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African Periodicals and Popular Culture

By Charles Muiro Ngugi

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Introduction:

On August 20, 2005, the *East African Standard* published an extensive profile of Caroline Mutoko, a leading radio announcer in Kenya, describing her as Kenya's "fastest mouth." The article was generously illustrated with color photographs of her "liberally spaced, entirely tiled, three-bedroom apartment where "parsimony meets stylishness." The apartment is in a "well-guarded" apartment block in a leafy section of Nairobi. The living room was described as being all of seven meters across, and the Kitchen was so large it had taken years to populate with choice accoutrements of modernity: a dining set, a lounge set, a card table with flowers, a drinks cabinet, and a glass-topped, round coffee table on which sat a chess board. She was photographed in different dresses, posing in different sections of her apartment. In one picture, she stood beside a mahogany-colored dining table in a navy-blue business suit; in another, she lounged, almost spread-eagled, on her green sofa, in a white dress, and in yet another picture, she sat cross-legged on the carpet in a black gown with gray fur trimming. Her car, we were told, is a Mitsubishi Outlander, a cross between a Saloon and a Sports Utility Vehicle. She works for KISS 100 radio station, which commands 10 percent of the Shs. 8.4 billion (\$116 million) Advertising industry in Kenya. She was quoted as saying: "They call me the KISS 100 Rottweiler...I will make sure the money comes in... I'll kill everyone in order to deliver."¹

The above article clearly depicts a new, arriviste Africa: an Africa you are probably not used to seeing. It is certainly not the Africa of the *Egungun* masks and divination, of teeming wildlife, of the Maasai herdsman standing on one leg silhouetted against the setting sun in an African Savannah of tall grass and acacia, of starving urchins and corrupt Big Men. This Africa is the product of the convergence of globalization, media freedom, and a certain resurgence of pride in things African, a kind of new Negritude. It may not be exactly representative of everyday life in Africa, but it is an Africa that is becoming increasingly common in many African periodicals. It is both existing and aspirational; while the African elite has attained it, the majority of Africans can only wish for it. In a continent where “stars” and “celebrities” have in the past meant the high achievers of other countries, the announcers, the rap and gospel musicians, celebrity pastors, the athletes, the rich, sexual therapists, and politicians are the new African celebrities, noteworthy for both their spectacle and role model value. In three important categories; communication, transportation and personal ornamentation, these new African stars are setting the trend, by owning the latest gadgetry, driving the latest car models, and dressing to kill. They have become fodder for the African popular media. Periodicals all over the continent are focusing on them like never before, and are using them as pegs to sell new lifestyles to African readers. Dele Momodu, the editor of Nigeria’s *Ovation International* magazine, told a BBC reporter: “In the West they have established stars. For us, we are creating celebrities.”²

Let us consider a few more examples to illustrate the lifestyle that these publications are selling and the kind of people being pointed out as role models. The September 18, 2005 issue of *Newswatch* magazine in Nigeria carried an article in its “Back of the Book” section headlined: “The Magic of Fruits,” with the following sub-head: “Experts say those who eat a lot of fruits regularly enjoy greater resistance to diseases.” The June 9, 2005 issue of the

Zenith pullout magazine of *Le Soleil* of Dakar, Senegal carried in-depth feature articles on the life, leadership style and achievements of President Abdullahi Wade, and generous color pictures of leading musicians, including Yossour N'dour and Baaba Maal, in full flight. The Nigerian magazine, *Ovation International*, in a 2004 issue, carried an extensive profile of "Jet Set pastor" Gabriel Oduyemi, showing off his palatial mansion and private jet. In its September 2004 issue, *Eve Magazine* of Kenya, led with the story of Njeeri wa Ngugi, the wife of writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o, who had been raped by thugs in Nairobi. The same issue contained stories about how to eliminate second hand clothes from your wardrobe. The June 2005 issue of *True Love East Africa*, had a story about Kenyan TV Personality Jimmy Gathu giving advice on how to raise daughters, and another article titled: "Too Shy to Undress: Your Body Image vs. Your Sex Life." And the *Saturday Nation* of June 4, 2005 had as its lead article in its insert magazine, an article titled "Alpha Females," that profiled four ambitious women who succeeded in their careers despite considerable odds.

This consecration of African celebrities by the African media is fairly new. A decade ago, African publications were full of articles on Michael Jackson, Elizabeth Taylor, MC Hammer, Phil Collins, All-for-One, and others. Things have changed considerably since then. Today, it is the new tribe of African superstars, rap musicians, who stare at you from the pages of the periodicals, exhibiting their most threatening thug pose, wearing baggy, sagging pants, oversize T-shirts, chains a slave could ogle at, gold teeth and other bling accessories.

This article looks at periodicals and popular culture in Africa. It starts by giving an overview of the history of African periodicals. The next section deals with African periodicals and popular culture. This is followed by a second section dealing with African periodicals in four regional contexts: Western Africa, Central Africa, Southern Africa and

Eastern Africa. It is hoped that this article will add somewhat to our view of Africa. As Greg Garrett has observed: “Africa is still a dark continent. Not in the ways that the Victorians thought of it, to be sure, but today, even to most Westerners – scholars included – Africa remains largely a cipher, an empty outline in Western minds like the map consisting mostly of empty white in *Conrad’s Heart of Darkness*, a map we fill in based on information or purest whimsy.”³ Popular culture in this article is taken to be culture that is widely accessible, assessed, disseminated, and widely viewed or heard or read. Periodicals are one of the main cultural influences in Africa, the others being other branches of the mass media including radio, television, films, and video.

Types of periodicals

Distinctions are often made by media scholars between the popular press and the official press. While such distinctions could be made amongst African periodicals, the African media scene presents interesting definitional issues of its own. Thus, we find numerous other categories of the press besides these two. The official press includes media that is owned by either the government or the ruling party. It articulates the view of the ruling class in a top-down version, from the leader to the people at the bottom. The government press refers to publications produced by the government for purposes of aiding its administrative function. This includes various gazettes or legal notices, as well as annual handbooks, parliamentary reports, and policy papers. The private or independent press consists of privately owned periodicals that pursue an independent editorial policy while operating openly. The alternative press, while independent, may or may not be privately owned. It might be owned by a political party, an underground movement, a rebel group, or

a pressure group that may or may not be funded locally. The alternative press tends to exist underground, operating without license or registration of any kind.

All these periodical types have to be treated together in discussions of popular culture in Africa because separately, they are nearly insignificant as contributors to cultural change, yet considered *en masse*, their impact is profound. Their content provokes debates and is circulated and re-circulated. For instance, a piece of policy or law – such as a constitutional draft - published in an obscure official gazette often enters the public discourse where it is exchanged repeatedly between different peoples. In other words, it is made popular. It is this popular productivity that eventually turns an official publication into a part of the popular press. This example is particularly pertinent; the African press is not full of stories about fantastic UFOs who copulate with humans. Stories about vampires, devil worship, and *mami wata*, tend to be transmitted more orally than through any form of modern mass media. As we shall see later, the African press is essentially a political press.

For our purposes here, a popular periodical, while it can be a newspaper or magazine, can be identified by the following broad characteristics: it covers news or general human interest stories without providing footnotes or a bibliography, with any references or attribution being entirely in-text. Articles are written mostly by staff reporters or freelance writers. It is usually, but not exclusively, published by a commercial enterprise. Normally, it has a lot of photographs, but few graphs or tables. Most use topological devices such as headlines, sub-heads, captions, to attract attention to particular articles, as well as to aid readability and for general visual appeal. Finally, it targets a wide, diverse readership, even when its audience is conceived as limited for purposes of media planning.

Some media critics tend to differentiate between the popular press and the so-called quality press, but this distinction is not employed here. We take the view that all periodicals,

popular or quality, contribute to culture. Moreover, in Africa, such distinctions are not often so pronounced. The gutter press did not even exist prior to the 1990s; whatever existed earlier was the underground press, which was more related to the quality press because it covered serious issues such as governance, politics and economics. The distinction between the quality and the gutter or popular press is also often blurred by the treatment of stories in those two types of periodicals. Each tends to influence the other. For instance, the quality press tends to copy techniques such as the mobilization of the personal as an explanatory framework from lifestyle and the gutter press, which it then uses in its “features” or “style” sections.

Popular periodicals in Africa, therefore, include newspapers, lifestyle magazines, music magazines, and certain kinds of corporate media. The magazines in particular have glossy covers, often featuring happy-looking model couples or families, single men flaunting their muscles or gorgeous single women of uncommon, hard-to-get vital statistics. Such periodicals carry advice on romance, marriage, health, sexuality, childbearing, cooking, religion and travel. Some may carry a romantic fiction article in the centerfold or elsewhere. Some magazines, particularly those in countries like Senegal, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, and Ghana that have relatively better economies, carry colorful advertisements for all kinds of goods. An important segment of lifestyle magazines are corporate magazines that organizations publish exclusively for their members. Such periodicals resemble lifestyle magazines in their content and design. Airlines, credit card companies, hotel chains, hospitals, professional societies, churches, and other institutions have them.

Although the total number of publications in Africa is difficult to ascertain, Mette Shayne of the University of Chicago had by 1999 compiled a list of 503 publications that were being received by American libraries.⁴ It is clear, however, that this is but a tiny fraction

of the periodicals produced in Africa. One country alone, Ethiopia, has licensed more than 700 periodicals. The problem with African periodicals is that they are generally irregular and opportunistic. Many are produced to serve a momentary purpose and disappear as soon as the event or trend is over.

History of the African Periodicals:

The first newspapers in Africa appeared more than 150 years ago. The earliest periodicals were the *West African Herald* which began publishing in Ghana in 1857, and *Iwe Irobin*, which appeared in Nigeria in 1859. During colonialism, periodicals edited by African nationalists were instrumental in anti-colonial campaigns. Such nationalists as Jomo Kenyatta, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nnamidi Azikiwe and Patrice Lumumba, worked as journalists at one time in their careers.

After independence, Africans adopted what Dennis McQuail has called Development Media Theory, which placed heavy emphasis on social responsibility role of the media without a concomitant stress being placed on media freedoms or rights.⁵ Thus, the newly independent governments saw the media as part of the machinery of the state, not the independent Fourth Estate it is supposed to be. The media were subsequently deployed, using governmental fiat, in the role of facilitating development. Their main role was to provide news about development, which was seen as important in stimulating further development. The media were also enlisted in another important objective: to help forge cohesion and a sense of national identity from the disparate ethnicities that had been arbitrary cobbled together by European powers during colonialism.

The motive force for transforming African societies emanated from the assumption that traditional or backward societies were ignorant of the benefits of modernity. These

benefits needed to be pointed out, and the media was seen as being well suited to perform this role by academics like Daniel Lerner, who had called for the illiterate, isolated and traditional societies to be “motivated” by being given clues regarding the benefits of modernity.⁶ Another scholar, Ithiel de Sola Pool, saw the media as capable of pinpointing to the Africans and others the opportunities existing for them to use the accessories of modernity⁷ - soaps, over-the-counter medication, fashion, canned food, sewerage, tap water, electricity, consumer electronics, cars.

Perhaps things would have been different if the majority of African countries had not embraced socialism and instituted *dirigiste* economies that nationalized the media and otherwise controlled them. For the better part of 40 years, the consequence of this ideological experimentation was to inhibit the media from carrying out its role of pointing out clues of modernity to its credulous masses. Many countries became so poor that there were no consumer goods worth writing about. Grinding poverty could not support advertising. Defamation and libel laws were misinterpreted to prohibit coverage of ostentation amongst the high and mighty, so that the majority of Africans remained ignorant of the extent to which their leaders wallowed in opulence, or came to regard such wealth as their leaders’ birthright. The very ideology of development communication stressed that news had to have a development value. News was therefore, reduced to a list of infrastructure-related development: roads, cattle dips, dispensaries, and schools. Coupled with this was the prevalence of the cultural imperialism view, which denigrated certain aspects of modernity as anti-African and therefore undeserving of being appropriated by self-respecting, patriotic Africans. A certain moralizing under the guise of protecting African culture also crept in, buttressed by anti-pornography laws. In this era, therefore, whatever

contribution the media made to consumerism and cultural change was incidental and symbolic.

To perform the role ascribed to it, however, the African media had to be blow-beaten into submission. Many journalists were detained, tortured, or killed and their publications banned, and printing presses vandalized by state agents. The condition of the African media prior to the 1990s is engraved in the views of Abodel Karimou, editor of *La Gazette* in Cameroon, who was quoted by Ghanaian journalist Baffour Ankomah in a famous article published in *Index on Censorship* of February 1988, as having said:

When an edition of *La Gazette* is ready for press [I send] a photocopy of each page to the Ministry of Territorial Administration in Yaounde, the capital, which is three hours by bus from Doula, where *La Gazette* is printed. At the Ministry in Yaounde, the newspaper pages go through the bureaucracy – from the Reading Bureau, to the Director for Public Freedoms, to the Deputy Director for Political Affairs. Each official is permitted by law to make notes on the articles which are finally presented in resume form to the Minister for Territorial Administration. The big man goes through the resume, if he has time to spare. He orders each approved page to be stamped and signed by the Deputy Director for Political Affairs. Printers in Cameroon are not allowed to print material without the censor's stamp. From the printers, 10 copies of the approved newspaper pages are sent back to the Ministry for final approval and a second stamp. Newspaper vendors are forbidden to distribute any publication without the censor's second stamp.⁸

The situation improved after the so-called second liberation occurred in the early 1990s, when most African countries abandoned control not only of political rights, but of the economy as well. So many publications appeared that no directory has been able to capture them all.

The emergence of alternative press can partly be explained by the wave of political liberalization that swept Africa since the late 1980s. Most of them have been small newsletters and pamphlets that were easy and cheaper to produce, but there are a number of magazines and newspapers. Most of these publications are virulently partisan, prescriptive

and preachy. An example of the aggressive periodicals aligned to political parties include *La Voie* founded in 1991 in Côte d'Ivoire, whose slogan is a “newspaper that will do combat for democratic values and human rights.” These newspapers have broadened the agenda of issues available for public discussion in a continent where dissent was disallowed by Strong Man, military, or single-party rule. Their rancor and cantankerousness, while fostering a culture of argumentation, has improved the bar for the tolerance for diverse opinion.

Because many of these publications are published on a shoestring budget, many have no schedule integrity to speak of. They are seen on the street whenever their proprietors manage to put enough money together to pay the printer. Many of the publications started in the last decade have tended to fold up as soon as they were started owing to a combination of inexperience on the part of the editors, bad management, and hostile governments. Some editors were forced into exile, while others abandoned journalism and joined politics. The professional weaknesses of those who remained in journalism as well as those who joined the profession during the transition to multiparty democracy has been noted by Lewis Odhiambo, a professor at the University of Nairobi's School of Journalism who has remarked that political liberalization “brought to the fore what was hitherto latent, i.e., the degree of recklessness and unprofessional behavior that some participants in this sector can display.”⁹ Some are purely pornographic. Those that cover politics distinguish themselves by their parochialism, with many blindly supporting the tribal groups of their proprietors.

More recently, there has been a trend to establish publications that cater for groups of regional countries. In Southern Africa, a regional newspaper *Southern Times*, was established in 2004. It is a joint venture between Zimpapers and *New Era* of Namibia, both government-owned media houses. Media critics regard this venture as a clever attempt by Zimbabwe to control information outside of its borders. The *Southern Times*, headed by *The*

[Zimbabwe] *Herald's* assistant editor, Moses Magadza, has its editorial offices in Namibia, and is printed in Zimbabwe. A Sunday paper, it was widely seen as an apparent attempt to counter the South African-based *Sunday Times*, which was seen as being anti-President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe. According to a joint statement issued by the publishers at its launch, a potential readership of millions across the region was envisaged. However, after the first two months, it had sold less than 20,000 copies. This is not the first time that a regional periodical had been established in Southern Africa. During the hey-day of the anti-apartheid struggle, members of the Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) established the Harare-based *Southern African Economist* in 1988.

In East Africa, the Nation Group of Newspapers launched the *East African* in 1994. It became the first regional periodical since the days of *Drum*. A quality weekly, it covers news throughout the entire East African region, with special emphasis on Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Somalia and Southern Sudan. Since it was founded in Mombasa 1902, *The Standard* has changed its name to *East African Standard* back and forth several times, suggesting confusion over its national and regional identity. In 2004, it was renamed *The Standard*, but continues to have a special section for East African news. West Africa does not have a regional publication that is based in the region, although some Nigerian magazines circulate in other West African countries. London-based *West Africa* magazine, remains the foremost regional periodical covering West Africa.

Except in their coverage of political news, African publications often fail to capture the idiom of their society because they are too elitist. According to Kwame Karikari, a Ghanaian media analyst, “it can be argued that, therefore, both the state-owned and privately owned independent papers represent different and sometimes contending sections of the political and economic elite.”¹⁰ The quality press is often in English, French or Portuguese,

and reaches but a small segment of the society. The number of people who speak the language of its publication on the other hand limits the reach of the vernacular press. The result is the formation of small concentric information communities overlapping international, national, regional and ethnic boundaries. For instance, a Yoruba who reads the vernacular Yoruba press probably also reads the regional and national press.

African Periodicals in Exile

The contribution of African periodicals based abroad to African popular culture also deserves mention. These periodicals are usually published in London and Paris. The practice of publishing periodicals in Europe started during the initial stages of colonization when official publications were sent to the Metropolis because no printing presses were available in Africa. *West Africa* magazine, perhaps the oldest publication in this category, first appeared in Liverpool in the 1890s, but started appearing with regularity in London in 1917 where it is still published. However, in the 1970s, the number of publications published abroad increased dramatically, owing to a number of factors. The first was lack of state-of-the-art printing presses in Africa capable of printing color publications to satisfy the palates of an increasingly quality-conscious readership. At the same time, a need was felt for publications that could cater for the advertising requirements and business intelligence of foreign multinationals doing business in, or simply eyeing, the continent. These multinationals preferred a different kind of periodical: one that was Pan-African in reach and possessing the requisite quality in production, editorial style and content. Some publications were started to provide business and political intelligence vital to investing in a continent where politics affected business and vice versa. The oil boom of 1970s resulted in a windfall that Nigeria used to subsidize the establishment of English-language magazines in Britain. The expulsion

of editors and journalists by increasingly paranoid regimes throughout the continent beefed up the number of exiled African journalists. The likes of Ralph Uweche, Baffour Ankomar, Abdulah Rahman Mohamed Babu, Kwasi Gyan Apenteng, Peter Enahoro, Abdullatif Abdullah, Ben Turok, Donald Woods, had found themselves either editing publication in London, or simply cooling their heels there.

Examples of African publications included *New African*, *Africa Events*, *African Business*, *Africa*, and *Africa Now*, which joined *West Africa* magazine in London. In Paris, the main periodicals were *AfricaAsia* and *Afrique Asie* as well as *Jeune Afrique*, which has been published in Paris for almost 50 years. These publications carried mainly business and political news on various African countries. Although they could have been expected to practice a kind of aggressive journalism given their location away from the African state police, in reality, they practiced substantial self-censorship in order to be allowed into African countries. In spite of this shortcoming, African readers still found these periodicals interesting because they were often better written, designed and printed than local publications. They carried extensive sporting news, stories about musical performances by Fela Kuti, Manu Dibango, Osibisa, Miriam Makeba, and other musicians of the day, and lifestyle end-of-the-book sections depicting the glitterati of the African Diaspora in cocktails, holding their wine glasses, resplendent in their business suits and expensive *agbadas*, besides their overdressed women wearing heavy make-up. The publications made African events abroad appear big and important, although they probably went unmentioned by the media of the country where they took place. To many Africans on the continent, this been-to class was the class to aspire to.

Some of these publications, the notable ones being Enahoro's *Africa Now* and Uweche's *Africa*, folded up after the end of the Nigerian oil boom. The pro-Islamic *Africa*

Events, which had been bankrolled by Middle Eastern financiers, also ceased publication. In Paris, *AfricaAsia* and *Afrique Asie* also went belly up because the socialist economies of Angola, Algeria and Madagascar that they relied on could no longer support them financially. Gyan Apenteng founded *Africa Topics* after he left *West Africa* but it ceased publication after a few years. *BusinessinAfrica*, which had been founded by Nigerian investors in London in the mid 1990s, relocated to Rivonia, South Africa, where it is still published. Beside financial problems occasioned by the end of the oil boom and instability in Angola and elsewhere, African-owned periodicals also faced competition from publications such as *Africa Research Bulletin*, *Africa Contemporary Record* and *Africa Economic Digest*. Some of these were newsletters, with lower production costs, relying more on dedicated subscribers than on advertising. They also tended to be edited by local hands, who knew the lay of the land in their own capitals better than the African exiles.

Today, few of these original publications remain. They include *West Africa* magazine, *New African* and *African Business*, which are still published in London. Another notable publication is the weekly newspaper, *The Zimbabwean*, produced in London and distributed in Zimbabwe as an international publication, and among Zimbabweans living abroad. Nigerian investors publish the *African Renaissance*. In addition, *African Soccer* is also based in London. In Paris, only *Jeune Afrique l'Intelligent* is still published of the original periodicals. It has been reconstituted as Groupe Jeune Afrique, and now also publishes, *Am - Afrique Magazine*, and a host of corporate directories and books. To cater for Anglo-phone Africa, Groupe Jeune Afrique started the *Africa Report* and lured Patrick Smith, former editor of *Africa Confidential*, to edit it. Indigo publications, also based in Paris, publishes *Africa Intelligence*, *Indian Ocean Newsletter*, *Africa Energy Intelligence*, *Africa Mining Intelligence*, *La Lettre du Continent* and *Maghreb Confidential* newsletters. Another important publication is *Africultures*, which is published in

Lyons, and carries articles in both English and French. *Afrique Tribune*, published in Montreal, Canada, is another notable periodical published abroad.

African Periodicals and Popular Culture

That Africa's press is largely political is not a coincidence. It was conceived as such and it has always been so. For instance, in 1922, *La Presse Porto-Novienne*, a newspaper in Benin, described a journalist as "a man of talent, a soldier who fights neither with a rifle nor cannon but with ideas. He is a patriot who makes himself an ardent defender of just causes, of liberties, of rights; a public advocate, a propagator of light, a savior of the country, in turn the bitter enemy of those who commit injustice. The journalist is a militant, a politician who offers his life in defending private and general interests of people while taking on the hate of those whom he fights."¹¹ Obviously, this journalist was not a celebrity writer; he was a professional with a political agenda, an agenda that has proved to be rather enduring. Even today, acres of newsprint are still devoted to political news, analysis, commentary, and political cartoons.

A quick perusal of many of sub-Saharan Africa periodicals indicates that media coverage is tilted towards coverage of men in prominent positions of leadership; rarely do women appear as news actors. The 2003 Gender and Media Baseline Study, an initiative of the Media Institute of South Africa and Gender Links, found that 83 per cent of those who speak in the media are men, while women constitute only 17 per cent of the sources in the media. Whenever women are portrayed in the media, they are overwhelmingly young and beautiful, working in such professions as beauty shops, nursing, teaching, airline hospitality, or as homemakers. They tend to carry their private labels with them – the wife of so-and-so, his daughter, his sister, his granddaughter. Older women are virtually absent in the media of

Africa, and there is no significant difference between how women are represented in both the public and private press. The media is staffed mostly by men, who occupy top positions in management, editorial and reporter ranks. This gap is particularly acute in the print media; television and radio tend to attract more women, but the electronic media in Africa is seen as less rigorous and less academically challenging.¹²

An important part of the content of some African periodicals concerns death. Obituary columns in such big newspapers as the *Guardian* of Lagos, the *Daily Nation* of Nairobi, the *New Vision* of Kampala, and *Ghanian Chronicle* are the equivalent of the birth and wedding pages in the *New York Times*. Obituaries and death notices have become an art unto themselves. Upon the death of a close relative, the family or clan, depending on their ostentatious inclinations, will take a quarter page, half-page or a full page of a newspaper to announce the death. It matters little that relatives who need to know can communicate via telephone or via word of mouth. As the Nigerian academic Dele Jegede has observed: “Because advertisement rates for obituaries are the highest, taking out a full-page ad to announce the passing away of a loved one or the thirtieth anniversary of the death of a grandparent is generally regarded as socially prestigious.”¹³ The design varies but little: the departed stares at you from an enlarged mugshot. Below it, details of the death are given, usually in a sentence that says whether the death occurred as result of long or shot illness, with all illness having been bravely borne. Then follows the names of the deceased’s significant progeny: sons and daughters and grandchildren, their professional and sometimes, educational accomplishments, and their locations all over the globe. Depending on the size of the advert, details of the professional or business accomplishments of the departed are provided, as are his philanthropic deeds while still alive. In Nigeria in particular, prominent people who sent condolences are thanked prominently. Finally, with variations amongst

religious groups, God or other supreme power is beseeched to keep the departed in a nice place in the hereafter.

Another notable practice in African periodicals is what are called “Real Life” stories. Such articles are distinguished by their catchy headlines as illustrated by the following: “Quarrels with my wife ‘chased’ me from home,” “Bitterness held me hostage for years” both of which appeared in Kenya’s *Family Mirror* magazine.¹⁴ The *Daily Nation* sometimes carries confessions of people who have been scammed by Nairobi’s con artists. “True life” confessions are extremely popular in Kenya. One such confession was published as a book called *My Life in Crime* and was a best seller.¹⁵ It told stories of the exploits of bank robber John Kiriamiti, jailed for particularly violent bank robberies in the Nairobi of 1970s. But perhaps the most ingenious innovation is the one by *Ovation International* magazine in Nigeria. These magazines are full of color pictures of smiling people in their best clothes. Do not be fooled; they are not national celebrities. They are just ordinary citizens who have paid to have their pictures published. This creates a situation whereby Nigerians buy the magazines in order to see people they know, rather than read about celebrities they may never meet. It is a kind of reverse media intrusion, in which ordinary people pay to appear in, rather than run away from the intrusion of, the media.

This technique of printing pictures of ordinary Africans was first used by *Drum* magazine in the 1960s and 1970s, with considerable success. For almost 30 years starting from 1951, *Drum* was one of the most popular magazines in Anglophone Africa. It was started by Jim Bailey, a white South African, and became unique for attracting a black readership by putting contemporary African culture at the center of its content. Its famous African editor, Henry Nxumalo, boasted in 1956 as follows: "From the coffee plantations of the Gold Coast to the jazz-stung nightspots of Nigeria, from the slow pomp of Uganda's

royal ceremonies to the livid frenzy of Kenya's turmoils; in the dreaming hamlets of Zululand; among Cape Town's fun-filled coon life, and Johannesburg's teeming, thrilling thousands - everywhere, every month Drum is read and relished."¹⁶

Drum's content was varied: It typically printed entertainment, sports, letters to the editor, and political news concerning Africans and African-Americans. It had a health advice column called "Dr. Drum," a heartbreak column called "Dear Dolly," a pen pal section, and advertisements promoting correspondence colleges, radios, skin-lightening creams, weight-gaining tablets, and medicines for acne. On the cover were beautiful African girls. There were text and picture love stories in every issue. The magazine became so popular that Bailey serialized the magazine in Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana, just on time to document the independence of most of Africa from colonial rule. The result was that its circulation rose to 300,000 copies. As Struan Douglas has observed: "Drum was a symbol of the new African cult, divorced from the tribal stereotypes, but urbanised, eager and proud."¹⁷ Although it eventually disappeared from the scene, it was re-started by popular demand, under different ownership. Today, Media24, a dominant player in the South Africa media scene, owns it.

Some African newspapers have entered into strategic alliances with major international newspapers, news agencies and article syndicates in which they are allowed to carry opinions, analysis, and other articles. Some of these foreign articles are selected for their prurient characteristics. For instance, on September 22, 2005, the *Mail and Guardian* of South Africa carried a story sourced from AFP, headlined "Vibrators Fly off the Shelves in Hong Kong Pharmacies." The article said Hong Kong women had given up on waiting for their workaholic husbands, and had welcomed a decision by a Pharmacy chain to start stocking sex toys. On June 1, another newspaper, the *Daily Nation* of Kenya, carried an advice column in a section of its centerfold magazine in which an English woman had

written to a Dr. Stuttaford, described as *The Times* (of London) doctor. In an article headlined: “I am losing my grip,” she explained that after the birth of her daughter, her husband had left her because he had discovered that no matter how hard he tried, he could not “climax inside me.” She had managed to attract another man, but the same problem had persisted, even after trying all the “pelvic-tonic exercises.” Her question was accompanied by a graphic of a tall woman in a scanty top-only see-through night dress, sewing a torn circular garment with a slit in between balanced in front of her loins. Dr. Stuttaford explained that this was a common problem, and advised her to “extend your knowledge of adventurous lovemaking and the positions that exert pressure” on the male partner. For good measure, a second opinion was sought from one Suzi Godson, described as a “sex writer and columnist” who, amongst other things, recommended that she try a certain cosmetic surgery clinic that could give her a designer version of what she wanted.¹⁸

What this articles show is that some African family newspapers will outsource from abroad prurient literature that appeals to the lowest common denominator when such articles cannot be written by in-house journalists, perhaps for fear of being seen as disrespectful. The African media have certainly realized that to attract the kind of massive audiences that are required by the market in keeping with free market economics, they have to pander to the needs of the audience. The formula is simple: give the audience what they want. What readers shows interest in, they get in droves. In Africa, this usually means politics and sex. But not every country is taking this proliferation of sex lying down. In Tanzania, for instance, porn-filled Swahili language publications such as *Chombeza*, *Arusha Leo*, *Kasheshia*, *Michapo*, *Cheka*, *Nyundo*, *Kombora*, *Majira*, *Watu*, and *Tingisha* were temporarily banned by the government between 1993-1999 for publishing obscenity and using profane language.

Another key feature of African media publications is the ubiquitous comic strip and satirical cartoons. The satirical cartoon almost always is a caricature of the political leadership, and is the best example of how far media freedom in Africa has come. Before 1990s, the head of state in most African countries could not be cartooned as this could result in the arrest of the cartoonist. Today, African politicians are perhaps the most caricatured of any leaders anywhere. In Nigeria, President Olesegun Obasanjo, a former military general, is often drawn with his generous girth protruding out of his military uniform, and President Robert Mugabe is always being drawn as a monkey, and Mwai Kibaki of Kenya as a retarded idiot. An interesting innovation is what appears like a cross between a comic strip and an editorial satirical cartoon. It looks like a montage of satirical cartoons occupying prime newsprint real estate. Unlike the editorial cartoon, which appears next to the Editorial, this montage appears on a single day every week, commenting on several issues at once, and employing different caricatures. An example is Paul Kelemba's "Madd, Madd World" in the *East African Standard*. Other leading cartoonists in Africa include Tanzanian Godfrey Mwangepamba (Gado), Nigerians Egun Aleshinloye, Obi Azulu, and Ake Didi Onu, and South African Jonathan Shapiro, Nanda Sooben, Al (Alphonse) Krok.

Many people in Africa cannot afford the price of periodicals, so they rely on the goodwill of the newspaper vendors, who in turn enjoy the goodwill and popularity emanating from this act. It is not unusual to see a vendor being surrounded by jobless people who read a publication from cover to cover and put it back on the stand. Nigerians, in their humor, have called them the "International Readers Associations" and "Free Readers Association of Nigeria" (FAN), hence FANatics. Some newspaper vendors charge a small fee to read a periodical, but they do so at the risk of being discovered by corporate inspectors, who see this practice as being inimical to their own interests. This communal

reading of newspapers is a site of cultural production where discussions often ensue, arguments are picked, and lasting friendships struck. Those who are fortunate enough to read the newspapers for free then share their newly acquired information with those without access to newspapers. This results in hand-me-down news, a kind of informed gossip or third party news, part of what John A. Wiseman called a “Chain of Communication.”¹⁹

Once a publication has been paid for, however, its life has just started. Several people, as many as 10, may read it. When it is eventually discarded, what is left of it will be bought by a shopkeeper or butcher, who will use it to wrap meat or grocery. At the very end of its life, a periodical may be used as a toilet paper in a pit latrine.

Regional Perspectives

Western Africa

Nigeria

Nigeria has a large media sector, probably only exceeded by South Africa. It is not clear how many newspapers there are in the country, but those that come out regularly exceed 100. They include well-respected dailies, popular tabloids and publications that cater for specific ethnic interests. At least 17 of these newspapers have a national circulation. These newspapers have an average print run of 45,000 copies daily. The main newspapers are *The Punch*, the most widely read daily newspaper in Nigeria, with circulation of more than 100,000 copies. *The Guardian* has a circulation of 60,000. It is a darling of Nigeria’s intellectual class, who respect it for its sober analysis and professionalism. Government-owned *Daily Times* sells about 45,000, while *Champion Daily* sells 38,000. Other newspapers include *Nigerian Tribune*, the *Daily Trust*, *The Comet*, *Vanguard*, *This Day*, and *The Daily Sun*, and

the government-owned *New Nigerian*, which publishes separate editions in Lagos and Kaduna.

Nigerian also has more than 50 magazines, about 20 of which are circulated nationally, with the rest being regional. The magazine market is dominated by three giants, namely, *Tell*, *News*, and *Newswatch*, which have circulation figures of about 100,000, 80,000, and 50,000, respectively. *This Week* sells about 45,000 copies. The largest lifestyle magazine, *Ovation International*, founded in 1990 by Dele Momodu, is a phenomenon that sells more than 100,000 per issue. Other magazines include *Insider Weekly*, *City People*, *Society*, *Celebration*, *Vintage People*, *Prime People*, *Fantasy*, and *Romance International*, as well as soft porn publications such as *Lolly*, *Ikebe Super* (Meaning, literary *Super Ass*), and *Fun Times*. Magazines are generally regarded as being geared to the elite, even more so than newspapers.

Lagos in particular, and South Western Nigerian generally, has the lion's share of periodicals. There have been claims that the concentration of the media in this region skews national politics and imposes secularism on other parts of Nigeria, particularly the North, where *Sharia* (Islamic law) has been instituted. These charges, however, appear to be hollow. Ownership of other periodicals is varied and reflects the diversity of the large cosmopolitan commercial city that is Lagos. Abuja, the federal capital, has publications like *Abuja Inquirer* and *Daily Trust*. Other large Nigerian cities such as Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Enugu and others have their own thriving periodicals.

The Nigerian periodicals have always been critical of successive Nigerian governments, including military regimes. The history of the media in Nigeria is replete with detained and assassinated journalists, such as Dele Giwa, a famous *Newswatch* editor whom state agents killed with a letter bomb in 1986. However, it is dictator Sani Abacha's rule that remains a dark age for the Nigerian print media, not only because of

detentions of journalists and tribulations of periodicals such as *Tell*, *News* and *Tempo*, but also because of poor economy and the introduction of value-added tax for the print media sector. Many publications adopted cost-cutting measures, including downsizing and shelving capital development plans. A number of periodicals were unable to cope and simply folded up. These include *Financial Post*, *Evening Express*, *Lagos Life*, *AM News*, *Sunray*, *Guardian Express*, *Concord*, *National Interest*, *Tempo* *The African Guardian*, *The African Concord*, *Anchor*, *Post Express*, *Eko Today*, *African Science Monitor*, *Banner*, *Classique* and *Quality*, to mention but a few.

Under President Obasanjo, media freedom has improved. However, because of general insecurity, Reporters Without Borders still lists Nigeria as one of the most dangerous countries in Africa for journalists. Despite this, new publications have come up. Examples include *NewsAfrica*, and *Breaking News*, which cover general news; *African Beatz*, which covers music; and *Smart* and *Market Today*, both of which are business magazines.

In the period since 2000 there appears to have been a slight drop in circulation of all publications, according to Nigerian scholar, Oyo Olukoyun. This decline has been linked to the recent trend by radio stations of reviewing the content of periodicals for their readers. Consequences of this programming have been mixed, but, on balance, quite adverse on circulation. On days when there is no major news, there is low circulation as potential readers hold on to their money. However, whenever there is a major news item, the radio reviews spur circulation as people opt to buy newspapers for greater, in-depth coverage. A recent increase in the cover price of the *Guardian* and other publications has exacted a toll on the circulation of periodicals, forcing them to become even more elitist in their readership.

As in other parts of the world, globalization has been accompanied by increasing localization and the resurgence of ethnicity. In Nigeria, this is illustrated by the rise of the

vernacular Press. One newspaper in particular, *Alaroye*, a periodical published in Yoruba, has a circulation that rivals those of the national press. In the North, Hausa periodicals include *Al-Mizān* which also sells widely.

Benin

Reporters Without Borders, ranks Benin, the small West African republic of six million people, 25th in its worldwide index of press freedom. According to recent estimates, there are approximately 18 daily and 41 magazines in Benin. This is remarkable given that the country has been free of Marxist policies for the last 15 years only. The papers, which are published Monday to Friday, are all tabloids, with daily circulation of between 1,500 to 5,000 copies. All are found in the urban areas, particularly the capital, Cotonou. At least 60 percent of the population in Benin is illiterate, with most of them living in the rural areas, hence the concentration of the media in urban areas. Periodicals are linked to various political financiers, who exert their agenda on the newspapers. For instance, *Le Citoyen* is published by Christian Vieyra, a brother-in-law of former President Nicéphore Soglo. It began appearing in June 1996, soon after he lost his re-election bid.

A distinctive feature of the periodicals in Benin is that they tend to be owned or managed by very young people. Most of the top executives are men who have recently graduated from college. They have no specific training in journalism, since there is no journalism school in Benin, but a few have undertaken journalism training in Ghana, Senegal and France. Perhaps because of inexperience and also because of lack of professional training, there is considerable sensationalism. At one time during the 1991 elections, for example, two newspapers, *Le Soleil* and *Tam Tam Express* referred to then-President Soglo's

wife, Rosine, as an “ugly witch.” These excesses have invited anti-press legislation, as well as self-regulation through *Code de Deontology de la Presse Beninoise*, a collection of 26 articles passed in 1999 by all media outlets in Benin. Despite this problem, Benin appears keen to maintain the vibrancy of its media. Every year, it awards through its High Authority of Audiovisual Communication, four million CFA (about \$2,000 each) to periodicals that demonstrate increasing adherence to journalistic ethics.

Periodicals in Benin began their fascination with politics during the colonial era. Newspapers such as *La Voix's* and *Le Guide du Dahomey* played an important role in the emancipation of the country from colonial rule. However, the considerable press freedom enjoyed by the print media in Benin during the colonial era was greatly curtailed post independence, particular during the reign of Mathieu Kérékou's. Newspapers such as *Le Gon*, *Dabo-Express*, *Kpanligan*, *Ehuzu*, were completely cowed by the Marxist regime. In the late 1980s, the Beninese started clamoring for political change. New periodicals emerged, notably *La Gazette du Golfe*, *Tam Tam Express*, and *Le Récade*. After political liberalization in the early 1990s, *Ehuzu*, which had served as the Marxist party newspaper, was renamed *La Nation*. Privately owned periodicals started to appear, but most of them disappeared as soon as they appeared. Ismaël Y. Soumanou, founder of contemporary Benin's first non-official newspaper, *La Gazette du Golfe*, in 1988, has boasted that it is the media that build the country's democracy. Today, the major newspaper include *Le Point au Quotidien*, *Le Point*, *Les Echos du Jour*, *Le Progres*, *La Nouvelle Tribune*, *Le Matin*, *La Pyramide*, *L'Aurore*, *Fraternite*, *L'Informateur*, *L'Evenement*, *Le Telegramme*, *La Cloche*, and *La Nation*, which is funded by the state.

Central Africa

Democratic Republic of Congo

It is not clear how many publications exist in the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, two Central African journalists, Celestin Lingo, Suzanne Kala Lobe, told a media seminar in 2001 that there are 163 periodicals in the country, all of which are notable for their irregularity and low circulation.²⁰ A Fact-Finding Mission Report on the DRC by the Documentation and Research Service, Refugee and Nationality Commission of Belgium (CEDOCA), issued in October 2002, reported that there are 165 titles but only about 20 appear regularly and only eight newspapers are published daily.²¹ The country is just emerging from armed conflicts between various forces under the control of the central Kinshasa government of President Joseph Kabila, local insurgents, non-Congolese warlords and foreign powers, notably Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and Zimbabwe. The government in Kinshasa lacks effective control of over half of the national territory. As a result, information about the media situation is scattered and localized, and media workers continue to be at the mercy of local officials who operate with impunity.

Free privately owned media are a recent phenomenon in the country. Before 1990 the state was a one party regime that tightly controlled the freedom of expression. In response to local and international pressure, Mobutu Sese Seko in 1990 liberalized the country's civil liberties and new periodicals emerged. The publications were met with abuses, which continued during the rule of Laurent Kabila who overthrew Mobutu. The current President, Joseph Kabila, has relaxed media controls, and has appointed Kikaya Bin Karubi, a former journalist as information minister. However, abuses are still being reported. The US State Department Report on Human Rights Practices for 2003 reported 50 abuses where members of the press were detained, threatened, or abused by government agents.²²

Newspapers are mainly published in Kinshasa, with few copies going to the rural areas. The main titles in Kinshasa are *La Reference Plus* which sells 2, 500 copies; *Le Potential*, 2,000; *Le Palmares*, 2,500; *Le Phare*, 1,000; *Le Soft*, 2,000; *Forum*, 1,000; *Demain Le Congo*, 1,000; *Salongo*, 1,000; *Elima*, 500; *La Tempete Des Tropiques*, 500; *Umoja*, 500; and *La Semaine de Reporter*, which sells 500 copies. Other periodicals appear irregularly in other cities such as Mbuji-Mayi, Lubumbashi, Mbandaka, Bukavu, Kisangani, and Goma. Most of these papers are eight pages of A5 size, and they are targeted at only people with a regular salary, mostly teachers and civil servants. The relatively high newspaper cover price of 300FC (nearly US\$1) is unaffordable for many Congolese. The poor economic circumstances and the small circulation prevent the periodicals from generating sufficient advertising revenue. This precarious financial situation impacts the quality of the writing. To minimize salary costs, the papers often employ students.

There are a lot of international organizations that are attempting to help the media in the DRC, but almost all of them are focusing on the electronic or New Media without realizing that even the print media needs resources and training. The main service provided by the government to the private media is the *Agence Congolaise de Presse*. This agency used to be extremely important during the *parti-etat* (single party) rule, when it was responsible for disseminating party news. Although it retains 22 bureaus nationwide equipped with telex machines and transmitters, most have stopped working. News dispatches are transported by road to newspapers.

Cameroon

The first newspapers to appear in Cameroon were produced by missionaries starting from 1900. Periodicals were started by African nationalists in the 1920s. An example that is

often given is *Mbale* (The Truth), which was printed by Cameroonians in France and sent home. After the defeat of Germany in 1918, Cameroon was given to France and Britain to administer on behalf of the League of Nations. The country was divided into two with each power administering its own territory. As French colonial policy changed after World War II in anticipation for African independence, many publications emerged to agitate for political independence. When Cameroon became independent in 1960, the former British Colony of Southern Cameroons became united with the Eastern Cameroons, which had been under French control. This bilingual culture still remains, and periodicals are available in both languages, as well as in some of Cameroon's 250 indigenous languages. French language papers have a higher circulation than English language ones.

After independence, the government of Ahamadou Ahidjo tightened its hold on the press, adversely affecting periodicals like *La Presse du Cameroun*, which had established a reputation for independence and objectivity. In 1966 the government passed a law that gave the Minister of Territorial Administration extensive censorship powers. Editors were required to submit their papers to the ministry before they could be printed, and all new publications had to be approved by the Ministry. Any editor breaking this law was liable to being fined, jailed, or both and his newspaper confiscated.

In December 19, 1990, new Liberty Laws came into effect, and profoundly changed the media sector in Cameroon. The freedom of the press became guaranteed by the constitution. However, the media still faces problems associated with censorship, and Cameroonian journalists have made various protest speeches at international conferences. Libel laws are particularly used to obstruct press freedom.

Reports indicate that there are about 30 newspapers in Cameroon. Some of the larger newspapers include *Le Messager*, *Challenge Hebdo*, *Le Front Indépendant*, *Le Combattant*, *La*

Nouvelle Expression, Dikalo, La Nouvelle Expression, La Gazette Provinciale, and The Herald. Le Messger is the main opposition newspaper, while *Cameroon Tribune* is the main government-owned newspaper. Like in other African countries, circulation is generally low, limited by poverty, illiteracy and high cover price. To encourage growth in the media sector, the government has tried to reduce import duty on a variety of products needed in publishing. Other than this, there is no public assistance to the private press.

Southern African

South Africa

South Africa has the largest media sector of any country in Africa, which is hardly surprising given that it has the biggest economy on the continent. A perusal of sources such as the *South African Media Directory*, published by the Government Communication and Information System, and the list of media organizations compiled by the Media Institute of Southern Africa, reveal many periodicals published by diverse organizations in virtually all of South Africa's 15 official languages.

During Apartheid, media contribution to the South African society was limited due to general fear and inter-ethnic suspicion. The print media was ethnically divided. Rarely did ideas prevalent in one group find their way into the media of another group. The Afrikaans newspapers, regardless of whether they were conservative or liberal, supported the government. The English newspapers largely posed as the opposition press, a fact that concealed their support of the *status quo*. Although the English press covered events and news in black townships, the coverage was neither reliable nor reflective of the true situation on the ground. Manion Irwin, a founding editor of the *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, once

remarked that his own English media tended to cover townships as “if they were foreign lands: exotic, remote, of sporadic interest.”²³

Fifteen years after the dismantling of Apartheid, the freedom and diversity of the media has not closed the cultural chasm in South African society. According to Sandile Memela, a South African commentator, the dynamics of South African society, including economic domination by white South Africans, means that the media continue to distort and fragment black cultures while elevating the Eurocentric cultural experience. As a result, the African cultural experience exists independently of the mainstream media and white culture, and “left stranded, strangled and impoverished in the rural areas, beyond the fringe of absorption.”²⁴ Eager to diversify its media, South Africa has established the Media Development and Diversity Agency, which began working in earnest in 2004. In January 2004, the agency approved payment of R3.6 million to 19 community media projects in the country.

South Africa’s many publications reflect the diversity of its population. They include *Agenda*, a South African feminist journal started in 1987 by a group of women academics and activists, and *The Big Issue* a leftist journal. Recently, there has been a rising popularity of men’s magazines such as *Gentleman’s Quarterly (GQ)*, *For Him magazine*, *Men’s Health* and *Maxim*. One of the main media owners in South Africa is Media24, which publishes more than 30 titles and controls more than 60 percent of the country’s circulation. Media24’s magazines include *YOU*, *Fairlady*, *Drum* and *True Love*, which are sold as far afield as Kenya and Nigeria. The other media giant in South Africa is The Independent Group, which publishes the *Cape Argus*, *Sunday Independent*, *Daily News*, and *Isolezwe*, amongst others. Other notable magazines include *Chimurenga* and the government-owned *Bua*.

The down market tabloid newspapers category has recently flourished, with spectacular gains in circulation, indicating that they had found a new market among people who appear not to have been newspaper readers in the past. *The Sun* offers sex, crime, scandal and sport, and has rapidly outstripped the established titles: its circulation has climbed through the 200,000 mark and was expected to hit the 400,000 mark by end of 2005. Some other big names in the South African periodicals list include *The Star* of Johannesburg, *The Sowetan*, *Beeld* (the largest Afrikaans daily), *Mail and Guardian*, and *Sunday Times*. *This Day*, an ambitious upmarket daily started by a Nigerian proprietor attracted a readership of 100,000, but crashed in 2004 due to financial problems and threats of legal action following its exposure of corruption in parliament.

Angola

The state is a major player in the Angolan media and owns *Jornal de Angola*, the largest newspaper with a circulation of 41,000. This state ownership of the media is a carryover from the socialist economic policies that the country has pursued under the MPLA party since it became independent in 1975. The country has been at war since independence, with the UNITA rebels fighting the socialist regime. Throughout the war, both the government and UNITA tightly controlled the media in their jurisdictions, and used them for propaganda purposes. Today, the constitution provides for freedom of expression and of the press. However, there are reports of restriction on media freedom.

Following the liberalization of the media sector in the 1990s, the sector has grown significantly and a number of periodicals have emerged. There are a total of seven private weekly newspapers in Luanda, the capital; *Folha 8*, established in 1994; *Agora*, established in 1996; *O Angolense*, established in 1997; and *Semanário Angolense*, *Actual*, *A Capital*, and *A*

Palavra, all established in 2003. The papers cost on average 120 Kwanzas (approximately \$1.50) each, and all have a combined circulation of 22,000 – 25,000 copies. This is extremely low given that the city has a population of four million, but low literacy levels and lack of disposable income can explain the low figure. It is estimated that less than five percent of the papers reach readers outside the capital, leaving the rural areas at the mercy of the government-owned press. The state-owned airline refuses to airlift private periodicals into the rural areas. The private independent press is therefore largely an urban phenomenon, where its growth has been spurred by advertising revenues from oil related businesses.

Some of these new periodicals are expected to cease publication soon, according to *Associação da Imprensa Privada de Angola* (A.I.P.A.), the association that caters for the interests of the private periodicals. *Faro*, a weekly newspaper started in 2004 by a group of journalists, published only two issues and is no longer operational. Another group of journalists tried to revive *A Palavra*, a weekly that shut down in 2003, but this effort was also unsuccessful. *Actual*, one of the oldest private newspapers, is also said to be experiencing problems. It recently re-styled itself as a business periodical, but this strategy appears to have been wrongly timed since there is probably no readership as yet to sustain a purely business publication. Apart from problems of limited advertising and readership, the private papers are struggling to find quality printing facilities at a price they can afford. Most printers decline to print periodicals because of fear of reprisals from the state.

Eastern Africa

Kenya

Kenya has diverse, vibrant media scene, with a sizeable multi-racial middle class and fairly well developed manufacturing, service, and agricultural sectors providing a base for

substantial advertising revenue. The print media is dominated by two major publishing houses, the *Nation* and *Standard*. These two groups also have interests in other branches of the media, and some observers have expressed concern at the level of media concentration in Kenya.

The oldest newspaper in Kenya is the *East African Standard*, started in 1902. It catered for white settler interests throughout Kenyan colonialism, and was part of the Lonrho multinational corporation until the mid 1990s, when it was sold to Kenyan interests linked to former President Daniel arap Moi, with some shares being owned by the Kenyan public through the Nairobi Stock Exchange. The largest newspaper is the *Nation*. Started by the Aga Khan, head of the Ismaili Islamic sect in 1961, it is the largest newspaper in East and Central Africa. It also publishes *Sunday Nation*, *EastAfrican*, and *Taiifa Leo*, and owns the *Monitor* in Uganda and *Mwananchi* in Tanzania. During the days of single-party rule, the ruling party bought *Nairobi Times* from publisher Hilary Ngweni, and renamed it the *Kenya Times*. In 1992, politician Kenneth Matiba founded *The People Daily*. These four are the only English-language daily newspapers in Kenya; they are supplemented by at least two Swahili dailies, *Kenya Leo* and *Taiifa Leo*. The *Nation* sells 200,000 copies, with its Sunday edition selling over 250,000, making it the largest newspaper in East and Central Africa. *The Standard* has a circulation of 100,000, *The People* 45,000, and *Kenya Times*, 25,000.

There are many magazines as well, with a particularly large number of lifestyles magazines. They include *Parents*, the most successful magazine in Kenya, started by Eunice Mathu almost 30 years ago. Others include *Family Mirror*, *Couples*, *Today's Marriage*, *Step*, *Baby Times*, *We*, *Lady*, *Eve*, *True Love*, *Character*, and *Baby Times*. Recently, a magazine called *Kwani?* (So?) was started by writer Binyavanga Wainaina, the 2001 winner of the Caines Prize for literature. It is dedicated to the development of Kenyan writers. Political magazines have

been on decline. *The Weekly Review*, for a long time the leading political weekly, folded up in 1997. Its rival, the *Economic Review*, had gone belly up in 1995 when the taxman came after it. Other publications that have disappeared include *The Option*, *New Era*, *Economic Review*, *expression today*, *The Analyst*, *The Star*, *The Star*, *Weekend Mail*, and *Newsline*.

During the single-party rule, Kenya retained private ownership of the media, but journalists were still harassed by state agents. After political liberalization in 1991, many periodicals were started. However, most of them disregarded journalistic ethics and the government has been trying to rein them in without success. In 2001, a new unpopular media bill was passed. It requires publishers to purchase a bond for one million Kenyan shillings (\$13,000) before publishing. The move scared off a number of small time publishers, especially in the magazine sector, as they could not afford the bond.

Ethiopia

Ethiopia is one the very few African countries to have its own alphabet and numerical and writing system. Its written language, Ge'ez, was established in the 4th century AD. However, the first newspapers in Ethiopia are considered to be *Le Semeur d'Ethiopie* (1905–1911) and *Aimero* (1902-1903), although some historical evidence suggests that the handwritten sheet produced by Blatta Gebre Egziabhere around 1900 probably preceded both these and is therefore considered the first *Amharic* “newspaper” in the country. *Le Courier d'Ethiopie* was established in 1913 and *Yetwor Ware* (War News), was issued from the Italian mission from 1916 to 1918. *Berhanena Selam* (Light and Peace) was founded in 1925 but ceased publication with the Italian invasion in 1936. *Addis Zemen* (New Era) was started in 1941 followed by *Ethiopian Herald* in 1945.

Subsequently, there was a gradual increase in the number of periodicals and by 1970, there were six dailies and 11 weeklies. Likewise, many magazines and journals emerged. After a military junta overthrew the monarchy in 1974, mass media institutions were converted into instruments of propaganda. Censorship became the norm, and continued until the overthrow of the military by guerrilla forces in 1991. Under Public Enterprise Proclamation No. 25 of 1992, former state-owned printing houses were transformed into commercial enterprises.

Since 1992, 790 organizations comprising of 513 newspapers, 200 magazines, three news agencies and 74 small electronic publishers have been given licenses, but only a tiny fraction of this number are operational. These publications cover the whole gamut of issues and topics: politics, economy, culture, sports, health and recreation. Newspapers are available in Amharic, English and Arabic. Media repression still remains a big problem. Media rights group Reporters Without Borders reported widespread media abuses after the violent protests that followed the 2005 elections.

Amongst the major newspapers are *Addis Zemen* and *Ethiopia Herald*, both state-owned dailies; *Menelik*, *Addis Admas*, *Seifenebelbal*, *Tobyia*, *Wonchif*, *Tomar*, all private weeklies; *The Reporter*, *The Sun*, *Addis Tribune*, and *Capital*, all privately owned English language publications.

Conclusion

African periodicals continue to influence popular culture on the continent. They add to the intensification of channels of information. They showcase local goods, services and

products. They purvey political messages. They subject global culture to a sieve, a gate keeping process that valorizes sexual relations in global genres, while consecrating and engendering local discourses of romance, marriage, religion, funerary rituals, politics, and general lifestyles. What emerges is not a dominating western popular culture, as is often feared, or a resurgence of an atavistic Africa, as is often portrayed by the Western media, but a contemporary African popular culture that is moderated by urbanization, globalization, and tradition. Global standards and genres are appropriated, inverted, or otherwise diluted and imbued with local narratives. Even the periodicals themselves succumb to these trends: we see ordinary citizens buying space to publish their own picture or those of their dead. And the irregular schedule of African periodicals is perhaps a reminder that they too are subject to African time; as the saying goes, there is no hurry in Africa.

With rising populations, increasing literacy levels, improving economies, and the establishment of more journalism schools, the future looks bright for periodicals in the continent. Unless of course, media convergence changes everything, in which case African periodicals will not die, but will be cannibalized by the process of convergence. In line with trends elsewhere, the African media have been tending towards mergers, consolidation and internationalization. Many African periodicals are now read across African borders, with some coming from abroad, but there has also been an increasing localization of the media. This creates widening informational communities, and it is in this sense that the media will aid African integration. The sharing of celebrities, political narratives, cartoons, lifestyles, and copying of journalistic conventions across boundaries, are some of the ways in which periodicals contribute to the homogenization of African culture. The future will certainly see more trends in this direction, with increasing partnerships, as well as multi-platform and on-demand publishing. National markets are likely to be replaced by regional markets and

eventually continental markets. This is already happening with respect to the electronic media. Although reaching only but a small segment of the African population, the print media will continue to serve as an important conduit of images and messages laden with a modernist appeal. The media are the principal tools for converting Africa into a consumer society and African periodicals will continue to perform their part in this role.

Notes

¹ *East African Standard*, August 20, 2005. The story, in the Style and Substance Section, was headlined "Caroline off-air." [Online] <http://www.eastandard.net/mags/style/articles.php?articleid=27597>

² See BBC, Wednesday, December 29, 2004: "Nigeria's Celebrity Class [Online] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4119365.stm>

³ Greg Garrett, "Introduction: African Popular Culture and the Western Scholar." *Journal of Popular Culture*, Fall 1998: 32, 2, pg 1

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Some Leading African Newspapers

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The Monitor (Uganda): <http://www.monitor.com>

The Addis Tribune (Ethiopia): <http://www.addistribune.com/>

The Analyst (Monrovia) <http://www.analystnewspaper.com/>

Cameroon Tribune (Cameroon) <http://www.cameroon-tribune.net>

The Cape Argus (South Africa) <http://www.capeargus.co.za>

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The Namibian (Namibia) <http://www.namibian.com.na/>

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Le Soleil (Senegal) <http://www.lesoleil.sn/>

The Sowetan (South Africa) <http://www.sowetan.co.za/>

Sunday Times (South Africa) <http://www.sundaytimes.co.za>

The Times of Zambia (Zambia) <http://www.times.co.zm/>

Kenya Times (Kenya) <http://www.timesnews.co.ke/>

The Punch (Nigeria) <http://www.punchng.com/>

Vanguard (Nigeria) <http://www.vanguardngr.com/>

The Ghanaian Chronicle (Ghana) <http://www.ghanaian-chronicle.com/>

Jornal de Angola (Angola) <http://www.jornaldeangola.com/>

L'Observateur Paalaga (Burkina Faso) <http://www.lobservateur.bf/>

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Sample African Magazines

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Africawoman (Kenya) <http://www.africawoman.net/>

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Eve (Kenya) <http://www.oaklandmedia.com/eve/>

Let's Cook (Kenya) <http://www.nationmedia.com/letscook/>

Agoo Magazine (Ghana)

Chimurenga (South Africa) <http://www.chimurenga.co.za/>

Uneek Magazine (Ghana)

Ovation International (Nigeria)

Kwani? I (Kenya) <http://www.kwani.org/>

Foolscap (Nigeria) <http://www.foolscap-media.com/>

Stage Magazine (South Africa) <http://www.stage.co.za/>

Momentum magazine (Nigeria – USA) <http://www.momentummag.com>

Farafina (Nigeria) <http://www.farafina-online.com/>

Botsotso magazine (South Africa) <http://www.111.co.za/botsotso.htm>

A Sample of African Cartoonists

South African Cartoonists: <http://www.cartoonist.co.za/cartoonists.htm>

Godfrey Mwampembwa (Tanzania) <http://www.gadonet.com/>

African Media Associations

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