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The Mass Media Systems of Kenya and Tanzania: A Comparative Analysis

by Dele Ogunade

Abstract

The article is a comparative study of the mass media systems of Kenya and Tanzania.

The author examines the historical, geographical, political, economic, social and cultural factors which shape the mass media systems in the two countries.

The article concludes that the factors of literacy and politico-economic system are destined to have significant impact on the future growth and shape of the mass media in Kenya and Tanzania.

Résumé

Cet article est une étude comparative des systèmes de média au Kenya et en Tanzanie.

L'auteur examine les facteurs historiques géographiques, politiques, économiques et culturels aux contours desquels sont organisés les systèmes des deux pays.

L'article a conclu que l'alphabétisation et le système politique et économique auront un impact significatif sur la croissance et la forme des mass média au Kenya et en Tanzanie.

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Introduction:

A comparative study of the mass media systems of two countries must take account of the historical, geographical, political, economic, social and cultural factors which shape the mass media systems in the two countries. This is because, as several scholars have noted, the nature of a country's history, population, geography, and politico-economic system goes a long way toward explaining the characteristics of its mass media.¹ Against such a background, this study offers a comparative analysis of the mass media systems of Kenya and Tanzania – two adjacent African nations sharing a related history dating back to the pre-colonial era, a common culture and ethnic makeup, and a common set of geographical and natural conditions that bear on the day-to-day lives of their people.

Since attaining nationhood in the early 1960s, Kenya and Tanzania have received the attention of students of African politics and development because of the divergent conceptions of development each has chosen to pursue. Analyses of the societal institutions of these divergent conceptions of development have invariably involved an analysis of the mass media systems of both nations. Consequently, there is a body of literature on the mass media of both nations.

Literature Review

Kenya and Tanzania mass media systems have been the objects of several studies. Hachten looked at the Kenyan press under a one-party form of government and expressed reservation about the degree of freedom the press enjoys.² James F. Scotton, who has studied the Kenyan mass media extensively, detailed the unusual success of African-language papers in a continent still dominated by a press in English, French, and other European languages.³ He observes pointedly that in a developing multi-lingual nation such as Kenya, successful and popular publication in a *lingua franca* such as Swahili are extremely important for national integration;

Scotton further analyzed the patterns of readership and ownership of Kenya's four major newspapers controlled by two non-African owners.⁴ He found that both in content and readership, these newspapers are usually divided not along ownership lines but along language lines, two being published in English and two in Swahili. These language lines are also major boundaries of Kenya's racial and socio-economic groups.

Peter Mwaura's *Communication Policies in Kenya* is perhaps the most comprehensive survey of Kenya mass media to date. Both in breath and depth, Mwaura's study examines the Kenya mass media in relation to

the historical, political, social and economic development of the Kenyan nation. Mwaura recognizes the largely underdeveloped state of the Kenya mass media but contends that the mass media, as a "vital and integral part of Kenya's development strategy," are likely to grow if "they address more directly the interests and concerns of the *wananchi* and, at the same time the literacy base is widened."⁵

In a study of mass media development in Tanzania, Graham L. Mytton outlines the problems of the mass media vis-a-vis the country's geography, population distribution, economics, literacy, and political history.⁶ He found that the mass media, although a very recent phenomena, have already played an important role in the development of national consciousness. Mytton concludes that people in the remotest village are today brought into daily contact with the political events that earlier would have taken weeks to reach them, if indeed they ever reached them at all.

John C. Condon, in a study of nation building and image building in the Tanzanian press, found that the press mirrors the political consciousness of a newly independent state and reflects some of the ambiguities that accompany political articulation in a one-party democracy.⁷ Analyzing four daily newspapers, Condon devotes special attention to the "new geography" which is presented on an attempt to anticipate the world image or "psychological geography" which results from reading the daily newspaper. Condon concludes that the selection of what news to print reflects the tensions and conflicts between an ideal news policy and the limitations imposed by the lack of funds, personnel, and the influence of the western news services.

Condon and Neher, in a comparative study of the mass media and nation building in Kenya and Tanzania, pointed out that such forms of traditional cultural expression as drama, literature, and dance are possible media for creating an ambience for the emergence of a national culture.⁸ Contending that mobilization of a national consciousness, to supersede regional and ethnic consciousness, is partially a function of communication, Condon and Neher concluded that those which are characterized by immediacy - radio, television, film - can be most effective in the political mobilization process.

In an analysis of the role of the Tanzania press in the formation of foreign policy, Okwudiba Nnoli found the press generally supportive of government policies.⁹ According to Nnoli, the foreign news content of Tanzania newspapers appeared to be sketchy, crisis oriented, and lacking in any serious analyses.

In his analysis of the role of the mass media in developing countries, N. Ngwanakilala, in *Mass Communication and Development of Socialism*

According to Joel D. Barkan, a scholar of Kenyan and Tanzanian politics, some of the significant benefits attributable to Kenya's history as a colony with a large European settlement were:

- (1) extensive development of cash crop,
- (2) larger and more developed urban areas, and
- (3) greater expenditures by the colonial government on schools, roads, and other public services.¹⁴

Another benefit was the establishment of modern mass media in Kenya long before Tanzania.¹⁵ Unlike Kenya, Tanzania's very small European settler community, high illiteracy of the African population, and the late development of African nationalism all combined to slow the introduction and development of the mass media. However, this lateness worked to Tanzania's advantage in that from their inception the media catered for the African population.¹⁶

Geography

To understand aspects of a country's media, Merrill and Lowenstein posit that the size of a country, the physical barriers to overland communication, and the location of major cities are important elements.¹⁷ A look at the maps of Kenya and Tanzania shows the differences in size, location of major cities, and physical barriers to overland communications.

With an area of 364,900 square miles, Tanzania includes the highest and lowest parts of Africa which are great barriers to communication. Tanzania's size, relatively low population density (40 per square mile), few urban centers, and scattered rural population have all influenced aspects of its mass media. For example, daily newspapers are urban oriented and large capital expenditures are required to bring radio signals to the scattered rural population.

In contrast, Kenya because of its small size does not suffer from Tanzania's geographical disabilities. With an area of 219,788 square miles, Kenya is mainly extensive plains dotted here and there by hills and Mount Kenya. Unlike Tanzania, Kenya's population density is high, reaching more than 1,000 persons per square mile in the South-Western quadrant of the country. Approximately 75 per cent of the population is contained in only 10 per cent of Kenya. This concentration of the population has made the task of communicating with the people easier and cheaper. Despite the concentration of the population, newspapers in Kenya and Tanzania are urban oriented.

Population:

The population maps of Kenya and Tanzania illustrate the differences peculiar to each country in terms of size, urbanization, languages spoken, education and affluence. Kenya has the advantages of its population being largely concentrated in an area easy to reach and its capital Nairobi, being situated near the center of this populated area. Tanzania is not that fortunate. Mytton captures succinctly Tanzania's communication problems with wildly scattered, un-urbanized population.¹⁸

A compensating factor that Tanzania enjoys over Kenya is the widespread use and understanding of the national language, Swahili. This factor has laid the basis for cultural and political integration of Tanzania's scattered population. Swahili is widely spoken and understood in Kenya but no means universally.

The high illiteracy, little urbanization, and low per capital income of the masses of Kenya and Tanzania have combined to stunt the growth of the press and make radio the pervasive medium it is today.¹⁹ For instance, by 1984 the highest circulation attained by a daily in either country was 100,572 by Kenya's *Daily Nation*.

Politico-Economic System

Besides having the same pre-independence British colonial master, Kenya and Tanzania are both one-party states. The ruling parties in both countries at independence gradually became the only parties: the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in Kenya and the Tanganyika African National Union renamed the Chama Cha Mapinduzi (The Revolutionary Party (CCM) in Tanzania. There the similarity ends.

In the years immediately following independence, Kenya and Tanzania have pursued divergent politico-economic policies with both being perceived as prototypes of capitalist and socialist developments respectively. To be specific, Tanzania has committed itself to building a socialist society through the 1967 Arusha Declaration which stressed national self-reliance. In contrast, Kenya has sought to develop its political economy on the basis of patron-client capitalism with private enterprise and foreign finance playing an important role.²⁰

As it is to be expected, the mass media systems of both nations reflect their politico-economic realities. For one thing, Tanzania's mass media, mostly state owned, are more politicized than Kenya because of the important role they have been assigned in the political education of the masses. In particular, they supplement the activities of CCM in the

encouragement of hard work and self-reliance, and in teaching people about their role in the developing country.²¹ In contrast, the privately owned Kenya press does not take such explicit ideological stands.

The Press

Although it is the first of the modern mass media to be established in Kenya and Tanzania, the press today remains a medium with a limited audience largely because of high illiteracy and distribution problems.²² Burdened by the disabilities arising from developing economics, the Kenya and Tanzania press continue to play a useful albeit limited role in the affairs of their countries.

Table 1 compares the vital statistics of the Kenyan and Tanzanian daily press. The daily papers in both nations are complemented by a battery of weeklies, fortnightlies and monthlies published in Swahili and English. The principal ones in Kenya are *Sunday Nation* (100,902), *Taifa Weekly* (63,012), *Chemsha Bongo* (10,000); and *Weekly Review* (25,000).

Both nations have expanding rural newspapers to satisfy the information needs of the rural population. Tanzania is reportedly "experimenting with the largest and most ambitious rural newspaper project in East Africa" and its Swahili monthly *Elimu Haina Mwisho* (Education has no end), with a circulation of 100,000, is the "largest circulating rural newspaper."²³

A content analysis of the daily press showed that "the 'news geography' for the Kenyan press is comparable to that presented in the Tanzanian press. The Swahili press tends to focus on national or local items with heavy emphasis on speeches by government officials and other political figures. The emphasis in the newspapers of both languages in both countries is on news from or about their own country."²⁴

A feature of the daily newspapers published in Tanzania is that they are highly politicized. According to the editor of one of the papers, "We preach and exhort about 90 per cent of the time....."²⁵ This prompted this elaboration from Condon, a scholar of the Tanzanian press: "If President Nyerere is officially the Teacher (Mwalimu) of the nation, the party press is the Preacher."²⁶

Because of their politicization and the socialist ideology of the nation, the Tanzanian papers do not have "a 'society page' or column on the social life of 'national personalities.'"²⁷ In addition, the Tanzanian press does not carry "any photographs or stories about weddings, engagements, baptisms, 'sundowners' or dinner parties."²⁸ Finally, the poetry, written by readers and published daily, is a unique feature of the Swahili language-press.

Condon estimates that occasionally as much as 25 per cent of the Swahili papers are devoted to poetry, usually in praise of the nation, the leaders, Africa, or attacking colonialism.²⁹

In contrast, the Kenya press though not party politicized is ideologically partisan. According to Mwaura, the Kenya press "lacks a well-defined concept of what is African about it. It is elitist and urban-oriented. It is Western in orientation....."³⁰

Radio and Television

Although Kenya and Tanzania show contrasting patterns of public and private ownership and operation of news papers, neither deviates from the standard African practice of state ownership and control of radio broadcasting. This practice is due partly to the pattern of radio control in colonial times. Additionally, Ainslie notes that there is a belief throughout Africa that radio is a powerful instrument of political control and that possession of the broadcasting facilities confers legitimacy on the regime in power.³¹

In Kenya, radio broadcasting and television are operated under the control of the Kenya government through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, and is known as the Voice of Kenya (VoK). Programmes for the whole country originate from Nairobi and are relayed by other stations located in Mombasa, Timboros, Nandi Hills, and Kisumu. The main languages used in radio broadcast are Swahili and English, but programmes are also broadcast in 16 local languages.

Television was launched in Kenya in October 1962. Through expansion, most of the country now is blanketed. The main languages of TV programs are English and Swahili and the TV stations are on the air for about 38 hours per week. Local programmes occupy about 60 per cent of total transmissions. Both radio and TV broadcasts are steadily increasing amount of advertising though there is a policy banning the broadcast of programmes with explicit violence, shooting or murder, sex, or other activities considered inimical to the social health of the nation.³²

The government waived the payment of the annual radio and television license fees since the beginning of the 1970/1971 financial year. This probably resulted in increased ownership of radio and TV sets. A 1972 survey showed that there were about 35,000 TV sets and 1,050,000 radio sets in use in Kenya.³³ By 1981, there were an estimated 1.6 million radio receivers and 100,000 TV sets in use.

Radio Tanzania is a department of the Ministry of Information and Tourism, which took over broadcasting from the Tanganyika Broadcasting

Corporation. Radio Tanzania broadcasts three main services: the national, commercial, and external services. At present, Radio Tanzania does not broadcast in any regional or ethnic languages. The national and commercial services are entirely in Swahili. Though music and light entertainment continue to be the main fares of the national services, the requirement that at least 70 per cent of the music has to be of East African origin gives the national service a distinct Tanzanian flavor.³⁴

Radio Tanzania's external service is more politicized and reflects Tanzania's commitment to the liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Most major liberation movements of Southern Africa are provided free broadcast time. This is in marked contrast to what obtains in Kenya.

Condon's survey of Tanzania's communication systems indicates that radio is probably the country's most important means of disseminating news. In answer to the question on their favourite kind of radio programme, 55 per cent said news.³⁵ No accurate and up-to-date data are available on the number of radio and TV sets in use in Tanzania. In 1969, radio licenses were abolished to encourage set ownership. By 1981, an estimated 500,000 radio receivers and 7,200 TV sets in Zanzibar were in use in Tanzania. The Tanzanian government has held back on the introduction of television partly out of a desire to wait until it has the capacity for local production.³⁶

News Agencies

Both nations' press, radio and television are serviced by fledgling national news agencies. The Kenya News Agency (KNA), established in 1963, is responsible for gathering local news and has offices all over the country. KNA transmits more local news than the local media can use on any given day and has purchased interception rights from the major news agencies. Tanzania's national news agency, Shihata, operates on similar lines as KNA though it does not operate a picture service for local newspapers as KNA does. Several major international news agencies have offices in both nations' capitals but more of these offices are located in Nairobi.

Traditional Mass Media

Leonard Doob, in his discussion of "basic" media, refers to clothes or fashions of dress as also a traditional means of communication in Africa.³⁷ While modern mass media are pervasive, the last few years have seen increasing stress on the use of traditional media for communicating political

Table 1

Comparison of Daily Newspapers in Kenya and Tanzania

Newspapers	Daily Nation	The Standard	Taifa Leo	Kenya Leo	Kenya Times	Daily News	Kipanga	Uhuru
Ownership	Private	Private	Private	KANU	KANU	Govt.	Govt.	CCM
Language	English	English	Swahili	Swahili	English	English	Swahili	Swahili
Daily Circulation	100,572	32,000	49,000	* *	* *	39,000	* *	100,000
Founded	1960	1902	1960	1983	1983	1972	1964	1962
City of Publication	Nairobi	Nairobi	Nairobi	Nairobi	Nairobi	Dar es Salaam	Zanzibar	Dar es Salaam

* * Figures not available.

or developmental goals. Thus public speeches, rallies, demonstration, dances, oral literature and group singing are regularly employed in Kenya and Tanzania to communicate contemporary messages and further national integration. For instance, "the singing of songs like 'Mungu Ibariki Afrika' (God Bless Africa) or 'Kanu Yajenga Nchi' (KANU builds the Nation) has become a means of communicating political solidarity and legitimacy by political parties in Kenya and Tanzania."³⁸

According to Neher and Condon, "Songs in political campaigns are particularly important in countries like Kenya and Tanzania because political advertising over the national mass media is either prohibited or prohibitively expensive."³⁹ And Mwaura asserts that since it is Kenyan official policy to receive and promote African culture, "It has become common place for communities and groups to communicate with government leaders and politicians through traditional dancing, songs and folklores - and messages are unmistakable and compelling."⁴⁰

Summary and Conclusion

An attempt was made to assess comparatively the mass media of Kenya and Tanzania within the context of those factors which impinged on their growth and present status. Differences and similarities were noted. The dynamic changes daily taking place in developing nations like Kenya and Tanzania mean nothing including the mass media as discussed in this study is fixed and inalterable. It seems the factors of literacy and politico-economic systems are destined to have significant impact on the future growth and shapes of the mass media in Kenya and Tanzania.

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