

# INTRODUCTION



## Investigative journalism in Africa – “Walking through a minefield at midnight”

*With contributions from Gwen Ansell, T. Kenichi Serino, Edem Djokotoe, and Eric Mwamba and research based on material from Article 19, the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ), Reporters without Borders, the Guardian UK and AP.*

When we began researching this manual, we discovered thousands of web pages devoted to the scope, techniques and dilemmas of investigative journalism. But there was one gaping hole: nowhere was information collated about the heroic contributions – and often sacrifices – made for the profession by African investigative journalists across the continent. Writing a history or complete account of African investigative journalism is outside the scope of this project. But we offer here a series of contributions – some current, some historical – on the topic, that will, hopefully, lay the foundations for further research, and also lay to rest decisively the myth that journalism which exposes social problems and criticizes the powerful is ‘un-African’.

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# A certain tenacity

## *Mozambique, Namibia and Kenya, by T. Kenichi Serino*

Journalist Carlos Cardoso was editor of the popular daily faxed newspaper *Metical* in Mozambique. On November 22, 2000, after publishing stories revealing corruption at the Mozambique Commercial Bank, he left his newspaper's office and was gunned down. On the same day, another journalist, Custadio Rafael, who had also been investigating Mozambique Commercial Bank, was attacked. Press reports at the time said he was accused of "speaking too much". His attackers slashed his tongue.

After a farcical series of bungled investigations, prison escapes and other mishaps, Cardoso's murderers were eventually tried and convicted. According to news reports, several of those involved had fingered Nyimpine Chissano, the son of a former president, as the man who commissioned the crime.

Cardoso's killing was not an isolated incident. African journalists who dare speak truth to power often find themselves the prey of thugs and government authorities alike (or sometimes in concert). Assaults, imprisonment, torture, censorship and death are well known. And yet... African journalists continue to conduct investigations.

They are well aware of the risks described above, but it is often other problems that impede their progress, particularly lack of resources. Many journalists find it difficult to investigate without resources, but many, somehow, manage.

John Grobler is a veteran freelance investigative journalist in Windhoek, Namibia:

"I wouldn't call freelance journalism a living, but it's an existence," he says. As a freelancer, Grobler is self-funded and often takes on contract research to subsidise his investigations. When he does discover a potential lead, he will first shop the idea around. "Where possible, I also get the newspapers to agree to a minimum of expenses. But this seldom amounts to more than getting fuel money back. Your biggest cost is actually the time it takes to dig stuff up, especially if the information is hard to come by," he says.

Grobler also makes use of websites like Global Witness, and an extensive network of colleagues, sources, and fellow travellers. Of course, he also uses the Internet, but cautions: "Public sources, including the Internet, only take you halfway there. But it makes it enormously easy to contact someone in Dubai or Antwerp whereas previously it would have been very expensive to do so. The newspapers here are small, no huge budgets, but the Internet has certainly levelled the playing fields in this regard.

"Investigative journalism just requires a certain tenacity and nose for the story... typically, first leads come from human sources; you try and develop them by checking public documents, look for connections, go back to sources or find new ones," he says.

Grobler's practice of finding first leads from human sources is one he shares with other investigative journalists, for example those at *The Nation* in Kenya.

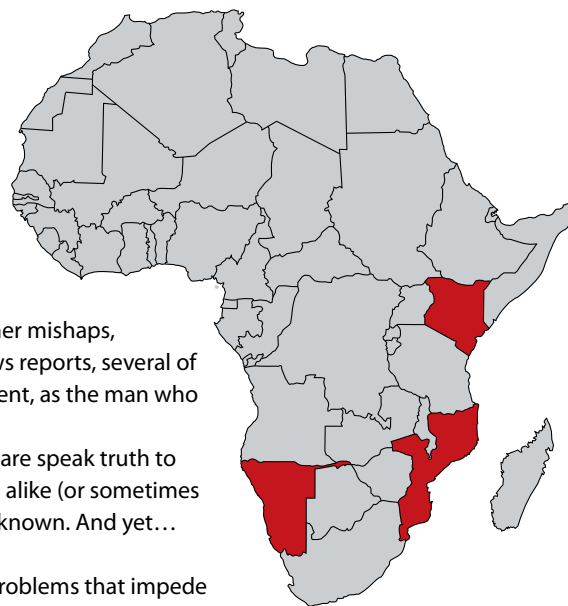
In contrast to Grobler's financial struggles, *The Nation* newspaper, is able to devote three journalists full-time to investigations with another 5-10 journalists devoting part of their time.

The paper has broken many investigative pieces over the years, one of the more recent being the 'Anglo Fleecing', revealing that military tenders granted by civil servants and bureaucrats had been fraudulent. According to Steve Agutu, a journalist who has worked for *The Nation*, information is often provided by members of parliament and civil servants. And while this on the surface "makes [the journalists'] work very easy", the politicians and civil servants who are blowing the whistle are not doing so out of good citizenship. Often they have a political vendetta. Many of the politicians and civil servants who owed their places to outgoing president Daniel arap Moi were extremely unpopular with their colleagues. They also tended to be as corrupt as their patron. These twin factors resulted in their being the subject of newspaper investigations.

So official tip-offs seem, at the very least, a mixed blessing. But Agutu is convinced they have some benefits. "For whatever reason, the Kenyan people benefit. Because of the leaks politicians are more careful. It's a step toward good governance and against corruption." But it is unclear yet in what form the media culture of investigating the highly-placed will live on after the last of Moi's appointees, with their trail of political grudges, leaves office.

Cardoso's murder trial was a massive public event in Mozambique. It was conducted in open court and broadcast throughout the nation and the names of the powerful were mentioned. Some of those involved in the immediate crime were convicted.

Chissano, who had been implicated, was charged by the state prosecutor in May 2006 but the warrant



was suspended, allegedly after the intervention of his parents. Chissano would later be found dead in his home, in November 2007, aged 37. Though the most powerful name mentioned never faced an open court, the openness of the trial served notice that the crooked dealing of the powerful could no longer be expected to remain secret, and that the murderers of journalists did not have impunity. It was a gain for investigative journalism; but a gain that still needs to be constantly defended.

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## The relentless denouncer

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*A tribute to Burkinabe journalist Norbert Zongo, by Eric Mwamba*

Norbert Zongo was a native of Burkina Faso and a journalist renowned for his stubborn refusal to stay silent about a killing involving the close entourage of President Blaise Compaoré. David Ouedraogo had been employed at the home of Francois Compaoré, the younger brother of the president of the Republic, and was accused of stealing money from his workplace. He was subsequently tortured by soldiers (who were identified by name) and killed in a fire that burned down the president's infirmary.

Zongo was offered large sums of money to drop the story and stay silent. After he refused the bribes, Zongo was burnt alive, together with three other people who were in his car, on 13 December 1998. The killing took place 100 kilometres from the capital, Ouagadougou. Ten years down the line, and justice in Burkina Faso still has not given its verdict on this matter. In the country of Thomas Sankara, the unsolved mystery of his death remains topical, and the symbolism of his life remains important. Zongo was the model of courage and integrity in the face of any challenge, two indispensable weapons for any investigative journalist.

In his book *Ces journalistes que l'on veut faire taire* (These journalists that we want to silence), Robert Ménard, co-founder of Reporters Without Borders, sums up the journalist's life thus: "Zongo relentlessly denounced matters of corruption, he attacked shady politicians, he exposed scandals, be they big or small".




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## Against the grain

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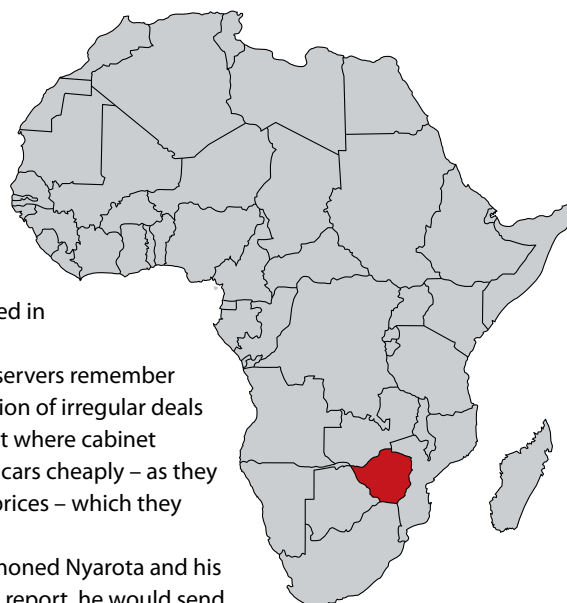
*The story of the 'Willowgate' investigation, by Edem Djokotoe*

In the late 1980s (in the years before today's stringent press censorship was enshrined in law), Zimbabwe provided the only known example of a major investigative project being undertaken by a government-owned newspaper, refuting the myth that only the commercial media can carry out investigative reporting.

The newspaper in question was *The Chronicle*, a regional paper that was part of Zimbabwe Newspapers Group. The editor who took the decisive step in probing the excesses of government was Geoffrey Nyarota, who has gone on to write about his experiences in a book published in 2006: *Against the Grain: Memoirs of a Zimbabwean Newsmen* (Zebra).

Nyarota's claim to fame is the story many Zimbabweans and media observers remember as the Willowgate Scandal. In 1988, the newspaper undertook an investigation of irregular deals at the state-owned Willowvale Mazda Motor Industries, a car assembly plant where cabinet ministers and senior government officials were using their positions to buy cars cheaply – as they were officially entitled to do – but later reselling the vehicles at exorbitant prices – which they were not.

Before the story broke, Zimbabwe's Defence Minister, Enos Nkala summoned Nyarota and his deputy, Davison Maruziva to his office. He said that if they failed to stop the report, he would send soldiers to drag them to defence headquarters to be taught a lesson they would never forget. Instead, the two editors intensified their investigations and eventually broke the story.



The *Chronicle's* investigations were so embarrassing to government that President Robert Mugabe appointed a judicial commission of enquiry to investigate the matter. The commission's findings vindicated the newspaper's reports and several ministers, including Nkala, resigned in disgrace. Willowgate may have earned Nyarota and Maruziva much kudos from within Zimbabwe and beyond its borders, but government was not amused.

Nyarota was 'promoted' to director of public relations (a position created for him) in the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group. The journalists who worked with him on the Willowgate stories were also reassigned within the company. A year later, Nyarota and some of those he had worked with left the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group to join the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe (ANZ) corporation, the publishers of five regional weeklies and the famous *Daily News*. The rest, as they say in the business, is history.

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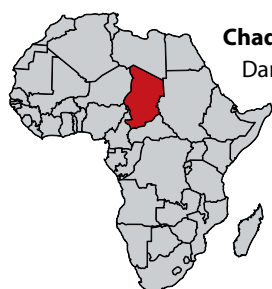
## Around the continent

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### Algeria

Mohamed Benchicou is the director of the Algerian newspaper *Le Matin*. In June 2004 he was sentenced to two years in prison after publishing an autobiography denouncing corruption under President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Benchicou served his sentence and in July 2006 received the PEN Freedom to Write Award.



### Chad

Daniel Bekoutou is a Chadian reporter who in 2000 was working with the Senegalese daily the Dakar-based *Walfadjiri*, covering mainly the rights, health and environment beats. But he had also gathered evidence that was used to help indict former Chadian dictator Hissene Habre (then resident in exile in Senegal) for torture and other human rights offences.

As soon as the indictment appeared, Bekoutou began receiving death threats to his home and office.

"What was my alleged 'crime'? Maybe it was an article that I published in the 26 January, 2000 edition of *Walfadjiri*, containing inconvenient revelations about the disappearance of two Senegalese citizens in Habre's prisons. The Senegalese authorities had apparently never been informed of this event, and Habre and his cohorts objected to a Chadian journalist writing about it in the Senegalese press, lest he damage their relations with a generous government that had granted them political asylum.

"That would explain why they saw me not as a journalist but as a traitorous Chadian who had intentionally set out to damage their reputations at a time when their legal position was already precarious.

"In fact there was no question of my betraying anybody or even of settling some sort of 'score'. It is an established and well-documented fact that Senegalese, Nigerians, Cameroonians, French citizens and other foreign nationals, along with thousands of Chadians, died under this tyrannical regime. It was my duty as a journalist to write about these things.

"But that was not the only thing that got me into trouble... I also found several of Habre's victims living in Dakar and convinced them to testify against the former president. Naturally, I carried out this work with utmost discretion, so as not to tip off the 'African Pinochet'. Otherwise, he might have fled."

Bekoutou was eventually moved to Paris by a human rights organisation because of the mounting threats against his life. But he also tells of Chadian journalists who were not so fortunate:

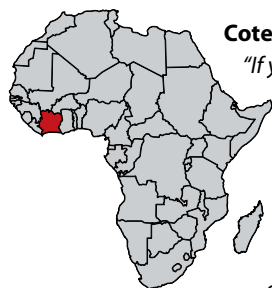
"On 28 January, 1992, a reporter named Maxime Kladoumbaye who worked for the daily *N'djaamena-Hebdo* was gunned down by police. On 28 November, 1992, state television anchor Djerabe Declaud, who was known to be an opponent of the regime despite his job, suffered the same tragic fate. Declaud took two bullets in the back as he was leaving the TV studios after presenting the last edition of the evening news.

"Other Chadian journalists have been poisoned to death, such as Nehemie Benoudjita, the brilliant

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editorial director of the newspaper *Le Temps*, or unjustly jailed, as in the cases of Coumbo Singa Gali, editorial director of *L'Observateur*, and one of her colleagues, who had published a controversial article about the poisoning of Benoudjita."

Bekoutou quotes a colleague of his as describing being a journalist in Africa as "like walking through a minefield at midnight".



### Cote D'Ivoire

"If you track money, you risk death."

Guy-André Kieffer, a freelance journalist with dual French-Canadian citizenship, married, and with two children, has been missing since 16 April, 2004. He disappeared from a shopping mall in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, allegedly abducted by four uniformed men.

Kieffer, who qualified as an agronomist, wrote for both French and (under a pseudonym) Ivorian publications, and served as an advisor to a cocoa commodities consortium. At the time, the Ivory Coast exported almost half the world's cocoa. Kieffer published several exposés of shady cocoa deals, whose profits both enriched the elite and provided money for arms to fuel the country's civil war. He had received death threats before his disappearance.

Jacques Huillery, AFP Bureau Chief in Abidjan, told *The Guardian*: "Here, you can talk about politics with violent words, but the one thing that makes people mad is money. If you track money, you risk death... Cocoa is a dark, confused world. You don't know where the money goes. And into it came Guy-André, obsessed with telling the truth."

Pro-government papers claimed that Kieffer was hiding to 'destabilise' the government. But in the course of a joint French-Ivorian investigation (during which the French magistrate alleged he was routinely blocked from working), evidence began to point at several figures close to Ivorian President Gbagbo, including Michel Legré, brother-in-law of the first lady. Legré is still detained, but apparently not under harsh conditions, and no action has yet been taken against those Legré allegedly named as accomplices and instigators.



### Nigeria

Dele Giwa, founding editor of the Lagos-based weekly *Newswatch* was killed by a parcel bomb delivered to his family home on October 19, 1986. Nigerian press reports alleged that the parcel bore a stamp with the Nigerian government coat-of-arms, and that Giwa had been investigating a story involving First Lady Mariam Babangida at the time of his death.

Two days before he was killed, Giwa had been summoned to the headquarters of Nigeria's State Security Services and accused of planning revolution and arms-smuggling. He later received a phone call asking for directions to his home so that an 'official invitation' could be delivered.

In 2001, former president Ibrahim Babangida, who had ruled the country at the time of Giwa's death, refused to testify before the country's human rights commission about Giwa's death, despite calls from inside the country and from international human rights and journalists' organisations for him to do so.

No-one has ever been prosecuted for Giwa's death.

Christine Anyanwu, editor and publisher of *The Sunday Magazine*, was wrongly convicted for plotting a coup against General Sani Abacha, Babangida's successor. She was imprisoned, tortured and almost blinded while in detention. Anyanwu demanded and received an apology for her suffering from Alhaji Zahari Bui, retired assistant commissioner of police, who had been one of her torturers.

Dele Olojede was the first African-born journalist to receive a Pulitzer Prize for International Reporting. He received the prize in 2005 for a series on the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide that he had reported for the US *Newsday* magazine, assisted by African-American photographer Conrad J Williams and African-American editor Lonnie Isabel.

Prior to moving to the USA, Olojede had worked with Giwa on *Newswatch's* founding team in Lagos. His 1986 investigation into the imprisonment of Nigerian musician Fela Anikulapo-Kuti led to the musician's release. The judge who had unjustly imprisoned Kuti was dismissed.



## Senegal

### *Sentinels of democracy*

When Senegalese President Abdou Diouf was finally ousted from power in 2000 after 40 years, many commentators credited the growing independent press with a role in the change. It was only in the 1990s that state media began to be challenged by independent publications and broadcasters after Diouf liberalised media laws.

The journalists, reported AP, were dubbed 'sentinels' (as in 'sentinels of democracy'). During the campaign, they reported on vote-buying, ballot stuffing and other abuses. Radio journalists reported election results as polling stations finished their counts, important in a country where literacy levels are low and radio plays a key information role. The agency quotes Dakar radio journalist Oumar Fall as saying "Nobody could have contested the will of the people because we, the journalists, were everywhere and recorded everything."

This is by no means a comprehensive picture of the investigative media in Africa; merely a series of snapshots showing the perils, bravery and achievements of some African journalists. There are more case studies in the chapters that follow, demonstrating that the mission to seek out and tell compelling truths is still alive and well across the continent.

And we hope these chapters will inspire more journalists to take up the investigative torch, by providing tools and approaches that should help to make the work more effective.

But perhaps not easier, because as we have seen, the task of the African investigative journalist is rarely easy. As I have compiled these chapters, I have been struck repeatedly by the miracle of reporters working with erratic (or no) computer connections and electricity, limited budgets, across long distances and often under surveillance and threat, who still manage to produce stories on a par with their far better resourced colleagues elsewhere in the world. It is actually no miracle: it simply takes passion, courage and extremely hard work.

So, to all investigative journalists – beginners or veterans, wherever you are working – and to the models and mentors who went before, many of whom gave up their lives for their work: these chapters are for you.

**Gwen Ansell**  
Editor