

# Pioneers, Rebels, and a few Villains

## 150 Years of Journalism in Eastern Africa

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Edited by Charles Onyango-Obbo





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## **KAS Media Programme Sub-Sahara Africa**

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) is an independent, non-profit German political foundation that aims to strengthen democratic forces around the world. KAS runs media programmes in Africa, Asia and South East Europe.

KAS Media Programme Sub-Sahara Africa believes that a free and independent media is crucial for democracy. As such, it is committed to the development and maintenance of a diverse media landscape on the continent, the monitoring role of journalism, as well as ethically based political communication.

# **Pioneers, Rebels, and a Few Villains**

150 Years of Journalism  
in Eastern Africa

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Edited by Charles Onyango-Obbo

Published by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Media Programme Sub-Sahara Africa

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## Foreword

### Pioneers and Villains

When Onyango-Obbo and I first discussed this book during a meeting in Kampala, we were surrounded by historic icons. Around the corner from the breakfast room was that Sheraton swimming-pool in which Idi Amin had organised swimming races for diplomats' children in the 1970s. Three hills away was the once-famous Makerere University, where big minds like Ngugi wa Thiong'o had studied and the academic tycoon Ali Mazrui had lectured. Irrespective of what the once brilliant university might stand for today, it was clear during that breakfast on a hill in Kampala that a book on journalism and writing in Eastern Africa would be a huge task.

KAS Media Africa, the Media Programme of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation is based in South Africa but is active all over the continent. And East Africa is important to the foundation with its offices in Dar es Salaam, Kampala and Nairobi.

Way back in the 1990s, long before joining KAS, I had the privilege of being one of those Western correspondents based in the Kenyan capital, who were far too often condemned for their reporting about Africa. Many of us were all the more criticised by people who could not read our feature stories, as they did not understand Italian, German or Norwegian. The 1990s were a time when brave scribes and members of civil society in Kenya demanded multi-partism and scrutinised the powers-that-be in public. While based in Nairobi for close to nine years, I got to know and make friends with some of these colleagues, namely, Wahome Mutahi, Joseph Odindo, the late Mo Amin and his son Salim, Catherine Gicheru, Josiah Obat and others. Those were the times when a manuscript of Wahome would be smuggled out of the country on a floppy disk in a shirt pocket. Those were the times when only Daniel arap Moi watched KBC, unless they were airing the soap opera *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Journalism was risky then — and it had consequences. These are not sentimental memories but they are reassuring about what has been achieved in Kenya and they highlight the shrinking media spaces in countries like Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

There are differing opinions about the role of the media in this book. KAS Media Africa believes that media and activism exclude one another. Media should rather investigate, question and look for the best way forward for society and mankind.

One of the things that Obbo and I agreed upon, even when we had long discussions across borders, was that we wanted a book that stands out on the shelf, a publication that speaks to those interested in writing and that media will pick up and consult, because it explains tradition and history. And it shows the wealth in characters and talents.

KAS Media Africa hopes that you enjoy the read!

Christoph Plate

Director KAS Media Africa

Johannesburg, South Africa

July 2021

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## Introduction

### Of Madmen and Madwomen

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In his wonderful book *Coups and Earthquakes: Reporting the World for America*, Mort Rosenblum relishes American journalist and author HR Knickerbocker's definition of foreign correspondents: "Whenever you find hundreds of thousands of sane people trying to get out of a place and a little bunch of mad men struggling to get in, you know the latter are newspapermen", adding that, "Editors are madder still, suffering hypertension over whether their man reached some obscure capital in time to duplicate stories available to them by other means.

"But Knickerbocker's madmen are in fact a surprisingly stable and talented bunch. The madness is in the system".

It is not just foreign correspondents who are madmen. Many times, it feels like most journalists, particularly the very good and bold ones are. I can think of nearly a hundred cases, but these three are deeply seared into my brain.

Peter Mungherera was a journalist at *The Monitor*, Uganda's leading independent newspaper, in the late 1990s, when I was its Managing Editor. He was as eccentric a reporter as you will find.

A heavy smoker and a little twitchy, many times he did not complete his sentences. His shoelaces were mostly undone, and his clothes rumpled. Mungherera's favourite notetaking platforms were the inner covers of his cigarette packets and the white part of their foil. He had the worst handwriting I had encountered and was also a bad typist.

His stories, however, were pure gold. To make sense of them, I would call him to my office, and he would spread all the many scraps of notes and cigarette foils on the conference table, and we would talk through them, as he arranged them

in some order like a jigsaw puzzle. From that mess, we got a record number of scoops.

There was a method to Mungherera's madness. His social awkwardness meant he was less threatening, and he exploited it. Scattering his notes, while a nightmare for editors, was a kind of cypher in an environment where the mobile phones and notebooks of journalists doing sensitive stories were often snatched by suspected security operatives. Mungherera's notes were useless to anyone but him.

One time we got stuck on a major story involving one of Uganda's deputy prime ministers. Neither he nor his aides would talk to *The Monitor*. One afternoon Peter disappeared from the newsroom. He returned early that evening and scattered his notes on the table. He had just had a long conversation with the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) at his home and he had even been served tea while at it.

How had he pulled this feat off? Well, he had taken a cab to the DPM's home, and put on the act of a distressed relative to the security guards at the gate. They let him through, and he was led into the living room to wait for the DPM. When the DPM came in, he did not recognise him, and asked him to explain who he was. Mungherera came clean and apologised. Both bemused and impressed at his bluff, he took to Peter and they spoke at length. As he explained his exploits to me, I broke into a panicked sweat thinking of the many ways his adventure could have backfired. He was totally calm.

Paul Waibale Snr was a veteran Ugandan editor. He was a much older, and in comportment, more disorderly version of Mungherera. Waibale was the Editor at the influential, but now defunct, *Weekly Topic* in Kampala, where I started my journalism. It was in the dying years of the typewriter in African newsrooms. Overweight and generally unkempt, Waibale was a chain smoker. He rarely got his shirt buttons in the right holes and his trousers were all over the place. He would sit over the typewriter to "bang out" copy, as the good old saying went, stopping to doze off for a few minutes. By the time he was done, there would be cigarette ashes all over the typewriter and table and an unsightly litter of scraps of food and folded papers everywhere.

He would rip the paper off the typewriter and it was magic that took your breath away. Waibale could resurrect a dead story and was master of the tongue-in-cheek and the dramatic headline. This seemingly chaotic and messy man was a genius.

Then, in March 2006, I was part of a Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) delegation to Ethiopia with CPJ Africa Programme Director Julia Crawford and veteran American journalist and CPJ Board member Charlayne Hunter-Gault. Following the closely fought election of 2005, which the opposition accused Prime Minister Meles Zenawi and his ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition of stealing, protests broke out in the country. The most violent were in the capital, Addis Ababa, where the opposition had put in a strong showing.

Meles came down hard on the protests with a fury that shocked the world and horrified Ethiopians. A record 27 journalists were arrested in a crackdown on the independent media in the wake of the protests and charged with treason and terrorism. We headed to Ethiopia to plead for their release and, failing that, for their conditions to be improved and for them to get a fair trial.

Ethiopia had become the leading jailor of journalists in Africa and the third highest in the world after China and Cuba. Among the journalists was Serkalem Fassil, then the 26-year-old publisher of the *Asqual*, *Menelik* and *Sanetaw* titles. She was five months pregnant and had been in prison since November 2005. Also, in the notorious Kaliti prison with her was her fiancé, the redoubtable Eskinder Nega.

We pressed a great deal of flesh and met many powerful people in Addis Ababa, including PM Meles himself. We went to the meeting with Meles straight from a visit with the journalists at the notorious Kaliti prison. We spent hours planning the meeting and managed to outfox Meles by not providing the red meat lectures on human rights that foreigners hand out to oppressive African leaders, sticking to moralistic and emotional issues that did not trigger him. At one point, I addressed Meles as "comrade" and made references to some key moments in his guerrilla war history. The meeting went well.

Meles promised that Serkalem would be moved to a low-security facility or health facility and said we could go back to the prison the next day and take for her vitamins, a pregnancy book since it was their first child, and reading materials that had been denied for the rest of the journalists. As we made to leave, he said, "Only comrade Obbo" will go to the prison, and promised that, if the journalists were found guilty, he would pardon them.

The next day I loaded a car with books, vitamins and medicines, and went back to Kaliti. I spoke to the journalists again, and though I doubted it would fly, I felt duty bound to tell them that Meles had promised a pardon, and had hinted at

lesser charges and even an early release, if they could signal some contrition. Their response was universally visceral. They told me they would rather die than retract or apologise.

We kept track of their cases. I lost hope and wrote a few opinion pieces in the *Daily Nation*, Kenya, and *Daily Monitor*, in Uganda, denouncing Meles. A few months later, in 2007, they were found guilty. Before the story broke in the media, a call came through to my office at Nation Centre. It was the Prime Minister's office in Addis Ababa. A Meles aide came on the phone and told me he had promised our delegation he would pardon the journalists if they were convicted, and he was keeping his word. Shortly after the call, the news broke that they had indeed been pardoned.

About a week later, I got a call from one of the pardoned journalists. He was in Nairobi with some of his colleagues. They had fled Ethiopia, he said. I told him they should make their way to The Stanley Hotel across from the Nation Centre, and order drinks or snacks, I would catch up with them and also pay the bill. I thought I would find three or four of them. I was taken aback; they were ten, if my memory serves me well. Serkalem and Eskinder were not among them.

Mungherera and Waibale's stories do not appear anywhere else in this book. Neither do those of the journalists in Ethiopia during the Meles period, and their refusal to countenance a plea deal for early release from the terrible conditions in which they were being held. They were likely to spend the rest of their lives behind bars — if they were lucky to survive the hangman's noose — but they did not buckle.

Journalist and writer Befakadu Hailu, who was jailed with five other members of the Zone9 blogger collective, however, looks at the more recent tribulations of new media journalists in Ethiopia and the rest of Eastern Africa in his chapter.

All these journalists were among the hundreds of other brave, eccentric, adventurous, ground-breaking, and mad men and women who stared peril in the face and pioneered the craft in Eastern Africa over the last 150 years. Those whose exploits and misfortunes are examined are a tiny fraction. That is success, because we thought at the outset that there are so many glorious journalists who are now forgotten, along with the game-changing impact of their work, that if a few chapters could cover them all then the void would be smaller than we thought.

One of our hopes is that the lives and work of the media workers covered in this book, the missing ones, and the quest for why African journalists continue to put their necks on the line in perilous environments will stir further exploration and get a younger generation of journalists and creators of content to tell their stories in new ways. That though, to be honest, was hardly the preconceived aim of this book, which started with a telephone call from the director of Konrad Adenauer Stiftung's (KAS) sub-Saharan Africa's Media Programme, Christoph Plate, in early October 2019.

Christoph and I were both scheduled to be in the Uganda capital, Kampala, for a KAS-sponsored African geopolitics conference, and were to stay in the same hotel. He wanted us to meet for breakfast to discuss a book project.

On the day, it was a rainy morning in Kampala and some light water splashes were falling on our table as we breakfasted. Christoph liked the muckraker series, particularly the latest one, *Southern African Muckraking: 300 years of investigative journalism that has shaped the region*, edited by Anton Harber.

Could that be done for East Africa? Is it the right thing to do now? Should it look at East Africa or Eastern Africa? And how might it be done? We tossed up many questions, but it became clear quickly that there were worlds of difference between Southern and Eastern Africa.

The first is just the varied colonial experiences of the two regions. Eastern Africa had far more colonial powers with their hands in the pie than Southern Africa: Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, and Portugal and the Sultanate of Oman (in Zanzibar). Eastern Africa had majority Muslim and Arabic-speaking nations, that Southern Africa does not. Weaving a single thematic story, based on either investigative journalism or the development of media, would be an onerous task.

The second was settler history and how, together with colonialism, they influenced how records were kept and in turn the manner in which journalism evolved. Outside of Kenya, East Africa did not have any other significant European settler experience. Immigrant and settler communities often have a need for diary writing and record-keeping that pre-colonial African societies did not. The latter relied more on oral records, and some even rejected recording as political protest.

There were many reasons for this, but part of it was to manage risk. With wars, migrations, and even the real danger of being captured and sold into slavery, your

records were safer when they were stored in your head, instead of manuscripts, whatever form they took. A traditional book looking back to over 200 years of journalism in Eastern Africa was possible, but would be a lifetime project.

Next was the question of East Africa vs Eastern Africa. East Africa in popular usage was for long confined to Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, which formed the first East African Community (EAC). The EAC has since expanded to include Rwanda, Burundi, and lately South Sudan.

After the Second World War and the end of Germany's colonial rule over Tanzania, the British administered Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania almost as one territory. The three countries, and especially Kenya and Uganda, have too much in common, and telling a regional story built around them makes sense, but is lazy. It does not yield much variety.

Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century realpolitik have also remade the region. Uganda got embroiled in the Rwanda Patriotic Front's war in Rwanda, and later the two countries played a key role in removing the Democratic Republic of Congo's (DRC) — then known as Zaire — corrupt dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997. Old East Africa and Central Africa eventually collapsed into one political region. The DRC has now applied to join the EAC and it will likely be admitted before 2024.

Uganda then got knee-deep in Sudan, backing the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), as Khartoum lent support to the northern Uganda-based Lords' Resistance Army of Joseph Kony that was fighting the Kampala government.

Kenyan diplomacy in ending the Sudan civil war and the death of the SPLA's charismatic leader John Garang, who believed in a united Sudan, in July 2005, all but ensured that the peace would end in South Sudan independence in 2011.

The long civil war in Somalia meanwhile sucked in neighbours from further south, with Uganda sending the first contingent of the African Union peacekeeping force (AMISOM) to Somalia in 2007. Burundi followed, then Kenya, and Ethiopia, which is seen by Somali nationalists as a peacekeeper by day and an imperial occupier by night.

The post-Cold War order had conspired to weave the region together in complex ways, although differences in the histories of countries were still many. But, again, the contrast with Southern Africa remained stark. This wider political Eastern African is closer to the United Nation's Statistics Division scheme of

geographic regions, in which 20 territories/countries make up Eastern Africa: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, South Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and Somaliland, Comoros, Mauritius, Seychelles, Mozambique, Madagascar, Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (more commonly included in Southern Africa), and Réunion and Mayotte, which are French overseas territories in the Indian Ocean.

In the end, we settled on an Eastern Africa scope covering 16 countries: Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, Sudan, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Comoros, Seychelles, Madagascar, DRC, and Mauritius. References in the book to *Eastern Africa* mean all or most of the 16 and East Africa is confined to the six-member East African Community region, and sometimes to the original three, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.

By December 2019, all was set for the book project to begin in February 2020. Then the Covid-19 pandemic brought the project to a halt. It was too much for some writers and they dropped out. One of them got seriously ill with the virus but fought back to health to complete their chapter. Travel was not possible, and libraries and bookshops closed. The internet was the saviour. However, the pandemic was also an opportunity, as some people became introspective, and those who could shelter in place, all sanitised and masked, could make more time to research (mostly online, the books in their home libraries, and through phone calls) and write.

The stressful times, though, were not helpful for temperaments and there was much head butting, but some beautiful things grew out of it all, and the book came together. It is a trophy of the battle fought and won through the pandemic in 2020 and into the start of 2021.

So here we are. Beside storylines that connected the Eastern Africa countries, as the chapters by Morris Kiruga, Oyunga Pala, and Zarina Patel do, the countries covered were also the common domains of the first generation of foreign correspondents who were active in Eastern Africa from the last one-third of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the stomping grounds of the region's own, and indeed some of the world's greatest, photojournalists like Priya Ramrakha, Mohamed Amin, Mohinder Dhillon, and Hos Maina. Some of them, like Amin and Maina, died or were killed there too. For the first time, a wide group of local journalists, who have historically been ignored in journalism chronicles, get a look in.

Zarina and Rajab also write of something that will likely surprise many. Some of the first newspapers in East Africa were started by South Asians, and they and



their printing presses were key hubs for the nationalist movements.

The story of the media in Africa has mostly been told as one of torment. And this book does a bit of that too. You cannot escape it. It is a hard place to be a journalist, with death, prison, and all manner of repression posing constant threats. Additionally, in many countries it is still a low-paying job. Though the situation has improved considerably in recent years, many journalists in Africa have died destitute. While much has been written and told about how they die and suffer, there has been little about how they lived, live, and why they still go out daily to do this dangerous and thankless work.

We decided to extract the journalists from under the oppressor's boot, do a roll call of who was where and did what, and we thought the best way to achieve that was a book that was mainly an Eastern African journalists' origin story.

An overview by Ahmed Rajab, a combo chapter of the fascinating history of South Asian journalists in East Africa by Zarina Patel, and also Kiruga and Oyunga, present a cast of the sometimes-colourful characters who defined the period from 1900 to the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They also attempt to paint a picture of the political, cultural, and even racial context of the Eastern Africa that they confronted.

Most newsrooms in Africa still have a shameful side: they are hostile to women and, especially in print, progress has been slow. Broadcast does better. However, over the years, a few female warriors have breached the gates and cracked the glass ceiling. It has come at a great cost to some, with attacks and death threats galore. Brenda Wambui traces the journey of some breakout female journalists who have opened doors for others.

With the barriers to entrance for women in the mainstream media, the internet and social media became a pole with which a new generation of journalist-activist women jumped over hurdles. Jackline Kemigisa writes of their creativity and how they subverted the old system.

A transition chapter in the middle of the book by Kwezi Tabaro shifts the focus to the last years of the Cold War and the period after, in a quirky chapter. It is a quick rundown of the forces that convulsed the region: from Djibouti, through the Horn of Africa, into Central Africa, East Africa, and down to the Seychelles and Comoros. It is a bloody trail, strewn with the villains of journalism who engineered hate radio during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda in which over 800 000 people were slaughtered, to the curious case in Somalia of Al-

Shabaab-linked journalist Hassan Hanafi. At his trial, Hanafi told the court, "Al-Shabaab killed many journalists but personally I killed only one." Presented in box stories, it gives a nod to more than a handful of dogged journalists and ground breakers.

The conflict-filled 1990s came along with the explosion of independent media and with them the embedded journalist at the frontline. Daniel Kalinaki traces the roots of the peril that presented and the journalists who attempted to dodge both the landmines on the battlefields and ethical pitfalls of being embedded, while trying to come out of it without a stink on their shirts and blouses.

A veteran of the regional media trade and wise head, Joe Odindo does a tour de force of the protagonists and demons unleashed on the East African media scene by the combination of the return of multiparty politics, the liberalisation of economies and airwaves, the rise of a new tribe of media tycoons, and the impact of globalisation after 1990. He examines it against a backdrop of the one-party era of the preceding 25 years.

The last 25 years in Eastern Africa have seen the dramatic growth of private radio and television. The scruffy madmen geniuses of print media were not for television. The sleek suits and dresses, well-honed accents, and big bucks were in. However, a wave of enterprising audio-visual journalism broke out too, along with the glitz. Broadcast in Africa has been less studied than print, on which much attention has been showered over the years and it fell to Joe Ageyo to begin to bring it together in one place.

The longest chapter in the book is by scholar, writer, and cultural critic Joyce Nyairo. Delightful as it, it is also the kind of chapter you would ask someone to write as punishment. Nyairo's punishment was to review editorial cartoonists in Eastern Africa. Though an area she had worked on, this is the first attempt to examine it across so many countries.

We kept fearing the next email or text message from her would be an announcement that she was out. The email came all right, and it was the first complete chapter of the project. Nyairo should not be allowed to rest.

We ended where our plans were disrupted, with the blows Covid-19 dealt the Eastern African media. As Rita Nyaga tells it, the pain is a lot, but the pandemic also drove some journalists to strike in bold directions at places like Nation Media Group and reinvent their media outlets as digital creatures.

From the time of Welsh-American journalist Henry Morton Stanley's 1871 scoop, when he found the missing David Livingstone in a village along the shores of Lake Tanganyika, to the peek into Covid-19's ravages, it is a survey of 150 years.

There will be several hotly contested parts of the book. Many people reject the works of journalists like Stanley and the extensive influence and actions of Christian missionaries in seeding media in the region, seeing them as colonial and foreign. However, as Kiruga and Kalinaki note, several newspapers, some of which still exist as African-owned today, were birthed in that period. To erase the journey they took would lead to an incomplete understanding of media history.

There are, however, stories that are not told, told briefly—or even inadequately—and questions that are unanswered, and we are acutely aware of that. One question to which we wanted an answer was why the greatest photojournalists in Eastern Africa were of South Asian descent. The answers were hard to find.

A deeper future study might find the answer in racial politics. The mainstream media in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda were dominated in the early years by Europeans. As independence approached, in the face of nationalist agitation, and after independence with the demand for “Africanisation”, the openings happened for indigenous Africans. The barriers to South Asian journalists, outside Asian-owned media, remained.

Being a photojournalist, a job often done best as a lone ranger, meant there was no need for an institutional pass handed out by a European or black African media boss, for one to enter the fray. Photojournalists like Amin and Mohinder, turned a handicap into a trump card.

As indicated earlier, there also are many missing names and faces we would have loved to see. Fred Senoga (“Snoogie”) was the most consequential cartoonist in Uganda of the early 1990s, until he went off the radar.

The vernacular press in all the region was a big deal, including in the independence agitation. We have a blind spot on that.

After 1990, there was also an avalanche of “tabloidisation”, with magazines like *Chic* and *Red Pepper* in Uganda and in Kenya *Citizen Weekly*. They had and still have some lively and provocative journalists. They broke many people's hearts and wrecked lives, but they also expanded the envelope of free expression.

Then, according to the CPJ, between 1992 and early 2021, 69 journalists had been killed in Somalia, the most in Africa. It is also the place where the most female journalists have been killed. They cry out for attention in the book.

Conflict in the DRC has taken a toll on the people in the last 22 years. In 2008, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) released shocking figures that said 5.4 million people had died in the DRC since 1998, because of conflict, as many as 45 000 deaths every month. The figures have been disputed, but the deaths have not stopped. Today, if even the IRC estimate were off by a large margin, it would still be horrific.

The country has been hell for journalists, with some of the best coming to a grim end. On 13 June 2007, the talented and highly regarded Serge Maheshe, journalist, editor and head of the influential United Nations-backed Radio Okapi station, was murdered in Bukavu, South Kivu, eastern DRC. Maheshe was 31.

A military court sentenced to death the two alleged assassins of Maheshe on 21 May 2008. Most atrocities against journalists in the DRC, a vast country, do not end in a trial and conviction, as in the case of Maheshe. They disappear down a vast hole. A light needs to be shone in there.

A similar spotlight needs to be put on digital media, the blogging space, and the wonderful things independent journalists and communicators are doing on social media, because, while the book does so, it only scratches the surface. These gaps point to areas where we hope this work will inspire others to look.

We did not want to do a book for thoroughbred journalists or media scholars. Our target was a Millennial reader, young journalists looking to connect the present to the past and to excite them into doing something with the material; an illustrated book, documentaries, films, or use it as an entry-level journalism teaching aid.

There is a template. In 2006, Salim Amin, son and only child of Mohamed (Mo) Amin, released the documentary *Mo & Me*, “a journey of recollection and reflection into the life of the frequently absent, globe-trotting father, Mohamed Amin, whom he loved, revered and feared”, as IMDb, the leading online source for movie, TV and celebrity content, describes it.

Salim does a good job of telling the story of a great and complicated man, who he calls *Dad* in the documentary.

At his wedding, Mo did not show up until the very end, and when he arrived, he stood at the back of the hall, fresh from one of his photographic adventures. He also left shortly after.

Yet that is not what set Mo apart. It is what made him part of the herd. It was an age when many of the best of the journalists were misfits, mavericks, and parents and children who brought great stress to their families. In other words, complex characters who make for, but also told, good stories.

Our joy will not only be in whether the book achieves what we set out to do. Much of it will be from opening the door to more great stories about African journalists.

Charles Onyango-Obbo

Nairobi, Kenya

July 2021



## Henry Stanley's Heirs

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Foreign correspondents defined Africa — for better or worse — often when the continent's media could not

Morris Kiruga

In July 2006, South Sudan's Vice President Riek Machar sat in a forest clearing in Ri-Kwangba, on the border of Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Machar was waiting for Vincent Otti, the deputy leader and spokesman of the Lord's Liberation Army (LRA), a Ugandan rebel group that had been active in the region since 1987.

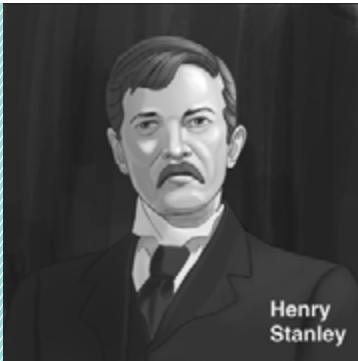
During the two-day wait, he looked up from the book he was reading, Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, shifted his gaze to his entourage, and then said: "Well, at least we can now all be like Stanley about to meet Livingstone."

He was referring to the famous 1871 scoop of a lifetime when Welsh-American journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley found the missing, ailing David Livingstone in a village along the shores of Lake Tanganyika. Machar's was a sarcastic remark, primarily directed at the foreign press present with him in the forest clearing. According to Dr Marieke Schomerus, who recounts the incident in her paper *Chasing the Kony Story*, that included "the Reuters correspondent, the camera crew from Al Jazeera, the stringer from AFP and [Schomerus]."

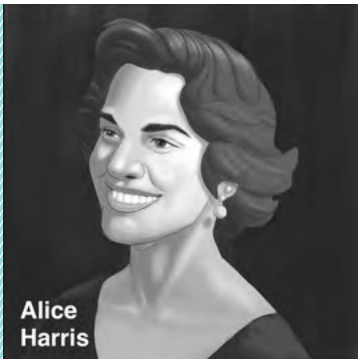
Although the remark was a century and a half in the making, the reason Machar said it to the foreign corps waiting with him in the forest was far more recent. It is also the context of Schomerus's paper, which is a blow-by-blow account of how one of her colleagues, a British freelance journalist called Sam Farmar, had embellished most parts of the stories he had done after they both interviewed LRA leader Joseph Kony the month before.

According to Schomerus, who had played a primary role in the events that led to the interview, Farmar had flown in from London to Nairobi on 31 May 2006. He had spent the night at a four-star hotel in the Kenyan capital before they left on a commercial flight to Juba, South Sudan, where they were treated like VIPs. They had met Kony alright, but it had been on the sidelines of a visit by Riek Machar and a peace delegation.

The way Farmar told the story though, in a broadcast on BBC Newsnight and an article in *The Times* of London in late June 2006, it had taken him “12 days of increasingly arduous travel” to reach the dark, airless jungle clearing in the Congo where he finally met Kony. It was the first time, he said in the report, a journalist had tracked down and interviewed the elusive rebel leader. The experience, he wrote, made him understand “how Stanley must have felt when he finally tracked down Livingstone.”



There were other, more important concerns with Farmar's reporting. The previous year, Kony, his Deputy Commander Vincent Otti, and several other LRA leaders had been indicted by the International Criminal Court. The indictment had increased international pressure on Kony and his commanders to negotiate a deal with Ugandan President Museveni's government in Kampala. So Riek Machar, a veteran of such peace negotiations in Sudan, was heading efforts to bring LRA's elusive leadership to the table and keep them there.



The ICC indictment had also brought renewed international attention on who exactly “Africa's most elusive rebel leader” was and what his two-decade rebellion was all about. While much had been written about the LRA in the foreign press, the consensus in newsrooms outside the region was that he had never

been interviewed (he had). So, interviewing him would be a major scoop, the kind that wins journalism awards. But why would Kony, a leader of a brutal organisation that had killed thousands and abducted children in record numbers, sit with the foreign press?

Foreign correspondents have had a long and complicated history with Africa as a whole; defining it — for better or worse — when the media on the continent was

still in its infancy or when military and civilian dictatorships made it too risky and costly for independent African journalists.

The first professional journalists who showed up to report on the region in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century followed the work of missionaries, soldiers, envoys, and explorers whose reportage, in the form of letters and scholarly works, had informed the world about Africa for centuries. Those first journalists further informed, confirmed, and added to many of the rumours about the “Dark Continent” that became lasting stereotypes.

By the 1890s and the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, their role evolved into reporting on the colonial enterprise itself. As more Europeans settled on the continent, foreign correspondents served as a crucial voice in affirming their right to do so and imperial expansion, as well as keeping tabs on what other colonialists were doing in the region. They also helped set up the nascent media on the continent and, for decades after, remained the primary conveyors of news from the region to their audiences back home.

In 1895, for example, a missionary-turned-settler called Robert Spencer Hyde established the *Central African Planter* (which still survives as *The Daily Times*) in Malawi. Four years later, in today's Tanzania, a German colonist set up a weekly called *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung*. Then, in 1900, the Christian Missionary Society founded *Mengo Notes*, the first English-language newspaper in Uganda. At the Kenyan coast, an Indian merchant called Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee founded *The African Standard* and hired an Englishman, WH Tiller, to run it.<sup>1</sup> More than a century later, the paper survives as *The Standard*.

After independence, the relationship between the foreign press and Eastern Africans settled into an uneasy balance. While, on the one hand, Eastern Africans viewed them with suspicion, as the remnants of colonialism, they also considered them important to communicating with their former colonial masters and the wider world, outside of diplomatic channels. Still, nearly all independence leaders in the region had fraught relationships with foreign correspondents, which worsened as the region's fractures began to show and grow. The reason was that, as foreigners and because of the protection they enjoyed from their embassies, they could report on things that local journalists could not because of the real and imagined repercussions for independent journalism. This included topics such as high-level corruption, human rights violations, rebellions and civil wars.

Rebel leaders and oppositionists, as aspiring leaders, also learnt to work with the foreign press. Getting their side of the story out was a way of seeking



international support for their causes, as well as disputing the government's official version of events, such as skirmishes and body counts. It explains why Kony, at Otti's insistence, had agreed to sit for the interview and why, despite Farmar's embellishments, Machar had another contingent of foreign press sitting with him in the forest clearing. With international pressure on both sides to come to a deal and the ICC indictment hanging on Kony's and Otti's necks, an interview could help shore up support where it mattered. For the journalists, it was the kind of scoop that makes careers.

Since Henry Morton Stanley arrived in Zanzibar in March 1871, generations of foreign press corps have reported on the Eastern African region, as on the continent. This has included many famous names, such as the future two-time British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the missionary and photojournalist Alice Harris, whose image of a man with severed limbs in the Congo still goes viral more than a century later, the American gonzo journalist Hunter S Thompson, who spent weeks in Zaire in October 1974 but did not file any story, and the journalists who covered civil wars, political upheavals and changes, and the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide.

While missionaries, explorers, and soldiers visiting the continent before him had regaled their audiences back home with stories, Stanley was among the first professional journalists to build a name for himself undertaking what, to audiences in Europe and beyond, seemed like impossible yet thrilling adventures in Eastern Africa. Stanley's first sojourn in the region was as a war correspondent to Ethiopia in 1867, where he got his first scoop covering the Battle of Magdala.

Four years later, his employers at *The Daily Telegraph* and the *New York Herald* sent him on the famous mission to find David Livingstone, who had been missing for nearly six years. Buoyed by the success and fame of his account of finding the missing explorer, Stanley returned to the region in 1874 to answer the centuries-old question about the source of the Nile. By his fourth trip to the region, he had evolved from a journalist to a colonialist in the employ of Belgium's King Leopold II.

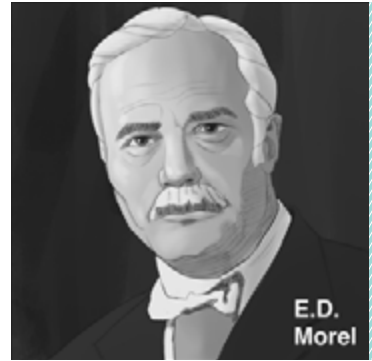
In a sense, Leopold's colonial excursion was made for him and then taken away by journalists from both sides of the Atlantic. On his third trip to the region, Stanley had completed Livingstone's work of mapping out the Congo River Basin, which was the last part of the continent that remained blank in European maps of the region. Using his knowledge and previous connections, he returned in 1878 as Leopold's agent, laying the foundations of what would become the Congo Free State. The discovery of his new mission, which was meant to be a secret but could

not be kept hidden for long, is often referenced as the event that triggered the Berlin Conference of 1884-5.

But news of what exactly Stanley and the other Europeans were doing for Leopold in the Congo remained scant in those early years. Then, in 1889, the Belgian king agreed to sit for an interview with a former American soldier-turned-journalist called George Washington Williams. Williams, a black man who had run from home to fight in the American Civil War when he was 14, was so impressed with what the Belgian king said he was doing in the Congo that he decided to visit and see for himself. It was that visit that gave the world the first piece of explosive investigative journalism, known later in the United States as muckraking, from the Great Lakes region.



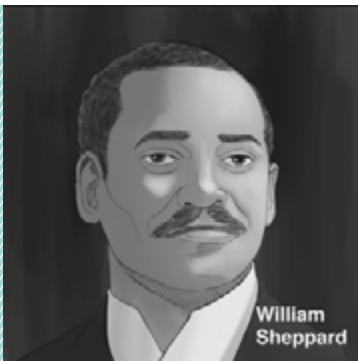
The article he wrote and sent from the Congo in 1890 was in the style of an open letter addressed to Leopold. He made 12 charges accusing Leopold's agents, led by Stanley, of, among other things, "deceit, fraud, robberies, arson, murder, slave-raiding, and a general policy of cruelty. Every charge which I am about to bring against your Majesty's personal Government in the Congo has been carefully investigated; a list of competent and veracious witnesses, documents, letters, official records and data has been faithfully prepared," he wrote.



Williams's letter was widely published on both sides of the Atlantic, but despite his saying that he had proof, the veracity of his account was still questioned. Leopold's administrators in the Congo issued a 45-page rebuttal, and there were multiple attempts by journalists and politicians to refute his reportage.

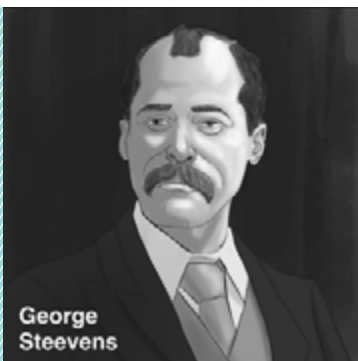
Several years later, a French-born British journalist called ED Morel happened on more proof of what was happening in the Congo. Morel worked a day job as a clerk at a Liverpool shipping firm, which had a contract with Leopold's colony. According to Adam Hochschild in *King Leopold's Ghost*, Morel correctly deduced what was happening by checking the internal accounts of the colony. He noticed that, while it exported valuable commercial goods, it imported only weapons and chains. When Morel's employers tried to bribe him with a promotion, he quit his job. By then a fulltime journalist, Morel escalated the work Williams' had begun a decade earlier.

The most famous photo of what life as a black person was in Leopold's Congo features a man, Nsala, sitting on a veranda, with two other men in the background. Nsala's gaze is on the veranda, where two severed limbs, one (the hand), his, and the other (the foot), his daughter's. The photo was taken in 1904 by British missionary and photojournalist Alice Harris. Like Morel's article, Alice's image became part of the growing work of journalists fighting Leopold's continued exploitation of the Congo. From Congo and European capitals, foreign correspondents had become the mortal enemies of Leopold, who fought back with propaganda.



Because commissions like the one that had brought Stanley to the Congo to find Livingstone were still rare, missionaries such as Alice Harris played a primary role as reporters of the Congo situation. At the turn of the century, for example, letters from Rev LC Vass and Rev HP Hawkins describing the murders of more than 90 people killed in the Congo by tax collectors, ran as news articles in the *New York Times*.

Another missionary, William Henry Sheppard, was then sent to investigate. He arrived in the colony armed with a Kodak camera, which he used to document mutilations as well as a woman confined in a pen. When he published his report in a church newsletter in 1908, Sheppard was sued by the Kasai Rubber Company, but he was acquitted the next year. By then, Leopold had lost the colony to the Belgian government, the direct result of fervent activism and reportage by journalists, missionaries, and other progressive forces.



In August 1898, the future two-time Prime Minister of Britain, Winston Churchill, arrived in central Sudan by travelling along the Nile from Egypt. The ambitious 24-year-old was a soldier in a British cavalry regiment called the 21st Lancers. On the side, he was also a journalist covering the ensuing war with Sudan for a conservative daily called *The Morning Post*. At the time, journalists like him were, like Stanley in Ethiopia three decades before, the primary cheerleaders of the colonial project, describing the heroics of Europe's sons in wars against 'barbaric' Eastern Africans.

Another journalist, George Warrington Steevens, was also embedded with the 21st Lancers on the same mission. Unlike Churchill, Steevens was there purely as a journalist reporting for *The Daily Mail*. As reporters, the two of them had a professional rivalry that extended far beyond the competition between their respective publications. Steevens was five years older and had already carved a name for himself as a famous war correspondent. Churchill was still young and fairly unknown, and he was trying to combine his on-off career in the military with two others that depended heavily on fame: journalism and politics.

Churchill would get his revenge the year after Sudan, when they both returned to the continent to cover the Second Boer War. In South Africa, Churchill was captured by Boer troops and kept in Pretoria as a prisoner of war. His daring escape from the camp in December 1899 and from South Africa — he ended up in Mozambique — gave him a scoop even Steevens could not best. But Steevens could no longer even compete, because he got trapped in a siege during the war and died of typhoid in January 1900.

At the time they were both in the Sudan, Churchill worried that soon, “these nice little expeditions” would end, and there would be “no more medals for the soldiers, no more peerages for the generals, no more copy for the journalists.” While he was right in that the conquest part of the colonial project was nearing its end, he was wrong on it being the end of war and copy for journalists in the region.

In 1936, *The Daily Mail* sent Evelyn Waugh, an English journalist, to Addis Ababa to report on Italy's expected invasion of Ethiopia. Waugh could have scooped his colleagues with proof of the invasion, but he filed and telegraphed a story in Latin, ostensibly for secrecy.

Waugh's first visit to Ethiopia had been six years prior, in 1930, when he covered the coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie. Ethiopia had always fascinated Europeans, who had sent and received envoys from the kingdom for centuries. Most of this interest was driven by the fact that Ethiopia was a Christian kingdom, and that it was upriver from Egypt. By 1930, however, the focus had shifted to the fact that it had defeated the Italians in 1895 and three decades later remained the only country in the region that was not under colonial rule and was also a member of the League of Nations, the precursor of today's United Nations.

Emperor Haile Selassie graced the cover of *Time* magazine twice in that decade. The first time was after his coronation in 1930, and the second time as Man of

the Year for 1935, just months before he fled into exile in the face of Mussolini's invasion. With that invasion, some of the same foreign journalists who had covered his coronation six years earlier, such as Waugh, were back, as well as many on their first reporting trip, such as the Hungarian Ladislav Farago. Their brief this time was to cover Benito Mussolini's attempt to restore Italy's colonial project. There were also 200 Italian journalists embedded with the Italian forces.

Waugh missed the big story of the run up to Mussolini's invasion, despite having met and travelled with the source, a mysterious American named FW Rickett. The story was broken by his competitors, James A Mills of the Associated Press and Percival Philips (*Daily Telegraph*) and it went something like this. Emperor Selassie had signed off mineral concessions to Rickett's American benefactors, which would complicate Mussolini's invasion. Although the deal was later called off, it was for a time the only thing editors on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond wanted the reporters on the ground to cover.

Waugh wrote two books about that short war. The first, *Waugh in Abyssinia*, is a factual narrative of the invasion, its aftermath, and Waugh's opinions about the empire. In it, for example, he describes the Ethiopian empire as a "vast and obscure agglomeration of feudal fiefs, occupied military provinces, tributary sultanates, trackless no-man's lands roamed by homicidal nomads."

Waugh's second book inspired by his reporting in Ethiopia was a fictional, satirical account, *Scoop*, published in 1938. It features a fictionalised journalist modelled on William Deedes, a young journalist who had arrived for his Ethiopia assignment with unnecessarily heavy luggage. The fictional journalist, William Boot, is mistakenly sent as a foreign correspondent to Ishamaelia, a fictional country in East Africa, to cover what his boss calls "a very promising little war".

Waugh returned to the region, as did several other journalists whose publications were intent on feeding the frenzied interest the murder and lifestyle revelations triggered among newspaper readers in Europe. But during World War II, interest in such news from the region waned and then spiked after as it became clear that there would be a new world order. In it, the most captivating news was about the Cold War and its proxy wars across the globe, an interest that would last for the next four decades.

Unlike many smaller rebellions before it, the Mau Mau rebellion rapidly made news across the world. Foreign correspondents trooped to Kenya to report on this post-war development in an important colony and the British colonial government worked to control the narrative. Each visiting journalist was handed

a 48-page pamphlet titled *The Mau Mau in Kenya*, published in 1954. The pamphlet set the narrative in such a way that the Mau Mau were a small group with dark rituals and little support. With no access to the movement's leadership in the forests, the stories were mostly one-sided.

Multiple leading journalists of the day covered the rebellion, at first trying to determine whether the Mau Mau was a communist organisation. They included South African-born journalist Colin Legum (1919-2003), whose writing tried to give the rebellion historical context; the novelist Graham Greene, who reported for the *Sunday Times*; and a popular American journalist-turned-author called John Gunther mentioned the rebellion's context in his 1955 book *Inside Africa*.

There were also correspondents from mainstream Western news organisations such as *The Times* and the BBC that had fully staffed colonial desks with reporters, journalists and editors. Pathe News, a British documentary filmmaker, filmed many of the surviving videos of the rebellion, including the leader, Dedan Kimathi, after he was arrested and hanged. A significant number of the black and white reels are credited to news cameraman William McConville.

The winds of change that had escalated after World War II had reshaped interest in the region, as new political leaders carved friendships with foreign correspondents. In Zambia, for example, Kenneth Kaunda befriended Richard Seymour Hall, a British journalist who had first worked for *The Daily Mail* but then edited a newspaper called *The African Mail*. Hall then worked as an African correspondent for *The Observer*.



Foreign correspondents profiled established and emerging leaders across the region for their audiences back home and the lead up to independence. But they inadvertently ran afoul of the region's new post-colonial leadership. For example, Philip Short, a freelance journalist, who worked in Malawi and Uganda in the late 1960s and early 1970s, wrote a biography on Malawi's Hastings Kamuzu Banda. The eccentric president had it banned. Banda, like many of his contemporaries, had a turbulent relationship with the foreign press and his administration frequently denied them visas, making reporting from the country almost

impossible. When William Finnegan, reporting for *The New Yorker*, was allowed into the country, he was given a fulltime minder.

Similarly, in Uganda, Milton Obote did not like them much during his stint as Prime Minister in the early sixties and two stints as President in the late 1960s and early 1980s.<sup>2</sup> His administration deported several journalists in the mid-1960s, including Ted Jones<sup>3</sup> and Bill Chipper, who worked for Nairobi-based publications.<sup>4</sup>

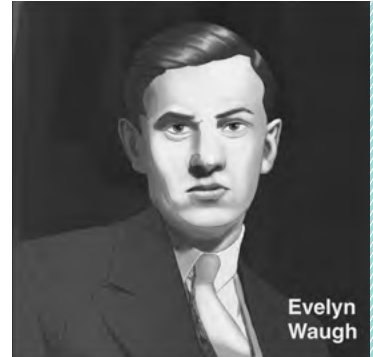
While the continent had been fairly safe for foreign correspondents during the colonial era, the post-colonial era was fraught with multiple dangers, the least of which was deportation.

After the Zanzibar Revolution, Kenyan photojournalist Mohamed Amin, then a young ambitious journalist, sneaked into the island and photographed a military camp with Soviet and East German advisors.<sup>5</sup> The images, right at the height of the Cold War and a few short years after the Cuban Missile Crisis, led to his arrest, torture, and eventually deportation after being held for 28 days.

In 1977, one of the 100-plus foreign correspondents covering Jean-Bedel Bokassa I's coronation in Bangui suffered under the new emperor himself. Michael Goldsmith, a journalist with the Associated Press, ended up not leaving for a while after the extravagant ceremony because of a series of unfortunate events. In the documentary *Echoes from a Sombre Empire*, Goldsmith explains that, when he tried to file the report he had written on Bokassa's ceremony, the power failed during the transmission, causing the text to become jumbled on the telex machine. Bokassa's spies then arrested him, suspecting that he was a spy for South Africa's apartheid regime. He was then tortured and beaten, including by Bokassa himself.<sup>6</sup>

Other than Bokassa's coronation, the other big social event that attracted journalists to the region was the Rumble in the Jungle, a boxing event hosted by Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko in Kinshasa. Among the press corps sent to cover the boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman were famous names such as Norman Mailer, George Limpton (*Sports Illustrated*), Hugh McIlvanney (*The Observer*) and Hunter S Thompson (*Rolling Stone*). Mobutu had organised the event as a public relations exercise, a "victory for Mobutism"<sup>7</sup> but he had not foreseen how events would turn out. After George Foreman suffered a cut during practice, the fight had to be postponed, forcing the sports journalists to also stay in Zaire throughout October 1974, poking around.

As civil wars and coups followed the independence era, some parts of the region became dangerous for journalists, even foreign correspondents. In Uganda, for example, a 33-year-old American called Nicholas Stroh and his friend Robert Siedle were found dead a year after they went missing in the wake of Idi Amin's coup in 1971. Stroh worked as a freelance journalist for several news organisations, including the ABC and *The Washington Star*, while Siedle taught at Makerere University. The two of them disappeared when, in the immediate aftermath of Amin's coup, they drove to Mbarara to investigate a rumour that 150 soldiers had been killed by their colleagues.<sup>8</sup>



The attention the two deaths brought made Amin wary of grievously harming the foreign press, but he did not hesitate to deport them. Thus, Christopher Munnion, who served as an Africa correspondent for *The Daily Telegraph*, and seven of his colleagues were arrested and deported in those early years. Like Goldsmith in Bokassa's new empire, they were suspected of being spies, a common reason for such actions against foreign correspondents. But it is just as likely that it was just an excuse to get rid of them due to their reporting, which was often detailed, and was read by policymakers and diplomats. In a 12 November 1972 profile of Amin for *The New York Times*, Munnion had posed the question: "Can Amin survive? Impossible, say the fleeing, impoverished Asians; unlikely, say the terrorised intellectuals; hopefully not, think the British and Uganda's African neighbours."<sup>9</sup>

Interestingly, but not unsurprisingly, the first interview Idi Amin did once he settled in Saudi Arabia after being ousted from power in 1979 was a sit-down with BBC journalist Brian Barron and Visnews's Mohamed Amin. Flying in from Nairobi, Barron had been among the first foreign journalists to reach Kampala after Amin fled the capital. There, he rummaged through the files of the secret police, which included "one detailing the surveillance of BBC colleague Philip Short who had been expelled by Amin," before heading to check the ousted leader's refrigerator in his living quarters to confirm "persistent reports that he sometimes kept the heads of his victims in the freezer" (there were none).<sup>10</sup>

Somalia is another place that has bedevilled foreign journalists. Because of its long conflict, and the collapse of the state, Somalia is by far the most dangerous place for foreign correspondents in Eastern Africa. As *New York Times* former long-term East Africa correspondent Jeffrey Gettleman recounts in his book *Love Africa: A Memoir of Romance, War, and Survival*, a Somali warlord tells the American journalist, "Welcome to the war."<sup>11</sup>



In 1993, journalists in the region had to report news that four of their colleagues had been killed by mobs in Mogadishu. The news of the deaths in July of two Kenyan journalists, Hosea D Maina (a Reuters photographer), Anthony Macharia (a sound man for Reuters), British-born Don Eldon, and German AP photographer Hansi Krauss, filtered out of Mogadishu from their colleagues.

The first to break the news to the world was the Washington Post's bureau chief in Nairobi, Keith Richburg, who also mentioned that another Reuters journalist, Mohammed Shaffi, had been shot twice but survived, and Scott Peterson, an American who worked for the *Daily Telegraph* of London, had survived a machete attack. Shaffi survived when a good Samaritan whisked him away in a truck and drove him to the Mogadishu hotel where foreign correspondents were staying, inadvertently breaking the news of the murders of their colleagues.

A few weeks before those attacks, a French sound technician called Jean-Claude Jumel had been shot and killed in Mogadishu by a sniper while on his way from the airport. Jumel was most likely killed by crossfire,<sup>12</sup> but the July attacks on journalists were pre-meditated. Nine foreign correspondents were killed in Somalia in the years between 1993 and 1995.<sup>13</sup> After their murders, Somalia remained a no-go zone for foreign correspondents. Then, as they began returning to the war-torn country in the mid-2000s, a BBC producer called Kate Peyton was shot outside her hotel. Two other foreign journalists, Martin Adler (freelancer, 2006) and Noramfaizul Mohd (Bernama TV-Malaysia, shot by African Union peacekeeping forces in 2011), have since been killed in the country.

In 1984, Mohamed Amin and two BBC journalists, Michael Buerk and Mike Woolridge, covered the Ethiopia famine. The resulting BBC broadcasts triggered a wave of sympathy in the West, where a famous 16-hour star-studded concert, titled Live Aid, was held in London and Philadelphia to raise funds for the famine's victims. The coverage set a standard for aid agencies working in the region, who realised that they could harness the power of the press to draw attention to disasters, both natural and man-made, in the region. But this had its downsides.

In early 1993, South African photojournalist Kevin Carter joined his friend, Joao Silva, on a United Nations (UN) invitation to cover the war in Sudan for a massive global humanitarian campaign. During the trip, Carter took an image that would get exactly the kind of global attention the UN was looking for. It would also get Carter the kind of jobs and access every photojournalist dreams of, especially after he won a Pulitzer for it.

The now infamous photograph shows a little skinny girl with a white necklace. Her head is on the ground, in what appears as a pose she fell into, rather than chose. Behind her, a vulture lurks. The little girl's (the subject was actually a boy named Kong Nyong, but that would not be known for nearly two decades) fate was a subject of debate from the start, so much so that *The New York Times* explained in a special editorial a week later that "the vulture was chased away" but no one knew whether "she (the girl) reached the (feeding) centre." In 1994, two months after the image won him the Pulitzer Prize for Feature Photography, Carter was found dead in his red pickup truck in a suburb in Johannesburg, a suicide note placed on the passenger seat. His reasons were varied, but the crux of them was "money!!" And the psychological pressures of "vivid memories of killings & corpses & anger & pain ..."

All these contradictions, tensions, complexities, possibilities, and failures of foreign correspondents were conflated in a single story: the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, the description adopted by a 20 April 2000 resolution of the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>14</sup>

Covering the 1994 Rwandan genocide is perhaps the most controversial and studied story in the century and a half that foreign correspondents have reported on Eastern Africa. With attention focused on post-apartheid South Africa and the election of Nelson Mandela, most of them missed the story's implications, regarding it a minor civil war in the early days. In the post-genocide era, foreign correspondents have been harangued as much as the UN and others, who could have helped bring attention to what was happening in good time and mobilise action to stop it.

When the Falcon 50 jet carrying Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana, his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira, and others was shot down on 6 April 1994, there were only two foreign correspondents — Katrin van der Schoot, a freelancer for a Belgian radio station, and Lindsey Hilsum, a freelancer for British news organisations who was at the time working for UNICEF — in the Rwandan capital. In the days and weeks that followed, many others followed, entering Rwanda from Uganda and Burundi. From Nairobi, for example, the BBC's World Service Mark Doyle flew to Uganda and then proceeded to Rwanda, while the AFP's Annie Thomas used the Burundi route. Others included Donatella Lorch for the *New York Times*.

The region's leading photojournalists, such as Mohamed Amin, Duncan Willets, Mohammed Shaffi, and Nick Hughes, also travelled to cover what was initially

thought to be a familiar African civil war. On 11 April, Hughes shot one of the earliest and few video recordings of the genocide, which featured a group of men clubbing two women to death. To get the video out, Hughes handed it to a stranger who was boarding a plane to Nairobi and then made sure his producer knew to pick it up when the plane landed. The video was sent to the British news agency WTN, from where it was broadcast across the world.

The genocide received some attention in those early weeks. For example, *Libération* correspondent Jean-Philippe Ceppi is credited as the first journalist, citing a Red Cross representative, to use the word “genocide” in his reporting in the first few weeks, but the word soon disappeared as others continued to cover it as part of an ongoing civil war.<sup>15</sup>

There were dangers to the journalists on the ground as well; some accounts have it that the Rwandan military was fervently looking for two foreign correspondents, both French, because of their broadcasts. One, Jean Hélène, had had a story published in *Le Monde* just six days after Habyarimana’s plane was downed, in which he described the retaliatory murders in some detail. As the situation worsened, journalists converged in Goma in the eastern DRC to cover the influx of refugees. Most of them ended up there on the invitation of aid agencies.

In addition to foreign journalists already posted in the region, the scale, reflection, and ripple effects that followed the genocide brought many notable names to the region. The *New Yorker*’s Philip Gourevitch visited Rwanda the next year and then travelled to and reported on its four neighbours. In total, he made nine trips over the course of 1995 and 1996, and published an award-winning book a few years later. Another journalist, Nigerian Dolo Olojede, won a Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting for a ten-part-series he wrote in 2004 for *Newsday*.

In the DRC, much had changed since the largely positive press that accompanied and followed the 1974 boxing bout. By the 1990s, Mobutu was old and, like many of his contemporaries, no longer a darling of the West. Journalists covered his fall from power and the wars that followed extensively, especially after the Rwandan genocide. Among them was the British Reuters journalist Michela Wrong, who cheekily confesses in her book about those years that she helped herself to a fish knife when reporting on the looting of Mobutu’s former palace.<sup>16</sup>

Nearly every story of foreign journalists in Eastern Africa of the post-independence era starts with a trip from Nairobi. Since the idyllic days when it was the capital of a model British colony, the East African nation has played host to generations of foreign correspondents. From here, they traversed what *The New York Times*

called “an enormous patch of vibrant, intense and strategically important territory with many vital story lines”, in a much-criticised 2019 job advert for its East Africa bureau chief.<sup>17</sup>

Since the American publication sent Richard Conley as its first foreign correspondent on the continent in the early 1960s, it used the Kenyan capital as its base. When Conley switched to another news organisation (NBC News) in the mid-1960s, he did not even need to shift location.

The presence of such a large cadre of foreign journalists in the country meant that they covered it extensively, much to the chagrin of its leaders. Similar to their neighbours, successive Kenyan leaders tried, at times unsuccessfully, to control the foreign press.

Jomo Kenyatta's new government deported several journalists, including Richard Kisch, who was reporting for a Tanganyika newspaper called *The Nationalist*. This was shortly after independence.<sup>18</sup> In the late 1980s, foreign correspondents, such as Blaine Harden<sup>19</sup> (*Washington Post*) ran afoul of the government and only survived deportation due to the presence of a large and sympathetic active diplomatic community in the country. Harden's “mistake” was that he had reported on a series of beatings and tortures of the government's growing opponents.

A few months later, the country's second President, Daniel arap Moi, returned to the country after State visits to two European countries, where the human rights abuses covered in the international press and a July report by Amnesty International had come up. “Why are they overcrowding here?” He asked as soon as he landed back in Nairobi.<sup>20</sup>

It was a poignant question, but one without a simple answer. In addition, to its tropical climate, Kenya's fairly stable and successive “pro-Western” governments attracted numerous news organisations to set up in the capital. In addition, to being the friendliest to journalists, Kenya has had its own homegrown early cadre of professional journalists. The photojournalist Mohamed Amin, whose legend as a newsman remains unmatched, was a pioneer in the region. There was also Aidan Hartley, who was born in Kenya in 1965 and worked for Reuters in the region in the 1990s.

In 2018, the BBC launched its largest office outside London, in Nairobi. Six years before, the China Global Television Network had launched in the Kenyan capital, an English-language Africa bureau, as part of China's growing relationship with the continent. While the two represent the China-West competition for Africa,

they also have a unique thing in much of the century and a half since Stanley. They are staffed with Kenyan and other African journalists, writing about their home.

While reporting from the region has improved, there is still a long way to go because foreign correspondents still “treat Africa as if it were one country”.<sup>21</sup> And reporting on that one country comes with a template of the “promising little wars” of Waugh’s fictional publisher, and adventures that, at least in print, seem to rival Stanley’s.

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## South Asian Journalists in East Africa

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In Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda, they were also among the original rebels and independence activists

Zarina Patel

South Asian journalists played a vital role in the anti-colonial struggle in East Africa, both nationally and internationally, as well as shaping and furthering it. It was a struggle that was closely linked to the development of journalism in the region, with Asian presses printing the first local African publications. In Kenya and Zanzibar, they established the first newspapers, with an Asian being the first journalist in Kenya.

Their spirited involvement in the anti-colonial struggle and outspoken independent press rested on some very real experiences and realities. For one, their families and communities had personally experienced the racial injustice and humiliation meted out to them and their compatriots by the British colonialists in their Indian homeland.

India had a vibrant and fearless press that was very vocal against colonialism, and was in support of Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose and other freedom fighters.

The first communist party in India was formed in 1925, and trade union organisation was widespread. In 1913, Indians living in North America had formed the Ghadr (rebellion) Party to promote Indian independence from British rule, and its clandestine followers had settled in Kenya. So, Indians had an early introduction to revolutionary and left-wing politics.

Gandhi's mobilisation of the masses and the press had exposed the futility of

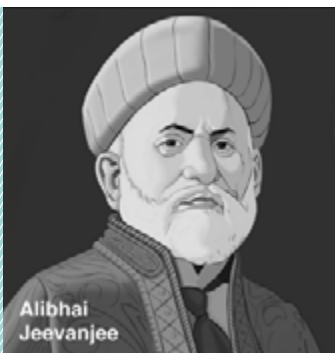
letters and petitions to the British government. These journalists were products of that background and were active on the East African stage in a period when the only authoritative voice to be heard was that of the colonialists, added to which was the Christianising, actually Westernising, influence of the missionaries, which denigrated African culture, religious beliefs, names, foods and dress codes and totally ignored the *ubuntu* value systems.

The colonial government in Kenya had segregated the Africans into their ethnic enclaves and barred them from organising across these boundaries. They were not allowed to own a press or organise nationally.

Asian-owned presses printed the local African publications. The East African Chronicle Press printed Kenyan nationalist Harry Thuku's *Tangazo*, and Jomo Kenyatta's *Mwigithania*; and The Colonial Times Printing Works printed *Ramogi*, *Habari za Dunia*, *Jicho* and others, the *Citizen* — Dedan Kimathi's charter on behalf of the Kenya Defence Council — and so on.

The press premises were meeting places for the African nationalists, as were the Desai Memorial Hall and the home of freedom fighter JM Desai. The English language newspaper articles helped to internationalise the anti-colonial struggle.

The story of South Asian journalists in Eastern Africa, would invariably be concentrated on three countries: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, because of the history of their migration and settlement in the region to work on the Uganda Railway (later it became the Kenya-Uganda Railway) in the late 1890s, home to the largest Asian population in Eastern Africa.



I categorise them under print, photo journalism and radio journalism; and list them more or less chronologically in each group. Hopefully in this way both a coherent and comprehensive exploration of their work and a picture of the times they were active in will emerge.

Perhaps there's no better person to start with than Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee (AMJ).<sup>1</sup> He was neither a journalist, scholar nor explorer; nor was he in dire economic straits. He was an entrepreneur. When contacted in 1895 by the British colonisers to help in the building of the Uganda Railway, he sailed to East Africa on his second visit there and his fortunes soared. All was well until white settlers and the Boers from South Africa arrived and racism reared its ugly head. AMJ joined the Indian Association formed



in Mombasa in 1900 to demand equal rights.

The *Mail* newspaper established in 1899 in Mombasa had Olive Grey as its editor. Her husband had lost against AMJ in some business deals so the *Mail* began to publish hostile articles; not only about AMJ but extending to the South Asian community.

Not keen on litigation, AMJ launched the *African Standard* on 15 November 1901. A simple tit-for-tat! He recruited William Henry Tiller from the London News Agency and soon the *Standard* became a formidable competitor to the *Mail*. The language was English and the format and content of the *Standard* followed the colonial norms of the time.

The important government and commercial news were almost always published first in the *Standard*, while the pages of the *Mail* were increasingly filled with gossip gleaned from the editor's social rounds. Finally, in August 1904 the *Mail* was declared bankrupt and ceased publication.

AMJ had achieved his objective. A year later he sold the *African Standard* to Anderson & Mayer who renamed it the *East African Standard*. One of the conditions of the sale was that the *Standard* would never publish articles critical of AMJ. With the rise of the business and political influence of the early British settlers, Lord Delamere and others, the *East African Standard* became their mouthpiece. AMJ on the other hand delved into the anti-colonial struggle and lost, thanks to colonial machinations, his entire fortune in the process. But his legacy lives on; the newspaper that he started 120 years ago continues to serve East Africans as *The Standard*, as part of a big multimedia company, Standard Media Group, albeit having undergone many policy changes.

What was to be a more strident: *The Daily Chronicle*<sup>2</sup> was set up in 1947 by a group of young, radical South Asian journalists, press workers and financiers. It had DK Sharda, Haroon Ahmed and Pranlal Sheth as its fulltime journalists. It became a meeting place for those who became some of Kenya's leading nationalists: Pio Gama Pinto, Makhan Singh, Achhroo Kapila, Hassan Rattansi, AS Rao, John Keen, Achieng Aneko, Tom Mboya, Njoroge Mungai and Fred Kubai.

Prof Piyo Rattansi, then a cub reporter, says:

***We worked for long hours without pay. There were frequent police raids ... the government prosecuted us so many times. In addition to providing the copy, we had to get up at five in the morning to print***

*and publish the newspaper ourselves on an antiquated press. After collating the paper, we delivered it ourselves on bicycles.*

With 50 cases of libel registered against the staff, European firms boycotting their advertising space, constant police surveillance and visits of the Civil Liberties Union; the *Daily Chronicle* was sold in 1952 and continued as a pale shadow of the once militant newspaper. Michael Fernandes was appointed editor but he too was considered “too extreme” and declared *persona non grata*, and had to leave the country. Pio Gama Pinto, who had joined the *Chronicle* in 1950, took over the editorship but was soon to be detained. The next editor was Jawaharlal (Joe) Roderigues, who, in 1960, went on to join the *Nation*. The *Chronicle* finally closed down a year later. In its heyday the *Daily Chronicle* was the leading voice of Kenya’s anti-colonial struggle, and a hub for star journalists and Kenya’s future leaders.



Another of the significant South Asian media pioneers was Girdhari Lal Hora (Girdhari Lal Vidyarthi). Born in Mombasa in 1907, Hora was an atheist. He was fiercely nationalistic and anti-colonial and started a handwritten newspaper, and adopted the name “Vidyarthi” (student). In 1933 he founded *The Colonial Times*,<sup>3</sup> a bilingual (Gujarati and English) paper with “Free, Frank and Fearless” as its slogan. It had a star cast of South Asian journalists, and provided a pivotal channel of expression for freedom fighters such as Jomo Kenyatta, Jaramogi Odinga, Tom Mboya and others.



He became the first journalist in Kenya to be sentenced for sedition and was sentenced to prison on three separate occasions. Exactly 50 years later, his son, Anil, was charged with sedition by the Daniel arap Moi government. Presently his daughter, Smriti Vidyarthi, is a news anchor and reporter for Nation TV.

From 1945 onwards, the Colonial Printing Press printed newspapers written in indigenous languages, a tradition that Colourprint, established in 1967, continued with the printing of “seditious” publications in the post-independence era. After struggling for 29 years, the *Colonial Times* ceased publication in 1962.

Two years earlier, Jawaharlal (Joe) Rodrigues<sup>4</sup> joined the *Nation* newspaper, launched in 1960, which unlike its competitor the *East African Standard*, supported

the struggle for independence and the campaign for the release of Kenyatta.

Rodrigues was one of the finest South Asian journalists in Kenya. He was an exquisite technician, excellent copy editor, layout specialist, and editorial and copy writer.

Over time the *Nation* had 20-plus South Asian journalists, both print and photo; the *Standard* had none. It was the decade when African journalists were few in number and others were still in training. The South Asian journalists were able to visit the African areas and bring first-hand news to which Joe, then editor, gave full coverage. The changes in the Civil Service, the Africanisation of the *dukawallah*, the build-up to the Asian exodus, all and much more were the oxygen that drove the *Nation* sales. It was also a sensitive time: the rulers of this newly independent country were extremely protective of their politics and decisions; the Muslim vs Indian biases following the partition of the sub-continent; the Kenyatta/Odinga tensions; the Ismaili/Arab/Israeli hostilities; religious/ethnic sensibilities; and relations with the ex-colonialists all fed into the government's political calculations. Rodrigues walked the tightrope adroitly.

Editor-in-Chief Rodrigues left the *Nation* in 1981.

Kul Bhushan<sup>5</sup> straddled both the *Nation* and *The Standard*. He came to Nairobi from India in 1954, as a 16-year old. He trained as a teacher and later turned to journalism. His first big break was during Kenya's Independence Day celebrations in 1963, when he acquired a press card and mingled with local and international journalists.

He did an International Press Institute (IPI) course in advanced journalism and was appointed as Senior Journalist and Education Editor at the *Nation*. Kul's Education Notebook was just the beginning. Next were Africanisation, the Asian Exodus from Kenya, the Safari Rally, Idi Amin's expulsion of the Uganda Asians and the *Nation* Economic Review, which resulted in the appointment of Kul as the Business Editor. He also lectured a course in journalism at the Nairobi University.

After 14 years at the *Nation*, Kul moved to the *Standard* as a fulltime editor, the first non-white to get the job. He has many accolades to his name: Journalist of the Year; Doyen of Safari reporters; IPI representative; UNIDO Media Consultant; Globetrotter (having visited 50 countries) and his flagship publication, *Kenya Factbook*. He now lives in New Delhi, India and as he says: "Even after celebrating my 75<sup>th</sup> birthday my love affair with journalism goes on."

That period also saw the rise of Cyprian Fernandes<sup>6</sup> who with a limited education built his audacious journalism career. Fernandes grew up in colonial Nairobi in Mathare, the urban hub of the Mau Mau War of Liberation, and the challenges he encountered shaped his bold and daring career in journalism.

In 1960, he managed to get an interview at the *Daily Nation* and secured a place as sports writer. Until then sports write-ups were largely about winners, losers and scores, but Cyprian changed all that. He delved into the politics of the game and soccer, the national sport, became hot reading. Clubs resented the exposure but, nevertheless, valued the publicity.



But his real interest was politics and interviewing those at the centre of power. He built contacts with presidents and ministers and was soon travelling throughout Africa, mostly with Foreign Minister Njoroge Mungai or Vice-President Daniel arap Moi, or as an embedded member of the Kenya delegation.

Cyprian wrote the “truth” as he saw it but politicians and leaders did not always agree with it and gradually the threats to his person began to mount. He now resides in Australia where he continues to practice his journalism.

Like Bhushan earlier, Ali Zaidi<sup>7</sup> started out in Kenya as a teacher. Zaidi had a genius for finding and attracting first class writers and, where necessary, maturing and growing them. He came from a highly accomplished Indian family of writers and academics, and emigrated to Kenya in 1985 to take up a job as an expatriate teacher in Kitale. There he met his future wife, Irene Wanjiru, a sculptor. He often mused aloud that his having an African wife made some of his fellow Indians reserved in his presence, as if he was somehow a traitor.

He returned to journalism in 1989 as Editor of the Executive, and joined Nation Media Group's *The EastAfrican* in 1998. Veteran journalist Philip Ochieng termed him “the most imaginative East African headline writer (in English) I have ever known”. To Ali Zaidi, the newsroom was home, not a workplace; writing a calling, not a job; editing a craft, not work.

For 21 years, Ali worked for *The EastAfrican*, first as Senior Editor, then as Consultant Editor. He policed its depth, style and aesthetics with a caustic tongue, delivering tough love to writers with big titles and fragile egos. Rasna Warah once asked him why he did that. Why did he feel the need to demoralise writers? His

response? "I am a writers' groupie. I admire writers, but I also need to show them who is boss and put them in their place." He coached, nurtured, cajoled and threatened a colourful cast of copy editors, writers, cartoonists, illustrators and photographers.

Ali was best known for his cryptic and humorous headlines such as "KQ Ready for Virgin Entry", when Virgin Atlantic announced the start of flights to Nairobi; or "No Sex without Movement" to express the threat of a bedroom strike by Ugandan women if men did not support President Yoweri Museveni's ruling National Resistance Movement party.

Ali was an incubator of great ideas, a man of profound intellect and boundless generosity. *Kwani?*, a collective founded in 2003 in Nairobi, started as a result of informal conversations that took place in his home in Loresho. He seemed happy in Kenya and often said: "In Africa, people accept you as long as they sense that you are genuine." He passed away in Nairobi on 6 September 2019.

One of the South Asian women working in print media in East Africa today, Rasna Warah,<sup>8</sup> while studying psychology at a university in Boston, started writing for a university newspaper and later the *Boston Globe*. She came back to Kenya in 1986 and joined *Viva* magazine, a bold women's magazine under the editorship of Salim Lone. She also had a weekly column called "Straight from the Heart" in the *Sunday Standard's Now* and *Lady* magazines. In 1994, she joined UN-Habitat and was one of the group that founded the *Kwani?* journal.

Rasna went back to mainstream journalism in 2006, when the *Nation* offered her a weekly column. Three themes come out in her columns: race/ethnicity and class; urbanisation and cities; and the value of development aid and its "poverty as entertainment".

Rasna has authored several books: *War Crimes* (2014) on Somalia and the negative impact of foreign actors; *UNSilenced* (2016) exposes corruption and impunity in the UN; and *Missionaries, Mercenaries and Misfits* (2008), which she edited, examines the failures of aid to Africa; *Mogadishu Then and Now* became an exhibition. Her first book dealt with her personal struggle with identity, *Triple Heritage* (1998).



On being a woman and a South Asian journalist, Rasna says: "Kenyan newsrooms are very male-dominated, and sexual harassment and gender discrimination are

things that female journalists have to contend with everyday ... There are a lot more women in senior editorial positions now, so the situation has improved somewhat." Being a woman journalist also meant that women were assigned "soft" stories and not the "hard" political ones.

Quite often she has had to endure racist comments from people who did not like what she wrote. She gets called all kinds of names, implying that because she is a *mu hindi* she does not have a grasp of the ethnic dynamics in the country, and that she is privileged and so has no right to comment on matters concerning the poor and marginalised.

In April 2018, Rasna and seven other columnists quit the *Nation* in protest over what they considered editorial interference and censorship. Since then, she has been sub-editing for *The Elephant*, where she also has a column. "Working for *The Elephant* has been stimulating and refreshing," says Rasna. "I believe the magazine is filling a void that has not been filled by the mainstream Kenyan media by 'speaking truth to power'. I didn't realise there were so many good writers in Kenya and on the continent until I started editing their articles."

*Viva*, which Rasna worked for, was born partly out of the stubborn principled stand of Salim Lone.<sup>9</sup> Lone is an internationally renowned journalist. His primary training was in teaching. He was part of the airlift to the USA in 1961. His focus shifted as he met journalists from the *New York Times* and read Philip Ochieng's columns in the *Nation* every Sunday morning.



The *East African Standard* turned down his application for a job but he was hired by Narain Singh as Editor-in-Chief of the *Sunday Post*. Kenya at this time was a police state drifting towards dictatorship. *The Standard* and *Nation*, both foreign owned, often toed the government line. The *Sunday Post*, a small Asian-owned, inconsequential paper, began giving voice to nationalist and socialist sentiments expressed largely by university lecturers and students.

"I was politically quite naïve," admits Salim. The warning signs were many. His articles had titles like: Israel as a racist state, The emerging class divisions in Kenya, Idi Amin's expulsion of the Uganda Asians, and others. The board chairman asked Lone to change the paper's approach to politics. Lone resigned.

His goose was cooked! Not even George Githii, Editor of the *Nation*, could get

Lone hired. He then started a women's magazine, *Viva*, which, during the 1980 Copenhagen Women's Conference, was listed as one of the world's eight most influential women's magazines. But Lone was regularly grilled and harassed by Special Branch police officers, and in 1981 became the only journalist in independent Kenya to have been prosecuted and convicted for his journalistic work.

He fled to the US to avoid arrest in June 1982 and his Kenyan citizenship was revoked. He was invited back to Kenya in 1986 by Foreign Minister Elijah Mwangale but on landing was arrested and taken to the infamous torture chambers at Nyayo House. He was freed under pressure from the United Nations and expelled from Kenya, and his citizenship was once again revoked. Back at the UN, Lone rose to its highest non-political rank when he was appointed by UN secretary General Kofi Annan as Director of its News and Media Division (1998-2003). Earlier, as Chief of Publications, Lone had worked closely with Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as Chief Editor and writer.

In 1993, his Kenya citizenship was restored and Lone returned to Kenya in 2004 following the 2002 democratic elections. He became the spokesman for Raila Odinga. He wrote and spoke widely but had to flee Kenya again during the post-election violence of late 2007/early 2008. Lone returned to Nairobi after an accord was mediated between President Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga in February 2008 and subsequently formed a national unity government. He continued to be Prime Minister Odinga's spokesman till 2013 when once again he received death threats and soon after the election left Kenya permanently. Lone now lives in Princeton, New Jersey, where he is writing his book, *War and Peace in Kenya*.

Away from the rough and tumble of politics, Zoeb Tayabjee<sup>10</sup> is one of Kenya's best-known sports writers. His interest in sports started in school, where he regularly wrote reports on soccer for his class. He then took up cricket, and in 1979 started writing the cricket news in the *East African Standard*. A year later he moved to the *Nation*. These weekly cricket reports written regularly for a quarter of a century mainstreamed the sport in Kenya and popularised it among the wider population.

Zoeb did not just present scores; he wrote the stories behind the matches and the results. Needless to say, he ruffled many feathers. Religious and communal differences stoked the most intense passions and rivalry between the



clubs, and Zoeb had to walk a tight rope with accusations hanging over his head with every report. "I tried very hard to be unbiased and critique what was best for the game," he says, "but it was hard to please everybody."

Once a prominent cricketer wanted to throw him into a pool; an administrator wanted to break his neck; and a club threatened to ban him. Players pressured him to write in their favour, but his thousands of fans encouraged him to "call a spade a spade".

In 1996, he started a column called "Bhim Sala Bhim", where he created a destructive character who would peer into a crystal ball and comment on general cricket matters. Only once when Bhim's prediction went awry, some fans wanted to floor him!

Those were the golden years of cricket in Kenya. But today "cricket has lost its soul, it is just a skeleton," writes Roy Gachuhi, a *Nation* sports writer.

One of the unique columns in the Kenya press was by Yusuf Kodawwala.<sup>11</sup> His "Surgeon's Diary", a popular fortnightly column in the *Sunday Nation*, ran for 38 years from 1980. Kodawwala, was a surgeon in real life and had previously written medical columns, "Nation Doctor" from 1964 to 1973 and "House Doc".

Surgeon's Diary, under the *nom de plume* of Yusuf K Dawood, related true stories that were at once dramatic, emotional, sentimental, suspenseful and humorous. Surgery made him a writer, he says. "I do see a lot of tragedy; a lot of suffering. To tell a man that his life had reached nigh, or his son has leukaemia or his wife has HIV is very painful. To keep my own sanity I have to write."



The popularity of this column was because the stories were derived from his rich multicultural practice. Also, they followed the universal rule of good journalism; they were educational, informative and entertaining, rendered in layman's language.

On 25 May 2018, at the age of 90, Kodawwala, hung up his journalistic pen. All the income derived from the Diary has been deposited in the Marie Rahima Dawood Foundation, a charity. He has also written 11 books, six fictional novels and one autobiography. He plans to publish more books and is working on a television and radio series of Surgeon's Diary. His wife Marie and he now live in the UK with their son and daughter.



I, Zarina Patel, the writer of this chapter, have been writing for the press since colonial times. The first letter I wrote was addressed to, if I remember correctly, a Charles Udall who had been mayor of Nairobi several times. It was in the early 1950s, about an altercation I had had with a white saleswoman in a shop in Nairobi.

Udall was very gracious in the official letter of apology he sent me, but of course no further steps were taken. Since then I have been writing on a variety of themes: mainly feminism, colonialism, capitalism, Jeevanjee Gardens, race and identity, Kenyan South Asian history, ethnicity and language and culture. In the era of the Moi-Kanu dictatorship, I used to write under different pseudonyms.



I have written the biographies of Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, Makhan Singh, and Manilal Ambalal Desai, as well as a book titled *The In-Between World of Kenya's Media — South Asian Journalism 1900-1992*. I am the Managing Editor of *Awaaz* magazine which focuses on minority and diversity issues; after 20 years of publishing printed copies three times a year, Covid-19 compelled us to suspend the print edition and expand our digital presence.

## The Tanzanian Contingent

Whereas the Uganda Railway, the construction of which started in 1895, was to play an oversized role in the history of South Asians in the region, earlier factors like the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which shortened the voyage from Europe to India by 6400 kilometres, also impacted the establishment of Asian business in East Africa, especially the opening of a new National Bank of India branch in Zanzibar, following the success of branches in several countries, including Aden, the capital of Yemen.<sup>12</sup> From that grew the giant KCB (Kenya Commercial Bank) today.

From the same roots, one could trace the establishment of one of the oldest Asian newspapers in East Africa, *The Samachar* (The News) in 1902. Those traditions fed into the mainland Tanganyika, and became part of the South Asian stream in the media after the union that established Tanzania in 1964, and I will highlight a few of the journalists from it.

Frene Noshir Ginwala<sup>13</sup> is a no-compromise, controversial journalist, a Marxist and dedicated African nationalist with a brilliant mind and a sharp single-

mindfulness. Ginwala is a second generation Indian South African who grew up in Johannesburg acutely aware of race and class inequalities. A trained lawyer, she was called to the bar in London. She went into exile in the then Tanganyika after assisting Oliver Tambo, Yusuf Dadoo and Ronald Segal escape to Dar es Salaam. There she launched a monthly magazine called *Spearhead*, with strong, fearless political journalism which was her forte; and wrote for the *British Guardian* and the *Observer* as an expert on the African nationalist scene.

She journeyed on to Britain to continue with her ANC work but Tanzania's leader Mwalimu Julius Nyerere invited her to return and take over as the Managing Editor as he was nationalising the Lonrho-owned *Tanganyika Standard* and its *Sunday News*. They discussed and came to a mutual agreement on how the paper, renamed *The Standard*, would be run. Nyerere was nominally the Editor-in-Chief, although he gave her a free hand.

"Dressed in a silk sari, Frene walked into the office and took over the top job on 4 February 1970," Shamlal Puri says. In no time she threw out the colonial bias of the paper's editorial policy, and overnight terrorists became freedom fighters! She ruffled establishment figures. There was even obscure criticism of Nyerere in the paper! She questioned Tanzania's socialism and categorised the state control of businesses as state capitalism.

Her defence of the young women who were being forced to marry elderly Zanzibar Revolutionary Council politicians created political problems for Nyerere, but he did not step in yet at that point to rein in the publication. However, she went too far in 1971, following a short-lived communist-backed coup in Sudan, led by Major Hashem al Atta, against the government of President Gaafar Nimeiry. Ginwala published a stinging editorial suggesting, if one was to plot a coup, the head of State should be executed first, and that Nimeiry had used this opportunity to purge the Communist Party, which she found unacceptable. Unknown to her, Nimeiry, a friend of Nyerere, was soon to fly to Tanzania on a State visit.

That day, the government of Tanzania declared her a prohibited immigrant, 18 months after she was appointed editor, and she was deported. Her colleagues remember Ginwala as a "cyclone in a sari" because of her robust no-nonsense style. She went on to play a central role in ending apartheid and serve as the speaker of South Africa's post-apartheid Parliament. Ginwala now lives in semi-retirement in South Africa.

More than a decade later, the Tanzania Media Women's Association (TAMWA) was registered in November 1987. Its first chair and founder was Fatma Alloo.<sup>14</sup>

A Zanzibari woman from a very conservative community, having qualified as a journalist from the universities of Dar es Salaam and London (a story for another day), she was then an employee of the *Daily News* and Radio Tanzania. In 1997, she helped to found the Zanzibar International Film Festival.

TAMWA had its beginnings when Alloo and a group of women who had just finished journalism school formed themselves into an informal unit to produce radio programmes. Their first topic was school girl pregnancies, and it was very popular. However, their next series on domestic violence was not given airtime; the male heads of the station turned it down. The women realised they had to have their own forum and TAMWA was born.

“Today [2018] TAMWA has an office of its own, a seventeen member secretariat team which implements projects and seven Board members,” says the present chair, Edda Sanga. “We recently launched online TV which is airing a programme called, *Sauti Ya Siti* — the name of TAMWA’s women’s magazine, borrowing a name from a renowned singer from Zanzibar, the late Siti Binti Saad.



“We have just produced a book recounting our 30 years’ journey; and from Michigan University, TAMWA was offered a rare opportunity to digitize its publications since 1987.”

Some of the projects established in TAMWA are the Economic Unit, Children’s Unit, Publishing Unit, Research and Documentation Unit, a Reference Library for material on women, a Crisis Centre and the publication of popular education materials. Regionally and at the pan-Africa level, TAMWA was able to have an impact by motivating women to organise and demand changes in laws impacting their lives, like the Land Bill, inheritance rights, education, and others.

They deconstructed the patriarchy which they had internalised. “Liberation of the mind is critical to achieve change and quality of life. Soon enough we became known regionally and internationally through our work and networking skills. One of the highpoints was the Beijing UN Conference in 1995, where Mwalimu Nyerere and Winnie Mandela visited our tent made of khanga. Those were proud moments”, says Fatma Alloo, adding, “We managed to change community perceptions. Soon we had women lawyer associations and organizations like Kuleana, and human rights organisations joining forces with us. The Tanzania

Gender Network (TGNP) arose and women became more confident as their forums increased."

TAMWA was a catalyst for media women's organisations in the region, including the Association of Media Women in Kenya (AMWIK), and in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region.

Sakina Dewji<sup>15</sup> was born in Singida, in central Tanzania. She studied science subjects at school and planned to be a doctor. While waiting for admission to medical school she volunteered at Dar es Salaam Television and was asked to cover and write up a children's event. "As I got back and sat down to write my first news story on a typewriter, it was like a certain switch had been flicked within me," says Dewji.

She then went on to study Journalism at the universities of Edinburgh and Missouri-Columbia. In 2001 she joined *The Express* in Dar es Salaam as its Chief Editor. In 2005 she became Managing Editor of the *Sunday Citizen* at Mwananchi Communications Limited (MCL), a newspaper launched by the Nation Media Group. It was a 40-page newspaper with many pull-outs, the children's one (*Young Citizen*) being one of its most loved pull-outs.

*Our speciality was in investigative reporting, predominantly on the mining sector though not exclusively. We covered a lot of corruption stories. We obviously rubbed a lot of 'important' people the wrong way due to this so we often received threats. I was the founding and Managing Editor of the paper for almost four years. Our reporting led to many reviews of mining laws as well as review of accountability of the mining companies. This cause was taken up by parliament following our coverage.*

*I later moved to IPP Media as Group Editorial Director of Print Media. While there, I continued receiving threats linked to the stories we had run in Sunday Citizen because some of the high-level officials we had busted had been charged with criminal offences. At the same time, I was confronted with fierce office politics in my new position. I used to receive anonymous calls also threatening me for daring to lead the entire IPP print media house of eight newspapers as a woman of Asian background. My motives and loyalty were a constant subject of nasty emails to my boss. One evening I was tipped by a trusted source of a plan to kidnap my children from school to teach me a lesson, though I never found out who was behind that plan and what*

*was their precise grievance. I didn't feel my family was safe working in the environment I was in any longer, so I decided to migrate and did so in 2009.*

Sakina Dewji moved to the UK where she registered for an MA Media Management degree. She obtained her Masters and most of her career in the UK has been in TV production. She runs her own media production company called Amsha Ltd and produces documentaries and shows for various TV channels on diverse matters.

When asked to comment on her work as a journalist in Tanzania she said:

*I conducted many interviews and some of those that I remember fondly were of the presidential candidates leading up to the General Election of 2005. However, my best interviews and those I am proud of have got to be the ones I conducted with anonymous sources. The thrill and adrenaline rush you get from pursuing 'scoops' can only be understood by journalists.*

*It was very hard for some men to work under me. I saw the resentment often and they were the ones who would write nasty things about me on forums such as Jamii Forum by hiding their real identities. They didn't realise I guess that I often edited their writing and so could straight away recognise their writing styles. A lot of lies were circulated to my bosses. To be very honest, it didn't bother me. I was just passionate about my job and I absolutely loved what I was doing, and felt it was a privilege and a blessing that God had bestowed upon me by giving me the talent and position to make a positive difference. Looking back, I feel I was naive but that's probably a blessing too because had I allowed myself to be bothered, I wouldn't have achieved the success I did.*

*As for being Asian, I was by-passed for many promotions because of my race. My immediate line managers shared this reason with me openly. I was also accused sometimes of 'favouring' people of my race by covering up for them, while those very subjects labelled me a 'traitor'. None of that bothered me as my conscience was clear.*

*Having said that, I have to say that the majority of my support was from men. My bosses, my colleagues and my teams were predominantly male but they always looked beyond my gender. It is definitely difficult for a woman to break into a male-dominated*

*industry; however I strongly believe that if a woman is able to prove herself and is able to uphold her dignity with confidence, she can earn the respect of her male colleagues.*

Sakina views her achievements in various categories, notably the positive changes to which they contributed through their reporting in fields such as mining. Before they started covering this sector, there was zero awareness of how this industry was sucking the country dry. By the time she migrated, public awareness was so high that ordinary citizens reading the newspapers began discussing mining and corruption. The media as a whole at some point took up this cause, and so did the parliament.

She is also very proud of the work they did at the Tanzania Editors Forum that she chaired. With the constant support of the Media Owners Association of Tanzania, they stood together to fight for their profession. She has many happy memories of Jukwaa la Wahariri and was able to mentor some young upcoming journalists who are successful today. "I was blessed to have really amazing teams who truly were the reason for my success," says Sakina.

"On one hand, I feel sad to see the state of media in Tanzania today. Freedom of thought and expression is so vital for the health of any nation. On the other hand, real old school journalism can mainly only be practised today in developing countries like Tanzania. In the West, media may be very diverse and yet, on a large scale, it is so skewed in one direction. Here in the UK for example, media is predominantly business first and foremost. For some of us who went to journalism school with big ideas of fighting for justice, memories of that adrenalin pumping era in Tanzanian newsrooms in the early 2000 remain ever so sweet."

Dewji was recognised with the CNN African Journalist of the Year award. She is the author of *Discovering the CAN in Cancer*, a book about her mother who conquered cancer with her determination.

## **The East African Hinterland: the Ugandans**

From Uganda, came one of the most consequential, shortest, and likely one of the most tragic stories of South Asian journalists in East Africa.

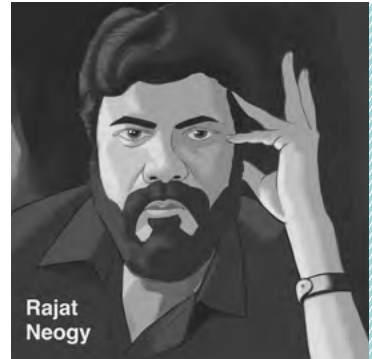
On 17 December 1939 Rajat Neogy, a Ugandan of Indian Bengali descent, was born in Kampala.<sup>16</sup> He studied in London and after returning to Uganda in 1961, at just 22-year old established *Transition Magazine: An International Review*. It

was described as the “most daring and important literary and political journal of Africa’s 1960s”.<sup>17</sup>

The “humble” magazine that nurtured Africa’s thinkers came to be considered the leading journal of free expression in Africa, a journal that accommodated contributions from intellectuals and creative writers of the era, from East Africa and beyond. Rajat Neogy said of it;

*‘... the ultimate purpose of a literary magazine will always be to herald change, to forecast what new turn its culture and the society it represents is about to take. It will do this by sometimes allowing prejudice and temporary obsessions to be aired [and] by being permissive to radical innovations.’<sup>18</sup>*

Africa’s top names were proud to be published in it. These included presidents, but also African and world literary giants like Nadine Gordimer, James Baldwin, Chinua Achebe, and the then budding American writer Paul Theroux, whose travel books later became classics. Apart from Chinua Achebe, the intellectual community in the then small city of Kampala included luminaries such as Nobel Laureate V S Naipaul, Ali Mazrui and Ezekiel Mphahlele. Also making frequent appearances were transcontinental creative personalities like Wole Soyinka, the poet Chris Okigbo and the German expatriate Ulli Beier, as well as Cameron Duodu from Ghana. In the magic mix were established or upcoming literary figures-cum-political activists like poet Dennis Brutus and others from South Africa, the then James Ngugi (now Prof Ngugi wa Thiong’o) from Kenya and David Rubadiri from Malawi. The list included presidents and government ministers.



*Transition* had become a must-read publication for anybody interested in Africa and its literary, cultural and political affairs. Paul Theroux in an obituary for his old friend Neogy wrote: “It is hard to imagine a little magazine that influenced writers on a whole vast continent, but that is what happened with *Transition*.” Another said: “He fought fascism in blackface, and that was rare and courageous. When contributors to *Transition* spoke and wrote, we listened, read and learnt. They ignited a passion in us for the well-written word and for balanced and civil debate.”<sup>19</sup>

In the process, *Transition* had captivated the intellectual community around the

world. Ideological contestation had found an African battlefield where there would be no bloodshed. *Transition* had become essential reading.

The literary gurus who gathered around Neogy's table assumed that Uganda would just get better. Only Naipaul disagreed. The politicians were clearly opportunists and crooks, he said. "This country will turn back into jungle. We did not really know what would happen. You never do. But it got worse, many of us left," says Paul Theroux, Neogy's close friend. Neogy stayed and got thrown into jail for sedition — criticising Obote's constitutional reforms.

Neogy was arrested on Friday 18 October 1968 together with Abubakar Kakyama Mayanja, a 39-year-old lawyer and parliamentarian, whose article and a subsequent letter to the editor Neogy had published in *Transition*. He was taken to the Maximum Security Prison at Luzira where he was placed in a 5.5 X 7 foot cell for total solitary confinement. Mayanja was already settled in his own solitary cell. He was acquitted of the charge one-and-a-half years later, but his detention in prison might have broken him. Or was it disillusionment? The magazine was partially funded by the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CFF), an anti-communist advocacy group. It was revealed that, for some years, unknown to Neogy and other recipients of CFF support around the world, CFF was being secretly funded by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The demoralised Neogy left Uganda in 1970 to settle in Ghana, from where he continued to publish the magazine for two years. In 1973 he handed over the reins to his close friend and associate Wole Soyinka, who said "something had snapped in Rajat's sensitive soul" and had debilitating effects on his earlier drive. Rajat moved to San Francisco, where he was to eventually die at the age of 57. After he left Africa, he was not the same.

In 1991 *Transition* was resurrected in the US by Hutchins Centre, Harvard University. It is published three times a year by Indiana University Press for the centre, and Soyinka is the chair of its editorial board.

In 2017 *Transition* had a homecoming when a partnership with Jalada, a pan-African writers' collective based in Nairobi, allowed one of the magazine's issues that year to be printed in Kenya, from where it was distributed across the continent. It was the first time since the early 1970s that *Transition* magazine was once again published in Africa.<sup>20</sup>

In broadcasting, Jimmy (Jamil) Dean,<sup>21</sup> rose to be the most prominent Ugandan Asian in TV as a news presenter, and leading sports broadcaster.



Dean was born in Wandegeya, Uganda, on 25 March 1952. His father was a trader in Nakasero Market and he died when Jimmy was about six years old. His mother was a house-wife who managed some cottage businesses.

To borrow the words of retired military officer and politician Col Kahinda Otafiire: "A lot has been said and written about Jimmy [Dean]. Jimmy the sportsman. Jimmy the motor rally ace, Jimmy the journalist and broadcaster. Jimmy the philanthropist."

As an environmentalist and human rights crusader, he fought for the green park, opposite the "Clock Tower" in Kampala, to remain an open space for people to meet. In the 1990 to early 2000s, the country was fighting off Rastafarians but Jimmy Dean fought for their rights saying, "they are also people who need their space to meet and congregate and live within our communities". The government was giving him excuses as to how the space had been marked to construct a fly over, but he argued saying, "we have heard that for the past 30 years, but as of now, can it be a freedom square for people to enjoy the green". More than 20 years on, a fly-over is slated to be built.

Dean also had a big impact on the arts and drama, and was a trustee of Nakivubo Stadium, the main stadium in Kampala at the time.

He was a feminist and encouraged the girl child to do whatever a boy could, teaching his daughters to fight from childhood for their rights. The fact that he was raised by a single mother no doubt influenced him; he and his mother were very close as she was the centre of their household.

Jimmy Dean was of South Asian origin. He was a down to earth person and associated with different calibres of people from different backgrounds. He loved dancing and always made jokes around his company. As a pan-Africanist he held leadership positions in the Pan Africa Society of Uganda, and once organised a motor rally to Rwanda during skirmishes between Uganda and Rwanda in Kisangani, eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2000.

He did a great deal of charity work but never bragged about it. During the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war in northern Uganda, he lost many friends and took care of their widows and children. Having had a good relationship with the Cuban embassy — he was chair of the Uganda-Cuban Society — they were able to give scholarships to the orphans which enabled them to go study in Cuba.

In his younger working life, Dean was a journalist and a director of Uganda TV.

When Paul Kana, a former floor manager at Uganda Television, reminded him that he was once the boss while Dean was a cameraman, Jimmy answered: "I appreciate your input." By then Dean was director of UTV. They remained close friends and Jimmy employed Kana at his Technofire Appliances after both retired from the civil service in the mid-1990s.

His brother Gulam Dean introduced him to the racing world and in the rally world they were referred to as the "Dean brothers". It was said that Shekhar Mehta was the fastest driver in Uganda, but Jimmy Dean was the best driver, known for his dare devil tactics. He clinched the 1987 and 1988 national rally titles.

On 27 April 2001, at 2.30 pm, Dean's body was found in his house where he lived alone. He had suffered a massive heart attack. He was at that time chair of the Uganda Motor Club.

"Every child, every shopkeeper, every market woman, more or less everyone knew him," says Prof. Mahmood Mamdani. *The New Vision* newspaper called Jimmy Dean, Uganda's folk hero!

Dean's body was driven in a rally car motorcade from his Kololo residence to the cemetery where he was buried.

Mahmood Mamdani was Dean's friend, but also a leading columnist in the country for a while. Mamdani is Uganda's, and one of Africa's, leading academics, authors, and political commentators. In 2017, Mamdani was named among the world's top 20 public intellectuals<sup>22</sup> by *Foreign Policy* and *Prospect* magazines.

Mamdani, specialises in the study of African and international politics, colonialism and post-colonialism; is a prolific author, his latest book, a tome, is *Neither Settler nor Native: The Making and Unmaking of Permanent Minorities*.<sup>23</sup>

He is the director of the Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), in Kampala, and the Herbert Lehman Professor of Government at the School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University and the Professor of Anthropology, Political Science and African Studies at Columbia University.

Mamdani is a third generation Ugandan of South Asian ancestry. Both his parents were born in Tanganyika (present day Tanzania).

He left for a refugee camp in the UK with his family after military dictator Idi Amin expelled members of the South Asian community in 1972. At the time he was a teaching assistant and also doing his research for his doctoral degree.

He left the UK in 1973 to teach at the university of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. The Tanzanian-led war against Amin found him there, and he joined the Moshi Conference of Ugandan exile groups in 1979 as an observer. He returned to Uganda after the ouster of Amin.

He was to lose his Ugandan citizenship a second time in 1984, while attending a conference in Dakar, Senegal, he became stateless after his citizenship was withdrawn by the government under Milton Obote due to his criticism of its policies.<sup>24</sup> He got his citizenship back after President Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement/ Army came to power in January 1986.



With the radical *Weekly Topic* having been revived Mamdani wrote one of the most influential columns in late 1980s in Uganda for the paper called “Over the Fence”, with Sekanyolya (heron) as the protagonist. In Uganda’s history, *Sekanyolya* was the title of an anti-colonial African newspaper, and the name is associated with being probing and questioning. Mamdani also one of the editors of a radical journal, *Forward*, in the early 1980s being his second expulsion, and established the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala in 1987. His column in *Weekly Topic* was the last regular newspaper commentary written by a Ugandan of South Asian descent in the national press.

## The Rebels Behind The Lenses

In chapter four of this book, on Eastern African photojournalists, Mohamed Amin, Mohinder Dhillon, and Priya Ramrakha are examined at some length. It is worth noting that photojournalism seemed to be particularly suitable in overcoming institutional barriers to entry into media work by non-whites in East Africa. And unlike written reporting, is a pursuit mostly done solo, making it attractive for South Asian photographers who were, in some ways, even in rebellion against the Asian social mainstream.

It’s small wonder the best of them were mavericks, eccentrics, and courageous in deadly ways. Mohamed Amin<sup>25</sup> was born into the high noon of colonial decline and rose to become a world renowned photographer, cameraman, TV producer/ director, author and publisher. Son of a poor railway worker in Nairobi, he started his photographic career with a second-hand box brownie and never received any formal training as a photo-journalist. His coverage, together with others, of the

Ethiopian famine in 1984 inspired a collective global response and saved the lives of millions of men, women and children. Mo (as he was popularly known) covered major events in Africa and beyond, braving 28 days of torture, surviving bombs and bullets, even the loss of his right arm in an ammunition dump explosion in Ethiopia. An artificial arm was fashioned, and Mo continued to project his images across the world.

Mo marketed himself as an African eye who could capture Africa better than outsiders could, "Africa has to be reported by Africans" was one of his refrains. In 1969, he was in the ambulance with the assassinated charismatic Kenyan minister Tom Mboya; he was there in 1991 when rebel soldiers marched into the Ethiopian capital, having overthrown the dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam; he captured exclusive images of the Pakistan military and the Afghan mujahedeen in the 1970s. He was one of the first TV reporters in Baghdad after the invasion of Kuwait in 1990. He was awarded the M.B.E. in 1992 to honour 30 years of covering trouble spots in Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

Mo had a fiercely competitive nature when it came to news. He founded the Camerapix company in 1963 in Dar es Salaam and moved the company to Nairobi three years later. His life was tragically cut short in November 1996 at the age of 53 when hijackers commandeered an Ethiopian airliner forcing it to crash land in the Indian Ocean off the Comoros killing 123 passengers and crew. He died on his feet still negotiating with the terrorists.

His son, Salim Amin, has built on his father's lasting legacy. Camerapix has evolved, moving away from hard news and more into documentaries and corporate work. One of its productions is a documentary titled "Mo & Me" about the company's founder and his son.

Sir Mohinder Dhillon<sup>26</sup> was born in a remote village in British India. Dhillon came to Kenya in 1947 at the age of 16; his earliest memory of photography was a camera advertisement: "Buy Kodak Box Brownie and shoot your mother-in-law!" With a simple Box Brownie he started taking pictures and processed them in a dark area in a kitchen that had no windows. He improvised with soap dishes and an ordinary light bulb wrapped around with yellow paper to develop and then print the images.

He knew no English and the white folks in Nairobi were downright racist but a Jewish woman who had a contract with the *East African Standard* gave him his first break. Without any formal training he developed an eye for composition, and a gift to recognise what makes a good picture. A dramatic picture he took of rows

of Mau Mau suspects being screened launched him as a news photographer.

He trained his wife to take passport photos and their income was secured. In 1961 he became a TV cameraman and the following year he founded Africapix which grew to be the biggest private news photo and TV agency in Africa catering for international demands. “I came into this profession to earn a living,” he said, “later it became a passion.”

He earned the reputation of a “combat film maker” as he covered major global wars, famines and rebellions in Vietnam, Ethiopia, Uganda, Afghanistan, Arab/Israel, India/Pakistan, Congo, Biafra, etc. There were risks involved; in 1964 he nearly got executed in the Congo. There was also a lot of anguish and frustration in filming children dying like flies.

For the most remarkable aspect of Mo’s brilliant career was that he never lost touch with his humble beginnings and deep humanism. Whenever he found himself in a situation where victims were being tortured for the benefit of the cameras, he would stop shooting even if it meant missing a world scoop.

In Kenya he trained dozens of technicians and organised free mobile cinema shows in the villages. One of his most famous trainees was the photojournalist, Mohamed Amin. Among his many firsts and greats is the historical trilogy, *White Man’s Country, Black Man’s Land*. Banned under the Kenyatta/Moi dictatorships, it is now preserved in Kenya’s national archives and shown on national occasions.

Known for his photographic skill and loved for his humanism, this “gentle giant” passed away in March 2020 after a long struggle with injuries resulting from some of his filming escapades.

For Priya Ramrakha,<sup>27</sup> photography had begun as a hobby and he graduated from a Kodak camera to a Rolleiflex. Soon it became a passion and he covered the Lari Massacre of March 1953, when Mau Mau militants killed up to 97 loyalist colonial Home Guards, to the trials of Kenya’s nationalist leaders, the “Kapenguria Six”—Jomo Kenyatta, Bildad Kaggia, Kung’u Karumba, Fred Kubai, Paul Ngei, and Achieng’ Oneko — in December 1952.

These pictures were published in his uncle’s (G L Vidyarthi’s) anti-British *Colonial Times*. Priya befriended Africans, rebel soldiers, and everyday people alike. He was trusted and respected; and he possessed the imagination, the inventiveness, and the perseverance to earn the access that would allow him to capture his subjects in striking detail. Priya’s photographs suggest that he saw his pictures from great distance, and then moved carefully into close proximity with his subject.

In 1959 he met a renowned *LIFE* magazine photographer and with him set out to correct the images in the West of Africa being the abode of primitive and uncivilised people. In 1963 he covered the pomp of Kenya's independence and recorded the festivities of decolonisation across Africa for *TIME* and *LIFE*. He was unflappably devoted to getting a story and carefully negotiated the racial politics of the era.

Ramrakha was energetic, creative and always in motion. Satwant Singh of Nairobi's Sapra Studio says: "When Priya came to town we had to be on 24-hour standby. Sometimes he arrived at three or four in the morning and I processed his film then. He would sleep on a chair or on the floor and then head straight to the airport the next day." He was a very westernised journalist, but Kenya was his country and Africa was his continent. He had the antennae out in all those directions.

His final assignment was coverage of the Biafran War, Priya charted its tragic course. He was emotionally torn to pieces by what he saw and lamented "Why can't the world understand?" In 1968 in the Biafra War Zone he came under a surprise ambush by the Biafran rebels and was hit, he died before he could get to an aid station. Priya was only 33 years old, but his work is testament to his dedication as both African journalist and historian of his time. His pictures capture the vision of a remarkable man who expressed his quiet sensitivity, and his love for Africa, from behind the camera lens.

In Tanzania, Adarsh Nayar<sup>28</sup> did freelance photography while still a student at the Allidina Visram High School in Mombasa, his first photos appearing in the *Mombasa Times* in 1959. That year he moved to a school in Dar es Salaam where he linked up with Mohamed Amin; they sent their photos to the *Tanganyika Standard*. Photo journalism then was, however, very much a white person's domain and Adarsh proceeded to India to study engineering.

But photography was his first love. He returned to Dar es Salaam in 1964 and would help out Amin in his Camerapix studio and freelance with the *Standard*. The following year Adrian Begg, the *Nation* bureau chief in Dar es Salaam, asked Adarsh to join him. Next, the *Standard* office in Nairobi appointed him as chief photographer on expatriate terms. This meant he could freelance with the international press, and from 1967 to 2000 he was the *Associated Press (AP)* representative in Tanzania for print and photos, and covered Uganda and Kenya too. "In those days," reminisces Nayar, "a newspaper was produced by less than ten persons and so we had many more privileges".

Though chief photographer at the *Tanzania Standard Newspapers* Nayar was the personal photographer of Julius Nyerere. He was the man behind Nyerere's images and portraits hanging in offices and featuring on some bank notes, and was instrumental in preparing Nyerere's press conferences. Though as a chief photographer he could have stayed in the office, Nayar says "there was a pull factor on Mwalimu ... I found myself following him wherever he went ... he was such a powerful orator."

Nayar gives us some interesting insights into Nyerere: For example his insistence on discussing issues and not people; he was a stickler for punctuality; he led a simple life and lived in what must be the smallest presidential house in the world; he closely guarded the privacy of his family life and refused to make it a burden on the state thus travelling abroad with only Mama Maria; he had a very good sense of humour but his temper would trip within a second.

The death of Nyerere in 1999 deeply affected Nayar. In 2000 he moved his office to London but continued as Reuter's (TV) representative in Tanzania. He now lives in London and has his work published in *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek* and other magazines. He remembers with affection the camaraderie with Mo Amin, Mo Dhillon, Priya Ramrakha, David Martin and others.



"I am sitting on a huge archive of Mwalimu's speeches, voice recordings and nostalgic photos which will die with me; and the Tanzanian masses will be deprived of their history," says Nayar. So he is building a library for Nyerere with the Royal Commonwealth Society of Britain, the Indian Council for Cultural Affairs and others offering facilities and assistance. He is working closely with Anna Nyerere, one of Mwalimu's daughters in writing a book titled: *Mwalimu Nyerere: My Father*.

## This Radio Journalist

"It all began in 1947 as fun", says Musa Ayoob.<sup>29</sup> "Cable & Wireless allowed a 15-minute slot for Hindustani music. Not only did I not know anything about radio broadcasting, having been born and bred in Kijabe [on the edge of the Rift Valley, 48 kilometres north of Nairobi] I had never even seen a radio." This was the genesis of an illustrious career and the formation of the Hindustani Service in Kenya; and the amazing band of men and women who, known for their enduring camaraderie, were its inspiration.

The air time was increased to 45 minutes. In addition, to the music and songs, Ayooob crafted new programmes: *Phoolwari* (Children's programme); *Mahila Mandal* (Women's Programme); original story reading; live vocal and instrumental music and *mushaira* (poetry reading). The news bulletin was supplied by the *East African Standard* and had to be translated.

In 1952, commercial announcements were introduced and T N Soni joined Ayooob as a fulltime broadcaster. Chaman Lal Chaman and Pritam Singh Chaggar followed and radio dramas, outside events and interviews of personalities were added. Politicians were out of bounds. After a short break, Ayooob returned to radio and in 1962 was promoted to Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) TV, a service for all Kenyans but aired only between 6.00 and 11.00 p.m. in the first decade.



The name was changed to VOK (Voice of Kenya); a Kiswahili Service was developed; James Kangwana was the first African Director of Broadcasting and Achieng Oneko was the first Minister of Information and Broadcasting. The Hindustani Service was amalgamated in the local languages service and its airing time curtailed. Ayooob retired before the Africanisation policy could catch up with him. Many of the stalwarts of the Hindustani Service: Deedar Singh Pardesi, Harbhajan Preet, Tochi Chaggar and several others

emigrated to the UK where they made their mark in the world of TV and radio, as well as sustain their camaraderie in the Voice of Kenya Union.

It would take the liberalisation of the airwaves from the mid-1990s, for a second wave of South Asians to return to radio and TV.

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## **A Chilly Wind over the Indian Ocean**

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In Seychelles the journalists sleep a little easier than in Tanzania, Comoros, and Madagascar

Ahmed Rajab

In one of its many coincidences, history linked the fate of Tanzania's media, at their most critical junctures, with both Germany's colonial expansion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its rebirth as a reunified state in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The first crucial events in Germany were the Berlin Conference (1884-1885) which gave the former Tanganyika to the Germans, and the signing in 1890 of the Heligoland-Zanzibar Treaty between Britain and Germany. The treaty, among other things, ended Germany's claims to the Zanzibar protectorate and its possessions on the mainland. In return, Germany recognised British suzerainty over Zanzibar.

It was during those times that newspapers were first published in both Tanganyika and Zanzibar. The main languages were Kiswahili (in Latin script and in Zanzibar, until 1964, in Arabic script as well), English, Arabic and Hindi.

The first newspaper, in what is now Tanzania, was published in Zanzibar in 1888 by the Anglican Universities' Mission to Central Africa (UMCA) and was called *Msimulizi* (The Story Teller).<sup>1</sup> Two years later, in mid-1890, *Mtenga Watu* (The Convertor) was established by the UMCA but it turned out to be a poor copy of *Msimulizi*. Newspapers, dailies, weeklies and monthlies, were thus first published by missionaries, then by colonial administrations, both German and British, and finally by private publishers.

In both countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, the locally owned press played a

pivotal role in politicising their respective populations and aided the struggle for independence from colonial rule. The press survived uneventfully until the mid-1960s, when it was stifled by the watchful gaze, nay control, of the one-party rule, particularly after the merger of the two countries into Tanzania in April 1964.

While the newspapers in Tanzania were once vivacious, attracting suitors from all walks of life, they became insipid in the period leading up to the reintroduction of multi-party politics in 1992. The collapse of communism and the demolition of the Berlin Wall (November 1989) contributed hugely to the liberalisation of the media in the country. In just under a decade, the media's ecology was totally transformed.

When the Berlin Wall stood, the media in Tanzania was almost entirely under the ownership of the government and only two political parties were allowed, the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) in Tanganyika and the Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP) in Zanzibar. The two parties merged in 1984 to form Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM). With liberalisation (political and economic), the government allowed private ownership of the media and, in no time, Tanzania had one of the fastest-growing media sectors in Africa.

Since independence from Britain in the early 1960s, radio has been the main medium of communication for most Tanzanians, because of its reach and the language used. The majority of Tanzanians could speak Swahili and the State-owned Tanganyika Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), which later became Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), broadcasting in the language, took advantage of the fact. Newspapers were mostly for urban dwellers.

The independent government's policy was to use the mass media as developmental tools to assist in the fight against what it said were its three enemies: poverty, disease and ignorance. The government also put the country's media, particularly the state broadcaster, at the service of African liberation movements based in Dar es Salaam.

Over the last 60 years, as these events played out in Tanzania, outstanding journalists emerged with them to play a significant role in the country's social and political life.

In radio, there was David Wakati, who rose to become the longest-serving director of RTD. His authoritative voice became synonymous with "big news".



When he took to the airwaves, Tanzanians knew something big was about to be announced. During the Cold War and the liberation struggles, he made sure that people were always informed of the government's positions on those issues.

Nsa Kaisi, an army colonel-cum-journalist, was instrumental in educating media colleagues about wars, ideology and the course of the Southern African liberation movements. Kaisi is said to have coined the term "Azimio la Arusha" (The Arusha Declaration), the most important political statement of independent Tanzania and a blueprint of President Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa (Socialist) policies.<sup>2</sup>

Kamwaga traces the beginning of investigative journalism at the government-owned radio station to Sami Mdee, when he started the Majira programme, which focused on the plight of ordinary people.

In the 1970s, Jenerali Ulimwengu, with a few other journalists, made a dangerous trek to the war zones in Mozambique, passing through the crocodile-infested Ruvuma River with make-shift boats. The foray into the liberated areas of Mozambique was the beginning of a lasting friendship between the journalists and the Mozambican liberators. It made Tanzania one of the few countries in Africa in that period whose journalists had actually visited the liberation zones and had personal stories to tell.



Benjamin Mkapa, who became the country's third president in 1995, played a pioneering role in Tanzania's post-independent press. Nyerere threw him in the deep in the 1960s when he nationalised *The Standard* newspaper and asked Mkapa to edit it. The newspaper was renamed *Daily News* and Mkapa quickly became the ruling party's and the government's eye on the media.<sup>3</sup>

In 1976, Nyerere picked him to be the founding head of the newly established Tanzania News Agency, Shirika la Habari la Tanzania (SHIHATA). The news agency died in August 1999 in the face of stiff competition from the new independent press. In the early 1990s, Mkapa was the information minister when the media was being privatised.

At all times, Mkapa made sure that journalists under him followed the party line. Dissent was not tolerated. This was the time when journalists developed self-censorship reflexes.

The early period saw its fair share of radical, and sometimes colourful, journalists. Erica Fiah was as radical as they came. The fiery Ugandan published *Kwetu* (Home), a Swahili weekly, which was the first newspaper in Tanganyika to be owned by an African.

Fiah's family had migrated to Tanganyika from Uganda. In Dar es Salaam, his father was the leader of the labourers at the port. Later, the son was also involved in dock workers' politics and became part of Dar es Salaam's social fabric.

He was well known in town by the time *Kwetu* started publishing on 18 November 1937. The application for the paper's registration said that *Kwetu* would focus on the social and economic problems of the "natives" and the issues of discrimination and racism.

Fiah's newspaper was a game-changer. Before *Kwetu*, successive colonial governments used newspapers as their mouthpieces. *Kwetu* was different. It attacked colonial as well as church leaders and sensitised Africans to their rights.

It was no surprise that, when the Swahili fortnightly *Mwafrika*, owned by Kheri Rashidi Baghdelle was launched in September 1957, it followed in the footsteps of *Kwetu*, which appeared erratically following the Second World War. It finally stopped publication in March 1951.

For a black-owned newspaper to flourish in Tanganyika, it had to champion the people's interests. That was the spirit that imbued *Sauti ya TANU* (*The Voice of TANU*), the organ of Nyerere's party. It set out its mission in its first edition as fighting for the country's independence and for the uplifting of the downtrodden.<sup>4</sup>

The paper, a weekly, was renamed *Uhuru* on Independence Day, 9 December 1961. It turned into a daily in 1964. A new sister weekly, *Mzalendo* (*The Patriot*), was also established at the same time. The two papers dominated the market for nearly four decades.

Tanzania has probably more sports newspapers than any other African country, and indeed many others in the world. This was no accident. It is thanks to one man, Salvator Bernard Ndyema Rweyemamu.

A graduate of the university of Cardiff, Wales, Salva climbed the professional ladder from being an *Uhuru* cub reporter to a News Editor by the late 1980s. Salva had a burning desire to own a newspaper. This amused some of his colleagues because, at that time, but for a few religious publications, all the newspapers

were owned either by the government or the ruling party.

Rweyemamu was resolute. In the late 1980s, he sounded out one of his close journalist friends, John Rutayisingwa, who was then working in newly independent Zimbabwe, on the prospects of starting a newspaper.

When Rutayisingwa returned in the early 1990s, Salva met him with a question: “When do we start?”. The government by then had already allowed private ownership of the media, and Rutayisingwa suggested they contact Jenerali Ulimwengu as a prospective partner. Ulimwengu, a lawyer turned journalist, was a District Commissioner in Dar es Salaam. He was also a member of Parliament, and the two journalists knew him when he worked with the government-owned *The Standard*.



Rutayisingwa had been informed that Ulimwengu was on the verge of starting his own publication, a magazine in English. It took much convincing on Salva’s part for Ulimwengu to agree instead to publish a Swahili-language sports newspaper.

That was how *Dimba*, the first Swahili newspaper exclusively devoted to sports, started in May 1994. Salva, Rutayisingwa, Ulimwengu, Johnson Mbwambo and Shaaban Kanuwa were the first directors of the company that published the new newspaper.

Rweyemamu was the editor, with Mbwambo as his deputy. The two former *Uhuru* journalists started out with just a typewriter. They had to “liberate” some furniture from their homes to furnish their first office, an abandoned kitchen at the Vijana (Youth) Social Hall, in Kinondoni Vijana.

However, with hard work and creativity, *Dimba* became one of the leading newspapers in Tanzania, just before the internet broke into the media space.

Every time Rweyemamu visited London, he would go to underground train stations and collect abandoned newspapers. When he returned to Dar es Salaam, he would translate stories that he thought would interest Tanzanians.<sup>5</sup>

In a few months, *Dimba* became the highest selling newspaper in the country. Other media houses decided to emulate *Dimba* once they saw the profits it was generating.

At present, on any single day, there are at least a couple of sports newspapers on the newsstands. The papers have popularised sport, particularly football, to the point where all influential people in Tanzania have to be associated with it.

There are numerous challenges regarding the depth of reporting, and the uneven concentration on football at the expense of other sports. But Rweyemamu and the *Dimba* team changed the game forever when they started the country's first sports newspaper.



Until then, politics had ruled the roost. When Tanzania's founding President, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, invited Frene Ginwala to become Managing Editor of *The Standard*, after its nationalisation in 1969, the spirited South African Marxist told Nyerere of her misgivings.

All her life, Ginwala had worked for the opposition in her country, constantly clashing with the apartheid regime. She did not know how she could fare working for a government, even one that was socialist-inclined and supporting liberation movements, as Nyerere's was.

Nyerere assured her he did not want a government mouthpiece. Little did he know what was awaiting him. In a very short time, Ginwala transformed *The Standard* like no other editor had done before or even after.

Using her vast connections, Ginwala was able to hire experienced foreign journalists, such as Richard Gott, to write for the paper. A leftist ideologue, she pushed the paper to the left of the ideological spectrum.

She is remembered for being the first to starting regional bureaus for a Tanzanian newspaper. This meant that stories from remote regions appeared in the *Daily News*. Later, other media houses followed suit by having correspondents in the rural areas and offices in major regional centres such as Arusha, Mwanza, Dodoma and Mbeya.<sup>6</sup>

The articles that Ginwala and her expatriate contributors wrote were eye-openers for her local reporters. They subsequently helped raise reporters' journalistic standards.

At that time, Tanzania did not have a single journalism school and most of the journalists had either received their training abroad or on the job.



Ginwala had worked for *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK and used to be a stringer for various western publications. She wanted her newspaper to have the same standards.

Unfortunately, she fell out with Nyerere and left the country before accomplishing her goal. During the rest of her exile, Ginwala travelled around the world preaching about the horrors of apartheid and the fight against it.<sup>7</sup> She returned to South Africa in 1991 after the end of apartheid. She was the Speaker of the South African National Assembly from 1994 to 2004.

What Ginwala did not do fell to Fili Karashani to accomplish. Nobody has trained as many journalists, or started as many newspapers, in Tanzania as did Fili Karashani, who passed on in 2020. Karashani will also be remembered for editing the *Business Times*, the first post-liberalisation private newspaper in Tanzania. It was started in 1987, when the country was still a one-party state.

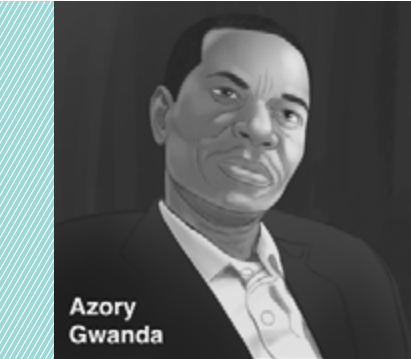
Karashani also trained journalists in Tanzania's first-ever in-house journalism training institution, the Maarifa Media Trust (MAMET). He was also the first Tanzanian journalist to work in a mainstream newspaper outside his country, at the *Daily Nation* in Kenya. His almost six decades in journalism also took him to Zambia and Zimbabwe, where he worked as a journalist as well as a trainer of journalists.

At the *Business Times*, Karashani had one mantra: "Never touch politics or politicians". His aversion to politics protected his paper but the stratagem had unfortunate, albeit unintended, consequences whose ripples are still felt today. Karashani's tactic of "playing safe" with the government has affected Tanzanian journalism. In the face of President John Magufuli's authoritarianism,<sup>8</sup> the mainstream media seemed to be emulating Karashani by shunning politics.

It has become increasingly difficult to have a critical press, as stringent media laws have been enacted and closures of newspapers and threats to journalists' lives have become commonplace. At least one journalist, Azory Gwanda, a correspondent for the *Mwananchi* newspaper, has disappeared. That was in November 2017.<sup>9</sup> In a BBC interview in July 2019, Tanzanian foreign minister Palamagamba Kabudi said Gwanda was dead.<sup>10</sup>

Large sections of the media are now concerned more with their own survival than with playing a critical role as a watchdog, because it is risky. Lately, it fell to Vicky Ntetema, a former BBC journalist, to use her journalistic skills bravely to

uncover albino killings and thereby exposed the country's entrenched beliefs in sorcery and witchcraft.<sup>11</sup>



In the post-independence state-building project, the consolidation of *Ujamaa* policies, the support for the African liberation movements, and the geopolitical games of the Cold War era, the state broadcaster Tanzania Broadcasting Corporation (TBC), in the end, was the main actor. To understand that period is to understand TBC.

After Tanganyika's independence, the Nyerere government invested heavily in the national broadcaster, then called the Tanganyika Broadcasting Corporation (TBC). Nyerere knew that he could best rely on the radio to convey his messages. Most of his people were illiterate, and newspapers were beyond them. In 1962, he appointed Mikidadi Mdoe, to be TBC's first Managing Director. Mdoe made significant and lasting changes to the TBC. Under his stewardship in 1968, TBC, then known as Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam (RTD), introduced two key programmes: the Second and Third Programmes. The first was intended to create extra income for the radio, and the other to assist liberation movements.

The radio would broadcast in Ndebele, Shona, Portuguese, Herero and other African languages in order to help the Southern African freedom fighters. RTD was put under TANU's Publicity Committee that was made up of top officials from government-owned media houses. It meant that the radio could not stray away from the party mission.

As the first native head of TBC, Mdoe made innovative changes. Some programmes, such as *Mazungumzo Baada ya Habari* (News Talk), which was aired immediately after the 8 pm news bulletin, were prepared in coordination with top TANU officials.<sup>12</sup>

The consequence of that practice is that up to now, the government-owned media still largely behave as if their duty is to the government of the day and not to the country.

## INSIDE THE INDIAN OCEAN ISLANDS

### Zanzibar

Until the revolution on 12 January 1964, Zanzibar had a plethora of privately owned publications in different languages, for urban and rural audiences. These included newsheets in Swahili using Arabic script. As well as devouring some of its sons, the revolution also swallowed almost all the privately owned press.

The first newspapers to close down were those which supported the ousted government formed by the Zanzibar Nationalist (ZNP) and the Zanzibar and Pemba Peoples' Party (ZPPP). These included the trilingual (English/Swahili/Arabic) *Mwongozi (The Leader)*, which was established in 1942 and whose editor, Ahmed Seif Kharusi, fled Zanzibar with the sultan on the day of the revolution.

Abdulrahman Babu, leader of the Marxist Umma Party, edited the *Zanzibar News Service (ZANEWS)*, which was published in both Swahili and English. But it ceased publication when the Umma Party was proscribed by the ZNP/ZPPP government on 6 January 1964. Two other Umma Party organs, *Sauti ya Umma* and *Kwacha* had stopped publication in 1963. All the Umma publications, together with *The Worker*, run by the Federation of Progressive Trade Unions (FPTU), which was affiliated with the Umma Party, had taken an openly pro-communist line at the height of the Cold War and played a significant role in propagating Marxist and progressive ideas among the urban youth.

The trilingual (Gujarati, English and Swahili) weekly *Adal Insaf (Justice)*, which was founded in 1948 and edited by the radical Parsee Rutti Bulsara, ceased publication in 1968. Bulsara also edited the ZNP's *Vanguard* which was started in 1959.

The oldest Asian newspaper in the whole of East Africa, *The Samachar (The News)*, which was first published in 1902, in English and Gujarati, also folded in 1968. Its demise was caused by the revolutionary government's new economic policies, which strangled Asian-owned businesses, leading to an exodus of Asians from the islands. This affected advertisement revenues as well as readership. The final blow came when the government confiscated its printing machine.<sup>13</sup>

The government started a broadsheet with the mouthful title of *Kweli Ikidihiri Uwongo Hujitenga (When Truth Prevails, Falsehood Vanishes)*. In the two decades following the revolution, Zanzibar hardly had any independent press to boast of. The situation dramatically changed during the political liberalisation era.

In 2002, a small group of Zanzibaris, led by a young political activist, Ismail Jussa, decided to set up their own newspaper. The group included veteran journalist Salim Said Salim, BBC stringer Ally Saleh and Hamza Rijal. They gave Jussa the task of approaching Ali Nabwa, a former journalist, to invite him to edit the paper. Nabwa agreed on condition that the newspaper should be transparent and fearless. Thus, the weekly *Dira (Compass)* was born.<sup>14</sup>



*Dira*, which was printed in Dar es Salaam, soon became a thorn in the government's flesh, with its exposés of high-level corruption, its analyses of the functioning of the Union of Tanzania at the expense of Zanzibar, including how Zanzibar's oil reserves would be used for the benefit of the Mainland (the former Tanganyika). Some of the anti-union articles were written with damning input by senior officials, including a minister of the Zanzibar government.<sup>15</sup>

The publication's investigative reporting also probed the corruption-infested tourism sector and dived back into history to explore the disappearances of revolutionary heavyweights during the early years of the revolution.

Nabwa's pen also dared to touch on the supposed sanctity of Nyerere, when he wrote an acerbic article under the heading "Nyerere was no angel". It was the first time that the "Father of the Nation" was portrayed so negatively in the country's media.

In the end, the inevitable happened. The Tanzania Media Council was used to silence Nabwa. He was accused of being a non-citizen, who was involved in a plot to overthrow the Comoros government. As a result of the continued persecution, Nabwa's health deteriorated rapidly. He died on 15 February 2007 at the age of 71.

### Comoros

The former French-ruled Comoro islands governments have had a curious – if not strange – relationship with the press. The French, who took possession of the islands in the 19th century, annexed the Comoros to Madagascar in 1912 and ruled them as a single province of Madagascar until 1946, when Comoros became an overseas French territory with its capital at Dzaoudzi, Mayotte. No newspaper was established in Comoros during the entire period of French rule, which ended in 1975, when Comoros unilaterally declared its independence.

The only way the population could express political views and air their grievances was through bilingual leaflets. These were usually produced in French on one side and Shingazija (a variant of Kiswahili, which was then written only in Arabic script) on the other.<sup>16</sup>

Until independence, when France withdrew its technical assistance, the radio on the island was a branch of the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF), the national agency charged, between 1964 and 1974, with providing public radio and television in France. All programming, and especially news broadcasts, were under the strict control of the French government.<sup>17</sup>

The first newspaper in Comoros, *Courier de Comores*, was published in 1976 by a *Figaro*-trained journalist, Hadji Hassanali. It was a four-page tabloid, printed in Tanzania's commercial capital Dar es Salaam. At the time, Comoros was under the rule of pseudo-Marxist Ali Soilih. After seeing his first two issues dominated by government-sponsored articles on the Marxist concept of history, Hassanali fled the country and ended his paper's publication.<sup>18</sup>

Comoros' second newspaper, *Al Watwany*, was started by the government in January 1985 as a monthly and, later, as a weekly. Prior to that, except for *Courier de Comores*, only pamphlets and political tracts dominated Comoros' media landscape. They were all allied to political parties. The most prominent of these was *Uhuru*, the mouthpiece of Parti Socialiste des Comores (Pasoco). *Uhuru*, reflecting its party's views, offered a socialist alternative to the policies of the main conservative and pro-French political parties — the Parti Vert (the Green Party) and the parti blanc (the White Party).

The main liberation movement, the Mouvement de la Libération Nationale des Comores (Molinaco), which agitated for independence from France, was founded in 1962 in Dar es Salaam, Tanganyika. Molinaco was banned in Comoros, but it started clandestine activities in the isles in 1967, collaborating with Pasoco and, at times, with another pro-independence party, the Party for the Evolution of the Comoros (Parti pour l'Évolution des Comores).

Another independent newspaper was *L'Archipel*, which was established in 1988 as a one-man operation by veteran journalist Aboubacar Mchangama, who was its publisher/editor. It survived for seven years. Mchangama, who was by then the Agence France Presse (AFP) correspondent in Moroni, has been in trouble with the Comorian authorities several times since French and Belgian mercenaries held sway in the country at various times between 1975 and 1995.

Another early independent newspaper was *Kashkazi*, which was edited by Saindou Kamaledine, a former *Al-Watwan* journalist. *Kashkazi* was as progressive as *L'Archipel*, but because of its financial clout was also able to do more investigative reporting, delving into issues of justice, human rights and high-level corruption, including in the nascent oil sector. The paper benefitted from the expertise of expatriate French journalists who worked for it.<sup>19</sup>

The journalists in Comoros have always operated in an oppressive environment. The country's 2001 constitution guarantees freedom of speech and of the press, but that has not stopped the government from instituting draconian press laws, impounding newspapers and arresting journalists. In a celebrated 2011 case, for example, Hadji Hassanali, who had resurfaced in Moroni as publisher/editor of the bimonthly *La Tribune des Comores*, and Ali Moindjié editor of the privately owned but now-defunct daily *Al-Balad*, were arrested for "publishing false news". *Al-Balad* was founded by Mohamed Bashar Kiwan, the controversial tycoon with dual Syrian/French citizenship.

The other vocal independent newspapers are *Al-Fajr* and *La Gazette des Comores*, which are run by Allaoui Said Omar and his brother El-Had Said Omar and edited by Mohamed Youssouf. The two independent newspapers together with the government-owned *Al-Watwan* are the most regular newspapers on the three islands of independent Comoros, Grand-Comoro, Anjouan and Mohéli. The fourth island, Mayotte, remains under French rule.

Another independent daily, which started publication about two years ago but mainly online, is *Masiwa*, which is published by Idjabou Bakari and edited by Toufe Maesha. It is heavily supported by members of the Comorian diasporic community in France. *Masiwa's* reportage is balanced, but at times it has been critical of the regime. As a result, a number of its journalists have been harassed by the regime, forcing the publication to appear erratically in recent months.

An interesting journalist in the Comoros is the long-term Reuters correspondent in the islands, Ahmed Ali Ameir, who worked with *Al-Watwan*. During his tenure there, he tried to make the government paper objective, inciting the wrath of his bosses. He was forced to leave about two years ago and the paper changed back to its former self. But so did Ameir, who is now courting controversy by running the communication team of the autocratic President Azali Assoumane.

To his credit though, Ameir mentored one of Comoros' rising female journalists, Faiza Soulé, who has distinguished herself as an investigative journalist. For the past five years, she had been under constant threats as a result of her work. She

was sacked from *Al-Watwan* when Amir left, and she then worked briefly with *La Gazette* before her recent return to *Al-Watwan*. She is one of the few female Comorian journalists who are making a mark in investigative journalism.<sup>20</sup>

## Madagascar

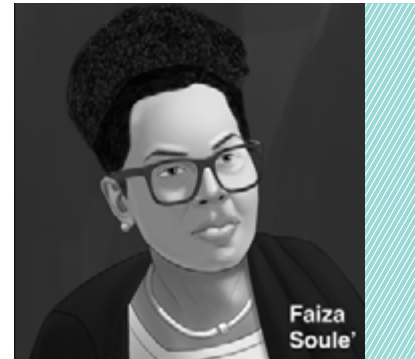
Several underground newspapers existed in Madagascar at the time of the Cold War, when the Malgache were fighting for their independence from France. The country regained its independence in 1960 but Philibert Tsiranana, who presided over the First Republic, ruled with an iron fist until a series of peasant and students' revolts ousted his regime in 1972. Journalists were heavily sanctioned during his rule and during the administrations of his successors. State censorship of the media was formally introduced in 1975 under the presidency of Didier Ratsiraka. Many newspapers proliferated in Antananarivo, the capital city, between 1958 and 1991. The media have always been highly politicised in Madagascar, and from the outset of independence many journalists were at the forefront of fighting for free speech, particularly since 1975.

There were some gains, but these were lost in 1991, when the independent press disappeared altogether in the country. At present, there is no free press in Madagascar. Instead, the press, albeit private, is heavily aligned with business or political interests. The possible exception is *Lakroan'i Madagasikara*, which is subsidised by the Catholic Church.

A number of journalists, too numerous to mention, distinguished themselves during the Cold War by fighting for press freedom and social justice. They include Rado Andriamanantena, Gaby Rabesahala, Rabefananina, James Ramarosaona, Arlene Ratsifehera and Latimer Rangers.

Many of the prominent journalists who used to work in the former independent press have become "employees" of the "commercial/political press" owned by several entrepreneurs. Rangers became the first journalist to be appointed a minister following the 1991 movement. This accounts for the scant objective and independent reporting.<sup>21</sup>

At present, it appears that the most independent and



“daring” of the “independent” press is *La Gazette de la Grande île* which is published by a group of local journalists. But it too at times relapses into sensationalism.

Although the constitution guarantees free speech and press freedom, the press in Madagascar, as in the other countries discussed in this chapter, is constrained in its criticism of the regime. Whenever it feels offended, the regime uses libel laws and criminal code to punish the offending journalists.

### Seychelles

The press in Seychelles has come a long way from the days of the Cold War, particularly when the country was a one-party dictatorship under President France-Albert René (1977-2004). Then the press was shackled by the René regime and individual journalists were arrested. An example was that of Bernard Verlaque, who was the editor and publisher of the weekly *Weekend Life* and a stringer for the BBC African Service.

He was arrested in November 1979 for allegedly plotting with others to overthrow René’s government. However, his arrest was more likely connected with the appearance of clandestine weekly newsletters demanding René’s resignation.<sup>22</sup>

About two weeks before his arrest, his paper was banned. Earlier, the paper had supported primary and secondary school students who had been demonstrating in their thousands against the government’s decision to send students over 15 years of age to Coevity island, some 322 kilometres from the main island of Mahé, for a year-long compulsory ideological and military training. The government later relented, saying that the training would be voluntary and would take place on Mahé island.

The independent *Weekend Life* was established in 1977, but it did not take long before it incited the wrath of the government with its critical reporting. Espousing centrist ideas, it was popular with its readers because of its willingness to publish their letters which were critical of René’s policies.

The *Weekend Life* ban left Seychelles with no independent paper, with the exception of a Roman Catholic church magazine. With the tight government control of the media, an underground press mushroomed for the first time in the islands. A mimeographed anti-socialist weekly, entitled *The Resistance Movement* (and later *New Life*) made its debut during the student protests. The weekly, which was published by the underground Mouvement Pour Résistance, scandalised the political elite and, because of its popularity with the masses, was viewed as a



threat by the authorities. People were warned by the government that they would be arrested and prosecuted if found in possession of copies of the publication.

An example of how *New Life* taunted the authorities was its issue No. 3, with an article under the headline “They seek us here, They seek us there!”:

*René is also asking the police to find out who are members of the 'Mouvement' and where does the paper come from. We will help you. For our first newsletter we used a 'Facit' typewriter, for the second one we used an Imperial 80 ... Our duplicating machine is presently out of order but we have been using one borrowed from our civil servants who hate you ...*

Whenever there was an alleged plot to overthrow the government during the presidency of René, it was the press that suffered the most. The government had progressively assumed emergency powers, including detention without trial, press censorship and arrest without warrant. At the height of the Cold War the legislature had also amended the Seychellois penal code, increasing the punishment for those who “publish or broadcast false news with the aim of sowing fear, or who make defamatory statements against the President of the Republic.”<sup>23</sup>

These days journalists in Seychelles, unlike those in Comoros, Tanzania and Madagascar, enjoy relative freedom and independence with less oppressive media laws. However, they are still constrained from reporting on issues that could be construed as damaging the image of Seychelles. The country depends on tourism as the mainstay of its economy and is touchy about its image.

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## Photojournalists of the Golden Age

They were the defiant ones who died tragically or young

Oyunga Pala

To write about even half a century of photojournalism in Eastern Africa is to wrestle with a subject that is rarely covered in works on journalism, but at the same time is too wide and complex, to be covered in a short chapter. It is a trade with many quirks. It was dominated by a few individuals who loomed larger than life, too often eclipsing their colleagues. They went on to make a significant mark on the profession and the world, in what I choose to define as the Golden Age of East African photography.

To use a metaphor inspired by Winston Churchill's wartime speech, "Never was so much owed by so many to so few." In the period of 30 years from 1965 to 1995, East African photojournalists rose to world-class standards and, for some, fame. This chapter pays homage to some of the pioneers, the risk-takers, the defiant ones, and the particulars of the era that created them.

Looked at against that golden age, photojournalism in the era of digital media is undergoing fundamental disruption. Technology has advanced rapidly, democratising photography and journalism itself. While the single image still holds power in our society, photojournalism is no longer purely the domain of professionals. The structure of news media organisations with the advent of digital media and the business model of news agencies under which photojournalism blossomed in its heyday have been deconstructed and restructured.

The photojournalist captures reality in a manner that is truthful and newsworthy. The scope of photojournalism is wide, and it was not possible to cover the entire spectrum of the evolution of photojournalism within Eastern Africa in

a few thousand words. It remains difficult to account for the rich work of the photojournalists in the region. Some will be excluded and there are those, some of whom were on the frontlines with the defiant ones, who are more qualified to write on the particulars of this subject.

I have elected to limit my focus to pivotal moments in the history of photojournalism in Eastern Africa and the photojournalists who became global actors in response to the challenge of the times. Kenya, partly by design and partly by default, becomes the home of photojournalism in the region, principally because of the presence of a pool of foreign news bureaus operating out of Nairobi, as the regional hub for foreign correspondents.

As a result, omitting detailed historical accounts of the pioneers of photojournalism from Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi will be noticeable. It is noted with some regret that they are no leading female photojournalists from East Africa in this list and, when this story is told in future hopefully the contribution of female photojournalists will be properly recognised. But, again, that also reveals just how journalism, and photography in a particularly stark way, was male-dominated in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

The focus of this chapter is narrowed down further to a group of individuals called the “defiant ones”. Those identified share a sense of dogged determination to break stories against insurmountable odds and usually at the risk of one’s own life. They are also chosen because they achieved fame and celebrity status that took them beyond the realms of their primary profession, and they were frontline witnesses to historically significant events in Africa. Their presence helped shape the space of photojournalism in Eastern Africa, and the period in focus is between the 1960s and 1990s.

The definition of what it meant to be East African here is wide. In the first decade of independent African states, when the region was seen as one territorial confederation, the selected cast here identified with the struggles of not just African peoples within the larger East African region but also those in the Global South under the yoke of imperialism. Irrespective of their ancestry, the selected subjects operated in an era when East African identity was fluid, and they moved between the countries in the region and worked across national boundaries in ways that encompassed the ideals of pan-Africanism.

The golden age delineates a definitive period and the key players involved in shaping our understanding as East Africans, in particular, of the place and purpose of photojournalism. It encompasses a period that begins with the universal

struggle for the emancipation of African people against colonialism, followed by the emergence of independent African states that are beset by internal strife and civil war. It is a period of significant famine stretches, leading up to the end of the Cold War and the rebirth of political pluralism, an imperative for democracy in African states.

The East African golden age is defined as the period of generating new stereotypes, defying structures of power, exposing tragedies in Africa to a global audience, and the prevalence of photojournalists facing high personal risk and premature death. It is during this period that the character of the photojournalist enters the public imagination as the risk-taker, occupying a central position with the arrival of international media bureau stationed within the continent and controlling the narrative in the post-colonial Africa.

How did these East African journalists shift the gaze from the colonial ethnographical- or safari-themed photojournalism to becoming active witnesses of the internal turbulence of post-colonial African countries, the tragedies, and civil wars in the midst of a cold war? Were these photojournalists partly responsible for the narrative of the dark continent of doom, disease and disaster, reinforcing the colonial tropes of Africa?

It is worth recording that photojournalists as witnesses also invariably actively fed macro-political structures and, in some instances, contested them. All the prominent photojournalists from the 1960s through to the 1990s in East Africa were attached to Western news outlets, and anyone who did not work for an international news agency was practically invisible.

At the broader Africa level, the photojournalism of the golden age was dominated by the internal conflicts of Nigeria, Congo, Zanzibar, Uganda, Rwanda, and Somalia and the humanitarian tragedies of the Ethiopian and Sudanese famines. The photojournalists also served as archivists of historical political moments and the beauty and disillusionment of life at the end of the Cold War.

This chapter mainly maps the contribution of four of East Africa's most celebrated photojournalists: Priya Ramrakha (1935-1968), Sir Mohinder Dhillon (1931- 2020), Mohamed Amin (1943-1996) and Hos Maina (1953-1995), but also pays homage to a few others.

Each one of these men had defining moments. Ramrakha showing up as the first true international correspondent from Africa; Sir Mohinder Dhillon for his longevity as a homegrown self-made photojournalist; Mohamed Amin as an

unusual talent who brought versatility and enterprise to the craft never seen before; and Hos Maina displaying understated fortitude as an heir apparent in a profession dominated by foreign correspondents in Africa.



Two of these men died in the cause of duty and away from home. Priya covering the Biafra war in 1968 and Hos Maina in Mogadishu in 1993. The other two, who shared a nickname, Mo, crossed paths many times and collaborated and were rivals, and also broke the world's greatest news story of the 1980s and helped saving millions of lives. Mo Amin died tragically in a hijacked Ethiopian Airlines flight that crashed into the Indian Ocean in 1996. Mohammed Dhillon lived a long life and at his passing at 88, he was widely celebrated as a legend.

East Africa's first true international photojournalist was Priya Ramrakha. Born in 1935, he became the first Kenyan photojournalist of South Asian descent and one of the first African photojournalists to have their pictures published in a major international outlet.

Priya Ramrakha took pictures for American media giant *Time-Life* magazine. Between the 1950s and 1960s, he accumulated an immense body of work but, after his tragic death by crossfire in Nigeria covering the Biafran war,<sup>1</sup> his photographic legacy was nearly erased. Fortunately, a nephew, Shravan Vidyarthi, recovered the archives gathering dust in a Nairobi garage 40 years later.

Ramrakha became one of the first African photojournalists to make statements through her work. e She began what would be a conscious attempt to train a different lens on Africa that fed into the narratives of primitive politics and ethnic-based warfare.

What makes Ramrakha unique is that he was able to capture the struggles against black oppression in both Africa and the United States, both the independence struggles and the civil rights movement, drawing a link between the black diaspora's civil rights struggle in the Americas and the indigenous African crusade for self-rule. Ramrakha covered the Lari massacre in March 1953 during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya and, with the limitations of coverage due to the British censorship of empire excesses, Ramrakha balanced out the images of horror with ones of optimism of a new African reality of political self-determination. The archive is a series of juxtapositions between the anti-colonial struggles in Africa and the civil rights movement in America.

Ramrakha captured iconic images of the charismatic Kenyan minister Tom Mboya, who was assassinated on 5 July 1969 and Jomo Kenyatta, alongside those of Martin Luther King and Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam. He photographed legendary musician Miriam Makeba in exile and developed a reputation for capturing images of ordinary people and their reality of life.

Naturally, most of his nuanced work went unpublished until the discovery of his archive, and a subsequent 2018 book *Priya Ramrakha, the Recovered Archive*, edited by Shravan Vidyarthi and Erin Haney. Through it, we see Priya's dogged attempt to create new narratives and perspective, to imagine pan-African solidarity and dignify the black universal struggle for national emancipation, and representations of ordinary life that painted African individuals as members of a progressive world.<sup>2</sup>

The foreword to the book is by Paul Theroux, who became Ramrakha's long-time friend in Uganda. His beat was not just Africa. He covered the Prague Spring in 1968 and Aden in Yemen. With the recovery of his archive and book in 2018, the world began to appreciate the impact of his 33 years on earth.

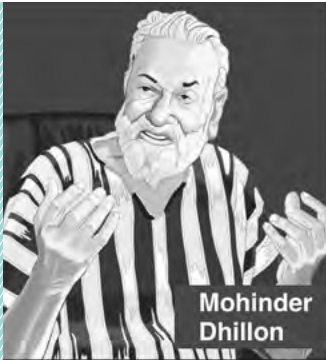
To understand Ramrakha's politics, one has to examine his history. Ramrakha was born in an Indian family that moved to Kenya for a better life. Ramrakha's grandfather emigrated to East Africa in 1900 and became part of the contingent of Indian workers or coolies as they were called that arrived to work on the Uganda railway between 1896 and 1901. There was the promise of job opportunities and a better life.

By 1914, Ramrakha's grandfather had risen to the position of Stationmaster. Ramrakha's uncle GL Vidyarthi founded an anti-colonial newspaper, the *Colonial Times* in 1933. Girdhari Lal Vidyarthi holds the distinction as the first journalist to be jailed for sedition in Kenya.

Ramrakha took his first pictures for this family paper covering the emergency years in Kenya. He was discovered by Eliot Elisofon, an American staff photographer for *Life*, who covered Africa. He later moved to California and joined the Art Centre College of Design in Pasadena.

Ramrakha carried a British passport. His grandfather was a subject of the British Empire from the Indian colony. The passport and Asian heritage afforded him privileges Africans did not have, and on the other hand access to places where Whites were not readily accepted. Priya returned to Kenya in 1963, and the next five years became hugely significant in the volume of work he produced.

His recovered archive has his account of the Ujamaa protests in Tanzania, intimate pictures with Haile Selassie, his forays into Congo, Uganda, Yemen and eventually Nigeria, where he meets his untimely death. Ramrakha's position as a pioneer African photojournalist, a man of colour, was ground-breaking. Ramrakha was a contemporary of David Goldblatt from South Africa, and both published features in *Life* magazine.



Ramrakha's East African contemporary was Sir Mohinder Dhillon, who at the time of his death in 2018 was described as one of the world's greatest frontline photojournalists.<sup>3</sup> Dhillon offers a unique snapshot into the history of East African photography, partly because of how long he lived, to 88 years.

Dhillon hailed from Barbarpur, in Punjab province in India. His father, the senior Dhillon, worked for the East African Railways in Uganda, employed as a builder on the Mombasa to Kisumu line.

The family moved to Kenya in 1947 to join the father and Mohinder grew up in Nairobi. In *My Camera, My Life*,<sup>4</sup> Dhillon's captivating autobiography, he details how the man who came to be known as Death-Wish Dhillon worked his way from obscurity to become an iconic photojournalist celebrated throughout the world for his work and warm charm.

Dhillon started his journey in photojournalism in the *East African Standard* in 1958 and was mentored by Ivor Davis, the Fleet Street-trained newspaper journalist who had come to Kenya in 1958 to work with the *East African Standard*.<sup>5</sup> Both Ivor Davis and Dhillon would later found Africapix Media in 1961.<sup>6</sup>

Dhillon covered wars extensively around the world, doing exceptional work in Yemen and had a near-death experience in Congo. Dhillon even had a stint as Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie's official photographer, until he was deposed in 1974. His knowledge of Ethiopia and access would be valuable later when he became the first photojournalist to tell the tragic story of the 1983-84 Ethiopian famine, making history in an experience that profoundly changed his life.

Dhillon was seen as an understated giant of television journalism who was considered incredibly brave by his colleagues and earned the nickname Death-Wish Dhillon from British troops in the Yemen war of 1967 for his daring exploits in trying to get the best shot.<sup>7</sup>

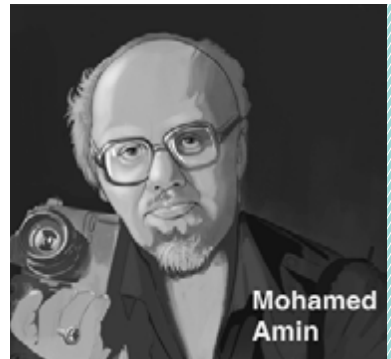


Dhillon would move on to make his name in documentary film-making, including the award-winning *Vietnam: After the Fire* (1988), about the legacy of the war, including the human and environmental destruction caused by the Americans dropping the defoliant agent Orange on the country, *The Black Man's Land* trilogy (1970), about colonialism, nationalism and revolution in Africa; *The African Runners* (1976), on the rise of Kenyan and Ethiopian athletes; *Portrait of a "Terrorist"* (1979), a BBC documentary about Zimbabwe's founding leader Robert Mugabe.<sup>8</sup>

It is impossible to write or talk about Mohinder Dhillon without bringing up Mohamed Amin (better known as Mo Amin) or about Amin and not bring up Dhillon. Amin was the student who bested the master. Perhaps no other name embodies the face of East African photojournalist than that of Mohamed Amin.

Mohamed Amin was born in the Eastleigh suburb of Nairobi in 1943, 12 years after Dhillon, and was the second of seven children raised by Muslim parents who had emigrated from Punjab in 1927.<sup>9</sup>

He plunged into photography early, while still a student in Dar es Salaam. Dhillon first met Amin when he was 18 years old, and the youngster briefly trained under him in television photography. A year later, Amin set up his own outfit, Camerapix in Dar es Salaam. At 23 years of age, the young Amin had already endured 28 days of torture in Zanzibar's infamous Kilimamigu jail, after his arrest following an exposé on Soviet and East German military advisers in the island in 1965, a year after the Zanzibar revolution. After his release from prison, he was deported to Kenya.



Amin was described by many of his peers as a brash and ruthless character in his pursuit of a story, earning the nickname Six-Camera Mo due to his ability to shoot stills and film simultaneously.

Both Dhillon and Amin became the most dominant frontline journalists in East Africa for close to three decades, covering local, pan-African and global developments through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Both men were defined by the realities of the Cold War era. They both intimately covered Uganda's military dictator Idi Amin, Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Emperor Haile Selassie. Amin's body of work includes travel books, documentaries and films.

Both became competent photography entrepreneurs and both were fathers of

only sons who had followed in their father's footsteps. Dhillon's son, Sam Dhillon, runs Africapix and is a respected documentary maker and Salim Amin has built a reputation as a media leader with his expansion of Camerapix.

In 1985, when Mo Amin became the first non-American to receive the Theodore E Kruglak Special Award, in the USC Journalist Alumni Association's 26-year history, he pioneered what would become the emergence of photojournalism from the margins into celebrity status in Africa.

*The award signified a major and radical shift in the thinking of those who decide why — as well as who — a person should be honoured for their work in journalism. The letter inviting him to accept the award noted the importance of the cameraman: 'If one of the basic goals of journalists is to present the public with the information it needs to make decisions and take action, then your work is a true model of noteworthy achievement. Your acceptance of the award and presence at the banquet would be something of which both you and our university could be very proud.'*

Previously, the publicity and the news brand were built around the reporter and the cameraman remained invisible behind the lens. Pictures were treated as the backdrop in the era of the anchor man. Amin could be credited with changing all that and, for the first time in East Africa, a photojournalist gained celebrity status, garnering fame that went beyond their particular profession. However, one big story would cement the legacies of both Dhillon and Amin, while simultaneously driving a wedge between them. The story took place in Ethiopia.

The reign of Haile Selassie attracted several international journalists, partly influenced by Ethiopia's unique history as an African country that was never colonised and the force of the personality of the Emperor. The ousting of Emperor Haile Selassie by Mengistu Haile Mariam's Marxist government in 1974 became a major flash point.

When in 1983 the story of the famine began to leak out, Dhillon, who had prior history with Ethiopia, found himself back in familiar territory using his contacts to unearth an unfolding famine crisis. Between 1983 and 1985, Ethiopia experienced a severe drought that led to food shortages and a catastrophic famine, which became one of the worst humanitarian events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>10</sup> It led to an estimated one million famine deaths, according to the United Nations. Millions more were displaced and left destitute.<sup>11</sup>

The 1980's Ethiopia famine and hunger crisis was one of the worst humanitarian events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, prompting a global response to bring food assistance and save lives.

The Ethiopian famine became a turning point for African photojournalism, with African photographers controlling the narrative and turning around a lacklustre international response in April 1983 to huge humanitarian action in 1985. Amin is largely celebrated as the man who brought this story to the fore, although Dhillon was the first African photojournalist to break the story a year earlier.

The social impact of the work of these two photojournalists on the Ethiopian famine helped to raise resources to help the hungry, changed the commitment to humanitarian aid, raising the profile of benefit concerts and spotlighting the moral agency of the artist in society. Ethiopia became a testament to the understated power and influence of the photojournalist who became the catalyst that would marshal Western-based entertainers to engage in a moral crusade, in a manner that no single African government could achieve.

Both Dhillon and Amin committed to keeping the story of the Ethiopian famine alive, profoundly affected by what they saw and aware of the short life span of a news story. They put together a body of material on the Ethiopian famine in a documentary known as the *African Calvary*. The name was inspired by Mother Teresa, who met Dhillon on a flight and when he told her of the mission, she muttered, "It's a Calvary".<sup>12</sup> *African Calvary* explored the work of both Amin and Dhillon's footage of the Ethiopian famine.

The iconic images of Amin that detailed the Ethiopia famine of 1984 created a symbolic moment that pricked the consciousness of the world into action. Ethiopia is also important because it shifted the focus off South Africa, which at the time was one of the biggest Africa stories, with the focus trained on the anti-apartheid struggle.

Amin would soak up most of the credit as the man who broke the story to the world. Amin, whom former US president George Bush Snr credited as the man who mobilised the conscience of the world, left out his most able collaborator in the credits of the collaborative documentary project. Dhillon fell out with Amin after the *African Calvary* documentary. They parted ways, never collaborating on a project again. Dhillon described his decision not to contest the issue of his credits as a co-creator on the *African Calvary* production as a case of professional disagreement.

The East African Railway, infamously described as the Lunatic Express,<sup>13</sup> is a major catalyst in the emergence of this cast of pioneer photojournalists. Intertwined with the railway project is the story of the contribution of South Asians to the independence struggles in East Africa.

In the late 18th Century, the British embarked on a mega project to build a railway from the Kenyan coast of Mombasa right through the hinterland to Uganda. To solve the resistance to labour conscription that they encountered, the administration decided to ship to Kenya a large contingent of Indian coolies from British colonial India. The Indians arrived in Kenya to occupy a second-class citizen position in the colonial racial structure, created as a buffer for the Whites against the Africans. Many decided to settle and became East Africans and a South Asian minority. They raised their children as African even as they retained ties with the motherland.

The railway line thus served as a symbol for adventure and an exploration into the unknown. Many of the new Asian families moved away from rural areas into urban life, and a new generation of children grew up in these emerging urban centres, exposed to the political struggles of Africans who were suffering under the same imperial structures that India had only recently emerged from, but also keenly aware of their privilege in the race hierarchy in colonial Kenya and the rest of East Africa.

Many would become the epitome of East Africanness, occupying an in-between world between the Europeans and the Africans, the adopted “other” as mediators between both the local and outsider. Paul Theroux writes of his friend Ramrakha that the South Asian minority learned how to be aliens, gaining the special ability to be home anywhere.<sup>14</sup>

It is quite clear from East Africa’s political history of struggle against colonialism where the Asian majority stood. In Kenya, they are ably represented in major facets of the resistance, with notable names like Makhan Singh, the labour union leader, Alibhai Jeevanjee and Pio Gama Pinto. This solidarity would start to emerge in the works of these pioneer photojournalists of Asian descent.

Zarina Patel,<sup>15</sup> the author of *The In-between World of Kenya’s Media: South Asian Journalism, 1900-1992*,<sup>16</sup> captures the lives and contribution of the Asian minority in the field of journalism (see Chapter 2, *South Asian Journalists in East Africa*). Zarina Patel’s father was the famous Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, the founder of the first Asian owned newspaper in Kenya, established in 1901.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that East Africa's most prominent photojournalists all emerged from this railway background. Ramrakha grandfather worked as a station master on the railway in 1914. Sir Mohinder's father, the senior Dhillon, worked for the East African Railways in Uganda, employed as a builder on the Mombasa to Kisumu line. This is what prompted the family's move to Kenya in 1947 and how Kenya became the place Ramrakha called home.

Mohamed Amin's father Sardar Mohammed was also a builder, a mason working on the East African Railway in 1929. Their children thus identified as East African. As the struggle for independence gained momentum, they chose to represent the plight of the masses.

GL Vidyarthi in 1930 started the trilingual weekly magazine, *Mitro*, in English, Hindi and Urdu. In 1933, he cofounded the Gujarati-English newspaper, the *Colonial Times*. He was the first journalist charged with sedition in Kenya.<sup>17</sup> Vidyarthi's father, Shamdass Bootamal Horra, a stationmaster, arrived in Kenya from Punjabi, in 1896 as part of the coolies constructing the Uganda Railway.<sup>18</sup> The Horra family name was dropped for Vidyarthi, meaning *student*. GL Vidyarthi would also be a huge influence on Ramrakha's career. Anil Vidyarthi, son of GL Vidyarthi, became one of the first photojournalists at the *Daily Nation* newspaper. The *Daily Nation* newspaper in Kenya emerged as an important birthing site for many careers of indigenous African photojournalists.

Pictures of charity work have stereotypically portrayed children from the Global South as emotional triggers for donors in West countries supporting humanitarian efforts. The defining images of the Ethiopian famine catapulted Amin to fame never before seen by an East African journalist. Yet, one could argue that Amin actually challenged this Western gaze to the extent that he helped start a universal moment of reckoning and moved photojournalism from the realm of passive objective observer to one of an active actor, seeking their own agency and wielding their influence to abet suffering.

Irish songwriter Bob Geldof turned prominent humanitarian fundraiser organised a cast of renowned British pop stars in the making of a record, *Do they Know it's Christmas?*, which was released in 1984. This move inspired the formation of USA for Africa, led by American singer and actor Harry Belafonte. Joining forces with Ken Kragen, he organised the production of *We Are the World*, written and composed by Michael Jackson and Lionel Richie. *We are the World*, the world anthem of love, released to worldwide acclaim in 1985, included the biggest musical stars of the era, among them, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, Kenny Rogers, Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Ray Charles.

In *Mo, the story of Mohamed Amin: The frontline cameraman*,<sup>19</sup> written by long-time collaborator Brian Tetley, who also wrote the text for his photography books, Bob Geldof reflects on this profound turning point in the foreword.

***But the pitiless, unrelenting gaze of this camera was different. Somehow, this was not objective journalism but confrontation. There was a dare here: 'I dare you to turn away, I dare you to do nothing'. Mo Amin had succeeded above all else in showing you his own disgust and shame and anger and making it yours also.***

Amin died on 23 November 1996, when his Ethiopian Airlines Flight 961 from Addis Ababa to Nairobi was hijacked and crashed into the ocean near Grande Comore. Amin boarded the flight with Tetley. Hijackers stormed the cockpit of the plane and forced the pilot, Leul Abate, to fly east over the Indian Ocean. Amin attempted to rally the passengers to attack the hijackers and confronted the hijackers. The plane ran out of fuel and Abate ditched the aircraft off the coast of the Comoros Islands. The plane broke into pieces, and as Amin was standing, his body hit the aeroplane wall causing his death. He was 53. Tetley also died in the crash.<sup>20</sup>

The economy and ecology of photojournalistic work in East Africa began to change with the emergence of the *Daily Nation*, at the dawn of Kenya's independence, rivalling the colonial newspaper the *East African Standard*. The emergence of the *Daily Nation* newspaper, also coincidentally founded by another South Asian, His Highness the Aga Khan, leader of the Ismailis, offered opportunities that were previously unavailable to the black majority, and Caleb Okwera became known as the first photojournalist of note from the Nation stable. Over the decades, the *Daily Nation* would build the careers of many prominent local photojournalists, such as Yahya Mohammed, Yusuf Wachira, and Sam Ouma, who worked as an apprentice with Amin.

While all these photojournalists rose to prominence within Kenya's media circles, none quite stands out as the young, unassuming Hos Maina. Maina started out at the *Daily Nation's* sports desk, mentored by veterans such Roy Gachuhi, and began to get noticed by the quality of his sports action pictures, particularly of the big football teams, bringing something absolutely fresh to sport photojournalism. He remained on the fringe, hardly noticed by the senior editors until he got a break with the failed Kenya military coup attempt in August 1982 against President Daniel arap Moi's government.

As Nairobi spun into a crisis, in a battle between two sides of the military, Maina

was the only *Daily Nation* photographer who dared to go on the beat. The pictures that he took would bring him the recognition he deserved and soon he was tapped to join Reuters as a photojournalist. From then on, he covered every major conflict from the 1980s to the 1990s in the region. At Reuters, he traversed Africa taking pictures but it is in Mogadishu, Somalia on 12 July 1993 that he would meet his tragic end chasing the story of a United Nations helicopter attack.

Maina was sent to Mogadishu to relieve Don Eldon, a 22-year-old popular sound engineer who had been nicknamed the Mayor of Mogadishu, due to his exuberant personality. Eldon, who had grown up in Kenya, was a British-American citizen. Press reports say Maina did not even get time to unpack his bags. A few hours later, Maina, Eldon, Hansi Krauss and Anthony Macharia would be chased down by angry mobs in the streets of Mogadishu and beaten to death. They had fallen victim to the people whose story they were trying to share with the world. At 38 years of age, one of Kenya's most promising photojournalists would die in the line of duty.



In the year of Maina's death, across the border in Uganda emerged a bright talent, Jimmy Adriko, who got noticed for his keen eye at Uganda's *New Vision* newspaper. Jimmy Adriko, like Maina, started out covering sport, then political events, before moving to conflict stories. Adriko is noted for the coverage of the Rwanda war in 1994. He also covered the conflict zones in the DRC, Northern Uganda and South Sudan. Adriko in this case makes the exception of mentioning American female photojournalist Connie Dufka as one of his greatest inspirations.<sup>21</sup>

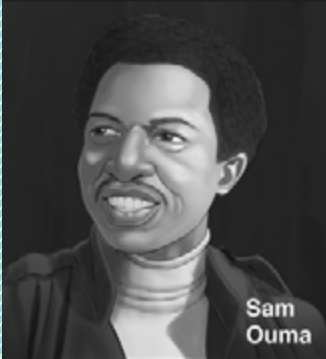


Connie Dufka<sup>22</sup> was stationed in East Africa and covered both the Somali and Rwandan conflicts for Reuters. Dufka became part of the prominent core of conflict photojournalists operating in Africa in the 1990s, famously known as the *bang bang club* who tracked the big conflict stories of that era, Rwanda, Bosnia, Somalia and Chechnya. Adriko rose to become the photo editor at the *New Vision* and, after a long career, he dedicated a sufficient amount of time to mentoring a new generation of photojournalists.

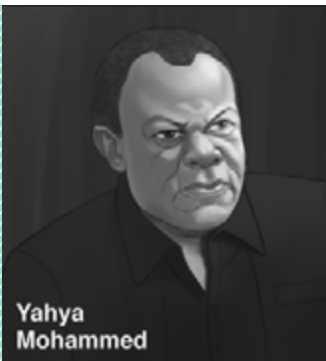
Looking to the future, frontline photojournalists continue to fill an important role, covering the big stories of the times, including conflict and struggles of people all

around the world, but it is a world that has dramatically flattened. The question then becomes, what does it mean to do photojournalism in a post-Binyavanga's

*How to Write About Africa* age?<sup>23</sup> How does the African photojournalist tell their story in an era where everyone with a phone is a potential citizen photojournalist with the agency to bring fringe stories to the attention of the entire world? What does it mean to have stringers while people are constantly taking pictures?



On 26 May 2020, the world woke to a disturbing image of an American police officer kneeling on the neck of a black man whom the world would come to know as George Floyd. The episode that began a few minutes earlier with the vigorous arrest of George Floyd on allegations of a forged cheque was caught on camera phones by bystanders. The recording, which ran just over 10 minutes, broke the news and in an unprecedented wave of anti-racism solidarity, protests were witnessed across every state in America, all the way to Japan, all over Europe to the south Pacific, and Africa, in memory of Floyd.



That single video started a worldwide protest. The person responsible for that amateur video was not a photojournalist. The George Floyd moment was filmed by 17-year-old digital activist Daniella Frazier. She ran into the police arrest of Floyd on her way to a grocery store and after the incident she loaded the video on her Facebook page. Then it went viral. Daniella joins the ranks of digital activists whose influential amateur videos, typically filmed on a camera phone, have drawn unprecedented attention to people's struggles and major political drama worldwide.



This illustrates the reality that photojournalists face in the contemporary age of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The heydays of the celebrity photojournalist might be over. News agencies face downsizing; print circulations are dropping and the media has lost significant credibility with the public nearly everywhere. There is a saturation of images in the world, but like all previous trends, this may

create a backlash that revives a hankering for a return to traditional storytelling in a post-truth world, where energy and attentiveness is invested to produce real



substance in celebration of slow journalism and storytelling. We might yet see more Dhillons and Amins.

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## Cracking the Glass Ceiling

When being a woman is either not enough or is too much

Brenda Wambui

In July 1986, Eunice Njambi Mathu became a rarity in Kenya and Eastern Africa. With the launch of *Parents*, she became the first female founder and homegrown Editor-in-Chief of a major magazine in the region. It was a long wait.

*Parents* has since become Kenya's longest-running print magazine. Her foray into publishing began in 1984, when she started *Consumer Digest*, but with the runaway success of *Parents*, she closed it.<sup>1</sup> *Parents* was a social magazine, focusing on health, family and relationship issues, and what Mathu calls sex matters.<sup>2</sup>

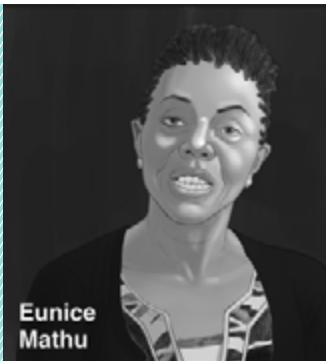
Mathu had started her career in mainstream journalism. Upon completing her university studies in 1975, she joined Nation Newspapers (today part of Nation Media Group) as a features writer. She left Nation to work in corporate communications, before leaving to start her publishing company.

Her story sums up the hurdles and complex path women have had in media in Eastern Africa. Narrowly focused on politics, conflict, business, and sports, these were considered areas women could not thrive in, at best, or were clueless about, at worst. And when the early opportunities opened up, they were in features writing.

Many female journalists could only advance by leaving to work at magazines. Later, however, the magazines would become the recruiting ground for the first generation of women who became senior reporters and editors in the mainstream. Structural obstacles usually stood in the way of Black African journalists.

The leading newspapers across East Africa were owned or edited by European men, except in the case of the Nation Media Group, which was started by the Aga Khan. But even the *Nation* was, for long, edited by white European or Kenyan male editors. This meant that the business, diplomatic, and dominant cultural circles in the capital cities, where the networks that made possible introductions to the top editors existed, were largely expatriate or white.

Sarah Elderkin, a Kenyan-British journalist, rose from an assistant to Hilary Ng'weno at the influential and political *Weekly Review*, to be a fully fledged journalist, then Deputy Editor, and Managing Editor of the magazine in 1983, and Deputy Editor of its sister *The Nairobi Times*.



*The Nairobi Times* was a broadsheet Sunday newspaper that had Kenya's first-ever colour supplement, long before the older and more established newspapers stopped being monochrome.<sup>3</sup> Elderkin was the Editor of *Weekly Review* until 1992, when she left to work with veteran opposition politician Oginga Odinga, when Kenya returned to multiparty politics after nearly 30 years of one-party rule. She returned to the UK where she was Deputy Editor at Salisbury Newspapers from 2003 to 2006, then back to Kenya. She co-authored (as a ghost writer) *The Flame of Freedom*, an autobiography of Raila Odinga, former Prime Minister of Kenya and son of Oginga Odinga, who took over the opposition mantle from his father.



After Elderkin's departure from the newsroom in 1992, it would be 15 years before another woman, Catherine Gicheru, became the founding Editor-in-Chief of *The Star* newspaper in May 2007 in Nairobi, Kenya. Five years later, Pamela Makotsi-Sittoni was appointed Managing Editor of Nation Media Group's prestigious regional weekly, *The EastAfrican* in 2012.

Harking back to where this unsteady progress began, perhaps an even more striking example of the play of socio-economic dynamics, race and class was Barbara Kimenye, born Barbara Clarke Holdsworth in Halifax, West Yorkshire in England on 19 December 1929. She trained as a nurse in London, where she met many students from East Africa.<sup>4</sup> She married Bill Kimenye, the son of a chief from Bukoba in what was then Tanganyika, and they moved to his hometown on Lake Victoria in the mid-1950s.

After their marriage ended, she moved to Uganda.<sup>5</sup> In Kampala, she reconnected with friends, some of whom had been some of the first Ugandan students in Britain, who would become leaders and professionals in independent Uganda. The Kabaka of Buganda, Mutesa II, invited her to work as a private secretary in his government and lived near to the palace compound with her two sons. During that time, her family became close to the royal family.

Shortly after, Kimenye worked as a journalist for the *Uganda Nation*, owned by the Kenya-based Nation Newspapers, becoming the first woman of colour in East Africa to occupy such a position.<sup>6</sup> She was also the Kampala correspondent for Kenya's *Daily Nation*. She moved to Nairobi, Kenya, in 1965 to work on the *Daily Nation*, and later *The East African Standard*.<sup>7</sup>



Kimenye eventually became one of East Africa's most popular and bestselling children's authors.<sup>8,9</sup> Her books sold more than a million copies, not just in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, but throughout English-speaking Africa.<sup>10</sup> She remains best remembered for her Moses series, about a mischievous student at a boarding school for troublesome boys.

Yet, for all that, Kimenye's story still illustrated the glass ceiling of the time that all women still ran into, even as those who were white, mixed, or from privileged African classes got an easier way into journalism, as Anna Adima noted:<sup>11</sup>

*As a journalist and author, Kimenye was one of the few women in Uganda and East Africa at the time writing and being published in English. However, despite her books' popularity, Kimenye did not gain as much fame outside of East Africa as her male regional counterparts did, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Okot p'Bitek, who were both published by Heinemann's African Writers Series.*

*This may of course have been due to finances and marketing, as international publishers then were aware that the topics the aforementioned authors chose to write about would sell more than, for instance, Kimenye's children's stories. However, it is also indicative of gendered power relations through the writers' differing access to publishing opportunities.*

*A focus on Kimenye as a historical figure also sheds interesting light on the nuances of race relations in an early post-colonial Uganda. Even though she was a mixed-race woman, it seems that it was her proximity to whiteness that opened many doors and opportunities to her living in Kampala in the 1960s.<sup>12</sup>*

It is said, for instance, that she became a journalist due to a chance encounter in a Kampala nightclub with Kenya's charismatic foreign minister Tom Mboya, who encouraged her to pursue the profession.<sup>13</sup>

*Kimenye described Uganda as 'liberal' with 'a great deal of mixing going on all over the place'; however, there was still a socio-economic hierarchy present, defined by race and class, and only black Ugandans with sufficient economic capital could access elite circles that consisted largely of white expatriates at the time.*

*Kimenye herself lived as a single mother — 'a simple lifestyle' in a 'small household' — circumstances which would have prevented black Ugandan women from moving in the circles Kimenye did. The fact that she was half white gave her access to many spaces and privileges her black Ugandan counterparts would not necessarily have had.*

*Arguably at the same time, however, because she was (half) black, and had been married to a black Tanzanian, she was accepted as an East African cultural figure more so than, for instance, [Ugandan-Asian journalist] Rajat Neogy, in part due to racialised colonial legacies in the region.<sup>14</sup>*

These colonial legacies had some of their roots in the first printing presses in the Eastern African region, which can be traced back to the late 1800s/early 1900s. They were crucial to the imperial colonial enterprise and its associated missionary activity.<sup>15</sup> Protestant and Catholic missionaries introduced them to aid in their Christian indoctrination, making the Bible and all sorts of written material, including newspapers, available in indigenous languages.<sup>16</sup>

Eastern African countries have long since gained independence from European colonial powers. Today, in many countries in the region the media is vibrant, though frequently under attack by state forces. As we read our stories, we may find ourselves still asking, "Where were the women?" They were few, but the women were right there. We can see them if we care to look hard enough.

Prof Wangari Maathai, world-renowned environmentalist, political activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate, tells the story of a burning forest – the animals in the forest fled and stood at its edge, watching it burn as they felt overwhelmed and powerless — except for a little hummingbird.<sup>17</sup> The hummingbird says, “I’m going to do something about the fire”, and flies to the nearest stream, takes a drop of water and drops it on the fire. The hummingbird goes between the stream and the forest as fast as it can, dropping little drops of water on the fire while other animals much bigger than it watch helplessly.<sup>18</sup> They ask the hummingbird, “What do you think you can do? You’re too little, and this fire is too big! Your wings are too little, and your beak so small!” and the hummingbird turned to them without hesitation and says, “I am doing the best I can.”<sup>19</sup>

The few women doing the best they can, sometimes do so at a very high price. Solange Lusiku Nsimire was the National Vice-President of the National Union of the Congo Press and the Editor-in-Chief and publisher of the independent newspaper *Le Souverain* in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), publishing stories on human rights and democracy and exposing sexual violence, rigged elections, and crimes against humanity.<sup>20</sup> *Le Souverain* operates out of Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu province in Eastern Congo, and Solange took over as Editor-in-Chief in 2007, after the death of its founder, Nunu Salufa.<sup>21</sup>



Because of her work, Nsimire was attacked multiple times by state forces. In 2009, when returning from a training programme in Nairobi, she and a fellow journalist were reprimanded at the airport and told, “The press doesn’t exist in the DRC. Journalists are worth nothing in DRC and because of this, they’re killed like animals.”<sup>22</sup> In 2010, for three months she was forced to run away from South Kivu with her two-year-old child.

In 2012, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) in Belgium for her exemplary work in journalism and was recognised as a women’s rights defender.<sup>23</sup> She passed away in October 2018 at 46, leaving behind a husband and seven children.<sup>24</sup>

Nsimire’s case speaks to the layered issue of women’s voices in the media. The media are a powerful tool and agent for change, with the ability to influence the direction of development, bring education, essential skills, social unity and a desire for change, which makes it crucial to the empowerment of women to

realise their social, political and economic rights on the continent in general.<sup>25</sup> These possibilities have, however, been squandered, as the media has too many times either sidelined issues critical to women's welfare or traded in stereotypes that reinforce our patriarchal societies' views of women as less than, especially when it comes to the violation of women's rights.<sup>26</sup>

This is in part due to the lack of gender balance and pluralism in the media; women are not fully and equally incorporated into newsrooms, both traditional and new, nor do they have equal representation in the media. As of 2015, women made up only 22% of the persons heard, read about or seen in newspapers, and on television and radio news in Africa. This relative invisibility was also seen online, with only 19% of the subjects and sources in internet news stories being women.<sup>27</sup>

While journalism has seen a shift towards human interest stories and has become more market-driven and consumer-oriented — making room for more women journalists in the process — it is still rooted in a male-centred professional culture, and these women are still seen as outsiders by their male colleagues.<sup>28</sup> As Liesbet van Zoonen puts it, "On the one hand they have to show that despite being women they are good journalists, but on the other hand they have to show that despite being journalists they are still real women too."<sup>29</sup>

In small steps of progress, however, women journalists in Eastern Africa have overcome these odds to bring us many of the region's most important stories, although it also makes the troubles and loss of journalists like Nsimire doubly painful. The women I tip my hat to in this chapter represent a wider corps of female journalists and remind me of Prof Wangari Maathai's hummingbird, doing the best they can to tell our stories, despite the odds against them.



There was Kimenye and Nsimire and there are Elderkin and Mathu. And then there is Catherine Gicheru. Gicheru became the founding Editor-in-Chief of Kenya's *The Star* newspaper in 2007. Prior to this, she was an investigative reporter and later a news editor and investigations editor

at the Nation Media Group, the first woman in the role. There she covered extrajudicial killings, arms rackets, corruption and the collapse of the banking sector.<sup>30</sup> She covered the controversial trials of the murder of Robert Ouko, Kenya's Minister of Foreign Affairs, until February 1990.<sup>31</sup>



Gicheru's reporting implicated then President Daniel arap Moi and his government in the murder. The *Nation* was barred from covering the judicial commission's proceedings for two weeks. Gicheru received threats from the ruling party KANU and was trailed by the police.<sup>32</sup> In September 1992, Catherine broke a story on corruption at the National Social Security Fund (NSSF), where millions of dollars had been stolen, despite harassment and intimidation to prevent her from doing so.<sup>33</sup>

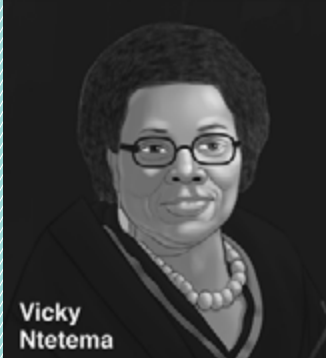
Currently, Catherine is an ICFJ Knight Fellow working with Code for Africa's Academy and Communities Programme.<sup>34</sup> She is the pan-African lead of *WanaData*, a network of women data journalists and data scientists, and she co-founded *PesaCheck*, East Africa's budget and public finance fact-checking and verification initiative.<sup>35</sup>

In an even more deadly time and place, in Rwanda on the evening of 6 April 1994, President Juvenal Habyarimana's plane was shot down above Kigali airport in the Rwandan capital, marking the beginning of a genocide that lasted three months.<sup>36</sup> Leaders of the opposition were murdered in reprisal by the Presidential Guard, and between April and June of that year over 800 000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred by the *Forces armées rwandaises* and the *Interahamwe*, a militia of between 25 000 and 30 000 members, within the space of 100 days.<sup>37</sup> The United Nations peacekeeping mission comprising 2500 soldiers deployed to Rwanda in 1993 was ordered to evacuate foreigners but not intervene to save innocent Rwandans from slaughter.<sup>38</sup>

As the world turned its back on Rwanda and most foreigners were struggling to flee, Sheila Kamawara from neighbouring Uganda did the opposite. She asked her editor at *New Vision* newspaper to be sent into Rwanda.<sup>39</sup> "Here we were, running stories by Reuters from Nairobi! As journalists, we can't abandon our credibility by depending on these accounts. We have to go in there," she recalled to Lydia Namubiru in *Africa Muckraking: 75 Years of Investigative Journalism from Africa*.<sup>40</sup>

She was joined by Cranmer Mugerwa, a freelance photographer. Her first few stories did not run because her editors found them unbelievable. They thought she was exaggerating about seeing hundreds of bodies in churches and in mass graves as far as the countryside. They asked her to provide pictorial evidence, so she travelled back to Kampala with the images of what she had seen and her story finally broke.<sup>41</sup>

She went back to Rwanda and reported from the frontlines, embedded with the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) until 19 July 1994, when the new government was sworn in. The next time she went back was in 2005. "It's beautiful now, but in my mind, every place was littered with bodies," she said.<sup>42</sup>



Covering a crime that did not happen at the industrial scale of the Rwanda genocide but no less heinous, Vicky Ntetema was BBC's Tanzania bureau chief when she went undercover in November 2007 to investigate a string of albino murders and the involvement of witchdoctors.<sup>43</sup> She posed as a businesswoman looking to become wealthy and managed to gain the trust of 10 witchdoctors. The witchdoctors offered her body parts of people with albinism, including hands, bones, hair and blood, starting from US\$2000, to use in potions to make her successful.<sup>44</sup>

The witchdoctors believed that minerals in mines were held by spirits and the spirits had to be fed the blood of people with albinism to set the minerals free. They also believed that their severed hands, used to pull up fishing nets, would bring a good day's catch.<sup>45</sup> On 21 July 2008, the night the BBC segment on Vicky's investigation aired, she received a call from the police in Mwanza. "You have put your country in danger," they said. The BBC told her to get out of the country, and she fled to London and later Kenya to escape increasing threats on her life.<sup>46, 47</sup>

Vicky is the board chairperson of the Tanzania Human Rights Defenders Coalition (THRDC). Previously, she was the Executive Director of Under the Same Sun, an NGO dedicated to ending discrimination and violent attacks against people with albinism.<sup>48</sup>

Turning to a conflict that had raged at that point for nearly 20 years, in 2010 Fatuma Noor travelled to Somalia to document the stories of a group of ten young men aged 17 to 24, on their way to join the militant organisation Al-Shabaab. Most of them were from the Somali diaspora in the USA, Canada and Sweden.<sup>49</sup> A mother of one of the young men had called Fatuma to ask about her son's whereabouts, tweaking her interest. She tracked him down to a hotel in Nairobi's Eastleigh suburb, where he was hiding with others from the USA.<sup>50</sup> When she asked him why he was going to Mogadishu, he said: "Young people like me are needed there to protect our country. I can do something important over there compared to what I was doing back in the US."<sup>51</sup>

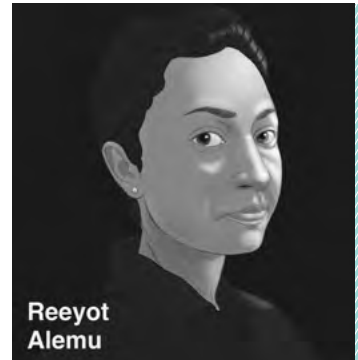
Fatuma had been sent on assignment by Kenya's *The Star* newspaper to Somaliland to cover the swearing-in ceremony of Ahmed Mohamed 'Silanyo' Mohamoud.<sup>52</sup> Five of the young men she had previously interviewed were on the same flight to Hargeisa, from where they would head on to Mogadishu.<sup>53</sup> After the ceremony, she joined them at a hotel lobby, waiting to meet their contact, Mohammed Jimale. He warned her against travelling to Mogadishu. "It's not safe, my daughter. I think you have your story already."<sup>54</sup>

She went with them anyway. On a stopover in Gaalcaayo, they were surrounded by seven men pointing guns at them, ordered out of their cars and forced to give the militants all their money.<sup>55</sup> "Who is this girl?", one of them asked. She explained that she was a journalist. The leader, with a gun to her head, said, "This is what we are discouraging; a Somali girl to act like some *Adon* [derogatory Somali word implying lowly person] and not obeying what our religion requires of her."<sup>56</sup> Her life was saved when the recruits asked the militants to let one of their drivers take her to the nearest town, from where she would take a taxi back to Hargeisa.<sup>57</sup>



"I promised myself I would never return to Somalia again — not until peace prevails in the country. My brush with death made me wiser," Noor said.<sup>58</sup>

In Ethiopia, Reeyot Alemu endured a long jail spell for her work. She was jailed on 21 June 2011 and branded a terrorist and threat to her country.<sup>59</sup> She was accused of planning terrorist attacks on infrastructure, telecommunications, and power lines in the country, with the support of an international terrorist group and Eritrea.<sup>60</sup>



Before her arrest and jailing, she had written columns that accused the government of coercive governance, giving the example of how they allowed access to economic and educational opportunities only to those who were members of the ruling party.<sup>61</sup> She had also written that the ruling party was deluding itself by believing it held the legitimacy of popular support, comparing its leadership to the slain Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.<sup>62</sup>

In January 2012, she was sentenced to 14 years in prison by the High Court for

planning a terrorist act; possessing property for a terrorist act; and promoting a terrorist act.<sup>63</sup> This was reduced to five years upon appeal in August 2012, when the Supreme Court overturned the other charges, but upheld the charge of promoting terrorism.<sup>64</sup> While in jail, she suffered from severe and chronic gastritis, sinusitis and breast pains, and no one was allowed to visit her except her parents.<sup>65</sup> She was released on 9 July 2015 after 1479 days in prison.<sup>66</sup>

More recently, on 4 April 2020, Arphine Helisoa, publishing director of Madagascar's *Ny Valosoa (The Reward)* newspaper, a privately owned entity, was arrested and sent to pre-trial detention in Antanimora prison by Malagasy authorities for criticising President Andry Rajoelina's handling of the national response to Covid-19.<sup>67</sup> She was charged with spreading fake news and incitement of hatred against the President.<sup>68</sup>

Rajoelina launched the Covid-Organics plant-based tonic made from *Artemisia annua* (sweet wormwood) and herbs, developed by the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA), to global scepticism in April 2020, after testing it on fewer than 20 people in a three-week period.<sup>69</sup> "Tests have been carried out, two people have now been cured by this treatment ... this herbal tea gives results in seven days ... schoolchildren should be given this to drink, little by little throughout the day," he said.<sup>70</sup>

Arphine was accused of disagreeing with the President. This despite the fact that the post, critical of the government's response to Covid-19 — citing its decision to allow open markets without implementing protective measures while at the same time using excessive force against those found outside during the curfew from 8 pm to 4 am — was published in an online version of France-based *Ny Valosoa Vaovao (The New Reward)*, which is a different publication.<sup>71</sup> The publication released a statement disclosing that she was not involved and should therefore be released.<sup>72</sup>

Arphine was released on 4 May 2020, a month after she was detained, following a presidential pardon of journalists in prison.<sup>73</sup> However, she still faces up to five years in prison and a possible prohibition of additional rights, including voting, for up to ten years, according Madagascar's penal code.<sup>74</sup>

The Sudanese state has also kept a similar menacing response to Amal Abbas' work. Abbas became the Editor-in-Chief of *Al-Rai El-Akhar (Other Perspectives)* in April 1999, with a simple goal: "The newspaper is firmly committed to the principle of giving space for other, alternative opinions, whatsoever they may be."<sup>75</sup> She was the first Sudanese woman to be the Editor-in-Chief of a major daily

newspaper in Sudan.<sup>76</sup> Between May and September of 1999, *Al-Rai El-Akhar* received seven suspensions by the National Press Council.<sup>77</sup>

On 4 February 2001, Amal and Hassan Ibrahim, journalists at the paper, were fined 15 million Sudanese pounds each (US\$5800) for an article that accused local authorities in Khartoum State of squandering public funds.<sup>78</sup> They were both sentenced to three months' imprisonment because they were unable to pay the fine.<sup>79</sup> Separately, *Al-Rai El-Akhar* was fined 1 billion Sudanese pounds (US\$390 000) for the same article, a move intended by the Omar Al-Bashir government to muzzle the publication because it could not afford the fine. This was the highest fine ever against a newspaper at the time.<sup>80, 81</sup>



"I am always going up against censorship. The security men come every night, looking at what is going out and removing what they like. And it's forbidden to leave an empty space," she said.<sup>82</sup>

Next door in South Sudan, Anna Nimiriano founded the *Juba Monitor* in 2011, the year the country gained its independence from Sudan.<sup>83</sup> She and Alfred Taban, the daily's former Editor-in-Chief, moved the paper from Khartoum, where it was based before independence, to Juba, which is South Sudan's capital. Anna became the Editor-in-Chief in July 2017, making her South Sudan's first woman to hold the role at a print media outlet.<sup>84</sup> Prior to this, she was the Managing Editor of the now-defunct *Khartoum Monitor*.<sup>85</sup>



Nimiriano remembers what made her decide to become a journalist: she read an article by a man titled "Why women are like cans of Pepsi", in which he wrote about how women could be compared to a variety of soft drinks.<sup>86</sup> She responded with her own piece, showing how it was a violation of women's rights and making it clear that no one should be held to such narrow standards.<sup>87</sup> Since she became Editor-in-Chief, she has received death threats and is routinely intimidated and called in for questioning by the country's National Security Service.<sup>88</sup> Despite this, she aims to expand the paper's circulation of 2000 papers a day and reach South Sudanese refugees who have fled the country and are living in refugee camps in Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and the DRC.<sup>89</sup>

For women journalist ground-breakers, the road has been steep, bumpy, and hellish, but in the process, they have laid claim to be heard and have created space. Predicting the future of women journalists in Eastern Africa would be foolhardy, seeing as we have not emerged from a devastating Covid-19 pandemic that few could have predicted.

The ground beneath our feet will, however, continue to shift. As Catherine Gicheru notes, "The traditional newspaper business model that is based on advertising and circulation being the main source of revenue that drives the business is not going to be sustainable for long."<sup>90</sup> To maintain their readership, media outlets will need to rethink their models holistically, and this will include how they represent women, both as subjects in the media and as creators of the news.

The penetration of information and communications technologies will continue to increase in the region, offering many possibilities to improve governance and advance gender equality in Eastern Africa, but we will need to ensure they are made more accessible to women to achieve these goals. We will need to lobby government regulators, telecommunications companies, and hardware and software manufacturers, as well as advocate policies that provide redress to previous imbalances to access.<sup>91</sup>

We will continue to fight against media capture, which happens when the parties the media is supposed to monitor on behalf of the society takes the media hostage such that they fail to perform this function, through (a) ownership/buying of media outlets, (b) financial incentives such as advertising, (c) censorship, both imposed by the government and self-censorship, or (d) cognitive capture, warping how journalists see the world, reporting it through the eyes of the powerful.<sup>92</sup>

We will also see data protection laws and frameworks become even more robust, raising the standard of journalism in the region and protecting the privacy and freedom of expression of Eastern African women and others in the region. However, as recently witnessed in Burundi, these laws are still prone to state misuse and overreach, and we must continue to be ever-vigilant.

Agnès Ndirubusa and Christine Kamikazi, along with their two colleagues, were sentenced to two-and-a-half years in prison and fined 1 million Burundian francs each (US\$521) on 30 January 2020, after they were convicted on charges of trying to undermine state security.<sup>93, 94</sup>

On 22 October 2019, Burundian security forces battled with an armed anti-government group based in the DRC.<sup>95</sup> The four, who are journalists at Iwacu

Press Group, one of Burundi's remaining independent media outlets, were arrested and detained without charge when they went to report on the matter from Bubanza province.<sup>96</sup> They were charged on 26 October with "complicity in threatening state security."<sup>97</sup> When the prosecution could not prove any actual link to the rebels, they changed it to "impossible attempt at the complicity in undermining state security"; they intended to threaten state security but it was not possible.<sup>98</sup>



The evidence presented was a joke sent via WhatsApp from one of them to a colleague that they were "going to support the rebels."<sup>99</sup> They appealed on 20 February and their appeal hearing took place on 6 May. Their conviction was upheld on 4 June 2020.<sup>100</sup> They were released in late December 2020 through a presidential pardon.<sup>101</sup>

For women journalists, it once looked nearly impossible to get in. Now that the glass ceiling has been cracked and some have made it, the price many are having to pay is very high.

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## **Guns and Roses**

Stories of democratic recovery, rebellion, war, genocide and media infamy

**Kwezi Tabaro**

The 1960s was the decade when most African countries got their independence. However, by the mid-1970s, the post-independence euphoria had ended in many of them. The two decades between 1980 and 2000 saw some of the deadliest conflicts and human displacement in the 16 countries of Eastern Africa. In these 20 years, all 16 countries, except Seychelles and Mauritius, experienced an insurgency that often spilt over to neighbouring countries or precipitated a famine.

In this period, the region saw some of the deadliest wars in Sudan, the war and genocide in Rwanda, the Uganda wars and the brutal rebellion by the Lord's Resistance Army, the war in Ethiopia, the collapse of Somalia and its descent into civil war, the Burundi civil war, and the outbreak of the deadly Democratic Republic of Congo wars.

This chapter focuses on some of this turmoil and tries to place them in the context of a world that was rapidly changing as the end of the Cold War drew to a close and then after. Many one-party states and military regimes in Africa were on the back foot, and a debt crisis was causing political upheaval. This chapter looks at the activist journalism produced by the turmoil and pays homage to a few of the many reporters who, without the benefit of the modern technologies and efficient communications we have today, still managed to be the eyes and ears for the rest of the world in some of these theatres.

While many of the political and social contests and upheavals in Africa at the time

are interpreted mostly through the lens of the Cold War, it was only part of the story. On closer scrutiny, one easily sees the agency of some media actors in an Africa region that was at the centre of this East-West tussle.

## War in Uganda — The Lost Decades



TONY AVIRGAN (R) and MARTHA HONEY (L) were American journalists with Reuters, based in Tanzania. During the Uganda-Tanzania war, they were embedded with the invading Tanzanian and Ugandan rebel forces. No East African journalists covered the war from the frontline. Avirgan and Honey were the only foreign journalists to cover the war from Tanzania up to the fall of Amin and subsequently wrote a book, *War in Uganda*.

Their interviews shed light on a war that was largely prosecuted under a news blackout and propaganda campaigns on either side.

### The 'Kagera War'

(9 October 1978 – 3 June 1979)

More popularly known as the Uganda-Tanzania war, the seven-month conflict was precipitated by Uganda's annexation of Northern Tanzania's Kagera Salient. In response, Tanzanian forces, backed by Ugandan exiles, invaded Uganda and in seven months ousted the Ugandan military regime led by Idi Amin.

The Kagera War was a unique conflict for the time. It was the first ever in Africa to see the conventional forces of one nation capturing the capital of another. The conflict's lack of a Cold War context — it was largely a result of personal animus between Amin and Nyerere — further set it apart from other conflicts happening around the same time.<sup>1</sup>

While the Kagera war resulted in the overthrow of Amin's murderous regime in April 1979, and the establishment of the transitional Uganda National Liberation Front (UNLF) government, it did not cure Uganda of its long-running political disease: state-inspired violence against civilians and general

insecurity. Following two short-lived administrations and a military commission government, Uganda would find itself back at war again.

### **The NRA 'Bush War' (6 February 1981 – 26 January 1986)**

The National Resistance Army's (NRA) bush war had its roots in the overthrow of the Ugandan military dictator Amin in 1979, and a flawed election in December 1980 that brought back into office ousted President Milton Obote. Obote's second administration was to be dogged by gross human rights violations, a failure to stem insecurity across the country, especially in the central region, and an economy in the doldrums due to gross mismanagement under Idi Amin.<sup>2</sup>

Against this backdrop, on 6 February 1981, led by the former Minister of Defence in the first post-Amin transitional government, Yoweri Museveni, a group of 41 armed young men launched an audacious attack on Kabamba, a military training school 150 kilometres west of the Ugandan capital Kampala. The guerrilla outfit, the Popular Resistance Army (PRA) — later to be renamed NRA — would go on for the next five years to prosecute a guerrilla campaign against the UNLF government.

The NRA war registered many firsts in post-independence Africa's liberation politics. Among others, it was the first guerrilla group on the continent that captured power when it did not have a rear base in a neighbouring country. That presented a major problem to overcome, in getting international journalists to the areas where they were based. The rebellion also marked itself out for its adept use of the media and propaganda to get its message out to supporters and sympathisers in Uganda and across the world.

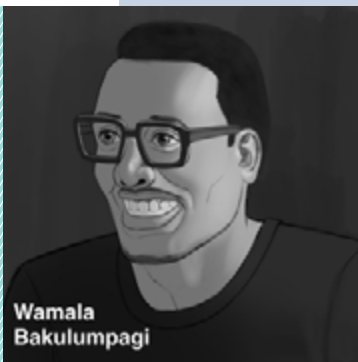
### **The NRA's 'Resistance News' — Propaganda or Good Journalism?**

The *Ugandan Resistance News* was launched in August 1981 as a monthly review of developments in Uganda and was the official newsletter of the National Resistance Movement, whose armed wing was the NRA, led by Yoweri Museveni. The newsletter was published and circulated clandestinely across Uganda, and in foreign capitals targeting Ugandan exiles and "friends of Uganda who want to know what happens to her suffering people".<sup>3</sup> *Uganda Resistance News* was published between 1981 and 1985, corresponding with the start of the NRA/M war until the start of the Nairobi peace talks in 1985.

Among the stories covered by the publication was NRM/A's Ten-Point programme, atrocities committed by the Obote government, updates on battle engagements

between the NRA and government forces and deaths of key NRA figures like battlefield commanders Ahmed Seguya and Fred Rubeereza, as well as its first Chairman, the Ugandan academic Prof Yusuf Lule. *Resistance News* ushered in both an underground and activist tradition in the Ugandan media, perhaps best exemplified by *Munnansi*,<sup>4</sup> a cyclostyled hugely popular newsletter linked to the opposition Democratic Party (DP) during the years of Museveni's guerrilla war. The publication went underground because publications like the left-leaning influential *Weekly Topic* had been banned in 1981, although other highly regarded ones like the Catholic church-affiliated *Munno* and local-language *Taifa* remained in operation, but they mainly took a centrist-measured approach. After 1986, *Munnansi* and a slew of other papers reinvented themselves as more mainstream publications.

GEORGE BAKULUMPAGI-WAMALA was the first editor of the Uganda rebel group National Resistance Army's *Resistance News*. He was born on 8 July 1947 in the then Mengo district of the Buganda kingdom. Having studied French and philosophy at Makerere University, he moved to the University of Kent in Canterbury where he studied for a Masters in Philosophy. He later returned to teach at Makerere University, before later working as a Chief Information Consultant to a UNDP project in Uganda. Following his father's death at the hands of Amin's soldiers in March 1976, he ran into exile in Kenya, returning in 1979 to take part in national politics.



He was one of the founder members of the Uganda Patriotic Movement (a precursor to the NRM) and its first publicity secretary. Besides Bakulumpagi-Wamala, *Resistance News* at different times in its four-year life was edited by leading Ugandan exiles, like Kirunda Kivejinja (later Minister and Deputy Prime Minister), Zak Kaheru (later Minister), Amama Mbabazi (later Intelligence Chief, Security Minister and Prime Minister), Justin Sabiti (later District Chairperson of Mbarara), James Tumusiime (journalist and publisher) and Arthur Katsigazi.

When the NRA took power in January 1986, Bakulumpagi had been tipped to be Uganda's representative at the United Nations in New York, but he died in

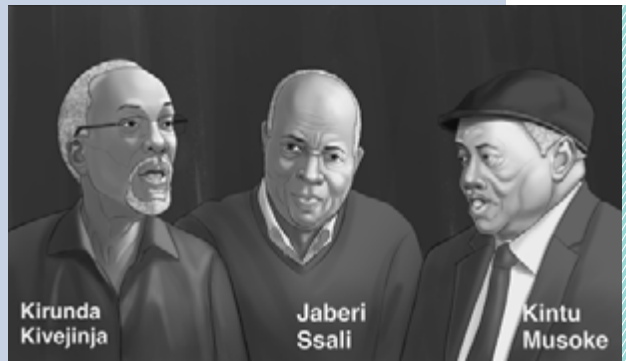


May 1986 as a result of health problems he developed from the torture he had incurred at the hands of Milton Obote's soldiers following his arrest in March 1981.

### The 'Sapoba Trio'

Sapoba Bookshop Press was the publisher of the *Weekly Topic*, Uganda's first real investigative newspaper. The left-leaning *Weekly Topic*, launched after the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, became dizzyingly influential, and it was common for people to queue to buy it on the day it was published.

The publishing house was started in the 1950s by Samwiri Kasule, before it was later acquired in the mid-1960s by the trio of former UPC youth-wingers JABERI BIDANDI SSALI (C), KIRUNDA KIVEJINJA (L) and KINTU MUSOKE (R), who had known each other from their time as student leaders on the Indian subcontinent.



The trio was later, with Yoweri Museveni, among the founders of the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) in the lead up to the 1980 elections in Uganda. After the disputed 1980 vote, and Museveni launching his guerrilla war on 6 February 1981, there was a crackdown. *Weekly Topic* was banned by the Milton Obote government. Ssali ended up in military detention; Kivejinja fled into exile and Musoke went underground in the country for a while.

The three were believers in socialist ideals, proponents of an open society, and critics of corruption, and transferred these ideals into *Weekly Topic*.

Based in the Katwe suburb of Kampala, a hub of anti-colonial politics in the '50s and '60s, Sapoba was run as a "worker's commonwealth,"<sup>5</sup> the bulk of proceeds from its business being channelled to help hundreds of children whose parents had died or been murdered in Uganda's civil strife. In all, according to a 2014 memoir by the three, over 500 children passed through the Sapoba family.

When Museveni came to power, the trio served in his government as ministers and later presidential advisors. *Weekly Topic* closed in 1993, and Sapoba itself too folded later. Sapoba was important because over the years, it supported radical magazines and newspapers, and represented a continuation from the independence nationalist press. Since its demise, there has been no mainstream radical magazine or newspaper published in Uganda.

### War in Northern Uganda: From Lakwena's Terror to Joseph Kony's Horror

The conflict in northern Uganda lasted nearly 20 years, becoming Uganda's longest civil strife and imposing an immense human and economic cost on the northern half of the country. In July 1985, with divisions in both the military and government over how to deal with the NRA insurgency, a faction of the army overthrew the Obote government. A military junta led by General Tito Okello took over. In January 1986, after failed peace talks in Nairobi, the NRA defeated the Okello military government. It set out to pursue remnants of the defeated army that had run into the villages of northern Uganda and the border with Sudan, from where they continued to carry out attacks on civilians and military targets.

Some of these remnants regrouped into several rebel movements, the most popular being the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM), led by Alice Auma Lakwena, a self-proclaimed spirit medium, whose aim was to "cleanse" the Acholi ethnic group of evil spirits, especially among the former UNLA soldiers who had committed several abuses during the Luwero War,<sup>6</sup> as they fought the NRA rebellion. As the conflict raged on, Lakwena's efforts turned into a campaign against the NRA. The HSM's clashes with the NRA were characterised by huge losses for the rebels, mostly young men indoctrinated by Lakwena into smearing their bodies with shea-nut tree oil and carrying stones to be used as "grenades", reported the national paper *The New Vision*.

As Lakwena's popularity waned on the back of these losses to the NRA, a new rebel group, led by Lakwena's cousin, Joseph Kony, emerged and waged an even more deadly terror campaign against both the civilian population and the national army supported by the Sudanese government.<sup>7</sup> At the peak of the government's offensive against the rebels in 1992, the Ugandan army reported killing several Sudanese soldiers who were embedded with the LRA and instructors and fighters.<sup>8</sup>

Born on 1 January 1963 in the northern Uganda town of Gulu, CAROLINE LAMWAKA started her journalism career at the Uganda Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, before moving to the State-owned newspaper the *New Vision*. At the *New Vision*, Lamwaka's coverage of Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) rebellion, as well as attempts by the NRA to stem the insurgency won her acclaim for her bravery and objective journalism.

According to William Pike, the paper's then Managing Editor, "She tried to steer an independent course between the NRA and the rebels, reporting as honestly as she could on what was actually happening. [Lamwaka] detailed not only the military operations and the 100 000 people displaced by the fighting but also a number of alleged abuses [by the national army] including claims that some people had been burned alive in their huts".<sup>9</sup>

Lamwaka's incredibly detailed reporting of the conflict in Northern Uganda — from Alice Lakwena's Holy Spirit Movement that later morphed into the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) under Joseph Kony — left her psychologically torn apart and as a result she suffered a nervous breakdown.

Lamwaka was rare in her lack of cynicism despite being a war reporter. On one occasion in 1988, ahead of a peace meeting between the army chief (now retired), General Salim Saleh, and rebel Uganda People's Democratic Army commander Lieutenant Colonel Angelo Okello in northern Uganda, Saleh complimented Lamwaka in a most unusual way for her honesty. "Carol, you really should not be reporting this war. You should leave it to these thugs here", he said, pointing to the other journalists who were waiting to head out with him to a meeting with the rebels.<sup>10</sup> It would be ironic if Saleh had sensed that the lack of cynicism was a likely source of vulnerability for Lamwaka.

Towards the end of February 2006, Lamwaka was brought from the north-western Uganda town of Arua to Lacor Hospital in Gulu, critically ill. She died at the hospital two weeks later, on 5 March 2006.

Her account of the conflict in Northern Uganda, *The Raging Storm: A Reporter's Inside Account of the Northern Uganda War 1986-2005*, was posthumously published in 2016. It remains one of the foremost accounts of the nearly two-decade conflict.



Kony's Lord's Resistance Army marked a serious turn in the northern conflict, as a government scorched earth policy against the rebels laid to waste hundreds of villages and forced people into IDP camps. By the end of the conflict, more than 1.8 million had been displaced in northern Uganda and thousands more had been abducted, maimed or killed.<sup>11</sup>

Although the northern Uganda conflict formally ended in Uganda in 2005, Kony and his by then small LRA band continue to roam in the dense forests of the DRC and the Central African Republic, where they carried out sporadic attacks on small communities.

### **LRA War and the Fight for Press Freedom in Uganda**

On 11 May 1999, the *Monitor* newspaper published a back-page photograph depicting soldiers holding down a nude woman while one soldier held a pair of scissors near her genital area. The caption to the photograph said that the incident took place at an army barracks in Gulu in northern Uganda. Days later, a then 24-year-old Candida Lakony came forward and claimed she was the woman being shaved by UPDF soldiers

The photograph incensed many women's rights activists and reignited the debate on human rights abuses by the army in northern Uganda, where the Uganda People's Defence Force (the victorious NRA rebels were renamed UPDF in the 1995 constitution) was waging a counterinsurgency campaign against the LRA.

Lakony was invited to State House by President Yoweri Museveni who promised an investigation into the incident.

On 13 May, the police arrested three *Monitor* journalists — Editor-in-Chief and Managing Director Wafula Oguttu, Managing Editor Charles Onyango-Obbo and Deputy Editor and News Editor David Ouma Balikowa — on charges of "sedition and publication of false news", under Section 50 of the Penal Code Act. Eventually, the journalists were acquitted because the state could not prove the case against them.

Meanwhile, Lakony was instead turned over to the security services by State House and charged with giving false information to the police. Following a trial, she was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment. She served her prison sentence and was released. She, however, died months after her release.

The *Monitor* editors would, in 2002, be arrested again under the same offence of

“publishing false news” and sedition, for reporting the crash of a UPDF helicopter, presumably shot down by the LRA. The paper was also closed for ten days. They were acquitted.

On 11 February 2004, the Supreme Court of Uganda struck down Section 50 of the Penal Code Act under which the *Monitor* editors had been charged on various other cases, marking one of the biggest wins for press freedom in Uganda to date. The *Monitor* editors and journalists combined hold the record for the highest number of cases brought by the Uganda state against a single media entity.

JAMES AKENA is a Ugandan photojournalist currently working with Reuters. Akena says his first big project was documenting the conflict in Northern Uganda in 2002.

“I spent eight months working on the story, photographing internally displaced families living in crowded camps, caught up in the war between the government and this elusive group (Lord’s Resistance Army), famous for its brutal killing methods. These photos were later exhibited in various places, including galleries in the United Nations, London, Germany, Belgium and Uganda,” he told Reuters.

In a career spanning two decades, Akena has covered the conflict in the Eastern DRC, and, more recently, political protests on Kampala’s streets.

On 20 August 2018, Akena was badly beaten by soldiers in Kampala, as he fell to his knees, with his arms raised.<sup>12</sup> Akena was one of the journalists covering the demonstrations for the release of Robert Kyagulanyi, a member of parliament and pop singer also known as Bobi Wine.

The weekly newspaper *The Observer* reported that its photographer, Alfred Ochwo, and two NTV colleagues, Ronald Galiwango and Juma Kirya, were also battered by soldiers.<sup>13</sup> Akena was confined to a wheelchair for months after the beating and sued the state for damages.<sup>14</sup>

### The SPLM/A War (1983 – 2005)

More popularly known as the Second Sudanese Civil War, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) war pitted the south against the majority Muslim government of the Sudan, which was based in Khartoum. The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), led by John Garang, sought autonomy from the north as well as freedom for all oppressed Sudanese under what the rebel movement called a New Sudan, a united, secular republic in which all would live in peace and harmony.<sup>15</sup>

Lasting 22 years, the conflict was one of the longest on the continent and equally one of the most destructive.<sup>16</sup> It drew in, on one side, Sudan's neighbours Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, who backed the SPLA,<sup>17</sup> while on the other side, the DRC, Iraq, and China backed the Khartoum government at different stages of the war.<sup>18</sup>

It eventually ended following the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed between the SPLA and the Khartoum government. Under the agreement, the south would have autonomy for six years, followed by a referendum on independence. Following the referendum in 2011, the South Sudanese overwhelmingly voted for secession from Sudan, becoming the newest nation on the African continent.

The CPA marked the end of East Africa's last truly "great" war in two decades, 1985 to 2005, and from 2006 onwards the sub-region enjoyed relative peace.

On many occasions, foreign press coverage of the Sudanese civil war fell into the tropes of a "Christian" south versus "Muslim" north,<sup>19</sup> which, while a factor in the conflict, peppered over more serious grievances by the south against historical injustices perpetrated by the north. According to the European-Sudanese Public Affairs Council, "Claims of a 'Christian south', forced to live under Islamic law, with all the implications for religious conflict, merely perpetuate[d] an inaccurate stereotype of Sudan, and an equally inaccurate and superficial context for the Sudanese conflict."<sup>20</sup>

The conflict, in its early years, was also dominated by the dynamics of Cold War politics. According to Peter William Klein,<sup>21</sup>

*Throughout the 1980s members of Congress investigated the Sudan's nascent second civil war, 1985-2005, and the resulting humanitarian disaster in terms of self-serving politics. The Sudan became a place of great geo-strategic importance and US politicians considered it*

*to have the capacity to become a significant trading partner. In the 1990s and later, as the Cold War ended, the focus of Congressional inquiries moved from the United States' self-preservation to a more humanitarian inclined foreign policy.<sup>22</sup>*

It did not help that two of Sudan's neighbours to the West and East, Libya and Ethiopia respectively, throughout the 1980s were seen as Soviet-leaning and part of the communist bloc in Africa.

### **The Eritrean-Ethiopian War (6 May 1998 – 18 June 2000)**

In 1991, the rebel Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), led by Isaias Afwerki captured Asmara, having fought Ethiopia's military leader, Mengistu Haile Mariam, alongside rebels from the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), led by Meles Zenawi, in a 17-year-long civil conflict that was marked by one of the worst famines recorded in Africa. Between 1983 and 1985, up to 600 000 people died in the Ethiopian famine, according to conservative counts, with other sources putting the number as high as 1.2 million.<sup>23</sup>

In 1993, Eritrea formally seceded from Ethiopia after a referendum, and Afwerki was appointed its first president. While the two governments initially enjoyed warm relations — their two guerrilla movements having been united by their opposition to the ruling Soviet-backed Derg junta's campaign of violent repression — fissures soon emerged over a disputed land border and trade relations.

The roots of the Eritrea-Ethiopia war in 1998 lay in a border dispute between the two Horn-of-Africa countries. While outright war between the two only broke out in 1998, the conflict was preceded by unreported incidents going as far back as 1992.<sup>24</sup>

On 6 May 1998, Ethiopian troops fired at an Eritrean patrol on routine duty at Badme, a town in the Gash-Barka region of Eritrea, leading to an exchange that left several dead on both sides. A week later, on 13 May, the Ethiopian parliament declared war on Eritrea.<sup>25</sup>

Owing to the high levels of media repression in both countries, most of the coverage of the conflict to the outside world came from foreign correspondents reporting mainly from the Kenyan capital, Nairobi.<sup>26</sup>

As a teenager, FESSHAYE YOHANNES fought for Eritrea's independence from Ethiopia. His military experience gave him connections to officials in the Eritrean government, and, in 1994, he used them to establish the beginnings of the country's first independent media.



Fesshaye's paper, *Setit*, became the largest-circulation newspaper in the country, covering social issues including poverty, prostitution, and Eritrea's lack of facilities to care for handicapped war veterans.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), *Setit's* coverage soon angered the Eritrean authorities, and in September 2001, all private media in Eritrea were banned and Yohannes and nine other journalists jailed.

Several sources told CPJ that Yohannes died on 11 January 2007, after a long illness in an undisclosed prison outside Asmara; while one source said the journalist may have died much earlier in a prison in Embatkala, 35 kilometres northeast of Asmara.

International media outlets like the BBC, *The Guardian*, VOA, and Reuters, brought to the world's attention the progression of the conflict that soon spilt out into neighbouring Somalia, with the Eritrean government supporting the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a rebel group seeking the independence of Oromia from Ethiopia, that was based in a part of Somalia controlled by Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid. Ethiopia retaliated by supporting groups in southern Somalia who were opposed to Aidid.

In the end, the economies of both countries, already weak as a result of decades of civil war and Cold War politics, drought, and then a border war, forced the belligerents' to sign a peace agreement on 12 December 2000 that marked the end to the shooting war, although tensions between the two neighbours remained and all diplomatic and trade links remained severed. It was to take nearly 20 years before the two countries formally agreed to end hostilities and restore ties, shortly after Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in Ethiopia in April 2018.



## The Rwandan Civil War and Genocide against the Tutsi (1990-1994)

Few events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century were as harrowing and gripping as the horror that was the 100-day massacre of ethnic Tutsi and moderate Hutu in Rwanda in 1994.

Four years earlier, on 1 October 1990, a group of Rwandan exiles in Uganda, led by Major General Fred Rwigyema, who had escaped Rwanda as a toddler following an ethnic cleansing campaign in 1959, crossed into Rwanda and declared war on the Juvenal Habyarimana government. They were fighting for a right to return home and for statehood.

Backed by Uganda, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and its military wing, the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA), comprised mostly Tutsi exiles whose families had been forced out of Rwanda in the 1950s and 1970s. Although many of the RPF's commanders were Rwandan exiles who had fought alongside Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army (RPA) in the 1981-86 NRA Bush War, the guerrilla outfit also had Rwandan exiles from Kenya, Burundi, the DRC, Tanzania, and the wider Rwandan diaspora.

Following Rwigyema's death on the first day of the invasion, RPF leadership fell to his close friend and colleague in the NRA Bush War, then Major Paul Kagame.

While initially taken by surprise, the fleeing Rwanda government troops were able to reorganise<sup>27</sup> and push back against the invading RPA. The invasion precipitated a wave of arrests and detention of mostly educated Tutsis and moderate Hutus whom the Kigali ruling elite considered RPF sympathisers. Soon, the Minister of Defence was on the national radio calling upon Rwandans to track down and apprehend the "infiltrators".<sup>28</sup>

Forced to retreat to the volcanoes of the Virunga after major battlefield setbacks, now under a new commander, Paul Kagame, the RPF continued to wage hit-and-run attacks against the much stronger Rwandan army backed by the French. The low-intensity conflict continued until eventually, on 4 August 1993, the Arusha Accord was signed between the belligerents, providing for power-sharing between Habyarimana's MRND party and the opposition making up the RPF and other groups.

The Arusha Accord would only hold until 6 April 1994 when president Habyarimana's plane, returning from a regional meeting in Dar es Salaam, was shot down as it descended into Kigali airport. President Habyarimana and his Burundian counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira were killed in the crash. The incident

sparked off 100 days of killings of Tutsis and moderate Hutus all over Rwanda.

According to the United Nations, more than one million people are estimated to have perished and an estimated 150 000 to 250 000 women were also raped in the genocide.<sup>29</sup> It was also the largest slaughter of children ever known.<sup>30</sup>

Media coverage of the Rwandan conflict and genocide within the country was polarised in a deadly way, with the government using radio stations like RTLM and Radio Rwanda to direct killings against members of the Tutsi ethnic group, and others seen as sympathetic to the RPF. The MRND government officials also owned shares in several newspapers,<sup>31</sup> the most notorious of which was the tabloid *Kangura*, which fanned hate speech and rallied Hutu Power sympathisers to kill on behalf of the party.

The RPF also had a string of newspapers, mainly owned by the Tutsi diaspora, that promoted the rebel movement's cause and carried interviews with leading commanders during the war. On top of this, the RPF campaign against Habyarimana also enjoyed favourable coverage from the Ugandan press, with reporters from the *New Vision*, *Weekly Topic*, *Uganda Confidential*, and later the newly launched *The Monitor* interviewing RPF leaders and reporting the progress of the war from the RPF side.<sup>32</sup>

SHEILA KAWAMARA is a Ugandan journalist, women's rights activist, and former legislator in the East African Legislative Assembly. She was among the first group of Ugandan journalists — and the only woman — to be dispatched to Rwanda two days after the downing of President Habyarimana's plane and start of the Rwandan genocide.

Married to a Ugandan army officer, Kawamara, then a journalist with the *New Vision*, had years earlier been among the first journalists to learn of the defection of a section of Rwandan officers and men of the NRA on 1 October 1990. She travelled several times to the RPA headquarters in Mulindi, northern Rwanda, in 1993, and reported on the rebel group for the *New Vision*. Such contacts proved valuable when she was deployed by the *New Vision* to cover the genocide in April 1994.

Her reports from the killing fields in Rwanda detailed the horror of the unfolding genocide and brought the crimes of the extremists to the attention

of readers of *New Vision*, as well as other international media outlets to which she gave interviews.

Kawamara's reporting of the Rwandan conflict ended on 19 July 1994 after the new RPF government had been sworn in. However, the horrors of the genocide continued to haunt her.

"Trauma. That's something journalists never think about. We just go after the story," she explained in a 2017 interview.



She later served as a member of the East African Legislative Assembly from 2001 to 2006 and is currently the Executive Director of the Eastern African Sub-Regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), a regional civil society organisation.

DISMAS NKUNDA was a reporter with *The Monitor* newspaper when he was assigned to cover the 1994 Rwanda genocide. Following Kevin Aliro's return from covering the events following the downing of President Habyarimana's plane, Nkunda was dispatched to cover the next three months of the conflict in Rwanda.

Together with other Ugandan journalists, Ssezi Cheeye (of the combative *Uganda Confidential*) and Sheila Kawamara (of *New Vision*), he reported on the RPA's final assault on Kigali and the unfolding genocide.

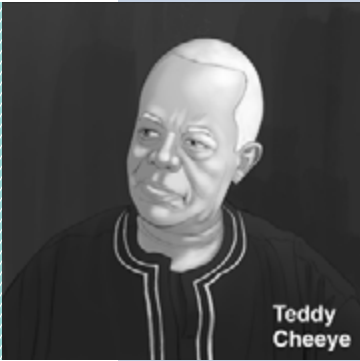
A Kinyarwanda speaker, Nkunda's reports brought much-needed nuance to coverage of a conflict that was often difficult to understand for outsiders who often fell for the usual tropes of "tribalism" and "ethnic violence" between the Tutsi and Hutu groups.

Following his experience covering the conflict in Rwanda and, later in 1998, the war in the DRC, Nkunda founded Atrocities Watch Africa, to contribute to the prevention, punishment, and deterrence of future mass atrocities. He is currently the organisation's director.

TEDDY SSEZI CHEEYE was easily the boldest, most controversial, divisive, and disagreeable but also one of the most ground-breaking Ugandan journalists. Born in Bulemeezi, Luwero district in central Uganda, Teddy Cheeye was the publisher of the anti-corruption and muckraking *Uganda Confidential*.

Cheeye attained fame for his rubble-rousing articles in the *Uganda Confidential* that exposed corruption within the ranks of NRM government, and in the military.

Due to his close relationship with NRA officers — he had been the first editor of the NRA publication *Tarehe Sita* — Cheeye, who had been a supporter of the NRM while he was in exile in Kenya, had a great deal of access to scoops and information on the infighting within the government and championed a kind of abrasive investigative journalism that was unmatched and shook the country.



He was the first journalist to secure an interview with RPF rebels after they had crossed into Rwanda in October 1990, with then RPF commander Major Peter Baingana. The interview would also raise questions about the whereabouts of Major General Fred Rwigyema, who ideally should have been speaking on behalf of the rebel movement.

Asked about Rwigyema's whereabouts during the interview, Major Baingana told Cheeye that he was at the frontline fighting. News of Rwigyema's death on the first day of the attack would only surface in early November 1990, when *New Vision's* William Pike, then *Weekly Topic's* Charles Onyango-Obbo, and the BBC's Hussein Abdi were covering the war and probed the issue.

Cheeye's coverage of the Rwandan civil war continued well into 1994, when he carried interviews with leading RPA figures like Major Paul Kagame and reported on the genocide. Cheeye made many enemies and was criticised for frequent one-sided reporting and started to face allegations of taking money to carry out investigations targeting particular people. He also shifted and became unusually pro-government.

Though a self-confessed anti-corruption crusader, Cheeye was in 2002 appointed Director of Economic Monitoring in the Internal Security Organisation (ISO). However, in 2009, he was found guilty by a court for

allegedly embezzling Shs120 million (\$35 000) worth of Global Fund money in 2005. He was sentenced to ten years in jail before being released in 2017 for good conduct.

Following his release, he resumed publication of his controversial *Uganda Confidential* newsletter. His return to journalism was, however, cut short in March 2018 when he was mysteriously killed after being hit by a motorcycle in Kampala as he was exercising along the street in the suburb in which he lived. In the end, Cheeye will always be remembered for rewriting the rulebook on anti-corruption reporting and almost single-handedly ensuring that there were no sacred cows for Ugandan journalism.

International coverage of the Rwandan civil war and the later genocide initially misunderstood the nature of the conflict and killings, attributing them to “tribal warfare”.<sup>33</sup> It did not help that newsrooms in the West were already stretched thin by the ongoing conflict in Bosnia and the upcoming first democratic election in post-apartheid South Africa. The frame would, however, dramatically change as pictures and news reports from journalists in Rwanda itself began to surface in international media.<sup>34</sup>

JIMMY ADRIKO joined the *New Vision* as a photographer in 1991. In a career spanning almost three decades, he has covered conflicts in Uganda, the DRC, Rwanda, and South Sudan.

During the 1994 Rwanda genocide, Adriko accompanied then *New Vision* reporter Sheila Kawamara to cover the RPA's final assault on the capital, Kigali, and the end of the genocide. His coverage, including of thousands of victims who had washed up on the northern shores of Lake Victoria in Uganda, were as horrifying to *New Vision* readers and they left an indelible mark on him.

“After seeing many bodies in Rwanda, I returned to Kampala and took my equipment to office and went to Arua for a break. During that time, I took close to one month without eating beef. The stench of decomposing bodies kept coming back to me,” he revealed in a 2019 interview.<sup>35</sup>

In September 1998, Adriko covered another regional conflict, this time in the DRC. Following the helicopter crash that had killed a senior UPDF officer,

Colonel Jet Mwebaze, in the Rwenzori mountains, he was dispatched to report on the ongoing Second Congo War, involving the armies of Uganda, Rwanda and six other African countries, as well as dozens of militias. Based in the eastern Congolese town of Bunia, Adriko and *New Vision* correspondent Emmy Allio covered the clashes between Uganda-backed militias and the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), a coalition of Rwandan, Ugandan, Burundian, and selected Congolese dissidents, for the national daily.

Comparing photojournalism in the 1990s, Adriko notes that sometimes, “Photos, depending on the location of the assignment, would run after a day or two of the stories they were supposed to accompany”.<sup>36</sup> Reporters had to use fax machines or a virtually non-existent public transport system to deliver photographs and stories to their editors in the capital. However, he observes, all that changed with the advent of email and now social media. “Within a decade, things changed and life became easier for photojournalists.”<sup>37</sup> By the time he left the *New Vision* in 2019, Adriko was the photo editor at the paper.

Adriko currently runs Jimad Media, a media production company he started in 2018.

## The Villains and Media as the Soundtrack to Genocide

According to retired Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, who was force commander of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) during the genocide, hate media were essentially the soundtrack of the Rwandan genocide.<sup>38</sup> A number of factors contributed to the outsize influence of media, especially “hate media”, in the unfolding of the Rwandan genocide. Key among these, according to a former director of ORINFOR, the public agency that managed public media, were the high levels of illiteracy in Rwanda at the time, coupled with the expensive cost of a newspaper.<sup>39</sup>

*The cost of a newspaper was 100 Rwandan francs before 6 April 1994 (US\$0.75) or the average day's salary of a migrant worker in rural areas of Rwanda. The drop in coffee prices on the world market and the IMF's structural adjustment programme worsened the situation. Potential consumers, such as elementary school teachers, did not have money to spend on print media.*

A combination of all this and, perversely, the liberalisation of the airwaves in 1990 added to the power of radio as an effective mobilising medium for genocide.

This potent mix between extremist politics and hate media is best illustrated by the trio of Ferdinand Nahimana, Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza—both founders of Hutu Power extremist radio RTLM—and Hassan Ngeze of *Kangura*, the infamous publication that advocated Hutu Power and the extermination of members of the Tutsi ethnic group. The trial of the three, dubbed the “media trial”, by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) sitting in Arusha, Tanzania, was “the first conviction of news media executives for crimes of genocide since 1946, when the famous Nuremberg tribunal sentenced the Nazi publisher Julius Streicher to hang for his vitriolic campaign against the Jews.”<sup>40</sup>

The ICTR's verdict was hailed as significant in ensuring “those who control the media are accountable for its consequences.”<sup>41</sup> The court was also a face-saving measure for the United Nations whose inaction had contributed to the death of perhaps a million innocent victims in the genocide.



Of the trio, only Hassan Ngeze and Ferdinand Nahimana are alive today and were serving sentences in prison. Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza passed away in 2010 in Benin. Another co-conspirator, Felicien Kabuga, was finally netted in May 2020 after almost three decades on the run. During the ICTR “media trial”, Kabuga was named as one of the chief financiers and president of hate radio RTLM.

According to his 2020 indictment by the UN's International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals:

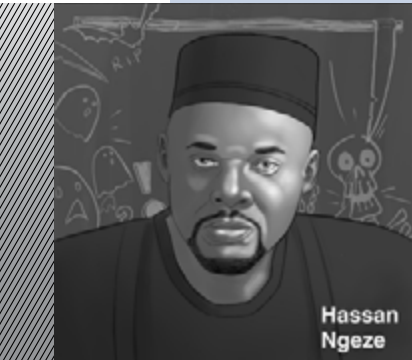
*Kabuga is alleged to have established, together with certain other persons, the National Defence Fund in order to raise funds to provide financial and logistical support for the Interahamwe's killing and harming of Tutsis. It is also alleged that Kabuga, together with certain other persons, agreed to plan, create and fund a militant group known as Kabuga's Interahamwe in Kimironko sector, Kigali, the purpose of which was to further ethnic hatred between the Hutus and Tutsis in Kimironko sector, with the goal of committing genocide against persons identified as Tutsis. Kabuga is further alleged to have instigated crimes, incited genocide or made persecutory statements*

*at various meetings at different locations in Rwanda between February or March 1994 and May 1994.*

Kabuga's case is now before the IRMCT court in The Hague, where he awaits trial.

### Genocide Media Villains

HASSAN NGEZE was born on Christmas Day 1957 in Rubavu commune, Gisenyi prefecture, in western Rwanda. From 1978, he worked as a journalist, before founding the newspaper *Kangura* in 1990. He was the Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper and also a founding member of the Coalition for Defence of the Republic (CDR), an extremist Hutu Power party known for inciting the genocide, which gave him access to members of the ruling Habyarimana government.



Published in Kinyarwanda and French, *Kangura* was possibly the best known newspaper inside Rwanda between 1990 and 1994. It was infamous for its incendiary pro-Hutu Power rhetoric.

For example, the paper in December 1990 published what it called the “Ten Commandments” of the Hutu which the Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) found to have “conveyed contempt and hatred for the Tutsi ethnic group”. During the genocide, *Kangura* published lists of people to be killed by Hutu Power militias.

In broadcasts on Radio Rwanda and Hutu Power’s RTLM radio, Ngeze also called for the extermination of Tutsi and Hutu political opponents.

The ICTR found that, as founder, owner and editor of *Kangura*, Ngeze used the publication to instil hatred, promote fear and incite genocide and that the publication “played a significant role in creating the conditions that led to acts of genocide”.<sup>42</sup>

Ngeze fled Rwanda in June 1994 and was arrested in Mombasa, Kenya, in 1997 from where he was taken to the ICTR in Arusha. In 2003, the court sentenced Ngeze to life imprisonment for aiding and abetting genocide, a sentence which was commuted to 35 years. He is currently serving his sentence in Mali.



FERDINAND NAHIMANA was born on 15 June 1950, in Gatonde commune, Ruhengeri prefecture, in northern Rwanda. He was a professor of history and Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the National University of Rwanda, before his appointment in 1990 as Director of ORINFOR (Rwandan Office of Information) and remained in that post until 1992.

Nahimana was a founder of RTLM—the hate-spawning Hutu private radio station that went on air in 1993—and a member of the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development (MRND), which was the ruling political party of Rwanda from 1975 to 1994.

According to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, through their respective roles on the steering committee of RTLM, which functioned as a board of directors, effectively controlled the management of RTLM from the time of its creation through and beyond 6 April 1994.<sup>43</sup>

Further, the court found that RTLM broadcasts engaged in ethnic stereotyping in a manner that promoted contempt and hatred for the Tutsi population.

“RTLM broadcasts called on listeners to seek out and take up arms against the enemy. The enemy was identified as the RPF, the Inkotanyi, the Inyenzi, and their accomplices, all of whom were effectively equated with the Tutsi ethnic group by the broadcasts ... These broadcasts called explicitly for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group,” noted the court in its 2003 indictment.

In December 2003, Nahimana was found guilty of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, incitement, directly and publicly, to commit genocide, complicity in genocide and crimes against humanity, and was sentenced to life imprisonment.

JEAN-BOSCO BARAYAGWIZA was born in 1950 in Mutura commune, Gisenyi prefecture, in western Rwanda. A lawyer by training, he held the post of Director of Political Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Habyarimana government. He was a founder of the Hutu extremist party Coalition for



Defence of the Republic (CDR) and a member of the steering committee of RTLM alongside his co-accused Ferdinand Nahimana. RTLM radio, the ICTR heard, “fanned the flames of hate and genocide in Rwanda.”

In April 1994, a week after the shooting down of Habyarimana’s plane, the ICTR Chamber heard: “Barayagwiza came to Gisenyi ... with a truckload of weapons, including firearms and machetes, for distribution to the local population to be used to kill Tutsi civilians. Outreach to three cellules was coordinated in advance, to recruit attackers from among the residents of these cellules and bring them together to collect the weapons.”<sup>44</sup>



On 3 December 2003, the ICTR convicted Barayagwiza, Ferdinand Nahimana, and Hassan Ngeze of genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide and crimes against humanity (persecution and extermination). On appeal

in June 2009, his sentence was reduced to 32 years’ imprisonment. Barayagwiza died on 25 April 2010 in Cotonou, Benin.

## The First Congo War (24 October 1996 -16 May 1997)

Following an end to the Cold War and the second democratisation wave across Africa in the 1990s, Zaire’s autocratic president Mobutu Sese Seko increasingly seemed like a relic from Africa’s past. In power since 1965, Mobutu’s corruption, economic mismanagement and a series of bad bets on other post-Cold War villains — the apartheid government in South Africa and fleeing Hutu genocidaires and former Habyarimana government elites — fomented a regional effort to overthrow him.

With the help of allies Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, a coalition of Congolese rebels, led by Laurent Kabila, the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire (AFDL), in seven months marched more than 2000 kilometres from the east of Zaire westwards and took the capital Kinshasa. By the time Mobutu’s government fell, the effort to overthrow him had been joined by two other armies — Angola’s MPLA and Eritrea’s EPLF — and became a truly pan-African

affair, with the involvement of Ethiopia, Tanzania, South Africa and Zambia,<sup>45</sup> with more countries joining later.

Kabila proclaimed himself President in May 1997. His predecessor Mobutu fled to exile in Morocco, where, suffering from prostate cancer, he died on 7 September 1997.

However, while all the allies seemed to agree on the overthrow of Mobutu's regime, they seemed to agree on nothing else. Following Mobutu's exit, fissures started emerging between the AFDL's Laurent Kabila and his allies, especially Rwanda and Uganda. The differences would culminate in the Second Congo War.

### **The Second Congo War (2 August 1998 -18 July 2003)**

In a televised address to the nation on 27 July 1998, then Congolese president Laurent Kabila thanked his Rwandan allies, including its chief of staff General James Kabarebe, an RPA officer, for their service to Congo and ordered all Rwandan troops out of the country.<sup>46</sup>

The response was an eruption of rebellion among Kabila's own armed forces that soon seized the eastern cities of Goma and Bukavu, followed by an invasion of at least 500 Rwandan troops. Soon Kabila called on the support of Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe, which buttressed his fledging army in the face of a large assault by rebel proxies backed by Rwanda and Uganda. These would be joined by Chad and Sudan as the conflict threatened to escalate into a continent-wide affair.

After a series of failed peace agreements and the assassination of President Laurent Kabila in 2001, a South African backed comprehensive peace agreement, The Sun City Agreement, was signed on 19 April 2002 between the various warring factions and set the ground for a transitional government under President Joseph Kabila, son of slain Kabila Senior, and marking the end, on paper, to a conflict that had lasted four years. The conflict, however, continued, even though the regional countries played a less visible direct role, working mostly through Congolese proxy groups.

### **The 'Short' Wars**

By 2008, the Second Congo War and its aftermath had caused 5.4 million deaths, mainly through disease and starvation, making it the deadliest conflict worldwide since World War II.<sup>47</sup> The 5.4 million fatalities were used by the United Nations

Security Council to put together a peacekeeping mission for the DRC, with 20 000 troops, it was the largest such operation in the world, but this has been disputed, with alternative methodologies putting the numbers much lower.<sup>48</sup>

The tragedy of the strife in the DRC is that even conservative estimates of deaths are still in the millions. Equally, the genocide in Rwanda, the civil war in South Sudan, and the long-running conflict in Somalia mean there is a category of smaller, low-intensity conflicts in Eastern Africa with lower casualties. This section looks at conflicts with fatalities of under 5000 that were not marked by significant humanitarian disasters.

### The Six-Day War (5 -10 June 2000)

Not to be confused with the six-day Arab-Israeli war of 1967, which incidentally took place on the same dates, the Six-Day War was a series of clashes between the armies of Rwanda and Uganda in the north-eastern Congolese city of Kisangani in June 2000.<sup>49</sup>

Hitherto allies, Rwanda and Uganda had constituted part of a vast coalition with motley groups of Congolese rebels<sup>50</sup> to overthrow Zairean dictator Mobutu Sese Seko in 1997. Rwanda and Uganda, having fallen out with their client, President Kabila, who then expelled them in 1998, were soon at odds with each other in the eastern DRC where they had withdrawn and set up shop, over the support of Congolese rebel groups and control of the strategic Kisangani city.<sup>51</sup>

The six-day conflict left 1000 dead and over 3000 injured, most of whom were civilians, according to a Congolese NGO. The conflict ended following a UN-brokered truce between the Ugandan and Rwandan governments. However, the two countries continued to support Congolese rebel factions until the end of the second Congolese civil war.

Born in the DRC in 1950, PETER BUSOMOKE came to Uganda when he was 19, in 1969, and was naturalised as a Ugandan citizen in 1973.<sup>52</sup>

His illustrious photojournalism career started in the 1980s, while working for a local Ugandan paper, *The Economy*, moving to the *Weekly Topic*, before, in 1992, moving to *The Monitor*, as a freelance journalist who was reputed for covering conflict in some of the most dangerous places in the Great Lakes region, for various local and international news organisations.

His knowledge of the Kiswahili and Congolese languages helped him to establish contacts in often hostile environments where he and fellow journalists reportedly survived vicious Pygmy attacks after escaping from a UPDF base in Gbadolite, to look for news.<sup>53</sup> He worked closely with the adventurous *Monitor* editor and writer Kevin Aliro who was covering the war.

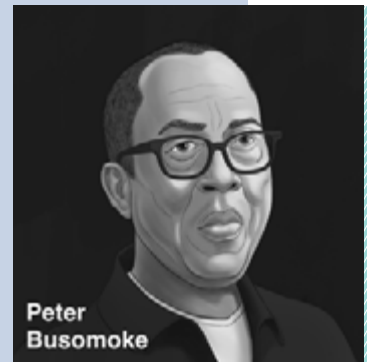
Later, Busomoke turned his lens to the LRA conflict raging in northern Uganda, where his photography made covers of international news publications and shed light on a conflict that had dragged on for two decades and created millions of internally displaced persons in Uganda.

Among his most enduring photographs was one of the SPLA/M rebel leader Dr John Garang boarding a Ugandan helicopter, taken on 29 July 2005. A day later, it was reported Garang had died in the same helicopter following a night-time crash on the border between Uganda and Sudan. The photograph taken for AFP was the last of the Sudanese first Vice President and SPLA/M leader while he was alive.

In 2007, Busomoke would also cover Uganda's campaign against the Al-Shabaab militants in Somalia for the national paper *The New Vision* and foreign news outlets like AFP.

His last assignment for *New Vision* was in July 2007, photographing the influx of refugees from South Sudan through Koboko.<sup>54</sup> He had previously covered the Ugandan army's intervention into South Sudan in late 2013 following the outbreak of war between the government and former Vice President Riek Machar's loyalist forces.

Busomoke died on 16 December 2017 from complications related to lung and liver disease. In a career spanning almost three decades, he had been one of Uganda's most sought-after photojournalists, covering important national events like the Pope's visits in 1993 and 2015; the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2007; and numerous street protests in the capital Kampala. On the regional scene, he had captured the horrors of conflict in his native DRC, Sudan and Somalia.



KEVIN ALIRO started his journalism career at the *Weekly Topic* newspaper in 1987. He was among the crop of the paper's journalists—Wafula Oguttu, Charles Onyango-Obbo, David Ouma Balikowa, Richard Tebere and Jimmy Serugo—who left to found the *Monitor* in July 1992.



Aliro is credited for his bravery and daring approach to reporting that made him one of Uganda's foremost war reporters in the 1990s. Owing to his friendships with key military figures, like RPF leader Fred Rwigyema and UPDF commanders James Kazini, David Tinyefunza and Salim Saleh, Aliro was always at the forefront of security reporting. His interviews with RPF frontline commanders like Paul Kagame brought to the world's attention the rebel group's profile and the determination of Tutsi exiles in Uganda and across the region to return home.

In 1994, it was Aliro, Hassan Badru Zziwa (then a photographer at the *Monitor*) and BBC's Hussein Abdi who were among the first journalists to report on the shooting down of Rwandan president Juvenal Habyarimana's plane and the start of the genocide in Rwanda. He would also cover the two Congo wars, including clashes between the UPDF and RPA in Kisangani, a story he would break for the *Monitor*. As editor at the *Monitor*, he mentored a number of young war correspondents, including Dismas Nkunda and Patrick Kamara.

In late 2003, Aliro left the *Monitor* to start *The Observer*, a leading investigative newspaper. Aliro died on 12 November 2005. He was 40.

HASSAN BADRU ZZIWA joined the *Monitor* in March 1993. At the paper, he was a photojournalist as well as a sports reporter, although he mostly worked as the former. As a photographer, he accompanied then *Monitor* Chief Sub-Editor Kevin Aliro to Rwanda following the plane crash that had killed presidents Habyarimana and Ntaryamira in 1994, to cover the events leading up to the Rwandan genocide and the RPF war.

It was the first time he was covering a conflict, compared to Aliro who had covered the LRA insurgency in the late 1980s and the RPF's invasion in 1990, and it showed.

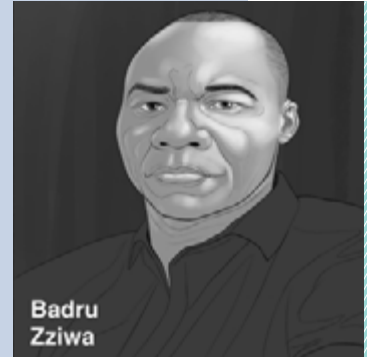
“At one moment during the war, Aliro and I, together with late Colonel Rutayisire and late Hussein Abdi (a BBC correspondent) lost touch with the RPF advancing towards Kigali. It was approaching dusk and we learnt that the place where we were had several landmines and we could hear some pockets of gunfire,” he told us.

While the rest panicked, “Aliro bravely insisted that we have to move that night but the few remaining RPF soldiers advised us not to put on headlights. Miraculously, he drove and we passed through Gahini, Kayonza and Rwamagana to link up with the RPF.”

Describing the genocide, Zziwa says, “It was a nightmare for me.”

Following the end of the RPF war, Zziwa focused on sports reporting, before later moving to *The Observer* newspaper founded by Aliro and other *Monitor* colleagues.

In 2013, Zziwa was among 11 journalists and 160 Ugandans who received medals for outstanding contributions to Uganda.



## Djibouti Civil War (1991–93)

Also known as the Afar Insurgency, the Djiboutian civil war was between the government and the predominantly Afar rebel group, the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD). The conflict had its roots in the marginalisation of the Afar by the predominantly Issas government (who are culturally close to the Somalis).<sup>55</sup>

The conflict could also have been spurred by the arms that flowed into Djibouti from Derg militia (Soviet-backed former Ethiopian government soldiers) who, upon being overthrown in May 1991, fled to neighbouring Djibouti. Weapons abandoned by repatriated former Derg soon fell into the hands of FRUD.

Skirmishes between the FRUD and government troops led to the deaths of several hundred and the displacement of about 18 000 Afars into Ethiopia.<sup>56</sup> Eventually, a peace agreement was signed on 26 December 1994 between the Djiboutian government and the moderate wing of the FRUD, ending the conflict

temporarily. A final agreement was signed with the radical wing of FRUD in 2000, finally putting an end to the civil war.<sup>57</sup> FRUD members joined the cabinet, and in the presidential elections of 1999, the FRUD campaigned in support of the still-ruling People's Rally for Progress (RPP), which has dominated the country's politics for 40 years.

Media coverage of the Afar insurgency paled in comparison to that of the ongoing Ethiopia-Eritrea and Somali conflicts, partly because its human cost and destruction caused was limited, and the willingness of the warring parties to negotiate.

The Somali militant group Al-Shabaab has mastered the use of new media platforms like Twitter and YouTube to spread its message, and offer an interesting, if deeply troubling, counter-narrative to officialdom.

The start of Al-Shabab's use of Twitter as a messaging tool began on 7 December 2011, and the platform was important in spreading its propaganda during the deadly 21 September 2013 Westgate bombing in Nairobi. The terror outfit's social media department provided a continuous stream of "updates" to news organisations and the public throughout the assault on Westgate Mall.

Their skills would soon be perfected in a series of other attacks in Kenya and Somalia.

Through its Al-Kataib Media Foundation, its external media-department, the Somali Islamist group often releases videos documenting its terror activities.

Al-Kataib media operatives usually accompany Al-Shabaab forces during some operations, from base attacks to ambushes and raids on checkpoints, in order to record footage for later use in the militant group's propaganda campaign.

In a dawn raid on Kenya's Manda Bay in January 2020, the Al-Shabaab media operatives were able to take photographs and released three press statements immediately after the attack, feeding into the news frenzy that followed.



### Face of Extremist Media

HASSAN HANAFI was born in Somalia's south-central Hiran region in the 1980s. Although his family left the country in the 1990s, he stayed behind and started a career as a journalist, rising to fame in 2003 while working at the popular Quran FM in the capital, Mogadishu.

According to the BBC, on leaving Quran FM in 2006, Hanafi joined a mainstream Somali news website, before in 2009 joining Radio Andalus, Al-Shabab's official mouthpiece.

Hanafi's close links to Al-Shabaab came to light after he became a major source of breaking news or information from the terror group about battle losses. He also interviewed a number of Al-Shabaab militants.



In his new role for the group, a court heard, Hanafi ran a secret bureau, monitoring news and threatening any reporter who spoke out against Al-Shabab or portrayed the group in a bad light. Hanafi later admitted he was responsible for the deaths of at least five Somali journalists, including the 2010 killing of Sheikh Noor Mohamed, a senior journalist at Radio Mogadishu. Most of his victims were lured to meetings where they were shot by Al-Shabaab militants or had explosives planted in their cars.

"Al-Shabaab killed many journalists but personally I killed only one," he told the court in 2016.

In 2014, Hanafi was arrested in Kenya, where he had fled and extradited to Somalia to face trial. In March 2016, a military court sitting in Mogadishu sentenced him to death by firing squad. The sentence was carried out on 11 April 2016.

Even in the face of death, Hanafi was defiant, "I am indifferent if you kill me. You will see if killings will stop even after my death," he told the Somali military court.

## **Opération Azalée — Comoros (28 September - 3 October 1995)**

Comoros is an archipelago off the Eastern African coast in the Indian Ocean. On 28 September 1995, a famed French mercenary Denard (real name Gilbert Bourgeaud)<sup>58</sup> backed by 33 mercenaries attempted a fourth coup in the island nation (he had registered success in his previous three coups in Comoros alone, as well as overthrowing rulers in places like Yemen, Nigeria, Benin and Angola), against president Said Mohamed Djohar.

France was opposed to the coup and on 3 October 1995 it okayed Operation Azalee. The operation would take back Comoros from Denard, his 33 mercenaries and a by then dissident force of 300. In a night-time raid on 3 October, 600 French commandoes descended onto the island and in 48 hours had taken over the barracks, forcing Denard and his “army” to surrender and rescuing president Djohar who had been held captive in the same barracks. In total, four Comorians died during Operation Azalée and nine people were wounded.

## **Operation Angela — Seychelles (25 November 1981)**

Also known as the Seychelles Affair, Operation Angela was a failed South African-orchestrated mercenary takeover attempt in Seychelles, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean at the eastern edge of the Somali sea.

Led by the infamous Irish mercenary “Mad” Mike Hoare, the team of 43 mercenaries flew into Seychelles’ international airport on Mahe island, but while checking through customs weapons were found concealed in the team’s luggage.

A standoff ensued with airport security and later with the Seychelles army, before the attackers fled on an Air India Flight 224 en route from Harare to Mumbai. While the coup plotters had initially asked to be flown to Zimbabwe, the flight captain, following negotiations, flew the plane to Durban, South Africa, where the hijackers were subsequently arrested.

At the subsequent trial, Hoare testified that the South African government had approved the coup and supplied his men with weapons. Prime Minister PW Botha later denied having authorised the attack, although a UN investigation found that the South African government probably had advance knowledge of the plot.<sup>59</sup>

All but one of the 43 mercenaries, including Mad Mike, were convicted of the hijacking in a South African court. Two lives were lost in the coup — one Seychellois

army officer and one mercenary — as well as damage to one armoured vehicle and the attackers' chartered plane.

## Postscript

While it had been expected that the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century would usher in a new era of peace, democratic renewal, and economic progress in Africa, few would have anticipated the two-decade flares of conflict that would engulf Eastern Africa. Fewer still would have predicted how journalist's involvement in and coverage of the conflicts would shape this new phase of history for the region.

In reporting the political currents and upheavals that shaped Eastern Africa, it has been important to look at the various conflicts not as isolated events but as part of a large continuum, one born out of the pan-Africanist decolonisation project of the 1960s and 70s.

Born on 21 December 1952, WAFULA OGUTTU was part of the first group of Ugandans in the UPC youth wing sent to study abroad, as part of Milton Obote's "Move to the left" strategy. In 1974, he received a Diploma in the Chinese Language from the Beijing Language Institute and moved on to attain a degree in Literature and Political Economy from Beijing University in 1977, before heading into exile in Dar es Salaam where he worked as the editor for a Tanzanian publishing house. He was also invited to participate in anti-Amin exile politics in Tanzania.

Following Amin's overthrow in 1979, Oguttu, who also holds a postgraduate Diploma in Journalism from the University of Cardiff, returned to Uganda to work as a journalist for the *Weekly Topic*, an English language newspaper owned by the trio of former UPC youth wingers, radical activists, and UPM founder members Jaber Bidandi Ssali, Kintu Musoke and Kirunda Kivejinja.

His spell at *Weekly Topic* came to an abrupt end in 1981, following the paper's ban for its opposition to Obote's second government following the disputed December 1980's election that brought him to power.

"The paper had tried to stop Milton Obote from becoming president because we thought he had made many mistakes [in his first term] and shouldn't be given another chance," Oguttu told the *Monitor* in an interview.

Oguttu also served as an assistant lecturer at Makerere University between 1981 and 1985. During his four years of teaching, he also worked as an editor both at the *Uganda Times* and Uganda News Agency, before returning to restart *Weekly Topic* in late 1985, after the second overthrow of Obote.

Following his exit from the *Weekly Topic* in 1992, Oguttu and others founded the *Daily Monitor* newspaper in 1992, eventually becoming the paper's Editor-in-Chief before leaving in 2004. The Kenyan regional media house Nation Media Group had acquired a majority stake in the Monitor in 2000.

As Uganda's leading privately owned newspaper, the *Daily Monitor* and the State-owned *New Vision* are credited for extensive coverage of the insurgency in northern Uganda when the new NRM government was still highly popular in the south of Uganda, having defeated the "northern" regimes of Amin and Obote. The paper was also among the first to send reporters into Rwanda and the DRC, following the RPF invasion in 1990 and Uganda and Rwanda's foray into Congo in 1996. Wafula oversaw many firsts, leading the Monitor to be the first media house in Uganda to computerise, to own a colour web press, and among the first to get on the internet.

In 2006 Oguttu joined the Ugandan parliament on the opposition Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) ticket and served in the House until 2016. In 2014, he was appointed the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the Ugandan parliament.

WILLIAM PIKE was born on 1952 to British parents in modern-day Tanzania. A freelance journalist with *South* magazine in London in 1984, Pike brought to the world's attention the NRA "Bush War" in Uganda, as well as the atrocities of the second Obote regime, in a series of articles for the *Observer* newspaper in the United Kingdom. He was the first foreign journalist to interview guerrilla leader Yoweri Museveni in the bush in 1984. His impressive catalogue of photos during his visit to the NRA's camps in 1984 are some of the most widely used in documentation of the Bush War.

Following the NRA's victory in 1986, Pike was appointed Editor-in-Chief of the new government newspaper, the *New Vision*, and he led it from 1986 to 2006. The *New Vision* became easily the most successful and independent State-owned newspaper, with Pike adopting the public broadcast model of the BBC.

In 1993, with the liberalisation of the airwaves, he co-founded Capital Radio

with expatriate Ghanaian businessman Patrick Quarcoo. Capital FM was the first private commercial FM radio station in sub-Saharan Africa. Following his resignation from the *New Vision* in 2006, he moved to Kenya where, as part of Radio Africa Group, which Quarcoo and Capital FM in Uganda had started, he worked to launch a new daily newspaper, *The Nairobi Star*, in July 2007, and became its Managing Director. *The Nairobi Star* was rebranded as *The Star* in 2009.

Pike's 2018 memoir *Combatants: A Memoir of the Bush War and the Press in Uganda* explores the NRA Bush War and the first years of the NRM government in Uganda. He writes: "Working with the National Resistance Movement as a journalist gave me a real sense — which I never had in the Labour Party — that I was an active participant in a historic movement that was changing the world for better."

The journalism arising from this period also illustrated a radical shift from one involving the covering of events from a "safe" distance—politically and physically—to the birth of the embedded war correspondent, the "rebel" journalist and activist media. Pioneering photojournalists like Mohinder Dhillon and Mo Amin were in many ways the world's eyes—literally—into the region, and Africa, throughout the turbulent '70s and '80s decades. The varied cast of "rebels" like Wafula Oguttu and William Pike proved that media could exist to support and check a government while not compromising its independence. Brave correspondents like Kevin Aliro and Caroline Lamwaka showed, as others had for most of the 100 years before them, that even without the benefits of modern technology, good old journalism can innovate to bring to the public's attention the plight and suffering of many as a result of war.

Several of these journalists did not necessarily produce the most news reports, but their reporting broke new ground, and their stories shaped our understanding of the forces shaping political contestation — and often resulting in conflicts — in our region.

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## End of the Honeymoon

There were too many trees in a turbulent Great Lakes region; it was hard to see the forest

Daniel Kalinaki

Few observers could have known that Tanzania's invasion of Uganda in 1979, supported by a few Ugandan fighters in exile, would lead to the removal of dictator Idi Amin. Yet even fewer could have predicted that it would be the start of a third wave of disruptive rebuilding of the nation-state in the Great Lakes region.

There had been two notable nation-building waves in the previous 100 years: the first via the imposition of colonial rule at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; the second halfway through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as many African countries were granted independence. The former had been violent and arbitrary; the latter mostly a peaceful change of guard, rather than a fundamental redrawing of borderlines, boundaries or an unbundling of the politico-economic elite.

At the heart of these nation-building periods was the need to popularise the new powers in charge and to legitimise the processes and the outcomes. The first wave often relied mostly on Christian missionaries and the pamphlets and newspapers they formed to shape the narrative.

While Alibhai Mulla Jeevanjee, an Indian migrant and merchant, set up the weekly *African Standard* as the first newspaper in Kenya in Mombasa in 1902, in Uganda the honour would go to the Church Missionary Society which set up *Mengo Notes* in 1900, and then the local-language *Ebifa e Mengo* in 1907.

By the time of the second wave, around independence, the media space was

contested by “native” publications: newspapers, newsletters and pamphlets openly supporting different factions, often assembled along ethnic or religious lines.<sup>1</sup> While some of the religious groups were global in membership and outlook, the post-colonial wave of nationalism meant that the journalistic focus primarily remained local and national.

The nationalism argument was essentially a legitimising effort for the new political elite. Where independence had been granted fairly painlessly, this legitimisation took an organisational format, for instance, through nationalising private enterprise, retreats to monolithic political systems, and State control of so-called public broadcasters and publishers.

Where independence was granted after or sought through confrontation, it fed into radical nationalist politics and socialist “people’s war” rhetoric and movements, including in Angola, Mozambique, Guinea-Bissau and, in Uganda, by the National Resistance Army (NRA).

There were two underlying realities underpinning this structure. The first, primarily in British former colonies, was what Low and Lonsdale referred to as the “second colonial occupation”,<sup>2</sup> which essentially meant the continuation of the colonial political-economy in the post-colonial nations, with authority “delegated” to native political figures.

The second reality, American-led, emerged during the Cold War. It was a western pre-occupation with maintaining regimes in the Third World as long as they were considered allies and provided stability in their respective geographies or spheres of influence. As Huntington noted, the underlying priorities of American foreign policy during the Cold War were to be stability, order and regime maintenance.<sup>3</sup> Thus, plutocrats like Zaire’s Mobutu Sese Seko and despots like Hosni Mubarak in Egypt were protected and pampered while troublemakers like Idi Amin and upstarts like Patrice Lumumba were dealt with.

Throughout this history, the media had played important roles in justifying causes or legitimising their outcomes. None were more important than the military adventures — whether *coups d’état* or full-on wars — that were a key feature of the nation-building or nation-shaping that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century.

The imposition of one-party political systems during the post-colonial nationalist phase extended to the media, reducing the diversity of views and vibrancy of the industry across many sub-Saharan African countries. When the Cold War swept

in the winter of discontent—you are either with us or against us—this only increased the chill factor in the media.

The binary environment of the Cold War provided incentives for the military to adapt and proliferate. As Greg McLaughlin noted in his book, *The War Correspondent*, “The military learn the lessons of the last war and then plan better ways to control the media in time for the next war, more often than not with a high degree of media cooperation. Most war correspondents seem to forget the lessons in time for the next war, reserving regret and protest for their post-retirement memoirs.”<sup>4</sup>

It can be argued, for instance, that the embedding of journalists with the Allied troops in the first Gulf War in Iraq in 1991 reflected lessons learnt by the US military from the debacle of the Vietnam War and its unpopularity with many Americans.

Similarly, any military leader watching the global lampooning of Idi Amin and the almost universal acclaim for his removal would have learnt the importance of good press. Thus, the Tanzanian invasion had at least two observable effects: one, the lack of condemnation, even by the Organisation of African Unity (the African Union’s predecessor)—whose clubby and chummy traditions made it popular among dictators and despots—and secondly it would open the door to foreign military intervention in the Great Lakes region, with wide-reaching consequences.

Second, it taught military and political leaders the need to shape and own the narrative, an awareness that would shape journalism in the region at least over the next three decades. Some journalists were shaped sub-consciously; others did so with a great deal more personal initiative and enthusiasm.

It was in this environment that a third, and eventually more significant, wave of political-economic recalibration begun with the United States’ impending Cold War victory, alongside its western allies.

Professor Dani Wadada Nabudere has traced a connection between the shifting political-economic sands and the emergence of a “new breed” of African leaders.<sup>5</sup> In 1980, the Organisation of African Unity had drawn up the Lagos Plan of Action (officially the Lagos Plan of Action for the Economic Development of Africa, 1980-2000), which sought to increase the continent’s self-reliance and reduce its dependence on the West.

A year later, the World Bank issued the Berg Report on *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa*, which would eventually be the first return shot from the other side of the ideological divide. The economic crisis in the mid-1980s, following a collapse of commodity prices on the global market, left African states vulnerable and in desperate need of bailouts from external allies. With the Soviet Union already showing signs of the early onset of economic rigor mortis, the African states quickly buried the Lagos Plan and took their begging bowls west to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

By the time the World Bank issued its report, *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*,<sup>6</sup> a decade later, the Cold War was all over bar the shouting. The report would become the blueprint for structural adjustment programmes across the continent, as well as justification for the break up of the post-colonial nationalist state in many parts of the region.

According to Nabudere, this “delegitimisation of the post-colonial state agenda” now “enabled the former colonial powers to reorganise the post-colonial state in their own images”. Across the Great Lakes region this reorganisation would primarily be through military means, starting with Amin’s ouster, and requiring a new narrative, a justification for the armed conflict, and a legitimisation of the new actors and nation-states that would ultimately emerge.

“‘Revolution’ has taken on a new meaning. It has basically come to mean taking power from a rotten African violent dictatorship to a more ‘enlightened’ and ‘benevolent’ dictatorship able to keep ‘law and order’ in a much more ‘civilised way’ for the free market forces to operate in more stable and secure environments,” Nabudere argued.

If many of the journalists who were covering these developments saw the forest for the trees it was not clear in their reporting, which in some cases enjoyed front-row seats to the action, but was also often fleeting, ephemeral and lacking the intellectual insight necessary to understand and interpret the ideological and political-economic recalibrations that were underway.

British journalist William Pike (he subsequently also got Ugandan citizenship) was a man searching for meaning in the early 1980s. As a hippie he’d spent time in Afghanistan, and been disillusioned by internecine fights in the Labour Party home in the United Kingdom. This disillusionment had followed him during a visit to Tanzania where he had been born and lived as a child, and where his father had been a colonial official, before running into Ben Matogo and Eriya Kategaya,

members of the rebel National Resistance Movement's (NRM) External Wing in London in the early 1980s.

That meeting changed the fortunes of the man and the movement. Pike was not the first journalist to report about the NRM or its armed wing, the National Resistance Army (NRA); Thomas Lansner, a war correspondent for the British press, for one, had spent time with the rebels in their early days before his credentials were withdrawn and he was forced to leave the country by the Obote government.

But Pike and the NRA/M were made for each other. In his book, *Combatants, A Memoir of the Bush War and The Press in Uganda*,<sup>7</sup> Pike notes: "Working with the (NRM) as a journalist gave me a real sense — which I never had in the Labour Party — that I was an active participant in a historic movement that was changing the world for the better. As time passed, my assessment of the NRM was modified by experience and a sense of lost opportunities but I never stopped feeling that it was a net positive."

The NRA/M needed Pike: the rebels initially espoused Marxist ideals, which, with the Cold War clearly swinging in favour of the West, were not useful for drumming up support for a supposed government-in-waiting. In addition, President Apolo Milton Obote had, in his second term in office, ideologically swung from left to right and was working to repair relations with the West. Exposing his weaknesses was of strategic importance, as rebel leader Yoweri Museveni told Pike during the journalist's well-publicised visit to the rebel camps.

"If a liberation army succeeds in preserving itself and in dismantling [the] enemy's strength by killing troops and capturing equipment, by destroying his political image and disrupting his diplomacy, then that army is winning."

Pike's reportage on the NRA gave a fresh perspective to the rebels. Not only were they organised militarily, they were ideologically coherent and even pragmatic about what had appeared to be their long-held Marxist views.

Leaders of military groups in the Great Lakes region, including the NRA, had watched and learnt lessons from the Cold War. The complete destruction and demonisation of Idi Amin in the international press was, to those who were paying attention, evidence that public perception was not something you merely allowed to evolve; you had to actively shape it.



Whether intentional or not, Pike's coverage distinguished the NRA from the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) of Obote that they were fighting, and helped buttress its reputation in the international press and legitimise its armed struggle. When it eventually took power, it led to at least two important developments.

The first was that the NRA imposed a new model of "no party democracy" which was a disingenuous form of the one-party systems in the post-colonial nation-states, but which fit more snugly in the Huntingtonian model of stability and maintenance of reliable, albeit undemocratic, regimes. Similar models would soon after emerge across the region, from Ethiopia to Burundi and in-between.

The leaders of the forces that emerged in this wave were the "new breed" that US President Bill Clinton would reference in the mid-90s. The floods that had swept Amin and then Obote out of power in Uganda had planted a seed of revolt and rebellion; it would later sprout into a forest whose labyrinth of roots would spread through the hills and valleys of the Great Lakes region.

Dismas Nkunda did not choose to cover the Rwanda War; it chose him. A Mufumbira from Kisoro, the mountainous range squeezed between the borders of Uganda, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he had grown up listening to *Radio Rwanda* and was generally interested in security-related stories. The Bafumbira are, in any case, very closely related to the Banyarwanda and many families have relatives on both sides of the border.

In October 1990 Rwandan exiles broke off from the NRM/NRA they had helped bring to power in Uganda and attacked Juvenal Habyarimana's regime, which had been in power since 1973, seeking to force their return to their country under the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) and its military wing the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA).

John Ogen Kevin Aliro, a colourful and intrepid journalist with the *Weekly Topic* newspaper, and who would later help co-found *The Monitor*, was one of the first journalists to latch onto the story, together with photographer Hassan Badru Zziwa.

But in the closely-knit world of guerrilla armies, reporters who could speak Kinyarwanda and knew the country and key players among the attacking troops soon became the go-to journalists.

"Because I was a westerner,<sup>8</sup> it was easier for me to report about security and the army," Nkunda recalls. "I could, for instance, call Jim Muhwezi, who headed

Uganda's internal security organisation at the time, greet him in Runyankore<sup>9</sup> and get a comment for a story I needed. So the editors thought that this guy must be a good guy to report this conflict."

Nkunda and Steven Shalita, another journalist from Kisoro, had been covering a Pan-African conference at the Nile Hotel in Kampala, which was a cover for many Rwandan exiles planning to join the war effort. They knew some key players and could speak the language — important to get access and acceptability to the guerrilla fighters.

So, while Nkunda reported from the field, Shalita corroborated information with the exiles that had remained in Kampala. But access was not always guaranteed. When he was sent up to the main camp of the rebel Rwanda Patriotic Army, Nkunda, in the company of a BBC journalist, were left sitting in the bitter night cold on the mountainside for eight hours.

When he finally appeared, their contact Major Wilson Rutayisire, the Rwanda Patriotic Army (RPA) head of information, was unapologetic. "Did you bring my things?" he said curtly. Nkunda reached into his bag and handed over the heavy jacket and digestive biscuits the soldier had asked him to carry. Then they could get on with the business of reporting the gruesomeness of war and, later, genocide.

The RPA commanders had learnt from their time in the NRA about the importance of carefully managing and shaping their public perceptions, and the embedding of journalists was part of this process.

Following the well-publicised embedding of western journalists during the first Gulf War, General Richard Myers, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff noted that such journalists developed a "soda-straw view of war"<sup>10</sup> which might be detailed but is inevitably narrow.

Nkunda was not blind to this reality as he recalled being under the thumb of one set of protagonists in what is an otherwise multi-faceted conflict: "They have this control over you and the only time you can speak to people freely is when in private, which is not always possible.

"You see only what you are indirectly directed to see so you can't tell [a more complete story of the war]. The only glimpse we had of the other side of the war was a meeting between the RPA and Habyarimana's generals where they later

addressed a press conference. It was the first time we heard about allegations against the RPA killing civilians and so on.”

Once, Nkunda “escaped” from the protective cocoon of the RPA and set off for Kigali in a hired pick-up truck in an effort to speak to government soldiers and get “the other side of the story”. Twenty minutes in they were ambushed and shot at by what he believes were Rwanda government troops; the driver of the hired pick-up truck was killed and Nkunda was wounded — he still has some of the shrapnel inside his body, he says — before they were rescued by an RPA patrol.

“You need to look at a war not from the perspective of the one with a stronger hand,” he reminisces. “You need to look at the weaker side. Looking back, there are parts of it where you feel that you were used. If I could go back I would absolutely make sure I have very careful accounts of [ordinary] people.”

The need to shape and control the narrative was of strategic importance to the principal actors, as Rutayisire, then still involved in military public relations and propaganda, would later argue in a paper written in November 1998, when the Congo was raging.

“Although the media coverage Africa receives is not the principal cause of the problems Africa faces, it provides the superstructure within which Africa is perceived and foreign policies on Africa are prescribed. Reporting Africa is therefore a very important issue at this moment in our history when crucial decisions governing African people are made from without the continent.”<sup>11</sup>

As with the NRA war before it, ultimately the written history of the Rwanda war, particularly that told by the embedded journalists, was a victor’s account. The overall coverage of the conflict also left many fundamental questions unanswered. For instance, the circumstances surrounding the death of the RPA commander Maj. Gen. Fred Rwigyema; the provenance and responsibility for the surface-to-air missiles that brought down the presidential jet carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana and his Burundi counterpart Cyprien Ntaryamira over Kigali on that fateful April 6, 1994 night; or even links between Uganda (and later Rwanda) to Pierre Buyoya’s coups in Burundi in 1987, and again in 1996 all remain unclear or contested.

Crucially, none of the reporting foresaw or at least publicly foretold the next set of dominoes that was to fall. The butterfly that had flapped its wings in the jungles of the Luwero Triangle in Uganda, where the Yoweri Museveni-led NRA

liberation was headquartered, was about to set off a wild fire in the vast tropical forests of Congo.

Journalist Adonia Ayebare thought it was a prank call. “We have this guy who is going to fight and remove Mobutu,” the voice on the other end of the line said. Would he be interested in interviewing him?

Ayebare was a young breakout reporter on the staff of *The EastAfrican*, a new regional newspaper published out of Nairobi by the Nation Media Group (NMG), but with bureaus in Dar es Salaam and Kampala, where the journalist was based.

He quickly conferred with his editor, the clever and thoughtful Joseph ‘Joe’ Odindo, who would, in later years, become editorial director of NMG as well as its rival Standard Group. The caller was a high-ranking official in the Rwanda government, where the RPA/F had taken over in July 1994, effectively ending the genocide.



The journalists thought it sounded unserious at best and a set-up at worst, but they decided to call their bluff. Ayebare had family in Rwanda and knew the country and some of its leaders well; if anything happened to him the newspaper could take it up with the authorities.

Arrangements were made, Ayebare did the interview and no sooner had it run in the weekly than war broke out in Zaire, with Laurent Kabila leading Congolese dissidents and fighters, backed by Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers, against Mobutu’s poorly trained, unmotivated and corrupt troops. It was then that the significance of the interview became clear to Ayebare.

“They really needed publicity badly. They needed to package Kabila; to fight Mobutu was a big Cold War story, bigger than the Rwanda war and the NRA war combined. They were attempting to remove a head of state who was [a big] part of the Cold War, and who had strong interests behind him, like France”, Ayebare said.

Tanzanian troops had set a precedent in the region in 1979 by attacking Uganda and removing Idi Amin’s government. NRA fighters who had been part of the Tanzanian invasion, had then overthrown the relic of the regime installed by Dar es Salaam, and successfully exported their own cross-border revolution into

Rwanda between 1990 and 1994. Now they were attempting an audacious move to overthrow one of the region's richest and most influential heads of state and take over a country several times bigger.



Justifying the invasion of Congo was key to its success, argues Ayebare. "They deliberately chose the regional media because the story was a regional story; there was a hierarchy and they gave us more access than western journalists. They needed to sell this story to audiences in Kenya, in Uganda; that's how Kabila saw the future of Congo: in East Africa.

"It was deliberate. They gave me the interview before, so when the war broke out the only story out there was in *The EastAfrican*; we had the only picture of Kabila. Most western journalists and countries made the mistake of assuming they were dealing with unsophisticated rebels and that this was just some tribal war, but these guys knew what psychological operations were. They were not riff-raffs; they were sophisticated."

The ground was shifting in fundamental ways in the Great Lakes region. In the space of just 15 years Cold War players like Obote, Amin, Habyarimana and Mobutu were uprooted and new political players imposed or gate crashed the party across the region. However, few reporters, especially those embedded and with their noses to the grindstone of front-line reporting, could see the big picture emerging before them.

"When you are reporting you don't realise that you are part of a big story. The heat of the moment consumes you. There's an adage that you are paid to report, not to think. You actually don't know that you are part of or are making history and I think that helps you to focus on the story.

"Until CNN and the BBC started calling me and asking me about the interview with Kabila I had not realised the significance of it all. One of the CNN anchors asked me, 'do you know that this war is going to reshape the map of Africa?' It hadn't dawned on me."

This, Ayebare says, is partly because the NRA war and the Rwanda war had primarily been reported as national stories, although their key protagonists had regional constituencies that would inevitably be affected.

“The Rwanda story was reported as a national story, maybe as a Ugandan story because these people [the RPA/F] had been here and we knew them. We didn’t understand it then that it was a regional story and the beginning of the unravelling of the Cold War political set up across the region which Habyarimana was part of; then it led into genocide in 1994 and then the media were overwhelmed; and this then led to Congo, the exodus, then the war. It all started in Uganda.

“If I could go back I would give the story richer context, show that this region would never be the same again. We were coming from the Rwanda genocide and the South African elections in 1994; now you had a war in Congo. Things were moving very fast and history was being made. A little more context and analytical perspective would have been better.”

A glaring absence of perspective involved the nature of the emergent protagonists. As noted earlier, Museveni and his allies in what came to be the NRA, and by extension the rump of what would become the RPF, had espoused socialist or Marxist theories in their formative political-military stages. Museveni’s undergraduate thesis at the University of Dar es Salaam had explored Frantz Fanon’s theory of violence; Ethiopia’s Meles Zenawi had once been such a hardline Marxist-Leninist, he believed the Soviet Union and China had sold out and turned to Albania for ideological inspiration.

Laurent Désiré Kabila had gone even further when, in 1967, his People’s Revolutionary Party established a self-declared Marxist territory in the Kivu region in eastern Zaire.

Yet, incredibly, by the time of the Congo War all these movements had turned their back on Marxism and socialism. This, argues Nabudere, was not coincidental but was key to “the political theory of adjustment advanced by the World Bank” which required “the alienation of the urban middle classes and the rural peasantry from the existing political order”.

He wrote: “In fact as it turned out, the best agents to understand this logic were the ‘revolutionary left’ who had fought guerrilla wars in Africa or were Marxist-oriented military officers. They, out of their experience in rural contact with the peasantry, had found that they could be a good source of ‘conservative’ support, if they were isolated from the urban-based political alliances. This called for a new form of political organisation which could link the new ‘revolutionary’ leaders with the rural peasantry, and this is what is behind the constant denunciation of the urban-based political parties by the new breed.”

Ayebare recognises embedding of journalists as a somewhat necessary evil in order to access difficult stories. The peril of getting too close, he says, can be somewhat tempered by newsroom structures and hands-on editors.

“Editors are important because reporters can easily be taken up by the embedment. You need editors to keep checking in on reporters to guide their questions and push for context. You need editorial support when you are embedded. The editor is removed from the theatre and is therefore more objective.”

But, in part due to the fast-paced nature of developments on the ground (in the decade from 1986 there had been civil war in Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia and Eritrea, as well as the 1994 Genocide) and the nation-level reporting outlook, few editors were able to see the big picture unfolding right in front of their eyes, or who some of the key painters were.

The challenge was less about reporting events and more about connecting the dots that tied them together. For instance, no sooner had the first Congo War against Mobutu broken out than western corporations lined up behind the rebels to sign mining concessions, even before victory was certain. After decades in which French and Belgian companies held sway in Mobutu's Zaire, the new players were decidedly Anglo-American: Barrick Gold, Banro Resources, Consolidated Eurocan and American Mineral Fields (AMF) were all from the United States and or Canada.

In the run-up to the NRA's capture of power in Uganda, in 1985 Tiny Rowland of the Lonrho conglomerate, which had a colourful reputation across the continent, had lent the company private jet to rebel leader Yoweri Museveni to fly around and do his diplomatic campaigning. The British government had also deputed its military attaché to Kenya, Colonel Anthony Pollard, to sit in on the Nairobi Peace Talks between the NRA and the Uganda National Liberation Army junta that had overthrown Milton Obote in July 1985 and were then in charge of Uganda.

A decade later, in Congo, with the war in its very early stages but with Mobutu's army folding like a pack of cards, the American Mineral Fields put its corporate jet at the disposal of rebel leader Kabila. Another company linked to Boule-American Diamond Buyers had been in negotiations with the Mobutu government to pay \$150 000 for a trading license; instead it paid \$15 000 to Kabila's militia for the license, having been linked to the rebels by a Belgian former army officer, General Willy Mallants, who had become a mercenary and a military advisor to the Congolese leader.

The AMF were very clear in their minds about what was going on: “We are business people, not politicians,” a company representative was quoted as saying. “We just need to know what the rules are and it looks like President Kabila is going to be making the rules.”<sup>12</sup> History was repeating itself but there was too much present for it to all make sense at the time, at least to those journalists closest to the action.

Yet if the problem with these conflicts was the inability to see the bigger picture evolving around them, in the case of one other conflict — the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency in northern Uganda against the Museveni regime — the biggest problem was getting even basic access to the other set of protagonists.

In late November 2008 the world held its breath as high-ranking dignitaries waited in Ri-Kwamba, deep in the southern jungles of South Sudan, for the signing of an historic peace-deal between the Uganda government and Joseph Kony, the elusive leader of the LRA rebel group.

Nine thousand kilometres away, in Paris, France, Billie O’Kadamari watched proceedings live on *al Jazeera* television. For two decades the LRA fighters had waged a savage war, not so much against the Ugandan government, which they sought to overthrow, but against the civilians in northern Uganda. Thousands had been killed, tens of thousands abducted and forced to join the rebellion, and about two million displaced from their homes.

O’Kadamari had covered the conflict from close quarters, first with the government-owned *New Vision* newspaper, and then for Radio France Internationale. And now, at a decisive moment in the conflict, he was watching it on television instead of being among the massed journalists waiting alongside the dignitaries in the jungle.

It was a big gamble. A week earlier, O’Kadamari’s editor had asked why he hadn’t put in a travel plan to cover the signing of the peace deal.

“I am not going,” O’Kadamari said.

“How can you not go?” cried the editor. ‘It is the biggest story of your career!’

“There will be no peace deal signed,” the journalist said, calmly but firmly.

“How do you know that,” the editor pressed back.

“Because Kony told me so last week,” the reporter said. “Right now he is about 300 kilometres away from that place.”

Suddenly there was a burst of activity on the screen ahead of them. The newsroom



in Paris fell silent. A spokesman for the LRA negotiating side appeared on the screen and for an instant O'Kadameri's heart was in his mouth. He could lose his job if RFI missed a story that had brought him to fame and led to his hiring in the first place.

The rebel representative spoke: Kony was a no-show. In a newsroom in Paris, sighs of relief. In Ri-Kwamba and across most of Uganda, groans of frustration.

O'Kadameri had taken bigger gambles before. In 1994 he'd met a source who had known Kony before the start of his rebellion, and who was still in touch, and had been arrested four times for his contacts with the rebel leader. Could he lead the journalist to the rebel leader?

O'Kadameri was not a stranger to the LRA's brutality. "I had a biased view of what Kony and the LRA were doing, because I was seeing it on the ground. I was seeing people running, I was seeing people being killed. But then, again, I had an objective mind myself; why not get their side of the story? Even the person you consider evil has his own reasons for being evil."

The journalist decided it was safer to couch his curiosity behind peace overtures; he would ask the source to try and persuade Kony to talk to Betty Bigombe, the Ugandan minister in charge of northern Uganda.

The source said he would try, and then things moved very quickly. After an exchange of letters and a few confidence-building encounters of officials from both sides, Bigombe led a team of traditional and religious leaders to meet Kony in the jungles of northern Uganda. Kony showed up, ranted for more than three hours and agreed to a managed transition out of the rebellion.

O'Kadameri and Minister Bigombe had a side meeting with Kony at which the journalist became the first to speak to the feared rebel leader. "He was much calmer away from the gathered crowd. Suddenly he became a very humble person, not the one who was terrifying in front of the crowd. That's how I got to him on a personal level."

O'Kadameri sent Kony the pictures he had taken of him at the meeting, which fascinated and pleased the rebel leader and a personal relationship developed between the two, although always tense.

"He said, 'but you also write very bad things about us' and I said but I only write what I have seen. If you want me to write good things about you then you do

good things," the journalist recalls. "Then the communication terminated but he already knew me very well."

About a year later, with the peace process still proceeding tentatively, President Museveni visited Gulu, one of the big towns in northern Uganda, and gave the rebels a two-week ultimatum to surrender. The confidence collapsed, Kony retreated to the jungles and, once he started getting direct support from President Omar al-Bashir's government in Khartoum, significantly expanded his fighting capabilities and the brutality of his insurgency.

There are few bigger scoops in journalism than exclusively interviewing one of the world's most wanted men, something O'Kadameri did in 1994 and later when the new peace process brokered by South Sudan leaders in the early 2000s. The journalist also scored a world-first when he recorded Kony's first and so-far-only international radio interview during those peace talks.

He also cultivated the source, sending him a suit and a battery-powered portable DVD player with war movies. The rebel leader was so thrilled; he called the journalist using a satellite phone and profusely thanked him for the presents.

Yet it was a relationship fraught with danger. "LRA was unapproachable; no journalist had dared approach them," says O'Kadameri. "I could not make an appointment by myself to go and visit Kony in the bush that I want to do an exclusive. I made sure that couldn't happen because he is very unpredictable."

And unlike other fighting groups that had nurtured and carefully cultivated the media to shape the narrative about them, Kony and the LRA were inept and unable to use the access that O'Kadameri could have provided.

"Kony failed to frame the grievances of his organisation and the reasons for his fight. And it all got lost in the subsequent method of execution of the mission: the brutality, the abductions, the sometimes very primitive retributions. Even those who had sympathy with him and who did not like the government found it very difficult to accept that he can bring liberation for them. I don't think there's any Acholi today who thinks that Kony could have brought liberation for them."

The Acholi War Victims Association, which brings together the survivors of the LRA insurgency, has over 15 000 registered members, O'Kadameri noted pointedly.

Writing about the conflict in Darfur Prof. Mahmood Mamdani once noted that in a war no party is entirely innocent or entirely guilty, and there is evidence of ambushes on civilians by government soldiers, and wanton killings of civilians, including one incident in which 57 LRA “rebels” mowed down by a helicopter gunship consisted of many civilian abductees who were being marched to Sudan with their hands tied.

But the victors and those able to tell their stories to the writers write history. Others, like Joseph Kony and his LRA rebels, have history written for them. There are many reasons for the military failure of the LRA rebellion, including the brutality against the civilian population that could have supported the rebels, superior military hardware and tactics of the Ugandan army, and the support it would later receive from foreign allies, especially the United States.

But none was perhaps as fatal as the LRA’s failure to build diplomatic support in the region and internationally, and position itself as a useful tool for the larger powers that were pushing the pieces on the geopolitical chessboard that was the Great Lakes region.

It is all easier to see in retrospect. The Tanzanian army helps Ugandan exiles remove Idi Amin whom they had been trying to remove on their own unsuccessfully for years. Then Rwandan exiles help a section of disenfranchised Ugandan fighters, mostly from the south of the country, to remove a mostly northern ruling military elite. The emergent military elite then repays the favour by supporting Rwandan exiles to invade and overthrow the Habyarimana regime, but this triggers the genocide in 1994. Millions of Rwandan refugees pour across the border into Congo and start remobilising politically and militarily. To prevent an inevitable counter-attack, Rwanda and Uganda follow them into Congo and overthrow Mobutu then fall out, fight, and are then forced to leave Congo with the state building job only half-done. With potentially hostile neighbours to the south and west, and with the LRA insurgency in the north, the regime in Kampala is almost surrounded and then helps create a bulwark in Sudan, through an independent southern republic, South Sudan.

But unseen or seen but un- or under-reported, was the shifting of the ground underneath: the ideological triumph of capitalism over socialism and its earth-shaking implication across Africa particularly through the structural adjustment programmes, the economic liberalisation and the re-introduction of political pluralism; the removal of the old guard — Mobutu, Amin, Habyarimana, Obote, Mengistu Haile Mariam, et cetera — and their replacement by the “new breed”; the latter’s expansionary foreign policy and redrawing of borders, coupled with

domestic undemocratic practices necessary to keep them in power and to deliver the stability vital to open markets, if not open politics.

These stories were reported over three decades by hundreds, maybe thousands, of journalists but the more they got closer to the subjects and the deeper they dug the less they saw. They reported the trees with great detail but mostly missed the forest.

## Notes

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## After the Berlin Wall Fell

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The media flood gates burst, and Power struck back

Joseph Odindo

Tanzanian media mogul Reginald Mengi had an unequivocal message for the three editors gathered at his home for a midweek dinner. With dust swirling around Tanzania's 2010 presidential election, the country's biggest media owner seemed to be under pressure from the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party to throw the weight of his 11 newspapers and five broadcast stations behind their faltering campaign.

He put his position to the three senior editors simply and directly: they had to support the ruling party in the unfolding elections. Richard Mgamba, then weekend managing editor of the IPP Media Group, remembers the small talk at the billionaire's home in Kinondoni, an upmarket suburb of Dar es Salaam, dissolving into an uncomfortable silence.

"It was not the first time Mengi was making this point — he was always very clear about his political preference," says the investigative journalist who had been lured from rival Mwananchi Communications with a newspaper editorship. "On this, he was better than many media owners; they pretend to be impartial but quietly fight their editors over stories which hurt their candidates."<sup>1</sup>

With multi-million-dollar interests straddling the mining, beverages and plastic pen industries, as well as a philanthropic web, Mengi, who was reputed to be worth more than \$560 million at his death in 2019, became for Tanzania media what a squall is to a calm sea.<sup>2</sup> So diverse were his media products that, at the peak of his business expansion, Tanzania was the only country in Eastern Africa at the time with a regional television channel and an evening newspaper. These

ventures cleared the way for a new generation of media investors whose free-market creativity and competitiveness would radically reshape the country's news outlets.

Theirs was not a quirk of commercial fate. In neighbouring Kenya and Uganda, the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall in faraway Germany triggered far-reaching economic and political reforms, ushering in multiparty systems. As with Tanzania, newspapers which had been rooted in a government-supporting tradition since the 1960s were suddenly upstaged by investigative and politically strident competitors.

At the same time, liberalisation of the airwaves ushered in independent FM radio, marked by a noisy celebrity culture, while private ownership of television gave a vibrant new meaning to audio-visual journalism and entertainment.

Until the privately owned *Majira* newspaper was launched in 1993, Tanzania's newsstands offered only two dailies, the *Daily News* and *Uhuru*, and on weekends the *Sunday News*, all three affiliated to either the government or the ruling CCM party. Except for the weekly *Business Times*, other papers were owned either by trade unions or religious groups.

Mengi's unveiling of *Nipashe*, with its English-language sister *The Guardian*, gave the country an additional two privately owned dailies, creating competitive pressure in mainstream journalism. As IPP Media launched more titles, it drew workers from existing newspapers and broadcasters, leaving Tanzania in the unusual position of having far fewer journalists than jobs available.

Salaries for editors and reporters rocketed, not only due to a talent scarcity, but also because Mengi's group and *Majira's* owners at the Business Times Ltd paid journalists higher than the market average. An IPP managing editor in 1995, for instance, earned twice as much as or even three times their counterpart in the government-affiliated media.<sup>3</sup>

Mengi's empire had three salutary effects on the news industry, according to Kajubi Mukajanga, who headed a rival newspaper *Wakati ni Huu*. "It raised the financial value of journalistic skill, brought into the country modern media technology and expanded the print and broadcast product range — we even had an evening newspaper!"<sup>4</sup>

From independence in 1964, Tanzania's politics had been dominated by a single party, the socialist-leaning Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM). When Mwalimu

Nyerere's successor, the unassuming Ali Hassan Mwinyi, launched economic and political reforms in the late 1980s, a new world order was taking root as Europe's Communist bloc disintegrated. The fierce public debate which broke out about these changes, pitting journalists, academics and politicians against each other, enriched the outspoken character of newspapers such as *Mfanyakazi*, the decades-old title owned by the country's umbrella trade union body.

Other papers and broadcasters joined the fray from 1992, when Tanzania formally discarded the one-party system. They included *Rai*, a Kiswahili weekly favoured primarily for its flagship commentary, a hard-hitting political column by lawyer Jenerali Ulimwengu, which was eponymously branded *Rai Ya Jenerali Ulimwengu*. Another significant voice was *Wakati ni Huu*, of which Mukajanga was editor and part-owner.

In neighbouring countries, the media was subject to varying political forces and transformation differed accordingly. In Uganda, Yoveri Kaguta Museveni's 1986 battlefield victory over the Lutwa Okello military regime and the establishment of a new government paved the way for the birth of a new paper owned by the state, the *New Vision*, and later the privately owned *Daily Monitor*. The two titles would help to reinvigorate a newspaper industry enfeebled by three decades of suppression by intolerant regimes, including nine years of dictator Idi Amin.

Within six years of Museveni's National Resistance Movement coming to power, the then dominant paper, the *Weekly Topic* — a carry-over from the immediate post Idi Amin years, but which was banned by Obote's second government, and which returned after he was again deposed in 1985 — suffered the fate of reformist media whose owners find themselves part of the establishment after successfully campaigning for regime change.

Wafula Oguttu, the respected editor-in-chief of the *Weekly Topic*, was removed as the editorial helmsman by the politician-owners of the influential title. The controversial transfer, ostensibly to a more senior but largely administrative position, only confirmed what the newsroom had all along suspected: that the cosy relationship between the newspaper's owners and Museveni's government, forged during the new president's days as a guerrilla fighter and when together they formed the Uganda Patriotic Movement (UPM) party in 1980, was beginning to hobble their journalism.





All three shareholders of the *Weekly Topic* had been appointed ministers in Museveni's cabinet. And, according to Jimmy Serugo, one of the journalists who later broke away to set up *The Monitor*, the *Weekly Topic*'s critical reporting was causing discomfort in government.

Serugo recalls that a *Weekly Topic* director one evening stormed the paper's printing press protesting over a front-page report about the son of Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda, who had reportedly killed a woman in Lusaka. It happened that Kaunda was due in Uganda that week for a state visit.

"He came to the factory and said the paper could not go," says Serugo. "He said we were embarrassing the state and would cause a diplomatic row. There was a stand-off and around that time they announced the editor had been 'promoted'."<sup>5</sup>

In July 1992, within days of Oguttu's transfer from the newsroom, six of *Topic*'s most senior journalists, including Oguttu himself, walked away and set up *The Monitor*, eyeing the vacuum left by the fawning Kampala title they had abandoned.

If *The Monitor* was a child of newsroom rebellion, the rival *New Vision* was part of the Museveni regime's architecture of the nation they were rebuilding. By giving the paper's editorship to Briton William Pike a few months after its launch in 1986, the authorities appeared to be torn between a nationalist desire for a strong party organ and a credible vehicle for good journalism.

Wholly owned by the government, the *New Vision* became surprisingly nosy. Between human-interest features and restrained political commentaries, it frequently ran unflinching investigations of government wrongdoing. Like the party-owned *Uhuru* in Tanzania, which had pummeled a cabinet minister into resignation for the bourgeoisie sin of acquiring a Mercedes Benz, the *New Vision* built a credible record of accountability journalism. The paper developed a dual personality, serving as a staunch defender of President Museveni and Uganda's interests, while harrying the government with squalid tales of official corruption, abuse of power and social injustice.

That the streetwise Pike was no stranger to the men and women in government certainly strengthened his hand as editor. As a correspondent for a London-based magazine, he had struck up friendships with many of the movement's functionaries, including Museveni, in their guerrilla days when he covered their guerrilla war in the Luwero bushes in southern Uganda, sharing their spartan life in the bush as he developed stories for the media back home.

"I'm a Ugandan citizen, but not being an African counted when we ran provocative stories about powerful people," Pike explained. "My motives could not be questioned. I couldn't be accused of trying to undermine the government for sectional reasons. Neither could I be branded an enemy of the Movement. I'd been with them from the beginning."<sup>6</sup>

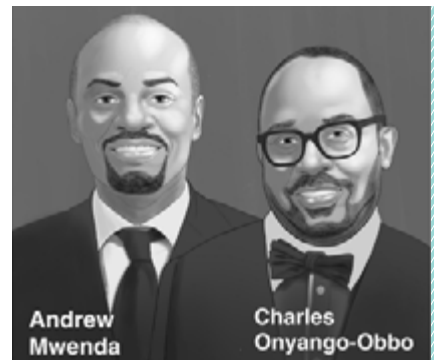
Oddly, a willingness to take the bullet for their journalists sealed the fates of both Pike at the *New Vision* and Oguttu at *Weekly Topic*. Pike ended his 21-year leadership of the *New Vision* after he was ordered by the newspaper's government-appointed chairman to sack four of his editors deemed to be politically hostile. He refused and opted to leave.

A decade before at the *Weekly Topic*, a similar refusal to dismiss assistant editor Serugo on a company director's orders had driven the final nail in Oguttu's editorial coffin, hastening his departure to set up *The Monitor*. Serugo had angered the powers that be with a story that revealed that the country's minister for energy had rushed to see the president in a borrowed oversize jacket, having been abruptly summoned.

Dogged muckraking about the Museveni regime would bring on *The Monitor* high-handed reprisals from the government. On four dramatic occasions, police shut down the newspaper's offices, suspending its publication for up to a week and twice hauled its editors to court on "criminal" charges.

One such offensive, in October 1997, found its way into legal history. The summons to editor Charles Onyango-Obbo and reporter Andrew Mwenda would have been just another media crackdown had the state not brought against them the controversial charge of publishing a false story. *The Monitor* had run a front-page report that neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, riven by civil war, had compensated Uganda with gold for helping its new leader, Laurent Kabila, end Mobutu Sese Seko's 32-year-old dictatorship.

Museveni was furious. The story gave the impression that his army, which until then was believed to have nobly marched into Congo to take down a despot, was in reality a mercenary force fighting foreign causes for filthy lucre. Few outside *The Monitor* newsroom could have guessed that the paper's editor, Onyango-Obbo, had the week before held back the story over more or



less the same concerns. He had instructed the reporter to plug a number of loopholes before he could consider it afresh for publication.

Onyango-Obbo was out of town when the *Sunday Monitor* hit the streets with the startling headline “Kabila Paid Uganda in Gold, says report”. On return, he and reporter Mwenda were arrested and charged under Section 50 (1) of Uganda’s penal code with publishing a false report likely to cause public alarm.

*The Monitor’s* fight-back was novel and politically audacious. First the journalists challenged their bail terms. They had been forced to pay an unprecedented \$2000 to avoid being locked up, arguing that publishing something that annoys the President could not be worse than rape or murder, which attracted lighter bail. The court agreed and reduced their bail to \$200.

Next, *The Monitor* challenged several common assumptions. It argued that the false news law was only intended to punish “very substantial falsehoods” and could not, for instance, be applied to a story which misreported the goals scored against the national team in an international football match.

Second, they went on, the state needed to prove not only that a report was false but also that it had caused public alarm, an issue which, in previous cases, police had interpreted widely and loosely. Finally, the argument was made that a “false story” had to be considered in its entirety and not judged merely by a few “untruthful” lines. This gave special significance to rebuttals from a cabinet minister, a state official, and a central bank, who would know if gold had come through the system, which the *Sunday Monitor* editors, luckily, had retained in their story. After a fitful two-year trial, Onyango-Obbo and Mwenda were acquitted.

“We were saved by the fact that the reporter contacted two government officials — and the Sunday editor let their denials stand, uninteresting as they were,” said Onyango-Obbo. “The lesson here is an old one. It is good journalism to give the other side its say, however little it might seem to add to the story.”<sup>7</sup>

The Kampala magistrate’s verdict not only struck a blow for independent journalism but set the stage for a Supreme Court battle the outcome of which would reverberate across former British colonies clinging to the “false news” law, often as a political weapon.

Onyango-Obbo and Mwenda appealed to the country’s highest court, after being slapped down by the Constitutional Court, complaining that the law they had been charged under was archaic and their prosecution amounted to a violation of

individual constitutional rights. After a two-year wait, the Supreme Court wholly agreed with their argument and — to everyone’s surprise — struck Section 50 (1) off Uganda’s law books because it was incompatible with the right to freedom of expression.

Said Justice Joseph Mulenga, who read the ruling on behalf of his six colleagues: “It imposes an unacceptable chilling effect on the freedom of the press. It does not serve any pressing or substantial social need, which outweighs the need to protect the freedom of expression.”

Ownership by journalists would always be a double-edged sword for *The Monitor*. It gave the paper elastic journalistic freedom, enabling editors to place professional interests above commercial ones. However, it also left the company starved of cash, constraining its growth at a time when richer media investors were threatening to bring sinewy competition into the Uganda market.

Only journalist-owners would have risked circulation sales and hostility from government by taking the controversial position *The Monitor* did on the restoration of the Buganda traditional kingship, for instance. While the government wanted to bring back monarchies through a private deal with the Kabaka, *The Monitor* argued for an open process involving all kingdoms, which would mean amending the Constitution in order to protect them.

“Everyone, including the President denounced *The Monitor*,” recalled Obbo. “One day Wafula told me his wife Alice had received death threats and even suggested they go into exile briefly for safety. He said no.”<sup>8</sup>

Yet, *The Monitor*’s position eventually became the compromise within Museveni’s party, where an important faction was equally opposed to reviving the kingdoms, especially bringing back only the Buganda monarchy.

Even with the newfound freedom brought to East African newsrooms by the Second Liberation, such editorial courage was uncommon. At best, mainstream media editors were masters of the tightrope, deftly walking a fine line between the interests of their publishers and the government, on one hand, and those of the reading public on the other.

Their balancing act was evident in the cautious but assertive journalism of the two main newspapers in neighbouring Kenya, the *Daily Nation* and *The Standard*, before Daniel arap Moi’s one-party dictatorship was dismantled by the global winds of reform. Kenya ceased to be a one-party state in 1992.

In the preceding years, when critics of the Moi regime, mostly academics and dissident politicians, were imprisoned without trial and theft of public funds became a rite of passage for cabinet ministers, Kenya's two main newspapers faithfully chronicled the crackdowns, often in deadpan reportage calculated to inform without causing excitement.

Under the Kenya African National Union (Kanu) regime, it was part of an editor's exceptional skill to give controversial stories treatment which would present unsavoury truths, without upsetting the government. Speeches critical of the President, such as outspoken Rev Timothy Njoya's New Year's day sermon of 1989 calling for an end to one-party leadership, would be reported in elaborate detail but given deceptively bland headlines.<sup>9</sup>

In that address, the Pentecostal clergyman fired one of the earliest salvos in the push for reforms by urging African leaders to rethink their one-party systems, given the changes taking place in Eastern Europe. Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu had just been toppled and executed together with his wife.

To deflect official retribution, *Nation* and *Standard* editors sometimes passed information and documents to foreign media, such as the BBC and the *Financial Times*, whom they would later quote as the origin of a "sensitive" story, while fleshing out their local version with damning details.



"The most important thing was to get news to the public," says Tom Mshindi, who took over as managing editor of the *Daily Nation* in 1991. "How you dressed it up came second. We knew the government's mind and where it drew the line, but we also had to do our work."<sup>10</sup>

Yet some papers disregarded this invisible line of restraint as an editorial strategy. *The Weekly Review*, a reflective magazine modelled on Britain's *The Economist*, opened a new frontier of political and economic reporting in 1975. Its founder and Editor-in-Chief, Hilary Ng'weno, a Harvard-trained scientist, popularised political analysis as an unobtrusive tool of awakening the public in a closed society.

*The Weekly Review* had won the hearts of readers in its first year with an unflinching coverage of a political assassination, that of JM Kariuki, a populist MP critical of Kenya's first President, the authoritarian Jomo Kenyatta.

More than a decade later, it would wield so much influence that, when Vice-President Mwai Kibaki was dropped from President Moi's cabinet after the 1988 general election, his supporters openly blamed the magazine. They pointed at a special report *The Weekly Review* had run highlighting Kibaki's growing popularity across the country.

True to its trail-blazing tradition, the weekly overhauled general election coverage in Kenya, producing detailed and deeply perceptive analyses of electoral politics in each of the country's 36 constituencies. Packed with interviews and statistics, the constituency profiles set a template for newspaper election coverage in the years to come.

Like the *Weekly Topic* in Uganda, however, *The Weekly Review* would flounder on the rocks of political partisanship, when its often-supportive coverage of Moi's besieged regime — buffeted by reformist agitation — alienated advertisers and readers opposed to the Kenyan President. From the magazine's intellectually vibrant newsroom, however, daily newspapers inherited a retinue of analytical writers, such as Macharia Gaithe, Jaiindi Kiseru and Kwendo Opanga, who would become household names as weekly columnists.

Of the forces which drove Moi into a reluctant acceptance of political pluralism in 1991, none was so shrill and clamorous as the publications which were collectively dubbed the alternative press.

These were a clutch of shoe-string periodicals that had broken away from the traditional restraint of the *Nation* and *Standard*, and injected a combative and opinionated tone into political journalism.



More by accident than design, each of the titles brought a distinct skill to their coverage of multiparty agitation. *Finance* magazine had been set up by economist Njehu Gatabaki as a business journal, and it brought a refreshing number-crunching perspective to current affairs. *Nairobi Law Monthly* was intended as a niche read for Kenya's lawyers, but turned to analysing politics through a legal prism. And *Society*, published by a former *Nation* parliamentary reporter, Pius Nyamora, made no secret of its reformist agenda. Its frontal attacks on the Moi regime chimed in with the restless mood of a public clamouring for change.

The cover illustration of its 2 November 1992 issue, with the headline "No fair elections", shows an agile Moi clad in sports wear racing around the electoral

track, with opposition politicians hot on his heels. It was the first ever caricature of the Kenyan President to appear in media.

On the day the issue hit the streets, cartoonist Paul Kelemba, who signed off as Maddo, sat nervously in his Nairobi office awaiting the overbearing knock of Moi's political police, the Special Branch, on his door. He could not believe it when noon struck and police had not picked him up.

"That changed everything," said the irreverent Kelemba, who at the time was also a contributor to *The Standard*. "Moi became fair game and we made fun of him freely in countless cartoons. He never once complained. I jumped at the chance because I'd tried to cartoon Moi in *The Standard* but I was always rebuffed."

KTN, the country's first privately-owned television, may have been inspired by Maddo's barbs when it pioneered the political comedy *Ridykkullus*, a weekly caricature of public figures which sometimes had a Moi double dancing soukous with his trade-mark ivory cane flailing to a jerky rhythm.

It was a peculiarity of the reform years that, as demand for pluralism became more urgent, publications emerged in different parts of East Africa which were distinguished by their political stridency and disregard for editorial convention.

In the Mwinyi years, Tanzania grappled with a rash of rogue newspapers and untidy journalism, exemplified in the unforgettable headline of an opposition Kiswahili paper: *Nyerere ni mtu wa kunyongwa*. Loosely translated, the paper was declaring that Nyerere deserves to be hanged, referring to none other than the revered founder of the Tanzanian nation and global apostle of rectitude.<sup>11</sup>

In Uganda, panic over the impending return of Milton Obote resulted in the periodical *Economy* carrying the comical but grimly resentful headline *Bad news — Akena Adoko is back*. This was a charged warning about the return to government of the dreaded lawyer who ran Uganda's intelligence during Obote's first presidency.

*Economy's* headline was one of a kind with screeching cover lines and opinionated stories in Nairobi's *Society* magazine. At the height of tension over the assassination of Kenya's Foreign Minister Robert Ouko, consecutive issues of the magazine carried the accusatory headlines *The Price of killing Ouko* and *Moi knows Ouko's killers* against blown-up head shots of President Moi.

For all their faults, however, the fringe media in Africa's political reform tended

to deliver impact when it mattered most. At a time when mainstream Kenyan newspapers were hobbled by a fear of criticising magistrates and judges, lest they fall afoul of the country's swingeing contempt-of-court law, it was the *Nairobi Law Monthly* which figured out how to put a bell on the cat.

Editor Gitobu Imanyara, an activist lawyer, gingerly side-stepped libel boobytraps and questioned the conduct and rulings of top judges, including the then chief justice, Cecil Miller. It was the *Nairobi Law Monthly* which led the intellectual assault on Justice Alan Hancox and Justice Norbury Dugdale, two expatriate judges accused by reform activists of favouring the state in civil rights cases, casting the judiciary as a pillar of repression.



For their reformist sins, Nyamora, Gatabaki and Imanyara bore the brunt of Moi's retribution against the media. *Society's* offices in the city centre were fire-bombed; issues of all the three magazines were frequently confiscated by police and their common printer, Fotoform, had its press hall equipment disabled by security agents.

Faced with 50 libel suits, Nyamora and his wife, both directors of the magazine, sought political asylum in the United States. After repeated arrests, Imanyara was thrown into political detention — a form of indefinite imprisonment without trial — and only freed due to international pressure. Another eight-week stint in solitary confinement left him with a brain tumour. Meanwhile, commercial printers were harassed into turning down Gatabaki's *Finance*.

The invasion of journalism by activist editors was not entirely unusual. Throughout history, radical publications had sprouted in times of political repression, giving victims of tyranny a much-needed voice. In the words of British sociologist Tom Burns, "An overtly political role falls on the media when the people's representatives abdicate their responsibilities."

Unlike fringe magazines, mainstream newspapers were spared the bare-knuckle assaults of Moi's security agents but were still put under pressure. The *Daily Nation*, for instance, was frequently the target of lynch-mob attacks from the floor of Parliament, during which scurrilous accusations were hurled by ruling party MPs at its editors and their proprietor, the Aga Khan.

Each battering invariably prompted an internal enquiry by the newspapers'



directors, in which the editors were forced into a defence, leaving them fearful, sometimes reluctant to run provocative stories.

In June 1989, the newspaper was banned from covering Parliament for six months, causing it a substantial loss of advertising and circulation. Worse, ministers and top civil servants shut their doors on the paper's reporters while some parastatals cancelled advertising.



"They wanted to teach us a lesson for not toeing the line," Wangethi Mwangi, who was then managing editor of the *Daily Nation*, is quoted as saying in *Birth of a Nation*, the history of Kenya's premier newspaper. "The powers that be decided to take us head-on and find a way of bringing us to our knees."

So restrained was the Nation's coverage of the pluralism movement in its early years — obviously shaken by government hostility — that the 1990 announcement by veteran politician Oginga Odinga of his plans to register an opposition party, the first in 20 years, was ignored by the paper and only covered by the *Weekly Review* and alternative media.

Ironically, it was the government's repressive attitude which gradually changed the *Nation's* tone. When Wangethi took over as the group editorial chief in 1991, the newspaper, which was becoming critical at the tail end of his predecessor's tenure, became fully reformist. With bold pro-reform editorials and lusty but thoughtful coverage of government critics, the paper became a totem for the pluralist movement.

At least twice, Wangethi found himself arguing with President Moi on the phone, fending off accusations of tribalism, or resisting orders to kill negative stories about cabinet ministers.

Moi's haranguing of editors had a long history. He had perfected it as Vice-President under Jomo Kenyatta, when self-censorship was the unwritten law of Kenyan newsrooms. An early riser and keen reader of the press, he had frequent shouting matches on the phone with Frank Young, editor-in-chief of *The Standard* in the 1970s, over pictures and stories touching on politicians and the government.

So, when the *Nation's* attitude began to harden as Moi, having become President,

became increasingly intolerant, it stiffened the back of government critics such as *Finance* and *Nairobi Law Monthly*. *Society's* Nyamora would later credit the alternative media's survival of state attacks partly to the Nation's exposure of their persecution and its unstinting defence of press freedom.<sup>12</sup>

That view, surprisingly, found support in a back-handed compliment from businessman Joshua Kulei, who jointly owned the rival *Standard* with President Moi. Three years after Moi's chosen successor had been vanquished in the 2002 poll by Mwai Kibaki, Kulei remarked to this writer while courting him for editorship of *The Standard*: "We didn't lose the election to the opposition; we lost to the *Nation*, and that's why we want our newspaper to be stronger."<sup>13</sup>

Nothing had prepared the three East African governments for the lurid headlines and intemperate commentaries which dominated the print media under their new-found liberty. In reaction, each government reached out for legal restraints to manage what they considered to be "media irresponsibility".

Within two years of Museveni taking power, Uganda's interim Parliament had debated a law which would allow the prosecution of anyone publishing information regarded as hostile to the armed forces, then the engine of government. In Kenya, MPs alarmed by the trenchant cover lines of magazines such as *Finance* and *Society*, pushed for the establishment of a Press Complaints Commission to "curb media irresponsibility". Tanzania in turn drew up a Media Regulations Act, which was to set up a media standards board with powers to discipline errant newspapers.

Industry reacted uniformly. In all three countries, they lobbied for self-regulatory bodies underpinned by law but controlled by journalists, not the state. A compromise was struck, giving birth to statutory media councils, the bastard child of power politics, which governments could under-fund or side-step at will.

A key benefit of media liberalisation was the rise of investigative journalism. Exploiting new-found state tolerance, editors in East Africa threw their energies into exposing social and political wrongdoing, turning corruption and government scandals into a staple of the front-page.

*The Monitor's* unrelenting scrutiny of the Museveni government would raise questions whether its journalism was driven by editorial independence or partiality for the opposition. Its controversial investigative stories ranged from the eye-popping picture of a naked woman in northern Uganda being held down by muscular men as a uniformed soldier shaved her pubic hair during the war in

the region, to an intrepid account of MPs being bribed by government agents to repeal a law limiting the president's term of office.

Said Joseph Were, a former *Monitor* editor, as the paper marked its 20 anniversary: "The government continues to attack *The Monitor*. The difference is that it is criticised for what it writes and not its perceived position as an 'opposition' newspaper. There was a time when many Museveni supporters believed *The Monitor* was part of an opposition plot to bring down the government."<sup>14</sup>

Not so the *New Vision*, the State-owned watchdog which had a bite as big as its bark. A chance conversation between a journalist and two aviation technicians at Uganda's main air force base yielded one of many investigative stories for which ruling National Resistance Movement nabobs resented the paper.

In May 1997, reporter Alfred Wasike was in an aircraft hangar at Entebbe, where Russian technicians were working on an MI-4 attack helicopter, one of two recently bought by Uganda's military.

"I can't believe these people hate their President so much," one of the engineers shouted from the helicopter cockpit. "This machine flew many, many missions and was dumped in a hangar in Byelorussia — now they want him to fly in it."

Wasike, who had lived in Russia for several years and spoke Russian fluently, could not believe his ears. "I'm surprised. They couldn't think of an easier way to kill him. Death in a helicopter will be quite messy," his companion replied.

Wasike could not restrain himself any longer. "Tell me about the helicopters," he interjected in Russian. "I'm a news reporter and I heard everything you said."

He shared his Russian background — including his stay in Varonezh, home of Aeroflot -- with the stunned technicians and beseeched them to trust him. Thus emerged the gnarled tale of how crooked Uganda generals with civilian accomplices bought two junk helicopters at the price of new and dumped them on the Uganda People's Defence Airforce.

"For the first time in my career, I feared for my life," said Wekesa, who wrote many of the *New Vision's* follow-up stories. "I was threatened by military commanders and even my editor, normally a tough guy, was shaken."

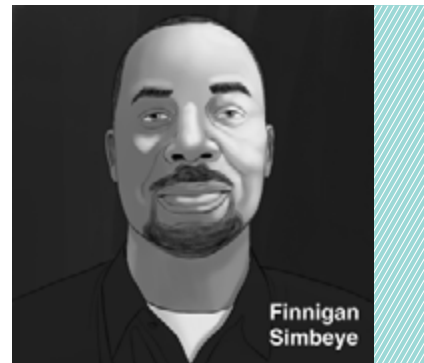
A shocked President Museveni set up a judicial enquiry to look into the fraud. It named his own brother, General Caleb Akandwanaho, popularly known as

Salim Saleh, as a principal player in the deal together with brothers Patrick and Emmanuel Katto. Out of US\$9 082 943 released to them by the military, they had paid only \$308 440 for the dilapidated choppers, giving \$8 774 503 to a Ugandan middleman.

Similar hard-nose sleuthing exposed Tanzania's Loliondo affair, in which 4000 square kilometres of a game reserve was secretly leased to an Arab sheikh as a hunting ground. An editorial campaign against the deal was driven, almost single-handedly, by journalist Stan Katabalo in the brash *Mfanyakazi* weekly, of which he was editor.<sup>15</sup>

Investigative journalism also exposed in 2005 the country's biggest financial scandal, commonly known as the Richmond heist. Two years after it was hatched, the fraud only attracted attention because of an attempt to snatch a multimillion-dollar pipeline contract from a US engineering company and give it to a briefcase firm with fake credentials.

The story first broke in *The Citizen*, owned by Nation Media Group, but when reporter Finnigan wa Simbeye moved to Mengi's *ThisDay*, it took on a life of its own. He discovered that the same briefcase outfit, Richmond Development Company, had been contracted to import industrial power generators to ease a national electricity shortage caused by severe drought. The generators arrived late, were technically faulty, and took so long to set up that Tanzania had solved its power problems by the time they were ready.



Yet, despite all these failings, the government in 2007 signed another contract with Richmond, this time committing to pay it \$100 000 a day.

*ThisDay's* spirited pursuit of the Richmond story led to the resignation of Prime Minister Edward Lowassa, who had influenced the award of the second contract. Such a journalistic push, it was openly acknowledged, was only possible because of sturdy support from the paper's owner, Mengi, whose attitude, however, used to vacillate according to his business interests.

Said Finnegan: "When we were doing the story, there were a lot of monetary offers to abandon it and also not to co-operate with the parliamentary committee (investigating the deal). Threats were issued and our publisher, Mengi, advised us to be careful when going out."<sup>16</sup>

A decade earlier in Kenya, exposure of the Goldenberg scandal by the *Daily Nation* had opened a new chapter in the public dissection of Moi's economic management. Exploiting loopholes in an export compensation scheme, a businessman, Kamlesh Pattni, conspired with government officials, including the then Vice-President George Saitoti and Intelligence Chief James Kanyotu, to collect at least US\$210 million, at the 1992 exchange rate, as tax refunds for fictitious gold and diamond exports.<sup>17</sup>

The story first appeared in the *Daily Nation*, buried in the inside pages. A year later, when its breath-taking scale became clear, the reports were rewritten and serialised by the same paper to a resounding effect. At an enquiry headed by a High Court judge, a witness said Goldenberg left Kenya so desperate for foreign exchange that the government had to borrow back hard currency from Pattni in order to import oil.

Says economist Peter Warutere, who penned the early Goldenberg stories as a business journalist on the *Daily Nation*. "We wrote a lot of stories but the impact was slow. Goldenberg was so complex that even judges who listened to the earliest civil and criminal cases linked to it seemed lost. It destroyed Kenya's economy and took us many, many years back."

It could be said of the reform era investigative reporters what Anton Harber, in *Southern African Muckraking*, observed of their professional cousins who bestrode the region's newsrooms over three centuries: they were not just "journalistic disruptors" but showed a determination to "question, probe and make uncomfortable those who wield power and authority."<sup>18</sup>

While a new burst of independent print journalism flourished partly as result of the Berlin Wall effect, radio and television were dramatically reborn, unleashing a broadcast revolution. The formal enactment of laws allowing private radio and television ownership cast a shadow over frail and faded state broadcasters, such as the Voice of Kenya and the Uganda Broadcasting Corporation.

The reforms gave Tanzania mainland its first television in 1992, years after Zanzibar, its partner in the united republic, had introduced a government-controlled channel. The launch of Coastal Television Network — which was the mainland's first private TV — was quickly followed by Mengi's ITV and Radio One.

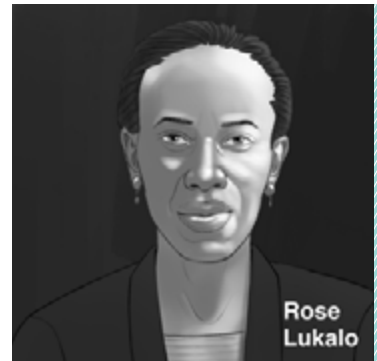
Across the border, Kenya's first privately owned television station, KTN (the Kenya Television Network), rode on a licence issued to a lawyer, Jared Kangwana, who was widely considered to have been a front for President Moi. The paradox of

courting viewership with robust coverage of multiparty agitation while defending a one-party dictatorship became a daily nightmare for the station's news editor, Rose Lukalo.

Fed up with multiparty advocates attacking him on his own television, Moi in mid-1992 summoned KTN's entire editorial leadership. He was furious. They had breached an unwritten rule of covering opposition gadfly Jaramogi Oginga Odinga, says Joseph Warungu, who was in the petrified delegation to State House as a news anchor.

In the presence of the station's chairman, Kangwana, the President laid it on the line: You can report Odinga's attacks on the government, he said, but his voice must never be allowed on air.

Not surprisingly, Lukalo, a fastidious news manager, was later shown the door, but for a different reason, airing the resignation of health minister Mwai Kibaki from Moi's government. At the time, no one saw this parting of ways as the first step in an opposition career which would make Kibaki Kenya's third president 12 years later.



KTN's dilemma highlights the reluctance with which many African leaders embraced multi-partyism and media liberalisation, usually at the prodding of Europe and the US. Without irony, presidents enacted laws allowing private media ownership, then hurriedly drew up regulations clawing back the concessions or simply clamped down on media they considered ill-behaved.

A wave of sensational headlines and flawed reporting in the new generation of Tanzanian media gave the Mwinyi government reason to ban at least six newspapers or arrest their editors in the two years leading to the 1995 elections.

Scholars like Ayub Rioba argue that, while Tanzania drew up numerous laws and policies as a scaffold for pluralism and the free market, no legal steps — except for broadcast licensing regulations — were taken to protect the media's new-found freedom.<sup>19</sup>

It was radio, however, which more than vindicated supporters of unfettered broadcasting. Both in Uganda and Tanzania, FM stations were the catalyst for a money-spinning entertainment and celebrity culture, with its ripple effect on music, fashion and the video industry.

Clouds FM, a music, news and talk station launched in the second half of *mageuzi* redefined radio entertainment in Tanzania. Its heady formula of short and interactive news, catchy local music and celebrity-driven chat shows rapidly gave it dominance over the Kiswahili broadcast market.

A smaller listenership — older and more conservative — stuck with Mengi's Radio One, which combined traditional current affairs with music and talk, but more as an improvement on the staid, government-owned Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam.

Launched in 1999 by former disc jockey Joseph Kusuga, Clouds turned Tanzanian pop rhythm bongo flava into a national emblem, edging out Congolese rumba as a radio staple. The unabashed promotion of indigenous rather than international pop stars launched the careers of music idols Mr Nice, Ray C and the velvet-voiced Jaydee, among others.

A penchant for walking the untrodden path ranked the station with Uganda's Capital FM, which tapped into the Ugandan thirst for modernised indigenous rhythm and political debate that won favour in urban households. At its peak in the 1990s, the station's flagship programme, *The Capital Gang*, pitted its panel of big-name commentators — which included the journalist Charles Onyango-Obbo and activist Winnie Byanyima — with surprise guests like President Museveni.

Their Saturday morning radio slugfests coincided with a trend in suburban bars barazas called *Kimeza*, where the public would gather desultorily to debate topical issues around one or two moderators. Without an aggressive opposition in Parliament, ordinary Ugandans may have been seeking a political vent with their informal talk shops.

Though separated by geography, Capital FM and Clouds FM — both targeting under 35 urbanites — triumphed by strategic innovation. First, they defied America's million-dollar marketing juggernaut to link local audiences with music from their own culture. Second, both channels proved that, while radio listeners may swoon over foreign celebrities, their first love is, without hesitation, the neighbourhood music or sports hero.

"Almost everything about Capital broke new ground," says Patrick Quarcoo, one of the two founders of the Ugandan station. "This was a music-based radio but also the place where Uganda's political future was discussed and given shape. There was no topic the programme couldn't touch."

Quarcoo's diversification into Kenya, where he also set up a radio chain, only

highlighted the cultural differences between the two countries; one a politically liberal nation newly emerged from war, swamped by youthful returnees from exile; the other a conservative bastion of capitalism held together by a one-party dictator with a morbid fear of civil strife.

The branding of Kiss FM, their Kenyan flagship, for instance, caused a national uproar and attracted sharp comment from church leaders. They had been used to Kenya's own Capital FM, an elitist channel owned by tycoon Chris Kirubi, which, by tone and musical taste, could have been cloned from a London rhythm and blues station.

"The Uganda market was more open to new ideas and experimentation," Quarcoo adds. "Kenya, on the other hand, was conservative. Broadcast legislation had been left behind by the reality on the ground. The laws should have encouraged more creativity."

A cluster of private vernacular radio stations signalled yet another difference between Uganda and Kenya's broadcast growth. Liberalisation ushered in a variety of radio stations, but placed 13 channels in the hands of one man, SK Macharia, a shrewd, diminutive businessman who had stood up to President Moi and taken the head of state to court.

Like Mengi, Macharia believed in quality programming and innovation. While rival stations aired Spanish telenovellas at prime time, his flagship, Citizen TV, captivated Kenyan families with locally produced music and drama shows. Actors in his television series, such as Papa Shirandula and Wilbroda, became household names feted by the media.

For years after independence, four words explained government refusal to free up the broadcast space: fear of political abuse. Yet for the most part after the reforms, East Africa's new radio and television broadcasters went about their businesses without ruffling feathers. The nearest they came to being misused was during the general elections, when some proprietors openly took sides.

Mengi dipped his toe in the water and quickly retreated, in 1995. He appeared in his own channel, ITV, warning Tanzanians against voting for the opposition lest





the country plunged into Rwanda-style cleavage. He never repeated it, preferring in later elections to be an invisible puppeteer, according to Mgamba, who had returned to IPP Media as Managing Director in 2015. “Mengi would say things like ‘protect me, I’m an old man. Good journalism is important but Tanzania is for all of us.’ By this, he was suggesting to his editors and managers to balance between their journalistic instincts and the national security interests.”

In Kenya, SK Macharia was more brazen. He threw in his lot with the winning side in the 2005 constitutional referendum, supporting the “yes” faction pitted against President Mwai Kibaki in a highly divisive contest.

Two years later, in the general election, Macharia came out in support of opposition candidate Raila Odinga, addressing campaign rallies from a truck bearing his television’s colours. His side lost, denting Royal Media’s advertising and audience market share.<sup>20</sup>

The worst cases of radio misuse, however, were the inflammatory broadcasts during Kenya’s 2007 General Election of a Kalenjin station based in the Rift Valley. It was accused of pressing opposition supporters into violence against other tribes, a level of bigotry only equalled by a Kikuyu vernacular radio station which, on cultural grounds, denigrated a rival party’s presidential candidate.

Above these national dynamics, a bigger regional society and economy were re-emerging. The birth of *The EastAfrican*, a regional weekly newspaper launched in 1994, was the Nation Media Group’s response to a growing movement towards renewed regional integration, spurred by the merger of East and West Germany. When the *East African Community* was finally re-launched (its first incarnation having collapsed in 1977), the paper had already established itself in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda as a niche source of issue-driven news.<sup>21</sup>

Its reporter, Adoniya Ayebare, was the first foreign journalist to photograph and interview Laurent Kabila on his way to occupying Kinshasa as Mobutu Sese Seko fled in 1997.

Over two decades, *The EastAfrican* crafted a template for cross-border journalism, targeting elite readers in three countries while navigating the minefield of political sensitivities between neighbouring states.

Regional journalism could be bumpy. Whenever the Tanzania government was angered by an unflattering story or critical comment in the paper, it would refer to the Kenyan origin of *The EastAfrican’s* mother company, playing on the animosity

and mistrust which had tinged relations between the two countries since the first East African Community break-up.

Going regional was a long-standing ambition of the Nation Media Group. Its entry into Tanzania through the purchase of *The Citizen*, *Mwananchi* and *Mwananspoti* newspapers was triggered by a private exchange between President Benjamin Mkapa and the group's principal shareholder, the Aga Khan.

According to Gerry Loughran in *Birth of a Nation*, Mkapa asked the Ismaili leader for media investment, hoping foreign competition would improve his country's journalism. He had complained elsewhere that Tanzania was being torn apart by corruption, implicitly demanding watchdog media to help curb the looting of public resources.

Says Loughran: "Diversification into East Africa fitted in two ways: national leaders wanted to introduce NMG's skills into their home-grown media (and had issued open invitations in private talks), while the group was eager to support new moves towards regionalism it had long espoused."

In the event, Mkapa only sowed the seeds of a cross-border news venture while his dream of a corruption-slaying indigenous media was only partially realised. Meanwhile, the flow of critical news and impassioned exchange of views, sharp, lively debate in the tradition of Uganda's *Capital Gang* or *Rai ya Jenerali Ulimwengu*, became part of a richly varied broadcast sector in all three countries. And newspapers — the pride of East Africa's middle class and bugbear of governments — gasped for air under the disruptive wave of digital technology while fulfilling an old truth paraphrased: that media at its best is a nation talking to itself.

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## When Journalism Meets Activism

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Digital warriors confront old enemies in the online world

Jackline Kemigisa

It was a sunny morning on 18 April 2016 the first time I was introduced to Stella Nyanzi. There she was, dressed in a dotted brown kitenge blouse and skirt, a chain around her neck, half her face smeared with blood-red paint, a bucket in one hand and the other spreading the colour on her office building at Makerere University, in the Ugandan capital Kampala.

Turning to address the journalists, her voice was the sound of rage. Staring into the camera, Nyanzi lifted her shirt, unhooked her black bra, and her breasts fell to her chest. She flushed the *f\*\*k you* finger at the journalists hoarsely shouting, “I am going to undress as I undress the oppression. Makerere is a public institution, and I want the public to know about my oppression.”

Her protest against her employer, televised live, sparked public debate rooted in Christian conservative moralist outrage. Many could not believe that a mother, a PhD holder and researcher would go so far as to undress in protest at what she considered unfair work conditions. She was dismissed as crazy, accused of “going too far”.

Later, the Ugandan government would attempt to label Nyanzi insane because of her vulgarity-filled posts on her Facebook page criticising President Yoweri Museveni and his wife, Janet Museveni, for their failure to fulfil their campaign promises to Ugandans.

Nyanzi, born 16 June 1974, wears many hats; first as a journalist with a Bachelors from Makerere University, then as a medical anthropologist, with a PhD in

Anthropology from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. For the 14 January 2021 election, she was a candidate for Parliament. As a mother, she is famously referred to as *Nalongo*, a term given to those who birth twins among the Buganda culture of southern Uganda.

"I am an introvert; many would not believe this. My personality on social media is different from who I am. Moreover, people often meet me, expecting to find a social media persona, only to be disappointed.



"I am a PhD holder whose version of self-care is Mills and Boon (a romance novel genre), but people do not want to hear that," Nyanzi says amidst laughter.<sup>1</sup>

Nyanzi explains her kind of activism as "radical rudeness", a term she borrows from the historian Carol Summers. In her paper titled *Radical rudeness:*

*Ugandan social critiques in the 1940s*, Summers uses radical rudeness to describe the attitude of Buganda men who resorted to insults as a form of protest against the British colonial government.

Nearly 70 years later, Nyanzi practices the same kind of activism as a means to insult the Museveni regime and the elite who support it. Only, instead of using printed pamphlets, she uses social media.

"Facebook plays a big role in my organising, and I use it to reach out to my enemies, the oppressor, as well as supporters. My voice on Facebook cannot be dismissed. For those who cannot put agendas on the decision table, we have created our own spaces, away from those who will not invite us to the table," says Nyanzi.<sup>2</sup>

Over the last four years, Nyanzi has accumulated thousands of social media followers along with a long charge sheet, going in and out of jail cells as well as a maximum-security prison, to the extent that she is on a first-name basis with most police commanders in Kampala.

In 2018, Nyanzi formed the Women's Protest Working Group in response to a spate of murders of women in central Uganda. The group comprises feminists,

lawyers, sex workers, and LGBTQ activists, all aiming to fight for women's right to live. Their first meeting was via WhatsApp.

The group organised a women's march with over 300 participants, again, relying on social media as an organising tool under the hashtags #WomenslivesMatter and #WomensmarchUg.

In November 2018, she was arrested for yet another Facebook post about the vagina of President Museveni's mother, and how she wished that he had burned in her acidic pus. When presented in court, the prosecutor charged her with "offensive communication", under Uganda's Computer Misuse law. She was in and out of court until August 2019.

On the day of her sentencing, Nyanzi appeared via live video from Luzira Maximum prison. She again bore her bare breasts, shaking them at the camera amidst cheers from her supporters and a visibly shocked judge, on national television. She was sentenced to 18 months in prison but only served half the time.<sup>3</sup>

"When you are pushed to the wall, you unleash your very last weapon. There is the spectacle, the audience, the wow factor; it does not matter when I have dropped my blouse or skirt. The response is 'oh god she is ugly', but people stop and pay attention. Sometimes that is all a person wants, to be heard. It shatters notions of respectability," Nyanzi notes.<sup>4</sup>

As a journalist first, Nyanzi understands the shock value of her protests, to the extent of capturing both social media and traditional media in an unapologetic, almost childlike manner.

"What I do would not be as powerful as it is if I cut out all my sexual language, vulgarity, obscenities and profanities. What I do would not be as startling or scandalous. Sometimes I just want to create a scandal.

"The impact of the language is obvious. It is seen. When people are bored, when the media has no story, they will put my pictures in the papers.

"The language has power. It doesn't matter how subjectively it is judged or misjudged, I feel like it has a power of its own. It does amazing things, so I would not explain it to someone who is not interested; it is not my responsibility to educate idiots."

In February 2020, Nyanzi's conviction was reversed by the High Court because the

magistrates' court had denied her the right to identify, [and] prepare a defence witness.<sup>5</sup>

Feminists like Nyanzi and other women across Africa offer insights into some benefits of digital organising, as well as the repercussions women face from the public and semi-authoritarian regimes across Eastern Africa.

Her story also illustrates the broader reality that, in Eastern Africa, as in most parts of the world, access to the internet has grown simultaneously with the tension between governments and citizens, as activism migrates from the mainstream to social-media platforms. For many committed to feminist organising, a key concern is how traditional media portrays women.

While Uganda's Computer Misuse Act (Section 24)<sup>6</sup> that criminalised cyber-harassment was used to arrest and charge Nyanzi with harassing the person of the President, across Eastern Africa, many activists have been on the receiving end of ICT-related legislation criminalising freedom of speech.

In April 2014, six bloggers and three journalists were arrested in Ethiopia, among them two women, Mahlet Fantahun and Edom Kassaye. They were charged with terrorism.<sup>7</sup> The charges included working with international organisations and conspiring to use social media to destabilise Ethiopia. The bloggers worked with Zone9, a collaborative blog covering social and political issues in Ethiopia under their motto "we blog because we care".

The group is famously known as *Zone9*, a name they derived from the Kalit Prison zones, which is famously known for jailing Ethiopia's political prisoners. The jail is made up of eight zones, and the prisoners called the entire country Ethiopia Zone 9 because of its lack of democratic freedom.<sup>8</sup>

"We were activists by accident, before founding Zone9, we had our jobs, we are from different spectrums of life. We were personal witnesses of what was going on in Ethiopia, not reporters or analysts," says Befekadu Hailu, one of the Zone Niners.

As the Zone Niners were in and out of court, across Africa and the diaspora, communities of bloggers and human rights defenders were organising internationally, demanding their release.

"Zone9 is a good case when it comes to solidarity across online platforms. For example, some activist bloggers in Uganda sent a letter to the Ethiopian embassy, and there was support from many other bloggers across the world.



That campaign influenced the government to release us finally. In our political prosecution, our group is the first to have all its members released without conviction," says Befekadu.

As activists organise both offline and online, their governments too are finding ways to further limit the already shrinking freedom of expression space, which allows them to escape accountability. Furthermore, network disruption, commonly referred to as *internet shutdowns*, have become widespread in Eastern Africa, with Ethiopia setting the pace.

According to the 2019 State of Internet Freedom in Africa report, 22 African countries experienced a government-ordered network disruption,<sup>9</sup> in the period they reviewed. For instance, Ugandans in 2016 experienced another shutdown on the eve of Presidential election night. The report implicated the Ethiopian government in being overzealous in blocking access to websites and disrupting the use of short message service (SMS). The governments' victories in arresting, charging and imprisoning those with dissenting views is a clear message to feminist activists using digital platforms that they too can be stopped.

The same tactics used in both Ethiopia and Uganda are mirrored in Tanzania. For example, Tanzanian police arrested comedian Sultan Idris, after a video of him laughing at an old picture of President John Magufuli went viral on social media.<sup>10</sup>

Governments in Eastern Africa also have a shared track record of weaponising tax legislation, wrapped under the banner of economic development, whose ultimate intent is curtailing access to social platforms. To access over 20 social media platforms, one has to pay extra as a result, and many cannot afford to use the internet. It is one of the many methods deployed to block digital activism.

In 2018, both Kenya and Uganda initiated new internet-related taxes on data bundles for over-the-top (OTT) services, under the Finance Act<sup>11</sup> and Excise Duty respectively. While Ugandans pay UGSh200 daily to access platforms such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, their Kenyan neighbours had a 15% excise tax increase on internet data. According to the Uganda Communications Commission, with the new tax measures, the number of internet users in Uganda dropped by 2.5 million.<sup>12</sup>

Unlike President Uhuru Kenyatta, President Museveni is not shy about his government's intentions. In a letter to the Finance Minister, Museveni writes that the excise duty tax would help curtail *lugambo* (social media gossip).<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, in Burundi, Article 50 of the 2003 Press Act prohibits the publication of information that is “offensive and injurious to the president” (note that the words *offensive* and *injurious* are not defined in the 2003 Press Act) and that punishment is a period of imprisonment and a fine.<sup>14</sup>

Twenty-five-year-old Burundian feminist Judicaelle Irakoze<sup>15</sup> is one of the many exiled from her country for authoring a Washington Post piece in response to hashtag #BurundiStopRape that went viral in response to rape allegations by the ruling party’s youth league. Her Twitter bio reads “ungovernable,” “disruptive”. She often reminds her new followers that she is a radical feminist, as well as sharing pictures of herself as proof that there is not a man behind her handle.

“The internet offered me different communities I belong to. I will forever be grateful. It also amplified my organising and space where I can dare to theorise about the world I daily imagine,” says Irakoze.

Irakoze was among the Burundians who in 2015 organised against the illegal third term of late President Pierre Nkurunziza.

“My first time organising on Twitter was 2014 with the election violence in Burundi. Then 2015, as the crisis in Burundi escalated, I was behind the stop rape campaign in the last months of 2015, where we were raising awareness of the sexual violence of the police during the political crisis.”

Currently, she serves as the President and Executive Director at Choose Yourself, a platform that hosts offline and online meetups among young feminists across Eastern Africa. It creates a safe space for women to share their experiences through programmes like #GirlTalk.

“I went through targeted harassment online so many times that I reached a level of total indifference. I completely ignore it now.”

When she is not taking part in United Nations panels on the refugee crisis and gender, Irakoze is in refugee camps in Uganda and Kivu, documenting the sexual violence women face in refugee camps and hosting workshops to address it.

Although the authoritarian response to activists organising has been in existence for decades, inherited from the colonial era, governments in Eastern Africa have changed in a significant way to legislation and policy to achieve the same goals. They are using the same new communication avenues and tools to monitor and control their citizens and are using the law to monitor and harass activists, as a

means to control their right to expression and ability to influence society.

In countries with limited access to the internet, like South Sudan, feminists are still finding ways of organising and calling attention to the issues affecting them, in the hope of creating a global community.

Struggling with a poor network, with phone lines dropping and murmurs of *“can you hear me, sorry about the network”*, Alue Atem shares her story.

As a young girl, growing up in South Sudan, Atem watched her mother stay in an unhappy marriage because of societal pressure. She knew then that her purpose would be to make sure other girls get options. And to do that, she picked feminism as her weapon of choice.

Atem, who turned 32 in 2020, is a development economist by training and blogger who believes change is not limited to offline and in-person engagements. Alue regularly hosts Gender Talk 211, an African-feminist platform on which South Sudanese virtually meet up to share their experiences and exchange resources on gender roles. When she is not catching flights to facilitate conflict resolution and rebuilding transformation skills workshops, she spends her time tweeting about girls' social status in South Sudan.

“I have always used my platform to speak on issues affecting women. Given the internet challenges in South Sudan, we are just getting to mobilising and organising online, which is exciting. However, there is always a backlash when women share their voices; people will insult you.”

In 2017, there was a conflict in Yei (in the south-west of South Sudan), with thousands of people stranded at the Juba airport for months. The government was in charge of airlifting to resettle them in the Upper Nile region. Atem took pictures and videos of the women and posted them under the hashtag #JubaairportIDPs. Media organisations picked up the story, and with the pressure, they were evacuated.

“I saw first-hand the power of social media and how hashtags work, so when people call me a Twitter feminist, I embrace the name-calling. Change can happen online.”

Like Stella Nyanzi, Alue Atem, Judicaelle Irakoza and the Zone9 bloggers, cases of women across Eastern Africa relying on social media hashtags to highlight causes they believe in continue to grow amidst criticism.

While Mary Joyce in *Digital Activism Decoded* defines digital activism as a set of digitally networked campaigning activities or practices that encompass all social and political campaigning practices using digital network infrastructure,<sup>16</sup> Dr Sandor Vegh, in his chapter *Classifying Forms of Online Activism*, places online activism in three categories: awareness/advocacy, organisation/mobilisation and action/reaction.<sup>17</sup>

It is fair to say that social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and WhatsApp play a vital role in organising across the world, as participation transcends geographical boundaries.<sup>18</sup>

These communication technologies create novel possibilities for the world to bear witness while connecting activists to each other. They are solidifying the growing relationship between social media and the women's movement in Eastern Africa.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, self-described militant feminist, Francoise Mukuku Mwamba Malale, as an activist for many causes, narrates how, even with limited internet penetration, Congolese feminists are organising and joining hands with the diaspora.

"Well, I started this work like 24 years ago, the internet wasn't a thing. I remember first using community radio, then blogs. For activists like me, internet is a good tool. It added a new layer to the work. As a space it gives us a new voice, but also amplify the old voice. It also provides a space for marginalised groups, people who don't feel safe speaking offline," says Malale.<sup>19</sup>

"I started activism quite young; it was after the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. I was just 16 years old. There were small arms in circulation, we began to hear about mass rape, girls were among the victims, and they were suffering cruel violence.

"Then came the virginity test, in churches. I didn't understand why the churches were carrying out such tests in such an environment. A friend and I started on-ground campaigns to stop this. Later we joined global campaigns like #TakeBackTheTech to address violence against women.

"In Congo women, politicians and journalists are subjected to deep fakes. Someone crops their picture on a picture of a naked woman in the hope of publicly shaming them," Malale adds.

"I will not say that there is a big difference. I will just say it is new media, it gives a voice. In the beginning, we were intrigued by the anonymity. Still, increasingly

it is no longer so. I think the internet is also reaching more people. It is virtually free, although I know it isn't free because it is accessible," she says in summary.

In the 2017 Kenyan election, activists used #WeAre52, to call for the implementation of the two-thirds gender rule, which requires no more than two-thirds of any public body to be made up of a single-gender. Writer Nanjala Nyabola in her chapter on Kenyan feminism in the digital age highlights the ways in which Kenyan feminists use social media to organise.<sup>20</sup> For example, the #JusticeforLiz campaign called for justice for a young woman who was gang-raped and thrown into a pit latrine. Kenyan feminists collected over one million signatures in an online petition and delivered it to the Chief Justice.

Additionally, feminist digital movements deliberately do not have a hierarchy, decentralising the power and making it communal rather than centring on a particular individual to speak for the movement.<sup>21</sup> Often hashtags evolve, and this, in turn, allows the members to feel equally valued and needed.

Researchers Luther P Gerlach and Virginia H Hine, in their work on the social structures of movements, termed it polycentric, to mean a movement with many leaders or centres of leadership. They were citing the fact that no one person can speak for a movement as a whole any more than there is one group representing the movement.

However, the use of hashtags and digital activism is not without criticism and backlash. Malcolm Gladwell, writing in *The New Yorker*,<sup>22</sup> likens social activism to "feel-good actions, low-risk participation". Other terms like "hashtag activism" and "armchair activists", to describe perceived lazy millennials, have also joined the pool.

Similarly, feminists on Twitter are often referred to as man-hating, accused of being in a "filter bubble" and out of touch with the real world. Nyabola describes the experience as, "Self-identifying as a feminist in Kenya is bad enough, but the derision stemming from the belief that feminism on social media does no real work offline affirms that being a feminist on social media is either tremendously brave or insane."

In *Gendertrolling: Misogyny Adapts to New Media*, Karla Mantilla writes about the abuse women face online, with gender insults like *c\*\*t* or *slut*. Sometimes abuse follows women offline as their addresses are leaked.<sup>23</sup>

As activists use social media to organise, they also rely on traditional media to

reach broader and, sometimes, larger audiences to which they would not usually have access. There is much contestation when it comes to where journalism ends and activism begins. Feminist journalists – and their organisations – have been called activists rather than journalists.

Several journalists are wearing the blurred badge of a feminist journalist with pride. Among them is Sudanese journalist Reem Abbas.



“Journalism is more difficult today when we witness government abuse of power. For example, I was to interview a writer, and when I called him, he said, ‘All my books have been confiscated, and I am being arrested.’ It is difficult for me not to be an activist.

“The governments are given platforms to talk, while other voices are marginalised. I think we have to challenge other big news outlets out there. You have a platform; use it for good! Sorry for the rant, I know this feels like one,” says Abbas during a breaking-up WhatsApp call.<sup>24</sup>

Like many Eastern African countries, Sudan is thin-skinned when it comes to internet freedom and freedom of expression. Reem Abbas, who also doubles as a fulltime feminist mother, shares her story in the parking lot near her grocery store.

Back when the Arab Spring was happening in Egypt, the government quickly released the power of the internet as an organising tool and, consequently, many journalists, if they did not write for the government, were banned.

“I think for many of them they went to social media. This changed things for the better and the worse. Before 2019, [Omar] Ahmad al-Bashir regime, if you didn’t write for the government newspapers you were banned. Social media provided a platform for many to access information, journalists turned to blogs to share the news.”

Abbas adds that the disadvantage of using social media in Sudan is the “Jihad cyber unit”, a well-trained, National Intelligence and Security Service’s Cyber unit that monitors online conversations and floods them with misinformation.

“The government [in addition to] harassing and cracking down on social media, [its] cyber jihad unit has access to top tier surveillance equipment and technology. They are really good. They are paid to spread information, target campaigns. For example, now they have spread misinformation on Covid-19 and they have never stopped working.”

Abbas asserts that journalists' work is no longer to simply write news. They now have the role of actively fighting misinformation, which ultimately makes, in Abbas view, one an activist and a journalist.

Michael Blanding writes in *NiemanReports*, “Traditionally, the division between journalism and activism has been motivated in part by a fear of being perceived as biased. Unspoken in that concern is who will perceive that bias.”<sup>25</sup>

The debate on what is and is not journalism has generational layers to it. Old school journalists insist there is a clear line. At the same time, the younger generation is open to discussing the power that journalists wield.

Increasingly, activist organisations through leveraging technology have ventured into journalism. Organisations like Human Rights Watch now publish content on their websites that go beyond press releases.

Danielle Tcholakian, in *Is journalism a form of activism*,<sup>26</sup> says it is time to take another look at the definition of activism and where journalism fits in. As this debate continues, perhaps the journalism gatekeepers will have to amend their stance on what journalism is and who journalism is for.

As the feminist movement grows in Eastern Africa, journalists turn into activists, blurring lines between activism and journalism, exposing the vagueness of legislation the repercussions of which affect journalism.

The case of the Nyanzi, as those of other activists across Eastern Africa, represents a dramatic but not uncommon example of how forms of digital activism continue seeking to promote change by relying on both new media and traditional media to build new audiences and communities.

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## Rise of the Digital Media Crusaders

It started with a small electoral count dispute and ended with a street revolution

### Befekadu Hailu

I am a writer, journalist, and a Zone9 blogger. In April 2014, six members of the Zone9 blogging collective were arrested by the Ethiopian government and charged with terrorism for our writing, among other alleged journalistic crimes.

Over time, some of us were released. I was granted bail and my offence was lowered to “inciting violence through writing”. I was re-arrested and briefly held on 10 November 2016, after giving an interview to Voice of America’s Amharic Service about Ethiopia’s state of emergency. Atnafu Brhane, Nathnael Feleke and I, though we had been freed, remained on trial until 7 February 2018, when our charges were discontinued in a political decision.

The Zone9 bloggers’ story captured world attention, and there were elements about it that many found sexy. However, more fascinating is that it told a profound story about how journalism was changing, and our persecution was also a statement about the coming of age for digital media, and blogging in particular, in Africa. It was a journey that took less than 20 years.

In the first decade of this millennium, as in most of Africa, Eastern Africa’s internet connectivity was dismal. Only a few more than half a million people had access to the internet. Two decades later, 150 million people are connected to the internet.<sup>1</sup>

At first, most of the bloggers who produced content online about the region were resident in Europe and North America. Blogging blossomed in Eastern Africa, when internet connectivity increased and social media became a thing.

By the end of the second decade, many Eastern Africans lived and worked in the digital space. Citizen journalists, bloggers and social media commentators have proliferated, using digital platforms to tell stories, set political agendas, criticise state and non-state actors, challenge the status quo, and even start revolutions. Today this array of digital warriors, writers, bloggers, journalists, videographers, cartoonists, and commentators form a noticeable Eastern African Fifth Estate.<sup>2</sup>

The arrival of the digital era set off a war between the silenced majority and governments, both authoritarian and half-democratic, that had monopolised political narratives in Eastern Africa.

In Ethiopia, it was a blog named *Dagmawi* that had first published a statistical discrepancy of electoral numbers during the country's most contested general election of 2005. That report was reproduced by local newspapers. Ethiopia, the most populous country in the region, started filtering political news websites in 2006.<sup>3</sup> Then it continued to block hundreds of news websites.

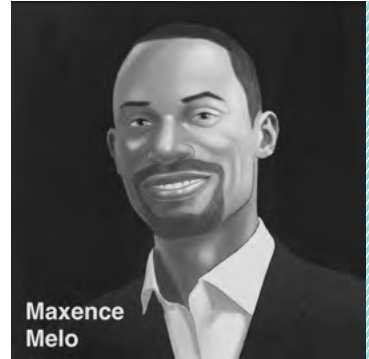
It was Kenya's *Ushahidi*, meaning "testimony", that first collected eyewitness reports of violence sent in by email and text-message and aggregated them on a Google map following the disputed presidential election in 2007.<sup>4</sup>

The growing digital activity intensified the war between governments in Eastern Africa and digital content producers and brought many more internet shutdowns. Sudan and Ethiopia became the worst "enemies of the internet".<sup>5</sup>

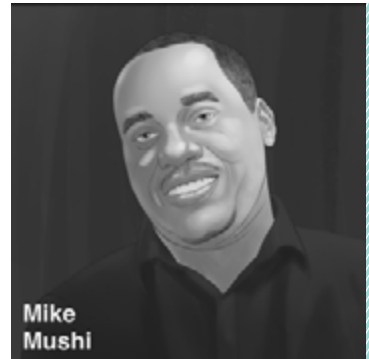
Ironically, both countries saw government or leaders forced out due to revolutionary movements primarily led online. Ethiopia has been undergoing political reform since 2018, which became turbulent in late 2020, after 27 years of a single party rule. Meanwhile Sudan ousted the 30-year dictatorship of Omar al-Bashir in April 2019, through a social-media-organised revolt.

The number of online media activists and story tellers in Eastern Africa is relatively high now; however, it was a few people who paved the way. They came from all walks of life and professions. Engineers, lawyers, the tech-savvy, and several others became bloggers, YouTubers, investigators of corruption, enemies of injustice, and the voice for the silenced. They levelled the media playing field that had been monopolised by the establishment and authority. From Sudan to Ethiopia, in Kenya and Tanzania, these warriors and disruptors forced a change in cultures of civic engagement, advanced respect for human rights, and held corrupt officials accountable.

One of the most notable of them considers himself an accidental journalist. In Tanzania, Maxence Melo and Mike Mushi helped redefine the way Tanzanians discuss politics, by establishing the most popular online community platform, Jamii Forums. The forum was founded in 2003 and a decade later, it reached more than 2.4 million users, 28 million mobile subscribers and up to 600 000 people every day. It became Tanzania's top social platform, as well as safe forum for whistle-blowers, where several corruption scandals were unveiled or alleged.<sup>6</sup> Jamii is also Eastern Africa's most successful discussion platform and one of the longest-running on the continent.



Mike Mushi was only 16 when he co-founded Jamii Forums, then called Jambo Forum, with Maxence Melo, who was 27. Mushi started managing the platform right after completing schooling at Green Acres school in 2003.<sup>7</sup>



Maxence Melo was born in May 1976 in Kantare village in the Kagera region of Tanzania. Melo studied Civil Engineering at the Dar es Salaam Institute of Technology. He did his Master's degree in Business Administration at Stanford University, USA. He is a recipient of the prestigious International Press Freedom Award in 2019 by the Committee to Protect Journalists. On receiving the award, he said, "I am an accidental journalist". He also added that, "I have been in court 137 times in the past three years, I have been arrested twice, spent 14 nights in detention. I have endured travel bans."<sup>8</sup>

The journey of Jamii Forums and its founders was not smooth. The founders have for long experienced threats and pressure from politicians and government officials. In February 2008, Melo and Mushi were arrested for a criminal allegation which could not be corroborated by evidence. Later in December 2016, Melo and Mushi were charged at the Kisutu Resident Magistrate's Court with the criminal offences of "managing a domain that is not registered in Tanzania" and "obstructing investigation on sensitive information" published by a user member on the platform. They were acquitted of the latter charge in June 2018, while the former continued to be heard.<sup>9</sup>

On 8 April 2020, Melo was convicted for refusing to disclose the identities of whistle-blowers on the Jamii Forums. The court slapped on Melo a three

million Tanzanian shillings (at the time \$1300) fine or he had to face one year of imprisonment.<sup>10</sup> He paid the fine and appealed the conviction.

Mushi was acquitted of the charges because “according to documents submitted to the court, he was not a shareholder or founder of Jamii Forums and did not know anything about its activities.”<sup>11</sup> The Tanzanian Human Rights Defenders Coalition, where Melo is a board member, issued a statement to appeal the decision because it had “several irregularities.”<sup>12</sup>

As of July 2020, Melo had appeared 152 times before the court. Since 2016, he was banned from travelling beyond Dar es Salaam without written permission by authorities, but he keeps fighting on. Melo said that he keeps going through the challenges by asking himself, “If I don’t do it, then who will?”<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps not too many will, just yet. It might not be a long wait though, if the rank of bloggers grows, as it has in neighbouring Kenya. As James Wamathai, cofounder of the Bloggers Association of Kenya (BAKE), said, “Blogging is like talking to human beings unlike newspapers. You start a conversation, and you can see it grow. You can [immediately] tell the impact of your content.”<sup>14</sup>

Wamathai, a resident of Nairobi, introduces himself simply as a blogger, an online content creator, and a digital influencer. His journey as a digital warrior started in 2009. A year before he became a blogger, he remembers, the only blogger he knew was James Murua, who is still an influential blogger in archiving African and Black literary works. Murua told him about the platform and gave him insights that helped open the gate for him to become who he is today. In 2011, Wamathai joined hands with other bloggers to create BAKE, which would go on to change the image of bloggers in Kenya in the following decade.

Kenya has the most vibrant blogosphere in Eastern Africa. In 2020, there were about 30 000 active bloggers in the country. BAKE had 40 members when it was founded in 2011; today, it has more than 3000 of these bloggers under its umbrella.

In 2011, when BAKE was founded, only 2% of Kenyans were online. Wamathai remembers why they needed to form an association, saying that, “It was mostly about internet access”. In 2019, almost half of Kenyans were online. As the numbers of people online and their members grew, BAKE’s objectives broadened.

“There are more than 30 000 bloggers in Kenya now shaping public opinion,” said Wamathai. “We fight for their rights on the frontline”. What BAKE does can



be summarised simply as representing and supporting bloggers. In this way, it has enabled citizen journalists to be heard. However, most importantly, it makes them feel safer.

Said Wamathai, “2014 and 2015 were the worst years as far as digital rights are concerned in Kenya. About 60 people were arrested that time in Kenya in connection to the content they created online. We strengthened our efforts, took issues to court and things have changed for the better, so much now lesser number of people are attacked or intimidated for this.”

Today, BAKE works more on shaping the bigger digital environment. It is involved in activities of digital policymaking; it does litigation when the government trespasses digital rights; it supports bloggers and builds up their partnerships; it promotes freedom of expression through recognition and annual awards for online content creators; it develops periodic reports on the state of digital rights in Kenya. Wamathai adds, “We are also boosting the digital economy by helping bloggers make money from the content they create.”

Wamathi also typifies what many online journalists and bloggers increasingly are. Apart from his many roles at BAKE, he is the CEO and cofounder of Hopa Kenya, an online platform that showcases content around technology, business, entertainment, travel, food and web culture in Kenya. He also runs a digital marketing agency called Wamathai Media.

Wamathai started his career as an English and poetry teacher at the Kibera Mpira Mtaani centre, a community-based organisation helping children at Kibera slums, one of the largest in Africa. Poetry and creative writing were also what took him online.

In Ethiopia, “husband and father of a daughter” is how Nathnael Feleke introduces himself to people. The same expression is used in his Twitter bio and at the end of his email below his signature. He says, “I started blogging because 30 years down the road, I want to tell my daughter that I did something during this period of repression in my country.”<sup>15</sup> He is the cofounder of the Zone9 Blogging and Activism Collective, a platform that inspired a generation through a series of blogs and online advocacy campaigns in Ethiopia.

Two of the founders of Zone9, Nathnael Feleke and Soleyana Shimeles, said both of their lives evolved in a way they never sought when they founded Zone9. Nathnael<sup>16</sup> is currently the head of the public relations committee of the opposition group named the Ethiopian Citizens for Social Justice Party, while Soleyana is a

public servant who is the Head of Communication at the National Election Board of Ethiopia. Nathnael, a banker who studied economics, and Soleyana, a feminist who studied law, both became communications experts after they were shaped by Zone9.

Zone9 got its name from the infamous Federal Prison of Kality in Ethiopia. By the time Zone9 was founded in May 2012, Kality Prison used to have eight zones. Political prisoners held in Kality used to call the entire country metaphorically Zone9, a big prison where political freedom is restricted.<sup>17</sup> Soleyana says, "We thought adopting that expression would promote our cause. We believed this phrase spoke what we were about to speak louder."<sup>18</sup>

Zone9 was founded by nine members (seven men, two women) who had come to know each other through their online activities. Each of the founders had different jobs in their respective professions: engineering, teaching in universities, social work, banking, and running public and private businesses. "We came together and spoke truth to power, because we cared," says Nathnael. The motto of the Zone9 Blogging Collective is, "We blog, because we care."

After its general election in 2005 ended in a crisis, Ethiopia was hit by a deafening silence. The state of media and civil society, as well as political participation, declined. It was amidst this political fear and silence that Zone9 was founded.



Zone9 created a platform where likeminded, socially conscious youth could contribute their commentaries in blog form. It also pioneered social media campaigns under the motto, "Respect the Constitution", which demanded the government open up the civic and political spaces. The members also started the culture of visiting political prisoners, following trials, and reporting them online, to bring awareness to a public that was usually uniformed.

Zone Niners, as the founders of Zone9 call themselves, faced harassment and prosecution for speaking truth to power. Soleyana says, "I didn't comprehend the price of engaging with an authoritarian power well until it came after us". Six Zone9 bloggers and three journalists who are associated with them were jailed in April 2014, and they were charged with the anti-terrorism law of Ethiopia, which would later be dubbed as repressive and revised by the government in 2018.<sup>19</sup>

Nathnael says, "The toughest challenge in my life has been going to jail for only writing online about the things that affect my life, but it was worth it. Since the political reform in 2018, I see the questions we have raised back then at the core of the current political discourse.

"Recently, there was an intriguing, televised discussion over constitutional means of postponing election due to Covid-19 pandemic. All we have advocated as Zone Niners was for the respect of constitutionalism, public participation and free expression."

Soleyana and two other members of Zone9 were abroad by the time the rest of Zone Niners were detained. She was the first defendant of the case in absentia. She remembers the situation as extremely traumatising. She says, "We felt the torture of survivor's guilt while our colleagues were facing physical torture in the infamous detention centre of Maekelawi at home. But we didn't have the luxury of mourning. We had to focus and use the platform to make our voice heard and get our colleagues released from prison. We did."

Soleyana continued to use the online platform to uncover rights violations in Ethiopia and report on the trials of political detainees. She went on to found the Ethiopian Human Rights Project (EHRP) online, documenting rights violations and reporting trials, and following the case of the Zone9 Bloggers, until early 2018, when the government decided to release thousands of political prisoners. In the process, EHRP monitored the trials of more than 50 politically charged cases.

Nathnael was released in October 2015, after nearly 18 months of detention, without a conviction. Soleyana was also acquitted of the charges because the

evidence of the prosecutor failed to corroborate the charges pressed against the bloggers.<sup>20</sup> However, their online activism and blogging continued regardless of the disproportional response of the government to their civic engagement. Eventually, their contribution, coupled with multiple others, have brought about change. The political reform started in December 2017 continued, with the release of political prisoners, the closing of the notorious Maekelawi detention centre, and a series of legal reforms.

Following the reforms, even though Zone9 bloggers no longer blog and engage in activism collectively, they engage in public affairs in different ways. Some formed media organisations, others went into civil society. Soleyana joined the public sector, while Nathnael joined hands with other politicians to form a new political organisation.

Zone Niners' contribution was recognised both at home and internationally. They won about five renowned awards, including CPJ's Press Freedom Award in 2015.<sup>21</sup> In Nathnael's words: The best reward is contributing something to tell his daughter what he did to overcome these times of repression.

### **The Women Warriors**

If only two of the Zone9 bloggers were women, that was to change in Sudan in 2019 with the revolution that overthrew the 30-year-long dictatorship by Omar al-Bashir. Citizen journalists can take credit for the revolution. The Sudanese Professionals Association offered strong leadership through social media. Most importantly and uniquely, however, was the massive participation of women in online and offline protests in the Sudanese revolution. This was remarkable because Al-Bashir's regime was extremely repressive towards women, but that did not stop them; nearly 70% of street protesters were women and it all started on social media.<sup>22</sup>

The main catalyst was a women-only Facebook group, Minbar-Shat, which had been created by Rania Omer to help women spot men cheating on them in 2015. It turned into a place to shame officers from National Intelligence and Security Services and to organise protests.<sup>23</sup> Rania Omer, a mother of a one-year-old baby girl at the time, was pregnant when the Sudanese people were protesting Al-Bashir's rule in the streets.

She currently lives in the US, where she went after winning the Diversity Visa Lottery. She was overwhelmed by the fact that many members of Minbar-Shat

were involved in the street protests. She never foresaw that the group she once created to catch cheaters would influence a revolution.<sup>24</sup>

Minbar-Shat was only one platform but Sudanese women had different ways of engaging online. Zeinab Mohammed Salih, founder of Sudanese Network for Human Rights Information, is a tireless freelance reporter about and beyond the Sudanese Revolution.<sup>25</sup> She is a regular contributor to the UK newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Independent*, and also Al Jazeera and many others. Sudanese Bloggers without Borders, an association co-founded by Eslam abu Algassim, was one of the shelters of many bloggers that gave them a voice.<sup>26</sup> Alaa Salah, a 22-year-old activist who led a street protest with a melodious chant, became the enduring image of the revolution. Her picture on a vehicle, pointing her finger upwards has proliferated on the internet. She, and the likes of her, are named after strong Nubian queen Kadanka. Salah told UN News that 50% of the campaigns for the protests were done on social media.<sup>27</sup> Now, the women have won the revolution. They are currently struggling to win the aftermath too.



These next battles will be many. Disinformation, propaganda, and hate speech are becoming the new concerns for digital warriors and the general public in Eastern Africa. Fake news cast a shadow on the integrity of the election outcome in Kenya in 2017.<sup>28</sup> Hate speech on social media is triggering or escalating conflicts in South Sudan and other parts of the region.<sup>29</sup>

Consequently, governments are using these threats to justify interfering to regulate freedom of expression online. Thus, although social media have created an opportunity to advance freedom of expression, they are also giving governments an excuse to regulate them in the name of preventing disinformation and hate speech.<sup>30</sup> These issues are the next battles awaiting the digital media warriors: to clear the digital space of disinformation and hate speech, while at the same time fighting heavy regulation and attacks on free speech by governments. That fight might be less dangerous but could be much harder and more complex.

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## The Wrath of the Cartoonists

They put a foot in first and then took over the whole tent

Joyce Nyairo

In the closing months of 2015, political talk in Kenya revolved around the impending exit of Anne Waiguru, Cabinet Secretary in the Ministry of Devolution and Planning.

Her appointment in 2013 had captured the nation's imagination for its progressive politics; a woman, young, divorced, technocrat, unmuddled by the well-known stench of political offices. At the heart of the expectation that she would now resign were the revelations made in the second quarter of 2015 about a Kenya Shillings 791 million (at the time equivalent to \$7.9 million) procurement scandal at the National Youth Service (NYS), a docket in her remit. Given her reputation as competent and “pushy”, it was not clear how she was planning to exit from this mess. Would she wait to thwart impeachment proceedings in parliament? Was she going to wrestle with the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission in court over corruption charges or get a reprieve from them by naming the real perpetrators, or would the President call off the attack dogs and rescue her, his allegedly trusted confidant? She went against the grain. On 21 November, she resigned. She cited health concerns and asked the President to allocate her “such lighter duties as he shall deem fit.”<sup>1</sup>

In *People Daily* of 28 November 2015, Celeste Wamiru, Kenya's first female editorial cartoonist, captured Waiguru's exit in the cartoon shown in Figure 1.



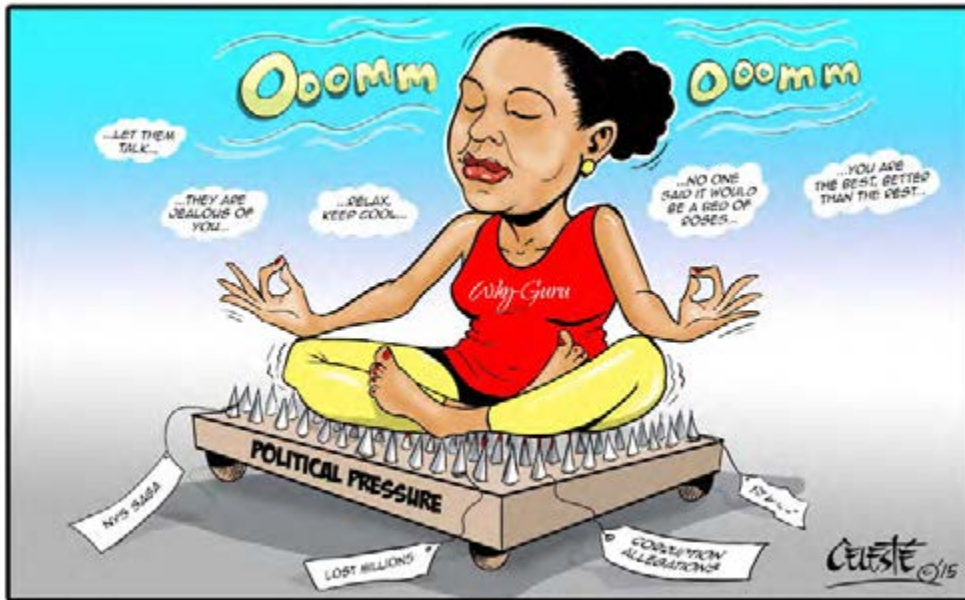


Fig. 1

The statement in Figure 1 on the delusions of high-ranking civil servants, their ability to avoid scrutiny, and their indifference and uncaring stance vis-a-vis the public they should serve is achieved with grace. It stands in sharp contrast to the puncturing nails Waiguru is sitting on and the empty chants that this guru of avoidance is reciting. Her womanhood may be clothed appropriately, even elegantly, but her firmly shut eyes, the legend of “Why”, a play on her name, imprinted on her tank-top, and her tone-deaf chants paint a willful blindness. Taken collectively, these actions metaphorically strip her naked by exposing her character, that is, utterly self-serving.

In an earlier cartoon on the subject (Figure 2), Wamiru tried to side-step gendered interpretations of Waiguru’s transgressions by depicting the minister as a baby, albeit a royal one. Submitted to *People Daily* on 19 October 2015 for the following day’s newspaper, the cartoon below raised dust in the newsroom. The editor pushed back. In a reversal that marks the intermediality that has expanded publishing options for editorial cartoonists, Wamiru’s Royal Baby drawing became the subject of public debate the following morning, when it was featured on NTV’s morning show, AM Live with Debarl Inea. The irony of this cartoon appearing on 20 October, Mashujaa Day — a public holiday to celebrate national heroes - was yet another reversal in the Anne Waiguru and NYS story.

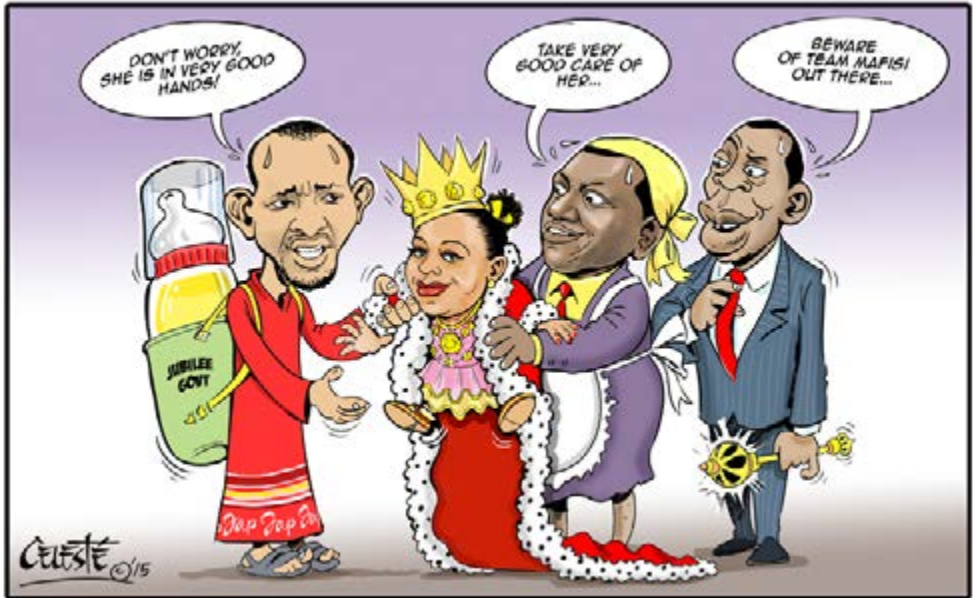


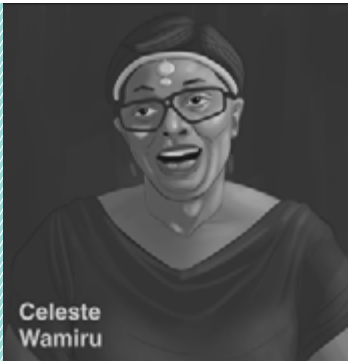
Fig. 2

So much can be said about the way Wamiru makes Waiguru small in Figure 2. Innocent and helpless, in defiance of the rumour-mills that typified her as an ensnaring villain, a temptress, a homewrecker.

By depicting Waiguru being nurtured by President Uhuru Kenyatta, Deputy President William Ruto and Aden Duale, the ruling party's Leader of the Majority in parliament, Wamiru tells us that Waiguru's sins are the sins of the leadership. She has inherited its penchant for rabid misappropriation of resources and, no matter what the NYS scandal might suggest, the proprietary hands and comments of these three men confirm that Waiguru is fiercely protected by the powers that be.

Wamiru's editorial cartoons have questioned or otherwise reversed many of the traditions in the way East African cartoonists depict power, and women, a point I will return to later. For now, I want to focus on another kind of reversal, the one that is germane to the life of editorial cartoons, making them an integral site for the interrogation of expectations and the reversal of hierarchies.

Amidst the sea of text and captioned photographs in a newspaper or magazine, the single panel image that is the editorial cartoon is, in and of itself, an act of defiance. By its very form, it defies the norms of the space in which it is housed,



like a sudden outbreak of childish play in a room full of adults.

It threatens the comfort zone of the newspaper reader who, by definition, is thought of as a person capable of interpreting the written word, literate, if you like. Interpreting a cartoon is something of a deflation of that literacy, to the extent that it calls for a slightly different set of skills in a reversal process that decodes what the editorial cartoonist has encoded.

Deflating spaces and their habitual occupants is, therefore, the first province of the editorial cartoonist. Thus, even before we think through the cartoonists' treatment of the subject matter, we must start by acknowledging their invasion of space and practice, the way they take the given — newspaper or magazine as a written text — and blow it open for realignment and scrutiny. While editorial cartoonists focus on unmasking untenable political and social issues and actors with a heavy dose of ridicule or satire, gag cartoonists provoke comedic laughter of the slapstick kind and it may include a caption.

There is something subversive, too, in the editorial cartoonist's idea of a single panel as a complete space in which to tell a story. That telling thrusts the bulk of the labour on the reader who, to appreciate the editorial cartoon fully, must have or must seek elsewhere the context of the cartoon, its histories, its geographies, its cultural codes, its related issues, and the cast of actors. To read a cartoon — much as it appears as one single frame — is to be tricked into peeling off layers along the trajectory of beginning, middle and end. In terms of literary method then, the cartoonist must always be armed with surprise, irony, hyperbole, caricature, black humour, and word play, such as puns, to summarise an event, to invite the rewriting of a plot, to reverse emotional responses to an issue by offering fresh insights.

In a recent conversation with *The Elephant*, Jonathan Shapiro, aka Zapiro, one of Africa's leading cartoonists, quoted the South African satirist Pieter Dirk-Uys, to explain the balance that the cartoonist must strike if she or he is to be effective.<sup>2</sup> "Humour has to have 51% satire and 49% anger and ... if ... more than half of it is anger and less than half of it is the satire, then it's not funny anymore." Fun drives the work that cartoonists of every description undertake, but there are limits to laughter, aspects that cannot be reversed and boundaries that should not be crossed.

## Cultural Politics

The cultural politics in Celeste Wamiru's pioneering role in the reimagining and reimagining of power and of women in East African cartoons is preceded by the cultural politics of race. This is the frontier that the first generation of print-paper cartoonists needed to cross in order to root the practice more firmly on the continent. In *Drawing the Line*, a publication of the Association of East African Cartoonists (KATUNI), Patrick Gathara observes that caricatures circulated among World War 1 soldiers and "at least one humour magazine, the *Karonga Kronikal*, was created for and by the troops" (2004:18). These drawings were meant "to boost the morale of the soldiers and to provide an outlet for their frustrations. Cartoons also helped define the enemy, by depicting German soldiers comically, such as in positions impersonating African women or as cowards hiding behind African men" (ibid). Given that these base stereotypes of Africans were intended to keep Africans unseen or seen unfavourably, they raise the critical question of representation and create the conditions for a cultural politics designed to resist, if not overthrow, dominant misrepresentations (Hall, 1988).

In Kenya, this happened in the 1950s when William Agutu and Edward Gitau emerged. Gitau ran the comic strip *Juha Kalulu*, which Kimani wa Wanjiru underlines is "the longest-running comic strip in East and Central Africa."<sup>3</sup> Wanjiru also explains that "Gitau coined the name of his main character by combining names drawn from two languages: *juha*, a Kiswahili word for 'not so clever' and bordering on being clownish, and *kalulu*, a Nyanja (a language spoken in Malawi) word for 'hare'." By extending the province of the African folktale beyond orality at the fireplace, Gitau localised cartooning in a very significant way, affirming Jonathan Guyer's argument that, "Comics hold out subversive potential and are best suited for transmitting progressive perspectives through tales with hidden meanings or stories of marginalized characters."<sup>4</sup>

These cultural politics of opposing marginality by



centring Africanness found new dimensions in the work of the Ghanaian/Kenyan cartoonist Frank Odoi and his long-running comic strip, *Akokhan*. Beginning in the mid-1980s, it was published — at different times — in the *Daily Nation*, *The Standard* and *The Star*, three mainstream Kenyan newspapers, and *The Monitor* in Uganda. Later, it was compiled into a book, *Akokhan: More than a Comic Story* (2007, see Figure 3). Duncan Omanga emphasises that *Akokhan*, “a naturalised Kenyan superhero”, is “a response to, and not simply an appropriation of, the more famous Detective Comics (DC) and Marvel comic superheroes” (2016:262). To sharpen the Africanness of this superhero, Omanga explains, Odoi drew

*... from Ghanaian folklore, complete with references to cultural artefacts, labels and social contexts that are obviously West African, but still uniquely able to transcend both time and space. As a result, Akokhan, though a West African historical legend, becomes a more localised superhero by the mere fact of being immortalised in a Kenyan newspaper (263)*

In an interview with Kymynet Media Network, Odoi explained that he grew up reading Superman and Batman by DC Comics and that, in creating *Akokhan* and his nemesis *Tonkazan*, he was consciously providing a counterpoint to Western imagination and also pushing the bounds of East African attitudes to traditional socio-cultural practices.

*The power of the western superhero is derived from scientific sources and thus easily explainable. So I created Akokhan, an African superhero, whose power sources are unexplainable. Call it magic, but then when you breathe life into fantasy, it stops being magic ... bringing fantasy and African roots-religion together gave me Akokhan ... One glaring difference between West Africa and East Africa is how local religious beliefs and rites are perceived. Traditional religions in Ghana and West Africa as a whole is culturally accepted and respected, while this is somehow frowned upon and referred to as voodoo, juju, witchcraft and other humiliating names in East Africa (ibid, Wanjiru).*

Odoi's cultural politics informed a new generation of cartoonists, passing on the baton by influencing, if not actively mentoring them, in the direct ways that his own career was transformed. He had trained as a medical illustrator in Ghana. When one of his colleagues got a job at Kenyatta Hospital, Odoi jumped at the opportunity to visit Nairobi and meet the famed *Joe* magazine crew whose work he had read in Accra.

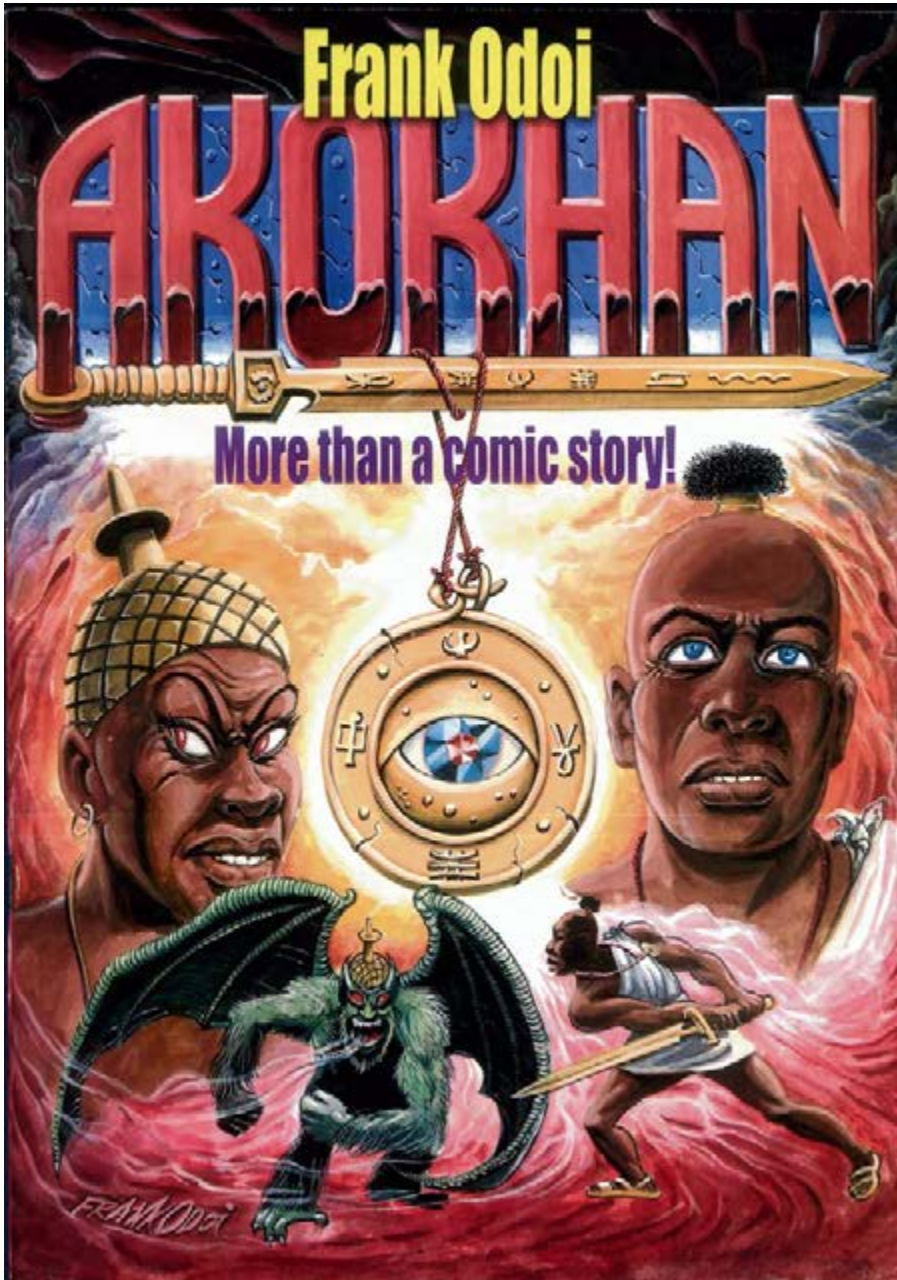
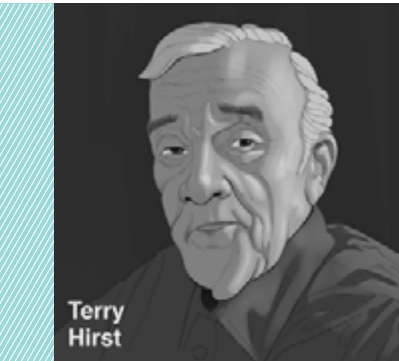


Fig. 3

On 20 September 2013, I interviewed 76-year-old Terry Hirst, Kenya's first editorial cartoonist at his home in Roysambu, Nairobi.<sup>5</sup> He recalled, rather wistfully, his own arrival in Kenya in 1965, meeting Tanzanian painter Elimo Njau and forming a brotherly pact. "I mean, he guided me in all my *mzungu* nonsense and got rid of them."



"Mzungu nonsense" was Terry's graceful way of talking about the difficulties of being a white man in a newly independent country that was still trapped in the settler philosophy and misrepresentations of "the other". Of Odoi's arrival in Nairobi, Hirst told me, "One morning in 1978 or '77, I was working from the Victoria House offices of Joe close to the old Nation House, when I looked up to find a young Frank Odoi freshly arrived, without notice, beaming up at me with the words, 'I'm here. I have come from Ghana to join you.'"

At its peak, the circulation of Joe magazine hit 30 000 copies per issue, going out as far as West Africa. Its genesis, the character Joe, had grown from Terry's work illustrating Hilary Ng'weno's Monday column in the *Daily Nation* from 1968.<sup>6</sup> It was called *With a Light Touch*. Terry explained that he and Ng'weno met every Sunday to pore through ideas and sketches. Out of this collaboration came the character Joe. Joe was a newly urbanised man, "a survivor who has to laugh to keep from crying", Hirst said.

"The purpose of Joe was to comment on the news and to socialise people into being urban ... to build a multiplicity of relationships ... friendly but not involved emotionally."

It was a significant step away from colonial ideas that Africans did not belong in the city, except as labour, and views of their socio-cultural impetus as limited to the villages where they were born (Furedi, 1973; Kurtz, 1998; Atieno-Odhiambo, 2001; Nyairo, 2015).

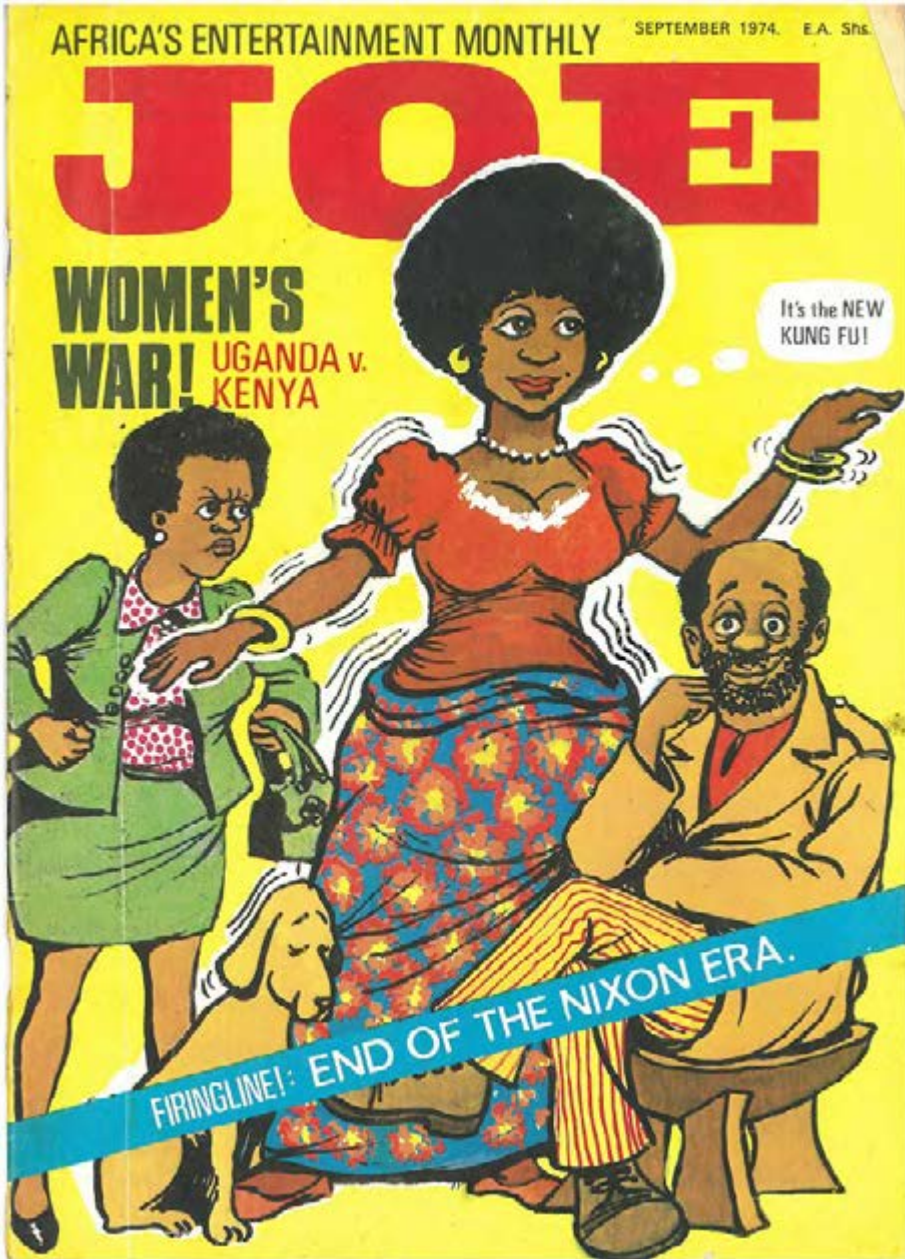


Fig. 4: Joe Magazine cover September 1974



By 1973, Joe had developed into an idea for a magazine featuring illustrated jokes, comic strips and guest short story writers like David Maillu, Leonard Kibera, Sam Kahiga and Ngugi wa Thiong'o. Edward Gitau, the other veteran cartoonist, ran the *City Life* strip in *Joe*.

Hirst's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugali* offered some of the most hilarious takes on contemporary life. *Joe*, a common man trying to make his way up in the world, interrogated issues of transport, elections, medical services, religion and urbanisation (Nyairo, 2018: 34). It was quite a treat for 3 Kenya shillings. Jonathan

Kariara of Oxford University Press breathed life into the magazine when he gave Hirst and Ng'weno "a room, a table and two chairs" to get started. Ng'weno left after a year, but *Joe* grew to a team of young artists, "a suite of offices at Esso House ... and a studio on River Road". Odoi joined them and thrived there until 1979, when he took over Hirst's seat, drawing editorial cartoons for the *Daily Nation* under the pen-name Fran.



In the mid-1970s, when Hirst and Ng'weno worked together, a comic-style book called *Field Marshal Abdulla Fisi* by Alumidi Osinya emerged. "It was a satirical rap on

[President Idi] Amin and the Ugandan events of his time. We never quite found out who Osinya was. Conjecture was that the story was told by Hilary Ng'weno, and the illustrations done by his friend Terry Hirst".<sup>7</sup>

Hirst's style was very distinctive. His cartoons seemed to jump off the pages at you. Unlike *Andy Capp* and *Flook*, they spoke of things that were familiar, characters locals could relate to, and topical issues of the day. The pencil lines were bold and the details striking. His style quickly caught on. It is evident in the work of Maddo, Paul Kelemba, who is described by his fellow cartoonist Patrick Gathara as "the first indigenous political cartoonist to reach national prominence" (2004:24). To use his own term, Hirst did a great deal of training by "remote-control ... by public drawing", as children in classrooms wherever *Joe* was read took to doodling and cartooning, imitating his style.

According to Kahiga, Hirst "was let down by humourless advertisers" (Nyairo, 2013). Hirst and Frank Odoi collaborated to produce *Joe Sukumawiki*, working without advertisers, "But the distributor decided not to handle it. Then in 1980, after eight years, Terry and Nereas [his wife] decided to fold the business."<sup>8</sup> Even though, following the failed 1982 Kenya coup, Hirst bloomed again, side-stepping editorial cartoons by launching a novel comic book of African stories, *Pichadithi*,

Gathara observes that “When [Joe] magazine ceased publication, it was as if the country had lost a national celebrity” (ibid, 21).

At Hirst’s memorial service held at The Nairobi Arboretum on 7 July 2015 (Saba Saba), Pheroze Nowrojee, Senior Counsel and pro-democracy advocate, eulogised Hirst’s role in the cultural and political awakening of Kenya.

*Terry carried on the correction process away from colonial thinking, taking it from the classroom and the staff room to the university lecture hall and the common rooms, to the exhibition galleries, then the newspaper pages, and finally to the whole country ... His 1966 exhibition Black & White ... was subtitled Essays in Visual Journalism and consisted of 40 large pen and ink drawings with washes. These were sharp yet sympathetic satires with incisive drawing of urban Nairobi characters in the painful colonial change-over. It was a report (‘visual journalism’) on people on the streets, in nightclubs, in dukas, and on suburban avenues. It was a smash hit. It was a rejection of the concentration hitherto of the Kenyan landscape as the only proper subject of art in Kenya.<sup>9</sup>*

Nowrojee also remembered the ground-breaking cultural hybridity of Hirst’s 1967 exhibition, *THE AKUA-ABA* series. “In a major set of beautiful and arresting oils on canvas, Terry, using the Ghanaian cruciform fertility figure Akua-Aba, dealt with the Mau Mau Emergency ... with issues of the effects of the colonial century and the idiom of our art, Africa-wide.”

*Hirst on Friday*, and *Hirst on Sunday* were *Daily Nation* brands. Among the stock characters that Hirst developed and turned into a national staple is the gluttonous pot-bellied Bwana Mkubwa, the ogre that devours national resources. But Hirst was careful not to rile the authorities. He did not draw President Jomo Kenyatta until the day he died in 1978. He captured him as a spirit hovering over the country from way up in the clouds, a clever play on hagiography since it also warned of the influence the founding President would continue to have on the nation’s politics. Hirst’s Bwana Mkubwa opened the doors to the visual critiquing of power, undressing politicians; and his dubious angel Jomo Kenyatta launched what became an undying question, how to draw a president, to caricature the failings of power in the highest office. It would take 14 years before another editorial cartoonist dared to draw a president, but the urge to do so, and the perils of doing so, continue to stalk East Africa’s editorial cartoonists.

## Drawing the Big Men

In 1992, Kelemba, aka Maddo, and his publisher Pius Nyamora, the proprietor of Society magazine made the well-timed decision to draw President Daniel arap Moi (Figure 6). When that 2 November issue hit the streets, they waited anxiously for the wrath of the authorities. Kelemba explains that the eve of a multi-party election was the right moment for such a cartoon.

*I was with the Nation for five years, up to the end of 1991, and in all that time, I never once drew Moi although the Nation was much more open than other papers and I did the government ministers and VIPs.*

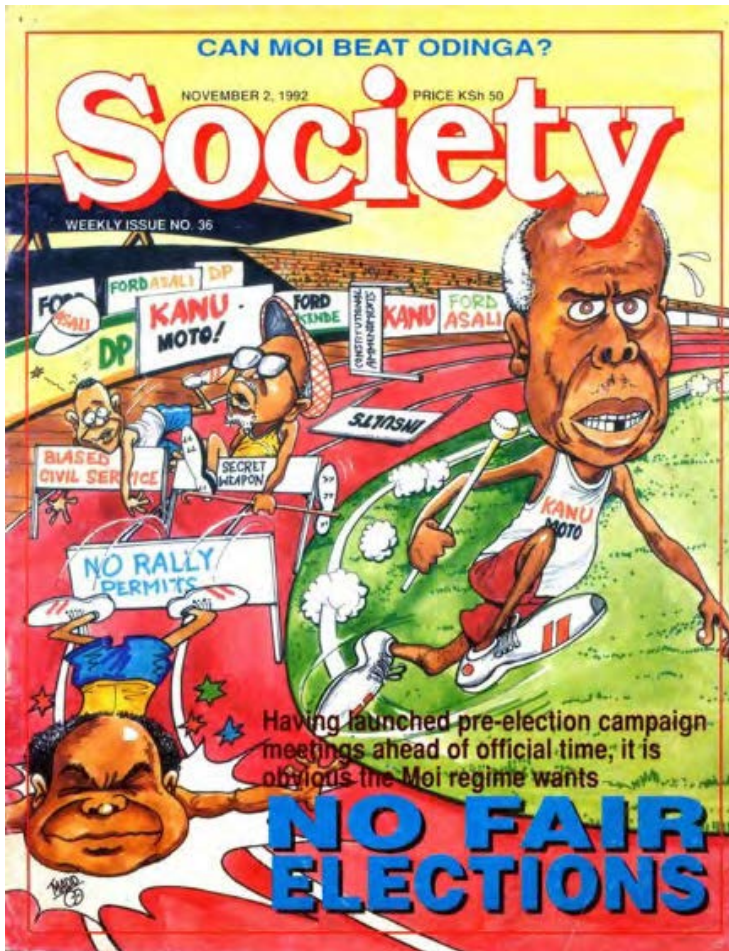


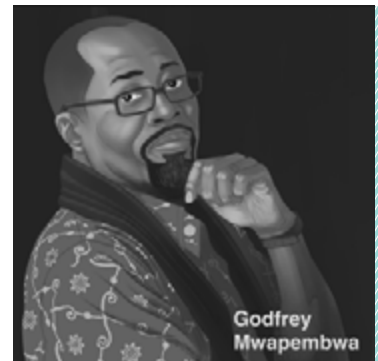
Fig. 5

*Then ... in the run-up to the December [1992] election, cartoonists were trying to put Moi into their cartoons. We were hiding him, giving him a hat, using shadows. Then Nyamora said, "Yes, go ahead."*

*The thing that was on my mind as I sketched the cartoon was that we were on the threshold of Moi's final years of absolute political control. I was convinced that he'd lose the election and if I was locked up, it would not be long before I was free again (Loughran, 2010: 231).*

Just as in Egypt, where Jonathan Guyer says, "the cartoonists who first caricatured Mubarak left an indelible mark on the public sphere", in Kenya, with one cartoon, Kelemba and Nyamora unleashed the popular imagination in a ground-breaking way.<sup>10</sup> Some were apprehensive about buying that copy of *Society* magazine and being found with what colonial and post-independence regimes had always classified as "seditious literature". Still, Maddo had harnessed a decade-plus of whispers and rumours about Moi's wickedness and his fallibility, and thereby freed many to think differently, to speak up against the regime. A few days later, the *Daily Nation* published Gado's cartoon of Moi "with a walking stick asking for five more years in office" (Loughran, 231).

With time, Gado, the Tanzanian-born artist whose official name is Godfrey Mwapembwa, became less tentative in the work of deflating a Kenyan president who had, for too long, been referred to in terms that invoked invincibility — Farmer No. 1, Teacher No. 1, Professor of Politics, Mtukufu (exalted one, his highness, his excellency), even The Prince of Peace! According to his website, Gado is "the most syndicated political cartoonist in East and Central Africa, and for over two decades a contributor to the *Daily Nation* (Kenya), *New African* (UK), *Courier International* (France), *Sunday Tribune* (South Africa), *Le Monde*, *Washington Times*, *Des Standard*, and *Japan Times*."<sup>11</sup> Borrowing a leaf from South Africa's Zapiro, Gado has published collections of his editorial cartoons over the years into five books, so far.<sup>12</sup> Gado created the satirical puppet show *XYZ*<sup>13</sup> and also currently is the editorial cartoonist at *The Standard*.



Gerard Loughran says that, when Gado first joined *The Nation* paper, he placed above his desk a quote from Art Buchwald, an American satirist (2010:231). It read: "Dictators from the political left or right fear the political cartoonist more than they do the atomic bomb. No totalitarian government can afford to be ridiculed."

Loughran goes on to explain that, "*The Nation* had carried political cartoons in its early days, but poking fun at government figures became a dangerous game. Kenyatta had never been caricatured in the press and to lampoon Moi was unthinkable" until Maddo did it with Nyamora.



Fig. 6

In a 2001, cartoon of President Moi, Gado boldly caricatured the President as the country's sole stumbling block to the achievement of gender equality (Figure 7). Grace Musila dissects the socio-cultural referents woven into this cartoon, from "the gap in the teeth as an allusion to Tugen ritual practices and belief systems, which frame women in fairly constraining parameters" to Moi's "wifeless state" and ultimately to a national frame of reference "for in Kenyan idiom, gender means women" (2007: 111). Overall, one can conclude from this cartoon and from Musila's reading of it that Gado's art presents strong advocacy for women, even when it means calling out the President for policies that lock women out of public spaces.

## The Real Gender Gap

Looking at the oeuvre of Gado's cartoons to date, it becomes apparent that his position on women is not always progressive on this question of inclusivity, of the need to reverse age-old prejudices against them. Consider the following examples.



Fig. 7

In this 17 January 2015 cartoon published in *The EastAfrican*, the male figure lying hedonistically, being fed grapes and attended to, hand and foot, by seven women is labelled JK, the initials of President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania (Figure 8). The portrayal of women as if they are the only ones who work at massage and beauty parlours is a cheap stereotype.

Even in East Africa, aside from their work in barbershops, men have, for decades now, been painting nails, styling women's hair and working as make-up artists in salons and on film sets. The time-lag in Gado's socio-cultural framing is clear. His

tradition-bound (sub)consciousness refuses to depict men as traders in leisure, and purveyors of the three vices he has labelled on the women's skirts, cronyism, incompetence and corruption. In his reading of this cartoon, the Nigerian-American literary critic, Tejumola Olaniyan, noted that the court around Kikwete was gendered, but he did not raise critical insights on the treacherous limitations of this depiction. To borrow a phrase from Dr Njoki Ngumi, a medical doctor and filmmaker, "misogyny posing as humour" is problematic. It entrenches cultural codes and social practices that leave women serving the bonds of patriarchy. At the same time, it refuses to implicate men in wrong-doing. Tanzanian men, like men everywhere else, are equally guilty of performing as court-poets, entertainers and practitioners of patriarchal vices.



Fig. 8

*In the editorial cartoon ... the body becomes an important signifier. Part of this is done through the use of the grotesque and distortion, in which the cartoon artist plays around with proportions, expressions, postures and even movements to elicit laughter and encode a specific message (Musila, 2007:99)*

In Figure 9, a 23 June 2020 cartoon, Gado gives Kenyan politician Raila Odinga the body and robes of a woman to mock him and show up his impotence as opposition leader. His role is reduced to that of a flower girl, inviting scorn and derision not just on himself, but also on women and their role in public spaces.



Fig. 9

Why do male cartoonists repeatedly strip faltering male political leaders of their masculinity or draw them as women? Why do they not fall back on the image of the pageboy? Is power a man? Uganda's Jim Spire Ssentongo, editorial cartoonist for *The Observer*, who has lately taken to drawing President Museveni holding a bottle of mineral water and a stick to symbolise his outdated ideas for drip-irrigation and backward ideology, loses his progressiveness when it comes to portraying other men. In Figure 10, a July 2020 cartoon, Spire uses the clichéd wedding analogy. It confirms the enduring drawback from East African editorial cartoonists who demean women, refusing to reverse negative socio-cultural attitudes.

In Spire's drawing, Erias Lukwago, the Mayor of Kampala, is the bride in a discoloured and off-white gown. The groom is Kiiza Besigye, the veteran opposition leader wearing the blue colours of his Forum for Democratic Change party (FDC). In the hut is Nobert Mao, President of the Democratic Party (DP). Lukwago, a prized member of the DP, had just crossed the floor to join the FDC. Joel Isabirye, Ugandan media practitioner and scholar, explains:





*The bride has been 'stolen' from Mao. There are many interpretations to this. One is the turbulence going on in political parties with members crossing from one party to another. But also, since Mao actually lost his wife to a divorce recently, does the cartoonist imply that he cannot keep partners? Maybe that is why he says "Take and finish to end the matter" or "take you treasure". 'Twaala Emmale' could mean either.<sup>14</sup>*

We must ask of these flower-girl and bride representations of diminished influence whether political power is a man. Would it be a bad thing if political power were to adopt elements of caring and nurturing? Must leadership and courage be brutal in this masculine sense?

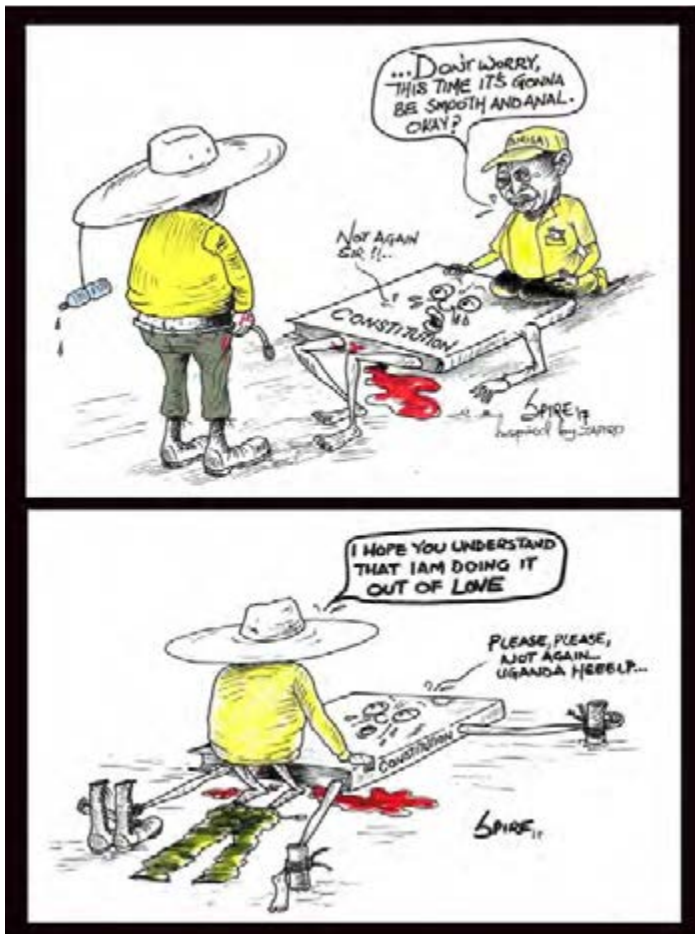


Fig. 10

In the hands of African cartoonists, depictions of political power as a brutalising imposition have gone so far as to show wayward male leaders preparing to rape lady justice (Zapiro in April 2017) or, as in Figure 11 above, Museveni raping the Ugandan constitution to defeat the age-limit and earn himself another term at the helm. One would think that, after the backlash that Zapiro received from women's groups, Uganda's Spire would have held back from publishing this cartoon on Facebook in December 2017.

He says he decided not to submit it to *The Observer* "because equating a serious crime like rape with legal chicanery may have been viewed as disproportionate".<sup>15</sup> Even if rape was not a daily occurrence the world over, this representation of power is unacceptable. It can never be read outside the idea of normalising a vile, criminal practice that invariably goes unpunished for reasons too many to go into here.

Kenya's Celeste Wamiru always pushes the envelope on gender equality. Her idea of China's entry into Africa was captured in a cartoon on the eve of President Obama's July 2015 visit to Kenya. It showed Africa as a woman seated on the bench being courted by America holding flowers and saying, "You are very special



Fig. 11



to me". Behind America's back, Africa stretches her hand to hold China. Wamiru quips cheekily in an interview with BBC News, "China is coming in as a partner in what an African would call a polygamous kind of arrangement".<sup>16</sup> Polyamory is the height of progressive gender politics. What connotations does a male cartoonist invite when he depicts a woman as an infant under the tutelage of a man or men, in the way Wamiru did in the October 2015 cartoon in Figure 2?

In the cartoon in Figure 12, drawn by Uganda's Chris Ogon, Dr Jane Ruth Aceng, the Minister of Health is being baby sat by President Museveni, held with kid gloves; yet she violated Covid-19 standard operating procedures (SOPs), which she designed. Her double standards became visible to the public when she met a large gathering of her supporters in Lira District and, moreover, without a mask. She was standing for elective office, in Lira, for the first time. Isabirye observes:

*Rather than castigate her as he has always done with others, the president explained on national television, on her behalf, that it was a 'genuine' mistake. In other words, he was trying to save her politically against the wrath of opposition People Power supporters who made this a big issue.*<sup>17</sup>

The red beret of People Power, the movement championed by musician Robert Kyagulanyi (more commonly known by his stage name Bobi Wine) is visible on the body behind the President's seat, clad in a blue mask that bears the key symbol of the Forum for Democratic Change party, and a green shirt to represent the Democratic Party. That man in bondage, with a gun in his face, is a powerful and very economical illustration of gerrymandering and the allied sins of election theft! Lira Lira is a brand of Uganda Waragi, a strong gin. So, in a clever double entendre whose ambiguities create a delightful pun, Ogon captioned the drawing "Lira Lira" on his Twitter handle. It is like saying that Dr Aceng is drunk from her proximity to power, while at the same time invoking the district of Lira she is gunning to represent in parliament.

In this 1 July 2020 cartoon, Figure 13, Gado probes the performance of Kenya's Anne Waiguru in public office from her time as a consultant at the Treasury, her tenure in Cabinet, to date, when she is the elected Governor of Kirinyaga County. She wears a tag bearing the ageist pet-name given to her by voters at the last election, Minji Minji, meaning fresh peas (her opponent was the comparatively

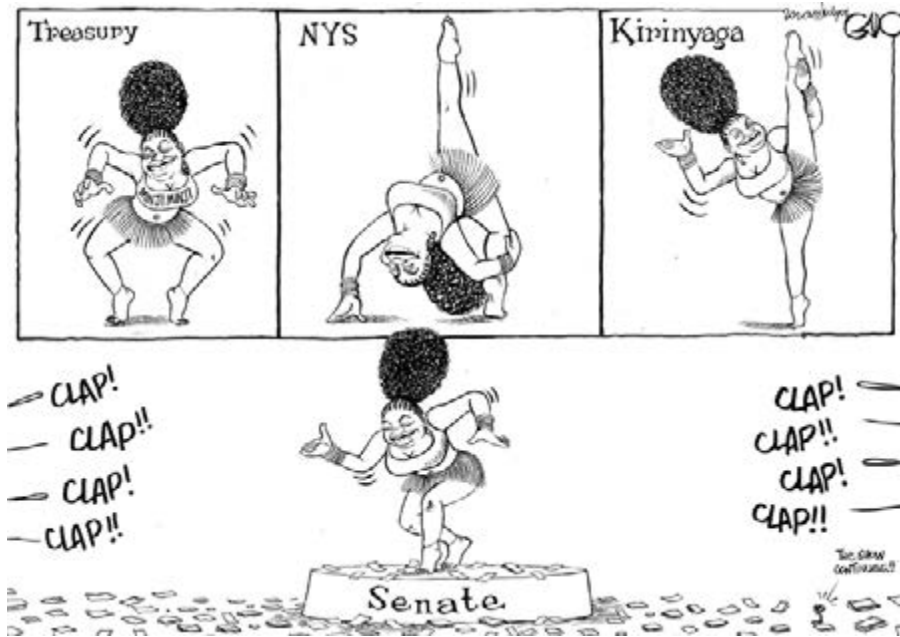


Fig. 12

older legislator Martha Karua). Gado's drawing implies that Waiguru is a non-performing public figure who has merely danced her way from one office to the next. The commentator on the side whispers, "the show continues", making more allusions to striptease or pole-dancing. The comment also signals that Waiguru is untouchable. The impeachment proceedings before the Senate are a time-wasting ritual to defeat popular will. One never sees a corrupt male politician drawn belching and farting on the grounds that "this is a family newspaper". And yet, the same paper allows a cartoon of a half-naked dancing woman to pass in the name of magnifying her endless, nonchalant accumulation. I asked Gado whether this cartoon did not run the risk of inviting feminist anger. His response is a clear indication of the struggle of the editorial cartoonist, self-censoring to avoid offending people while at the same time delivering barbs that censure.

*I really struggled with it! I did it last week! I knew the anger that it might invoke, too (Iknew nitachapwa na hii) but I could not get it, otherwise. We even got to debate it with my editors and changed this and that to make it "palatable."*<sup>18</sup>

### Women Finding their Voices



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

Jonathan Shapiro, aka Zapiro, reminds us about the need to read a cartoon within the continuum of work that the artist has previously done.<sup>19</sup> Using this approach, we might argue that Gado's long-running depiction of Wanjiku, the voice of the people, is his enduring evidence of painting women progressively. Indeed, as Serageldin underlines in his reading of Egyptian cartoons, one of the markers of the impact of a cartoonist is when the characters they create take root in a society and become national symbols (2005:1). Tanzania's James Gayo has such a character in Kingo, who has graced local newspapers for three decades now, even crossing over to become a much-loved figure of innocence and wit in Uganda, Zambia and Kenya. Gado's Wanjiku is a national emblem of this kind.

In essence, Wanjiku was not Gado's brainchild. In this use of the name to mean the common, poorly educated, ordinary citizen, Wanjiku was birthed by President Moi when he sneered dismissively at the National Christian Council of Kenya's idea of a people-led constitution. What Gado did thereafter, in a classic moment of the cartoonist's penchant for reversal, was to personify Wanjiku, and boost her. He gave her visible shape and form by drawing her. With speech bubbles, Gado thrusts Wanjiku into critical international moments and debates where she distils the essence of social justice, people's welfare and public against the never-ending tide of corrupt, hypocritical, self-serving and greedy public figures. Former Chief Justice Willy Mutunga says:

*She delights in laughing at the visionless ... Kenyan elite and the opportunistic middle classes. She is multi-racial, multi-regional, multi-gendered, multi-generational, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic. She constantly calls for nationhood and unity in our diversity. She is the political leader Kenya yearns for. She remains a beacon of the hope that a just Kenya and a just world are still possible.*<sup>20</sup>

To mock power, one must also mock the public that looks up to it, blinded by the trappings of those offices. Wanjiku's barbed tongue delivers criticism without flinching at what she sees as the problem with Kenyan values at all socio-economic levels (see Figure 16). Thanks to Gado, Wanjiku, as the collected essays in the book edited by Naomi Shitemi and Eunice Kamaara demonstrate, is indelibly woven into the region's popular discourses and imagery. This is so to the point at which, for decades now, as Prof Kivutha Kibwana avers, "Wanjiku has been popularly used with the assumption that everybody understands who Wanjiku is."<sup>21</sup>

As critical as Wanjiku's voice has become, it is the entry of women into the work of cartooning in East Africa that is proving to be the real game-changer in the



Fig. 15

representation of power. As my discussion of Celeste Wamiru's cartoons of Figure 1 and 2 above shows, power can be depicted in ways that do not trash women. Wamiru says that, for her, to "see things from a woman's point of view comes naturally".<sup>22</sup> The reminders of inequality are everywhere, as Wamiru told me.

*The newsroom is a very male-oriented space whichever newspaper you're in ... the negativity, I made it very deliberate to avoid the negativity ... so I try to work from home or away from the newsroom as much as possible. I only go once in a while just to, you know, to touch base.*

Stepping into this space of a public voice was not easy for Wamiru, who went to a Catholic school and then trained as a graphic designer at the University of Nairobi.

*Growing up, I didn't know that I had a voice like that ... especially like us girls; the expectation is that you should be demure. Don't be too opinionated; don't take a stance; don't take a stand. But when you get to a point where it's your job; you have to do it; you get to realise, wooo, I actually feel this way, this strongly about an issue.*

Wamiru talks about the need to secure “freedom after speech” to save cartoonists from “cyber bullying, litigation, [or being] pursued extra-judicially”.<sup>23</sup> Her 24 January 2015 cartoon (Figure 17) about the grabbing of a children's playing field at Lang'ata Primary School, allegedly by Deputy President Ruto, who is said to own the neighbouring Weston Hotel, earned Wamiru the wrath of faceless cyber-bullies. Some threatening emails she received were from India and Pakistan. At that point, she wondered whether her art had crossed the “Charlie Hebdo red line” in its depiction of the grabbers wearing the Sikh turban, a religious symbol.



Fig. 16

This use of the turban can be said to be borrowed from Gado's trademark drawing of the Deputy President. By showing him unmasked, Wamiru makes a clever comment on the clumsy attempts that had been made to front a famous Kenyan-Indian draughtsman-turned-contractor as the person behind the illegal allocation. Wamiru uses the speech bubble to further typify the Deputy President;



“accept and move on” is the phrase that the leadership of the Jubilee Party used to silence protests against a stolen election in 2013 and again in 2017.

The “borrowed” symbol of the turban in this cartoon affirms Wamiru’s celebration of the camaraderie that exists between East African cartoonists. Indeed, her career as an editorial cartoonist at *People Daily* was made possible when Maddo called her and asked her to apply for the job which was open. He made a strong recommendation and she felt very honoured by this because she grew up reading the comics of Terry Hirst and Maddo.

When she met Maddo for the very first time it was surreal, she was “full of excitement”. Being mentored by him taught her a valuable lesson about nurturing a network with fellow creatives. Wamiru is committed to engendering and gendering Kenyan public discourse and she has drawn many cartoons for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and for exhibitions to drive the point about women’s leadership home. One of her famous cartoons in this vein depicts what she terms “the modern family”.

*That bicycle is supposed to be, you know, the household the family. The woman is pregnant. She is riding the bicycle. She’s carrying the husband. The husband has her baby on the back, yeah, but he’s enjoying the ride ... It really generated a lot of discussion ... about the role of women because a lot of times we do cartoons of the family with the man at the head, you know, but the reality is many women are now heading families in our country.*

These changes in socio-cultural formation are issues Wamiru discusses with her male counterparts “over a drink”. She finds the work of Victor Ndula in *The Star* newspaper, where she occasionally publishes her cartoons particularly sensitive in its representations of women. Her own inspiration and perspectives, as she said in a conversation with *The Elephant*, comes from a great deal of reading and, as she says, “Cartoonists do not see themselves as people with all the answers ... our role is to question ... and we listen a lot”.<sup>24</sup> This approach to her work has not changed now that she no longer works fulltime for a newspaper. As a freelance illustrator, Wamiru keeps up with social-justice issues, always finding new ways to create catchy graphics as a visual communicator in alternative platforms that range from books, to posters, to a variety of online platforms. She is also a co-founder of Karakana, “an artist-run ‘think tank’ promoting ... local arts initiatives”.<sup>25</sup>

## Censure and Silence

Editorial cartoonists seek alternative spaces for the publication of their work for a variety of reasons. First, as Wamiru observes, they undertake public service communication. Gado talks of “the social responsibility” of the artists and Alaa Satir of Sudan talks of protest art as part of the revolution.<sup>26</sup> Shapiro, Gado, Wamiru and Satir were described by John Githongo as “Africa’s leading cartoonists”. They spoke of what Shapiro termed “a public service to communicate basic information, to debunk fake news, especially in times of social crises such as HIV/AIDS and Coronavirus”. He added that they shine a light on the basic health guidelines but also stand up to criticise the excesses of state regulations where they hurt livelihoods needlessly or government promises that are “difficult to access”. When a cartoonist has a readily recognisable style — such as these four, Maddo, Osun and Spire — they are trusted voices. One cartoon from them, published as public art in murals or on billboards, with the right information on public health or security, increases compliance.

Gado explained that drawing in these situations is “different from the practice of policing authoritarian regimes or ridiculing the failures of the state ... serving both demands is heightened in times of crises”. Speaking of Kenya’s 2007-2008 election violence, he says, “For the first time I really felt weighed down by my responsibilities” (2012:1).

The other reasons cartoonists explore alternative spaces are their personal safety, their growth in professional and economic terms, as happened with Gado in November 2015, when, on the back of pressure from both the Tanzanian and the Kenyan governments, the *Daily Nation* did not renew his contract.

When they call out the failings of public figures, the wrath of cartoonists is expressed in scathing drawings. In response to these, the wrath of the authorities is expressed in angry complaints to newspaper editors, punitive laws to choke freedom of expression and lawsuits. The wrath of the public, many hiding behind pen names, is channelled in direct communication to the cartoonists, mostly fast and hot on social media, much of it filled with *ad hominem* abuse. In particular, furious politicians, offended that a cartoon has distorted the beauty of their faces or reputation, call the cartoonist on the phone to hurl their anger.

As thought-catalysts, cartoonists provoke and they goad. Looking at the political climate in East Africa, Gado confesses that he finds Tanzania to be “the most sensitive about criticism of either its president, ... the country or its institutions” (2012:105). Rwanda, given its history with inflammatory broadcast media that

aided a genocide, makes him “think twice”. The “lanky Rwandese President Paul Kagame, who is lovely to draw by the way ... is not a fan of criticism and is quite paranoid about the media” (ibid).

Sycophants will always run to aid politicians whenever they feel a cartoon depicts their men or women in poor light. However, the one subject that draws the wrath of the public in ways that still surprise Gado is religion. His 17 June 2008 cartoon (Figure 18) stirred both the public and religious leaders in ways “which have not made my relationship with my editors any easier” (ibid).



Fig. 17

Gado’s January 2015 cartoon (Figure 8) of a half-naked President Kikwete at a massage parlour led to the closure of *The EastAfrican’s* offices in Dar es Salaam. The official version was that the paper did not have the correct registration documents. This incident draws our attention to the variety of laws that can be used to stifle press freedom. In 2013, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) “identified 17 repressive provisions in Tanzanian law”, any of which could be used to ban newspapers and thereby shut down publication avenues for

cartoonists and journalists alike.<sup>27</sup> Two years ago, in Rwanda, the government made amendments to the penal code that essentially criminalised freedom of expression.

*Any writings or cartoons that “humiliate” lawmakers, cabinet members, or security officers will be dubbed an offence and could attract two years in prison or a fine of up to one million Rwandan francs (\$1,152). Any person who defames the president could also be jailed between five and seven years and fined 7 million francs. Editing images or statements “in bad faith” without stating it wasn’t the original version could also draw up to two million francs and a prison sentence of not more than one year.<sup>28</sup>*

In such an environment, it becomes difficult for cartoonists to lampoon public officials.

In a chapter titled *Kenyan Cartoons and Censorship*, Patrick Gathara, a journalist and cartoonist, says,

*Kenyan cartoonists see the focus of their art as regulating the behaviour of political leaders and ... they have largely succeeded in their goal of bringing these leaders down to a level where they can be viewed as normal human beings who make mistakes (2018:99).*

*No matter how prickled the Moi regime was by the newspapers, Gathara observes, cartoonists were never among the number whenever publications were “proscribed or sued, editors and journalists imprisoned” (2018:101).*

As the democratic space expanded in the new millennium, the state changed its silencing tactics to withdrawing advertising. Defamation suits are financially draining, so the mere threat of them is a powerful deterrent for a business and for a cartoonist. Threats of deregistration by the Media Council of Kenya also leave establishments cowering and lead to hasty apologies when one is said to have crossed the line over issues of religion, public decency and taste.

Working for a media house, one must be aware of the religious inclinations of its owners. Gathara found himself in the headwinds of the Nation Media Group, accused of being “anti-Muslim”, when the *Daily Nation* published his cartoon showing “the opposition leader as a suicide bomber shouting ‘Uhuru Akbar’” (2018:105).

In the period when he worked at the *Daily Nation* standing in for Gado, who had been sent on sabbatical leave following his infamous President Kikwete cartoon, Gathara found that “the greatest impediment to the work of Kenyan cartoonists today remains editorial self-censorship by the newspapers” (2018:106). This kind of tiptoeing coupled with the array of regulations and legislation for the media industry create in the newsroom an untenable atmosphere of self-censorship for the cartoonist.

Sometimes what cartoonists struggle with is not the censure of the authorities but rather the silencing from their own conscience. Sudan’s Alaa Satir, who trained as an architect at the University of Khartoum, avers that “cartoonists are not anarchists.” Following the revolution which finally deposed President Omar al-Bashir in September 2019, Satir says:

*There are hardly any cartoons criticising government because we do know that it is a transitional government, so we are just trying to be patient and trying to support the kind of government that we fought hard for to be in power ... we are trying to give them the benefit of the doubt.*<sup>29</sup>

Her perspective of the impact of cartoonists, and other visual artists, in building public consensus comes from what she witnessed then.

*We never really realised how much these kind of cartoons that we do or these murals that were in the streets kind of frightens them [the authorities] until the revolution happened and they were wiping out everyone’s work; they were trying to erase any sign of protest, even if it was like a small drawing or a cartoon. So, that gives you perspective on how powerful these kinds of things are and how they are afraid of that happening (ibid).*



Fig. 18



Fig. 19: Translation by Satir: "A Woman's Place is in the resistance", mural in Burri, Khartoum, Sudan.



Fig. 20

Satir creates a great deal of public art, on murals, and also exhibits on Instagram using the handle *alaasatir*. She is also a member of Cartooning for Peace, a network of 203 artists spread over 67 countries. When artists like Satir choose to blow punches on political leaders, they turn to other social justice issues, like women's rights (Figure 21). Sometimes, Satir conflates the issues brilliantly, as is evident in the mural in Burri (Figure 20).

*I translated [a famous saying] into Sudanese Arabic because, for me, it perfectly describes how we were fighting two systems at once. It was a fight that started way before the recent political uprising where we just struggled on a daily basis to be heard and included in a society that has very limited roles for us.<sup>30</sup>*

Like other artists, when Satir suppresses satire, she falls back on silly gags for comic laughter, but they nonetheless imprint the key messages in her drawings favourably in the minds of audiences. In terms of technique, she says, “Black and white is still my main palette ... I love my work to be simple and sometimes right to the point, and I feel like black and white helps me with that”. Her other focus is more on “pattern and textures than colours and I feel it goes better with my style” (ibid).

Shapiro is quick to underline to all up-coming cartoonists the dictates of their craft. “You are not out to get belly laughs only. You’re out to actually really say what you believe and that will get you into trouble sometimes, under any circumstances”.<sup>31</sup> Isabirye argues that the arrest and harassment of journalists in Uganda never extend to editorial cartoonists. In his view, it is the layers of meaning in their work, the loaded ambiguities, double-entendres and allegories that provide a cover for plausible deniability.<sup>32</sup>

While the words of journalists in columns need to be direct and forthright in both tone and wording, cartoonists can be playful and literary in ways that escape the attention of the higher-ups. Ironically, with little use for words, their drawings cross the barrier of language and literacy in one leap to present a bigger public than writers. Isabirye also points to the time-lag in bureaucracies. By the time the Uganda Communications Commission was moving in to formalise legislation for the approval of online media, it was eight years late! Online platforms took off with an alacrity that proves creatives will fashion and employ tools and spaces that regimes are not even aware of.

A stifling atmosphere in the press often triggers the emergence of alternative publications. In the words of Jonathan Guyer, the “limits, counterintuitively, animate creative dissent.”<sup>33</sup>

## Satire Rises High

The work of Paul Kelemba, aka Maddo, represents a significant shift in the traditional ways that East African newspapers carried cartoons, as a single editorial panel or as a gag comic strip. As if to pay homage to Hilary Ng’weno’s

*Weekly Review* magazine,<sup>34</sup> Maddo's weekly *It's a Madd World* panel comments on anything and everything around the world, a summary of news, views, and history.

Additionally, it features funeral tributes, shout-outs and personal dialogues with friends and family on their memorable occasions. His panel not only illustrates the characters and scenarios of the mad world we live in; it also gives us a visual representation of chaos, unpredictability, and assaults on the senses from daily occurrences. Maddo is visualising the idea of no order — in politics, in social life, in the moral economy. It is like looking at the precarious high-rise apartments of urban Kenya, complete with illegal densification!

As I argue elsewhere, “the relationship between cultural forms and places is symbiotic for places help to shape cultural forms, while cultural forms are in turn crucial in mediating our understanding of space and places” (2007:73). Veering away from the defined grid system and sequence of the strip cartoons of our childhood, this weekly panel is a collage of scenarios, with a burst of colours used to bring to life Maddo's witty take on the events happening the world over.

Maddo's career started in 1981 at the *Coastweek*, under the tutelage of Adrian Grimwood, who tasked him with producing a Modesty Blaise kind of comic strip. In those days, his penname was *Mapolomoko*, a caricature of the onomatopoeic Kiswahili word for *landslide*. Over time he took Brian Tetley's advice and settled on a short, memorable penname. *It's a Madd World* grew eight years later from a challenge thrown at Maddo by two editors, Sean Egan and John Lawrence. They wanted him to “produce a composite cartoon strip that would be very different from the daily editorial cartoon” (Maddo, 2012:8). Fellow cartoonist Frank Odoi said that Maddo “turned the composite cartoon into a complete graphic feature column”, which first appeared in 1989 in the *Daily Nation* as a 9 cm deep strip across three tabloid columns (ibid: 7). Maddo explains that, despite the big leap in technology to aid the visual artist, which he does use, he is still attached to his pencils and sketch notebook. He uses software to fill in the colour and text, taking care to choose fonts that will invoke ease and play to aid comic wit. His warning to younger artists is that “overuse of computer programmes can render an artist's work artificial and without life” (ibid, 9).

While this position might suggest Maddo is reluctant to embrace new methods, that is not the case. In 1989, when *Kenya Times* became the first local paper to release a full-colour copy of their newspaper, Maddo looked on, with envy, from his perch at the *Daily Nation*, recalling his roots as a comic book artist who always worked with colour.<sup>35</sup>



**Kenya's Market World**  
 Nairobi, Saturday 25 July 2020

**YOU WAKE UP AND WONDER WHY WILLIAM RUTO RANTS SO MUCH. IF IT WEDES YOU, WHAT WOULD YOU DO??**

**Goodmorning in Karen!**

■ This is for conspiracy theorists: Late '30s and early '90s they said they had never seen an HIV/AIDS victim. Then they heard of a dude they kind of knew who got it, then of a colleague, then a relative ... and then they themselves. Before they knew it, they were dead.

■ Uthuru is like Karen now ... He will make (or not make) appointments just to annoy you. Some of the 24 lawyers he has conferred the title of senior counsel upon have integrity issues - the same charge he's putting across for not confirming the 4 judges offered by JSC

**Special Feature**

Some airlines simply won't survive the ravages of this virus. Even rich ones have a bad cough. Aircraft makers are reeling as well.

Hostened by Covid-19 manufacture of the Airbus A380 has crashed to an end after just 13 years (the bulky fruit fly will fly on into the 2030s though). Boeing's 747 is retiring honourably after 51 years (the last major carriers, BA and KLM, are shedding the former queen of the skies, but she'll haul freight into the 2040s).

Way back in the early 2000s we somehow knew that the massive A380 didn't have a future as flying focused on long range, fuel sipping 777 and 787 twinners rivaled today by the also highly efficient A330 and A350).

● Airbus queen can't be repurposed for cargo either: she's too clumsy to load and, akin to European SUVs, has an almost non-existent second hand market.

**WHAT'S THE SECRET OF YOUR YOUTH?**

**RETIRING THE MIGHTY BIRDS**

The majestic A380 has eluded me, but I've done the 747 dozens of times - including being committled in that famous hump. We'll miss the passenger service, but that distinct whine of four Rolls Royce turbines approaching JKIA over Mombasa Road will still be heard from the converted freighters for years.

**HIYO NDO FOKKED?**

**Air Pirates**

Elsewhere in Africa, a previously privatised airline is desperately trying to get nationalised to avert disaster. It's been bled - as successive governments watched...

**Kenyans behaving madly**

● But let's give it to the bulbous A380... she does have her elegance. And you are living history right now; there shall be no other like her. Ever.

CULTURAL GIGGS: SANDRINE TERRESSI IS MOVING FROM HER RAIPOR STATION FOR A NEW POSTING. THIS COLUMN, HANGS, FLORA, BEA, CHLOE, TABU - BANG WHO ARE ALL THE BEST IN HER NEW ASPIRATIONS.

**HIYO INA LAND KUTOKA LAGOS NI YA MINE. HOW MUCH DO I COME TO COLLECT? WAS IT FULL?**

...The bosses see up offshore outfits to sell or lease aircraft to their employer at higher prices than what it cost regional competitors for planes of the same type. The carrier morphed into a 'sacco' with individuals controlling aircraft units. Return to parastatal status won't aid much with the same cabal of super thieves setting up SPVs to 'facilitate' the latest first class flight.

**Dominic Odipo Medical Fund**

Now, this is a decent and virtuous journalist who has contributed immensely to positive change in our society. Struck in his prime by a stroke, he needs us. You can help lessen the cost of his surgery by sending a donation via **Mpesa Paybill 720707 Acc. No. 127-208-0730**

**Charles Bukoko**

*This hearty giant with a big laugh was so good that the Heavens must have withdrawn his performing license for review. He's probably one of those who are released back into this world in their thousands to make it a better place. Rest, Papa.*

Caricature: Louis Aloia

kenyemba@gmail.com • Facebook/kesamaddworld • Twitter @kesamaddworld • Instagram kes\_maddworld

Fig. 21

“The world has always existed in full colour, it is us cartoonists who forced black and white representation of life on our audiences.”<sup>36</sup> Editorial cartoons are a daily event. That did not leave the cartoonist with much time to think, sketch and paint, until the advent of computer software such as Photoshop and Illustrator.

Both Maddo and Gado still prefer to paint their colours in, by hand. Given the amount of work that this takes — “it’s double the labour” — initially, Maddo would only use colour for special occasions such as the Christmas pull-out. He was convinced though that cartoons needed to evolve and embrace colour. The biggest pushback came from readers who told him that colour cartoons “look fake”. Maddo salutes Wachira Waruru, the editor at *The Standard*, who urged him to use colour daily for the editorial cartoon. Now, it “feels like I have done a skeleton when I use black and white”, he says, laughing at Gado whom he describes as “a traditionalist”.

Gado confesses that he does struggle with colour, prefers to do it by hand, but it is “labour intensive. “It slows me down as I work on the characters twice; it’s clumsy and not as neat as black and white.”<sup>37</sup>

As one who works to protect the underdog, Maddo enjoys imagining novel ways of representing power, which he says is, in any case, embodied in symbols such as motorcades. Even then, sketching the body to carry power is an art. At present, his favourite exercise is imbuing the body of President Uhuru Kenyatta with the contempt that he carries for the media — flared nostrils puffing anger, bulging, red, eyes signalling many things. Fortunately, as he says in his book, “At my age, I have long learnt how to sting but stay in the safe margins” (2012:9).

When it comes to safe margins and avoiding the wrath of the offended, Gado plays differently. While women and children are subjects he says he tries to handle “with kid gloves”, everything else can be ridiculed, “powerful international institutions such as the IMF and even Kibaki’s hands-off approach to power”.<sup>38</sup>

“With Kibaki I tend to use soft lines to depict his lazy demeanour. For Raila, I apply sharper, straight lines to mimic his hyperactive behaviour and approach to politics” (2012, 247).

In the Moi era, in the best tradition of allegorical African folklore, Gado launched a cast of animals to represent the East African elite and particularly, “the corrupt class: a fat cat, a pig, a crocodile, a hyena, and sometimes a vulture” (ibid: 131). In this way, he was able to side-step the flurry of demand letters from lawyers tasked to follow him up for implicating them in corruption scandals covered

elsewhere in the paper. Gado did not just use the animals; he gave them grotesque proportions to capture how alienating and out of the ordinary corruption is, how outlandishly the corrupt behave.

To draw people as animals is to degrade them because their behaviour is disgraceful. But no matter how much Gado distorted the animals to achieve these stated effects, there was always someone complaining about unfair depiction. At some point, a senior editor told him that State House had called because they had recognised the people Gado had drawn as animals, so could he consider finding a new cast of animals!

But readers loved Gado's animals and he avers that, "for me to 'kill' my grotesque animals", there will have to be a significant change in the mindset and culture in our societies (131). Recently, he captured the broken promises of the newly sworn-in President of Malawi, Lazarus Chakwera by drawing him as a snake breaking out of its old skin. Quite a stinging Biblical allusion, if you consider that Chakwera, a Christian theologian, led the Assemblies of God for 24 years!

The "little guy" is Gado's other powerful element of disguise, sneaky and radical in his ideas. Gado credits this idea to American cartoonist Pat Oliphant, who used a penguin throughout his long career to sum up an argument. Some readers call Gado's character "the rat"; others, "the animal". Gado thinks of him as an alter-ego who always finds an alternative view, saying what no-one else might say, "adding salt to wounds". Sometimes he says nothing, but the way he stands, as if ready to leap and with strokes like flying sweat above his head, shows how astounded he is.

I asked Gado why he tucks "the little guy" in the corner. "To say the things that the editor will not notice. A speech balloon would be too obvious, so in the cartoon I must find somewhere to hide. He is my escape; I have used him to get away with a lot of things".

It is worth noting that the way in which a speech bubble, is drawn communicates meaning. They can be large and carry just three words, to signal the disproportion in an issue. They can be loaded with information, too dense to decode, to obscure or to overload a character with vice. The speech balloon is the first thing that many readers look at, to grab the message of the cartoon. Every word counts and can be easily discounted, hence Gado's technique of disguising his sting in the corner, with the "little guy".

In 2009, under the newly registered Buni Media, Gado and Maddo expanded

their craft from two-dimensional editorial cartoons to a three-dimensional audio-visual editorial puppet show for television, to capture the 12 to 25 years of age segment, many of whom lay outside the newspaper-reading audience.

Their *XYZ Show*, which launched in May 2009, was inspired by Britain's *Spitting Image* and *Les Guignols de l'Info* created in France. These shows are satire that use latex puppets in a mock newscast that analyses recent social and political developments. The puppets draw their humour from the disproportion of the puppet, especially the big heads to capture arrogance and intransigence, and the voices which imitate, with stunning vocal accuracy, well-known figures saying ridiculous things.

Some people have wondered why the *XYZ Show* did not emerge with the return to multi-partyism in 1992, or soon thereafter, when the *Redykyulass* trio broke through.<sup>39</sup> Coming out of single-party politics, so much else remained trapped in that era's culture of scarcity and lack of choice, that perhaps only one new way of satirising the leadership could emerge and thrive. Additionally, commercial TV stations, newly launched by the liberalisation of the airwaves, were still struggling to find a business model that would work for them and for independent producers.

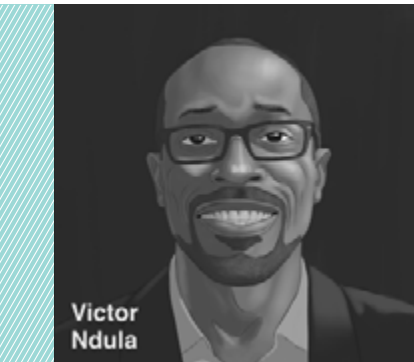
*Redykyulass* performed stand-up comedy, imitating President Moi and his court of yes-men, like JJ Kamotho. With a heavy reliance on ethnic stereotypes, they put Moi in improbable situations, dancing *ndombolo* for one, and thereby deflated the mystique of his limitless power. Immediate acclaim thrust *Redykyulass* from performing on the margins of the half-time interlude during rugby matches in Nairobi to centre stage on national television.

*The three young men's political satire was a particularly radical intervention against the backdrop of the geriatric tone of state power in Kenyan politics, as well as the mobilisation of ... familial Afro-cultural iconography in maintaining the status quo through ideas of respecting the elders and leaders (historically synonymous categories in Kenyan politics) ... [Redykyulass] unmasks the façade of dignity in which power masquerades (Musila, 2010: 284-5).*

*Redykyulass* opened the public to what was possible in audio-visual mimicry and, by the time of Kibaki's entry to power at the start of 2003, followed hotly by turbulence in the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC), Gado and Maddo knew the kind of satire they wanted to develop. In early 2003,<sup>40</sup> Gado got Gerald Olewe, a sculptor, to make some rubber puppets that he started experimenting with. When Alliance Francaise, Nairobi (the French Cultural Centre) sent Gado and a

group of artists to France to perform and exhibit, Gado visited the *Les Guignols* studios and immediately latched onto the idea of using latex, rather than the inflexible rubber, to make his puppets. It was not difficult to persuade Alliance to sponsor Olewe to France the following year, to learn the craft of latex puppets from the gurus at Les Guignols. Olewe returned after a month with skills and with one puppet, of Kibaki, which Maddo describes as “still the best one we have” (see Figure 23).

To make the pilot of the show, in 2004, Gado got free studio-time from Myke Rabar of Homeboyz, a leading entertainment agency in Nairobi, and asked fellow cartoonist, Victor Ndula, to throw in some animation. Moving beyond this point became a journey of hope, despair, and hope again. Gado’s employer at the time, Nation Media Group, liked the idea but frowned at the budget. Gado was determined to have editorial control of *XYZ*, but how was he going to source funding and retain editorial control? He needed to look beyond broadcasters, so he went to the big-time donors. The Ford Foundation liked the idea, but it did not gel with its programmatic focus. Others found it too risky a venture, worried about the political climate. The idea was on ice for another three years.



In 2007, Marie Lora, a French journalist, watched the pilot and came back to Gado the following year with a proposal to support him in finding funding on the condition that she be taken on as the producer of the show. The big breakthrough came late in 2008 when Gado found Dr Willy Mutunga and me at the Ford Foundation.<sup>41</sup> We listened, debated the cost, and offered to host a donor’s roundtable where Gado and Marie would make their pitch. The Ford Foundation was ready to commit \$100 000 to contribute to the making of at least ten new puppets; for apprentice and staff training; administration and core costs; production and transmission of one season of the show.

The question of editorial control came up with one of the donors at the table. Gado stood his ground: only he would make that call. Gado left that meeting with commitment from two other donors, apart from the Ford Foundation.

Taking the risk on Buni Media was easy, a pleasurable grant to recommend and supervise. Gado and Maddo had a record of achievements and many experiences of failure, for instance, *Africa Illustrated* and *Penknife Weekly*, and they were not quitters. They were rooted in the local economy and, as the kings of satirising

graft, they were not about to run out of town with donor money. Equally important, they respected the role of other professionals — accountants, writers, make-up artists, everyone — and they knew that the secret to the success of this project was teamwork, mentoring others to implement their ideas, and growing the concept beyond their own strengths as satirists.

Gado dreamt big and bold and was the front face of the project. Maddo did the paperwork in the background and cracked the whip on deadlines. When they started the work of making the puppets locally, they ran into many problems. They could not find an engineer who could make the eye mechanism and the kilns were old, dated technology hardly suitable for latex. During the one-year hiatus between the end of Season 1 and the start of Season 2, they improved their craft and even learnt how to disguise some puppets to represent more than one character, among numerous other improvisations.



Fig. 22

Season 1, which comprised 13 episodes, aired on the commercial broadcaster Citizen TV (Royal Media Services). The support of the Group Managing Director, Wachira Waruru, was immense. He fielded calls from angry politicians and handlers, absorbed the backlash and kept the show on air, with a prime-time weekend slot.

In its first season, the *XYZ Show* contributed to popularising local debates on curbing impunity and exposing high-level corruption. It expanded press

freedom and succeeded in building new relationships by engaging commercial broadcasters in ways that safeguarded the editorial freedom of independent producers.

The funding base grew beyond the original four, which include Alliance Francaise, which laid so much of the original groundwork. Between 2009 and 2011, Buni Media got support amounting to \$750 000 from the Ford Foundation, which took great pride in the growth of Buni Media. Within two years, their staff grew from a team of 30 to 65, most of whom benefitted from training. New talent came on board to improve the voices, handle costumes and make-up, and to develop and manage web distribution platforms. In 2019, the *XYZ Show* was on to Season 13!



Fig. 23

In its heyday, it had a following of more than 10 million people on television, radio, city buses, and its various digital platforms (official website, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter). It received coverage from CNN, the BBC, Al Jazeera, Variety Magazine, AP, AFP, Reuters, RFI, *The Guardian*, and many other media outlets worldwide. In 2013, it won Best TV Series at the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards. Most important of all, the *XYZ Show* inspired many African artists. Senegalese music great Youssou N'Dour invited Gado and his team to Dakar in August 2010 to plan a collaboration, eager to make a satirical puppet show "the African way". The idea floundered after N'Dour joined politics the following year.

Spin-offs fared well in Uganda with *The Simimi Show* airing on Urban TV from May 2015 and Nigeria's *Ogas at the Top*, which aired online through Buni TV from 2014. Both had their puppets made by Buni Media and preliminary training for their crews. Surprisingly, Uganda's Reefknot Communications got clearance from the Uganda Communications Commission for *Simimi* even though thoughts of censure and silencing worried the Buni crew.<sup>42</sup> The ways in which Gado and Maddo have influenced media operations and cartooning on the continent are legion.

## The Two-Faced Freedom

Radical shifts in publishing technology over the last 25 years have transformed the way cartoonists work and raised the profile of their work. Newspapers can only publish a very limited number of editorial and strip cartoons, but the talent has always been abundant. In the past, multi-talented artists would abandon cartoons and opt to maximise on another front. Such was the case of David Munyaka, who went off to record pop music in 1970, supplementing that income by working as a commercial painter. Today, the internet absorbs those who cannot find space in newspapers and some who opt out of newspapers to enter the world of webcomics, animation and graphic novels.

Take for example Chief (David) Nyamweya, author of *Emergency* (2010), a fictionalised account of the Mau Mau insurgency published online by *Okay Africa*. In an interview on 9 July 2020, Chief, who was born in October 1985, told me that his art was inspired by the need to fill a cultural gap for a generation that, he feels, grew up with no films or music that spoke of their reality. Worse, they grew up without real knowledge of Kenya's past. In much the same tradition as Terry Hirst and his *Pichadithi* series, this work of producing knowledge about what it means to be a Kenyan with tenable roots, in this century, is what drives Chief, a qualified lawyer and accountant. In *The Art of Unlearning* (2018), a dramatically illustrated guide to creativity, in black and white, Chief shares his experience about what it takes to break from the mould and pursue one's dreams. He draws expansively from ethnic folklore, Western mythology and the biographies of contemporary headliners in various fields (Figure 25 and 26). Chief's wake-up call was the 2007-2008 election violence. Questions about injustice racked his mind, pulled him away from the practice of law and pushed him to repackage the history of Dedan Kimathi and the Mau Mau with enough facts to inspire a new generation of Kenyans.





Fig. 24

Chief has always been drawn to alternative narratives. In 2011, Chief created *Roba*, a superhero story with traces of Maddo's *Miguel Suede*. "We wanted our own Spiderman", he says. This monthly comic strip about a former prisoner turned crime-busting anti-hero who hunts down conmen and cartels was initially published on Facebook. With its huge following, *Roba* was soon syndicated by *The Star* as a daily and grew into a team of writers and four chapters with Chief illustrating.

He values the discipline, timely precision and professionalism that working with *The Star* gave him. His knowledge as a lawyer and accountant helps him safeguard intellectual property and manage finances for the creative team at his Freehand Studios. They are working on Trust.

*It's a transmedia project happening at multiple levels simultaneously. At the lowest level it is a graphic novel sponsored by The Interchain Foundation among many others working in the blockchain space*

... at the highest level it's an animation, a short motion comic that should grow into a feature (ibid, 9 July 2020 interview).

They chose a young Kenyan woman as the character who transforms her community with blockchain technology. Chief sees the artist as the most important voice to safeguard in a community. He explains the artist's relationship with authoritarians thus:

*Putting cartoons and wrath in the same sentence is an oxymoron ... we are not loved because we are difficult to control ... we are free-minded ... we are mild-mannered people, but there is fury, there is fire, but that fire is harnessed down to a pencil tip and it's a beautiful thing that we are mild but the ink has a fury.*



Fig. 25

The growth of webcomics in the region has not stifled the traditional print comic. A recent study of *Shujaaz* comic assessed its impact "on attitudes, norms and behaviours around family planning and income generation" and found that

the analogue version (print pull-out in the *Saturday Nation* and syndicated on FM radio) had an intermediate impact, while the digital webisodes distributed on social media showed higher percentage point increases in behaviour change.<sup>43</sup>

The comic is written in Sheng, the language of Kenya's urbanised youth. Since it started in 2010, *Shujaaz* has provided a critical platform for young Kenyan women to explore their talent as illustrators.<sup>44</sup> Among the team that designed the arresting characters, colour and imagery of *Shujaaz* is Naddya Adhiambo Oluoch-Olunya, an animator who trained at the Sheridan College in Canada. She also led the creation of the Nia Comic for Zana Foundation, advocating social justice issues for young girls. Today, Naddya runs Nalo Studios, where her team created Ngimurok, a virtual reality game.<sup>45</sup> In 2019, *Uzi*, her animated short film, under Sunflower Pictures, about a perfectionist seamstress and her precocious daughter Kpokpo, was one of the ten winning projects to be funded by Digital Lab Africa for development into a full-scale feature.<sup>46</sup>



Fig. 26

The idea that online comics are a standalone feature is disproved again and again by the fluid ways in which they flow into other spaces. The most popular Somali cartoonist lives in Canada and publishes all his work on his website, <http://www.aminarts.com/>. From here, Amin Amir's cartoons are picked up by blogs operated from all over the world, and numerous newspapers in Somalia and civil society, as literature, banners and protest placards. This diffusion gives the term "syndicated

cartoonist” new meaning. Usually, as in Kenya, cartoons move from print editions in one place to online platforms elsewhere, often being aggregated on one, such as the Facebook and Twitter handle Op-Ed Conversations. This aggregation yields new ways of reading; one can grasp the day’s news solely from reading four or five cartoons on the site.

Peter Chonka sees Amir’s cartoons as a part of local media, not as a voice of cyber society, emphasising that “the artist collapses conventional distinctions between diasporic production and local consumption” (2017:350). Through Amir’s cartoons, millions of Somalis in the diaspora make an instant connection to a country thousands of miles away. That connection is a process of the mind and of the heart, a daily ritual that affirms their belonging. Language is key. By having captions and speech bubbles in what Chonka calls “colloquial Somali”, Amir beckons to insiders, calling only the initiated to participate in what Chonka describes as “Ummadda Soomaaliyeed”, the Somali Ummah, “a supranational conceptualisation of shared identity based on a common religion (Islam) and ethnic descent” (355).

Diasporans from everywhere have many moments of yearning for inclusion. Amir feeds that hunger for diasporan Somalis. Home is a place in the mind triggered by little moments like Amir’s cartoons, delivered by technology as the all-powerful link that aids discursive connectivity, in a reversal of Sherry Turkle’s argument in *Alone Together*, which sees the internet as dispersing, creating isolated people, not aggregating them (2012). Since 1991 Somalia has been a nation in and of dispersal, both within and outside of its contested borders. Chonka identifies three broad themes in Amir’s cartoons: “a critique of foreign intervention and the venal politician; critiques of clannism; and a discussion of cultural or religio-political imports in processes of state contestation” (360) (see Figure 27).

Amir is said to be a popular cartoonist because he has “perceived neutrality”, evidenced by this willingness to critique everybody. The number of hits on his site and the reproductions of his cartoons elsewhere confirm that he succeeds in creating a public sphere and building civic engagement (Dahlgreen, 2005). Amir’s role in reconstituting a nation prompts one to paraphrase a line from the film *The Social Network*, which is about the emergence of Facebook: Somalis have lived on farms; they have lived in cities and now, many live online.

What of political memes, the other internet-driven sensation? How do they relate to the traditional world of the editorial cartoon? Are they really the political cartoon of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? (Guyer, 2017). A meme is a creative blending of the day’s political events with elements from unrelated events or popular

culture — music, film, fiction, videogames — using Photoshop-type software. Its pull comes from this witty fusing of what is serious with what is thought to be entertaining or playful, against a background of shared national references. As artful visual commentary, it is fun and quick to absorb in this too-long-didn't-read (TLDR) age, the age of the infodemic, when the satirical column, of the Ng'weno and *Whispers* (Wahome Mutahi) vein has all but withered in the press as the gifted literary satirists find alternatives on the blogosphere!<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 27

But there are two reasons not to get carried away with political memes. First, the internet is a place of surreptitious movements, a good degree of anonymity and bots. Political memes can be designed with the sole intention of framing a politician's position, cracking a joke to get him out of trouble, or pushing a sinister agenda that would otherwise receive a backlash. Invariably, memes generate emotional reactions ranging from mirth to fury.



Fig. 28

One of the most meme-fied figures in Kenyan politics today is President Uhuru Kenyatta (Figure 28 and 29).<sup>48</sup> While this might look like freedom of speech, the meme-ification of Uhuru could also be a political strategy by his communications

team, to soften him, make him likeable, or “with-it”, and sell him to a demography that is too harried to bother with history or facts. Memes are always inside jokes. In Figure 29, the joke about Uhuru’s shirt blunts his 25 March 2020 announcement of a 30-day dusk-to-dawn curfew as part of government measures to curb the Coronavirus. To catch the joke, one has to know about Kenya’s relationship with China as a trading partner, the fact that the country imports building material like tiles used in excess and has outrageous designs that have come to be known as Gikuyu Gothic. And then there is the matter of the government’s heavy borrowing from China for heavily contested projects like the Standard Gauge Railway. Lastly, the fact that the Coronavirus broke out in China, adds to the context of this joke about Uhuru wearing tiles!

Hardly anyone comes forward to claim the authorship of a political meme. They carry no signature, thus indicating that whoever is behind them does not need to earn a living from the public. When they go viral on every social media platform — from Facebook to Twitter to WhatsApp and back again — the only people who seem to earn shillings from the popularity of these political memes are the internet service providers! But there is also political capital to be banked.

Political memes are a force behind another kind of mischief. Gado celebrates the internet as a vehicle for platforms that have lowered the barriers for entry for those who want to be artists. It has also increased the options and income for editorial cartoonists who find more places to sell their work.

*One of the things that actually has always helped me with my contracts with newspapers is when they ... cannot go ahead and publish my drawings, I have every right to publish them online. That also has pretty much helped the environment in the sense that whatever happens your work will be seen by your audience and also picked up by other media houses.<sup>49</sup>*

On the flip side of this internet-driven freedom to distribute is the licence that others take to plagiarise and use one’s work for dubious ends.

“People take our drawings and concoct stuff out of them and post them”, Gado says, complaining about memes, many of which he finds funny, but some of which violate his intellectual property and use his work to attack people unfairly. Since his style is readily recognisable, these mash-ups of his art gain traction, although they are used to propagate fake news. For an editorial cartoonist of repute to have their work furthering the goals of fake news, even inadvertently, defeats their journalistic duty to speak truth to power, “to comfort the afflicted

and afflict the comfortable”, as the famous Chicago humourist, Finley Peter Dunne summarised it.

## The Limits of Satire

Over the last 70 years, the work of cartoonists in the Eastern African region has been driven by two main goals. First, centring what was on the cultural and political margins. Second, marginalising whatever takes up too much space at the centre. Both goals lead cartoons to speak of the reality of the afflicted, whether their oppressors are a dominating colonial force or bloated public figures who forget the call to serve and instead destroy institutions and impoverish their nations or, worse, annihilate their own citizens. Neutrality is important for the editorial cartoonist. Sometimes, insiders like Celeste Wamiru, Naadya Oluoch-Olunya and Alaa Satir teach us how to include those previously left out, women and young people. Other times, it takes a perceived outsider like the Tanzanian Gado working in Kenya or the Canadian-based Amir drawing Somali, someone with geographical detachment, who will be seen to comment fairly, outside the ethnic and clan affiliations that drive political participation in many parts of this region.

The pioneers, rebels and changemakers in this field have changed the way media looks and works; who it reaches, and when it reaches them. Though it is difficult to quantify their contribution to the pro-democracy movement in percentage points, there is no doubt that cartoonists and satirists using other media have added positively to the grammar and content of public discourse. They clarified some issues and lent their audiences new ways of imagining freedom and couching dissent.

The big breakthroughs in cartooning and satire have come in moments of remarkable teamwork aided by daring editors, generous publishers and substantial funding. But has the public's engagement with power really changed? Editorial cartoonists shame; they do not deter. Despite drawing wayward public figures as hideous snakes, pigs, crocodiles, hyenas and vultures, cartoons have not stopped the next person appointed to high office from stealing. Gado admits to a certain amount of defeat when it comes to depicting corruption in particular. “These characters are never brought to justice ... Sometimes when I draw these characters laughing, I literally feel that they are laughing at me” (2012:131).

Cartoonists, even editorial cartoonists, who take as their province the deflation of all excesses, including the follies of the middle class and the ignorance of gullible

folk, are not a one-stop correctional facility. They tell the story of what a society is, they dream of what should be, what could be, and they offer hopes for a more humane society. The leap from dreams to reality is not for the cartoonist to provide alone, not even the illustrative cartoonist who, as we have seen, performs a public service by communicating basic information, especially in times of crisis.

Additionally, while cartoonists are progressive, even radical sometimes, they do have blind spots and so they must not be relied upon to fight every battle for political reform, social change and economic justice. In a symbiotic relationship, their work strengthens and must be amplified by that of other public intellectuals.

Reviewing the growth of satire in this region, it is clear that there is a time-lag between the freeing of democratic space and the emergence of new forms. A political economy of scarcity lingers and growth in technology make the difference in aiding the products that artists can imagine.

Looking at the democratic gains made in Kenya between 1992 and 2010, it seems the problem was not just a shortage of democratic space for free expression and inclusion in decision-making; the problem has always been a deficit of positive values. The problem of the body-politic is the sickness of a low-trust society in which money is a god, knowledge is a certificate, and having whatever you want justifies your crooked means.

Perhaps the profits before people economic system is untenable. Maybe political cartoonists should not be lampooning individual politicians, in any human, animal or other allegorical form; they should be ridiculing values more. And as graphic novelists and animators continue with their work of drawing the histories that will tell posterity what East Africans were about, may they frame those stories to re-engineer values in the present, not just to mirror what there is.

I alluded to the meme as a contested site of free expression. "The imagery of the safety valve has oft been used to describe this sort of pressure drop."<sup>50</sup> As people delight in silly memes of presidents and the newspaper's cartoon of the day, they are easily distracted from more sinister occurrences in the country, the kind that would have the people boil in an uprising. As some have observed, Kenyans laugh when they should be angry, or they never get angry enough to do something about their misrule. Cartoonists must weight their role in acting as a pressure valve.

By now, it seems tritely obvious to say that East Africa is made up of many



elsewheres. From the traditions of marvel comics to West African folklore, Terry Hirst's distillation of the urbanising post-colonial Kenyan, Maddo's localising of Modesty Blaise, Buni's XYZ puppets, Chief's anti-heroes and Naddy's Kpokpo — to name a few — it is clear that whenever we call a cartoon or animation local, we are actually invoking what it has absorbed from external sources and merged with the indigenous. Indeed, the word *indigenous* refers to a very hybrid, somewhat tenuously authentic, reality because we do not go back to our roots to stay there but to mine from them and blend them with other things, to create something new.

Everywhere you look in Eastern Africa, a younger generation of cartoonists identify their predecessors and talk highly of the role they played, directly and indirectly, in nurturing the form and a new generation of artists. Terry Hirst made room for Ghanaian Frank Odoi and Uganda's James Tumusiime of the *Bogi Benda* fame. In Kenya, Maddo nurtured Tanzania's Gado, and together Maddo and Gado inspired and held the door open for Kham (James Kamawira), Victor Ndula, Celeste Wamiru, Ozone (Alphonse Omondi), Gammz (Eric Ngammau) and many others. Organising in bodies like the Association of East African Cartoonists (KATUNI) consolidates a community of practice, allows for reflection, organised mentoring, exhibiting in ways that centre marginal art forms, and fosters a culture of recognition. In December 2013, KATUNI gathered to celebrate Edward Gitau and Terry Hirst in a wonderful moment of the future embracing the past. Paying back and paying forward secures a future full of possibilities. In the words of Celeste Wamiru, "Every day I wake up ... it's never obvious what I will come up with."<sup>51</sup>

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## The Tuner and Tube

A new anchor generation and celebrity presenters have arisen

Joe Ageyo

In the 1970s, if you heard the name “Amin” anywhere in Eastern Africa, it would have been referring to one of two people; a renowned photo and video journalist or a ruthless president who came to be known by the befitting moniker of “Butcher of Uganda”. Yet the two men were usually part of the same story, because much of what became known in the 1970s about former Ugandan president Idi Amin was brought to the world through the camera lenses of the celebrated Kenyan journalist, Mohamed Amin, or Mo, as he became popularly known.

On 25 January 1971, disgruntled troops led by the then Army Commander, Major-General Idi Amin, mutinied and seized key installations around the Ugandan capital Kampala, and the country’s Entebbe International Airport on the Lake Victoria shore. Backed by some 5700 soldiers and 5500 police officers, Amin overthrew the government of President Milton Obote, who was preparing to return to the country from the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore.<sup>1</sup> The coup plotters did what was then emerging as the modus operandi of military uprisings all across the continent: overrunning the studios of the national radio station and announcing the change of guard.

At about 4.30 pm on that day, an unidentified officer went on air on Radio Uganda to announce the change of government, accusing President Obote of ills ranging from corruption to attempting to cause divisions in the army. Later that evening, General Amin himself would address the nation through a similar broadcast, marking the beginning of his eight-year rule and eventful relationship with the media.

At Nairobi's Wilson Airport, foreign correspondents were scrambling to find the next available flight to Kampala, as news of the coup trickled out. However, none of the charter companies would agree to fly into the uncertain airspace just hours after a dramatic coup; until Mohamed Amin showed up. Mo's son Salim Amin recounts how his father got out what he called the "black book" of contacts and made just one phone call that changed everything. He dialled State House Entebbe and asked to speak to General Amin. He introduced himself simply as "Mohamed Amin", making sure to emphasise the last name, which he shared with the new president. The operator on the other side, perhaps convinced that "Mo" was a family member, immediately put him through to General Amin. The name recognition gamble had paid off and, true to his nature, he took full advantage of it.

Mo regaled the new leader with calculated tales of how he desired to go into Uganda to document the General's "triumph" and show it to the world. Salim reports that the General was so fascinated that he not only ordered for Mo's clearance but personally went to the Entebbe International Airport to receive him.<sup>2</sup> Mo thus documented the first few hours of Amin's regime, accompanying him on a triumphant tour of the streets of Kampala and an interview. Mo had stumbled on the lucky charm that would open doors for him for most of Amin's turbulent presidency, even at a time when foreign correspondents were banned from setting foot in the country.

Mo's ability to film video and take still pictures simultaneously afforded him an obvious edge over many of his colleagues, landing him world scoops on many occasions. The irony of Mo's relationship with General Amin was the fact that the President detested Indians, just as much as he hated all foreigners, yet the renowned journalist had Indian roots, his parents having emigrated into Kenya from Punjab in the late 1920s. Indeed, even when Amin announced in 1972 that he had received a dream from God to kick out all Asians living in Uganda, Mo remained one of Amin's closest contacts, even after 50 000 Asians, many of them Ugandan citizens, had been expelled from the country. Still, he was able to capture the horrors of Amin's regime without losing his trust because he published almost all such photographs anonymously.

The storming of the radio studios by the military in Kampala reaffirmed the potency of radio as a tool in the hands of the wielders of state power, a fact that had long been recognised on the continent, even by the colonial governments that had ruled Africa into the first half of the 20th century. Many accounts of the early years of broadcasting in Africa confirm that colonial administrations, which introduced broadcasting to Africa, controlled it and used it largely for

political propaganda.<sup>3</sup> That trend continued, and even intensified in some cases, after independence, with the African governments that took over, maintaining or consolidating imperial power structures. In Kenya, for instance, the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), which was founded by the British colonial administration, was quickly nationalised in 1964, just a year after independence.

The broadcaster, which became the government's mouthpiece, was renamed the Voice of Kenya and placed under the Ministry of Information to ensure greater direct control by the new administration. Radio, which remains the most accessible medium on the continent, thus became a natural and essential tool for disgruntled soldiers such as General Idi Amin, who resorted to changing the fledgling governments through military uprisings. As such, during this period of the 1960s all the way to the late 1980s, radio stations were prized targets for coup makers on the continent, and individual broadcasters were forced to toe the government line in times of peace and kowtow to military edicts whenever soldiers rose to topple existing regimes.

Nine years later, Kenyan broadcaster Leonard Mambo Mbotela was to have his strange encounter with rebelling soldiers. Mbotela is a household name in Kenya. He burst onto the broadcasting scene in the mid-1960s, when journalism was only a small part of the industry. During this period, broadcasters seamlessly switched between relaying a breaking news story from a distant world to talking up the latest release by TP OK Jazz Band or any of the music groups that enthused listeners of the time. Mbotela was therefore among an eclectic generation of broadcasters who gained national – and in some cases, regional – fame, by their ever-present voices on the radio, whatever the genre of information they relayed.



He was thus a natural choice for rebellious junior soldiers, who on Sunday, 1 August 1982, commandeered the studios of the then Voice of Kenya in Nairobi to announce they had taken over the reins of power in Kenya.

Air Force Senior Private Hezekiah Ochuka, regarded as the ringleader of the attempted coup, had personally driven to Mbotela's house in the early hours and bundled the broadcaster into a Land Rover before speeding off to the station. A trembling Mbotela would then break the story, as dictated by the coup makers, that the government of President Daniel arap Moi had been overthrown and the military was now in charge of the country. The mutiny was crushed hours later,



and it again fell to Mbotela to return to the microphone to inform a terrified public that calm had been restored.

Coups and attempted coups served to tighten the grip of the state on broadcasting. In Kenya, the botched takeover ushered in a period of sustained political repression. Journalists were routinely arrested and detained alongside other perceived threats to the government of President Moi. Unusually, Mbotela was promptly transferred to the Presidential Press Unit (PPU), from where he would henceforth only report on presidential events. KBC virtually became an extension of the PPU and any event attended by the President, however inane, was accorded extravagant coverage in the news bulletins. The news bulletins always began with a cleaned-up image of the President, drawn from a collection of photographs from yesteryears, that made him look 20 years younger than his real age.

A small error with any of the presidential news items would lead to an entire news bulletin being restarted and repeated. Each news bulletin ended with a searing commentary ridiculing government critics and heaping praises on the President and his government.

But in addition to the whims and policies of the new rulers of Africa after independence, the broadcasting environment in the first three decades was also being shaped considerably by international politics. While the local scene was dominated by monolithic state-run, state-controlled broadcasters, a slew of international broadcasts also beamed out from Western and Eastern capitals, into the African market via short wave technology.

The scramble by foreign powers for Africa's attention was part of the fierce Cold War propaganda battle that coincided with the first three decades of independence on the continent. Western broadcasters, such as Voice of America, the BBC and Radio Free Europe, traded ideological punches with Radio Moscow, Radio Peking and Radio Yugoslavia, among others, in the East.<sup>4</sup> Radio South Africa also transmitted broadcasts to the rest of the continent and around the world in order to counter anti-apartheid sentiments. The broadcasts, some of which were run by journalists from Eastern African countries, ironically provided first glimpses of what plurality in the broadcast space would look like and set the tone for the liberalisation that was to follow.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked the end of the Cold War and ushered in a new world order as former socialist and communist governments of the former Soviet Union and East and Central Europe disintegrated and Western

democracy gained ascendancy.<sup>5</sup> A wave of political change swept across Africa in the wake of a confluence of internal political agitation and pressure from Western powers, many of which now demanded the introduction or reinstatement of multi-party politics and other forms of freedoms. Liberalisation of the media was seen as a critical part of these reforms and was defined in terms of the licensing of private broadcasters as well as the demand for the transformation of state broadcasters into independent public-service broadcasters.

The Kenya Television Network (KTN) was the first-ever privately owned television station to be licensed in Kenya. It was granted approval in 1989, amid the clamour for a return to political pluralism and greater democratic space. Signs of a change of heart had emerged in the same year when the country's state broadcaster, Voice of Kenya, was renamed the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Further, the organisation was designated as a semi-autonomous state parastatal in place of the government department it had been. It, however, remained domiciled in the Ministry of Information and in the firm grip of the government of President Moi. A second private television station, Stellagraphics Ltd (STV), obtained a licence in July 1990, but did not gain traction as it offered only limited local news coverage.

The licensing of private TV stations heralded the beginning of a golden era in broadcasting in Kenya. KTN in particular was an instant success. It not only changed the way news was formatted but its coverage also brought into the living rooms of Kenyans images that had never before been seen on local television. The station's popularity soared since it "pioneered the screening of news that couldn't be screened on KBC."<sup>6</sup> It gave elaborate coverage of the riots and other dramatic political events that preceded the repeal of the infamous Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution, which had outlawed multi-party politics in the country. Further, the station cut the image of an independent broadcaster by giving voice to the opposition that had been locked out of the state-broadcaster, KBC.

However, KTN also stood out for its contradictions. On the one hand, its news coverage was a veritable alternative to the predictable government propaganda that came from KBC, but on the other its ownership was widely associated with the very elite that controlled the politics of the country, notably President Daniel arap Moi himself and his aide at the time, businessman Joshua Kulei.<sup>7</sup> According to Rose Lukalo-Owino, one of the first news editors at KTN, the journalists had to take great care in ensuring that the station's coverage, while bold, did not rub the two men and their allies up the wrong way. "We were aware of the news environment and the political control, but we wanted to be different from KBC. We started with small things like moving the president's story to position two in

the news rundown ... then to position three and eventually, even out of the news and nothing happened. We were cautious but we kept pushing the envelope.”<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Lukalo would become one of the defining casualties of this delicate balance. At about 9 am on Christmas Day of 1991, just days after the repeal of the infamous Section 2A of the Kenyan constitution, which had outlawed multi-party politics in the country, Lukalo arrived early at the KTN offices, then located in Nairobi’s city centre. Security guards informed her that then Health Minister Mwai Kibaki, who had only three years earlier been demoted from the position of Vice President, was frantically looking for her. When she managed to talk to him at about 10.30 am, he had a bombshell that would shake Kenya’s political scene for months to come. Kibaki was announcing that he had resigned as a minister from Moi’s government and was leaving the ruling party, KANU, to start his own, the Democratic Party (DP). This was a major story that Lukalo had stumbled upon.

Kibaki had fallen out with Moi three years earlier during the controversial queue voting elections of 1988, which were widely criticised around the world. But in his typical non-confrontational style, he had taken his demotion in his stride and bided his time. His resignation was therefore a big deal and the founding of a new political outfit even bigger. Kibaki would now join the ranks of such key opposition figures as Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and Kenneth Matiba, who had fought fiercely for the opening up of the democratic space. Indeed, he would later be accused of opportunism by the opposition since he had, for years, been an ardent critic of the push to restore multi-party politics in Kenya. The story therefore presented Lukalo with tough choices; she knew the political sensitivities of the time but was just as convinced of the magnitude of the story. She hurriedly scrambled a studio crew and got a reporter at the time, Wangu Gachie, to go on air, in a

borrowed jacket, and break the story. Lukalo and KTN had got the scoop of the season. The story aired several times during that day and was eventually picked up by the newspapers and wire services. But on the same day, Lukalo was dismissed from her job for what was termed “insubordination and reporting without consulting authorities” at KTN. Gachie was reprimanded several days later for covering follow-up stories that referred to the contents of Kibaki’s resignation letter, in which the former Vice President accused the ruling KANU party of rigging the 1988 election. The period would give rise to star broadcasters such as Kathleen Openda, Joseph

Warungu and Solomon Mugeru. Catherine Kasavuli, who had been a sensation on KBC, joined the KTN team and together with Njoroge Mwaura, defined a

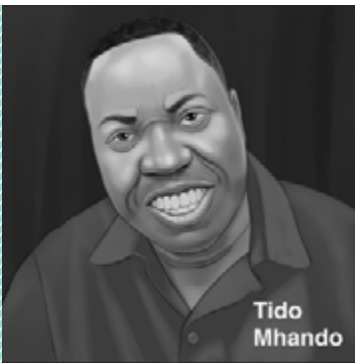


new era of news broadcasting in the country. The vibrant nightly newscasts, backed by passionate young reporters, revolutionised the practice of television journalism in Kenya. According to Linus Kaikai, who began his reporting career at the station, this new crop of broadcasters largely comprised trained journalists and served to transform news “reading” into news “anchoring”.<sup>9</sup> He recalls a number of highly sensitive political events for which KTN gave elaborate coverage. These included rallies held by opposition parties in Nairobi and the frequent Saba Saba (7 July) riots that were staged to push for greater freedoms in Kenya. KTN remained the giant of broadcast news through the first multi-party election in 1992, the disintegration of the opposition, the rise of civil society in the clamour for constitutional reform, and the 1997 Inter-Parties Parliamentary Group (IPPG), which agreed on a minimum reform package ahead of the elections that year. By the time the country was going into the historic 2002 general election that ended the 40-year reign of the independence party, Kanu, KTN was already facing emerging competition from other broadcasting players, which had since been licensed. Younger broadcasters who would make a mark on Kenya’s journalism scene, such as Farida Karoney, currently a Cabinet Minister in Kenya, Linus Kaikai who is the current Director of Strategy at Royal Media Services, Joe Ageyo (the author of this chapter), Alex Chamwada (Founder, Chams Media), Lillian Odera who is now an editor at KTN and many others, all honed their skills at the station.



Despite the copious airtime that President Moi received in the news, especially at the KBC, only a handful of journalists got to interview the now deceased Kenyan leader. Moi had a general mistrust of journalists, especially foreign ones and often complained about being misquoted. His frequent tirades were often directed at journalists whom he collectively and almost pejoratively referred to as *watu wa magazeti*, literally translating to “newspaper people”. So rare were his interviews that every newsroom in the region pulled all stops whenever an opportunity presented itself.

Only two journalists in the region seemed to know how to get the man who ruled Kenya for 24 years to sit down for an interview. One of them was Tanzanian broadcaster Dunstan Tido Mhando, who worked in Kenya at the height of political turbulence in Kenya. He was posted to Kenya in 1985, as the first correspondent of BBC Swahili in the country. The veteran journalist, who is currently heading Azam TV in his home country, is often cited as the first journalist to report on the disappearance and eventual murder of high-flying Kenyan Foreign Minister Dr Robert Ouko, in 1990, and the last one to interview the now-deceased president of the Democratic Republic Congo, Laurent Kabila, before his assassination in 2001.<sup>10</sup> The interviews with Moi, which aired on BBC Swahili, interestingly were granted only after Mhando was transferred to London and often focused on Kenya's turbulent transition from single-party rule to multi-party politics. Mhando recalls that Moi was particularly impressed that he conducted his interviews with him in Kiswahili, which was spoken by many of Moi's supporters and a considerable number of East Africans. Mhando represented a group of journalists from the East African region who dominated the Swahili service of the BBC and gave the network an authentic connection with audiences in the region.



The second journalist who could interview Moi almost at will was veteran Ugandan journalist Shaka Ssali. Shaka is best known for his Straight Talk Africa show on the Voice of America, which was a permanent fixture in many homes in Eastern Africa in the late 1990s and early 2000s. With his signature baritone voice, a somewhat boisterous personality, a stubborn Ugandan accent and keen knowledge of the continent, the holder of a PhD from the University of California chronicled the events of Africa and beamed them back into living rooms across the region. The former soldier, who proudly calls to himself the Kabale Kid, in reference to his roots in the Western



Uganda town of Kabale from where he hails, over the years has interviewed tens of presidents and political leaders in Eastern Africa and beyond.

Shaka recounts how in August 2001, he received a phone call from an old friend who was at the time serving as a senior official in an unnamed African country. The official informed him that he had with him an important news source that Shaka would be interested in. The next voice on the line was that of Colonel

Kizza Besigye, the Ugandan opposition leader who had just escaped from the country following the controversial elections in March of that year. Besigye told Shaka, who wanted an interview, that he was “headed in his direction”. What followed several hours later, was Besigye himself speaking on Straight Talk Africa, sending other international news outlets into a frenzy. Shaka would only refer them to the VOA broadcast and happily so. Shaka says he has never named the African country where Besigye fled to before heading to the United States, owing to diplomatic sensitivities. He eventually settled in South Africa for nearly four years. Even Besigye himself has only given scanty details of how he escaped from Uganda despite the 24-hour lockdown of his residence.

The localisation of international broadcasts, such as those of the VOA and Deutsche Welle, was made possible by a wave of new technologies in the 1990s that changed the broadcasting landscape in considerable ways. The rise of satellite broadcasting, in particular, created new possibilities for international broadcasters that had previously used shortwave to beam their signals into the continent as part of the Cold War propaganda. They quickly gave up their ageing shortwave transmitters and hopped onto the relatively cheaper satellite broadcasting. The developments made it easier for journalists such as Shaka to interact with African audiences. Straight Talk Africa, for instance, was rebroadcast on KBC and several channels in East Africa. Programmes from Radio Deutsche and its television counterpart were also transmitted across the region, featuring such journalists as the legendary Swahili anchor and reporter Oumikheir Hamidou from the Comoros Island, who only retired in 2020 after working for DW for 41 years, Othman Miraji, Martin Mule and other notable names from Eastern Africa.



Further, the wider adoption of FM radio in Africa in the 1990s, dramatically reduced the start-up cost for broadcasters who could now “potentially reach millions of people in their local languages, with a radio signal from a cheap, simple studio with a staff of perhaps only four or five people.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, international broadcasters could now ride on cheaper FM transmitters to set up local broadcasting hubs and reach wider audiences on the continent. The BBC and Radio France International are now local FM stations in East and Central Africa, and their content and personnel increasingly reflect the face of the region.



Recent analyses have also considered the role played by international aid in promoting media plurality in the region. Western donors invariably used the carrot and stick approach, withholding aid on the one hand and providing finance support to the media on the other. A report by USAID suggests that the US spent some \$264 million on media assistance initiatives around the world, between 1985 to 2001.<sup>12</sup> It is not clear how much of this funding was directed to Africa, or indeed Eastern Africa, but considerable donor funding from various countries focused on the development of community radio on the continent. Two premier community radios in East Africa, namely Uganda's Kigadi-Kibaale, which went on air in 1992, and Kenya's Radio Mang'elete, which began broadcasting in 1994, were both funded by the Swedish government.

Radio Okapi in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), unlike many of its predecessors and contemporaries, was not a direct product of the push for pluralist politics and greater democratic space in Africa. Instead, it rose from the ashes of the political turmoil that has engulfed the country since it gained independence in 1960. The radio station was set up through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1201 of 24 February 2000, to support the peace-keeping operation in that country.<sup>13</sup> The decision followed the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in July 1999 between the DRC and five regional states that had been embroiled in a widespread conflict that threatened to dismember the country.

Okapi, named after the endangered zebra-like animal that is native to the DRC, went on air for the first time on 25 February 2002, from its Kinshasa studios, broadcasting to the entire DRC territory. To date, it stands out as an intriguing experiment in the country's complex and highly diverse post-liberalisation media environment. In a departure from the structure of previous such ventures, Radio Okapi was set up as a partnership between the United Nations Organisation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), now known as United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), and the Swiss-based Hironnelle Foundation. The foundation was mandated to oversee the day-to-day operations of the station but under the authority of the Head of MONUC. The station would, however, be free, at least in theory, to set its own news agenda, with its core values stated as "universality, diversity and independence".<sup>14</sup>

Radio Okapi shot to prominence within the first few years of its launch, owing to a nationwide reach and new approach to the coverage of news and current affairs. It made history by relaying live broadcasts from the 19-month long Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) that culminated in the signing of the Sun City Agreement

on 2 April 2003, in South Africa's casino resort of Sun City. The partnership with the Hironnelle Foundation ended in 2014 but Okapi has continued to broadcast under the auspices of MONUSCO. It is one of only a handful of stations able to broadcast to the whole country, relaying programmes in DRC's five major languages, namely, French, Lingala, Swahili, Tshiluba and Kikongo.

In spite of its stated editorial autonomy, the unique nature of Radio Okapi's ownership and funding mechanism inevitably exposes it to the inherent tensions between the UN's public information imperatives and the ethos of independent journalism.<sup>15</sup> The station's editorial policy from time to time runs afoul of its very benefactors. In 2006, for instance, Radio Okapi interviewed former vice-president and warlord Jean-Pierre Bemba after he had lost the elections of that year and had rejected the outcome. Okapi argued that Bemba, who would later go on trial at the International Criminal Court for alleged war crimes, was a key political figure and therefore warranted journalistic attention. But the UN saw him as a destabilising factor and a threat to its own authority in the DRC and did not deserve to be given such a platform. Okapi editors were asked by UN officials to edit or delay broadcasting of Bemba's interview for fear that it would inflame passions in the country. The interview had to be delayed by two weeks.

Further, Okapi has endeavoured to cover even such sensitive subjects as allegations of human rights abuses by DRC military personnel working with UN peacekeepers in the country's conflict zones. And whereas there is no apparent interference with the station's reporting of these alleged violations, it is equally unclear if any internal discussions take place around the coverage.

In addition, this unique model in the midst of a volatile region is constantly in the spotlight, owing to the persistent threat to the safety of journalists. One such journalist who paid the ultimate price was Serge Maheshe. Like many great journalists in the DRC, Serge Maheshe covered the endless civil wars and militia operations in Eastern DRC. He joined Radio Okapi as a journalist in 2003 and quickly rose through the ranks to become the Editor and Head of Station for the province of troubled South Kivu. Serge covered ground-breaking stories in a region where the UN estimates that, in 2005, approximately 45 000 women were raped. But the greater difficulty for journalists like him who tried to find the truth was that nearly all sides were involved in the atrocities, a dilemma that persists to date. In 2007, the UN human rights expert Yakin Erturk, in a report, blamed rebel groups, the armed forces and national police for the sexual violence against women.<sup>16</sup> At around 8 pm, on 13 June 2007, Serge was shot and killed by two men in front the house of a friend he had just visited in Bukavu. He was murdered just as he prepared to get into a waiting UN vehicle. Two friends who



had accompanied him were also wounded in the attack. The 31-year-old rising star who had trained in law at the Catholic University of Bukavu, left behind a wife and two children. To date, the identity of his killers remains one of the many mysteries of the war-torn region of Eastern DRC.



Another journalist at the station, Didace Namujimbo, was killed a year and a half later, in the same city. And “there was little doubt among their colleagues or their national listening audience that both attacks were deliberate assassinations intended to intimidate any local broadcaster who dared to report on corruption, political intrigue, or the continuing violence against civilians by rebels and government forces alike.”<sup>17</sup>

The station has also clashed with the DRC government from time to time over its coverage. In 2012, for instance, its broadcasts were blocked by the government over what was explained as “administrative compliance”. Okapi journalists were, however, quoted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), saying they believed the suspension was in connection with the station’s broadcast of an interview with Jean-Marie Runiga, who was the leader of the M23 rebels that controlled parts of eastern DRC then.<sup>18</sup>

The big question now facing Radio Okapi is its prospects when MONUSCO winds down its operations in December 2021. The impunity with which its journalists have been killed or harassed points to more ominous prospects once the UN cover ends with the expiry of MONUSCO’s mandate.

Like the DRC, Somalia is one of the most active media landscapes in the region and its society ranks among the most media literate in Africa,<sup>19</sup> despite the absence of a functional government for most of the period since the fall of Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. It has been the theatre of some of the most consequential stories in the Eastern African region and, indeed, the world, but it also remains one of the most dangerous places for journalists, both foreign and local.

In recent years, fewer journalists in Eastern Africa have covered the region like Yassin Juma, a former reporter with NTV (Nation TV), who now does freelance work. In September 2006, while working on a special TV series for NTV Kenya, he captured the first few moments of the assassination attempt on the then President of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed, right outside the National Parliament in Baidoa.

Juma was scheduled to interview the President later that day and was scheduled to meet with him in the city, which came to be known as the “city of death”. The attack, which was billed as the first-ever suicide bombing inside Somalia, killed Ahmed’s brother and four of his bodyguards. Juma and his cameraperson Somoe Athman brought home footage of the scene of the bombing and later of the President showing his grazed neck and recounting the narrow escape.

Earlier that year, Juma had been momentarily held hostage together with President Ahmed at the airport in Baidoa over a row with a warlord. At that time, the President was based in the city of Jowhar, the current administrative capital of the Middle Shabelle region. Mogadishu, which was under the control of the Islamic Courts’ Union (ICU), was simply too unsafe to host the TFG, which had been stitched together in neighbouring Kenya, in 2004. On this day, the President had gone to Baidoa to meet with various clan elders and the seven warlords who still held sway in the region. But one of them was apparently disgruntled that he had not received adequate resources from the TFG and staged a daring hostage-taking at the airport when the President was due to leave for Nairobi. Juma recounts that the now-deceased president and his entourage had to pay a hefty ransom before the plane flown by a Russian pilot could depart for Nairobi.

Juma was also present in Somalia on 3 May 2005, when an explosion at a football stadium marred the first visit to Mogadishu by the then Prime Minister of the transitional government, Muhammad Gedi. NTV Kenya video journalist Robert Gichira, who was Juma’s cameraman, recalls the pandemonium that rocked that stadium following the blast that killed at least 15 people and injured more than 50 others. He has vivid memories of how their driver hurtled out of the chaotic stadium with a pistol in one hand and the steering wheel in the other.



The war against the Al-Shabaab extremist group has remained a major story both within Somalia and in neighbouring countries, particularly Kenya. An offshoot of the Islamic Courts Union, Al-Shabaab announced its arrival on the global scene with a daring attack in Mogadishu in which a certain Adam Salam Adam used a car bomb to conduct a suicide attack against Ethiopian soldiers, killing 73 people. It then embarked on territory acquisition and extended its attacks to various parts of Somalia and to Kenya.

On 16 October 2011, Kenyan troops crossed into Somalia in what was dubbed

Operation Linda Nchi (Operation Protect the Country), following a series of kidnappings by Al-Shabaab-linked armed men in Kenya. Just three days earlier, two Spanish aid workers had been abducted from the Daadab refugee camp in a daring raid that alarmed the international community. The abductions came just days after Frenchwoman Marie Dedieu was abducted from her home, and one month after a British man, David Tebbutt, was shot dead and his wife Judith kidnapped in Kiwayu Island on the Lamu archipelago. The Kenyan government argued that the deployment was aimed at creating a buffer zone between Kenya and Somalia in order to prevent Al-Shabaab militants from crossing into the country to launch further attacks.

While this was going to be a big story, the Kenyan media was in unfamiliar territory, having covered only its many internal conflicts, not a full-scale war involving Kenyan troops. The absence of a functional government in Somalia made the situation even more precarious.

The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) embarked on an aggressive media strategy that would involve embedding journalists on the mission. Several meetings were held to “organise” how the media would report on Kenya’s first military excursion into a foreign land. How would the casualties be reported? How would journalists file their stories back to the newsrooms? Would live broadcasting be allowed? Renowned Kenyan broadcast journalists, such as John-Allan Namu, Yassin Juma, Robert Nagila and Dennis Okari, all did their turns in Somalia, under the protective umbrella of KDF. The stories were criticised by observers as sanitised accounts of the events that neither reported the true magnitude of Kenyan casualties, nor asked critical questions about the mission.



John-Allan Namu and videographer Eric Okoth were among a few journalists who witnessed firsthand the capture of the city of Kismayo by KDF and the Somali National Army (SNA) in September 2012.

Kenyan journalists would find themselves in an even more daunting place in 2016, when Al-Shabaab militants mounted a daring raid on a Kenyan army base in El Adde, killing an unknown number of Kenyan soldiers. By this time, the deployment of Kenyan journalists had reduced to a trickle and the camaraderie with KDF had been replaced by suspicion and cynicism. The insecurity in Somalia made it almost unthinkable for journalists, especially from Kenya, to deploy independently. It was therefore virtually impossible to know exactly what

had transpired in the El Adde attack, which to date is considered Kenya's worst military defeat ever. Yassin Juma was arrested a few days after the attack after he posted on Facebook and Twitter that he had confirmation from a credible source that 103 Kenyan soldiers had been killed in the dawn raid. Kenyan officials never divulged the number of casualties but various sources have estimated that between 140 and 200 were killed in the attack. Juma was charged for the offence of "misuse of a telecommunication gadget".

Al-Shabaab has since staged several attacks of varying degrees, such as the 2015 Garissa University raid in which 147 people, most of them students, were killed and the upmarket Nairobi Westgate Mall attack in September 2013. The Westgate attack presented unique challenges for both the government and the media. The media was caught between accurately documenting the unfolding drama and the government's expressed need to manage information as part of the operation that was going on to flush out the terrorists who had laid siege to the building.

Journalists transmitted live images of the security operation, often with caveats about what they could or could not show. And coming as it did in the age of cellphones and social media, the mainstream media was not the only source of information. The government's attempt to manage information backfired when a minister told the nation the much-ridiculed story of burning mattresses in trying to explain the massive explosions that could be heard at various intervals and the billowing smoke. The story of Westgate would feature such young journalists as Dennis Okari, who kept a vigil at the mall and gave compelling accounts of the rescue, as well the nosy pair of John-Allan Namu and Mohamed Ali, who went on to produce a controversial investigative story exposing the apparent involvement of KDF soldiers in looting from a supermarket in the mall during the operation.

Amidst all this, there was a sea change. The big stories of the region have over the years been the preserve of print journalists and traditional broadcasting houses. But now in one fell swoop, the Internet has eliminated that historical advantage of reach that traditional broadcasters enjoyed. A new breed of broadcasters has emerged on the internet and they are changing the rules.

The most notable of these audacious pioneers include Africa Uncensored, founded by now celebrated investigative journalist John-Allan Namu; Chams Media, headed by another veteran Kenyan broadcast journalist and producer, Alex Chamwada, and in more recent times, Debunk Media started by the more youthful Kenyan journalist Asha Mwilu.

Uganda's award-winning journalist Solomon Serwanja is also pioneering a model

that goes beyond story generation to encourage cooperation between individual journalists to execute big investigative projects.

These new models are largely a response to the shortcomings of the traditional broadcast platforms that are no longer entirely fit for purpose. Namu co-founded Africa Uncensored in 2015 and has so far executed ground-breaking investigative stories that have regional implications. In 2019, Africa Uncensored produced a three-part documentary titled *The Profiteers*, which exposed how certain members of South Sudan's political elite were profiting from the civil war and taking their investments to other East African countries, such as Kenya.

The documentary, which local stations such as KTN News declined to air owing to political sensitivities, showed how well-connected individuals in South Sudan moved their funds and acquired weapons with support from the military, business people, and even financial institutions, to cover their trails.

Chamwada contends that mainstream media are bogged down by the perennial rat race of keeping up with the latest breaking news. "They are unable to undertake Day Two journalism where one has enough time and can plan to do well-researched stories without the pressure of tight deadlines."<sup>20</sup> Chamwada has cut a niche in featuring Kenyans and other East Africans living abroad. He has covered the stories of the troubles and triumphs of East Africans in the US, Europe and Canada. Closer home, he has documented the stories of Kenyan teachers in places like Botswana and Rwanda. With creative partnerships with airlines, he has managed to travel to many corners of the world and distributed his content to local TV channels, such as NTV and KTN News.



Asha Mwilu's *Debunk Media*, which launched in the second quarter of 2020, describes itself as "a pioneer digital media platform in Africa, bringing together journalists, data scientists, filmmakers, illustrators and animators through the art of story-telling to make sense of issues that affect us all."<sup>21</sup> The company, whose content is primarily web-based, is seeking to mainstream data in its journalism, as well as non-conventional story-telling tools such as animation, to widen its public appeal. The company's launch coincided with the crisis of Covid-19 and most of its stories have employed data to make sense of the science of the disease and its various impacts on society.

The success of these self-employed entrepreneur journalists, at least in the short term, has, however, elevated their relevance in the information market. While traditional media initially ignored them, there is now a converging view that these smaller outfits can be partners rather than competitors. Linus Kaikai, who is the Director of Strategy and Innovation at Royal Media Services, the largest broadcast media house in East Africa, says these pioneering journalists have seen more value in becoming channels rather than working for channels and will be a continuing threat to the dominance of traditional broadcasters. He proposes a partnership model or “duality where these emerging content creators are present both online and on the big screen”.<sup>22</sup>

Africa Uncensored, for instance, has supplied content to such mainstream outlets as KTN News, owned by Kenya’s oldest media house, The Standard Group, as well international channels such as Al Jazeera and Maisha Magic on the digital satellite platform, DSTV. Chams Media has also piloted a number of its products on mainstream media. Its two flagship weekly shows, Daring Abroad and the Chamwada Report, have aired on KTN News and NTV at different points since 2015. The company also periodically produces ad hoc current affairs documentaries that air on local channels.

These media experiments are barely ten years old and their long-term survival remains a subject of ongoing analysis and, in some instances, even scepticism. But they are part of a changing landscape that keeps begging the open question of what all this would have meant for the legendary scoops that defined the career of notable journalists of yesteryear, like the great Mo.

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## And Along Came Covid-19

The storm that knocked journalism off its feet

Rita Nyaga

Mutuma Mathiu is the sardonic editorial director of the Nairobi-headquartered regional media house Nation Media Group (NMG), the second-largest publicly listed media company in Africa after South Africa's Naspers. He was appointed to the job in January 2019, at a time when the mainstream media in Kenya, like almost everywhere in Africa and the world, was continuing to come under pressure. In 2019, NMG posted a 21% fall in pre-tax profit,<sup>1</sup> the fourth year in a row of a profit slump after a long run of big earnings for nearly two decades.

Mutuma had a battle plan, which included a redesign of most of the group's titles in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. In February 2020, it all unravelled when the Covid-19 pandemic happened. He did not see it coming, and it was the last thing he wanted. He was not alone.

Operating in countries seeing some of the highest economic growth rates in the world, but also struggling with the challenges of exploding populations, conflict, food insecurity, and poverty, African media had already been roiled by the technology revolution. Many had taken time to pivot to digital media because their operations are tied not only to technology, but primary supplies like electricity and internet networks, all of which are still in short supply on the continent.

Amidst the gradual development of such infrastructure, though, they also have to contend with new threats brought by climate change that have impacted especially print media. Flooding has in recent years affected Sahel, Southern African, and Eastern African. In East Africa, 2020 saw the worst floods in 40



years,<sup>2</sup> affecting Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Roads for distributing newspapers and outlets where broadcast news was consumed — and made — have disappeared or being extensively damaged.

It was the worst possible time for the coronavirus pandemic that swamped the world at the start of 2020. In a business built on going out to get the story, journalists had to stay and work from home. The safety and access for journalists became an issue in ways it has not been for a long time.

The pain was immediate everywhere in Eastern Africa. “The press in Mauritius is one of the oldest in the Southern Hemisphere having been in operation since 1773”, said *L’Eco Austral* News Editor Jean-Michel Durand,<sup>3</sup> “but Covid-19 threw even countries with such long media traditions into a tailspin.”

One of the least corrupt and democratic states on the continent, the Mauritian government restricted movement. Journalists had to apply for and get a special permit. Press cards were not recognised.

In countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Sudan, where journalists were designated as essential workers, allowing their press cards to get them past roadblocks and into some restricted places, they could move without being hindered by lockdown and curfew rules, but they had little else, apart from often brutal treatment of curfew breakers by security forces, to cover as people sheltered from the virus. Only one story ruled supreme, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Media houses gave excess attention to all topics related to the pandemic and updates were reported promptly, but it came at a price: many people tuned out the gloomy news. Additionally, because early state responses to the pandemic were chaotic, access was not always granted to the media to places where they see the virus’s impact.

“With permission from local authorities, I was allowed to visit an isolation centre”, said Mwahib Abdalatif, Editor with Sudan Olayat Khartoum TV.<sup>4</sup> However, such access also raised health concerns for journalists.

In Eastern Africa, the region with the world’s youngest population, the pandemic was a boon for telecommunication companies like Safaricom, Airtel, and Vodacom, as demand for their services and news alerts soared during the lockdown. With some of the most reliable internet connections on the continent, consumption of online news grew in Kenya. It presented an opportunity for those who were crazy enough to gamble. They were desperate

times. With distribution disrupted by the lockdown and as many people stopped buying newspapers, fearing they were spreading coronavirus, Mutuma says<sup>5</sup> he decided he would sell subscriptions of the *Daily Nation* in the suburb where he lives.

He donned an NMG vendor's coat and went knocking on doors. Many of the people knew him, but they were more likely to give him tea than buy a subscription. After many days of toil, he had sold only one subscription, to a woman who is a government scientist. After a month, she cancelled the subscription. He went to find out what had happened. She said she knew the science about the virus but had a problem in her house she could not overcome. Her elderly parents had moved in to shelter with her during the pandemic, as she wanted them close, and they were afraid of newspapers. She also did not want to take a chance. If the writing for print media had been on the wall before, it was now writ large for Mutuma.

In what was an extraordinary move, he and Churchill Otieno, NMG Head of Development and Learning, who leads on the group's digital content, in the midst of the pandemic led a charge by NMG to transform into a fully digital brand, a move the company had been taking in baby steps for nearly 17 years. In September 2020, it re-launched its *Daily Nation* as an Africa portal Nation Africa, deployed a registration system, and as the year ended, a paywall.

"We sneaked the paywall toward midnight on December 31, to give us time to fix anything that might go wrong, when many people were engrossed in the holiday season to notice," Otieno said.<sup>6</sup>

By mid-January, NMG announced it had reached a record 200 000 registered users in five months.<sup>7</sup> By early February, according to both Mutuma and Otieno, that number was just over 240 000 registered users, and they are adding 1700 daily.

The paywall was formally launched on 8 February 2021 and, according to Mutuma, in five weeks subscriptions had topped Kenya Sh1.7 million (US\$15 530). With aggressive marketing, promotion and improved content, he said he was optimistic NMG was on course to be the region's most successful digital media company.<sup>8</sup> It is ironic and indicative of the surprising upside of the pandemic, that it took an outbreak to propel the launch of what had been an elusive digital transformation for the group.

However, that is a rare spot of good news for Eastern African media in the

pandemic. After Covid-19 broke out early in 2020, governments moved to put in place measures to protect their citizens, closing international borders and rolling out varying levels of restrictions within countries.

Rwanda was the first country in Eastern Africa to impose controls and, together with Uganda, had one of the strictest lockdowns in Africa. However, to its south in Burundi and southeast in Tanzania, it also had the continent's leading Covid-19 deniers and vaccine sceptics.

By late February 2020 media houses were on the run. The virus had not been understood and each day there was new information. Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), the national broadcaster, started airing Covid-19 prevention messages in early April 2020. In Sudan, hospitals were experiencing a shortage of life-saving drugs and personal protective equipment (PPE) for medical staff in hospitals and isolation and screening centres. The world was reminded of the penalties resulting from placing Sudan on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, since the mid-1990s, hampering importation of medical equipment and leading to the deterioration of health infrastructure. The sanctions were lifted by US President Donald Trump in October 2020, after Sudan agreed to recognise Israel.<sup>9</sup>

At the *L'Eco Austral* in Mauritius, duties were reorganised and clientele were retained by keeping in close contact with regular clients, through telephone calls and follow up emails. Working from home was a new phenomenon for Durand and his family. He had to create some working space. "My children were continuing with online learning, which also needed my supervision. A large part of my family is in Europe and it was stressful with the lockdown knowing that I could not visit them," he said.

In Durand's opinion, with the pandemic, most of the small media organisations that are in print media will have disappeared or migrated online before five years. The major press groups will have reduced publications. Staff reductions will continue to hit radio, print and digital media in Eastern Africa as media houses reduce and reallocate others. The escape to the internet, however, has been and will not be easy for all, in part because of poor access, and state interference.

Despite Ethiopia having a population of over 100 million people, it has one state-owned telecom service provider, Ethio-Telecom, and less than 5% of the population relies on the internet and social media for information. Television viewership is centred within cities and towns. Notably, 85% of the population

lives in the countryside and relies on radio for information.

Amidst the pandemic from 1 to 23 July 2020, following protests demanding justice for the killing of Oromo musician Haacaaluu Hundesa, the government in Addis Ababa shuttered the internet to curb protests against the popular artist's killing. Later, in November, it shut down telephone and internet services in the restive Tigray region, during a campaign to put down a bloody defiance campaign by the local government.<sup>10</sup>

When information and clarity was needed on the Covid-19 virus, shutting down the internet left citizens without access to reliable information, making them rely on rumours. The Ethiopian government, through the Ministry of Health, tried to narrow the information gap by providing daily updates on how to reduce the spread of the disease. There was a huge boost in radio audiences, starting from when the pandemic began.

Interestingly, Covid-19 did not result in a lockdown by the Ethiopian government, as happened in many African and world nations, and no curfew or significant restrictions of movement were imposed. The government took the view that a lockdown would create an economic crisis. Nevertheless, many journalists remained indoors in the early stages because they did not have protective gear and sanitisers. Some of them reported nothing on Covid-19 for over a month.

Journalists like Tesfa-Alem Tekle followed closely the updates from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Africa Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC) and used the information in his stories. He also highlighted government decision-making,<sup>11</sup> although a tough focus could bring trouble. Journalists who criticised the government's approach to the pandemic were arrested, creating reluctance on the part of some of them to report on Covid-19.<sup>12</sup>

Journalists needed to spend hours online reading more about coronavirus, yet the government shutdown the internet for 21 days in July 2020. Still several Ethiopian media houses saw an unprecedented audience growth during the pandemic. It has given rise to fears about whether the audiences and revenues — much of it virus-related — will hold up once the pandemic is over.

In Sudan, Mawahib observed that media houses operated with a skeleton staff, while the rest worked from home. Some had no prospect of returning. "Advertising revenues for print media reduced and some media houses stopped print production and sent journalists home, while other started going digital and opening sites on the internet", she said.

Skeleton staff were the order of the day. “Here at the BBC [East Africa Bureau office in Nairobi] only 50% of the staff is allowed in at once and they need permission from their line manager”, said Patricia Ng’ethe.

Covid-19’s economic impact on reduced consumption of print media and reduction in advertising revenues was felt hard in journalists’ pocketbooks. In Mauritius, Durand had to take a salary cut of 8% due to reduced revenues. It was a deeper cut in other places. In Kenya, in June 2020, NMG announced that, from the end of that month, it planned to lay-off 100 of its media staff.

By September, correspondents were being informed that, whether a story or photograph appeared across all publications of NMG, they could only be paid once, unlike before when each publication would pay them. At the Standard Group (SG), NMG’s main competitor, lay-offs began as early as March 2020, when 170 employees were laid off, days after the full reckoning with the fury of the virus. By June the company had recorded a net loss of KShs 306 million.<sup>13</sup>

For many who lost their jobs, the axe was unexpected and left them in shock. Some used their savings to begin businesses. Others moved their families upcountry, reasoning that life is cheaper there, while others liquidated assets like cars.

Many also turned to pension funds and made withdrawals. Pension managers for the Standard Group said that, since September 2019, pension remittances had not been made, leaving staff who were laid off in even deeper distress. Another Kenyan media house, Mediamax, laid off employees and reached a deal with them to pay their dues over a three-year period.

By August 2020, the Kenya Media Council reported that 600 journalists had lost their jobs at that point, due to Covid-19.<sup>14</sup> By September, at least 70 Kenyan journalists had tested positive for Covid-19 while reporting.<sup>15</sup>

In South Sudan, the politicians weaponised the virus against the media. Journalists were already finding it challenging to get information in the country because of the ongoing civil war. Politicians who are questioned about the expenditure of funds from donors are rude to journalist and even threaten them. With the onset of Covid-19, they totally shunned journalists, arguing that they feared contracting the virus.

The South Sudan Broadcasting Corporation (SSBC), the only free-to-air television station across the country, can reach the few with television sets. According to

the World Bank, 75% of the population has no access to electricity, affecting the number of people who can make use of television sets even if access was not limited. In the capital city Juba and other state capitals, there is access to online media (and social media pages run by the media organisations based in these states). Private media that were online before the pandemic have survived. There is limited demand for newspapers outside Juba and, since the pandemic, production has shrunk, with independent media citing both movement restrictions and transportation costs.

This has given radio renewed importance in a country where most of the population gets information through that channel, which remains popular and cheap. They rely on community radios that are funded by donors and broadcast in vernacular languages. The United Nations (UN) Radio Miraya and Eye Radio run by USAID have been the main sources of information on Covid-19. The Catholic Radio Network also runs community radio stations, which have been in operation for more than five years.

With print media, several publications were opened after independence from Sudan in January 2011. Many no longer exist, having been shut down due to economic difficulties or government threats. Censorship is still high. Since journalists interact with numerous people in the course of their work, taking the cue from the politicians, the average citizen also took to seeing them as carriers of the virus. They were reluctant to do interviews.

Information about the virus was scarce and, to compound matters, listeners developed fatigue. Inevitably, journalists lost their jobs, which increased the economic strains on their families. In South Sudan, other specific difficulties added up to a gloomy picture. "Media jobs in South Sudan are rated the lowest-paying jobs, where a reporter can earn nearly \$40 as a monthly salary. With the above constraints, the future is very dark", said journalist Garang Malak.<sup>16</sup>

The picture in Kenya, where the media industry is far more vibrant, offers more bright spots in a difficult period. Many boast of radio, television, print and online and several run vernacular radio stations. These are Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), NMG, Royal Media Services (RMS), the Standard Group (SG) and the Radio Africa Group, though the last has no vernacular radio station. These media blanketed both rural and urban areas with information about Covid-19. Those without access to any of these media in the country with the highest internet penetration in Africa<sup>17</sup> rely on text alerts received on their mobile phones.

At Citizen TV, Kenya's leading television station, journalist and anchor Waihiga Mwaura<sup>18</sup> aired stories on rumours about Covid-19. He interviewed those who believed that the virus did not exist, and also spoke to survivors about the effect of Covid-19 on their families, the recovery process and their experience while at the hospital. He did the interviews 100 days after the new coronavirus was first reported in Kenya. On 19 June 2020, Waihiga spoke to Dr Ken Ouko, a sociologist at the University of Nairobi, who was to die a few weeks later, on why the denial was apparent. "Human minds can respond to fear or pain in different ways. The risk is visible but the level of optimism is so high," Ouko said. He succumbed to the virus on 1 August 2020.

With time, as the number of people infected and dying rose, the public grew hungrier for detailed news on Covid-19. Research by GeoPoll found that viewers on television and listeners on radio grew as the days went by.<sup>19</sup>

In another interview by Waihiga, on 19 June 2020, aired on Citizen TV, he explored perceptions about the virus in Nairobi County and aired Kenyan politicians holding meetings in total disregard for social distancing rules. Millennials were also breaking the rules while out socialising. By late June 2020, Kenyans were worried that indiscipline was hindering the fight against the pandemic, according to an Ipsos survey reported by Citizen TV on 19 June 2020.

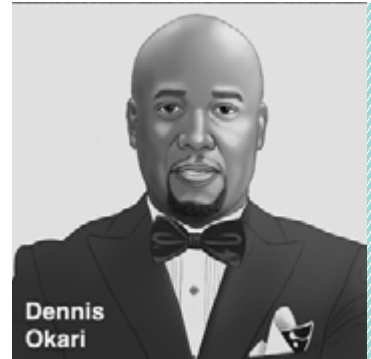
Waihiga observed social distancing during interviews, especially when he spoke to two survivors, as well as Liu Yimenghan, a Chinese national who had lived in Kenya for more than five years and was now facing stigmatisation. Liu had visited China in December 2019 and returned to Kenya on 5 January 2020. "While walking in Nairobi someone shouted 'coronavirus' right into my face", said Liu.

The Chinese Embassy in Kenya came out to warn against racist remarks while calling for a national and scientific approach towards Chinese communities, even as back home, where the first outbreak of the virus was reported in Wuhan, Africans were being attacked and hounded in several Chinese cities, some being blamed for spreading Covid-19.

Royal Media Services introduced child-friendly and educative programmes to keep children edu-trained while at home. They also adjusted programming schedules to favour those working from home, including giving daily Covid-19 updates and medical tips.

The biggest splash of the Covid-19 story in Eastern Africa came from Nation TV

(NTV). In mid-August 2020, it aired an investigative report helmed by journalist Dennis Okari, titled “Covid-19 Millionaires”, exposing shocking levels of corruption surrounding alleged theft of coronavirus funds and PPE, and the people who had got rich off the schemes. A week later, protestors took to the streets in Nairobi, demanding action against those who had allegedly stolen Covid funds. The police responded firmly. The programme had racked up 700 000 views on YouTube barely five weeks later, when a judge ordered it pulled down, after a company went to court suing NMG and Okari for linking it to the scandal.<sup>20</sup>



That must feel like a rap on the knuckles for Okari and NTV, as others did not get off so lightly. Between 12 March and 13 August, ARTICLE 19 Eastern Africa said it had “documented 48 incidents in which 34 male and 14 female journalists and media workers faced various forms of violations, including physical assault, arrest, telephone or verbal threats, online harassment and lack of access to public information, officials and buildings”.<sup>21</sup> Several of the journalists who were beaten were covering excesses by security forces in enforcing Covid-19 curfews. About 60% of these cases were related to a lack of access to public information or journalists being restricted from accessing places to report on the Covid-19 preparedness.

Still, compared to what the media in Uganda faced when electoral politics, a pesky opposition, a long-ruling president seeking a sixth term, and Covid-19 met, the Kenyan violations were little more than a massage.

In November 2020, Human Rights Watch released a statement accusing the Uganda government of wielding Covid-19 to suppress the opposition and media.<sup>22</sup> Ahead of the elections on 14 January 2021, the presidential rivals to President Yoweri Museveni faced numerous arrests, attacks, and disruptions to their campaigns. The most targeted was youthful musician-turned politician, member of Parliament and leader of the National Unity Party (NUP) Robert Kyagulanyi (more commonly known by his stage name Bobi Wine) and Patrick Amuriat, the candidate of the Forum for Democratic Change (FDC). Most of the arrests and attacks against them by security forces were allegedly because they were violating Covid-19 social distancing and crowd size during their rallies. The journalists covering them paid a high price, with some shot and several arrested.

HRW highlighted reports by Kampala-based African Centre for Media Excellence



(ACME), detailing that police used pepper spray on journalists on 3 November, as they covered a procession by Kyagulanyi's supporters and arrested Ronald Kakooza, a journalist from the semi-State-owned Vision Group, while he covered events at the FDC headquarters in Najjanankumbi, on the outskirts of Kampala. On 5 November, the police shot another journalist, Moses Bwayo, in the face with a rubber bullet as he was filming Kyagulanyi arriving at his party's office.<sup>23</sup>



On 18 November, Saif-Allah Ashraf Kasirye, a Radio One journalist and Ghetto TV cameraman, was beaten and pepper-sprayed by police while he was covering the arrest of Kyagulanyi in the eastern Uganda industrial town of Jinja. On the same day, Sam Balikowa of City FM and Nile TV in Jinja were arrested while covering the same event, and John Bosco Mwesigwa was sacked from his job at the station, accused of writing pro-opposition stories.

On 27 November, the Ugandan government deported three CBC journalists and crew. Correspondent Margaret Evans, producer Lily Martin and videographer Jean-François Bisson arrived in the country on 21 November to do a series of reports, mainly focusing on the coronavirus pandemic and decided to take in the election.

By the end of December 2020, seven weeks after the campaigns formally launched, at least 15 journalists had been attacked, injured, and arrested as they covered 2021 election-related events.<sup>24</sup>

With the job losses, shattered careers, and the collapse of incomes and livelihoods, Covid-19 could result in easily one of the largest physical dislocations of journalists in Eastern Africa, and their exit from the middle class, of recent times. And when the story gets written long after the storm has passed, the irony that in some countries covering the disease was as deadly, if not more so, than reporting on war will be inescapable.

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