

**MEDIA DEVELOPMENT, CENSORSHIP AND WORKING  
CONDITIONS OF JOURNALISTS IN THE REPUBLIC OF BENIN  
(WEST AFRICA)**

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*This contribution explores the structural and political conditions of journalism in the Republic of Benin. It discusses opportunities, but also constraints on the prospering of independent and excellent media productions, including economic aspects as well as modes of censorship. I argue that we have to consider not only direct interventions by media authorities and the central state, but also indirect modes of obstructing the freedom of press. Furthermore, it focuses on the precarious working conditions of young media professionals, exemplified by radio producers (presenters, DJs, technicians, and journalists). Despite the various challenges they are facing, many of them manage to acquire a substantial appreciation among both their colleagues and their audiences.*

**Keywords:** Africa, Benin, journalism, media, radio, censorship

## Introduction: Media in Benin

My analysis investigates the situation of media in the Republic of Benin, a small country in West Africa with a turbulent history. Colonized by the French, the country gained independence as the Republic of Dahomey in 1960. The young state underwent a period of political instability with several *coups d'état* from 1960 to 1972 and a longer socialist period (1972-1989), characterized by a dictatorial system. In 1990, a national conference opened the way for a more democratic political system.

Unlike many Anglophone colonies in West Africa, mass media emerged slowly in Dahomey. The first newspapers were colonial gazettes, edited by the colonial administration or circles of expatriates in the capital of Porto-Novo. In the 1930s and 1940s, several few independent journals newspapers were launched, but later banned due to anti-colonial activities of their editors. In 1946, the Catholic Church, present in the country since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, inaugurated its own magazine, *La Croix* (which still exists today). After independence, governmental newspapers in particular and magazines such as *Daho Express* proliferated. They were departments of the respective Ministries of Information. Only a few independent periodicals were published between 1960 and 1972.

Electronic broadcasting only emerged in the 1950s, with the creation of Radio Cotonou in 1953. After independence it was renamed Radio Dahomey and integrated in the newly established public Broadcasting House ORTB (*Office de Radiodiffusion et Télévision du Bénin*). In the 1970s, the radio service figured as *La Voix de la Révolution* with an enlarged program schedule and began airing shows in various African languages. Furthermore, the state established a regional station in Parakou. In 1978, a TV station was also set up<sup>1</sup>, but only slowly started to penetrate the country. During the socialist period (1972-1989), government propaganda and educational broadcasting dominated most programs.

The national conference in 1990 and the promulgation of a new constitution<sup>2</sup> set the stage for considerable media liberalization that consequently led to new independent newspapers and, later, rural radio stations (Grätz, 2003). Consequently, the period just after the national conference saw a veritable blossoming of freer

<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of August 2013, a second TV channel, named BB24 (Benin Business 24), owned by ORTB was established. It focuses especially on information and developmental issues.

<sup>2</sup> The 1990 constitution guarantees and protects freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, in articles 23 and 24. Article 23 states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, opinion and expression in accordance with the public order established by law and regulations". Article 24 stipulates that "freedom of the press is recognized and guaranteed by the State. It is protected by the High Authority for Audiovisual and Communication (HAAC) under the conditions laid down by an organic law". The latter law was promulgated in 1992 (Loi Organique N°92-021 du 21 août 1992 relative à la Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de Communication, HAAC).

and ample media productions, above all with regard to newspapers. The number grew systematically, especially in times of elections, and now comes up to about 100 different daily newspapers, plus various weeklies and magazines.

In 1997, a new media law<sup>3</sup> also enabled the establishment of independent radio and TV stations (Adjovi, 2001; Carlos & Djogbénu, 2005). These are generally licensed by the Supreme Media Board *Haute Autorité de l'Audiovisuel et de la Communication* (HAAC) and have contributed to a growing openness with regard to political debates. Ongoing debates among journalists revolved, however, around the inevitability of greater professionalism, the autonomy of media production and the necessity to modify media legislation. A new media law<sup>4</sup> was finally approved by the parliament in January 2015, offering journalists a somewhat larger room for maneuver. It modifies the previous severe penal sentences (e.g. for offensive statements) and standardizes an easier access to news sources.

The field of journalism and media production (in the sense of Bourdieu, cf. Benson & Neveu, 2005) is constantly growing; as is the vibrant industry of film and video, and also the increasing number of smaller and larger commercial media production companies. The resulting multiplicity of media production, as well as the increasing availability of media technologies, allow both media consumers and producers to combine and interrelate different media.

In spite of the increasing mediatisation (Krotz, 2001) of the social landscape in Benin, radio is still the most important electronic mass media in Benin (Grätz 2014). Although television is growing in its importance, with five larger channels (Golfe TV, Canal 3, LC2 and two state channels) and some regional TV stations currently available, there are many more radio stations, with broadcasts reaching numerous people: from office clerks to night watchmen, shopkeepers, university students and schoolchildren. Radio devices are easily accessible; basic devices with loudspeakers only cost around five euros, while those without speakers only cost around one euro. The availability of radio programs continues to rise, supported by the booming popularity and use of mobile phones to access radio channels all across West Africa. Today, about 80 radio broadcasters are operating across the country, especially in the major urban areas such as Cotonou and Parakou. These metropolitan areas offer listeners the opportunity to choose between various stations and multifaceted program schedules, including information, entertainment, advice and announcements.

<sup>3</sup> Loi n°97-010 du 20 août 1997 sur la démonopolisation des ondes.

<sup>4</sup> *Code de l'information et de la communication*, 22 janvier 2015.

## Journalism in Benin: Structural Constraints and Modes of Censorship

Despite a general openness of the media system and its growing plurality, a free and bold development of media and journalism in Benin is still hampered by various circumstances that I will explore in the following chapter. Firstly, I would like to propose to distinguish various levels of constraints that are limiting an unhampered activity of journalists in the country. These may comprise 1) legal-institutional and structural-economic aspects, 2) direct and indirect modes of censorship, as being exercised primarily by the state (including “soft censorship”, see below) and the supreme media board HAAC, 3) professional attitudes and modes of self-censorship, and finally 4) the general place of media and its relevance in everyday life in Benin.

On the first level, we have to look at the conditions that enable journalists to establish media outlets. To start a newspaper is rather easy – it only needs to be registered with the Ministry of the Interior – whereas radio and TV stations as electronic media are licensed by the HAAC only periodically after a call for applications followed by procedures of assessing the documents<sup>5</sup>. This procedure is, however, not always a guarantee of success. In 2008, the HAAC was in fact already licensing various new electronic media, including local radio stations, but the Ministry of Information refused the final signature based on technicalities, evoking the absence of a proper study of available frequencies. Broadcasting frequencies are, in fact, not available to an unlimited extent, but in this case the argument was played out in a moment when the president was not in favor especially of those radio stations run by people or groups distant to his regime.

Secondly, once a media outlet is established, its daily survival is difficult to assure. Newspapers in Benin derive their revenue from the sale of print copies or through subscriptions only to a very limited extent. Sponsors, either from political parties, individual politicians or businesspeople, substantially contribute to the budget, as well as clients using the newspapers to publish advertisements. Thus, the editorial line of the periodical is often not independent from those contributing to its existence. Economic conditions incline radio and TV stations to sign contracts for large advertisement campaigns. Another factor is the growing influence of religious actors, not only founding their own radio stations such as Radio Maranatha or Radio Alléluia, but also buying airtime from TV and radio stations to broadcast their programs. One side effect is that often news shows or political reporting have to be re-scheduled to give priority to those clients.

<sup>5</sup> The last attribution of frequencies was issued in 2013.

Censorship in Benin includes a wide array of interventions and measures to shape the activity of journalists, including more direct interventions, such as lawsuits against media outlets or journalists, as well as indirect strategies, i.e. intimidating phone calls or bribing critical journalists to tame their voices. In this regard, the country witnessed a certain shift of censorship to more indirect procedures, parallel to the swearing-in of the (incumbent) president of Benin, Yayi Boni in 2006. After the national conference of 1990, and the appearance of many new independent newspapers and magazines especially after 1992, more and more journalists started to openly criticize political positions. This situation changed to a certain extent after the (re)election of president Kérékou in 1996. His administration put a little more pressure on journalists, and several cases of prosecutions and imprisonment were reported. The government did not, however, systematically and effectively persecute independent periodicals, and was also not opposed to a new law introduced by the parliament in 1997 that helped state independent TV and radio stations to emerge. As several observers mentioned, Kérékou himself was not that much interested in what newspapers and journals stated about him. He was very much present in TV, which covered all his activities very closely, but allowed also critical programs such as *entre nous* to be aired on public TV. Some of his followers tried to manipulate certain editors, but faced the public power of those in opposition.

The situation changed very much with the arrival of the new president Boni Yayi. Yayi employed a wide array of diverse strategies to control the media, including more direct interventions but primarily indirect strategies or modes of “soft censorship” (Podesta, 2012). First, he staffed his PR department (*cellule de communication*) very well, and with insiders from the field of media in Benin. They helped him to exercise control of various newspapers and radio stations thanks to a series of contracts they made them sign, where the media outlets agreed simultaneously to publish information issued by the government and to refrain from disseminating critical statements against the latter. Almost all the contracts were drafted in a similar form. Seeing the economic problems of most journals, newspapers and electronic media mentioned earlier in my contribution, most directors signed the contract, enabling their structure to survive. This included media such as the Broadcasting House Golfe with its TV station, radio and journal, which used to be known to voice critical statements and employ a distinct style of journalism. A few media outlets refused to sign such a contract, among them was Radio CAPP FM.

The latter station is one of the most successful in Benin in terms of popularity and may still live off advertising, especially aired before and after a daily press

review in the local language Fongbé, widely followed in the Cotonou area. Here, also critical commentaries were included, very much to the disgust of the government. Its daily press review in local languages was, however, under pressure from the government, because the presenter Dah Houawé sometimes added his own accentuation to the news. Furthermore, rumor has it that he was bribed for selecting some newspapers, a fact that cannot be verified.

Many observers saw nevertheless the success of the show as the main reason behind the temporal closure of the station, known for often taking a critical position towards the regime, in 2009 by the HAAC, on the ground of defamatory statements of a guest presenter. In addition, other media or particular programs were closed or temporarily suspended by the HAAC as well. This was, for example, the case with the newspaper *Le Béninois libéré*, which was closed in December 2011 because of statements judged as inappropriate (characterizing several African heads of state visiting a summit in Cotonou, as ‘criminals’). Furthermore, in March 2012, the daily *Le Potentiel* had to interrupt its work for three months. It published a comment alleging a former public prosecutor of wrongdoing. In May 2012, two other journals, *Actu-express* and *Aujourd’hui au Bénin* were suspended for false information by the HAAC as well (Dares, 2012). The journal *Aujourd’hui au Bénin* had been already suspended for a month in January 2012. In November 2012, the widely followed morning show “Actu Matin” on Canal 3 that was promoting vivid political debates was temporarily suspended by the HAAC because of alleged “intoxications”.

Each of these measures were, however, perceived by most journalists in Benin in a different light: Whereas the temporary closure of Radio CAPP FM triggered heavy protests as well as solidarity, the closing down of the journal *Le Béninois libéré* was seen as exaggerated though not fully unjustified act, as the journal was already known for its lack of professional standards. Leading journalists such as Hado, Ehoumi, Kakpo or Carlos are quite aware of the necessity to discuss among their peers all such cases of offense and false information, as well as the abuse of the media by politicians or businesspeople. Such misuse of the media was, for instance, the cause for the complete closure, ordered by the HAAC, of Radio Tonignon in Zogbodomey in May 2011, because its founder Zéphirin Kindjanhoundé used the station to promote his own parliamentary election campaign (HAAC, Décision N°11- 024 / HAAC du 4 mai 2011; Gbaguidi, 2011).

The HAAC is certainly an important institution, but its current members are apparently not free from governmental control either (see below). Furthermore, some individual critical journalists are still intimidated. This concerned above all Wilfrid Hounghédji, journalist at the state owned daily *La Nation*, who was tem-

porarily removed from the news desk and seconded to a less important position. In November 2013, François Yovo, publisher of the newspaper *Libération* was sentenced for three months in prison for alleged defamation critical articles on corruption. In 2014, the newspaper *L'Indépendant* was heavily struck by severe sentences for “insults” against President Thomas Boni Yayi. Its publication was suspended for six months, the journalist Prudence Tessi was imprisoned for two months and its publisher John Akintola sentenced for three years on probation plus a fine.

Discontent among journalists<sup>6</sup> and members of the civil society reached a new peak in January 2015 when the TV journalist Osias Sounouvou was banned from the screen after issuing a critical statement<sup>7</sup> urging president Yayi Boni, just back from his participation in a public rally in Paris in support of the satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, to end the unidirectional way of reporting dominating the coverage of the state broadcaster ORTB.

A typical mode of obstructing independent media, here in the form of soft censorship, is related to severe fiscal controls, i.e. to examine the accounts of a media outlet, where in many cases irregularities can be found, and to impose high tax fines on them, so that they have either to close down or sign contracts, such as those mentioned above. Furthermore, some eminent owners of media outlets were given important positions in state institutions, of course with the intention to bind them to the president's policies and avoid critical positions. This applies, for example, to Janvier Yahouédéhou, owner of *Radio Planète* (Cotonou) and an ally of Yayi for a certain time, who was appointed adviser of the president, and Issa Badarou, director of the private broadcaster *Radio Wékè* (Djèrègbè), who became Minister of maritime transports. Furthermore, eminent members of churches were promoted, among them Reverend Marcellin Zannou, customs officer and the founder of *Radio Alléluia*, an outlet of the Celestial Church of Christ (*Église du Christianisme Céleste*). At the beginning of his presidency, also the successful media manager Charles Toko, controlling the journal *Le Matinal* and *Radio Océan* was on the side of the government, but later the relationship deteriorated and now he works again against the president. Conversely, the owner of the media group Canal 3, Issa Salifou, came into trouble with the president

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<sup>6</sup> Their critical position was recently reiterated (Message des Associations Professionnelles des Medias à la HAAC, Journée de la Liberté de la Presse, Edition 2015, Prononcé par le Président de L'UPMB, Représentant des Associations Professionnelles, 8 Mai 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqi1aj1ESac> (9.5.2015)



in 2012<sup>8</sup> and then declared, certainly to ensure the survival of his media group, loyalty to Yayi.

Technical measures can be a powerful way to disrupt proper broadcasting, such as in the action taken against the French broadcaster RFI, whose broadcasting emitters were simply switched off for a while in 2011. Their local correspondent was also several times the object of intimidation. Indirect modes of hampering the free, bold and multifaceted coverage of political life include, among others, the attitudes of politicians and their spokespersons to prevent access to information, to documents, to refuse confrontation with requests to verify and give interviews. Modes of steering the content of media coverage by state officials also include the exclusion of critical journalists from invitations to press conferences and promote others who are in favor of them. Furthermore, paid advertisements and information may be placed in uncritical journals only.

The role of PR departments is another important element of political life in Benin that should be critically assessed. As a substantial part of the budget of ministries, state companies as well as international organizations, NGOs and private operators, PR departments are usually reserved for outreach and public relations. In many cases, these organizations or firms would nominate representatives or establish a PR department issuing not only press releases, but also editing journal articles or information campaigns. Very often, they organize press conferences and employ various strategies to shape the image of their employer. In fact, many journalists found jobs in these departments, or working for smaller institutions without a PR department on a contractual basis. They profit from their knowledge of the media industry and their contacts within it, but are obliged to not only do everything to improve the reputation and image of their employers, but also the political interests they may pursue.

This does not exclude direct attacks on journalists, either by intimidating phone calls or by lawsuits. Governmental forces occasionally also do not shy away from directly attacking journalists, as several cases of police abuse against journalists during the last couple of years reveal. In March 2011, for instance, the reporter Séidou Choubadé of the daily *Le Nokoué* was heavily beaten by the police, despite showing his press card to police. He was covering a march of oppositional parties, protesting against the results of the presidential elections of 2011,

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<sup>8</sup> In October 2012, a quarrel occurred between the state broadcaster ORTB and the media group that owns the private TV channel Canal 3. The latter apparently used installations on pylons of the ORTB, that were initially allowed to install mobile phone services of the same media group only, to also install its transmitters, without signing an additional contract. The installations were removed and caused a temporary suspension of reception of that channel before new technical solutions were found.

which declared Yayi the winner. This event resulted in a public rally of about 400 journalists protesting against such violations of the press code<sup>9</sup>.

Furthermore, we witness a certain degree of self-censorship with regard to certain topics and issues that seldom leave the realm of rumors and *radio trottoir*. This applies, among other things, to the private life of politicians, actors or businesspersons, as well as religious and ethnic differences. In this regard, we may detect a rather positive side of the current media system of Benin. Although some magazines (e.g. *paparazzi magazine*) have started to focus on the private life of musicians, the country does not (yet) feature large-scale boulevard journalism. Furthermore, it is not common to see critical statements against former presidents and other senior politicians, who are respected despite their often compromising political careers in the past. In addition, some political events or periods in the country's history are usually not part of media coverage, such as the socialist period and the human rights violations of that era, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts. Here, a kind of consensus reigns, following the national conference that appealed for reconciliation and (legal) amnesty. Some of these topics, together with those pointing at larger scandals, form part of individual book publications (cf. Adoun & Awoudo, 2008). Curiously, no governmental intercession occurred when these books were published, obviously because of their limited proliferation, since these are usually bought and read only by a few intellectuals.

When we look at modes of self-censorship of journalists, we also have to assess the way in which they cover events, often driven by economic necessities of daily survival first. A coverage of a press conference of a political party, when per diems paid by the PR department could be expected, is not only preferred to other potential topics, but also will certainly result in rather benevolent news reports. Here, the working conditions of journalists (see in more detail below) may obviously have a direct or indirect influence on standards of reporting as well. Many journalists themselves detect this problem as well (cf. Agognon & Eyebiyi, 2011; Assogba, 2011). Furthermore, the professional skills of some journalists often do not arm them with adequate means to produce quality reporting. As many of them come to the profession without proper training, they need quite some time to develop relevant professional strategies, e.g. to create a network of informants, assess important documents, effectively use the internet etc. Generally, I am against an overly critical view on these issues, since they can trigger creativity, such as novel broadcasting genres that are often developed by those who did not undergo formal media training. A better system of training of those wanting

<sup>9</sup> Benin is currently (2013) ranked 79<sup>th</sup> by *Reporters without borders* in its World Press Freedom Index ([http://issuu.com/rsf\\_webmaster/docs/2013index?e=4673624/1284078#search](http://issuu.com/rsf_webmaster/docs/2013index?e=4673624/1284078#search)).

to improve the quality of the press is, however, ever more desirable, including legal instructions to help set the boundaries for courageous yet responsible journalism.

Finally, the work of journalists is generally hampered by the still insufficient role of the media in everyday life. Certainly, access to the media is ever-growing, especially in the southern parts of the country. In contrast, in other parts, it's still limited. State TV may be now present terrestrially in almost every part of the country, but the private TV broadcasters are still operating on satellite systems outside the southern districts and major towns of Benin. With regard to magazines, their presence and availability in the north is extremely limited, being sold only in a few shops. Many people don't buy journals at all, either because they cannot afford them, or because they are not used to it. The limited sales of newspapers published in the central part of Benin, often arriving a day late, reduces in turn the economic ground on which regional coverage could emerge. Generally newspapers do not cover regional developments. This, in turn, makes it difficult for publishers to rely on sales. Still, coverage of local events is primarily undertaken by local radio stations, including the associational ones. The latter, however, are not able to employ a high standard of journalism. There is often a high staff turnover, and limited financial and technical means to produce excellent coverage and reporting (Grätz, 2011). Most associational radio stations do a great job, but especially with regard to national news, they have limited means.

If we look at the role of public institutions that are structuring the media field in Benin, we must first and foremost critically assess the position of the supreme media board, HAAC (Adjovi, 2003a). The role of the HAAC has been, since its establishment and across its different mandates, a very ambiguous one. On the one hand, it helps to increase the standards of media production by channeling development aid and organizing further education, and issuing ID cards (*carte de presse*). It assumes a necessary watchdog position in confronting media professionals with any abuses of the media, such as defamation, the publication of false and unverified information, as well as an equitable access to the media for all political actors, especially in times of elections.

On the other hand, it does not apply the same standards to governmental media, above all the TV department of the ORTB (see below). In addition to that, many of its decisions seem to be quite severe, even overdone, such as the closing of media outlets. Moreover, the incumbent president is obviously close to the regime in place, a fact that mitigates the reputation of his organization in the eyes of most journalists. Furthermore, several of its prerogatives were not fulfilled: it could independently nominate the director of the National Media outlet ORTB

based on a call for applications, but finally the government managed to impose its own candidate.

Conversely, most journalists are themselves aware of the need to sanitize their profession, especially to reduce incorrect or commissioned information. Here, the journalist association UPMB (*Union des Professionnels des Médias du Bénin*) as well as the ODEM<sup>10</sup> (*Observatoire de la Déontologie et de l'Éthique dans les Médias*) are trying to identify media abuses while offering training sessions and workshops to enhance the professional skills and knowledge of their colleagues.

As mentioned above, many private or commercial broadcasters or magazines are heavily dependent on interest groups' subsidies or advertisements. This is, in theory, not the case of the state broadcaster ORTB, much better equipped than other TV and radio stations. It benefits from a large budget partly based on taxes and on direct subsidies, especially important to guarantee the salaries of its employees. A very visible malaise is the misuse of the state broadcaster ORTB, and its TV department (with two channels) in particular by the government as a sole channel of propaganda and for the personal display of the president (many people refer to it as "Yayi TV"). Conversely, oppositional voices are almost never present, in contrast to the private TV channel Canal 3. Even employees of ORTB complained in an open letter about their broadcasting house's one-sided policy of reporting information.

This is possible due to various structural features. First, the director of ORTB is appointed by the HAAC, after a public call for applications where the state might suggest a candidate. Pressure on the HACC resulted, however, in the appointment of a general director and a TV director who are unconditional followers of the president and do everything to embellish his public image. Secondly, the ORTB is still controlled by the ministry of information and the president's *cellule d'information*, which both often directly interfere in its activities and programs. There is no independent public administration, resembling the model in place in some European countries. ORTB's budget has two main components: a license fee included in the sale of devices and the annual fee for the individual use of receivers (that are, however, mainly collected from civil servants), and direct subsidies by the state. Furthermore, TV programs with critical discussions of the political life of the country, such as *Bonjour citoyen*, and the aforementioned *Entre nous* were meanwhile almost completely banned from all governmental channels. A recent report (Africa Governance Monitoring and Advocacy Project et

<sup>10</sup> The ODEM is regularly publishing reports of media abuse, following investigations, when pushed to by individual citizens. Its decisions have primarily a moral, but not any legal, power (Alyko & Ehoumi, 2007; Carlos et al, 2001; Tchanou, Awoudo & Loko, 2009).

al., 2013) strongly recommends the transformation of the ORTB from a direct state-dependent broadcaster into a real public one, governed by an independent council, a transformation that requires, nevertheless, the promulgation of a new media law taking into consideration structural reforms.

A typical example: on 28th December 2013, the state TV channel ORTB covered in part the demonstrations of trade unions (Le Journal édition 23.30, 28.12.2013), but finally added that the demonstrations were, after a while, dispersed by the police – without mentioning that during that operation, several persons were injured, a fact that was, however, relayed by several journalists over Facebook right after. Apparently, the Internet is offering an important alternative space for critical coverage and debate, although still not equally available to all Beninese citizens.

All the mentioned structural constraints as well as modes of censorship result in a rather limited open public debate on political issues, but do not exclude it from the public sphere either. Still there are important programs especially aired by radio stations such as CAPP FM, Tokpa FM, but also TV programs such as CANAL 3 where current political problems are targeted, as well as critical newspapers and magazines, such as La Croix or Nouvelle Expression. Occasionally, also books are published giving full details of scandals and background information on the political life of the country.

## **Journalists in Benin: Generations, Careers & Working conditions**

The field of journalism in Benin is composed by a set of very heterogeneous actors, in terms of professional skills, experiences and self-perception. This fact relates to the above-mentioned history of media in Benin. In this respect, we may distinguish four generations (i.e. Karl Mannheim, cf. Parnes, Vedder & Willer, 2008) of media professionals. The first generation is comprised of those pioneers working mainly in press houses established in colonial times, and to a lesser degree in radio, especially as part of the colonial administrative service targeting expatriate audiences. They were mainly working as employees of official gazettes, a few emergent publishing houses, or as (often part-time) presenters at Radio Cotonou. As in other African countries after independence, some of these radio pioneers were able to take over administrative positions in state-owned media companies. These people often came from typical literate professions, working as teachers, pastors, translators, or clerks. The second generation is related to the greater development of the state-owned broadcasting and press system in

Dahomey and Benin in the mid-seventies. This cohort is associated with the establishment of larger TV and radio broadcasting houses in Cotonou and Parakou, as well as the broader nationwide distribution of the governmental press. This expansion created the need for a greater number of well-trained media specialists. These were hired after rounds of public competitions and tests following training at supra-regional educational institutions abroad. In most cases, lifetime journalists became permanent state agents, often working within the same media institutions. Subsequently, career journalists assume higher-ranking positions within these media outlets or, in some cases, on an international level, including political expatriates. The third generation comprises all those journalists and media professionals that emerged immediately after the political changes in 1990 that were marked by growing political and economic liberalization, the introduction of democratic institutions and the aforementioned bettering of the press freedom. Immediately after 1990, the press sector in particular experienced a veritable boom; today there are up to 100 magazines or newspapers. Members of this third generation often started their career with one of the early independent and newly licensed newspapers — including student magazines. Most journalists from this group, who often possess a high level of formal education, came from fields outside journalism, such as history, linguistics, or law, often having formerly worked as teachers. They were trained on the job and/or in subsequent intensive training courses. Some of those who started in these post-socialist times acquired much professional knowledge by working with various media, particularly the print media. Many have meanwhile become either editors or owners of media groups, and are now working in high-ranking positions in media-related state institutions, NGOs, or as consultants. Several of them left the media field for political or administrative careers. The fourth and contemporary generation of journalists profits from a multiplicity of emergent options and institutions in the field of media and the public sphere, including the growing importance of audio-visual and ICT technologies. However, this generation of media professionals is also facing growing competition, commercialization, and direct political interference by the state. They may choose between various options to engage with the media, may change their affiliation to particular media outlets or combine various activities, but also often strain to work simultaneously for several institutions to add divergent sources of revenue. Some of the newcomers may face a precarious job situation and the predicaments of freelance activities as many new options inside and outside the media field open up. However, despite these difficulties, this generation profits from a greater variety of institutional pathways and a certain ease of access into the media field. The recent introduction of

media schools and university curricula in the fields of journalism and communication conversely set higher standards and require higher qualifications for those wishing to advance in their career.

As previously mentioned, the last decade has witnessed the proliferation of a set of young people working in the media sector. In many cases (although not exclusively), newcomers in the field of media enter low-profile institutions starting from scratch, but gradually acquire experience, knowledge and prestige. Aiming for professional success, these young individuals often work simultaneously as presenters, journalists, technicians, DJs, editors, or PR officers for several media outlets. Although often entering the field of media production without any formal job training, this generation made its way through internships and contracts in various different media. Many members of this new cohort now regularly host the news, political debates, and call-in shows. Some have become quite famous and/or have become directors of a particular department within their radio stations or smaller media outlets. Some members of this rising generation, particularly the youngsters, promote novel programs and engage in creative media production.

The position of journalist or radio host, especially in one of the independent institutions, generally does not pay well. Salaries are low (between 50 and 200 Euro) and working conditions are bad, especially because extra allowance is not provided for the production of features and the coverage of events. Consequently, many of those media professionals hold side jobs; either as Master of Ceremonies (MC) at private or public events, in the ad business, or as actors or press officers for smaller organizations without a PR department.

Some of them split their time between two jobs. For example, station workers may work both as teachers and as radio presenters; they may work at municipal offices; they may become involved occasionally with the organization of elections; or may serve as field assistants in statistical projects.

Several radio presenters, for example, have become music producers, organizers of theatre companies, or IT advisers. Technicians often run workshops at home, or offer technical assistance at private parties or public events.

These practices may result in demanding individual schedules, but keep these individuals in close touch with various potential audiences and other professionals. They gain much insight into the daily hustle of various parts of the public that inevitably shape their methods in producing media content. In addition, the mentioned *per diem* payments from one of the numerous workshops, seminars or conferences which media professionals are often invited to as “social multipliers” are seductive additional revenues supplemented by money for expenses

radio contributors receive for covering a particular event, meeting, opening ceremony, seminar, etc. (Adjovi, 2003b). However, individual pathways to media engagement and the current positions in the media field are quite diverse. They range from successful radio presenters with impressive careers to volunteers and spare-time MCs in high school and to celebrities of prime-time talk shows in TV and ad campaigns. Alternatively, they might still be *débrouillards* ('those muddling through'), struggling as permanent interns while working other jobs and trying to gain further experience in order to advance in the field.

Conversely, the most prestigious of radio contributors create a novel genre of broadcasting thus attracting more listeners regardless of social position and age, such as the aforementioned Dah Houawé who presents a workday press review on Radio CAPP FM in Cotonou.

Larger media outlets are well staffed, whereas in smaller ones fewer employees have to carry out a large variety of tasks. As opposed to the state broadcaster ORTB, most private as well as community and religious radio stations, for instance, feature a small number of permanent staff, maintain fluid professional hierarchies, and entail rapid production processes. With regard to equipment, most press periodicals and electronic media operate on a digital standard of production. Most of them nevertheless remain under-equipped, thus facing a multitude of daily challenges of a technical (power cuts, lack of spare parts) and financial (travel funds for coverage, phone cards) nature. Most radio and TV stations try to profit from their position through the sales of CDs, traditional medicines or booklets, often in specialized kiosks. Traders may enter into contracts to commission the selling of their goods, which are simultaneously advertised on the radio (Grätz, 2009).

Often radio moderators first started their career as devoted media consumers, i.e. as listeners of particular programs or shows; through frequently phoning in or sending requests; through participating in quiz shows; through engagement in some special station activities like holiday programs for school-going kids; through volunteering for holiday programs; or by serving as studio guests for discussions. Step by step, they may get more and more involved in any kind of media-related activities, such as a 'radio' at their school, through acting as an MC at a school event, at university, or through writing for a student magazine. Later, they may start their career with an internship at a radio station, or by starting with the small campus radio station Radio Univers at the University of Abomey-Calavi (established in 1992) or Radio Ado3S (operating since 2004) in Cotonou. Gradually, they may turn a side job into a more permanent position, acquiring



more knowledge, expertise and professional relationships, thereby eventually becoming the director of a media outlet, enterprise or NGO themselves.

Many TV and radio presenters are, for example, supported by show-specific fan clubs that not only help to reinforce personal relationships with presenters and technicians, but also often additionally provide critical assistance and even financial help. Some of the younger, enthusiastic members of these clubs may eventually become radio personalities, after internships and the improvement of their talents. For some younger media professionals, working as a journalist or presenter is the fulfillment of a dream, as they themselves have been enthusiastic listeners of radio programs.

Almost all young media professionals strive towards a better job training and the completion and perfecting of their skills, and envision journalism as an exclusive, lifetime profession, a wish that unfortunately does not come true for all of them.

## Conclusion

The media system in the Republic in Benin is very vibrant, featuring a growing plurality and diversity of media and media products. Journalism is, however, facing a series of challenges that are contingent upon economic and institutional constraints, and to some extent, imperfect professional attitudes. Furthermore, modes of direct and indirect censorship and state control on the media reduce to a certain extent the development of independent news coverage.

Recently, in February 2014, a general convention of all media producers in Benin (États Généraux de la Presse) focused on most of the problems mentioned here. Participants were unanimous in demanding better conditions for the media sector, especially state subsidies, the creation of a central buying office and the establishment of a common investment fund.

Especially the generation of young, motivated journalists seeks novel ways of engaging with the media. Despite their often problematic working conditions, they attempt to gain the attention of their audiences and readers and enhance their professional proficiency.

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