



FRANCIS P. KASOMA

# The Press and Multiparty Politics in Africa

*University of Tampere  
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# ACADEMIC DISSERTATION

University of Tampere, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

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*Francis P. Kasoma*  
Lusaka

# Preface

I have been a daily newspaper journalist in Zambia and Tanzania for nearly 10 years during which time I worked on both private and government newspapers doing a wide range of reporting and copy editing chores and rising to the position of assistant editor. I have reported for newspapers and a journal in Tanzania (Tanzania Standard), in Kenya (Sunday Nation) and in Britain (Commonwealth Parliamentarian). In 1977, I joined the academia to teach journalism and mass communication at the University of Zambia which I have been doing and continue to do for the last 22 years. During my academic tenure, I have published more than 50 articles and four books dealing with a wide range of topics on the press in Africa. The most common subject I have written about concerns the press and politics on which I have published more than 30 articles.

For this dissertation, I have submitted five of my publications dealing with the press and democracy in Africa, namely:

- 1) Communication Policies in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.  
University of Tampere, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, 1992 (140 pages).
- 2) Media ethics or media law: the enforcement of responsible journalism in Africa.  
Equid Novi - Journal for Journalism in Southern Africa. Special Edition Focus on Media Ethics. Edited by A.S. de Beer, E. Steyn and G.N. Claassen. 15(1), 1994: 26-42.
- 3) The role of the independent media in Africa's change to democracy.  
Media, Culture & Society, 17(4), 1995:537-555.
- 4) The independent press and politics in Africa.  
Gazette – The Journal of Communication Studies, 59(4-5), 1997:295-310.
- 5) The neo-multiparty theory of the press: donor and other influences on the media in Africa.  
University of Zambia, Professorial Inaugural Lectures Number 5, 1999 (36 pages).

The first publication, which arose from a research project sponsored by FINNIDA deals with communication policies of three of the countries in southern Africa, which have shared a common colonial history, like most of the African countries, and which have taken different post-independence political paths. The publication, shows how the three countries have conducted their communication policies since colonial rule. The differences in the communication policies of the three countries have been brought about by, among other things, their different political systems in which Botswana has, since independence, remained one of the very few multiparty democratic countries in Africa whose press policies have been far more liberal than most countries; Lesotho, which has tasted military government (the only southern African country to have experienced military coups) as well as multiparty politics and democracy and has had a checkered press policy oscillating from liberalism to centralised control and back; and, the Kingdom of Swaziland which, surprisingly, has not had a typical controlled press but a mixture of controlled and semi-liberal press since private newspapers such as the Times of Swaziland, one of the oldest newspapers in the sub-continent which dates from colonial times, have been allowed to operate side by side with a government press. Communication policies in as far as they are philosophical pronouncements about the role of the media in society, are related to ideology which is a systematisation of sets of ideas about human existence. Ideology, in turn, leads to political systems which call for different ways of managing the press to conform to a particular political philosophy. I have shown in



this work that politics has, more than any other factor, influenced the way the press in the three countries has been organised since the colonial times. Secondly, in as far as communication policies are modus operandi of the press, they reveal patterns of press operations which have a close affinity with homo politicus. The subject matter of this publication – communication policies - has laid the foundation for the focus of this review which is about what I see as a new conception of the press in Africa which is itself the subject of the fifth publication.

The fifth listed publication, *The Neo-Multiparty Theory of the Press*, as I call it, is my understanding of the system of the functioning of the press in Africa during the 1990s which was first proposed in my inaugural lecture as full professor of journalism and mass communication at the University of Zambia. In this particular publication I use the term 'theory' loosely, as McQuail (2000:7) has stated, not as a system of law-like propositions, but as any systematic set of ideas that can make sense of a phenomenon, guide action or predict a consequence. It is an informed observation on who controls the press in Africa in the wake of the rebirth of multiparty politics and democracy at the dawn of the 1990s and how, arising from this control, the press in Africa has been operating differently from the way and manner it has been controlled and operated in earlier eras. In this review, I have simply referred to it as a 'conception' rather than a 'theory' in the light of the intense debate that has been raging on among scholars in mass communication about whether or not normative theories of the press deserve to be called theories (see for example Nerone, 1995; Nordenstreng, 1997a). The conception, in brief, reveals that the press in Africa, in the wake of multiparty politics and democratic political dispensation, is influenced by various media playmakers led by the international donor community. These include the African governments themselves, civil society, the church, and opposition political parties. The presentation of this press conception is the core of this review. It will be my submission in the review that the role of the press in Africa's political transformation from strong centralised post-independence governments to multipartyism and democracy in the 1990s is best understood in the light of the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press.

The breath-taking experience of Africa's political turn-around itself is the subject of the third and fourth publications. Both were commissioned articles by the respective Sage journals which published them. I considered the request for me to write the articles by the two reputable European journals as a recognition of my modest contribution to knowledge on the subject through my numerous publications. This view was strengthened when the third article was subsequently published in an abridged version in Canada in a sociology textbook which was published by Prentice Hall (Kasoma, 1997b). In the third publication, my thesis is that the independent press, more than the government one, was crucial to the political transformation of the continent. Like its counterparts in the American War of Independence (Emery and Emery, 1978) and the French Revolution (Gough, 1988), it, among other things, informed the people about the progress of the mass protests for political change, urged them to persist in their demands, and exposed the weaknesses of the existing one-party and military governments. Due to the intolerance of the governments, the independent press in many countries had to operate underground before it was officially allowed to operate, in most cases, just before multiparty politics and democracy set in.

The fourth publication widens the discussion to cover the general contribution of the independent press to politics in the 1990s in Africa. The article is based on my informed observations that the independent press in Africa's multiparty states of the 1990s had developed a confrontational relationship with governments, which was sometimes done unprofessionally. In the publication, I put the independent press in the dock and question a lot of its excesses as it tried to perform its unfamiliar watchdog role. Governments, obviously unhappy with the press' confrontational stance saw it as a chance to restrict press freedom once again. Many African governments were contemplating or already putting in place measures, legal and otherwise, aimed at making the press behave responsibly, in the seeming absence of effective self-regulating mechanisms by the press itself. I warn that these measures were likely to lead

to the subjugation of the independent press by governments and the re-introduction of dictatorship in Africa once again. I conclude that when this happens, the independent press would have to bear the bulk of the blame for the loss of press freedom and democracy.

The final publication (which I have actually submitted, chronologically, as the second) was another commissioned article by Equid Novi - the Journal for Journalism in Southern Africa published in South Africa. It was the lead article of the special edition of the journal on media ethics. The edition was published in the same year (1994) as the book, *Journalism Ethics in Africa*, for which I was editor and one of the contributors. In the article, I discuss the phenomenon of the proliferation of media laws in Africa in the 1990s supposedly meant to check irresponsible journalism which accompanied the liberalisation of the press in the new multiparty and democratic dispensation. I state that an impression had been created that unless laws were put in place, African society stood to lose. This was because African journalists were largely seen by political leaders as a professional body who could not be trusted with the responsibility of carrying out journalistic chores competently and honourably. My worry in this article is the proliferation of new laws which African governments had passed or were trying to pass in order to make the independent press, as they put it, 'behave responsibly'. Most of these laws were being introduced in the form of media or press councils enacted by parliament which contained clauses which virtually negated press freedom. I was also worried about the numerous laws and decrees passed by both the colonial governments as well as the post-independence one-party and military governments which, surprisingly, the governments of the new multiparty and democracy era had not only kept on the statute books but which they were now using against the recalcitrant press. Promises by the leaders of the new governments when they were campaigning to unseat the one-party and military regimes that once in power they would repeal or amend these laws were still fresh in people's minds. I am, of course in the article, careful to distinguish a bad newspaper as seen by Africa's rulers and a genuine bad newspaper as seen from the professional view point of the journalists. The article, finally, explores whether journalism ethics in Africa could be successfully enforced by law or by journalists themselves. I submit, by giving more than 10 reasons, that journalism ethics cannot be successfully enforced by law.

The present text has been written as a review of the main ideas brought up in these selected publications, with a focus on the role of the press in emerging multiparty politics in Africa. Chapter 1 contains the historical background of mass communication in Africa as well as definitions of the key concepts used in the review. It ends with the statement of the problem which is to find out the role the press has played in bringing about multipartyism and democracy to Africa in the 1990s. Chapter 2 discusses the role that the press played in the politics of the one-party and military regimes, giving the necessary historical setting to the press in the 1990s. Chapter 3 discusses the input of the press, mainly the independent press, to the coming of multiparty politics and democracy. It was clear that the role and function of the press during the one-party and military regime era had to change to a new role and function to serve the new political dispensation. Chapter 4 discusses this new role as the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press. Finally, Chapter 5 is a general discussion of the main factors and characteristics of the neo-multiparty press. It also gives an informed prediction of what is likely to happen to the development of the African press in the first decade of the 2000s.

# Chapter 1: Setting the Parameters

## 1.1 Historical Background

Mass communication as we know it today is relatively new to Africa. It was introduced in the dying years of the 1790s and early 1800s when missionaries, settlers and colonial administrators first introduced newspapers. The first newspaper in Africa is reported to have started in Egypt during the Napoleonic occupation in 1797. In 1859, missionaries published Nigeria's first newspaper called 'Iwe Irobin fun awon ara Egba Yorubas' (the newspaper for Egba and Yoruba people) which is regarded to be the first newspaper published on the continent in an African language. (Mytton, 1983:38; Ugboajah & Sobowale, 1980:134).

Authors who have written on the history of the newspaper press in Africa generally agree with their early use particularly in former British colonies in the expression of political protest (Ainslie, 1966; Hachten, 1971; Head, 1974; Ugboajah, 1980; Kasoma, 1986a etc.). British West Africa in particular had a very outspoken political press from the early 1920s with newspapers like John Payne Jackson's Lagos Weekly, Herbet Macaulay's Lagos Daily News (1925), and Mnamdi Azikiwe's West African Pilot (1937) all in Nigeria, and Kwame Nkrumah's Evening News (1948) in the then Gold Coast, now Ghana. British East Africa had its own share of political journalists such as Jomo Kenyatta who edited Mwigwithania (1928) which was published in Kikuyu in Kenya. It should be noted that some of these early African editors like Azikiwe, Nkrumah and Kenyatta became founding fathers of the political independence of their respective countries. Although far less outspoken and consistent, the African political press in French Africa which was aimed at influencing the few évolués also played its part in influencing the political trends of the countries. The political press in British Southern and Central Africa was split between those which supported the continuation of white settler rule, which was patronised by a substantive number of white settlers, and those that agitated for African rule. There was also a substantial number of newspapers which the colonial governments started which were aimed at circulating among Africans and which were used to pacify them to colonial rule as well as educate them on governance. Missionaries can also be credited with a number of pioneering newspapers across Africa some of which were aimed at not only evangelising but also awakening Africans to their political and civic rights (Ugboajah & Sobowale, 1980; Ole-Ronkei, 1997).

The national political newspapers of Africa were mostly published in a language that the colonialists had introduced in the territories (English, French, German and Portuguese) rather than in indigenous languages. This was because Africa has literally thousands of indigenous languages of which one country could have as many as 100 (e.g. Angola). It was practically impossible to publish newspapers in each of these languages, most of which had never been used in print, but much more convenient to publish them in the so-called official language, as the colonial languages were called. This, as Mytton (1983) observes, has important implications since traditional oral forms of communication, which played a central role in the maintenance of social and political order – ensuring continuity and reinforcing values and norms of behaviour – was gradually confronted by a quite different form based on the new technology of print and, generally, on a foreign language. Thus the newspaper marked the beginning of a break with the past (Mytton, 1983:37).

Although Mytton has submitted that radio proved less restrictive (in terms of use of language) since it was able to reach many more individuals through a greater number of languages, it can be said that the language issue still haunted Africa even in this oral medium since only a few languages could be used in radio broadcasting in a country.

Radio broadcasting in Africa was started as and has continued to be a government mass medium. The first radio station is said by historians (Mytton, 1983:52; Head, 1974:400) to

have been opened in South Africa in 1920. The first radio stations were opened as communication media for the substantial population of white settlers who settled mainly in the southern and eastern parts of the continent and not for the Africans. It was not until the Second World War that colonial governments opened radio stations for the African population with the first one coming in the then Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, in 1941. The station in Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia, like several such stations elsewhere in British colonial Africa later, was an organ for the colonial government to tell Africans about the war, from the British government point of view, of course, as well as educate Africans generally on governance and the European way of living. It was anathema for colonial radio stations to broadcast other political views, from African nationalists. But the stations quite often broadcast political views from the white settlers who were perpetrating the continuation of white rule in addition to broadcasting the official views of the colonial government. This was the case in colonies such as South Africa and the Rhodesias (Southern and Northern) where during the political debate for decolonisation, the continuation of white rule was seen as an alternative to the rule by black Africans. The epitome of this situation was the extended rule through the policy of apartheid which white Afrikaans imposed in South Africa and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by white settlers in Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. It was not surprising, therefore, that after independence the new African governments similarly usurped the use of the medium to that of issues about the government which they wanted the people to know. They used radio as an instrument to mobilise the people, taking full advantage of the credibility of the medium in a largely oral society. The people gullibly believed what the radio said as being what their rulers were saying. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to state that in almost every part of Africa, radio has been regarded, until very recently, as the authoritative voice of the government. During the 1990s when radio broadcasting (as well as television) was liberalised, the rank and file had yet to get used to the idea that anyone else other than a person 'sent' by the government could also speak to them on radio.

But perhaps the greatest political use of radio in Africa has been during a crisis. Leaders of the numerous military coups that have afflicted the African people have nearly always rushed to the radio station to announce their takeover. Consequently, radio broadcast stations have been the scenes of some bloody battles during military takeovers between government soldiers and the determined coup supporters. A failure to takeover the radio station has often signalled the failure of the coup. Hachten has written a penetrating observation on the role of radio during a coup in Africa:

More than any other medium, radio is associated with the voice of the nation and speaks with peculiarly direct authority. A new leader or his mouthpiece can talk directly to the people, using the full range of emotional overtones. ... Listeners tend to conceive it as the government itself speaking.

(Hachten, 1974:396)

I am also in a position to testify to the accuracy of Hachten's statement with my personal experience during the 1997 failed coup in Zambia. I and a friend, a Catholic priest, really believed the person speaking 'to us' that morning on radio was now in control of the country. He (calling himself Captain Solo) announced that the soldiers had taken over and (President) Frederick Chiluba and his entire cabinet would later that day be killed publicly by firing squad. But, with our ears still glued to the radio, as machinegun fire continued in the direction of the government radio station after two hours or so, a voice came on the air and assured 'us' that the coup had been foiled and the leader and his supporters had all been arrested. We sighed with relief! It is, no doubt, due to this political sensitivity of a radio station that African governments, even during the liberalisation of broadcasting of the 1990s, were reluctant and in many cases not willing to grant Short Wave radio broadcasting licences to private business people and civic society but reserved it for the government.

Towards the end of the 1960s, television broadcasting was introduced to Africa – the earliest station being the one opened in Algeria in 1956 (Head, 1974:399). From the earliest times, two types of television stations developed in Africa: the commercial station and the government station. At independence or soon afterwards, however, most countries had only

government stations since the commercial stations had been taken over by the government. Head has summarised very well the political use of television in Africa in the following words:

Politics colours much of the programming. Explicit political material comes in the form of frequent public speeches by major government personalities, official statements and releases, and official commentaries on news. The movements and ceremonial activities of the head of state or other important political figures receive extensive priority coverage. Some stations maintain special production units with the exclusive assignment of covering presidential appearances. (Head, 1974:11)

It is important to point out in this historical background that the different colonial policies of the various powers affected the development of the press in the colonies uniquely. The press in the Belgian colonies was largely underdeveloped since the policy of paternalism did not favour the development of a local press for the black people. The few settlers and colonial administrators in these territories were served by the press (newspapers and radio broadcasts) from their home country. The press in the British colonies, by contrast, as indicated above, was more solidly established and developed, particularly in those colonies with a substantial population of white settlers. In such countries, a dual press developed: one for the white settlers and the other for the indigenous black people. It was only towards the time of independence that efforts started to mould the two types of press into one. Moreover, British colonial policy was based on the principle of preparing Africans for self government and independence by educating and generally introducing them to the art of modern governance based on the British model. Accordingly, the press was generally used to partly serve this purpose as the purveyor of information and ideas about liberalism and democracy. Due to these two reasons, the press in British colonial Africa was freer and better established than that of colonies belonging to other European nations. The French colonies, like the Belgian ones, were largely served by a press that was mainly imported from the colonising country in line with the policy of civilising the black people by making them consume everything that was from France, including media. Even the few local newspapers and radio broadcast stations which were established in the colonies were largely carbon copies of the French media. Another unique feature of the press in French colonies was that it was subject to very severe government censorship. Consequently, a largely poorly developed and subjugated local press emerged in the French colonies. Finally, the press which served Portuguese colonies was basically imported from Portugal for the Portuguese settlers in these territories in line with the colonial policy of turning the African colonies into extensions of Portuguese territory. The Portuguese did not entertain any idea of developing a press for the indigenous people. Even the local radio stations were meant for the white settlers.

By independence time in the early 1960s, for many of the countries, the press in Africa had been firmly established to continue playing a role in politics which was mainly as a government information tool. As the newly independent countries grew older and their governments took on more centralised authority which was soon to culminate in one-party or military rule, in the 1970s and 1980s, much of Africa's independent journalism died, leaving a sycophant press which glorified the leaders into deities of sorts. By now both the newspapers and the broadcast stations had switched to supporting the African governments and the ruling-party politics. There were some newspapers, however, particularly in the former British colonies, which continued to play the traditional liberal Western adversarial role against government. But most of these were subsequently silenced with the entrenchment of centralised government. Their official role now was to mobilise the people for nation-building and development. While all this was happening, the African leaders continued to pay lip service to freedom of the press within their territories which they generally defined as the ability of the press to tell the people what government was saying it was doing and intended to do for them rather than the ability of the press to pick on government. They generally described a press that criticised government as being 'irresponsible' and made life very difficult for the journalists working for such a press through numerous measures aimed at curtailing their freedom to criticise government.

Under largely government ownership and control, the press in Africa became polarised from the people since it mainly reported what government was saying more than what the people were saying. In short, the press had become a government mouthpiece. As the politics of poverty continued being practised by African rulers and the people increasingly noticed discrepancies between what the rulers said and what they did, the press started to suffer a crisis of credibility. The people started regarding the press as the propagator of lies which their rulers were propagating. In the meantime, as already noted, there was a section of the press, which was very small in most countries, which campaigned against the ills of one-party and military government, particularly the lack of observance of human rights. In most countries, the iron hand of the rulers proscribed this type of critical press from operating legally and so it had to operate illegally as an underground press. This was the situation when multiparty politics and democracy returned to Africa at the beginning of the 1990s.

The historical strata presented here provide very interesting bases for treatises on the role of the press in the politics of a particular era. In this review, however, I have picked the decade of the 1990s because of its very unique nature regarding the political transformation and the accompanying press changes. The role that the press played in the political transformation from centralised authority to plural politics responsive to democratic principles as well as to its own transformation from being largely a sycophant to established authority to suddenly taking on a watchdog role, are certainly worth serious consideration in a treatise. I wanted to establish in this dissertation whether the press in Africa had a significant role to play in bringing about multiparty politics and democracy as well as sustaining them. This is particularly important in a world in which, according to literature which I will cite later, political scientists do not seem to give the press as much direct credit to the democratisation process as scientists in mass communication and professional journalists do.

## 1.2 Conceptual Framework

The setting of the review, therefore, is rooted in the forces that have led to the surprise political transition of the continent with the accompanying political ideology. It is about the changing relationship between African governments and the press: from a press that is completely or near completely subjugated and shackled by government to one that is relatively free from it. It is about the continual struggle between government and the press in which those in political power are constantly trying to subjugate and use the press to stay in power and the press rebelling against them with chequered rates of success or failure. This struggle is agitated and fuelled by other constituents of the African political scene who include civil society, the church, and opposition political parties as well as the donor community. It is important, however, at the outset to define the various concepts that are going to be used and to place them in their proper framework. The terms include political party, multiparty or plural politics, democracy, the press, and freedom of the press.

### *1.2.1 Political party*

The etymological origin of the word 'party', referring to a political party is variously traced to the two Latin words: 'partire' which means to divide and 'pars' which means 'part'. Scholars like Sartori (1976), who have said the word comes from 'partire', state that the derivative of the word 'party' would thus be subject to two opposite semantic pulls which are both appropriate: the derivation from 'partire', to divide, on one hand, and the association with 'taking part', and thereby with 'sharing', on the other (Sartori, 1976:4). For them, therefore, the derivation of the word gives it the two descriptive meanings of 'political party' which is about a group which divides itself from others for the purpose of sharing a common vision or problem about the body politic. For scholars like Von Beyme (1985), who have

tressed the term to 'pars' or 'part', they state that semantically the meaning accurately describes what a political party is: a group of people which merely constitute part of a whole by sharing a general interest. They say the term suggests that a political party can never claim to represent the whole, however, much it may stress the general interest in its propaganda or even develop a tendency to see itself as 'the natural party of government' (Von Beyme, 1985:13).

There are various approaches to the theory of political parties. They range from a historical approach to a sociological one and many permutations in between. Whatever approach one uses, however, one common denominator comes out and this is that a political party was created to serve homo politicus in a specific time in history and in specific places belonging to specific peoples. If we theorise about political parties, it is only because as scientists we want to understand their nature and operation. Von Beyme (1985) has identified three types of political parties:

- a) The party that remains external to, and uninvolved with, the sphere of government;
- b) The party that operates within the ambit of government but does not govern;
- c) The party that actually governs, that takes on the governing or governmental function.

In the African context that this review addresses, namely the political parties of the Africa of the 1990s, it is interesting that all the three types of parties apply. Of the numerous parties that sprung up in the wake of multipartyism and the new democratic dispensation, there were some, usually very small and often tribally-based, which seemed to deride in merely criticising government and showed no interest in being part of government by participating in coalitions or elections. Indeed their existence resembled more what political scientists would refer to as a faction than a party. Political parties, however, are not factions. A faction is a group of people who join together to express personal conflicts in their own personal interests and who in the process disregard the common or public good, while a party is also a channel of expression for a group but with the aim of providing for the common or public good. The concepts, however, are clearly distinguishable in theory but not so in practice. Quite often factions, particularly the tribal factions of the Africa of the 1990s, were referred to as political parties. It is more correct to say that generally bad political parties often become factions and good factions, political parties.

The Africa of the 1990s also had parties that operated within the ambit of government but did not have any ambitions to form a government. These were the not-so-small parties (by African standards) which always won a few seats in parliament but never really vied or had any ambition to govern. In some countries such parties had existed for years without ever coming to power. They seemed to be merely content with providing the government with the 'other voice' so that it could take the views of the minority with some seriousness as is required by democratic governance.

Finally, there was, of course, in Africa the third type of party, the one that campaigned for and actually took on the job of governing. In the context of the decade in question, such a party usually commanded an overwhelming majority to the extent that it appeared in many countries that the one-party state had not actually disappeared but what had actually happened was to replace single one-party with another form of one-party which allowed other parties to exist as long as they did not govern, with the result that there was a nominal multi-party polity under a de facto one-party governance. By the close of the decade and early in the 2000s, however, the dominant party political structure started disappearing as people began voting for issues rather than political parties. The voting pattern became more diversified and the domination of one political party started disappearing.

Of course, political parties may also be distinguished by their structural representativeness. We can speak of mass as opposed to elite parties with the former being far more open to participation by the rank and file than the latter. The parties which took over power from the one-party and military regimes were, certainly, mass rather than elite parties. Some parties

are closed while others are open. Ostrogorski (1964) makes an interesting observation that initially and for a long time parties in England had no distinct life of their own save in Parliament. (Ostrogorski wrote the study in the 1890s and the first English edition was published in 1902). He says English parties barely existed in the country as moral entities independently of the personages or families which were their embodiment (Ostrogorski, 1964:70). Many African parties during the 1990s were parties only by name which merely appeared during elections and went into oblivion as soon as the electioneering was over. Such parties usually never won any seats in parliament. Others were only existing in towns and urban centres and did not exist in the rural areas. In other words, there was hardly any party structure of such parties in rural areas to speak of.

In this review, the term political party will, therefore, in line with the foregoing, be used loosely to represent any of the three connotations.

Satori (1964) states that a party-based polity or political system requires three conditions, namely:

- a) Responsible government;
- b) The 'reality' of elections; and,
- c) The establishment of parties as a system (Sartori, 1976:23).

Responsible government is defined as government that is answerable to parliament. In a situation, however, where the ruling party commands a near absolute majority in parliament as was the case with many African governments in the 1990s, it is a mockery of the meaning of the word 'responsible' to speak of such governments being 'responsible'. If anything they were merely responsible to themselves. Traditionally, being 'responsible to parliament' has meant ultimately being answerable to the people who elected the members of parliament in the first place. The assumption was that the members of parliament were representing the various views of the people rather than one view, which in this case, is the ruling party's official view. This was not the case in the 1990s in Africa as is witnessed by the easy passage with which laws were enacted in the parliaments of this period since there was hardly any debate or questioning of such legislation from the floor of the house, especially in situations where party discipline of the ruling party was strictly enforced through a system of parliamentary party caucus.

As indicated above, the 'reality' of elections was one in which the elections which put the multiparty elected governments to power earlier in the decade, were heavily contested. The reason was that the citizens, having been for several decades with the same governments while they were facing untold economic problems, were very anxious for political change. Many of them, therefore, participated in voting in the elections of early 1990. However, the enthusiasm by the voter was not the same in the subsequent elections following completion of the first term in government of the parties which had been voted into power. Few voters turned up, most probably because they thought their vote would not make such a difference since the party in power would still win and continue to rule. The picture was, however, changing as the parties' presidents finished their second terms in office as heads of state and were in many cases not eligible to stand for election in the next general elections which were due at the turn of the century. Indications were that polling was again likely to be heavy because the voters were likely to be anxious to vote for people who would solve their economic problems which those they had elected to power, in most cases twice, had failed to solve. It was already evident during the dying years of the 1990s, when opposition parties clearly showed signs of growing in strength as evidenced by the increasing number of parliamentary by-election victories which they scored against the ruling parties, that the elections of 2000 or so would be fiercely contested.

There is much to be said about the establishment of political parties as a system in Africa in the 1990s. First of all the party system was not a new idea. What was new was the existence of many parties, which in some countries numbered as many as 30. The people of Af-



rica must have been wondering whether all these parties meant well for them. This was probably the reason why they voted heavily for one party in which they placed their trust. Sartori (1976) states that Western party systems had no part in building the nation-state and became operative only when the crisis of legitimacy – i.e., acceptance of constitutional rule – had been resolved. This was not, however, the case in Africa where it is the party that brought nation-building at independence and continued doing so throughout the one-party and military government era. In fact, it can be stated that the concept and the reality of a one-party state itself was brought about because of the need to mould nations in what were still fragmented pieces of territory. The leaders of the one-party and military states saw the multi-party political system as a distraction from nation-building, since, they said, it introduced bickering among the various tribes which often were identified with parties (Senghor, 1964:67-104; Bienen, 1978:56; Zolberg, 1969; Onuoha, 1965:62-66; Sklar, 1963). The authors just cited have argued strongly to show that Africa's one-party states were not only instruments of nation-building but were also 'democratic' both in the elective and participatory meaning of the term. When nationalism precedes party politics as it did in Europe, party politics is seen, as Sartori says, to be compatible with unity rather than a division that disrupts it (Sartori, 1976:16). However, when party politics precedes nation-state, as it did in Africa, the dominant party that is trying to build it is often identified with nation-state. No wonder the distinction in Africa between the government and the state hardly exists. Moreover, the party that is trying to build the nation often wants the fullest attention from the people doing so and regards 'voices' from other parties as unwelcome distractions. This is why in Africa, including during the decade of the 1990s, people belonging to other political parties are seen as bad people by both those in government and also by the rank and file who have been successfully indoctrinated by the ruling parties. The culture of party tolerance has still to be inculcated in the African people.

### *1.2.2 Multiparty politics*

Pluralism is about holding various, not necessarily different or opposing views. Political pluralism is about a variety of political views. It is often expressed by people belonging to various political parties in a situation which is normally referred to as a multiparty or plural polity. But pluralism need not always be expressed through the presence of various political parties. Pluralism can exist between members of the same political party.

Sartori (1976) identifies three levels of pluralism:

- a) Cultural pluralism;
- b) Societal pluralism; and,
- c) Political pluralism.

In what he calls the philosophical theory of pluralism, Sartori states that pluralistic culture as an attitude of meaning, points to a vision of the world based, in essence, on the belief that differences and not likeness, dissent and not unanimity, change and not immutability, make for the good life. (Sartori, 1976:15). This is what has been expressed in African parlance as "two heads are better than one" (I am here translating a proverb from Bemba my mother tongue). When people with various views 'put their heads together', good solutions to problems usually come out. But the connotation here is not the same as that of consensus where it means 'agreeing to agree'. It is more akin with consensus where it means 'agreeing to disagree'. It is an attitude of mind by which we are mentally prepared to appreciate and accept the fact that other people too have a right to their own opinions as we have. It is a culture of accepting the fact that society consists of people with different views which should be harnessed for the good of society instead of being discarded as being divisive and, therefore, destructive of society. It is a philosophy of valuing expression of differences instead of always condemning and discouraging them. Under this philosophy, nation-building does not

necessarily mean being united under the same political thinking. Nation-building could also arise in a situation of political plurality.

In the 1990s, Africans were far from accepting this particular meaning of pluralism. The reason was not only because, as I have indicated above, they shunned people belonging to other political parties, but also because in many cases, the ruling elite had not changed substantially from that of the former one-party or multiparty state but had, apart from the very top leadership, remained more or less the same. Since old habits die hard, the ruling elite was also prone to be autocratic like the regimes they had replaced. A mentality of cultural pluralism is also important for Africa because it would help lessen some of the unnecessary wars and conflicts that Africa has seen and continues to see. A person who accepts dissent and not unanimity is unlikely to go to war. Witness how many wars were taking place in Africa during the decade in question. There were wars in Sierra Leone, Nigeria (Moslems and Christians and with Cameroon), Cameroon, Congo (D.R.), Congo (Brazzaville), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Angola, Lesotho and South Africa during the entire or part of the decade.

The second distinction that Sartori makes is that of societal pluralism which he distinguishes from societal differentiation. A plural society, he writes, is not a pluralistic society. Both are societal structures or, more exactly, structural principles epitomising socio-structural configurations. But while any complex society turns out to be 'differentiated', it does not follow in the least that all societies are differentiated 'pluralistically' (Sartori, 1976:15).

African society, however, is in some cases both 'differentiated' and pluralistic. It does not only, in some cases, consist of various tribal and ethnic groups of a dominant racial group (pluralistic) but also consists of different racial groups. The conduct of plural politics in such mixed 'pluralistic' and 'differentiated' societies takes on a peculiar character very different from that which obtains in societies which are either only predominantly 'pluralistic' or 'differentiated', both of which are also found on the African continent.

Political pluralism suggests the diversification of powers as well as the existence of various political groupings or parties which are independent from each other and do not include each other. People are given freedom to express their dissent. The various political views and programmes are allowed to circulate within the body politic so that they can both influence the way people in government conduct governance as well as provide the electorate with choices to give them information on which to base their choices and which political programmes they should support or reject.

The existence of plural parties or multipartyism is regarded as a basic foundation of Western liberal democracy (see for instance Katz, 1980:1; Robertson, 1976:1). The question, however, regarding the number of parties that are ideal for multiparty politics is an important consideration. The initial high numbers of political parties which sprung up in countries that adopted multiparty politics, referred to above, was perhaps too many to make any meaningful impact on the democratic process of these countries. In this connection, it is interesting to note that the oldest multiparty democracies, the U.S.A. and Britain, did not begin with many parties. They both started with only one party each – the Democrats in the U.S.A. in 1828 and the Conservative Party in Britain in 1832. There are even those like Katz (1980) who hold that the ideal number of parties in a democracy should be two, after the British and the American models. It is, however, useful to point out that there are fairly good democracies in the world which have more than two parties. But the number of parties which Africa saw in the 1990s was, generally, exceptionally high to the extent that the political impact of many of these parties was far less than would be the case in a situation with fewer parties. The proliferation of parties in Africa can perhaps be explained by the fact that African society is both pluralistic and differentiated. It is, however, likely that as Africa's multipartyism grows older and more mature, the number of political parties may tend to decrease as the national political issues are narrowed down to the basic ones.

According to Von Beyme (1985), political parties fulfil four functions, namely:

- 1) The identification of goals (ideology and programme);
- 2) The articulation and aggregation of social interests;
- 3) The mobilisation and socialisation of the general public within the system, particularly the elections; and,
- 4) Elite recruitment and government formation (Von Beyme, 1985:13).

With regard to Africa of the 1990s, it is interesting to note that the parties which wrestled power from one-party and military regimes were not parties in the classical sense but conventions or movements, as some of them rightly called themselves. They were spontaneous peaceful 'uprisings' of people with a common purpose of getting rid of rulers for whom they had developed a great dislike. Many of these parties did not even have time, leave alone the administrative capacity, to develop an ideology and a programme, not to mention the articulation and aggregation of social interests. What they managed to achieve was, certainly, the mobilisation and socialisation of the general public within their parties and the recruitment of the elite, the dissatisfied intelligentsia, to form government and perform the duties of governance.

Pakulski's book on social movements provides valuable lessons in connection with the African movements-cum-parties of the 1990s. He writes:

Social movements are ubiquitous. They persist, with varying intensity in all societies including most orderly democratic and totalitarian. However, large-scale mass mobilisations, mobilisations which effectively challenge the institutional establishment ... are relatively rare events.

Large-scale mass mobilisations always involve networks or 'bundles' of movements rather than a single-issue or concern-specific group. ... (S)uch mass social movements resemble natural cataclysms. They unexpectedly mobilise large masses of people, disrupt establishment routines and leave the social landscape changed.

The sudden eruptions of movements, and the strong commitment they engender, attract public attention, provoke political debates, and encourage sensational media coverage which often highlights fringe and bizarre aspects of movement events.

(Pakulski, 1991:xi)

In this penetrating insight, Pakulski concludes that social movements always involve what he calls 'unconventional' political participation (Ibid.).

Although his book came out in 1991, it is interesting to note that Pakulski was not writing about the African political social movements which were taking place at around the same time, except, of course, generally. Although he does not discuss the African experience, Pakulski's description of social movements fits very well with the African experience of movements early in the 1990s. They were, certainly, 'rare' events for it had taken them nearly 30 years to reappear. Secondly, they involved networks or 'bundles' of movements. In many cases, trade unions, the church, civil society, and, of course, the press, as we shall see in this review, all combined to form the formidable mass movements that dramatically, and suddenly changed Africa's political destiny at least for the time being, if not permanently.

### *1.2.3 Democracy*

In defining democracy, it is very important to remember that we are defining an ideal rather than full reality. Even the renowned great city state of Athens which is reputed to be the first democracy as early as 500 years before Christ, was not completely democratic as some historians and political scientists would have us believe. Not every adult Athenian ruled Athens. Most of the writers who have attempted to define democracy, who include Beetham and Boyle (1995); Dahl (1998); Held (1993); Fullinwider (1999); and, MacPherson (1973) agree on the basic meaning of the concept. For all of them democracy means more or less full participation of the adult citizens in their own governance which entails, among other things:

- 1) Effective participation in the political affairs of governance;
- 2) Equal voting rights and free, fair and frequent elections;

- 3) Respect for the rule of law where everyone is equal before the law;
- 4) Respect of the decision by the majority but also taking into account the views of the minority;
- 5) Presence of institutions which ensure the necessary checks and balances of political power which should include a free press, parliament, the judiciary and the executive wing of government consisting of a head of state and her/his ministers forming a cabinet;
- 6) Freedom of expression leading people to express their opinions about government and being left free to form their own political parties and other civic organisations to oppose or advise the governing party with which they should compete to win the favour of the citizens;
- 7) A government which is transparent, accountable and responsible; and,
- 8) A government based on the principles of good governance and the respect for human rights.

These tenets of democracy are impossible to obtain singularly and collectively in any pure form in a body politic. However, the more effort is made to attain them in a more or less pure state is made, the more democratic a polity is. Taken singularly, none of the above tenets, even in their full state, amounts to democracy.

A democratic government may be described as a 'government by argument' in which consensus among the opponents, both from within the ruling party and outside, is given priority. The existence of many political parties in a polity i.e. a multiparty situation, does not in itself mean there is democracy, for people belonging to those parties may not be in a position to express their political opinions freely; or the leaders of the party may themselves not be representative of the general membership of the parties; or, indeed, the elected members of government (of the ruling party) may not be representative of the majority of the citizens of the country. In other words, elections conducted in a multiparty situation may end up representing a minority rather than the majority.

There is a relationship, though not necessarily causal, between democracy and multipartyism. If democracy is based on the participation of as many people as possible in their own governance, then allowing as many people as possible to express their views as well as work out a programme on how they want to be governed, which is what multipartyism is all about, contributes to the democratic process. Secondly, multipartyism allows for elective democracy. It is only in a situation where there is more than one political party that elections for political office become meaningful, the assumption being that the various parties will present more than one political alternative to choose from. There are, of course, scholars like Onuoha (1965), Schapiro (1972) and Bienen (1978) who argue that democratically valid elections can be held under a one-party situation. Bienen, in particular, reasons that if it is true that African one-party systems are decentralised political machines, it is also true that the machines may become so loose and decentralised as to no longer constitute a single party (Bienen, 1978:56). In other words, he sees a possibility of having *de facto* parties within a party – a multiparty political structure within one party. In theory this is true, but in practice the African single parties, although some of them looked structurally decentralised, were in the conduct of elections so centralised that the party headquarters dictated, in many cases, chose who was to stand for elections in a particular area. They called it 'adopting' a candidate and there were many instances where the choice or nomination of the local people was rejected by the party headquarters. In this regard, it is interesting to note that many writers, particularly those from the then West, during the Cold War, always made a distinction between Western democracy and, by implication, other democracies. If democracy is defined in the manner I and many of the authors have defined it, with all its distinguishing characteristics, then it cannot be divided according to regions where it is practised. Democracy is simply democracy, a form of governance which countries and regions of the world have tried to practise, some with better success than others, but which none of them can claim to have practised completely successfully.

The best correlation I have found between democracy and multipartyism has been expressed by Held (1996). He writes:

The idea of democracy is important because it does not just represent one value among many, such as liberty, equality or justice, but is the value that can link and mediate among competing prescriptive concerns. ...

Democracy does not presuppose agreement on diverse issues; rather, it suggests a way of relating values to each other and leaving the resolution of value conflicts open to participants in a public process, subject only to certain provisions protecting the shape and form of the process itself.

(Held, 1996:298)

And implicitly linking democracy with multipartyism, Giddens (2000) says that democracy is a system involving effective competition between political parties for positions of power. He names the freedom to form and join political groups or associations as one of the civil liberties which people in a democracy enjoy.

Multiparty politics is, therefore, about allowing the various political parties first of all to exist in a polity. In Africa, this is done not only by those in political authority, namely the government, but also through a national constitutional provision. This is because in most African states the practice of multiparty politics, which existed in many countries soon after independence, at least nominally, was abolished by a constitutional provision. It could, therefore, only be brought back by another constitutional provision. The government of the day, which in fact is often the very cause of the problem in the first place, has, of course, to agree to amending the constitution to allow multiparty politics to exist. In many countries in Africa, this did not come easily but came only after intensive pressure from civil society and the press as well as the international community.

It should be pointed out that in Africa what has immediately brought about the rebirth of multiparty politics – the graciousness of one-party or military government albeit after a lot of pressure to amend the constitution – can easily be reversed. In other words, the two immediate causes of multiparty politics cannot be relied on to introduce a more or less permanent change. Governments are bound to change as was being witnessed already in the second half of the 1990s, when governments which were once elected with landslide majorities lost power or were in danger of losing power, in some cases surrendering it to the very parties which led the dictatorial regimes they replaced. (In Benin, for example, the former head of state and his party bounced back to power after the election that took place in the mid-1990s following the end of the first term of the multiparty elected government.) There is little assurance that these parties once in power again, would not revert back to their dictatorial systems of governance which leave no room for multipartyism. This is all the more so since national constitutions in Africa are changed and/or amended literary overnight as soon as a new set of rulers come on the scene. The national constitution in Africa is not the sacred document that it is meant to be in older democracies.

Second, multiparty politics is about giving the various competing parties equal opportunities of conducting politics – levelling the playing field, as the saying goes. This seems to be particularly difficult for Africa due to a number of factors. In the first place, there is a common tendency to regard majority views as always being right. As we have seen above, people holding minority political views are often ridiculed, hated and made to feel unwanted in African society. This breeds unnecessary political violence which sometimes leads to national crises such as declarations of states of emergencies and banning of opposition political parties.

Another factor which often leads to political party misunderstanding is, as we have seen, the identifying of political parties with tribal or ethnic groupings. Tribal politics in Africa, as elsewhere, is more often a source of national destabilisation than unity. When it comes to tribal politicking, Africa has rarely tasted the advantages of unity in diversity. The consequences of tribal conflicts are so terrible that many African countries would rather avoid tribal politics than court it through multipartyism.

A third difficulty in levelling the political playing field of all the competing political parties has been the presence and biased use of the government press which nearly always tends to treat the opposition parties unfairly by giving them either no coverage or bad publicity and giving the ruling party blatantly favourable coverage. The calls on abolishing the government press in Africa which have often been made are aimed at finding a solution to this serious problem.

Third, multiparty politics is about respecting the rule of law and treating all citizens equally before the law, regardless of to which political party they belong. The unfair use of security personnel (police, intelligence officers, soldiers) by governments to hound members of the opposition parties while leaving those in government to go Scot free when they commit the same alleged offences, so common in Africa, is a source of great concern. It becomes even more worrisome when courts of law also treat the opposition unfairly as has been the case in a number of countries where judges have abandoned their judicial independence for political expediency.

To sum up, multiparty politics are about citizens of a country enjoying unfettered rights to express their political views as well as receive political views from others without hindrance from anyone, including the government, as long as such expression and receiving does not infringe on the rights of other citizens. This is also what democracy is partly about.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Stated simply, the problem that I want to look at can be expressed in the form of a question: has the role that the press has played in Africa's surprise change early in the 1990s from authoritarian government to plural politics and democratic dispensation made a difference in the conception of the African press from what it has been during the time of one-party and military rule? In other words, I want to explore whether the coming of multipartyism and democracy in the 1990s to Africa correspondingly changed the way the African press operated. My intellectual exploits arise from the hypothesis that the press of any country/region/continent reflects the politics of that country/region/continent and vice versa.

# Chapter 2: The Press in One-Party and Military Regimes

## 2.1 The Press and the Democratic Process

### *2.1.1 Link with the five publications*

As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, the press in the one-party and military regimes was mainly government-owned and, therefore, pro-government and would, normally, not be expected to campaign for political change beyond the government line (Publication No. 1). The campaign for the democratisation of Africa had to come, and indeed mainly came both openly and in some cases clandestinely, from the independent press (Publication Nos. 3 and 4).

In order to have any political impact, however, the independent press, which in most cases was operating against all odds, had to be resolute, persistent, and ethical, although at times illegal (Publication No. 2).

The assumption, however, that the independent press in Africa, as elsewhere, had an influence on politics which helped to bring about multiparty politics and democracy later in the 1990s, needs to be first established as a fact. But before I do that, it is also important to point out that the government press should not be seen as being equally and uniformly quiescent of government authorities everywhere in Africa. There were some, albeit few, government newspapers during the one-party and military rule which were, surprisingly, relatively critical of the administration. These, as we shall see in this chapter, may be said to have also contributed in some way to the political change to multipartyism and democracy. Some government media, particularly those of Anglophone countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, have provided critical insights to conflict generating issues in society, thereby contributing to the criticism against government that is necessary for any political change to emerge (Ugboajah & Sobowale, 1980:140; Kasoma, 1986a; Sandbrook, 1999:16-17). Some of the critical information, as we shall see shortly, which the government press has published may be said to have been published by chance or accident in the process of reporting speeches of government officials, protests by citizens and other mobilising actions.

In this chapter, I shall discuss the question of the role of the press in the one-party and military regimes that preceded the period of multipartyism and democracy. This discussion is important for understanding the transformation of the press in the 1990s regarding its role in politics.

### *2.1.2 The independent press and democracy*

There is debate on whether an independent press is a prerequisite for democracy in theory and with regard to the political changes in Africa in the 1990s, in particular. I will discuss the general theoretical question later in Chapter 3. In this chapter, I want to address the practical question of whether the independent press was a causal factor in bringing democracy to Africa. I am aware of the strong opinion that is held by some scholars who maintain that the independent press had no role in the coming of democracy to Africa. According to them, when multipartyism came to Africa, the press was predominately government-owned and, therefore, neither supported nor campaigned for democratic change.

It is important in dealing with this issue to first remind ourselves about the nature of democracy. In Chapter 1, I explained that democracy is an ideal which is attained more or less

in a more perfect form, the more we strive to get it by acquiring its benchmarks in better forms. Bearing this in mind, the next question to be answered is: at what point can we really say democracy came to Africa? I do not think we can reasonably pin the coming of democracy to Africa to a definite time. The decision to end one-party politics and allow other parties may have been the first step in the process but can hardly be equated with the coming of democracy. So were the other steps in the process such as the holding of multiparty elections, the installation of new governments etc.

It is my considered view that the independent press, and to a much lesser extent the government press, had more or less a facilitative role to play in the realisation of each of the democracy benchmarks, although the extent of its input was not with the same intensity in every case and for every country. At the time of making the decision to accept the existence of many political parties, the independent press may, indeed, have been weak or non-existent in many, perhaps most, countries. Its causal effect on the decision to abolish one-party politics may have been minimal or non-existent. However, soon after this decision was made, the independent press was firmly established in almost all the countries that took on multipartyism. Having been so strongly established, the independent press had more impact in facilitating the benchmarks of democracy.

It is with the preceding argument in mind that I, therefore, make the assertion that a certain measure of press freedom needs to be there before democracy can be born. Indications are that democracy has been slower in coming in countries where the press has been completely quiescent. Conversely, countries where the press has had some measure of freedom to expose bad governance and facilitate the realisation of democracy benchmarks, have attained democracy faster.

Free expression is an essential pre-condition to democratic politics, which in turn depends on the existence of an informed, aware and active citizenry. To be full and active citizens, then, individuals should be free to publish and receive information and opinions. The freedom to publish and receive information and opinions itself is hardly possible without a free press.

First, the communication system generally is important in turning people into citizens, a prerequisite in the democratisation of the body politic.

As O'Neil (1998) submits, mass communication in some form is critical to the establishment of democracy:

Ideally then, the media do not only provide a link between rulers and the ruled but also impart information that can constrain the centralisation of power and obfuscation of illicit or unethical state action. ... The media ... is (sic) vital to the creation and vitality of civil society; without it, freedom of communication, and thus the foundation of democratic rule, is undermined. (O'Neil, 1998:2)

Writing about the contribution of the media to democratisation in the Third World, Randall (1993) states that:

Though the national media themselves rarely played a 'triggering' role, in a situation in which popular protest or opposition demands were already beginning to mount, they could widen awareness of issues and help put some kind of frame on events. They could mobilise and orchestrate popular protest. By deepening and accelerating political communication in this way they significantly added to the pressures on the authorities. (Randall, 1993:636)

With particular reference to Africa, the recognition of the potency of the independent press in democratisation was pronounced in the UNESCO Windhoek Declaration which proclaimed:

Consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the establishment and maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development. (UNESCO Windhoek Declaration 1991)

An independent press existed in Africa during the era of one-party and military governments, although its potency varied from country to country. As Ronning has stated:



The new independent media with a democratic agenda did not emerge from vacuum when they started appearing in the late 80's, indeed there have been critical and independent voices in the media in Africa also in the period of one-party rule, and even in the official press criticism has been voiced.

(Ronning, 1998:13)

Further in the same article, Ronning has submitted that:

While the media have rarely constituted the actual cause which served as the direct catalyst for the democratic process, both the mainstream media and the journalists based within them and the new and alternative media have often been a source of direct pressure and demands for democratisation and a watch dog in relation to governmental malpractices

(Ronning, 1998:19).

The presence of the independent press, however, was more conspicuous in some countries and almost negligible in others.

Countries in Africa where a relatively independent and free press has accelerated the coming of democracy include Nigeria, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa. It is noteworthy that all these countries are former British colonies. Generally, Anglophone Africa has enjoyed a freer press, and, therefore, a quicker return to democracy than both Francophone and Lusophone Africa, although the cases of Benin and Cote d'Ivoire seem to be exceptions. For many of the Francophone countries, independence rang the death knell for the independent press, leaving a sycophantic official press competing with each other to produce the most flattering editorials and news reports about government (Duteil and Duteil, 1991).

Nigeria, which finally in 1999 shook off the shackles of military rule, has all along, through its long military government history, had some of the freest and independent newspapers in Africa. Despite the fact that most Nigerian dailies were government-owned, a significant proportion was owned by private individuals and companies, unlike the situation in most African countries, during the one-party and military government era, where the government owned and controlled the most significant portion of the press. It is as a direct result of substantive private ownership that the Nigerian press, despite long stretches of military rule, was by the close of the 1990s, still among the freest on the continent (Puri, 1991:28). Nigerian journalists have kept press freedom alive by constantly challenging and defying attempts by successive military regimes to suppress them. The President of the Nigerian Union of Journalists, Ladi Lawai, bemoaning the country's strict laws, has been reported as saying that the press in post-independence Nigeria has been less free than it was in the colonial period, 'we have never had it so tough even in the colonial period,' he said on the occasion of the 49<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union (Zambia Daily Mail, 18 March 1995). The fact that multipartyism and democracy eluded Nigeria until 1998 (when elections were held) is, in my opinion, more a reflection of military muscle than the timidness of the Nigerian press and journalists. If it were not for the soldiers yielding the gun to force their will on Nigerians, the vibrant independent press would have played a decisive role in helping to make Nigeria attain multipartyism and democracy much earlier.

The press in Zambia has been relatively free in the early post-independence years (Kasoma, 1986a) until President Kenneth Kaunda's tightening grip nearly throttled it during the 1970s and 1980s. During Kaunda's tight grip on the Zambian press, the National Mirror, a church-owned independent newspaper, refused to bulge even after being denied advertisements from government and parastatal (government-owned) companies. From its founding in 1972, the weekly tabloid has been a consistent and constant critic of Kaunda's one-party rule and some of the evils that came with it. Kaunda found what he derogatorily referred to as 'the little mirror' a thorn in the flesh.

Kenya, which enjoyed a relatively free press before the onset of the new wind of change of the 1990s (N'gweno, 1978), suddenly flung into the limelight as the East African country where the independent press and the government often came to head-on collision. It cannot be denied that some sections of the independent press in Kenya played a crucial role in exerting local and international pressure on the government of Daniel arap Moi which led to the

government giving in and allowing Kenya to become a multiparty and democratic state in 1992. It can, generally, be said that the treatment of journalists during the period starting from June 1990, was typical of government hostility towards the independent press. Like in other African states at the time, a number of journalists were harassed by the government through the use of security personnel. It was clear, through these harassment, that the Kenyan government had a lot of pressure from the independent press which was agitating for multipartyism and democracy.

South Africa provides the most interesting situation regarding the role of the independent press in agitating for multiparty politics and democracy. The apartheid regime lost no opportunity to arrest any journalist under the notorious Section 21 of the Internal Security Act and other laws which gave it powers to detain anyone indefinitely and incommunicado, without charge or trial for the purpose of interrogation. The names of the people so detained were not to be mentioned in the country's press or other forms of communication. Despite this treatment, many anti-apartheid journalists both black and white, particularly those whites working for what was and is commonly known as the English press, soldiered on. A number of anti-apartheid newspapers and other publications as well as broadcast stations, both internal and external were banned. The South African newspapers and magazines which at one time or other received warnings from the Minister of Home Affairs, a prerequisite to being suspended, or had their editors arrested, included practically every newspaper and magazine in the country, including, the government's own South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). But the journalists of South Africa soldiered on amidst some of the most brutal suppressions of journalists the continent has ever seen and is likely to see. The role of the independent press in South Africa's struggle to democracy is perhaps unmatched anywhere on the continent. It, ironically, even made the apartheid regime to boast to the international community that it allowed the independent press to operate unlike in many other African countries, a statement which media people within South Africa challenged as a fallacy (see for example Qubozza, 1978:231). Tomaselli and Louw (1989) in their article, 'Alternative Press and Political Practice: The South African Struggle', have discussed how the alternative press of various types – they name nine categories – put political pressure, of one form or another, on the apartheid regime.

Although the press has been less vibrant in Francophone Africa, it nonetheless, has had some effect in accelerating multipartyism and democracy. In Benin, the first African country to adopt multiparty politics, during the period between February 1990 when a National Conference declared the country a multiparty state, and the multiparty elections in January 1991, the country's independent press, which had mushroomed in what might be called the interregnum period, became the champion of multipartyism and democracy. Commenting on the role of the independent press in Benin during this time, a journalist from that country, Francis Laloupo, wrote:

Given the new economic challenges which face the country, there is mounting criticism of the absence of political debate designed to set the nation on the right path. The independent press, no longer a club for the expression of received opinions, is taking a surprising outspoken stance in articulating criticism, particularly attacks on those in power. It is as though the press is the only place for opposition in a democracy which is still trying to establish the rule of a game which will allow free expression of divergent views.

(Laloupo, 1991:6)

Other Francophone countries where the independent press has been active in condemning one-party or military rule in favour of multipartyism and democracy include Mali, Cameroon, and Cote d'Ivoire.

The main reason why in Francophone countries the independent press was less active in spearheading multipartyism and democracy was that generally the press was more tightly controlled than in Anglophone countries. In Mali, for example, a new measure was adopted on 27 December 1990 requiring newspapers to submit copies of all editions to the authorities prior to publication (Index, 1991:38). Countries such as Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire had very stringent censorship regulations. According to a report by Reporters sans Frontieres, by

April 1992, there had been at least 218 instances of censorship in the 40 Francophone countries covered in the Reporters Sans Frontières 1991 Report, 'La liberte de la press dans leys pays Francophone'. The survey records 84 arrests or examinations; 76 cases of overt censorship like seizures, bans or the application of the censor's scissors; 11 foreign correspondents expelled; at least 24 cases of torture or beating by government bodies; more than 80 cases of harassment and 17 journalists in prison. The report noted that virtually all such violations of press freedom were aimed at keeping incumbent governments in power (Index, 1992:26).

In Lusophone or Portuguese-speaking Africa, more effort by journalists in Mozambique and Angola have been thrown into reporting against the civil war than calling for multipartyism and democracy although the call was implied in the demands to end civil war. All former Portuguese colonies in Africa inherited a very strict practice of press censorship, although in Mozambique, particularly after the peace agreement was made between FRELIMO and RENAMO, the press enjoyed relatively more freedom. Writing about the Angolan press and journalists in the 1980s, Coelho (1983) has aptly expressed their frustrations in the face of acute government censorship.

It (press) is constantly being accused, insulted and maltreated, then, the next minute, being pressed into service, the object of devoted attention, only to be rejected again shortly afterwards. The journalist, meanwhile, feels damned if he speaks and damned if he doesn't. (Coelho, 1983:301)

In discussing the role of the press in the one-party and military regime politics of the Africa of the 1970s and 1980s, it is important to point out that although the official government press was the most common, there was a section of the independent press which had some prominence in some countries such as Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Zambia. I will first focus on the role that the independent press, where it was most active, played in the one-party and military rule politics before I turn to the role played by the official press which, as we have seen, was the dominant type of press during the period.

## 2.2 The Independent Press

Literature abounds about the opposition of the independent press to one-party or military rule (see for example Barton, 1979; Faringer, 1991; Karikari, 1993; Ngugi, 1995; Ronning, 1966, 1998; Quboza, 1978; Waldahl, 1998; Murdock, 1992; Sandbrook, 1996; Randall, 1993; Kasoma, 1986a). Apart from such scholarly works, there has been a lot of information provided by human rights and press freedom organisations across the globe in their regular official publications about the heroic and other efforts that journalists of the independent press in Africa have been making to oppose one-party and military rule.

Not much, however, seems to have been written about the role of the independent press during the two decades in supporting one-party and military rule (see for example, Gecau, 1996; Ochieng, 1992). This is partly because some of the literary contributions on this topic is hidden in the literature about the manipulation of the free press by rulers of the one-party and military governments who have been accused of influencing, or indeed corrupting, the press to support them. I will discuss the two roles of the independent press in this part of the review.

### 2.2.1 *Opposition to one-party and military rule*

The opposition of the independent press to one-party and military rule, which was expected, was based on the traditional role of the press in a liberal democracy as a watchdog against government, which will be discussed later. Accordingly, the independent press, despite the fact that the political situation had changed from a more liberal one which existed at independence to a more authoritarian one which did not allow political dissent, still saw itself as the spokes-organ of the people's human rights which it saw being violated by the one-party

and military regimes. It also saw its role as that of assisting in making the governments transparent and accountable for their actions or the lack of them. Its criticism of the governments was expressed through news reports, opinion pieces, including editorials and other features, letters to the editor, and even advertisements.

In news reports, the independent press highlighted news items which were either directly or indirectly critical of the administration. The people were informed of incidences in which the party cadres who were also regarded as government officers (since there was in many countries little or no distinction between the two) treated the rank and file unfairly by disregarding their human rights. The independent press was full of news reports exposing bad governance. Reports of corrupt practices and incompetence by party and government officials were prominently displayed. So were stories about the high rate of crime which the independent press in its opinion columns often blamed on rampant unemployment brought about by the general economic slump which the one-party and military governments had caused in their countries through economic mismanagement.

Journalists from the independent press also attacked the bad policies and bad governance of the one-party and military regimes in their editorials and other features. Some of these features came in the form of humorous satirical columns in which the writers poked fun on the rulers. Zambia's Kapelwa Musonda column in the Times of Zambia, which run for over 30 years, is one of the best examples of satirical writing which was critical of the one-party state.

The independent press also indirectly criticised the one-party and military government by allowing the publication of critical correspondence in the 'Letters to the Editor' sections of the newspapers. Some of the letters were so critical of the government that the government secret service officers often made inquiries at newspaper offices about the identities of some of the writers, particularly those that criticised the head of state. (I experienced this when I was features editor for two years for the Times of Zambia in the mid-70s).

### *2.2.2 Contradictory views on power of the independent press*

There are two contradictory views by scholars regarding the role of the independent press in Africa in enhancing democracy. On one hand, there are those like Traber (1997) and Domatob (1991) who hold that the African press is autocratic rather than democratic and that the views, activities, trials and triumphs of the vast majority who are peasants, labourers, farmers, shepherds and market traders are usually excluded from the press (Domatob, 1991). Africa media analysts like the Duteils (Michael and Mireille) even go as far as declaring that the (few) literate and educated readers in Francophone Africa have opted to go through the absurdity of buying, reading and listening to foreign rather than local media (Duteil and Duteil, 1991). Indeed, the observation of the Duteils with regard to Francophone countries can equally be applied to Anglophone Africa where many of the evoules listen to the news bulletins of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the Voice of America and other foreign stations more regularly than their local broadcasting stations and read foreign newspapers from the United Kingdom (U.K.) and the U.S.A. instead of locally published ones. The foreign broadcast stations and newspapers provide the few African elite with more truthful reporting about news and events in their countries than the local press (to which the majority of the people have no access) are able to do.

Concurring with the view about the dominance of an urban press in Africa, Fergusson (1993:32), Kpudeh and Riley (1992:269), and Kivikuru (2000) have stated that in the clamour for democracy sweeping across Africa, it is the urban professional's voice which is often heard and his or her demands appeased whilst the needs and perspective of the rural majority remain neglected. Fergusson (1993:32) has further submitted that it is precisely to limit the participation of rural citizens that African states have been reluctant to extend modern telecommunication infrastructure outside main urban areas. In essence, what the protagonists of this view are saying is that the independent press in Africa has been so small in terms of

reach and so elitist in terms of content that it cannot be much of a driving force towards bringing about democracy.

On the other hand, other press analysts like Imanyara (1992:21), Louw and Tomaselli (1994:64) do not agree. For Imanyara, the independent press, which he sometimes refers to as the alternative press, has been decisive in democratisation. He writes:

Generally, the role of the press in democratisation has been that of an independent forum and mouthpiece of crusaders of change. The openness of the alternative press to the public and its bold approach to sensitive and critical political issues, has had the cumulative effect of inciting the general public to wake up to their democratic rights and demand change.

(Imanyara, 1992:21)

Writing about the Kenyan experience before the coming of multiparty politics and democracy, Imanyara states that the alternative press had provoked the people to debate their political destiny at a time when the integrity of parliament was smothered by an overweening and predatory executive (Imanyara, 1992:21). Louw and Tomaselli (1994:64) see the press in Africa as facilitating social dialogue, democracy and an on-going learning process. They want the press (of South Africa) to be a mechanism for institutionalising dialogue so that an active grassroots political culture can directly impact on national policy.

It is my submission that although in terms of size and reach the independent press in Africa has, admittedly, been generally small, particularly before the 1990s, it has tended to reach the most politically influential people who have played a decisive role in shaping their countries' political destinies. It is precisely the better educated urban dwellers, whom the independent press has tended to reach, who can reasonably be expected to be receptive to the political views the press presents and not the less educated and less politically aware rural and marginalised people it has largely ignored.

After being politically charged by the independent press, the urban elite, if they are politically ambitious, and many of them are, start politicising the rural and marginalised people with ideas largely borrowed from the agenda set by the independent press. This is not an excuse, however, for the failure of the independent media to reach the majority of the people in Africa whom they ought to reach but rather an explanation of why, despite being insignificant in terms of both participation and reach, the independent press can still be said to be reasonably effective in the process of democratisation in Africa.

Africa's independent press can specifically be credited for contributing to political change in two significant ways. First, the independent press has broken the myth, once held on the continent, that the African authoritarian rulers were invincible and could not be criticised. The once idolised presidents, thanks to the independent press, are no longer untouchable and for the first time, have become subjects of severe public criticism. They have severely been criticised for not observing human rights. They have, for example, been severely criticised for wrecking the economies of their countries through their largely unattainable socialist policies. They have also been criticised for muzzling freedom of the press and for not allowing the people political freedom to have a say on who governs them and how they should be governed.

Newspaper readers who were before the 1990s used to seeing their political leaders immortalised in the press through a well orchestrated ritual of hierarchical news reporting (Kasoma, 1987) and who were accustomed to reading a drab official press singing songs of praise for its masters (Duteil and Duteil, 1991), suddenly awoke to the reality of a watchdog press stubbornly critical of those in government. The once so-called dissidents now found a voice in the independent press to express their recalcitrant views against the administration to the disgust of the demythologised presidents who were quick to try and silence the unwelcome challenge to their authority.

The second significant contribution of the independent press to multipartyism and democratic political change in Africa has been the fact that some of the few readers who have been the most fervent supporters of independent newspapers have themselves been political aspirants of the new order and have used the newspapers to propel their ideas of dissent against government and call for a new political order. Their ideas have spread like bush fire to a peo-

ple who have been more than willing for political change. Beguiled by a severe economic crisis which has literally reduced the continent's people to virtual destitutes, the people of Africa have been very receptive to dissent from the independent press. Before the coming of multiparty politics, Africans had seen in the independent press a chance to mount concerted opposition that would result in the electorate voting the long-established regimes out of power.

The contribution of the international independent press to Africa's democratisation is also worth mentioning. In the age of instant satellite radio and television broadcasts, the news about the democratisation of East Europe and the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1989 must have come as a shock worth emulating to many Africans, particularly those which had close ties with countries belonging to this political grouping. The details about these political events were also profusely read in foreign newspapers and political magazines. Ronning (1998:15) has also acknowledged the contribution of the international media to Africa's democratisation by stating that they (the international media) have contributed to the creation of popular discontent and awareness of political alternatives.

Discussing the role of the international media in the democratic process, O'Neil (1998) has submitted that no country could shut out the tide of information of the events in the former Soviet Union and the rest of eastern Europe that undermined regime credibility, raised expectations, and eventually helped to destroy communist rule. He concludes:

In broader terms, what international mass communications have the potential to do is to serve as a source of information otherwise restricted at the domestic level, and as an instrument of what have been termed demonstration effects. Demonstration effects refer to the process by which transition processes in one state influence the calculations of societal and state actors in another. Populations become informed about and encouraged by the changes elsewhere and begin to press for change at home as well; elites become panicky over the downfall of the autocrats abroad and in response become more reconciliatory or reactionary, either of which may spark mass mobilisation.

(O'Neil, 1998:12)

### 2.3 Support for One-Party and Military Governments

A section of the independent press in Africa, however, has supported one-party and military rule either voluntarily or involuntarily. Scholars like Gacau (1996) and Kasoma (1986a) and Sandbrook (1996) have documented how private publishers of newspapers such as the London Rhodesia Company (Lonrho) and the Aghakan have sought political favours from rulers of one-party or military governments by having their newspapers toe the official line. Editors who refuse to 'obey instructions' by choosing to exercise editorial independence, have been removed from editorship and replaced by more 'obedient' ones. Similarly, when those in government are not happy either with the news coverage of certain events or opinions expressed in editorials and other features by a newspaper, they have complained to the newspaper owners who have exerted influence over the editors to give the government favourable coverage.

It is important to point out that the influence which the independent newspaper publishers have allowed to be exerted on their press have been from the highest political level – the President. Usually, such publishers have wide-ranging economic interests in the countries in which they publish the newspapers. To ensure favours from the government for their economic empires, they have appointed people very close to the President, usually a relative, to be the corporate chairpersons of their conglomerates. By using such chairpersons, the publishers are able to interpret more or less what the President wants their newspapers to publish and not to publish. An additional point of influence which I have discussed elsewhere (Kasoma, 1986a) is the practice by which the publisher arranged that the President appoints the editors of her or his newspaper(s). In such arrangements, rarely were editors who were anti-government appointed. In the few cases where anti-government editors were 'accidentally'

appointed, they were soon after taking office made to toe the official line or told to leave if they persisted in 'disobedience' Kasoma, 1986a).

The realities of newsrooms of newspapers with such sycophant editors were that the editor publicly, particularly among her or his staff, proclaimed her or his editorial independence and encouraged her or his journalists to exercise it, while privately she or he received instructions from the publishers or the Office of the President regarding the officially desirable line of treating certain so-called 'sensitive' stories. Good journalists working for such newspapers tended to be frustrated people since every copy they filed which was critical of government was either 'killed' or heavily edited to toe the official line. In due course, many of the journalists on such newspapers practised self censorship by avoiding to report on 'sensitive' stories or report them along the official line. The editors were in no doubt as to what the official line was since, apart from the 'instructions' from the publisher and/or the corporate chairperson, they also frequently received briefings at the Presidential Palace, often by the President himself.

In this connection, Sandbrook's (1971) rather penetrating insight is worth quoting:

The struggle between government and press is weighted against the latter. Limited markets, precarious finances, and the intimidating power of government to reward friends and punish enemies tempt newspapers to temporise with the politically powerful. Some journalists are bought off. Some publishers placate the government in order to escape libel actions, avoid unsettling threats and harassment, and buttress advertising revenues from firms which had hitherto feared association with an "opposition" newspaper. Other newspapers bypass political controversies by transforming themselves into tabloids devoted to sports and scandals. Still others continue in a critical vein, but live a precarious life.

(Sandbrook, 1971:84)

There was another type of independent press namely that which supported the one-party or military government not by coercion but voluntarily. The editors of such newspapers usually had some connections with the people in government either financially or personally or both. At the financial level, some of these newspapers were either wholly financed or subsidised by the government or by a person or persons in the government. The financial or personal connections, however, were rarely made public. The newspaper passed as a privately-financed publication which, out of its own conviction, had chosen to support government.

Newspapers which were supportive of the one-party or military governments were often referred to as 'responsible' newspapers while those which were critical of the government were dubbed 'irresponsible'. Thus, being a 'responsible' journalist in the one-party or military state often meant not carrying out the watchdog role but being an uncritical supporter of government in the opinion pieces and in news reporting by avoiding taking positions which could be interpreted as being critical of the government.

The foregoing shows that it is certainly not true in every case to state, as Andersen (1996:161) does, that the media must be privately-owned and market driven in order to make bureaucracy and politicians accountable to the citizens. It would all have to depend on what type of private media in terms of what their policies are and whether or not they are truly independent and free from government control. But it is true to state that it is the privately-owned and market driven media which are more prone to make bureaucracy and politicians accountable to citizens than government-owned media.

## 2.4 Support for Democratisation by Government Press

Just as there was a small section of the independent media which supported one-party or military rule, there were also government newspapers and, sometimes even broadcast stations, during the one-party and military era, which occasionally supported democratic change either knowingly or unknowingly. It was not unusual for government newspapers and broadcast stations, particularly during the early stages when one-party or military rule were just introduced, to voice dissent, mostly indirectly, about the undemocratic aspects of the systems.

Mistakes by people in government, except the President, as well as bad policies, were sometimes criticised and suggestions for solutions made. But editors and broadcast directors knew just how far they could go in their criticism and suggestions. They hardly, if ever, criticised the President or called for change of the system of government from one-party or military rule to a multiparty elected regime. Those editors and broadcast directors who allowed themselves and their media to cross the limit were always 'disciplined' by the party or military regime, which quite often meant losing their jobs and being blacklisted never to be employed in a journalistic job.

As the one-party and military governments became entrenched, however, fewer criticisms of the 'system', even the most veiled ones, were tolerated from the government press. The one-party or military government had succeeded in setting up a well-oiled machinery for checking on recalcitrant government press journalists and media houses. The machinery consisted of, first and foremost, the President's Assistant for the Press, a post which most countries had, who was the person who was the direct link between the press, particularly the government one, and the President. She or he often briefed the press on government policy regarding how to tackle certain so-called sensitive stories. She or he often had direct access to the editors and broadcast directors to give them reprimands or praises from the President for what they were doing. In some countries she or he also sat on boards of directors of the government media houses. Next, there was the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, as it was called in many countries, with the Minister as the political head who controlled directly, in many cases, the running of the government press. She or he usually had assistant or deputy ministers entrusted with specific assignments in the supervision of government media. The administrative head of the Ministry was the Permanent or Principle Secretary who kept personal files of government newspaper editors broadcast directors and other senior journalists. She or he appointed them, under the authority of the Minister. It was a brave and determined editor or broadcast director who defied such a watertight press control mechanism and went ahead to advocate for democratic change.

However, as the one-party and military governments lost their popular control towards the end of the 1980s, with the rise of social movements which protested against misgovernance which the run-down economies and abject poverty of the people had laid bare, the government press again started coming out as a kind of vox populi to veildly criticise the government in some countries and call for political change. It did this, however, with a tongue in the cheek in what may be called a bite-and-blow mouse-like behaviour. The simile comes from the behaviour of a mouse which is chewing off a finger of a sleeping person (who goes to bed without washing his hands properly after eating a meal of fish or meat so that her or his fingers have the scent of what she or he ate). The mouse bites and blows, the blowing meant to soothe the pain of the bite so that it can continue biting. Similarly, the editors of the government press in Africa have been known to criticise the administration in one breath and somehow withdraw the criticism in the next breath with a 'but', 'nevertheless', 'although' or similar qualifying words.

Writing about the role of government media in democratisation, O'Neil (1998) has qualified his remarks by stating that the degree of state control needs to be taken into consideration. Some authoritarian orders are able to stifle all forms of criticism by closing alternative publications, restricting access to electronic communications, and centralising news services within an oversight framework to 'pre-censor' the media. In other circumstances, state authorities lack either the power or the interest in direct control and rely instead on a system of post-publication censorship using means from socialisation, harassment, economic sanctions against publications or programmes for slander or public incitement, the revocation of licences or supplies, jail terms against journalists to the extremes of torture and murder. Then O'Neil specifically elaborates on how the government broadcast media play their role in democratising society:

First, information can be disseminated by accident; that is protests, speeches, Or other mobilising activities are transmitted by chance, before such information can be censored. ... Second,



the dissemination occurs as a product of a regime crisis, in which state-run media institutions come to believe that they can ignore the strictures of censorship with fear of state reprisal. It is often the media's reflection from the authoritarian camp that seals the latter's fate. (O'Neil, 1998:12)

## 2.5 The Press as Political Opposition in One-Party and Military Regimes

African governments, having succeeded in proscribing all political opposition, increasingly saw the press, official but more especially independent, which was critical of their rule as fomenting political opposition. They, accordingly, in many cases treated it as a subversive organ which was being used by political dissidents. Some of the editors confirmed this impression by publicly stating in their newspapers that since there was no political opposition in the country, they had taken on the onerous role of the opposition to act as a check on government (Kasoma, 1986a).

This explains the excessive bashing that the rulers of one-party and military regimes gave journalists who they regarded as expressing opposition views. For, although the countries had legally become one-party or military states, political dissent had not completely disappeared. There were people who continued voicing political dissent in the so-called dark-corner meetings as evidenced by the high number of political detainees and prisoners in many of the countries. In some countries such as South Africa, as was indicated earlier, the press was forbidden by law from disseminating statements by political detainees or prisoners. Many newspapers and foreign-based broadcast stations (such as the African National Congress Radio Freedom broadcast to South Africa from Lusaka, Zambia) dared the authorities on this ban. The fire for the struggle for plural politics and democracy was kept burning in the hearts of many citizens because they followed through the media what their leaders were saying and telling them to do. In some instances, the dare-devil actions by the press to publicise statements from political detainees and prisoners, ironically, helped bring about reconciliation and democratic change as was witnessed by the publicity given to the world's most famous political prisoner, Nelson Mandela, by the South African and other international media.

The banning of newspapers and other publications which published critical views against government was, in many cases, aimed at killing political opposition factions which the publications were meant to represent. The editors of such publications themselves were regarded as people who did not belong to the one and only political party but to various underground political factions. It was for this reason that editors and directors of the government press were scrutinised with regard to their political leanings before being appointed. In many cases, the country's secret service was involved in screening the appointment.

The contribution of the editors and other journalists, who used their media as political opposition of sorts against the one-party and military regimes, was, in many cases, rewarded by the leaders of the new multiparty elected governments. Some of these editors and directors were coopted in the new governments as ministers/secretaries, deputy ministers/secretaries etc. Some of the editors, however, opted to remain outside the government circles, preferring to continue as journalists who either supported the new regime, or continued with their critical, watchdog role against the new government this time.

Some of the political opposition views and opinions which the press expressed during the one-party and military rule were, however, faction views from within the sole parties or military establishments themselves and were expressed by the journalists in the press deliberately or unknowingly. This was particularly the case during times of political crises and indecision when editors and broadcast directors were not yet in a position to tell the official party line from the semi official or even contradictory line. During such times, the party machinery was usually quick to brief editors and directors about the official party line regarding certain controversial issues. Some of the unofficial or opposing views were disseminated by the press, especially the government one, before such briefings had taken place, as editors and

directors took advantage of the confusion. For well-organised parties and military establishments, however, such moments of confusion were rare, since there was always someone in the top ranks of the party or military who editors or directors could contact for briefing.

Using the press as political opposition was a graver crime in those one-party or military governments which had incorporated the press completely in the party or military structure as its information wing. This was because in such situations, the people appointed to oversee the operations of the official press were usually senior party or military officials who were normally politicians and not journalists.

There were situations, however, in which the party or military hierarchy left the official press to operate more or less on its own, headed by professional journalists, with minimal political supervision. It is in such situations where the official press was more likely to behave as political opposition for a short time before it was checked.

Sometimes, editors and/or newspapers who/which acted as political opposition, particularly those from the independent media, became organs for an opposition party, usually the main one, during the time when multipartyism was finally legalised. These were usually the same editors and newspapers who/which continued to support the new multiparty elected governments as their official organs in addition to the government press which such governments inherited from their predecessors.

After all has been said about the merits and demerits of the press acting as political opposition in the one-party and military governments, it has to be admitted that such a press played a no mean role in helping to raise the political consciousness of the citizens which must have played some role towards the popular agitation for mass mobilisation for multipartyism and democratic governance.

## 2.6 Press Policy of Post-Colonial One-Party and Military Rule

In order to understand the role of the press in one-party and military governments in Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s, it is important to examine the press policy of these regimes. This will give us an insight into how the press operated in the way it did. It will also prepare us to understand the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press presented later in this review. (This links with Publications Nos. 1 and 5.)

The one-party and military regimes outrightly rejected the idea of a watchdog press because it hardly fitted in their total rejection of liberal democracy and capitalist ethos. What was important to them was not the freedom of expression and of information which the press provided under a liberal democracy but rather the rallying-point role which the press, if properly harnessed, provided for a nascent nation whose peoples still needed to be moulded into nationhood. Martin (1998) has given a penetrating insight into how the media under the post-independence African governments closely resembled that of the colonialists which also allowed little free expression, which is an essential precondition for democratic politics. He writes:

The striking characteristic of the coming of independence and the two decades that followed is not the extent to which they presented a break with the colonial past but rather their remarkable continuity with the past. ... Freedom of expression was viewed as neither necessary nor significant in the development process. In the substantial literature on development, few, if any, arguments have suggested that free expression might contribute in any way to development. The primary role of the mass media was to serve the government - the embodiment of the people's unity and the engine for development.

(Martin, 1998:66-69)

Indeed, the African leaders, as Righter (1978) states, argued that the Western model of the press was undesirable in itself.

Instead of championing the right of the public to make the fullest use of the mediating institutions between their individual rights and the constraints of power, the press should adopt a didactic, even ideological, role, explaining to the people their part in forging the new social order. It (press) must therefore support authority instead of challenging it.  
(Righter, 1978:14-15)

Although African governments generally took the position that the Western watchdog model of the press was undesirable, this type of press did not disappear from their countries altogether. It existed in varying degrees of strength from one country to another. It was less in countries with more socialist leanings and more in those which supported the capitalist ideology. In practice, what obtained in many countries was a struggle between the two types of press: a developmental one and a watchdog one. However, because in most African countries the government press dominated the independent press, the official government policy of using the press as an instrument for development was dominant.

Politically, African rulers of this time preferred 'communal' democracy which they said was more akin to African socialism (Onuoha, 1965; Schapiro, 1972; Senghor, 1964; Bienen, 1978) and which they used to justify the one-party and military governments. Under this political ideology, the press was to be concerned not with satisfying individual needs and wants, or protecting individual rights, but with satisfying societal needs and rights as represented or propounded by the ruling one and only political party or military junta.

The press was, thus, variously described as a 'mirror of society', a 'conveyor belt' of information between the governors and the governed, and as a companion of the 'party and its government' or the 'military council and government' in nation-building. The press was additionally seen as a rallying point for the nation and the clarion call for every citizen in the new nation state to unite and work together to develop and build the young nation. It was not meant to be a Fourth Estate which contributed, in the classical sense, to the cultivation and existence of democracy by providing a necessary set of checks and balances. Rather it was part of the executive wing of government, its mouthpiece rather than opponent.

Accordingly, African states built up an elaborate system of the government information service under the ministry of information and broadcasting (Kasoma, 1990a, 1992b; Mwaura, 1980; Ugboajah, 1980) which was the umbrella under which the press was to be channelled for development and nation-building purposes. The information dragnet was, ideally, supposed to cover the rural areas so that government would be accorded the means to mobilise the people. Due to economic and other reasons, however, the government press did not embrace rural people as much as African governments wanted. This was especially true of the print media as well as television. Radio broadcasting penetrated rural areas more than the other media (Mytton, 1983). Due to its greater spread, radio was used more often by the one-party and military governments as a link between the people and "their" government. The address to the nation on radio (and television) by every President was, thus, institutionalised in the African politics of the time. The President would often record an address about an important announcement which was then solemnly broadcast to the nation. Quite often the presidential broadcasts were done live.

Broadcasting was, during the one-party and military rule, so politicised that programming of political material took a substantial amount of air time, perhaps beaten only, or in some cases equal, to the time taken by music, some of which consisted of songs with a political theme or message. Quite often, the entire speech of the President at a party or national rally, as they were called, was broadcast live for several hours.

The use of government media as a link between the government and the people tended to be one-sided. The views of the people, especially if they were expressing dissent, were rarely, if ever, publicised. They were effectively, in many cases, kept out of the government press either by government censors, particularly in Francophone and Lusophone countries, or by the editors and broadcast station directors through the practice of self-censorship.

The conception of the press which such a policy supported was referred to as the Development Media Theory (McQuail, 1987:119-121; Wilcox, 1977:40-41; Sandbrook, 1996:14; Servaes, 1999; Sussman, 1977:10-13). Depending upon how one understood and interpreted the term 'development', the so-called Development Media Theory could in fact turn out to be exactly the same as the so-called Authoritarian Theory of the Press since it could mean the press doing what those in power or authority wanted it to do. There was even a blending in the so-called Development Media Theory, of some of the characteristics of what has become known as the Soviet Press Theory when the responsibilities given to the press about its functions within the Party or military junta are taken into account ( see Siebert, Paterson, and, Schramm, 1956). Moreover, some sections of the press in certain African countries, albeit few as noted earlier, closely resembled the Western watchdog press. All in all, it can be said that there was not a single conception of the press which could be wholly attributed to the pre-1990 press policy of the authoritarian regimes of Africa.

It should be pointed out that this press policy by the one-party and military governments by and large went unchallenged both within and outside these countries. Within the country, there were few, if any, foolhardy people who dared to challenge the one-party and military iron-fisted rulers and risk being punished, often severely, for the act. From outside the country, there were again hardly any authorities which were interested in challenging such a press policy. Certainly not many from countries in the Eastern Block which may have seen this policy as somewhat resembling their own at least in as far as the exerting of authority on the press by the one and only party was concerned. Also not many from countries of the Non-Aligned Movement could reasonably be expected to challenge this policy which was in line with the self-determination and non-interference policies which the movement supported. If there were going to be any opponents of the press policy under the one-party or military government, it was expected to come from the capitalist countries which saw the policy as a denial of individual freedom of expression and, particularly, of the press, to criticise those in the administration as well as express political views freely. However, although Western capitalist countries did not approve of the press policy under the one-party and military rule, they did little, or nothing, to try and directly influence African governments collectively or individually to change it. In this regard, even the protest against the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) by the U.S.A. and Britain when both left UNESCO, which may be interpreted as a condemnation of government interference of freedom of the press, should be seen not so much as an attempt by the two countries to try and influence the African countries who were among the ardent supporters of NWICO, but as a principled expression of disagreement among nations which are presumably equal.

I will show in the next chapter, how this rather neutral stand by the Western countries against the policy on the press of one-party and military governments changed with the coming of multiparty politics and democratic governance to Africa in the 1990s.

# Chapter 3: From Authoritarianism to Multipartyism and Democracy

This chapter will deal with the role of the press in the immediate transition to multipartyism and democracy in Africa and how the press played its vital function in maintaining a reasonable measure of both in the 1990s. But before I do that, I want to set the tone of the chapter by discussing the issue of the democratic theory ignoring or, at least playing down, the role of the press in helping to bring about democracy.

## 3.1 Role of The Press for Democracy Ignored in Democratic Theory

Numerous authors, as we saw in the last chapter, have established the causal relationship between the press – a free and independent press – and democracy (Duteil and Duteil, 1991; Laloupo, 1991; Ansah, 1988:13; Babu, 1992:14; Imanyara, 1992:21; Lichtenberg, 1990:102, 1999:351-352; Geller, 1990:290; Bollinger, 1990: 372; Splichal and Wasko, 1993:3-4; Brants and Siune, 1998:138; Lahav, 1995:339 etc.). Their basic argument is that there can be no democracy in a situation where there is no free and independent press. Some of the basic arguments they have used include: freedom of the press in democratic societies is a nearly unchallengeable dogma which is essential to individual autonomy and self-expression and an indispensable element in democracy and the attainment of truth (Lichtenberg, 1990:102); the press in particular, serves as the people's watchdog, ensuring independent criticism and evaluation of the established power of government and other institutions that may usurp democratic power (Lichtenberg, 1990:110); a democracy depends on representative government and, therefore, on a free and unfettered press bringing to it all worthwhile ideas and views (Geller, 1990:290); even when a free press does not lead to the establishment of other parallel institutions, it inevitably reinforces democratic ideals and with freedom of the press, people are in a position to participate in the decision-making process (Bollinger, 1990:372).

In a much more recent treatise, Lichtenberg (1999) again affirms that public journalism (the press) has emerged in the 1990s alongside the revival of interest in civil society and civic participation both of which are often identified with democracy. He says that there are at least three connections:

First, public journalism is supposed to improve the quality of public discussion of politics. Second, public journalism is supposed to bring the public in, giving it an enhanced role as an actor in the public sphere rather than as just a spectator of debates among the elite. In so doing public journalism reinterprets the cliché about a free press giving citizens in a democratic society the information they need to make decisions, it can also give them opportunities to make decisions as well as new ways to conceive the choices before them.

The third connection between public journalism and civic renewal concerns journalists themselves. Public journalism reflects the model of the journalist as an outsider, the neutral observer who tells us how things are but plays no further role in public life. ... reporters do shape public discourse and guide public life, and therefore they might as well do these things self-consciously.

(Lichtenberg, 1999:351-352)

And, according to Brant and Soune (1998:138) the press is a prerequisite for a well-functioning democracy because for decades mass media have been the prime source of information, making people aware of issues and influencing the agenda of the most important political themes of the day, while Lahav (1985:339) simply states that freedom of the press is woven into the texture of modern democracy.

Despite this almost unanimous agreement by scholars that the press and democracy have a causal relationship, I have found it surprising, and a number of authors such as Dahl (1996), O'Neil (1998), and Ronning (1998) have the same opinion, that theorists of liberal democracy such as Held (1996), McPherson (1973), and McChesney (1999) have totally ignored the role of the press in fostering democracy. They fail to outrightly recognise the press as a factor that helps to bring about democracy. I am also equally surprised at authors like Grosswiler (1998) and Dahl (1998) who seem to be undecided to clearly come out and attribute to the press a causal relationship with democracy.

Regarding the first group, Held (1996), for instance, in his book, *Models of Democracy*, has given five criteria for a system of collective decision-making which allow extensive involvement of citizens in the diverse forms of political affairs that affect them "to be fully democratic". Interestingly, the press is not even listed as one of the five. In a subsequent submission, Held (196:316) again seems to leave out the press when he describes 'democracy' as a double-side stating that for democracy to flourish today it has to be reconceived as a double-sided phenomenon concerned, on one hand, with the reform of state power and, on the other hand, with the restructuring of civil society.

McChesney (1999) while not dismissing the role of the press in enhancing democracy, clearly suggests in his rather comprehensive treatise on democratic theory, that the media as they are today cannot be agents of democracy. He argues that the media have become a significant antidemocratic force in the United States and, to varying degrees, world-wide. He states that the wealthier and more powerful the corporate media giants have become, the poorer the prospects for participatory democracy. He argues that if democracy were to be valued, it would be imperative to restructure the media system so that it reconnects with the mass of citizens who in fact comprise "democracy". For this to happen, he envisions a media reform which would take place only if it was part of a broader political movement to shift power from the few to the many (McChesney, 1999:2-3).

As indicated above, other scholars like Grosswiler (1998) and Dahl (1998) seem to be sitting on the fence. Grosswiler posits that electronic media (and he includes in this term what is generally known as 'print media') can either enhance or disrupt the practice of democracy. He argues that what seems certain is that without conscious application of technology to democracy, the media would indeed serve demagoguery as politicians turn the democratic potential of the media into public relations and campaign tools (Grosswiler, 1998:135). Otherwise, Grosswiler believes what is known as electronic democracy can work when he states that beyond utopian arguments about whether electronic media are by nature democratising, the record of teledemocratic experiments provides persuasive evidence that the electronic democracy can be made to work (Grosswiler, 1998:148).

Dahl (1998) equally fails to clearly come out and name the press among the six political institutions of modern representative democracy which he lists. By implication, however, one could conclude that he is, partly, referring to the press in his 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> institutions which he describes as:

3. Freedom of expression. Citizens have a right to express themselves, without danger of severe punishment on political matters broadly defined, including criticism of officials, the government, the regime, the socio-economic order, and the prevailing ideology.

4. Access to alternative sources of information. Citizens have a right to seek out alternative and independent sources of information from other citizens, experts, newspapers, magazines, books, telecommunications, and the like. Moreover, alternative sources of information actually exist that are not under the control of the government or any other single political group attempting to influence public political beliefs and attitudes, and these alternative sources are effectively protected by the law.

(Dahl, 1998:85)

Thus, there are two groups: proponents of the thesis that there is no causal connection between democracy and the press and, those who concede that the press can help bring about democracy but not in the form that it is in today.

In what seems to be a response to the proponents of the thesis that there is no causal connection between democracy and the press, Splichal notes that there is one surprising characteristic in the matter of democracy: all fundamental ideas and texts on principles of democracy had appeared before the development of mass communication and the mass media in the strict sense, that is, before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and before the 'information revolution', although the contemporary massive prophesy of democratic society seems to be strongly related particularly to the recent developments of information and communication technologies (Splichal, 1993:3). Splichal's reasoning seems to be that it is not reasonable to argue that because democracy is much older than the press as we know it today, democracy does not, therefore, need the press. He aptly concludes:

Although the questions of democracy cannot be restricted to mass communication, the reason for considering the mass media much more relevant for general democracy than other forms of communication becomes quite clear when (a) contemporary society and its communication networks are compared with ancient and medieval societies; and (b) the general social significance of the mass media is compared with the political and economic relevance of other forms of communication.

(Splichal, 1993:4)

As I indicated at the outset of this argument, there are scholars who have the same view like me that denying the press in democratic theory any role, is rather strange.

For example, Dahl (1996) (not the one quoted above, who is among the scholars who have not come out to give the press any role in democracy) in his article on the interplay between media and democracy, has noted this seeming discrepancy. He writes:

Strangely enough, established theories on democracy do not allow much room for this kind of discussion. Very few, if any at all, include reflections of the very concept of mass communications or its significance for democracy. Not even the most insignificant reference to media and communication can be found in for instance the works of Robert A. Dahl or Stein Rokkan's all encompassing theories of political development and democracy. In the international Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences' comprehensive overview article on democracy, no reference whatsoever is made to the media – not even under the general 'conditions for democratisation' listed by Giovanni Sartori can such be found. Sartori includes conditions such as economic development, inter mediating structures, and management. No mention whatsoever is made, to the communications media, or to the media as intermediaries.

(Dahl, 1996:77)

O'Neil (1998) has made a similar observation in his book: *Communicating Democracy, the Media and Political Transitions*. He says that despite the fact that the recent spread of democracy has led to a commensurate amount of scholarly work on authoritarian collapse and democratisation, little attention has been given to the media in this regard. In his four-volume *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, for example, the media are never mentioned. (O'Neil, 1998:3 and 6).

Writing about the African democratic transition of the 1990s, Ronning has noted:

In principle the media play an important role in democratic life. It is therefore striking that the functions of the media have been treated relatively scantily in the democratic theory.

(Ronning, 1998:4)

Yet the human race has not really been short of instances where the press has played a significant, albeit prominent, role in the democratisation process. Apart from the African experience of the 1990s which is the subject of this review, there are a number of earlier examples in human history among them the American War of Independence, and the French Revolution. The rise of Communist China which culminated in the accession to power in 1949 of Mao TseTung is, in my view, an excellent example of how the press can be used to contribute to a drastic political change. Mao's communist party excelled in the use of radio to create political consciousness among the people even in the remotest parts of China where radio loudspeakers were fitted almost everywhere to broadcast Mao's thoughts and other Chinese Communist Party propaganda.

It does, therefore, seem logical for anyone theorising on democracy to give a recognition to the role of the press in the democratic process. I also have difficulties with theorists who,

while agreeing that the press generally has a role in bringing about democracy, insist that it first needs to be reformed before it can perform this function. My view is that, the press for as long as it is relatively free and independent can, in some measure, help to democratise society. In making this submission, I need to remind the reader what was established in Chapter 1 that democracy, just as a free press, are always actualised in relative rather than absolute terms.

### 3.2 The Independent Press at the Dawn of Multipartyism and Democracy

The independent press in Africa played a significant role in the politics of the period immediately prior to the advent of multiparty politics and democratic rule. Moreover, the newly acquired multiparty political dispensation and democratic governance would not have lasted for as long as it did without the support of a virile and independent press.

As soon as the one-party and military governments had given a clear political direction for change by giving the green light for multiparty politics and a liberalised economy, and before the one-party and military governments themselves were removed from power through the ballot box, the floodgates were opened for the establishment of many independent newspapers. So many independent newspapers appeared all of a sudden in all the countries which adopted multipartyism that for the first time the official government press was seriously challenged as a purveyor of news and information and setter for the public political agenda. The people now had a choice: to take what the government media were telling them, which was mainly the voice of the government, or to take what the independent press was saying which was mainly fault-finding about government. Many of them, perhaps the majority, preferred the watchdog independent press against the propaganda government press for a change.

### 3.3 Press as Watchdog

The adversarial or watchdog role of the press in a liberal democracy is based on two basic tenets. The first one is that in a democracy, the press has a duty to promote transparency, accountability and good governance by revealing to the citizenry what government is doing or not doing that deserves public attention. Government owes it to its citizens to explain its actions or the lack of them and does this mainly through the media of public communication. Secondly, in a democracy, the press should play a watchdog role by alerting the citizenry against misuse of power and bad governance. Like a watchdog, the press is supposed to bark only if something has gone or seems to be going wrong or is likely to be going wrong so that society can attend to it.

There are four arms of the body politic which make democratic governance possible, namely parliament, the judiciary, the executive and the press. Each of them balance and control the power of the other in order to make possible democratic governance. Parliament makes laws which the judiciary must interpret and uphold. The executive wing of government governs by translating the ruling party policies which parliament has codified into law or approved into a programme of action. The press in a democracy is like someone standing on a watchtower sounding alarms each time something seems not to be going right, especially within the executive as the centre of government policy and action. The press, in turn, is kept in check by laws initiated by the executive, enacted by parliament and enforced by the judiciary.

All the Four Estates, as they have been traditionally known in liberal democracy, are advocates of the people and serve the democratic process each in their own right. Parliament is the people's assembly where elected representatives promulgate laws in order to make it pos-



sible for everyone to enjoy their human rights and freedoms. The judiciary ensures that no person or group of persons in society unnecessarily deprives others of their right to enjoy their human rights and freedoms by breaking the law. It also ensures that no person is above the law. The executive, as the people's elected government, translates into practice the ruling party election manifesto and government policies in order to enhance the enjoyment of individual rights and freedoms by all the citizens. This often means initiating the promulgation of new laws. The press is, among other things, the day-to-day chronicler of activities mainly by government, particularly those which seem to be wrong so that society can be forewarned and acts to influence government to change its course. Its role is not only to give the information but also to interpret it by telling the people how their lives would be affected by the information it reports.

The press, therefore, together with the other three Estates, has a special enabling role in a democracy. It is a partner in the overall system of checks and balances that democracy entails. Without the press, one link of the democratic arm is severed thereby mortally wounding democracy.

The watchdog role of the press is directed mainly against the executive wing of government as the chief planner and actor in democratic governance. The press probes government to ensure that its actions or the lack of them are done or not done in the interests of all the citizens or at least the majority of them. By being a critic of government, the press complements the basic requirement of providing a visible, tangible, accessible and effective check on government which is a *conditio sine qua non* for democratic governance. To deny the press this role in a democracy is to negate one of the most basic tenets on which democratic governance is based.

The press is an adversary but not an enemy of government. Enemies are created when two sides have conflicting interests and fail to agree. The interest of the press and that of government in a liberal democracy is the same. They both are concerned, presumably, with the welfare of the citizenry. They both contribute to that interest from their respective points of view. By being a watchdog on government, the press is, therefore, merely performing its democratic role and not trying to be mischievous.

The watchdog role of the press, however, has duties and responsibilities. First and foremost, it has a responsibility to be an adversary for truth. Truth in journalism has two interpretations. First, it represents that which obtains in reality, the real state of affairs out there, as opposed to what is in the mind or *mens rea*, as the old Latinists would say. This is what is known as the 'objective' truth. Journalists being historians writing history in a hurry, strive to get the objective truth but sometimes do not get it. They end up giving a subjective truth i.e. truth either as seen by their sources or as seen by the journalists themselves. This is the second meaning of truth. The saying that a journalist is as good as his or her source underscores the fact that the truth that journalists present is often that as seen by their sources. When it is said that journalists are watchdogs against government for the truth, what is meant is that journalists are expected to report accurately and fairly what they are told as well as try and reflect in their reportage the objective truth. When journalistic reporting is not based on either of these two versions of truth but on other motives such as hatred or dislike for those in government, the press forfeits its role as a watchdog.

Unfortunately, not many journalists in the independent press understood the full meaning of the watchdog press. This was sometimes due to the lack of journalistic training and/or experience among many people who took up journalism during this period.

### 3.4 Education and Training of Journalists

The professional performance of journalists very much depends upon how well educated and trained they are for the task. Journalism is such an exacting profession that it is not right to expect journalists with little or no education and training to perform well.

There is a basic difference between education and training of journalists. Education of journalists refers to systematic instruction or schooling in preparation for work as journalists. It is about the whole course of scholastic instruction which journalists are supposed to receive. Training of journalists, on the other hand, means systematic instruction and exercise in the art, profession and occupation of journalism which journalists receive with a view to being proficient in it. In other words, education concerns the body of knowledge required in order to be a good journalist while training is about specific skills and proficiency required in order to perform the journalistic chores. Both are necessary to make a good journalist.

The education of journalists requires that students of journalism acquire a sufficient base of knowledge both in the theory of the profession as well as in other matters that are relevant to the profession. Journalists are supposed to know not only how to perform the journalistic chores but also why they have to perform these chores as well as the whole philosophy and theory about journalism and mass communication. Regarding general education, journalists are supposed to possess an appreciable amount of knowledge in a wide range of subjects such as a good command of the language they are supposed to use as journalists as well as some knowledge in politics, history, economics, sociology etc. in order to be knowledgeable, and therefore, effective journalists.

The training of journalists has two sides. First, there is the practical know-how that journalists should have on journalistic chores such as reporting, editing, programme production etc. In other words, trainee journalists should know the 'tricks of the trade' to be able to practise it competently. The best way to have student journalists learn these journalistic practices is to make them practise the particular activity under supervision over and over again until they are able to do it competently.

The success of Africa's journalism schools in imparting education and journalistic skills to trainee reporters still left much to be desired by the beginning of the 1990s although there had been some progress from the earlier period. Many of the schools did not offer their students enough practical experience before sending them into the field. The result was that the journalists who passed through this rather inadequate mill had literary to learn the hard way while they were already on the job. The old adage 'you can only learn reporting by reporting' seemed to apply.

In a study in 1984 edited by Nordenstreng and Boafo in which I participated, there were, for example, only 18 journalism training institutions in Anglophone Africa which had training laboratory newspapers but even these were published irregularly as resources for them were reported to be meagre and usually non-recurrent (Nordenstreng and Boafo, 1984:8). The situation changed little in the 1990s.

The second side to journalism education and training is the imparting of knowledge on non-skill subjects such as journalism ethics, law, the role of the press in society etc. This theoretical knowledge is necessary to support the practice. Without it, as we have seen above, journalists would be doing things mechanically without understanding why certain things should be done in a particular way. Journalism is a profession which invariably affects people served by it. Unless journalists know the likely outcome of their journalistic actions on individuals as well as society as a whole, they would not be prepared to counteract its effects if and when this is necessary.

Again here, the Nordenstreng/Boafo (1984) study revealed that certain theoretical knowledge was not being taught in the continent's journalism schools. The most notable area was that of journalism ethics which almost all institutions neglected. A few of the institutions taught courses in journalism law to which they sometimes appended ethics, clearly mixing up the two subjects and their roles in journalistic performance. The situation hardly changed

from the time of the Nordenstreng/Boafo study to the 1990s as suggested by the research of Ochilo (1997). In his study which covered the three east African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda, Ochilo lists 19 subjects which were being taught in the training programme of the three countries. Journalism ethics is again conspicuously missing.

In the book *Journalism Ethics in Africa*, I have discussed the necessity of teaching journalism ethics in African journalism schools (Kasoma, 1994b:1-21). I have argued that journalism ethics is necessary for the press and journalists in Africa to retain respectability and credibility both of which are *conditio sine qua non* for their social and political roles in society. African journalists badly need a system of principles and values to ensure that their work attains a high level of ethical predictability. The ethical values and principles as well as the whole ethos of journalistic praxis have to be deliberately taught to the trainee journalist. Once she or he knows them, the next step is to ensure that she or he lives by them in the day-to-day practice of journalistic chores.

Publications Nos. 2, 3 and 4 which I have submitted for the dissertation both specifically (No. 2) and generally (Nos. 3 and 4) express the concern about unprofessional conduct by journalists in the 1990s, particularly those from the independent press. In these publications, however, I do not discuss the direct linkage of this unethical behaviour with the lack of education and training, which I am now making. Partly this is because in writing those publications, I was aware that education and training are not the panacea to unethical journalism, although they help to reduce it. If education and training were all that was needed to rid the press of unethical journalism, media people in industrialised countries who are, generally much better educated and trained than those in Africa, would not be practising unethical journalism as many of them do.

The education and training of journalists in Africa in the 1990s, like in earlier periods, lacked, in many cases, an in-depth, all-round education in the philosophical questions concerning journalism and its role in society. It was not enough merely to teach trainee journalists how to report or edit a news story and lay it on the page or broadcast it. The trainee needed to know why she or he was reporting and editing the stories for publication or broadcasting in the way she or he did. Even more, the trainee reporters needed to know and understand their society before they started serving it as journalists.

It is true that more journalism schools opened in African universities and colleges from the second half of the 1980s onwards but the curricula these schools offered left much to be desired. First of all, there was an over-dependence on curricula from the industrialised countries of the North whose journalism textbooks were also predominantly used. Although the problem of lack of textbooks had been identified as early as 1978, as reported by a number of studies, little had been done to improve the situation (Shaw and Grieve, 1979; Traber, 1987; White, 1988; and James, 1990). White in particular noted that:

The training of journalists and other communication specialists has not always contributed to a new communication ethos because it is often simply a transfer of professional education in Western nations with a very different set of presuppositions. Textbooks, reference material, educational methods and communication ethics are often based on a public philosophy that differs from that in a developing country.

(White, 1988:41)

In this connection, Murphy and Scotton (1986:32) have made the not-so-surprising statement that some of Africa's journalism or communication programmes could be moved to the U. S. A. without changing texts, curricula or instructors. In agreement with these authors, Nwosu (1998) has stated that his survey of literature in the areas of communication training and research in Nigeria and other African countries reveals a high level of regularity in the expression of concern among various experts in and outside Africa about the absence of what can be described as a dominant guiding philosophy, the dominance of Western and European communication training and research philosophies, and the negative effects these situations have on communication training and research in Africa. He has called for indigenous communication training and research philosophies in various African countries (Nwosu, 1988:369-370). He has also suggested a model for communication training and research

based on patriotism, conscientisation, public interest, self-reliance, developmentalism, cultural integrity, traditionalism, internationalism and generalism (Nwosu, 1988:371-374).

After pointing out the deficiencies that have retarded journalism training on the continent, Ochilo (1997) has recommended the institutionalisation of non-formal training programmes to support the formal training programmes. He suggests that the formal training institutions should run in-service training programmes side by side with the pre-service regular courses that they offer (Ochilo, 1997:68-69). This is a very good suggestion bearing in mind that the continent has scores of journalists who have entered the profession with little or no training, particularly with reference to the 1990s. They would benefit from such short courses and in the process the performance of journalists in Africa would improve.

There were basically two types of African journalists who needed in-service training: (1) those who had risen to journalists' positions through the civil service ranks (who were found mainly in the government media); and, (2) those who suddenly joined journalism from other occupations. The second group represented many of the journalists of the numerous newspapers and broadcast stations which sprang up at the start of the multiparty era at the beginning of the 1990s.

In-service journalism courses in Africa have very often been organised and/or sponsored by foreign countries and agencies, particularly those of the UN. They usually last a couple of weeks and are conducted by journalism teachers who are sometimes not residents of the places where such courses are being conducted. The problem with this type of short courses has always been the lack of continuity. They are usually a one-time affair which leave the participants with no prospects for follow-up so that they can build on the knowledge and skills they have acquired.

The second problem with short courses is that of some employers not being willing to release their staff, or even worse, releasing the 'wrong' people for the course. Many newspapers and other media houses in Africa have very few members of staff, therefore, and find it difficult to send people to attend courses without risking a situation where the labour force is dangerously depleted. This problem leads some employers to send people who are not suitable for particular courses but who they can afford to miss.

The third problem of short in-service courses in journalism in Africa is that many employers hardly allow their employees to practise what they learn in these courses. The main reason is that quite often what the journalists are sent to learn is not what they do at their workplace. A good example is that of short courses in editorial writing. Writing editorials is, usually, in Africa, a prerogative of the editor-in-chief, who hardly attends short courses.

These problems reduce the value of short in-service courses greatly. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many journalists in Africa have acquired some competence from the knowledge and practice gained during these short courses. Countries and other donor agencies increased the number of short courses for journalists which they conducted and/or sponsored towards the closing years of the 1980s and in the 1990s. Some of these courses were conducted in Europe and America for Africans exclusively or mixed with other nationals.

The lack of textbooks and other teaching materials in African journalism schools had been compounded by lack of other supportive equipment to facilitate teaching. Many institutions were lucky to use outdated equipment whenever they were able to maintain it. Donor aid came to the rescue of some institutions and the flow of aid increased as the 1990s wore on. Some of the aid packages were very comprehensive and included items such as the provision of training equipment, textbooks and other teaching materials as well as the training of teachers. In particular, the NORDIC agencies of FINNIDA, NORAD, SIDA and DANIDA were very active in this field.

In publication No. 5, I have shown that the influence of the international donor community to the press in Africa extended to the fields of journalism education and training. It is, therefore, really not surprising that the education and training which African journalists acquired through the aid would tend to be the same or at least similar to those that corresponding institutions get in the countries sponsoring the education and training.

With regard to the competence and performance of some of the journalists who suddenly found themselves working for the many independent newspapers and broadcast stations which sprouted in Africa on the eve of multipartyism and democratic governance, the problem was that few of them hired educated and trained journalists for a number of reasons. First, it was expensive to employ educated and trained journalists and many of the media houses could not afford it. Second, many of the editors and broadcast managers were themselves uneducated and untrained and preferred fellow uneducated and untrained people to work with them, claiming that the reporters would get the necessary experience on the job and through short in-service courses. Third, there were not enough educated and trained journalists in many countries to go round. Fourth, and finally, many of the journalists who reported for the newspapers were first and foremost politicians belonging to the many political parties which had started and journalists second since many of the newspapers were party organs or closely connected with some political parties or big politicians which/whom they supported.

### 3.5 Other Roles of the Press

The independent press performs other functions in a democracy besides that of a watchdog. One of these is providing information to citizens. If democracy means giving people free choice regarding matters that affect their wellbeing and making them somehow participate in their own governance, there can be no free choice if there are no alternatives to choose from. Alternatives in turn cannot be there if there is no free flow of information through which the people are told what the alternatives are. An independent press provides people with the information about what is going on in society. This information gives them some of the alternatives which enable them to make informed choices. The second function of the independent press is that of enabling people to debate issues and alternatives which is a hallmark of democracy. By providing the people with various topical issues and thus setting the agenda, the press enables the people to deliberate on these issues and make important decisions. Third, the independent press also enables the people to recognise themselves in their aspirations in the range of representations offered by the press.

Murdock (1992) has succinctly summarised all the three roles in the following words:

We can identify three important ways in which the communications system is implicated in the constitution of citizenship. First, in order for the people to exercise their rights as citizens, they must have access to the information, advice, and analysis that will enable them to know what their personal rights are and allow them to pursue them effectively. Second, they must have access to the broadest possible range of information, interpretation and debate on areas that involve public political choices, and they must be able to use communications facilities in order to register criticism and propose alternative courses of action. And third, they must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer within the central communications sectors and be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations.

(Murdock, 1992:21)

Part of the second way that Murdock proposes in which the press plays a role in democratic development, namely, giving people an avenue to voice their grievances when things are not going right in the body politic needs elaboration. The body politic is like a steam boiler which is in danger of exploding if there is no vent to let off the excess steam once in a while to lower the pressure which is building up inside the boiler. The action of the people in voicing their grievances through the press is tantamount to the action of opening the vent of the body politic to let off some steam and thus lower the political pressure to manageable levels. This only happens, of course, where the press is free to let the people voice the grievances. In a situation where the people are not free to voice their grievances through the press, a political explosion becomes inevitable. It usually manifests itself in sudden eruptions of violence and other physical demonstrations by the people. These were not common in the

early 1990s in Africa partly because the people were free to express their grievances through the press. It can, therefore, be said that some of the violent mass demonstrations, which directly contributed to the concessions which one-party and military regimes made to introduce plural politics, were themselves caused by the lack of an independent press to allow the people to express their grievances peacefully.

The independent press in Africa during the 1990s played all these roles to enhance multi-party politics and democracy.

### 3.6 Faults of the Independent Press

As suggested earlier, the independent press did not, however, perform its functions in support of multiparty politics and democracy to perfection. It had its faults some of which I will now discuss.

First, the press sometimes failed to perform its adversarial or watchdog journalism well by engaging in what may be called vendetta journalism. This is the kind of journalism which is based on hatred or dislike for those about whom journalists are reporting. In many cases, journalists failed to make a distinction between hating the actions or lack of them of a politician against whom this type of journalism was directed, and hating the person per se. This is not to say journalists cannot personalise their attacks on a person where there is need to do so. It is merely to say that such attacks ought to be based on issues rather than personalities.

In this connection, it is my submission that African journalists and politicians are yet to reach a stage of making a clear distinction between criticism aimed at an individual person in government and that directed at the institution of government or a branch of it. Quite often in the 1990s ministers or secretaries in government took personal offence when their ministry was criticised by the press even though they as individuals may not have been at fault. On the other hand, journalists too were often to blame when they criticised the minister or secretary in situations where they were supposed to criticise the ministry and vice versa. Although the minister or secretary may be the head of the ministry, she or he does not personify the ministry. Ministers or secretaries come and go but ministries remain. Moreover, the ministry as a legal person can be blamed for wrong policies or action which the minister or secretary as its head may not be personally responsible. African journalists in the 1990s often failed to make this distinction. Consequently, their watchdog role was undermined and its effectiveness reduced.

In older democracies, the distinction between the two is so clear that a government minister or secretary usually resigns if press attacks against her or him as an individual are substantiated and found to be damaging to her or his role as leader of a government ministry. But no minister or secretary in older democracies is expected to resign if her or his ministry is attacked by or through the press. Such attacks are regarded as normal under the adversarial relationship that exists between the press and the executive wing of government.

Second, the independent press did not always report factually. News stories were often highly sensationalised and opinion pieces more emotional than reasoned. Writing in 1992 about 40 existing independent newspapers in Ghana, Ansah estimated that only about 10 to 20 percent of what they published was factual. The following were his observations about their performance:

The quality was uneven, presentation poor, there was more gossip than straight reporting analysis, the language continued to be inelegant and grammatically offensive, headlines and pictures bore no relation to the accompanying story. Sometimes we saw a categorical and an affirmative statement in a headline while there was only speculation or a guessing game. Logic was stood on its head and it looked as if the editors had declared war on journalistic ethics or decorum. (Ansah, 1992:118)

What Ansah wrote about the Ghanaian press during this period was more or less applicable in the 1990s to many independent newspapers on the continent.

Third, the independent press in Africa was also often guilty of arrogance and the use of abusive language against political leaders, particularly those in government. When a newspaper constantly refers to the head of state in the country in which it is published, or to any head of state for that matter, as 'childish', 'immature', 'criminal', 'forger', 'fool', 'scoundrel', 'crook', 'bandit' etc. like *The Post* in Zambia repeatedly did against President Chiluba in the 1990s, the motive can be anything but honourable. Even if Chiluba deserved these epithets, as *The Post* editor would insist, at least as an elected head of state he deserved some respect. The independent press in Zambia, not just *The Post*, made a radical shift from the personality cult that was practised by the press under Kaunda to the insulting and derogatory publicity of the 1990s that Chiluba received, both of which were wrong. *The Post* even changed its style from using a capital 'p' in President (of Zambia) to using a small 'p' while it used capital 'e' and capital 'c' to refer to its Editor-in-Chief. There were a number of independent newspapers in the rest of Africa in the 1990s which also practised insulting and derogatory journalism against heads of state when they were left free to do so. One instance was that of Ghana in 1995 where the government urged journalists not to use abusive language when writing about the government. A government spokesperson said journalists were free to criticise the government, tear its policies apart and take it to task, but that all these were to be done decently (Index, 6/1995:175). Another instance took place in Kenya on 17 October 1998 when cabinet Minister Sharrif Nassir warned that the ruling KANU party would no longer tolerate 'insults from the press'. He accused unnamed newspapers and magazines of 'specialising in hurling insults at President Moi and the government' and warned that their days were numbered. "We shall set their printing presses on fire (and) we shall make sure no vendor will touch their papers," he said. He added that newspapers which reported negatively about the KANU party were to be taught "a lesson they would never forget" (Index, 1/1999:89). Many newspapers in Africa, however, whose editors were well known for publishing insults against the head of state, were constantly or permanently banned. Such was the case throughout the decade with Cameroon's *Le Messager*. Many editions of this newspaper were banned and the editor repeatedly detained.

The faults or weaknesses of the independent press were caused by a number of factors. First, there was the lack of sufficient education and training for many, perhaps most, of the journalists and the technical support staff. Even worse than journalists, technical support staff in the press were hardly formerly trained as strongly suggested by a number of studies, including two in Lesotho and Zambia which I undertook (Kasoma, 1986b; Kasoma, Novotny, Sichalwe and Ntsane, 1987). When you get into a situation of having paste-up artists on a daily newspaper who are hardly literate, like we found, then the quality of your newspaper has to be compromised.

Second, some of the weaknesses by journalists of the independent press were caused by corruption. Corruption has always been a powerful cause of bad journalism in Africa and it was particularly so in the decade of the 1990s because of increased opportunities to be corrupted brought about by the increased number of politicians wrestling for power in the new multiparty political system.

Third, the lack of sufficient money also played a big role in adding to the weaknesses of the independent press. For example, many newspapers could not afford to hire the best reporters, let alone keep the relatively good ones who were already on their staff. Consequently, many newspapers made do with uneducated and untrained or semi-educated and semi-trained staff whom they could pay less. The lack of money also made many newspapers

not to adequately maintain or upgrade their equipment, thereby causing some inefficiency in the production of the newspapers.

In Publications 3 and 4, I discuss more fully, the problems of the independent press in Africa during the period just before the 1990s set in as well as during the entire decade.

### 3.7 Reaction by African Leaders

The negative reaction, in many cases over-reaction, of African leaders of multiparty elected governments against the independent press was not always consistent. In many cases the leaders reacted negatively against a genuine watchdog press because of their dislike for it. Sometimes, however, the leaders reacted negatively against the faults of the press and journalists discussed above. However, due to the widespread bias by governments against a critical independent press, it was often not easy to immediately tell whether what the governments were doing against critical journalists and the press was warranted by the journalists' or the press' own faults or not.

In some cases, however, it was clear that the bad treatment by governments in Africa of a probing press and critical journalists clearly demonstrated that the continent's rulers refused the watchdog role of the press. Critical journalists during the period were killed, maimed, incarcerated, arrested, detained without trial, searched constantly, threatened with violence or death etc. to shut them up. According to figures I compiled from country reports in Index on Censorship between January 1990 and July 1999, some 72 journalists were killed in Africa with the highest number, 53, from Algeria; 301 journalists were arrested, 50 of whom were from Ethiopia and 35 each from Nigeria and Sierra Leone; 287 journalists were detained and/or jailed, out of whom 52 were from Ethiopia, 39 from Nigeria and 27 from Sierra Leone; 18 journalists fled or went into hiding, 4 each from Nigeria and Sierra Leone and 2 from Ethiopia. Their offences included 'reporting which was displeasing to the authorities', 'insulting the head of state', 'reporting lies', 'painting a bad picture of the country', 'infringing law and order through reporting', 'reporting that disturbs the peace' and even 'reporting the opposition'. The last charge in particular may sound very unusual in a normal multiparty political situation where the press is supposed to cover the opposition parties as well as the ruling party, but it was, apparently, not unusual in some African countries including those that had adopted plural politics. In Malawi, for example, Hastings Maloya, a radio journalist with the state-run Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), was dismissed on 26 August 1996 for covering the opposition Malawi Congress Party rally in Blantyre. Francis Chikunkuzeni, an MBC editor, was suspended for one month for editing Maloya's report (Index, 5/1996:96). A year later, President Bakili Muluzi would complain to the annual conference of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) about Malawian journalists who he said had a reckless disregard for truth and professional ethics which put him and others "under terrific pressure in our defence of the press" (Index, 1/1997:117).

Many of the new multiparty elected government rulers did not want both the official press and the independent press to give opposition parties a political voice and platform. They also detested unfavourable publicity about them from the independent press. The following examples picked at random illustrate the point being made.

In Cameroon, copies of the five independent weeklies – L'Expression, Le Messenger, Mutations, Dikalo and La Plume du Jour – were seized by police on 18 August 1997 following the publication of a conversation between Economy and Finance Minister, Edourd Akame Mfoumou, and Ahamadou Ali, Secretary General in the office of the President. According to the official charge, the conversation touched on dissension within the government (Index, 5/1997:167). Earlier, the 5 May edition of the biweekly L'Expression, carrying an interview with former Health Minister, Titus Edzoa, was confiscated from kiosks in Yaonde by security forces. Another privately owned newspaper, L'Anecdote, which alleged that a



meeting took place between opposition leader John Fru Ndi and Edzoa, was also seized the following day (Index, 4/1997:106).

In Burundi, Prosper Nzeyimana, a journalist with the national television corporation, Adre Nyanawi and Jacqueline Segahungu, journalists with the private radio station, Umwizero, were questioned by police on 18 September 1997 after attending a press conference held by the opposition party APRONA. Recordings of the conference were confiscated (Index, 6/1997:105). In Lesotho, a ban preventing journalists from covering debates in the lower house was imposed on 28 August 1997, after a feud between the ruling Basotoland Congress Party and the breakaway Lesotho Congress for Democracy. The Speaker, Dr. Toboho Kalane, lifted it on 15 September, 1997 after pressure from local and international journalists (Index, 6/1997:116). In Mauritania, the 25 July edition of the weekly, *L'Eveil Habdo*, was seized under Article 11 of the Media Law, which forbids criticism of the state or Islam (Index, 4/5 1994:244).

In some countries, independent newspapers were simply banned during elections as was the case in Gabon in February 1994 when one such ban was lifted after six months, a period which covered the presidential election campaign. In Equatorial Guinea, on 27 September 1993 the only opposition paper still circulating, *La Verdad*, was banned for 'issuing untruthful news and information prejudicial to public spiritedness and morality (Index, 1/1994:237). In Zambia, journalists of *The Post* newspaper were throughout the decade, frequent guests of the country's prisons and police cells mainly because of their hard-line stand against government. The harassment of journalists, particularly from the independent press, has been so harsh and frequent that in one country, Liberia, on 15 January 1996, seven independent newspapers and four independent radio stations called a 24-hour press blackout to protest against continued harassment of independent journalists by security forces (Index, 2/1996:94).

It was clear that the new political dispensation of multipartyism of the 1990s had not essentially changed the thinking of many of Africa's rulers, although many of the new leaders continued to pay lip service to their belief in a free press, for the ears of the donors. It seemed not all of the new generation of leaders had made the transition to plural politics without accepting one of the necessary ingredients of that change: the watchdog role of the press. Without this acceptance, Africa's transition to plural politics was bound to be incomplete and was doomed to fail. Many of the new leaders, like their predecessors during the one-party and military government era, would continue to pay lip-service to democracy, good governance, accountability and transparency, while maintaining a dominant government press and making these ideals practically unattainable throughout the decade. Without giving the press its rightful democratic role of being a watchdog of government, the transition of the continent from one-party or military rule to multiparty politics and democracy would be illusory rather than real. Consequently, there was little or no difference between these new multiparty elected rulers and their predecessors. It was bad enough for African rulers of the 1990s to insist, as many of them did, that they needed a government press to defend their parties and governments from attacks from the independent press, a protection many democratic governments in the world have done without. But it was worse for them to do everything in their power, as many of them did, to prevent the independent press from exercising its watchdog role. It was a total mockery of democracy worthy of the strongest condemnation by those who were maintaining these same governments through monetary drips reminiscent of a patient in a hospital's intensive care unit. Such leaders had to be told not to give the newly won democracy a terminal blow from which it could never recover.

### 3.8 Immediate Contribution of the Independent Press to Multiparty Politics and Democracy

Admittedly, the weaknesses of the independent press discussed above have somewhat reduced its impact in enhancing multiparty politics and democracy. But despite these weaknesses, the independent press still remained a formidable ally of multipartyism and democracy in Africa in the decade of the 1990s, as it has done elsewhere. In making this assertion, I am reminded of the significant submission of Mollenhoff (1968) who in his article entitled 'Life line of democracy', after declaring that the future of the American democracy was contingent upon the performance of the American press because democracy was contingent upon an informed public with means to learn what the government is doing, the right to criticise what the government is doing, and the mechanism for effectively expressing opposition by voting to oust the highest officials from office, was very aware of the weaknesses of the American press at the time by declaring:

I stress these points at this time because the press of the nation is failing in its responsibilities, and because there are disturbing signs that the press does not recognise its failures. There are many spectacular examples to demonstrate the press does not understand many stories of major importance. There is a growing accumulation of evidence indicating the press even fails to understand itself and its own self interest.

(Mollenhoff, 1968:175-176)

I submit that the independent press continues to show, throughout the ages, many weaknesses as it strives to be an ally of the people in creating and enhancing a pluralistic and democratic society. Indeed, in as far as its democratic mission is concerned, it may even be stated that in its weaknesses lies its strength. By showing its imperfections and by its constant and consistent attempts to be perfect, the independent press is a living testimony that the democratic ideal needs to be constantly and consistently fought for in order to keep it at a reasonably acceptable standard or level.

It can, therefore, be said that the independent press in the 1990s in Africa played a key role in politicising the people to press on their demands for plural politics and democracy in a number of ways.

First, through its brave attacks on the President and the established one-party or military authority, it destroyed the myth that the one-party and military rulers were untouchable and could never be criticised. As suggested earlier, by breaking the taboo never to criticise the President which was almost an unwritten law in almost all the countries, the floodgates were opened for the people to express their political dissent openly with little or no fear.

Party, and hence, multiparty politics, is about expressing political dissent openly so that one's views can gain support or be rejected by people. Indeed as Satori (1976:14) submits, an essential concomitant of democracy which has developed in modern times is precisely the diversity of views and interests among people. For the 18<sup>th</sup> Century fathers of democracy only unity and unanimity were valued. It is important, however, to remember that all three – unity, unanimity as well as diversity of views and interests – can hardly come about unless people are able to receive and give information to many people at the same time which can only be achieved through the press.

This brings me to the second reason why the independent press may be said to have facilitated multipartyism and democracy during the 1990s. People were not only able to express their views to another person in a one-to-one situation, but they were also able to do so to many people at the same time through the press. Conversely, they were also able to receive views from others through the same press. For it cannot be denied that the independent press at the dawn of multipartyism and democracy gave the people far more opportunity to express their views publicly than its earlier predecessor when one-party or military rule was at its zenith.

Third, the independent press was able to directly appeal to the international community, particularly the donor countries and agencies, against any procrastination by the rulers of the

dying one-party and military governments from going full throttle in introducing multipartyism and liberal democracy. And the international community, which financially supported many of the good governance activities of most of the governments, usually responded quickly through the imposition of sanctions which forced the governments to address the issues raised by the independent press. It was not difficult for the international community to pick up complaints addressed to them by the independent press since some of the newspapers were available on the Internet and could be read instantly by any interested party in the donor community.

Fourth, many independent newspapers made startling revelations in their news reports about those at the helm of the one-party or military governments which the press had been unable to reveal before and which undermined the people's little trust, if any, in the rulers and thereby increased popular demands for political change. The most common of such revelations were about how the one-party or military rulers had impoverished their countries by usurping public funds and property for their personal use. Many of the rulers were often reported to have siphoned millions, if not billions, of Dollars from their countries' treasuries into their personal bank accounts abroad, usually in Switzerland.

Fifth, apart from giving negative reports about the rulers of governments which were soon to be replaced, the independent press gave positive publicity to the leaders of the main opposition parties, which, as I have noted earlier, were more of mass movements than political parties. The people were constantly urged to vote the opposition into power so that there would be not only change of government but also change to a new political system – one which was going to be open to new ideas and which would be more responsive to people's needs. The independent press further urged the people to unite and not be cheated by what the outgoing rulers were telling them through the government press.

### 3.9 The Government Press Immediately Prior to the Coming of Multiparty Politics and Democracy

Journalists working for the government press during the period just before the multiparty elected governments came to power, were in a real dilemma. Many of them knew that they were campaigning for a system of governance which, according to every political sign and indicator, was on its way out. Yet, many, if not most, of them continued to propagate the same old ideas about what the rulers said they stood for and would do for the people, simply because the journalists working for the government press had to earn a living.

There were a few journalists, including editors and broadcast directors, who quit their jobs to join the independent press or seek other journalistic jobs, particularly public relations. There was also a small number of editors and broadcast directors who started changing through editorial policies by accommodating, albeit often in a veiled manner, ideas about the need for political change which required that people's dissenting political views should not only be accepted but also encouraged. Of course the more blunt ones of these editors and directors were sometimes spotted by the authorities and summarily dismissed. This was particularly the case in countries where the government leaders had not yet been completely converted to the idea of adopting multiparty politics. In situations, however, where the leaders had seen the writing on the wall and accepted multipartyism and democracy, editors and directors more openly embraced and publicly expressed the new political dispensation with little or no fear of being punished by the authorities.

It was interesting to witness, as I did, the last-minute shifts in editorial policy which some of the government newspapers made when their political masters had finally fallen from power. For many of the newspapers, their rhetoric in support of the government essentially remained the same except for the change of names. Citizens were amused to see the political leaders once condemned and ridiculed by the same press as subversive people and 'political misfits' now being praised for what the newspapers termed 'their courage and political fore-

sight'. But there was also a noticeable change in the increasing accommodation by the government press, at least initially, of views and news from the new opposition to the new government which included the fallen political leaders.

### 3.10 Government Dilemma

There was a dilemma among many African leaders of multiparty elected governments regarding whether or not to get rid of the government press and honour their pre-election pledges to liberalise the press or keep it and swallow their promises. Many of them, perhaps the majority, chose to break their promises and keep the government press. In the final analysis, the press set up in Africa in many countries, perhaps the majority, did not substantially differ from what it was during the one-party and military rule in as far as the presence of the government press was concerned. It was practically the same with the government in most countries maintaining a dominating hold on the media of public communication, particularly during the 1990s when the numbers (not the circulation) of the independent newspapers were greatly reduced from what they had been at the beginning of the decade. The only difference was that the government had opened up the media industry to private enterprise, which was not the case in some of the African countries during the one-party and military rule and that the government had now to compete with the independent press for public attention.

A very serious dilemma faces a popularly-elected African government, or any popularly-elected government for that matter, that has to deal with a strong independent press acting as a watchdog. The root of the problem is that both the government and the press claim to speak for the people. When they contradict each other, as they often do, tensions emerge. It is obvious that both of them cannot be right at the same time with reference to the same issue and that one of them has got to be wrong. Because neither of them is prepared to admit being wrong, both of them stick to what they are saying, thereby, raising the tensions even higher. In this connection, Powe Jr. has made an apt observation by submitting that:

A powerful and privileged press checking a popularly elected and powerful government creates tensions that cannot be removed without compromising press autonomy.

(Powe Jr., 1992:293)

The upper hand in the conflict is usually held by government which, normally uses the state machinery to silence a recalcitrant press in one way or another. The worry about governments suppressing outspoken newspapers is not restricted only to countries of the South. Writing about the U.S.A. and Britain, Graber has observed:

We are faced with a persistent attempt to reduce the free flow of information and to buttress government and corporate secrecy, in the interests of business rights and supposed national security.

(Graber, 1994:396)

Governments in Africa seem to be confronted with a dilemma whenever they are facing a press that is behaving as a watchdog. They may choose to ignore the newspapers as being insignificant and inconsequential muckrakers. But what if what the newspapers are reporting, true or false, is taken seriously by the electorate and, more particularly, by donor countries? Worse still, what if what they disseminate, true or false, is used by the opposition parties as ammunition to unseat the ruling party from power? Finally, and even more of a potential disaster, what if what the newspapers are reporting, true or false, is used by the donor countries to decide what aid the country gets or does not get? The last 'what if' actually happened to a number of countries in Africa in the second half of the 1990s. For example, Britain and Japan suddenly reduced their aid to Zambia after expressing unhappiness over the Chiluba government's souring relations with the independent press, particularly *The Post*. As I was finalising this review, a dispatch on the Internet from Article 19 headed 'Rights Group Calls on donors to Maintain Human Rights Pressure on Zambia' was released as the World Bank's Consultative Group on Zambia prepared to meet in Lusaka. It condemned the Zambian authorities'

continuing harassment of independent media and other critics and their failure to reform the laws which threatened media reform. The dispatch quoting Andrew Puddephatt, Executive Director of Article 19, said the Zambian Government had consistently since 1992 failed to fulfil its promises to donors to review and reform laws which violate freedom of expression. In the circumstances, the dispatch said, Article 19 did not believe that any relaxation of the Consultative Group's position to withhold some of Zambia's balance of payments support would be justified. (Internet: <http://www.article19.org>). This kind of direct pressure was not unique or peculiar to Zambia but was applied to all the African countries each time the World Bank or other donor groups or countries were about to meet to discuss donor aid contribution to their balance of payments.

If, however, government chooses to react against the adverse publicity by taking punitive measures against the press, as many governments did, as we have seen above, it risks being accused of tampering with freedom of the press and still end up alienating itself from the donor community, the opposition parties, civil society and, above all, the electorate. It is, indeed, a double-edged-sword situation in which no matter which of the two alternatives government chooses – remaining silent or reacting – it invariably ends up hurting itself to the chagrin of the independent press, the opposition, the donors, civil society and other media playmakers.

This no-win situation may not have been so painful for those in government and the ruling party if what the newspapers, behaving as watchdogs, were reporting was true. The fact is that, as we have seen above in this chapter, not everything the watchdog press reported about government was true.

### 3.11 Donor Influence on the Rebirth and Sustenance of Multiparty Politics and Democracy in Africa

The advent of multiparty politics in Africa in the 1990s, brought in political opposition parties and all the cut-throat politicking that goes with it. As explained in the first chapter of this review, it came soon after the break-up of the Soviet Union communism in 1989, whose emphasis on state monopoly of the means of production and distribution of goods and social services many African countries, including some of those which belonged to the Non-Aligned Movement, had adopted. Many African countries had also adopted or partly infused into their press systems the Soviet Union press system which presumably they were now bound to give up following the fall of their Soviet mentors. So far reaching was the extent of Soviet influence on the media in Africa. Writing in 1977, Wilcox noted that the government ownership of the print media (almost all broadcasting stations were owned by the government right from the colonial times) was a clear trend and the extent of ownership domination had increased significantly in the 1970s. Wilcox estimated that over half of the African governments had 100 percent ownership of all print media produced within their borders (Wilcox, 1977) – a clearly Soviet style of state/party control of the press which could not totally be explained by the legacy of government ownership of newspapers which was left in some countries by the colonial administration. It was clear that countries of the North, which supported the fall of one-party and military regimes, were also keen to promote the new political dispensation because it promised to support values which they themselves promoted. The values included multipartyism, democracy, economic liberalisation, free elections, respect for human rights, free elections, good governance, and, of course, a free press.

Before the rebirth of multiparty politics in the 1990s, donor activity in Africa could be described as an extension of the Cold War that raged between the Soviet Union-led communist block and the Western Capitalist countries. Aid had trickled down to Africa from both the West and the East as each side struggled to get a foothold on the continent. Most of the aid from the West was meant to check the spread of communism or at least make countries which were on the communist path abandon the idea. The reverse was also true from the

communist side. Democratic governance was never used as a condition for the aid. As soon as multiparty politics and the democratic process had been initiated in the first few countries at the beginning of the 1990s, the international donor community, which was now reduced to only countries of the West – since after the crumbling of the Soviet Union, the resultant smaller states, including Russia itself, were too economically weak to render economic assistance to Africa since they themselves badly needed such assistance so that their tattered economies could pick up (Kasoma, 1992c) – was now using aid to force African countries to reform their governments and politics to generally emulate those of the countries of the West. Democracy and all the values it stands for, now became a condition for the aid. The aid itself was aimed at either introducing multiparty politics and democracy where they had not been initiated, or strengthening them where they existed. This is how it happened.

As early as 1991, we see the crystallisation of the linkage of aid to good governance by donors. In that year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Human Development Report, argued that recent development experience suggested that a high level of political freedom could unleash "the creative energies of the people". The report included, for the first time, a controversial 'human freedom index' ranking some 88 countries against 40 criteria such as multiparty elections, press freedom, rule of law, and opportunities for gender and ethnic equality (Africa Recovery, September 1999:49).

The Human Development Report came out amid calls from donors for 'good governance', including greater democracy, to be taken into consideration in the allocation of aid, and the equally growing concern from many developing countries that this could lead to yet further conditionality and political interference. Despite subsequent assurances from both the UNDP and the World Bank President Barber Conable, the fears of the developing countries, which included African countries, were subsequently vindicated. At their economic summit in London in 1991, the then Western leaders urged developing countries to practise good governance, defined as including 'democratic pluralism' or multipartyism along with respect for human rights. "Good governance not only promotes development at home, but helps to attract external finance and investment from all sources," the Group of Seven communiqué said (Africa Recovery, September 1991:49)

In line with this thinking, the United Kingdom (UK) during the same year (1991), committed some \$135 million in aid for furthering 'good governance' in Africa. The money was to be used in the next two years to help reform central and local government structures, training for police, customs and civil servants, election monitoring and support for the media, human rights groups and other non-governmental organisations. The UK Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Douglas Hurd, had during a UN-sponsored conference the previous year (1990), specifically proposed linkage between aid levels and more democratic and pluralistic forms of government in developing countries. He subsequently wrote to the European Commission urging that his concerns should influence the Commission's aid programmes. (Africa recovery, September 1991:49)

It was in fact, Conable himself as World Bank chief who in 1990 had set the tone for political pluralism in Africa as a condition for aid. Speaking at a meeting of the Breton Woods Committee in Washington in late April, he said that all too often in Africa "open political participation has been restricted. ... I fear that many of Africa's leaders have been more concerned about retaining power than about the long-term development interests of their people." He listed 'better governance' as the first requirement in initiating economic recovery, and hinted that donors would increasingly link assistance to the question.

Speaking at the same Washington conference, US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Herman Cohen, was even more blunt when he said that governments not responding to democratic change would be at a disadvantage in obtaining external assistance. He added that democratisation would become the third conditionality for US assistance after World Bank/IMF approved economic policies and US assessment of a country's human rights record. The US Ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone, gave further details of this emerging US concern in a Nairobi speech in May of the same year (1990). Speaking on his return from

a chief's of African missions meeting in Washington, he said: "there is a strong political tide flowing in our Congress, which controls the purse strings, to concentrate our economic assistance on those of the World's nations that nourish democratic institutions, defend human rights and practice (sic) multiparty politics... This may also become a fact of political life in other donor countries tomorrow" (Lone, 1990:14).

Earlier in 1989, the World Bank's new strategic agenda for Africa report made a conscious linking of the Bank's continuing firm belief in the need to liberalise the development process. The report argued that "Africa needs not just less government but better government". It said, "Aid flows should be conditional on achievement of democratisation, as well as in the adoption of more human centred development policies" (Laisley, 1989:9).

Former President of Tanzania, the late Julius Nyerere, who was until his death in 1999 Chairman of the South Centre, has borne testimony to the influence of the North in economics and politics. He has graphically described how countries of the North have controlled the economies and politics of countries in the South. In a keynote address to the Association of Commonwealth Universities which met in 1998 in Ottawa, Canada, he said:

The Cold War is now over, and refreshingly the same Western countries have now become champions of democracy and democratic elections everywhere in the world but now it has become their turn to preach a kind of 'scientific' democracy.  
(Nyerere, 1998:6)

Nyerere pointed out that on top of dogmatic democracy imposed on countries of the South by countries of the North, the countries of the South also had to be content with dogmatic capitalism imposed on them from the North. Nyerere insists that like democracy, the world cannot have one single form of capitalism. His thesis is that the Western countries have all along been exerting a telling influence over the politics (governance) and economics of developing countries. He concludes:

There was a time when a developing country leader could say "No" to the IMF or World Bank. But no leader of a highly indebted poor country, ... can with impunity say "No" today. His country will be crucified! So a time comes when the leader is forced to accept a neo-colonial status for his country in return for a financial bailout from its international creditors. This is the case today in many African countries.  
(Nyerere, 1998:6)

The North took a very active interest in the promotion of a free press in Africa, starting from the end of the 1980s, and, more especially during the 1990s. Commenting on the contribution from some countries of the North, Kivikuru (2000) has observed in the executive summary to her research report on media developments and communication competence in Eastern and Southern Africa in the 1990s entitled *An Arm of democracy for Promoting Human Rights or Simple Rhetoric?*, she writes:

The role of Scandinavian assistance, together with Dutch and Canadian assistance, has been considerable in the promotion of media liberation and deregulation in Africa. It is interesting that the usually quite cautious and rational assistance agencies especially in the early 1990s let themselves "go ideological". They turned their back on the public media such as national broadcasting companies and started supporting various private media exercises and bodies advocating freedom of expression. The reason behind this probably lies partly at least in the rhetoric of democracy and human rights, distilled out of the political arena and highly valued in the northern countries. This was interpreted as meaning that the existing media did not promote democratic ideals; hence it was worth giving a chance to new agents of publicity.  
(Kivikuru, 2000:13)

Kivikuru is of the opinion that donors, particularly those from the Nordic countries, should not restrict their aid to the independent (private) media only but should extend it to the government-owned broadcast stations, particularly radio which, she says, surprisingly enjoys relative freedom from state control in many African countries. She writes:

Still the greatest northern error or rather miscalculation has no doubt been the fact that public broadcasting – in the African frames radio broadcasting – has been put aside in the Nordic-sponsored projects. While willing to support democracy and human rights, northern donors have tended to bypass the grassroots and the rural communication needs.

(Kivikuru, 2000:25-26)

She concludes:

If the northern assistance seriously wants to work for democracy and human rights in Africa, it cannot avoid the question of the media and a need to design a consistent, credible policy on assistance in the sector of media and communication.

(Kivikuru, 2000:26)

The influence which donors exerted on the press in Africa at the turn of the decade and throughout the 1990s was as real and decisive as that which they exerted on Africa's political and economic life. Much of the aid to the independent press has come in the form of money and equipment for establishing or maintaining independent newspapers and broadcast stations. For most, if not all, the donor countries, their comprehensive aid packages have nearly always included sections on the promotion of a free press whose budgets are quite substantial. The 'good governance' package of the U.S.A. to many African countries, for example, has very elaborate sections on the promotion of a free press for which a lot of money is usually budgeted.

Sometimes, the aid takes the form of giving assistance to journalism training and education, the inference being that well-trained and educated journalists (in the art of Western journalism, see earlier section on journalism training and education) serve a free press and democracy better than those who have little or no training and education. Kivikuru (2000:22-26) has given detailed instances of this aid in Eastern and Southern Africa pegging the Nordic assistance alone during the decade to between \$2-4 million (10-20 million Finnish Marks).

Behind the promotion of a free press by the North is the understanding that the press so promoted will enhance and safeguard liberal democratic interests. I will, subsequently, in Chapter 4, propound how this aid to an independent press by the North transformed the way the African press, including the government one, operated in Africa during the decade of the 1990s which gave rise to what I have called the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press.



# Chapter 4: The Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press

In this penultimate chapter, I am essentially recapping or recasting Publication No. 5, following careful reflection brought about by advice from academic colleagues who have heard or read Publication No. 5. As indicated in Chapter 1, my dropping of the word 'theory' and replacing it with 'conception' is one of the consequences of that reflection. I should also point out that Publication No. 5 has been revised substantially several times since I delivered the lecture a couple of years ago, first, as a chapter in my forthcoming book 'The Press and Multiparty Politics in Africa' and, next, as Chapter 4 of this review.

## 4.1 Political Changes Necessitate Press Transformation

The conception of the press in any era is dictated by the prevailing political and economic conditions. The traumatic political and the accompanying economic changes that Africa experienced in the 1990s necessitated a corresponding transformation in the conception of its press. There were a number of influences on the press which directly brought about these changes and gave the press a specific character befitting the period. Key among these was the influence of the international donor community and its satellites.

The influence of the donor community on the press in Africa in the 1990s had its roots, of course, in the financial aid it gives. Because the mass media are expensive, since they often involve the importation of technology and raw materials at exorbitant prices, African governments had, during the 1990s, mainly to rely on foreign aid, as they did on many other services, to meet the requirements of setting up viable mass media structures (Kasoma, 1993c:71). According to an earlier study by me, of all the mass media aid Africa has received from industrialised nations, almost half has gone to developing radio and television. The rest has been shared among the other media, with newspapers accounting for a sixth (Kasoma, 1991). But this is only considering direct aid. If we concede to the assertion that the bulk of the money developing countries use comes from donors, then we have to admit that the money which African governments use to subsidise government media is ultimately from donors.

This writer no longer holds, as the authors of the so-called Four Theories of the Press did more than four decades ago, that in the final analysis the difference between press systems is one of philosophy (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956). Apart from philosophy, there are other factors which guide the nature and operations of the press. Key among them is donor influence. The policy and operation of the press on the continent of Africa in the 1990s was certainly, among other factors, being influenced by what the donors said, did and wanted.

That donor influence spread to the press should not be surprising given the fact that politics and economics in Africa in the 1990s, as I have shown in Chapter 1, were donor-driven. Many, if not most, of the policy decisions which African governments made had to take into serious account or had to be in conformity with what the donor countries and agencies were saying, doing and demanding.

We have seen earlier that during the one-party and military rule the press in many African countries was tightly controlled and owned, by the government as an organ of political propaganda. The government used it to consolidate national unity and mobilise citizens for development as seen and interpreted by the rulers. There was little or no room for journalists and the press as well as for the people to try and set the political agenda through the media of public communication.

Ziegler and Asante, in trying to avoid what they refer to as Eurocentric descriptions of the press in Africa, have classified the press on the continent as being either 'unrestrained', 're-

strained' or 'directed'. They describe 'unrestrained' media as those that operate 'according to their own rules, norms and objectives'. This is more or less what Siebert and his colleagues would call the liberal press. For Ziegler and Asante, a 'restrained' press is controlled by the government. They distinguish between 'control' and being 'directed'. For them a 'directed' press 'operates under the influence of government's stated objectives for national development' (Ziegler and Asante, 1992:104).

Ziegler's and Asante's term of 'directed' press could have come closer to the meaning of the neo-multiparty press concept I am proposing except that the ambit of 'direction' is too narrow. By 'directed' press Ziegler and Asante seem to be thinking of direction by government and not by any other concerned parties. Moreover, 'directed' is too restrictive a term to describe what happens in the moulding of a neo-multiparty press. There is usually a combination of directing, cajoling, daring, threatening, advising, blackmailing, suggesting, complaining, requesting, ordering, demanding, asking etc. by the media playmakers (countries, institutions and organisations which influence the status and operation of the press) as they attempt to influence the policy and direction of the neo-multiparty press. Finally, the 'directing' in a neo-multiparty press is not aimed at making the mass media serve a specific purpose as Ziegler and Asante have suggested. It is for multipurposes in the service of democracy and depends on who is making it, where, for what purpose and at what particular time.

## 4.2 The Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press Explained

The Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press posits that the philosophy, policy and performance of the press in Africa of countries that have adopted plural politics and democracy in the 1990s was/is in direct response to the pressures persistently exerted on it by the donor community and other media playmakers such as governments, opposition parties, civil society, NGOs, the church and other concerned parties. Ideally, the press in a multiparty and democratic polity is supposed to be guided by liberal principles of freedom and independence from government in which those in charge of the media decide, without any external pressures, what news and other information, including editorial comment, to publish or broadcast.

This has, however, largely not been the case with the press in Africa's multiparty states of the 1990s. Freedom of the press was still a concept most leaders of African states talked about rather than actively promoted. By the end of the 1990s, Africa was still inundated with government-owned and controlled media while at the same time a private and independent, presumably free, press had mushroomed all over the continent. Polarised into two main camps – the government and the independent media – Africa's neo-multiparty press had increasingly taken on a myriad of stances, and roles, depending on which pressures it was responding to at a particular period and where. The propositions upon which the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press is anchored are as follows:

First, in a multiparty political dispensation, the press is supposed, among other things, to serve as the purveyor and disseminator of many different political views and information so that the people are accorded the opportunity to think about them in order to meaningfully contribute to the political debate and make informed choices. In a situation, however, where the people in government control most or a substantial section of the country's mainstream media through government ownership and other arrangements, the press predominantly, or at least part of it, becomes the purveyor and disseminator of mainly government and ruling party views and information, thereby largely denying opposition political parties and other stakeholders the chance to have their views and information to be made available to the public and thus effectively excluding these views and information from exposure and public debate.

The second proposition is that in the political dispensation of liberal democracy, the press is supposed to be the Fourth Estate which, as we have seen earlier, serves as a watchdog on government by helping to make it transparent and accountable to the electorate. Without the

press playing this role, the issues of good governance as well as transparency and accountability by those in government become very difficult if not impossible to monitor.

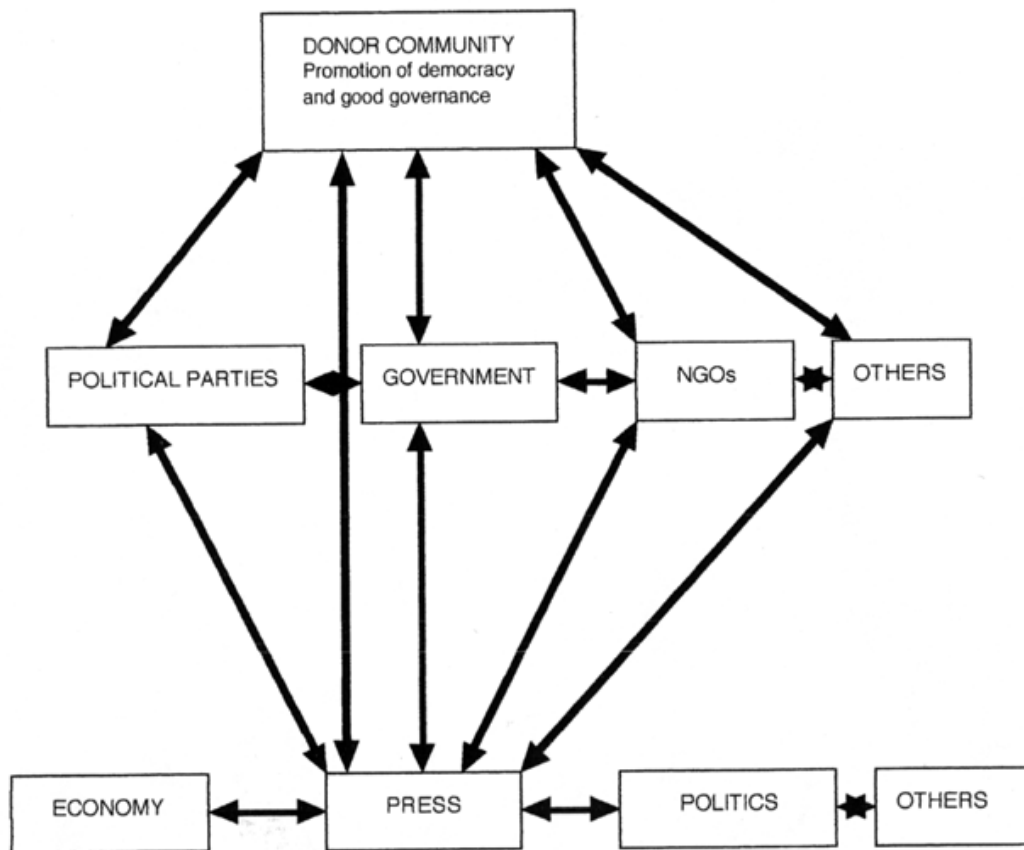
The third proposition is that the donor countries and the international funding agencies of the North, as was conclusively shown in Chapter 3, have been determined to link their aid to concerns of the good conduct of multiparty politics with free, open political participation and fair elections, good governance and the maintenance of democratic institutions, including a free press. It is therefore logical to conclude that the donor countries and all the other media playmakers would do everything to influence not only governments but also journalists and the press, to support the idea and practice of the independent press as a watchdog acting as a bastion of democracy and multipartyism in the same manner as it does in the North, or, alternatively, to support a government press which acts as a public means of communication rather than a more or less exclusive organ of government and the ruling party.

The influence exerted by donors and their satellites on the press, therefore, is as decisive as that which they exert on Africa's political and economic life. But this influence is not one-sided. It is double-sided since the press and other donor aid recipients also influence the donors to a limited extent, regarding the course and direction their demands should take. The press sometimes reflects the views of Africa's critics of the politics of donor funding. An example of these critical views is that of Global Coalition for Africa (GCA) which groups senior figures from Africa and donor governments and multilateral agencies. GCA spent considerable time and effort in 1992, brokering some form of understanding between the two sides. Addressing the issue of whether good governance and democracy should be determining factors in donor aid programmes, Boubakar Diaby-Quattara, speaking on behalf of the GCA, stressed the importance of Africans determining what should be the basis for their relations with donors and not just the North setting the agenda. "Conditions must be negotiated, not imposed; there has to be a consensus," he said. (Africa Recovery, December 1991:16). But the greater influence is exerted by donors to the press directly or indirectly through the other media playmakers whom the donors largely support. The influence from the press on donors is mainly reactive rather than proactive.

The donor influence I am talking about is not the ordinary influence which free politics and a liberalised economy exert on the conduct of politics and the operations of economic and other institutions, including the press. I am, rather, talking about influence that permeates the entire policy and philosophical outlook that guides praxis. It is an influence where those who are supposed to provide guidance and manage affairs cease to take the initiative and merely react or respond to pressures all of which are ultimately traceable to donor countries and organisations. It is a far-reaching influence. In this regard, we may, therefore, speak not just about the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press but also about the Neo-Multiparty Conception of Economics, the Neo-Multiparty Conception of Politics etc. For in the donor community, we have a force which affected, from the 1990s onwards, nearly every facet of life in Africa. The truth of the old adage that 'he who pays the piper calls the tune' was literally applicable in this regard.

If we accept the proposition that the donor community, from the 1990s, started exerting decisive influence and control over the economic and political spheres of recipient countries in the name of multipartyism, democracy and good governance, then we must equally accept the proposition that this influence extended to the press, which, according to the donor community's own admission, plays a decisive role in supporting multiparty politics, democracy and good governance.

The way this influence is exerted is graphically presented in the Figure (page 60). In the Figure, the donor community takes the top slot dictating the policy and conditions under which the press, as well as other sectors, should operate. It does this either directly or through organisations and institutions, including government, which it supports financially. Government, opposition political parties, civil society, NGOs, the church and other media playmakers who depend on donor aid also influence the press in their own capacity as well as in their capacity as agents of the donor community. The double arrows indicate reciprocal influence.



*Figure: the Neo-Multiparty Model of the Press Control*

However, as already pointed out above, the influence exerted by an organisation or institution at the top of the Figure is greater than the opposite influence exerted by one at the bottom. It is a top-down influence in which the donor community dictates matters which all organisations below it, which are dependent on its aid, should respond to, if they want the financial and other support. The institutions dependent on foreign aid in Africa are wide-ranging. They include government, civil society, NGOs, political parties, the church and, of course, the press.

The donor countries and organisations in their attempts to promote democracy and good governance, have sometimes given direct financial support to the press, cajoling it to perform to their satisfaction in the promotion and support of multipartyism and democracy. The cajoling is often done through the numerous briefings embassies and other donor organisations give senior journalists, particularly newspaper editors and broadcast directors. It is clear from the pressures exerted on the press, that the donor support has big strings tied to it and media managers are more or less morally and otherwise forced to give in to the demands in exchange for the support.

Usually the aid the donor community gives is for very specific purposes or programmes. For example, in 1991 UNESCO reported that it had received a \$400,000 proposal from the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers and Reporters San Frontières 'to help the independent African press stand up to censorship and the numerous difficulties threatening its

existence.’ The fund was to create a ‘sponsor’ system of co-operation between newspapers in the industrialised world and Africa. The project foresaw an exchange of news and the development of ‘real solidarity between the sponsors and the sponsored’, so that when a newspaper in Africa was shut down, seized or sued, its sponsoring newspaper in the North would use its influence to help. (Africa Recovery, December 1991:43)

African governments too, after receiving financial support from the donors, exert their own pressure on the press requiring it to operate under specific guidelines, some of which have been dictated to them by donors in return for more financial aid and other support. The most noticeable influence is, of course, on the press that the African governments themselves own and control. Even the independent press, however, has been subjected to some of the demands through mainly government policy pronouncements and laws which are often moderated or changed nearly each time the donor community reacts to them.

NGOs, like government, are recipients of donor funding some of which is exclusively given to support the press on condition that the press in turn operates according to the manner desired by the NGOs and, ultimately, the donor community which provides the funds. Apart from the public statements that NGOs make demanding that the press operates in a manner conducive to multipartyism and democracy, there is a lot of lobbying and discussing going on behind the scenes between leaders of NGOs and the press management. NGOs have particularly exerted a lot of influence on government media, urging them to be fair to the opposition parties and other stakeholders critical of government.

Opposition political parties too have pressurised the press, mainly through their constant cries for fair treatment by, particularly, the government press. The aid link between the donor community and the opposition is usually not shown in the form of direct financial aid, which risks being interpreted as inference in a country’s internal affairs. It is, usually in the form of other aid such as educational tours of leaders of political parties in the North as well as other institutional linkages.

The government press, in particular, has responded to demands by the donor community and other media playmakers by adjusting from a position of being purely ‘voice of the government’, to one in which news and views of the opposition, including that which is critical and at times opposed to government, is sometimes published or broadcast. Thus the government’s authoritarian grip on their own media has, in the 1990s, certainly been weakened in all countries which have turned to multipartyism and democratic governance, although the rate of accommodating the opposition by the government press is undoubtedly, different from one country to another.

Listening and watching broadcasts from government radio and television stations in some of Africa’s multiparty states, one cannot fail to notice some spirit of accommodation towards the opposition that has taken place in many countries. In some countries, leaders of opposition parties are even allowed to address the nation on government-owned radio and television, a thing that was anathema in the same broadcast stations under one-party or military rule. Of course, Africa’s opposition political parties have continued to complain, and often rightly so, that the government newspapers and broadcast stations still either do not give them enough publicity or give them a biased one.

The rate of accommodating divergent news and views in government media has differed from country to country and from time to time and was by the close of the 1990s, still very far from what the donors and other interested parties, particularly those from Nordic countries, would have liked it to be. It seemed in many countries to have been stronger soon after the multiparty elected governments first took office in the early 1990s than later in the decade, particularly in countries where the same government was re-elected for a second consecutive term and had, therefore, become more authoritative and entrenched. In such countries, autocratic tendencies seemed to be cowing the government press once more into increased submission amid fresh pressure against this from the donors and other media playmakers. Depending on the outcome of this dialectical confrontation, as pressure intensified from donors and other media playmakers on the government press, it was expected that sub-

stantive change would come about where the government press would be more responsive to the needs of all concerned political players in the true multiparty spirit. When, not if, this happened, assuming donor and other pressure continued, the government press in Africa would truly become public information utilities and not just organs of government and the party in power.

There can be no doubt, however, that the move to accommodate opposition news and views by Africa's government press has been due to pressure from the donor community and all the other media playmakers. It has not happened by chance. The demand by the donor community, in particular, has often been accompanied by threats to cut off financial support to the government media directly or to government as a whole. Some donor countries and organisations have given financial support to the government press on condition that it publicises divergent news and views befitting a multiparty political situation. The seriousness of such pressure should be understood in the light of a situation where most of the African governments are unable to adequately finance operations of the press they own and control because of demands of the Structural Adjustment Programme (S.A.P) and other donor-driven programmes which the World Bank, the I.M.F and other financiers have imposed on these countries.

Some of the donors, particularly those from Nordic countries, have driven the point home to government media managers during the numerous briefings that are held, that they (the Nordic governments) too have government-financed media but these are not for the exclusive monopoly of those in government since they also publicise news and views from the opposition which sometimes contradicts or at least is different from those of government. They have told the media managers that despite this, the Nordic governments do not threaten or punish the media they support in their home countries because of sometimes carrying different and at times contradictory news and views from those of government.

Hill (1998:467) has shown in his article how the World Bank has influenced the policy and operation of the telecommunications industry in the sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries by pressing for the introduction of liberalisation and a move away from state monopolies since, according to the World Bank thinking, the state cannot be both the provider and the regulator of telecommunications as it is in many developing countries. There is a close affinity between telecommunications and the mass media, since most of the new media technologies depend on telecommunication infrastructure. It may, therefore, be concluded that this action by the World Bank has also affected the development of the mass media industry.

Likewise, the independent press has also been wilting to pressures from the donor community, the government and other media playmakers to be more responsive to the demands of the multiparty political set up and democratic governance. When the independent press won its freedom from government control at the start of the 1990s, it was like a dog which, having been constantly in chains, is suddenly freed and to express or celebrate its freedom goes wild barking at, charging and biting everyone in sight. Most of the independent press in Africa in the early 1990s behaved in similar fashion. It often wantonly attacked those in government, the opposition and even private citizens, to the point of fabricating some of the information all in the name of a free press. It was largely very irresponsible.

At first the international donor community believed much of what the independent press was reporting. It interpreted what the press did as a testimony of the expression of press freedom brought to Africa by the advent of multiparty politics and democracy. Some of the editors of the newspapers became heroes overnight for daring to challenge the hitherto sacrosanct heads of state and governments. Some of them were even decorated with honours and awards of sorts by the international community, presumably for keeping alight the torch of a free press. The awards were seen as more deserving since some of these editors had been incarcerated by African governments for presumably "reporting the truth". The effect was that some of the editors and their newspapers became even more mischievous in their reckless exercise of freedom of the press.

Part of the pressure on editors of the independent newspapers came from governments which persecuted media people whom they thought overstepped the rights of press freedom. Although, as we have seen earlier, some of government's reactions to the independent press were premeditated and not always directed at wrongdoers, some of the journalists the government persecuted could be said to have been rightly punished. Some of them realised their mistakes and reformed. Others did not, in some cases, even becoming more hardened. The other pressure groups against the press who included NGOs, civil society, and the church also influenced the independent press in various ways, not always positively, of course.

NGOs, particularly those which agitated for the improvement of the status of women - and many of these sprang up all over the continent during the decade - were specially insistent that the press should treat all sections of society equally and fairly. In many cases, they obtained money from donors to promote specific areas of reportage in the press. The most common among these were gender issues, agriculture, environment and health reporting. Courses, workshops and seminars were organised to teach as well as encourage journalists to report in these areas. It is not by coincidence, therefore, that the press in Africa during the decade started, more than ever before, diversified its areas of coverage by way of specialised reporting on various areas of human concern. Its content was, certainly, more diversified than that of the press during the one-party and military rule era whose content predominantly consisted of politics.

Civil society is usually understood as the realm of those institutions larger than the family yet smaller than the state that form the social fabric of modern societies (Sullivan, 1999:31-32). There were, during the 1990s, because of the emerging political consciousness of more citizens than Africa had ever seen before, many self-organising groups among citizens through which people were able to collectively work to try and solve common problems. These same groups were able to act as channels of popular opinion and pressure upon not only government, but also upon the press, to make it more responsive to the promotion of their collective interests. One of the unique influences of civil society on the press to serve its needs was that of distress calls and funeral announcements which the press, both independent and government, often provided in many African countries free of charge or at a nominal fee as a public service.

Because civil society is based on free exchange rather than coercive decision-making, the press was also repeatedly used by civil groups to call attention to the need for solidarity and social responsibility on the part of individuals in society. This was done either through journalistic pieces of reportage e.g. news stories and features, or through advertisements in the press, usually with advertising space donated by NGOs or some other benefactors. Finally, because of its insistence on an individual's free contribution to the welfare of the citizenry, civil society has a very close affinity to free thinking and liberalism. Civil society, therefore, tended to promote, among the various media of public communication, the liberal spirit of supporting various and different opinions and views from individual persons. Because African society is essentially an oral society, the oral media of radio and television tended to be influenced more than the written media of newspapers and other publication media.

The power of the church as a media playmaker on the African continent has been as significant as its influence on politics (Ole-Ronkei, 1997). The church (both Christian and Moslem) has played no mean role in influencing the philosophy and practice of the press. During the decade in question, the church often criticised the independent press for sometimes using its freedom irresponsibly and the government press for being too docile with government. The church has been very particular against the press corrupting public morals and good taste as well as the reporting of untruths and the lack of exposure of human rights' violations and other injustices which the people in Africa were and, still are, often subjected to by their governments.

Consequently, the earlier enthusiasm by many of the editors of the private press to champion the liberal principle of a free press by hook or crook, seemed by the close of the 1990s, to have been dampened by a rather disillusioned donor community and other media playmak-

ers who started exerting more pressure on the editors to exercise their freedom more responsibly and professionally. Much of the pressure, of course, came from the economic front. The donor community started discriminating in their offers of financial support. Only responsible independent newspaper editors, or those who promised to act responsibly were receiving the financial support. In due course, the economic pressure started to be a real deterrent since the independent press was generally short of money to continue publishing. The point was driven home to editors that freedom of the press only made sense if it was exercised responsibly. Accordingly, editors started becoming more responsible while still maintaining their role as watchdogs. They realised that the watchdog role did not mean regarding those in government as sworn enemies who should be hounded out of power at any cost. There was no doubt that due to this pressure, some of Africa's excessive independent newspaper editors became more responsible while continuing to enjoy their freedom.

Generally the pressure from the donor community and other media playmakers saw Africa begin to see a new breed of more responsible independent newspapers. By the close of the 1990s, however, there were still some newspapers in Africa which behaved like untied watchdogs celebrating their freedom irresponsibly. But some editors had changed for the better.

In Publications Nos. 3 and 4, I was expressing grave concern that the independent press in Africa was not reforming towards a more responsible journalism fast enough. I was expressing the fear that if the continent's independent press continued behaving largely irresponsibly, the multiparty elected governments of Africa would find a perfect excuse of once more usurping freedom of the press as the one-party and military governments before them had done.

If we define democratic governance as 'government by argument' and multipartyism as 'the art of shouting at the top of one's voice amidst competing political viewpoints', then we have to concede that a press capable of serving these two democratic ideals would have to be flexible and accommodating while maintaining a certain level of firmness. Such a press should make those in government accountable and transparent in their deeds and misdeeds as well as keep a check on opposition political parties, many of which were conducting politics for the first time, to politick fairly and decently. A neo-multiparty press should be flexible enough to accommodate the various political players. The neo-multiparty press would eventually become so flexible that it lacks a distinguishing character or philosophy. Sometimes we saw the neo-multiparty press, particularly if it was government-owned, play the role of a government and ruling party organ reminiscent of the government press of the one-party or military autocracy; making efforts to try and provide information to the greater part of the population, particularly those in rural areas, regardless of financial benefits. Sometimes we saw the neo-multiparty press, particularly if it was owned privately, trying to act as a watchdog against government; sensationalising its reportage to be able to make money on which it depended for survival; and, trying to maximise its profits by concentrating in urban areas. Sometimes we saw a press, which was bent on converting the nation to one political or religious philosophy or conviction etc. These roles were not always just performed by particular newspapers or broadcast stations specifically set up to perform them, but they were also done by way of a 'mixed-dish offering' by the same newspaper or broadcast station as a direct or indirect response to pressures from the various media playmakers, led by the donors.

A particular press system is normally identified with a specific philosophical base which guides its praxis. This philosophy consists of a set of principles or beliefs about the *raison d'être* of the particular press system which explains why it exists. Very often this is expressed in an editorial policy which every mass medium is supposed to have. A common characteristic of the newspapers and broadcast stations during the decade of the 1990s, however, was precisely their lack of a consistent editorial policy, if they had one. Many newspapers grandiosely announced their editorial policies in their maiden issues which they hardly followed, leave alone, remembered, afterwards. Many of the media just published or broadcast according to their journalistic instincts hoping in the process to achieve some specific objectives,



some of which contradicted each other. Incidences were common such as the one of a newspaper in a country in southern Africa which criticised the government in an editorial for accepting the World Bank and I.M.F. donor aid conditions which it said had resulted in untold suffering among the citizens. The newspaper in its very next issue completely cancelled its condemnation of government by publishing another editorial this time praising the government for accepting the World Bank and I.M.F. conditions for donor aid, saying the suffering these conditions had brought among the citizens was temporary and would end sooner or later.

The lack of a unitary philosophical base for the neo-multiparty press may not necessarily, though, be a weakness. On the contrary, it may be a strong suggestion that pinning down the press to one philosophy and approach may be futile since history has shown that the press throughout the ages has not operated continuously and consistently under one philosophy.

### 4.3 Neo-Multiparty Press and Society

Since the press under the neo-multiparty conception is influenced by the donor community and various media playmakers, it is only natural to expect it to be, first and foremost, responsive to the needs of these playmakers. For example, the donor community may be demanding that the press gives fair publicity to all the contending players on the political scene. By responding to such demands, however, the neo-multiparty press may not necessarily be serving the interests of the citizens who may be more interested in the press publicising information that would help alleviate their abject poverty, ignorance and disease than telling them about petty squabbles of political parties. It is my submission that the neo-multiparty press is rarely directly responsive, if ever, to citizens' needs. It merely reflects those needs of the citizens which are, in the first place, reflected in the various demands on it by the donor community and other media playmakers.

The neo-multiparty press has to serve a variety of masters who directly make demands on it. Since the citizens rarely, if ever, directly make any demands on it, their interests are hardly, if ever, on the agenda of the media playmakers. In other words, the interests of the citizenry would only be served if the media playmakers so demand. Under the neo-multiparty press, the role of the press to set the agenda for the people is often influenced by the need to amplify the agenda of the media playmakers. The press largely becomes a megaphone of what those who control it are saying or want it to do.

The influence of the media playmakers is not the same, nor is it uniform. Some of them exert more influence than others depending on a number of factors, including their credibility and ability to impose their will on the government and the people managing the press. Because the donor community uses its money-power to influence both government, political parties, NGOs and other media playmakers, it would seem logical to ascribe more influence to it. In this connection, it would also be correct to state that the neo-multiparty press, particularly the independent one, is more responsive to the demands of the economic forces under which it operates than to the needs of its direct audience or readership. The advertising hole, for example, is always expanded, whenever advertisements are available, at the expense of the news hole. The newspapers also hardly expand to serve readers in rural areas because it is not economical to do so since the people with the buying and advertising power are in the urban centres and not in rural areas.

It is an indisputable fact that the press in Africa in the 1990s benefited greatly from financial and other support by the donor community. Some donor countries, such as the U.S.A., had, as part of their good governance aid package, allocated to the press and related institutions huge sums of money and other technical aid to make the press in Africa serve what they saw as a truly democratic role. The interesting thing was that there were differences and, sometimes contradictions, among donors in the purposes behind aid to the press. While generally the purpose for the aid was to advance multipartyism and democracy, each donor

country or agency approached the issue from its country's or organisation's underlining principle(s) in such aid.

For example, The U.S.A. does not believe in a government-owned and controlled press serving a democracy. Consequently, the American aid package to the press in Africa did not usually extend to the government-owned and controlled press. On the other hand, donors from the NORDIC countries also came up with their own aid packages meant at ensuring that the press, both the private and the government-owned and controlled, plays its role in fostering multipartyism and democratic governance.

There were a host of other countries such as France, Britain, and Canada which gave their money and other technical aid to prop up the press in Africa during the decade in line with their respective philosophical and politico-economic positions. While democracy and good governance may have been the underlying factors in all this aid, the philosophical justification was certainly not the same. For example, the French would see state-ownership and control as the basic approach to a press serving a democratic political set-up. On the other hand, the British would support a privately-owned press or at least one owned by a public corporation similar to the BBC. The Canadians would support a mixture of privately-owned and publicly-owned press but not a government one, while the Americans, as we have seen, would support only a privately-owned press. There can be no doubt that each of these countries inculcate their media philosophies and approaches on the press of the particular African country they are giving aid. Where more than one country belonging to different philosophical systems and approaches was aiding the press of a particular African country, as was usually the case, the government and the press of that country could hardly have been blamed if they ended up believing that any of the various press systems presented to them by the various donors was good enough for their countries. This added to the confusion and lack of a philosophical base characteristic of a neo-multiparty press.

The truth, however, is that the various different press systems which democratic countries in North America and Europe have adopted may not necessarily work in Africa unless the political and socio-cultural conditions obtaining in these countries are also replicated in African countries, a situation that is not possible. While in Nordic countries, for example, the practice of government funding of the press does not adversely affect the ability of the press so funded to accommodate both ruling party and opposition news and views in its reportage, it is doubtful, as past experience has shown, that the same system would be used to support multipartyism and democracy in Africa where the distinction between the government and the ruling party is largely still absent. It seems most likely that for a long time in African politics, the ruling party would continue using state or government facilities, including the government press, for its own benefit at the expense and exclusion of the opposition parties. Even if laws are passed, as they have been in some countries, specifically forbidding the ruling party from appropriating the government press for its use, the political realities on the ground will still tend to ignore the law. It is my submission that it would require a change of political attitudes, beliefs and values of the entire body politic in Africa to make the political transition of distinguishing between the ruling party and government. Laws will always tend to be ignored or even amended by the people in power to suit their needs and requirements. Perhaps this is why the Nordic countries have been reported by Kivikuru (2000:32) to be still reluctant to deal with the state/government when involved in assisting the African media and prefer to deal with NGOs.

#### 4.4 Support of the Conception from other Authors

The influence of the donor community on the press in Africa directly or through governments has been referred to by a number of authors. Discussing the changing perceptions of the press in Tanzania in the 1990s, Grosswiler (1997:110) has written that the Tanzania government's tolerance of press freedom has been due to donor pressure in the face of what he calls "careless and sensational news reporting". He writes:

This new government tolerance of press freedom may have several causes. ... Another reason may be the government's need to accommodate countries that provide much of Tanzania's economic existence.

(Grosswiler, 1997:110)

Another writer, Eribo (1997), has credited international agencies with influencing how the press in Nigeria functions. He writes:

The spread of democracy has made it possible to monitor press freedom more effectively. International agencies such as Freedom House and the International Press Institute monitor the violation of press freedom in Nigeria. Their efforts have yielded some results, including the release of journalists jailed by military dictators and the privatisation of the electronic media. This new development is a sign of the changes that may check the abuse of press freedom in Nigeria.

(Eribo, 1997:72)

In Cote d'Ivoire, Tudesq has reported that the ruling class often takes international opinion, particularly that of France into consideration (Tudesq, 1997:301).

According to him the newspaper, *Fraternite Martin*, formerly a mouth-piece of the PDCI-led government, has undergone some significant changes.

Not only does the paper now report on stories involving controversy, but it also dialogues with, rather than confront the opposition press. In fact, it even covers the activities of the opposition parties.

(Tudesq, 1997:295)

The influence of the donors and other playmakers on the media in Africa is at two levels. It is either exerted directly on the media people in various ways including press briefings, funding, technical aid, awards, study tours and attachments; or it is applied through the government by withholding aid to it until government starts treating the press, both government and independent, in a particular, desired way. Donor nations and agencies have, for example, been known to withhold balance of payments allocated to certain African countries until they stop persecuting journalists from, usually, the private press, or until they stop 'violations of human rights', the generic term which donors prefer to use as they press their demands for media reforms in Africa.

Of course, few of the donor countries and agencies would admit that they influence the philosophy, policy and operations of the press they directly or indirectly aid. Some of them, like some Nordic countries, have even caused to be instituted in some countries in Africa, local trusts made up of national journalists' associations to dispense their grants to both government and private media so as not to be seen as influencing the press directly if they administered the funds themselves. But it would not make sense if their aid was not meant to influence the philosophy and approach of the press when the same aid does influence governance in other fields, particularly the conduct of politics and the economy.

Many spokespersons of diplomatic missions and other agencies based in Africa maintain that their aid has no strings attached to it. But when the press starts to preach doctrines contrary to those they hold or operate in a way they do not like, these same missions and donor agencies usually threaten to cut off their aid, and, in some cases, actually do cut it off. In this connection, Ronning has observed:

The so-called alternative media are often owned by trusts and controlled by small groups of allies and friends, or totally are dependent on one person's dedication. ... Their frequent dependence on foreign donor funding does not serve as an incentive for efforts to be economically viable. Furthermore, this renders them vulnerable to shifts in donor policies, as well as economic and political changes beyond their control.

(Ronning, 1993:11-12)

While most African governments maintain that, like anybody else in a liberal economy, they are free to own media, they, however, are unwilling to admit that they also control the operations of the media they own. Many of them insist that their media have as much editorial independence as the privately-owned ones. But we all have heard the outbursts that come from African Presidents and their Ministers when government media publicise the 'wrong information' or do not publicise what they wanted them to publicise. We have all seen the treatment they give the 'erring' journalists to either punish them for 'wrong-doing' or to reward them for doing what they want or expect them to do or not to do. Some of the newspaper editors, broadcast station directors and other senior journalists from the government press have, as we have seen earlier, been detained, suspended or fired from their posts for not toeing the line by publishing the 'wrong' information. Others have been given expensive gifts, hefty pay rises or promoted for doing what the government wants or expects them to do.

Similarly, most media managers in Africa are adamant to admit that their editorial independence is sometimes, perhaps too often, compromised by pressures from government and other interested parties, including the owners of the media houses. The only time media managers, particularly those from the government press, admit government has been interfering with their editorial independence is when they are fired from their jobs for some alleged wrong-doing. In like manner, managers of the independent press are often unwilling to admit that the owners of the media they manage sometimes influence them in their editorial decisions. But they are only too willing to accuse the government, rightly or wrongly, for interfering with press freedom.

African governments, throughout the 1990s, were constantly and consistently trying to control the independent press because they were mostly unhappy with its criticism of government and revelations of bad deeds by those in government. Soured relations between the government and the independent press therefore persisted with the government insisting that the independent press was up to no good. For example, writing about Ghana, Anokwa has quoted the country's President Jerry Rawlings as having characterised Ghana's independent press as 'having nothing good in stock but lies and falsehood'. He also quotes Rawlings' Director of the Public Affairs Secretariat as having said:

'There is no struggle between Ghana's private press. There is no clampdown. There is no siege. There is, however, considerable disgust on the part of those who have put up with the constant barrage of smears, innuendoes and vicious rumours from those who have gone berserk with press freedom'.

(quoted from Anokwa, 1997:24)

I have discussed in great detail earlier in this review measures which African governments used in the 1990s to try and control the independent press. It is only apt for me to quote Ogbondah who has observed:

The problem with press freedom in Africa is not that there is an absence of a body of laws or constitutional provisions guaranteeing that freedom. The problem is that arbitrary actions, extra-legal measures and instruments of violence and coercion are utilised by the state in attempts to curb the right of freedom of expression.

(Ogbondah, 1997:283)

Closely connected with the influence of governments on the press in Africa is that of the ruling parties. Discussing the influence of ruling parties in Botswana and Zimbabwe, Darnolf has written:

Another factor that cannot be ignored in emerging democracies is the ability of the ruling party to exert influence over the operations of the media apparatus. Of course, both state and private media editors report that their operations are independent of the political orientation of their owners, but a number of studies indicate that such is not always the case. (Darnolf, 1997:202)

Darnolf has listed three pressures from ruling parties on the press: They are:

- 1) the economic dependence of the state media on the state;
- 2) the appointment of members of boards of directors of the state media;
- 3) the direct influence of ministers over news editors and programmers.

On financing, Darnolf says that the state media are financed by the state budget and therefore it is possible for the ruling party to link the media's budget to positive news coverage. The appointment of members of boards of directors by the ruling party makes it possible for the ruling party to choose board members based on their political orientation rather than their performance. (Darnolf, 1997:102-202). Of course, Darnolf is using the term 'ruling party' in the African sense of not really distinguishing it from government.

The influence from the opposition parties, the NGOs and other media playmakers is substantive too. The demands by the opposition parties, for example, on the government press to be fair to them have, in some countries, taken the form of legal action. In Zambia, for example, the government broadcasting station, ZNBC, was in 1991 sued in the High Court by the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD), which was then the opposition party, for refusing to broadcast material, including paid-for election campaign advertisements. The High Court ruled in the MMD's favour and ordered ZNBC to broadcast information about MMD, including political advertisements. The resultant change by the ZNBC both in its policy and practice by trying to accommodate the opposition parties was immediately noticeable, particularly when the MMD itself came to power. ZNBC even instituted a code of conduct which it was supposed to follow during election time. Despite this, Zambia's opposition parties were throughout the 1990s still complaining, albeit with some justification, that they were being given a raw deal by a broadcasting station that was supposed to be a public broadcaster and not a government and ruling party mouthpiece. Similar action has been taken by opposition parties elsewhere in Africa against government media, particularly broadcasting stations.

In this regard, it is important to explain the status of government broadcasting stations in Africa regarding whether or not they were public broadcasters during the decade. Although the word "Corporation" was often used in their name, most of them were not corporations in the BBC sense but merely government departments of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or some such ministry. They were operationally answerable to the government and the ruling party. Their whole management structure was constituted in such a way as to make this possible. The government, usually through the Minister or Secretary of Information and Broadcasting, appointed members of their boards of directors as well as their chief executives, called directors or director-generals. The people serving as board members or chief executives were usually members or at least supporters of the ruling party. The money to run the stations was budgeted for under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or similar ministry which controlled expenditure. With such ties, it was very difficult, if not impossible, for most African government broadcasting stations not to be directed by government and the ruling party in a way that affected adversely the interests of the opposition parties.

Some African governments were willing to admit that their broadcasting stations were not 'yet' public broadcasters. In Zambia, for example, ZNBC was still at the end of the 1990s a long way from becoming a public broadcaster. Opening the Forum on Broadcasting in Zambia, MMD (ruling party) Chairman, Sikota Wina, admitted:

‘The Zambian government looks forward to a day when the public broadcasting service operates like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which is perceived as a great institution dedicated to the service of the British public.’

(quoted from Panos, 1997)

One of the very few exceptions was the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) which had made great strides during the decade to be a public broadcaster not answerable to the government of the day. Some of the steps taken by the SABC to achieve a commendable measure of nearly attaining public broadcaster status was the conduct of public hearings to appoint members of the board of directors. Notably, the station had hardly any direct links with any government ministry or department ensuring its fairly independent operations.

Press systems often tell us the role of the media in a given society, the philosophy under which it is operating, who is controlling its operations and how it is affecting the body politic and society at large. They hardly tell us how the voiceless majority of the people can influence the operations of the press, particularly if it is found not to be serving their needs. The people of Africa were, however, during the 1990s, hardly in a position to meaningfully challenge media which were ignoring them or not serving their interests. The citizens of Africa were too preoccupied with bread-and-butter issues to worry about a press that never even reached or served the majority of them, particularly their rural kith and kin. They were more worried about how to solve daily problems arising from the abject poverty, ignorance and disease to worry about how to influence an urban-concentrated and minority-focused press.

There were, however, by the close of the decade, feeble signs of attempts by the citizenry of Africa to influence the press so that it could be more responsive to their needs. This was becoming noticeable in occasional letters to the press in which a few readers complained that the press, both the government and the independent, was not performing its task to their satisfaction. There were also occasional radio and television discussions which were critical of the performance of the press. But these attempts by few individuals to influence the philosophy and practice of the media were so small that they were insignificant and negligible. They certainly did not have the impact of a mass protest against the press. For all the African press knew, the majority of the people seemed to be happy with what it was doing.

The attitude of the press to think the people were happy with its work was largely assumed. There were hardly any readership and audience surveys to corroborate it. Few African countries conducted surveys to find out people’s opinions about what the press was doing. In the absence of feedback from the people about what they think about the news and other information the press is giving them, the press is hardly in a position to adjust its operational and institutional policies to respond to people’s needs. Instead, it continues giving the people the same menu of information which media playmakers insist it must give. This is what seems to have been happening in Africa in the 1990s in as far as the input by the citizenry generally in influencing the neo-multiparty press was concerned.

In my communication policies studies – Publication No. 1 and Kasoma, 1990a - there is an implied suggestion that the framing of the policies, whether at national level by governments or at institutional level by the media houses or organisations, was not based on scientific findings based on surveys or research but on assumptions some of which were not realistic. For example, it was, and still is, largely assumed that urban people have more access to newspapers than rural people. But precisely how many urban people are able to buy and read newspapers is rarely, if ever, known. Similarly, it was and continues to be assumed that radio is the most widely used mass medium because it is also accessible to people in rural areas. But how many rural people, leave alone urban ones, in a particular country are actually able to listen to radio does not seem to bother African policy makers although it is a crucial question that should influence the direction of the policy that radio broadcasting in a particular country takes.

## 4.5 Press Policy

In view of the liberalised political dispensation of the 1990s, it was necessary that African governments re-define their relationship with the press through well-thought-out and documented press policies. There was, clearly, a need for a complete shift from the role the press had played in the preceding one-party and military regimes. The new relationship between the press and government as well as its role in the multiparty and democratic set up needed to be defined publicly so that all the players in the body politic were aware and agreed to the new reference points in relation to the press. They needed to know and agree on what was the function and status of the press in the new political system. The stakeholders in the new political dispensation needed to know and agree on the strategies which were going to be required to substantially increase public access to the means of free and unbiased information as well as what guarantees were necessary to foster a press system which would promote freedom of the press, increase people's access to the public means of information and communication and ensure that the press was not, once again, abused to promote or legitimise autocracy and violations of human rights. The age-old democratic role of the independent press as the bastion of democracy needed to be asserted publicly so that the press, the government and the people knew and understood the agenda before the press in the new political dispensation. Beyond the political roles of the press, there was also need to define its other roles to society.

Perhaps the key policy issue during the decade was that of affirming the freedom of the press and working out practical strategies to realise it. The independent press was free, as we saw in Chapter 1, because it was not obliged to listen to government, beyond the general requirements of the law, in the way it managed and performed its journalistic functions. A government press was not free precisely because it was subject to government control in its operations. A pertinent policy issue then, which dogged African governments during the decade, was that of whether to abolish the government press completely or turn it into a public one so that it could be free to serve multipartyism and democracy. Many African nations were undecided. Others decided to continue with a government press in a kind of press policy contradiction. A few decided to do away with a government press. The donor community and other media playmakers, however, were insistent on countries which had managed to come out with a documented press policy to have enough safeguards in these policies about a free press. Those countries which did not satisfy what the donors and other media playmakers thought were enough safeguards for freedom of the press were ordered to revise their press policies until they satisfied this requirement. In this regard, I feel obliged to share my experiences in Zambia where I was in 1996 and 1999 hired on both occasions as a consultant by the government to prepare the country's information and media policy document. The 1996 document which was subsequently published by the government after extensive amendments to my original draft by the cabinet, was almost immediately after its publication rejected by the donors because it lacked assurances regarding the commitment by the government to freedom of the press, assurances which I had included in the draft but were removed by the cabinet. In 1999, I worked on the new document and in my covering letter to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services, I advised the government not to again remove the 'freedom of the press' clauses as they had done before. By the time I was writing this review, in July 2000, more than six months after submitting the draft, the government had not yet published the new, revised information and media policy, although when I was given the work, I was told that the document was 'very urgent' because the donors wanted it ready before the beginning of the year 2000.

There was also insistence by donors and other media playmakers to remove all existing impediments to press freedom, particularly those contained in existing laws. A requirement which received donor encouragement in many countries, therefore, was that of including in press policies clauses about press law reforms. Some countries started on these reforms towards the end of the decade. Others were, by the end of the decade, still discussing how best

to do it. Some had not even started and were being pushed by donors and other media play-makers to start doing so. In a few countries, the law reforms started with amending the national constitution to include a clause specifically protecting freedom of the press.

Another key press policy question was that of technology. Goulet (1977) states that technology refers to the systematic application of collective human rationality to the solution of problems by asserting control over human processes of all kinds. According to him, what is included in the term is not simply machines or the knowledge of hardware but the collection of transferred attitudes, values, institutions, social and political structures and systems that come with technology (Goulet, 1977). His point that technology does not only refer to machinery but also to values, processes and institutions is reiterated by other scholars such as Mody (1985). Mody defines communication technology as the techniques and institutions by which information is produced, packaged and disseminated to geographically-dispersed receivers.

It is clear then that by technology we are not just concerned with machines and the software that go with them. We are also referring to the values, knowledge and institutions under which the technological devices are operated. In other words, new communication technology is a process rather than merely a mechanical phenomenon of making news and information available to an heterogeneous and ubiquitous public through the use of the latest techniques or machinery.

It was important for African countries during the 1990s to pronounce a policy stating what communication technology they wanted, when and where if they were to avoid taking the hasty decisions they sometimes made which resulted in making mistakes and some illogical decisions. There was the story of an African country, which I would rather not name, which bought radio broadcasting transmitters from China and antennae from France and then discovered that the two sets of equipment were not compatible. Africa has wasted a lot of money in this way. Moreover, the continent has often been used as a dumping ground of obsolete technology from the North which once acquired cannot be maintained because there are no spare parts since the manufacturers are no longer making the machines.

The influence of donors on the kind of communication technology Africa acquired during the 1990s was very far reaching. They did not only dictate what communication technology a country should use but also when and how to use it which resulted in telling effects on the cultural, social, political, religious and other values of the particular country they were giving aid to. The race for the internationalisation of technology also meant that each donor country tended to promote its own technology at the expense of other, and sometimes, better technologies from other countries.

In the final analysis, the influence of donor countries on the communication technology of recipient countries certainly influenced the policy and operations of the press in Africa into adopting a multiplicity of approaches not only from country to country but also within the same country, and sometimes, within the same media house. The adage that 'donors are not choosers' was literally applicable in this case.

The neo-multiparty press was, therefore, on the policy level a press system with a multiplicity of policy approaches which were not only different but also sometimes contradictory. In the circumstances, co-ordination and consistency in press management was often difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Perhaps the one area where outside donor influence on press operations was most deeply felt was that of the content and format of media products. There was little that was specifically African in the contents and format of what Africa's newspapers, radio and television stations offered. Almost everything was an imitation, usually poor imitations at that, of the American and/or European press. My communication policy publications - Publication No. 1 and Kasoma, 1990a - have made this point very clear.

There has long been a need for the press in Africa to change its content and format to suit the African cultural taste and values. In broadcasting, for example, many programmes about songs and dances do not reflect their real import and aesthetic value because they are broad-



cast either in a wrong or in an inappropriate format and context. Some of the dances may not be meant to be heard by everybody and at any occasion due to their 'sacred' nature. For example, trying to capture a couple of minutes of a Nyau dancer from Zambia or Malawi on television makes a mockery of the whole dance which cannot be dispensed with within such a short time. African song and dance nearly always serves specific purposes. There are songs and dances for initiation ceremonies for young girls and boys; for fertility of agricultural crops, animals and humans; for worship and other rituals such as rain-making; for celebrating the birth of a child, marriage or harvest; for funerals; for entertainment for women only, for men only and for both men and women; for communicating specific messages to particular people in the extended family e.g. in-laws etc. The functional use of such songs and dances needs to be taken into serious account before broadcasting them. The broadcast formats and programming modelled on those of the North, which Africa has largely been using rarely, if ever, take the African cultural perspective into account.

It is also important that the 'oral' media of radio and television adopt the conversational traits of the people of Africa if they have to be culturally acceptable and useful. For instance, repetition should be valued rather than shunned as a waste of valuable broadcast time. The broadcast media should emulate African conversational practice which is full of repetitions to help the listener remember what is being said. When Africans are discussing an issue, speaker after speaker, usually in order of age seniority, will repeat verbatim what the previous speaker has said in what may look to a person from the North as an extremely boring discussion. The repetition means 'I have understood what you are saying and I am with you or agree with you,' or 'I am not with you or do not agree with you'. In a largely oral society, which Africans to a great extent still are, to repeat what someone has said also serves as a cross-check on misinformation. It means getting prepared to accurately tell the story to others who are not present at the discussion - a technique African news reporters could do well to adopt.

News reporting in Africa should take into account cultural sensitivities. For instance there are certain forms of expressions showing politeness, respect, collegiality, etc. Africans are full of such expressions which broadcasters could use to endear themselves to their audiences.

The sensitivity to cultural values can even extend to newspaper headlines. Newspapers should not disregard people's sensitivity like a Ghanaian newspaper once did when reporting on an airforce pilot who died in an air crash. The newspaper was certainly in bad taste when it said in a screaming headline that the pilot's body was like corned beef. Respect for the dead is a common cultural heritage in Africa.

There were hardly donors during the 1990s who gave the press money to develop along these suggested cultural lines. All of them seemed to have been contented to see the press look like that in their countries. And since there were a variety of donors, it meant that the press had no uniform format but took the form of whatever country was contributing to its support. Sometimes the influences of several donor countries were evident in one mass medium as, for example, the common occurrence of newspapers in Anglophone Africa using American headlines while imitating the reporting style of the British tabloid press.

#### 4.6 Profile of a Neo-Multiparty Press

Based on what I have said about the neo-multiparty press up to this point, it is possible to profile this particular type of press so that its characteristics are brought out and contrasted with the other types of press which have served Africa during other historical epochs. I will, therefore, in this section present annotated notes about the characteristics of the neo-multiparty press.

#### *4.6.1 Inconsistent reporting*

Both the government and the independent press is often inconsistent in reporting of news and editorial opinion. News angles are sometimes consistently maintained in a given direction only to be suddenly changed to some other position or changed back again to the old position. There is sometimes a corresponding shift in the tone and direction of the newspaper's editorials which normally reflect the official position of the newspaper. Sometimes, however, editorials take a different line from that taken in the news and other information columns, clearly suggesting some inconsistency between the position taken by the newspaper in reporting the news and its official position as reflected in the editorial. The shifts in news angles are obviously responses of the particular media house to various pressures by donors and other media playmakers. The different, and sometimes opposing positions, taken by the newspaper with regard to its news columns when compared to its editorial position may be explained by the fact that the reporting staff have a different set of influences affecting their reportage which are not also affecting the editor, and there is not enough time for the editor and her or his staff to reconcile the different positions. In such situations, it is not unusual for the newspaper to contradict itself in the position it takes regarding the reporting of the event or issue and that taken in editorialising on the event or issue.

Such inconsistencies and contradictions in editorial positions of newspapers were not uncommon in the press of the 1990s in Africa, especially in the arena of politics. There were often inconsistencies in newspaper endorsement of politicians and political positions with some newspapers changing their political endorsements so often that they sometimes left their readers confused. The government press in particular supported whoever was in power regardless of what it had said about them when they were fighting to get into power. The situation sometimes became comical when people in power resigned from the ruling party or when members of the opposition joined the ruling party. The angel became the devil and the devil, the angel.

In the economic field, we saw the neo-multiparty press sometimes come out strongly in support of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) and other donor-driven economic programmes and then totally condemn them the next time as programmes which were making the poor poorer and the rich richer. Sometimes the same newspaper would reflect the two incompatible positions within the same issue and even in the same article.

#### *4.6.2 Political advertisements*

The neo-multiparty press very often carried political advertisements, large whole, half or quarter page statements, often clarifications, of political stands or issues which individual politicians or political parties wanted to make. The need for such clarifications was, ironically, often brought about by the biased reporting of the very newspapers that carried the advertisements. Sometimes, however, the advertisements were simply placed in newspapers not to clarify misreportage but rather to avoid it. Some parties and politicians preferred to place an advertisement of their statement in the newspaper than to subject themselves to the possibility of being misquoted or misreported by calling a press conference or giving the statement to the press as a news item. In other words, the advertisements were sometimes aimed at avoiding the bias of the neo-multiparty press in reporting politicians and politics. It was clear that many politicians did not trust journalists and the press whom they saw as being bent on destroying their political careers. Yet they needed the press to make known their political views and opinions. Hence the safe way to make the political views and opinions known was to advertise them.

#### *4.6.3 Preponderance of entertainment and religion*

If the press of the one-party and military rule period was characterised by a preponderance of political content, then that of the 1990s was certainly characterised by a preponderance of entertainment and religion. In the field of broadcasting, the decade saw a very substantial increase in entertainment and religious programming. A number of radio stations were opened exclusively for music entertainment, and, of course advertising. There were also radio and television stations which were set to broadcast religious material meant for evangelising. Televangelism (preaching on television) in Africa really took the continent by storm with government stations devoting a lot of broadcast time to it, particularly at weekends.

Both the entertainment and the religious programming were mainly externally generated. Most of the new independent FM radio stations which sprang up all over the continent as a result of the liberalisation of the airwaves, mainly broadcast American pop music. So did the government so-called commercial radio channels. In some cases, American disco jockeys were broadcast either live or from recorded cassettes. Attempts at a cultural revolution of promoting indigenous music on national broadcast stations seemed to have disappeared with the one-party and military regime era. The external origination of the religious programming too was predominant. Most of them, particularly the television ones, came from the U.S.A. but a considerable number were generated in South Africa.

Much of the entertainment and religious programming was made possible by media multinationals either through satellite or cable transmission. The South African media multinational M-Net, in particular, was spreading very fast to most of the continent's government television stations with which it signed partnership contracts. In Zambia, for example, ZNBC signed a contract with M-Net to have 30 percent of its shares in the entertainment programmes it broadcast on the network. Soap operas from the SABC were also becoming increasingly popular, particularly across Anglophone Africa.

#### *4.6.4 Investigative mixed with so-and-so-said reporting*

For the first time in African journalism, a serious attempt was made at investigative journalism, by mostly the new independent tabloids, although in many cases it was poorly done with journalists basing their stories on single, often unreliable, sources, or sometimes even hearsay. Nonetheless, we sometimes saw newspapers making eye-brow-raising revelations of corruption and sex scandals among politicians, mainly from the ruling party, things which were hardly revealed by the one-party and military regime press. But the old so-and-so-said type of reporting of the autocratic era was still widely practised, particularly by the government press. Sometimes the same newspaper would make an attempt at investigative reporting and then revert back to so-and-so-said reporting in the next story, or even worse, mix a bit of investigative reporting with so-and-so-said reporting within the same story. It was obvious that the press was responding to two distinct pressures from the media playmakers with some agitating for investigated stories like the press of the North would do, and others maintaining the importance of the press reporting exactly what the speaker said.

#### *4.6.5 Carrot-and-stick treatment of journalists and the press*

The period of the 1990s stands out as the time when African journalists celebrated their freedom while willingly paying for it dearly. Never had the journalists in Africa been so free but also never had they paid for their freedom so dearly but with such enthusiasm and zeal. The one-party and military rule at its height did not persecute journalists as much as the multi-party elected governments did. During the one-party and military rule, most of the journalists had been cowed into submission and there was little need for the government to apply the stick. During the 1990s, however, there were many journalists celebrating their newly-won freedom rightly or wrongly whom the government felt it had to 'discipline'. Consequently,

many African governments saw the need to apply some of the draconian laws against journalists and the press which the one-party or military rule governments inherited or passed but never used. The use of such laws was often accompanied by arbitrary arrests, detentions, interrogations, tortures and similar iron-hand methods. Sometimes, however, the government offered the carrot to journalists and the press generally by giving them more freedom to operate in response to pressure from donors and other media playmakers.

The various forces influencing the press played their hand in this mixed treatment. There were those who agitated for the position to give the press freedom but also 'teach' it how to use the freedom responsibly. There were also those who maintained that the government should stop violating the human rights of journalists by persecuting them and allow them to enjoy press freedom brought about by the new political dispensation. They called on the government to carry out legal reforms which would remove laws which negated freedom of the press replacing them with ones that supported it.

#### *4.6.6 Many newspapers with a high turn-over*

The neo-multiparty press was characterised by a deluge of new titles of newspapers which had a high turn-over. A lot of newspapers were started within a short time from the official liberalisation of politics. In some countries, such as Malawi, as much as 30 new newspapers were started within a period of about two years. A few of these, though, did not survive beyond their maiden editions. Many were published intermittently. Many did not live beyond one or two years. While it is true that a high turn-over has usually characterised the African press both during the colonial era as well as during the one-party and military period, the turn-over of the press in the 1990s was much greater because it involved greater numbers of newspapers beginning and dying within short periods of time.

One of the main reasons why the UN-UNESCO conference on a free and pluralistic press was organised in Windhoek in Namibia in 1991 was precisely to try and see how many of the independent newspapers which were starting to spring up in Africa at that time could be maintained to support the democratic process. Since then, much of the donor funding and aid has been devoted to this effort. Without donor support, it is difficult to see how much of the independent and free press in Africa would survive. Africa would have had a free press in principle which, in practice, does not exist.

#### *4.6.7 Proliferation of party press*

The 1990s also stood out as the period when the party press in Africa started and grew in strength more than ever before. Of the many political parties which were started, some had their own newspapers to project their political vision to the citizenry. In some cases, the party merely sponsored an existing newspaper to support its cause while still posing as an independent publication. In this respect, it was difficult to find really independent newspapers in a situation where the parties jostled to gain support among the various newspapers, with the ruling party, of course, securing the use of the government press. The church press also continued its conspicuous presence while sometimes taking more or less consistent political sides and at times remaining neutral among the contending political parties.

The neo-multiparty press was, thus, a mixture of government, independent, political and church media all being pulled this side and that side by both external and internal forces to play a specific political role or a mixture of roles.

The nationalist press during the pre-independence period was, of course, political too but it did not present diverse political views like the neo-multiparty press and the number of newspapers were, certainly much fewer than those of the neo-multiparty press. There was no party press during the one-party and military regime era since the press supported the only party or military junta that was in power.

#### 4.6.8 *Government and independent press*

One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the neo-multiparty press is the presence of a government press at the same time as a private or independent press and the interplay between the two types of media in the political arena. While, on one hand, there is the continued monopoly of government on the main means of public communication, on the other hand, we see less rigidity by government regarding the operation of the press owned by it. There is also less open monopoly of the use of government media by government and the ruling party, particularly during electioneering time. Noticeable too is less patronising of the government mass media, particularly those of broadcasting by the head of state than was the case during the one-party and military rule.

There is an attempt by government newspapers and broadcast stations to be somehow critical of government, albeit in a bite-and-blow manner. Unlike in the one-party and military era, the criticism of the government by the government press is tolerated and, sometimes even expressly allowed, to give the government media some credibility and, more especially, to attract donor funding and other support. Also tolerated or allowed is the dissemination of news and views from the opposition.

There is also the independent press trying, sometimes against all odds, to assert its editorial independence to publish whatever it wants. We see the government exercising less prior restraint and more post-publication censorship on the independent press to avoid being accused of interfering with freedom of the press by donors and other media playmakers.

Most interesting is the clash between the two types of press as each tries to project itself as the one serving multipartyism and the democratic process better. Journalists from each of the two camps often cross swords publicly with the support of their respective backers. Sometimes the journalists cause to be formed different and opposing associations representing the two camps which both solicit for support, financial and otherwise, from the same donors and benefactors.

However, financial and other support for both sides is hard to come by with the result that the media houses are perpetually impoverished and merely limp along. Editorial offices and in particular newsrooms have staggering unpaid telephone and electricity bills and other debts, outdated and often unoperational equipment, no cars or other vehicles to transport reporters to and from assignments, and poor, often, irregular salaries and other conditions of service for staff. The acute economic hardship is mainly caused by the impoverished economies which the multiparty elected governments inherited from the one-party and military regimes. It is seemingly worsened by the Structural Adjustment and other economic programmes which the World Bank, the I.M.F. and other donors have imposed on the countries to resuscitate their economies, which affect even media institutions.

Generally, the journalists and other support staff of the neo-multiparty press are a dissatisfied and frustrated lot with little, if any, incentives and motivation to work as journalists under the prevailing conditions. This brings about labour unrest to the African journalistic corps for the first time in their history. It also encourages corruption among the journalists to a level which, perhaps, is unprecedented.

### 4.7 Distinctive Character

This profile of the press of the 1990s in my view makes it stand out and deserving of a distinctive conception and label. This is what I have called the neo-multiparty press. It is a press full of contradictions and whose only main purpose is to advance the cause of multipartyism and democracy and whose driving force is derived not only from the owners but also from various institutions, organisations and countries all of which exert a decisive and telling influence on it.

It is possible that some of these profile indicators may not have existed in certain African countries during the decade in question. But the majority of them were applicable, in my view, to the press in most countries. The big exception, with regard to government versus independent media dichotomy, was, of course, South Africa, which uniquely, did not have a single government newspaper during the decade, although it had a government-owned broadcasting house, the SABC. The SABC, unlike most government broadcasting houses on the continent, had made tremendous strides towards becoming a public broadcaster, as we have seen, in response to pressures from the various media playmakers who consisted mainly of the various political contenders in the country. Also because of the relatively better economy of South Africa in comparison to most African countries, the country's press was also relatively better off than that of the average African nation.

#### 4.8 Neo-Multiparty Press: a No-System

The neo-multiparty press is a phenomenon that has come about by default rather than by design. In other words, it is a press system that has not been deliberately thought-out, designed and implemented by media policy-makers and planners. Rather, it is a press system that has been born from competing pressures by media playmakers led by the donor community. It is a responsive rather than proactive system that lacks a unified philosophical base and praxis.

In this respect, the neo-multiparty press may be said to be a no-system, an absence of a clearly directed and focussed press philosophy guiding praxis. A consistent negation or absence of a well-defined press philosophy and policy, however, can itself constitute a policy and philosophy thereby creating a press system in which the relation of the press with society is based on changes with the exigencies of the forces at play. It is a *laissez faire* system which is subject to unpredictable external (to the press) influence.

It is obvious that such a press system cannot last. It is bound to disappear when the conditions and forces that influence it are no longer there. Key among these conditions and forces is donor aid to Africa in support of multipartyism and democracy. First, it is unlikely that donor aid to Africa will always be there. And even for as long as it lasts, it is unlikely, as history has shown, that it will always be given in support of multipartyism and democracy. The other key condition and influence is that of the co-existence of a dominant government press side by side with an equally dominant independent press with both claiming to work in support of multipartyism and democracy. In the pre-independence period, some African countries, albeit few, also had both the government and the independent press co-existing side by side. But the two did not support multipartyism and democracy both of which were absent at the time. Rather, they supported colonialism, which had the support of the colonial powers who were the donors of the time, and nationalism which was condemned or merely tolerated by the colonial governments and their sponsors. It is unlikely that the government press will exist indefinitely and in the same way as it existed in the 1990s as an almost exclusive government and ruling party organ. It is also unlikely that the independent press will equally exist in the same way as a weak economic structure hardly able to stand on its own feet and always struggling to remain in business as it has been during the neo-multiparty press era.

## Chapter 5: Conclusive Discussion

In this final chapter, I intend to wrap up my treatise by showing how each of the five publications I have submitted, contributes to the theme that the press played a key role in the coming and sustenance of multiparty politics and democracy to Africa and was also in turn transformed into a new system by the momentous political change at the beginning of the 1990s. I will also discuss the distinctive features of the African press linking them up with the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press before I end the review by making an informed look into the immediate future of the African press within the next decade. For the convenience and easy reference of the reader, once again, the publications I have submitted are:

- 1) Kasoma, Francis P. (1992): *Communication Policies in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland*. Tampere: Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Tampere (143 pages);
- 2) Kasoma, Francis P. (1994): *Media ethics or media law: the enforcement of responsible journalism in Africa*. *Equid Novi – Journal for Journalism in Southern Africa*. Focus on Media Ethics. Edited by A.S. de Beer, E. Styn and G.N. Claassen, 26-42;
- 3) Kasoma, Francis P. (1995): *The role of the independent media in Africa's change to democracy*. *Media, Culture & Society* 17(4), 537-555;
- 4) Kasoma, Francis P. (1997): *The independent press and politics in Africa*. *Gazette – The Journal of Communication* 59 (4-5), 295-310; and,
- 5) Kasoma, Francis P. (1999): *The Neo-Multiparty Theory of the Press: Donor and other influences on the media in Africa*. University of Zambia, Professorial Lectures, Number 5 (36 pages).

Overall, the topics treated in these five publications are. (1) communication policies, (2) media ethics and responsible journalism, (3) the independent press and democracy, and, (4) multipartyism, democracy and the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press. I will show how these topics intertwine with each other in an interrelationship that reveals the central and changing role of the press to African politics generally.

### 5.1 Communication Policies

Underlying all the five publications is the theme of communication policies. I have shown in Publication No. 1, as well as in my other publication that also deals with communication policies (Kasoma, 1990a), that a communication policy is based on political, economic, social and other factors peculiar to the existence of the particular people the communication/press is meant to serve. The political influence, in particular, stands out because of the special relationship that exists between political power and the press. The people in government are always trying to secure the use of the press for their own benefit or at least minimise its bad effects on them. National communication policies in Africa in the few countries which have codified them are rarely concerned with the need for the press to provide service to society. They are more preoccupied with the use of the press by government.

Publication No. 2 dealing with media ethics and responsible journalism is, certainly, a communication policy matter. At the political level, Africa has repeatedly grappled with this issue throughout the short history of the press on the continent. The issue has become more acute with regard to the independent press than the government press because of what African governments have often seen as the need to control the freedom or independence of the

press. This need has rarely, if ever, arisen with regard to the government press which they already control. The independent press, on the other hand, has reserved for itself the prerogative to decide and enforce matters dealing with responsible journalism. The tag of war between the two was strongest during the decade of the 1990s when the presence of the independent press was more intensely felt by government than ever before. Publications Nos. 3 and 4, therefore, become an elaboration of the interaction of the independent press and the government in Africa. The very introduction of the independent press in the 1990s was, itself, a communication policy matter which changed the status of the press in Africa from a largely controlled one to a far more liberal one or, more accurately, a mixed one having aspects of a controlled (government) and a liberal (independent) press.

Publication No. 5, dealing with the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press, is also related to communication policy because any conception of the press or press system arises from a deliberate policy to channel the media of public communication to a special role or function overtly or latently. In other words, the press in the 1990s in Africa was directed to achieving certain aims which were generally in support of multipartyism and the democratic process. The consistency in the way the press performed its functions during the decade itself arose from a codified or uncoded policy by each of the governments to let it operate in that specific way or manner. Some governments instituted codified communication policies by defining and documenting them, while others did not have documented communication policies but had unwritten ones by consistently making the press operate in a particular manner through certain deliberate programmes, strategies and statutory arrangements in order to achieve a set of objectives conducive to multipartyism and democracy.

In short, we can only speak about media ethics and responsible journalism, the independent press and democracy, and the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press within the framework of communication policies.

As I have stated in Publication No. 1, communication policies are concerned with both the philosophical outlook of the roles of the media in a given society as well as the modus operandi in attaining these roles. The latter refer to a given set of operational strategies established by the press to achieve their goals and objectives. They are guides to strategy on what the press should do or not do. As philosophical pronouncements, however, communication policies give the ideological framework or *raison d'être* of the press in a given society. In other words, they answer the basic question: why have communication at all? A corresponding question would be: why have these rather than other types of communication? – a question which brings in the relevance of adopting as well as adapting new technology in communication (Kasoma, 1992b).

Further, communication/Press policies can be either implicit or explicit. Implicit communication policies are present in every society in the sense that the media and other implements of public communication cannot operate without at least some general unarticulated objectives. Many, perhaps most, African countries in the 1990s, had communication policies which could only be deduced from what they did or did not do to journalists and the press. Even those countries which had a written communication policy during the preceding period of one-party and military regime found themselves in a situation where the policy did not apply any longer due to the changed political climate. In the circumstances, they had to rely on a kind of policy partly evolved from try-and-error and partly on continuing those aspects of the communication policy of the one-party and military rule period which were still valid even under the new political dispensation.

Some countries, with the approval of donors, were merely content to change their national constitutions to include a Bill of Rights for freedom of the press and leave its interpretation wide open rather than trying to elaborate on it through a codified communication policy. In such cases, however, demands were also made on general law reforms so that the laws of the country were made to be compatible with the constitutional provision for freedom of the press. The legal provisions to cater for freedom of the press were themselves policy issues because the law is but an elaboration of how to realise certain policy objectives.



Explicit communication policies, on the other hand, are well-thought-out philosophies on the press which are translated into specific, concise and publicly-pronounced norms and guidelines on communication operations. A number of African countries, particularly during the decade of the 1990s, made attempts at establishing elaborate national communication policies whose publication they often grandiosely announced to catch the attention of donors whose approval they sought. In some cases, as we saw in Chapter 4, donors objected to the inclusion or exclusion of certain clauses or parts in the published national communication policies. They, accordingly, demanded for their revision. In many cases, the revisions were obligingly attended to and the revised communication policy documents, which were more agreeable to donors, published.

Communication policies can also be considered at international, regional, national, sectoral and institutional levels. With regard to the national and international categorisation, it is important to point out that the dialectics of the press policy of Africa in the 1990s did not only take into account the individual national political concerns but also the international political and professional journalistic concerns. While the various national governments seemed to be determined to try and tame the press to serve what they saw as their specific national interests, both the governments and the press had to take into account the demands on African journalists of international democratic standards of journalism along with some internationally-accepted principles, values and norms. For, while it is true that journalism and the press should serve a specific society, it is also true that it has to conform to internationally accepted journalism standards.

The problem that African journalism has faced, regardless of which era is being considered, is precisely that of identifying the international standards in journalism. To begin with, there are very few such agreed-upon universal standards. However, even with the few that exist, controversy still rages regarding their interpretation. For example, the seemingly internationally accepted standards of reporting truthfully, fairly and accurately are still being debated whether they deserve singling out since they are subject to so many different interpretations. There are press analysts who even question whether journalistic reporting can ever be truthful, fair and accurate in the absolute meaning of these words (see, for example, Felsher and Rosen, 1966; and, Goldstein, 1985).

Moreover, it is sometimes also a question of some national standards of journalism being projected as international standards. The more powerful industrialised countries whose media are predominant in the world seem to be more successful at projecting their national journalism norms and standards as the international standards. (see, for example, Tunstall, 1977)

International aid proved in the 1990s to be an effective way of imposing both the international as well as the national journalism standards in Africa. This is because the acceptance of these standards was, sometimes, made as a precondition to the aid which African countries found very difficult to reject as long as they were set on the path of multipartyism and democracy which the donor community was not only supporting but also sponsoring. The operations of the African media during the decade, therefore, became intrinsically connected with the political agenda of multipartyism and democracy. In other words, the communication policy that Africa adopted in the 1990s was basically born out of the political policy and could not be divorced from it.

## 5.2 Media Ethics and Responsible Journalism

The subject matter of Publication No. 2 equally underlies the themes of all the other four publications. Before I delve into it, let me first define journalism ethics and responsible journalism.

Journalism ethics is concerned with making sound decisions in journalistic performance and it assumes the presence of societal morality. Morality has to do with actions guided by generally acceptable human values, norms and responsibilities. Human beings, and in our

case, journalists, subscribe at the same time to a number of values, norms and responsibilities which together constitute a moral system. Ethics begins when elements within a moral system conflict, and a journalist is called upon to choose between various alternatives. (Kasoma, 1994f: 3).

In journalism ethics, the alternatives to courses of action are not always in black and white or clear cut. There are very often grey areas necessitating tricky and at times difficult choices. Sometimes the journalist has to choose between two correct or good ways of practising journalism and pick the more correct or better way. Sometimes the choice is between two wrong or bad ways of doing journalism with the less wrong or less bad way being preferred.

By responsible journalism is meant journalistic action that takes into account its effect on people both as news/information sources and news/information consumers. The opposite, irresponsible journalism, is reportage that does not care about consequences on the people arising from what is reported. The reporting of news and other information in the media of public communication very often adversely affects individual persons or society generally. A person can be permanently damaged and her/his life shattered by a single story about her or him in a newspaper or on radio or television. For example, a young woman who is raped could have her life literally destroyed by a newspaper news report which identifies her in the story. Many people who read the story or hear about it are likely, especially in these days of HIV/AIDS, to shun her company and discriminate against her. This is a perfect example of irresponsible journalism.

With regard to Publication No. 1, media ethics and responsible journalism is such a key issue that a communication policy that ignores its consideration by paying no attention to how journalists and the press are going to conduct themselves ethically and responsibly, is seriously deficient. In Chapter 3, I discussed the importance of journalism training and education in ensuring a reasonable measure of ethical and responsible journalism. But I also suggested that education and training are not the magical wands which would automatically make journalists ethical and responsible in their performance. In addition to education and training, one such necessary requirement is the will by the journalist to be ethical and responsible. Journalists as individuals, as a collective body of professionals, as employees of the same media house, as professionals belonging to a particular country, region, continent and world body, need to have a resolute will to perform their journalistic chores ethically and responsibly. This resolute will would make them find ways and means of how to enforce ethical and responsible journalism within their workplace, professional organisation, country, region and the world. Both the will to perform journalism ethically and responsibly, and the working out of strategies to achieve this goal, are communication policy issues.

The performance of journalists in Africa in the 1990s, particularly those from the independent press, was, certainly, a cause for great concern as I indicate in Publications Nos. 3 and 4. It was so worrisome that it threatened to overshadow the commendable role that the independent press had played as a catalyst for bringing about and sustaining multiparty politics and a reasonable measure of democracy. The unethical and irresponsible use of press freedom was, clearly, leading African governments to a repeat clampdown of the press which would itself lead to retrogression of the democratic process and, possibly, cause Africa to revert to autocracy. For, as I have emphasised in this review, without a free and independent press, it is impossible to have democracy.

A normative theory of the press necessarily includes considerations of ethical and responsible journalism. This is because normative theories of the press deal with the press in relation to its role to and in society. In considering the role of the press to and in society, value judgements regarding the goodness or badness, rightness or wrongness of journalistic principles, values and norms guiding or determining journalistic praxis are always taken into account. I could not, therefore, ignore considerations of ethical and responsible journalism in Publication No. 5. At its core is the question: was the neo-multiparty press ethical and responsible? And whatever answer was given, was subject to various considerations and qualifications.

### 5.3 The Independent Press and Democracy

The subject matter of the role of the independent press in a democracy which is central to Publication Nos. 3 and 4, is, more or less, treated in each of the remaining three publications.

It is one of the main points of reference in Publication No. 1 in which I am constantly comparing freedom of the press in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland and how it affects democratic governance in each country.

I have done so because the role of the independent press in democracy is itself a communication policy matter which has and should constantly preoccupy communication policy planners because one of the main functions of communication or the press in the body politic is to precisely enhance the democratic process.

In as far as Publication No. 2 is concerned, the subject matter of the independent press and its role in democracy is implied in the discussion of democratically elected African governments of the 1990s trying to enforce journalism ethics through the promulgation of laws or the use of existing statutes rather than letting journalists keep their own house in order. The implied understanding is that, it is not in the nature of democratic governments to impose all forms of restrictions on the press instead of letting it free to operate with only minimal and absolutely necessary legal precepts. This understanding arises from the fact that in Africa press laws are mainly prohibitive rather than facilitative. They are negative precepts which forbid the press and journalists from certain actions and not positive regulations which give the press and journalists greater capability to perform their functions.

The role of the independent press in a democracy, of course, permeates the whole of Publication No. 5. It is, in fact, its pivot. The publication centres on discussing how the independent press in Africa in the 1990s was being affected and influenced by donors and the various media playmakers as it went about its work to prop up multiparty politics and democracy.

### 5.4 Multipartyism, Democracy and the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press in Africa

The central themes of this review, multipartyism, democracy and the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press, are treated directly or implicitly in the five publications.

Although 'multipartyism' is hardly mentioned in Publication No. 1, it is, nonetheless, implied in the numerous references to democracy found in the publication. Similarly, the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press, although not mentioned, is, in a way, implied in the government control of the press that is discussed in the document. Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press refers to a "new" conception of the press. There cannot be a "new" conception unless there is/are "old" conception(s). It is this/these "old" conception(s) which is/are the subject matter of Publication No. 1.

Although the term "multipartyism" is hardly mentioned in Publication No. 2, it is implied in the reference to Africa's multiparty elected governments of the 1990s trying to enforce responsible journalism by law. Through the promulgation of statutes, governments involved in this action are aiming at achieving a certain measure of "democracy" in as far as they are trying to enforce the rule of law. In the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press, the method used by government, the donors and the other media playmakers is one of the key issues.

Publications Nos. 3 and 4 both directly deal with the central themes of "multipartyism" and "democracy" and the role the independent press has played in enhancing both. At the time I wrote both articles, I had not, as yet, conceived the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press and did not, therefore, discuss it in both publications. The fact, however, that I picked on the "independent press" and not the whole press as a catalyst to multipartyism and democ-

racy in Africa in the 1990s, suggests that I was convinced that only the independent press can serve the democratic purpose

Finally, Publication No. 5 directly treats “multipartyism, democracy and the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press”. In the article, it is “multipartyism” and “democracy” that the press helps Africa achieve and that give the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press its *raison d’être* and distinctive character.

## 5.5 Press Characteristics

Having dwelt with how the five publications I have submitted relate to each other, I want now to go a step further and discuss the peculiar characteristics of the African press that the five publications as well as this review have laid bare. Some of these characteristics further clarify certain aspects of the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press that I have presented in the review. It is my submission that the press in Africa has always been:

- a) A political press;
- b) An alien press;
- c) A minority press;
- d) Shrouded in controversy;
- e) A financially poor press;
- f) A government affair or issue;
- g) A dangerous business or undertaking;
- h) Suffering from a credibility crisis; and,
- i) A campaign press.

### 5.5.1 *A political press*

Politics has permeated both the conception and praxis of the press in Africa throughout its history. The African press is a political press through and through. It was conceived as such and operates as a political tool. Politicians, particularly those in government, have, necessarily, always been involved in and with the press, legally and extra legally, ordering journalists to do this and that, complaining about acts or omissions by journalists and the press, warning journalists and the press to report what those in government are saying even if it does not conform to what they are doing or not doing, and, punishing and rewarding journalists and the press for their actions or omissions.

The African press is, indeed, like a wife who is married to a domineering husband, in this case, politics. Its very existence depends on and is determined by politics. It is thus killed or made to survive, nurtured or left out in the cold, encouraged or discouraged, loved or hated by politics.

The African press breathes politics. Its contents are full of politics either meant to please or displease people in power or those aspiring to it. Much of what it publicises is prompted or inspired by politicians, particularly those in government. The news and information it leaves unpublished is often left because of the direct or indirect influence of politicians, mainly those in government. Even the angling of its stories has often to be in compliance with the direct or indirect controls imposed on it by the politicians.

It is no wonder that the contents of the African press, perhaps more than any other press in the world, is full of politics, mainly what politicians in power are saying and doing or planning to say or do. News columns and features are full of reproductions of speeches of the President and ministers in government as well as reactions to these speeches by other politicians both in government and the opposition. It is hard to picture the African press without its hallmark of overemphasis on politics.

The neo-multiparty press of the 1990s certainly kept close to this image of a political press, except that the emphasis was on plural politics as opposed to colonial or one-party and military junta politics to which earlier press systems had been devoted. As we have seen in this review, there were also attempts during the 1990s for the neo-multiparty press to diversify its coverage to other issues outside politics and a start was made in this direction. But on the whole, the neo-multiparty press was still as political, if not more political, than earlier types.

If anything, the political arena of the neo-multiparty press seemed to have expanded. Instead of only responding to the whims of local politicians, particularly those in government, like the press in the one-party and military regimes did, it was also made to respond to political influences from the donor community and other media playmakers both within and outside the country. This enlarged political influence certainly made the neo-multiparty press more political than previous versions of the press in Africa.

It may, however, also be said that the neo-multiparty press was being influenced by the donor community and other media playmakers not to be swayed or dictated to by politicians, especially those in power, but maintain its independence and composure. In as far as this advice was followed, the neo-multiparty press may be said to have been less political than earlier versions. While in theory this was possible, in practice, the influence of the various political players on the neo-multiparty press was no less involving than in previous eras.

### *5.5.2 An alien press*

From its introduction, the press in Africa has always been an alien press not only in its conception but also in its operation.

The very idea of news and information being sold as commodities is alien to African mentality. News and information in Africa has been exchanged and shared for centuries without money or some other value of exchange being passed round. It is almost immoral to African thinking to imagine anybody collecting and selling news and information which people in a community/society are supposed to share or exchange freely as a sign of collegiality, togetherness, solidarity and fraternal bonds. It was, therefore, with some trepidation that Africans reluctantly allowed the press in their midst and they were, and still are, careful to refer to it as "the white man's press". To confirm this image of the press, to many Africans, particularly those who have not been to school, as far as the majority of the people are concerned, media products are still shrouded in mystery. Radio and television are nothing short of the white man's magic, while newspapers, particularly when they carry photographs of the people in the news, also belong to the world of the incomprehensible.

The image that the press in Africa is alien is reinforced by the fact that its contents are largely alien too. Both what the press presents and the form in which it is presented are unAfrican. Not only is the news and other information which radio, television and newspapers present foreign, but the form in which they are presented is alien too to many, if not most, Africans. Much of the news and other information does not concern them in their lives and even the bit that does concern them is presented in an alien, Euro-American way.

I will always tell a unique experience I had in the mid-80s in Sierra Leone. I was conducting a rural press workshop in a village some 100 or so kilometres from Bo, the country's second city. I was naively teaching the villagers in Malendema Village, through an interpreter, how to report news in a village newspaper, by using the inverted-pyramid style, when an old man, actually the village headman, suddenly started to repeatedly shake his head, indicating that he did not agree with what I was saying. I asked him to explain why he did not agree with me. He said news in the villages within Sierra Leone was not told in the manner I was suggesting, by starting with the main point in the so-called lead or intro. He said, for example, if the chief died, the narration of this sombre fact would not be direct. The person narrating it would say something like, "The chief has gone to sleep" and because the action

of the chief going to sleep is normally not publicly announced, the people to whom the news is being told would figure out that their chief has actually died, the old man concluded.

The contribution of that old man to the workshop strongly suggests that there are many news reporting formats among African peoples which journalists can adopt to make their news reporting, particularly when it is being done in local languages, more African. Instead of doing this, however, journalists and the press in Africa continue to report news even where they are doing it in local languages, in the Anglo-American format and style to the chagrin of the people of Africa.

The language issue has also added to the 'alien-ness' of the press in Africa. In most African countries, the press reports in the so-called national language, which is normally that which the colonialists bequeathed to the particular African country which they colonised. The result is that many, perhaps the majority, of the people are cut off from what the press is reporting.

The neo-multiparty press, in the true African tradition, continued to be an alien press to the majority of Africans. Few people in the various African societies accepted it as 'their own' medium for public communication. Few people used it to receive information, let alone communicate what they wanted to say to fellow citizens.

### *5.5.3 A minority press*

The African press has essentially been a minority press catering only for a few who can both understand and afford it. As stated above, the bulk of it disseminates news and other information in a language which only a few citizens can understand while those who speak the languages it least or never uses are hardly, if ever, catered for. There are still hundreds of thousands of languages in Africa which have never been in print or been used in broadcasting. The people who only use these languages have, therefore, no access to the press.

There are also people who cannot read and are, therefore, cut off from the print media which require proficiency in reading and writing skills. This effectively excludes many illiterate people from having access to newspapers and magazines as well as sections of the television medium where literacy is required for full understanding as is the case when the sound track on television is in a language which the people watching the footage do not understand and interpretations of what is being said are flashed on the screen in written form in a language which people watching it are presumed to know. The number of people who can be accessed by radio, which does not require literacy, is also substantially reduced due to a number of factors. They include lack of radio sets partly caused by the fact that not many people can afford to buy radios. Radio sets are not easily available in many countries in Africa since they are often imported at exorbitant prices and heavy duty slapped on them because they are often regarded as luxury goods. When they are available, they are, usually, so expensive that few people can afford to buy them.

Among the people who are able to buy radios, some are unable to use them either because they are not in working condition and need repair or maintenance, or because there is no power to operationalise them. Both electricity and batteries are not only rare to obtain, particularly in rural areas, but also expensive for the poor to afford.

Moreover, due to terrain and other factors, the radio signals cannot cover many African countries 100 %. These factors, therefore, further reduce Africa's radio audience substantially so that it is not really the widespread mass medium it is often reputed to be. For, more or less, the same reasons as those of radio, television has far fewer viewers in Africa than it has in the industrialised countries of the North. Additionally, very few African countries have even cared to provide television signals to rural areas, thus effectively cutting off the majority of the African population from this mass medium. During the decade in question or part of it, some countries such as Botswana and Malawi did not even have television.

The neo-multiparty press of the 1990s, in line with this scenario was, essentially, a minority press too, although the number of people who the three mass media of newspapers, radio

and television were reaching, has been steadily increasing over the years. But still the fact remained that more people had no access to the press compared to those who did, although exceptions in a few individual countries with regard to specific media, are possible.

#### *5.5.4 Shrouded in controversy*

The African press has always been shrouded in controversy over its use, management and operation.

There has always been lack of agreement among the users, especially those in government, regarding what the press should be used for. During the colonial era, we see the struggle between those who wanted to use the press for government propaganda, who were mainly the colonial administrators and their sympathisers, who consisted mainly of white settlers, and those who wanted to use it for nationalism, who comprised mostly of nationalist leaders and their followers who were mainly the indigenous people. The battle was not conclusively won by either side since both types of press continued to co-exist while the quarrels continued, with the colonial government refusing to tolerate, and in some cases, even allow the nationalist press to operate, and the Africans fighting back to the point, in some cases, of establishing an underground nationalist press where an open one was totally outlawed.

During the one-party and military rule period, we saw disagreement regarding whether the press should be used as a government mouth-piece (for propaganda) or as a mirror of society reflecting society to itself or whether the press was a watchdog against government, or a tool for development and nation-building.

During the 1990s, we saw the key controversy of government versus independent press which was mainly fuelled by media playmakers, including donors. This essentially continued the disagreement as to whether the press should be used as a watchdog or as a branch of government.

Regarding management, the controversy has been about who should own and control the press between the private sector or the government and regarding how the press should be managed: whether it should be tightly or loosely controlled, leaving it with a reasonable measure of freedom.

Controversy also surrounded the African press regarding its operations. There were those who were happy about the press preponderantly covering politics and those who were not happy and would have liked it to give coverage to other equally important issues such as health, agriculture, gender and environmental issues.

Still in the area of operations, a lot of controversy surrounded the press regarding who a journalist is and how she or he should operate. First of all there were those who maintained that a journalist must be trained as a journalist and refused to recognise untrained journalists (in some countries, they were not given accreditation). Second, there were, on one hand, those who mainly supported the existence of a government press, who thought a journalist's main function should be that of faithfully reporting what the leaders in government are saying and the reactions from people about what the leaders are reported as saying. There were, on the other hand, those who believed that a reporter is an intelligent chronicler of events and issues who should also interpret what she/he reports bringing out its relevance to the lives of the people, instead of merely reproducing speeches like a stenographer.

There were those who believed that the reporter should not publish any information that may tend to destroy unity within a nation such as reporting tribal, ethnic or political conflicts and wars and those who thought that the reporter has a duty, indeed, a responsibility, to report these divisive problems so that society can try and find solutions to them.

There were those who believed that the reporter and the press had a duty and responsibility to maintain good morals in society and not corrupt people by disseminating information about sex and violence. There were also those who believed that the press and journalists should provide information on these issues because not to do so would restrict the people's right to know and the freedom of the press to publicise the information.

Finally, there were people who maintained that the press is there to serve the people and not to make money, and those who believe the press is there both to make money as well as serve the people. According to the latter, the press would cease to serve the people if it did not make money since its freedom would not be guaranteed.

#### *5.5.5 A financially poor press*

Talking about making money, the press in Africa has generally always been a financially poor press regardless of whether it is government or privately owned. Very few newspapers and broadcast stations on the continent run at a profit or break even. By far the majority are always in debts and often are forced to close down due to bankruptcy. There are various factors which have caused this situation. They include bad financial management of newspapers and broadcast stations as well as lack of sufficient advertising mainly brought about by slumps in African economies.

Even media which are heavily subsidised by the government, are constantly making losses more or less due to the same two reasons to which rampant corruption and misuse of public funds, so common in Africa, should be added. Many of the people who have been given the responsibility of managing government media see their appointments as a chance to enjoy life and get rich quickly by pilfering and misusing the media companies' finances and other assets.

Additionally, the government media are financially poor because governments rarely provide them with sufficient basic capital funding from which they can grow. This was more acute in the 1990s when the structural adjustment programmes by the World Bank, the IMF and other donors were being stringently applied by governments, resulting in heavy cuts of subsidies to the government media.

#### *5.5.6 A government affair or issue*

The involvement of government in the press in Africa has throughout history been so heavy that it can rightly be said that the African government is obsessed with the press. It wants to direct and control it, manage it, influence it, secure it to its side, favour it, condemn it, etc. No wonder almost every African government has a full-fledged Ministry of Information and Broadcasting or some such similar ministry to take care of the heavy load of press matters.

Statutes are nearly always being promulgated to control the press. The African government has never left the press alone to operate freely with the minimum interference within and outside the law like most democratic governments do. With regard to the 1990s, not even donor pressure was able to stop African governments from meddling too much in the affairs of the press, although it must be admitted that the independent press was relatively more free of government interference than the government press.

#### *5.5.7 A dangerous business or undertaking*

The press in Africa has always been a dangerous business or undertaking for one to be involved in. African journalists have, through practising their profession, subjected themselves to more risks than their counterparts in Europe and America will ever be. They and the media houses they work for are constantly under threat by mainly people in government, who include law enforcement officers who keep an eagle's eye on them. It is almost standard practice for secret service agents to trail the movements and actions of journalists. Private home telephones belonging to journalists, as well as their office telephones are often tapped and both personal and official mail sometimes tampered with. Reporters are punished in one form or another by government agents for what they report or do not report.

The punishment is sometimes extended to their families, associates and friends. Journalism, good journalism that is, in Africa is, certainly, not a profession for cowards. To be a



good journalist often means stepping on the toes of politicians and government officials who are capable of literally turning the life of the journalist into a nightmare. An angry government official will stop at nothing in punishing a journalist.

Reporters and, particularly press photographers, are often attacked by a crowd while officially on duty. This often happens at political rallies and other public meetings where, for some reason, the people resent the presence of the press to cover the event or are annoyed at previous coverage. Vehicles in which journalists are travelling are sometimes pelted with stones or some other missiles by people who are, obviously, against what the journalists have done or are about to do.

In some countries such as Algeria, to be a journalist is the surest way of being on the assassin's hit list. It is often unsafe in such countries for reporters to reveal their identities publicly. Newspaper by-lines, for example, are never used unless they are pen names.

Even reporters on normal beats are sometimes threatened with violence from sources for one reason or another. There was the shocking incident of a cabinet minister in the 1990s in Zambia who threatened to shoot a reporter from an independent newspaper who went to his house during a weekend to interview him. The only reason was that the minister did not like the newspaper which the reporter was reporting for because of its hard-line on government.

As if all this is not enough, media offices in Africa sometimes become scenes of violent demonstrations by aggrieved people, particularly political cadres from the ruling party. It is not unusual to have a newspaper office or radio station pelted with stones and other missiles by an angry mob and its staff injured in the process.

Very often security wings of government, particularly the police and the army, barricade media offices in an unnecessary show of force, as the helpless journalists are trapped inside the office building for hours or even days without contact with the outside world. Usually this happens when the so-called law enforcement officers are conducting their now too common and familiar searches of newspaper offices and broadcast stations. Sometimes newspaper offices or broadcast stations are targets of planted bombs or arson attacks. Many media offices and installations in Africa have been destroyed in this way without their attackers being arrested, with the result that journalists belonging to the media which have been so attacked, constantly work in fear and uncertainty.

The insecurity of the neo-multiparty press was worsened by the presence of more political parties and factions who were potential enemies of the press and journalists. Thus, journalists and the press during the era of multiparty elected governments were bound to annoy one or more of the political parties in their reporting of politics and thereby create enemies.

#### *5.5.8 Suffering from a credibility crisis*

The press in Africa has throughout its history been haunted by a credibility crisis. During the colonial era, Africans found it very hard to believe much of the propaganda the government broadcast stations and newspapers were disseminating. They also had a problem of trusting a press that was aimed at serving the white settlers, in countries where such a press existed, because of the discriminatory racial bias of such a press against them. On the other hand, the colonial government, together with the white settlers, neither trusted nor believed much of what the nationalist press was reporting, largely dismissing it as subversive literature.

During the one-party and military rule, the distrust of the government press by citizens was, perhaps, even greater than that they had during the colonial period because of the action by government to monopolise the press. Most people found it hard to believe what the government press was reporting.

The credibility crisis against the government press reached its zenith during the time of the multiparty elected governments in which the people were able to compare what the independent press reported against what the government press said, often finding a wide gap between the two. Many, perhaps most, people initially chose to believe what the independent press was reporting, if only for the sake of change. They had, for too long, been forced to

read, listen and view only or mainly government media since they were the only ones available or the ones which were predominant in many countries. The credibility crisis, however, soon spread to the independent newspapers when people started realising that the independent media's reports were often sensationalised. It was said during the time of the neo-multiparty press that the truth was somewhere between what the government and the independent press were reporting.

#### 5.5.9 *A campaign press*

Finally, the African press has always been a campaign press. Most of the time it has been used to campaign for the government cause which has variously been seen as mobilising and uniting the people for nation-building.

Sometimes it has been used as a political campaign tool to mop up party support of either the ruling party or the opposition. It is for this reason that party newspapers are not uncommon in Africa. Some countries have both government and ruling party newspapers. Given the lack of distinction between the government and the ruling party, it can be said that the so-called government newspapers also double up as campaign organs for the ruling party.

Very often the African press has been used for teaching people literacy as well as health, farming and environmental issues. On the question of health, during the 1980s and 1990s, the press in Africa was very much used to campaign against HIV/AIDS. It has been established that the results of this campaign were fairly successful at the knowledge level. (Kasoma, 1990-1991; Kasoma, 1996b)

One of the most remarkable areas of campaign that the press in Africa has intensified its involvement in particularly during the 1990s, was that of evangelisation. It was during the decade of the 1990s that a new word, televangelism, was added to the English lexicon, due to a marked increase of preaching on television by the many evangelists who were using the African media. This religious campaign through the press by mainly born-again, fundamentalist Christian churches was, markedly, on the increase in many African countries by the end of the decade.

Additionally, the African press has been used in campaigns for nationalism and independence as was noted in Chapter 1. It has also been used for revolutionary campaigns in situations where a section of the population has taken up arms to overthrow a legitimate or illegitimate government in order to settle a political dispute. Thus, both the nationalists and rebels (there is sometimes a thin difference between the two) use the press to campaign for their causes among the citizens and the international community. The governments against which the nationalists or the rebels are fighting, also use the press to campaign among the people, as well as the international community, to ignore what they often refer to as media propaganda from 'terrorists' or 'rebels'.

The result is often a fierce media war between the two sides which only ends when one of the sides is defeated. For example, the media war between the ANC in South Africa and the apartheid government only officially ended in 1990 when the ANC started ruling.

The African press at any one time is always campaigning for one cause or other. Sometimes it is campaigning for a number of causes at the same time. Some of the causes the press in Africa campaigns for endear it to some of the citizens. Others make it repulsive, or at least, objectionable to some people. Some of the causes for which the press campaigns have become subjects of major controversies. This has been the case, for example, with some of the aspects of the anti HIV/AIDS campaign which have tended to publicly display and discuss sexual matters, an action which is taboo in most African societies.

## 5.6 The Future

The final substantive section of this review on the future of the African press is not an attempt at soothsaying. It is meant to reflect my serious concern for what the future holds for the press in Africa vis-à-vis its role in sustaining multiparty politics and democracy. Two key questions may be asked: (1) for how long will African governments continue to demand for the existence of a government press to serve their interests in a multiparty set up? And, (2) for how long is the independent press likely to continue serving multipartyism and democratic governance? The answers to these questions also determine the future of multipartyism and democracy in Africa. The time-frame for my peep into the future will be the first decade of the 2000s.

### *5.6.1 Evolution of multipartyism incomplete*

By the end of the 1990s, it was clear that the evolution of multiparty politics leading to reasonable democracy was incomplete in almost every country on the continent. African parliaments were still overwhelmingly controlled by ruling parties with only a handful of members from the opposition parties. The result was that governments had an easy passage of almost any piece of legislation they wanted to introduce since the opposition was too weak to defeat it. The same applied to government policies. The opposition was again too weak to successfully influence government policy by spearheading opposition to those policies regarded as bad and marshalling public opinion against them.

With such a political climate in place, it was easy for African governments to insist on the continued presence of the government press and get away with it. I, however, see a time when African governments may have to give up owning the press because opposition to the existence of a government press would be so big and decisive that governments would fear to lose power to the opposition if they insisted on having a government press against the will of the opposition parties supported by public opinion. The government press has to disappear and give way to either a combination of a public and private press or only to a private press. This situation, however, will only be attainable when African parliaments become more balanced politically, when the opposition parties start controlling substantial numbers of seats in parliament so as to make the defeat of the ruling party a real possibility.

Such a time is only likely to come to Africa when consolidation of the political parties takes place and there are only a few parties left on the political scene to fight for power. The situation obtaining at the end of the 1990s when most African countries had scores of political parties, with some of them existing only in name, was not conducive to political consolidation and stabilisation. Africa's voters simply had too many parties to choose from outside the ruling party. The result in many countries was voter apathy. Many voters did not turn up at polling stations during elections because they did not see much chance of their vote making any difference in changing the government in power. With or without their vote, the people in the ruling party would still retain power.

Africa's incomplete evolution of opposition political parties in the 1990s also had an effect on public opinion. Ruling parties were not afraid of upsetting public opinion because of pursuing unpopular policies. Little wonder the ruling parties continued with the policy of having a government press which they had condemned when they were campaigning for power. It is my hope that with the consolidation of political parties into two or three strong ones, public opinion would also become stronger and better informed so as to create a situation for fierce political contests in which only the party with the most convincing policies would be likely to win an election and form a government.

With such a political change, I cannot see the continued existence of the government press in Africa. The idea is likely to be thrown out by successful governments as a bad policy which properly belongs to the Africa of the one-party and military governments and not to the Africa of multiparty politics.

To merely suggest that Africa's public opinion is likely to become stronger when political parties become consolidated and better organised would be too simplistic. Good political party organisation is merely one of the factors which would help to strengthen public opinion. There are other factors, among them, better and more widespread education of the citizenry, at the academic, technical and civic levels. As Africa's citizens get more and better educated, they are likely to become more knowledgeable about issues with the result that they would not be easily cheated by people in power or opposition political parties. They are also likely to become more aware of their political and other rights and how to fight to attain and defend them. In the face of such awareness by civil society, it will be unlikely for governments to continue cheating the people that the political set up under multipartyism can accommodate the existence of the government press. The people would clearly see that the existence of the government press in a multiparty political set up is a contradiction which should be rejected and done away with.

As Africa's political parties become more and better organised, so will civil society. The continent's citizens will be better organised in interest groups, associations NGOs etc. These bodies are likely to apply increased and intensified pressure on governments with the result that African governments will find it increasingly difficult to impose policies such as having a government press.

When all this happens, Africa would have attained a higher and more mature level of democratisation than that which was obtaining at the close of the 1990s. The checks and balances that democratic governance consists of would have been sharpened for more competitive and mature politics. The press, in particular, as a democratic institution, would have been accorded its rightful role.

#### *5.6.2 Growth of the independent press*

When the government press eventually disappears from the face of Africa, assuming multipartyism and democracy matures in the manner described above, it will be replaced by either the independent press or a mixture of the public and the independent press. To some extent the existence of the government press in the 1990s, held the key to the growth of the independent press. In most countries, the government press held such a dominating position that it stunted the growth of the independent press. First, the government press swallowed up much, if not most, of the advertising revenue, leaving the independent press, which is not subsidised, to operate mainly at a loss. Little wonder the turn over of the independent press was high during the decade. With the government press out of the way, the independent press would face a more fair competition for advertising revenue within itself or with a commercialised public press.

With the government press out of the way, the number of readers, listeners and viewers for the independent press is also likely to increase substantially, thereby making its operations more economically viable. The situation in the 1990s was not healthy for both the government and independent press since they had to fight for the few media consumers and advertisers. In an effort to try and survive by increasing their revenue, both hiked the prices of their products and their advertising rates with the result that media products and advertising were priced out of the reach of most citizens resulting in even less revenue.

There is also a likelihood, as indicated earlier in this review, that Africa's massive government press would be turned into a public press which is not answerable to the government of the day. In this event, prospects for the independent press would depend on a number of factors. One of these is whether such a public press would also conduct advertising business or would, like the BBC, not carry advertisements. Another factor concerns how far such a public press would be subsidised by the government which would bring in the issue of unfair competition. A third factor would be the rate of credibility such a public press would have which would also be a factor in determining the strength of the competition it is likely to have with the independent press. In short, it all depends on whether the government press

develops into a genuine public press or continues to be a government press masquerading as a public press. In the event of the government press developing into a genuine public press, the independent press would have a serious competitor not only for advertising revenue, assuming the public press decides to carry advertisements, but also for readers, listeners and viewers.

Let me now turn to the second question: for how long is the independent press likely to continue serving democratic governments? In discussing this question, I am repeating the submission made earlier in this review that freedom of the press, like democracy, is never absolute although it is measurable through a number of specific internationally recognised indicators. In this part of the review, therefore, I am merely examining the possibility of these indicators being present in sizeable amounts in a continent whose politics are as unpredictable as the English weather.

### *5.6.3 Indicators of a free press*

Let me now discuss the specific indicators for a free press in relation to how Africa is likely to cope with them during the first decade of the 2000s.

#### *5.6.3.1 Absence of censorship*

The greatest enemy of a free press in Africa is censorship. The practice of press censorship in Africa is so deeply rooted that not even the coming of multipartyism and democratic governance could end it. During the 1990s, the censorship was not only restricted to the government press, but was extended in many countries to the independent press. The fact that most countries insisted on having a government press to exist side by side with the independent press raises no cause for optimism that the government press is likely to completely disappear during the first decade of the 2000s. On the contrary, there is every likelihood, despite pressure from donors and other media playmakers, that the press in Africa, by the close of the year 2010, would still be government-owned to a great extent. The government press will necessarily continue, as before, to be subjected to censorship by government. Whether the intensity of this censorship will increase or decrease will, however, depend on the pressure that donors and the other media playmakers apply on African governments. A factor, however, that might lead African governments to increase the amount of censorship on the government press may be the likelihood of the independent press increasing the incidence and intensity of its attacks on government thereby creating a need for the government to want to retaliate through propaganda in its own press. The government can only manage to use its own press for propaganda by imposing censorship on it.

Another likely scenario is that of the independent press buckling under the pressure of censorship and becoming less of a watchdog. Many governments are likely to continue applying the iron fist on the recalcitrant press and rewarding the compliant one, with the possibility that the independent press could become softer, docile and sycophantic on government. This is likely to happen if journalists in the independent press relax their fight for press freedom and if African governments ignore some of the pressure from the donors and other media playmakers and intensify their hard-line on the independent press. Press freedom, as I have indicated elsewhere in this review, is a commodity that needs to be constantly fought for in order to be maintained at the same level or increased. The moment its stakeholders relax their fight for it, it tends to diminish.

One of the most abhorrent forms of censorship which hounds the press in Africa is self-censorship. Many journalists have learnt by experience that they can only publicise certain information at their peril. They, therefore, do not want to get into trouble with people in government by avoiding to displease them in performing reporting chores. Self-censorship, as I explained earlier in this review, is based on fear of persecution which either the journalist or her/his close associate(s) have experienced. The only way, therefore, self-censorship can be

stopped is when African governments stop persecuting journalists. Going by the experience of the 1990s as well as earlier experiences, that seems to be a tall order as far as the first decade of the 2000s is concerned.

The third scenario is that of the independent press growing stronger in its watchdog role to the point of completely overshadowing the government press. By the close of the 1990s, a few countries, were actually in this situation. South Africa was a good example. As indicated earlier in this review, the control of the SABC, the only government mass medium institution in the country, was getting less intense, compared to the time when the apartheid regime was in power. This was because, as we have seen earlier, more measures were put in place to turn SABC into a public broadcaster not answerable to the government of the day. Given the fact that South Africa ended the decade with the government not owning a single newspaper, the stage was set for that country to enter the first decade of the new millennium with an independent press which was relatively free from government control. There were other countries which were likely to follow the South African example.

### 5.6.3.2 Presence of a government press

I have suggested above that the government press in Africa is likely to continue in the first decade of 2000. What is not certain, however, is whether it will continue to dominate the independent press or dwindle both in size and influence. If governments create more favourable conditions to encourage the growth of the independent press and do not result to policies which are aimed at entrenching the dominance of the government press, as seemed to be the case in most countries by the close of the 1990s, the independent press is likely to overshadow the government press. This is particularly more likely to happen if donors and other media playmakers mount massive pressure on African governments to reduce the strength of the government press or abolish it altogether. But it would not be easy for the media playmakers to shake off the misguided but strong belief by African governments that they need their own press to tell their own story to citizens and the rest of the world and undo the alleged harm that the independent press supposedly inflicts on them. Moreover, the lack of consensus among donors on the issue of whether or not a government press should continue to exist is likely to give some encouragement to some African governments to persist in their ownership of the press. The pressure by the donors on African governments may even dwindle if, as suggested in Chapter 4, the government press becomes more accommodating to the opposition and drastically reduces its propaganda role for the government, or, if the government press is turned into a public press.

If, on the other hand, the government press becomes more intolerable of the opposition and too propagandistic as the mainstream media, the donor community and other media playmakers may have to agree on a concerted effort to stop this undemocratic use of the press. They would have to tell the African governments that the insistence by them that they should have their press to tell their own story contravenes the principle of using the press as a check on government in the true Fourth Estate tradition of liberal democracy. They may have to insist that multipartyism and democracy demand that the press not be answerable to the government. On the contrary, the government is supposed to be answerable to the press.

It certainly will not be easy for African governments to dismantle the massive structures of the press which most of them set up in the 1990s or inherited from previous governments. It is possible, however, depending on the amount of pressure applied on the governments, that these structures, which in many countries are responsible for employing the majority of journalists, would be greatly weakened during the decade.

### 5.6.3.3 Laws inimical to press freedom

By the close of the 1990s, most countries in Africa still had on their statute books laws, many of them bequeathed from previous governments, which were inimical to press freedom.

There is no good reason to believe that many of these laws will be repealed or substantially amended during the period in question.

Many African governments were reluctant to change both the laws they inherited from previous regimes and the ones they passed, in order to give the press more freedom. They feared that giving the press more freedom would put them further in an awkward position, given the recalcitrance of the independent press which they were already experiencing. Many more governments were, therefore, inclined to pass more laws restricting the operations of the press rather than opening up a Pandora's nest by giving the press more freedom.

A few countries, however, had by the close of the 1990s either declared their intentions to reform the obnoxious laws or had already started changing them. Among them, were those, whose law reforms involved not only emending the old laws but also introducing new positive ones which gave the press more freedom. The new positive laws included freedom of information acts which countries like South Africa were working on or had just passed. The countries which were committed to reforming the laws were, however, far fewer than those which were not and it was unlikely that the situation would change drastically by the end of the decade. It is important to mention that some of the countries which kept assuring donors that they were committed to reforming the press laws had been making the same commitment ever since they got into power. It was unlikely that these countries would implement their commitment this time unless the donors did something drastic.

#### 5.6.3.4 Misuse of law enforcement officers on the press

A phenomenon that did great damage to freedom of the press in the 1990s was what I have called the misuse of law enforcement officers by government to repeatedly harass and intimidate journalists and media houses. I have already discussed in this review how many African governments used Gestapo methods of harassing and intimidating the independent press by using police and other law enforcement officers to search, arrest, interrogate, torture, and detain journalists. In some cases, the police were directed by people in government to lay petty charges, some of them trumped, on the arrested journalists which led to unnecessary court trials many of which ended with the journalists being acquitted for lack of evidence or the government withdrawing the charges. These actions had the general effect of scaring many journalists and media houses from reporting and commenting on news about government honestly and truthfully.

I have no good reason to believe that African governments would, during the first decade of the 2000s, drastically reduce or stop the use of police and other law enforcement officers to silence outspoken journalists and media houses. As more donor and other pressure is exerted on governments to grant more press freedom, journalists may be more vicious in their attacks on governments resulting in governments applying more Gestapo methods to stop them. It is true that the Gestapo tactics themselves may be somehow checked by donors and other media playmakers but not to the extent of stopping them altogether.

#### 5.6.3.5 Constitutional protection of press freedom

At the close of the 1990s, very few African governments had managed to amend their national constitutions to include the protection of freedom of the press in the Bill of Rights. The majority did not and continued to treat freedom of the press as not being a basic human right. What most African governments protected in their Bill of Rights was the freedom of expression which they thought, as we saw earlier in this review, included freedom of the press.

As the ideals of democracy become entrenched in each country, it is hoped that governments would see the need to amend their national constitutions to include the protection of freedom of the press in the Bill of Rights. Given the propensity of African governments to amend national constitutions literally over night, the issue is not whether they can amend them but rather whether governments would have the will to do so. It is my prediction that

only a few governments would have such a will. The majority are likely to stick to the status quo.

#### 5.6.3.6 Government not allowing free flow of information

The press can only report information that is available to it. Democratic governments the world over are not particularly known for their generosity in giving information to the press, especially when the information is likely to paint a bad image of the government or expose it to public criticism and probing. But there is an acceptable level of co-operation by democratic governments to make information available to the press. When journalists ask government officers questions, the officers are bound, by the democratic requirements of transparency and accountability, to give the reporters the answers they need as long as by doing so the officers are not contravening the law. Democratic governments the world over also make certain information, which is in the public interest, available to the press even when the press has not asked for it. Denying members of the public information they need is robbing them of their right to know.

By the close of the 1990s, however, African governments continued to be very secretive of their operations even when there was absolutely no need for them to be so and contrary to liberal democratic requirements. It is true that under democracy, government has a right to keep certain information secret either because time is not ripe to reveal it or because it is not in the interest of the general public to reveal it. This is partly the reason why officers in government swear the oath of secrecy. But African governments seem to have gone overboard by literally declaring nearly all government records secret. They enforced this declaration with a law commonly referred to in African countries which were former colonies of Britain as the Official Secrets Act. Nearly all the files in government offices were marked "secret" and "confidential". Even the most innocent information enjoyed this protection as public officers were tongue-tied and tight-lipped to reveal it. The end result was that the public was many times denied information which they had a right to know.

It is important to point out that the onus of keeping certain government information secret lies with government officers and not with journalists. In other words, when journalists uncover the so-called secret information, government has no democratic right to stop them from disseminating it, unless by doing so the journalists are contravening the law.

The culture of allowing the free flow of information between government officers and the press is unlikely to come to Africa within the first decade of the 2000s, even with pressure from donors and other media playmakers. It is a culture which normally takes a long time to take root as is evidenced from the older democracies in Europe where it has taken much longer to be accepted. For most of the decade, therefore, African governments are likely to continue to operate under a cloud of secrecy like they and their predecessors have always done, treating press revelations on their operations as an affront on their secrecy.

#### 5.6.3.7 Bribes

It is said that the cancer of African journalism is corruption, particularly bribes. A bribe is a favour done or given to a journalist in order to influence him or her to report favourably or unfavourably or not to report at all. For a gift or favour to qualify as a bribe, the journalist should know or understand that it is intended to influence his or her journalistic professional work.

Many journalists in Africa have fallen prey to bribes which are referred to by seemingly harmless euphemisms such as 'oiling hands' or 'brown envelop'. Bribes have an adverse effect on press freedom because they prevent journalists from reporting freely and objectively. Instead, reporters engage in falsifying information or not reporting it in order to please the people who have bribed them.



There are many reasons why reporters in Africa accept bribes and it is not my intention to discuss them here. I should, however, point out that as multiparty politics become fiercer, and the need by the press to reveal corruption and other criminal behaviour by politicians in government and other public officers becomes more necessary in order to enforce transparency and accountability, temptations for bribing journalists are likely to increase rather than diminish. Having temptations, however, is one thing and succumbing to them is another. Africa's journalists are, however, likely to more and more succumb to bribes if the poor conditions under which they work continue, and they are likely to continue. Although even well-paid reporters can be bribed, reporters who are subjected to abject poverty are more prone to succumb to bribery than well-to-do ones.

#### 5.6.3.8 Fight for press freedom

The pressure on African governments for more press freedom is likely to be intensified than reduced. Within the press ranks, journalists are likely to increase pressure on governments to desist from censorship and other anti-press freedom acts and practices. This is likely to be done mainly through press associations and journalists' unions which are likely to grow in strength due to increased membership and other capacity-building measures by donors and other media playmakers. The support by the donor community and other media playmakers for press associations and unions was already noticeable during the 1990s. There is no reason to believe that it is likely to diminish in the first decade of the 2000s. On the contrary, there is every likelihood that it would increase as the pressure for maintaining a free press to support the democratic process becomes more intensified. With such financial and moral support, journalists are likely to become more courageous to fight for freedom of the press.

Journalists from the independent press are more likely to wage a fiercer battle than those from the government media because they are likely to face greater pressure from governments. This would be more noticeable in countries where journalists from the independent press are served by different associations and unions from those which serve their colleagues working for government media. It would be less noticeable in countries where journalists from both camps are served by the same journalists' associations and unions.

Africa's journalists are also likely to increase law suits in the fight for press freedom than was the case during the 1990s. This is because they are likely to become more aware of their rights and their associations better organised and more powerful.

Civil society is likely to intensify its pressure on governments for more press freedom. It is more likely to put pressure on the government press not to be used as a government and ruling party mouth piece. Above all, civil society is also likely to exert more pressure on the press to exercise its freedom responsibly.

The attitude of the citizenry, however, of being generally disinterested in matters relating to freedom of the press is not likely to change much. By the close of the 1990s, the majority of the citizens of Africa, as we have seen, were really not concerned with the issue of joining ranks with journalists to fight for freedom of the press. There is no reason to believe that this situation would change drastically during the first decade of the 2000s.

The international bodies which monitor press freedom and human rights are likely to continue exerting more pressure on African governments which would continue to persecute journalists and deny them their right to press freedom. Donors and other media playmakers are likely to continue responding to adverse reports of these bodies by threatening or actually cutting off aid and other co-operation from the erring governments. The action by donors and other media playmakers is likely to influence some African countries by making them desist or reduce the persecution of journalists.

The donor community, as suggested in Chapter 4, would hold the trump card to whether or not African countries would continue to respect freedom of the press during the first decade of the 2000s. If the events of the 1990s, which have led me to propound the Neo-Multiparty Conception of the Press, can be relied upon, and there is absolutely no reason why they

should not, the muscle of the donor community is likely to force many African governments to guarantee more press freedom. Even if all the other factors discussed above which are likely to safeguard an increased amount of press freedom in Africa countries were removed, the donor factor alone would be enough to make us optimistic that, unless the unexpected happens, the future of press freedom in Africa is assured in the first decade of the 2000s. Donor pressure alone is enough to force African countries, which are so dependent on foreign aid, to increase the amount of press freedom or at least maintain it at the level of the 1990s.

There is a remote possibility, however, that a few African governments may opt, like some of them did during the one-party and military rule, to dispense with donor aid in order to be left alone to do what they please. In such an unlikely eventuality, the amount of press freedom in these countries would certainly drop to a very low level as was witnessed in the countries that took this step during the one-party and military rule period. It is reasonable, however, to assume that very few governments would be so foolhardy as to take this drastic step. The few governments that may take this step are also likely not to maintain multiparty politics and democracy but revert to one-party politics and autocracy.

#### 5.6.3.9 Community, church and political party press

Apart from the welcome re-birth of the independent press, Africa, during the 1990s, saw the increasing establishment of the community as well as church press. Although distinct, the two were, in some cases, one and the same press. Sometimes the church was responsible for setting up a community press. Apart from the church, the community press also had other sponsors and funders who included UN agencies, NGOs and private entrepreneurs.

In some countries such as South Africa, the community press, particularly community radio, was expanding so fast that by the close of the 1990s it was becoming a powerful section of mass medium to reckon with. This was in line with media developments in the rest of the world where the 'big media' were gradually being replaced by the 'small media'. Community newspapers and radio stations were being preferred to national newspapers and radio stations not only by the communities but also by advertisers who were crucial to supporting their sustenance.

It was becoming obvious that if this trend continued, there would be a time when the community and church press would rival the government press as mainstream media in many African countries. In Zambia, for example, out of the seven new radio stations which were operating by October 1990, five belonged to the Christian churches, mainly the Catholic Church, one was a women's station started and supported by UNESCO and the last one was a private station run commercially by a Zambian advertising firm. This situation was not only unique to Zambia but was also common to some other countries.

It was obvious that if this trend continued, there would be a time when the community and church press would rival the government press as mainstream media in many African countries. The involvement of the church in the press in Africa was by the close of the 1990s deeper than merely at the level of ownership. The use of the press for evangelising or church propaganda was noticeable almost everywhere on the continent. With reference to television, in particular, televangelism, as I have discussed earlier in this review, became a daily feature of programming for not only church-owned stations but also government television stations. In some countries, such as Zambia, the broadcast time devoted to televangelism particularly during weekends constituted about half of the total air time. The churches, of course, paid for the air time they used for televangelising on the government stations. The government television stations welcomed the income which beefed up their meagre budgets. I see the influence of the churches in the press in Africa during the first decade of the 2000s as increasing rather than decreasing both at the level of ownership as well as content.

A third type of press is the one belonging to political parties which was also relatively strong in some countries by the close of the 1990s. Many countries had newspapers published by ruling as well as opposition parties, although in some countries the ruling parties usually

preferred to usurp the use of government media. It is only party broadcasting stations (both radio and television) which were rare to find, since governments were reluctant to issue broadcast licences to political parties due to the sensitive nature of broadcast stations in Africa which I discussed earlier in this review.

Through these three types of press, Africa seems to have bolstered its image of using the press for propaganda. The people of Africa seem to have become largely unwilling victims of political and religious press propaganda. Either they were being whitewashed politically through the government and political press to support those in government or the opposition, or they were being subjected to religious propaganda through the church, community and government press. This does not argue well for the traditional use of the press in a democracy for objective and critical reporting. When the people of Africa get used to the idea that the press is mainly there for propaganda, as they seem to have been, it is difficult to make them understand that the same press can be used for objective and critical reporting.

The first decade of the 2000s is, therefore, going to be a crucial time. It would either consolidate the idea, which seems to have gained ground to many Africans that the press is merely there for propaganda, or change this impression about the press by making Africans regard it for what it should be: the Fourth Estate and a *conditio sine qua non* for multipartyism and democracy. Which of the two would turn out to be the case, would depend on a number of factors. The first one is that the growth of a truly independent press should outstrip that of a propaganda press. This would only happen if governments level the playing field and do not favour certain types of press in consolidating the policy of liberalisation of the press which they started in the 1990s. By the close of the 1990s, there were in certain countries sure indicators that the government was favouring the growth of the church press at the expense of the expansion and consolidation of the independent press. With such a prospect, the growth of the independent press would, without doubt be outstripped by that of the press belonging to the government, political parties and church, thereby entrenching the notion in the rank and file citizens of Africa that the press is there mainly as an instrument for propaganda.

Second, if African economies continue on the decline during the first decade of the 2000s, there would be few investors, particularly local ones, willing to invest in the press. On the other hand, since the investment capital for the press owned by the government, political parties or the church can be marshalled as soon as a decision is made, without caring too much about the monetary profit factor, the growth of the press owned by the government, political parties or the church is assured even in times of bad economy. As explained elsewhere in this review, an unprecedented number of newspaper titles hit the market early in the 1990s with the coming of multiparty politics and democracy. Later in the decade, many of these newspapers died due to the economic slump that hit most African countries, coupled with bad management. By the close of the 1990s, there were generally fewer newspapers in most African countries than had been there at the beginning of the decade. Their number is expected to stabilise during the first decade of the 2000s. There is no reason to believe that the number of independent newspapers would suddenly and drastically rise during the period under consideration. If many governments institute sound policies to encourage the growth and sustenance of the independent press, the situation may end up by not being as bad as is being predicted here but it is very unlikely that the number of newspapers would reach the level that it attained early in the 1990s.

Outside investment into the independent press as well as favourable fiscal policies by local financial institutions could result in a modest growth beyond the grim levels being predicted here. All in all, the economic probabilities would seem to favour the growth of the government, political party and church press and with them the idea that the press in Africa is more of a propaganda tool than a Fourth Estate.

The third factor that might determine whether the majority of the people in Africa would regard the press as a tool of propaganda or of democracy during the first decade of the 2000s, would depend on how much civic education the citizenry generally get on the role of the

press in propping up multipartyism and democratic governance as well as what they do in practice to promote this ideal. Considering the shortness of the period (10 years is not really long), much of this education, if it has to be felt within the decade, would have to be carried out mainly at the informal and non-formal levels rather than the formal level. The focus would have to be on adults rather than school-going youth. The education campaign would have to require all the available forums as well as means of public communication. The independent press, which is the main beneficiary of such an education campaign, has rarely been known for its participation in public enlightenment campaigns. On the contrary, most of the time, the independent press is too busy sensationalising news and other information in order to attract readers, listeners and viewers. The other alternative is to use the community press. But the community press has only taken root in very few countries, making its influence for the whole of Africa by the end of the first decade of the 2000s, practically low. This leaves the government, political party or church press to conduct the education campaign – the very institutions against which the campaign is supposed to be aimed. It is unlikely that they would support the idea, leave alone conduct the education campaign. The odds are, therefore, against such a public education campaign being conducted successfully. This leaves the possibility of the citizens of Africa remaining with the impression that the press is there for propaganda.

## 5.7 Conclusive Assessment

In his foreword entitled ‘A witness to the press freedom’ for the book *Directory of African Media*, Marthoz, who wrote it in his capacity as Director of Media for Democracy in Africa, an organisation set up and funded by a number of donors which include the European Union, has stated:

African journalists have played – and will continue to play – a decisive role in the democratisation of the continent. In recent years, hundreds of new media have flourished promoting pluralism, government accountability and freedom of expression and retrieving an African tradition of debate and decades of colonialism and post-colonial ‘one-party’ states.

(Marthoz, 1995:9)

This assessment is a rather optimistic picture about the future of African journalism since even Marthoz himself is ready to admit that:

As a directory this one runs the risk of being quickly outdated. It reminds us of the fragile nature of African media: journalists and publishers live most often in very difficult situations characterised by social deprivation, persistent state pressures and inadequate equipment.

(Marthoz, 1995:9-10)

The editor of the same book, Marja-Pierce seems to be more realistic. While admitting that the demise of the one-party state in Africa has resulted in a proliferation of independent newspapers and magazines in most of the countries covered in the directory, he notes that to conclude that such media have served the reading public better is debatable.

The majority of independent newspapers are shoestring affairs staffed by journalists (and even editors) with little or no formal training, and while it is undoubtedly true that the lack of proper training facilities and the years of repression could hardly have resulted in the sudden emergence of a more responsible press, the tendency to degenerate into personal abuse, particularly when dealing with politicians deemed to have strayed from the path of rectitude, threatens to undermine the very freedom that is otherwise being exploited.

(Marja-Pierce, 1995:11-12)

It is my submission that the press in Africa faces a chequered first decade of the 2000s. To begin with, I do not, as indicated above, see the disappearance of the government press during the decade. It is likely to continue in many countries, and so would its rather dampening effect on the free flow of information and its inability to serve as a watchdog against government. On the contrary, African ruling parties are likely to dig in and strengthen the generally economically unviable government press as they seek re-election into office in the sec-

ond half of the decade. They are likely to continue subsidising the government press at very great cost so that it continues to serve as a 'voice' to tell the people what government is doing for them as well as to counteract the so-called bad publicity from the independent press. But the situation differs from country to country. As indicated at the beginning of this review, there is no uniform African picture.

Second, the independent press is likely to survive, as we have seen, amid less intensified acts by government to suppress it as a result of pressure from the donor community and other media playmakers. It is also likely to get better in quality than it has been in the last decade because of the same pressure and as a result of journalists being more qualified due to better education and training. In terms of numbers, no substantive increase is expected, although the category of the independent press under the generic title, community press, is likely to increase in numbers.

Third, the press of certain interest groups is likely to continue as well. In particular, the church press is, certainly, going to grow and with it, the use of the press generally for evangelisation. In the same vein, the party press is also likely to increase as political parties intensify their jostling for power and political competition becomes more fierce since it is expected that the ruling parties would lose some of their popularity which has enabled them to generally control African parliaments in the 1990s with absolute majorities.

Fourth, in terms of performance, the African press would still largely continue, as we have seen, to be propagandistic than a relatively objective source and purveyor of news and information. Furthermore, African governments, due mainly to pressure from donors and other media playmakers, are likely to allow more freedom of the press which is likely to continue to be misused by some of the media houses and/or journalists, particularly those belonging to the independent press.

In the final analysis, the press in Africa will almost certainly be still far from resembling that of the older democracies as the donor community and other media playmakers would like it to be. It would still carry a peculiarly African character and would not be very conducive as a bastion for the maturity of multiparty politics and democratic governance. Africa would have to continue working very hard, under the pressure of the donors and other media playmakers, to improve the image and performance of its press beyond the decade if building of multipartyism and democratic society in the continent has to progress rather than remain stagnant or retrogress.

In a nutshell, the first decade of the 2000s is not long enough to drastically change the press scene in Africa from what it was at the end of the 1990s unless African governments take courageous and wide-sweeping policy decisions to step up the gear for press reforms. It would seem that many African governments would not be in a hurry to do this. What we are likely to see are some policy decisions prompted by the donor community and other media playmakers which African governments quickly implement, while they take their time in making wide-sweeping policy changes. In the end, the decade could come to an end before the press reforms are fully implemented. Some countries may not even get round to preparing the media policy changes in the first place. Others may prepare the policy documents but never get to the point of starting to implement them by the time the decade comes to an end.

After all has been said and done, the press in Africa in the first decade of the 2000s is, certainly, going to be slightly better than that of the just ended decade in terms of better content, availability to the public, ability to give the people a fairly wide choice, and, above all, some limited ability to put pressure on governments to be transparent and accountable to the people. It is hoped that due consideration will be given to the press serving the people instead of always ignoring them as has been the case in the past.

## Epilogue

With the coming of multipartyism and democracy in the 1990s, the press of Africa reached the most significant turning point in its relatively short history. It attained the much sought after freedom which had eluded it throughout the colonial and one-party and military political epochs. At the same time it was unable to shed off the government control of the press which had haunted it since the colonial era. The interplay between the government and the independent press which was mainly brought about by both internal and external political forces gave birth to a new type of press which gave the body politic a revigorated impetus for multipartyism and democracy. The decade of the 1990s may, therefore, rightly be referred to as the golden era of African journalism.

My task in this review and in the five publications I have submitted for my dissertation, has been to discuss this great phenomenon, linking it to the running story of Africa's attempts at liberal politics and democracy which also reached a watershed during the same decade. That liberal politics and the press of Africa should both come of age at the same time was itself remarkable but not surprising. Remarkable because it was not planned but had to happen the way it did. For liberal democracy and the press, a free press, are, as I have shown in this review and the five publications, birds of the same feathers. They flock together. Most of this review and the five publications have been devoted to showing the validity of this altruism.

The remarkable story of the interaction between the press and politics in the 1990s was, as I said at the beginning of this review, a story worth telling by a person who has not just studied it but also in a way experienced it, as I have been. In telling the story, I hope I have done it both as a scientist and as a person somehow emotionally involved. I can but testify that the researches I have carried out have always been supplemented, whenever this has been possible, with personal experience which I hope has enriched rather than impoverished my account of the press and multiparty politics in Africa in the 1990s.

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