STAATS- UND UNIVERSITÄTS-
BIBLIOTHEK
HAMBURG
CARL VON OSSIETZKY

Dag Hammarskjöld
Foundation

GIGA
German Institute of Global and Area Studies
Institute of African Affairs

G¦GA ■ ■ ■

Covering Post-Conflict Elections: Challenges for the Media in Central Africa

Marie-Soleil Frère

Abstract: In the past ten years, elections were held in six countries of Central Africa experiencing "post-conflict" situations. The polls that took place in Burundi (2005), the Central African Republic (2005), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2006), Congo-Brazzaville (2002, 2007), Chad (1996, 2001, 2006) and Rwanda (2003) were crucial for peace-building. In some cases, they were widely supported and supervised by the international community, being considered the last step of a peace process and the first step toward establishing a truly representative "post-conflict" regime. The media were expected to play a large part in supporting these elections, both to inform the citizens, so they could make an educated choice, and to supervise the way the electoral administration was organizing the polls. This paper attempts to show the many challenges faced by the media while covering these post-conflict electoral processes. In a context of great political tension, in which candidates are often former belligerents who have just put down their guns to go to the polls, the media operate in an unsafe and economically damaged environment, suffering from a lack of infrastructure, inadequate equipment and untrained staff. Given those constraints, one might wonder if the media should be considered actual democratic tools in Central Africa or just gimmicks in a "peace-building kit" (including "free and fair" elections, multipartism and freedom of the press) with no real impact on the democratic commitment of the elite or the political participation of the population.

Marie-Soleil Frère is a research associate at the Belgian National Fund for Scientific Research and teaches journalism at the University of Brussels, where she is also the director of the Research Center in Information and Communication Sciences (ReSIC). She is the author of *The Media and Conflicts in Central Africa* (Boulder, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007) and *Elections and the Media in Central Africa* (London, Zed Books, 2011).

Like most countries in Africa, the six countries on which this paper focuses[1] have only recently gained experience with free and pluralist elections, as well as with free and independent media. For three decades after independence, when elections took place, they were organized under single-party regimes and aimed to renew and legitimize the head of state, demonstrating the population's complete support for his political programme. Media were under state monopoly and supported the party in power.

In the early nineties, the multiparty system and media freedom resurfaced on the continent. "Free and pluralist" elections were organized for the first time in the Central African Republic (1991), Burundi (1993) and Congo-Brazzaville (1993), and the new private press participated in the contradictory political debate. Those elections led to a change of leadership but also paved the way for instability and civil war. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre), Rwanda and Chad, although political pluralism was authorized, elections could not be organized, as in each case the serving president was hanging on to power. Rebel movements contesting the ruling party emerged, also leading to further instability and violence. During these wars, in four of those six countries (Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, DRC), some media organizations were so integral to the fighting strategies of political movements or figures that they have been called "hate media".[2] Many reporters turned into propagandists, and governments and other belligerents attempted to control the circulation of information (Frère 2007).

In order to put an end to the conflicts, peace processes, "dialogue" and "transition" mechanisms were established. They culminated with the organization of general elections, perceived as an unavoidable step in the peace-building process, meant to mark the return of a "legitimate" authority, sanctioned by the ballot (Sisk and Reynolds 1998: 185). The elections that took place in Burundi (2005), the Central African Republic (2005), the DRC (2006),

---

1   Central Africa is usually defined as the following nine countries: Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Rwanda, even though some of those countries are also included in other regional groupings such as the East African Community (Burundi and Rwanda) or the Southern Africa Development Community (the DRC). This paper focuses on the six (Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda) that were at some point qualified as "post-conflict" because a war broke out that interrupted the regular process of power management.

2   Case studies have been published about each country: Rwanda (Chrétien et al. 1995; Thompson 2007), Burundi (Kaburahe 2002; Palmans 2008), Congo (Gakosso 1997), DRC (JED 1998-2007). Frère (2007) covers the nine countries in Central Africa.

Chad (1996, 2001), Congo-Brazzaville (2002, 2007) and Rwanda (2003) can be categorized as "post-conflict" elections, which have been described as "quite unlike other elections" (Quantin 2009: 181).

These elections were highly valued by the international community, which often supported their organization as "a necessary condition (that one would wish sufficient) to rebuild a state" (De Villers 2009: 366). As the Belgian political scientist Jean-Claude Willame remarks (2006: 166):

> Whether in Afghanistan, Iraq, Burundi or the [DR] Congo, throughout the long exercise of restoring civil and military peace, 'peacemakers' have always kept to the same plan: a transition government must lead to a legitimate government stemming from 'free and democratic' elections, often organized before the guns have fallen silent.

These post-conflict polls are therefore always a risky bet, as

> if elections go well, the country can continue on the road to democracy and peace. But if they don't, democracy can be undermined and the country can descend into conflict again (Howard 2005: 3).

Despite the risks involved by holding these elections, in countries experiencing ongoing insecurity, diplomats, political stakeholders and armed movements are generally unable to agree on any other plan to bring about a definite end to the conflict (Sisk and Reynolds 1998: 146). Furthermore, the organization of these elections is often a logistical challenge in post-conflict countries with highly unreliable census data, hardly any transport infrastructure, and scarce electricity.

In that uneasy and highly sensitive context in Central Africa, the media were expected to play a crucial part in the electoral process: They were supposed to be the ones informing the citizens and encouraging them to participate, giving a voice to the candidates and controlling the transparency of the organization of the elections, therefore guaranteeing their "free and fair" label. This paper will show the challenges the media faced in bearing this huge responsibility during these post-conflict electoral processes. The media could be qualified as "free" in the six countries, as private newspapers and radio stations were operating. But the media landscape was enduring the legacy of wars that created unfavourable economic conditions for the press.

This paper is divided into three sections: The first part outlines the ideal role the media were expected to play during those elections, a role of which they were often reminded through training sessions organized and financed by international organizations or foreign NGOs prior to elections. The second section presents and analyses the main obstacles that the media in Central Africa have faced while covering these electoral processes. The third part presents some success stories, showing how some media outlets

were able to overcome these obstacles. The conclusion then draws prospects, both for media and for democratic consolidation, as elections are now supposed to take place regularly in these six countries.

The Duties of the Media in the Electoral Process

Covering elections is never an easy task for journalists, no matter where they are taking place. Elections generate heightened political pressure in the newsrooms, increase attempts to manipulate information, and force journalists to work hastily. At the very moment that citizens expect the media to be ubiquitous, able to report on election preparedness, and able to report from all over the territory, material and financial difficulties and a shortage of competent staff can lead to incomplete or unbalanced coverage.

The duties and responsibilities of the media during electoral processes have been widely described (Marthoz 2000; Lange and Ward 2004; Howard 2005), and some specific guidelines have even been issued regarding their situation in "transition" regimes (Article 19 1994; Schnellinger 2001). The media are one of the main platforms through which candidates and parties can make their views and programmes known to the national electorate. It is through the journalists' coverage of electoral issues and their analysis of contenders' proposals that voters are able to distinguish among candidates and parties. The media also give voters practical information on the electoral process, the unfolding of the campaign and voting operations. Moreover, it falls to the media to question the transparency of the elections and freely inform voters about any possible dysfunctions in the organization of the elections. The *Commonwealth Election Broadcasting Guidelines* issued in 2001 state:

> Free and democratic political processes must include elections whose credibility cannot be doubted by any voter, candidate or observer. The delivery of such credibility is very much in the hands of the media.

According to Howard (2005: 5), four requirements of a democratic election simply cannot be achieved without a free press: There must be a real debate between distinct positions; the parties and candidates must enjoy freedom to campaign and communicate to reach the electorate; elections must be governed by rules that are well known and respected by all candidates as well as voters; the voters must be well informed and get all the information they need in order to make their choices. Free media are indeed necessary to fully support those four dynamics.

To help the media achieve these goals, professional codes of ethics and training manuals recall the basics of what "good journalism" should be: accurate, impartial, responsible, balanced, accountable. Especially the public media, funded by the citizens' taxes, have to devote "equitable" or "fair" amounts of reporting to all political parties and candidates and make sure they give a voice to all segments of the population. According to the British NGO Article 19,

> governments have a positive obligation to promote a diversity of view-points on matters of public interest in the media. […] [W]here state-owned or state-controlled mass media exist, the government is obliged to ensure that there is no discrimination in programming, including on the grounds of political opinion (1994: 14).

Moreover,

> the government takes steps to eliminate inequities affecting the ability of the parties to communicate these messages. This latter factor is particularly important in countries in transition from military or one-party rule to democracy (1994: 16).

These international standards were especially important to recall in post-conflict countries that have no long tradition of electoral reporting. The journalists in Central Africa, from public as well as private media, were trained in those theoretical commitments before the elections took place in the six countries.[3] Donors, local and international NGOs, electoral commissions and communications regulatory bodies have organized training sessions on the duties, responsibilities and basic principles of electoral coverage for the local media professionals. In the DRC, a report by the EISA (Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa) reminded that

> [a] free and unbiased press is a crucial component of any democracy […]. The media is an essential tool during election campaigning to provide voters with impartial and credible information regarding the competing candidates and political parties (2006: 30).

And a report from the European Union in Burundi in 2005 stated that

> equal access to media for all political contenders is a necessary condition for any serious democratic process. The different points of view have to find a place in the media so that the voters are well informed

---

3   The number of training sessions was nonetheless different according to the degree of donor investment to support the electoral process. In the DRC and Burundi, when the support was important, many training sessions were organized, but there were just a few in Congo-Brazzaville and Chad.

and able to choose between the several existing options with full
knowledge of the facts (MOE-UE 2005: 40)

But, beyond those theoretical requirements, which are similar worldwide,
the political and economic environment, as well as the organization of the
information sector, play key roles in the manner in which journalists will be
able to fulfil their duties while covering elections. Lang and Ward have
shown that where the media environment is unstable, respecting the princi-
ples of equal access and non-discrimination against parties and candidates
can become very problematic (2004: 203). And in the six post-conflict
countries under study – where the situation of the media sector was scarred
by the consequences of the war – certain obstacles could prevent the local
implementation of "good electoral journalism".

On the eve of the elections, some donors and international organizations
became concerned about the ability of the media sector to positively contrib-
ute to the electoral process in Central Africa. For instance, the Department for
International Development (DFID) in the DRC, the French Embassy in the
Central African Republic (CAR), the International Organisation of La Fran-
cophonie in Chad and the United States Agency for International Develop-
ment (USAID) in Burundi decided to inject funding into the media sector
once they realized the chasm that existed between the great expectations
regarding the contribution of the media to the electoral process and the frailty
and vulnerability of those media organizations. For example, the DFID inter-
vention in the Congolese media sector amounted to a donation of 7 million
GBP in 2005-2006. This support was part of the second global goal of the
DFID's *Country Engagement Plan* for the DRC, which aimed to establish "a
functioning state", along with the support for the transition institutions and
the organization of the elections. A 2005 DFID paper emphasized that parti-
san media could threaten the impact of the support of the UK:

> Overtly negative or positive media coverage can influence electoral
> processes, meaning that external assistance is devalued. This is partic-
> ularly relevant in those states where there is little history of multiparty
> elections (Vallings 2005: 21)

Supporting an independent and professional media landscape through
training for journalists, donating equipment and promoting professional
organizations was thus perceived as a priority.

Despite those interventions in the media sector (which, while some-
times massive, were still generally belated), obstacles remained that pre-
vented the local media from fully playing their part in the post-conflict
electoral processes; the second section of this paper will outline those diffi-
culties.

Covering Elections in Post-Conflict Central African Countries

Nine major obstacles to balanced, fair, complete and professional election coverage by the local media emerged during the electoral process in the six countries under consideration. If these obstacles are also to be found in countries with a long democratic tradition, they have been amplified in the post-conflict context of Central Africa. Those nine obstacles have also had an impact on media coverage and therefore on the "fairness" of the electoral process. There is not much in common between the broadcasting profusion of the DRC (350 radio stations and more than 70 television stations operating before the 2006 elections) and the scarcity of private radio stations (not even reaching a dozen) in Chad, Congo-Brazzaville or Rwanda (where there was no private broadcaster in 2003). And one cannot compare the newspaper circulation in Kinshasa (with over 10 private dailies) with that in Bujumbura (which has none). Nevertheless, common trends are obvious and are generally related to the post-conflict situation.

Media with No Media Enterprises

Most private media outlets in the six studied countries can hardly be called "media businesses". Most of them have a rather informal way of operating, small and insufficiently trained staff, no transport, limited financial capacities and a small telecommunications budget. The huge majority of the newsrooms have between 4 and 15 permanent staff members who are unable to circulate outside the city where the office is located. Private media in these countries have not been able to develop or strengthen themselves as business corporations. They are run by media professionals, often full of goodwill and highly motivated, but with no journalism training background, and little if any management ability. Local community radio stations, which are particularly useful to disseminate information in remote places, are, for the most part, even more impoverished and weaker than the commercial "for-profit" media established in the main cities.

Among the few exceptions are the media that were born within a UN peacekeeping mission, such as Radio Okapi in the DRC and Radio Ndeke Luka in the CAR. Thanks to international support (both of them are financed by foreign donors and managed by the Swiss foundation Hirondelle), these stations enjoy financial and technical capacities that are far superior to those of other local media. But their budgets (13 million USD/year for Radio Okapi and 300,000 USD/year for Radio Ndeke Luka) could not be generated within the local environment. These media outlets

are therefore faced with a major sustainability challenge.[4] Dependence upon donor support is also a concern for the major private radio stations in Burundi. Established with an explicit goal of contributing to peace-building, stations such as Radio Bonesha, Radio Publique Africaine (RPA) and Radio Isanganiro have been financed by foreign money since they were created. With between 15 to 30 journalists, their yearly budgets go from 130,000 to 580,000 USD, which allows for a certain level of professionalism. From being a matter of finance and sustainability, the dependence issue sometimes expands to become a matter of editorial choices and agency. Tensions between Radio Okapi's staff and the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) regularly arose around editorial issues, as the newsroom had to fight against its main donor in order not to be turned into a marketing tool for the MONUC.

The local economic context is not favourable to the development of financially sustainable "independent" media companies, as the wars have generally paralysed or destroyed the economic fabric and diminished the advertising revenues. Conflicts have sent investors fleeing, impoverished readers, and generally pushed up production costs due to shortages of raw materials and energy. Moreover, conflicts generally contributed to destabilizing the entire education and training sector, government spending being refocused on the army and military expenses. The media thus have to hire young graduates who are either insufficiently qualified or whose training is unsuitable for the job. Again, only media supported by foreign donors can invest in the internal training of their human resources and count on experienced journalists (Putzel and van der Zwan 2005: 25).

If there is a minimum level of equipment and qualified human resources necessary to ensure professionalism in the media, it is obvious that the post-conflict Central African context cannot supply it. Therefore, media sustainability and professional quality are very much dependent on the short-term support of donors, and the media outlets cannot be labelled "businesses", meaning entities able to survive by themselves in their own environment.

---

4   The radio stations set up by the UN with the aim of peace-building generally have no local status and are therefore not considered "local media" by local broadcasting authorities. The outcome is thus generally that the radio station is shut down when the UN peacekeeping mission ends (Orme 2010).

The "Dangerous Liaisons" between Media and Politics

As mentioned above, in Central Africa, private media were authorized and established less than 20 years ago, at the same time as political pluralism. Political parties and the new private media (first limited to the written press, then extended to radio and even to television in some countries) emerged simultaneously, and the first newspapers generally belonged to what is referred to as an "opinion" press (Perret 2005). Virtually unconcerned by questions of profitability and entrepreneurial positioning, the new media "industry" was more focused on the political debate – promoting or criticizing the authorities – than providing citizens with confirmed, verified and credible information (Nyamnjoh 2005: 231).

The wars have generally reinforced the links between politicians and the media, as each belligerent group has tried to control one or several media outlets to make its propaganda heard. Conflicts also increased pressure on independent media, leading many of them to serve influential politicians in order to simply survive or enjoy minimal security (Frère 2007).

During the post-conflict electoral processes, many media outlets remained or became mouthpieces for candidates. In the DRC, no fewer than seven television stations in Kinshasa belonged to a presidential or parliamentary candidate running in the 2006 elections. Former armed groups-cum-political parties used "their" media to promote their candidates at the polls. Many so-called "community" radio stations established inside the country were also the property of a local candidate. In the informal private sector, there is rarely any transparency as regards shareholders, and many media companies in the DRC and Congo-Brazzaville are officially owned by straw men with underlying political interests.

During electoral campaigns, the financially frail media are also more vulnerable to pressure from politicians and political parties keen on receiving sufficient coverage. Even with no particular ideological sympathy for a party or a candidate, some radio stations and newspapers are thus driven to sell airtime or print space to the highest bidder, forgetting about equal access and balanced coverage. In Congo-Brazzaville, *La Semaine Africaine*, a weekly newspaper created in 1952 and belonging to the Catholic Church, has long been the only "independent" paper in the country. But deprived of the Church's support a few years ago, it could not avoid publishing political advertorials during the 2008 elections. That undeniably impacted the credibility and long-established image of neutrality of the oldest Congolese newspaper. During the 2005 elections in the CAR, some newspapers' editors-in-chief were openly campaigning for one candidate: *Le Confident* was supporting Olivier Gabirault, while *Le Démocrate* and *L'Hirondelle* were devoted to

former president Kolingba's campaign. Obviously, their publishers were also employed as "communication counsellors" of these candidates.

Generally, the media outlets that have managed to avoid campaigning for a candidate (the major radio stations in Burundi, Radio Liberté in Chad, and some community stations such as Radio Maendeleo in the eastern DRC) are the ones depending on funding from foreign NGOs.

Of course, close ties between the media and political parties are hardly unique to Africa and do not necessarily undermine the democratic qualities of the media. Nevertheless, problems arise when the political affiliation leads to anti-professional attitudes, when the political sympathies overwhelm the professional principles and drive journalists into lying, insulting the challengers or using xenophobic arguments to defend their candidate. Elsewhere, the media's impartiality vis-à-vis political parties was built on the development of commercial advertising and the involvement of journalists themselves as shareholders in the media companies. But such a scenario seems still very unlikely in post-conflict countries in which, except for the foreign support, the media have almost no way of surviving without direct funding with political influence (especially as politics also infiltrates the economy), and in which journalists are poorly paid and unable to invest in their own media business.

The Government's "Public" Media

In these six countries, although the Electoral Law decreed that public broadcasters should ensure equal and fair coverage for all candidates and parties,[5] the national media have demonstrated blatant favouritism toward the incumbent president. Imbalance, be it quantitative or qualitative, is reported in all media monitoring reports made during the post-conflict elections. In the DRC, for instance, the monitoring centre of the broadcasting regulation body (Centre d'Ecoute et de Monitoring de la Presse Congolaise, CEMPC) showed that during the first round of the 2006 presidential elections, the national television (Radio Télévision Nationale Congolaise, RTNC) news devoted 1 hour and 56 minutes to Kabila, 1 minute and 27 seconds to Bemba, 3 minutes and 11 seconds to Ruberwa, 16 minutes

---

5   Burundi (Electoral Code of 20 April 2005), Congo-Brazzaville (Law no. 9-2001 dated 10 December 2001 on the Electoral Law), Central African Republic (Order no. 4/014 dated 11 August 2004 on the Electoral Code), Rwanda (Organic Law no. 17/2003 dated 7 July 2003 on presidential and legislative elections), Democratic Republic of the Congo (Law no. 06/006 dated 9 March 2006 on the organization of presidential, legislative, provincial, urban, municipal and local elections), Chad (Law no. 021/PR/2000 dated 18 September 2000 on the Electoral Code).

and 30 seconds to Pay Pay, and less than 1 minute to each of the 29 other candidates. For the second round, with the two remaining challengers, television newscasts devoted 2 hours and 24 minutes to the incumbent Kabila and 10 minutes to Bemba, and the national radio news devoted 1 hour and 48 minutes to Kabila and 1 minute and 55 seconds to Bemba (CEMPC 2006b: 4-6). From a qualitative point of view, the European Union monitoring team showed after the 2002 presidential election in Congo-Brazzaville that not only did candidate Sassou Nguesso receive 65 per cent of the airtime devoted to all candidates on Radio Congo and 52 per cent on Télé Congo, but he was also always presented in a very positive way (71 per cent of positive coverage on Radio Congo and 72 per cent on Télé Congo): He was systematically associated with the Congo's evolution toward peace, whereas other candidates were not (MOE-UE 2002: 22). In 2003 in Rwanda, Kagame also received 60 per cent of the airtime devoted to all candidates on Radio Rwanda, and the three other contenders shared the remaining 40 per cent. Kagame was also systematically presented in a positive way, whereas the media tied his main challenger, Twagiramungu, to allegations of "divisionism" (MOE-UE 2003: 45).

Reports tend to demonstrate that, in countries in which the public media have been co-opted by the incumbents, opposition media have often used this as an excuse to justify their own radical and unbalanced positions. The private media raised their voices because the public media failed to guarantee the legally required equal access and balanced coverage to all candidates and parties. In 2001 the majority of the Chadian Press (*N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo*, *L'Observateur*, *Le Temps*) used that argument to justify its commitment to stand with the opposition parties and to demonstrate after the election and proclaimed victory of Idriss Déby.

The co-optation of the "public" media by the incumbents was a major obstacle to providing pluralist information during all electoral campaigns.[6] This behaviour, well anchored among not only political leaders but also the state media's newsrooms, dates back to the military rule and single-party regimes that had a state monopoly on the media for decades before 1990. In many African countries in which military regimes made way for civil governments 20 years ago, public media have tried to evolve toward the status of a "public service corporation", with more administrative and financial independence, opening their airwaves to other points of view and to civil society. The aim was to compete with a new private media sector that was

---

6   Burundi is something of an exception in this respect, given that the President Ndayizeye was not allowed, according to the Arusha Peace Agreement, to run as a candidate at the 2005 elections. The RTNB (Radio Télévision Nationale du Burundi) had thus more agency and was less blatantly unfair in its coverage.

much more open and diverse (Tozzo 2005). Nevertheless, in countries that went through a conflict, such an evolution was short-lived and the state media soon became instruments of propaganda once again, strategic weapons used to defend governments. After the war, these governments thus continued to act in such a manner, especially during elections.

Editorial independence and a "public service" – rather than a "governmental" – identity have been the benefits of a long quest for all major public broadcasters around the world. And in every case, setbacks are possible, and pressure from the executive remains a recurrent issue. In Central Africa, establishing true public service broadcasters seems to be even more of a challenge as there is no such thing as an apolitical administration, and there are hardly any operating public services of any kind. "Presidential public media" reflect the global lack of neutral public services provided to the citizens in whatever domain and the general co-optation of the state apparatus by the presidential party.

The Media's Limited Scope and the Information Blackout

If most citizens of Central African countries have no access to balanced and fair information, it is not only because the public broadcaster (with the wider coverage) is biased, but it is also due to a large part of the population having no access to any media at all. The written press is generally limited to the capital city, and its print runs are small: *Le Potentiel*, the leading private daily newspaper in the DRC (a country of 71 million), hardly reaches 2,500 copies, while the biggest paper in Chad, *N'Djamena Bi-Hebo*, is a bi-weekly that prints barely 5,000 copies. Private newspapers in Burundi, the CAR and Congo-Brazzaville also had low daily print runs during the 2005 and 2007 elections: between 200 and 1,000 copies. Even if one copy of a newspaper circulates from one reader to the next, the paper overall still reaches only a small, urban elite. Extreme poverty prevents a large part of the population from purchasing newspapers; moreover, people are rarely able to read them anyway. Recently, press reviews broadcast by radio stations have expanded the audience for newspapers, but those programmes are limited to radio newsrooms which have direct access to the Internet and can check online for the few papers that have a website. Television, which requires costly receivers and access to electricity, also has a very limited scope: In Bangui, N'Djamena, Bujumbura and Brazzaville, national television, which still had a near monopoly during the post-conflict elections, was hardly received outside the capital.

Radio is a cheaper medium, and it transcends the illiteracy problem, but private radio stations in Central Africa broadcast on FM within very limited areas (normally a radius of 50 to 100 kilometres), though there are some

stations that have been able to invest in short-wave broadcasting. The lack of qualified staff to maintain equipment leads to frequent breakdowns of transmitters and limits their capacities. As for public radio stations – which were historically the ones disseminating information to the whole nation – in four of the six countries, they were unable to cover the whole territory during the elections due to technical problems and a lack of public investment to keep them operating properly.

The lack of a stable source of electricity (another consequence of the wars) also reduces the scope of the media. Generators, upon which the overwhelming majority of the media rely in the countryside and even in the capital (in Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, the CAR and Burundi), are a short-lived and costly palliative.

The exclusion of a section of the population from national information is an issue not only of access, but also of media content. The lack of roads and transport facilities, as well as the high costs of telecommunications limit the possibility not only of circulating information beyond the capital, but also of collecting data on what is happening inside of the country. The media's "capital centrism" can thus be seen in both their scope and their content.

In all six countries, parts of the population were therefore excluded from electoral information, be it for technical, financial or cultural reasons. As democratic elections lose all meaning when the percentage of citizens who have access to the candidates' programmes is too limited, some projects were implemented in order to support a wider circulation of information during the electoral period. In the CAR, a couple of months before the 2005 election, the national station Radio Bangui was no longer able to broadcast outside the capital city due to problems with its transmitters. The French Embassy had to set up an "emergency solution", linking the studio through a mobile phone line with Radio France Internationale (RFI, the public French foreign broadcasting service). RFI then used its satellite connection and network of local transmitters in Africa to broadcast the signal in short waves, covering the CAR's territory. During those months, Central African citizens based outside Bangui could thus receive national news programmes and be informed about the electoral process – through Paris! Nevertheless, due to its high cost, this "emergency plan" was in operation for only a dozen weeks. After that, most of the population fell back into an "information blackout".

Attacks on the Press

In Central Africa, freedom of expression is a recent conquest, dating back to the early nineties, but the media's use of this freedom has already made them the victims of numerous acts of violence and repression, especially

during the armed conflicts. In Rwanda, half of the media professionals were murdered during the genocide of the Tutsi and the massacres of political opponents in 1994. When the second war broke out in the DRC in 1998, that year turned out to be one of the darkest in the profession's history. In the east of the country, seven journalists have been killed since then. In Congo-Brazzaville, Burundi, Chad and the CAR, journalists also have, in recent years, been threatened, arrested arbitrarily and put in jail. The war has created a situation in which threats against journalists can come from a wide range of sources (the army, rebel groups, private militias, etc.). There is still no control of the use of violence against journalists and a general situation of impunity regarding any violation of human rights in a broader sense (JED 1998-2007).[7]

One way to attack press freedom during elections is to silence the critical media. During the 2006 electoral campaign in the DRC, the signals of CKTV and CCTV, Jean-Pierre Bemba's two television stations, were arbitrarily interrupted on a number of occasions by the National Intelligence Agency. Media supporting the other "side" were also targeted – for instance, Radio Boboto's studio (in the town of Bumba, in the Equator Province), close to Joseph Kabila's party, was ravaged and looted on the day of the second round by Bemba's partisans. In 2002 in Congo-Brazzaville, the written press was indirectly prevented from being published. As claimed in a report by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH 2002: 4-5):

> The main printing works of Brazzaville were "instructed" from mid-February to print the ballot papers and posters related to the presidential campaign. This measure by the Ministry of the Interior […] was taken to prevent the publication of the main newspapers that were critical (though there are not many of them …) during the presidential election.

Journalists have also been arrested and imprisoned in the middle of campaigns. In Burundi in 2005, Etienne Ndikuryio, a journalist working for Radio Bonesha and the Zoom.net press agency, was arrested for having written in a despatch that the incumbent head of state, Domitien Ndayizeye, was allegedly "depressed" following the defeat of his party in the communal elections. He was charged with "contempt for the head of state" according to the law on the press. In Chad in 2006, Tchanguiz Vatankah, the director of Radio Brakoss in Moïssala and president of the URPT (Chad Union of Private Radio Stations), was arrested by the police and detained for three

---

7   The Congolese NGO "Journaliste En Danger" (JED) publishes a yearly report that presents all press freedom violations perpetrated in the DRC and more broadly in Central Africa during the previous year; see <www.jed-afrique.org>.

weeks because he had signed a URPT press release demanding that the elections be postponed. In the DRC, several journalists were brutalized by political party militants in Kinshasa and in the Kasaï province and deprived of their equipment by zealous police officers and soldiers, also receiving anonymous threats by phone (JED 2006a: 31-33). After journalist Mwamba Bapuwa was assassinated at his home in Kinshasa during the electoral campaign, JED published a reminder of basic measures for media professionals to ensure their security during elections. JED recalled the fact that "no news item is worth a life and no report is worth dying for" (JED 2006b).

The number of press freedom violations, the various forms they take and the fact that they generally go unpunished have increasingly led journalists to practise self-censorship. In such a context, self-censorship by threatened journalists might even have become the first obstacle to the right of citizens to have access to information.

The Regulatory Authorities' Weaknesses and Biases

New independent broadcasting authorities have emerged in the African media landscape over the last two decades in the wake of the liberalization of the media sector and/or in the course of peace processes. Aside from allocating frequencies in the context of pluralist broadcasting, one of their main missions is media regulation during elections, especially to ensure fair access to the public media (Frère 2009: 329). During these post-conflict elections, such was the role of the HCP (High Council of the Press) in Rwanda, the CNC (National Communications Council) in Burundi, the HCC (High Council for Communications) in the CAR and Chad, the CSLC (High Council for the Freedom of Communication) in Congo-Brazzaville and the HAM (High Authority of the Media) in the DRC.[8]

Countries in Central Africa belong to the tradition of "civil law" (the French or Belgian tradition), which, contrary to the Anglo-American tradition, provides for laws governing not only the media companies' establishment, but also the contents disseminated by the media. During elections in particular, the public media's activities are closely defined, and private broadcasters are often subject to significant regulation. The media regulator is in charge of organizing the media's involvement in the election campaign, but also of dealing with complaints lodged against the media.

This job is particularly important and delicate in countries that are emerging from conflicts and where the fair distribution of speech in the

---

8   The HCP (Rwanda) was established in 2003, the CNC (Burundi) in 1992, the HCC (CAR) in 2005, the HCC (Chad) in 1996, the CSLC (Congo-Brazzaville) in 2006 and the HAM (DRC) in 2003.

public space is crucial for peace-building. Indeed, the regulatory authority has to help restore a culture of dialogue, negotiation and verbal confrontation in areas where armed violence has for a long time been the main means of managing political disagreements. As mentioned above, the six countries studied have a highly politicized media landscape, and four of them even experienced "hate media" during the war.[9] This has led the broadcasting regulatory bodies to be overly cautious, to the extent that one could suspect them of "overdoing it" and of restricting the freedom of the press (Frère 2009: 344). Closely supervising private media on the one hand but on the other hand remaining unable to force the public media into being balanced and fair, the regulatory bodies were viewed as either useless or supporting the government.

Moreover, these media regulation authorities are institutionally fragile, under-financed and under-equipped, often inactive, sometimes incompetent, and generally too politicized. Most of them are facing distrust from journalists (since media professionals prefer to undergo the fewest possible interventions from the public authorities), along with their government's attempts to control and manipulate the regulatory body.

Therefore, the relationships between the media and the regulation authority deteriorated during the electoral processes. In 2005 in Burundi, the CNC accused a private radio station, RPA, of being unbalanced (for having covered the rallies of only two political parties live) and decided to suspend it. The professional organizations tried to negotiate with the CNC, which refused to lift the sanctions. RPA then decided to resume broadcasting despite their suspension. The police intervened to shut down the station by force, but the other radio stations stood by RPA and started a trial of strength over the airwaves that led the CNC's president to eventually resign in the middle of the electoral process.

In Chad in 2001, although radio stations had already prepared for the election period, the HCC decided that "during the entirety of the media campaign for the presidential election of 2001, all political debates and debates with a political character shall be banned from the airwaves on private or community radios".[10] Article 35 of that decision specified that radio stations "that do not conform to this decision will be suspended for the length of the electoral campaign". The HCC's president argued that

---

9   Rwanda (1993-1994) and Burundi (1993-1996), but also the DRC (1998) and Congo-Brazzaville (1997-1998).

10   Decision no. 002/HCC/P/SG/2001 on the regulation of the media campaign for the 2001 presidential election (Article 23).

> [p]rivate community radio […] was created to support development efforts, [and] to educate the population in matters of its development and growth. […] The primary purpose of these radio stations is not to be politically involved.[11]

This prohibition outraged the two main private radio stations of N'Djamena. Radio Liberté's administrative director declared:

> It is unacceptable, almost revolting. It is clear from this decision that the HCC is playing along with the authorities. […] We cannot create radio stations just to observe the political scene from the sidelines. We created these stations so that citizens could express themselves.[12]

After days of discussion and after Radio Liberté organized an extraordinary general assembly of all its listeners, the HCC eventually allowed the radio to cover the campaign, except for one particular programme.

In 2006 in the DRC, the HAM had to regularly call the politically oriented media back to order. Two weeks before the first round of the election, it prohibited six stations (RTNC1, CCTV, CKTV, Digital Congo, Global TV and Afrika TV) from broadcasting any electoral debate for 72 hours.[13] But the two stations close to Joseph Kabila, Digital Congo and the national RTNC1, refused to implement the sanction. That probably fuelled the resentment of Jean-Pierre Bemba's militants towards the HAM, and they looted the institution three days before the elections. Seventy-two hours before the election, the HAM found itself deprived of its office and equipment, and its staff members were profoundly traumatized.

The legitimate, neutral and impartial intervention of regulatory authorities, which is particularly needed during election periods in a context of great tension, still needs perfecting in Central Africa.

Informing while Not Informed: The Lack of Access to Information

In countries that for decades have had state monopolies on the media followed by murderous conflicts, and in which information has been handled as a spoil of war, there is a strong tradition of withholding information. Free and democratic elections require transparency and communication, whereas opacity and even deliberate lies and propaganda have been the rule for years.

---

11   Emmanuel Touadé, president of the HCC, interviewed in *N'Djamena Hebdo* no. 491, 27-30 April 2001, p. 9.

12   Sosthène Ngargoune, interviewed in *N'Djamena Bi-Hebdo*, no. 491, 27-30 April 2001, p. 9.

13   HAM decision no. HAM/CVEM/114/2006 dated 17 July 2006.

This is a radical change of culture both for administrations, which now have to make the information public, and for journalists, who have to learn where to find it or how to demand it.

For instance, during the 2006 election in Chad, President Idriss Déby openly asked the administrative services not to let the press get access to information. He reminded his militants that the press was "an enemy" to be categorized in "the category of Chadians who want his death".[14] In a context where media should have access to data about the population census, the number and locations of polling stations and the first partial results, the restriction on information access by public authorities largely impeded their work. Moreover, access to the field was sometimes also difficult. As Begoto Oulatar, the editor of *Ndjamena Bi-Hebdo*, testified, "journalists can only go where opposition parties or the government are willing to take them, if not the French army".[15] Journalists are thus often dependent on the collaboration and the goodwill of the administrative authorities in order to gain access to the field and to information.

Sometimes, the lack of public information (in addition to the low level of training of journalists) can lead the media to report rumours. In a post-conflict context, fake opinion polls and misinformed forecasts can have devastating consequences. In the DRC, after the first run of the 2006 election, the media on each side presented as a confirmed fact the victory of "their" candidate, preparing their militants to distrust and reject any other results emanating from the electoral commission. When the official results were eventually published three weeks after the polls, they didn't match either side's predictions, fuelling a clash between the two camps that led to the deaths of anywhere from 23 (according to official sources) to 100 (according to local NGOs) people. As a consequence, during the second round, the HAM and the electoral commission forbade any early dissemination of partial results. Journalists saw this decision as an abuse of power and complained that they had been robbed of one of their main missions in the election.

In the CAR, Burundi and Chad, a debate took place between those who favoured the gradual publication by the media of results (simultaneously to their posting in polling stations) – which would limit fraud, but which would make way for dangerous extrapolations – and those who believed that only complete results validated by competent authorities should be transmitted to the public to avoid any manipulation. The electoral processes often brought up the issue of the necessity for civil society and media

---

14   *Le Temps* no. 474, 12-18 April 2006, p. 3.
15   Begoto Oulatar, paper presented at the ECCAS (Economic Community of Central African States) conference "Media and Elections", Bangui, April 2009.

organizations to launch campaigns and lobbying activities in order for new laws on access to information to be adopted.

The Candidates' Campaign Strategies

The parties' campaign strategies heavily influence the way in which the media can cover elections: Not all candidates mobilize the same means to approach journalists.

The contenders' campaign strategies might, first of all, rely on very different budgets. For the media, it can be a real challenge to give equal coverage while facing candidates with disproportionate means. In particular, the politicians who have access to state funds do not hesitate to use them for their campaign, becoming much more visible than their challengers. In 2001 in Chad and 2002 in Congo-Brazzaville, the media noted that the whole state apparatus was required to contribute to the president's victory. It was therefore difficult for the media to give equal coverage to a serving president – who organized a wide range of rallies, tours of the provinces (with "embedded" journalists taken on board his personal jet), and charity and public events – and to opposition parties that could hardly organize a single rally in the capital.

Moreover, in post-conflict countries in which the main presidential candidates had a military background, electoral campaigns were run like military campaigns. They were meant to seize (or keep) power and planned like combat missions, which required that all available troops and means be mobilized. Military leaders ask no less and no more of their workforce – even if they are paid with public money to serve the population – than to defeat the enemy. All six presidents eventually elected (Bozize, Kagame, Kabila, Nkurunziza, Déby and Sassou Nguesso) had previously led battalions in the regular army or in a rebel movement (or both) before entering the electoral campaign. Five of them were incumbents, accused by their challengers of confiscating public equipment and staff to reinforce their supremacy in the contest. The imbalance observed in the media thus often reflected the disproportion in the campaign means mobilized by candidates.

Campaign strategies also heavily influence the tone of the media coverage, for instance when the political candidates are using inflammatory arguments. In the DRC in 2006, when journalists were accused of spreading xenophobia or directly attacking the honour of particular candidates, they often defended themselves by saying that they were just channelling the politicians' addresses. Indeed, the tensions resulting from the programmes broadcast or the papers published were not so much due to journalists themselves as to the politicians who were given a voice. Media outlet owners also blamed shortcomings on the lack of professionalism of young media

professionals, who were judged unable to properly moderate political debates. Taking them at their word, the HAM decided, in the middle of the campaign, to suspend the politicians from media access rather than to sanction the media or the journalists themselves.

In 2005 in the CAR, the HCC had also noted that "some candidates, including party leaders, [had] started using their allocated airtime to voice abuse, diatribes and hateful comments unworthy of a public representative". It also warned that, in case of a second offence, the HCC "would unfortunately be compelled to suspend the slots allocated to offenders in the public media".[16] And indeed, a few days later, the HCC carried out its threats and prohibited some political parties' spokespeople from access to media.

This issue is tied to the lack of substance of political programmes and parties. Many studies put forward the weakness of African political parties, centred around a "big man", as well as their ethnic or regional foundation (Basedau, Erdmann and Mehler 2007). In these post-conflict countries, the contending political parties are often one of three kinds: former single parties accustomed to one-party rule; former armed rebel movements hastily converted into a political party; or opportunistic initiatives set up to serve personal ambitions and limited to a few members in the capital. The campaigns are often based on the rejection of the other, the threat of a return to war, or untruthful promises, arguments that journalists and the media end up relaying, sometimes involuntarily.

Confusion between Information and Communication

The electoral coverage by the media in Central Africa is strongly influenced by a widespread professional practice: concealed advertorials. The words *gombo* (in Chad), *camora* (in Congo-Brazzaville), *coupage* (in the DRC) and *giti* (in Rwanda) refer to the amount of money journalists receive from organizers to cover an event, or from any source of information that wishes to be quoted. Thus, interviewing a candidate, covering another's rally, or reporting on a civil society organization that supports yet another candidate, are opportunities for journalists to obtain financial rewards from their source of information. Reports based on this kind of deal are always presented to the public as news reports, and not as advertorials, although they always praise the "donor". These deals may provide great financial help to fragile media and ensure that impoverished journalists are paid. But they also dupe the audience and violate the codes of ethics adopted by the journalists in the countries under consideration.

---

16   High Council for Communications, declaration dated 15 April 2005.

The only media among those we have studied which do not practice "rewarded journalism" are those financed by foreign donors (for instance, Radio Okapi and *Le Journal du Citoyen* in the DRC, Radio Ndeke Luka in the CAR, and Radio Isanganiro in Burundi), all of which pay their staff sufficient salaries. Indeed, a journalist from Radio Okapi earns around 800 USD, while a radio reporter in a private Congolese station makes between 80 USD and nothing at all!

Years of a single-party system followed by armed conflicts have nurtured this type of behaviour. Indeed, for decades, African journalists have been considered first and foremost "channels" through which to communicate rather than news professionals whose mission it is to collect, select, crosscheck and diffuse facts independently. After independence, journalists in Central Africa have been continuously used to serve the country's national unity and development plans. More recently, they have been financially rewarded, by donors and international NGOs, for disseminating "peace-building" programmes or papers. This practice of a "paid-by-the-source" type of "journalism" is so common that many political figures only perceive journalists as mouthpieces, who are to be paid for channelling ready-made information. In such a context, equal access and balance are replaced by the potential balance of the *gombos*, *camoras*, *gitis* and *coupages* from the different campaigners.

Opportunities in the Twenty-first Century

The coverage of the post-conflict elections in Central African countries shows a number of shortcomings which explain the gap between the media's ideal role in democracy-building and the one they actually played. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties arising from the nine obstacles described above, some very positive trends and experiments have to be mentioned, as in each country segments of the media greatly contributed to creating a space for a pluralist political debate before the elections.

First, it should be recalled that never before have there been so many media outlets in Central Africa, and never before have they been so diversified or enjoyed such freedom of expression. Despite an unstable context and a decade of widespread violence, hundreds of newspapers, radio and television stations are now operational throughout the region. Elections were an opportunity to observe the extent to which the public space had opened up to critical discussion and contradictory opinions, breaking off the previous single-party unanimity.

Second, most media outlets understand how communication technologies could give them unprecedented opportunities to gather and diffuse

information: Mobile phones and the Internet have revolutionized the circulation of information and increased the possibilities for isolated journalists to access information and communicate with fellow journalists (Frère 2009a). Radio Okapi, for instance, had set up a system to collect results via SMS. After the first round of elections in 2006, the radio drew up a compilation (on the basis of approximately 10 per cent of polling stations) and announced moderate and confirmed trends while partisan television stations on both sides were already announcing the victory of their party, preparing minds to distrust and defy official results. "We played a really essential role in that regard," says the former project manager of Radio Okapi. "I am certain that Radio Okapi prevented more violence."[17]

In Chad in 2001, with the support of the International Organisation of La Francophonie, newspapers were equipped with mobile phones (still rare at the time), and they could despatch their reporters to several towns in the provinces to follow voting operations and communicate information to a central newsroom in N'Djamena. These correspondents denounced many technical shortcomings and irregularities: polling stations that lacked ballot papers; voters with several voting cards; polling stations that did not use indelible ink; places where military personnel voted several times without their identity being checked; places where polling station officials were threatened by soldiers; places where opposition members, who were meant to participate in monitoring voting operations, were prevented from taking part in the election procedure; etc. The media thus had enough data to document the fact that the elections were flawed. In the CAR, thanks to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 17 journalists were also sent into the provinces, equipped with communication tools to remain in contact with Bangui. Those correspondents were responsible for monitoring vote-counting in as many polling stations as they could before sending the data to a central newsroom. The media could then compare their results with those published by the Electoral Commission, whose neutrality was contested. Certain technologies therefore greatly helped to reinforce the ability of the media to report on the transparency of the process.

Third, professional solidarity undeniably reinforced the media's capacities to face up to the elections. Knowing they lacked the means to cover the 2005 elections independently from one another, the Burundian media outlets gathered in a "synergy", an editorial coordination project that ensured them the capacities to cover the elections. Eleven media outlets created a joint newsroom in Bujumbura and established a pool of 116 journalists that

---

17   Yves Laplume, former project manager for Radio Okapi, personal interview, Lausanne, November 2009.

could spread all over the country and send regular reports to the central newsroom. All radio stations could then broadcast simultaneous daily news-casts with information coming from all the main towns in the country. This experiment in joint electoral coverage and broadcasting increased the power of the media to control the electoral process in regions where fraud could have been suspected and helped to guarantee the credibility of the electoral process. The media synergy also played an important role in encouraging turnout on election day, although reports on the security situation were alarming. As the International Crisis Group noted,

> on the eve of the elections, fear was at its highest in several towns in the country […]. On election day, people did not turn out to vote in large numbers. But as time passed, they did make their way to the polling stations, reassured by the radio news broadcasts which re-ported on how quietly the elections were unfolding (ICG 2005: 13).

The synergy also proved very useful to the electoral administration, facili-tating communications with the polling stations as well as with voters. For instance, during the local community elections, the head of the Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante (CENI) used the synergy newscast to inform his colleagues that the closure of the polling stations would be de-layed by a few hours.[18]

Other joint professional initiatives have consolidated solidarity within the media sector: the adoption of codes of conduct before elections, the involvement of self-regulation authorities in media monitoring, and the joint denunciation of press freedom violations have all reinforced the sense of a common professional belonging and enabled the media to consolidate their autonomy from politicians. Wars and conflicts had generally paralysed the professional associations and often led to profound divisions between members, depending on the "side" each one chose during the conflict. But peace and the electoral process have brought new opportunities for journal-ists to meet and work together. Many professional associations and organi-zations came back to life to launch projects to strengthen professional soli-darity, consolidate self-regulation, train journalists and defend the freedom of the press and the rights of media professionals.

In some countries, however, such as Congo-Brazzaville, joint profes-sional initiatives were difficult to initiate, given the strong competition be-

---

18   For the next election, in 2010, another media synergy was set up. It included more media outlets and cost about five times more (more than 1 million USD, instead of less than 200,000 USD, in 2005). Relations between the media, the electoral com-mission and the political parties were quite tense, and the overall assessment was less convincing.

tween heavily politicized media outlets. When political allegiances outweigh professional identity, journalists are the mouthpieces of politicians before being journalists, a hindrance to professional solidarity.

Fourth, even if the relationship between the media and the regulatory body has not always been friendly during those elections, the creation of communications regulatory authorities was in itself a positive evolution. Even though they were accused of having acted favourably toward the incumbent president, the HAM in the DRC and the HCC in the CAR obviously played a major part in monitoring and regulating the media during the post-conflict elections in a context of very high political tensions, with candidates and spokespersons using xenophobic arguments and personal insults. If those institutions need to consolidate their autonomy and become more professional, most of the private media are now convinced of the usefulness of a regulatory body.

Last, these elections have brought the international community to turn its attention to the media sector and to acknowledge the journalists as key players in ensuring peaceful elections. The international community's commitment to supporting the media was not the same everywhere: The greater the former's involvement in the peace process and in the financing of elections, the greater its tendency to support the media, as was the case in the DRC and Burundi.[19] In countries where the national authorities controlled the organization of elections (Congo-Brazzaville, Chad, Rwanda), fewer efforts have been made by foreign donors to strengthen journalists' capacities, though vigilant media risked facing as many (and maybe more) obstacles there. Though donor support has been essential for the completion of many projects with positive repercussions (such as the above media "synergies"), the major drawbacks to this support are that it is short-lived and strictly centred on the elections themselves. The media thus risk finding themselves unable to pursue their work after the polls close and fail to give citizens the information they need to participate in the monitoring and control of the people they have elected.

Conclusion

The nine major obstacles and the five positive aspects identified while observing the work of journalists during those elections were obviously rooted in the post-conflict positions of those six countries. Nevertheless, the situation has not changed much since, even though the specifically defined

---

19   In the DRC, donor support for the media sector reached at least 43 million EUR between 2004 and 2007, during the end of the transition and the electoral process.

"post-conflict" period is over. And most of the issues described above are still relevant as those countries have already organized their second elections after the war (Burundi, CAR, Rwanda, Congo-Brazzaville) or are about to do so (DRC). So, are the media on the right path that could lead them closer to the international standards of "good journalism"? Are they progressing in filling the gap between the role they are expected to play in theory and what they are actually doing in "emerging electoral democracies"?

Our conclusion is that the contribution of the media to democratic consolidation in those six countries can be assessed optimistically or pessimistically, just like the electoral process itself. Indeed, distinct trends have emerged regarding elections on the African continent, their quality and their impact on state-building, leading to positive or negative assessments (Van de Walle 2009: 151).

Regarding the evolution of electoral democracy in Africa in general, 20 years after the political liberalization one has to acknowledge that only a limited number of countries (e.g. Mali, Benin, Senegal) were able to organize regular elections without any violent interruptions. Military coups and civil wars often disturbed the normal electoral calendar (e.g. in Niger, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania). And where conflicts did not break out, the ruling authorities stuck to a "minimal" notion of democratic consolidation, holding regular, pluralist elections, while also establishing mechanisms to control the political opposition (e.g. Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Togo). Most of these regimes evolved into what have been termed "electoral authoritarianisms" (Schedler 2006).

In observing these evolutions, the pessimist perceives elections as a mechanism which merely serves as a semblance of democracy in regimes characterized by clientelism, weak institutions and mediocre economic growth. The optimist, however, claims that the regular holding of pluralist and free elections, even in unfavourable circumstances, can help consolidate democracy and reinforce a sense of citizenship and civic freedoms. In this sense, elections would not only be a component and indicator of democracy, but also a factor of democratization, since each new election would strengthen and develop civil awareness (Lindberg 2006: 20). If rulers manipulate the ballot, perpetrate fraud and threaten voters, they will now be forced to deny these manipulations and recognize that they constitute anomalies. In that way, they will contribute to legitimizing the principle of free elections.

The same conclusion can be applied to the evolution of the media sector regarding its role in building electoral democracy in Central Africa.

After 20 years of liberalization, very few media outlets aside from the ones supported by the international community and foreign NGOs have

been able to develop into powerful tools that can altogether inform the citizens fully, honestly and rigorously; monitor the activities of public and private actors on behalf of citizens; and serve as a platform for society's various components. Given the obstacles described above, most of the region's media outlets are still far from the theoretical model, a fact that could lead as easily to a pessimistic view as it could to an optimistic view.

Pessimists might argue over whether Central African media are not merely, like the elections themselves, gimmicks in the "democracy kit" – unsuited to the context, and perhaps even dangerous arsonists who maintain perverse relations with governments and political actors. Indeed, the difficulties which countries in the region have in generating (without foreign aid) the economic and political conditions necessary for the development of professional media seem widespread. For pessimists, the media, as they currently stand, are at worst instruments at the service of political ambitions, and at best impotent voices addressing citizens who have no power. Just like elections, they contribute to a façade that rulers can use to show the outside world their commitment to democracy: They are indeed a part of an "authoritarian liberal media environment" where private media actually exist but are incapable of helping a real public sphere to emerge.

But optimists will argue that, just as any election can be seen as an opportunity for democratic principles to reinforce themselves, each newspaper, radio station and television station is a voice that helps reinforce the freedom of expression. Paradoxically, even abuses committed by the media can contribute to democracy as long as they are identified, denounced and punished by the entire profession as having violated the principles guiding the responsible exercise of the freedom of the press. For optimists, regardless of their shortcomings, the media's contribution to the creation of a pluralist public space and to the anchoring of citizenship is in itself a huge step forward in Central Africa, one that is indeed irreversible.

References

Article 19 (1994), *Guidelines for Election Broadcasting in Transitional Democracies*, London: Article 19, online: <www.article19.org/data/files/pdfs/tools/electionbroadcastingtrans.pdf> (18 January 2011).

Basedau, Matthias, Gero Erdmann and Andreas Mehler (2007), *Votes, Money and Violence. Political Parties and Elections in Sub-Saharan Africa*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

CEMPC (Centre d'Ecoute et de Monitoring de la Presse Congolaise) (2006a), *Rapport d'observation de la couverture de la campagne électorale pour les élections présidentielles et législatives du 30 juillet 2006*, Kinshasa: HAM, August.

CEMPC (Centre d'Ecoute et de Monitoring de la Presse Congolaise) (2006b), *Rapport d'observation et d'analyse: audiovisuel et presse écrite*, Kinshasa: HAM, October.

Chrétien, Jean-Pierre (ed.) (1995), *Rwanda. Les médias du génocide*, Paris: Karthala.

Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) (2001), *Commonwealth Election Broadcasting Guidelines*, published for the Commonwealth Secretariat, available on <www.cba.org.uk/Resources/publications> (9 June 2011).

De Villers, Gauthier (2009), *République démocratique du Congo. De la guerre aux élections. L'ascension de Joseph Kabila et la naissance de la Troisième République*, Coll. Cahiers Africains, 75, Paris/Tervueren: L'Harmattan/Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale.

EISA (Electoral Institute for the Sustainability of Democracy in Africa) (2006), *Observer Mission Report: D.R. Congo, Presidential, Parliamentary and Provincial Elections*, Johannesburg: EISA.

FIDH (Fédération Internationale des Droits de l'Homme) (2002), *Elections en trompe l'œil au Congo Brazzaville*, Paris: FIDH

Frère, Marie-Soleil (2007), *The Media and Conflicts in Central Africa*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Frère, Marie-Soleil (2009a), News Media Use of ICTs amidst War, Violence and Political Turmoil in the Central African Great Lakes, in: Okoth Fred Mudhai, Wisdom J. Tettey and Fackson Banda (eds.), *African Media and the Digital Public Sphere*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 223-238.

Frère, Marie-Soleil (2009b), After the Hate Media: Regulation in the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda, in: *Global Media and Communications*, 5, 3, 327-352.

Gakosso, Jean-Claude (1997), *La nouvelle presse congolaise. Du goulag à l'agora*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

Howard, Ross (2005), *Media and Elections: An Elections Reporting Handbook*, Vancouver: IMPACS.

ICG (International Crisis Group) (2005), *Élections au Burundi: Reconfiguration radicale du paysage politique*, Brussels/Nairobi.

JED (Journaliste En Danger) (1998-2007), *Annual Reports*, Kinshasa.

JED (Journaliste En Danger) (2006a), *La liberté de la presse en période électorale. Assassinats, agressions, menaces, expulsions, destructions, propagandes, procès bidons et dérapages dans les médias*, November, Kinshasa.

JED (Journaliste En Danger) (2006b), Les règles de sécurité du journaliste pendant la période électorale, in: *La Référence Plus*, 3777, September, 2006, 14.

Kaburahe, Antoine (2002), *Burundi. La mémoire blessée*, Bruxelles: La Longue Vue.

Lange, Bernd-Peter, and Ward David (eds.) (2004), *The Media and Elections: A Handbook and Comparative Study*, London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Lindberg, Staffan (2006), *Democracy and Elections in Africa*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Marthoz, Jean-Paul (ed.) (2000), *Election Reporting Handbook*, Brussels: International Federation of Journalists.

MOE-UE (Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne) (2002), *Congo. Election présidentielle 10 mars 2002. Rapport final*, Brazzaville.

MOE-UE (Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne) (2003), *Rwanda. Elections présidentielles (25 août 2003) et élections législatives (29 et 30 septembre, 2 octobre 2003). Rapport final*, Kigali.

MOE-UE (Mission d'Observation Electorale de l'Union Européenne) (2005), *Elections législatives 2005. Rapport final*, Bujumbura.

Nyamnjoh, Francis B. (2005), *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*, London: Zed Books.

Orme, Bill (2010), *Broadcasting in UN Blue: The Unexamined Past and Uncertain Future of Peacekeeping Radio*, Washington DC: Center for International Media Assistance/New Endowment for Democracy.

Palmans, Eva (2008), *Médias et politique en situation de crise: Le cas du Burundi*, Doctoral Thesis in Language and Literature, University of Antwerp.

Perret, Thierry (2005), *Le temps des journalistes. L'invention de la presse en Afrique francophone*, Paris: Karthala.

Putzel, James, and Joost Van der Zwan (2005), *Why Templates for Media Development Do Not Work in Crisis States: Defining and Understanding Media Development Strategies in Post-War and Crisis States*, London: The London School of Economics and Political Science.

Quantin, Patrick (1998), Pour une analyse comparative des élections africaines, in: *Politique Africaine*, 69, March, 12-28.

Quantin, Patrick (2009), Entre déconnexion et réduction: L'étude des élections et des partis, in: Mamoudou Gazibo and Céline Thiriot (eds.), *Le politique en Afrique. Etat des débats et pistes de recherche*, Paris: Karthala.

Schedler, Andreas (ed.) (2006), *Electoral Authoritarianism: The Dynamics of Unfree Competition*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Sisk, Timothy D., and Andrew Reynolds (eds.) (1998), *Elections and Conflict Management in Africa*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press.

Schnellinger, Lisa (2001), *Free and Fair: A Journalist's Guide to Improve Election Reporting in Emerging Democracies*, Washington DC: International Center for Journalists.

Thompson, Alan (ed.) (2007), *The Media and the Rwanda Genocide*, Pluto Press: London.

Tozzo, Emile (2005), La réforme des médias publics en Afrique: servir le gouvernement ou le citoyen?, in: *Politique Africaine*, 97, March, 99-115.

Vallings, Claire (2005), DFID Electoral Assistance in Fragile States, paper, June, cited in: Charlotte Vaillant, Ann Condy, Pierre Robert and Georges Tshionza (2009), *Country Programme Evaluation: DRC*, Evaluation Report Ev704, London: Department for International Development.

Van De Walle, Nicolas (2009), Démocratisation en Afrique: un bilan critique, in: Mamadou Gazibo and Céline Thiriot (eds.), *Le politique en Afrique. Etat des débats et pistes de recherche*, Paris: Karthala.

Willame, Jean-Claude (2007), *Les "faiseurs de paix" au Congo: Gestion d'une crise internationale dans un Etat sous tutelle*, Brussels: Editions Complexe.

Wahlberichterstattung in Post-Konflikt-Phasen: Herausforderungen für die Medien in Zentralafrika

In den letzten zehn Jahren wurden in sechs zentralafrikanischen Ländern, die sich in einer Post-Konflikt-Phase befanden, Wahlen abgehalten. Die Wahlgänge in Burundi (2005), der Zentralafrikanischen Republik (2005), der Demokratischen Republik Kongo (2006), Kongo-Brazzaville (2002, 2007), dem Tschad (1996, 2001, 2006) und Ruanda (2003) waren entscheidend für die Friedenskonsolidierung. Einige dieser Wahlen wurden von der internationalen Gemeinschaft umfassend unterstützt und überwacht, denn sie wurden als letzte Stufe des Friedensprozesses und erster Schritt hin zu einer repräsentativen politischen Ordnung angesehen. Den Medien wurde eine wichtige Rolle zur Unterstützung dieser Wahlen zugeschrieben, sowohl in Bezug auf die Information der Bürger, damit diese eine auf Kenntnissen beruhende Entscheidung treffen könnten, als auch auf die Überwachung der Organisation der Wahlen durch die Verwaltung. Dieser Beitrag versucht, die vielen Herausforderungen zu zeigen, denen sich die Medien bei der Wahlberichterstattung ausgesetzt sahen. In einer Situation starker politischer Spannung, in der die Kandidaten häufig ehemalige Kriegsteilnehmer sind, die ihre Waffen nur für den Wahlgang niedergelegt haben, operieren die Medien in einem Umfeld, das durch Unsicherheit und wirtschaftliche Zerstörung gekennzeichnet ist. Ihre Arbeit leidet unter der mangelhaften Infrastruktur, ihrer ungenügenden Ausrüstung und nicht ausreichend qualifizierten Mitarbeitern. Angesichts dieser Unzulänglichkeiten ist fraglich, ob die Medien in Zentralafrika wirklich als Instrumente der Demokratisierung angesehen werden können oder (wie auch „freie und faire" Wahlen, Mehrparteiensys-

tem und Pressefreiheit) eher als ein Element aus dem „Peacebuilding-Bausatz" ohne wirkliche Bedeutung für die demokratische Einstellung der Elite oder die politische Partizipation der Bevölkerung.

Schlagwörter: Zentralafrika, Burundi, Kongo (Brazzaville), Kongo (Kinshasa), Ruanda, Tschad, Zentralafrikanische Republik, Wahl/Abstimmung, Nachkonfliktphase, Verhältnis Politik – Medien, Informationszugang