MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA
MUTUAL POLITICAL BEDFELLOWS OR IMPLACABLE ARCH-FOES

JIMMY OCITTI, Ph.D.
Fellow (1998-1999)
Fellows Program
Weatherhead Center for International Affairs
Harvard University
1737 Cambridge Street,
Cambridge, MA 02138

JULY 1999

Abstract

It is nearly a decade since most African countries embarked on what Samuel Huntington has popularized as the "third wave of democracy". The proliferation of political institutions, the liberalization of the economic and political landscapes, the regularity of elections hitherto unheard of in certain African countries, and a decline in military coups in the 1990s, have all signaled that a momentum towards democratic consolidation on the continent is on the increase. Yet, these formalisms of procedural democracy have also concealed a much more profound pattern of declining press freedom on the continent, as African governments, under the guise of constitutional rule, have resorted to the enactment of suppressive laws against an increasingly critical media. In most of the new democracies, as this paper attempts to show, new parliamentary bills that are hostile to the media, are increasingly being promulgated, and this includes countries that have traditionally been considered democratic. This paper posits the question that, given this evolving trend, and considering that the media is the mirror of society's freedom, can we authoritatively conclude that democracy is gaining momentum in Africa?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Introduction

The 1990s will probably go down in history as the decade of sweeping democratic reforms and structural economic adjustments in Africa. As one government after another succumbed to growing domestic demands for political reforms in the face of increasing disenchantment with military rule or one party systems, and as pressure for political change gradually gained momentum from outside the continent in the aftermath of the Cold War, African leaders have found it increasingly difficult to hold on to power by force of arms. Domestically, a combination of student activism, trade union strikes and 'watch-dog' journalism of the press were instrumental in paving the way for the new atmosphere of political pluralism. Externally, the linkage of economic aid by Western governments and multilateral institutions to Africa's political and economic reforms was crucial in the democratic changes and economic liberalism that swept much of African in the 1990s.

For African leaders, the new momentum meant that survival became predicated on political adjustments towards liberalism, rather than the dictatorship or one-man rule of the past. Structural adjustment meant economic reforms and political plurality. Pluralism became synonymous with general elections - elections that have since become the rule rather than the exception in nearly all African countries. As a result, nearly a decade after the first of such reforms were launched in Africa, even countries that have not yet embarked on this democratization path now publicly acknowledge that, politically, the way forward in Africa lies in long-term commitments to the values of liberal democracy.[1] Hence, virtually all such countries have had to publicly commit themselves, if only rhetorically, to the values that are essential for the establishment or consolidation of democracy. This includes support for political pluralism, regular elections, freedom of the press, and the right of association. It is this picture of Africa as an emerging democratic continent from decades of brutal dictatorship and the massive economic mismanagement and social misery of the 1970s and 1980s, into an era of regular elections and greater involvement in the world economy, that has led to the oft wildly stated claim that a renaissance is emerging on the continent.

Viewed from this perspective, Africans are now said to enjoy unprecedented levels of political freedom, greatly improved human rights records, freedom of speech and expression, and unparalleled levels of economic growth. In other words, the evolving dynamics are now seen to have greatly enhanced political life for the average African far more than it was in the 1970s and 1980s.

But is this really the case? Is it not also true that the growing enthusiasm to celebrate the little gains in the 1990s in terms of electoral politics and economic reforms is perhaps blinding us to the grinding problems of consolidating the new democracy itself? For how else can one explain the growing internecine conflicts in many of the new African democracies? What can be said about the lack of effective political opposition in Africa today? Can we really talk of Africa now being democratic?

Answers to these questions require a much broader examination of the factors that underpin democracy in general, or at least those that are essential for its consolidation. That task lies beyond the purview of this work. In this paper I make instead a limited observation of Africa's democratic process by focusing on the role of the media as a way of taking the body temperature of Africa's democracy in the 1990s.

I attempt this by examining the interface between the media and politics in some of the countries that have joined the democratic bandwagon in the 1990s. The media, after all is a critical ingredient in the transition of society from authoritarianism to democracy. As post-Cold War political events amply demonstrated in the former Soviet satellite states in eastern Europe, the media reflects the nature and level of maturity of democracy in a country as no other social indicator can. To what extent has Africa's decade-old democratization process therefore improved the professional working environment of the African journalist? Is the average journalist more free today than he was a decade ago? Has quality journalism spread in those countries that have embarked on this democratic process? Do the constitutional laws now better support the media? How are the proliferating private media contributing to the democratic debate in Africa? In short, what role is journalism playing in Africa's new democracy? While it is true that these questions collectively raise the wider issue of democratic consolidation in

Africa, I nevertheless, intend to keep the focus of this paper on the media as a key indicator of social freedom, rather than on democratic consolidation per se.

This paper takes as its starting point the axiom that the media mirrors the level of democratic maturity in a country, and is in turn affected by the maturity of that democracy. The media epitomize what has often been described as the unfettered freedom of expression of ideas and opinions in a society. In other words, it acts as the thermometer of measuring the democratic body temperature of a country or society. In this role, as the editors of the *Media Studies Journal* rightly opined in 1995, the media supports

> The democratic system of free elections, majority rule, political freedom, political equality, minority rights, representative government and an independent judiciary. And since freedom itself means a lack of restraint, it is assumed that media can operate unfettered at least until they collide with individual rights or institutional interests. Ideally, democracy and media coexist and support each other through a process of negotiation hopefully aimed at developing a consensus about the public interest.[2]

The approach adopted in this paper reflects this view, but in a way that is pertinent to the political realities in Africa. In this endeavour, although I have given a historical overview of the media in Africa, I have mainly focused on the years between 1989 and 1999, significantly, the period when Africa's "third wave of democracy" has been gaining momentum. As this paper will demonstrate, the period shows that, despite the obvious social reforms under way in Africa —and despite the rhetoric concerning growing freedom under these reforms — the position, role and impact of the media are still critically constrained by an underlying current of state-erected impediments.

Theories of the Press

In discussing the symbiotic relationship between the media and government, it is essential to look at the philosophical and political rationales that undergird media/politics in general. This is necessary if we are to set the media properly within the wider context of relationships and control between governments and institutions as they pertain to evolving democratic societies.

The fact that African countries have lately shown signs of embracing the values of democracy makes it all the more imperative for a theoretical understanding of how this change is affecting relationships between individuals, the media, institutions and the state within Africa itself. The changing political dynamics brings out even more critically the need to understand the interplay between the media, as the mirror of social and political freedoms, and politics as the ultimate struggle for power in African societies, or in any society for that matter.

The four theories of the press developed by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schram in 1956, provide, so far, the best philosophical and analytical bases for understanding this complex role of the media in society. Although they refer explicitly to the 'press' in their work, it is important to point out from the outset, as they themselves do, that, what they really mean was the media in general.[3] The first of these theories is the authoritarian theory, which evolved out of the political authoritarianism and social relations that prevailed in the sixteenth century in Europe. This was the period of the Renaissance, a time when political power rested solely with the church and absolute monarchs of the time. Social relations were heavily influenced by the thoughts and writings of philosophers who held pessimistic views of life in the state of nature. This was also the period when the printing machine was invented, and, as the press grew in importance, a social redefinition of the notion of truth began to emerge. As Siebert, et al explain,

> In that society, truth was conceived to be, not the product of the great mass of people, but of a few wise men who were in a position to guide and direct their fellows. Thus truth was thought to be centered near the center of power. The press therefore functioned from the top down. The rulers of the time used the press to inform the people of what the rulers thought they should know and the policies the rulers thought they should support.[4]

In other words, the role of the press was defined as doing no more than providing support and advancing the policies of the ruling system. Criticism of government policies, in whatever form, was strictly forbidden and ownership of the press could only be granted through a royal patent.

This tendency to perceive the truth as a preserve of the ruling elite, rather than as a value on its merit subsequently affected the notion of what was news-worthy. News became defined in what the rulers deemed it to be, not what journalists considered to be newsworthy. In light of

subsequent global European conquests, it was perhaps not surprising that this notion of the truth and its position in the function of the press spread to different parts of the world over the years. Within Europe itself, from the early parts of this century to the middle of the 1940s, the Soviet Communists, German Nazis and the Italian fascists, epitomized this absolutist notion of truth through information control and a massive deployment of propaganda.

Other societies have no doubt also manipulated the public through such authoritarian use of the media to reflect the views of the ruling elite. As we begin the new millennium, however, it is Africa that still needs to overcome this authoritarian perception of the truth and grant the media freedom. It is this absolutist approach to the media that forms what has essentially been the core of the recurring struggles between African journalists and political leaders. The constant problems of dictatorship, military rule, one-party systems and lack of democratic consolidation that has formed much of the history of Africa during the past thirty years or so, manifestly attests to this mentality. It is important to see how far African leaders are now willing to give journalists freedom of the press in light of the democratization process under way.

The second theory of the press is the libertarian model, a by-product of the philosophy of liberalism that evolved between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This was the period of the Enlightenment in Europe, when individuals began to demand greater political freedom from the authoritarian monarchs. Citizens began to press governments for treatment as rational beings, capable of making independent judgements on social issues and developing their own individual senses of truth. The period saw a general rejection of absolute monarchical perception of power and truth. Concurrently, a powerful middle class emerged, especially in England, as commerce expanded rapidly. Philosophers like John Milton, John Locke and John Stuart Mill argued for intellectual freedom and the open marketplace of ideas. This was a time for a social rebirth underpinned by the notions of freedom of thoughts and opinions as the cornerstones of the emerging change. The libertarian theory, which evolved out of this libertarian atmosphere, argued for limited government and greater individual freedom. As far as the press was concerned, libertarians viewed it not as an instrument of government, but rather as a device for presenting evidence and arguments on the basis of which the people could check on government and make up their minds as to policy. The press, argued libertarian theorists, should stay

completely free of government control and influence. Given the general demands for social change towards freedom, this view soon gained widespread acceptance in Europe and the U.S. where it formed the basis for establishing that country's Bill of Rights.

The essential features of this theory are that any individual with the economic means to own a press should be allowed to do so. Additionally, the notion of "truth" was to be left to the free marketplace of ideas, rather than government interpretation, as advocated by authoritarian theorists. In the words of media scholar Denis McQuail, "the nearest approximation to truth will emerge from the competitive exposure of alternative viewpoints, and progress for society will depend on the choice of 'right' over 'wrong' solutions".[5] This means that the media was to be allowed as much freedom as practically possible, so as to promote political debate and encourage a multiplicity of viewpoints on social issues, as a way of presenting the truth to the public. The significance of this theory to Africa stems from the fact that it helps us better understand the degree to which governments are, or are not, interfering with the work of the media during the ongoing democratization process. It also helps us explain what has already been alluded to; namely, that the relationship between the media and governments in a liberal democracy should point towards the open marketplace of ideas. But to what degree has this actually been occurring in Africa since the latest efforts to establish and/or consolidate democracy began?

The third press theory is the social responsibility model, which is in large measure an outgrowth of the libertarian theory, or, what Siebert et al refer to as "a grafting of new ideas onto traditional theory."[6] In principle the theory accepts most of the functions of the press or media as advocated by the libertarian model, but questions the social roles of the media under liberal principles. This skeptical approach finds its genesis in the technological advancements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, during which the size, speed and availability of information changed, while the new technology also gave rise to the birth and expansion of various new media, including radio, cinema and television.

Furthermore, with growing urbanization, rising levels of literacy and the growth of the middle class, ownership of the media began to be concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. This not only gave media owners a tremendous source of power, but made it increasingly difficult for

newcomers to break into the new media. It soon emerged that the media owners virtually determined what sorts of facts, i.e., "truth" were to appear in the media. This was a far cry from the old concept of the press as a free marketplace of ideas and opinions that the libertarian model championed, and issues such as libel, slander, and privacy soon came to take a prominent place in public discourse over the role of the media. Consequently, the concept of public interest began to take center stage. Journalists were increasingly expected to act not merely according to the whims of the business community — which provided much of the advertisements for the media — but in a socially responsible manner that educated, informed, and entertained the main consumers of the media — the public — in a balanced way.

The fourth theory of the press, though less relevant for this particular study, still needs to be mentioned, nevertheless. This is the Soviet communist theory, a product of twentieth century Marxist ideology that maintained the supremacy of the party over the Soviet population. According to this theory, the press functions at the service of the party and state. Individuals are expected to be loyal to the party and state, and not to criticize party policies whatsoever. The mass media in the Soviet Union and its satellite states reflected this ideology in its most original form, not only instrumentally to disseminate government propaganda, but as part and parcel of the party and state machinery. As Siebert et al explain, "in the Soviet system, there [was] not a theory of the state, and a theory of communication; there [was] only one theory".[7] And, in a remarkable similarity with its older authoritarian version, the crucial point of this theory was the creation of unity in society as the key function of the press. The press was merely an instrument of the state, to be used, in the words of Lenin, as "a collective propagandist, collective agitator and collective organizer".[8]

The demise of the Soviet system and the end of the Cold War has rendered this theory largely irrelevant in discussing contemporary policy issues regarding the media in Africa. Although a number of African countries, including Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Sao Tome and Principe, and Guinea Bissau did flirt with Marxist governments at various stages of their history, the global political and economic realities of the late 1980s, as well as mounting domestic pressures for political reforms, forced them to abandon their belief in Marxism and embrace instead the concept of liberal democracy, and with it more open media policies. The

results have been mixed, however, as far as press freedom is concerned. Suffice it to mention briefly that it was almost inevitable that in the aftermath of their experience with Marxism in Africa, countries that adopted a more open political system were almost certain to register a qualitative and quantitative improvement of the media. This study will look at the situation in a few of these countries, and ask why media developments in those countries have not taken uniform paths.

The four theories outlined above form the basis upon which the media have generally been analyzed in the past and will probably be scrutinized in future. Whether one looks at them as generic concepts or as applicable only selectively, the philosophical and historical foundations of these theories form in large measure, the basis upon which other media theories have evolved.

Furthermore, while as theories they are largely fixated on the belief that the function of the press is to provide mainly political news, their relevance as a basis for general analysis of the media in Africa is quite important. This is especially significant, since the role of the press or media is generally recognized to have grown much wider over the past few decades. For instance, media roles now recognize the different levels of political and social developments in different parts of the world, and also the effects of the new media, such as videos, satellites, the internet and other new information technologies. These new technologies may well redefine the parameters of the libertarian and social responsibility press theories in the future. In fact, this assumption is implicit in McQuail's Development Media Theory and the Democratic-Participant Media Theory.[9]

According to McQuail, development media theory takes as its starting point the fact that countries that are in the transitional stage from authoritarianism to economic and political reforms could not be expected to have the necessary conditions or infrastructures to sustain media freedom comparable to those that exist in the developed countries. In this situation, the functions and goals of the press must be seen differently, especially around the following themes: the primacy of national development tasks (economic, social, cultural, political), the pursuit of cultural and informational autonomy, support for democracy, and solidarity with other developing countries.[10]

In other words, in emerging societies, the responsibilities of the media must be emphasized much more than their rights and freedoms. In a sense, this theory accepts the notion that, in developing countries, nation-building must precede media freedom. In the immediate aftermath of Africa's independence in the 1960s, it was a theme that was quite popular among African politicians and academics alike. It fitted with what African politicians then preached that there was a need to unite and build the new nations first before democracy could gain ground. The expectation was that the media would be part of this process in an instrumental way that both de-emphasized critical appraisal of the leaders' performances and advocated national unity.

As far as democratic-participant theory is concerned, it starts from the assumption that the mainstream media, largely dominated by private interests or public monopolies, do not accommodate the interests and views of minorities or small groups. As McQuail explains, "the theory supports the right to relevant local information, the right to answer back and the right to use the new means of communication for interaction and social action in small-scale settings of community, interest group or subculture… The theory rejects the market as a suitable institutional form, as well as all 'top-down' professional provision and control. Participation and interaction are key concepts."[11] In Africa, this theory finds its practical expression in community radio stations and rural newspapers, and may include the call for developing the oral tradition as a means of mass communication on the continent.

Emergence and Historical Overview of the Press in Africa

The historical evolution of the media in Africa reflects to a large degree a familiar pattern that has existed in other parts of the world where colonial rule has prevailed. This has included the rise of the private press, the birth of colonial government newspapers, the missionary press, and the emergence of nationalist papers as instruments for fighting colonial repression. Within this setting, the authoritarian media has evolved interchangeably with the libertarian model. Thus, it has not been uncommon to find phases of the libertarian press only to be followed immediately by authoritarian policies and, thereafter, to revert to some form of libertarianism.

On a general level, this reflects the pattern of political developments in Africa itself, where democratic rule, military regimes, and one party systems, have often followed each other interchangeably. Although as far as the media itself is concerned, this pattern was not always reflective of all countries, the overall trend was symptomatic of the political situation in respective countries. That is why countries like Nigeria have in the past had some of the liveliest newspapers at a time when the country was being ruled by some of the most ruthless military dictators. It is a reflection of the uneven evolution of the media in Africa.

Significantly, a large share of this had to do with the nature of colonial rule, despite the fact that the press industry in Africa began long before the continent was partitioned by European countries during the infamous Berlin Conference of 1885.[12] Colonialism in Africa was essentially an authoritarian mode of governance whose nature was reflected negatively both on African societies and the media. The slow flowering of the press in the then Belgian Congo and the Portuguese colonies, for instance, was symptomatic of the brutal experience those countries underwent under Belgian and Portuguese colonial rule. In what was to become the British West African colonies, on the other hand, the press emerged long before colonialism itself had been instituted. There, especially in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria, the press took a central political role quite early, a trend that eventually spread to other parts of the continent. Because of the power associated with the media, politics and the press became complimentary to each other, with many journalists eventually ending up as politicians. Many also used their position as journalists to become the most vocal advocates for Africa's political independence.

The Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser led Africa in the publishing industry by becoming, on August 16, 1800, the first newspaper ever to be published on the continent This was nearly 150 years after Dutch settlers first arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa, and at least eighty five years before Africa was partitioned by European imperial powers. But the paper's groundbreaking appearance in Cape Town was to prove only a journalistic teaser. Within three months of its first appearance, the paper folded. There is no record to show why Africa's first newspaper suffered this sudden death, but one can hazard a guess or two as to possible reasons for its early demise. First, it is conceivable that the

newspaper was being run by non-journalists, perhaps a group of volunteers without any journalistic training at all. These were probably amateurs who had no experience whatsoever in running a successful press. The proprietors of the newspaper might have found out only too late that such issues as newsgathering, obtaining newsprint, and distribution required a much more solid financial base and better organization than they first thought. It is conceivable that such problems may have affected the profitability and quality of the newspaper.

In any case, after nearly 150 years without a newspaper, one can only conclude that the press appeared to have been quite low in the priory of the white settlers in South Africa, or that the prevailing political system was too authoritarian for an independent press. This is plausible considering the fact that it took a further twenty four years before another newspaper appeared in South Africa. Another possible reason is fact that the extractive settler economy based on gold mining and the exploitation of black labour did not require commercial advertisements in order to sell the product. Gold was mined locally but sold abroad, and whatever competition existed among the owners of the gold mines, as the main business preoccupation at the time, it did not rise to the level of seeking to advertise the products in order to capture a particular domestic market. Labour, forcibly obtained as it was, was cheap and profits were high. As a result it is possible that the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* carried no adverts that could have conceivably sustained it during its first infant months. The cost of running the paper probably turned out to be too high for the owners of the paper, hence, forcing it to fold prematurely.

The following year, in February 1801, *The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertiser* appeared in the streets of the Sierra Leonian capital, Freetown. Sierra Leone had been created in 1792 as a special West Africa colony for freed slaves returning from North America. The appearance of *The Royal Gazette and Sierra Leone Advertis*er was a momentous occasion for the new citizens of Sierra Leone. It became the main forum for raising political consciousness especially within the more educated elite. The editors tried hard to use the newspaper to rally Sierra Leonians around the issues of unity and peace. In this setting libertarianism and what became known much later as "social responsibility journalism" were emerging concurrently.

Despite this seemingly libertarian beginning, the paper lasted for only one year before folding, largely due to the fact that its English printers abandoned the publishing industry in 1802 in favour of the slave trade.[13] The long-term survival of the newspaper had been heavily mortgaged to the profitability of the printing press, which apparently, was not owned by the publishers of the newspaper. With the printers gone, the newspaper was therefore forced to close down.

Nevertheless, unlike the experience in South Africa, the seeds of journalism had been sown. As Frank Barton accurately explains, "the idea of newspapers began to spread, slowly at first, then more rapidly and eventually almost like a bush fire out of control throughout the coastal belt of West Africa".[14] Present-day Ghana, then known as the Gold Coast, had its first newspaper in 1822 with the publication of the handwritten *Royal Gold Coast Gazette and Commercial Intelligencer*. Liberia's first newspaper, the *Liberia Herald,* first appeared in 1826. Nigeria, on the other hand, saw its first paper, *Iwe Irohin,* in 1859. By this time the newspaper industry had spread throughout much of the English-speaking West African region.

Of great import here is the fact that these early newspapers set the tenor that in the long run provided a powerful forum for political struggles between the Africans and the colonial powers. Papers like the *Liberia Herald* had been particularly vocal quite early on against European oppression. Other African-owned newspapers soon took on this mantle and started combining entrepreneurship with political advocacy. In Nigeria, the man who was later to become the country's first Prime Minister, journalist Nnamdi Azikiwe had ten newspapers under his control. His political adversary, Abafemi Awolowo, leader of a major political party owned as many as fourteen newspapers. By the time colonial rule finally came to an end in British West Africa, a total of 227 newspapers had been published over the years in different countries in the region. Sierra Leone alone had seen fifty two, the Gold Coast (Ghana) boasted a figure of seventy, Nigeria had a total of 100, while Gambia had five. These were impressive figures, considering the fact that the facilities were poor and literacy rates, quite low at this time in the region.

By the time the first newspaper appeared in East Africa in 1899 with the appearance in Mombasa of *East Africa and Uganda Mail*, not only had newspaper publishing become a

lucrative business in West Africa, the line between journalism and politics had considerably narrowed as well. While the colonial newspapers continued to publish government information through dry official *Gazettes*, and while owners or editors of the private papers increasingly catered for the interests of the settler community, a new breed of African newspapermen started combining their profession with politics. Jomo Kenyatta, editor of the first Kenyan African-owned newspaper, *Mwigwithania*, personified this new breed of journalist cum politician. He subsequently became Kenya's first president.

In southern Africa, on the other hand, the evolution of the press took two parallel trends. There was the powerful white press, largely independent and with an economic muscle that matched its size. This stretched not only to different parts of South Africa, but to the other white-ruled southern African states such as present-day Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and Malawi (Nyasaland).. The South African Argus Company, which controlled newspapers throughout the region, had interests that stretched as far away as East Africa. Within the white press itself, there were also two trends: one that catered for the interests of the Dutch settlers, and the other for the English speakers.

The Dutch press traces is origin to the *Cape Town Gazette and African Advertiser* of February 1800 mentioned earlier on. However, there was also a parallel non-white press in the region, particularly in South Africa. As Allister Sparks further elaborates, "between 1836 and 1977, more than 800 publications were written by or aimed at Africans, Coloureds, or Indians in South Africa. Some were small, ephemeral newsletters of only two to four pages; others, with white publishers, were full newspapers or magazines with circulation up to 17,000. No where else was the indigenous nonwhite press as diverse, widespread and sophisticated as in South Africa."[15] The vibrancy of the nonwhite press was nevertheless adversely affected by the authoritarian apartheid policies of the white-led regime from 1948, in which press freedom as it is known in conventional parlance, was subjected to the heavy strictures of the country's apartheid policies.

Elsewhere in Africa, the emergence of the press followed a somewhat different pattern. In the Francophone African countries, no newspapers existed prior to colonial rule. This may have been incidental, and not a result of some scheme to leave the area behind in terms of press

evolution. The area had interacted quite regularly with the outside world in terms of mineral and slave trade long before French colonialism was established. But this level of contact was not instrumental enough to open up the possibility of creating a local press industry.

In the end, a combination of poor regional communication infrastructures and language barriers made it all the more problematic for the spread of the newspaper industry from neighbouring English-speaking countries. In terms of news consumption, there was total reliance on newspapers published in France itself. When local newspapers were eventually allowed, yet further strictures were imposed on the Africans. The colonial authorities decreed that only Frenchmen could own the press in the colonies, and that Africans could neither operate nor own any newspaper. Until the middle of the 1930s, this ruling was strictly observed, which explains why the first French language newspapers in Africa — *Le Reveil du Senegalais* in 1885, *Le Petit Senegalais* in 1886 and *L'Union Africain* in 1896 — were all started by African-based Frenchmen in the Senegalese capital, Dakar. It was a reflection of the official policy of excluding Africans from the publishing industry.

In the Lusophone (Portuguese-speaking) countries, the situation was even worse. There, not a single local newspaper was ever published throughout the 400 years of Portuguese rule in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and Sao Tome and Principe. Such was the absoluteness and autocratic nature of Portuguese rule in Africa that, in a typical mode, newspapers were perceived as instruments that could awaken Africans to their rights. When the first newspaper eventually emerged in Mozambique — the most important of the Portuguese colonies — it was begun neither by the large Portuguese community there, nor by the Africans, but through the initiative of a small British community that had settled in Mozambique.

This by itself would not have been significant were it not for the fact that, this was happening nearly 400 years after the Portuguese arrived in Africa. The *Lourenco Marques Guardian,* named after the Mozambican capital, Lourenco Marques, as it was then known, first appeared in 1905 when the resident British community decided to start a newspaper that could facilitate unity and communication among its members.[16] For nearly fifty years, the *Lourenco Marques Guardian* was published only in English, despite the fact that the majority of the white community in Mozambique spoke only Portuguese and the Africans, naturally, their local

languages. News coverage was almost exclusively on events in England, with only a sprinkle of reports about the community itself in Mozambique.[17]

What this meant was that the Africans were excluded from this enterprise by language and law. For the few educated Africans, English was alien to them. Even those who may have wanted to start publishing in Portuguese or the local languages, the law prohibited them.

Post-Independence Media Policies

The achievement of independence in much of Africa in the early 1960s and the subsequent post-independence socio-economic imperatives affected the media in several ways, three of which are particularly relevant here. First, and this must be seen from the government perspective, a social redefinition of the functions of the press was instituted, akin to the evolution of the notion of 'truth' under the authoritarian press model of the sixteenth century. The new African governments perceived the media as part of the machinery of state to be deployed in facilitating the process of development in a manner that was thought to help achieve national cohesion among otherwise disparate ethnic groups. In line with McQuail's Development Media theory, heavy emphasis was placed on the social responsibilities of the media rather than on their rights and freedoms.

Competing political demands from the various ethnic collectivities and the search to expand the economic base of the respective countries made the press all the more important as an instrument for change. The new governments concurrently opted for political centralism and other policies that were essentially designed not to encourage criticism of government policies, but rather, to promote the spirit of nationalism in the new nations. The press, as the most effective means of disseminating government views, was particularly targeted by this policy. As Takirambudde explains, "A combination of an inadequate civil society as a source of effective countervailing power, underdeveloped systems of accountability and the lack of sanctioning schemes generated a perception of absolute power and impunity".[18] Malawi certainly exemplified this absoluteness of power and the constriction of space for the civil society (media). Only seven years after gaining independence from Britain, a total of 840 books, 100

periodicals and sixteen films had been banned under the Censorship and Control of Entertainments Act, which empowered the government to ban any material it deemed critical of the government.[19] Elsewhere in Africa, similar policies abounded. In many places, what had emerged under colonial rule as official *Gazettes,* were gradually transformed into government-owned newspapers. Those that had evolved in the libertarian tradition as private newspapers were nationalized or purchased by the new governments in power.

In Ghana, for instance, the *Daily and Sunday Graphic* was bought by the government which turned into an official mouthpiece, despite the fact that the *Graphic* was the most popular independent newspaper in the country.[20] The Tanganyikan (Tanzanian) government did the same with the *Tanganyika Standard,* transforming it into what journalists like to call a lap-dog press. Within a few years, Zambian journalists were in a similar situation after the government acquired the *Central African Mail* from private operators, renaming it the *Zambian Mail*. The same fate befell the *Times of Zambia*, which was bought by the government in an effort to centralize the dissemination of government information.

Even church newspapers in some countries had to adapt to this conformist view of the media as uncritical social instruments for unity and development. As a consequence, press libertarianism was drastically scaled down in favour of the authoritarian media policies that African leaders preferred. At the same time, government-run and rural newspapers emerged on the scene, in large measure, as a reflection of this imperative to nationally disseminate government policies in an attempt to bring about national development. In Senegal, *Dakar-Matin* was replaced by the pro-government daily *Le Soleil de Senegal*. In Guinea virtually all medium of communication was brought under government control. Nigeria's federal government set up its own group of newspapers.[21] Liberia and Niger certainly had this in mind as the first African countries to set up such rural newspapers in 1963 and 1964, respectively. Their limited initial success may have indeed encouraged many other countries to adopt a similar policy regarding the rural press. That is why by 1971, a total of eleven African countries had started rural newspapers of one kind or another. Yet, as UNESCO found out in a survey conducted in 1977, the impact of these rural newspapers remained modest, at most.[22]

Secondly, the political instabilities that gripped much of Africa during the first few years of independence speeded up decline in both the quality and quantity of newspapers. A combination of state-sponsored repressive policies against journalists as political and economic instabilities set in, and the resultant self-imposed censorship by journalists themselves, grossly affected the freedom and quality of the media. Hachten records that during the first twenty five years of African freedom, a total of seventy leaders in twenty nine nations had been deposed through assassinations, coups and purges. He goes on to report that out of forty one independent African countries only seven allowed political opposition, seventeen were one-party states and another seventeen were military regimes. Between 1957 and 1981, forty four nations were rocked by twenty major wars and forty successful coups.[23] During roughly the same period, the independent newspapers that had flourished in the early part of the 1960s began to register a qualitative and quantitative decline. Although qualitatively, some newspapers continued to maintain their journalistic professionalism, overall there was a marked decline in quality. Nigeria is a case in point where, even though the press continued to flourish under military rule, fewer and fewer papers became critical of government policies as the military tightened the screws on society. Quantitatively, this trend was even clearer. According to the United States Information Service (USIA), for instance, there were at least 160 newspapers in Africa by 1966.[24] Although, in comparison with other regions of the world, that may not be a high number, this was significant in Africa because it marked an increase of sixty percent from the number given by Helen Kitchen in 1956.[25] Yet, Hachten in a separate study finds that by 1969 this number was still stuck at 160 and had not registered any increase at all.[26]

Given a sixty percent increase the previous decade this could only be taken to mean, in effect, that there was a decline in the number of African newspapers. Further demonstration of this trend is contained in a survey carried out by the *World Press Encyclopedia* which found that while in 1969 there were at least 170 dailies throughout Africa, this number had declined to 124 by 1980. If one considered the fact that only three countries — Nigeria, South Africa and Morocco — accounted for more than a half of that total, then the picture looks even grimmer.

Third, Africa's gradual economic downturn in the 1970s, continuing through the 1980s, had a major bearing on the work of journalists. With the exception of South Africa, revenue for

the press tumbled drastically as the purchasing power of the public and business community declined. This meant in effect that newspapers not only became a luxury for the average man or woman in the street, but that newspapers had less and less significance in people's day-to-day lives. The daily struggle for survival in the face of a spiraling cost of living became more urgent. By the end of the 1980s, the number of African countries unable to meet their basic needs had increased radically from the previous decade, and average incomes were falling by as much as thirty to forty percent annually in the more affected countries. By 1990 alone drought was threatening a total of twenty seven million people in at least fourteen countries, while nearly forty million people had been displaced by environmental disasters and military conflicts.[27]

For the press, commercial advertisements that supported them in the past had all but ceased. Newsgathering itself became an expensive venture, as infrastructures broke down. Obtaining equipment and newsprint, even for the government-owned press, became costly. In short, journalism became a very expensive profession, especially under the prevailing socio-political instability and uncertainty. The economic decline also meant that governments invested less and less on education, which would have raised the literacy rates as an essential ingredient for the press industry, let alone national development.

The end result was a steady narrowing of the consumption base of the press, since most newspapers published only in the official languages, such as English, French or Portuguese. Coupled with the rising cost of living, the press became less and less attractive. Respectively, its impact on politics also declined in the 1970s and 1980s, especially given that the political situation under military rule and the one-party system gradually became more and more authoritarian.

It is under this climate that in the late 1980s the press, together with trade union organizations and students, began to advocate even more actively for democratic change in Africa. They demanded more accountability from the political leaders, and political pluralism and openness by governments. Coincidentally, the international political climate, which had evolved in the aftermath of the Cold War, started coercing African leaders into liberalizing the political and economic landscapes. These two positions, domestic pressures and international political dynamics, converged at a critical juncture at the end of the 1980s as ordinary people in

the street started getting agitated against authoritarian rule. The resulting strikes and protests, as the Benin and Zambian cases exemplified, were significant factors in launching the momentum towards democracy, with the potential of dispatching resistant countries along the footpath of the Philippines, where dictator Ferdinand Marcos had been toppled through what has been popularized as "people's power". For the first time since the 1960s, African dictators found themselves cornered by both sets of pressures, the only way forward being to yield some ground, albeit grudgingly, over the issue of multi-party elections.

In the end, what started as a combination of workers strikes and media criticism in certain African countries, snowballed into a democratization process through a number of political reforms, such as the registration of political parties and the convention of National Conferences throughout Francophone countries. The liberalization of political and economic activities became the adopted modes of leadership styles. Elections, rather than military coups, became the means to power. Yet, for the media, freedom in its libertarian variant continued to be elusive.

Democracy and the Media in the 1990s

From the media perspective, a striking element of this new found democracy was the proliferation and expansion of the African media – predominantly the print media – toward finding a set of principles or vocational responsibilities to which they could address themselves.[28] Within this setting, a sense emerged that the role of the media needed to be redefined to at least include some of the libertarian ideals which would allow for the independence of the media and a greater involvement by them in the on-going democratization process. Journalism, as viewed by these media practitioners, was a public trust, driven by the profession's sets of ethical conduct to society, in which media integrity arose out of upholding ethical standards, not yielding to the political whims of rulers.[29]

That interpretation, in turn, arose out of the media's own contribution in ending military rule and the one party system in Africa — a feat which journalists linked to their own collective sense of social responsibility to the population. After all, the fall of the communist regimes in

Eastern Europe at the end of the Cold War had taught them that journalists in transitional societies needed to take their social responsibility seriously, if they were to make effective contributions to society.[30] This often meant advocating for what commentators sometimes call "public journalism", or, what media critic Jay Rosen refers to as, "a desire to 'reconnect' with citizens and their true concerns, an emphasis on serious discussion as the primary activity in democratic politics, and a focus on citizens as actors within, rather than spectators to, the public drama".[31]

Such views fitted well under the general rubric of what was referred to earlier as social responsibility journalism. Jean-Paul Marthoz's caveat in the influential *Global Beat Syndicate*, "If journalists really want to be beacons of democracy, fulfill their role as a counterweight to power and be a conduit for citizen participation, they need to worry about more than just the fairness and impartiality of their reporting,"[32] echoes these sentiments.

To African leaders, however, the freedom the media were demanding was to be placed within their own power positions and the wider context of national unity. This, in fact, was the same argument that had been mooted during the immediate post-independence years in the early 1960s. It was argued then, just as it is in the 1990s, that the media were to be part of the machinery of state, and not to engage in what can be loosely termed critical journalism. In the social conditions of the 1990s, however, things were slightly different in that there was the added element of fear in the ruling establishments, especially the anxiety over the untested relationships between the independent media and the vibrant opposition groups.

The heat of electoral politics in Africa had signaled a possible convergence of interests between these two forces, and with it the possibility that the incumbent regimes could be politically out-maneuvered. Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe echoed the mood of his African contemporaries when, in a 1993 exchange with journalists regarding the question of independent radio stations, he said, "The issue of a broadcasting station that runs parallel to our own is a ticklish point because you do not know what propaganda they are going to broadcast. We are a developing country and cannot afford the danger of sabotage and subversion from a broadcasting station….You will find that the opposition papers in our country go out of their way to try and hunt for those stories that damage the government".[33]

Benin President Mathieu Kerekou, the first African leader to be ousted in the democratic wave of the nineties, was even more explicit over the cause of his defeat. "It was because of journalists that everything has turned out so badly", he said.[34] It certainly is debatable whether journalists alone caused his downfall or whether other more profound forces were at play against his military rule. The Benin National Conference, the interim parliament that drew up a new democratic constitution, certainly thought the media had done a commendable job educating the public on their democratic rights. At the end of the conference, the delegates publicly acknowledged the role of journalists in the restoration of democracy in Benin, a gesture that paved the way for a parliamentary bill guaranteeing press freedom in Benin.

For journalists, the new bill meant that, at least in theory, they would be protected from such things as arbitrary arrests and detention without trial, which had characterized the previous military regime, led by none other than General Mathieu Kerekou himself. So, while the general's outburst may have been a result of electoral frustration and his evident slowness in accepting what was in effect, a new social order, limited credit must also be given to him for respecting the constitutional provisions that allowed for nominal press freedom, and the electoral results that set Benin as an example to be emulated by the rest of Africa in 1991. It is this atmosphere and attitude that have led to the resurgence of the private press and electronic media in Benin today.

His Ugandan peer, Yoweri Museveni, a self-declared opponent of multiparty democracy, has not been as tolerant of the media. At the height of a public debate on political pluralism in Uganda, Museveni, in an unprovoked outburst, labeled journalists criminals. "Two types of criminals interest me in Uganda", he bellowed. "Common criminals and journalists."[35] To prove his point, a number of journalists were rounded up and detained for weeks without charge simply because they had criticized the government's militaristic policies and anti-multiparty posture. A few years later in April 1999, Museveni's security minister, Muruli Mukasa, echoed exactly the same words, when, in reaction to emerging critical journalism in the country, he too declared that Ugandan journalists were criminals.

In light of the constant harassment of Ugandan journalists by the state, such statements cannot be taken as unfortunate gaffes, but as a sign of political obduracy, reflecting in large

measure, a hidden policy of a regime that has after all, obfuscated the restoration of multiparty democracy in Uganda since 1986. Other African leaders who have harassed, demeaned, imprisoned, and in some cases even caused the death of journalists are: Togolese president Gnassingbe Eyadema, Kenyan President Daniel Arap Moi, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, Sudanese President Omar el-Beshir, Cameroonian President Paul Biya, Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu, Mozambican President Joachim Chisano and the late General Sani Abacha of Nigeria, to name but a few.

By the beginning of 1992, these presidents and prime ministers had imprisoned a total of sixteen African journalists, for reasons that ranged from insulting the president to causing public alarm. Although this figure was an improvement from the previous year's total of thirty one, the fact that most of these journalists were detained purely on grounds of their journalistic work, indicated that, far from the official rhetoric of prevailing democracy, freedom of expression, as an essential ingredient of democratic practice, was badly lacking in Africa. In Cameroon, for instance, there were sixty eight attacks on the media in 1991, including the cross examination of thirty five journalists; eighteen cases of censorship, seizures and banning; one expulsion; and fourteen cases of physical violence or gross harassment by way of legal proceedings, death threats, coercion and pressure.[36] A law requiring publications to be licensed by the Cameroonian government enacted in 1990 was used numerous times to suspend the publication of critical newspapers. In 1993 alone there were nine such suspensions.

As Abdoulaye Ndiaga Sylla correctly states, "It is hardly surprising that in these circumstances, the press that disturbs the powers-that-be has difficulty in carrying out its role as watchdog, supplier of information and instrument in the formation of strong, healthy critical public opinion. The main difficulty lies in the state's conception of the press."[37] Such views are supported by concrete evidence throughout Africa. Take the case of Pius Njawe, Cameroonian editor of *Le Messager*, who has been imprisoned, harassed and detained more times that he cares to remember. He had to resort to having two bodyguards with him at all times. Kenneth Best, one of Liberia's leading editors, was deported from Gambia, where he was employed as editor of the *Daily Observer*, because, as he puts it, he "was trying to promote freedom of the press in an area where media censorship is the norm". Zambian journalist Fred M'membe of the

independent *The Post* is yet another case of a journalist who has been harassed by the state to the point where many Zambian watchers thought he would flee the country or close down the paper altogether in fear for his life. But he has refused to budge. In 1996, the authorities banned both the internet and printed editions of M'membe's paper, *The Post,* after the paper revealed that the Zambian government was planning to hold a referendum over the constitution. The decree banning *The Post* also made it criminal to be in possession of the paper, including the on-line version. Ironically, such levels of harassment which has become a common feature of "democratic" Zambia, had not been seen in the Zambian journalistic scene since the colonial times. Tragically, such cases have become common throughout Africa.

It is such ruthless attempts to muffle the independent press that have led the London-based *Economist* magazine in September 1993 to describe Africa's experiment with democracy as "lull in the wind", a reflection, in other words, of the ambivalent posture of procedural democracy prevalent on the continent behind the electoral façade, on the one hand, and, on the other, a brutal suppression of the other rights associated with democracy. The imperative for survival by incumbent political leaders has always taken center stage against long-term and more profound commitments to the values that are essential for the consolidation of democracy, including freedom of speech and the press.

In the 1990s, a common feature in the harassment of African journalists has been the use of the law in what is in effect a thinly guised attempt to camouflage the suppression of press freedom. Throughout the continent, parliamentary bills are being enacted to restrict the activities of journalists even further. Somewhat surprisingly, this includes countries like Namibia and Botswana, which have historically exhibited the values and conducts of democracy. However, since 1996, Namibian government officials have increasingly shown hostility against the media coincidental to the enactment of the Powers, Privileges and Immunities Act of 1996, which granted enormous powers and rights to parliamentary committees to force journalists to reveal their sources of information. Among other things, the act bars journalists from interviewing any member of parliament on pending legislation, contravention of which can lead to five years imprisonment.

Similarly, in Botswana, the government introduced a Mass Media Communications Bill in 1997 to establish, a broadcasting board, a press council and the registration of newspapers and the accreditation of journalists. The board and the other bodies are directly answerable to the minister of Presidential Affairs and Public Administration in the Office of the President. Under the bill, the police are empowered to seize any publication that is seen by the authorities to contravene the law. Foreign journalists are required to have accreditation, while foreign ownership of the media is restricted to twenty percent. On at least one occasion, the bill was used to deny World View Botswana, a locally based non-governmental organization, a license to operate a community radio station.

In Swaziland a similar bill was introduced in Parliament on October 3, 1997. Known as the Media Council Bill, it requires all journalists wishing to practice in Swaziland to register with the authorities before beginning their work. The bill gives the government the right to enforce a code of ethics which the government itself, not journalists, has drafted. Violation of the code leads to prison terms and/or fines of up to 100,000 Rand (US $21,000) for the offending journalist. Swaziland journalists first reacted to the bill by staging a street protest on October 7, 1997. They then embarked on other forms of quiet campaigns, not only to have the bill scrapped, but to allow multiparty politics to be established in the tiny southern African kingdom. Coming only less than a year after acting Prime Minister Sishayi Nxumalo, accompanied by heavily armed police, entered the television newsroom on June 23 1996 to personally ensure that that evening's news line-up was in tune with government policy, the bill has to date left most Swaziland journalists afraid to do their work, and wondering whether they have any rights at all as professionals. In Niger, Cameroon, and Togo there are draconian laws against defaming or insulting the head of state, contravention of which can lead to fines ranging from 200,000 to five million CFA (US $340–$8,600). Similar laws also exist in Congo where journalists have been sentenced to between six months to five years in prison.

According to the media watchdog, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), by the end of 1998, out of a world figure of 118 journalists in prison, Ethiopia had twelve, sharing that number with China; Sierra Leone, which in 1997 had no journalist at all in prison, had eleven by the end of 1998; Nigeria, despite making a move towards democracy,

still had seventeen by the end of the year. Reporters Sans Frontiers (RSF), another media watchdog, adds that in Benin, although no media professional had been jailed since 1994, as many as four had been imprisoned by 1998.

But no where else is the restriction of the media more tightly controlled than in Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where critical journalism is almost nonexistent. RSF states that in Ethiopia, the arrest of journalists is a common practice, and they are freed only after paying ruinous amounts in bail which effectively dissuade them from criticising the Meles Zenawi regime. A total of thirteen journalists remained in prison at the end of 1998. Between October 1992 and May1996, at least 219 newspapers, 108 magazines and two news agencies were registered in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Free Journalists' Association estimates that 150 journalists were prosecuted between that period for publishing information about ethnic rivalry or national security. By the end of 1996 only a dozen private newspapers were still publishing, as arrests and disappearances of journalists increased dramatically.

In the DRC, the RSF's 1999 *Annual Report* gives this graphic account of the situation on the ground; "In the Democratic Republic of Congo, [President] Laurent-Desire Kabila maintains intense pressure on the country's media, using officers from the flying squad to arrest any journalist who dares to criticise the president or those close to him".[38] Such are the conditions under which African journalists work, making their contribution to the on-going continental democratization process, highly minimal, to say the least.

Between 1989 and 1998, the period when Africa's democratization program started, a total of sixty journalists were killed on the continent in the line of duty, compared to a world figure of 472. The African number, which according to the CPJ is much lower than that of Europe and the former Soviet Union combined (131), excludes the fifty nine journalists killed in Algeria and two in Egypt during the same period, an area not the focus of this study. The figure is also much lower than the Americas (117), Middle East (94) and Asia (78).

In a continent where conflicts abound and militarism is cherished, where life expectancy is quite low and freedom of speech and expression are very limited, these figures are nothing to cheer about, particularly when one looks at the list of countries where journalists have been killed during the past ten years. In descending order, the worst cases have been: Rwanda (17),

Somalia (9), Angola (7), Chad (4), South Africa (4), Burundi (3), Ethiopia (3), Liberia (2), Nigeria (2), Sierra Leone (2), Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire) (2), Burkina Faso (1), Congo (1), Sudan (1), Uganda (1), Zambia (1). In 1998 alone, out of the twenty four journalists murdered worldwide, there was one in Angola, one in Burkina Faso, one in Congo, one in Ethiopia, two in Nigeria, one in Rwanda, and one in Sierra Leone.

Despite these depressing figures, many African journalists have shown remarkable courage and resilience in the face of such onslaughts by the state. Highly innovative ways have been devised for dealing with the repressive state policies involving individual and collective efforts. Many journalists have fought hard for their rights through a combination of defiance, professionalism, and legal means. In Niger, for instance, a private radio station, Radio Anfani, has introduced what would be the equivalent of a phone-in radio, except that instead of telephoning, listeners walk in and discuss their grievances openly, be it about democracy, health, the military or human rights.[39] This, despite the constant warnings, harassment and even detention of Radio Anfani's staff by the state. The show is unedited, with the result that the views expressed by the listeners regularly irk the authorities a great deal. Consequently, owner and director general of the station, Gremah Boucar, has been arrested, harassed, and threatened numerous times. He has refused to budge, however, and Radio Anfani's popularity continues to grow by the day.

When the authorities in Burkina Faso, a country that boasts an abundance of newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations, banned the re-transmission of broadcasts from international radio stations in December 1997, a total of four commercial radio stations announced a seven-hour blackout in protest. In Uganda in 1997, the Uganda Journalists Safety Committee (UJSC), which works for the protection of press freedom, unsuccessfully challenged the constitutionality of controversial press laws that have been regularly used by the state to intimidate and arrest journalists. Similar steps have also been taken by the Tanzanian media watchdog, the Association of Journalists and Media Workers, when in 1997, it challenged the constitutionality of the laws against the media, in a bid to halt the escalating harassment of journalists.

In yet another incident of media reaction to a prowling state, a group of Mozambican journalists resorted to using a fax machine to disseminate their news, in the aftermath of a new government campaign to harass independent journalists. The eventual product, *MediaFAX*, subsequently became the leading source of domestic news and information for most of the diplomatic and business communities, including non-governmental organizations.[40]

Regional organizations such as the Windhoek-based Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Monitoring and Defence of Press Freedom in West Africa, and international bodies such as the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontiers, International Center for Journalists, Amnesty International, Africa Watch, to name those that are better known, have made equally significant contributions to press freedom in Africa by applying pressure to the authorities to release detained journalists. As Reporters Sans Frontier summed up in a letter to *Index on Censorship*, "In the euphoria of Africa's 'wind of change', it is easy to overlook the difficulties and dangers that face a press still at the mercy of government whim and military intervention. Time may be running out for those in power, but they show little sign of abetting their own demise by giving the press a free hand".[41]

Conclusion

The euphoria that greeted the new arrival of democracy in Africa at the beginning of the 1990s has started giving way to more pessimistic evaluations of the continent's politics, as the quality of democracy itself, as opposed to merely electoral politics, begins to be more closely scrutinized. Such evaluations must take into account not just electoral politics, but also the role of the media in the democratization process, especially the constraints under which African journalists have been able to work within the new democratic setting.

As this paper has demonstrated, many of the impediments that the African media faced in the 1960s and 1970s are still alive today. Cases of arrests, harassment, threats, intimidation and death exist throughout the continent, to the point where even countries that have nearly always been democratic and have never in the past had military rule or one-party systems, are

now beginning to force journalists to conform to the government line of thinking. This is a dangerous trend that needs to be halted if the limited democratic gains are to be consolidated.

Despite the rhetoric to the contrary, it also marks a reversal of the little that has been achieved politically since the beginning of the nineties. African leaders are still too deeply steeped in the politics of uniformity-of-views, and not in the habit of tolerating policy criticisms. With a generally weak opposition, the media in most of these countries are the only ones left to punch holes into ill-conceived policies and expose corrupt practices that permeate much of what we call Africa's new democracies. Journalists will always be the mirror of society's freedom, and fortunately, African journalists have come to realize that role as well as their rights and obligations in the on-going process of change. Their unyielding endeavours to protect freedom of speech, expression and opinion, may well be the back upon which Africa's new democracy will be built in the new millennium.

Notes

[1] These include Rwanda, Congo, The Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

[2] See 'Media and Democracy' in *Media Studies Journal*, Freedom Forum, Summer 1995.

[3] See Fred. S. Siebert, et al (1956), *Four Theories of the Press*, University of Illinois   Press, Urbana.

[4] Ibid, p. 2.

[5] Denis McQuail, (1994), *Mass Communication Theory*, Sage Publications, London, p. 128.

[6] Siebert, et al, *Four Theories of the Press*…, p. 75.

[7] Ibid, p. 116

[8] Quoted in Siebert et al, Ibid, p. 116

[9] Denis McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory*…, p. 131

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] See William A. Hachten, (1993), *The Growth of the Media in the Third World*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, p. 15

[13] See Frank Barton, (1979), *The Press of Africa,* Macmillan Press, London, p.15.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Quoted in Hachten, *The Growth of the Media*…, pp. 18-19.

[16] Lorenco Marques was the original name of the present Mozambican capital Maputo.

[17] See Barton, *The Press of Africa*, p.169-170.

[18] Takirambudde, Peter Nanyenya, 'Media Freedom and the Transition to Democracy in Africa', in *African Journal of International and Comparative Law*, Vol. 7, No. 1, March 1995, pp. 18-53

[19] Ibid.

[20] See Clement E. Asante, (1996), *The Press in Ghana: Problems and Prospects*, University Press of America, Lanham

[21] Hachten, William. A., *The Growth of the Media*…, p.24

[22] Paul Ansah, et al, (1981), *Rural Journalism in Africa*, Unesco

[23] See William. A. Hachten, *The Growth of the Media….*, p.30

[24] U.S Information Agency, *Communications Data Book for Africa,* Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1966

[25] Helen Kitchen, (1956), *The Press in Africa*, Washington, D.C., Ruth Sloan Associates

[26] *Index on Censorship*, April 1992, Vol. 21, No. 4.

27 Tunji Lardner, 'Democratization in the African Media Forces', *Journal of International Affairs*, Summer 1993, Vol. 47, Issue 1.

[28] See William A. Hachten, 1971, *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa*, Iowa State University Press, Ames

[29] For journalists' activities in eastern Europe, see Ellen Mickiewicz, 'Transition and Democratization: The Role of Journalists in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union', in Graber, McQuail and Norris, (eds) *Politics of the News: The News of Politics*, pp. 33-56.

[30] Jay Rosen, 'Making Things More Public: On the Political Responsibility of the Media Intellectual', in *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Vol. 11, Issue 4, December 1994.

[31] See, for instance, 'The media can be used as weapons for change' in *IPI Report*, Vienna, Vol. 43, Issue 9, 1994

[32] Marthoz, Jean-Paul, 'A Call for Committed Journalism', in *Global Beat Syndicate*, New York University, May 5, 1999.

[33] Andrew Meldrum, 'The fragile freedom', in *Africa Report*, New York, Vol. 38, Issue 5, Sept 1993.

[34] *The Sowetan* (Johannesburg), August 4, 1992. Also quoted in Peter Nanyenya Takirambudde, op.cit.
[35] Personal communication

[36] See *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 21, NO. 4., April 1992

37 Ibid.

[38] Reporters Sans Frontiers, *19 99 Annual Report*, Paris

[39] For more on this see *The New York Times* of November 30, 1998

[40] Joe Davidson records that though *mediaFAX* is not cheap, i.e., $50 Dollars for a monthly subscription, the paper's popularity has continued to grow. See the *Media Studies Journal*, Summer, 1995, New York.

[41] See *Index on Censorship* of April 1992

Selected Bibliography

Ansah, Paul, Cherif Fall, Bernard Chindji Kouleu, Peter Mwaura, (1981),
     Rural Journalism in Africa, Unesco, Paris

Asante, Clement E., (1996) *The Press in Ghana: Problems and Prospects*,
     University Press of America, Lanham, New York, London.

Barton, Frank, (1979), *The Press of Africa*, Macmillan Press, London

Boden, William, (1995), *Power Plays: A Comparison between Swedish and American
     Press Policies*, Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Journalism and Mass
     Communication, Gotenborg University Sweden.

Bourgault, Louise M., (1995), *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Indiana University
     Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis.

Campbell, W. Joseph (1998), *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Cote
     D'Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy*, Praeger, Westport
     Connecticut, London.

Cater, Douglas (1959), *The Fourth Branch of Government*, The Houghton Mifflin
     Company, Boston.

Cook, Timothy, (1998), *Governing with the News*, The University of Chicago Press,
     Chicago and London.

Faringer, Gunilla L., (1991), *Press Freedom in Africa*, Praeger Publishers, New York.

Graber, Doris; McQuail, Denis; and Norris, Pippa (eds) (1998), *The Politics of News*,
     The News of Politics, Congressional Quarterly Inc., Washington, D.C.

Hacten, William (1993), *The Growth of Media in the Third World: African Failures*,
     Asian Successes, Iowa State University Press, Ames.

Humphreys, Peter J. (1996) *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe*,
     Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York.

Kitchen, Helen, (1956), *The Press in Africa*, Washington, D.C., Ruth Sloan Associates.

Kunczik, Michael, (1984), *Communication and Social Change*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Bonn.

Kunczik, Michael (1988), *Concepts of Journalism*, Friedrich Ebert Stifftung, Bonn

Mcquail, Denis, (1994), *Mass Communication Theory*, Sage, London.

Ochs, Martin, (1986), *The African Press*, The American University in Cairo Press, Cairo

Siebert, Fred. S., Theodore Peterson & Wilbur Schramm (1956), *Four Theories of the Press*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana

van Ginneken, Jaap (1998), *Understanding Global News: A Critical Introduction*, Sage Publications, London.