

AMERICA'S LEADING MAGAZINE ON AFRICA

# AFRICA REPORT

MARCH—APRIL 1987

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THE WEEKLY MAIL  
VOLUME 3 Number 4 FRIDAY JANUARY 30 to THURSDAY FEBRUARY 5, 1987  
THE PAPER FOR A CHANGING SOUTH AFRICA

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*There is still a glimmer of hope ...*  
Full story: PAGE 2

\* WE REGRET THAT THERE IS NO ACCOUNTING FOR TOMORROW

# The PRESS and AFRICA

South Africa's  
Muzzled Media

How We Cover  
Southern Africa

The Disinformation Scam

Africa on the Newsstands

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*Africa Report* (ISSN 0001-9836), a non-partisan magazine of African affairs, is published bimonthly and is scheduled to appear at the beginning of each date period at 833 United Nations Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10017. Editorial correspondence and advertising inquiries should be addressed to *Africa Report*, at the above address. Subscription rates: *Individuals*: U.S.A. \$24, Canada \$30, air rate overseas \$48. *Institutions*: U.S.A. \$31, Canada \$37, air rate overseas \$55. Second-class postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: If this magazine is undeliverable, please send notice to *Africa Report* at the above address. Telephones: Publisher (212) 949-5719; Editor (212) 949-5731. Copyright © 1987 by the African-American Institute, Inc.

European Distribution by CLIO Distribution Service, 55 St. Thomas' Street, Oxford OX1 1JG, England. U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by FOUR STAR News Distributors, Inc., 33-30 57th Street, Woodside, New York 11377.

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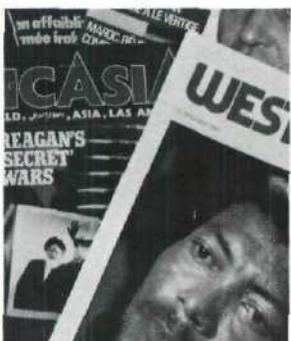
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# How We Cover Southern Africa

While American media coverage of the southern African drama has quantitatively increased over the past two years, is the picture we are getting an accurate one? A network television producer examines the shortcomings in today's reporting on the region, suggesting ways in which journalists' and therefore our own understanding might be improved.

BY DANNY SCHECHTER

South Africa's recent expulsion of a *New York Times* correspondent was one signal of its official contempt for independent journalism. Its byzantine press restrictions governing coverage of what it antiseptically calls "the unrest" is certainly another. Pretoria does not make it easy to cover South Africa.

But then that's not its job. It's precisely the totalitarian and repressive nature of the apartheid system that ex-

*Danny Schechter is a network television producer who has reported on African issues for many years.*

cites foreign journalists about the challenge. This is one "adversarial" relationship that is open and pronounced. White South Africa is warring with a world that won't accept its definition of itself.

At the same time, foreign journalists there—white journalists for the most part—live and work in the "white world," often sharing its values and orientation. Restrictions are imposed on them not only by the government or the whims of foreign editors, but by limitations of culture, class, color, and consciousness, which are harder to detect and even harder to confront. Moreover, the canons of professional practice, the demands and routines of news coverage, and the ideologies of the news or-

ganizations journalists work for also influence what stories are covered and how.

South African journalists, black and white, who write for papers critical of apartheid are not always enamored with their American colleagues who are rotated in and out to do the daily reporting. "They can be awfully lazy and uninformed about what's really happening," Anton Haber, editor of the *Weekly Mail*, told me during a recent visit to New York. "Sometimes we feel they never leave their offices." Complaints of American journalists using but not crediting stories from South African newspapers or exploiting sources cultivated by locals are legion.

**Ted Koppel interviewing Winnie Mandela: "The journalistic establishment has bestowed awards and recognition on those whose coverage is deemed extraordinary"**



ABC News

Nevertheless, we all admire those reporters dodging the Casspirs of the South African police, the TV crews who became open targets, and journalists forced into jail cells or courtrooms because of their loyalty to the values of a free press. The journalistic establishment has bestowed awards and recognition on the Joe Lelyvelds, Charlayne Hunter-Gaults, Ted Koppels, and others whose coverage is deemed extraordinary.

Only the American right-wing seems disturbed by the tone of the reporting, complaining that South Africa is getting a raw deal, that journalists are fanning the flames of violence and ignoring the so-called "democratic" alternatives represented by people such as Angola's CIA-backed and South African-equipped guerrilla leader Jonas Savimbi—now a darling of American conservatives. For the most part, this type of "media criticism" serves as a figleaf for ideological point-making.

Yet there are serious shortcomings in our collective coverage, major gaps and omissions, and challenges for media institutions willing to strengthen their approach. A recent tour of southern Africa, which included conversations with South African leaders in exile and African journalists, led me to appreciate five key areas where our reporting is superficial and stories are underplayed.

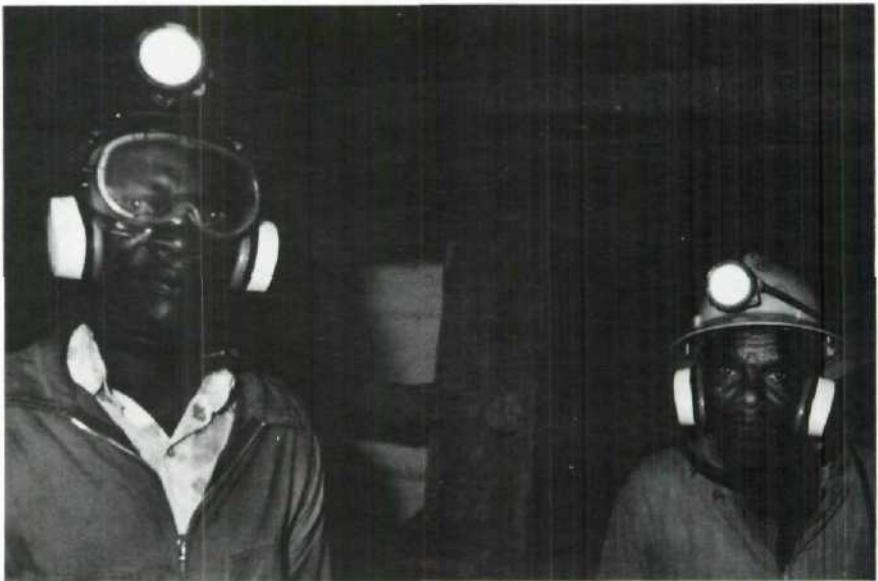
### The Nature of South African Apartheid

American reporting tends to focus on race and human rights violations, not on the structural characteristics and aggressive designs of the South African state. Basic questions such as, "Who really runs South Africa?" are not addressed. The press rarely explores the

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**"There are serious shortcomings in our collective coverage, major gaps and omissions and challenges for media institutions willing to strengthen their approach."**

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John Conn

**"Western journalists rarely ask how South Africa's low-wage labor pool, denied most human rights, helps sustain the economies of the West"**

militarization of South African society, the role of key insider power groups such as the secret Broederbond, and the "total" strategy that Pretoria follows in defense of its system.

As a result, there is a tendency to downplay the fascist-style character of the state and its links to an economy which is anything but "free." The media rarely describes how the country's rulers create jobs for their supporters in a bloated military and police establishment. This practice has given a class of Afrikaners specific and concrete economic interests in the status quo, in sustaining a system of economic exploitation and racial domination. Instead, the Afrikaners are portrayed as a people addicted to religious and racial mythologies. Their policies are made to seem irrational and not highly self-interested, or even calculated.

At the same time, Western journalists rarely ask how South Africa's low-wage labor pool, denied most human rights, helps to sustain the economies of the West. Who mines the gold whose fluctuations and "fixings" are reported daily? Where do the diamonds come from which finance the De Beers ads that appear in our magazines and on *Nightline* and other network newscasts? How much do American companies profit as a result of apartheid?

Apartheid still tends to be reported mostly as a system of racial discrimination—not economic domination. This distorts some of its most pernicious as-

pects including the Group Areas Act, with its separation of families, the homelands policy, and the ferocity of opposition to the African National Congress (ANC), whose program, as set forth in the Freedom Charter, seeks economic justice as much as racial equality.

Nor has the U.S. press paid much attention to the role of Americans in shaping the "reform" program the Botha government is using to buy time. For example, what has been the real political impact of the State Department's "constructive engagement" policy? There has been very little in-depth reporting on the content of the Reagan administration's various diplomatic initiatives or day-to-day interactions with Pretoria.

Similarly, little attention has been paid to the influence of Harvard University Professor Samuel Huntington who played a controversial role as a Vietnam war adviser and later as a theorist for the Trilateral Commission. Last August, the South African daily, the *Sowetan* credited Huntington with having played a key role in shaping Pretoria's policies. Yet his ideas and influence have yet to be written about here.

### The State of Emergency

Is the American press doing all that it can to report the brutality of the state of emergency or has the media been completely intimidated by the press restrictions first imposed in November 1985? The state of emergency regulations

limit coverage of what the government considers to be "unrest." Police and soldiers cannot be photographed regardless of what they are doing. The government now responds only to media questions sent via telex. Many of these restrictions were aimed at radio and television, but they affect newspapers and still photographers as well.

The restrictions have been effective. "If the purpose of the ban was to remove images of violence from American television screens," reports *The New York Times*, "most broadcast journalists say that it has worked." Additional pressures on television coverage have come from South African government attempts to sow mistrust by impersonating journalists in the townships and influencing whites not to cooperate with the foreign press. "So now the kids think we're plainclothes cops," admits Tony Wasserman, a widely admired NBC cameraman. "Since you can't film any security officer, even a traffic cop, we could sit here and watch them killing people and couldn't do a thing."

To their credit, newspapers do tag their stories with disclaimers noting the press restrictions. But few are as explicit as those carried by South African papers. "This issue has in effect been

censored," is how the *Johannesburg Star* begins its daily front page box titled, "Government Restrictions." Black newspapers are even more straightforward.

There is no denying that important stories are not getting through and those that do are not being appreciated. The fact that the number of detainees in South Africa nearly doubled to an estimated 20,000 in October, from a government-released figure of 8,551 in August 1986, has barely been mentioned. The wholesale torture of detainees, including children, has been reported by human rights monitoring groups but confirmed by only a few media outlets. One would think that tales of nine-year-olds being tortured would make good copy and provoke world-wide outrage, the way the hostage issue has. It hasn't.

Yet when the will is there, police abuse can be reported. Independent television journalist Sharon Sopher managed to get into the townships and interview torture victims. Her dramatic report, which was recently nominated for an Academy Award, appeared on a late-night PBS screening, but was not picked up or followed up on by the far wealthier commercial networks. Independent non-commercial video services like the

London-based Afravision often have footage of internal events, but the networks rarely tap this and other "alternative" sources.

### South African Resistance and "Black-on-Black Violence"

For the most part, the political goals and heroism of the anti-apartheid movement have been downplayed. True, personalities like Bishop Desmond Tutu and Winnie Mandela have been highlighted, but most of the grassroots and union activity has received short shrift. Contrast this with the sustained and sympathetic coverage afforded the Solidarity union movement in Poland.

What do Americans know of the United Democratic Front (UDF) or COSATU, the half-million member labor federation? How many regular news consumers could identify UDF leader Allan Boesak, labor militant Cyril Ramaphosa, or Beyers Naude, general secretary of the South African Council of Churches? What has the press reported about the tribal politics practiced by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi, the man cited by the Reagan administration as the leader of non-violent, "democratic" forces?

The leading liberation group, the African National Congress, has begun to receive more media attention but it is rarely free of Cold War news framing. The ANC is invariably described as "pro-Soviet" or Marxist. Yet, other groups are rarely called "capitalist," "racist," or "pro-American."

Even *The New York Times*, which devoted a Sunday magazine piece in early October to a dispassionate analysis of the ANC perspective, couldn't resist using a four-color picture of a man wearing what appears to be an ANC uniform with a hammer and sickle armband. The photo caption explains in fine print that the colorful shirt represents one individual's taste and is by no means official. But just as the Reagan administration buys the South African line that the ANC is a communist front, so much of the media uncritically parrots the same view.

This was never more apparent than during ANC President Oliver Tambo's visit to the United States. News coverage focused on Tambo's meetings with

Allan Boesak with reporters: "For the most part, the political goals and heroism of the anti-apartheid movement have been downplayed"



Patrice Habans/Sygnia

Secretary of State Shultz. While conservatives noisily demonstrated outside the State Department—some wearing rubber tires around their necks to mimic “necklacing” in a successful bid for TV attention—much of the reporting of the meeting emphasized Secretary Shultz’s concerns over violence and Soviet influence. The ANC’s viewpoint was given less attention.

While *The Washington Post* carried a sympathetic feature called, “The Testament of Oliver Tambo” (along with a Jeane Kirkpatrick column calling him “sinister” and the “moral and political equivalent of Robespierre”), *The New York Times* headlined its interview: “African National Congress Leader Defends Killing of Whites.”

On *Nightline*, ABC’s Ted Koppel repeatedly pushed Tambo into repudiating violence on the air to the virtual exclusion of other areas of inquiry. The questions reflected the official American obsession with violence and communism, the twin evils that the South African government also continually emphasizes in connection with the ANC. “Rarely in recent years has the U.S. media so completely allowed a foreign power—in this case the Pretoria regime—to define the terms of debate,” concluded an editorial in *The Nation*.

Few stories covered Tambo’s enthusiastic receptions in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles, especially in the black communities. Fewer still outlined the ANC’s program, or asked for its assessment of its prospects inside South Africa. There were no interviews with other members of the delegation which included Cultural Secretary Barbara Masakela, Information Director Thabo Mbeki, or a member of Umkhonto we Sizwe, military wing of the movement.

“Black-on-black violence” conjures up images of Africans slaughtering each other for primitive reasons. The term “blacks” is a faceless designator, useful for stereotyping and avoiding more specific explanations of who is killing whom and for what reason. When such violence takes place, it is usually focused political violence in which township residents attack government informants, agents, or police. Or it is organized violence by government-backed “vigilante” groups, armed by government police agencies, and directed for political ends.

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## “One would think that the tales of nine-year-olds being tortured would make good copy and provoke world-wide outrage.”

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Such violence is really a form of terrorism in that its purpose is to intimidate a community and destroy its political leadership.

Yet reporters rarely investigate or clearly explain these issues. As a result, it is hard for the public to see beyond the seeming chaos to understand how much of the violence is provoked and structured. In the case of the so-called Crossroads riots, for example, thousands of homes were burned by men armed and controlled by the police. In that case, these terror activities were reported. But the fact that much of the so-called black-on-black violence has this same origin deserves more attention.

Specifically, the role and funding of the paramilitary Inkatha organization controlled by Chief Buthelezi, trumpeted as the “democratic alternative,” needs scrutiny. Who is funding and training his private army? Reporters need to look into the documented instances of Inkatha attacks and assassinations of militants in other groups.

This is not to say that there is no decent available reporting on this issue. Journalists would do well to read Michael Massing’s essay in the February 12, 1987 issue of the *New York Review of Books* that speaks openly of Buthelezi’s anticipation of a civil war between ANC backers and his forces. Longer think-pieces like Massing’s in-depth reportage or Andrew Kopkind’s *Nation* essay seem to be the only places one can find analysis of the type absent in the ordinary coverage.

Those interested in exploring “black-on-black” violence might examine the internal practices of the rulers of the “independent homelands” or bantustans created by the South African government, including the brutal suppression of critics and the anti-apartheid movement.

## Sanctions

The sanctions bill is another measure which was barely scrutinized. Few reports at the time contrasted what was passed with what might have been passed. Little mention was made of provisions that allow the CIA and South African intelligence to continue sharing information. (A *New York Times* “Op-Ed” article—not a news story—noted that it was this type of intelligence collaboration that resulted in Nelson Mandela’s initial arrest and imprisonment.)

There is also a provision in the law that calls on the Justice Department to investigate the ANC’s alleged communist links. In his speech vetoing the Senate bill, President Reagan specifically praised this section. There has been little analysis of the implications of this measure, nor few suggestions that this type of McCarthyite provision will make it difficult for the United States to play a constructive role in the region should the ANC ever come to power.

When the State Department delivered its report to Congress in January 1987, its charges of “communist control” were reported but largely unchallenged. Few media outlets acknowledged the findings of Professor Thomas Karis whose article in the winter 1987 issue of *Foreign Affairs* refutes the propaganda line that the “ANC is a Moscow tool.”

Likewise, a measure that gives the U.S. State Department \$40 million in aid allows for all kinds of intervention in South Africa’s black community for politically motivated subsidies of groups and individuals. How that money will be spent has yet to be covered.

Also underscrutinized has been the role of the AFL-CIO in cultivating conservative unionists. The AFL-CIO has had a long history of working overseas as an arm of the U.S. government.

Although the current sanctions legislation is weak, are news organizations prepared to investigate the sanctions-busting apparatus that the South Africans say is already in place? Such reporting would involve close monitoring of shipping and transport networks, as well as business groups around the world. It is a task clearly beyond the means of South Africa-based correspondents. Monitoring Commerce Department compliance with the sanctions law

is another story that calls for attention to detail and insider sources.

### The Frontline States:

#### The Regional Face of Apartheid

I recently produced a television report on Jesse Jackson's August 1986 visit to seven countries sharing borders with South Africa. After its broadcast, a number of African diplomats and television colleagues commented that it was the first time the regional dimension of the South Africa problem had received prime time TV exposure (a conservative media monitoring group blasted it for bias). In the segment, Jackson shared his feeling that South Africa's attacks on neighboring states had been "no big news deal" in the American media, a charge that few would seriously contest.

To be fair, the frontline governments are not always hospitable to foreign journalists or able to meet their needs. The Angolans, for example, have been notorious for keeping correspondents waiting, and then denying them access to war zones and key ministers. Others are not well-versed in communicating their story in the Western media, perhaps because of ideological suspicions, inexperience, or a plain lack of openness.

In contrast, Savimbi's Unita, with its heavily financed Washington public relations firm, Black, Manafort, and Stone, well-connected to the administration, has run smooth, well-orchestrated press tours. Recently in the aftermath of the expulsion of *The New York Times'* Alan Cowell from South Africa, the *Times* has been paying more attention to the frontline states, with excellent reports by James Brooke in Angola and Serge Schmemmann from Mozambique. Perhaps the expulsion of its resident correspondent has motivated the *Times* to be more aggressive and enterprising next door.

But by and large, news organizations have covered individual "incidents" involving South African border crossings or military attacks. The full picture of a state whose strategy is to mount economic and military campaigns against its neighbors has not come through. Nor are the extent and implications of South Africa's occupation of Namibia widely appreciated. South Africa's illegal stran-

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## **"For the most part, the political goals and heroism of the anti-apartheid movement have been downplayed."**

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glehold on that country is rarely mentioned. Its internal political maneuvers there which illustrate its idea of "reform" are also ignored.

"The escalating violence within South Africa now features almost every day in the media throughout the world," note editors Phyllis Johnson and David Martin in the book *Destructive Engagement*, a best-seller in Zimbabwe, but not available in the U.S. "But very little media space is devoted to the economic and social impact on the frontline states."

Perhaps that is one reason why President Reagan could get away with telling a press conference that one difference between Nicaragua and South Africa is that "Nicaragua aggresses across its borders." Yet when a South African military officer is captured trying to blow up an American oil refinery in Angola nearly 3,000 miles from his home, the event becomes merely an incident—not another indicator of South Africa's systematic military aggression against Angola, including the physical occupation of its territory.

Pretoria's economic sanctions against the other countries of the region are rarely reported as part of its strategy to choke off their attempts to reduce their dependence on South Africa. When shipping is deliberately moved out of Mozambican ports or when the country's railroads are blown up and its highways and road network disabled, the already fragile economy is dealt near-fatal blows. The population is also under attack from the Mozambican National Resistance Movement (Renamo), an organization that the Western press often dignifies as a legitimate rebel group. In southern Africa, it is considered an arm of the South African military.

NBC's Weekend News showed some of the victims of Renamo violence—people mutilated, their noses or ears cut off—in an October 25 report in the aftermath of the plane crash death of Mozambican President Samora Machel.

The graphic images flashed by in seconds, a rare look at a savage war which has been waged with little media attention for five years. The report was narrated in Paris, so it is unlikely that the correspondent had even been in Maputo. It took the death of Mozambique's president to bring the country's pain into America's living rooms.

In his excellent new book on apartheid power in southern Africa, Joseph Hanlon documents the South African war against the frontline states. The recently published book, *Beggar Your Neighbors*, itemizes actions taken since 1980:

- Invasions of the capital cities of Lesotho, Botswana, and Mozambique;
- Assassination attempts against the prime ministers of Lesotho and Zimbabwe; questions still remain about any South African role in the fatal plane crash which killed Samora Machel;
- Support for dissident groups in Angola and Mozambique, and support for disorder in Lesotho and Zimbabwe;
- Disruption of oil supplies to six countries;
- One-hundred thousand people dead in Mozambique alone because of the disruption of relief efforts to famine-stricken areas;
- One million people displaced from Angola and Namibia;
- An estimated financial damage of \$10 billion from 1980-84—more than all the foreign aid received by the frontline states in the same period.

When set out this starkly, the southern African problem seems much more serious—yet is its full impact widely understood?

To argue that the media is not doing enough on this issue is to invite discussion about what issue is being well-covered, at least well enough to satisfy those who care to seek out a more detailed understanding.

My list of ingredients missing from the media mix is as incomplete as my own understanding of the nuances of how race, class, colonialism, and ethnicity boil together in the regional cauldron. Yet it does pinpoint some areas that demand more attention and resources from those who say that they want to inform the world about one of the most important moral and political issues of our time. □

# To Tell the Truth

What remains of press freedom in South Africa is being steadily eroded with each new set of restrictions on news coverage. Will the South African government succeed in silencing foreign and local journalists, whom it accuses of generating a "revolutionary climate"?

BY PATRICK LAURENCE

Charting the laws introduced to control the press in South Africa over the past year or so is like trying to keep track of a rapidly changing kaleidoscope. They move with bewildering speed.

The point is vividly illustrated in a problem faced by the *Weekly Mail*, a member of the small band of newspapers comprising South Africa's "alternative"—as distinct from the "established"—press, as it tried to exploit a temporary gap in the network of restrictive laws closing in on the press.

During the course of a single publishing day in January, the law changed twice, overtaking the *Weekly Mail* as it came off the presses. At noon that day, an emergency decree was in force prohibiting publication of an advertisement calling for the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC).

By dusk, the decree had been declared invalid by the Supreme Court in Johannesburg. By midnight, publication of the advertisement was again forbidden under a new order issued under a special decree hastily printed in response to the legal judgment.

The *Weekly Mail* saw the Supreme Court ruling as an opportunity to publish the advertisement, which it had been forced to withdraw on police orders earlier. It printed the ad on its front page with the headline: "Illegal Yesterday—Legal Today."

A sub-headline explained: "We present, courtesy of the Rand Supreme

Court, the advert we were prevented from printing three weeks ago." Praising the Supreme Court, the newspaper added: "There is still a glimmer of hope." But by the time the paper went on sale, the advertisement was no longer legal. The special decree had given the commissioner of police the power to ban any "news, comment or advertisement," overriding the Supreme Court finding that he had exceeded his power in imposing the nation-wide ban a mere three weeks before.

The banning and re-banning on the same day reflected the government's determination to suppress what it viewed as pro-ANC propaganda and the difficulties the press faces in trying to give the ANC even a limited hearing in the political debate raging in the country.

An enraged President P.W. Botha appointed a judicial commission of inquiry to establish who had financed the advertisement, after first insinuating in Parliament that the managing director of Barclays Bank, Chris Ball, was behind it. The ad had originally been carried by sections of the "established" press on January 8, the 75th anniversary of the ANC, before the authorities could intervene.

While events surrounding the advertisement moved with particular speed, they mirror a generally shifting situation. While the constraining laws setting the parameters of permissibility for the press have changed rapidly—there have been three major sets of emergency regulations impinging on the press since late 1985—the overall direction is unmistakable. Press freedom or what remains of it is being steadily whittled away. In the process, the press

is prevented from reflecting all sides in a complex and volatile political situation.

Press restrictions were imposed under the state of emergency in November 1985, in June 1986, and again shortly before Christmas last year. The 1985 curbs forbade journalists from filming and photographing the rebellion—euphemistically described as "unrest" in South Africa—sweeping across the black townships. The government rationale was that television cameras incited black youths to acts of rebellion and the broadcasted coverage gave a distorted picture of South Africa, arousing world hostility.

In March 1986, there was a temporary respite for the press when President Botha lifted the partial state of emergency declared in July 1985. But on June 16, 1986, the tenth anniversary of the 1976 revolt which started in the black township of Soweto, the police commissioner imposed new and more draconian curbs on the press. Botha had created the legal platform for the new clamp-down four days earlier by imposing a nation-wide state of emergency, the first since 1960.

The new restrictions forbade publication of "subversive statements" as defined in the Government Gazette. The definition was extensive and its effect was to prohibit the media from reporting calls for strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, or marches in support of political demands. These calls emanated largely from South Africa's extra-parliamentary opposition movements, among the dwindling courses of non-violent action open to them.

The restrictions renewed the ban on filming or photographing scenes of black resistance in the townships. They prohibited reporting and comment on the

*Patrick Laurence, formerly editor of the Rand Daily Mail, is a correspondent for The Guardian of London and a contributor to the Christian Science Monitor and The Melbourne Herald. He is also a political analyst for the South African Weekly Mail.*

actions of the security forces. At the same time, they barred journalists from entering black areas or "unrest areas" for the purpose of reporting (black journalists could hardly be prevented from living in their own homes in the townships).

The decree also empowered the Minister of Law and Order to seize or ban newspapers. Copies of both the *Weekly Mail* and the *Sowetan*, a daily paper with a large black readership, were later seized. Heavy penalties backed the restrictions: a fine of up to 20,000 rands

(approximately \$9,600), jail terms of up to 10 years, or imprisonment without the option of a fine.

But in the course of the next few months, Supreme Court decisions severely impaired the effectiveness of the curbs. In August, the Supreme Court in Natal ruled that four of the gazetted definitions of "subversive statements" were either wholly or partly invalid because they were vague and imprecise.

In September, the Natal Court delivered a more important judgment, declaring invalid the clause authorizing sei-

zure or banning of papers containing subversive statements. Another clause, empowering the commissioner of police to issue general orders authorizing whatever he deemed necessary to maintain public order, was similarly declared invalid. The Court found that sections of the decree were "so far-reaching and horrendous" that Parliament could never have intended them when it passed the enabling law, the Public Safety Act.

The government immediately moved to repair some of the defects in its re-

**"The emergency curbs impose a blanket ban on reporting of security force actions"**



John Corn

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## **“During the course of a single publishing day, the law changed twice, overtaking the Weekly Mail as it came off the presses.”**

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pressive regulations. But its main bid to restore them came on December 11 when it issued a new set of restrictions. They were essentially similar to the June curbs, restoring nearly all of the powers invalidated by the courts, including the power to seize or ban newspapers.

But every effort was made to make them invulnerable to further court action. As William Lane and Douglas Hoffe, two lawyers specializing in the press, remarked: “A competent draftsman has taken careful note of the objections taken to the previous regulations by the courts.”

But in some ways the December regulations went further than those of June. They prohibited newspapers from running blank spaces to indicate that the curbs prevented them from reporting a particular event—or reaction to it. They forbade coverage of allegations in court of assault by members of the security force until final judgment by the court.

The only people who could make statements on prohibited matters were the relevant cabinet ministers or their authorized spokesmen. From December 11, the Bureau of Information made available government spokesmen to whom journalists could refer their reports if they were in doubt about their legality. These officials passed or rejected reports or approved them subject to stipulated excisions.

The government justified the new curbs as necessary to prevent the media from generating what it called a “revolutionary climate.” In an Orwellian twist, the new Deputy Minister of Information, Dr. Stoffel van der Merwe, asserted that they were necessary for the protection of democracy. His Bureau for Information declared: “There can be no doubt that there are individuals within the established media and organs of the alternative media who strongly

believe that the media should be overtly and covertly used to promote the objectives of the radical revolution.”

The attitude of the pro-government Afrikaans newspapers was generally one of regret rather than opposition—that the government had been forced to impose the restrictions in the interests of security. The anti-government press, however, protested vigorously.

Rejecting allegations that unnamed journalists, particularly in the alternative media, were aiding the forces of revolution, the *Cape Times* described the curbs as “subversive of independent journalism.” *The Argus* labelled them “worse than we feared,” proclaiming that they created a “wall of silence” as a shield for the security forces. It rejected as “arrogant gobbledygook” the government claim that it was preserving press freedom from exploitation by revolutionary forces.

However, the government had not yet completed its moves to contain and restrict the press. On the night of January 8, after several major newspapers had carried giant ads calling for the unbanning of the ANC, the commissioner of police issued yet another emergency decree, making it unlawful for newspapers to publish articles or advertisements defending, justifying, or even explaining resistance strategies of unlawful organizations.

The offending advertisement quoted two ANC leaders, Nelson Mandela and Albert Luthuli, explaining how the ANC had only reverted to armed struggle after years of peaceful pressure and after the ANC was banned and confronted with the choice of armed resistance or docile submission.

When the Supreme Court declared that decree unlawful, the police commissioner was given even wider powers, which he immediately used to restore the ban on the advertisement calling for the unbanning of the ANC.

**T**hree additional points need to be made in this overview of the curbs of the past 15 months. First, even if the emergency curbs were lifted overnight, the press would still be severely restricted by statutory law. Second, and paradoxically, even the curbs as they stand today have not reduced the press

## **Journalists in Jail**

**T**he imposition of curbs over the past year has been paralleled by the detention and deportation of journalists. The detained journalists are South Africans. Their deported colleagues are foreign correspondents.

Nearly all the detainees are members of the alternative press, the small but vigorous newspapers which have emerged during the past two years. At present, six journalists are known to be in detention.

The best known of them is Zwelakhe Sisulu, editor of the weekly publication, *New Nation*. Sisulu, like his publication, minces no words in opposing the government. He is a former Nieman scholar and the son of Walter Sisulu, the imprisoned African National Congress leader, and Albertina Sisulu, a president of the United Democratic Front. He was detained during the last state of emergency.

Sisulu's co-journalist detainees are Mxolisi Jackson, Brian Sokutu, a freelance journalist, Clive Stuurman, of *Saamstaan* (Stand Together), and Umbulelo Grootboom, of the same publication.

Sipho Ngcobo, a journalist who worked for *Business Day*, a member of the “establishment press,” was detained late last year. He spent Christmas and New Year's in detention before being released in late January. His articles on people's courts and street committees in the black townships preceded his detention. He, like many journalist detainees before him, was not charged.

American correspondents or those working for the American media appear to be the main targets of the state clampdown against foreign journalists. The *Newsweek* bureau chief in South Africa, Richard Manning, was ordered to leave last year. So too was Wim de Vos, a Dutch national who worked for CBS. The authorities refused to renew the work permit of Alan Cowell of *The New York Times* or to grant a visa to the man appointed to succeed him, Serge Schmemmann.

—P.L.

to complete docility. The network of restrictions still has lacunae which can be used to air unpopular views. As Tony Heard, editor of the *Cape Times*, put it: "We are not yet in the Cambodia league."

Third, and perhaps most important, there are strong suspicions that sections of the established press are not resolutely committed to fighting government restrictions, that they are itching to make a deal with the government.

The media is restricted by about 100 statutory laws, many of which interlock to supplement one another. Pivotal to press freedom—or more accurately, to its partial denial—are a quartet of laws: the Internal Security Act, the Prisons and Police Acts, and the Defense Act.

The Internal Security Act prohibits promotion of the aims of an unlawful organization. Thus, even before the special decree was issued forbidding newspapers from explaining why the ANC adopted armed struggle, it was hazardous for newspapers to offer an alternative view challenging the denigration of the ANC by state-owned television.

The Internal Security Act further empowers the Minister of Law and Order to ban newspapers, a prerogative which was exercised in 1977 against *The World* and *Weekend World*. Moreover, the law makes it an offense to quote banned people, most of whom offer a radical critique of the established order.

The Prisons Act virtually limits coverage on prisons to reports approved by the prison authorities. The law makes it an offense to publish "false information" about prisons or prisoners without first taking "reasonable steps" to verify it. But the test of what constitutes "reasonable steps" is very stringent, as shown in the 1970 judgment in a case where the then editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* and a reporter were found guilty of contravening the law. Legal fees amounted to 250,000 rands, a large sum at the time.

As Professors William Hacten and C. Anthony Giffard later noted: "The Prisons Act and the conviction of the *Mail* have successfully inhibited press coverage of events taking place behind prison walls in South Africa, a nation with one of the highest per capita prison populations in the world." The Police Act contains a similar clause restricting



John Conn

**"The government rationale was that television cameras incited black youths to acts of rebellion and the broadcasted coverage gave a distorted picture of South Africa"**

publication of "untrue matter" about the police "without having reasonable grounds" for believing it to be true. It, too, has an inhibiting effect.

The Defense Act excludes the press from the whole of the "operational area." It restricts reporting on the "composition, movements, or dispensation" of South African soldiers, sailors, or airmen and makes it an offense to incite or encourage resistance to compulsory conscription.

Commenting on the restrictions imposed under statutory law, Professor Gavin Stewart of Rhodes University has

written: "Given the content of South Africa's statutes, the declaration of the state of emergency was barely necessary to the government and its lifting makes little difference." Stewart's appraisal was made before the December restrictions and the decree forbidding articles explaining the policies or strategies of unlawful organizations.

While Professor Stewart's essential point is still valid, his assessment underestimates the impact of the emergency decrees. First, the emergency curbs impose a blanket ban on reporting of security force actions, with security forces

being defined widely to include even the new black municipal police who are not covered by the Police Act. Second, the new, revised definition of subversive statements severely curtails reporting on street committees and "people's courts" in the black townships.

Meanwhile, however, there are fears that sections of the established press are in favor of self-censorship. In a statement issued late last year by the Newspaper Press Union—an organization which represents newspaper managers and owners rather than journalists—the NPU agreed that the Media Council, set up to maintain the press code of conduct, may need revising in view of the crisis in the country.

The NPU told President Botha: "The council was not created by the NPU to deal with conditions such as have been brought about by the intensification of the revolutionary onslaught and the resultant state of emergency. We believe that the mechanism of the council may need reviewing to take into account the state of emergency [and] the revolutionary onslaught."

Botha disclosed later that he had of-

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**"There are strong suspicions that sections of the established press are not resolutely committed to fighting government restrictions, that they are itching to make a deal."**

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ferred the NPU a deal: If they tightened their code of conduct, they would be exempted from the December 11 emergency restrictions. That would have subjected only the "alternative press"—none of whom are NPU members—to the curbs.

The NPU rejected the offer, forcing President Botha to apply the restrictions to the entire press. But the organization did agree to consider how operations of the Media Council—which under earlier government pressure was empowered to fine errant newspapers

up to 10,000 rands—could be tightened to counter the "revolutionary onslaught."

There has been anxiety that it will belatedly accept Botha's deal, partly because two of the four newspaper companies comprising the NPU are pro-government and partly because the ailing newspaper industry fears it will be deprived of its share of television advertising if it does not comply.

The established press did turn down a second offer from President Botha to strike a deal with him which would have granted it immunity from the emergency restrictions, leaving the alternative press to bear their full weight.

The four companies which comprise the NPU—Argus, South African Associated Newspapers, Nasionale Pers, and Perskor—are joint owners of an infant television network known as M-NET. As a former *Rand Daily Mail* editor, Raymond Louw, put it: "M-NET's transmission times, its program of content, and, indeed, its very existence is at the pleasure of the government and what the government giveth it can taketh away." □

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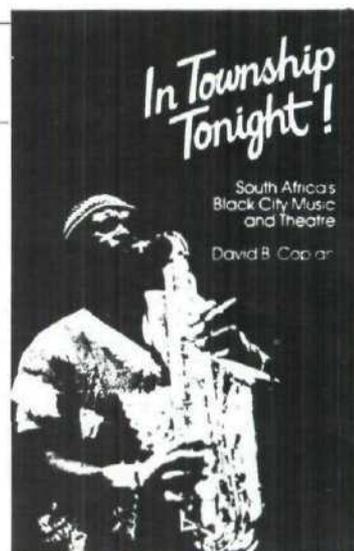
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# SUN CITY

ARTISTS UNITED AGAINST APARTHEID



# Roundtable: The Press in South Africa

A group of South Africa's leading black journalists—Ameen Akhalwaya, editor of *The Indicator*; Joe Thloloe, features editor of the *Sowetan*; Z.B. Molefe, reporter, and Peter Setuke, photographer, of *City Press*; and Zodwa Mshibe, reporter for Drum Publications—discusses the rise of community newspapers, the impact of the press restrictions, and American media coverage of events in South Africa.

INTERVIEWED BY  
MARGARET A. NOVICKI

**Africa Report:** Can you provide a brief overview of the history of the press in South Africa?

**Akhalwaya:** The press in South Africa today can be divided into two main groups—the community press (what the government calls the “alternative media”) and the “establishment press.” The latter is composed of four major newspaper groups [South African Associated Newspapers, Argus, Perskor, and Nasionale Pers], all owned by whites—two English-language groups and two Afrikaans groups. Their papers control just about the entire newspaper industry in South Africa. Within the establishment press, the English newspapers carry extra editions which go to the black townships. They claim that the editions are “regional,” but of course it has nothing to do with region—it is straight race.

Television and radio are totally controlled by government; there are a couple of allegedly independent radio stations which operate from the bantustans, but for all intents and purposes, they are South African stations. They are primarily entertainment and music stations and cover little in the way of politics. And the radio and television stations themselves are subdivided into racial categories and language groupings, part of the apartheid system.

The community press is what black journalists have set out to do themselves for various reasons. It is community-based in the sense that it is politically oriented. These newspapers were started because of the propaganda onslaught that we get from the government and the establishment press—that the types of activities that go on in the black communities are not reflected in these particular newspapers. In the community papers, it is easier to dispense with the “two sides of the story” principle because the one side has already been written or broadcast in the establishment press. Our papers are to offset those types of lies and crystallize community issues.

**Africa Report:** What are the major community papers?

**Akhalwaya:** The *New Nation*, sponsored by the Catholic Bishops Conference, *Grassroots* in Cape Town, which was initially a project of the Media Workers Association of South Africa [MWASA], *The Indicator*, basically a two-person operation in an editorial sense, and the *Weekly Mail*, which is run mainly by white journalists who left the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Express*.

**Thloloe:** I work for the *Sowetan*, which is owned by the biggest newspaper company, the Argus group. It's designed for Africans, written and edited by blacks, but it is white-owned. The Argus also owns the *Natal Post*, which is designed specifically for Indians, and they used to own the *Cape Herald*, which was designed specifically for Coloureds, until it went under. Besides these tribal papers, we have the main newspapers—the *Sunday Star*, the *Star*, which are designed for whites, but within which you've got the township or African editions—an extra page or two for blacks.

**Molefe:** To add an historical note, it was 55 years ago when the big money, the big corporations moved in and gobbled up all the black independent papers. I work for *City Press*, which is Afrikaans-owned, by the Nasionale Pers group. It started publishing in 1982.

**Setuke:** One should not omit the fact that there was also a black newspaper called *The Voice*, black-owned and run, which died because it was not supported by advertising. The majority of the advertisers felt that the paper was very left-wing and too committed to the survival of the blacks and that it had nothing to do with those issues that promote the paper only commercially.

**Mshibe:** I work for *True Love*, one of the magazines owned by Drum Publications, run by Nasionale Pers. *True Love* is a black women's magazine which covers mainly women's issues such as babies and cooking. It used to be very sexist, it still is in a way. It is aimed at the 16 to 55-year-old group of men and women and is more concerned with the black woman who has



Catherine D. Smith/Impact Visuals

"The establishment papers are still read for primary news, but black readers are much more aware that all white political and social activity affects blacks directly"

made it, though we do sometimes have stories on development and current affairs.

**Thloloe:** Drum Publications used to be owned by Jim Bailey, who was one of the "independent" publishers. In fact he saw himself as the newspaper magnate of South Africa. He owned *Drum*, which was one of the most outstanding magazines on the continent, not just in South Africa. It was very liberal, very outspoken in the 1950s and 1960s, but later it deteriorated, and it was at the point when it was deteriorating that *True Love* came in. In the end, Bailey sold out his whole operation to Nasionale Pers, one of the four top groups, collected himself \$4 million, and went into retirement.

**Akhalwaya:** It is important to dwell on *Drum* for a while in order to understand how our press and media works. *Drum* had a very special place in our history especially in the 1950s, when it was created. It was where all the creative writing that was coming up and was controversial at the time was published. If you look back on it now, you find it wasn't as politically heavy as what journalists over the last 10 years have been writing, but for that particular era, when they believed in the rapier rather than the bludgeon, a lot of creativity came out of *Drum*, not offending the government, but stepping on its toes all the time. Some of the most brilliant writers of our time came from *Drum*, they were allowed a lot of leeway and their writing was sort of a jazzy style, township slang. It was very readable, it was the language of the streets, and people could identify with it.

Allied to it was *Golden City Post*, which was also owned by

Jim Bailey—the first totally black newspaper in the country, published for Coloureds, Indians, and Africans. When Bailey finally sold that paper to the Argus company, suddenly black journalists' creativity was crushed because we were now dragged into the mainstream press which stuck very rigidly to the British tradition of separating news stories and features, two or more sides of the story type of thing. It killed creativity completely because blacks who then joined the establishment press weren't allowed any leeway. They were allowed to concentrate on sensational crime, soccer stories, and that was it. There was no political writing, no colorful feature writing. That is why we find ourselves in a depressed state because that type of creativity is lacking in our newspapers.

We worked for white establishment newspapers, and in my personal case, it was frustration that we weren't getting anywhere on the newspaper that was the real reason for establishing *The Indicator*. We were shunted sideways, down, backwards, and that was called "promotion." The *Rand Daily Mail* was in the very curious position of having a marvelous public image—it did tremendous work and was in the forefront of exposing the evils of apartheid—but its staff relations inside, what happened to blacks who were working for it, was totally disgusting. Eventually we quit in frustration.

I joined another newspaper within the same group, but the idea was to start my own paper eventually and finally when the *Sunday Express* was closed down with the *Rand Daily Mail*, and we got paid off, I said this is the time to finally start. We had a choice of taking our redundancy pay or being offered

jobs on the new publications. I decided it was time to quit, so I got the pay-out and then went around to friends and family and raised small amounts, hired an office, and now we're trying to exist on advertising. In our area of distribution, we distribute free, but outside, we sell the paper.

**Molefe:** This is an interesting aspect—the coming of Afrikaans newspaper groups into the black market, like when they came to own my paper, *City Press*, on April 1, 1984. For the first time, we had black nationalism and Afrikaans nationalism trying to move parallel. These Afrikaners came into the black market—liberals, *verligtes*—we were told it was a bridges-building exercise. It is interesting to look at because of what has happened in black newspaper publishing, in terms of the rise of community-based newspapers. Now we are looking to see what is going to happen, because we have the community papers who come with the real stuff, and us, on the side.

**Africa Report:** Do people tend to rely more now on the community-based papers for news than the mainstream press?

**Akhalwaya:** The establishment papers are still read for primary news, but black readers are much more aware that all white political and social activity affects blacks directly. The community press comes out either weekly, bimonthly, or monthly, so the establishment papers are left to fill the daily gap and that is why they have a big readership among blacks. In fact, of the total readership of the *Rand Daily Mail* at one point, 72 percent was black, and the readership of the *Sowetan* is totally African. The *Sunday Times*, which is the largest selling newspaper in the country, has about 62 percent black readership.

**Africa Report:** All of South Africa's press is subject to the current restrictions, but do people tend to give the community-based papers more credibility? Do you get across things that the mainstream press does not?

**Akhalwaya:** No, not really, mostly because of the time constraints. We rely more on feature, background material than on hard news. But in terms of what we set out to do in terms of crystallizing the issues, I think we succeed because there are no other papers doing that.

**Thloloe:** Even before you start comparing the mainstream papers and the alternative press, take the *Sowetan* and the *Star*, for example. People will still buy the *Star*, then read the *Sowetan* as a supplement. I read the *Star* for the mainstream news, and then the *Sowetan* because I want to get black-oriented information. But I will still go and read the alternative press to get an interpretation that is essentially black.

**Africa Report:** What types of features has *The Indicator* been publishing?

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**“The kind of emotion they have vented by throwing out the New York Times correspondent is just an outward version of what they have been doing internally.”**

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**Akhalwaya:** I'll give one recent example. A lot of people who had served very long prison sentences were released from Robben Island. In the mainstream press, it was either just recorded or they printed one picture with the usual family jubilation, but no other background information on who this person is, what's happened on the island. We can't write much about that, but we try to imply it within the law. We try to give background about why he went to jail in the first place, what his views would be. The younger people don't even know of the existence of a guy who spent 18 years on the island, and we believe that they are a big part of our history and people have to know who they are, so it's that type of thing that we feature.

**Thloloe:** One thing we should mention—perhaps *The Indicator* might be an exception—is that the community papers tend to take particular political positions. You might get a pro-UDF [United Democratic Front] publication. They are much more partisan than the mainstream papers. Ameen's is probably one exception where he is trying to balance the various political organizations.

**Mshibe:** But even the mainstream press—I can quote two examples, the *Sowetan* and *City Press*—is in a way partisan, though they were not definitely so over the last two to three years.

**Akhalwaya:** About ten years ago, it was only the black consciousness movement which was the real extra-parliamentary opposition in the country, and then the UDF came along, which is closely allied to the Freedom Charter and ANC. So what's happened is that most of the alternative newspapers tend to support the UDF, but most of the UDF people don't get on with the black journalists, whom they accuse of being black consciousness, so you have a conflict there. And some newspapers have been targets of boycott by one organization which thought that they were trying to distort the news.

**Mshibe:** I was told that there was a time when black journalists were forced to draw the line as to where they stood politically, what their ideology was.

**Thloloe:** It didn't quite reach that point, but the *Sowetan* was singled out as being a pro-black consciousness paper and there were attempts at a boycott campaign. In fact, in some areas it was fairly successful, but it didn't reach the point where we were asked to take sides. We were just accused generally of being a pro-black consciousness publication.

**Africa Report:** But just by what you choose to publish you are taking sides to a certain extent. In the South African context, isn't it almost impossible to be “non-partisan”? I would think that you can't help but reflect your involvement in the situation.

**Thloloe:** I think our position was set out at a MWASA conference where Zwelakhe Sisulu said that in South Africa, you are either a propagandist for the oppressor or a propagandist for the oppressed. You can't be neutral. That is the broad choice that every black journalist faces. When it comes to partisan politics within that broad thing, that's a different kettle of fish. But I still believe that once journalists get bored, then they start talking about balance, objectivity, etc. You must always write from a particular perspective. I think we have accepted

**Aftermath of security police raid on Afrapix offices and darkroom:**  
**"The photographer is not allowed to publish what he photographs"**



Gisele Wulfsohn/Impact Visuals

generally that our perspective is one of an oppressed people trying to fight the oppression. That's the bottom line for every black journalist.

**Akhalwaya:** The irony of all this is that up to about 1980-81, we were constantly accused of being propagandists. Then one day we decided to sit down and talk about it. Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu spoke at what was then the writers' association before it became MWASA and both of them said that neutrality in the struggle will never be forgiven. To us that was just a statement of fact, nobody took notice of it. But the *Rand Daily Mail* picked it up, attacked us and everybody else. We then decided to respond, and it took two years before they finally decided to publish our response.

Our response set out where we stand, that it is just impossible to become objective, and we pointed out specific examples of the bias and one-sidedness of the newspapers like the *Rand Daily Mail*. We said we believe in a type of balance when it comes to news reporting, but that's as far as it goes. We are not neutral and we cannot be objective. Then the debate suddenly ended and they didn't accuse us for a while, then suddenly it started all over again. They first said blacks were incapable, they were not any good in newspapers, but then when we showed we were capable enough, the excuse was thrown back at us that we cannot be objective. So it is this type of vicious circle that keeps on coming up against black advancement.

Z.B. Molefe brought out a very important point which is a significant development—that an Afrikaner nationalist group, very pro-government—in fact some of the National Party cabinet ministers were directors of this company—is publishing a newspaper which is by and large UDF-supporting.

**Molefe:** I can add to that point of being owned by Afrikaners, though UDF-supporting. Somebody described us as maverick. We are taking chances on some of the things we are publishing, so all of us are still waiting to see whether the Pik Bothas and the people with the money will come down on us. We are walking that tightrope. We haven't faced any clamp-

down yet from management and owners, we are still watching them and they are watching us.

**Akhalwaya:** There is this in-built conflict because these are the newspaper groups—Molefe talked about the "enlightened" group, the Nasionale Pers especially—that have been in the forefront of calling for reform in government. The most fundamental need of a trade union is recognition, and they are refusing to recognize MWASA.

**Thloloe:** Both groups, Nasionale and Perskor, refuse to do so. The Newspaper Press Union, which consists of Nasionale Pers, Perskor, SAAN and Argus, was invited by Botha to discuss the "total onslaught" against South Africa and they gave him a statement that said they recognize that there is a revolutionary onslaught against the country. Now these are the people who in their papers pretend to be on the side of blacks, so they are in fact making choices as to which side they are on.

**Mshibe:** To add to that, I think *City Press* is about the only paper which has an official censor on its staff. I call him an official censor because he is an Afrikaner who actually sub-edits stories before and after they are subbed.

**Molefe:** I wouldn't say he's an official censor. He's supposed to be an associate editor. What he is doing was never spelled out to us. He offers suggestions. He doesn't actually sub.

**Akhalwaya:** But on most newspapers, the lawyers are sitting there, especially at a very crucial time when we don't know what regulations are coming. All the newspapers are in constant contact with their lawyers. Law's the growth industry at the moment.

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**"We play this cat-and-mouse game to see how we can leave things unsaid, or let our readers read between the lines, but that's not our calling."**

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**Africa Report:** So before you publish any story, you check it out with your lawyers.

**Akhalwaya:** Self-censorship begins long, long before that.

**Thloloe:** The day after Oliver Tambo's press conference in Lusaka, I read a story reporting on the conference to our lawyer. I read it to the younger man who is more daring—we normally go to him because we know he will allow more than his senior partner. After he had gone through the story and amended certain things, he suggested I should read it to the senior partner because after the embarrassment with the advertisement calling for the unbanning of the ANC, they have decided that any sensitive story must be counter-checked by the other. So when I took it to the senior chap, he deleted more stuff out of it. In fact, the story was cut to almost a quarter by the second chap. That is the type of censorship that is taking place now.

**Akhalwaya:** It is at the source of stories that self-censorship begins. First, there are a lot of people who are banned and cannot be quoted, so immediately if they say anything, that is out. If you go to a political meeting and you start taking notes, and if you think that there is something that may be a little contentious, you don't put it down for the simple reason that people have been dragged in by the security police and their notes demanded. In other words, you are expected to be state witnesses against these people, so you don't write down what they say. You know how much your lawyers are going to allow you to write, you become conditioned to that, so you don't even bother writing down a whole lot of things. Finally after that sifting process, when you go and write your story, you still have to take it to the lawyers for a final check.

**Africa Report:** Can you give a short synopsis of the current state of the press restrictions?

**Akhalwaya:** Before the emergency regulations came out, we had the Terrorism Act, which I just mentioned. But when the emergency regulations came out, they were very vague. Previously the establishment newspapers were so terrified that they would hardly mention the ANC or PAC. If you go through the files in the newspaper libraries from the 1960s onwards, the ANC and PAC virtually didn't exist in our newspapers. Suddenly they started getting a little more courage after 1976 and occasionally they would be quoted, but the risk was very small. In 1979, one of the Afrikaans papers quoted Thabo Mbeki by mistake, they didn't know he was banned. After the paper came out, they paid a 50 rand admission-of-guilt fine. That was really the essence of the risk, but the white newspapers wouldn't take that risk, so they would ignore them completely.

Since the last emergency regulations came out, you couldn't even write the names of detainees or so they thought, unless the government gave approval. Finally the lawyers went to court over that particular issue and others, so you were allowed to get away with a certain amount of it. But unrest for example, or police movements, police activities, all of that was off limits. Some papers tried to get around that, like the *Star*, which played a reasonably decent role in this. But come the latest regulations in December 1986, you can't quote or say virtually anything about the ANC, or PAC,

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**“For black people, there is no TV coverage and the government is trying to cut off newspaper coverage, yet black people see what is happening around them, so they are not being deceived.”**

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you can't show anything that will enhance their standing. You can't even write about their strategies or policies.

**Thloloe:** The December 12 restrictions are particularly interesting. The lawyers are saying that the December 12 restrictions are better written than the ones that were thrown out the last time, so they think the chances of fighting them this time are very slim, but this case will be coming up in late February.

**Akhalwaya:** These regulations are very, very specific about what you can't report, whereas the others were vague and that's why they were thrown out.

**Thloloe:** The victories that have been won in court have been pyrrhic, because it is just the wording that is wrong, just on technicalities. What has happened now is that these loopholes have been tightened and it looks like we will have to deal with them for a hell of a long time.

**Africa Report:** What ultimately is the effect of the restrictions on both the domestic and Western press and in turn how readers perceive what is going on in South Africa?

**Thloloe:** It becomes a challenge for the lawyers because they have to be looking at loopholes. That's the game they play, a game that we as journalists are engaged in every day. We have this new regulation that you can't comment on detentions, you can't call for the release of a detainee. We wanted to focus on journalists who are in detention, so we decided to write a column saying we remember so-and-so who has been in detention. I had an argument with the lawyer. He was saying you can't call for the release of a detainee. We said we are not calling for their release, and we had quite an argument before he actually said OK, you can use the article.

**Akhalwaya:** I think they are ultra-cautious. When Zwelakhe Sisulu was detained, about 11 of his fellow Nieman Fellows issued a statement calling for his unconditional release and yet no action has been taken against any of the signatories. It may be because some of them are government supporters, but significantly no action has been taken.

**Thloloe:** What we are getting in the papers is filtered, about one-tenth of the truth, but for us journalists, it has become a game of trying to find a gap.

**Setuke:** Then you come to the side of the photographers where the law requires that the photographer should remove himself from any scene of unrest. If a photographer happens to be there at the time, the law also comes and photographs the very same situation. The photographer is not allowed to publish what he photographs, but when black people are being arrested for being against the government, the very law itself then produces their pictures when they detain them and says,

"Is this not you?" That now reverts back to the photographer, because where did he take those pictures if he didn't take them to the law itself? It is very difficult.

They want to reduce the black journalist and the black photographer to the level of a pin-up or beauty contest photographer or reporter. I was taken in for being at the OK Limpet mine incident and I had to destroy the film, because that would have provided grounds for them to say that I had photographed the situation.

**Molefe:** I see all this as presenting black journalists and journalism with a challenge. If we are now true to our calling, we will find a way out.

**Akhalwaya:** It has made us more creative in a sense. We play this cat-and-mouse game to see how we can leave things unsaid, or let our readers read between the lines, but that's not our calling. We go around self-congratulating and being very happy about how we manage to get away with it. That becomes a little game as Joe said, but it's not what we really want to do.

**Africa Report:** How do you view Western reporting on South Africa and the Western reporters who are based in your country?

**Mshibe:** I find the British media terribly insensitive. I remember there was a big argument about why media like the BBC doesn't use local journalists. They had this excuse that African journalists wouldn't be able to put news in the British perspective. There are so many distortions.

**Akhalwaya:** The American and Western media who accuse our government of being racist are just as bloody racist as our government when it comes to handling black journalists. When I mentioned it in 1981, they said they'd do something about it and nothing was done. When I said it at a Harvard conference, they all said, "Yes, that's shocking and we will do something about it," but nothing is ever done. It's the same excuse we get from our white bosses that we can't be trusted, that we're not capable enough to write for the white newspapers in South Africa.

That's how the American media sees us as well. We are used as the porters and bearers as you see in the old cartoons about the white baas in his safari suit with all the darkie porters behind him with his cases and bags. We take them into the townships, give them introductions and telephone numbers, thereafter we do not matter. This has been going on for donkey's years and it hasn't changed. Even now, *The New York Times* hasn't got a correspondent in South Africa, but as far as I know, not a single black guy has been sounded out. When the American and British correspondents go on holiday,

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**"You must always write from a particular perspective. I think we have accepted generally that our perspective is one of an oppressed people trying to fight the oppression. That's the bottom line for every black journalist."**

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they get a white South African journalist who has never set foot in a township and who doesn't even know how to get to Soweto to come and cover for them. They plagiarize black articles, rewrite them, and send them off. The whole pack mentality changed a lot when Joe Lelyveld came in, who was the shining exception. When Lelyveld set an example, the foreign media generally started looking at things differently, but it hasn't altered the fact that darkies don't matter.

**Mshibe:** In 1981, when I used to work for the Voice of America, my job description was administrative/editorial assistant. The correspondent used to give me a lot of leeway to do whatever I wanted, but the one thing he would never allow me to do was to voice my stories. When he went on leave for two months, he got an American woman to fill in. I would go out and do the stories and then if they liked them in Washington, they would get her to voice the stories. She was just freelancing. What she made per story she voiced was half my salary!

**Akhalwaya:** A very good example was in 1976 at the outbreak of unrest in Soweto. For all these years, they kept on attacking us and saying the blacks were useless, incapable, and can't be trusted. Came 1976 and the unrest, and no white journalist would dare put his foot anywhere near Soweto. The black guys used to hide in refuse bins in order to get their stories. Most of them were freelancers. They got beaten up, they had their noses busted, they got detained. All their stories made the front pages of all the papers throughout the world and then suddenly they could be trusted, they were good enough. When the thing died down, black journalists died as well. Back to the old thing, they're not capable.

In 1982, I attended a New World Information Order conference in Connecticut, where there were people from the *Christian Science Monitor*, *New York Times*, etc. and the arrogance that came out from these guys was hard to imagine. The *New York Times* guy told us they only employ Americans as foreign correspondents. But that didn't stop them from having any number of white stringers before they had permanent correspondents out here, and Alan Cowell, the guy who was thrown out, was British.

The *Times* guy then very arrogantly decided for himself that they can't use the natives as reporters because they are under too much pressure from the government and so forth and he didn't really know if they could write the truth. So we said our guys have been under the whip long enough and they are still there plugging away and we don't succumb to that kind of pressure. So then he said, "*The New York Times* subscribes to the belief that there are three aspects of journalism—the news story where we give more than one side of a story, feature writing which also reflects that type of balance, and the personal views for the op-ed pages." We said *The New York Times* didn't discover that. As we mentioned earlier, we are part of the British tradition, so we have been subscribing to that for years as well. Those are the types of excuses we get.

**Thloloe:** I have found an oversimplification by the Western press of some of the problems in South Africa. There is a tendency to look at the surface of issues. I don't know whether it's because they believe the American audience would not be able to get the nuances of any story, or whether

it is a question of they not knowing themselves what is happening.

**Molefe:** I am generally disappointed with American papers—they seem to have this show-biz mentality. Like Joe said, oversimplification. I believe we are writing history. We are talking of life and death matters. So I find *The New York Times* just oversimplifies things.

**Mshibe:** Oversimplify and sensationalize! There are a lot of gaps and lots of unanswered questions. If you look at the famine for example, they never bothered to examine the real causes of famine.

**Africa Report:** The *New York Times* correspondent was recently expelled from South Africa and there are probably more expulsions of foreign correspondents on the way. What is the motivation for this and what impact will it have on how we view what's happening in South Africa?

**Setuke:** Maybe they think they are teaching the Americans a lesson as far as politics in South Africa is concerned, teaching the world a lesson, that if they participate in the struggle, this is what they can expect. They are saying to the other media, you will also suffer the same blow that *The New York Times* has suffered.

**Thloloe:** I think it's part of a campaign to show the world that it doesn't mean anything to them. They can survive on their own. Remember before the sanctions were imposed, Botha was saying "Let the sanctions come." It's just a question of daring the world. Even though the sanctions are there, they are still trying to play very tough, very in control. In fact, there is a move into the laager by the entire white community. It's part of that campaign now to say to hell with the rest of the world. That's why we are having these campaigns against foreign correspondents. In the end, those who come in will be cowed. It happened with the *World, Post, Sowetan*—every one of these papers has been a little softer than the one before, so in the end you are going to get that type of correspondent in South Africa.

**Akhalwaya:** I tend to go a little further than that. I think they are preparing some Argentinian-type goon squad operation. The townships must start bracing themselves for a real nightmare now, where the vigilantes are going to be let loose. Last year, Pik Botha said he was going to throw some TV correspondents out and he mentioned that they were suffering from tunnel vision—they only give one side of the story, which is exactly what their own TV station does, but they can't see that for themselves. They have sensed that America lost the Vietnam war in the living rooms on the TV sets, and that South Africa lost the propaganda battle in the living rooms and TV sets.

**Africa Report:** I think to some extent their strategy has succeeded, as it was only when scenes of violence were shown on our nightly news casts in the U.S. that Americans really got involved in the South African issue. In the U.S., the newspapers don't have quite the same impact as television.

**Thloloe:** But I think it's worse having to say that we are unable to provide you with the material, we have been censored. That is worse than whatever bad picture they might have shown.

**Akhalwaya:** All they are now doing is widening the conspir-

**RELEASE MANDELA CAMPAIGN**  
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**NEW YEAR MESSAGE TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**1. WHAT THE ANC STANDS FOR**  
The African National Congress is a communist party of the oppressed people of South Africa. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government.

**2. THE ANC AND THE WORKERS**  
The ANC is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government.

**3. THE ANC AND THE CIVIC STRUCTURES**  
The ANC is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government.

**4. THE STATE OF EMERGENCY**  
The ANC is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government. It is the only party which stands for the liberation of the people of South Africa from the rule of the white-minority government.

**"THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT" - The Freedom Charter**

Advertisement in the Weekly Mail: "You can not quote or say virtually anything about the ANC, or PAC, you can't show anything that will enhance their standing"

acy of deception and the only people who are being deceived are their own electorate. For black people, there is no TV coverage and the government is trying to cut off newspaper coverage, yet black people see what is happening around them, so they are not being deceived. The outside world hasn't been deceived. So their own white electorate tends to think: What are we doing? We're not bad people, we haven't done anything, and yet the rest of the world is seeing what we're not seeing. As long as the whites in South Africa are happy that nothing is going on, there won't be a big panic.

**Setuke:** The kind of emotion they have vented by throwing out the *New York Times* correspondent is just an outward version of what they have been doing internally, because the English press and the black press are not allowed in those areas which are declared operational while the Afrikaans press is allowed. The Afrikaans press will be the only one that will confirm unrest. If a child is throwing a stone, then they publish the picture, but if a cop is shooting at a child, they don't publish the picture.

**Africa Report:** Any closing comments?

**Akhalwaya:** I would like to pay tribute to my colleagues. I don't think there is anyone around this table who hasn't been taken in, beaten up, etc. What bugs me is that these senior black journalists are not in it for the glory, but if you look at the people writing outside, they get the prizes because they happen to be white. I'm not being critical of what they write, they do a great job. But people like Joe Thloloe and others have suffered. Joe finally got an award from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard to its credit, but unfortunately at that time it carried no monetary award. Yet everybody else who hasn't suffered anything like Joe and the others have all cashed in financially as well. Nobody seems to recognize the importance of the role black journalists have played. I think history will be much kinder, looking at the period from 1976 onwards, to what black journalists have done. But they get no recognition. What makes it even worse is that our own liberation movements for example, outside the country, seldom say anything about what black journalists have gone through. I'm surprised that people still battle on, but it is because they see it as part of the greater struggle and they're not in it for the glory. □

# Covering the White Tribe

You won't read much about the upcoming elections in South Africa's black newspapers. After all, those most affected by the issues—the black majority—don't have the vote, so black journalists sit on the sidelines of the debate over how best to keep the white tribe in power.

BY AMEEN AKHALWAYA

**T**he Christmas holiday season is over and South Africa has entered the season of media hype with State President P.W. Botha's announcement of white tribal elections on May 6. Since the announcement of the poll, the white liberal newspapers, which usually castigate black journalists for their alleged lack of objectivity, have abandoned all pretense of impartiality. The battle lines are clearly drawn. Nearly all the major English-language newspapers are rooting for the official opposition in the white Parliament, the Progressive Federal Party (PFP).

One exception is the morning newspaper, *The Citizen*, which was launched through secret government funds in what came to be known as the "Info Scandal" a decade ago. *The Citizen* and its stable-mates in the major Afrikaans newspaper groups will unabashedly act as propagandists for the ruling National Party.

The black newspapers, meanwhile, will be on the sidelines during the white tribal faction-fighting. Black people have no vote, yet the election is really about them. Those classified Coloured and Asian now can vote for separate racial chambers in Parliament. But parties in the two darker-hued chambers do not want to be subjected to another election.

Their first elections in 1984 were di-

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sastrous. Anti-apartheid groups called for their boycott. Those elections, in fact, led to the establishment of the United Democratic Front, whose pro-boycott rallies drew huge crowds.

The issues were simple: A vote for any candidate would be construed as support for the apartheid system. A stay-away would be regarded as rejection of an evil system. The actual turnout of eligible Coloured and Asian voters was well below 20 percent.

The credibility of the two "non-white" chambers has suffered further through Botha's humiliation of his Coloured cabinet colleague, the Rev. Allen Hendrickse, who apologized for any "af-front" after, in American civil rights fashion, he had defied the law by swimming on a whites-only beach.

In addition, a newly elected Asian member of Parliament was recently convicted of fraud, but retains his seat in the apartheid chamber. Another current MP served a prison term in Ireland in the 1960s for the gruesome death of a young Dublin woman.

The two chambers, by their own admission, have nothing to offer the racially designated electorate. But then what do the parties contesting the May elections have to offer their 3 million white voters?

If one is to believe the liberal white press, the election is about political reform. In any normal parliamentary democracy, the issues would be straightforward. The South African economy, thanks to the disastrous apartheid poli-

cies of the National Party, is in a mess. Foreign confidence in the economy is low, millions of blacks are unemployed or underemployed. Double-digit inflation is causing added hardship. Apartheid has caused foreign countries to impose limited economic sanctions on South Africa.

On that record alone, the ruling party would be voted out of office in any normal election. The problem is that the 75 percent of the population which is most seriously affected by the poor economic performance doesn't have the vote. Some black analysts say that in fact that is a major reason why they don't have the vote—they would vote the ruling party out of power.

The real issue for white voters has been made simple by Botha's party: how to keep their tribe in control of the political and economic direction, while making concessions here and there which would impress the West, most notably the Reagan administration. And in this power game, Botha's party has identified two culprits: the foreigners who allegedly want to impose change on South Africa and the outlawed African National Congress (ANC).

The xenophobic element is, or should be, easy to exploit. The National Party won a handsome victory when it went on a Yankee-bashing spree against the South African policies of President Jimmy Carter and UN Ambassador Andrew Young.

This time around, however, Yankee-bashing is a little harder. While the

United States Congress is the obvious target, the Reagan administration is seen as a realistic friend of white South Africans. But to bash the Congress with one hand and caress the Reagan administration with the other fudges the issue.

The major target therefore is the ANC, and to simplify the issue for Communist-fearing Americans, the National Party propaganda focuses on the role of Communists in the organization. The major propagandist is the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), which is really the government's mouth-piece. With regular monotony, it churns out anti-ANC propaganda aided and abetted by conservative American religious and media stars such as Senator Jeremiah Denton.

South Africans are regularly told how evil the ANC is, how its Communist element is waiting to pounce and turn the country into a Communist dictatorship. None of the propagandists spell out how exactly black South Africans would be worse or better off under alleged Communist rule than under apartheid.

One doubts if too many black South Africans would vote for the Communist Party in opposition to the ANC in any case, but to them, any party would be preferable to the present one under whom they continue to suffer and which gives them no direct say in national decision-making. They are expected to accept the word of the ruling party.

Of course, the ANC isn't the only organization black people would support. There are others such as Inkatha, Azapo, and the outlawed Pan Africanist Congress. Yet to listen to the conservative American churchmen and government ministers such as Pik Botha who are paraded on SABC-TV, one might think the ANC has no support. But of course, the only way its support can be tested is in a free and fair election. This the government refuses to do, and Senator Denton and the media churchmen don't tell why exactly they shy away from testing black opinion in the only place it matters.

To continue with its anti-ANC onslaught, the government has now made it even more difficult to give media coverage to banned organizations, most of whose leaders cannot be quoted in South Africa in any case. South African

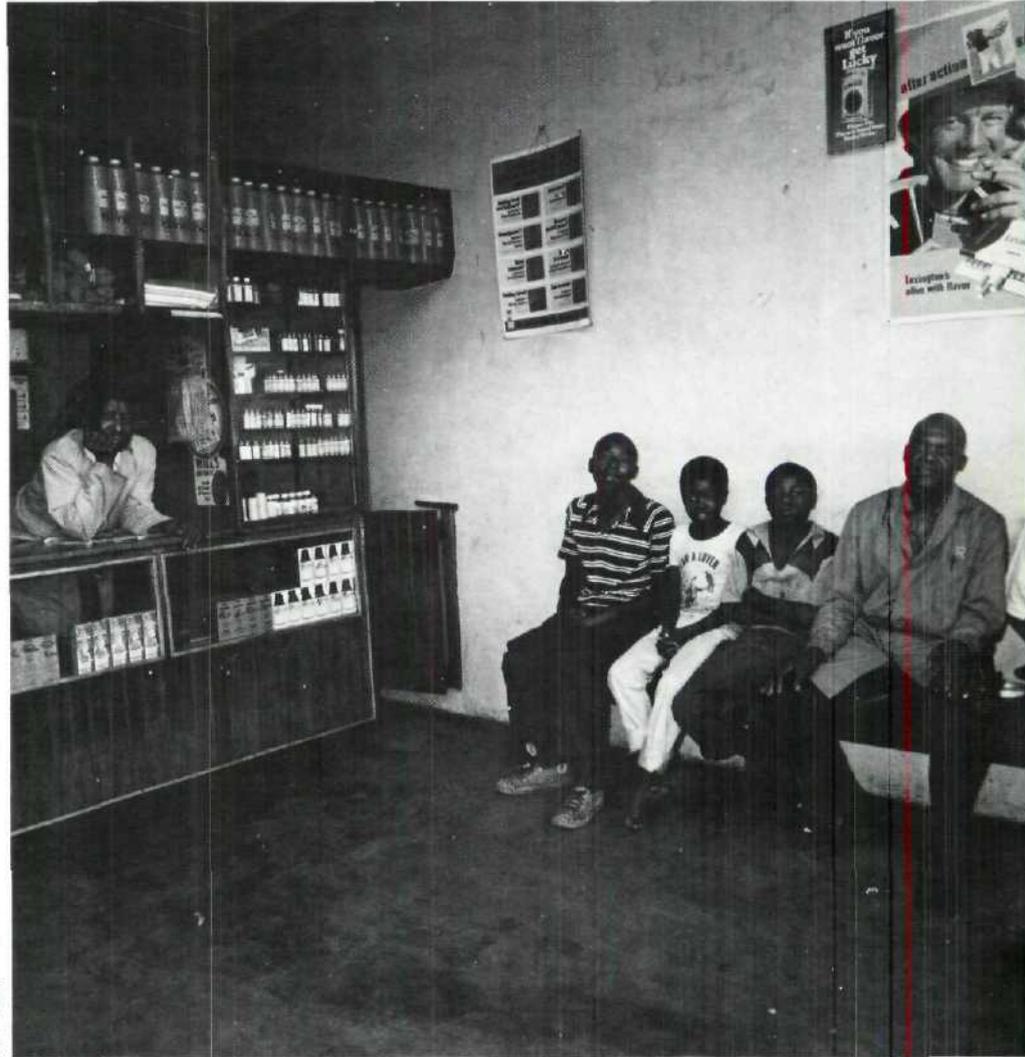
TV is thus correctly accused by anti-apartheid activists of being blatantly dishonest and one-sided.

The PFP, which like other parties contesting the May 6 election doesn't have a hope of unseating Botha's re-

order.

That is why the black media sit on the sidelines sniping—when they are legally allowed to do—into a vacuum at the ruling party and others contesting the election. Now the *Sowetan*—a white-owned

**"The problem is that the 75 percent of the population which is most seriously affected by the poor economic performance doesn't have the vote"**



John Conn

gime, is threatening to go to court over the SABC's "biased and distorted" political coverage during the election campaign. The PFP says the SABC's performance is a contravention of the SABC charter and official conditions of license.

But it is saying little about the violation of common decency on the SABC's part for attacking the ANC and not giving it any time to reply or spell out its views. And the liberal media has also been generally silent in this regard. So the organization which is the main issue in the election is shut out by official

newspaper controlled editorially by blacks—has launched an "alternate poll" for its readers. Readers are asked to choose any 10 South Africans, irrespective of race, whom they would like to see run the country.

It is almost a foregone conclusion that jailed ANC leader Nelson Mandela will top the poll, which is why Botha's party will not give the vote to the blacks. And that is what the May 6 election is about—asking the white tribe to endorse white political and economic supremacy at the expense of 75 percent of the population. □

# In Defense of the Fourth Estate

Journalists assigned to cover the continent often find themselves caught between their editors' definition of what is "news" and African criticism of the Western media for sensationalizing. Our correspondent looks at the difficulties and rewards of reporting on one of the most under-reported regions in the world.

BY MARY ANNE FITZGERALD

When they stepped out of the grass with AK-47s slung over their shoulders, we stopped the car. The taxi driver produced a white flag with the word "press" penned across it. He had made it himself.

The guerrillas of Uganda's National Resistance Army (NRA) were polite but firm. "You cannot go any further. You must go back."

"Tell your commander I have come to see him," I said, giving my name and that of my newspaper.

The tension dissipated. A man wearing dark glasses said, "We know you. We heard you on the BBC. Wait here."

In Africa, where self-censorship is practiced rigorously by the local media and international newspapers are hard to come by, the BBC is regarded as the only reliable purveyor of the truth. Never phone a diplomat here at 4 p.m. He is listening to the "Beeb." The "Lillibullero" is the best known march on the continent. A few bars precede the World Service's news broadcasts.

Later that day, I was packed into the front of a pickup, bristling with weapons and NRA soldiers, to be taken on a guided tour of rebel-held territory. We drove down empty roads at very high

*Mary Anne Fitzgerald, a journalist based in Nairobi, writes regularly about East Africa for the Financial Times, The Economist, The Sunday Times of London, and Macleans. She also contributes to The Washington Post and The International Herald Tribune.*

speed, passing mute villagers standing outside dilapidated buildings.

I was taken to the edge of the no man's land that separated the rebels from the troops of Gen. Tito Okello. We walked quietly, conscious of the Ugandan army only one mile away. The young men and teenagers deployed there, focused on survival, looked tired and strained. Fighting to overthrow a government is a serious task.

I met prisoners of war who, when questioned, turned out to be army deserters caught by the NRA as they made their way back home. There were 19 (they thought), very frightened and very thin. They spoke of being trained in kung fu by men from North Korea. They did not know why they were being made to learn the martial arts of an alien culture, they said.

Outside the NRA command post—the backroom of a shop—over a hundred villagers and peasant farmers ringed me in a deep circle, congregating to tell me their experiences. They spoke one at a time, relating with quiet resignation how the army had shot their relatives and razed their mud hut homesteads.

Much later that day, the taxi retraced the road to Kampala, a trip that was punctuated by road blocks manned first by other guerrilla groups loyal to the government, then as we approached the capital, by the army. The NRA had advised us to reach the military road-blocks before 5 p.m. After that the sol-

diers will be drunk and dangerous, they said.

It was my second venture "behind the lines" to talk to the NRA when they were fighting first to overthrow former leader Milton Obote, and at that time—October 1985—a military junta led by Gen. Tito Okello. No one knew it then, but they were only three months away from achieving their objective of seizing power.

For the NRA, I served as a valuable courier, relaying their aspirations to an outside world that knew very little about them. The story I wrote, describing a well-disciplined, benevolent force that held large areas close to the capital, was published in Britain's *Sunday Times*.

The account yielded different information to various audiences. For the diplomats based in Kampala it was a useful guide, encapsulated in their dispatches, as to the status quo of power. For those Ugandans who received the clippings from friends abroad, it signalled hope for a fresh start in their war-torn country.

And for Britons enjoying their Sunday breakfast it provided what my editor intended—a jolly good read about the atrocities perpetrated by yet another brutal regime in a far-off African state.

For the sad fact of the matter is that Africa is no longer politically fashionable. The hopeful spotlight on the grand post-independence experiments in economic and social liberty has dimmed along with national aspirations. Instead, the continent presents a repetitive litany of coups, corruption, and famine.

"Not starving people again," my editor sighed when I sought permission to accompany the BBC trip that brought the Ethiopian drought to the attention of the rest of the world, illustrating that even hard-nosed newsmen can misjudge the mood of their readers.

For the most part, Africa is viewed as a vast black hole fringed by Libya and South Africa. With the exception of these two countries, both propelled by extreme convictions, it is not a player in the great global power game. In short, Africa is not deemed to be newsworthy. A *New York Times* reporter spent a year covering sub-Saharan Africa before he wrote a story that opened with the word "today."

And so foreign correspondents who work the continent must resort to "color" stories to get space in their papers. Mass circulation newspapers are not interested in worthy development stories dealing with dam construction and rural health networks, although the *Washington Post* encourages reporting on social customs and lifestyles whose prototype is Alistair Cooke's "Letter from America" on the BBC.

The leading stories this year have been AIDS and revelations of cannibalism and torture at the trial of former Emperor Jean Bedel Bokassa. There has also been the fighting in Chad. But that story has gotten attention because Col. Muammar Qaddafi is involved, not out of a concern for the fate of the Chadians.

The Western taste for the sensational compounds ignorance. Foreign correspondents are often faced with the task of explaining the geographic location and political complexion of the country they are visiting before they can embark on an account of a news event. One old Africa hand quips that he prefaces every piece he writes with: "In a resource-rich but debt-ridden. . ."

This is not fair to Africa. It deserves more than the stereotyped images that are all too easy to portray.

Yes, there is repression and authoritarianism, which flourishes in one-party states where leaders are buffered from reality by a coterie of sycophants. But there are also bold exceptions such as Mauritius, Senegal, Sudan, and Botswana where there is still the benefit of pluralist choice. Uganda may one day return to these ranks too if President Yoweri Museveni introduces the new constitution he has promised.

To a certain extent, these inroads into democracy are mirrored in the national press. Sudan and Uganda both have an exceptionally lively press as does Senegal, where there is an array of polemical broadsheets on the streets. Uganda boasts about a dozen regular newspapers, even though it is a struggle to find the paper to print them on and all but two use typewriters rather than typesetting. But with freedom of expression comes a certain looseness of opinion. Most of these newspapers lack even a modicum of objectivity.

Elsewhere, the local press is often subject to the whims and tyranny of its government. A general rule of thumb for Africa is that the press is as fossilized as its leadership. Many ranking politicians consider the domestic press their personal domain, using the media to get across subjective and often totally misleading viewpoints. It is common for a politician to respond to criticism by summoning newsmen to his office to "lash out" at "unfounded lies." The outburst is then duly reported.

Intimidation can be harsh. Pressmen who step out of line bare themselves to repression that at times puts them in jail. For the foreign correspondent, the direst consequence of irritating officialdom is a session with security officials and a one-way plane ride out of the country.

The ploy works. This was illustrated in Kenya this February during a series of sedition trials concerning membership in Mwakenya, a left-wing underground movement that is seeking to overthrow the government. One of the accused mentioned the name of a close presidential crony and ranking party member, Kariuki Chotara. The defendant, later given a four-year jail sentence, was quickly silenced by the judge.

Both points were picked up by the foreign press. But only one of the three English-language daily newspapers mentioned the incident. And none of

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**"The foreign press, with our mixture of cynicism, dedication, idealism, and disillusionment, bear the brunt of the fourth estate's responsibility to focus distortions and coax change."**

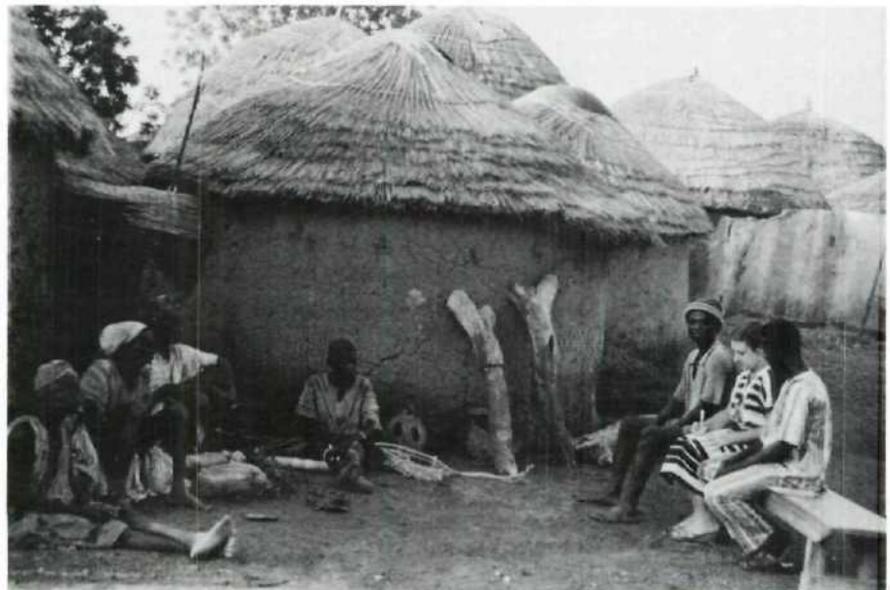
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them referred to the trial's revelations in their editorials, preferring instead to deal with less contentious issues such as domestic crime and the safety of Kenyan drivers working in neighboring Uganda.

It must be mentioned here that a brave exception to this line of inaction is Kenyan Hilary Ngweni, who has been accurately documenting political events in his *Weekly Review* for over a decade.

It is not only the Africans' concern for survival that places the role of adversary squarely on the shoulders of the foreign press. African journalists, it must be remembered, come from the same background as their leaders. They have been brought up in a society awash with cultural legacies and are not Western in their mindset. The African tradition of chiefs who receive hongo (tribute in the African lexicon, bribes in the Western

**"The respite and the reward is giving readers a glimpse of the more settled pace set by Africa's businessmen, farmers, herdsman, mothers, and children"**



Fred LeBeath



Camerapix

"For the NRA, I served as a valuable courier, relaying their aspirations to an outside world that knew very little about them"

one) makes dictatorship and corruption seem less offensive.

Likewise, the domestic press is concerned with issues that leave the foreign media cold. I have been to many press conferences with African leaders where my Western colleagues' eyes have glazed over as the national newsmen deliver endless questions about school fees and rent control.

Increasingly, African newspapers are recognizing the advantages of sending their staffers abroad to the United States and Europe for in-house training with newspapers. Exposing reporters to the objectivity, broad vision, and sense of humor that represents the better aspects of the Western media is the best means I can think of for raising the standards of journalism back home.

Meanwhile the foreign press, with our mixture of cynicism, dedication, idealism, and disillusionment, bear the brunt of the fourth estate's responsibility to focus distortions and coax change. Because of African journalists' self-imposed restrictions, it falls on us to forestall the demise of justice and reason by

exposing its abuses.

For the victims who dare to challenge official misdemeanor, we are a valuable part of the strategy. The wise dissenter makes sure that his actions attract our attention. This way he can throw his darts of criticism from behind a shield of international concern.

Whether it is worth it is a question we, the foreign press corp, have all struggled with at one time or another during long, lonely nights in dingy hotel rooms when the temptation to trade in our credentials as ombudsmen looms

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**"Foreign correspondents are often faced with the task of explaining the geographic location and political complexion of the country they are visiting before they can embark on an account of a news event."**

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large. The adrenalin charge of being the first one "in" after a coup is offset by the tedium of endless hours of waiting in airports, hotel lobbies, and the offices of civil servants. The aftermath of on-the-spot accounts of famine and fighting is often bouts of dysentery or malaria, not to mention sometimes irretrievably fractured family life.

And there is also the tussle with our own consciences as we ponder how to portray fairly the oppressed and the oppressor. Part of being what is known as "a good operator" is encasing the more brutal aspects of Africa in carefully worded phrases that will allow us back into the countries we visit.

For me, the respite and the reward, as Alistair Cooke so wisely recognized many years ago, is giving readers a glimpse of the more settled pace set by Africa's businessmen, farmers, herdsmen, mothers, and children. Africa should not be portrayed as a continent that veers wildly between apocalypse and inertia. It also has its routine. And it is by this that we will truly come to know it. □

# Perils of the Profession

It began as a routine assignment to report on the aftermath of the bloodiest urban violence to convulse Zambia since independence. But thanks to the paranoia of politicians and the misguided zeal of an immigration officer, the writer—not the riots—hogged the headlines.

After dutifully recording for eight straight days the angry protests against a doubling of basic food prices, President Kenneth Kaunda's cancellation of the increase in the name of his official philosophy of humanism, and the round-up of foreigners for alleged links to the disturbances, I was afforded a rare glimpse of an uglier side of Zambia concealed from most outsiders.

It was the inside of a filthy, vermin-infested, and overcrowded prison that was my home for six days. The experience underscored three stark realities about some African countries today:

- Food price increases, often prescribed by aid agencies like the International Monetary Fund as a condition for reviving ailing economies, do unleash grassroots hostility toward leaders, prompting panic reaction.
- Foreign journalists are as welcome as a locust plague in a famine when popular unrest, by official accounts non-existent, explodes into violence.
- And certainly in the case of Zambia, a government that professes humanism does have something to hide.

The rioting by hundreds of thousands of mainly jobless Zambians, protesting against a doubling in the price of staple breakfast mealie meal, swept through a dozen cities and towns in early December. Mobs looted stores and homes, burnt down offices of the ruling United National Independence Party, overturned cars driven by the evidently rich, and stoned to death at least one policeman who tried to stop them.

Only when army troops joined paramilitary police in confronting the rioters with live bullets after tear gas failed did the angry men, women, and children evacuate the rubble-strewn streets. But not before at least 15 people were

*John Edlin has reported from Africa for more than 20 years. He is currently the Associated Press correspondent in Harare, Zimbabwe.*

Denounced by African government officials as the "enemy," foreign journalists are not always welcome when internal unrest is the story they've come to cover. The AP Harare correspondent explains how a routine assignment got him more than he bargained for—six days in a Zambian prison.

killed, most cut down by security force gunfire.

Kaunda, visibly shaken, went on national television and radio to announce he had reluctantly cancelled the food price increase—a move that had been forced on his government by the IMF in return for urgently needed credits. Only then was it clear that he had defused the gravest threat to his leadership since shepherding the former British colony of Northern Rhodesia to independence as black-governed Zambia on October 24, 1964.

But it wasn't exactly the end of the story. Few foreign correspondents are based in Lusaka, the Zambian capital, most of them preferring the security, stability, and sophisticated communications of Harare in neighboring Zimbabwe. Harare-based myself as correspondent for the Associated Press news agency, I was curious to find out how the IMF might react to Kaunda's volte-face at a time when other Third World governments were being urged to swallow equally bitter pills for their economic recovery.

So, eight days after arriving in Lusaka on a New Zealand passport that in Commonwealth countries normally does not require visas, I called on the Immigration Department to extend my visitor's permit for a week. A Mr. Mpande in the investigations division granted the extension without question.

An hour later, a knock on the door of my room at the Ridgeway Hotel, a half-mile away, should have heralded the arrival of a late breakfast. Instead, it sig-

nalled the beginning of six days as a "prohibited immigrant" in Kamwala Remand Prison.

Mr. Mpande turned out to be the waiter I was expecting. There was some paperwork to be checked, he explained. I should accompany him to another immigration office downtown.

There Mpande collected a file, told me some cabinet ministers objected to my presence, and said I would be deported. But first, he added with a grin, I would be detained.

I was escorted in his battered grey Land Rover to Kamwala, handed over to green-uniformed prison guards who finger-printed me, stapled money, credit cards, and my leather belt into an envelope, and ushered me through a 10-foot steel door with two large padlocks into the prison compound. No reason was given for holding me although some wardens suggested it was because "you are a foreign journalist."

I had been declared a prohibited immigrant along with a dozen other foreign correspondents in 1970 when Kaunda hosted a summit of non-aligned nations. At the time, the Zambian leader said that the foreigners were bent on sabotaging the summit.

Like others expelled at the time, I had been back to Lusaka at least eight times in the 1980s with the permission of Ministry of Information officials. The day before my release on Christmas Eve, Information Minister Milimo Punabantu announced that I was a free man and no charges were envisaged.

But Punabantu did not explain why I

was held with 520 convicted criminals, prohibited immigrants, and refugees—most of them Africans from as far away as Senegal and as close to home as Malawi.

Some were detained for up to four years. One became mentally deranged while incarcerated in Cell Block 3, a concrete building 15 paces by nine paces that I shared with 110 others.

One tap provided water for all inmates in the prison. Prisoners were locked up between 4:30 p.m. and 9 a.m. in four cell blocks infested by lice, cockroaches, bedbugs, and rats. A corn porridge was served twice a day with a few beans or peanuts. Meat delivered each morning was stolen by trustees and given to guards for such favors as cigarettes, marijuana, and matches.

Lights went out at 9 p.m. and for hours we would lay awake on grey, lice-infested blankets spread on the concrete floor listening to the sounds of inmates as young as seven—mostly pickpockets—being sodomized, while other prisoners coughed incessantly, tossed and turned fitfully, whispered among themselves about things people on the outside take for granted—cold beer, hot baths, clean clothes, and juicy steaks.

After vigorous lobbying by my employers, various international press organizations, the New Zealand High Commission in Harare, and the American Embassy, I was freed, escorted to the airport by Mr. Mpande and put on a plane to Harare. Authorities kept notebooks, files, and an address book saying that they would be photocopied before being returned. Six weeks later, I was yet to get them back.

Africa with its myriad of ethnic groups, languages, political systems, and religions has never been easy to report from. Few countries can boast a wholly free press. Low-paid but courageous African reporters are routinely jailed, fired by state agencies that control most of the media, or harassed by security officers. Some have died.

In October last year, Dele Giwa, the respected editor of *Newsweek* magazine in Lagos, Nigeria, was killed by a parcel bomb several days after being interrogated by state security police.

In Uganda, at least six foreign corres-



Margaret A. Novicki

**Bus station, Harare: "Most foreign journalists are in Africa to report on day-to-day events and explain why they are happening to readers back home"**

pondents—two Americans, two Swedes, and two West Germans—have been slain by soldiers.

In pre-independence Zimbabwe, two foreign reporters were killed allegedly by guerrillas fighting to topple the white-ruled Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith—a New Zealand woman in an ambush and a British peer who unwisely donned camouflage and joined an army attack on a rebel hideout.

Colonial rule did not set much of an example for the Africans who led their countries to independence or who reported on their progress afterwards. Colonial-era newspapers, though largely independently owned, invariably served the interests of white minorities and the administrators sent out from Lisbon, London, Madrid, and Paris. Most ignored black nationalist agitation for political emancipation except when it involved thuggery. Violence committed

by impatient blacks—angered and frustrated by economic exploitation from abroad and police repression at home—was usually headlined as evidence that the colonies were not ready for self-determination.

Oliver Chimunya, a black journalist in Smith's Rhodesia and Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's present-day Zimbabwe, predicted two years before his country's independence that little would change from the colonial era. "The first thing an African leader does when he comes to power is to seize the radio and newspapers and bring them under his control," he said in a May 1978 interview.

Chimunya, who has worked both as a newspaper reporter and broadcaster for the BBC, and is now employed as a public relations consultant for the South African-owned Anglo American Corporation mining conglomerate in Harare, said at the time: "You keep on dishing

out lies to the people and eventually you believe your own lies. They've all [African leaders] fallen victim to controlling their own press."

Throughout the continent, politically appointed editors eagerly write what information ministers tell them to at weekly briefings, their reporters are quick to link survival to slavish sycophancy, self-censorship in the news room is the order of the day, and the foreign correspondents in search of the truth are labelled enemies of the state.

Nathan Shamuyarira, Zimbabwe's Minister of Information, Posts and Telecommunications, has often warned the 40 or so foreign journalists based in Harare that they will be deported or charged under emergency powers regulations if they write negative or unsubstantiated reports.

When Robert Mugabe led Zimbabwe to independence on April 18, 1980, he pledged among other things that there would be freedom of expression and a free press in the new nation. Since then, the government has (through the Mass Media Trust) effectively nationalized all but one of the country's newspapers, introduced emergency powers regulations controlling what reporters can write and where they can go, detained two Scots-born local reporters without charges for a month, expelled at least six foreign journalists, and barred countless others from visiting.

Yet Harare—after Johannesburg and Nairobi—is base for the third largest foreign media corps in sub-Saharan Africa. Zimbabwe is easier to operate out of than many other African countries, a sad reflection on the others.

Foreign journalists are perceived by some African leaders mostly as racially imperious, ignorant of local cultures and social traditions, and motivated only by the pursuit of the sensational—coups, corruption, chaotic economies, crocodile attacks, and quaint tribal rites. Some are. But most are in Africa to report on day-to-day events and explain why they are happening to readers back home just as they would do from Australia, Afghanistan, or Argentina.

In Africa, we are often told by senior officials that they like what we write about tourism, development programs, and cultural cooperatives, but would we kindly steer clear of political detentions,

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**“Foreign journalists are perceived by some African leaders mostly as racially imperious, ignorant of local cultures and social traditions, and motivated only by the pursuit of the sensational.”**

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suppression of opposition parties, ethnic conflict, and economic woes.

That is why I suspect I spent six days in a Zambian prison. But the prison outside Kamwala is harder to crack. That's the systematic method of denying journalists access to information, a common ploy that forces correspondents into risking trouble with sensitive authorities by tapping unofficial sources.

In a column in Zimbabwe's state-controlled Bulawayo *Chronicle* newspaper a year ago, Jonathan Maphenduka, an outspoken writer, said: “The print media in Zimbabwe faces a brick wall behind which information of public interest is stored. Short of a break-in—a risky business, indeed—there is no way one can get at the official source of the information without being made to feel like one is trying to leak state secrets to the enemy.”

Foreign journalists are routinely denounced by African politicians as “the enemy,” agents of international imperialism, or mischief-makers bent on spotlighting domestic problems that don't exist. “What you foreigners don't understand is that if you don't support an African country, or a government, or a leader, you are in opposition to it,” a high-ranking Ethiopian official told me with a wag of his finger not so long ago. “So, you are the enemy. How then can a foreign journalist who's writing about problems in Africa ever be trusted?”

I have won a great deal of trust from Africans in over 20 years reporting from this continent, from Senegal to Swaziland, Ethiopia to Angola. But only rarely has the person I've interviewed willingly allowed attribution by name.

“The mercenaries have invaded from Angola and our boys are running away,”

a ranking army officer in Zaire told me in 1969 at a time when this was not common knowledge. “But don't quote me by name. Don't even say I'm with the forces. . . .” He wasn't in the forces for long. Last I heard, he was in detention in Watsa, a remote town in northeast Zaire.

There's a small town not far from Harare that is known to many foreign correspondents in southern Africa—Kadoma. On July 31, 1983, information ministers of the frontline states—Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe—met there to decide on a strategy to blunt South Africa's international propaganda machine.

Too much news on the black-ruled states in confrontation with South Africa was emanating from Johannesburg and Cape Town, they argued. And much of the reporting painted South Africa in bright colors, but its neighbors in dark.

Thus the Kadoma Declaration was born. It banned “in principle” foreign journalists based in South Africa from reporting in the frontline states. It decreed that a correspondent refused permission to work in one frontline country “is deemed barred in all frontline states.” It assured foreign correspondents that if they were accredited to one frontline government, they had automatic accreditation to the others. And it exempted South African journalists working for South African media from the blanket ban, without explanation.

Some foreign correspondents who reported on the Kadoma Declaration from Harare at the time and are officially recognized by the Zimbabwe government are still waiting for permission to visit half of the frontline states—Angola, Mozambique, and Tanzania. Zambia is keen to welcome foreign correspondents from Johannesburg for news conferences by the African National Congress, but at times of domestic crisis any outsider is viewed with suspicion.

There is a good ending to this story. Without anything else to occupy my mind in Kamwala Prison, I memorized the names of 18 prisoners who should not have been there, contacted their consulates when back in Harare, and was told all but one was freed within 48 hours. □

# The Longest War

As the conflict with Ethiopia enters its 26th year, an entire generation of Eritreans has known no life other than war. Our correspondent, who spent a month in EPLF-held territory, documents the daily lives of the Eritrean fighters in their mountain strongholds in this *Africa Report* exclusive.

BY CAROL BERGER

**W**e had been in the demolished frontline town of Nakfa on a day when two Soviet-made MiG-23 fighter planes attacked, swooping low over the devastated rock houses which were victims of previous raids. Their target—a riverside agricultural plot and one of the town's few areas where daytime work continues.

Amid a deafening roar, one of the MiGs fired rockets which landed less than 200 meters away from us. An hour earlier, the field had been full of workers. As it happened, the strike occurred during a meal break and no one was injured.

Once populated by 6,000 people, the Italian-built town is now home to no more than a few hundred. Most are fighters moving between the nearby frontline trenches to base camps further north into the mountains. No one lives in the once-grand houses. Instead, the people have moved underground into small houses dug into the surrounding hills.

The bitter civil war between the province of Eritrea in northern Ethiopia and the Addis Ababa government has entered its 26th year. A former Italian colony, Eritrea was formally annexed by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie in 1962, the year after what is now Africa's

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longest war broke out. For the better part of the past decade, Ethiopia has relied on Soviet advisers and military equipment in its war with the northern nationalists.

Years of concentrated aerial bombardment by the Ethiopian army have forced more than 300,000 Eritreans into neighboring Sudan as refugees. Those who have remained behind in rebel-held territory have become experts in camouflage and underground construction. Within the heavily militarized rebel area, the predominantly nomadic civilian population has learned to avoid long daylight journeys in camel caravans which are vulnerable to aerial attack.

More than three-quarters of Eritrea's 120,000-square kilometers is claimed by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF). Behind the heavily fortified frontline trenches, which run some 300 kilometers, the 20,000-strong EPLF has constructed a well-organized network of hospitals, schools, and transport centers in the rugged mountain terrain.

Beyond the frontlines—inside government-held territory—the rebels claim to control the countryside and small towns. The cities and main highways are held secure by some 150,000 Ethiopian troops.

While the EPLF maintains that the Ethiopian army is demoralized and lacks the will or training to fight, the Eritrean nationalists themselves are beginning to show the strains of protracted warfare. The conflict has left thousands of chil-

dren orphaned and many more lives scarred or ended.

Letters sent by fighters, many of them younger than the war, to families in Sudan now routinely end with the slogan: "Better to follow the path of the martyr than that of the traitor"—a strong message to the thousands of young men and women who have chosen life as a refugee over the hardships of war.

At the underground hospital of Orotta, where surgeons operate on the most seriously injured, recovery wards are full of young wounded. Amputees and shrapnel victims—both civilian and fighter—are a common sight. Like almost all populated areas in "liberated" Eritrea, it is a nocturnal town. The threat of aerial attack means that work begins at dusk and ends in the early hours of morning. Power is provided by a diesel generator. All road journeys are made at night.

During a month of travel in EPLF-held territory, I grew almost accustomed to the steady diet of dura (sorghum), became relatively blasé at the sound of approaching MiGs, and adapted to the necessary night shift. What became increasingly fascinating but difficult to comprehend was the discipline and psychology of a movement whose fighters have largely known no other way of life.

The high illiteracy rate, coupled with the rugged and regimented life of the fighter, has precluded the chronicling of the combatant's story. In the absence of journals, his experiences are reduced to often repetitious catch-phrases recorded in fragmentary interviews by foreign journalists.

The Czech dissident author Milan Kundera wrote in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* of the "political kitsch" of all movements: "Kitsch is a folding screen set up to curtain off death." In conversations with dozens of Eritrean fighters, I found that no one ever dies—instead, he is "martyred." The wounded fighter lying with glazed eyes beneath a rough blanket supposedly will not suffer trauma from the loss of his leg. The presiding doctor tells me, "You see, he is smiling." And, indeed, he is.

I met one veteran fighter who had begun keeping a diary the previous

year. It traveled everywhere with him in the standard handstitched leather supply belt worn by all fighters. His personal thoughts and observations rested inside a custom-made pouch at the hip—next to a flashlight, two Chinese-made hand grenades, and three spare AK-47 magazines. The leather comes from boots stripped off captured or dead Ethiopian soldiers.

After nine years as a fighter, Araye Tekle had begun to worry that military engagements would be forgotten, experiences left untold. I asked him if this meant that he was growing sentimental, that his war was more in the past than the future. He replied: "I am here to fight. Peace and a peaceful life can only be realized when the enemy you see in front of us has been wiped out."

In October 1985, Ethiopian troops broke through a section of the vital Nakfa frontline trenches. More than a year later, dozens of Ethiopian corpses still rot in the sun inside EPLF lines, apparently killed when Eritrean fighters cut them off in a natural land basin behind the trenches. Bleached skulls and withered hands lie strewn over the site. Most had been stripped of all but their green army-issue socks. The EPLF claims to have buried several hundred following the battle.

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**"In conversations with dozens of Eritrean fighters, I found that no one ever dies—instead he is 'martyred.' "**

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For the past six months, EPLF fighters have been reinforcing these same trenches, extending them 50 meters further into Ethiopian territory along parallel lines. Narrow communication tunnels link the advance positions with the more secure rear. We had arrived in the day's last light, after a walk of several kilometers across a mountain ridge littered with spent shell and bomb casings. Fighters were working in pairs to carry the three-meter-long timbers, brought to the trenches by truck from forests to the north.

With the Ethiopian positions at some points only 80 meters away, they work in shifts throughout the night. As pick-

axes and shovels cut through the rock and earth, megaphones blare revolutionary songs into the facing Ethiopian trenches. More often than not, the Ethiopians return the gesture with their own blaring broadcasts.

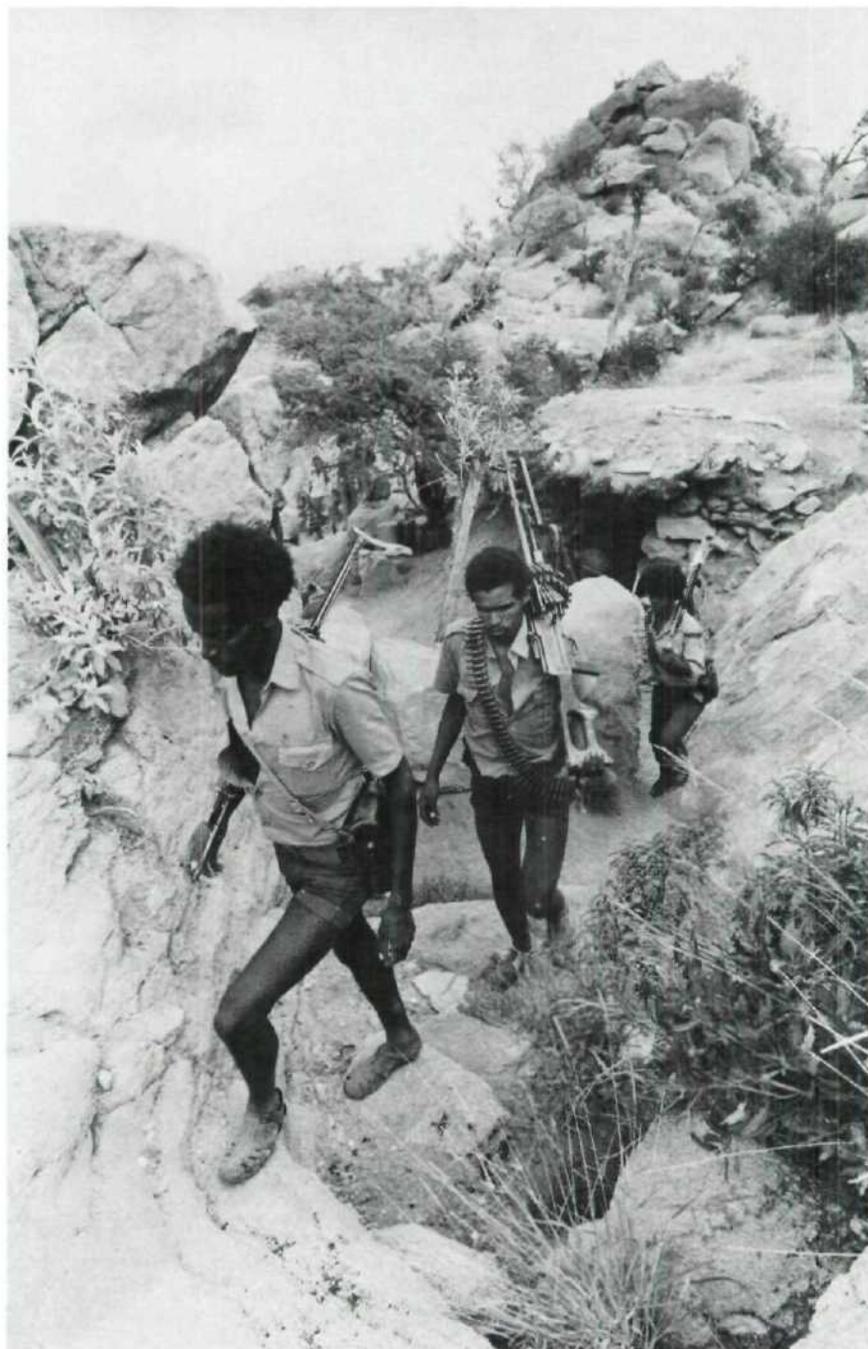
Like clockwork, the Ethiopian artillery began firing mortars as dusk approached. It would continue sporadically until the early morning hours.

After more than two weeks of travel through rebel territory, we arrived at the main training camp. Entering our

lodgings late at night, after several hours of rough travel, my head was suddenly filled with an image of "The Flintstones," one of the more durable of North American cartoons. Their town is called Bedrock and their homes are made of boulders.

The room we entered consisted of two rock beds finished in clay—one of which was three meters by two and a half meters wide—an elaborate rock sofa and two matching "easy" chairs, also in rock. As with all the other stone

**EPLF fighters at Nakfa: "Letters sent by fighters, many of them younger than the war now routinely end with the slogan 'Better to follow the path of the martyr than that of the traitor.' "**



Caroline Penn

interiors we had slept in, brightly colored blankets covered everything. Two of the walls were sheer rock faces, while the remainder were made of thatch and straw mat. For the first time in more than a week, a diesel generator provided light.

Throughout the EPLF's mountain base, camouflaged and underground housing has become almost obligatory. Hospital wards are set into mountainsides. The entrances to underground houses are covered in vines and plants. Above ground, only chimneys—made from spent BM-21 bomb shells—betray their position. A standard design provides shaft-like windows and overhead vents. A three-man team of civil engineers works as the EPLF's design department. Their task is to make areas of concentrated population safe from airborne attack.

"We always take the natural contours of the ground. Only if there is no alternative, we build them above ground," engineer Yohannes Tsegai told me. "All shiny surfaces are covered with branches, sometimes with camouflage paint, and we always try to plant vegetation around."

He added: "During the sixth offensive [1983], when night bombings were common, we used stoves which could be covered. Civilians kept piles of sand ready to put out their fires."

Their biggest problem in building underground is ventilation. Said Tsegai: "We study the direction of the wind and from there we position the windows and doors." The fighters rigorously observe the rules of cover as well. Truck windshields are blanketed and the body of the vehicle covered with branches during the daytime, when all road travel stops.

At one stopover, it was well after midnight when our journey ended. Our driver rose at dawn, moved the truck, and covered it with vegetation. The next day, in what was a heavily forested area, it became apparent he had done his job too well. It was more than two hours before the truck was found.

While the frontline remains relatively static, the EPLF has been expanding the use of surgical strike commando units. In 1983, the front began recruiting from its veteran fighters for special assault teams. A much-publicized com-

mando attack on the Asmara airport in 1984 reportedly destroyed several Ethiopian fighter planes. Now, according to Abdullah Adam, commander of the Halhal front, every frontline will have its own commando detachment. Formerly, the special fighters were dispatched on their clandestine missions by central headquarters only.

Said Adam: "We have to weaken the enemy from different corners—conventional fronts, using land mine engineers plus units which are active behind enemy lines making ambushes. Attacking the enemy inside terrorizes him. The enemy has no rest."

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**"What became increasingly fascinating but difficult to comprehend was the discipline and psychology of a movement whose fighters have largely known no other way of life."**

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Days later, a former member of the ruling Ethiopian Dergue and deputy commander of EPLF training, "Major" Nagash Tesfatsion, gave a more lyrical explanation. "When you look at the enemy, you can take him as a big tree. The branches of the tree are the soldiers who are fighting us along the front. The trunk of the tree is his communication line. The roots of the tree are different posts behind the line—the headquarters, communication centers.

"If you want to make a big tree die quickly, you have to cut it at the roots, not the branches," he said, pausing before continuing.

"The business of the commando is to go back behind the lines and cut the root and in a sense destroy the main body of the enemy. The mission they play is very important. They may be very small in number, but what they do is very important."

The 51-year-old American-trained major is a specialist in military engineering—land mines and booby traps. An Eritrean national, he defected to West Germany while on an official tour as a

Dergue representative in 1986.

In his small office there were dozens of books—all on war. Within easy reach on his desk lay a two decades-old U.S. army manual on special warfare titled, *MATA Handbook for Vietnam*, and from 1972, a Ranger handbook from the U.S. Army Infantry School.

On October 17, for more than half an hour, the light of the moon was extinguished in a lunar eclipse. It was then, just after 9:30 p.m., that a special force of commandos carried out a raid on the Malepo military post inside Ethiopian-held territory. In a coordinated attack, a Halhal front brigade hit two small posts nearer the frontline at the same time. The EPLF claimed that 135 Ethiopian soldiers were killed in the commandos' 18-minute lightning raid. EPLF officials said they had moved on foot for more than 17 hours to stage the strike.

A full week later after several hours' drive to the north, I met two men who had participated in the raids. Neither was a commando, but one had taken part in the mission's reconnaissance detail, receiving a land mine leg fracture. The second had been in on the coordinated attack by brigade fighters. He had lost his right leg below the knee in a land mine explosion. Before reaching the central hospital, he had spent three days traveling by stretcher and then by truck. Talk was of fitting him with an artificial limb.

Hours earlier, I had taken lunch with the EPLF surgeons responsible for incoming wounded. Since the late 1970s, when they worked with only the most rudimentary skills and instruments, the doctors have graduated to delicate vascular surgery and the repair of ear drums perforated by bomb blasts. As the conversation turned to their considerable medical advances, several doctors began talking at once. There was an apparent pride and sense of achievement in their enthusiastic comments.

And then I asked how much longer they would apply their skills to patching up young fighters and civilians caught in aerial raids. There was a sudden break in the banter and I became uncomfortably conscious of having broken the mood. While the others remained quiet, one surgeon ventured: "We don't intend to do this forever. Someday this war will be over." □

# UPDATE

## Tambo's U.S. visit puts ANC on White House agenda

African National Congress (ANC) President Oliver Tambo met with Secretary of State George Shultz in Washington for nearly an hour on January 28 in the highest level contact ever between a U.S. government official and the 75-year old liberation movement.

Although the historic meeting in itself does not mark a fundamental shift from the Reagan administration's "constructive engagement" alliance with the South African government, the very fact that it took place is significant. As Tambo said, the meeting "represents recognition that the ANC is there to be reckoned with."

Given that the White House has long condemned the ANC as a "terrorist" and "communist-dominated" organization, Shultz's recent acknowledgement that Tambo is "an important player" in the South African equation indicates that the State Department now recognizes the need for more flexibility in its much maligned policy of "constructive engagement." In the past, the Reagan administration claimed the ANC did not represent black aspirations in South Africa and instead chose to praise Pretoria's so-called reforms, but the Botha regime's inability to crush or accommodate the liberation movement and prevent the conflict from escalating in the townships has forced the U.S. government to reassess its strategy.

While Tambo and Shultz both agreed that the meeting had been "serious and substantive," the two sides remained far apart on the Reagan administration's two key sticking points with respect to the ANC: its support for the armed struggle and the presence of South African Communist Party (SACP) members within its ranks. State Department spokesman Charles Redman said that Shultz "laid out our concerns about the degree of Soviet influence in the ANC and its stance

on violence. The secretary made it clear that a policy of violence from any party is not the answer to South Africa's problems, and that there are other options." Shultz had no new "options" to propose, however, reiterating the Reagan administration's long-held contention that the ANC should renounce violence as a precondition for negotiations.

Considering the administration's open military support for rebels in Angola and Nicaragua, such a demand may have sounded a little hollow to Tambo, who made clear that the ANC had no objections to negotiations but that it could not accept the idea of a preliminary ceasefire. "Apartheid is inherently a practice of violence," said Tambo. "We choose not to submit but to fight back, arms in hand. We have no alternative but to intensify our armed resistance."

Tambo also strongly defended the ANC's alliance with the SACP, arguing that all opponents of apartheid have a right to take part in the struggle. The SACP has fully accepted both the ANC's political program and its leadership, said Tambo. "I have been in the leadership of the ANC from 1944 right through," he explained at a Foreign Policy Association luncheon in New York. "And I say that the ANC is not controlled by Moscow. I dominate the ANC," he added with a laugh. "Not the Communist Party."

Following his meeting with Shultz, the ANC leader said he found "a large area of agreement" with the administration "on the nature of the apartheid system and the need to abolish it, and we are considering together the best way to

*Continued on next page*

## The world according to Shultz: Selling free enterprise on an African safari

As George Shultz concluded his long-overdue eight-day swing through six carefully selected countries in East and West Africa in mid-January, the Secretary of State's primary message came over loud and clear: *Black Africa and the U.S. should develop a "new partnership" based on a shared vision of free enterprise as the basis for economic development.*

To mark the first time that the Reagan administration had sent its secretary of state to sub-Saharan Africa, Shultz began his whirlwind tour in Senegal before making brief stops in Cameroon, Kenya, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, and Liberia—all countries that have adopted or are in the process of implementing such Western-style policies. Shultz hailed the growing number of African countries which in recent years have decided to turn their backs on

socialism and to embrace capitalist principles of free market management as the only hope for economic recovery. Concluded Shultz approvingly, "Old orthodoxies about the need for state control are being discarded, while the benefits of free markets are becoming ever more widely acknowledged."

Even though Shultz said he carried "a message of friendship and encouragement to the leaders and peoples of Africa," he was forced to admit that he had come largely empty-handed as the U.S. would provide no additional economic aid. When pressed, he conceded, "Our overall aid levels to Africa did decline in 1986 as a result of serious budgetary problems at home—and this stringency is likely to continue in 1987." Total U.S. aid to sub-Saharan Africa was cut by 34 percent,

*Continued on next page*

Tambo . . . continued

achieve it." Tambo revealed he had sought to persuade the U.S. government to give its full support to the black nationalist struggle and to use its influence "as the leader of the West" to persuade European nations to adopt sanctions similar to those passed by Congress in October 1986.



Robert Kaiser/Dept. of State

Tambo meets Shultz: Looking for a fair shake

In line with the administration's evolving strategy to establish contact with the ANC, a special advisory committee set up by Shultz to reconsider U.S. policy toward South Africa issued a report in mid-February urging that the "first and foremost priority" should be to facilitate the start of "good-faith negotiations" between black and white leaders. To bring Pretoria to the negotiating table, the report recommended that the U.S. urge its European allies, Japan, and Israel to join in a "multilateral program of sanctions" based on the Anti-Apartheid Act of 1986.

According to the 12-member commission, sanctions should be dropped only when Pretoria has agreed to legalize the ANC, free political detainees, and lift the state of emergency. In advocating a strategy to strengthen ties with the ANC, the report argues that the administration's policy of "constructive engagement" has failed. As the report concludes, "A new policy is now urgently required." ■

Shultz . . . continued

falling from more than \$1 billion to \$664 million in 1987.

Shultz defended the slash in aid by pointing out that although "there's nothing wrong with wanting to help people and see them do better," altruistic notions take a back seat in determining the allocation of foreign aid. The U.S., he said, must be concerned with minimizing Soviet influence, maximizing markets for American exports, and securing sources of raw materials for American business. As one administration official put it, "Our principal objectives in Africa center on strategic denial to the Soviets. These countries are of specific importance to us in a geopolitical sense."

In this vein, Shultz expressed his support for Hissène Habré's Chadian government in its war against Libya and reiterated his opposition to sanctions against South Africa as a means of eradicating apartheid. But Shultz reserved his most controversial statements for the last leg of his Africa shuttle, failing to sidestep the human rights banana skin.

To the astonishment of many Af-

rica experts, he gave unqualified praise to the Liberian regime of President Samuel K. Doe, which he claimed was making "genuine progress" toward democracy. "There has been a return to a government produced out of an election," asserted Shultz. "There is freedom of the press here, there is an opposition, there are no political prisoners." Shultz went further. The October 1985 election—judged to be fraudulent by virtually all independent observers—was according to Shultz "quite open" as the only question raised was about "the vote counting process."

Shultz's comments not only brought prompt protests from Liberian political activists, but also served to undermine American interests in sub-Saharan Africa by casting the U.S. as an apologist for an openly repressive regime. Perhaps Shultz was closer to the mark when the van taking him through a Kenyan game reserve hit a small quagmire and came to a halt. A journalist told him he would refrain from drawing a parallel with the administration's foreign policy, but Shultz quickly replied, "Stuck in the mud, eh?" ■

WESTERN AFRICA

Reconciliation summit falls apart

Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny abruptly postponed a key regional security summit scheduled for January 10 in Yamoussoukro when Burkina President Thomas Sankara announced that he intended to use the occasion to present an "explosive dossier" detailing a foiled plot in Ouagadougou implicating a "neighboring country."

The inter-African meeting—dubbed the "summit of reconciliation"—was to have brought Togolese President Gnassingbé Eyadéma together with Sankara and Ghanaian leader Flt.-Lt. Jerry Rawlings for the first time since the September 1986 aborted coup attempt in Lomé. Eyadéma had openly charged that the authorities in Ouagadougou and Accra were behind the bungled attempt to over-

throw him—an allegation both governments vigorously denied—prompting Houphouët-Boigny and Organization of African Unity (OAU) President Denis Sassou-Nguesso to organize the mini-summit on regional security.

But unlike the successful reconciliation meeting in Yamoussoukro between Sankara and Malian President Moussa Traoré in January 1986, which officially put an end to the Mali-Burkina war, the latest reunion fell apart before it could begin. Sankara and Rawlings both expressed their desire to attend the talks, yet made clear they would accept no responsibility for the plot to overthrow Eyadéma and the Togolese government.

Said Rawlings, who has reportedly survived at least 10 coup attempts by Lomé-based Ghanaian

dissidents since coming to power in 1981. "At best, we are prepared to admit that Ghanaian and Togolese individuals who had a score to settle with the Togolese regime managed to circumvent Accra's security services to cross our borders and seek to destabilize Gen. Eyadéma, but official Ghanaian authorities had nothing to do with it. Thus we accept to go to Yamoussoukro, but more in deference toward the 'Vieux' and the acting president of the OAU, than to present our excuses."

Sankara also showed a willingness to meet Eyadéma in Yamoussoukro despite mounting evidence that Lomé was implicated in a plot to sabotage an official visit to Burkina by French President François Mitterrand in November 1986. The "explosive dossier" was confidentially submitted to OAU Secretary-General Idé Oumarou before Burkina Information Minister Basile Guissou provided details on the eve of the summit.

According to Guissou, "Criminal explosions set off by men trained and equipped externally, and infiltrated into the country" had been planned. The plot, added Sankara, "could have turned into a bloody drama within the French community in Burkina," as two Burkinabe nationals acting for a neighboring country had planned to throw grenades at a crowd of French people waiting to see Mitterrand during his visit to Ouagadougou.

Although the evidence gathered by the security services reportedly points to a destabilization effort implicating the Togolese authorities, Sankara indicated he did not want to aggravate already strained relations between Burkina and other West African states. "Those who are involved externally will be contacted as discreetly as possible so that they can explain the facts. We feel that we do not have to use or exploit the situation since that would add oil to the fire," said Sankara.

Nonetheless, the summit broke down when authorities in Lomé balked at the prospect of participating in a meeting where roles might suddenly be reversed. The Togolese

## Dogs of war link U.S. to Ghana plot

Four American mercenaries who spent 10 months in jail for their part in an aborted attempt to overthrow the Ghanaian government of Flt.-Lt. Jerry Rawlings, escaped from a Brazilian prison in late December and provided a convoluted account of their mission, which they claim had the backing of the U.S. government.

Two of the men who made their way back to the U.S., Timothy Carmody and Steven Hedrick, were among eight Americans and 10 Argentines arrested in March 1986 off the Brazilian coast aboard the *Nobistor*, a Panamanian-registered freighter carrying six tons of weapons that had been loaded in Buenos Aires. According to Carmody and Hedrick, the *Nobistor* was to pick up a force of 100 Ghanaian rebels from Côte d'Ivoire before launching an assault by sea on the ruling Provisional National Defense Council, while the American mercenaries were instructed to free two "CIA operatives" jailed in Accra.

The plot, masterminded by Godfrey Osei, a Ghanaian dissident living in the U.S. with previous CIA connections, was foiled when the Rawlings government alerted Brazilian authorities that a shipment of "clandestine arms" was passing through its waters. The captain of the ship, Eduardo Gilardoni, and the leader of the American contingent, John Dee Early, were sentenced to five years in prison, while the others received four-year terms. Although their sentences were overturned on appeal, they were awaiting extradition to Argentina where they were to face related charges.

Carmody, a Vietnam veteran and a co-founder of the Rhodesia Veterans Association, escaped with three compatriots after sawing through iron bars using hacksaw blades sent by his wife in a food parcel. As Carmody put it, "She sent me a box of powdered milk with an iron supplement."

Carmody and Hedrick said they were convinced the covert operation for which they were paid \$5,000 each, had the backing of the CIA or the National Security Council (NSC). According to Hedrick, unnamed sources had sent him coded messages in jail that assured him the plot had the sanction of the U.S. government. "I thought I had the blessing of my country," recalled Hedrick, who later felt "abandoned" by the government while languishing in various Brazilian prisons. CIA spokesman George Lauder, however, denied that the agency was in any way involved and called the men's charges "ridiculous."

Nonetheless, Carmody and Hedrick said they had every reason to believe that the U.S. government supported the operation. Hedrick revealed that Ted Bishop, a commodities broker from Texas who had arranged the purchase of arms on Osei's behalf in exchange for an agreement designating him as the exclusive broker for coffee and other products from Ghana should the coup succeed, had boasted of "walk-in access" at the NSC—a claim Hedrick found hard to believe until the Irangate scandal brought the NSC's activities into question.

Bishop allegedly told Hedrick, "I work for the highest office in the United States. I work for the NSC and I report to a Marine colonel in Room 357 of the White House Executive Building." Added Hedrick, "I would be very interested in finding out who had the desk in that room. For all I know it could be the executive washroom, but if it was Ollie North, that would really be something."

government called Sankara's allegations a "diversionary maneuver" whereby the "aggressor could present himself as the aggrieved." In reply, Sankara claimed that his government had in no way sought to jeopardize the holding of the summit but merely wanted to demon-

strate that Burkina had also been the target of destabilization attempts. "It's a pity that what comrade Guissou said served as a pretext for the cancellation of the reunion," concluded Sankara. "We were all set to go to Yamoussoukro." ■

**NIGERIA**

**Debt accord viewed as catalyst**

The Paris Club's partial rescheduling of Nigeria's medium and long-term debt is expected to help provide access to desperately needed foreign capital. Lagos had been trying to reschedule more than \$20 billion in foreign debt for the past two years, but Western creditor nations had balked, holding that an agreement with the International Monetary Fund had to precede a debt accord.

In December, however, the Paris Club relaxed its conditions somewhat and rescheduled an estimated \$7.5 billion of the medium and long-term debt over 10 years, with a five-year grace period, and consolidated the short-term debts. Nigeria has also reached a rescheduling agreement for \$3.5 billion owed to commercial bank creditors.

Government officials anticipate that the reschedulings will help stimulate foreign trade, overseas investment, and development aid. The Paris Club accord paved the way for an IMF standby arrangement of 650 million SDR approved in January. The loan—to be drawn in installments over a 12-month period—is designed to reduce Nigeria's dependence on petroleum exports, the IMF said. Nigeria's export earnings—primarily from oil—slumped from \$25 billion in 1980 to an estimated \$5 billion last year.

The IMF and the Paris Club were responding in large part to President Ibrahim Babangida's comprehensive economic reform package, developed in conjunction with the World Bank and introduced last year. The key element in the package was the effective devaluation of the naira through weekly currency auctions run by the central bank. The economic plan also includes most of the other reforms called for by the IMF and the World Bank, including reductions in public spending, abolition of state agricultural marketing boards, and efforts to sell parastatals.

Public opposition to accepting an IMF loan has been widespread in Nigeria, but the rapid deterioration

of the economy has forced Babangida to accept both the standby and assistance from the World Bank, which provided a \$452 million low-interest loan in October. ■

**SENEGAL**

**Wading into the campaign**

The return of opposition leader Abdoulaye Wade to Dakar in mid-January signaled the start of campaigning for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for February 1988. Wade, who had been working in Sudan as an economic consultant to Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, is secretary-general of the country's main opposition party—the Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS).



Nobu Arakawa

*Diouf: Taking the heat from the opposition*

At a PDS congress in January, Wade denounced the ballot rigging that marred the 1983 legislative elections and announced that the party would boycott the upcoming elections unless several conditions were met, including the representation of all 14 legal political parties on the electoral commission, the presence of international observers, and the distribution of voting cards three months before the election. The last boycott of the polls—when 12 of 15 registered parties refused to participate in the 1985 local elections—helped ensure a strong victory for President Abdou Diouf's ruling Socialist Party.

Wade claimed that the PDS could carry the upcoming elections and denied that its ranks are divided. Yet since 1985, the party has been split into two rival groups, each publishing its own PDS news organ and claiming to be the legitimate PDS. The other PDS branch, led by Sérigne Diop, has affirmed that it intends to run candidates in the elections.

Meanwhile, the Democratic League/Movement for a Labor Party (LD/MPT) has appealed to all opposition parties to develop a common election platform as the only means to gain ground against the Socialist Party. In 1985, the PDS and four other parties tried to cooperate in a grouping called the Democratic Alliance of Senegal, but it was banned by the government on the grounds that the constitution prohibits party coalitions.

At the congress, Wade repeatedly attacked the Diouf administration, charging that it is not open to dialogue with the opposition, in contrast to the practice of past President Léopold Senghor who met with opposition leaders. (Opposition parties were banned, however, under most of Senghor's long tenure as head of state.)

The PDS leader also lambasted the government for "blindly" implementing policies promoted by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. However, there were few substantive proposals directed to the theme of the convention which had demanded, "What future for Senegal?" and promised to present, "The PDS response." ■

**SIERRA LEONE**

**Hungry students demonstrate**

President Joseph Saidu Momoh ordered the closure of Fourah Bay College, Njala University, and Milton Margai Teachers College, following student protests for higher food allowances in January.

The National Union of Sierra Leone Students had decided at a meeting in December to demand an increase at least doubling the current level of 11 leones a day (about 30 cents), which students have

charged is insufficient to cover three meals. They claim that their situation is so desperate that many have been forced to subsist on cassava or to beg for food.

After their mid-January boycott of classes failed to produce a government response, students took to the streets, burning, looting, and vandalizing government buildings. In the eastern town of Kenema where the worst violence occurred, they attacked and burned buildings including offices of the ruling All-People's Congress, the town council, and a Lebanese school. Schoolchildren joined the riots in sympathy with the university students. Police used tear gas to dispel the protesters and arrested several student leaders.

Facing the first major public crisis of his presidency, Momoh decided to stand firm. The students were ordered to return to class or risk losing their government scholarships. At a press conference at State House in Freetown, Momoh urged students to regard their education as a privi-

lege rather than a right, and reminded them that the government spends \$140 per university student each year. Some 500 students lobby the ministry of education daily for university scholarships, he said.

Government officials pointed out that because student allowances are standardized for all institutions of higher learning, concessions to university students would necessitate increases in meal allowances at training colleges throughout the country. The government also reasoned that it is being forced to drastically reduce public expenditure as part of an IMF-sanctioned economic adjustment program, an argument that lost some force following the mid-February announcement of civil service salary increases averaging 90 percent.

Students have repeatedly demonstrated for improvements and more government support in recent years, although the January outbreak of violence was the first since Momoh took office in November 1985. ■

anti-government organization. John Maine Kamangara, a Nakuru businessman and politician, received a 15-month sentence for failing to report information about Mwakenya activity, while James Omwenga Achira, a journalism student, received a two-year sentence for belonging to the group. An estimated 60 Kenyans have been jailed in connection with Mwakenya in the past year.

In addition, a Nakuru member of Parliament who has been considered close to Moi—Kariuki Chotara—was named in court in connection with Mwakenya in early February. Chotara is district chairman of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the ruling party, and one of the most prominent of the former Mau Mau leaders. He was detained with the late President Jomo Kenyatta in the 1950s as a result of his involvement with the Mau Mau movement.

Chotara was named by another former Mau Mau member, Kimunya Kamana, who is Nakuru branch organizing secretary of KANU. Kamana had been arrested along with other Nakuru politicians in January. ■

## EASTERN AFRICA

### Moi blocks congressman's meetings

International attention turned to the deteriorating human rights situation in Kenya when the government of President Daniel arap Moi interfered with meetings that U.S. Congressman Howard Wolpe had scheduled in Nairobi in late January.

Kenyan police broke up a meeting between Wolpe's delegation and a church leader, while meetings with the National Council of Churches of Kenya and the country's development agency were cancelled reportedly due to government pressure. Wolpe's requests to meet with Moi and four cabinet members were refused because of "short notice" although they were made 12 days before the delegation's visit.

Wolpe, who chairs the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa in the House of Representatives and is the key congressional spokesman on African affairs, called a press conference in Nairobi to publicize

the government's intervention and express concern about the decline in freedom of expression along with the "growing concentration of executive power." Wolpe had intended to discuss economic development issues and the crisis in southern Africa, as well as human rights in Kenya. He said he was "stunned by the government interference."

His delegation arrived shortly after a visit by U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz, whose public statements in Kenya focused on southern African issues. When a foreign journalist questioned Shultz about human rights in Kenya, he avoided the issue. Wolpe told *The Washington Post* that the Reagan administration has been "extraordinarily passive in the face of the deteriorating human rights situation in Kenya during the past two years."

Meanwhile, the Moi administration continued its security crackdown, detaining two more Kenyans with alleged links to Mwakenya, the

### SOMALIA

#### Rebels free French hostages

The anti-government Somalia National Movement (SNM) released 10 members of a French medical team in early February, two weeks after they had been kidnapped from a refugee camp in Somalia.

The hostages—four doctors and six nurses—were working for Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), a French humanitarian organization which was expelled from Ethiopia in December 1985 after claiming that 100,000 Ethiopians had died in the government's controversial resettlement scheme. They were captured when 60 gunmen attacked the camp of Tug Wajale not far from Hargeisa in northwest Somalia near the Ethiopian border. Most of the 32,000 residents of the camp fled Ethiopia in 1985 and 1986 to avoid the resettlement program.

The medical team was freed un-

harmed near Dire-Dawa, Ethiopia, and turned over to French authorities in Addis Ababa. According to MSF president Rony Brauman, who was in close contact with SNM chief Mohamed Silango throughout the two weeks, the kidnappers' sole goal was to attract international media attention to their cause. He added, however, that MSF had initially suspected revenge by the Ethiopian government as a motive.

The SNM, one of two major guerrilla groups seeking the overthrow of Somali President Siad Barre, is supported by Ethiopia. In recent months, it has intensified military operations in northwestern Somalia. Residents of Hargeisa, the capital of the northern region, were unable to leave the city during January due to warfare in the surrounding countryside.

The SNM claimed credit for the assassination of a Somali regional security chief and his aide in Hargeisa in December and for the liberation of 36 detainees from a prison near Berbera in January. The group has also denounced the December presidential election in which Barre—the sole candidate—won 99.93 percent of the vote. ■

## UGANDA

### Human rights inquiries open

A commission of inquiry has started investigating the human rights violations of past governments, amid challenges to also examine alleged abuses of the current administration.

The five-member commission, established by the government last May, will tour the country over a two-year period, collecting evidence for the attorney-general who will determine what cases should be prosecuted. Nearly 200 cases have been placed on a waiting list to be investigated, and it is estimated that there could be up to 10,000 cases in all.

The commission will investigate incidents occurring between October 9, 1962—the day Uganda gained its independence—and January 25, 1986—the day Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Army (NRA) took over Kampala.

## CIA helped Amin in covert operation

The CIA, working hand in hand with two aircraft companies in the U.S., delivered weapons and other military equipment to former Ugandan leader Marshal Idi Amin, and took part in military operations for the dictator in the mid-1970s, according to a recent exposé in *The Village Voice*.

Spearheading the agency's covert activities in Uganda, Page Airways Corporation of Rochester and Southern Air Transport of Miami—a company implicated in the Irangate scandal—may have violated U.S. law as the *transactions with Kampala were prohibited by Congress at the time because of Amin's human rights abuses*. The Ugandan government was responsible for the murder of an estimated 150,000 to 300,000 civilians during Amin's eight-year rule.

The Ugandan mission, which occurred in part while Vice President George Bush served as CIA director, began in 1975 as a spying assignment against the Amin regime, but quickly developed into an important military aid operation despite the U.S. military embargo, which also prohibited covert assistance by the CIA. Page Airways sold two airplanes to Amin, a Grumman Gulfstream II and a Lockheed L-100-30, while Southern Air provided pilots, flight crews, and maintenance personnel who included several CIA operatives who supplied the agency with information about the Ugandan leader and the government's military operations.

By 1976, Amin reportedly asked Southern Air crews to transport bombs, smuggle military equipment to Kampala from the U.S., and take part in military operations against rebel forces in Uganda. Concerned that Amin would end his association with Page Airways and Southern Air if they balked at his demands, CIA officers allegedly authorized the missions in order to continue receiving intelligence information. Two members of Southern Air, who admitted spying for the CIA, revealed that their agency contacts ordered them to transport weapons and assist in various military operations, but it is still uncertain whether higher placed CIA officials gave the missions their stamp of approval.

Details of the operation were contained in depositions taken in a 1978 investigation of Page Airways and its top executives by the Securities Exchange Commission which charged that they made more than \$2.5 million worth of bribes and other questionable payments to officials of other governments—including Amin—in connection with some of their overseas aircraft sales. Investigators for the commission had built a powerful case against the firm, providing details of illegal payments in several overseas countries, but the case was suddenly dropped in 1980 and the depositions sealed by the federal judge at the CIA's request, according to *The Village Voice*.

Although neither the SEC nor Page Airways spokesmen would comment at the time on the reasons for abruptly settling the case, a key sentence in the SEC statement left little doubt as to what had transpired. "In reaching the settlement of this action, the commission and Page considered concerns raised by another agency of the United States government regarding matters of national interest."

The hearings opened in January with the case of nine people reportedly killed by government troops who stormed a wedding party near the village of Kikube-Bulera on January 26, 1985. The incident apparently set off a chain of such killings.

Anyone who wants to complain of human rights abuses during the past year should use other channels, including the court system which is functioning again under the

new government, said commission chairman High Court Justice Arthur O. Oder, who was exiled in Kenya and Zambia during Idi Amin's rule. Commission members also pointed out that the NRA is enforcing a tough code of conduct which imposes the death penalty on soldiers who seriously harm civilians.

Northerners are claiming, however, that the discipline of govern-

ment forces has disintegrated in recent months in the region around Gulu and Kitgum, where the NRA is trying to quash rebel activity. Museveni himself recently admitted that his army is not adhering to the high standards of conduct he had established.

The Kenyan-based *Weekly Review* reported in January that a priest from Acholi district came to the publication's offices to report that government troops had been burning farms and villages, indiscriminately killing civilians, and detaining and torturing youths on the grounds that they were assisting the rebels. The priest said that government censorship was preventing the Ugandan media from reporting on

the situation.

*The Times* of London reported in December that a prominent Acholi who had fled to England charged the NRA with severe civil rights abuses and described an incident in which troops killed 11 civilians.

Meanwhile, the NRA scored a major victory at Corner Kilak in mid-January which opened up the Lira-Kitgum road, a key northern supply route that had been cut off for five months. As the fighting escalated in January, an estimated 1,000 civilians were killed and up to 5,000 displaced, sources said. At ceremonies marking the first anniversary of his takeover, Museveni promised to subdue the rebels within five months. ■

## GENERAL AFRICA

### *Riding in style on the Transgabonais*

Amid great fanfare and celebration, President Omar Bongo inaugurated the Transgabonais railroad in late December—a colossal construction project linking the capital, Libreville, to Franceville in the southeast of the country. Congolese President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, French Prime Minister Jacques Chirac, and Jean-Christophe Mitterrand, son of the French president and special African affairs adviser, were among the guests of honor attending the ceremony to baptize the 400-mile railway line which took more than 12 years to complete at an extravagant cost of \$4 billion.

The Transgabonais, which is expected to form the backbone of the country's economic development, gives interior regions access to the capital and the coast for the export of tropical hardwoods that were previously hauled largely by road and river. It will also provide for the transport of key manganese exports from Moanda in the southeast which are presently shipped through Congo. Gabon is the continent's second largest supplier of this strategic mineral after South Africa, holding 25 percent of the world's known reserves.

However, the last section of the line, which passes over the waterlogged ground of the tropical forest,

still needs additional work. The finishing touches threaten to heavily overstretch Gabon's financial resources as they alone will absorb half of the \$300 million set aside for investments in the 1987 budget.

Most experts consider the Transgabonais, with its 49 bridges and one tunnel, a major feat of engineering. But the project was financed largely from the country's oil revenues during the boom years. With the economy still heavily dependent on oil—accounting for about 45 percent of GDP and 83 percent of export earnings—slumping

oil prices have forced the government to introduce an austerity budget with little room for the completion of such a costly undertaking.

Even if oil prices rise, the finished railway will place a heavy long-term burden on the economy, requiring an annual \$60 million state subsidy to finance its timber and passenger traffic. In fact, First Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Transport Georges Rawiri has already admitted that construction costs aside, there is no possibility of the railway producing an operating profit.

Originally, the line was intended to run to Belinga in the north-east to exploit rich iron deposits with the backing of a consortium of French and U.S. business interests, as well as the World Bank. But they pulled out, and this section was virtually abandoned as iron ore was no longer considered worth exploiting under prevailing conditions, while the construction of the Transgabonais' initial phase overextended Gabon's financial reserves.

Yet economic setbacks have not stopped Bongo from traveling in style. The president has ordered a special VIP coach at an estimated cost of \$750,000 to go with 10 standard carriages, each worth \$450,000. Although details of the transaction are a closely kept secret in Libreville, rumor has it that the VIP coach is lavishly styled to resemble the one used by Queen Victoria. ■

## NORTHERN AFRICA

### *Bourguiba endorses new labor body*

President Habib Bourguiba opened the 18th special congress of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) in late January by giving the newly restructured trade union confederation his stamp of approval. After two years of systematic efforts to undermine and ultimately dismantle the influential UGTT led by Habib Achour, the ruling Socialist Destour Party (PSD) now expects the "reunified" labor body to play a major role in promoting a new era of social peace—particularly in light of the

government's economic austerity plan introduced in mid-1986.

"The return to the fold of the UGTT nationally, which has adopted the path of true patriotism, is a major gain and amounts to a third revolution comparable to independence and the emancipation of women," Bourguiba told 400 labor leaders with evident satisfaction. Thanks to the "normalization" of the labor movement, added the Tunisian president, it should be possible to replace the old "protest mentality" with a "participatory

unionism" made necessary by the country's difficult economic conditions.

Congress leaders made clear that the labor confederation's opposition activities are a thing of the past, issuing a "message of loyalty" to the Tunisian leader committing them to obeying his directives. In a public statement, they agreed to help the government increase labor productivity and said they would ensure that "protests are no longer part of union activity."

Abdelaziz Bouraoui, a long-time UGTT leader under Achour, was elected secretary-general of the new confederation following Bourguiba's recommendation to the congress. In 1984, he had broken from the UGTT and established the National Union of Tunisian Workers (UNTT)—a rival organization which Achour labeled "a creation of the ruling party." In the run-up to

the special congress, Bouraoui dissolved the UNTT at the PSD's instigation and joined with several leaders of the old UGTT to form the re-united trade union confederation.

But large sections of the labor movement remain loyal to Achour and to the former union structures, rejecting Bouraoui's leadership and the recommendations of the special congress. Achour—who is serving a seven-year prison term—and other leaders of the "legitimate" UGTT have agreed to negotiate with the ruling party in order to break the impasse if certain preconditions are met. Said Taieb Baccouche, a leader of the old confederation, the government would first have to release all trade unionists, put a stop to further detentions and trials, rehire all UGTT members who have been sacked, and respect the freedom and autonomy of the trade union movement. ■



Camerapix

*Chipenda: Buries the hatchet with Luanda*

**SOUTHERN AFRICA**

*Chipenda returns to Angola's fold*

The government of President José Eduardo dos Santos scored an important public relations coup when Daniel Chipenda, a veteran opposition leader, announced in late December that he had decided to bury his differences with the ruling Popular Liberation Movement of Angola (MPLA). Chipenda's return to the fold boosted the government's policy of national reconciliation, coming at a time when rebel leader Jonas Savimbi has made significant diplomatic gains in the U.S. and Western Europe.

Chipenda, who had seriously challenged the late President Agostinho Neto's leadership at the MPLA congress in 1974, subsequently defected to the CIA-backed National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA) on the eve of independence. Dismissed by the MPLA as an opportunist for joining the now defunct anti-communist FNLA after failing in his leadership bid, Chipenda later returned to Lisbon where he has lived in exile since 1979. Explained Chipenda, "I went with them [the FNLA] because they were the more nationalist of the re-

maining groups—I couldn't opt for Savimbi's tribalism."

Although Chipenda has been on Angola's political sidelines in recent years, he is believed to retain a constituency in the southeast where the South African-backed National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) draws its strongest support. As part of the government's national reconciliation campaign to politically isolate Savimbi and undermine UNITA's international credibility, Chipenda is expected to play a key role in persuading the estimated 200,000 Angolan exiles to return to Luanda and reconcile their political differences. He noted that about 70,000 Angolans living abroad were trained professionals whom he would encourage to return in order to take up jobs now held by foreigners. If Angolan exiles came back, concluded Chipenda, "We'd be half-way toward a political solution."

Chipenda's recruitment is part of the dos Santos government's wider reconciliation policy to break the diplomatic impasse that has prevailed since the U.S. linked Nami-

bia's independence to the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola. While the government has been adamant that Cuban soldiers are necessary to protect Angola from South African incursions, the Reagan administration has upped the stakes by giving Savimbi a rousing welcome in Washington last year and providing UNITA with sophisticated Stinger missiles.

Savimbi's growing credibility in the U.S. has added to Angola's resolve to improve its diplomatic relations with Western countries. In particular, Foreign Minister Afonso Van Dúnem's recent visit to Portugal represented a breakthrough in Angola's strained relations with its former colonizer. It was the most senior visit to Portugal by an Angolan official since independence and is expected to pave the way for a trip to Lisbon by dos Santos later in the year.

The policy of national reconciliation, however, has not gained the unanimity of the ruling party. Roberto de Almeida, an influential Politburo member in charge of the Angolan media—and the MPLA's chief ideologist—has taken a hard line against friendly overtures to dissidents living abroad. At a recent meeting of the government's security and defense council, he branded Chipenda a "traitor" and strongly opposed allowing him to return to Luanda. But this tough stand is not likely to sway the government, which is firmly committed to reconciliation as the most practical way to undermine UNITA's growing support in the West. ■

# Habré's Push North

After breaking his alliance with Libya, Goukouni Oueddei has finally reached an accord with his arch-rival, Chadian President Hissène Habré. A consequence, however, has been the internationalization of the conflict, with Habré's American and French-backed forces at war with Tripoli and its remaining Chadian allies.

BY FRANZISKA JAMES

**"I**t was around 4 a.m., still dark as we reached the small entrance leading to the town. Then we attacked. At first the Libyans resisted, but they quickly gave up. The battle lasted until about 5 p.m. Yes, it was bloody. You know, we were ready, we had determined to go to Fada and take it or die."

That's how 25-year-old Chadian soldier Hamid Khamis described the January 1 battle in which President Hissène Habré's government troops attacked the strategic northeastern oasis of Fada and took it from Libyan and rebel control within a day. When the battle was over, close to 1,000 Libyan and rebel soldiers lay dead, while government losses were reported at fewer than 20.

How were the better equipped Libyan forces so easily overrun from defensive positions which they had held for more than three years? According to Chadian soldiers who took part in the fighting, the answer is motivation. "We're used to the harsh conditions here and we're defending our land and our families," one Ndjama government soldier said.

Captured Libyan soldiers seemed uncertain about their mission in Chad. When asked why he was there, a Libyan prisoner said: "Because my government sent me."

The fall of Fada into government hands was a major defeat for Libya's

Muammar Qaddafi and a key victory for Hissène Habré—a clear sign that Habré was pushing north in a bid to oust the Libyans from Chad.

The battle for Fada—Libya's southernmost stronghold—was a bold and decisive move for the government. It proved once more that contrary to Tripoli's adamant claims, there were indeed Libyan troops in Chad; more than 100 of them were captured and presented to the press in Ndjama.

Inside Fada, Chadian soldiers found stacks of Libyan newspapers, military pay and accounting records, and copies of the "Green Book" containing the teachings of Col. Qaddafi. Perhaps more important, the Chadians captured significant supplies of weapons and war materiel. "Libya has inadvertently become Chad's biggest arms supplier,"

says a high-level Western diplomat in Ndjama. "It's kind of them to leave behind equipment that is still so much intact."

While the battle of Fada may have been the most significant development thus far in the current round of fighting in Chad, it was not the real beginning of the northward drive.

Speaking with reporters last November at the Franco-African summit in Lomé, President Habré hinted that he had reached some sort of agreement with his former arch-rival and one-time Libyan ally, Goukouni Oueddei. By that time, Goukouni had already broken his alliance with Libya and his supporters were under attack by their former ally in Chad's rugged northwestern Tibesti mountains.

It is not certain just when and how many of Habré's troops joined with Goukouni's men, but by early January the two armies were officially merged into one force. While Goukouni's supporters reportedly bore the brunt of the fighting in the Tibesti, Habré's soldiers were also reported to have been in the area.

Most of the recent fighting in the area has been centered around the strategic desert town of Zouar, which has changed hands several times since the hostilities began. Zouar was first captured by Goukouni's forces in December, retaken by the Libyans, and then re-captured by Chadian government troops. But Zouar lies in a valley and holding it can prove more of a liability than an advantage unless the surround-

January 1987: "Captured Libyan soldiers seemed uncertain about their mission in Chad"



J. Langevin/Sygnia

*Franziska James is an American journalist based in West Africa who has been covering African events for the past six years. She recently returned from a visit to Chad.*

ing mountains are also controlled.

Gaining control of these hilltops has been the aim of government forces since early January, as they moved out from Zouar itself, reportedly capturing Libyan outposts and routing and killing Libyan troops. Control of the Zouar region is vital because of its strategic location astride a major supply route to Libyan and rebel bases farther south, such as Faya-Largeau and Ouadi-Doum. While the southern bases can still be supplied by air, cutting off ground supply lines puts a further squeeze on Libya and makes daily operations much more difficult.

Libya, however, was not standing still. At a news conference in January, Habré accused Tripoli of "doubling" its air and ground forces in northern Chad. While Western observers in Ndjamena agreed that the charge may have been exaggerated, intelligence sources in the Chadian capital say Libya has reinforced its troops and equipment in northern Chad and at bases in southern Libya. They estimate there are between 9,000-10,000 Libyan troops in northern Chad, along with a few thousand still loyal Chadian rebel allies.

Libyan reinforcements sent into the Tibesti have clashed with government troops almost daily. Libyan planes have been carrying out frequent bombing raids around Zouar as well as around Fada in the east.

"They come every day, early in the morning," says one young Chadian soldier. The bombers tend to fly high, careful to keep out of range of the "Red-eye" and "Sam-7" anti-aircraft missiles, the latter captured from the Libyans. For the most part, the bombings have been inaccurate and quite ineffective, but at times people have been killed or injured—mostly civilians, according to government officials. Despite the relatively low casualty figures, the day-in, day-out bombing raids have been unsettling, especially for the civilian population.

Habré's own forces have also reinforced their positions. Logistics between government bases and the front are difficult and supply lines long and hazardous, but the necessary equipment has been reaching the soldiers in the field. Truck convoys leave Ndjamena regularly carrying fuel, weapons,

ammunition, and food. Giant American "Galaxy" C-5A cargo planes landed at Ndjamena airport almost daily throughout much of January, bringing in military supplies from France and the United States. Both countries, Habré's major foreign supporters, have accelerated and increased their military aid to the Chadian government over the past several months.

In December, the Reagan administration awarded \$15 million worth of military assistance to Chad in addition to the \$5 million already allotted for the current fiscal year. France remains Chad's main supporter, providing substantial military and economic assistance. A French defense force of approximately 1,400 soldiers and technicians, along with Jaguar and Mirage fighter planes and a variety of sophisticated radar and other military equipment, is stationed in Chad.

So far, France has adamantly refused to become directly involved in the fighting in the north, and except for one air drop of supplies to Goukouni forces in the Tibesti in December, the French force has remained south of the 16th parallel, the dividing line between Libyan and rebel-held territory and government-controlled areas. French planes bombed Libyan radar installations at Ouadi-Doum in early January in retaliation for a Libyan bombing raid at a Chadian government outpost at Oum-Chalouba and Kalait a few days earlier, but that was more a symbolic tit-for-tat than an effort to inflict any real damage.

In his push north, it seems Habré is acting alone, albeit with substantial material support from his allies and with hints of more assistance to come if necessary.

"Discussions for additional aid are going well," Habré said at a recent news conference. While no specific plans have been announced, "the Chadians will not run out of ammunition," said one high-ranking diplomat in the capital.

### **Habré's Political Strategy**

So far, the government's military strategy has worked relatively well: a clean decisive victory at Fada and hit-and-run attacks against the more conventional Libyan forces to keep them tied down in the Tibesti. But Habré's success over the past several years has

been more in the political than the military arena. The 44-year-old French-trained lawyer from Faya-Largeau has come a long way from his days of exile in Sudan, where he and a small band of followers fled in 1980 after losing to Goukouni, who held power in Ndjamena.

Accepting aid from outside supporters, particularly the United States, Habré built up his force and successfully marched on Ndjamena in 1982, ousting Goukouni and taking over the government. Viewed at first as just another factional leader who had managed to gain power in a country plagued by internal strife almost since independence in 1960, Habré is now recognized as head of the legitimate government of Chad by most of the international community.

During almost five years in power, he has co-opted—some say bought off—most of his major internal opponents. He has readily taken aid from foreign allies, then sharply criticized and cajoled them into giving more. Always declaring himself "ready to talk and negotiate," Habré has not only isolated any remaining opposition factions, but also managed to portray Libya as the "aggressor and outside occupation force."

"National reconciliation has been virtually achieved," says Habré, pointing out that almost all opposition leaders from both north and south have come over to the government side as a result of internationally sponsored talks over the past two years. Noted opposition figures such as Alphonse Kotiga, the once-renowned southern rebel leader, and southerner Djibril Djogo, one-time defense minister in the Transitional Government of National Unity (GUNT) opposition coalition, moved to Habré's side. GUNT Vice President Wadel Abdelkadar Kamougue finally joined the government side in February, after having resigned his position with the GUNT in mid-1986.

While Habré was busy consolidating his power base, the GUNT was plagued with internal dissension. There were clear signs of splits within the opposition, much of it over Libya's role within the GUNT. The final blow to the coalition came in March last year when Habré and Goukouni were to meet in Congo for discussions sponsored by

Congolese President Denis Sassou-Nguesso and then-OAU Chairman Abdou Diouf of Senegal. Goukouni's failure to show up for the conference removed the last shred of credibility from the GUNT leader, prompting open speculation that he was little more than a Libyan puppet.

When Goukouni made further overtures for talks with Habré later in the year, he was ousted as opposition leader, and Libya shifted its support to another Chadian faction, the Revolutionary Democratic Council (CDR) led by Acheikh Ibn Oumar. The CDR was once considered a prominent element in the GUNT, having one of the best organized military units in the opposition. However, it has since split into several groups, and Acheikh's supporters are now believed to number only about 1,000. Whether Acheikh will stay within the Libyan fold no one knows, since he did try to break away from the GUNT a few years ago and was subsequently detained in Tripoli for some time.

The remaining question is just how deep national reconciliation and unity really go. Chad's history as an independent nation has been characterized by shifting alliances of convenience. For the moment, the once-prominent north-south conflict seems to be over, although one still hears of "minor incidents" in the south.

Just two years ago, however, Habré was faced with major opposition in the southern regions as a number of rebel groups, known as "Codos," fought against his rule. The fighting was often harsh on both sides and the reprisals bitter, with numerous reports of atrocities committed by Habré's soldiers against not only suspected rebels, but also entire villages believed to be aiding the opponents. While the Codos have long since rallied, it is difficult to say just how much the southerners, who controlled the country after independence, still resent the northerners now in power.

There is some optimism about the possibilities for national unity in Chad. "Chad is more unified today than ever before and it's mainly because of Libya," says one Western diplomat in Ndjamena. When asked how this "unity" might fare once the "Libyan threat" is removed, the same diplomat thinks



Jean-Claude Criton/Sygnia

**"Hissène Habré's success over the past few years has been more in the political than the military arena"**

"chances are good that national reconciliation will hold," admitting however that, "it's just impossible to really know."

National reconciliation has been among Habré's foremost goals since coming to power; another has been to keep international interest focused on Chad, to prevent it from slipping into an endless, unnoticed conflict. He has taken every opportunity to point out that if "Libyan expansionism" is not stopped in Chad, other African countries, particularly in Central Africa, may become future targets. With this argument, he has found a willing listener in Zairean President Mobutu Sese Seko, who for years has been among the very few African nations to openly support the Habré government.

Zairean troops were sent to Chad in 1983 to assist Habré's forces and Chadian soldiers still receive military training in Zaire. To his Western allies, especially the United States, Habré has stressed the East-West factor in the conflict, pointing to Soviet and Eastern bloc assistance for Libya and at one point during the current round of fighting, accusing Soviet military advisers of assisting Libyan troops in their campaigns in northern Chad.

#### **Continued War or Negotiations**

In mid-January, during the first lull in the fighting, there were a series of diplomatic maneuvers and calls for reconciliation and a peace conference. However, Chadians are skeptical. They say national reconciliation has been virtually achieved and only direct talks between President Habré and Col. Qaddafi can

realistically lead to an end to the fighting. Habré makes no secret of his skepticism that OAU involvement could end the conflict, calling the pan-African organization "paralyzed" and simply "unable" to deal with such problems.

The OAU has an ad hoc committee to deal with the border dispute between Chad and Libya, but according to Habré, Libya has never been willing to bring its case before the committee. The OAU has also repeatedly tried to convene national reconciliation conferences, but with limited success. Yet despite his skepticism, Habré does not rule out discussions.

It's clear at this point though that Habré sees his advantage on the battlefield. His troops are better equipped than ever. Morale is high, especially after the first taste of victory. Habré has fully committed himself and his government to recapturing the north from Libyan hands and perhaps for the first time since 1983, the Chadian leader may realize his dream of re-taking his home town of Faya-Largeau.

However, Habré has proved himself to be a shrewd strategist—he does not discount Libya's strength and military potential. He knows Qaddafi cannot afford a defeat in Chad, not without losing face at home and influence in Africa and the entire Third World. The Libyan leader is unlikely to simply withdraw from Chad, especially from the northernmost area, the Aouzou strip, annexed by Tripoli in 1973. But some are already calling Chad "Libya's Afghanistan," saying the Colonel may well find it easier to negotiate a solution than to keep fighting. □

## Gouara Lassou Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Chad

In a conversation with *Africa Report*, the Chadian foreign minister assesses the level of American and French support his government has received in its "war against Qaddafi."

INTERVIEWED BY MARGARET A. NOVICKI

**Africa Report:** What is the current military situation?

**Lassou:** The current situation has revealed very clearly that which Col. Qaddafi has always tried to obscure. From October 4, Goukouni Oueddei's supporters, who had been allied to Qaddafi, began demanding that Qaddafi withdraw his troops from Chadian territory. Angered by this, Qaddafi ordered the bombing of not only these armed elements, but also the civilian population. During the course of these bombings, weapons were used which have been banned by the international community, notably napalm and toxic gas. Women, children, and old people were killed, villages were burnt, and entire cities bombed. The defenseless civilian population was forced to flee into the hills, but Qaddafi continued with these attacks to Bardai, Zouar, and Yebbi-Bou.

Today, our forces continue to fight against Qaddafi's forces. On January 2, the Chadian National Armed Forces attacked and took Libya's most important base in the occupied territory—the city of Fada, which is just above the 16th parallel. In the course of this battle, the Libyans lost a tremendous amount of materiel and about 784 men. Many more were wounded and taken prisoner. These prisoners were presented to the international press in Ndjamena. We also captured several tanks of Soviet make, as well as six combat aircraft.

**Africa Report:** Until nearly the end of last year, it appeared a negotiated solution to the Chadian war was in sight, with the defections to the government side of significant portions of your opposition. Why did the situation explode?

**Lassou:** As long as there was one Chadian faction which served Qaddafi's interests, he had a screen behind which to carry out his designs in Chad. But thanks to President Hissène Habré's determination to do all that he can to reconcile the opposing Chadian factions, meetings took place in Libreville which paved the way for two accords. Inside the country as well, there were meetings with our opponents, and there too agreements were reached. These accords allowed President Habré to reshuffle his government and appoint as ministers heads of factions which formerly opposed our government.

From the moment that the president demonstrated his willingness to bring about national reconciliation and his belief that all of Chad's children have a right to participate in running the country, the other opposition groups decided that it was useless to continue to fight against the government and that it would be better to meet and discuss with him in order to forge a common platform. But when those elements who were still faithful to Qaddafi expressed this desire—among them, Goukouni—Qaddafi found it intolerable. Goukouni had finally realized that it was useless to continue to make blood flow in Chad and thus it was necessary to negotiate with the president. Qaddafi could not permit the element which he used to justify his presence in Chad to support reconciliation with the Chadian government. That's how the battle broke out between the Goukouni elements and Qaddafi's troops in Fada on October 4 last year. Goukouni himself was wounded during a skirmish with the Libyans. He has given orders to his men to forge a united front with the government forces to fight against Libya.

**Africa Report:** So now it is only the forces of Acheikh Ibn Oumar who are fighting on Qaddafi's side?

**Lassou:** Acheikh doesn't command any forces to speak of. He uses a few personalities, a few individuals who have remained with him, but he really doesn't command any forces. There are no other forces fighting with Qaddafi in the north. Only the Libyans are on the ground directly engaging us in battle.

**Africa Report:** How does your government view the positions of the United States and France with regard to the conflict? Are you satisfied with the level of their military support?

**Lassou:** The U.S. and France are providing assistance to the government and people of Chad. But we don't think it is sufficient, given that the Chadian National Armed Forces must fight against an enormous war machine—the Libyan military. Thus, it is absolutely imperative that we have adequate weaponry to be able to fight effectively against them. Yes, both France and the U.S. are supplying aid, but the level is often inflated in their declarations to the press. But we hope that more aid will be forthcoming, in keeping with the real situation we are facing. We have asked France and the U.S.

for anti-aircraft weapons to enable us to counter the Libyan air force. We are not asking that American or French soldiers come to fight in our place.

**Africa Report:** Haven't the French attacked north of the Red Line?

**Lassou:** Yes, the French neutralized Libyan radar installations at Ouadi-Doum, but that hasn't stopped the Libyan planes from attacking. What we are hoping for is assistance that will enable us to attack and destroy their runways and to render ineffective the Libyan air force. That would enable us to do the rest.

**Africa Report:** The Libyans have attacked south of the Red Line?

**Lassou:** Yes, they have bombed Arada and Kouba Oulanga and they have flown over Abeche and Sahr, thus demonstrating that they are capable of attacking with impunity throughout the country.

**Africa Report:** Will they bomb Ndjamená?

**Lassou:** We can't put ourselves in the place of the enemy.

**Africa Report:** But is their aim to overthrow your government?

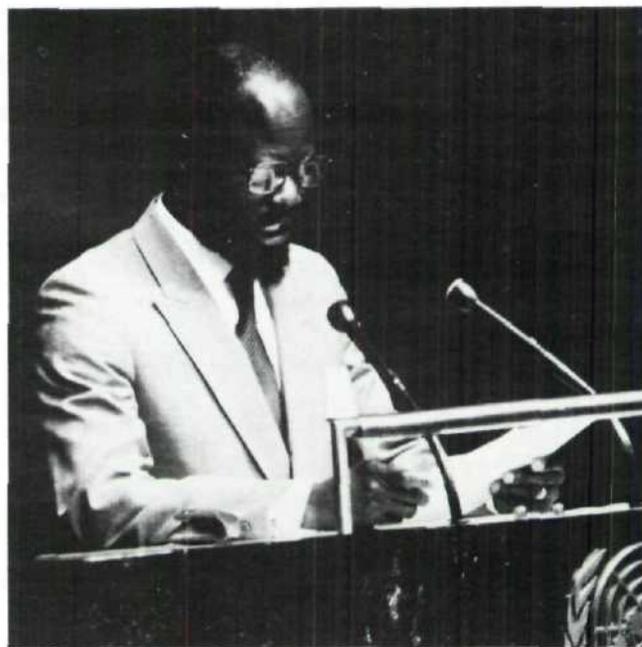
**Lassou:** Overthrow our government? If they were capable of doing so, they would have done it a long time ago. But our entire population is fighting—not only the government, but the entire Chadian people—for our independence and our territorial integrity. Therefore, even if the Libyans were to bomb Ndjamená, they would not succeed in bowing the heads of our people.

**Africa Report:** The U.S. government often uses the "Libyan factor" as a pretext in its foreign policy designs. Do you think the U.S. has a sincere interest in helping your government, or is it solely motivated by Libyan involvement?

**Lassou:** If you look carefully, it is not only in Chad where Libya has enemies. The Libyans sow death across the world and are against American interests everywhere. If the U.S. reacts against the Libyans anywhere, it is first of all to defend American citizens and interests.

What is a war? Terrorist acts constitute acts of war. If a Libyan takes you hostage, it is an act of war. You are an American citizen and your government is obliged to utilize all means of freeing you. Thus, war is not only coming to bomb a country. War is when an American plane is blown up by Libyan bombs, it's when an American embassy is blown up. That is a more difficult war to fight. Thus to stop this type of war, it is necessary to find a radical solution. This radical solution is to put an end to the regime which is fomenting it, and that is Qaddafi's regime. The United States seeks to put an end to Qaddafi's regime.

An American president once used the term "war by proxy." What is happening in Africa today is clearly war by proxy. We are up against a country that wants to annex ours, and that is Libya. And Libya is fighting tenaciously against Chad because Qaddafi has said that Chad is a platform from which he can launch other actions in Africa, first of all, Sudan, and then others. Why Sudan? Because Qaddafi wants to have access to the Red Sea, which would allow him to control the West's oil routes. Qaddafi believes himself the prophet of the



"Our entire population is fighting—not only the government, but the entire Chadian people—for our independence and our territorial integrity"

Arab revolution. He believes that he must lead the Arab world. And from Chad, Qaddafi would also like to conquer other countries in black Africa.

**Africa Report:** Which ones?

**Lassou:** I don't know the secrets of Qaddafi, but the countries know, their leaders know, even if they don't say so.

**Africa Report:** I don't know of many African countries where Libya has achieved a foot-hold.

**Lassou:** There are agents of Qaddafi in Africa! In these countries, Qaddafi pays the salaries of government officials, finances certain development projects, provides weapons to their armies, and directs some of their security services. The Libyans have landing and takeoff rights for their aircraft in certain African countries. But we don't allow any country that right in Chad. No country!

**Africa Report:** In a recent speech, Qaddafi said your government is an agent of the French and American governments.

**Lassou:** Qaddafi must first ask himself if he isn't an agent of the Soviet Union!

**Africa Report:** Relations between Libya and the Soviet Union are hardly close.

**Lassou:** Even if they don't have very good political relations, they have very good commercial relations. What guides the world? Commercial interests! Qaddafi buys a lot of arms from the Soviet Union, but also from whatever Western country will sell it, maybe even the U.S.!

**Africa Report:** How do you see your country's future?

**Lassou:** Our country is currently in the midst of a very dramatic and sorrowful period. But as they say, there is no birth without pain. We believe that the pain we are experiencing right now will ultimately bring forth a child and that child will be a happy one. □

# Demonizing Qaddafi

Wittingly or unwittingly, the American media has participated in the Reagan administration's campaign to portray the Libyan leader as public enemy number one. *Africa Report* looks at how the press has been used to further questionable foreign policy goals.

BY ANDREW BRESLAU

American media coverage of African affairs has been striking for its paucity and lack of sophistication. More alarming than this troubling state of affairs, however, is how that sparse coverage has been shaped and used by various U.S. administrations to further specific political agendas. A recent example of this kind of media manipulation was the orchestration of news coverage during the months surrounding the American bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi, Libya, on April 14, 1986.

On April 5, a bomb exploded in West Berlin's La Belle Discotheque killing an American serviceman and a Turkish woman. Over 200 people were injured. Little more than a week later, U.S. warplanes attacked Tripoli and Benghazi leaving more than 100 Libyans dead and hundreds injured.

Not long after the American F-111s, A-6s, and A-7s had returned from their bombing runs, White House press spokesman Larry Speakes linked the two incidents, calling the strike "self-defense against future attack."

In his speech to the nation, President Reagan declared, "Self-defense is not only our right, it is our duty." In that same national address, Reagan cited a speech he made in New Orleans warning Col. Muammar Qaddafi that any Libyan-sponsored terrorist action against American citizens would bring certain retaliation.

Strangely absent from the subse-

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quent press accounts of the bombing was any serious inquiry into the nature of the "evidence" used by the administration to justify its attack. Also left unexplained was the nature of the threat America was "defending" itself against, and why it was Libyan terrorism—not Syrian or Iranian—that represented the gravest and most immediate "danger" to the United States and its citizens.

The administration asserted: "Our evidence is direct, it is precise, it is irrefutable." Reagan went on to allege that two cables intercepted by U.S. intelligence agencies conclusively demonstrated that Libya had masterminded the attack. In an editorial, *The New York Times* claimed that the evidence was "now laid out clearly to the public." The *Times* went on to say that "even the most scrupulous citizens can only approve and applaud the American attacks on Libya."

As has been revealed elsewhere, this "irrefutable" evidence has hardly turned out to be air-tight. Manfred Ganshow, chief of the Berlin Staatsschutz and head of the 100-person team which investigated the disco bombing, told *Stars and Stripes* on April 28: "[I have] no more evidence that Libya was connected to the bombing than I had when you first called me two days after the act. Which is none."

West German authorities still lack any conclusive proof. Leads seem to spray in all directions: Libya, Syria, neo-Nazis, the Klan, and rival drug dealers have all been suspected at one time or another.

European press coverage of the at-

tack was generally cautious, yet in the United States uncritical and jingoistic headlines, such as New York *Newsday's* "SAY UNCLE!" abounded. By and large, the American media's rush to judgment was as dramatic as Ronald Reagan's rise in the ratings following the bombing. Why the marked schism in coverage?

We might well begin with MIT Professor Noam Chomsky's observation that the American bombing raid was the first in the history of modern warfare to be executed in time for the 7 p.m. nightly news. As millions of people across the country turned to their TV sets, the first eyewitness reports from Libya were being filed. Once the action shots ended, a press conference was called and the Reagan administration made its case to the American people.

This monopoly on early public interpretations clearly set the tone for the rest of the coverage. The administration knew that it is in these first moments of a breaking story that our initial impressions and often times final judgments are made.

Media coverage of Libya in the years and months preceding the bombing offer another clue. The demonizing of Qaddafi began in earnest in the summer of 1981 with the first U.S.-Libyan clash in the Gulf of Sidra, in which two Libyan jets were shot down. Libya was then publicly identified as a prime mover in the Soviet-inspired "terror network" and Qaddafi had become, as Secretary of State George Shultz later called him, "his own smoking gun."

In November, the alleged Libyan "death squads" hit the streets of Washington. Only much later, the U.S. government curiously identified the assassins as leaders of the passionately anti-Libyan Lebanese Amal, including Nabih Berry. Berry went on to enjoy a certain notoriety for his role in assisting U.S. efforts to secure the release of the TWA hostages held in Beirut.

In 1982, the Reagan administration imposed an embargo on Libyan oil and curtailed U.S. exports to that country. In 1983, Libya accused the U.S. of jamming its communications and threatened to turn the Gulf of Sidra into a bay of "blood and fire." In 1985, the U.S.

## A BRIEFING: How Disinformation Works



Danzinger in The Christian Science Monitor © 1987 TCSFS

accused Libya of complicity in the Rome and Vienna airport massacres carried out by Abu Nidal.

In January of 1986, Reagan ordered U.S. banks to freeze Libyan assets and called Qaddafi "a pariah in the world community." In March, American Navy planes attacked Libyan patrol boats and radar stations in a dispute characterized by Sen. Mark Hatfield as a "childlike game of dare and double dare."

Later, administration officials admitted that the Navy's foray into the gulf was intended to draw Libyan fire. On April 9, Reagan called Qaddafi a "mad dog." Recent disclosures have shown that the White House went so far as to plan a U.S.-Egypt invasion of Libya in 1985, only to have the plan scuttled by cooler heads at the Department of State.

Throughout this period, Washington gave its support to anti-Qaddafi dissidents in exile and authorized American ships and planes to approach the Libyan coast a total of 25 times. Hardly anywhere in the mainstream press at this time were the questions asked, "Why Qaddafi? Why Libya?"

While Col. Qaddafi certainly hasn't won any congeniality awards of late, it is equally clear that his role in international terrorism is that of a bit player. The

lion's share of Qaddafi's terror abroad is carried out against leading figures of the Libyan opposition in exile. Both Syria and Iran are commonly recognized as far more influential in the conduct of anti-Western terrorism. As *The Washington Post* has reported, U.S. intelligence recognized this fact, but sought to avoid the messy political fallout a confrontation with Iran or Syria would entail.

The Reagan administration still had much at stake in its "get tough with terrorism" policy; therefore rather than chancing an unduly messy operation, the administration baited Libya, hoping to exploit both Qaddafi's bad image and his relative political isolation.

John Poindexter, then deputy national security adviser, developed a plan of action that centered around the need for America to demonstrate this "resolve" through a direct military confrontation with Libya. In regular meetings and contingency planning sessions that began in July 1985, a "Libyan response" was developed.

In January 1986, Qaddafi's claim over the Gulf of Sidra presented the administration with the pretext for the attack they had been planning for months. In April, the disco bombing provided the rationale for a strike at Qaddafi's heart.

Last August, Poindexter once again

"dealt" with Libya by developing the disinformation campaign that precipitated the resignation of State Department spokesman Bernard Kalb. Stories apparently emanating from the White House were planted in the American press in order to convince Qaddafi that another U.S. attack was imminent. These false leads were perpetrated in hopes of further destabilizing Qaddafi and encouraging coup attempts.

Like few before it, the Reagan administration understands the implications of what New York University communications professor and author Neil Postman calls the dilemma of "public discourse in the age of show business." Clearly, a prime objective of U.S. foreign policy in the Reagan years is to demonstrate America's "resolve" and willingness to use force.

However, in post-Vietnam America, the need for a broad public mandate for such a policy is understood. Public relations victories are needed in order to insure military ones. The call came from central casting for a villain whose defeat would not produce dire geo-political consequences. Col. Qaddafi got the part. As one administration official put it: "American public opinion was ready for this, prepared, knowing that Qaddafi is a bad actor." □



omits examples from Africa's current leadership, preferring to dwell safely on Bokassa, Nguema, and Idi Amin. An article covering the 20th anniversary of Gnassingbe Eyadéma's reign in Togo glosses over the bloody way in which he came to power and the severe methods used to force the country's small population into submission. An article about a story which appeared in *The New York Times* uncovering the use of Zairois airstrips to transmit arms to Unita guerrillas reaffirmed President Mobutu's denial of involvement in the Angolan civil war, and concluded that Zaire is so large he probably didn't know about the alleged activity.

Finally, the product of a Moroccan-paid junket to the Western Sahara, the copious prose of Abdelaziz Dahmani describing the disputed territory as a virtual paradise on earth completely controlled by the forces of King Hassan was allowed to pass as a news article, until the flow of complaints from readers (including this critic) reached such a crescendo that Bechir Ben Yahmed was obliged to introduce a new policy easing the distinction between advertisement "Messages" and articles.

One African magazine editor described J.A.'s paid political content as "advertorial, which dangerously blurs the distinction between journalism and finance." This concern is all the more warranted when one realizes that the same staff "journalists," upon whom thousands of readers must unfortunately rely for objective information, are regularly enlisted by the company's public relations wing, "Difcom," to churn out ad copy—too discreetly labeled "Message"—for the governments they ordinarily cover.

*Jeune Afrique's* heavy reliance on special inserts and paid messages from African governments has predictably led to the blossoming of *rappports privilégiés* (privileged relations) with the governments of its core markets. No scandal involving Ivorian President Houphouët-Boigny and his close entourage risks being uncovered by J.A.'s roving, but Paris-based reporters.

In fact, their trips to the continent are often paid in part or in full by the governments they come to cover. For the past two years, the magazine's journalists

have traveled in tow with the presidents of the OAU just like members of the presidential suite, and have produced predictably glowing copy about the valiant efforts of President Abdou Diouf of Senegal and Congolese President Denis Sassou-Nguesso on behalf of the continent.

Côte d'Ivoire, an example chosen because of the importance of the market for the magazine's prosperity, is routinely spared embarrassing coverage. The activities—indeed the existence—of an Ivorian opposition in France is routinely ignored by the magazine. Only with the greatest care, and even then on a highly selective basis, is anything critical of President Houphouët-Boigny allowed to creep into the magazine, whereas week in and week out, *Jeune Afrique* beats the drum of the aged Ivorian leader, the "Sage of Africa," attributing to him the prestige and influence of a veritable titan in world affairs.

The back of the magazine is filled with letters to the editor, seemingly stacked in its favor, like the 99.5 percent-type presidential "election" victories that this critic has had to cover repeatedly in the region (and which J.A. has never seen fit to fully ridicule). Letter after letter begins with a reverential expression from the writer explaining why he or she has never voluntarily missed an issue in years.

The 0.5 percent of oddballs and malcontents whose letters are allowed in are the exception that confirms the rule and appear most often to be chosen for their ineptitude. They begin their letters offering that because J.A. is in the pay of someone or other, their letter will never be allowed to appear. Another variation is the letter complaining that a particular topic is never given coverage. In this case, the topic was invariably fea-

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**"One African magazine editor described J.A.'s paid political content as 'advertorial, which dangerously blurs the distinction between journalism and finance.' "**

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Comptex

**Félix Houphouët-Boigny: "Jeune Afrique beats the drum of the aged Ivorian leader, attributing to him the prestige and influence of a veritable titan in world affairs"**

tured in the latest issue of the magazine.

The boosterism evident in J.A.'s letter selection—for several months following a bomb explosion at the magazine, editors weekly published a prodigious amount of sympathy mail, from ordinary readers, celebrities, and (sic) information ministers—is seemingly infectious and has penetrated every sphere of the company. The editorial staff, composed of primarily French and Arab writers working in Parisian offices, regularly headlines features like: "How we are working for you," seemingly blind to the patronizing tone.

Regularly questioned on the scarcity of black Africans on the staff of a publication with African pretensions, the publisher has typically replied: "We can't find enough [blacks] with sufficient talent."

**A**cross the English Channel, the staff of an even more venerable magazine toils away to put out the most widely distributed English-language weekly on Africa.

The 75-year old *West Africa* magazine stands in sharp contrast with its French-language counterpart (rival would be too strong a term) in that it takes a much more studied and sober look at its loosely defined region of coverage.

The off-white, non-glossy paper and relatively scarcer graphics (all black and white, except the cover photo) are all stark testimony to the less commercial approach to the news pursued by Editor-in-Chief Kaye Whiteman.



"An article covering the 20th anniversary of Gnassingbe Eyadéma's reign in Togo glosses over the bloody way in which he came to power"

*West Africa* has faithfully adhered to a staid—some would say dowdy—layout style in recent years: an introductory editorial; a commentary/editorial entitled "Matchet's Diary"; a handful of news stories which nominally cover West Africa, but range all over the continent, including ample dispatches from francophone Africa; cultural news which concentrates mostly on African culture; a short story; book reviews; and the final third of the magazine devoted to letters and economic and news briefs.

The treatment of news in *West Africa* is also different from that of its French counterpart. One discerns greater attention paid to how Africans relate to each other directly, as opposed to *Jeune Afrique's* seeming obsession with how Africans relate to the metropole, and through the metropole with each other. While both magazines are primarily African-owned, but published in Europe, this difference is likely due to the fact that *West Africa* has evolved from the chronicle of imperialists that it was founded to be to a publication written primarily by and for Africans.

A good deal of opinion sometimes comes through in the news copy of *West Africa*, but one rarely gets the impression that the magazine is pandering to any given audience, or that it is letting financial considerations get in the way of a reasonable standard of objectivity. This is all the more remarkable because the magazine is largely owned by Nigeria, which receives ample coverage but seemingly little deference.

*West Africa* also favorably impresses

this reader by its habit of datelining articles, so that the reader can know if actual reporting was done from the country in question, or if a "reporter" culled information from other publications, and/or "worked" a story over long distance telephone, as one must surmise is often done at *Jeune Afrique* and too many other African specialty publications.

The magazine also makes a favorable impression by its relatively high rate of attributed quotes, an exceptional feature in an area where all too many writers and editors complacently traffic in dubiously unsourced material hiding behind the pretext that in Africa no one will speak for the record.

While *West Africa* tends to cover the continent in a broader fashion than its francophone cousin, it is handicapped in its means because its circulation is based to a great extent on a readership in anglophone African countries with very limited access to foreign exchange. In recent years, circulation has been stopped in Liberia, limited in Ghana, and contingent on scarce forex in the Gambia and Sierra Leone. As a result, there is little prospect of reducing dependence on markets in Nigeria and the U.K.

**T**he other widely circulated political magazines concentrating on West Africa as a region appear at less than weekly intervals (with the exception of the Catholic Church-supported *Afrique Nouvelle*), generally have lower circulations than the two discussed above, and are of spotty interest, if not bereft of substantive material.

*Afrique Nouvelle*, published in Dakar, was founded in 1947 as the voice of the Church in the affairs of the region. Despite its understandable bias, it sometimes overcomes its severe budgetary constraints and reliance on a network of occasional contributors to produce very interesting copy that looks squarely at the problems of a country without winking before the threat of sanction or censure that is everywhere implicit in francophone Africa. *Afrique Nouvelle* has the added merit of being produced on the continent and written and edited by Africans.

*Afrique-Asie*, a Paris-based bi-weekly, can boast all of the faults of

*Jeune Afrique*, but pushed to the opposite extreme. Heavily reliant on the "progressive" states (Algeria and Angola primarily) for its advertising revenue and supplements, *Afrique-Asie* can be counted on to tout their virtues to whomever will listen. However, unlike *Jeune Afrique*, it has made a commendable effort to expand beyond its francophone market by publishing an English-language edition, *AfricaAsia*.

What this reviewer suspects keeps publisher Simon Malley in business is that his magazine consistently seeks to stake out the opposite bias from *Jeune Afrique*, and is thus sought out by readers in countries regularly lauded by J.A., who know from first-hand evidence that things cannot be as rosy as Bechir Ben Yahmed's "advertorialists" would have people believe.

Rarely alluding to each other by name, the two magazines fight a war reminiscent of the "Spy vs. Spy" comics of the past, sometimes suddenly displacing each other as champion or *bête noire* of a given regime.

Following the showdown in which President Paul Biya of Cameroon displaced his predecessor Amadou Ahidjo, *Jeune Afrique*, which had previously cornered the tightly censored foreign press market in that country, committed the indiscretion of writing articles perceived as favorable to Ahidjo's memory.

Suddenly, as *Jeune Afrique* was being turned back at Cameroon's borders, the nominally leftist *Afrique-Asie* was pumping out flattering accounts of the achievements of Paul Biya as if he were of the same vintage as an Agostinho Neto. *Afrique-Asie* overnight became the in-flight magazine of Cameroon Airlines, and was for a time so heavily distributed in the streets of Douala that news vendors began to discount them.

A vicious former colleague of more cynical persuasions than me once suggested that *Jeune Afrique* and its poor mirror image, *Afrique-Asie*, make their money by "sully the reputation of a country and its leader to such an extent that they are forced to buy editorial cooperation." When the flow of advertising dollars slows or stops, a few slightly critical pieces are usually sufficient to get the message across and get the flow going again, he said. □

# In Search of Friends

We arrived at Lomé's Tokoin airport to the rhythmic chant of dancers and the roar of jets approaching the airstrip. Along the ceremonial red carpet, Western and African journalists fanned out awaiting the arrival of visiting heads of state coming to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadéma's ascendancy to power.

One after another, jets landed and we chased after the president as he personally greeted his guests. As the afternoon wore on, we were presented with plenty of photo opportunities, but no time for questions, despite standing only a hair's breadth away from a trio of francophone leaders—Denis Sassou-Nguesso, Omar Bongo, and Paul Biya.

The occasion of the president's anniversary provided the Togolese government with an ideal setting for displaying the country to its best advantage. Journalists were invited to Lomé, installed in luxury hotels, granted accreditation, fêted with lunches and dinners, and given free rein to tour the city. The strategy, part of Togo's effort to increase international press coverage, was implemented by the government's stable of public relations firms based in Paris, London, and Washington.

Last August, and again in January of this year, the Washington-based public relations firm, David Apter & Associates, invited *Africa Report* to join a group of journalists they had convened for an all-expenses-paid junket to Togo. On each occasion, the Togolese government had instructed Marc Apter, president of the firm, to organize a trip for the purposes of covering what it perceived as major political events—the alleged bombing conspiracy of the American embassy in Lomé and Eyadéma's 20th anniversary celebrations.

For Apter & Associates, the August trip bringing journalists to cover the country's political affairs was a first. Since 1981—when they were recruited by Togolese authorities to polish the country's image in the U.S.—Apter & Associates' primary task has been to promote Togo as a hot-spot for American tourists and investors. They have organized an average of two trips a year

Although many African governments are critical of the Western press' one-sided coverage of the continent, few have devoted as much time and energy to developing a favorable media image as the Togolese. How successful has this public relations exercise been in boosting the Eyadéma government's reputation abroad?

for travel writers, worked closely with tour operators to develop the country's tourist industry, and encouraged U.S. businessmen to participate in the government's privatization drive.

But over the past year, Apter & Associates' role has expanded into a full service package, in line with the Togolese government's push to upgrade its reputation abroad. Since 1981, Togo has spent approximately \$3 million on its promotional campaign in the U.S. and is now seeking to portray itself as a world leader in the fight against international terrorism—a decision which has not made Apter & Associates' work any easier.

Apter admitted as much when asked to comment on the government's image as a force against terrorism in West Africa. For obvious reasons, Apter's firm has preferred to rely on stories promoting the country as an economic success story—the "Switzerland of Africa"—rather than push political scenarios to the fore which might tarnish Togo's reputation as a model of stability.

On the other hand, the government has evidently concluded that Togo's international prestige would be enhanced—particularly within the Reagan administration—by publicizing such stories as the terrorist attack it had allegedly foiled against the American embassy in Lomé. Minister of Information Gbignon Amegboh made this point during an interview at the Presidency in mid-January, when he claimed that this

was the kind of news that Americans wanted to hear. It would be a positive draw, he added, in attracting U.S. interest in the country.

But despite the government's concerted campaign to drum up the most favorable international press coverage that money can buy, this strategy has produced rather mixed results. In the case of the alleged "international terrorist plot," the strategy simply backfired.

On August 11, Interior Minister Kpotivi Tèvi-Djidjogbé Laclé announced to a group of journalists—invited to Lomé at the government's expense—that it had thwarted a Libyan-backed plot on July 23. He claimed that the security forces had arrested nine Togolese and Beninois nationals implicated in the affair, and seized two briefcases containing "very powerful explosives"—one earmarked for the U.S. embassy and the other for Lomé's open-air market. The plotters had apparently tried to smuggle the material into Togo from Benin, where they had been supplied by "a member of the Libyan embassy in Cotonou."

The government's account, and the press conference in particular, raised some eyebrows and certainly raised many more questions than it answered. Laclé did show us "proof" of the plot by displaying the explosives, along with three grenades, a knife, an automatic pistol, and a handful of cartridges found in the dissidents' possession. But the detainees were nowhere to be seen,

and their identities remained shrouded in mystery—even though they had been arrested nearly three weeks earlier.

Why call an international press conference so long after the plot had been unearthed if many of the details could not yet be divulged because “investigations,” as Laclé put it, were far from over? What advantage could the plotters expect to gain from killing local people in the marketplace and carrying out their plan to hurl grenades into several movie theaters, as the government alleged? If the Libyan government masterminded the conspiracy, why didn't the Eyadéma regime lodge a formal protest against Tripoli?

Although the Togolese government managed to stir up indignation against the West's favorite bogey man, Col. Muammar Qaddafi, much of the specialized press on Africa remained skeptical. Several publications pointed out that the plot—if it existed at all—had been embellished to divert attention away from recent charges of human rights abuses by Amnesty International. Others suggested that the government wanted to bolster its reputation as a valuable Western ally and a guarantor of peace in West Africa in order to pave the way for future crackdowns on suspected Togolese dissidents. The influential *Africa Confidential* went further, concluding quite forcefully that the plot simply “didn't exist.”

No sooner had the story of the alleged plot faded from the news and life in Lomé returned to normal than reports of a new threat to the government made headlines in late September. The authorities claimed that the Togolese army had successfully thwarted a coup attempt orchestrated by two of its “radical” neighbors—Ghanaian leader Flt.-Lt. Jerry Rawlings and Burkina President Thomas Sankara.

According to Laclé, a group of 60 “professionally trained terrorists” invaded the country from Ghana aiming to assassinate Eyadéma and overthrow the government. But Togolese security forces, having received advance word of the attack, neutralized the assault before it could begin by surrounding a Lomé villa and capturing a group of plotters with large quantities of weapons.

Although sporadic gunfire was heard later that night and again on Thursday morning, the assailants never got close to any strategic targets. Nonetheless, France sent 150 men from its rapid deployment force to Lomé on Thursday evening in a show of solidarity with the government.

Among the many mysteries arising from the attack was why Eyadéma requested French military assistance when by all accounts the situation was well under control. Several reports speculated that the dispatch of French troops was required more to impress a recalcitrant Togolese army than to quell an invading force that independent observers singled out for being particularly inept and ineffective.

The following Monday, a handful of the “terrorists” arrested in the villa and in the aftermath of the attack were paraded in front of a group of journalists that had been flown to Lomé for yet another international press conference. Authorities spoon-fed the journalists with accounts of the detainees' confessions that appeared to implicate the governments in Accra and Ouagadougou.

The fact that Ghanaian military papers were allegedly found on two dead assailants, that men in the group had confessed to receiving military training in Ghana and Burkina, and that 200 Burkinabe soldiers had reportedly gathered at the border to assist the plotters provided the backbone of the govern-

**Minister of Information Gbegnon Amegboh: “A journalist is free to write what he wants. He is alone with his conscience”**



Alana Lee

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## “Press coverage of the coup attempt was extensive, ranging from guarded skepticism of the Togolese version to outright disbelief.”

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ment's “evidence.” Togolese authorities never provided a shred of proof to substantiate the allegations, and would not permit the press to directly question the plotters.

Press coverage of the coup attempt was extensive, ranging from guarded skepticism of the Togolese version to outright disbelief. Even the usually conservative *Jeune Afrique*—traditionally a staunch supporter of the policies of moderate francophone governments—featured an editorial by one of its correspondents, Sennen Andriamirado, in which he expressed serious reservations with respect to Lomé's account.

Evidently disturbed by the influential magazine's doubting tone, the government felt compelled to invite Andriamirado to take a first-hand look. He arrived in Lomé and asked to be allowed to interview the captured assailants. Denied this right, he went to Tokoin military base with Minister of Information Amegboh to examine the weapons captured in the raid, and was offered—but never given—copies of the Ghanaian identity cards allegedly found on the prisoners. From there, he was chauffeured to Pya where he met with President Eyadéma, and then proceeded to Ouagadougou to confer with Sankara about the allegations of Burkinabe troop support, before returning to Paris to file his story.

In his article appearing on November 19, Andriamirado concluded that his initial doubts were well-founded and that it was impossible to prove Ghanaian and Burkinabe complicity in the affair. But in an interview with *Africa Report* to discuss the Togolese government's view of press coverage of the coup attempt, Amegboh dismissed Andriamirado's account and those of others who questioned the government's story.

“Some journalists did not give all the



Alana Lee

President Eyadéma with his guests, Omar Bongo, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, and Paul Biya in Lomé: "The absence of press briefings reinforced the feeling that there was little of newsworthiness"

information that was demanded of them in their profession," said Amegboh. "That is their right because they work for papers that are communist-inspired. Togo was attacked by two communist countries. [The plotters] were trained in Ghana and they were trained in Burkina Faso. They may not call themselves communist but they are left-wing."

Asked to comment specifically on what was communist-inspired about *Jeune Afrique*, Amegboh declared: "Sennen Andriamirado is a journalist with his convictions. He has his own ideas. You can't change them. He says he is a Trotskyist—thus a communist. . . . A journalist is free to write what he wants. He is alone with his conscience." Not a very convincing rebuttal to legitimate concerns with the Togolese government's serious and damaging accusations.

In retrospect, it seems that Andriamirado and the other doubting-Thomases of the press corps were wise not to swallow the official line on external involvement in the coup attempt. A recent report in *West Africa*, picked up from a Voice of Germany news broadcast monitored in Accra, said that Togo has reopened its borders with Ghana in light of investigations that "showed the alleged threat from Ghana is a farce." Togolese authorities have now admitted that there was no threat to their security from Ghana, and the Accra daily, the *People's Daily Graphic*, published an editorial demanding that the Togolese gov-

ernment issue a public apology to the Ghanaian people.

The question remains: What has Togo achieved by its efforts to bring the country under the focus of the international media? Has the reporting on the flurry of events in the country's recent political history enhanced Togo's reputation abroad? Does the government believe that the time and money spent on bringing journalists to Lomé has truly served its best interests?

Certainly, during the 20th anniversary festivities, we toasted the president's beneficence, but were we convinced by Eyadéma's speech to the nation—which we did not hear ourselves but read the following day in the country's one daily, *La Nouvelle Marche*—that stressed the progress he has made in achieving political and economic stability?

Eyadéma's anniversary celebrations were not covered by any of the major Western newspapers, as the organizers

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**"Despite the government's concerted campaign to drum up the most favorable international press coverage that money can buy, this strategy has produced rather mixed results."**

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had hoped. For most journalists invited to Lomé, the anniversary was more or less a non-event attended with some cynicism. A few stories on the country's economic progress and the president's success at unifying the country through his ubiquitous cult of personality appeared in the specialized press. But the absence of press briefings, despite the attendance of regional leaders, reinforced the feeling that there was little of real newsworthiness.

Stories that ran in the wake of the event ranged from straight—if tongue-in-cheek—accounts of the anniversary week and mild assessments of Togo's economic progress, to a startling "viewpoint" published in the conservative *Washington Times*.

In a series of articles, the paper's correspondent chronicled his visit more from the perspective of an interested and naive Western tourist than a political analyst. And yet, his comments on the West African regional situation, in which he contrasts the virtues of Togo's "free-enterprise spirit" to "Marxist" Ghana and Burkina Faso's "catastrophic economic conditions" are patently misleading. His claim that what stability these countries enjoy is due to the presence of Cuban troops, moreover, is sheer ignorance that can hardly hope to dispel many of the myths about Africa.

Articles such as these are a disservice not only to the Togolese people but to the region at large. It leaves one wondering whether this is really the best that money can buy. □

# The Press and Nation-Building

African governments often have a different perception of the function of the press than the adversarial tradition of Western journalism. Nigeria's minister of information and culture examines the role of the domestic press in furthering national unity and development.

BY PRINCE TONY MOMOH

**T**heoretically, the role of the press in any society includes informing, educating, entertaining, decoding the environment, and acting as watchdog. But can anyone deny that the press in any society takes on the form and colorations of the social, political, legal, and economic structures within which it operates?

In this article, I want to first look at the role of the press in nation-building. Then I will attempt to argue a case for the role of the press in Nigeria as a polity, because certain duties are spelled out for organs of the Nigerian system, and the press is specifically asked to monitor them on behalf of the people of Nigeria.

In discussing the role of the press in nation-building, one of the issues to be resolved is what is meant by the press. Another is what a nation is and how one would indicate that it is being built or destroyed. The third issue is what role the press should play. The fourth is whether that role is defined, and if it is not, whether it can be identified.

My definition of the press includes not just newspapers and magazines but also other media, like radio and television. Secondly, I understand a nation to mean a geographical area that has identified itself as a country and which is admissible to the United Nations. Thirdly, I understand nation-building as an activ-

ity in furtherance of the well-being of the state. Fourthly, I understand the role assigned for performance and the activity performed as operations of the human person. In other words, I see a nation being a nation in terms only of the humans who belong there and have a duty to further its well-being.

My concept of the role of the press is to win, maintain, and perpetuate support for vested interests in a hierarchy within a system. My definition is a product of more than 20 years of active work in the media and of studies of media performance the world over.

The vested interest is identifiable through policy which is the preserve of the system; through ownership of the medium reflected in the saying that he who pays the piper calls the tune; and through patronage in the form of subsidy or advertising—a variant of ownership.

The hierarchical order is defined by the threat or presence of an opposing interest which may be called an adversary. If the opposing interest or adversary is on the same plane of operation as the vested interest that the medium represents, ownership and patronage are decisive in the role the medium plays.

But if the opposing interest or adversary is an overriding interest dictated by policy which is the preserve of the system, then that interest supercedes the vested interest. This is when the press can be gagged or journalists jailed for sedition or for breach of laws like the

official secrets act, where an organ of the system charged with law-making, execution, or interpretation sees itself as synonymous with the system and its interests as the same as those of the system. This is where critics emerge to differentiate between national interest and the attempt by a few to pocket the system. This also is the time of sycophants and of praise-singing.

Finally, the system we have in contemplation is the nation, the country, not any organ of it, however highly placed.

When we ask what role the press should play in nation-building, therefore, our answer simply would be that as the interest of the nation overrides any other interest, the press has a duty to win, maintain, and perpetuate support for the nation as the apex of the collective vested interests of the operators within the pyramid.

I shall come to discuss Nigeria specifically, but let us apply the framework to the ideological situation in the world today represented by the two superpowers, the United States and the USSR.

I tried in my book, *News of the Forgotten Army*, to explain the pattern of ownership in both capitalist and socialist or communist systems to lay to rest the rather simplistic belief that in effect, a cacophony of voices in a marketplace is evidence of democracy and that the silence that pervades a department store



Prince Tony Momoh, a former journalist, is Nigeria's Minister of Information and Culture.

where prices are carefully tagged on items for sale is evidence of dictatorship.

In the capitalist system, where press ownership is private, this ownership does not supercede the overriding vested interest. This type of ownership is consistent with capitalism. The role of the press then is to promote, protect, and sustain that system.

In a capitalist system, the adversary (within the system) is government for the simple reason that ownership is private. And because private ownership is never the preserve of one individual, different people speak with different tongues. In that Tower of Babel, everyone who can afford a medium can have his say against everyone else. Those within the tower and others outside see no more than a reflection of the situation in the tower—dissension, uproar, hullabaloo, bedlam. In the media, they call it a marketplace of ideas.

In the communist system, the government owns the media. The press has a duty then to promote, protect, and sustain that system. The adversary (within the system) is thus not the private sector in the socio-economic setting. The adversary within the system then can only be dissidents.

However, the outside adversary is capitalism, since communism does not

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**“The press is a forum for monitoring the goings-on within and outside the Nigerian system, but the slant must be Nigerian and seen through the eyes of Nigeria as a nation.”**

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permit private ownership of the means of production. To the man outside the system, there is one spokesman, one voice, no quarrels. Even if there are disagreements over the methods of sustaining, promoting, and protecting the system, you would not know it because those who have access to the seemingly closed system do not show you the windows through which fresh air blows in for the resolution of issues even at the expense of powerful individuals.

What we are building up to is that at the apex of the pyramid, countries mobilize the media to the well-being of the nation with an approach that may be capitalist or communist or even a hybrid.

The role the press plays in nation-building then is not one imposed by an organ of the system like the legislature, the executive, or the judiciary. It is one

imposed by the system itself, strictly in a division of labor situation.

Let me now relate what I have put down as a framework for Nigeria. Nigeria as a country has been forged through many mills, and today it is the fruit of the roles which various organs within the system have played individually and collectively. It is an *abysmal failure* on the part of such organs to see themselves, in a division of labor setting, as links in a chain, each link as strong as the other, each in dedicated service to the chain.

In Nigeria, we have a constitution (the 1979 Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution) which must be read with the amendments that the Armed Forces Ruling Council may make in the form of decrees. The AFRC is Nigeria's law-making body, an organ of the system, a link in the chain assigned the duty of making law to promote nation-building.

The judiciary is also an organ of the system, a link in the chain assigned the duty of interpreting law in furtherance of nation-building. But the 1979 constitution specifically denies the judiciary the power to entertain any matter under Chapter 2 of the constitution.

Chapter 2, entitled “Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy,” sets out the duties which the system, Nigeria as a country, wants performed. Chapter 2 specifically provides that the press must uphold the aims and objectives of Nigeria as a nation; that the press must ensure that all organs of government (legislative, executive, and judiciary) uphold these aims and objectives and perform the duties imposed in furtherance of nation-building; that the press must also hold the government accountable to the people in performance of these duties.

The aims and objectives are clearly set out. They are political, economic, social, educational, and cultural, and they even define our foreign policy, that is, our vested interests as a nation.

The role of the press in building Nigeria now clearly comes into focus. The press is a forum for monitoring the goings-on within and outside the Nigerian system, but the slant must be Nigerian and seen through the eyes of Nigeria as a nation. The press must therefore recognize that it is a link in a chain only when it knows inside out the beat that it must sustain—and that is Nigeria.

**Election rally, Kano, 1979: “The press has been the anchor for the protection of Nigeria's national unity as well as a lubricant in its political system”**



Beryl Goldberg

Within Nigeria, there may be disagreements among vested interests but when it is Nigeria as a system that is involved, then the country must come first.

The freedom of the press in its role of nation-building is derived from the system, not from any organ of it. The implication therefore is that any attempt to muzzle the press so that it cannot perform in furtherance of nation-building must be resisted. Otherwise, the press as an organ of the system, as a link in a chain, is weakened by another link in the chain. And the whole chain stands to lose. It is not that such attempts have not been made or that threats to press freedom are not identifiable within the system itself.

As a result of the rather too frequent changes in Nigeria's political leadership, policies about the media changed with its leaders. The result was that there was neither sufficient time to plan for a consistent media policy, nor to develop a properly articulated information culture. At every turn, both before and after political independence, the press was hampered in its duty by certain legislative processes, by the injustices of Chapter 2 of the 1979 constitution, and by the courts.

To be sure, the problems of the Nigerian press are real and disconcerting enough. It neither speaks as a monolith, nor is it quite professional in rendering accurate reports on events. It is said that the Nigerian media is too quick to sensationalize and take sides on critical national issues without conducting a proper investigation.

Protagonists of this argument cite the case of 2.8 billion naira in oil money said to have been paid into a personal account. Despite the fact that a panel of inquiry was set up to investigate this so-called deal, the media's contribution in bringing the various circumstances to light was minimal.

The Nigerian press has also been rather slow to branch off into relevant areas like community newspapers, rural coverage, etc. Critics also say that after 1979, the press ceased to be completely objective. The Supreme Court decision on the issue of 12 2/3 of 19 states was followed by a sudden avalanche of terrible accusations hurled at the president-elect.

Worse still, at independence, journalists who waged relentless press wars against the colonial rulers and on whose shoulders rested the mantle of the management of the post-independence press could not be restrained and were at each other's throats with the same degree of bitterness that characterized their attack on the white rulers.

In this way, they knowingly or unknowingly championed the development of a national tragedy called ethnic chauvinism or tribalism, and the attendant evils of nepotism, political corruption, and partisanship, which sadly survive until today.

In our plural culture, with competing interests and beliefs about national priorities, attempts to use the press for individual ends resulted in a partisan and highly polarized media that sharpened the cleavages that were beginning to be etched into Nigerian society. Instead of helping to forestall the inferno, the Nigerian press was swept along, as during the 1963 riots and macabre murders in western Nigeria.

There is, however, another school of thought holding that the Nigerian press played quite commendable roles in nation-building consistent with the facilities open to it and having regard for Nigeria's problems, priorities, and goals. The problems include, for instance, the need to strengthen national unity, the need to express our faith in the survival of this country as an indivisible, viable entity both politically and economically, and the need to revamp the nation's economy. Others are the needs to increase the national literacy level, update health care delivery, and eliminate the crime syndrome in our society. The national goals and priorities invariably include the achievement of national unity, economic self-reliance, a just and stable society, a minimization of indiscipline and corruption, and the adoption of a leadership role in Africa.

Judged against these goals and priorities, the press has been the anchor for the protection of Nigeria's national unity as well as a lubricant in its political system. It has also been a most consistent, vibrant, and viable medium for exacting accountability from our leaders. Nigerian journalists have usually risen, as if with one voice, against all demagogues

and other agents of instability. They have never compromised the sovereignty of this country against foreign attacks. The Nigerian press has also made stupendous progress since independence toward purveying daily events and reaching out to the masses.

As a decoder of the environment, the Nigerian press has strongly come into its own by explaining the policies and programs of the various governments to the masses. It tells the people what is happening because it is at home with the daily events that make our history. Through news analysis and editorials, it makes empirical predictions. Even before UNESCO started creating awareness of the need for rural coverage, the Nigerian press had started to penetrate the hinterland. The press uses the various organs at its disposal so that people coming into our society may quickly and easily learn about our different cultures and our mores.

The Nigerian press has also had an impact on the struggle to decolonize Africa and ensure the eventual total liquidation of apartheid in South Africa. It did this by constantly highlighting the efforts of freedom fighters and lifting the curtain from the sad events in that country.

**"President Ibrahim Babangida's administration has consistently regarded the press as a true partner in progress"**



André Astrow

At home, the press has contributed in no small measure toward law-making. Many state edicts and federal government decrees have come about as a result of media intervention. The press has played a commendable role in encouraging positive attitudes in such efforts as the War Against Indiscipline (WAI). Besides contributing substantially to the detection of graft and political corruption and crusading on key issues in the public interest, the press has been foremost in initiating and supporting community service.

The achievements of the press in recent times, however, have been less a result of the vibrancy of the Nigerian press or of the greatly improved educational background of its members than an outcome of the open and humane nature of President Ibrahim Babangida's administration, which has consistently regarded the press as a true partner in progress.

The president, for example, abrogated Decree Number 4 in his maiden speech to the nation for being at variance with the spirit of his open govern-

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**"In our plural culture, with competing interests and beliefs about national priorities, attempts to use the press for individual ends resulted in a partisan and highly polarized media."**

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ment. DN4 sought to protect government officials against press criticisms or charges of corruption. Thereafter, the *Guardian* journalists who had been jailed under the obnoxious decree regained their freedom.

Also apart from blazing the trail by appointing deserving members of the profession as ministers and state commissioners, the administration has shown keen interest in the media's current effort to streamline communica-

tion, which is bound to strengthen the hands of media operators to contribute more responsibly to national development. Without pre-empting the outcome of the communication seminar now underway, the resultant policy will tend to lay bare all known communication channels and identify the specific agencies that will handle a particular communication function and at what levels.

The policy will also help to define the roles of the media (print and electronic) within the context of our peculiar geopolitical, economic, and cultural setting in achieving national objectives. It will increase the flow of needed technology and give appropriate guidelines for the development and systematization of our traditional modes of communication, thus reducing the level of alienation of the majority of our rural populace as a result of Nigeria's penchant to adopt new imported technologies. This way, it is hoped that the press in Nigeria will be availed wider opportunities for higher and improved performance of its onerous responsibilities. □

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# Muzzling the Media

Since independence in 1847, Liberia has had a lively journalistic tradition. However, successive governments, in particular the current regime, have jeopardized press freedom with detentions of journalists, sabotage of press offices, and newspaper closures.

BY LEWIS SMITH

Journalism is one calling in Liberia that has been assailed by the slings and arrows of bitter fortune over the years. Throughout Liberian history, the press has traveled an arduous road in its desire to function according to the traditions of the fourth estate.

The high expectations of the Liberian media and the people's quenchless appetite for free expression are understandable, viewed against the backdrop of a country that proclaimed its sovereignty in 1847. Indeed, the origins of the Liberian media are traceable to the pre-independence period. On February 7, 1826, Charles L. Force, an American printer, landed on Liberian shores to publish the first paper, the *Liberian Herald*. Before independence in 1847 and for almost a century afterwards, other newspapers were founded but were short-lived due to the high illiteracy and poverty of the small population.

The Liberian media has endured tumultuous times and as one of the country's pioneers of modern journalism, the Rev. S.T.A. Richards, succinctly asserted, it has been a "fight not for honor or glory or wealth."

In his book, *The Love of Liberty*, exposing the excesses of Liberia's 18th president, William V.S. Tubman, Tuan Wreh, a lawyer and journalist and now a senator in the Liberian legislature, recounted how journalists were cowed into submission due to the "serpent of Tubmanism." Wrote Wreh: "Once thus bitten, the conscience of the sacred

journalist was enfeebled, his integrity was bought over and fawning and lavish praises became the order of the day." It was during Tubman's rule—from 1944 to 1971—that modern journalism began.

Daring journalists had to pay a heavy price. There were men like Albert Porte, the famous pamphleteer and journalist, who did not hesitate to write personally to Tubman when he felt that the president's actions were not in the national interest. He served many jail terms and became the target of unjustified vituperation.

C. Frederick Taylor, a naturalized Liberian of West Indian origin, was stripped of his citizenship and jailed for 17 years after criticizing Tubman in 1942 for actions which he felt went contrary to the president's election vows. The Rev. Richards, publisher of *The Friend*, was "taught a lesson" when his printing press was smashed by unknown assailants in 1954.

In 1955, when Tuan Wreh, the young corresponding editor of *The Independent*, authored an article headlined, "Inside Politics: Why you should not vote for Tubman," he was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Another journalist, Bertha Corbin, an American missionary who acquired Liberian citizenship by marriage, was unconstitutionally deported for running articles critical of Tubman in a paper she edited.

After Tubman's demise in 1971, abuses continued as the new leaders, like their predecessors, felt that press freedom would not serve them well. William R. Tolbert Jr., who succeeded Tubman to the presidency, sought to convey the impression that his adminis-

tration would sharply depart from the repressive tactics of the Tubman regime.

But Tolbert paid only lip service to press freedom and according to his close associates, he was surprised that people took him seriously on his pledge to promote freedom of speech. His government took exception to any adverse comments on official conduct. In one instance, the judicial system was utilized to crush *The Revelation*, a student-run magazine which criticized a gambling bill spearheaded by the president's brother, Stephen Allen Tolbert.

At the time of the military takeover in April 1980, most Liberians felt that a new day had dawned and they would enjoy all the basic freedoms denied them under previous administrations. But they soon discovered that press freedom would not be handed to them on a silver platter.

Government control of the media was still evident when the *Daily Observer*, an independent newspaper, was born in February 1981. Pursuing a vigorous style of reporting under the editorship of veteran journalist Rufus Darpoh, the paper soon found itself at loggerheads with the government. Both Darpoh and the managing director, Kenneth Best, were very familiar with professional journalistic norms and knowledgeable about the cause of a free press.

Unfortunately, the *Daily Observer* has paid a dear price for its independence, having suffered many closures and fines on government orders. At one time, it was closed for carrying a story headlined "Monrovia stinks," which drew attention to the hazards posed by unsanitary conditions in parts of the nation's

Lewis Smith, formerly editor-in-chief of the *Liberian newspaper*, *Footprints Today*, writes on African affairs and development issues.

capital. On another occasion, the "crime" was the publication of a story with a picture captioned, "Bad, bad roads," showing the deplorable conditions of some roads. Paradoxically, this occurred at a time when the government itself was officially seeking international assistance to rehabilitate Liberian roads.

Another independent daily, *Footprints Today*, which won the Press Union of Liberia's 1986 award as the country's best newspaper, has also suffered from government repression. On August 1, 1984, barely five months after the paper's debut on the newsstands, publisher Momolu Sirleaf and sports editor Klon Hinneh were incarcerated in connection with an article headlined, "Malpractices at Public Works," alleging high-level corruption in the Ministry of Public Works. They were released after 55 days without any formal charges leveled against them.

The vicissitudes of journalism in Liberia have affected not only the print me-

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**"The constant closure of newspapers has made Liberian journalists acutely aware of the hazards of their chosen profession."**

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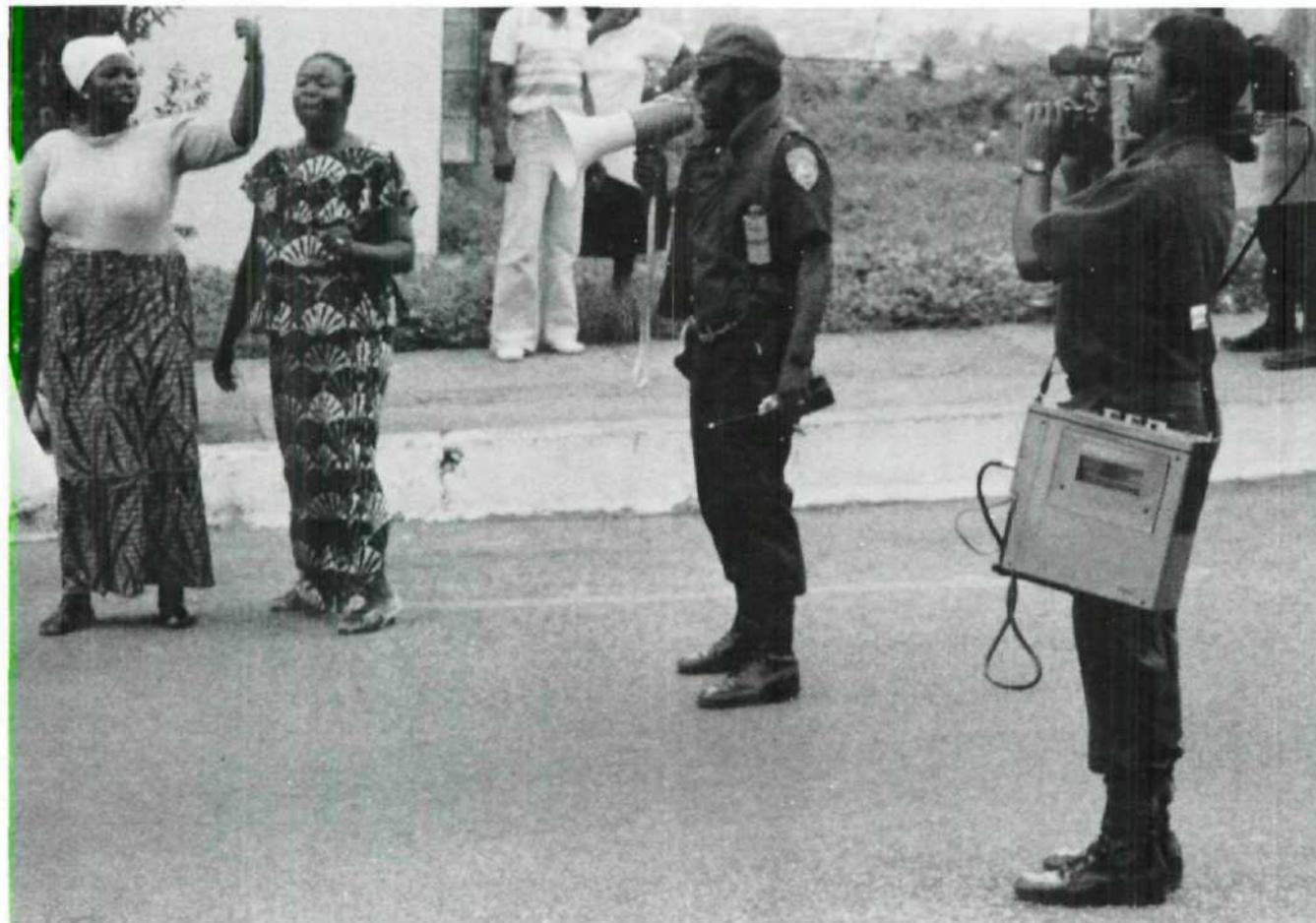
dia, but also both the state-owned and the private electronic media. By far the most serious stumbling block to press freedom in recent years was the July 21, 1984 promulgation of Decree 88A by the then-People's Redemption Council government. The decree conferred sweeping powers on the security forces "to arrest and detain any person found spreading rumors, lies, and misinformation against any government official or individual either by word of mouth, writing or by public broadcast."

The decree, a blatant attempt to stifle press freedom, hung like the "sword of

Damocles" over the heads of all media practitioners until recently when it was repealed. National leaders have repeatedly issued serious warnings to the independent press. In his 1984 Christmas message to the nation, President Samuel K. Doe cautioned independent newspapers against creating a situation that would disturb public peace and security. He advised publishers to be guided by the experience of the past year to "prevent a closure of their papers."

Since then, the press has received many admonitions from other government officials to desist from acts that would undermine the peace and security of the state. However, the Press Union of Liberia, the professional association of media practitioners, maintains that it is essential to develop and promote an amicable working relationship between the government and all journalists working in the country. In the Press Union's view, what Liberia needs is journalism that promotes unity, peace, and pros-

**Monrovia, Liberia: "The press has received many admonitions from government officials to desist from acts that would undermine the peace and security of the state"**



Larry James



Joseph Margolis

**Liberian television station: "The electronic media is mostly controlled by the government"**

perity and at the same time allows for constructive and healthy debate of national issues.

Although the constant closure of newspapers has made Liberian journalists acutely aware of the hazards of their chosen profession, it came as a complete surprise when unknown persons attempted to burn down the offices of the *Daily Observer* on March 5, 1986.

Closed at five different times since its founding in 1981, the paper had reckoned that with the adoption of a new constitution on January 6, 1986 in the transition to the Second Republic, it could automatically resume publication, since the last directive for its offices to be sealed was not a court order, but a mere instruction from the Minister of Justice unsupported by any constitutional provision. Thus on March 4, 1986, the Board of Directors announced that publication was resuming. Less than 25 hours later, arson caused thousands of dollars worth of property damage.

Foul play was transparently evident when matches were found on the office floor the morning after the fire. The law enforcement dragnet has not yet apprehended anyone in connection with the incident, nor uncovered the cause of that criminal act. But pressmen march on, and the *Daily Observer* is now back in circulation, following an executive ruling on July 26, 1986.

In the wake of several untoward de-

velopments in the media, a rather awkward and hitherto unknown phenomenon occurred. The commercial printers of *Footprints Today* abruptly decided to cease printing the paper on March 5, 1986, the day the premises of the *Daily Observer* were discovered burnt. The printers' excuse was that it was experiencing "unprecedented problems." *Footprints Today* could not find any other willing printer.

Another independent paper, the *Sun Times*, established in 1985, was once banned but subsequently re-opened. In September last year, it was fined \$3,000 and closed down when the government expressed reservations regarding its manner of reporting and revoked its articles of incorporation. Some of its headlines had apparently offended the government. Ironically, the *Sun Times* won a 1986 Press Union of Liberia award for carrying the best headlines.

The paper's managing editor is Rufus Darpoh, the pioneer editor-in-chief of the *Daily Observer* and former editor of the government-owned *New Liberian*. In 1984, Darpoh was jailed for six months at the country's maximum security prison, Bella Yella, for allegedly writing articles inimical to the country in the foreign press, a charge Darpoh vehemently denied.

The problems of the Liberian press are aggravated by the fact that the newspapers do not have their own printing facilities, so their operations are al-

ways in danger of grinding to a halt through acts of sabotage and interference in the production process.

In Liberia, the electronic media is mostly controlled by the government, which runs the largest radio station and rural radio as well as the only television station in the country. There are two other radio stations: Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) and the Catholic Community Radio (ELCM). Although independent, both stations are careful not to air what official circles might consider distasteful or contrary to the national interest.

In the face of all these odds, the media remains unperturbed, and it is to Liberia's credit that there are five daily newspapers, only one of which is government-owned, in a country of approximately 2.3 million people. There are two other papers which are not currently in circulation.

The survival of the media in Liberia is predicated not only upon an environment conducive to free expression but also to a large extent on fundamental economics. The print and electronic media require substantial revenue to keep the wheels of business running.

Due to their low readership, newspapers must depend on advertising rather than circulation to stay in business. The state-owned radio and television stations also require enormous advertising revenues to be able to operate profitably and meet staff payrolls and other overhead costs. However, as Liberia is now experiencing an economic recession, few business establishments are able to afford large-scale advertising or business promotion.

In the absence of sufficient revenue from advertising, the media is financially crippled, thus making mere survival or the pursuit of it the order of the day. It is, however, heartening to note that media practitioners are fully cognizant of the ills that plague their profession but they remain dedicated to the onerous task of crusading for truth and liberty. They know that even when they endeavor to do their best, they may be seen as sowing seeds of strife and discord in the society. Yet journalists know what society expects of them and they view their role as an opportunity to make an important contribution, even if they get little in return. □

# Closing the Gap

## The New World Information Order

While rapid advances in communications technology have made the developed world information-rich, developing countries continue to lag behind in their efforts to redress the North-South news imbalance. Western opposition to the New World Information Order makes improved coverage of the Third World unlikely.

BY C. ANTHONY GIFFARD

African nations have long taken an interest in promoting a more balanced flow of international news. More than a decade ago, the Organization of African Unity adopted the "Cultural Charter for Africa" which stated that "there can be no cultural policy without corresponding policies in information and communication."

The charter called on African governments to ensure the "total decolonization" of the mass media and urged them to cooperate to break the monopoly of non-African countries in this field. Africans like Tunisia's Mustapha Masmoudi and Senegal's Amadou Mahtar M'Bow, director general of UNESCO, have been key figures in the debate over the New World Information Order (NWIO).

It was at the UNESCO 19th General Conference in Nairobi in 1976 that the NWIO issue first drew international attention. In order to head off a resolution that Western delegates feared would give UNESCO's sanction to government control over news media, the United States offered to help Third World countries develop their own communications infrastructures.

One proposal was to use American funds and personnel to develop regional training centers for broadcasters and journalists. The other was to be a major effort to apply the benefits of advanced

technology—particularly communications satellites—to developing nations.

Now a decade later, it is appropriate to ask to what extent we have in fact achieved a better balance in international news flow. In the case of the United States at least, the picture is not encouraging.

Americans have long been interested in the possibilities of technology as an answer to the world's problems. From Ben Franklin with his kites in search of an electrically powered paradise to Marshall McLuhan's vision of a satellite-networked global village, a succession of visionaries have believed in the possibilities of creating an ideal society based on science and technology.

Technology is seen as one answer to the problem of uneven distribution of wealth and resources between the post-industrial "information societies" of Europe, Japan, and North America on the one hand and the developing Third World on the other. Some experts suggest that the introduction of micro-electronic processes to the developing countries could be the panacea for the North-South problem, allowing those nations to leapfrog into the sophisticated industrial world of the 21st century.

Certainly, the new technologies have brought about a quantum leap in the ability of people and nations to communicate with each other. Technically at least, it is now possible to meet the core demands of proponents of a New World Information Order—that all population groups should have the opportunity to

make their voices heard and that one-way communication should give way to all-around exchange.

More information is flowing around the globe and the cost of transmitting, receiving, and storing it is decreasing. The new satellite technologies have largely reduced the importance of "gateway cities" in Europe, Japan, and the U.S. that previously handled the bulk of the world's communications traffic. Direct horizontal communication on a South-South basis is now a reality.

UNESCO's International Program for the Development of Communication, an effort by the international community to enhance the communications capability of the developing world, also has put its trust in the technologies. Among the projects it has funded are studies of facilities for international exchange of information through global satellite systems and the application of communications technology to rural areas. An underlying premise of all these efforts is that such exchanges would benefit not only the information poor but the information rich. The lives of all would be enriched through exposure to the ideas and cultures of other nations.

The technical progress that has taken place in international communications is impressive. In 1960, the passive reflecting satellite Echo I demonstrated that a radio signal could be bounced off a satellite and picked up by another earth station thousands of miles away. The fifth generation of Intelsat satellites, now being deployed, carries 12,000 voice cir-

*C. Anthony Giffard is professor of communications at the University of Washington in Seattle. He has authored books and articles on international news flow.*

cuits, plus two color TV channels, with world-wide coverage.

As capacity has increased, costs have dropped. The cost per circuit per year in 1965 was \$22,000. But the next generation of satellites will handle 100,000 circuits at \$30 a year each. The costs of associated computer equipment have fallen equally rapidly.

The implications for information exchange between the developing world and the industrialized countries are obvious. The U.S. and the Soviet Union are vying with each other to link Third World countries to their respective satellite systems, Intelsat and Intersputnik. Both offer earth stations as part of their aid packages. Since the satellites are virtually cost-insensitive to distance, people in remote and rural areas theoretically have access to transmitted materials as cheaply as the city dweller in a developed country. Today, the Intelsat system has more than 100 member nations, who between them generate more than 95 percent of all international communications traffic.

Most of the members of Intelsat are developing countries, including African states, and among them they control a third of the corporation's investment shares, which are based on use of the system. Several developing countries now have domestic satellite systems based on spare capacity on Intelsat. Regional systems have linked developing countries directly together for the first time. Systems either in operation now or in the planning stage include Afrosat, an African system for the 38-member Panaftel group; the ASEAN network using Indonesia's PALAPA satellite; an Arab regional system, Arabsat; and an Andean system to serve Latin American nations.

The availability of low-cost transmis-

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**“This perceived ideological orientation meant that when IPS tried to break into Western markets, particularly the U.S., it ran into a political storm.”**

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sion facilities, together with the establishment of national news agencies in more than 120 countries, has greatly increased the flow of news across frontiers. Narinder Aggarwala of the United Nations Development Programme estimates there are now no fewer than 16 regional news pools operating among developing countries that could not have existed before.

A typical example is the Pan African News Agency. Others include Accion de Sistemas Informativos Nacionales (ASIN), a regional pool of 16 national news agencies of Latin American and Caribbean countries. ASIN uses satellite links to exchange news daily. In some cases, there is also an exchange of news between regional systems. ASIN, for example, now has a reciprocal news exchange with the Middle Eastern news pool, FANA. Another example of an inter-regional system is the News Agencies Pool of Non-Aligned Countries. The new technologies have also made possible the growth of a new international news agency, Inter Press Service (IPS), which focuses on Third World countries.

These encouraging developments do not mean, however, that the gap between the developing countries and the advanced information societies is closing. If anything, the new technologies are widening the communications gap between the rich and poor nations.

While the most advanced countries are awash in new information systems, the poorest nations have barely wet their feet. One communications finance expert has estimated that other countries will have to invest \$50 billion a year over the next 30 years just to bring their communications systems up to *present* American standards. By then, the U.S. itself will have vastly increased the range and size of its own system, continuing to outstrip its competitors.

While the developing nations' news agencies have upgraded their communications capabilities through the use of satellites, these often are low capacity telex channels. By contrast, the American agencies, the Associated Press and United Press International, are in the forefront of technological innovation. AP, for example, now distributes its news directly into the computers of sub-



**Dakar, Senegal:** “While the most advanced countries are awash in new information systems, the poorest countries have barely wet their feet”

scribers in the U.S. via WESTAR satellite. UPI has linked its journalists worldwide into a single high-speed network.

Most American newspapers now get their news agency copy directly from satellite receivers and do their editing electronically. Because of the extra costs involved in keyboarding hard copy into their systems, many editors are reluctant to accept news delivered by traditional means, such as telex. As a result, unless Third World news services can get their materials carried on the U.S. domestic distribution systems, they are unlikely to break into the world's largest media market.

The impact of the new technology on news, therefore, has been to increase the amount flowing within countries, among the Third World nations through regional pools, and from the North to the South through improved communications links. It has also made possible a larger flow of news from South to North. But in fact little has been achieved in this dimension.

The reason is that what is technically possible is a very different matter from



R. Greenough/UNESCO

what is politically and economically feasible. The difficulty lies in the very different attitudes in the developed and developing worlds toward the role of news media, its function in society, and the very definition of what is news. The recent debates in UNESCO concerning the New World Information Order illustrate these differences very clearly.

To Western journalists, news is simply an impartial report of an event. To some Third World leaders, news is any statement that can advance the objectives of the government. Much of the news in the Western media, it is alleged, focuses on the aberrational and the negative. Many Third World journalists perceive the real news as their slow, painful process of development with its victories and setbacks, rather than the coups and earthquakes that beset them.

The political and economic factors involved in attempts to change existing international news flow patterns are perhaps best illustrated by two recent developments. One is the experience of Inter Press Service in trying to distribute its news to media in the United States; the other is the U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO.

Inter Press Service is an international news agency that specializes in news

relating to the Third World. Its primary emphasis is on developing horizontal communications links and promoting news and information flows among the developing countries. In addition, the agency distributes news about the Third World to clients in the industrialized countries of the North, thus enhancing the South-North flow.

As of 1983, IPS had bureaus or correspondents in more than 60 countries and had distribution or news exchange agreements with some 30 Third World news agencies. Bureaus in several European countries translate and adapt IPS material for use in local media. Third World nationals form the majority of IPS's staff and correspondents, even in some European bureaus.

About 80 percent of the news distributed by IPS is produced by its own correspondents. IPS also has contracts with several national news agencies in the Third World to distribute their materials to IPS clients. The agency carries several special feature services, including two focusing on the role of women in the developing world. The IPS services emphasize news about the Third World and the Third World in relation to the industrialized West.

By the budgetary standards of the Big Four agencies (AP, UPI, Agence France-Presse, Reuters), IPS is a shoestring operation. It has no wealthy national base to finance its foreign operations. The countries it has traditionally served have few privately owned media that can afford substantial subscriptions. Were it not for inexpensive satellite links, it probably could not exist. The agency is frequently strapped for cash. It finds itself squeezed between the powerful commercial agencies on the one hand and Third World government and inter-governmental initiatives to promote news flow on the other.

One reason for the agency's precarious financial position is that IPS has a definite philosophical perspective. To the developing countries, IPS represents a strong protagonist of the New International Economic Order and its linkage with the New World Information Order. It is perceived as supporting the more "progressive" movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, while opposing right-wing govern-

ments. This perceived ideological orientation meant that when IPS tried to break into Western markets, particularly the United States, it ran into a political storm.

Distribution of the agency's services in the U.S. was handled by Interlink Press Service, a non-profit organization set up in New York in 1980. It translated and adapted IPS material, as well as news from a variety of other alternative sources, for the U.S. media market. Breaking into that market was not an easy task.

Technologically, Interlink was innovative. It received feeds from IPS via Intelsat channels, and in turn fed American news into the IPS international network. Early attempts to distribute the service domestically to U.S. subscribers by mail were unsuccessful, partly because the time taken meant it was not competitive and partly because of editors' reluctance to accept copy that had to be keyboarded into their computers.

But Interlink's attempts to distribute its copy over the AP satellite channel were not successful either. The AP would not carry the service unless it had a certain number of guaranteed subscribers to begin with. The editors would not buy the service unless they could try it out first—and they couldn't because it wasn't available on the AP satellite.

Interlink resorted to yet another new technology—distributing its copy on a nationwide time-sharing computer network. Any subscriber could dial the network, making only a local phone call, and access the Interlink files. That worked well for some institutional users, like church groups and universities, but was not acceptable to news media, accustomed to getting news fed directly into their computers off satellites. As a result of lack of support and little prospect of gaining much, Interlink shut down in 1986.

North American subscribers can still get the Inter Press Service, but no longer tailored to their specific audiences. And politically, IPS still has to fight the perception that Third World journalists, whatever their qualifications, are under open or hidden pressure to write in a way pleasing to their

governments. As one editor is quoted as saying, "In the Third World, the good journalists are in jail and those who aren't in jail aren't good."

IPS/Interlink could potentially play an important role in improving the balance of international news flow. It offers an alternative source of news from a Third World perspective. It has access to technology that makes it possible to distribute that news. But so far, political and economic restraints have stymied its growth.

In part, the opposition to IPS is one reaction of the Western media to Third World pressure to implement a new information order. Caught off guard when the issue was first raised in the 1970s, Western governments and media led by the United States have become more aggressive in defending their interests. An example is the withdrawal of both the U.S. and Great Britain from UNESCO due in part to UNESCO's support for the New World Information Order.

The withdrawal was the culmination of a long and bitter debate over UNESCO's communications policies. The mandate in the agency's charter to promote the "free flow of ideas by word or image" reflected the ideology and foreign policy objectives of the Western nations that dominated the agency in its early years. The free flow doctrine came under challenge, however, as more nations, particularly in Africa and Asia, achieved independence and a vote in UN agencies. UNESCO's unconditional support for a free flow of information was then modified to back a "free

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**"Some experts suggest that the introduction of micro-electronic processes to the developing countries could be the panacea for the North-South problem."**

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and balanced flow."

News organizations in the U.S. and Europe, perceiving a threat to their operations in the Third World, began to pay close attention to UNESCO's communications policies. They took steps to head off any new information order that would be inimical to their interests.

To achieve this, the U.S. media adopted several key strategies. One was to form the World Press Freedom Committee to lobby on behalf of the free flow doctrine at UNESCO meetings. And it put pressure on the U.S. government to take a stronger line against UNESCO's media policies. News reports and editorials set the agenda for congressional debate. One result was an amendment to the State Department appropriations bill in 1982 that threatened to cut off U.S. funding for UNESCO if the agency should in any way restrict the free flow of information.

Then, in December 1983, the U.S. informed UNESCO that it intended to withdraw from the organization a year later. A study nearing completion by this author of media coverage of the withdrawal demonstrates that the media

was strongly hostile to UNESCO. A content analysis of news agency files, of what actually appeared in the press, and of editorials and columns shows that more than two-thirds of the themes in the reports were critical of UNESCO.

The most common complaint was that the agency is politicized. The second largest cluster of criticisms centered on allegations of mismanagement. Then came press issues. Here UNESCO was accused of supporting the New World Information Order, of favoring state control of media systems, and of wanting to license journalists and impose codes of conduct on the press. It is clear from the coverage that UNESCO's communications policies were a major factor in the decision to withdraw. Britain withdrew a year later, citing similar concerns.

These two events—the failure of Interlink News Service to break into the U.S. market and the withdrawal from UNESCO—suggest that Third World hopes of more and better coverage of their concerns in Western media are unlikely to be achieved in the near future.

The attack on IPS and UNESCO has been particularly vehement in the United States. In Europe, where there is a long tradition of government subvention of the media, there is much greater tolerance of and support for what these agencies are trying to achieve. Governments in countries like West Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Austria, and France have channeled funds to IPS, often through their development aid agencies or through non-governmental organizations set up for such purposes. Some of these operations, particularly in West Germany and Sweden, have been remarkably successful in attracting media clients.

It has, however, taken a deliberate political decision by the governments involved to fund the service. This in turn is based on a perception that the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, both politically and economically, and that it is in their own self-interest to promote an understanding of Third World issues among their citizens. The new technologies have made it possible for these initiatives to germinate. But without the right political and economic climate, there is little chance they will take root and flourish. □

**UNESCO Director General Amadou Mahtar M'Bow: "A key figure in the debate over the New World Information Order"**



D. Rogers/United Nations/UNESCO

sometimes confusing interpretations. Apparently, they found more favor with one-party governments, which advocate some control of foreign journalists, resent the overwhelming influence of Western media and culture, and saw the recommendations as a way to limit criticism of their policies.

To a certain extent, they were also more palatable to the socialist countries, which eventually endorsed the NWIO as an opportunity to mark their solidarity with the southern hemisphere against Western "imperialism."

### PANA's Birth

It was in this heated atmosphere that PANA was founded in 1979. According to its new director-general, Auguste Mpassi-Muba (Congo), nominated in 1986, PANA's aims are to rectify the "distorted" image of Africa created by the international news agencies and to let the voice of Africa be heard on the international scene.

The PANA project was of particular importance to UNESCO Director-General M'Bow, a former cabinet minister in Senegal. Whereas the idea for such an agency was formulated as early as 1963 at the constitutive meeting of the Organization of African Unity, the decision to create it wasn't taken until 1976 at a meeting of the African News Agencies Union in Accra. In 1979, the OAU decided to locate PANA's general headquarters in Dakar, and Cheikh Ousmane Diallo (Niger) was appointed director.

As a specialized OAU body, PANA is under the control of the organization's Conference of Information Ministers, a steering committee which is selected by an inter-governmental council of 14 member-states. The continent has been divided into five regions, each with a specified number of representatives on the council: North Africa—2; West Africa—4; Central Africa—3; East Africa—3; and, southern Africa—2. These five regions correspond to five "pools" with their respective headquarters in Tripoli, Lagos, Kinshasa, Khartoum, and Lusaka.

As of this year, the news agencies of 42 countries are PANA members (out of 51 OAU member states): Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Ethiopia,

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## **"One of PANA's most formidable challenges is undoubtedly the problem of combining its militant aims with objective reporting—a necessary prerequisite for credibility."**

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Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, São Tomé, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zaire, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Notable among the countries which did not sign the PANA convention is Côte d'Ivoire, one of the most pro-Western governments in Africa, whereas Libya was chosen as the site of one of the regional "pools." (The five pools conduct technical and administrative operations and train journalists and technicians.) PANA's service is broadcast in three languages, English, French, and Arabic, with Portuguese being a prospective fourth service.

Dakar is the main center for the collection and distribution of the news. The national news agencies send their dispatches to the general headquarters, where they are translated into the different languages. They are broadcast by radio, the time-table and the wavelengths varying according to language and destination, with a daily average of eight to nine hours in English and French and an hour in Arabic. PANA has also established two local bureaus—in Addis Ababa to cover OAU activities and in Harare to disseminate news concerning the southern African liberation movements.

The PANA service is distributed outside Africa, via satellite, to UNESCO headquarters in Paris, to India, and to the Italian news agency, ANSA.

PANA's permanent staff numbers less than 100 (journalists, technicians, and other employees), with about 40 based in Dakar, and one or two in each national news agency, who select news items and transmit them to the regional

headquarters. In addition to the national news agency dispatches, PANA supplies special reports on economic and scientific matters, as well as press reviews. The total volume of copy per day amounts to more than 25,000 words.

The International Communication Development Program, which was finally endorsed at a meeting of 35 member-states in Acapulco in 1982, was endowed with \$1.5 million to launch PANA. The agency has since received contributions from several international organizations (including the United Nations Development Programme and the Arab Bank for Development in Africa) and from several countries (France for radio transmissions, the U.S. and Soviet Union for personnel training). PANA's budget for 1984 and 1985 was kept under \$3.5 million, which should have been provided by the contributions of member-states, although some of them do not pay regularly.

### Objective Reporting

One of PANA's most formidable challenges is undoubtedly the problem of combining its militant aims with objective reporting—a necessary prerequisite for credibility.

According to its mandate, as officially proclaimed in the charter, PANA should contribute to "a better understanding of the liberation struggle against colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, racism, and zionism." It should also "rectify the image of Africa, its countries and its peoples, which has been distorted by partial and negative information disseminated by foreign press agencies."

The still-surviving resentment against colonial domination, the long struggle of the liberation movements of southern Africa, and the hostility of northern African countries toward Israel no doubt explain this rather aggressive tone.

But the charter also indicates that PANA should aim at the "speedy and permanent circulation of objective and responsible news." As its main sources of information come from one-party or military states, the objectivity of the information gathered and distributed by PANA has been questioned.

There are indeed very few countries in Africa which can claim to have a free

press. The governments who tolerate or encourage a democratic system in the Western sense of the word, with several political parties and free elections, can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

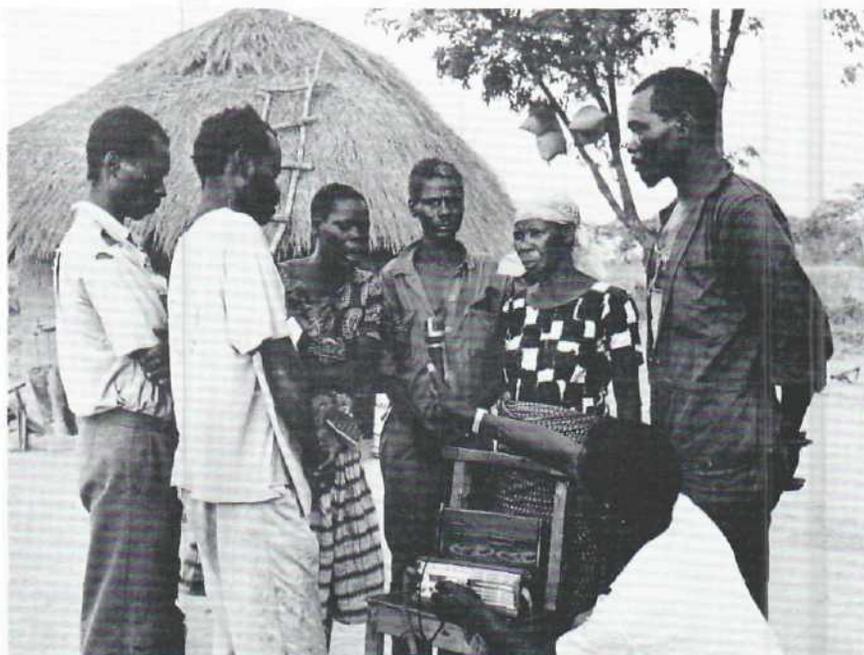
A notable exception is Senegal, where newspapers proliferate and have remarkable freedom of expression. In Sudan, newspapers representing different political parties have appeared since the coup which toppled Gaafar Nimeiry. There are several political parties in Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt, but no real freedom of the press: The newspapers know perfectly well that they will be banned if they transgress non-written rules of behavior.

Liberia is another example of limited press freedom, despite U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz's remarks during his recent visit to Monrovia in which he referred to the government's "genuine progress" toward democracy. The executive director of the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, Michael Posner, reminded him that a journalist was bayoneted to death in November 1985 while in custody of the Executive Mansion guard.

Owing to its federal structure and history of some democratic practice (although marred by nepotism and corruption), Nigeria has managed to retain a range of newspapers of different opinions. But at what price? The recent letter bomb murder of one of the country's best journalists, Dele Giwa, editor of *Newswatch*, who was known for his unveiled criticisms of the present government, has even been attributed in some circles to the state security service.

But almost everywhere else, news agencies, television, radio, and newspapers are strictly controlled by the ruling party or the government—or their official mouthpieces.

According to its charter, PANA is not allowed to alter the contents of the news items supplied to its headquarters by the national news agencies. This has two consequences: First, in most cases, the news strictly reflects the official point of view of the member-states, and there is no room for differing opinions from opposition parties or individuals. Second, in the event of a dispute or a war between member-states, the conflicting views of each side have to be



"PANA's aims are to rectify the 'distorted' image of Africa created by the international news agencies and to let the voice of Africa be heard on the international scene"

UNESCO

relayed on the PANA wires.

So far, PANA has observed the rules. Its audience received the unaltered version of each party in recent conflicts, such as the Mali-Burkina Faso war and the struggle in Chad, with the Zairean news agency, AZAP, reporting the Ndjamena side of the story, and the Libyan news agency, JANA, supplying the Tripoli version. However, PANA editors are allowed to eliminate phrases or statements of a damaging or slanderous nature which might appear in incoming copy. PANA also has to keep an equitable balance of daily wordage among the various national agencies, and has set a limit of roughly 1,000 words for each.

The fact that PANA has been able to adopt a non-partisan attitude in inter-African disputes is a rather remarkable achievement. The first PANA director, Cheikh Ousmane Diallo, was a professional journalist, trained in France, who had long experience in mediating inter-African disputes as chief of staff for the OAU secretary-general. His successor, Auguste Mpassi-Muba, is also a media professional as former head of the Congolese news agency, ACI.

Much is yet to be done to achieve the goals set by the PANA charter. The international news agencies still enjoy a comfortable position in Africa, where Agence France-Presse and Reuters helped to create the national African news agencies and have maintained

their links with African journalists, many of whom have been trained in Paris, London, or New York. AP, Reuters, and AFP news services, though filtered by the national news agencies, are widely used in Africa, while the Soviet Tass and the Chinese Hinshua news agencies have gained little influence thus far.

The volume of copy delivered by PANA is still much smaller than that offered by the international news agencies. But as Olivier Boyd-Barrett and Michael Palmer said in their book, *The International News Agencies* a few years ago, AP, Reuters, and to a lesser extent, AFP provide their African customers with more news about America and Europe than about Africa.

These agencies view African news in terms of coups d'état, droughts, and inter-African quarrels—the "negative" stories which initially inspired UNESCO to advocate the NWIO.

Will PANA be able to redress this imbalance and improve the image of Africa? It is undoubtedly too early to venture a prediction, since it is only a few years since the first PANA news item was broadcast on May 15, 1983, after four years of preparation. But the first inter-African news agency has proven its capacity to establish a communications network among African national news agencies and to provide the media with "home-made" African news. □

# PANA: The Voice of Africa

Several regional news agencies have been established in developing countries to right inequities in international news flows. Despite difficulties with balance and objectivity, PANA has succeeded in expanding news coverage from an African perspective since its first broadcast in 1983.

BY CLAUDE WAUTHIER

The Pan-African News Agency (PANA), which began operating in 1983, was born in the wake of the debate over the New World Information Order (NWIO), initiated and sponsored by UNESCO.

PANA's creation was one concrete result of the battle waged by Third World countries against the Western news agencies—the Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI), Reuters, and Agence France-Presse (AFP)—which they accused of maintaining a *de facto* monopoly over the flow of international news and of presenting a biased image of the southern hemisphere.

In this battle, the Third World received the support of the socialist states, while the Western press and the American and British governments strongly objected to NWIO's objectives. The withdrawal of the U.S. and Britain from UNESCO was prompted to a large extent by their hostility to NWIO; as a result, UNESCO Director General Amadou Mahtar M'Bow—a resolute NWIO advocate—renounced his 1987 re-election bid after serving two terms in office.

After independence in the 1960s, most African countries began to estab-

lish national press agencies, and very soon the idea of an inter-African news agency—in accordance with pan-Africanist ideals—became a recurrent theme in the continent's political and journalistic circles.

Several professional associations such as the Pan-African Union of Journalists, which by 1965 already had links with the Afro-Asian Association of Journalists, were established to reduce the domination of Western news agencies. In 1975, Arab and African news agencies held a conference in Tunis and the following year, the non-aligned countries established a "pool" of their news agencies.

In 1977, at a London meeting of the Commonwealth Press Union, Asian and African journalists charged the Western news agencies with misrepresenting the Third World and advocated the creation of Third World and African news agencies. In Rabat a year later, a seminar of members of African journalism schools and institutes denounced the prevailing influence of Western media models in the teaching of journalism. And in France in 1978, Hervé Bourges (who later became an aide to M'Bow) published a book entitled *Décoloniser l'information*.

Similar initiatives had been taken in other parts of the Third World, such as the creation of the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), the Accion de Sistemas Informativos Nacionales (ASIN) in

Latin America, and in the Middle East, the Federation of Arabic News Agencies (FANA), the Islamic International News Agency (IINA), and the OPEP news agency. Much earlier, in 1964, a group of European-based journalists interested in the Third World founded the Inter Press Service (IPS) cooperative which established close links with South American press organs, the non-aligned "pool," and Arabic and African news agencies.

UNESCO joined the battle, undertaking a study of the ways and means by which the Third World could redress the imbalance between developing countries and the West in the field of information and communication. Sean McBride, a former Irish foreign minister and Nobel and Lenin Peace Prize winner, was entrusted with the task of preparing a report on the matter. Completed in 1979, the report was approved almost unanimously at the UNESCO 1980 general conference, and recommended what would later become the NWIO—itsself a part of the New International Economic Order (NIEO) advocated by the Third World.

It was to be implemented by a special UNESCO project, the International Communication Development Program. The McBride report condemned censorship, urged that journalists be guaranteed access to political dissidents (a suggestion which did not please the socialist countries), and called for effective measures to "circumscribe the actions" of the transnational news agencies. It also recommended that the media contribute to the development of the Third World.

The UNESCO proposals—particularly those regarding the "protection" of journalists—were strongly criticized in the West. The International Press Institute, the Inter-American Press Society, the American Newspaper Proprietors Association, and the World Press Freedom Committee (which included AP and UPI representatives) expressed fears that the NWIO could lead to a system of licensing journalists. Reuters' general manager called the McBride report a "hybrid monster."

In fact, the UNESCO proposals were couched in such carefully balanced phrases that they led to various and

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# “Assignment Africa”

The avalanche of news coverage of the Ethiopian famine brought the attention of the world to Africa's problems. Our reviewer analyzes a PBS documentary which followed the efforts of three Africa correspondents in an investigation into the difficulties of reporting on the continent.

BY MICHAEL PAUL MAREN

It's an old controversy. Africans and their sympathizers in the West find that Western press coverage of Africa is wholly inadequate. They charge that the Western press concentrates on the negative aspects of Africa or ignores the continent altogether.

Western press organizations often agree that their coverage is not what it should be and they place much of the blame on African governments for being uncooperative and overly sensitive to criticism, adding that covering the continent is logistically difficult and expensive. African governments have sought to regulate the foreign press as their domestic press is regulated, and foreign news agencies bristle at any hint of censorship.

But the debate remained academic until 1983 when famine devastated Ethiopia. The massive outpouring of assistance in response to news coverage of the famine was a powerful example of the influence of the Western media. But this show of power raised other troubling questions. Why had the Western press ignored reports of the famine for so long, even after network executives had seen the film footage from the refugee camps? How many lives could have been saved if it had been reported earlier? To what extent was the Ethiopian government responsible for blocking coverage of the crisis?

It was this neglect and the subsequent exhibition of the power of television which prompted *Inside Story*, the

*Michael Paul Maren is a freelance journalist and former assistant editor of Africa Report.*

PBS investigative news program, to examine the role of the Western press in Africa. The result was *Assignment Africa*, an hour-long documentary which was first aired on November 24, 1986.

At the beginning of the program, host and narrator Hodding Carter explained, "There is a difference between the Africa you read about or see on your TV screen, and the other more complex Africa that is hidden from you. This film is

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**“The media’s misunderstanding of African crises stems from a dearth of the kind of day-to-day coverage that would put extraordinary events like famines and coups into perspective.”**

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an attempt to examine why it is hidden.”

What Carter found was reporters in the field being frustrated by African governments in their efforts to get stories and then frustrated in their efforts to publicize the stories by their editors and public indifference. To illustrate, *Inside Story* tracked two television journalists and one photographer as they sought to gather and disseminate their material.

We are introduced to Tony Suau, a photographer for the *Denver Post*, and Mohamed Amin, head of the Nairobi-based Visnews, a television news agency. Both Amin and Suau filmed images of the Ethiopian famine that they

could not get published or aired. Both came up against editors who thought that there was no news in another African famine. But the Ethiopian crisis persisted and Amin's footage was eventually shown on the BBC and NBC, leading to the now-legendary avalanche of publicity and aid.

The irony is that despite the well-founded charge that Western news organizations pay attention only to disasters in Africa, the biggest Africa story in decades was ignored. Why was it ignored? *Inside Story* offered a few theories from interviewees such as racism and ignorance, but these possibilities were never really explored. Whatever the root causes, it was clear that network executives and editors simply could not grasp the significance of the crisis. It was a poignant example of how little understanding media decision-makers have about an entire continent.

But *Assignment Africa's* focus on the Ethiopian crisis is misplaced. The media's misunderstanding of African crises stems from a dearth of the kind of day-to-day coverage of the continent that would put extraordinary events like famines and coups into perspective.

The program moved closest to the source of the problem when it followed Gary Striker of Cable News Network—the only American television reporter based in black Africa—on a routine assignment in Uganda.

Striker says that he is planning to do a “positive story” on the reconstruction of Uganda under the new government of President Yoweri Museveni and a separate story on AIDS. He has scheduled an interview with Museveni and visits



## ASSIGNMENT AFRICA

the Ministry of Information in Kampala to get it confirmed. The next morning he drives an hour to State House in Entebbe only to find that the president has left town and all of his appointments are cancelled.

Any reporter who has worked in Africa can testify that this kind of thing is more the rule than the exception. Hours or even days can be wasted waiting for interviews that never materialize. But Strieker is visibly ruffled and tells us that without a decent interview with the president, there can be no story on Uganda's reconstruction. Now he will have no choice but to spend time on the "negative" AIDS story, just what the government doesn't want.

One can't help suspecting that after being stood up, Strieker gets some satisfaction by reporting the AIDS story. He later says that African governments could get better coverage if they would "manage" the press better. Does he mean that they should treat journalists

better? That he would be willing to trade positive press for better access to heads of state? It is never elaborated upon.

I found myself looking at Strieker and his camera and wondering if he really needed that interview with Museveni to do his "positive" story. Certainly there are other government officials who could have spoken about the subject of reconstruction and there also must be hundreds of stories in the streets of Kampala that—better than an interview with the president—might reveal the "more complex Africa that is hidden."

Even the AIDS story that Strieker finally files is not as complete as he would have liked. He hasn't gotten an interview with an AIDS patient, nor will the hospital staff directly address the issue. But while Strieker is frustrated by Ugandan officials in his efforts to report, *Inside Story's* video tape is quietly rolling, giving us as true a slice of African reality as we've seen on television.

Strieker's problem is that he needs a

"hard" news story that will play at home. AIDS is a hard news story no matter what you say about it. An interview with a head of state is a hard news story—though neither is necessarily revealing about realities in Africa. An interview with a market woman or a policeman in Kampala would probably tell us more about the African condition—but it's not hard news.

This has everything to do with the nature of television news and less to do with the fact that we are talking about Africa. *Assignment Africa* pointed out that during a test period, less than 1 percent of the total nightly news coverage was on Africa other than South Africa and North Africa.

But how much international coverage is there on the 21-minute evening newscasts? How much coverage is there of the Middle East, South America, Asia, or even Europe when "terrorism" or some kind of catastrophe isn't involved? If one were to judge New York City by the information given on the nightly news, there would only be the impression of corruption and racial violence. Is coverage of Africa really any different?

The crisis is within the nature of American journalism in general. Network executives think that they know "what sells" and that's what we see on the air. Certainly there has been no shortage of Africa coverage on PBS, starting with Ali Mazrui's *The Africans*, the BBC's *End of Empire*, and *Assignment Africa* itself. But these are documentaries, a species of news coverage that is virtually extinct on network television. Unfortunately, it is the form best suited for conveying a sense of Africa's complex realities to the American public. □



**Africa Report** welcomes comments from its readers on issues raised in the magazine and on matters relating to African political and economic development. For reasons of space a contribution sent in the form of a letter to the editor stands a much greater chance of publication than one submitted as an article. Letters should be as brief as possible, normally between 100 and 400 words.

The editor retains the right to abridge or otherwise alter letters for reasons of space or other editorial requirement. It is editorial policy to maintain a balance of views on controversial issues.

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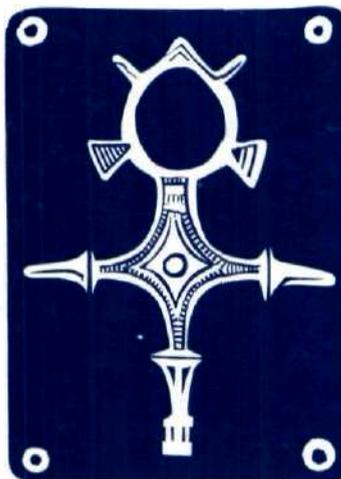


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