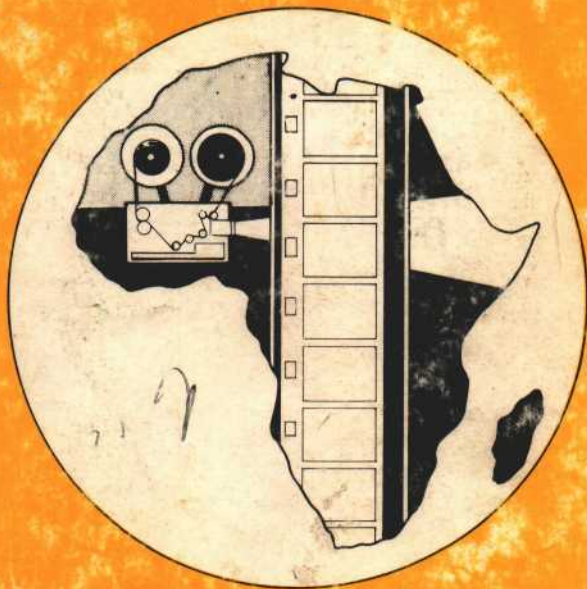


AFRICA MEDIA REVIEW

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- Images of Africa
- Development Journalism in Africa
- Nigerian Press Laws
- Decolonization of African Films

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Comment on the Contents of this Issue

That the images of the world are created by the media of mass communication is a truism. And so is the fact that the images of Africa in the western media (and mind) are often negatively distorted. What is not obvious are the ideological ramifications of such orchestrated distortions for global power relations – the fact that such distortions help justify hegemonies of particular socioeconomic systems over others.

In this issue of the AMR, Abubakar Abdullahi and Lewis Odhiambo address the issue of ideological bias in media portrayal of Africa for western audiences and its implications for international relations. Abdullahi's historical survey of Africa's coverage from the days of the European explorer-journalist to-date reveals a consistent reference to Africans as barbaric, savage, communists and terrorists. He concludes that such negative distortion of the African image justified slavery and colonialism in the past just as it now rationalizes imperialism and military adventurism in the continent. Odhiambo argues that while the position of western journalists is understandable from the perspective of global power relations, that of Africa's own journalists by their adoption of the conciliatory development journalism model is baffling since it amounts to abdication of journalistic responsibility. He argues that the current status of journalism in Sub-Saharan Africa amounts to capitulation by African journalists to politicians and the military, to despots and to corrupt influences.

Perhaps the best way of gauging journalistic performance in the continent is to look at media coverage of political issues. Rahman Olalekan Olayiwola finds the cacophony of epithets, distortions and lies in the Nigerian media coverage of politics in the country not conducive to national integration. It is such irresponsibility that has sometimes led African governments to take over, or closely supervise, the mass media.

If journalistic performance in Africa still leaves some room for improvement, defining comprehensive mass media policies for specific African countries faces even more complex problems. Onyero Mgbejume finds that legal, economic, historical, linguistic and cultural hurdles would have to be overcome before a more appropriate mass media policy can be laid down for Nigeria. This might mean, as Chris Ogbondah and Emmanuel Onyedike suggest, the elimination of all anachronistic and unconstitutional sections of the criminal code – vestiges of colonial laws – which criminalize free speech and opinion.

Gender issues in African journalism scholarship is seldom addressed. To this extent Nnamdi Emenyeonu's study of the motivations for Nigerian female students to enrol in journalism courses is refreshing. The study shows an encouraging trend in attitude and motivation among Nigerian female students towards journalism which should lead to a balancing of scales between the sexes in the profession. And while still on journalism education, Samwilu Mwaffisi, in a study of a sample of Tanzanian journalists, finds that most of them are clearly ill-pre-

pared to cover developmental issues which their calling as development journalists implies. He recommends recruitment of better academically trained personnel in the Tanzanian mass media and the provision of continuing technical education for journalists.

Finally in this issue, Hyginus Ekwuazi identifies the inalienable features which characterize the truly African film and works out the rubrics for an African aesthetic of the film.

Table of Contents

- 1 Noble Savages, Communists and Terrorists: Hegemonic Imperatives in Mediated Images of Africa from Mungo Park to Gaddafi by **Abubakar Abdullahi**.
- 17 Development Journalism in Africa: Capitulation of The Fourth Estate? by **Lewis Odhiambo**.
- 31 Political Communications: Press and Politics in Nigeria's Second Republic by **Rahman Olelakan Olayiwola**.
- 47 Constraints on Mass Media Policies in Nigeria by **Onyero Mgbejume**.
- 59 Origins and Interpretation of Nigerian Press Laws by **Chris W. Ogbondah** and **Emmanuel U. Onyedike**.
- 71 Motivations for Choice of Course and Career Preferences of Nigerian Female Journalism Students: Implications for the Status of Media Women in a Developing Nation by **Nnamdi B. Emenyeonu**.
- 85 Development Journalism: How Prepared are Tanzanian Journalists? by **Samwilu M. Mwaffisi**.
- 95 Towards the Decolonization of the African Film by **Hyginus Ekwuazi**.