Nobel Prize writer, Wole Soyinka.

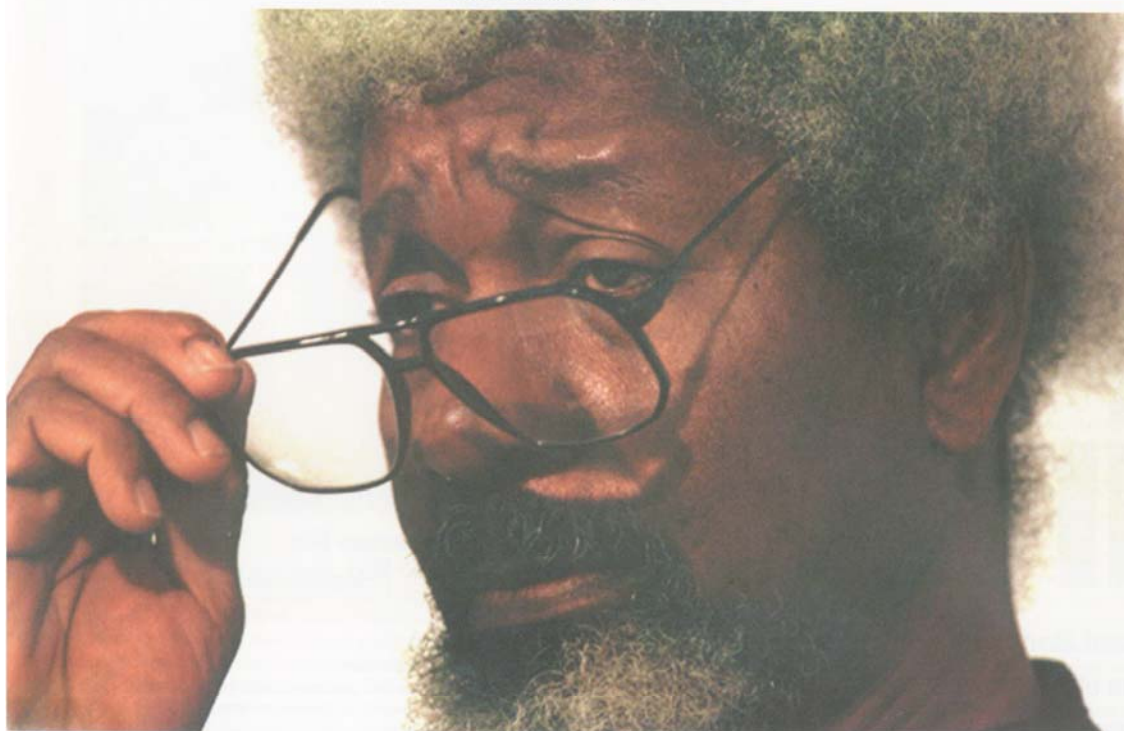


PHOTO: KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

nants in what meanings get produced and circulated on a global scale. The increasing monopolisation and commodification of culture by an increasingly smaller number of primarily Western media providers raises concern as to the nature of the images and meanings being globally circulated.

Cultural commentators debate endlessly whether the emergence of a 'global culture' – with the hallmarks of homogenisation and convergence – is obliterating local cultures, creating in its wake mirrors of American consumer society. Media theorist Cees Hamelink comments on this debate by saying: "... the impressive variety of the world's cultural systems is waning due to a process of 'cultural synchronisation' that is without historic precedent."

Although it is tempting to take a pessimistic view of the obliteration of African cultures in the inexorable wake of globalisation, it is too simple a take on what is actually going on. Hamelink belongs to a particular media theory tradition – that which believes in the 'cultural imperialism' thesis.

In criticising global domination these theorists see media operating within a single world market organised by the global imperatives of the American- and West European-controlled multinational corporations. Central to the process of economic domination is the role played by the communications-cultural corporations. The media products are largely determined by

the same market imperatives that govern the overall system's production of goods and services. Their role is not only informational, but also ideological in that they promote and develop popular support for the values and artefacts of the capitalist system. Says Herbert Schiller, one of the strongest proponents of this view, "Media-cultural imperialism is a subset of the general system of imperialism. It is not free-standing."

So if we return to the role media plays in helping people all over the world cope with globalisation and modernisation, Schiller argues that "it is the imagery and cultural perspectives of the ruling sector in the center that shape and structure consciousness throughout the system at large." The model this view puts forward is of weak receivers of the global message who are unable to withstand the cultural-ideological onslaught of the centre (primarily America).

Is this really what is happening? Are the images produced by the globalised media so powerful and pervasive that all cultural forms and expressions will become a mere mirror of the MacDonald's society?

Arguments which see indigenous cultures in the non-West as terribly vulnerable don't acknowledge that for centuries – before the project of globalisation swung into high gear – cultures have been encountering each other. A number of commentators point out that the current panic over American cultural imperialism tends to overlook the fact that the globalisation of communication is only the most recent of a series of cultural encounters, in many cases stretching back centuries, through which the values, beliefs and symbolic forms of different groups have been superimposed on one another. Thus, most forms of culture in the world today are,

to varying extents, hybrid cultures.

The concept of 'creolisation' is one that is currently used to refer to this process of cultural inter-penetration. Anthropologist Ulf Hannerz says: "Globalisation need not be a matter only of far-reaching or complete homogenisation; the increasing interconnectedness of the world also results in some cultural gain." The people on the receiving end of globalisation and its media do have a choice of what to accept – and very often they choose bits and pieces which they mix with their own forms and expressions.

Hannerz points out that there would not have been a Nigerian Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1986 if Wole Soyinka had not creatively drawn on both a cosmopolitan literary expertise and an imagination rooted in Nigerian mythology, and turned it into something unique. Another example is world music – influence and counter-influence make an eclectic new form of expression which is not Western and not indigenous.

There is also a political dimension to this choice by those on the receiving end of what to take and what to leave. Hannerz uses the example of Sophiatown in the 1950s and 1960s: "To the people of the township, a cosmopolitan esthetic thus became a form of local resistance. Accepting New York could be a way of rejecting Pretoria."

To simply stick to a thesis that says globalisation will obliterate local cultures is to ignore the complex, varied and contextually specific ways in which media messages are interpreted by socially located viewers and readers. In recent years media theorists, drawing on qualitative research techniques such as in-depth interviewing, ethnographic observation and so on, have started to probe how receivers make sense of global media.

The studies have often produced totally unexpected results.

In a well-known study of Dutch viewers of Dallas, Ien Ang discovered that contrary to expectations, it was not the capitalist values of conspicuous consumption and rugged individualism – so obviously woven into these programmes – that provided the points of identification and pleasure for the viewers. Rather, the attraction for Dutch viewers was the proof that even the super-rich have their problems. Furthermore, far from helping to buttress the status quo (a la America), some research has indicated that in patriarchal cultures, masculinist values can often be undermined by soap operas which portray strong women and emotionally open men as key characters. Recently one of my students admitted that he had been "dumped" by his lover because he was not "sensitive like the men in *The Bold and the Beautiful*"!

So does this mean that we should uncritically welcome into our local spaces global media images, sounds and stories? To give a categorical answer is not possible. Despite the fact that receivers of global media often decode messages in ways not intended by the makers, there are still messages sent out and received which espouse the values of consumerism, competition, individualism and so on.

Thus arguing for the power audiences have to use media messages as they will should not blind us to the fact that meanings generated and circulated by particular media can, and do, in specific contexts, help sustain relationships of domination and subordination. In Britain the homophobia of some of the tabloids has played a part in periodic bouts of gay bashing. In South Africa we need to ask to what extent the misogynous sentiments evident in much of gangsta rap and our own home-grown kwaito help naturalise those social values underpinning our high incidence of domestic violence and rape.

Furthermore, it is one thing to 're-make' the meanings on offer, while quite another to be offered radically different ways of understanding and making sense of the world. Where pressure to attract audiences to advertisers is increasingly the imperative for the commercial media, there is usually little desire to work outside of the ambit of whatever everyone already feels comfortable with and to present us with radically different ways of understanding and making sense of our world. As George Gerbner, the well-known American media theorist argues, "Competition for the largest possible audience at the least cost means striving for the broadest and most conventional appeals, blurring sharp conflicts...and presenting divergent or deviant images as mostly to be shunned, feared or suppressed."

The globalisation of media messages is a complex issue requiring much more debate and study. Meanwhile, we should resist making simplistic assumptions about either how good or bad its effects are.

LARRY STRELITZ is a Senior Lecturer in research methodology in Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies.

Africa online



Roland Stanbridge surveys some of the Internet initiatives across the continent...

Until quite recently African journalists had little opportunity to contact colleagues even in neighbouring countries, let alone elsewhere on the continent. Telephone calls and faxes between African states are still often routed via London or Paris, and are prohibitively expensive.

This is changing dramatically with African media organisations increasingly embracing the Internet. Several innovative collaborative projects are under way. A growing number of individual journalists or small freelance collectives are also benefitting from email communication, access to global information resources and being able to market their articles internationally.

RADIO ONLINE

One such project is a digital audio database established in 1998 and originally shared by privately owned radio stations in eight French-speaking African states. Most are in West Africa, but Madagascar is also a participant. The project now has a network of correspondents in 20 African countries, and nearly 100 private and public radio stations receive the programmes free.

While I was visiting one of the member stations, Radio Sud FM in Dakar, Senegal, audio contributions from the New York correspondent began arriving as compressed email attachments. "This works just fine," says Daouda Toumbou, an editor at Sud. "A four-minute contribution takes less than two minutes to arrive here. Within Africa, where there is often poor bandwidth and many technical problems, it is not always so straightforward. But we are succeeding. The members are contributing to the radio bank, and increasingly they exchange digital audio files among each other."

Toumbou says that using the Internet to store and exchange radio programmes is much faster and less expensive than mailing audio cassettes via postal systems, which were often damaged, lost, stolen or late in arriving. "Most importantly, radio stations are getting very positive feedback from listeners who feel enriched by the increasing amount of regional content."

The Bank of Radio Programmes is a collaborative project between the Panos Institute and OneWorld, and grew out of a call in the Dakar Declaration of 1997 for information technologies to be used to promote interaction between African radio stations. Project leader Johan Deflander, based at the Bamako, Mali office of Panos, says several of the stored African radio programmes are now being offered to any radio station in the world, through the use of Real Audio software at the website http://www.oneworld.org/panos_audio.

"The network's intention is to promote the decentralisation of production capacities and to ensure access to a large bank of programmes stored on this particular website," Deflander says. "The radio stations involved in the project graciously offer the best of their programmes on the website. This should hopefully enhance the role of private radio stations in French-speaking Africa."

"Radio today represents the most important means of information dissemination in large cities and rural regions. There is a particularly high number of stations on the continent, with more than 200 independent stations in West and Central Africa and about 100 in the Indian Ocean area."

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EAST

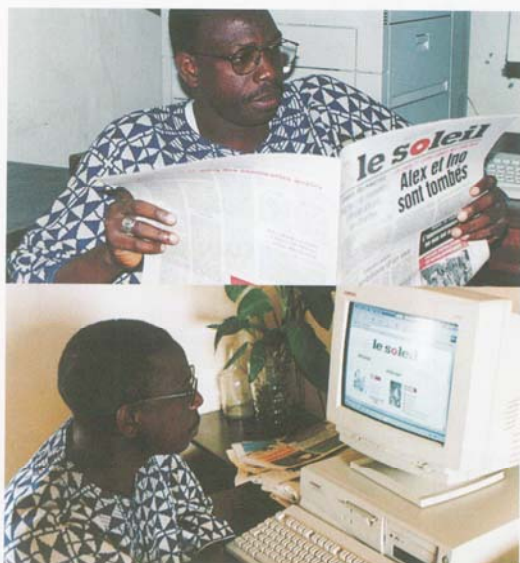
Africa Online in East Africa (www.africaonline.com) has taken yet another approach. It hosts several online newspapers at its site, presently from Swaziland, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Uganda, Ivory Coast and Ghana.

One plan the company has is to create an all-African media search engine. It is presently working on a search engine that will address those online media at its website.

Africa Online business manager Nosipho Nkiwane, based in Zimbabwe, says there are crippling obstacles in Africa to reaching desirable levels of Internet utilisation.

"Where African media do venture onto the Internet, it is more as a research tool for the journalists and a distribution mechanism for the newspaper companies," he says. "And certainly email has been important to journalists in overcoming censorship. But state control of telecommunications, poor infrastructure and exorbitant costs of related equipment such as computers present long-term obstacles to the development of the Internet as a mass medium in Africa."





M. Seydou Sissouma, editor of Senegal's *Le Soleil*, describes his paper's "global information strategy".

NEWSPAPER INTERNET EXCHANGES

Another growing West African project is an information exchange between newspapers in nine French-speaking states. The idea was the brainchild of M. Seydou Sissouma, editor of the influential government-owned Dakar daily, *Le Soleil*. "When *Le Soleil* went online in April last year – the first in Senegal – I quickly perceived the need for an Internet strategy, to reach audiences in Africa and globally, and to give my news team access to regional and global information resources," Sissouma says. "We actually needed a global information strategy."

"Before the development of online media here, Senegalese citizens living abroad were generally excluded from participating in important societal debates, which were confined within our borders. Now we find that debates are often sparked by comments from citizens elsewhere in the world," he says. "Being online is a big advantage in Africa, which is getting increasingly connected to the Internet. Now we can be read anywhere in French-speaking Africa, with no distribution costs, no postage costs."

Sissouma says that he soon perceived that *Le Soleil Online* had to differ from the print edition, addressing an African, rather than an exclusively Senegalese, audience. "We quickly began to realise the benefits of electronic interaction and collaboration, and set out to create an online network of Francophone journalists and media. Now we have ten newspapers and many other journalists collaborating. Our final aim is to collaborate all over French-speaking Africa. Presently we help each other with research, background information, useful contacts and so on."

"And we are reaping many benefits," he adds. "As an example, there was recently a brief report by the news agency Agence France Presse (AFP) that a judge had been killed in neighbouring Mali by members of a religious sect. There was no context, no details, no explanation. And we could learn no more from AFP."

"Liaising by email with media in Bamako, the capital of Mali, we were able to get court documents, tips about who to speak to, more details of the events, pictures and so on. This was obtained rapidly, cheaply and from credible sources. How could this have been possible before the Internet?"

A powerful new form of collaboration, Sissouma says, is for media in several countries to work simultaneously on the same issue. Then each has their own story, enriched with up-to-date contextual regional information.

"Our common website is presently under development, and will soon be launched on the net," he says. "There all members will continually contribute material. They will each bear legal responsibility for content they put on the site. It should quickly become an invaluable pool, and archive, of information about the region."

"I think these developments are quite frightening for governments. These initiatives will inevitably make it far more difficult for states to curb the free flow of information."

TAKING ON THE CONTINENT

Quite a different form of online collaboration has been initiated by Africa News Online (ANO – www.Africanews.com), an invaluable resource for keeping informed of developments across the continent. ANO began operating on the web in 1995 and has been growing steadily since.

Commenting on its rapid success, the London *Financial Times* wrote recently: "The idea is simple. African newspapers are invited to post a selection from their pages on the Africa News website, allowing worldwide electronic access to items that were formerly available only to local newspaper readers in Ghana, Kenya and elsewhere. The newspaper publishers receive a share of earnings calculated according to the number of their stories transmitted as daily news feeds to various organisations, as well as a share of revenue from advertising and royalties on the electronic pages."

All Africa News stories have links to the websites, if any, of the featured publications. About 200 stories are added to the site each day, coming from more than 40 African news organisations and another 20 international news sources.



CONNECTING SOUTHERN AFRICA

Down south the most famous example of Internet collaboration is the experience of MISA, the Media Institute of Southern Africa, established in the early 90s with a call for media plurality and diversity. Until 1994 the head office in Windhoek, Namibia communicated with members in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region by telephone and fax. Postal services were too slow and inefficient for MISA's needs. The organisation's telephone costs were exorbitant and it began to seek alternatives. Email, still a relatively new concept in Africa at the time, seemed the best possibility, although few newsrooms had computers and almost none had modems.

MISA found donor funding for a connectivity programme, still ongoing today. In spite of enormous impediments, such as poorly developed telecommunications infrastructure in some countries, through MISA an unprecedented communications network developed between media organisations throughout the SADC region.

Named MISANET (www.misanet.org), the network has now grown into the most comprehensive online source of southern African news and information. Today 20 newspapers and news agencies contribute to the MISANET News Service, which currently carries between 300 and 400 stories a week. As MISA continues to hook up more of its members to the Internet, so the number of news sources increases. Placed at the hub of this southern African news pool, the MISANET News Service provides subscribers with a unique perspective of events in one of the world's fast-emerging markets.

OTHER INTERNET ENTERPRISES

A growing number of African journalists are finding that they no longer have to join a major media organisation to ply their trade. The Internet has opened up many new opportunities for them. A small sample:

- In Uganda two years ago writer Wairagala Wakabi began Newsline, a local news agency using email only to interact with clients. He soon found markets both inside and outside of Africa.

- In Malawi journalist Raphael Tenthani, who has no computer of his own, uses a Blantyre CyberCafe to send his email copy. Through being wired in this way, he has become the local correspondent for the Pan African News Agency (PANA) and the BBC.

- In South Africa's rural Eastern Cape, Port Alfred-based journalist David MacGregor gave up his newsroom job to work at home, hoping that online interaction would open up opportunities. He and friends created @LiveWire Media (www.livewire.co.za), now a small cooperative of creative writers who sell their stories and photographs all over South Africa and elsewhere in the world. They send all pictures, audio files and texts via the Internet, and communicate with editors worldwide via email.

Although in Africa we may still be at the level of information cowpaths, rather than superhighways, the few examples given above show that the Internet is inevitably changing how the media work and opening new possibilities for interaction. This can only benefit democratic trends.

ROLAND STANBRIDGE is Director of the New Media Laboratory at Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies.

Confidence trick?

The pros and cons of the Internet in Africa



A group of African journalists debate whether the Internet is just a 'con', or if it really brings benefits to the continent...

Miriam Zimba (Zambia):

Africa needs the Internet. Africa jumped on the bandwagon realising how effective phones, T.V. and radios were for the dissemination of information. But while we appreciate telephones and faxes as a mode of communication, these tools are very expensive for most Africans. That is where the Internet comes in – it is cheaper.

Daliso Mwale (Zambia):

Africa does not need the Internet. The evolution of the Net was necessitated by the fact that the West, with its fears of the Cold War, wanted a system where data could be communicated at any point even if one point was done in. That was a typical military approach and it has not changed much.

With the coming of the Internet, it is no longer necessary for the West to have costly operatives in different countries. All they have to do is encourage the whole world to put their vital statistics on the Net, and access them without having to pay anyone. In that light, the Internet is a tool to propagate neo-colonialism.

Miriam Zimba:

Why don't we as Africans make an impact as well on the Internet, make our presence felt, and become information providers? If Africa participated fully on the Internet by putting up its own information, the West could end up embracing African values.

Frazer Mweemba (Zambia):

The reason Africa needs the Internet is not because the West is dictating to Africans what they should do. When you look at the African family, you'll find that there is a web type of communication. Let me cite an example from where I come from: I'm weTonga, and wherever I am in Zambia if I come across someone with a name heard in the area where I come from, I would be interested to find out more about that person. When I find out more about that person, I'll link him or her to somewhere where I come from. It is the same model as the Net.

Africa can use the Internet to do so many things. For instance, let us look at our universities in Africa which are deprived of materials and books. With the Internet, we can do all forms of research which before was difficult.

Daliso Mwale:

But the Internet is a system which dilutes human interaction. People just talk over the computer and do not meet face to face to put human feelings in what they agree to do.

Therefore, going back to our Africanness, our African values, the Net does not promote Africanness. I want to believe that Africa has potential to develop a parallel system of communication that is going to work for Africa without having to deal with the Internet.

Catherine Mwewa (Zambia):

At the level we've reached, the Internet is not a priority. We have a lot of vices we need to deal with before we can spend our small resources on the Internet just for the sake of communication. When we look at the way people are suffering in the rural areas, it would be unfair to import computers just to meet the standards of the West.

Furthermore, if you look at the Internet it's too Americanised. When you are doing research, when you are looking at information about Africa, you won't easily access it.

Frazer Mweemba:

The Information Revolution offers Africa a dramatic opportunity to leap ahead into the future, breaking out of decades of stagnation or decline. If African countries cannot surf this great wave of technological change, we may be crushed by it and become more economically stagnant than we are today.

Human rights and democracy also thrive on a good telecommunications infrastructure. If you go on the Internet, you find different organisations, different governments, parties trying to air themselves. UNITA, people whom we label as rebels, have a site on the Internet.

Raphael Tenthani (Malawi):

The Internet is not one of our priorities because its impact is negligible. The majority of those with access to the Internet in Africa are not actually Africans. In Malawi, of every 20 Internet users, roughly 15 are aid workers and people like them. So although the Internet has come to Africa, it has not necessarily benefitted Africans themselves.

Raphael Mweninguwe (Malawi):

The danger with this Internet animal is that it has brought some immoral behaviour amongst our cultures – spurred in part by Internet porno which is corrupting the minds of Africans.

What the West is doing is just creating employment for its citizens. Each time they come up with a new technology that is exported to Africa, they send their staff here.

Herbert Macha (Zambia):

It is very clear that a country with high levels of technology and communication is far more economically developed than one that is less advanced in communications. Let us look at communication as a tool for development. You may argue that only the elite would benefit – that is not true. The fact that the economic development can trickle down to the lowest levels is a benefit.

Jerome Ngitu (Tanzania):

We all know that information is power. He who has information has got power over others who have not. Since this technology is highly elitist, the elite will have this information which they will use to exploit the majority of the people.

Herbert Macha:

It's utopian to think that the Internet would be accessible to every African. But we should think about the multiplier effect that the Internet is going to have for Africa. The more people have access to this Internet, the more we will get information disseminated.

Miriam Zimba:

Africa's level of education is already low. By completely shutting out the Internet, the African won't have access to the outside world. In my language, we have a saying: "The child that never travels thinks that mum is the best cook." When you talk about retardation of African culture you must look back to where we've come from. With the advent of certain Western cultural values, we have done away with some of the archaic African cultures where women were being sold.

Catherine Mwewa:

The Internet can enhance democratic principles. In Zambia, the paper that was first to go onto the Internet was a privately owned newspaper. And what did the government do? They had to try to ensure that the state-owned newspapers were also on the Internet. African governments have not taken a pro-active role in promoting information technologies. But if they want to enhance democracy, they should go ahead and promote the Internet.

(This debate occurred as part of the Rhodes New Media Lab's Computer-Assisted Reporting Programme held in Grahamstown and organised by the Nordic-SADC Journalism Centre in Maputo.)

How the SABC is buying into bi-media

pooled resources



Snuki Zikalala describes the developing partnership between television and radio in the halls of the national broadcaster:

The largest news organisation in world – after the BBC and CCN – the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) would like to position itself as the world's most effective and credible news organisation. One way of doing that is the recent creation of a free-standing news division which integrates its radio and television news departments.

Until May this year the SABC had two separate news departments which were scooping each other. Radio didn't know what television was doing and vice versa. Radio and T.V. assignment editors were not talking to each other.

There was duplication in management structures. We had two managers dealing with finances and human resources. In the regions, we had two regional editors for radio and T.V. who never used to communicate.

With this new system – called 'Bi-Media' – in place, we hope to integrate all our news departments by the end of this year. Currently we have two newsrooms and six assignment editors housed in two different buildings.

We are planning to have a single newsgathering department, the engine of our news department. Both radio and T.V. assignment editors and journalists from both media will be co-located. We will have one planning session and one assignment desk for both radio and television.

Journalists will be required to file their stories with a central desk. This will ensure that all our 17 radio stations and 3 T.V. news channels have immediate access to hard copy and sound. We want to inform both radio and T.V. audiences about what is happening as it happens. At present radio and T.V. journalists often keep a breaking story around and broadcast it three days later. But with the competition out there, the name of the game is who gets it first on the air.

With the integration of our news department we will have a bigger newsgathering team, with a more efficient use of resources, better forward planning, a wider range of skills

and a wider range of information available to all journalists and producers.

We have made a lot of strides. Initially people feared that radio would be swallowed up by T.V. But the opposite has happened. Radio journalists are more enthusiastic and willing to go the extra mile.

During South Africa's June elections all our operations were Bi-Media. We were co-located in our temporary studios in Pretoria. We shared resources and manpower. What people heard on radio they saw immediately on T.V. Television journalists filed hard copy and radio journalists filed for T.V. In the process we strengthened the quality and credibility of our news. We improved our efficiency and productivity and our journalists were exposed to both media.

Concerns and tensions around Bi-Media, however, have been expressed. Some journalists feel that they will be forced to work harder and others fear that they will be overtaken by those who have just joined T.V. Unions are concerned about job losses. They fear that the integration will lead to downsizing. But they have been assured that people will be deployed.

We have started courses on Bi-Media. Journalists from radio are being taught how to write to picture and those from T.V. how to write to sound. Our journalists will be multi-skilled. With digital technology available to them, they will be able to edit their own stories for both radio and television.

It is a challenge for all our news journalists: to achieve faster reactions from television and radio news bulletins in order to beat the global and local competition; to maximise the use of SABC specialists to improve the quality of information; to further train to ensure better quality reporting; to generally give our viewers and listeners better service.

SNUKI ZIKALALA is Executive Editor of SABC News.

With the integration of our news department we will have a bigger newsgathering team, with a more efficient use of resources, better forward planning, a wider range of skills and a wider range of information available to all journalists and producers.

the Lying lens

Don't blame the camera



Digital technology is rattling the credibility cage of news photography. The talk is of dangers deriving from 'digital manipulation'. But what counts as 'manipulation', and how exactly does it damage credibility?

Angie Lazaro surveys the field of South African photojournalism:

The public's reliance on news photographs as a vital component in newspaper reporting is central to the question of journalistic credibility. For years newphotos have served as visual confirmation of the truth and accuracy of newspaper reports. But today the controversial use of digital image technology threatens to change this historic relationship between picture and paper.

The majority of South African photojournalists working for daily newspapers agree that news photography's credibility is at risk. This is according to the views of a quarter of the estimated 100 photojournalists in the country who responded to a study late last year. There is an interesting theory embedded in their responses and their reasoning behind the dangers of digital manipulation.

News photographs have never been pure unadulterated representations of reality. Manual photographic techniques have been in evidence since the origin of photography, and only in recent years have they been supplemented (and surpassed) by digital technology. Framing, focus, depth-of-field, shutter-speed, lenses, film, lighting and other devices have always been used to make specific photographic meanings; techniques such as burning, dodging, colour enhancement and cropping have been traditionally accepted. What's new now is simply that this can all be done much faster – and more invisibly – with digital programmes such as Photoshop.

But if making, adding or changing meanings in news photographs is not something new, why the fuss caused by 'digital manipulation'? Clearly, it cannot be the operation as such, nor the use of new technology, that raises the spectre of 'manipulation' and damage to credibility.

The apparent cause for alarm lies in two complex criteria that photojournalists use to call 'foul': the realism of the image, and the traditional techniques used in its making. South African photojournalists operate intuitively with these two criteria to define manipulation. They work with rules, or what theorists call 'codes', of what is realistic, and rules or codes of what is normatively acceptable in photographic production.

Their responses show that a photograph appears credible if it fits the familiar recognitions of how news photographs are represented (codes of realism). That is, if the image incorporates 'natural' and 'normal' concepts (naturalism). The realism codes of a photograph also include 'intertextuality' elements such as the accompanying caption and news story which contribute to its credibility.

Thus, if the photograph complies with realism codes it is



Did Time darken its cover, or did Newsweek lighten theirs?

accepted as credible – but only up to a point. When the reader discovers that the photograph deviates from the accepted codes of production, things change – according to the photojournalists surveyed.

Production codes pertain to all the stages of the photographic process. There are standard ways of making meanings which are acceptable within the realm of news photography. Techniques such as retouching, bleaching, producing print composites and deleting or moving elements in a photograph are perceived as changing the denoted meaning and thus deviating from the accepted codes of production. Other normally accepted techniques (e.g., burning) can also be branded as illegitimate if they change the codes of realism in the resulting image.

If a photograph is recognised as deviating from the accepted codes of production, its credibility may be questioned. Thus the increasing power of photographic technology can lead to increasing cases of production codes being crossed.

According to these South African photojournalists, then, for a news photograph to count as credible and non-manipulated it must meet two distinct conditions: it must be both realistic and the product of accepted practices. It is not enough that the product looks 'okay' if the process behind it was not. Nor is a newphoto credible if the production process is 'okay' but the resulting image contradicts the codes of what we take as realistic.

What can be done to rescue newphoto credibility when the seamless character of digital technology means that no

one can easily tell if production codes have been broken? South African photojournalists are uncertain as to whether a caption explaining the changes would enhance or jeopardise credibility. They mostly prefer to avoid any 'manipulation' of news photographs in the first instance. But some suggested that a category system identifying an illustration or news photograph as manipulated could enhance credibility.

The survey also revealed that the credibility of a newphoto depends partly on source authority codes, such as the publication in which it appears. The two case studies used in the research, (including the O.J. Simpson images, left) illustrate the differences between a news photograph appearing in a newspaper and a news photograph appearing on the cover of a magazine. Manipulated newspaper photographs are more at risk of losing their credibility than a newphoto on the cover of a magazine. A third of the photojournalists said that the public expects magazines to manipulate their covers and the breaking of codes is therefore more acceptable.

Capturing images digitally – or making digital changes on news photographs – does not imply manipulation *per se*. Manipulation occurs only if those changes contradict accepted codes of realism and/or production. Manipulation is not so much about the techniques or the technology used, but rather the way that technology relates to the codes of photographic representation. It is the act of deviating from these codes that impacts on credibility.

This model of photographic representation, based on the codes of realism and production, shows that credibility is always constructed, and is not something intrinsic to photojournalism, old or new. What complicates things today is that photographic digital retouching is more sophisticated than its manual predecessor. It not only provides clean, 'realistic' representations; it also allows the invention of photo-realistic images – in other words it goes beyond changing photographically captured images.

The implicit theory of credibility and manipulation held by South African photojournalists is thus only a starting point. It will probably be remoulded as the dynamics of photographic production and representation continue to shift.

ANGELIQUE LAZARO completed her MA in Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University in 1999. She works as a freelance photographer and designer in Pretoria.

Secrecy

◀ from page 7

duce accurate and balanced journalism for the benefit of the public.

A state which moves against journalists on allegations of breaching military secrets encourages the belief that there is something to hide, creating a credibility gap with the public and tensions with journalists and the media as an institution. As the Zimbabwean and Zambian governments learnt earlier this year, after arresting journalists on allegations of breach of military matters/secrets, such action brings about a torrent of international criticism which impacts on the international standing of the country. It also affects the country's ability to enjoy the confidence and levels of support that nations which respect human rights and observe the rule of law enjoy. Once action is taken using laws which are archaic and infringe on human rights, the question becomes not whether the government is correct in taking action against breaches of existing laws, but a broader issue of low standards of governance.

For the general public a confrontation between journalists and public officials can be confusing, contributing to lack of trust in public institutions. The ramifications for using Official Secrets Acts therefore far outweigh their efficacy, if any, in modern contexts. In short, in contexts where there is no Freedom of Information but Official Secrets Acts there is no winner.

Landscape

◀ from page 9

On the civil side, the law of defamation continues to present a daunting challenge to the media in the region. Several newspapers have been forced to shut down after large libel awards were given against them. What is disturbing is the failure of our legal systems to recognise the distinction between private individuals and public figures when it comes to liability and damages in libel cases against the press. It is now widely recognised – since the 1964 U.S. Supreme Court decision of *New York Times vs. Sullivan* – that public figures should not be entitled to damages for libel in the absence of malice. The rationale is that it is not in the public interest for the threat of libel proceedings to discourage open debate on the conduct of public affairs. And yet the wisdom of *Sullivan* seems to have largely escaped the courts in the region, where offended public figures are awarded huge damages at the expense not only of individual newspapers, but of press freedom at large.

Zambian courts came close to recognising the importance of *Sullivan* in 1995 in *Sata vs. Post Newspapers Ltd.* & Another when the High Court held that public figures must be open to the most searching criticism of their official acts and must accept factual errors reasonably made in the course of such criticism. But then the court went on to say that only the public conduct of public figures was to be protected by the defence of fair comment, pointing out that it remained illegitimate to attack the private

A balance needs to be struck which will enhance the standing of public institutions and protect the interests of society. This balance necessitates the abolition of Official Secrets Acts in favour of Freedom of Information Acts. Freedom of Information Acts can have provisions which protect sensitive information from being placed in the public domain. However, such provisions must not deviate from the principle of openness. Mechanisms must be worked out so that it can be verified that particular information is sensitive, or which aspects of such information are sensitive. We must rectify the situation where information is declared secret and so unavailable to the local media because it allegedly endangers national security, yet it remains available to media from 'enemy' countries. Besides, in the modern context of global media such information becomes available locally anywhere.

Public officials and agencies must prove that information needs to be kept out of the public domain and not the other way round. The principle must always be one that recognises that openness and access to information is a right not only for the media but for the public at large. Only in extraordinary situations should the principle of open access be curtailed, and even then the parameters, processes and duration for doing so must be protected from abuse.

A system which adjudicates access to information needs to be easily accessible itself and must work expeditiously so that decisions are not reached when the matter has become academic. Media work on dead-

lines because of the perishability of news, so access to information for journalists wishing to publish breaking news needs to recognise news routines and processes. Secondly, in relation to ordinary citizens or groups the mechanism for adjudicating disputes over access to information must not be so cumbersome and expensive that it acts as a deterrent. If access to information is a right, it must be a right that can actually be exercised and enjoyed.

Once such a system is in place journalists – in the interests of responsible, informative journalism – must adhere to the system or face the legal and professional consequences of publishing information that is legally protected. Because of ongoing social change and technological developments, any mechanism which limits access to information for specific reasons in a given context and for a specified duration needs constant review. If enacted without excluding key institutions like the executive branch of Cabinet and without bowing to claims from corporate organisations about the need to keep secrets for commercial reasons, South Africa's Open Democracy Act could be a place to start – a model to help set standards of freedom of information and access to information that the continent so urgently needs to adopt.

TAWANA KUPE is a Lecturer in media studies in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

behaviour of public officials. In practice, that distinction is not always easy to make.

The South African Supreme Court has also recently loosened the noose around the media in defamation cases when, in *National Media Ltd & Others vs. Bogoshi*, it rejected the traditional doctrine of strict liability for media defendants and introduced the availability of a defence of absence of fault. But the Zambian and South African cases are exceptions to an otherwise hostile regime of defamation laws throughout the region which are in urgent need of reform.

NEW FORMS OF CENSORSHIP

A relatively new threat to media freedom comes in the pervasive attempts by governments to muzzle the press by introducing media council legislation which seeks to register journalists, set up government-appointed media councils and establish harsh disciplinary measures against journalists who fall foul of such laws. In the last two years there have been attempts to introduce such legislation in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana and Swaziland. The Ugandan law is already in the statute book despite being blatantly unconstitutional. The media and civil society in Tanzania, Botswana and Zambia have successfully fought off this threat to media freedom, while the jury is still out in Kenya and Swaziland where such laws have been published but not promulgated.

AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT: ACCESS TO INFORMATION

The attempt by governments to establish compulsory registration of journalists and set up media councils has been done in the

name of maintaining high journalistic standards. However, it is ironical that the governments so intent on standards are also the slowest in creating an enabling environment for such standards to flourish. In this regard, the need for access to information legislation is obvious and common to all countries in the region. South Africa is the most advanced in this regard, with its Open Democracy Bill in the final stages of enactment. Although not perfect, the bill nonetheless offers a good model for the rest of the continent. What remains to be seen is how other countries, which have for so long been governed under a cloak of official secrecy, will find the political will to promulgate access to information legislation. The media and civil society have a crucial role to play in creating the necessary impetus through sustained advocacy.

The landscape for media freedom in the region, then, is uneven, but largely fraught with the dangers of yesteryear. The relative opening up of political space has not been accompanied by systematic reform of repressive legislation inherited from the one-party and apartheid eras, and governments have continued to use these laws to suppress press freedom and undermine the tenets of democracy. There is urgent need for an overhaul of repressive laws to further expand the boundaries of free expression and create political space for the entrenchment of democracy.

NJONJO MUE is the Legal Adviser to ARTICLE 19 – The International Centre Against Censorship, and Head of ARTICLE 19's regional office for east and southern Africa

Prix

◀ from page 21

ing government, has no equal in any other Muslim or Arab country. The governments of the countries of the Maghreb have labelled Algeria's independent press 'subversive' to the point of forbidding its dissemination in their territories. One cannot cross the Moroccan or Tunisian borders with Algerian newspapers.

TELEVISION: AN OUTMODED MONOPOLY

If the press is largely free and diversified the situation with broadcast media is something else. The one television network, as well as both national and regional radio stations, are under state control. In spite of demands and a law which provides for the setting up of independent radio and T.V. stations, the authorities to this day have not delivered the necessary administrative approval.

But this should not be further delayed. It is necessary to emphasise, however, that these state broadcast institutions have strongly competed with the foreign networks broadcast via satellite. Compared with countries with a similar population count, Algeria has among the highest number of satellite dishes in the world. Algerians have the choice between dozens of foreign networks, notably those broadcasting in Arabic and French.

The Algerian media, particularly the independent press, has become in a relatively short time a true opposition, a real and precious open space where one enacts every day an apprenticeship in democracy and in free citizenship. This achievement didn't fall from the sky. It is the fruit of struggles diverse and strenuous against the monopolies and censors who impaired journalists with imprisonment, judicial harassment, suspended publication and many other setbacks. But above all, in the struggle against fundamentalist terrorism, a negation of all liberties – the profession has paid the highest price: 90 journalists and media workers assassinated in five years.

A journalist for more than 20 years, LAZHARI LABTER has worked for a variety of Algerian and foreign newspapers. He is currently Coordinator of the International Federation of Journalists in Algiers. A writer and poet, he is the author of several books.

This article was translated from the French version by Melissa Baumann.

Messengers

◀ from page 34

tions, parties take steps toward resolving a conflict, they risk being attacked by more intransigent members of their own constituencies. The media can greatly facilitate the process of compromise by making it possible for negotiators to address their own publics through the media in order to explain their negotiating positions and build support for them.

- **Solution building:** Conflicts get prevented or managed when the parties table and consider possible solutions to grievances. Journalists can play a role in this process by pressing the parties for their proffered solutions. Although this seems self-evident, many third-party negotiators have noted that parties are often so invested in their grievances that they do not develop or consider options for potential agreement with adversaries. The simple act of eliciting ideas and reporting them could assist the dynamic of the more formal mediation process itself. It should also be noted that the process of formal mediation can fail if there is not a parallel process of what might be called 'social mediation', by which the constituents and publics of the formal negotiating parties are brought into the process and prepared to accept its outcome.

This is but a partial account of potential media roles. A fuller account would describe a complex set of activities undertaken by a great variety of actors operating from institutional bases in independent, multi-lateral and governmental institutions

in conflict situations of great diversity. Elaborating such a full account will require, over time, the combined efforts of media professionals, diplomats, conflict resolvers and diverse protagonists, among others.

The process by which this could be done would be one of 'social invention' in which the spontaneous, largely uncoordinated but not random activities of diverse actors could create new institutions and behaviours. Journalism itself, in fact, is a product of precisely this process over time, as is the sitcom, soap opera, rap song, portable radio and the sports page. It would be folly to believe that the history of the media has ended here, and that we do not possess the social imagination to meet the challenge now being posed by the threat of mass social violence to human societies everywhere.

ROB MANOFF is Director of New York University's Center for War, Peace and the News Media, which has been developing strategies to help prevent, manage and resolve international and sub-state conflict. This article was adapted from a paper delivered in 1998 at a conference on Media and conflict sponsored by The Hironelle Foundation.

1 James W. Carey, "The Dark Continent of American Journalism," in Robert Karl Manoff and Michael Schudson, eds., *Reading the News*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.

West

◀ from page 47

Meanwhile, Kinshasa's own demands to Kabila were depicted as stubbornness and indecisiveness. Indeed, the reports on Kabila's demands conveniently omitted the U.N.'s demand for a ceasefire as a preamble to negotiations. However, the reports did point to frustrations by U.N. emissaries in their negotiations with Mobutu and other government leaders.

As military engagements intensified, the imbalance in coverage of the two sides widened. The agencies' reports chronicled the rapid advance by rebel alliance forces – 1,500 kilometres in barely three months – and openly suggested that government forces were no match. For example, in mid-February 1997, the AP depicted use of aerial bombardment by government forces as ineffective against the rebels' ground plans to take several key cities, including Kisangani, the country's third largest. The air strikes were reported as "last options in Mobutu's fight against rebels" that couldn't "change the tide in war". The articles also depicted aerial bombings as a threat to peaceful resolution because they could prompt Kabila to "withdraw his offer to negotiate". Indeed, the AP once claimed (without substantiation) that journalists and relief workers saw "Mi-24 combat gunships and warplanes apparently piloted by mercenaries from Eastern Europe".

But the reports went beyond allusions. AP regularly reported the rebel take-over of towns and settlements as "orderly and peaceful". Government forces were described as a "struggling army counter-offensive against the rebels". Government forces were portrayed as "troops on looting sprees in nearly every town they have abandoned to the rebels". Where they didn't altogether abandon a town, the government forces offered "little resistance". The agency wrote on March 8th: "In each town, demoralised and unpaid Zaïrean troops learn of the rebel approach, loot everything in sight and then retreat, leaving the town to the rebels without a fight." And a day later: "[Kabila] presides over a sophisticated military and political organisation. And his rebels have three advantages over Mobutu's unpaid and demoralised government troops: strategy, discipline and motivation."

AP later wrote: "[The rebel alliance] favours pincer movements on the battlefield, always leaving the enemy an escape route to herd it west. Government forces have pillaged towns they were supposed to be defending and fled without much of a fight. Unlike the army, the rebels are disciplined. On a continent where many armies are fuelled by beer, rebels are not drunk in public. Their U.S.-style uniforms are crisp in sweltering jungles. They follow command."

The manner in which the agencies consumed war propaganda from both the rebel and government forces is disconcerting. For example, the rebel forces were reported

Tide

◀ from page 45

taking place globally. But it has also meant, at times, redefining the commonly held definitions of news to include new perspectives, other and more voices and a different position to the dominant view.

Translating this vision into practice within the IPS Africa network means that reporting on the issues of health, education, poverty, women's human rights, labour, transport, the environment and other issues of development is still the essence of the IPS reporting from Africa. Getting journalists to accept these issues as part of their daily news agendas has been the result of training programmes, seminars on new themes and constant on-line, daily guidance by the IPS editors. To IPS journalists in Africa, a story about the Congolese rebels suspending hostilities in their territories to allow children to be immunised is as important as the story about seven heads of state involved in the Democratic Republic of Congo conflict signing a cease-fire accord.

We live in an era where international bodies like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) determine the winners and losers in the movement of goods and services, and most often the 'winner's' story gets told. But the other side of the story must be told, too: like the recent IPS story filed from Kenya on the fight to stop a Parliamentary bill which would strip farmers and local innovators of their right to technologies and indigenous knowledge. Or the underside of the story, reported in the mainstream press, that Mozambique's multi-billion dollar debt relief package could be a big boost to the nation –

IPS went deeper to reveal that the deal would prevent the country from rescuing its cashew nut-processing industry. This would mean that 10,000 Mozambicans, half of them women, would remain without work.

Along with stories on African politics and economics, IPS' Africa coverage has included, among many others, stories on girl soldiers in Sierra Leone laying down their guns for books; the housing crisis in the oil-rich country of Gabon, where the disabled are particularly vulnerable to homelessness; prison conditions in Kenya; children's rights and new laws in Nigeria; a rice production scheme that has been successful in providing a livelihood to the unemployed in Congo; increasing poverty in oil-rich Equatorial Guinea. These stories focus on human development, and people's right to development.

During the last two years, IPS Africa also has worked on re-training its network of journalists to advance reporting on women's rights as a human rights issue. Through the development of an editorial policy and through subsequent training programmes, IPS journalists have actively begun to seek out women as valuable sources of news and information.

IPS is constantly refining its role within the world's information order. Remaining a 'classic' among the 'trend-setters' means that the agency must meet the challenge of filling the gaps in reporting events and processes with a different focus, yet one that engages media managers and audiences. It must also continue to meet the challenge of keeping Africa, with all of its complexities and changes, on the international media's agenda.

PATRICIA MADE is IPS' Regional Director for Africa. She is based in Harare.

being within 14 miles of Kisangani on March 4, 1997, but within 50 to 60 miles of the city a week later. Had there been a retreat or a misrepresentation of fact? And when Kisangani eventually fell on March 14, both wire agencies reported heavy fighting and mortar-fire, yet the AP talked of "little resistance from the government forces" a few days later.

The characterisations of Mobutu and Kabila were pointed. During October and November 1996 – the period when G-7 countries were contemplating an 'intervention force' – Mobutu was portrayed as a stubborn African leader who was nonetheless open to dialogue. Yet in the months leading to his ousting, the wire agencies simply switched adjectives. They described him as a "dictator", "systematic plunderer", "looter" and "thief". Describing his re-emergence after a month-long "seclusion", AP reported that "even his cap seemed to be getting tattered." Kabila, on the other hand, was depicted as a pragmatic leader and his past – allegedly as a gold and diamond smuggler – was left largely unquestioned. News reports described him as a modern leader with a corporate look, a sharp contrast to the old-fashioned and impervious Mobutu. Some wire reports even alluded to Kabila's energy and sense of humour.

But probably the most insidious bias in this reportage was the negligence towards the human costs of war. Reports filed throughout the entire period were silent about civilian casualties, dilapidation of

public amenities, threat of epidemics, destruction of economic activity and the general mayhem that are war's direct results. Indeed, the coverage was so overtly reductionist that it at times appeared to mobilise support for war or at least make the civil war acceptable. On numerous occasions, the agencies used language and imagery that portrayed war as inevitable and morally justifiable.

Little wonder that the wire agencies, despite their close proximity to the civil war's frontline, could not corroborate relief agencies' claims that hundreds of thousands of refugees had been slaughtered in the rebel onslaught. Considering that a large number of stories carried 'battlefront' datelines, it is difficult to understand how the now widely feared – but all so real – genocide of fleeing Rwandan Hutus could have gone unnoticed. Even more confounding was the glaring failure by agency correspondents to take the rebels to task on the refugees' fate as the civil war raged.

The truth about these serious omissions lies in the storyline that the correspondents subscribed to in their reportage. Clearly, the line followed during the rebels' march on Kinshasa conformed to the foreign policy of Western governments. Whether other storylines will ever emerge is anyone's guess.

NIXON KARIITHI holds the Pearson's Chair of Economic Journalism at Rhodes University.