

Spring 2004

Learning to be Free: The Print Media of Cotonou, Benin

Stephen Urbanski

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd>

Recommended Citation

Urbanski, S. (2004). Learning to be Free: The Print Media of Cotonou, Benin (Doctoral dissertation, Duquesne University). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/etd/1299>

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection. For more information, please contact phillipsg@duq.edu.

**Learning to be Free:
The Print Media of Cotonou, Benin**

A Dissertation Presented to the Faculty
of the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Duquesne University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

by
Stephen J. Urbanski

March 26, 2004

Signature Page

Name: Stephen J. Urbanski

Title: Learning to be Free: The Print Media of Cotonou, Benin

Degree: Doctor of Philosophy

Date: March 26, 2004

APPROVED

Dr. Janie Harden Fritz, Dissertation Co-Chair
Associate Professor of Communication

APPROVED

Dr. Michael Dillon, Dissertation Co-Chair
Assistant Professor of Communication

APPROVED

Professor Margaret J. Patterson, Reader
Associate Professor of Communication

APPROVED

Dr. Calvin Troup, Director, Rhetoric Ph.D. Program

APPROVED

Dr. Ronald C. Arnett, Chair, Department of Communication
and Rhetorical Studies

APPROVED

Constance Ramirez, Ph.D., Dean
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Acknowledgments

The three people to whom I am most indebted are Father Andre Quenum, King Gnaho, Jr., whom I will always know as Pascal, and his mother, Annick Adegnika. It is an understatement to say this dissertation would not have been possible without their help, support, and encouragement. I will never forget Andre's simple reply to my e-mail of April 2000 asking if I could travel to Benin to learn more about his country. "That's a wonderful idea," he wrote. "We will make it happen." Our trip the following summer, as well as the journalism seminars we conducted in Cotonou, gave us both the inspiration to continue researching communication and journalism in Benin for our respective dissertations.

Andre's giving, outgoing disposition hides his incredible (and enviable) determination and dedication to his faith. I have never met a priest who better reflects the old adage: *People do not choose to become priests. They are chosen.* Andre has the gift to bring out the best in those around him. In a Western era in which the priesthood has encountered great turbulence, Andre is a rock of peace, comfort and spiritual focus. When presented a problem or an objective, he simply will not give up until success is achieved. And then he finds another objective, and then another. He is determined to make this world a better place and is achieving quiet success every day. My life is better, richer, and happier since I have known him.

When my laptop computer became too unreliable to use on the 2003 trip to Benin, Andre lent me his without hesitation. His mother, Veronique Quenum, welcomed me into her home as if I were her son. There are few places on Earth I feel safer and happier than in Andre's mother's cozy little home just off a very busy street in downtown Cotonou. She understands little English, but we connect on a level of mutual trust and respect that transcends language and culture.

I met Pascal during my 2001 trip, and his skills as a translator were only part of the great contributions he made to the success of my research. He knows the print media of Cotonou better than almost anyone I met in Benin. He assisted with translation during the 2001 journalism seminars but was invaluable during the research trip in 2003. Because Andre had gone to Benin earlier that year, he was unable to accompany me. My French was not comprehensive enough to do the level of interviews required for this dissertation. Enter Pascal. After one or two interviews, it became obvious Pascal was more than just a translator and a friend. He was a fellow researcher. His honest suggestions, rigorous editing, and countless hours of guiding me around the busy, complex streets of Cotonou are debts I can never repay but will gladly try through my everlasting friendship.

Pascal's mother, Annick, has social and governmental connections that are beyond belief. Since she worked for the Ministry of Communication, she naturally was able to schedule interviews and reach important sources I could never have reached on my own. One day Annick would be contacting a high-level government official for an interview I needed. The next day, she would arrange a place for me to eat, or, on one particular occasion, gladly put us in touch with her auto mechanic when our otherwise reliable car would not start.

I also wish to thank Andre's sister and brother-in-law, Elise and Joseph Bocovo, who treated me as though I was one of the family and fed me on several occasions. I am greatly indebted to Yaovi Hounkpanou, director of Agence Benin Presse. Yaovi allowed Pascal and I to use the agency as a base of operations. By allowing me to check my e-mail and conduct Internet research there, Yaovi saved me a great deal of money. He also was a great help organizing and executing our journalism seminars in 2001. We held the seminars at the agency and the turnout (more than 43 journalists) was impressive and gratifying.

I also must thank Father Pio Hounyeme for his friendship and the use of his car. It is no wonder Pio and Andre are close friends. Both are selfless, dedicated, and generous. When I did not receive the research grant I had hoped would fund my 2003 trip, it became clear I was going to have to work within a very tight budget. Without Pio's car, my research would not have been possible. Not only is Cotonou a very large city, but a few of my interviews were many miles outside of the city.

Other people in Africa to whom I am eternally indebted: The Most Reverend Nestor Assogba, bishop of the Archdiocese of Cotonou, made me feel welcome on both of my trips to Benin. Father Raymond Goudjo, another friend of Andre's, watched over me and was always there when I had questions or needed help. It was reassuring to know the archdiocese was only about 100 yards up the street from where I stayed. A special thanks also goes to Maurice Chabi, Thomas Megnassan, Bernard Kanmadozo, Sidoine Quenum, Dr. Jean-Leon Olory-Togbe, Louis Olory-Togbe, Abraham Voglozin, the staff at *Le Matin*, and the many journalists I met and interviewed. I hope this dissertation will continue a significant journalistic and intercultural conversation.

From the 2001 trip, I am especially indebted to Nadaj Zinzindohoue and her parents, Abraham and Marie-Josee Zinzindohoue, and I also wish to thank Marthe Ezin, a great friend, for her constant help with my French, and Fernando Doldan for his friendship.

I cannot express enough gratitude toward my doctoral committee: co-chairs Dr. Janie Harden Fritz and Dr. Michael Dillon, and reader, Professor Margaret Patterson.

Dr. Fritz is a refreshing well of enthusiasm, and her depth of communication literature is downright frightening. Any time I e-mailed her with a question, she was quick with a thoughtful and encouraging reply.

Right from the start, Dr. Dillon immediately sensed what I was trying to accomplish with my research but not yet able to express. During one of our early meetings, he said something to the effect of: "It sounds as though you're looking at freedom and how the media in the West and Benin work within that concept." The light went on, and my research suddenly became focused and meaningful.

Professor Patterson, who was chair of my master's thesis at Duquesne, has been a great friend and mentor throughout both the master's and doctoral programs. I can always rely on her for a candid opinion and an honest edit of my writing. I am a better journalist, teacher, and researcher because of these three people as well as the entire faculty in the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies. A special thanks goes to Dr. Kathleen Glenister Roberts for her assistance with the ethnography part of my methodology. Her suggestion to use the term "esoteric ethnography" made my work unique and exciting.

I also would like to thank three other professors from Duquesne: Dr. Bernard Beranek, of the English department, gave me a great piece of advice

when I talked with him about writing a dissertation a few years ago. He said: “Pick a topic that is interesting to you and one that can be finished in a reasonable amount of time.” That advice is very simple but also logical and precious. This dissertation is only the beginning of my work in West Africa. I plan to continue it for many years, and one of the primary roots of that passion is Dr. Beranek’s advice.

Two classes I took from Dr. Daniel Watkins, also from the English department, changed my life, and that is not an understatement. His literary theory class forced me to think more abstractly, and his Marxist theory class made me begin to see, appreciate, and question the interconnectedness that drives journalism, academia, and life itself. Dr. Watkins is one of the few professors I have ever had where EVERYTHING he said in class was worth writing down. The many notebooks I filled during those two classes will serve me well in years to come.

Dr. Fred Evans, of the Philosophy department, helped me think outside the box during his Michel Foucault class in the spring of 2000. The reading and research I did for that class made me a much better and confident academic researcher.

Two people from Wake Forest University deserve special thanks. Dr. Sylvain Boko, associate professor of economics and a native of Benin, answered many questions during both of my trips. Andre and I met Rosita Najmi, one of Dr. Boko’s students, during our trip in 2001. By pure chance, Rosita’s and my paths crossed again (in Cotonou) in 2003, and I will cherish her friendship for many years. In the fall of 2003, Rosita was named one of *Glamour* magazine’s Top

10 College Women. That was no surprise. I am certain great things are in store for her.

Thanks to Jane Gardner and Cindy Burke of Duquesne's Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies for answering the many questions I had concerning this dissertation. They are two of the nicest and most professional people I have ever known.

My two trips to Benin would not have been possible without the support and cooperation of John Craig, former editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. The art department of the Post-Gazette also deserves a special note for filling for me during my trips: Ted Crow, Kim Crow, Anita Dufalla, Cathy Tigano, James Hilston, Stacy Innerst, Diane Juravich, Daniel Marsula, Bill Pliske, Steve Thomas, and Christopher Pett-Ridge.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my wife, Leslie Rubinkowski, who walked every step of the doctoral path with me. I am convinced I never would have gone to graduate school without her encouragement, love, and support. Without a doubt, she is the best writer and editor I know.

Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 1
Chapter One: <i>A Western notion of freedom, according to Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Walter Lippmann, and John Dewey</i>	Page 21
Chapter Two: <i>Benin's multi-layered history, and how it and the media define freedom</i>	Page 47
Chapter Three: <i>The oral and written traditions</i>	Page 74
Chapter Four: <i>Freedom ... as defined by the directors of publication of Cotonou's daily newspapers</i>	Page 96
Chapter Five: <i>Le Matin: The daily operations at one newspaper, and how it covered the story of the year</i>	Page 130
Chapter Six: <i>Conclusion and observations: Moving toward a keener sense of professionalism in Benin's print media</i>	Page 162
Appendix A: <i>Daily newspapers in Cotonou visited in June 2003</i>	Page 193
Appendix B: <i>Deontology Code for the Benin Press</i>	Page 194
Bibliography	Page 199

Learning to be Free: The Print Media of Cotonou, Benin

Introduction

In 2003, Reporters Without Borders, the international journalism watchdog group, ranked Benin, the small West African republic of six million people, 29th in its worldwide index of press freedom.¹ In comparison, RWB ranked the United States, with a population of 280 million, 31st, two spots below Benin. What makes the story of Benin's media particularly significant is not the ranking by RWB, although being number 29 on a list that includes 166 countries is certainly notable. What places Benin in a journalistic spotlight is the fact that as of 2003 the republic had been a democracy for just 13 years. Prior to that, Benin was ruled for 17 years by a staunch Marxist regime that censored any and all information. In a little more than one decade, Benin has gone from a land where censorship was commonplace to a burgeoning hotbed of daily newspapers.

Cotonou, Benin's largest city² with a population of more than 800,000, had 19 daily newspapers in the summer of 2003 when the majority of the research was conducted for this dissertation (see Appendix A). The papers are all in a tabloid format, usually averaging 12 to 16 pages, with a daily circulation of between 1,500 and 5,000. All of the papers publish Monday through Friday. Only six of the 19 daily newspapers in the city possess their own printing presses. Owning a press in Cotonou is an enormous financial and organizational advantage.³ As of the summer of 2003, the six newspapers with presses were *Le*

Progres, Fraternite, Le Matin, Le Matinal, Le Republicain, and La Nation, the state-funded paper.

In June and July of 2001, I conducted a series of journalism seminars in Cotonou with Father Andre Quenum, a fellow Duquesne University student and native of Benin. The seminars, held after visiting all of the daily newspapers in Cotonou, addressed topics such as newspaper design, photography, the value of objective reporting, and ethics. During the seminars, I began to realize the potential of how democracy is viewed in the West, how it is viewed in Benin, and the role the print media has played in both cultures. The research conducted during the 2003 visit essentially began with the 2001 journalism seminars, and I plan to continue it for many years after this dissertation is completed. During the 2003 trip, I again visited each of the daily newspapers to gain a clear picture of how freedom was defined among Cotonou's journalists.⁴

Immediately noticeable during these interviews was the lucid, articulate manner with which each director of publication conveyed his or her definition of freedom. Researchers of the African media such as Louise Bourgault, Joseph Campbell and others term these individuals the educated elites.⁵ What is still developing, however, is a sense of how to actualize that sense of freedom. Most newspapers place a weighty emphasis on political coverage since democracy remains a very popular topic among readers. Bizarre and sensational news also gets a high priority since these types of stories sell papers. The issue of objectivity immediately must enter a discussion on how Cotonou's print media appears to favor political coverage. Although critics have labeled journalistic objectivity as everything from a myth to an audience building tool, the involvement of the public and the realization of each journalist's standpoint epistemology can offer

methods for the collection and dissemination of information that describes reality as accurately as possible.⁶

The forces of politics and economics (and sometimes religion) exert a great deal of power on how news is reported and presented.⁷ Many of the newspapers have financial backers with distinct political agendas and, since economics has an obvious influence in country as poor as Benin, their wishes are usually followed. Religion also plays a major role both personally as well as professionally. In a region as religiously diverse as West Africa, how a supreme being is defined and worshiped at times carries over to the professional sphere.⁸

The theoretical perspective of narrative offers insight into the interconnection of these forces.⁹ Take, for example, the concepts of religion or close family ties in West Africa. If both are viewed as dominant narratives, it becomes easier to understand why a new, largely unfamiliar narrative – such as leaving the religious or family unit to gain a broader journalism education – might be rejected. From a Western perspective, additional education and ultimately achieving a higher position in the corporate world is worth, in most cases, leaving the family unit. But the cultural forces of West Africa are different, and utilizing the narrative paradigm to surface these typically embedded nuances can be beneficial and ultimately begin a more textured journalistic conversation that can lead to positive changes for both the West and West Africa.

The vast majority of Cotonou's directors of publication¹⁰ and reporters are very young, many just out of college. With the exception of Maurice Chabi and three or four other directors, journalism in Cotonou is a haven for young, educated males. They are the characters in a narrative of professional journalism that is still developing a plot.¹¹ One of the downsides to a business made up of

very young, usually inexperienced journalists is the urge to sensationalize or underreport the news. Legal mechanisms are slowly being approved by the government that act as checks and balances against the growing power of the media. However, a flexing of sorts is constantly occurring in Cotonou (as well as all around Benin). Such an incident occurred in April 2003 at *Le Telegramme*, one of Cotonou's dailies.

On April 1 the newspaper published a letter it had possessed since February alleging dissatisfaction among members of Benin's national police force. The letter suggested unfair practices involving the exams required to join the police force. Next to the letter ran a story written under a nom de plum, a practice *Le Telegramme* uses for that particular feature. Reporters and editors take turns writing under the pen name Sagbé AHO. This story addressed the accompanying letter and questioned the leadership of Raymond Fadonougbo, chief of the national police force. Blaise Fagnihoun, *Le Telegramme's* editor in chief, said that day's paper sold well. It was a sell-out, in fact, but unknown to him had also set into motion events that would later that day result in the arrest of him and three other journalists from the paper.

Fadonougbo read the story and did not like it. At 1 p.m., he sent two plain-clothes officers to the offices of *Le Telegramme* to find out who wrote the article and bring that person (or persons) to police headquarters. Etienne Houessou, director of *Le Telegramme*, was not in the office when the officers arrived. They left and soon returned with two armed policemen. Fagnihoun, the editor in chief, and two other journalists, Norbert Houessou, society editor, and Casimir Assogba, a page designer, were handcuffed and taken outside to a police

car. According to Fagnihoun, all three were forced to sit on the floor of the vehicle as they were driven to the main police station in Cotonou. Once there, they were ordered to strip to their underwear and were taken into Fadonougbo's office where they were beaten by two men wearing civilian clothes. Fadonougbo asked them who wrote the article and questioned their skills as journalists. At one point, Fagnihoun claimed, the chief said: "I am the power. You must learn to respect the power."¹²

Fadonougbo knows something about journalism, according to several directors of publication. He received journalism training in Senegal and taught at Benin's National University. He also has a master's degree in law. Fagnihoun said the chief slapped them repeatedly and told them they were like children to him.

By mid afternoon the three journalists were placed in a small — approximately 10-foot square — cell containing upwards of 20 other prisoners. Fagnihoun said he was not afraid because "I knew I had not done anything wrong."¹³ The other two journalists were afraid, he said, because they had no idea why they had been put in jail.

Meanwhile, Houessou, director of *Le Telegramme*, had learned of the jailing of his three colleagues and reported the incident to the Organization for the Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM), one of the top professional journalism groups in Benin. He also had called the national police and was connected to Fadonougbo who assured him that if he came to police headquarters, he would not be beaten and the situation would be resolved. Houessou reported to the station and, according to his editor in chief, was handcuffed and beaten. All four of the journalists were then jailed until

approximately 7 p.m. when they were released. They spent the next three days recovering in a hospital.

Word of the illegal detention and beatings infuriated ODEM as well as the Union of Private Press Journalists of Benin. To protest the illegal detention of the *Le Telegramme* journalists, none of the city's privately owned newspapers published on Monday, April 7, 2003, in what many journalists call the greatest day for Beninese journalism since the National Conference in February 1990 that heralded the move to democracy. *Le Nation*, the government-funded newspaper, was the only paper to publish. The paper did not know of the planned day of protest, but editors and reporters said they would have published anyway since they are the nation's newspaper.

Fagnihoun smiles and appears almost embarrassed when asked if he and the other journalists at *Le Telegramme* feel like celebrities. "No," he said. "But I do feel very proud that all of the other journalists backed us."¹⁴

This dissertation is about people like Blaise Fagnihoun, a journalist in a small, developing West African country that is learning about freedom and the price that freedom typically carries.

On the surface, the emergent, independent print media in Cotonou may seem insignificant when compared to the print media in the United States or Europe. However, when the notion of freedom and its effects on the media are isolated in a developing democracy, then compared and contrasted with a Western model, a clearer and more useful understanding of press freedom emerges.

The cultural lens through which this dissertation observes a Western concept of freedom rooted in the words and ideas of Thomas Jefferson, James

Madison, Walter Lippmann, and John Dewey. Because the first two are former presidents of the United States — as well as architects of the Constitution — they provide a distinctly democratic foundation on which to overlay the philosophies of Lippmann and Dewey. The one constant within all four of these philosophers' words is their focus on the sphere of the public, how it is defined and located, within the overarching concept of freedom.

This Western concept of freedom is juxtaposed with that evolving within Benin's print media (specifically in the republic's largest city of Cotonou) and its evolution through a tumultuous history that includes the competing influences of multiple languages and cultures, the French colonization, numerous *coups d'état* following the republic's independence in 1960, a 17-year period of Marxism, and now democracy. At the time this dissertation was written, Benin was in the process of still defining freedom, and the media were playing an enormous role in that process of definition.

Observing the evolution of freedom in both cultures — and the print media's role in that evolution — makes it increasingly clear that one culture can learn from the other. Intercultural journalistic growth is achieved by creating a historically and narrative-based mosaic of ideas, and this process helps avoid the journalistic ethnocentrism that is an unfortunate byproduct of functioning within one's comfort zone.¹⁵

Much of the existing literature on the press in West Africa examines journalism from a macro vantage point, which tends to ignore the individual journalist's hopes, fears, dreams, and aspirations.¹⁶ This reflection of the individual is of vital importance to journalism in both West Africa and the West because it is those individuals who ultimately generate the practice of

journalism. In Benin, journalists have experienced a free press for just 13 years. Many reporters and editors have vivid memories of the restrictive days of the Marxist regime when publishing the truth usually meant arrest, imprisonment, and/or beatings, so functioning within the republic's new realm of freedom carries with it a great deal of responsibility. The Beninese journalist of the twenty-first century needs more than just a high level of technical skill. He or she also must grasp and appreciate the theoretical components of community, narrative, and ethics and apply these to the overarching notion of freedom in order to reap the most productive rewards from their technological know-how.

In contemporary America our basic freedoms can be compared only to the concept of no freedom.¹⁷ In Hannah Arendt's terms, we humanize the world around us but only in part do we humanize it in a general way.¹⁸ The historical moment in which we are situated defines our reality. In short, Western journalists in the twenty-first century have always functioned within a free press.¹⁹ They read about totalitarian regimes but actually working within one is an abstract concept for most. By reading first-hand accounts of journalists in Benin, the Western media can gain a broader understanding of the interconnected nature of an often-taken-for-granted term such as freedom.

Research question and significance of topic

The initial question for this dissertation is: *How does a developing West African democracy blend elements of a Western model of democracy with its core pan-African values?* Since journalism is such a broad topic, it is necessary to narrow the scope to the print media of Cotonou. The concept of freedom will serve as a background phenomenon that connects the two cultures.

The significance of this dissertation lies within the first four words of the title, “Learning to be Free.” These words reflect Benin’s experience since the democratic transition began in 1989, and nearly every Beninese adult can remember the many *coups d’etat* after independence from France in 1960.²⁰ The various forms of media are essentially still grappling with the responsibility involved with a free press. Some newspapers — those judged most accurate by an independent journalistic boards such as ODEM — receive government subsidies, and in Benin (one of the world’s 15 poorest countries, according to the United Nations²¹) this money can mean the difference between publishing and not publishing. Unfortunately, the allocations may be an indirect tool of power on behalf of the government. Ostensibly, the funding comes with no strings attached, according to editors and reporters in Cotonou²², but just the possibility of losing it causes some newspapers to shy away from criticizing the government.

Despite such threats, each Beninese journalist’s realization of his or her responsibility to the masses is unmistakable. Even though only a small number of Beninese reporters and editors have the privilege of attending accredited journalism schools, all of them appear to understand the primary mission of journalism in a democracy: to inform and educate their fellow citizens fairly and ethically. But engaging this mission on a daily basis can be difficult in the face of constant economic challenges.²³

These challenges at times can be overwhelming. With unemployment hovering around 80 percent²⁴, jobs are precious. Reporters and editors sometimes cave in to the wishes of their newspaper’s financial backers and print salacious stories that are far from objective.²⁵ This economic state cannot be effectively

addressed by one dissertation. However, merely expanding and extending a conversation about journalistic responsibility can ultimately broaden and deepen hope for the future. This conversation must be of an invitational nature. Media “experts” from the West cannot go to Benin with a fixed agenda, as they have in the past, and expect their colleagues to naturally follow. By comparing freedom in the West to Benin’s continuing search for freedom, this dissertation creates overlapping regions of similarity. Within these similarities is a realm in which members of both cultures can learn.

Because of American ethnocentrism, new forms of technology have been introduced to West Africa and have failed because of often unrecognized cultural differences such as time, family structure, and the basic written and oral forms of communication.²⁶ Observing the journalistic culture of Benin illustrates that these differences can be recognized and thus make overall communication more efficient by surfacing the inherent differences.

In the West, journalism has changed a great deal since the days of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein during the famous Watergate break-in and the pair’s subsequent investigation during the early to mid-1970s.²⁷ The media of the twenty-first century have been criticized for being too concerned with getting the story first than getting it right.²⁸ Beninese journalists, though functioning in excessive poverty, are also living in a time of great potential. Democracy is new, as are other freedoms that did not exist under Marxism.

A study connecting freedom, journalism, narrative, culture, and the corresponding responsibilities of each culture can be of great value. The sense of responsibility individuals such as Jefferson and Madison must have felt during the formative years of America’s democracy are analogous to the responsibilities

borne by journalists in Cotonou today. America of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was not emerging from Marxism, however; it was breaking from the economic, social, and cultural constraints of the British monarchy. The 13-year period — from 1776, when America gained its independence until 1789, when George Washington took office as the first president — was a time of transition from the Continental Congress and an emphasis on regional governments to a centralized, multi-branched form of government.

Benin also experienced a transition period between the end of Marxism in 1989 and the beginning of a multi-party democracy in 1990. Great care was taken by the founding fathers in America to insulate the young democracy from British influence, writes Garry Wills, in *James Madison*²⁹, but those steps were harder in Benin, since many of those who moved into democratic positions also had been part of the Marxist regime. Mathieu Kérékou, who was the last dictator, was — at the time this dissertation was written — in his second (and final) five-year term as president.³⁰ Many members of his government, Beninese journalists say, also were members of his dictatorship. Kérékou was adept, after losing his first bid for president (to Nicéphore Soglo), at staying out of sight and then reemerging as a reformed leader who claimed to be more sensitive and caring.

The first decade of democracy in Benin was a time of trial and error. Now as the republic enters its second decade, democracy is more resilient. Elections, though tumultuous at times, are becoming more routine, and the media are also finding a place within the free Benin. The most in-depth literature to this point has been W. Joseph Campbell's book *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Côte D'Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy*. Since his research ended in 1998, this dissertation will also serve to update and extend his work.

Campbell's research on the history of Benin's print media is perhaps the most comprehensive in publication. Very little new literature has been published since 2000, and journalists in West Africa are yearning for new information, particularly on Benin, a country Robert Dossou, a leading Beninese human rights lawyer has referred to as "... a land of the press."³¹

Methodology

This bulk of this project is based on an esoteric ethnographic study³² I made during the summer of 2003 and explores interpretations of freedom in the West (based on the aforementioned Jefferson/Madison/Lippmann/Dewey model) and of freedom within Cotonou's emergent, independent daily newspapers. The dissertation explicitly addresses four points:

1. The assumed relationship between the cultures of the West and Benin, the notion of freedom, and the behavior of the journalists, government officials, and the readers in both cultures. Noted ethnographer John Van Maanen refers to this in *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* as "the observed."
2. The experiences of the fieldworker (the observer, according to Van Maanen).
3. The representational style selected to join the observer and the observed. Van Maanen calls this connecting element "the tale."
4. The role of the reader engaged in the active reconstruction of the tale. Van Maanen calls this "the audience."³³

The key esoteric ethnographic work took place in Cotonou during a two-month period (June and July of 2003) and included interviews with each daily newspaper's director of publication. Though this research is esoteric ethnography, it also is strongly grounded in the methodological framework of Barney

Glaser and Anselm Strauss.³⁴ The interviews were driven by one question: *What is the role of a newspaper in a free society and how well do you feel your newspaper fulfills this role?* Following Glaser and Strauss's research, the follow-up questions were generated by the respondent's answer to the framing question. In order to accentuate the inherent communication problems between West Africa and the West (particularly the United States), the issue of an oral culture (Africa) and a written culture (the West) is addressed in a separate chapter, Chapter Three. This chapter connects the foundational notions of freedom discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two to the individual editors and journalists of Benin (discussed in the Chapters Four and Chapter Five).

The responses each director gave constitute qualitative data, and they are presented in narrative form. There were 19 daily newspapers in Cotonou when this research was conducted. For the responses to have relevancy to the research question, themes between the directors have been connected to other historical and social trends of West Africa. When two or three directors reported nearly the same information, their comments were condensed for the purposes of space.

The term "esoteric" is significant to the reading and understanding of this dissertation. As a journalist with 25 years of experience, I cannot begin to observe the practices of other journalists without encountering (as well as bring with me) several professional and cultural problem points. These points must be outlined early in the methodology so the reader can process the information that follows in light of these problem points.

First, as an American, I work within a nation of wealth that is inconceivable to many living in a poor, developing country such as Benin. The newspapers I visited were, in comparison their American counterparts, under

staffed, under equipped, and some faced a daily struggle to continue publishing. It is difficult to enter such a culture and not be perceived as one who possesses the solutions to any and every publication problem. Since there is no accredited journalism school in Benin, my journalism undergraduate degree alone was envied by many of the journalists I interviewed.

Second, my values as a Westerner are far different from those in West Africa. It is common practice in the United States, for example, to graduate from high school and immediately go to the university of one's choice. This prepares Americans for entry into the competitive capitalistic system that drives our culture. Benin is far different. Jobs are scarce, but education is valued as much as in America, perhaps more. But the scarcity of employment makes the vast job market in the West appear otherworldly. Evidence of this was the many stares I received during my travels around Cotonou. Pascal, my good friend and translator, on several occasions would reassuringly say: "Don't worry about it. When people in Benin see a white person, they assume he is either European or American, and both are rich in comparison."

The values of a Westerner are far different from those of a Beninese. I consider myself to have a very strong family unit. But the family units of West Africa are both larger and stronger. It is not unusual for the close families groups to occupy part of a city block or entire sections of smaller villages. The elderly of the West frequently do not always receive the respect they deserve. If an African shows the same disrespect for the older and wiser, he would likely be ostracized.³⁵

Perhaps one of the largest potential problem points I encountered was the fact that I am white. It was impossible for me to travel anywhere in Cotonou

without being very obvious. During my first trip in June and July of 2001, I attended mass at St. Michael, a very large Catholic Church in Cotonou. There were easily between 500 and 800 people attending mass, and I was the only white person. I know this because when mass ended, I quickly scanned the church.

But being different had its advantages. Many people I did not know introduced themselves after mass and shook my hand. I learned later that when a white person, particularly an American, goes to a developing country such as Benin to learn, he or she is held in great esteem. Places such as Benin are too often forgotten and usually misunderstood by the white West.

My color certainly made me appear different while conducting my research, but I do not feel it hindered the research in any way. Repeatedly, Pascal told me how impressed people were that I had traveled so far to learn about Benin. Additionally, when they learned I had financed the trip myself, many were astounded. I am not a rich person by any means. But the money I spent on this research project – roughly \$5,000 – is, by Beninese standards, a fortune.

Amidst these differences, though, are similarities. I believe the Beninese journalists taught me much more than I them. This is, as will be further discussed in Chapter Three, Paulo Freire's recognition of the "other" at its best. I tried to enter each interview with an open mind and reflect what I saw and heard as truthfully as possible. On many occasions merely getting to an appointment was an exercise in futility. The traffic of Cotonou can, at times, be as unbearable as the afternoon sun. A canopy of blue exhaust frequently hangs over busy streets, and many intersections are crowded with people begging for money or selling everything from puppies and radios to rat poison and laminated maps of the

world. At times, we would successfully navigate these obstacles, arrive at our appointment on time, and have to reschedule it for another day. People in Africa observe time differently than Westerners. My first trip to Benin prepared me well for this cultural difference, so I was not as surprised during this visit.

What I discovered after interviewing more than 50 Beninese journalists, editors, directors of publication, and scholars was a refreshing idea of journalism that has been informed by a rich history. Beninese journalists appreciate freedom because most have a clear memory of no freedom. In comparison, American journalism appears to be an unreflective practice. We cannot imagine what life must be like under a Marxist regime unless we read about it. Beninese people know first-hand the difference between freedom and no freedom. American journalists and Americans in general can learn a great deal from this story of freedom.

This study is esoteric because I am a journalist. Though that carried with it the pressure points outlines above, it also had its advantages. A bond of professionalism exists between people who practice the same profession no matter what their cultural background may be because they share a salient professional identity that offers situated transcendence of other identities.³⁶ When I met the directors of publication or journalists, we immediately began discussing the similarities and differences of our various newspapers. The paper for which I worked in 2003 was the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, a seven-day-a-week publication with a daily circulation of more than 200,000. As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, the average daily circulation of the papers I visited was between 1,500 and 5,000. If anything, the natural openness and productivity of these interviews was enhanced because I was a journalist.

Perhaps the largest advantage to being a journalist came after I had interviewed all of the directors. The information gained from the interviews was tested and broadened by a three-week observation at one newspaper, *Le Matin*, Cotonou's oldest privately owned newspaper. These deeper observations offer a micro look at the print media that Campbell's research does not include. It also allows individual journalists to discuss their field as well their apprehensions, fears, and dreams. At times their comments echo those of the directors of publication; at other times they are diametrically opposed. Presenting these macro and micro dimensions of Cotonou's print media provides an intellectual space from which present and future journalists can learn. This space is not specifically for the journalists of Benin or West Africa. Western journalists alike can enter this theoretical region to see the similarities and differences present between both cultures, and this is perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of this dissertation.

Chapter description

Chapter One provides the critical Western framework of freedom and the media. The media of Benin can have little relevance in the West without this reference. Benin's media more resemble a nineteenth century American model in that there are many newspapers vying for a voice. Objective reporting is something that exists in theory but is still developing in actual usage. The voices of Jefferson/Madison/Lippmann and Dewey frame the Western definition of freedom. Additionally Walter Fisher will provide the necessary theoretical perspective that will connect the concept of freedom to narrative. Fisher's theoretical framework will be used at the end of this and subsequent chapters to

illustrate how the concepts addressed in those chapters can achieve greater depth and practical usefulness when combined with the scholarly framework of narrative.

Chapter Two takes a similar look at Benin's history, beginning with its core values and then looking at the following historical moments: the French colonization, independence in 1960 that included 12 subsequent years of numerous *coups d'etat*, the 17-year Marxist regime, and, most recently, the conversion to a multi-party democracy. One constant theme throughout these many changes has been the dissident media. Certainly under a democracy, the media have a much broader scope of freedom in which to work. How those media have evolved from a Marxist regime to a multi-party democracy is a constant theme throughout this chapter as well as the entire dissertation.

Chapter Three highlights the critical oral and written traditions in West Africa. This comparison is necessary to this overall project because it is the key area where most conflicts occur. It is also the area where Fisher's theoretical framework can be enriched and broadened by including the research of Clifford Geertz, James Carey, Walter Ong, and Paulo Freire.³⁷ Africa is dominated by the oral tradition whereas the West is more propelled by the written tradition. When the two clash, which typically occurs in Africa, communicative problems arise. Frequently, the present-day media appropriate portions of the oral tradition when sensational stories are reported.

Chapter Four provides the necessary macro look into Cotonou's print media. Cotonou is Benin's largest city, so it is the logical setting from which to gain an objective view of how the print media functions. It also is where Campbell did the majority of his research. Interviews were conducted with all

directors of publication of all the daily newspapers, and the their definitions of freedom compared. All of the directors eloquently define the concept of freedom, but, as this chapter reveals, many have a difficult time applying that concept in an objective manner primarily because of economic pressures.

Chapter Five offers a micro look at this media by taking an in-depth look at *Le Matin* and how its staff functions on a day-to-day basis. This chapter also sheds light on how the newspaper reflects the general trends of journalism in a developing democracy by examining how *Le Matin* reported, photographed, and presented the biggest story it faced in 2003, the deaths of 15 people during a stampede at a Cotonou concert. Occasionally, it is necessary to step back and utilize Western journalistic standards such as fairness and truth to offer constructive criticism of *Le Matin's* coverage. *Le Matin's* intent to embrace a professional model of journalism invites such evaluation from the standpoint of an experienced Western journalist.³⁸

Chapter Six looks at the future of democracy in Benin and the crucial role journalism will play in that dynamic by asking the question: *How will the print media respond as Benin's overall institution of democracy grows and gains a deeper, more textured historical background?* This is not an easy question to answer because it involves the global forces of politics and economics. Benin, probably not a focus for most Americans, suffers from great economic strife, and political power is many times viewed as a way people can change their plight.³⁹ When that political power and journalism collide, the issue of objectivity arises because, in its most professional state, journalism must reflect truth as accurately and unfettered by bias as possible. When politics enters the dynamic, particularly

when political figures own newspapers, as is sometimes the case in Benin, objectivity can be compromised.

This chapter also offers a number of suggestions – including developing a greater sense of journalistic professionalism – that can help Benin meet the challenges of the twenty-first century and preserve its burgeoning democracy for many years to come. This chapter serves primarily as a means to draw together the similarities of the West and West Africa. The media of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, for example, were focused on a common enemy – breaking from the monarchical rule of Great Britain and developing an independent form of government. Benin’s media during the French colonization were focused on a similar enemy – the influential, and very unpopular French rule. However, once democracy took root in both countries, the media went through a period of adjustment. The modern media of Benin are still fighting some of the old battles. America’s media, though much older, have ebbed and flowed throughout history in terms of how responsibly and ethically it has informed and educated the public. How Benin’s media grow and respond to the new democracy can inform America’s media and ultimately help it face the twenty-first century.

Chapter One

*A Western notion of freedom,
according to Thomas Jefferson, James Madison,
Walter Lippmann, and John Dewey*

The America of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries envisioned by founding fathers Thomas Jefferson and James Madison was one in constant motion. The young and impressionable democracy had form, but its substance had not yet become part of the American consciousness. Citizens still had firm roots in England and elsewhere, and the notion of one over-arching government felt very much like the monarchy that had been at the root of the Revolutionary War.¹

The colonies were much like independent mini-nations bound by geography, commerce, language, and a common distrust of England. At the center of these 13 original colonies was Jefferson and Madison's Virginia. It was between the northern and southern sentiments that constantly pushed and pulled the young democracy and its corresponding freedoms. In Jefferson's mind, according to Joseph J. Ellis, the world was a clash of dichotomies: "Whigs versus Tories; moderns versus ancients; American versus Europe; rural conditions versus urban; whites versus blacks."² The common ground between these dichotomies is where a workable notion of freedom began for Jefferson and Madison.

One hundred and fifty years later, Walter Lippmann and John Dewey took the common-ground sentiments of Jefferson and Madison and fused them with a more contemporary concept of the public. For Lippmann, the media have

a responsibility, as he writes in *Public Opinion*, to help people make sense of the world around them. But the world within our minds does not always agree with the world presented to us by other groups including the media. As Lippmann writes in *Public Opinion*:

The pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, purposes, and relationship, are their public opinions. Those pictures, which are acted upon by groups of people, or by individuals acting in the name of groups, are Public Opinion with capital letters.³

Lippmann believes public opinions must be organized for the press, not *by* the press as was the case in his day, and, it can be argued, is still the case today.⁴ The issues of public — not to be confused with public *opinion* — and private and how these concepts mediate freedom are always embedded within any discussion of Lippmann and Dewey — not to mention Jefferson and Madison — and these are the foundational elements of this chapter. How the media in America and Cotonou maintain freedom has perhaps more similarities than differences. Dewey's Great Community has resonance in a discussion of Jefferson and Madison because their vision of America's potential was like nothing previously imagined. The natural resources and the nearly limitless land available made the prospects of the young America almost infinite.⁵ Jefferson and Madison's vision was in many ways the ideal they saw for America.⁶

This chapter looks at a Western concept of freedom as defined by Jefferson, Madison, Lippmann, and Dewey and the influences the media exert within that concept. Jefferson and Madison are particularly significant because they represent a time when freedom was still a new, malleable concept in the

young America. Their thoughts connect particularly well with a discussion of Benin's multi-party democracy that has been in effect in the republic since 1990. Lippmann and Dewey's thoughts help to frame what roles the individual, as well as the community, play within a democracy. Lippmann, in particular, also isolates the role of the media and how it affects both the individual as well as the community as a whole. By challenging us to consider philosophically how we view and are shaped by news, Lippmann's thoughts are as relevant today as they were when he wrote them in the early twentieth century.

At the end of this chapter, Fisher's narrative paradigm – because it is rooted in a form of innovative logic – will connect and deepen the thoughts of Jefferson, Madison, Lippmann, and Dewey. Applying the narrative paradigm to communication, Fisher writes, "... is to hold, along with Aristotle, that 'people' have a natural tendency to prefer what they perceive as the true and the just."⁷ When realized and applied as foundational elements of praxis, the true and the just have the potential to propel journalism (in Benin as well as in the United States) to a level that can be beneficial on a global scale.

Freedom for Jefferson and Madison

As Ellis notes in *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, the creation of a separate American nation was sudden and not gradual. It literally was via a "... revolutionary rather than evolutionary fashion."⁸ In just the final decades of the eighteenth century, America went from 13 colonies to one nation that possessed, as many of the founding fathers argued, a divine mission in history.⁹ This is why historians generally view American independence in two phases, the first occurring with the Declaration of Independence in 1776, and the

second being the notion of independent statehood made possible by the constitutional process of 1787-1788.¹⁰

The malleable nature of the young democracy and its corresponding freedoms is nothing short of astonishing. Jefferson and Madison realized the collectivist nature at the core of the spirit of 1776. Basic freedoms, as Zall notes, had to be insured, including religion, the press, and freedom of the person.¹¹ As Ellis writes, there was a certain surrendering "... of personal, state, and sectional interests to the larger purposes of American nationhood, first embodied in the Continental Army and later in the newly established federal government."¹² Essentially this is the beginning of the collectivist notion of freedom as we know it today. To the early citizens, it was just a gamble. Few had the genius and vision of a Jefferson or a Madison. Today, however, freedom has become synonymous with America and the Constitution. Generations of Americans have grown up knowing nothing but freedom.¹³

The historical moment in which Jefferson and Madison lived allowed them to experience moments of freedom and restriction. On one hand were the vivid memories of British rule and the symbolic, ever-present nature of the crown. Even with an ocean between the colonies and England, monarchical controls in the form of taxes and overall governmental meddling were constantly felt, and the Declaration of Independence started the mechanism moving toward an idea — albeit a fuzzy idea — of freedom and self-government.¹⁴

The enormous challenge facing the Continental Congress in Philadelphia was to begin evolving the 13 individual colonies into one collective unit with a common, national destiny. Jefferson and Madison knew this would not occur overnight. The key was to use their political wisdom and the spirit of 1776 as the

sparks to light the fires of nationalism.¹⁵ Issues such as sovereignty and state debts — not to mention the most volatile issue of the time, slavery — at times made passage of the Constitution seem perilously close to impossible, but the powers of negotiation and persuasion ultimately prevailed.

Classic ideological differences existed between the Federalists of Washington and Adams and the Republicans (a predecessor of today's Democratic party) of Jefferson and Madison, but both believed in the basic goal of 1776: Freedom from the restrictive monarchy of England. As the first president, Washington fully upheld every letter of the Constitution.¹⁶ These core principles held the union together throughout his two terms in spite of the nagging question of states' rights and the always present yet seldom directly addressed issue of slavery. However, when Adams took office, the chasm between Federalists and Republicans widened and deepened, and it eventually threatened the long friendship of Adams and Jefferson.¹⁷ Political strategies were more malicious and the scar of slavery soon threatened the very notions of national identity and freedom.

Slavery and the notion of national freedom

Although basic ideology divided Federalists and Republicans, slavery was a moral quandary with an obvious answer that no one dared propose. Even before ratification of the Constitution, Jefferson and Madison had each grappled with the long-term effects of slavery since it violated the basic principles of the Constitution.¹⁸ How could the new nation be built on freedom for everyone if slavery was still tolerated? But since the Deep South was so dependent on the institution that merely proposing any "... clear resolution of the slavery question

one way or the other rendered ratification of the Constitution virtually impossible.”¹⁹

Madison often used what Wills calls “a rhetoric of slavery” when discussing slavery.²⁰ Merely addressing it meant a retrenchment of the basic rights he felt entitled to as a member of Virginia’s elite class. His family owned slaves (his father James Sr. owned eighty-eight slaves and James Jr.’s grandfather Ambrose Madison owned thirty²¹), but, as Yarbrough notes, they were somehow detached from the abused slaves of the Deep South, where slavery was more closely tied to the issue of cheap labor. The mere possibility of a fully developed commercial society frightened Jefferson in particular. The agricultural life was considered at the time “morally superior.”²²

Neither Madison nor Jefferson would bend to this moral superiority. Both knew the potentially destructive nature slavery posed to the union. In 1787, in fact, Madison made one his boldest attempts at solving the problem when he proposed the establishment of a black settlement in Africa in which all American slaves would eventually be settled.²³ And in December of 1831, he wrote that society could not hope to brighten unless the “dreadful calamity which has so long affected our country, and filled so many with despair, will be gradually removed.”²⁴ But Madison took great care to also note that the removal of slavery should be consistent with “justice, peace, and the general satisfaction; thus giving to our country the full enjoyment of the blessings of liberty, and to the world the full benefit of its great example.”²⁵ This hints at the importance of holding the nation together in the face of slavery. Getting the Constitution ratified had to take precedence – for the time being – over slavery.

Jefferson also could not escape the destructive tendencies of slavery. When the Declaration was drafted, as Peterson and Randall note, Jefferson included an angry charge against slavery, calling it the king's "cruel war against human nature itself."²⁶ In 1784, he sponsored a Congressional bill that would have outlawed slavery in any new state. However, in 1820 during debate on whether Missouri should be admitted to the Union as a slave state or a free state, Jefferson argued in favor of slavery. As E.M. Halliday writes in *Understanding Thomas Jefferson*:

His basic argument was that a large number of independent small farmers, each having only a few slaves, would be more likely to treat them kindly, and more willing to let them go if and when the time came for emancipation. Thus, he maintained, the "diffusion" of slavery would both humanize it and hasten its end — and, he no doubt hoped, also lessen the likelihood of a mass rebellion.²⁷

Essentially — and ironically — slavery carried enormous power in terms of freedom in America. Taking the moral high ground and abolishing it assured that the Constitution would never be ratified. Accepting slavery as a necessary evil rendered the Constitution's core principle of freedom for all illogical. The easiest course of action was no action. As Ellis writes:

Neither side got what it wanted at Philadelphia in 1787. The Constitution contained no provision that committed the newly created federal government to a policy of gradual emancipation, or in any clear sense placed slavery on the road to ultimate extinction. On the other hand, the Constitution contained no provisions that specifically sanctioned slavery as a permanent and protected institution south of the Potomac or anywhere else. The distinguishing feature of the document when it came to slavery was its evasiveness. It was neither a "contract

abolition” nor a “covenant with death,” but rather a prudent exercise in ambiguity.²⁸

That ambiguity protected the nation, however, until it could withstand the ultimate challenge of the Civil War slightly more than 70 years later. Madison, at times, claimed to be deeply embarrassed by the excessive proslavery rhetoric of the Deep South. Virginia was directly between the largely antislavery North and the proslavery Deep South. He uses what Ellis terms “enlightened obfuscation” when discussing slavery that enabled him denounce it on one hand and eventually double back and appear worried “... that the matter is being talked about at all.”²⁹

What the slavery issue ends up tugging at hardest, however, is the bedrock issue of freedom. Jefferson and Madison — as well as other founders such as Washington and Franklin — were concerned about how slavery would make the nation look. As Jefferson was writing and revising his only published book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he spoke of having bad dreams about racial wars,³⁰ and Washington once termed slavery as “... a cancer on the body politic of America that could not at present be removed without killing the patient.”³¹

Jefferson’s understanding of freedom encompasses, according to Sheldon:

... both the liberal, Lockean ideas of individual freedom from government interference and the classical notion of freedom to participate in the public deliberation which develops one’s highest qualities and shapes the laws under which one lives.³²

These are ancient and modern concepts that were being considered at a most crucial period. A balance between the pair was paramount if the new union was to survive and slavery was not helping matters.

Madison sensed the tense nature of slavery late in his life and skillfully linked its eventual abolition to freedom, liberty, and the entire notion of government in Richmond in 1829, just seven years before his death, when he said: “The essence of Government is power, and the great trick in a republic is to see that the powerful majority never oppresses the minority rights.”³³ The minority to whom he referred was the slaves.³⁴ As hard as he tried to connect the degrading nature of slavery to America’s Constitutional promise of freedom, Madison was fighting a losing battle. The founding fathers had ignored the issue too long. The battle would have to be settled by the Civil War generation led by Abraham Lincoln.

The media as a force in early freedom

The newspapers of the early American landscape certainly played a part in the many debates on slavery, but Jefferson and Madison also used them for political purposes.³⁵ The newspapers of this era typically were mouthpieces for various political parties, just as they are today in Cotonou. The *Philadelphia Aurora*, for example, was considered the voice of Jefferson and his Republicans and the *Gazette of the United States* was a supporter of Hamilton and his Federalist party. It was Jefferson, however, who most eloquently addressed the need to preserve press freedom in his letter to Col. Edward Carrington on January 16, 1787:

The basis of our governments being the opinion of the people, the very first object should be to keep that right; and were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.³⁶

Both Jefferson and Madison, as Koch writes, shared a keen “respect for public opinion.”³⁷ In 1791 in fact, Madison talked with a former classmate Philip Freneau about relocating to Philadelphia a Republican newspaper (*The National Gazette*) that he had planned to locate in New Jersey. Freneau announced his propose in the *Gazette* as:

In this paper the Editor engages to support, as far as a newspaper can with propriety be supposed to support, the great principles upon which the American Revolution was founded, a faithful adherence to which can alone preserve the blessings of liberty to this extensive empire – an empire, in which the grand experiment is now making, whether or not the assertion of certain European philosophers be true, *that a pure republic can never subsist for any length of time, except in a very limited extent of territory.*³⁸

Newspapers held a great deal of power during this era.³⁹ John Fenno’s *United States Gazette* countered Freneau’s anti-Federalist *Gazette*. This is one area the early press of the West parallels the present media of Benin. The early American press, like many of the papers during the colonization-era in Benin, had a common enemy.⁴⁰ For editors such as Fenno, it was the anti-Federalists; for the early papers in Benin, it was the French. Fenno’s *United States Gazette* used phrases such as “mad dogs” and “audacious scribblers” to describe the political process.⁴¹ The early press of Benin, as will be seen in Chapter Two, used a similar dissident approach.

Many adept politicians employed what John Adams called “puffers” — a version of modern-day spin-masters or public relations experts — who would release perfectly timed tidbits of information in order to bolster or erode public support (although it was not termed public relations in the eighteenth century).⁴²

Portions of letters written by Jefferson, Madison, Washington, and Adams were frequently released to newspapers to inform readers of their personal lives. When Jefferson and his close friend Adams were feuding, the two would purposely release letters to newspapers in an attempt to persuade people to take particular stands on various issues of the time.⁴³ Advertising was not a primary source of revenue for newspapers of this era. They were primarily vehicles of general comment and political persuasion, and *The Federalist Papers* were perhaps the best example of this. Most rural colonists during late eighteenth century could not read, but the newspapers, particularly those in New York, were a means for Alexander Hamilton, Madison, and John Jay to make their case to the educated class for a united Union. By forging unity among these elites, a stronger, verbal case, they believed, could be made to those who could not read the newspapers or who did not have access to them.⁴⁴

New York was the focal point for *The Federalist Papers* since it was one of four states needed for ratification, the others being Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and Virginia. Jay wrote some of the first papers (Nos. 2, 3, 4, and 5) but was wounded in a street riot and returned to write only one other contribution (No. 64).⁴⁵ The series, written under the collective pseudonym "Publius" (the Public Man), was, according to Wills "... a targeted act of propaganda."⁴⁶ However, Madison's contributions in Federalist No. 10, published on November 22, 1787, has been interpreted by contemporary historians⁴⁷ as one of the major rationales for passage of the Constitution, although No. 10 did not receive much debate during the actual ratification process.

Madison's most important passage is the claim that "no man is allowed to be a judge in his own case."⁴⁸ He was challenging Charles Louis de Secondat

Montesquieu's axiom that "... a republican government could not operate effectively in a large geographic area," according to historian Robert Allen Rutland.⁴⁹ Instead, Madison is applying the reverse judgment in No. 10, suggesting that of all systems of government, a republican form is the best.

A second contribution to freedom in No. 10 is the connection of faction and liberty. Madison writes: "Liberty is to faction, what air is to fire, an aliment without which it instantly expires."⁵⁰ He is suggesting that liberty and its embedded element of freedom make possible factions and the inherent dangers that go with them. However, it is sheer folly, he notes, to abolish liberty to get rid of factions. The constant challenge to any free society, as was evident in the young, newly united America, is to nurture the driving concept of collective unity to the point where it can withstand the tension posed by the inevitable factions. The notion of faction being fostered by freedom is still being realized in Benin. Since the democracy is a little more than 10 years old, it is reasonable to assume that the residual fears of the Marxist regime are still in the minds of most adults more than 25 or 30 years old.

One of the most common sources of faction during the formative years of democracy in America — the various and unequal distribution of property — is addressed by No. 10. According to Rutland, the classic rich/poor conflict is one society has never satisfactorily solved.⁵¹ Even in early America the many usually deferred to the few, or, as John Adams, former president and close friend of Jefferson, once warned: "Aristocracy like Waterfowl dives for Ages and rises again with brighter Plumage."⁵²

Hamilton's plan for *The Federalist* series was simple: He would essentially barrage readers with pro-ratification arguments.⁵³ Since *The Federalist Papers* were

published four times each in a number of newspapers — four of New York City's five papers alone — reaching a large number of literate people was never a problem. Though Hamilton's plan was sound, it largely failed. As Wills writes in the introduction to *The Federalist Papers*:

If the first aim of the series was to persuade New Yorkers to elect friends of the Constitution to the ratifying convention, then Hamilton failed. The delegation opposed the Constitution two to one (though the popular vote had only been opposed by fifty-six percent). *The Federalist* in book form could still be used to influence debate after the delegates assembled in Poughkeepsie, and Hamilton rushed off copies to Virginia, where Madison distributed them to influence the Virginia convention. But the heroic propaganda effort does not seem to have swayed many people by its logic or its eloquence. The New York convention abandoned its opposition to the Constitution in large part because a ninth state (New Hampshire) ratified during the Poughkeepsie debates, leaving New York with the prospect of lonely nationhood to itself.⁵⁴

Political deal-making aside, the press in early America did play a significant role in shaping public opinion as well as educating the citizenry on how the Constitution could assure freedom for nearly all free colonists.⁵⁵

Freedom and the public: Lippmann

In many ways the debate between Lippmann and Dewey addresses the ideal of journalism rather than the reality. Real world journalism is far removed from the grassroots, inclusive notion of democracy that Jefferson and Madison envisioned in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The mass media of the twenty-first century is routinely perceived as egotistical and elitist.⁵⁶ It has moved from being a defining concept of democracy to actually meshing and

hobnobbing with the power structure at the core of democracy. As Charles Peters, editor of the *Washington Monthly*, tells James Fallows in *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*: “It is a major problem that journalists have come to identify with the rich or upper middle class rather than with the poor.”⁵⁷

Throughout the bulk of his literature, Lippmann connects professionalism in politics with professionalism in journalism. When the two work together, democracy is propelled in a positive direction.⁵⁸ In reality, however, this often does not occur. In *Liberty and the News*, *Public Opinion*, and *The Phantom Public*, Lippmann connects politics, journalism, and the common man. Journalism should be the conduit between politics and the common man, but it typically does not work this way. The ideal *democratic* setting, according to Lippmann, is something akin to a New England town meeting — or perhaps some of the public settings of Jefferson and Madison’s era — where everyone has a voice. Since this is not possible on a large scale, the press needs to serve as a sort of town meeting, providing a space where any citizen can theoretically enter and be heard.⁵⁹

The press never quite measures up to Lippmann’s expectations, though. In *Liberty and the News*, published in 1919 when Lippmann was thirty years old, he states that [at that time] most of the newspaper stories were distorted and largely inaccurate, based not on facts but on the hopes of the individuals who made up the news organizations. These conclusions were drawn from experiences Lippmann had as a propagandist during World War I. While working behind the front, Lippmann wrote propaganda leaflets, interrogated prisoners, and worked with other intelligence efforts on behalf of the Allies. As Ronald Steel writes in

the preface of *Public Opinion*: “He [Lippmann] learned how easy it was to manipulate public opinion. That lesson had a powerful effect on him, leading him to question the dogma that the public must always be right.”⁶⁰

As Lippmann saw it, the ideal role of the press was to circulate information, not encourage argument. Arguments were what occurred in the absence of reliable information,⁶¹ and this is one of the first areas where Lippmann and Dewey overlap and contradict each other. Dewey believes our search and ultimate discovery of reliable information is guided by questions that arise during argumentation. In essence, argumentation is a plot that drives the overall story of information discovery.⁶² To argue with someone, we must momentarily enter that person’s point of view, and by doing so we run the risk of ultimately agreeing with them.⁶³

Realistically, though, Lippmann sees the media as more of a searchlight, as Steel writes, that illuminates one area, then another, and still another. What is illuminated is given primacy.⁶⁴ The reader (listener or viewer) of the news consumes what he or she is given and largely never takes the time to consider what is not being illuminated. Lippmann’s view, according to James W. Carey, is that reality is “picturable,” and truth can be achieved by matching a picturable reality with a language that corresponds to it. Carey writes:

News, however, cannot picture reality or provide correspondence to the truth. News can only give, like the blip on a sonar scope, a signal that something is happening. More often it provides degenerate photographs or a pseudo-reality of stereotypes. News can approximate truth only when reality is reducible to a statistical table: sport scores, stock exchange reports, births, deaths, marriages, accidents, court decisions, elections, economic transactions such as foreign trade and balance of

payments. Lippmann's major argument is this: Where there is a good machinery of record, the news system works with precision; where there is not, it disseminates stereotypes.⁶⁵

Carey notes that Lippmann is implying that the ground for discussion of the mass media must be shifted from questions of public, power, and freedom to questions of knowledge, truth, and stereotypes. This point is particularly significant to this dissertation because it begins to set a course for journalistic realization and change, at least from a Lippmann-esque point of view.

Journalism has always been considered an integral component of democracy.⁶⁶ During the Watergate investigation of the early 1970s, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of *The Washington Post* set the tone for a new era of journalism: one where the press became a watchdog for the polis.⁶⁷

The first amendment guarantees a press without government intervention, but the Watergate investigation essentially recast the role of the journalist in a way that emphasizes Lippmann's distinction between truth and information.⁶⁸ This distinction rests on what Carey terms a "spectator theory of knowledge."⁶⁹ As Lippmann saw it, knowledge is obtained when people receive a copy of reality that has been observed by a scientifically trained expert. The journalist, as Lippmann notes throughout all of his writings, is not scientifically trained, yet he or she is in a position to inform the masses of what is occurring in the world. In *Public Opinion*, he writes: "There is a very small body of exact knowledge, which it requires no outstanding ability or training to deal with. The rest is in the journalist's own discretion."⁷⁰ In most news stories, a journalist begins with a basic fact or facts that drive the story, but the final truth that results "... is only his [the journalist's] version."⁷¹

If Lippmann was suspicious early in his life about public opinion and the role journalists play in that dynamic, he became even more doubtful in *The Phantom Public*. Here he proclaims the possibility of a public competent enough to direct public affairs an abstraction or a mere aberration. The members of this “public” are spectators on the sidelines of life and are not well enough informed to get involved. “They must judge externally,” Lippmann writes, “and they can act only by supporting one of the interests directly involved.”⁷²

This act of “supporting” is significant to this discussion of Lippmann, freedom, and democracy because it places the public in a passive role. For Lippmann, the public does not express an opinion per se. Instead, as Wilfred M. McClay writes in the introduction of *The Phantom Public*, “... it merely aligns itself for or against a person or proposition.”⁷³ Lippmann offers a stark portrait of a “disenchanted” man in *The Phantom Public*. The public affairs of this disenchanted man are “invisible” and, for the most part, “managed” by unseen forces.

In *Liberty and the News*, Lippmann has more faith in the role of the media. The role of gathering, ordering, and presenting the news is viewed as “one of the truly sacred and priestly offices in a democracy.”⁷⁴ In *The Phantom Public*, however, the role of the individual becomes much more detached and distant. He writes:

If the voter cannot grasp the details of the problems of the day because he has not the time, the interest or the knowledge, he will not have a better public opinion because he is asked to express his opinion more frequently. He will simply be more bewildered, more bored and more ready to follow along.”⁷⁵

In many ways, today's journalist is cultivating this community of followers. As suggested, many journalists have not only come to identify with the upper classes of society, they have joined those classes. Entry-level reporting positions at newspapers, television stations, and radio stations routinely pay less than \$30,000 per year.⁷⁶ However, journalists at the nation's largest 30 to 50 newspapers usually make more than \$40,000, \$50,000, and \$60,000 per year with upper-echelon editors making more than six figures.⁷⁷ The journalist of Lippmann's era — who was able to identify with blue collar workers because he/she *was* a blue collar worker — has been replaced by journalists who too often write about the poor and downtrodden because those types of stories might win awards, thus enabling them to improve their place in the publishing hierarchy. The publisher of the twenty-first century, as Fallows points out, tends to be politically interested in legislation that protects his or her corporate interests.⁷⁸

The presence of elitism and egoism in journalism is evidenced by Fallows pointing to economic legislation such as the 1993 and 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) as indications that the media many times sympathize with the educated elite and not the poor. Both NAFTA and GATT were perceived as good for the economy, and in theory they were because intellectual labor moves from the more powerful United States and at the same time cheaper food, clothing, and other products can be imported from foreign lands where labor is nearly always cheaper.⁷⁹

This very basic model is what the educated, predominantly liberal, media gravitates toward. They forget, Fallows writes, the other half of the equation: The

American workers who lose jobs because of the influx of cheaper foreign goods. Family units can be strained and broken, leading to what Deetz and Giddens refer to as *ontological insecurity*.⁸⁰ Our personal existence tends to be overshadowed by the powerful corporate organizations around us. For many, Deetz writes, these organizations wield more power and influence than organized religions and ultimately fragment our identities.⁸¹

Strategically Lippmann sees the average citizen as detached from the social process. "To judge the whole universe," he writes in *The Phantom Public*, "you must, like a god, be outside of it, a point of view no mortal mind can adopt."⁸² Since most cannot understand these complex processes, he/she must "... judge externally, and they can act only by supporting one of the interests directly involved."⁸³

The agents of change for Lippmann are twofold: education, both for the disenchanted citizen as well as the journalist, and a realization of individual participation, which aligns him with Dewey. Concerning education, he believes democracy has never sufficiently developed an acceptable way to teach. It has always aimed "... not at making good citizens but at making a mass of amateur executives."⁸⁴ The unfortunate result is the aforementioned mass bewilderment.

Concerning the individual, Lippmann is more hopeful. Near the end of *The Phantom Public*, he writes:

Then, we can say without theoretical qualms what common sense plainly tells us is so: it is the individuals who act, not society; it is the individuals who think, not the collective mind; it is the painters who paint, not the artistic spirit of the age; it is the soldiers who fight and are killed, not the nation; it is the merchant who exports, not the country. It is their relations with each other that constitute a society. And it is about

the ordering of those relations that the individuals not executively concerned in a specific disorder may have public opinions and may intervene as a public.⁸⁵

Freedom and the public: Dewey

It has been said that if Lippmann's form of communication and philosophy emphasizes the metaphor of seeing, the communication and philosophy of Dewey emphasizes hearing as a way to argue that speech captures the action of language and communication better than the more "static images of the printed page."⁸⁶ Dewey's philosophical framework is built on a foundation of community life. Through discussion, people become informed and create a larger body of information that is dialogic in nature. The other is a necessity for personal and community growth in the eyes of Dewey. It is a form of communication that does not begin with one person and end with another. It occurs *between* the two.⁸⁷

This is a paramount difference between Dewey and Lippmann, yet is one that makes them vitally important to this project. Lippmann assumes most people are detached — "disenchanted" in his words — from the true interactions of the world, and those people merely align themselves with a "public" opinion generated by the minority who are on the inside. Dewey's notion of freedom is one that is "made active" by community life.⁸⁸ He takes great care to distinguish a term such as "public" from other more political entities such as "government" and "political democracy."

Community life is the core of Dewey's philosophy. Early in *The Public and Its Problems*, he distinguishes between organized public life and other modes of community.⁸⁹ He writes:

Friendships, for example, are non-political forms of association. They are characterized by an intimate and subtle sense of the fruits of intercourse. They contribute to experience some of its most precious values. Only the exigencies of a preconceived theory would confuse with the state that texture of friendships and attachments which is the chief bond in any community, or would insist that the former depends upon the later for existence.⁹⁰

The individual and community are interconnected in Dewey's philosophy. This base level is significant before one can even consider larger concepts such as government and democracy. Whereas Lippmann tends to separate the disenchanted man from the overall workings of democracy and freedom, Dewey places dialogic interactions directly at the center of these. It is simple to assume that once a discussion begins with an individual, the logical next steps move toward community and then state. Dewey stops short of making this leap. The connections between individuals and the state are significant enough to warrant careful framing and definition.

Dewey illustrates the interconnected nature of these three entities when he writes: "Communities have been supplied with works of art, with scientific discoveries, because of the personal delight found by private persons in engaging in these activities."⁹¹ In short, he is suggesting that even our most private activities can have an effect on our public lives. Two individuals may engage in a private conversation; however, the consequences of that conversation may spill into their public lives. Habermas refers to the sphere of the market as

“private” and the sphere of the family as the “intimate” sphere,⁹² but the resulting interaction and ultimate overlapping of the two are very much the same as what Dewey refers to in *The Public and Its Problems*.

The differences between Dewey and Lippmann are significant, particularly in how they situate the individual within their respective philosophies. Dewey is much more inclusive of the individual in nearly every type of interaction. Early in *The Public and Its Problems*, he notes that individuals may:

“... lose their identity in a mob or in a political convention or in a joint-stock corporation or at the polls. But this does not mean that some mysterious collective agency is making decisions, but that some few persons who know what they are about are taking advantage of masses force to conduct the mob their way, boss a political machine, and manage the affairs of corporate business.”⁹³

This, in fact, is what Lippmann feared most: A society where the masses were essentially controlled by a few with special interests and predetermined agendas. His answer was a technocracy composed of a group of highly intelligent, politically disinterested people who would make all of the key decisions. Though a bold theory, it seems impossible in reality.

Dewey saw more hope because individuals are the basis of everything in society, from interpersonal conversations to large corporations. What he did not anticipate were things such as the vast gulf that has come to separate the very rich from the very poor, and, particularly in a twenty-first century America, an overall eroding of values and ethics as evidenced by corporate scandals such as Enron and WorldComm.

Dewey uses the public as the ultimate barometer with which to gauge notions such as community, government, and democracy. The degree to which any public is organized, Dewey writes, is one of the basic criterion for determining how good a particular state is. Perhaps more significant, he notes, is determining "... the degree in which its officers are so constituted as to perform their function of caring for public interests."⁹⁴ When the state, which is made up of individuals, cares for the masses, the masses in turn sustain the existence of the state.

As will be addressed in Chapter Two, this is one of the problems facing Benin as a young democracy: The state is still viewed by many as an abstraction due in large part to its vast economic strife.⁹⁵ The first decade was perhaps the most crucial because memories of Marxism were so vivid.⁹⁶ To become the type of democracy of which Dewey writes, the individuals of Benin must begin to relate to statehood and democracy as identifying terms.

The voice of individuals may hold hope for the young democracy of Benin. Dewey writes that a "representative" government is one in which the public "... is definitely organized with the intent to secure this dominance."⁹⁷ The Beninese people are still realizing this potential, and they often fall into the American trap where people, as Dewey says, "... either praise or damn democratic government absolutely, that is, without comparing it with alternative polities."⁹⁸ In America, in the more than 225 years since the Revolution, freedom has become ingrained in the American consciousness to the point where we can only conceive of no freedom in abstract terms. Since a restriction of basic freedoms is still quite vivid in the minds of many Beninese, this is one of the primary areas in which each country can learn from the other.

Dewey's ultimate goal is a movement from the Great Society, where a few are involved in the decision-making process (perhaps America can be termed a Great Society from the perspective of Dewey's philosophy) to the Great Community where all have a say.⁹⁹ One of his primary concerns deals with the "machine age" of the Great Society. It has, "... invaded and partially disintegrated the small communities of former times without generating a Great Community."¹⁰⁰ It is clear in this passage that Dewey, as well as Lippmann in many respects, greatly favors the interactions of the small communities. The one remaining challenge is how to find the Great Community.

Dewey intertwines the concepts of democracy, "the good citizen," and community life. It is easy, and tempting in some respects, to look at any of these in abstract terms, which makes them mere theories. Human action and involvement, however, are what brings these abstractions to life.

Journalism (and freedom) as a narrative

A significant connecting theme that must be established in this dissertation is the embedded role journalism plays within freedom¹⁰¹ – and the subsequent role each individual reporter and editor plays within journalism as a profession. Western journalism is embedded in the post-revolutionary period of America's history and continues to play a distinct role in the broadening story of freedom. In *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Walter Fisher writes that a key component of the narrative perspective is that it "... sees people as storytellers, as authors and co-authors who creatively read and evaluate the texts of life and literature."¹⁰² This process, Fisher writes, goes far beyond the learned and imposed structures of our lives.

As a species, humans are constantly pursuing a “narrative logic.”¹⁰³ As we navigate life, we are in a continual process of weighing new accounts against those we already know.¹⁰⁴

Fisher’s philosophy is built around the terms “narrative probability” and “narrative fidelity.”¹⁰⁵ The first refers to the degree of coherence a person finds in story, while fidelity refers to whether or not the story rings true to the world as the person knows it.

These terms engage well with America’s early experience with democracy. The narrative with which America had been most familiar was that of Great Britain’s monarchy. This narrative was not popular but embedded within it was the commitment and resolve America needed to declare its independence. The new independence resulted in a new narrative, one that competed with and contradicted with the known. The drive for a constitution that would establish a United States spun off yet another competing narrative.

The founding fathers were faced with a host of conflicting narratives: The individual colonies had a sense of autonomy and freedom that were naturally threatened by the concept of one over-arching *federal* government. The proposed narrative was framed in the Constitution that outlined a government built on the concept of freedom for all. The states would still have a great deal of inherent power, and that power would be bolstered and broadened, they were assured by the founding fathers, by the sense of nationalism and international superiority that one united nation would provide.

However, within the proposed narrative of freedom was a flaw: slavery. Jefferson, Madison, and the other founding fathers knew the Constitution would never be ratified if slavery were condemned from the outset. By taking no action,

they allowed the guiding narrative of nationalism to gain the needed fidelity to withstand the full-scale assault on slavery that would eventually result in the Civil War.

Fisher's narrative paradigm has a distinct connection to logic, particularly the logic required in dialogue and dialectic. He believes both of these phenomena function because of what occurs *between* characters, one that is implied in Martin Buber's notion of "I" and "Thou."¹⁰⁶ From a journalistic perspective, this links the writings of Lippmann and Dewey because both find hope in the recognition of all voices, not just the elite. For Lippmann, this process begins not with the journalist, but with the individual who, through education, can become informed enough to begin to change Dewey's Great Society into the Great Community where all voices are potentially heard.

This chapter has utilized the philosophy of Jefferson, Madison, Lippmann, and Dewey and constructed a foundation of how freedom is perceived in the West. Fisher's narrative paradigm has broadened and deepened the understanding of each philosopher. Chapter Two takes a similar look at the history of Benin and how multiple narratives such as existing West African traditions (and values), the French colonization, Marxism, and, most recently, a movement to democracy has framed the concept of freedom. Fisher's narrative structure is also present here and will further assist in placing Benin's history into perspective.

Chapter Two

*Benin's multi-layered history,
and how it and the media define freedom*

The print media of Cotonou can be best described as a vehicle for political dissent.¹ Now in its second decade of democracy, the republic has a long, rich, layered history composed of four stages that are by no means separate and equal. They intermingle and are in constant tension with one another. This chapter looks at the layered history of Benin, how that history defines the republic's sense of freedom, and the role the media has played in that history. The various historical layers, many of which were in conflict, serve as further examples of Fisher's narrative paradigm. "The world as we know it," he writes, "is a set of stories that must be chosen among in order for us to live life in a process of continual re-creation."² The many stories that make up Benin's history are also major components of the republic's present, and this present will inform the narrative for future generations.

A natural foundation with which to begin are the core values of West Africa. These stem from the traditional tribal rule that lasted in the region (known as Dahomey prior to 1974) until the 1860s when "French protectorate was established in Benin [after] Dahomey's leaders refused to abolish the lucrative slave trade."³ Exportation of slaves was a major source of income among the 46 ethnic groups who lived in the region. In addition to slavery, Dahomey was also known during this period for its female warriors called Amazons and voodoo cults that still are prevalent and influential.⁴ The core values are of particular significance because they are still very evident in Benin's

culture in spite of the numerous historical (and cultural) disruptions that have occurred throughout history.⁵

The four historical stages⁶ on which this chapter will concentrate are:

-- The French colonization of late nineteenth century that constituted a centralized governmental structure always focused on Paris. As Allen W. Palmer writes: "It did not envision the self governance of colonies, but rather the organic unity between France and its overseas possessions."⁷ The French had no use for West Africa's culture. Instead, they envisioned replacing the region's languages and culture with those of France through assimilation.⁸

-- Dahomey's independence from France in 1960. This period is of particular significance because the notion of independence actually had a counter effect on the region's freedom of speech. Instead of knowing its common enemy, as had been the case during the French colonization, Dahomey was now forced to deal with a series of regimes that usually possessed hidden agendas. Independence, as will be seen, actually resulted in fewer newspapers.

-- The 17-year reign of Kérékou's Marxist-based regime that took power in 1972 changed the republic's name to Benin (in 1974) and remained in control until 1989. This regime was actually welcomed by much of the population because it put an end to the in-fighting and general instability of the previous 12 years. However, personal freedoms, as well as freedom of the press, were restricted more intensely as the regime's power structure became more pervasive. Toward the end of the 1980s, as economic strife worsened, the regime's tight hold began to weaken and newspapers began to orchestrate an organized call for change.

-- The era of multi-party democracy which officially began in 1991 — following a two-year transition period — and is now entering its second decade. Once Kérékou's regime ended, the number of daily independent newspapers exploded to as many as 19 in 2003. They are still vehicles of political dissent, much as the underground papers such as *Tam Tam Express* and *La Gazette du Golfe* were during the Marxist years and papers such as *La Voix du Dahomey* and *L'Echo du Dahomey* were during the early years of the colonization, but Cotonou's journalism of the twenty-first century is in a process of evolution. Some papers publish only a few editions and then go on hiatus. Two particular Cotonou papers, *L'Essentiel* and *Dunya-Info* are evidence of this. Both are dailies but their publication numbers (which appear in the each paper's flag) as of July 1, 2003, were 107 and 113, respectively, evidence that both probably had been on hiatus sometime during the year. Had both papers published five days per week, the numbers would have been higher. Others papers, such as *Le Matinal* and *Le Matin*, possess their own printing facilities and are beginning to build a historically based reputation. Still, however, the print media of the twenty-first century is not without its problems and controversy. Many of the directors of publication and scholars interviewed said freedom has tempted the media to overstep its true mission of responsibly informing and educating the public and gravitate more toward sensationalism and questionable ethics.

Defining core pan-African values⁹

Before considering the issue of the media and its relationship to the overriding concept of freedom in Benin's history, one must first locate the core values that partially define the African culture. These core values differ from

American values primarily because of the ever-present force of poverty in Benin. However, these are broad-based values and they define many of the cultures of West Africa.¹⁰

In Chapter One, it was noted that the planning of the U.S. Constitution took into consideration the existing basic freedoms of all Americans (except for slaves). West Africa experienced a massive cultural interruption during the French colonization. Indigenous values survived largely intact; however, they are in constant tension with other forces, whether those forces be French, Marxist, or democratic.

Isaac Obeng-Quaidoo identifies “four core African values”¹¹ in an attempt to put them in a proper context for communication research. The four are:

1. the role of the Supreme God / Allah and lesser gods in the daily life of the African;
2. the African concept of time and its influence on him / her;
3. the African’s concept of work and its relationship to how he / she perceives his / her own relationship to nature;
4. the non-individuality of the African and how this affects his / her world view.¹²

Concerning an African’s concept of God and lesser gods, Obeng-Quaidoo notes that many African religions believe in not only one Supreme God or Allah, but also numerous lesser gods who are below the Supreme God or Allah, and these lesser gods listen to people’s prayers and dish out reward or punishment. The chief God or Allah is considered by most Africans as “... far away, slow and does not manifest Himself frequently at our level of existence.”¹³ Other researchers maintain that it is “... out of great reverence for the Almighty God that Africans resort to going through these lesser gods.”¹⁴ It must be remembered

that 15 percent of the population of Benin is Christian while another 15 percent is Muslim. The remainder of the population practices a number of traditional African religions, one of the most popular being voodoo.¹⁵

The core value of time is perhaps one of the most studied aspects of the African culture. Time, in the traditional African sense, represents a symbol for events. Obeng-Quaidoo writes: "The linear concept of time in Western thought (with an indefinite past, present, and infinite future) is emphasized less in traditional African thinking."¹⁶ For most Africans, the future is absent because time must be linked to a corresponding event or events. Mbiti defines African times as:

A composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of an immediate occurrence falls in the category of "no-time." What is certain to occur, or what falls within the rhythm of natural phenomena, is in the category of inevitable or *potential* time.¹⁷

This is a significant departure from a Western view of time where much of the culture, particularly from a business sense, is defined and measured by time.¹⁸ When these two cultural components clash, it results in frequent communication interruptions. Even the ultimate end of time as human beings know it, i.e., death, is never a natural phenomenon in Africa. There is always a reason for it.

The difference in time recognition has an affect on new technology primarily because it usually is introduced to Africa via a western paradigm that is dominated, according to Carey, by a transmission model where information is based "... on the desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel

in space.”¹⁹ Conversely, Africa is dominated by a ritual view, Carey writes, that emphasizes notions such as participation, association, and the possession of a common faith.²⁰

These technological breakdowns many times directly affect the media. As John C. Merrill, an American scholar of international news media, observed in the early 1990s: “Africa’s media problems have essentially been the same” since the independence era of the late 1950s and early 1960s. “Things just keep recurring,” he said. “They keep recurring.”²¹

Merrill’s comments bear directly on Obeng-Quaidoo’s third core value: the African’s concept of work. Many Africans, he writes, have “... no full commitment to industrial work since traditional work is more meaningful to him/her than industrial work.”²² Farming is a perfect example. It embodies the total productive process, whereas working in a factory can be “short, repetitive and characterized by unvaried work cycles.”²³

The West has long been dominated by the Protestant work ethic wherein a person’s worth (Earthly as well as eternally) is measured by his or her output.²⁴ No sense of duty is attached to most working Africans. It is merely done out of necessity, according to Obeng-Quaidoo.²⁵

The final core value — the non-individuality of the African — is perhaps one of the most significant differences between America and Africa. The traditional African family, which tends to be much larger than families in America — is a locus for power. Every African family has a number of elders who compose the power structure for the remainder of the family members. As Obeng-Quaidoo writes: “This explains why the caring for the aged, the destitute,

the handicapped members of the group is the duty of all well-to-do and able bodied members of the family."²⁶

During my first visit to Benin during the summer of 2001, this concentrated familial power structure was especially evident in the smaller, rural villages. Here the families were even larger than in cities such as Cotonou and Porto Novo and the voices of the elders were much stronger than even the national government. Obeng-Quaidoo writes that freedom for many Africans is embedded more in a sense of Africanism than overall national citizenship, and this tends to be diametrically opposed to America where the value of good citizenship is embedded in our educational system.

A clear example of this embeddedness was in the village of Abomey, about two hours north of Cotonou, where the remnants of the sixteenth-century Kingdom of Dan-homey are still alive and well, right down to an active king who in 2001 also held the government position of secretary of customs for the Port of Cotonou. The king may have worn a suit and tie in his office, driven a sport utility vehicle, and owned several homes, but when he encountered any of his "subjects," he or she would immediately bow. In an interview, the king admitted the tradition of bowing made him somewhat nervous. "I believe the people are bowing in honor of the Kingdom of Dan-homey," he said. "They are not bowing to me."²⁷

Now that Benin is a democracy, the former kingdom is not officially recognized and its king is, more or less, a figurehead; however, there is an enormous power structure in place that wields a great deal of influence both politically and socially, and this, it can be argued, creates tension between the

people who pay homage to the king, and the officially recognized democratic government.

The French colonization

The French colonization of Dahomey, which was official in 1905 when the area became a colony in French West Africa, was solidified by the new world order that followed World War II. The colonization brought with it the “official” language of French as well as the influx of the French educational system. It was, according to Louise Bourgault, “... a social and economic process tied to the imperial order and represented a new wave of capitalist expansion of the dominant European powers of the late nineteenth century.”²⁸ Even prior to this physical colonization, close ties had existed between the African elite class and Europe. The colonization was a way of establishing a physical — and ultimately a cultural — presence in Dahomey.

From an educational perspective alone, the colonization posed an affront to the core pan-African values mentioned earlier. It is interesting and significant to note the difference between the British colonization — which affected anglophone countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria — and the French colonization — which affected countries such as Benin, Togo, and the Ivory Coast. Some of the earliest British schools, for example, had two aims, according to Bourgault. The first was to educate children in basic literacy as well as convert them to Christianity. Concerning these, Bourgault writes:

The acquisition of literacy offered quiet introspective and independent paths to the acquisition of knowledge. Conversion to Christianity

implied the rejection of an African polytheistic world view and its concomitant attachment to the extended African family system.²⁹

The aim of the French educational system was simple: to teach Africans to become Frenchmen.³⁰ Many African schools, particularly universities and professional schools, require students to leave the core values of the villages and cities and learn the ways of the West (or at least France). From an economic perspective, education tends to be accessible primarily to elites, thus creating a wider rift in the African class. This class of “modern elites,”³¹ is significant, according to Bourgault, because they are a product of Western education and traditionally run African civil service, including much of the mass media.

Henry Bretton documents this phenomenon in *Power and Politics in Africa* and defines the African elite as a person who depends on outside sources of capital to maintain his or her lifestyle and participates in a “broader international class.”³² As Bourgault proclaims, “It is far easier to describe the elites who are plainly visible in Africa (and easily recognized by their compatriots) than it is to classify them.”³³ A Western education is for many of these elites a symbol of success, tempting many to travel to France, Canada or the United States to secure one. Still, the majority of Beninese – about 80 percent – are illiterate, and this in itself is a sociological conflict between Africa and the West. Illiteracy in America is far different than illiteracy in Africa. Not being able to read and write in America means not being able to produce economically. Not being able to read and write in a rural African village is the norm.

The colonization may have been considered “official” in 1905, but in terms of cultural, the region’s values had been shaken to their core for the past 11 years. In 1894, the last great king of Dahomey, King Behanzin, was driven into the

wilderness around Abomey. The French military kept the king isolated for weeks, and when his people began starving, he surrendered and left the country.³⁴

The colonization was perhaps the richest period for journalism in Benin. It was at this point that the media began its tradition of political dissent. Thomas Megnassan, considered by nearly every Beninese journalist to be the dean of print media, said the French made a grave error right from the start: In the late nineteenth century, they proclaimed they wanted to bring *civilization* to the region.

“This suggested that there was no civilization to begin with,” said Megnassan, who holds a doctorate in journalism from France. “Immediately after the colonization was completed in 1905, the first newspaper [*L’Echo du Dahomey*] was established.”³⁵ *L’Echo* was actually run by French people, Megnassan said, who sympathized with the plight of the Dahomeans. It was a small weekly printed in Porto Novo that had one goal: the removal of then colonial governor, Victor Liotard. The paper was short-lived but achieved its goal. Liotard was recalled in 1906.³⁶ Many other newspapers followed *L’Echo* and all were resolutely against colonization. Megnassan said during the entire colonization, upwards of 100 newspapers had been established as vehicles of protest.

“Of all the French colonies in Africa, Dahomey had the most newspapers,” Megnassan said. “Many Dahomeans had fought in World War I [for the French] and knew the meaning of freedom. They felt the colonization was taking away their freedom, and newspapers were their most effective way to protest.”³⁷

The influence wielded by these early papers was unmistakable. Thirty-four colonial governors came and went during the 55 years of the colonization,

according to Megnassan. The papers would denounce everything that dealt with the French, and often it was easier for the French to change governors than fight the press.

“Some of the governors did not even unpack their bags,” Megnassan said. “They just went back to France.”³⁸ The French did, however, pass a law in 1881 that defined how journalism should be practiced. Though still technically part of Benin’s legal system, early Dahomean journalists largely ignored the law. It was a French law, Megnassan said, and contradicted every aspect of Dahomey’s culture.

Campbell suggests four key reasons why the French met so much resistance from Dahomey’s early journalists: 1). Many of the early journalists were incredibly adept at obscuring criticism with praise. Essentially they used a slick process of critique and praise and allowed their readers to skim past the praise in order to access the criticism. Chapter 4 details how Maurice Chabi used many of these same tactics to undermine the Marxist regime during the 1970s and ‘80s. 2). The frequent turnover of colonial administrators probably acted as a natural buffer for Dahomean journalists. Megnassan said newspapers would many times begin criticizing a governor even before he arrived in Dahomey. 3). The increasing importance of educated Dahomeans to French administration in West Africa. Throughout its history, Dahomey (now Benin) has been known as a land of very educated people. The French knew that without these educated people, governing the Dahomey would be next to impossible. 4). The constraints effectively if indirectly imposed on French colonial rulers by international human rights and political movements.³⁹

The manner in which a journalist was perceived during the colonization is interesting to note. In 1922, *La Presse Porto-Novienne* described a journalist in this particularly glowing fashion. He was seen as:

a man of talent, a soldier who fights neither with a rifle nor cannon but with ideas. He is a patriot who makes himself an ardent defender of just causes, of liberties, of rights; a public advocate, a propagator of light, a savior of the country, in turn the bitter enemy of those who commit injustice. The journalist is a militant, a politician who offers his life in defending private and general interests of people while taking on the hate of those whom he fights.⁴⁰

Most colonial-era journalists were not formally trained, according to Palmer, and rivalries were not uncommon. Journalism was a way to become one of the “soldiers” about which the *Porto-Novienne* so colorfully wrote. *La Voix du Dahomey* was one of the most radical papers, practicing what it termed “combat journalism” and being a voice for the people.⁴¹ Megnassan said most journalists performed their missions at great risk and many were arrested. Louis Ouéssou Hunkanrin, who wrote for *La Voix*, was one journalist who was repeatedly hounded by French officials. Because the colonial governors utilized Dahomeans as office workers, journalists such as Hunkanrin had countless unseen (and very loyal) sources who copied pertinent (and usually embarrassing) information pertaining to the French governors.

“Once the French even ordered all of their documents moved to Togo [another French colony] because they thought they would be safer there,” Megnassan said. “But the information was still couriered to the journalists.”⁴²

Actions such as these underscore the notion of the journalist as a character in a narrative structure noted in Chapter One. By recognizing the coherence of

freedom, these journalists were giving action to Fisher's notion of narrative probability in that the colonization was seen a threat to Dahomey's established narrative, so it was repelled. By comparing freedom to the known narrative of the colonization, the Dohomeans were illustrating narrative fidelity in that no matter how well colonization was presented by the French, it could never compare with the established story of core pan-African values.

The French essentially attempted to modify their narrative by striking back. In 1934, *La Voix*, its editorial board, and several financial backers were taken to court in what has been termed "the most celebrated press trial in French-ruled West Africa."⁴³ The case revolved around the alleged bribe of a colonial administrator. All told, thirty-five people associated with *La Voix* were charged with attacking French authority, theft of an administrative document, and organizing an illegal association.

La Voix's defense was to produce scores of articles that praised the French, many of which written by Dorothee Joaquim Lima, a celebrated journalist who founded *Le Guide du Dahomey* in 1920, and was later a founder of *La Voix*. In his editorials, Lima was quick to remind everyone that he was a veteran of the French army, and, a few months prior to the trial, even printed the text of his 1914 draft notice on the front page of *La Voix*. The trial – which began in January 1936 and lasted until June – ended up being a victory for Dahomey's dissident press. Judge Mathieu Mattei acquitted three defendants and found the others guilty. Their punishment, however, ended up being merely symbolic fines. Hunkanrin, many times referred to as Dahomey's "Gandhi,"⁴⁴ was among the defendants. He continued his journalistic war against the French until he was eventually deported to Nauritania.

Megnassan said many of the judges and prosecutors during this period were not French citizens and naturally sympathized with the journalists. One prosecutor, for example, was from the West Indies – where many of Dahomey’s slaves had been shipped many years earlier – so when forced to prosecute dissident journalists, he prepared cases that favored the defense, not the French government.

The press was not always correct in its vehement attacks on the French. Megnassan noted that one colonial governor wanted to make Dahomey a producer of cocoa plants because of the region’s tropical climate. The press, fearing that cocoa plantations would require huge tracts of land that would be taken from Dahomeans, spoke out against the plan with such fervor that the governor (as well as his plan for cocoa) were moved to the Ivory Coast. Today the Ivory Coast is the world’s largest producer of cocoa.

Independence and a turbulent 12 years

Dahomey’s dissident press eventually was victorious. In 1958, the French began a two-year process of reorganizing every administration in each of its 10 West African colonies. Slowly the colonies began to experience more autonomy, first by handling all of their internal affairs, and eventually the French allowed them to elect their own prime ministers and parliaments. However, all military, economic, and foreign affairs were still handled by the French.⁴⁵ The great irony during this time of independence involved the media.

“There were no newspapers during this time,” Megnassan said. “After the colonization had ended, they felt their job was finished.”⁴⁶ Independence ended up being a dark period for freedom in Dahomey. The politics that followed

independence were based largely on regionalism. Leaders from three different areas of Dahomey – the north, the central, and the south – soon began naturally favoring their regions. Confusion soon followed, and it was during this confusion, Megnassan said, that hints of the eventual Marxist regime were born. The three leaders who ruled during Dahomey during this time were: Sourou-Migan Apithy, a Catholic-trained politician from Porto Novo in the south; Justin Ahomandegbe, a descendant of the Fon peoples in Dahomey's central region from the central; and Hubert Maga, a schoolteacher from the north (and officially the first president of Dahomey).⁴⁷ The three ruled Dahomey for nearly 12 years in a haphazard fashion ... at times two would join forces to exert influence on the third. Their rivalries resulted in a number of military coups: one in 1963, two in 1965, and one each in 1967, and 1969.⁴⁸ At one point, according to Megnassan, Abomandegbe was even arrested and sent to jail by Apithy and Maga.

Following the 1969 coup, a measure was initiated wherein the presidency would be rotated every two years among the three in an attempt to pacify the mounting regional and ethnic differences. The experiment failed.⁴⁹

"Press censorship was very powerful during this time," Megnassan said. "Freedom of the press had all but vanished. No one could criticize the government. They did not want the people to know what they were doing."⁵⁰ There was only one government newspaper and one radio station, and both were used for propaganda, he said.

Toward the end of this turbulent period, Emile Zinsou took power via a *coup d'état* and established a short period of national stability. What is particularly notable about Zinsou's government is how it treated the press.

Megnassan said unlike the three regional leaders, Zinsou allowed a great amount of freedom for the few papers publishing.

Megnassan had been in Paris working with Charles de Gaulle when Zinsou asked him to return to Dahomey and start a state newspaper. The president had noticed that of all the West African nations, Dahomey was the only one that did not have a state newspaper. On August 1, 1969, with Megnassan serving as director of publication, *Daho-Express* began publishing.

“There were times when *Daho-Express* was harsh on the government,” Megnassan said. “We were even harsh on our own ministry [of communication], but the government never intervened.”⁵¹

What did end up intervening in Zinsou’s government were Colonel Maurice Kouandete and two other members of the military. In December of 1969 – in what had become almost routine – the three overthrew Zinsou’s government. Surprisingly, Megnassan said, Kouandete’s regime also permitted press freedom, but the media was constantly watched. Megnassan pauses for a moment, laughs, then recounts a story of the regime’s obsession with controlling information.

“There was an officer of the international court in The Hague [Netherlands] who also was from Dahomey,” said Megnassan. “His name was Ignace Pinto, and he was openly opposed to the Kouandete regime. On one occasion, he was leaving Dahomey for The Hague and granted an interview to both *Daho-Express* and the national radio station. Pinto harshly criticized the members of the regime. The radio station broadcasted his comments and *Daho-Express* prepared a story. When the regime learned of the story, they called me in

the next day. They also seized all of the editions of *Daho-Express* and accused the newspaper of publishing subversive information."⁵²

Megnassan recalled his defense. He said the radio station had already broadcast the information, so *Daho-Express* was essentially publishing material that was generally known by the public. No legal action was taken against *Daho-Express*, but Megnassan said he was very cautious in the future. "We did not want to go to jail," he said.⁵³

In 1971, Apithy, and the other two former regional leaders, returned to the political scene and overthrew Kouandete's regime. This time Apithy served as president and the other two were his vice presidents. The regime was often referred to as "the monster with three heads,"⁵⁴ and since it included a myriad of cronies from the three regions, conflicts (and eventually coups) quickly followed. *Daho-Express*, Megnassan said, once again was heavily censored. It was during this period of political unrest and social instability that Kérékou's regime seized power. Freedom of the press and the people of Dahomey were about to change markedly.

The Marxist years

When Kérékou's regime seized power via a *coup* in 1972, the majority of the population was relieved. They were fed up with the instability that had wracked Dahomey during the previous 12 years. Kérékou, a French-trained paratroop commander, surrounded himself with educated elites, most of whom had been educated in Russia. Early in his regime, Kérékou delivered a speech that ended with the phrase "... long live the revolution." The dictator was not a pure Marxist; however, many of those in his regime were, and they used that

phrase to frame the regime's Marxist ideology that would rule the country for nearly 20 years.⁵⁵ During its early years, the regime was extremely rigid. Benin attained the dubious distinctions of being a country that would accept radioactive wastes one year and ban Christmas and Easter another.⁵⁶

In spite of the regime's harshness, Benin's resilient, dissident press again came to life. According to Megnassan, numerous, and at times sporadic, underground newspapers began publishing and speaking out against the regime. One of the most vocal was *Le Gon*, which first supported the regime (in its kinder, early years), but the paper's criticism became more intense in direct proportion to the regime's increased restrictions on freedom.

"*Le Gon* was sued repeatedly by members of the regime," Megnassan said. "To avoid going to court, the paper changed its name to *Kpanligan* [the name of a former government minister], moved to another area, and kept publishing."⁵⁷ As the regime's grip on Benin tightened, the number of newspapers steadily decreased and the entire journalistic landscape began to change. The state newspaper was renamed from *Daho-Express* to *Ehuzu* (which means "revolution" or "everything has changed" in Fon, a local language). The regime's rationale was simple: Marxism is rooted in symbolism, and the regime feared the name *Daho-Express* would be associated with the bourgeois middle class. By selecting a name rooted in a local language, the regime believed the state newspaper would be more readily accepted by the masses, thus increasing its value as a conduit for propaganda. The newspaper's name was not the only thing that changed at *Ehuzu*. Megnassan was fired and reassigned to the Ministry of Communication where he worked until his retirement in 1987.

“There was an enormous amount of censorship under the Marxist ideology,” Megnassan said. “Freedom of the press virtually disappeared.”⁵⁸

An example, of both the regime’s zeal to control basic freedom as well as its absurdity, occurred when Mao Tse-Tung, former chairman of the People’s Republic of China, died in 1976. Megnassan said the regime would not permit *Ehuzu* to publish the news for two weeks. It first wanted to make a public announcement.

“To the average citizen [of Benin], this was not particularly important information,” Megnassan said. “To the regime, however, it was extremely important. This shows how detached they eventually became from the citizens.”⁵⁹

Things steadily became worse for the regime as well as the Beninese people. The value of the nation’s currency (the CFA franc⁶⁰) plummeted, and government officials were soon not getting paid. The general population began talking about the need for change, and dissident newspapers began reflecting those views, two of the most popular being *La Gazette du Golfe*, established in March 1988, and *Tam Tam Express* that soon followed. *La Gazette* had a particularly notable influence on the public, selling out its inaugural press run of 5,000 copies within seven hours. Just three months later, *La Gazette* sold an astonishing 30,000 copies “... in the aftermath of a suspected conspiracy of junior military officers to assassinate Kérékou.”⁶¹

The regime may have been weakened, but it still managed to exert a good amount of pressure on the press. Parfait Agbala, a reporter for *La Gazette*, was arrested and jailed for nearly three weeks in early 1989. The regime charged him with interviewing students who had struck at the National University. Copies of

the paper were frequently seized and occasionally burned, according to Ismael Soumanou, publisher of *La Gazette*.⁶² Finally, the regime banned *La Gazette* in October of 1989. By this time, however, it was too late for Kérékou's regime. Fearing mass demonstrations, the beleaguered dictator responded by proposing massive changes including the end of Marxism and the beginning of democracy. The result was the National Conference in February 1990, viewed by Benin as "the resurrection of Christ."⁶³

Just before the regime completely lost its control, Megnassan came out of retirement in 1989 to publish *Le Récade*, a monthly paper that during its heyday undertook several impressive in-depth reporting projects about the smuggling of bootleg gasoline from Nigeria, various environmental and education stories, and multiple-page coverage of the National Conference. Perhaps the signature, of sorts, to each edition of *Le Récade* was Megnassan's front-page commentary entitled "siges de tempts" or "signs of the times." In this column, he offered a look at a variety of topics ranging from economics to science and education. During an interview on a pleasant, sunny July morning, he resembled a doting father as he proudly leafed through bound copies of *Le Récade*, pausing occasionally to recount stories of the thrilling four years he published the paper before a devalued CFA and dwindling advertising forced him to cease publication. It is easy to understand Megnassan's disappointment with the present newspapers in Benin. *Le Récade's* coverage, general look, and sophistication are strong evidence that many of his criticisms have merit.

The multi-party democracy

In the aftermath of the National Conference, Benin's new constitution made provisions that guaranteed a free press. Suddenly, freedom of the press was

back and more popular than ever. *Ehuzu*, the ever-present state newspaper, was renamed *La Nation*. Privately financed papers began appearing like fads, some publishing one day and disappearing a few editions later.

The newfound freedom was pushed to its limits. In the 1991 presidential elections, for example, two newspapers, *Le Soleil* and *Tam Tam Express* referred to then-President Nicéphore Soglo's wife, Rosine, as an "ugly witch."⁶⁴ A fortnightly paper, *L'Observateur*, the same year improbably linked the president with a campaign financier who allegedly had ties to Kérékou's former regime. Soglo sued Francois Comlan, *L'Observateur's* editor, and won. Comlan was sentenced to six-month jail term.⁶⁵

Cotonou's journalism scene has improved somewhat during the last decade, but political news still dominates all of the dailies. The apparent lack of objective reporting caused Dr. Abraham Voglozin, who owns a college in Cotonou, to write a commentary published by *La Nation* in 1995. In the commentary, Voglozin – who holds doctorate degrees in both psychology and chemistry from universities in Canada and Europe – outlined the following priorities presently held by Cotonou newspapers: political news, sensational news, reports concerning Non-Governmental Organizations (such as UNICEF, CARE, etc.), economic news, cultural reports and sports, television listings, and horoscopes.⁶⁶

Voglozin's concerns rest in the apparent disinterestedness the newspapers show toward issues such as economics and science. Economics, he argued, should be a major priority, given Benin's ranking as one of the world's poorest countries, yet it is routinely relegated to inside pages, if it is reported at all.

Instead, both Voglozin and Megnassan say the newspapers consistently try to outdo one another in uncovering the political scene.

“One has to remember that the government has spent more than 300 million CFA on training for journalists,” said Voglozin, who has held journalism seminars at his college. “The results have not been acceptable. We should have highly trained journalists considering the amount of money being spent.”⁶⁷

Many of the directors of publication, as Chapter Four will note, agree that immediately after the National Conference standards were low. In the past three years, though, new laws have been passed that have made it easier for libeled citizens to sue for damages. The directors say these laws have forced them to police their profession more vigorously. The deontology code passed in September 1999 (see Appendix B) is an example of these self-policing measures, they said. Chapter Four looks at the deontology in greater detail.

But a journalist merely watching himself is not enough, according to Megnassan. Simply observing who works at most newspapers provides some astonishing evidence.

“These are mainly students who completed their studies in fields other than journalism,” he said. “They could not find jobs in their field, so they became journalists.”⁶⁸

Additional evidence, he said, can be found in the number of lawsuits filed against journalists, more than thirty-five in the five years following the National Conference. The number has gone down, particularly in the past five years, as will be seen in Chapters Four and Five, but independent observers such as Megnassan and Voglozin are not optimistic.

“There is no pure journalism,” Megnassan said. “What is prevailing is what I would term ‘business journalism.’ The special interests surrounding business and politics have invaded journalism. They have invested money into newspapers for the sole purpose of discrediting their opponents.”⁶⁹

The sheer number of daily papers concerns Voglozin. In true scientific fashion, he mathematically sketches a profile of Benin. Of the republic’s six million population, he said approximately three million are adults. Voglozin estimated only about 20 percent of those adults are educated, and if that number is divided among the three major cities of Porto Novo, Cotonou and Parakou, it averages about 400,000 *potential* readers. Of this number, he said only about one percent actually reads a newspaper on a regular basis. His calculations reveal that the approximately 20 dailies in Cotonou, are vying for about only 4,000 readers.⁷⁰

Voglozin, who unsuccessfully ran for president of Benin in 1996, sees some hope in what he terms “democratic censorship.”⁷¹ The readers, and not the government, must be the barometers that measure the quality of journalism. As things stand, he said, the public wants political and sensational news, and the papers are merely responding to a need.

Individual reporters do not, as Megnassan suggested, always turn to journalism because they cannot find other jobs. Some have entered a profession – albeit via a circuitous route at times – for which they have developed genuine appreciation. An interview with four reporters from *Le Point au Quotidien*, revealed some interesting (and at times) surprisingly candid opinions. Kolawolé Sanny, 47, primarily edits copy at *Le Point* but also occasionally writes stories. He studied history and geography in Senegal and became interested in journalism

while working with his uncle who published a magazine. When he moved to Cotonou in 1996, he sent a letter to *Le Point* and was given a tryout, then a full-time job. Perhaps a testament to his dedication came while working for a former director of publication. Sanny said he had gone three months without being paid. A new director came to *Le Point* and asked which employees wanted to stay. He enjoyed his job, so he stayed. A few weeks later, the new director gave Sanny all of the back pay he was owed.

The four reporters laughed when asked to provide a general salary range for Cotonou journalists. They said many go months without being paid while others are paid frequently.

“We feel fortunate at *Le Point*,” said Bruno Dossou, 31, a reporter and assistant editor. “Fernando [Hessou, the present director of publication] is our boss, but he doesn’t seem like a boss. He’s more like a friend.”⁷² Dossou explained that Hessou recently won a journalism award that carried a 900,000 CFA cash prize. The director immediately re-invested the money into *Le Point*. Many directors would have kept for money, Dossou said.

Abdoulaye Soumana grew up in Niger and always wanted to be a journalist but the French educational system pushed him into a French/liberal arts course of study. He taught French for four years, worked for a weekly newspaper in Niger, and eventually moved to Benin because Niger had only one daily newspaper, *Le Sahel*, which was operated by the government.

Similarly, Marie-Louise B. Matehoudo always loved to write but received training as a laboratory technician. When she married a journalist, it rekindled her love for writing and she began freelancing and eventually moved into a full-time position at *La Point*.

“After a while, you begin to feel a sentimental link with the newspaper,” she said. “Sometimes our hours are long and our pay does not always come through, but I enjoy the work. I feel like I am doing something new every day.”⁷³

When asked about the preoccupation many Cotonou newspapers have with political news, the reporters’ comments were similar to those of the directors of publication interviewed in Chapter Four. They said it is what their readers demand. Usually when other topics are profiled, the paper does not sell.

Megnassan’s charges of misguided motives and allegiances come to mind when reflecting on the journalists’ comments. From a purely content perspective, *Le Récade* was far more comprehensive, objective, and thought provoking than nearly any of Cotonou’s present newspapers. *Le Récade* was responding to two distinct historical moments – the end of Marxism and the beginning of democracy. The historical moment being reflected by the new generation of journalists is one in a constant state of change as the still-developing story of democracy settles into the consciousness of the people.

Perhaps a judge presiding over one of the libel trials attended by Megnassan summed it up best when he paused, looked at a journalist who claimed never to have heard of the 1881 French law outlining the duties of a journalist, and said: “We are all still going to the school of democracy.”⁷⁴

Fisher’s narrative paradigm in action

Benin’s multi-layered history provides a lively case study in Fisher’s narrative probability and narrative fidelity. One story is consistently being weighed against another. Fisher writes, “Where the rational-world paradigm is an ever-present part of our consciousness because we have been educated into it,

the narrative impulse is part of our very being because we acquire narrativity in the natural process of socialization."⁷⁵ The core values were disrupted by the French colonization. This was a massive confrontation of narrative structures with the core values narrative being known and trusted, and the colonization seen as alien.

The manner in which the French introduced their narrative – as the introduction of “civilization”⁷⁶ – only made the Africans doubt it more. This example reiterates the dimension of rationality in Fisher’s paradigm. The colonization may have been perfectly logical to the French. However, since they did not take into consideration the existing culture, their efforts were rejected. A key component of Fisher’s narrative paradigm is the rationality of all people, something the French ignored during the colonization. Fisher writes:

Obviously some stories are better stories than others, more coherent, more “true” to the way people and the world are – in perceived fact and value. In other words, some stories better satisfy the criteria of the logic of good reasons, which is attentive to reason *and* values. Persons may even choose not to participate in the making of public narratives (vote) if they feel that they are meaningless spectators rather than co-authors. But all persons are seen as having the capacity to be rational under the narrative paradigm.⁷⁷

The French saw West Africa’s population as savage and unworthy of participation in the colonization discourse.⁷⁸ This was a grave oversight and led to the emergence of Benin’s dissident press.

Other narratives, such as the tumultuous rule of the many dictators and the eventual rise of Kérékou’s Marxist regime, many times played off one another. The unpopularity of many of the early dictators, for example, made the conversion to Marxism easier than it would have been had social and economic

climates been more stable. The eventual failure of Marxism was again attributable to the government not recognizing the rational capacity of all people as outlined above by Fisher. The regime was presented as an entity able to care for everyone. When it could not, the competing narrative of democracy, where all voices could be theoretically heard, was readily accepted.

One foundational element of West Africa's cultural makeup that was ignored by the colonization was the oral tradition, which is compared and contrasted with the written tradition in the next chapter. Framing the traditions as competing stories begins to highlight the significance between Benin and its media.

Chapter Three

The oral and written traditions

One of the most potent differences between the West and Africa continues to be the oral and written traditions. Africa's roots are oral in nature, much of its rich history detailed vividly and kept alive through songs and stories that are passed from one generation to another.¹ The West and Europe, on the other hand, are rooted in the written tradition. When the two clash – which frequently occurs when new technology is introduced in Africa² – communication interruptions.

This chapter details the significance of these two traditions, according to the literature of Clifford Geertz, James Carey, Walter Ong, and Paulo Freire. Geertz's work is significant because it provides the necessary cultural framework. Carey provides a vivid definition of the two traditions, while Ong's work shows them in action. Freire's literature, particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, illustrates the need for education as a way to bridge the gap between the two traditions. In short, Freire's work is the ethical voice for this dissertation. His process of engaging a group's cultural and environmental nuances into the process of teaching is praxis at its best.

The significance of these two traditions connects the history of the West and Benin – as well as the embedded notion of freedom – to the opinions of the individual directors of publication who are interviewed in Chapter Four. Their definitions of freedom and their claims about how their individual newspapers are upholding that concept illustrate the tension that exists between the

traditions. As noted later in this chapter in the comments of Beninese scholar Abraham Voglozin, many of Cotonou's journalists are appropriating the techniques of the oral tradition as a means to lure readers. These techniques, which include sensationalism and fantasy, work well when communicating portions of a culture through vivid tales, but they cannot be a part of objective journalism as understood from the traditional narrative.³

Historically, contemporary journalism in Cotonou is not unlike American journalism in the early twentieth century when many newspapers, such as those owned by William Randolph Hearst, would print anything and everything in order to capture the attention of potential readers.⁴ In case of Cotonou's newspapers, late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are not nearly as sensational as America's "yellow journalism" period; however, objectivity, as Voglozin noted, usually takes a back seat to the immediacy of selling newspapers. Journalistic objectivity, though often criticized, is indispensable in a free society and, as Michael Ryan suggests, is often attainable by seeking common ground.⁵

Investigating these traditions requires some grounding in the general concept of culture. As noted by Geertz, culture shapes and gives meaning to geographical areas such as the United States, Europe, and Africa. These cultures, in turn, have collectively played a large part in the construction of Cotonou's print media.

Carey's definitions of the oral and written traditions will be placed within Geertz's cultural framework. It will illustrate the active nature of the traditions. Ong's literature, through various examples, challenges us when discussing an

orally based culture to “try to imagine a culture where no one has ever ‘looked up’ anything.”⁶

Many early philosophers, perhaps the most notable being Plato, generally considered the written word as inhuman since, as he notes in the *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter*, it pretends to establish outside the mind what is only possible within the mind. He also suggested that writing destroys the memory since people no longer are required to remember anything. They merely write it down. Third, Plato accused writing of being unresponsive. The written word, after all, cannot defend itself. Any discourse is between the reader and his or her own mind. In a spoken discourse, there is a natural tendency to debate and defend. It must be noted, however, that in spite of his suspicion of writing, Plato preserved many of his thoughts by writing them down.⁷

The cultural forces in Benin are powerful, particularly when discussing the print media. The vast number of Beninese who cannot read may outwardly seem a detriment to newspapers. That aspect also tends to label the media as elitist. However, as Chapter Two noted, the freedom to speak out against restrictive forces – let those forces be the French and colonization, a Marxist regime, or a democratically elected government – draw literate and illiterate citizens alike to a free press. During both my visits – both in 2001 and 2003 – a number of journalists recounted examples of educated children buying newspapers, taking them home, and reading them to their illiterate parents.

Most of Cotonou’s newspapers circulate primarily within the city, but *Le Matinal*, the largest privately owned daily, is beginning to have more of an impact in the rural villages. This notion connects well with Benin’s commitment to education, another point raised in Chapter Two. Benin has always been

known as a nation of educated people.⁸ Although an education is more readily available in cities such as Cotonou and Porto Novo, more and more children in the rural areas are beginning to appreciate the value of and pursuing an education. This has had a direct effect on the core values of West Africa since many of those date back to an era when the oral tradition was prevalent and may be one of the most notable examples of the constant tension between the traditions. The foundational element of these traditions is culture, and Geertz's work on culture serves as a good starting point.

Culture as an abstraction

Whether using signature terms such as "thick description," "webs of meaning," "deep play," or "the confusion of tongues," Geertz initiates a conversation on the relation between abstract and concrete knowledge in cultural and anthropological studies. In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Geertz takes something as innocuous as a wink and discusses it in terms of "thick description." On one hand a wink is an involuntary twitch; on the other hand, a wink can be a "signal to a friend."⁹ Similarly, later in the book, he notes the significance of cockfighting in Bali in terms of its apparent meaning to an outside observer and its inner meaning to the Balinese people. The two are vastly different. The former seems cruel and inhumane; the latter is an expression of personal identification and "status."¹⁰

The conceptual methods of cultural study have been blurred, as Geertz asserts in *Local Knowledge*. There is no shortage of willing observers eager to gain new insight into different cultures. But their eagerness "... is about as likely to lead to obscurity and illusion as it is to precision and truth."¹¹ A statement such

as this underscores the importance of using culture as the basis for a discussion of the oral and written traditions. The two, after all, would not exist without the phenomenon of culture.

Geertz's definition of culture in *The Interpretation of Cultures* consists of 11 parts. The definition, presented in summary form in Clyde Kluckhohn's *Mirror for Man*¹², describes culture as:

(1) the total way of life of a people; (2) the social legacy the individual acquires from his group; (3) a way of thinking, feeling, and behaving; (4) an abstraction from behavior; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a storehouse of pooled learning; (7) a set of standardized orientation to recurrent problems; (8) learned behavior; (9) a set of techniques for adjusting normative regulations of behavior; (10) a set of techniques for adjusting both to the external environment and to other men; (11) a precipitate of history.¹³

This definition begins to highlight the definitive role culture plays in the oral and written traditions. It is the natural backdrop against which the nuances of each tradition emerge. Culture is, as both Geertz and Max Weber claim, a web of significance that man himself has spun. The oral and written traditions are just one component of each individual web. This cultural web, however, is just one layer of man's "stratigraphic" construction, as Geertz terms it.¹⁴

Kluckhohn's wife, Florence, is generally credited with a six-dimensional method for comparing cultures. The six dimensions are:

1. What do members of a society assume about the nature of people, that is, are people good, bad, or a mixture?
2. What do members of a society assume about the relationship between a person and nature, that is should we live in harmony with it or

subjugate it?

3. What do members of a society assume about the relationship between people, that is, should a person act in an individual manner or consider the group before taking action (individualism vs. groupism or collectivism in terms of such issues as making decisions, conformity, and so forth)?

4. What is the primary mode of activity in a given society, that is, *being*, or accepting the status quo, enjoying the current situation, and going with the flow of things; or *doing*, that is, changing things to make them better, setting specific goals and accomplishing them within specific schedules, and so forth?

5. What is the conception of space in a given society, that is, is it considered private, in that meetings are held in *private*, people do not get too close to one another physically, and so on; or *public*, that is, having everyone participate in meetings and decision making, allowing emotions to be expressed publicly, and having people stand in close proximity to one another?

6. What is the society's dominant temporal orientation: past, present, and/or future?¹⁵

Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck's research is significant primarily because it notes that each society has a dominant cultural orientation that can be described in terms of the above six dimensions, but "... that weaker orientations may also exist simultaneously in its different geographical regions and racial and ethnic groups."¹⁶ This relationship between the dominant culture and its weaker orientations begins to put into perspective the multi-faceted history of Benin, as well as the core pan-African values described in Chapter Two.

The challenge to understanding the force exerted by culture is carefully to strip away the various layers – whether they are cultural, psychological, or social

— until only the base biological foundations are left. Geertz terms this “... the edifice of human life.”¹⁷ This edifice is fundamental and important because, as Geertz writes, “... the relations between the biological and the cultural advance of man was that the former, the biological, was for all intents and purposes completed before the later, the cultural, began.”¹⁸ People essentially had to become part of their biological world before the notion of culture could mean anything. At that point, he could transmit the primary ingredients of culture: “knowledge, belief, law, morals, [and] custom.”¹⁹ What this underscores is the intricate part culture plays in differentiating human beings different from other animals. In fact, Geertz observes, without culture, humans would be “... unworkable monstrosities with very few useful instincts, fewer recognizable sentiments, and no intellect: mental basket cases.”²⁰

It is through their cultures that humans are able to establish common sense. In *Local Knowledge*, Geertz addresses the phenomenon of common sense as a cultural system. He suggests that it is much more than just what “anyone clothed and in his right mind knows.”²¹ Common sense, in fact, is derived from culture. Geertz writes:

When we say someone shows common sense we mean to suggest more than he is just using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say, keeping them open, using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively, reflectively, or trying to, and that he is capable of coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness.²²

This discussion can be brought around to the media, the oral and written traditions, and their effects on the West, and West Africa, by looking at the work of researcher John A. Wiseman, who has described Africa as “... a chain of

communication, in which reading is only part of the chain."²³ Benin's chain is composed primarily of non-reading adults. This greatly limits the size of the potential audience any newspaper can reach. In spite of this, there are 19 daily newspapers in Cotonou and several other weekly and fortnightly publications. With numbers such as these, it is no wonder many of the newspapers resort to sensational tactics to attract as many readers as possible. The sheer number of non-reading Beninese is one reason it is necessary, at least temporarily in this chapter, to break out culture and view it as an abstract entity rather than simply to talk about the cultures of the Beninese people or the American people. Merely contrasting Benin to America in journalistic terms makes it too easy to assume that the Western culture is superior just because more people can read. As will be noted later through Ong's examples, reading and writing do not always signify a superior culture.

Perhaps a fitting point to complete this discussion of culture and move on to the actual definitions of the oral and written traditions is the phenomenon of charisma and its relations to culture. Geertz is quick to include charisma as a distinct form of power that defines governments and monarchies, thus making it an intricate part of culture. In this chapter, charisma is notable because of the part it plays in the rich history of Benin profiled in the preceding chapter. As Geertz writes in *Local Knowledge*:

Thrones may be out of fashion, and pageantry too; but political authority still requires a cultural frame in which to define itself and advance its claims, and so does opposition to it. A world wholly demystified is a world wholly depoliticized ..."²⁴

What this quote begins to do – by observing culture in relation to political power – is bring culture back from the abstract realm in which this chapter has been viewing it thus far and return it to its natural concrete form, a form that is present in everything we do.

Defining the two traditions

There are many ways in which to define the oral and written traditions, but for the purposes of clarity and simplicity, Carey's definitions are the most useful when considering the media and freedom and the role each has played in the West and Benin.

In *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*, Carey terms the oral tradition "the ritual view of communication."²⁵ Terms such as "sharing," "participation," "association," "fellowship," and "the possession of a common faith"²⁶ are part of its conceptualization. The common good, common roots, communion, and community are considerations made when delivering a message, whether via the media or word of mouth.

Further, Carey writes, "A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs."²⁷ The similarities between Carey's ritual view and the oral tradition are unmistakable, particularly in terms of the importance each one places on fellowship and commonality.

The emphasis on shared beliefs and the common good are primary elements of the African culture (as well as its embedded oral tradition). Even at the level of journalism, these cultural forces are present. Beninese reporters are

quick to think of the effects their words will have on their readers as opposed to Western journalists who believe that publishing the truth is usually the best course of action, particularly when it comes to politicians and celebrities. Chapter Five profiles how *Le Matin* reported, photographed, and presented a deadly stampede at a concert in May of 2003. What is particularly notable about *Le Matin's* coverage is how quickly reporters respected the feelings of those involved in the tragedy. They respected their feelings to the point of not shooting photographs and interviewing key witnesses to the tragedy. Even more astounding, from a Western perspective, was how quickly editors not only understood their reporters' actions but also defended those actions.

Communication interruptions between the West and Africa occur when the oral tradition clashes with the written tradition, or what Carey refers to as a transmission view of communication. The written tradition is prevalent in most, if not all, industrial cultures and is defined by terms such as "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving information to others."²⁸ The written tradition, as Carey writes, "... is a view of communication that derives from one of the most ancient of human dreams: the desire to increase the speed and effect of messages as they travel in space."²⁹

Perhaps most instrumental to the written tradition was printing press. As Bourgault writes:

The Western world has been deeply influenced by the Guttenberg revolution, which ushered in the age of print. Printing brought about linear thinking, the use of logical syllogisms, and the paramountcy of logically derived principles in the acquisition of knowledge. Printing has also distanced readers, the users of information, from the source of information, thereby engendering the critical spirit which has been a

hallmark of Western scholarship and, by diffusion, Western thinking since the Age of Reason.³⁰

When one considers for a moment the presence of the oral tradition in Africa and then observes the *print* media for any length of time, the conflict between these two traditions is highlighted. The oral tradition, after all, is ancient. Many of pan-Africa's values are rooted in this tradition. The introduction of the written tradition within this background does not cause much of a conflict on the part of the educated elites. They, after all, have been part of the written tradition throughout their educational experience. However, the non-reading sector of the population, which is the majority of the population, still functions within the parameters of the oral tradition.

News, as Carey writes, is "... a historic reality"³¹ that is a form of culture "... invented by a particular class at a particular point of history."³² News satisfies a basic hunger in people to know what is going on around them. In a culture such as Benin where the oral tradition (or ritual view of communication) is dominant, news is not rooted in mere information but rather it is perceived as drama. Cotonou's voracious appetite for political news is the most obvious example of this tradition in action.

In the West, news is traditionally based on informing and enlightening readers to the truth³³, although in the case of many tabloid newspapers, it tends to gravitate more into the oral tradition of drama. Leading publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* were founded on the principle of being newspapers of record where people felt they could get unbiased, objective information. The work of both Dewey and Lippmann, which was a large part of Chapter One, is at the center of this discussion. Both philosophers feared the

effects of the information delivered to the majority of citizens. In Lippmann's case it was the gap between the pictures in our minds and the pictures of the outside world (largely presented by the media). The two seldom match. For Dewey, it was the need to have information at our disposal in order act in a responsible manner. The natural gap that occurs between what we naturally know and what we need to know was, according to Dewey, the point where knowledge most effectively grew. Human beings can always know more, Dewey believed, and knowing more can help propel them to a higher plane of existence.³⁴

It is very easy when traveling from one culture to another to ignore the presence of a pre-existing tradition. This was particularly evident during my first visit to Benin. It was tempting to plan the journalism seminars, advertise a time and date, and wait for the participants to show up and consume the knowledge. This would have been a classic example of the two traditions clashing. I easily could have perceived myself as a filled vessel of journalistic knowledge and viewed the Beninese journalists as empty vessels. But because I was conducting the seminars with Father Andre Quenum, a native of Benin, recognizing and respecting the oral tradition took precedence. In order to achieve a sense of community – a key element of the oral tradition – we visited each of Cotonou's daily newspapers (there were 17 in 2001) and asked what problems those newspapers encountered on a daily basis. Once this conversation had been initiated and a basic understanding of each paper had been obtained, an invitation to attend the seminars was extended.

On a base level, this seems like a very small gesture. However, by recognizing the fundamental elements of the existing oral tradition, it served as a

background for the journalism seminars which were, as a result, very successful. Many of the participants noted that they felt their opinions were valued and the information being presented was not one directional. Instead it was being presented in recognition of the strengths and weaknesses learned during the visits to the individual newspapers. Father Andre and I learned from the journalists and they from us.

Chapter Two noted the period of the colonization, which is a classic example of the two traditions clashing. The French never attempted to recognize or respect the existing oral tradition of Africa as we did during our journalism seminars. They actively tried to change it with largely disastrous consequences.³⁵

The two traditions, according to Walter Ong

In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, Ong takes the unique approach of considering orality as an entity used by persons totally unfamiliar with writing. This is an important distinction because, as Ong writes:

Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all.³⁶

Numbers such as these begin to highlight the preeminence of the oral tradition. Writing makes words appear and places them in a form that can be stored in a form other than memory. This is why Ong terms the written word as “residue.”³⁷ The words are locked in a visual field and cannot escape that realm.

The oral tradition, conversely, is rooted in sound, a phenomenon that is impossible to stop. Once sound is gone, there is only silence. The mind processes sound at a much faster rate, Ong notes, than the hand can write. Traditionally, the written tradition has been favored because, it has been argued³⁸, once something is written down, it is preserved for the ages. Ong counters this through examples such as ancient rhetoricians and rhapsodes who could memorize huge texts (such as Homer's *Odyssey*) and freely recite them to audiences. The performance and community aspects of the oral tradition originated with the addition of this human element.

Writing relies on abstractions. Ong writes:

In the absence of elaborate analytic categories that depend on writing to structure knowledge at a distance from lived experience, oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all the knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings.³⁹

Writing, he continues, "... fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle."⁴⁰

What is immediately noticeable about a culture, such as Benin's, which is based in the oral tradition, is how quickly people think of the masses and how reluctant they are to think of the self. The oral tradition spans much broader than just stories. It is a significant underpinning of the notion of community in Africa.⁴¹ One of many examples Ong uses is from the work of A.R. Luria, who studied oral cultures around the world and documented his findings in *Cognitive*

Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations. One of Luria's studies was of illiterate (which, according to Ong, means primarily oral) peasants in Uzbekistan. To accentuate the sense of community exhibited in oral cultures, one of the questions Luria posed to his subjects was: "What sort of person are you?" One of the peasants, a 36-year-old man, responded in a particularly touching and humane manner: "What can I say about my own heart?" the man said. "How can I talk about my character? Ask others; they can tell you about me. I myself can't say anything."⁴²

In Benin, a similar community-oriented sensibility also exists, and it gravitates into the realm of journalism. During one interview for this dissertation, Tiburce Adagbe, director of publication for *Le Progres* in Cotonou, told a story about a recent trip he had taken to Germany:

A passenger plane had crashed recently and all of the newspapers in Germany were covering the story. Here in Benin, we would not cover a story like that with nearly as much enthusiasm. Everyone would know about a story that big. People here don't have an 'I' mentality. It is based on 'we.'⁴³

There is an ontological clash between the culture of journalism, which is based on informing and educating people in an objective and ethical⁴⁴ manner, and cultures based in the oral tradition. Ong notes "... urbanization provided the incentive to develop record keeping."⁴⁵ The entire business of print journalism is based on documenting the world around us in a printed fashion. Benin's fascination and preoccupation with political coverage could be a reaction to this clash between the traditions. Although every director admits to running stories on breaking news, Cotonou's journalists are not nearly as quick to react to the

urgency of breaking news as their European and American counterparts, both of whom are well entrenched in the written tradition. As is noted throughout Chapters Two, Four, and Five, editors place more of an emphasis on what stories will sell.

Ong differentiates audiences implicit to the oral and written traditions. Spoken words, he writes, "... are always modifications of a total situation which is more than verbal. They never occur alone, in a context simply of words."⁴⁶ In short, there is always a visible person involved in a verbal discourse. Writing, on the other hand, involves an audience that "... is always a fiction."⁴⁷ When this "fictional" audience is coupled with the strong sense of community exhibited in most oral-based cultures, reporting news in a timely fashion becomes a new concept.

Abraham Voglozin, a noted scholar in Cotonou, believes many journalists, perhaps unknowingly, are appropriating aspects of the oral tradition when they write sensational stories.

"In the villages, the concepts of reason and emotion were conveyed through very passionate stories," Voglozin said. "However, the purpose of these stories was to strengthen the bond among members of the village. When journalists use these same tactics when conveying news stories, the result is not the same."⁴⁸

Voglozin said too many contemporary journalists are driven by the wrong motivation. Far too many, he claimed, have started newspapers merely as a way to make money, not for the benefit of the masses. Appropriating the oral tradition for essentially the wrong purposes is an easy way to present stories that are sure to be read, he said.

“The journalist is an individual,” he said. “This is an undisputable fact. However, the journalist must consider the community. One of the key components of a democratic society is a free press that is accessible by the people.”⁴⁹

Each newspaper must realize its responsibility to preserving that sense of community, Voglozin said. His comments underscore Ong’s thoughts concerning the printed word as opposed to the written word. Ong writes:

Print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did. Writing moves words from the sound world to a world of visual space, but print locks words into position in this space. Control of position is everything in space.⁵⁰

The issues of print and control are of utmost significance when discussing Cotonou’s print media. As Chapter Five notes, an enormous amount of consideration is placed on the type of headlines published on *Le Matin’s* front page. This care is commendable if it is for the purposes of clarity and impact, and these two are definitely considerations. However, editors also admit that the ability to sell is also a top consideration ... so much so that at times the headline is agreed upon before the story is actually written. In the West, marketing and sales also are significant factors, but in most cases, headlines are not written until the story has been completed and edited. When journalism is guided by a sense of praxis, as Voglozin notes above and Megnassan notes in Chapter Two, it preserves information and presents it to readers in a non-sensational, objective manner. When sensational methods are used, the line between news and entertainment disappears.⁵¹

Hope for community-centered journalism, Voglozin believes, lies in education. The next section looks at the literature of Paulo Freire as one possible avenue toward a form of journalism in Benin that embodies the professional narrative of objectivity with greater consistency.

Education through an application of praxis

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire spends a great deal of time destabilizing the traditional teacher/student narrative of education. He terms this “the banking concept” of education whereby students are turned “... into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher.”⁵² This form of education relies on depositing information into students. The teacher is considered an all-knowing vessel of knowledge. For education and knowledge to achieve true praxis and power, Freire believes in a different form of education, one in which the student – or the oppressed in the case of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – learns in conjunction with his environment. Eventually, the oppressed “... perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a *process*, undergoing constant transformation.”⁵³ Communication plays a vital role in the non-banking form of education. Freire writes:

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher’s thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students’ thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible.⁵⁴

This form of education is pertinent to a discussion of Cotonou's print media because there is a huge gulf between the educated journalists and many readers who cannot read. The reliance on political coverage, popular as it may be, is essentially communicating with other educated elites. In order to broaden the base of readership, Beninese journalists must realize the relationship between those they are presently communicating with (i.e., other educated elites) and those they are not (the majority of non-readers). Politics certainly affects all walks of life. However, educational and economic reporting can begin to bridge this gap and place journalists in a position to uphold and improve the polis, not just deliver political news that has a high sales potential.

Merely liberating people is a form of praxis, according to Freire. It sets into motion "... the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it."⁵⁵ By modifying the role of the teacher from "the-one-who-teaches" into a person who is "... himself taught in dialogue with students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow."⁵⁶

This transformation is not possible without dialogue, and Freire places strong emphasis on the realization that dialogue is required to achieve praxis. In fact, he writes, dialogue is an "existential necessity." He writes, "It is between men, mediated by the world, in order to name the world."⁵⁷ The important connection between Freire's thoughts and media studies is the realization of the part mass communication plays in the mediation component of Freire's observation. There is a good deal of faith involved in what Freire terms the "dialogical man" because that man believes in others even before he enters into an actual conversation with them.

A realization of this connection can greatly aid the independent print media of Cotonou. The Western practices of community or civic journalism⁵⁸ are not present in Cotonou. The heavy emphasis on political coverage complicates this process because the transformative power of the individual reader has not been considered in terms of how those individuals impact broader societal issues such as poverty. By realizing the positive force the media can have on those issues, change is possible.⁵⁹ Many of the directors of publication believe that by concentrating on one geographic area, other areas will not care enough to read stories that do not directly affect them. But if those stories address universal topics such as poverty and education, there will be a natural connection to all readers. This is an area of journalism that holds great potential in Cotonou.

The first step, however, is opening a dialogue with the vast numbers who do not read, and this step must involve critical thinking. Freire writes that critical thinking is:

... thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them — thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity — thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved.⁶⁰

Perhaps the greatest fear in Cotonou right now is a very tangible fear: economics. Every newspaper, even a well-established one such as *Le Matin*, worries about making enough money to stay in business. The infrastructure of the republic is improving. More streets are being paved and other public works projects are being completed. Unemployment is still very high (around 80 percent), but the situation does not seem as dire as it was two years ago during

my first visit. Still a legitimate critical dialogue has to begin with the question: Is Cotonou a large enough city to support nearly 20 daily newspapers. Independent observers such as Voglozin and Megnassan say no, and the future will prove them right or wrong.

The type of reporting now being done is short sighted at best. It may win readers in the short term, but to have a long lasting effect on the masses, more papers must look to the long term.⁶¹ The type of critical thinking Freire advocates is one avenue that can help the papers make this transition and begin to reach out to a broader readership.

The oral tradition is an inherent part of the African culture. The vast influence of European and Western cultures – rooted heavily in the written tradition – always will be present. Freire discusses the concept of “totality” in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He writes:

One of the characteristics of oppressive cultural action which is almost never perceived by the dedicated but naïve professionals who are involved is the emphasis on a *focalized* view of problems rather than on seeing them as dimensions of a *totality*. In “community development” projects the more of a region or area is broken down into “local communities,” without the study of these communities both as totalities in themselves and as parts of another totality (the area, region, and so forth) — which is in its turn is part of a still larger totality (the nation, as part of the continental totality) — the more alienation is intensified.⁶²

In order for a more comprehensive, objective form of journalism to evolve, editors and reporters need to realize the part-to-whole relationship between them and all the people of Cotonou. The journalists must reach out to the populace with a form of journalism that not only informs the community but also

plays an active role in improving that community. This is no easy task. This chapter has attempted to highlight the differences between the oral and written traditions and suggest ways to bridge those differences. Perhaps more significant, this chapter connects the cultures of the West and Benin and the directors of publication who are featured in the next chapter. The various ways in which they define freedom can collectively suggest ways to begin a dialogue that can ultimately lead to a more comprehensive form of journalism.

Chapter Four

Freedom ... as defined by the directors of publication of Cotonou's daily newspapers

In a democracy as new as Benin's, the journalistic landscape is always changing.¹ During my first visit in 2001, 17 daily newspapers were published. In 2003, at least 19 were publishing regularly (see Appendix A), and, as Chapter Two notes, at least two that published sporadically. One thing is clear, however, from my observations. Studying the media in Cotonou reveals time and again the forces of politics and economics intertwining and exerting a great deal of power and influence.

This chapter examines how the directors of publication at Cotonou's daily newspapers define the notion of freedom and also reflects how they believe their newspapers are applying that notion. They define freedom, at times, with eloquence and passion. They engage that sense of freedom – which is now guaranteed by Benin's constitution – with mixed results. Political news clearly dominates the coverage of all the papers, so much so that they appear to merely follow one another in a mad rush to publish whatever unusual political story that might sell. Economics wields a great deal of power over this rush. In a nation as poor as Benin, ethics, objectivity, and, arguably, good journalistic common sense at times must be compromised to survive. If this competition between economics and freedom is viewed from the perspective of Fisher's narrative paradigm, the concept of public moral argument can be applied as a means to mediate such confrontations. This chapter also captures the diversity of

Cotonou's journalists. Many are quite young, well under thirty years old, while others, such as Maurice Chabi, have vivid memories of times when the press was not free.

Journalism as a vehicle for change

Maurice Chabi hates to wear a tie. The husky legendary Beninese journalist once had a high-paying position with the Economic Commission for Africa, a United Nations affiliate, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and left after just one year. It was not the tie per se that confined him, although it did feel very good to take it off each day, he recalls with a robust belly laugh. It was the job's monotonous routine that got him down.

"All the other people who worked with me would say: 'What's wrong with you? Why don't you just do like everyone else does?'" he said.² What was missing from Chabi's life was journalism, a profession that was instrumental in subverting a Marxist regime in the 1970s and '80s and continues today to mediate Benin's multi-party democracy.

What is most striking about Chabi is his simplicity. His second-floor office at *Les Echos du Jour*, a newspaper he founded in 1996, is decorated with pictures of the people of Benin: children smiling, adults at work, fishermen casting their nets in the nearby water village of Ganvié. Dressed in black jeans and a brown, button-down work shirt (sleeves rolled up), he comes out from behind his desk and pulls a chair near the couch where he is being interviewed so no desk is between him and his interviewer. Apparently a desk is somewhat like a tie to Chabi. When discussing journalism, Maurice Chabi is never at a loss for words.

He can easily talk for two hours or more, often laughing at examples of his own brashness.

“Sometimes I think back at things I wrote and did, and I’m honestly amazed,” he said. “Now that I am older [he is 51], I tend to analyze them a little more closely than when I was young.”³

He has no regrets, though, and said he is most proud of the fact that he has earned the respect of his friends as well as many of his foes. An example of this occurred several years after the collapse of the Marxist regime in the late 1980s. Chabi wrote a book detailing the failure of many of Benin’s top banks. In short, his book named names in a massive scandal that included bank presidents and tens of millions in Beninese francs. Several years after the book was published, Chabi attended a function at which he met one of the bank presidents who had been implicated in the scandal. The former bank president introduced Chabi to the man with whom he had been talking.

“The way he introduced me really surprised me,” Chabi said. “He said: ‘I would like you to meet Mr. Maurice Chabi, a very well-respected and honest journalist.’ Remember, this was a man I had exposed in my book,” he said. “To be able to expose a person for doing something wrong and still maintain his respect is something I am proud of,” Chabi said.⁴

His life is far from simple. In many ways it is extraordinary because of the way he used both his education and journalism to help subvert Kérékou’s regime. Chabi studied journalism and political science in France in the early 1970s and after graduating worked for a French daily newspaper for six years. He was young and frequently amazed when far more experienced journalists would ask his opinion on stories. “I was just a kid,” he said. “And here were

people who had 20 and 30 years of experience asking me to look at something they wrote.”⁵ More than likely, however, those experienced journalists sensed the skills Chabi had not yet realized he possessed.

In 1982, he returned to Benin. The regime had taken power in 1972 and its affect on free speech was obvious when Chabi began working at Agence Benin- Presse. Government censorship was part of the news business, but what worked in Chabi’s favor was his out-going, gregarious nature. Many of the government officials, who were personal friends of Chabi’s before he left to attend school in France, were now part of the regime. They knew he was an experienced journalist and recruited him. They asked him to be director of publication at *Daho-Express*, the national newspaper that during the regime had been renamed *Ehuzu*. Chabi did not agree with the regime. After all, he had gone to school and worked in France for years and had lived in a free society. He knew the only way to insure freedom in Benin was to use Marx’s notion of creating a revolution from within. Essentially Chabi was using Marx’s thoughts to defeat a regime that was based on those very same teachings.

“I accepted their position,” Chabi said. “Because I knew I could not do anything from outside the regime. I had to be on the inside. *Ehuzu* would provide the perfect opportunity to reach as many people as possible.”⁶

This was not an easy task. Government censors would routinely check the content of the newspaper, but whenever possible, Chabi would include very subtle commentaries questioning the rationale behind the regime. The readers, of course, loved these stories. The regime did not, and whenever these commentaries or uncensored news accounts would appear, Chabi would have to meet with a representative from the propaganda office.

“They always would call me comrade,” Chabi recalled with a laugh. “They would say: ‘Comrade, why did you publish this? You know we can’t allow things like this.’ Even my own journalists would be afraid whenever I would publish unapproved stories. They were afraid of what might happen to them. I couldn’t blame them. I had to do it, though. The people had to know what was going on.”⁷

One of the best examples of this occurred near the end of Kérékou’s regime. One of Chabi’s close friends was also Minister of Youth and Sports. The minister also did not agree with the regime but served because he feared for his own safety and the safety of his family. For several years – from the mid-’80s until the end of the regime, the minister wrote a weekly column for *Ehuzu* under a nom de plum and openly criticized the regime. His criticism, Chabi said, were cleverly cloaked in metaphors.

“I remember several columns in which he would refer to the story of the feudal monkey,” Chabi said. “The monkey is very happy because he doesn’t see what is going on around him, nor does he hear or say anything. It was obvious when people read this column that the feudal monkey also could be compared to the head of state, Mr. Kérékou himself.”⁸

The obvious question is why the regime just did not fire Chabi or put him in prison as they had done to many other journalists. Again, the reason was Chabi’s personality and his popularity among the people. Members of the regime would question him concerning articles such as the one written by the minister. Chabi said he would usually just deny that they had anything to do with the head of state. In the case of the minister, the regime finally learned his identity, but by then it was too late. The regime had lost much of its power.

Another thing that worked in Chabi's favor was his skill as a journalist. The regime respected his talents, even though they resulted in opinions that were diametrically opposed to theirs. More powerful, perhaps, was Chabi's popularity among the people. To put him in prison would be to make him a martyr. It was easier, Chabi said, for the regime to sanction him.

"I was sanctioned lots of times," he said. "Most of the time I honestly don't think they knew what to do with me. They would call me in and ask: 'What do you think we should do about this?' I would just answer: 'I'll try to be more careful in the future.'"⁹ He knew many of his friends who were part of the regime did not agree with its massive restrictions, but they feared for their own safety. By taking great chances at *Ehuzu*, Chabi said he was able to give a voice to those (both within the regime as well as private citizens) who otherwise had no voice.

During the final few years, the regime lost much of its power. Underground publications such as *Tam Tam Express* and *La Gazette du Golfe* were easier to obtain, particularly on the campus of Benin's National University. During these final years, an interesting series of events again provided an opportunity for Chabi to use his power as a journalist to inform the public. A national chain of stores named Coop (for cooperative) had been an extremely popular place for Beninese people to shop. Anything could be purchased at Coop stores and when the chain suddenly went bankrupt, the affect was felt throughout Benin. The government conducted a lengthy investigation into what had happened and prepared an official report that was given to Chabi to publish in *Ehuzu*. This perhaps was one of the greatest examples of how he used *Ehuzu* to inform the people of what was going on within the regime.

“I remember that day so well,” Chabi said. “It was a Friday when an official brought the report to me. I looked through it and couldn’t believe my eyes. Everything was there ... names of big government officials ... high-ranking members of the regime who had been implicated in the scandal. I couldn’t believe it hadn’t been censored. I had to publish it.”

Chabi obviously should not have received the entire report, and the regime soon realized its oversight. The next day the director of propaganda met with him and asked Chabi to withhold the names of the top regime officials. He refused. On Sunday a government minister (and close friend) called Chabi to his house and ordered him not to publish the names of the regime officials.

“I knew this person,” Chabi said. “I knew that he did not agree with the regime. He was just doing his job.”¹⁰ Chabi offered to do one of two things: Either he would withhold the entire report or he would publish it entirely. Because of the popularity of the Coop stores, the government minister knew that not publishing the results of the investigation would cause natural suspicion on the part of the public. Surprisingly, he left the decision to Chabi. On Monday, the entire report appeared in *Ehuzu*.

The repercussions were more signs of the regime’s growing ineffectiveness and eventual demise. Chabi said he was sanctioned via a letter. The detached, almost informal, manner in which the regime attempted to censor him confirmed its growing ineffectiveness.

“I couldn’t believe it,” he said laughing about being sanctioned by mail. “And two days after that, the same minister who had sent the sanction to me invited me his house for dinner.”

Chabi is not proud of everything he did during the regime. At times, he had to feign acquiescence to the regime in order to stay out of prison. He remembers being called to Kérékou's residence for a staged press conference. A friend of his, a reporter from Reuters, also was there. All questions from the media had been submitted in advance and Kérékou's responses carefully prepared. Chabi said his friend from Reuters was a good reporter. At one point, he asked the president if the rumors of political prisoners being held in a massive prison in northern Benin were true. Kérékou looked stunned and paused, then turned to Chabi and responded: "This is Mr. Maurice Chabi, a journalist who is respected by many people in Benin. Mr. Chabi, do you know of any political prisoners in Benin?"¹¹

Chabi suddenly realized he had been used. Kérékou obviously had anticipated such point-blank questions, so he had asked Chabi to attend the press conference to essentially bail out the president from such a situation. "I couldn't do anything," Chabi said. "I just looked at him and said: 'No, Mr. President, I don't know of any political prisoners being held in Benin.' If I would have disagreed with him, I might have ended up in that same jail. I didn't want to take that chance, and that still bothers me."¹²

After the National Conference in 1989 that marked the beginning of the transition to democracy, Chabi left *Ehuzu* and became director of *La Gazette du Golfe*, a weekly paper. He later took the position in Addis Ababa and a year after that (in 1996) returned to Cotonou and secured enough funds to begin publishing *Les Echos du Jour*. Once again, his personality and popularity helped him fund his venture. A wealthy businessman whom Chabi had known during his time at *La Gazette du Golfe* did not like the owner of the paper and told Chabi

if he ever decided to start his own paper, the businessman would be interested in providing key advertising. When Chabi approached him after his year in Addis Ababa, the businessman quickly agreed to help fund the paper.

“I didn’t know too much about how to start a paper,” Chabi said. “I had saved some of the money I had made working in Addis Ababa, but I didn’t have enough, so I ask this man: ‘Would you consider advancing me half of the money immediately?’ He agreed,” Chabi said. “And that’s how I started *Les Echos du Jour*.”¹³

Newspaper ownership is not easy, even for a person as popular as Chabi. *Les Echos du Jour* has a daily circulation of about 3,000, but, like most Cotonou newspapers, it is hard to get an exact number. During elections or key government debates, circulation will go up; during lean times it will go down. Advertising is always a difficult venture also. Many newspapers will publish stories for money. At first Chabi refused to do this. He clearly marked those types of stories “paid advertisements.” They are much like the advertorial copy in American newspapers. However, he soon felt he had to compromise.

“I started publishing the stories for money,” he said. “It came down to a business decision. So many of the other newspapers were doing it, I had to or I would lose a great deal of money.”¹⁴

From a news perspective, Chabi is always looking for ways to be a voice for the people, just as he was during the regime. That, he said, is what he loves most about journalism. “This job provides something new every day,” he said. “Journalists ... they know who’s who, and I like that.”¹⁵

He has matured into the kind of journalists he had known as a young boy in France. Because he is so well respected, younger journalists typically come to

him for advice. And his investigative skills are sharper than ever. In 1997, he was sentenced to six months in jail after an investigation into the embezzlement of funds at the Ministry of Education. Chabi's information was solid, right down to cancelled checks and deposit slips proving the funds had been deposited into private accounts. However, he lost the case because the minister claimed he was just temporarily keeping the funds until they could be transferred into the appropriate Ministry of Education account.

"I really thought I was going to jail that time," Chabi said. "Then I was called to before a government commission and told they were going to investigate the legal proceedings of my trial. I got the feeling they did not want to send me to jail. I believe they honestly believed the minister was guilty."¹⁶

His gut feelings were correct. The case was thrown out on a technicality and a year later the government conducted an independent investigation and found the minister guilty of embezzlement.

"I believe freedom of the press is as good in Benin as anywhere in the world," Chabi said. "We're working on what it means to have a free press. We're still learning. We have to give it time."¹⁷

A commitment to better journalism

The offices of *Le Point au Quotidien* in bustling downtown Cotonou do not appear fashionable by Western standards. To get to the newsroom, visitors must walk past the box office of a movie theater – which on this particular day is showing three garish Indian features – through a dingy doorway, and up several flights of crumbling steps to the offices.

Inside *Le Point* all the windows are wide open in hopes of luring in breezy relief from the late morning sun, but the heat and humidity are not phasing Fernando Hessou, director of publication of the six-year-old daily. Hessou, a youthful-looking 41, gestures wildly as he discusses *Le Point's* role in the concept of freedom. The paper's mere existence is somewhat of a testament to freedom because the date it was established – August 4 – is date feudalism officially ended in France during the revolution of 1789.

Founded by a group of idealistic young people, *Le Point* is serious about its mission of training journalists for the future.¹⁸ The National University of Benin does not have a journalism school, so students interested in writing must go to Ghana or Senegal or receive training through groups such as the West African News Agency for Development, which has a branch in Cotonou.

Hessou's story is similar to that of many Beninese journalists. It seems he was almost pre-destined to enter the field. Editor of his high school newspaper, which was hand written, Hessou originally wanted to become a history and geography teacher. During a visit to Ghana, he was playing handball (when he was younger, Hessou was one of Africa's top players) and struck up a conversation with some sports writers who were there covering the matches. They sensed his love of writing and suggested he attend classes at the Ghana Institute of Journalism. Although Hessou never formally entered the institute, the lectures he attended reminded him of his love for journalism, so he returned to Benin and trained for four years at the West African News Agency for Development. He wrote for several of Cotonou's newspapers as well as Agence Benin-Press before becoming a director of publication at *Le Point*. Two of his

brothers also are in communication, one works for a Cotonou television station and the other for the Ministry of Communication.

Hessou is perhaps most passionate about moving Beninese journalism in a new direction. “‘Professionalism first’ is our motto,” he proudly notes.¹⁹ In a city of nearly 20 daily newspapers, Hessou appreciates (and demands) accuracy. For too long, he said, newspapers were interested in just getting a sensational story that would sell papers. Some papers (as well as other media outlets) still do that as evidenced by the many sensational headlines. But *Le Point* is doing its best to turn the tide toward better journalism, and their efforts are paying off.

“We do not want to just follow what everyone else is doing,” Hessou said. “But sometimes it is hard. Cotonou is such a political center. People cannot get enough political news. But we try to balance our coverage with other types of stories such as sports, culture, entertainment, economic, and environmental.”²⁰ Finding the right mix is a touchy game. Hessou admits he does not agree with the extremely heavy emphasis Cotonou’s newspapers place on politics. Whenever *Le Point* deviates too much from that trend, though, the result is simple: “The paper does not sell.”²¹

Le Point’s commitment to quality is evident in other ways. It has won a host of journalism awards, including a 2002 Best in Africa citation for an investigative series documenting corruption at the local custom’s office. One of *Le Point*’s reporters, Bruno Dossou, has been a benefactor of the paper’s commitment to training. Dossou had no writing experience when he started at *Le Point*; however, he has developed into one of its best reporters, recently winning a number of awards for his writing on AIDS.

A similar commitment to accuracy can be found at *Le Progres*. Tiburce Adagbe has been director for just one year, but he has been a journalist for six. When asked how he would define press freedom, Adagbe rubs his eyes and concentrates to mentally escape the loud banging of construction workers on the floor below. His answer is simple yet points to deeper issues: “To do what we are doing right now. Freedom means a person can start his own newspaper and say whatever he wants as long as he respects the deontology of journalism.”²² Like many of the directors, Adagbe said quality is becoming a higher priority than the quantity of stories in the paper. Not long ago, he said *Le Progres* was happy to get any sort of article about a government minister. Today, he is quick to add “well-written” in front of the word “article.”

A number of the directors and reporters made frequent references to the significance of upholding the *Code de Deontology de la Presse Beninoise*, a collection of 26 articles passed in 1999 by all media outlets in Benin (see Appendix B). The board, composed of elected members from the media, keeps tabs on which newspapers, radio, and television stations are upholding and breaking portions of the code. The number of corrections each outlet publishes or airs also is documented and the information is made available to the public as well as the government. The rating each media outlet receives is one criteria used by the government’s High Authority of Audiovisual Communication when it awards funding each year. The funding is not much – two first place awards of four million CFA (about \$2,000 each) are given each year as well as several smaller secondary awards – but any type of funding is welcome news to most Cotonou newspapers.

A tight community

Being a journalist in Cotonou is being a member of a tightly knit community. Many reporters eventually become directors of publication and nearly all journalists know one another. Hessou, for example, made his rounds before becoming director at *Le Point*. Vincent Folly, director at *La Nouvelle Tribune*, formerly worked at *Le Point* and was director at *Le Matin* and later at *Le Progres*. Charles Toko was director at *Le Matin* before moving to *Le Matinal*, the city's largest privately owned daily, where he is principal shareholder. Christophe Hodonou, now director and part owner of *La Pyramide*, helped a wealthy Algerian establish *Le Matin*, the city's oldest privately owned daily, 10 years ago.

Having the opportunity to direct a publication is a great source of pride, but the savviest individuals attempt to balance journalism and business. These are the few who eventually establish their own newspapers. Folly has accomplished this at *La Nouvelle Tribune*, a paper he has owned for nearly two years. Patrick Adjamonsi has done the same at *L'Aurore*, a paper he founded five years ago, and Hodonou celebrated his eighth year (on June 10) as part owner of *La Pyramide*. (He notes that the paper first published as a fortnightly and built to twice a week, then a daily ... just like a pyramid.) Clément Adéchian helped establish *Fraternite* before moving on in 2001 to help found and become part owner of *L'Informateur*.

Folly, impeccably dressed in a Pierre Cardin suit, barks out orders to office personnel at *La Nouvelle Tribune* as he answers questions about press freedom and newspaper ownership. He defines freedom as the ability to let the people know what is going on in a responsible way. Folly is well known in West

African journalism circles; however, he was not in Benin during Kérékou's Marxist regime. "I was an English teacher for 15 years," he said in fluent English.²³ During most of the regime, he was in the Ivory Coast, but he still feels a keen sense of commitment to informing the public.

"I insist on truth [at *La Nouvelle Tribune*]," he said.²⁴ This tenet of accuracy is foundational to professional journalism, but Folly notes that since the multi-party democracy, newspapers often stretch the truth as a way of selling papers. The constant economic challenge of making ends meet many times tempts directors to gravitate toward sensationalism. Adjamonsi of *L'Aurora* is all too familiar with the price of sensationalism, even when a journalist accidentally gets caught in its turbulent wake.²⁵ He was arrested in 2001 for a shoddy news report that he claims was not even his fault. Following the September 11 attacks in New York, Adjamonsi received a tip that a high-ranking member of Benin's military was about to be fired. The source suggested the man might have had dealings with someone affiliated with al Qaeda. The military official was indeed fired a day or so later and Adjamonsi ran his story on September 27 hinting at the connection the man may have had to al Qaeda.

On its own merit, Adjamonsi's story was not libelous. He was reporting on a government official and trusted the information he had received. What a Cotonou radio station did, however, was what got Adjamonsi into legal trouble. He claimed the station added to and greatly embellished many of the facts, so much so that Adjamonsi said the radio report made it sound as though Osama bin Laden himself had been to Benin. The government was furious and sued Adjamonsi (not the radio station). When taken before a judge, the issue was compounded because the judge had heard only the radio report and demanded

that Adjamonsi justify the story. The matter was resolved in an almost anticlimactic fashion when Adjamonsi read his story that had run in *L'Aurore*. Adjamonsi said the suit was thrown out. However, according to a Reporters Without Borders account, *L'Aurore* published a story the next day (September 28) claiming that Benin had no connections to the terrorist attacks. The Reporters Without Borders story stated that Adjamonsi was released later the same day he was arrested.

Vincent Metonnou, director and one of the founders of *La Cloche*, also was sued when he published a controversial story about a politician receiving a lucrative contact for a tollbooth on a busy Cotonou highway that leads to Porto Novo. Metonnou said the information on the scandal was readily available to all of the newspapers, but none would print it because they were afraid of what the politician would do. *La Cloche* published the story and was sued. However, because of *La Cloche's* story, a government investigation was ordered and this resulted in the politician withdrawing his lawsuit.

Threats of lawsuits and actual suits are one of the hazards of newspaper ownership in Cotonou. Metonnou claimed that if a Cotonou newspaper is printing every day, it has to be receiving some funding from a politician. That is also one reason why, he said, so many papers exist: When one paper refuses to publish a story, a person can always go to another. The uncertainty of finances was particularly evident the day of Metonnou's interview. Because of financial difficulties, *La Cloche* had been forced to reduce publication to only three days per week.

Many voices as opposed to one

Over at the quaint offices of *L'Aurora*, Adjamonsi smokes a cigarette in his air-conditioned office. Ownership for him presents many of the same problems of which Folly spoke. In addition to owning *L'Aurora*, Adjamonsi is also a shareholder in *Le Matinal*. He attended journalism school in Senegal and has a master's in geography. During many of the regime's years, he worked for the Ministry of the Environment and had to release appropriate information to *Ehuzu* as well as the other media outlets. After the National Conference, he began working for a weekly newspaper then moved to a daily. When a politician bought the daily and began dictating what could and could not be written, Adjamonsi left and founded *L'Aurora*.

His memories of the regime have molded a clear picture of what freedom means: "Many voices," he said simply.²⁶ To completely appreciate the intricacies of freedom, Adjamonsi said one has only to look at how restricted speech was during the regime. Aside from the few underground newspapers – such as *La Gazette du Golfe* and *Tam Tam Express* – that were published at great risk, *Ehuzu* was the only readily available newspaper, and it was rigidly censored by the regime. "One newspaper meant one voice," Adjamonsi said. "Now there are many voices."²⁷

Yaovi Hounkponou, director of Agence Benin-Presse, also remembers the restricted voice of *Ehuzu*. Hounkponou started at the agency in 1985 as a technical engineer and has been director since 1996. To better illustrate the confining nature of the regime, Hounkponou, a diminutive, serious man, pulls an easel to the conference table in his spacious, air-conditioned office. He begins

sketching a flow chart to illustrate how information was distributed by the agency before and after the regime.

During the regime, all information was input into ABP where a host of government censors periodically visited and sorted out what news should be released. That news was then sent to the one government-sanctioned newspaper, *Ehuzu*, as well as the sanctioned television and radio outlets. Chabi's efforts aside, access to objective information was difficult during this period, Hounkponou said.

In the wake of democracy, a plethora of privately owned newspapers sprang up. Hounkponou's flow chart is essentially the same on the input side. However, in a democratic era news is no longer censored. It is sent out to any newspaper that requests it. These papers also have their own reporters who are free to gather additional information.

"We provide primarily international news," Hounkponou said. "They [the newspapers] are suppose to pay for the information they receive from ABP. But if they do not, we still send it to them. Our constitution guarantees a free flow of information to the people."²⁸

Any discussion of print journalism in Cotonou, always seems to return to the emphasis on politics. Hounkponou has a powerfully simple explanation: "When you are hungry, you do whatever is necessary to eat."²⁹ By Western standards, it is easy to cast a critical eye at the heavy political coverage and accuse the newspapers of merely following one another, but the extensive poverty in Benin makes selling newspapers more than just business. Jobs are precious here, and creative ways of securing capital are always being considered.

At *La Nouvelle Tribune*, for example, Folly said many newspapers, including his, rely on capital from private individuals. The government funding mentioned earlier is another source of income, but not all newspapers receive it, and many of the journalists interviewed say politics inevitably enter into the selection process.

Advertising, of course, is a natural source of money, and there are some paid ads, but the overall advertising base in Cotonou is not nearly as deep as in Europe and in the West. Another form of revenue comes from partnerships newspapers have with government businesses such as the national water and electric authority. Because the authority is government-owned, it must advertise all bids for construction work.

These partnerships may smack of an obvious conflict of interest. Folly said when controversial stories occur involving these government agencies – and they frequently do – the newspapers run the risk of not having the partnerships renewed if they report negative things. “It is a chance every newspaper takes,” he said.³⁰

Sylvestre Fohoungo found a creative way to fund his five-year-old newspaper *Liberté*: With his first degree in French, he established a private school in Cotonou with some friends. The money he makes from the school subsidizes *Liberté*. He still accepts advertising and received a government grant when he founded the paper in 1998, but he is proud of the fact that *Liberté* is not subsidized by political money. His definition of freedom is obvious to anyone who looks at the newspaper’s front-page flag: The Statue of Liberty is part of the letter “L” in *Liberté*. “It is an international symbol of freedom and liberty,” Fohoungo said.³¹ He has an interesting theory on why a free press is so vital to

democracy: The average person, he explained, does not understand what is going on in the government. It is the media's function to explain these things in a responsible manner.

The French language may have been Fohoungo's original course of study at Benin's national university, but journalism is definitely his love. He received a second degree in journalism from Senegal and has attended a host of journalism seminars throughout Africa. Prior to establishing *Liberté*, Fohoungo was editor of *Le Matin*. Locally he is secretary of the Organization of Deontology and Ethics in the Media (ODEM) and is a firm believer in the ability of such organizations to temper the press. Immediately after the democratic movement, he said newspapers were tempted to publish any type of story to sell papers. ODEM has the authority to fine newspapers that commit infractions that violate the previously mentioned deontology code. Now, as the democracy enters its second decade, he said reporting must become more objective and more responsible.

"Press freedom is not only freedom for journalists," Fohoungo said. "It is also freedom for the readers to choose which ever paper they want."³²

La Nation: Then and now

The offices of *La Nation* are housed in a walled compound that is guarded by soldiers. Since it is the national newspaper, *La Nation*, like all government buildings, has a military presence. Once inside the compound, however, *La Nation's* grounds appear better maintained than many of the smaller privately owned newspapers. The driveway winds around the main two-story building to a second stucco building that houses the press. Akuété Assevi has been worked at *La Nation* for 25 years. After democracy, the newspaper, though still funded by

the Beninese government, was free to elect its own editor and director of publication. Assevi was elected the paper's first editor during the democratic era and he is now director. As he walks up the stairs to his second-floor office, it is obvious he is well liked at *La Nation*. He frequently stops and jokes with people and appears genuinely interested in their personal lives.

The regime was not a pleasant time to be a journalist, he said. During many of those years, Assevi concentrated on the sports coverage of *La Nation*. "It was the one area where we had some freedom," he said. "News was very formatted. Everything was checked by the government."³³

Today is a very different time at *La Nation*. People obviously trust it as the official source for government information because its daily circulation is 5,000. Assevi takes *La Nation's* label as the nation's newspaper very seriously. Democracy for him means making the paper a national concern. Everyone – whether they are a member of the government or a private citizen – should be able to have access to *La Nation*, he said. "Many of the private papers will not publish a story from a private citizen," Assevi said. "But at *La Nation*, we want everyone to feel they have access."³⁴

An example of *La Nation's* commitment occurred during the April 7 no-publication protest. Assevi said he did not know about the planned protest, but had he known, he still would have published. "We are the nation's newspaper," he said firmly. "It is our responsibility. And on this particularly day, someone had to tell everyone why there were no other newspapers."³⁵

The protest helped *La Nation* financially also. Assevi's eyes widen when asked how the paper sold: "We printed 8,000 papers that day," he said. "And sold them all."³⁶

***Le Matin* and *Le Matinal*: The old and the respected**

If *La Nation* is respected because it is considered Benin's national newspaper, *Le Matin* and *Le Matinal* are respected for different reasons. Both newspapers are privately owned and both are interconnected in several other ways. At 10 years old, *Le Matin* is Cotonou's oldest privately owned newspaper, while *Le Matinal* has the largest daily circulation at 5,000. There are other geographic and phenomenological similarities too. Charles Toko, principle shareholder of *Le Matinal*, was once director of *Le Matin*, and many of Cotonou's other reporters and directors have either worked at or directed *Le Matin*. The two newspapers are a just few blocks from one another and both buildings are a reflection of the each newspaper's financial success.

Kokou Antoine Ogawin is *Le Matin*'s director of publication. Camille Djamagho, a graphic artist, and Ignace Fanou, the paper's assistant editor, both join Ogawin in his office. The question of freedom creates an intense discussion. Ogawin believes freedom for *Le Matin* means the right to convey any type of information, let it be political, social, or environmental.

"A good newspaper should be a go-between for the people and the government," he said. "The best newspapers are advocates for the people."³⁷

Unlike many of the city's papers, *Le Matin* tries to vary its coverage. The day of their interview, the front page contained a story on politics. The prior edition, however, featured a major story on sports. Benin's soccer team had won a qualifying match for the African Nations Cup tournament. Ogawin said that paper sold very well.

As mentioned earlier, a wealthy Algerian businessman, who later sold the paper to a Beninese businessman, established *Le Matin*. Ogawin said the paper receives no funding from politicians, and this allows it to report objectively on the government.

Two things give the editors of *Le Matin* particular pride: The newspaper's age and the fact that it has never been fined by ODEM. Being 10 years old carries with it a certain status, Ogawin said, and the record with ODEM speaks for itself.

What *Le Matin* has established with longevity, *Le Matinal* has established through diversification. Any visitor who gets within a block or two of *Le Matinal's* offices immediately sees a massive radio tower atop the building. "We just received final approval from the government for this," said Agapit Maforikan, director of publication. "We should be broadcasting by the end of the year."³⁸ In addition to the station, *Le Matinal* also owns an entertainment business, a commercial printing business as well as two handball teams, one male and one female.

Maforikan believes freedom is the ability to print anything they want as long as it does not violate the deontology code or the laws of Benin.

"There is, technically, very much press freedom in Benin," Maforikan said. "But there is always economic censorship, and that is universal." He said any time any newspaper accepts advertising, there could be some form of pressure. *Le Matinal* tries to negotiate with advertisers, but still this sometimes creates conflicts with the deontology of journalism. (See Article 9 in Appendix B).

Advertising is much more prevalent in *La Matinal*. At times, the newspaper publishes special advertising sections that are inserted into the paper. These can generate a great deal of money. *Le Matinal* also was the first

newspaper in Cotonou to begin using full color on a daily basis earlier this year, although Brice Houssou, director at *Fraternite*, claims the two papers started on exactly the same day. *Le Progres* has followed suit as did *L'Informateur* and all of the other papers use spot color. Full color is expensive, Maforikan said, but it also results in the sale of more newspapers.

Being the largest privately owned newspaper can sometimes generate ridicule from the other Cotonou papers. Maforikan takes this in stride.

"We do get our share of criticism," he said. "But in a way, that is a form of respect."³⁹

The diversification *Le Matinal* has achieved helps insulate it from financial hardships. No other newspaper in the city has such a diverse base from which to make money, and this is a challenge to Maforikan. "We're always looking for new ways to improve, to make more money, and to stay number one."⁴⁰

A lone feminist pioneer

Cotonou's newest daily newspaper is called *Nokoué*, which is the name of a lake near the city, and what makes this paper unique is that its General Director Sylvia d'Almeida is the only female director in the city. *Nokoué* may be just two months old, but d'Almeida is no newcomer to the Cotonou journalism scene. She was director of publication at *Le Beninois* for one year in 2001 and editor in chief a year prior to that. One thing that became very clear to d'Almeida when she was director at *Le Beninois* was that she could run her own newspaper. *Le Beninois* was owned by a Cotonou used car dealer, and when its tenuous financial state became even more uncertain, d'Almeida suggested to several of her colleagues at *Le Beninois* that they pool their money and launch their own

newspaper. Her instincts were sound because a few months after leaving *Le Beninois*, the newspaper closed.

As primary shareholder of *Nokoué*, d'Almeida is faced with the constant struggle of making ends meet. It is too early to tell if *Nokoué* will survive in Cotonou's competitive newspaper market, but d'Almeida has keen instincts. For example, above the mast of *Nokoué* is the newspaper's mission statement: "Une équipe, un but, une foi" or "One team, one goal, one faith."

"Since we launched this newspaper together, we are a team," d'Almeida said. "We share the same goal of success, and our faith in that goal will keep us going."⁴¹

D'Almeida laughs shyly when compared to a female island in a sea of men. But behind her shyness appears to be a lot of confidence. "When I am working at the newspaper, I feel like a man," she said. "But with a capital 'M.' I don't really feel like the boss. At work I'm just a journalist."⁴²

That sense of confidence is what drew her to journalism in the first place. After finishing her master's in history at Benin's national university in 1997, she saw an advertisement in *La Nation* for journalists. She had always enjoyed writing and was not looking forward to a career in history (too much time in an office, she said), so she entered the journalism program offered through the West African News Agency for Development. After completing that, she worked for Agence Benin-Presse, then Radio Golfe FM and eventually as editor in chief of *Le Beninois*.

One of the most noticeable things about Cotonou's daily newspapers is the stark domination of men. Most women work during the day as a receptionist or typist which is why d'Almeida's position as general director indeed seems like

an island. She claims to have never received any pressure from other directors. "They know that I'm not an easy mark," she said with a laugh.⁴³ In a market as competitive as Cotonou, however, the mere fact that she is a woman may be a built-in advantage for d'Almeida. She feels a need to highlight women's issues more than the other Cotonou papers. In fact, each Thursday she devotes two entire inside pages to women's news and writes a column for women. "This is something I started at *Le Beninois*," she said. "I wanted to continue it after starting *Nokoué*."⁴⁴

Another built-in advantage, d'Almeida claims, is the fact that since *Nokoué* was launched with money from journalists, it is not beholden to any political figures. "People know we are a voice of truth and honesty," she said. "And that is a good feeling."⁴⁵ What concerns her, though, is the constant uncertainty of raising enough capital to keep the paper publishing. Finding advertising is always a challenge. She said everyone who reads Cotonou newspapers are watching *Nokoué*. "They are expecting us to eventually fail. But that is more reason for us to work together and make this newspaper a success."⁴⁶

The business of running a daily newspaper does not infringe on d'Almeida's family life. She and her husband, a computer scientist, have one daughter and d'Almeida is pregnant with their second. She said her husband is very supportive of her work at *Nokoué*. In culture where the vast majority of women are housewives and mothers, d'Almeida explains her husband's view of her career in a very matter-of-fact manner: "Times have changed," she said with a laugh. "He has no choice in the matter."⁴⁷

Being a woman has yet another built-in advantage for d'Almeida. She said she is instantly afforded more credibility than her male counterparts. She said in

the African culture, men are far more likely than women to take bribes. “That gives me a natural sense of credibility,” she said.⁴⁸

Her long-term goals are to become a better journalist. D’Almeida has attended seminars in Senegal and Paris and sees freedom a difficult entity to define. It definitely exists in Benin, she said, but there are many laws and other forces (such as economics) that constrict it. “It is as if the government has given us a goat,” she said. “But they continue to keep a leash on the goat.”⁴⁹

A swinging pendulum of press freedom

Chabi used a good analogy to describe Benin’s movement from a regime to a democracy. He said during the regime the restrictions on basic press freedom were so great it was as if the pendulum of freedom could not swing any more to one side. Once freedom was heralded in, the pendulum swung just as far in the opposite direction. Journalists now felt they could publish almost anything. When Joseph Campbell ended his research in 1998, the independent print media of Cotonou was beginning to find its way. Now, just five years later, there are clear signs that the pendulum of freedom is finding a more reasonable center point.

The establishment of the deontology code was an enormous first step. Doucis Aissi, assistant editor in chief of *Le Republicain*, points to other positive restraints. He said even prior to the deontology code, key laws were passed that set up legal boundaries for newspapers. Basically, he said, those laws established a framework for how a newspaper could be sued. Such a legal framework has actually helped newspapers become more objective, he said. Benin still lacks

freedom of information laws, Aissi said, but the government also is considering these laws.

Always a question of money

Aissi said at *Le Republicain*, which was founded in 2000, professionalism has been an expectation from the start. The director worked for Benin's public radio and trained in Russia. Aissi went to school in Montreal. In spite of carefully planning a publication, Aissi points to two familiar problems for all newspapers in Cotonou: economics and the basic pay of journalists. He freely admits there may be too many newspapers in Cotonou but adds that as long as investors feel money can be made, more probably will be founded. Concerning the pay of journalists, he said there are no guidelines to assure a base salary for journalists. Many who are underpaid, may consider taking bribes, he said.

The issue of money may change soon, however. According to a number of directors, Cotonou's journalists are in the process of establishing a collective agreement that will set minimum salary guidelines. When this research was conducted, it was difficult to ascertain an exact average salary. Some were being paid as little as 20,000 CFA (about \$35) per month, while others were making upwards of 50,000 CFA (about \$90) per month. Some reported going months without being paid. During such spells, they found other ways to earn money. One former director of publication, who had a master's degree in geography, worked part time for private firm when the newspapers at which he worked could not pay him. Other journalists said some newspapers pay them under the table to avoid government taxes on salaries.

Reporters' salaries in Benin are low. Government positions – which traditionally pay less than jobs in the private section – pay employees with a bachelor's degree about 100,000 CFA per month and twice that if they have a master's degree.

In a very poor country such as Benin, economics can be a very powerful force. Christophe Hodonou, *La Pyramide's* director, said the media is technically free and objective, but the power money is everywhere. Ironically, Hodonou said, much of the freedom can be attributed to Kérékou, the former dictator. In fact, a move made by Kérékou in 1995 may have tempted the press to move beyond objectivity and into sensationalism. That year the president said he would not sue the media for anything that was printed about him. He sensed the advantage of having the press behind him, Hodonou said, but the no-sue promise has tempted too many papers. They know, from experience, the appetite the public has for sensational stories.

"It's like a double-edged sword," said A.P. Virgil Houessou, assistant to the editor, at *L'Evenement du Jour*, a paper that was one-year-old in October. On one hand, he said, the people want, love, and will buy sensational news, but on the other hand, each newspaper has to bear in mind the deontology code, which, according to Article Eleven, forbids sensationalism (see Appendix B). Problems naturally arise when the president refuses to sue no matter what is published about him.

"Kérékou is a smart guy," said Brice Houssou, director at *Fraternite*, a four-year-old paper. "He doesn't want to have the journalists against him. Many of his top ministers have said the same thing ... they will not sue, no matter what

is written about them.”⁵⁰ This is quite a departure from when Soglo was president, when, Houssou said, two journalists were sent to prison for a year.

The philosophy of staying true to journalism

Like many of the directors, Clément Adéchian, at *L'Informateur*, is well educated by most standards for a journalist. He has undergraduate degrees in both French and philosophy and a master's in philosophy. In addition to being part owner of *L'Informateur*, he also teaches philosophy at the national university. Socrates is his favorite philosopher.

“He always spoke of truth. He died for what he believed in,” Adéchian said. “He would have been a great journalist.”⁵¹

With so many newspapers in Cotonou, he said reporters must always fight for information, but it is the duty of every paper to get as much information as possible and provide the truth to their readers.

“Freedom is a great thing,” he said. “But it is a difficult thing to manage. Steps are being taken to assure that all newspapers are being as fair as possible.”⁵²

A niche market

In a region where economic concerns always rank at the top of any business is a Web publication called *L'Araignee* that has found enough advertising and enough followers (100,000 hits per day) to remain in business for three years. This dissertation has concentrated on just published daily newspapers, but *L'Araignee* bears a mention. Several other dailies have Web

editions, but *L'Araignee*, French for spider, is exclusively for Beninese people living outside of the republic, primarily in Europe.

Willéandre Hounbedji is editor in chief of *L'Araignee* and admits that advertising is not great, but he has received enough positive comments from his readers to persuade his backers to maintain funding. When *L'Araignee* was founded and originally applied for registration with the government, it was turned down, Hounbedji said. When the site appealed the decision and provided documentation of its many readers abroad, the registration was approved.

One of the site's most popular sources of income is a "Guest of the Week," usually a government minister who will pay *L'Araignee* to run segments of pre-arranged interviews. Hounbedji said the politicians never want to appear in a live-chat format, something he proposed. They feel they have more control when the interviews are pre-arranged.

The site has a staff of only five employees, three of whom are either part-time or freelance. *L'Araignee* is an example of a publication that has found a way to eek out an existence by relying on a body of readers who live primarily outside of Benin. Hounbedji said only 15 percent of the hits the site receives are from within Benin. The site can be found at: <<http://www.laraignee.org/>>.

Public moral argument as an instrument for mediation

The directors of publication interviewed for this chapter have a clear grasp of the meaning of freedom. Their definitions are eloquent and reflect the level education for which Benin is well known.⁵³ The methods in which these understandings are engaged into everyday practice, however, are not always as

fervent. Fisher's narrative paradigm can put the debate between immediate economic concerns and journalistic excellence into the proper analytical perspective, while the theoretical concept of the moral argument offers a tool with which to mediate the debate.

In *Human Communication As Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*, Fisher greatly details the public moral argument, but it has its roots in a number of theorists, perhaps most notably Alasdair MacIntyre in *After Virtue*.⁵⁴ Moral arguments are not to be confused with ideological, bureaucratic, or technical arguments where a particular political "truth" is professed.⁵⁵ Instead, public moral arguments are, according to Fisher, encounters that are "... publicized or made available for wide consumption and persuasion of the polity," and aimed at what Aristotle terms "untrained thinkers."⁵⁶ A public moral argument, Fisher continues, is "... oriented toward what ought to be, is often undermined by the 'truth' that prevails at the moment."⁵⁷ MacIntyre writes, "Contemporary moral argument is rationally interminable, because *all* moral, indeed all evaluative, argument is and always will be rationally interminable."⁵⁸

These thoughts begin to frame a logical method to use when considering immediate economic gain of Cotonou's daily newspapers versus achieving a level of journalism that ethically and responsibly informs and educates the public. The directors in Cotonou (and their counterparts in the West) face such issues on a daily basis because newspapers, when operated as a private business⁵⁹, must make money, but there is always the conflict of keeping monetary considerations as separate as possible from the journalistic mission.

For Cotonou's directors, freedom is a narrative that has been informed by the republic's multi-faceted and rich history. Nearly all the directors have clear

memories of the Marxist years when freedom of the press was severely limited. However, Benin's poverty has power that even these directors do not often recognize. It is a competing narrative that must be dealt with on a daily basis, and publishing news that sells is one way to deal with the immediacy of poverty. Many of the political stories, according to observations I made, are not published to inform and educate the masses. They are published for sales purposes only.⁶⁰ The narrative of economic response to poverty was, at the time this research was conducted, taking precedence over the narrative of journalistic excellence.

If the economic/journalistic excellence debate is viewed as a public moral argument or debate, the validity of both issues is recognized. However, as Fisher writes, a public moral argument "... is moral in the sense that it is founded on ultimate questions – of life and death, of how persons should be defined and treated, or preferred patterns of living."⁶¹ The issue of economics certainly is significant from the criteria raised in this definition. However, when a form of journalism that could responsibly educate and thus empower people to contribute more toward the world around them is not practiced in lieu of the immediate concern of making money, that decision must be viewed as morally shortsighted. An active form of Beninese journalism can theoretically give the masses the information needed to participate more in the day-to-day activities of their republic. The majority of the political stories published during the summer of 2003 was sensational in nature and appeared to have little long-term value.

There is, of course, the question of education in Benin. Many residents, particularly in rural areas, cannot read or write, and most of them function comfortably within an agrarian setting. The ability to read and write is not as important in these villages as it is suburban areas (or in the West, for that

matter), but this is also changing. More schools are being established and the general value of an education, which was always considered a high priority in urban areas, is now gain momentum in the villages.⁶²

Wide-scale change is not going to occur over night. Additional research will have to be conducted to measure the growth, depth, and scope of journalism. At present, the economic/journalistic excellence mission debate is just that, a debate. But the moral good of all the people of Benin must be the objective of these debates. As MacIntyre writes in *A Short History of Ethics*, “They[moral concepts] could not be part of our language unless there were rules for their use, rules which could be taught and learned, rules which are socially established and socially shared.”⁶³ Benin provides an exciting setting for these public moral arguments. They not only can potentially broaden the journalistic debate throughout Benin but also on a global scale. During the tumultuous days of the colonization, Benin’s media was embraced as vehicle for social and political change. Reinvigorating that sense of journalistic excellence and pride should be a goal for all directors and reporters alike.

This chapter has provided a snapshot of how freedom is defined and applied by the print media of Cotonou. It also has offered suggestions on how to mediate the debate between economic and journalistic concerns. The next chapter provides a micro view of the daily operations at one newspaper, *Le Matin*.

Chapter Five

*Le Matin: The daily operations at one newspaper,
and how it covered the story of the year*

The newsroom at *Le Matin* is unmistakably French, right down to the tile, spiral stairway that leads to the newspaper's second-floor offices. The newsroom, usually getting crowded by 8 o'clock each evening, is very airy. Again, the French influences are there: the French doors that open to the veranda that winds around two sides of *Le Matin's* building. On the street outside, however, it is quite a different scene: Here it is all Africa. Hundreds of *zemidjans*, the motorcycle taxis that are universal in Cotonou, crowd the streets, belching their signature trails of blue exhaust. Deals of every type are being negotiated: for swaths of colorful clothe, dried fish, bread, corn, household items, rat poison, and just about everything else. Technically street venders – who crowd each busy intersection – are illegal, according to the journalists at *La Matin*. But the government (and the police) looks the other way. Too much money is being made and too many votes are at stake to risk alienating any of these people.

At 10 years old, *Le Matin* is Cotonou's oldest privately owned daily newspaper. It looks very much like all of the city's other papers, its front page crowded with multiple, very large headlines that usually deal with politics, but a sense of history is beginning to emerge at *Le Matin*. The journalists said that working for the oldest paper carries a certain prestige that becomes more powerful as *Le Matin* grows older. The liveliness in the newsroom is a hint of this sense of prestige and history. Many of Cotonou's other newspapers are in a

constant economic struggle to stay in business. *Le Matin* certainly is not immune from these economic challenges, but the journalists say being the oldest carries weight when advertisers decide which outlets will get their business.

This chapter looks at the daily operations of *Le Matin* and attempts to capture the interactions, hopes, fears, and personalities of the newspaper's editors and reporters, and particularly how these reporters and editors view freedom as a component of journalism. The observations were made during nightly visits spanning a three-week period from July 1 to July 20, 2003.

Additionally, *Le Matin's* reporters and editors also were interviewed at length about the most controversial story the paper reported in 2003: The deaths of 15 people following a stampede at a Cotonou concert during the early morning hours of May 4. Freedom, on both a personal as well as an institutional level, played a large part in the reporting and presentation of the story. The reporters' and editors' comments concerning the stampede further illustrates Fisher's narrative paradigm in action. The familiar and strong cultural narrative of sensitivity played a large role in how the story was reported and presented.

An average night in the newsroom

Like many newspapers around the world, most nights at *Le Matin* are routine. There are reporters coming in and out of the paper all day, but the actual writing begins by mid afternoon and continues into the night. The first news meeting of the day is held at 1:30 p.m. and a second one at 8 p.m. A television is always switched on at 8 p.m. (sometimes earlier) to catch the evening news. While this is going on, two or three reporters are busy hand writing their stories. Because most journalists in Cotonou were educated in a variety of different

disciplines – everything from linguistics to philosophy – basic typing skills are many times relegated to a very slow, one-finger method. A number of reporters (at least three) said it is easier to organize their thoughts when they hand-write stories.

A large blackboard on the newsroom wall (opposite from the French doors that overlook the street) is updated throughout the evening with stories that are being completed. The reporter's name, along with a brief outline, is written in chalk. This is a far cry from Western journalism where story budgets are electronic and news meetings are held in large conference rooms. But the feel of the news is the same, as is the process of taking that news from idea to printed page. On one particular evening, for example, one of the lead stories was about the new United States Ambassador to Benin being named. Another hot story was the upcoming soccer match between Benin and Zambia. Benin's team had been doing exceptionally well in 2003. A win against Zambia would assure Benin a spot in the African Nations Cup tournament in February 2004, a feat that had not been accomplished since the tournament had been started in 1957. The match would be held at Cotonou's Kouhounou Stadium, which means "something that kills." Just two months earlier, the stadium had lived up to its name.

A not-so-usual occurrence

Gilles-Hervé da Silveira is soft spoken. At times his voice almost disappears as he discusses the night of the stampede. Da Silveira has a master's degree in linguistics from Benin's National University and is an intern at *Le Matin*, covering society news, mostly art, cultural events, and concerts. He was assigned to review the Koffi Olomide concert on May 3 and had no idea what

was about to transpire. Olomide, of the Democratic Republic of Congo, is one of Africa's most popular *dumbolo* stars ... so popular he is sometimes compared to Michael Jackson. He has sold millions of CDs and also has a line of clothing for which his loyal fans gladly pay big money.

Cotonou had been buzzing about the Olomide concert for weeks. A track and field meet had been held at Kouhounou Stadium during the afternoon but was scheduled to end at noon and continue on Sunday. The concert would not begin until 8 p.m., so there was ample time to set up the stage, security, and other equipment for the Olomide show. What the concert promoters, and those already beginning to line up outside the stadium had not anticipated was the behind-the-scenes political wrangling that had taken place in the days prior to the event.

New grass had been planted recently on the stadium's soccer field, and the stadium authority did not want the Olomide show to take place. Thousands of spectators trampling the new grass would ruin it, they said. The authority ordered the concert cancelled on May 1. When the concert's promoter, a godson of former Benin president Emile Zinsou, learned of the authority's order, he appealed to his godfather, who then appealed to the Ministry of Sports. Before the concert appeal could be heard (on Saturday) the track and field meet was already underway. Assuming the concert had been cancelled, the meet continued until 4 p.m. During those crucial afternoon hours, the Ministry of Sports overruled the concert ban. Suddenly, the show was back on.

Olomide was unaware of this. He did not arrive in Cotonou until the day before the concert. The fans also knew nothing and began arriving in droves, some before the track meet ended, hoping to get prime seats. Lines began

forming outside Kouhounou Stadium and became longer as early evening gave way to the darkness of night. Inside the stadium, *Le Matin's* Blaise Tossou had been covering the track meet. One thing seemed peculiar to him: It was 4 p.m. and the stage for the Olomide concert still had not been set up.

July 6, 2003: The night three fingers said everything

Benin won the soccer match against Zambia, 3-0, and the city erupted in a joyous celebration. In *Le Matin's* newsroom, the director of publication, ordered soft drinks and beer for everyone. Tossou, a political reporter who also covers sports and had been at the match, danced to African music in the newsroom. When Félix Sohoundé Pépéripé, *Le Matin's* sports editor, walked into the newsroom, everyone cheered and shook his hand. "Tonight I will be buying a lot of beer," Sohoundé Pépéripé proclaimed.

On the street below, jubilant fans wore Benin soccer jerseys, waved Beninese flags, and blared car horns. People crowded the Alimentation Bar across the street from *Le Matin*. Outside the bar, another crowd of about 25 chanted: "Zambia said we couldn't lift her, but we did." The chant was in reference to another African sport – wrestling – where an opponent is not considered defeated until he is lifted up and thrown to the mat. Ironically, Zambia's soccer team was spending this night in the Vikinfel Hotel just two blocks from *Le Matin's* offices. Several reporters said police and Beninese soldiers had to escort the team to the hotel to protect them from the hordes of Beninese fans.

"It's good to see so many people wearing Benin jerseys," said another person in the newsroom. "For so long people wore other teams' jerseys. This is good for the entire country."

Zemidjan drivers on the street below joyously waved three fingers as they sped by, signifying the Ecureuils' three goals. Ecureuils is French for "squirrels." Many of their motorcycles dragged clanging cans and pieces of sheet metal ... anything to make noise. Most of the cycles' handlebars proudly displayed miniature Benin flags. On this night, every Beninese resident was smiling. For the time being, the economic strife that grips the region had been pushed to the background. The number three was the only thing that mattered. At 8 p.m. ORTB (the Radio and Television Office of Benin) reported two people injured by cheering crowds on a Cotonou street. Sohoundé Pépéripé said things were more serious at the stadium. He feared more people might be hurt or even killed in the aftermath of the match. Assistant Editor Ignace Fanou was sure of one thing: "Tomorrow's front page will be all soccer," he said. "A huge headline and a picture. This is the only story that matters in Benin."¹

The aftermath of the match was not as serious as Sohoundé Pépéripé had feared. Two people on a motorcycle had been killed, however, and a third man injured in a hit-and-run accident. Bystanders had gotten the license number of the car and police were investigating. Witnesses claimed the driver, apparently celebrating the soccer victory, had driven his car partially on the curb of a busy street, hitting the motorcycle and the pedestrian. The journalists in *Le Matin's* newsroom were relieved more people had not been injured or killed. Too often in Africa and Europe, major soccer victories turn into major disasters.

A fun paper to publish

The front page of the Monday, July 7 edition of *Le Matin* was, as Fanou said, all soccer. In fact, all of Cotonou's dailies featured huge headlines and pictures honoring the team. For the time being, politics took an uncharacteristic backseat to sports. Soccer was the only subject in which people were interested. A large, red headline across *Le Matin's* Monday edition proclaimed: "Mission accomplished for the Ecureuils." The page also displayed a picture of the team's bus as well as promos to nine related soccer stories on four inside pages. Many of the inside pages were routine: Page 2 contained regional news, while Page 3 had political news, and Page 5 cultural events. Pages 6, 7, 10, and 11 were all devoted to the Ecureuils. Page 10 displayed 11 pictures from the match. Sohoundé Pépéripé wrote many of the stories in the Sports section with help from Tossou, the reporter who covers both politics and sports. The stories analyzed various aspects of the match and included statistics, but many of Tossou's stories managed to find the political angle of the match. One, for example, noted which of Benin's government ministers attended the match and included a picture. Even during an event as joyous as a major soccer victory, politics is still apparently a major theme. As most of the directors of publication noted in Chapter Four, politics sells.

A new assistant editor learns of the big story

Ignace Fanou had been culture editor at *Le Matin* before being named assistant editor just two days before the stadium stampede. He is thirty-seven years old but looks much younger. He went to bed on Saturday, May 3, unaware a major tragedy was unfolding at Kouhounou Stadium.

“I came into work at about 4 or 5 p.m. [on Sunday] and someone told me a lot of people had been killed at the stadium,” Fanou said. “I knew that would be our major story for Monday’s newspaper. We started planning what the headline would say when I saw the pictures. I was shocked. But I knew we had to run them. Many of the people who see our paper cannot read. A picture is a universal way to communicate.”²

Something else helped Fanou decide to run pictures on the front page. When the government learned of the tragedy on Sunday morning, they immediately proclaimed the next three days an official period of national mourning. This made Fanou more confident about running the pictures.

“According to the deontology code, running the pictures [as controversial and graphic as these] was not a good move,” he said. “But we ran them anyway. Images speak so much louder than words. Pictures appeal to everyone.”³

Pictures of the dead and the grieving

Sohoundé Pépéripé, *Le Matin*’s sports editor, also was at the concert, not to cover it but merely to enjoy the music. When he knew people had been killed, he immediately looked for Ange Gnacadja, *Le Matin*’s photographer covering the concert. Like many photographers in Cotonou, Gnacadja also shoots pictures for multiple papers. On this night he also was shooting for *Fraternite*, another daily. What Sohoundé Pépéripé learned later was Gnacadja had seen the entire stampede and faced one of the most difficult decisions of his eight-year career at *Le Matin*: To capture images of dead bodies and grieving relatives or to respect their privacy. He chose the latter.

Tossou had covered many sports events at Kouhounou Stadium and knows it extremely well, right down to the exact number of entrances: 21. He said what more than likely caused the stampede was a combination of three factors: the track meet running late, which delayed the stage being set up on time (the political gaming that had taken place earlier apparently contributed to both of these), and, because the stage was not set up, the stadium gates were kept locked. As 8 p.m., the time when the concert was scheduled to begin, the gates still were not open and people became frantic that they would not get to their seats on time. Finally, Tossou said, after a few more crucial hours had passed, only two gates were open, gates 18 and 19. By this time it was near midnight, and people frantically scrambled for the two entrances.

The main gates at Kouhounou Stadium are at street level. Once inside, spectators must go up a flight of stairs, then out into the main seating areas. The on-field seating for the concert was on a first-come, first-served basis. This may have been another, perhaps indirect, contributor to the catastrophe. Once inside the stadium, people rushed down the aisles to a small railing that separates the seats from the all-weather track and the soccer field below. The stadium seats are approximately 10 feet above the field. Tossou, who was on the field looking up at the stadium seats, instantly knew something was wrong.

“I saw people running down from the entrance toward the field,” he said. “Some had fallen down and had been trampled by others. Pretty soon many of the first people became pinned against the railing. You could hear screaming. Some people even fell over the railing and on to the field below.”⁴

Da Silveira was outside the stadium when this occurred. He said he saw people running in many different directions and assumed there had been a fight near one of the gates.

“Then I heard someone say people had been hurt and possibly killed inside the stadium,” Da Silveira said. “Once I knew people had been killed, I was in a form of shock. I began to record what people were saying. I didn’t see any of the bodies, but I think we were correct to run the pictures. They added another dimension to the story. The stories provided one perspective. The pictures added so much more.”⁵

A question of ethics and cultural narrative

Meanwhile, Gnacadja, who also was on the field near where people were being trampled and trapped, was screaming for the crowd to back away from the railing, but no one could hear him. There already were several bodies on the field who had either fallen from the seats above or who had jumped to escape the crushing stampede. He had already taken an overall picture of the crowd at the railing and decided to shoot a picture of the bodies next to him. As he raised his camera, he heard the soft weeping of a man near him who was crouched over the dead body of a victim. As he was about to take the picture, he said the man shouted: “Don’t shoot that picture! This is my brother!”⁶

Soon another photographer and friend of Gnacadja’s who was shooting pictures for *Le Echos du Jour* and *Le Matinal* joined him and said a similar experience had happened to him. He said crowds had threatened to break his camera and beat him if he shot any images.

“I couldn’t shoot any pictures of the bodies,” said Gnacadja. “I felt so sorry for that man ... as well as for the other people who had lost friends and family members.”⁷

Instead of taking pictures, Gnacadja tried to get the crowd to back away from the railing so the trapped and trampled people could be rescued. He said he could hear one man screaming: “People are dying here; bring water, bring water!” Gnacadja found a hose that had been used to water the soccer field, turned it on and began spraying the crowd hoping to turn them back. His efforts partially worked; the crowd began dissipating, but by then it was too late. Emergency crews were on the scene removing bodies. One mother and her two daughters, both under 10 years old, were among the dead.

Once all of the stadium gates had been open, many of the spectators presumably had no idea what had just happened around gates 18 and 19. They entered the stadium, almost four hours after the show was schedule to begin, and took their seats. Many probably saw the emergency crews attending to the injured and dead, but few realized the gravity of the situation. Police met with Olomide and suggested the show be canceled. When the singer pressed them for details, they at first said, “an incident had occurred” in which several people had been injured. Later they confirmed that some people had been killed. Olomide said he had a responsibility to do the concert, so the show proceeded.

A sports editor makes a quick decision

When Sohoundé Pépéripé learned that Gnacadja had not shot any images of the dead bodies, he was not upset. From a humanist (as well as a cultural narrative) perspective, he understood the sensitive situation Gnacadja had faced,

but he also knew a major news story was unfolding. He asked a friend, who knew a freelance photographer, to arrange for as many pictures as possible to be shot. His friend paid the freelancer 100,000 CFA to begin shoot images. In turn, Sohoundé Pépéripé paid his friend an additional 50,000 CFA to get all of the film to him as soon as possible to assure that only *Le Matin* would have the images. By this time, emergency personnel and police had separated relatives from the dead, so the freelancer did not encounter the angry mobs and relatives that had earlier surrounded many of the dead.

The freelance photographer's black and white images were graphic. Most of the bodies had been placed on a tile floor inside one of the stadium entrances. Many of them lay in contorted positions, some with their clothes partially torn off or twisted in an unnatural manner. The picture of the mother, who died with her two young daughters, was particularly striking. Over her right shoulder was her purse, now twisted behind her right shoulder blade. The picture of her daughter was equally striking: A hand, perhaps of an emergency worker, checks her chest for a heartbeat while another person holds a bag of water that had been given in vain to the child.

The challenge: Balancing duty and making money

Fanou faced a significant dilemma on his third day as assistant editor: He had to make the coverage of the stampede compelling enough to sell papers, but he also needed to be conscious of the many relatives who had lost loved ones.

"When I was a reporter, I just wrote ... that was all," Fanou said. "But now everything was different. I had to determine how things were going to be handled for the entire newspaper."⁸

His plan was simple: Since da Silveira had been outside the stadium, his story would include comments and observations from that perspective. Fanou would address what actions – legal and otherwise – could be taken against the concert’s promoter. Tossou would write a story on the special commission the government had appointed to investigate the tragedy.

The pictures were another matter. Dead bodies were too graphic to run on the front page, but the editors (and reporters) all believed they should be published. The issues surrounding how the stampede had occurred were still largely unanswered, so the images, as da Silveira had said, added another dimension to the stories *Le Matin* was about to publish.

The front page of the May 5 edition was a combination of headlines and promos to inside stories. What is particularly notable about the page is that two of the stories being promoted have nothing to do with the stadium disaster, a story that is arguably newsworthy enough to deserve the entire page. One of the unrelated stories was political, dealing with Rosine Soglo, Benin’s former first lady and now a member of parliament. The second unrelated promo was for an editorial.

The coverage of the stadium events took most of the page. Three pictures were used in vertical fashion on the right side of the front page, the first of a soldier kneeling over an injured spectator; the second of two people carrying an injured (or perhaps dead) person to an ambulance; and the third photo, near the bottom of the page, was the overall picture of the crowd just after the stampede that Gnacadja had taken.

The main headline, which ran in red ink (perhaps not the most tasteful color to use, considering the subject matter) proclaimed: “Thirteen dead.” Above

the headline was a deck that read: “Drama at Koffi Olomide Concert.” The number of dead in the main headline contradicted an inside story, released by the government, that listed 15 victims. Editors said they were relying on their own count of the dead.

In parenthesis below the main headline, a subhead read “Images of the drama, Page 12.” Below the subhead were promos to three other concert-related stories. Near the bottom of the page were the two promos to the unrelated stories. The bottom of the page featured three advertisements.

On Page 12 – the back page of that day’s edition – the photographs of eight of the 15 victims were published, the one at the top, left, was one of the two girls who had died with their mother. The cutlines under each picture also ran in red ink. The only other page devoted to the stampede was Page 6, which featured the stories by da Silveira, Fanou, and Tossou. The fourth, and final, story on the page was an official statement from the government that listed the names of the dead and proclaimed the three-day period of mourning.

Stepping back to analyze *Le Matin’s* coverage

It is not proper to analyze *Le Matin’s* coverage of the stadium tragedy from a Western perspective, but certain fundamental journalistic standards – such as truth and fairness – are universal in free societies⁹ and these provide a good starting point for a critique. The main thrust of this chapter has been to observe *Le Matin* in action; the following observations offer both practical and theoretical analysis of how the story was reported, photographed and presented.

First, the stories published in the May 5 edition, at best, provided only a surface glimpse at this tragic and unfortunate incident. Da Silveira’s story on

Page 6 was seven paragraphs long. Tossou's story, which ran below da Silveira's, was only four long paragraphs. Fanou's piece on the concert organizers was 10 paragraphs. The official governmental statement, which rounded out the concert coverage on the page, was six paragraphs. That is a total of 27 paragraphs of coverage on the day following a major disaster ... one that had occurred early Sunday morning. Essentially the staff had all Sunday morning, afternoon, and evening to report what had happened. The four stories on Page 6 contained virtually no quotations or none of the vivid detail that Tossou, da Silveira, and Gnacadja had all witnessed. One of two pictures on Page 6 appeared to be the same one used on the front page (the overall shot of the crowd). The second photo, at the bottom of the page, appeared to be a file picture of the inside of an empty Kouhounou Stadium.

Second, this story deserved more in-depth reporting, and this practice is not solely a Western construction. The media of free societies generally attempt to inform the masses as comprehensively as possible, despite the inherent institutionalization of journalism.¹⁰ This is the basis of journalistic professionalism.¹¹ From a cultural (and an ethical) perspective, Gnacadja's decision to respect the privacy a grieving relative was commendable, and his efforts to help dissipate the crowd bordered on the heroic. But considering the immensity of the story, more images should have been taken in my opinion. Certainly there must have been a number of potential images of grieving and shocked spectators that could have been tastefully captured. The paramount distinction that must be considered, however, is culture, an entity within which we routinely operate within but never question the force it exerts.¹² The delicate situation faced by Gnacadja was how to capture images that would tell the story

and do it in a culturally acceptable manner. By doing nothing, he chose culture over profession. This was a personal decision that should not be criticized. However, by ignoring the opportunity to reflect the tragedy's aftermath, his actions eliminated any chance of comprehensively telling the story in a way that might prevent future episodes.

Third, from a photographic composition perspective, the photos on the front page were poor. The top picture (of the soldier helping the injured spectator) was the best of the three pictures used because it captured the emotion and power of the rescue. It was cropped in haphazard manner, though, and printed somewhat blurry. The second photo, also of emergency personnel helping a victim, also was compositionally poor. A requirement of a good documentary photograph is its ability to connect immediately with the reader.¹³ This photo did not possess that quality. It lacked a distinct focal point and had contrast problems since one of the emergency workers was dressed in white that appeared to have reflected the flash used by the photographer.

Gnacadjá's overall picture of the crowded stadium was just that: a photograph of a crowded stadium. The picture lacked emotion because it was shot from too far away and lacked any temporal value.¹⁴ As used, it easily could have been a crowd attending an evening sporting event. This story called for one dominant image – perhaps a tasteful image of a grieving concert spectator – to assure visual impact. The three pictures *Le Matin* used were all far too small to provide this impact. The utilization of a single, dominant image could be, in Sonja Foss's terms, a "violation of function."¹⁵ The image, acting as a natural focal point, could perhaps tell the story – at last on the front page – better than two or three smaller images.

The coverage of the stampede echoes Megnassan and Voglozin's concerns about the lack of objective reporting on the part of most of Cotonou's newspapers. Pages 2 and 3 are another good indication of this. Page 2 featured local news and no mention of the concert. Page 3 was devoted to two political stories and an editorial (also political in nature). None of these mentioned the tragedy.

A good newspaper rises to the occasion of a major news event.¹⁶ Lack of staff or equipment should not enter the equation. The deaths of 15 people who began their evening with the innocent intension of attending a concert deserved more comprehensive coverage. As tragic as this story was, it also could have been a valuable opportunity for *Le Matin* to step forward and lead the competition with a bold form of journalism. Judging from the lack of overall reportorial depth most Cotonou newspapers exhibit on a daily basis, training indeed seems to be the problem. Perhaps many of these reporters simply do not know how to develop a story from the basic core facts into a connected series of mental images that both informs the reader as well as educates him or her in a responsible manner.

Why were the gates of the stadium locked for so many hours? Why weren't the political games reported earlier? Why were the relatives of the victims not eventually interviewed for subsequent editions? *Le Matin* did conduct some follow-up coverage of the stampede. Sohoundé Pépéripé said one of their stories questioned why so many of the stadium's gates had been kept locked. He said the story was one reason the concert's promoter, Magloire Agbale, was eventually jailed. He was quietly released in July, according to reports.¹⁷

The obvious story, however, which never was done by any newspaper, would have been an hour-by-hour account of the ill-fated evening. Reported and presented in a responsible and tasteful¹⁸ manner, this story could have answered many of the questions surrounding the tragedy and ostensibly could prevent a similar tragedy from happening in the future. Perhaps most noticeable from a Western journalistic perspective is the lack of compelling detail in the May 5 stories. Providing a vivid account of the tragedy, through the effective and tasteful use of both words and photographs, could have been a way to experiment with public journalism because by informing and educating the public, *La Matin* could indirectly have empowered them to prevent a similar tragedy from occurring.¹⁹

As mentioned earlier, Tossou, da Silveira, and Gnacadja had seen such compelling details first hand, and they clearly recounted them to me during interviews for this dissertation. Those colorful and dramatic details easily could have been used to construct a more comprehensive and beneficial account of the stampede.

The aftermath

Le Matin's May 5 edition hit the streets at 6 a.m. and sold out within five hours. Between 2,500 and 3,000 copies had been published that morning, and since *Le Matin* had more photos than any of the other dailies, it was the paper people wanted that day.

“People wanted us to print more papers,” said Kokou Antoine Ogawin, director of publication. “But we did not. We also did not get any complaints from

readers [concerning the pictures of the dead bodies].²⁰ Fanou estimated that they could have sold at least twice the number of copies they had printed.

Later that day, however, *Le Matin* received a request from the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication to publish an apology for printing such graphic pictures. The authority could not have ordered the apology but in light of the fact that children had been among the dead, the authority thought it was necessary. *Le Matin* agreed and published a short apology on Page 3 of the next day's edition. It was, according to Fanou, a small headline that asked for readers' understanding for *Le Matin's* publishing of the graphic pictures.

"We wanted to assure our readers that we did not intend to hurt anyone's feelings," Fanou said. "This was a very tragic story, and the photographs were a way to communicate the severity of the story."²¹

A headline *before* the story

The 8 p.m. news meeting at *Le Matin* offers an up-close view of how journalism is practiced in Cotonou. In the three weeks I visited *Le Matin*, the evening news meeting was held at, or near, 8 p.m. on only three occasions. Usually it was well after 10 p.m., sometimes even later, before the meeting would occur. The three news meetings – on Wednesday, July 9; Thursday, July 10; and Monday, July 14 – all began with a review of the political stories being planned for the next day.

The July 14 meeting was of particular interest because a breaking news story was occurring which would lead the next day's newspaper. It was not political, but rather involved 17 sailors who had been adrift for three days in a

lifeboat in the Gulf of Guinea after their tanker had sunk. Editors immediately began bantering about possible headlines that would best sell the newspaper.

The front page of Cotonou dailies is an interesting page to analyze. The planning of this page is much different than Western (and European) newspapers in that since the vast majority of newspapers are sold at busy intersections, headlines and pictures must capture potential readers. Headlines are important in the West, but they are balanced with the actual story that accompanies it. Very few of Cotonou's daily newspapers begin stories on the front page. Compelling headlines mean sales and sales mean money.

The rescue at sea story offered a change from the usual political news. The planning of the headline indicated how carefully the individual words are considered and weighed by editors. Several potential headline were considered and "17 rescued in Gulf of Guinea" appeared to be one most editors agreed on. Sohoundé Pépéripé, the sports editor, who at times leads the 8 p.m. meeting because at 42 he is *Le Matin's* most seasoned editor, noted that many people viewing that headline, such as zemidjan drivers who often have little education, would not know where the Gulf of Guinea is situated. He suggested changing the headline to something that would immediately connect with every strata of the population. The main headline ended up being: "17 survivors rescued along Benin coast." Another promo headline for the front page focused on a politician who had died.

Once the main story is determined for the front page, the rest of the paper is reviewed. Gilles-Hervé da Silveira, the society intern, noted that he was planning a story on the French National Day being celebrated.

“Will it sell the paper?” Sohoundé Péréripé interrupted. He noted that most Beninese do not care about when independence was achieved in France. He wryly added that the French certainly do not celebrate when Benin achieved its independence from France. Another story was suggested for the society page, and the French National Day story was moved to the bottom of Page 3, the page that featured political stories. It also ended up being promoted on the front page.

The news meetings on July 9 and 10 were interesting in another way because both meetings focused heavily on political coverage. Sohoundé Péréripé was leading the July 9 meeting and seemed perturbed that many of the stories reporters had been working on all day were still not finished. He said ideas had been tossed around at the 1:30 p.m. meeting but nothing had been finished. He suggested a story on the candidate who was running for the African Union as the lead story. He said it had been promoted in several magazines and was still a hot story. The problem was no story existed; however, the editors began suggesting various headlines that would sell the story. Once one was agreed upon, the story was assigned to a reporter. By this time, it was near 9 p.m.

The July 10 meeting was a similar exchange of political ideas. Only two stories were planned and neither was written. Fanou was leading this meeting and asked if there were ideas for a better political story that might lead the story. Several ideas were suggested before one concerning the changing of Benin’s constitution to allow Kérékou to run for a third term was selected. Again it was well after 8 p.m. and again no story had been written. Suggestions for the lead headline were again suggested, one was selected, and then the story was assigned to a reporter. Blaise Tossou, the reporter who usually covers political

stories (and occasionally sports), said he was too busy to write the story. Another reporter was selected.

This process of determining a headline that will sell and then writing a story that backs up the headline underscores the undying commitment *Le Matin* has to political news.

Candid observations

Sohoundé Pépéripé looks as though he was put on earth to cover sports. He has the husky physique of an athlete and a personality that is impossible not to like. He rides a powerful motorcycle to work, parks it on the sidewalk, and never makes it into the building without someone chatting with him, usually about sports. He almost always has a ball cap pulled down over his eyes and frequently wears jeans and tennis shoes.

Concerning *Le Matin's* news (and political) coverage, Sohoundé Pépéripé does not pull any punches. During the July 9 news meeting, I asked him why *Le Matin* does not feature more in-depth and enterprise-type stories. Many of the political stories are very short and address only surface issues, never delving into deeper, perhaps more newsworthy, concepts.

"They are lazy," he said of the reporters. "We should have better stories, but they always find it easiest to write political stories."²²

During the July 14 meeting, a suggestion was made to attempt to get actual interviews with several of the tanker crew members who were adrift at sea. Sohoundé Pépéripé liked the idea. In fact, he said: "That's such a good idea, we have no one who can write it."²³

The reporters' views of their jobs, freedom, and political coverage

Sohoundé Pépéripé's comment about not having anyone to cover in-depth stories suggests a staffing problem at *Le Matin*, and he may have a point. In addition to Ignace Fanou, the assistant editor who frequently writes news stories, the only other full-time reporters are Tossou, Sohoundé Pépéripé, and Euloge Gandaho, *Le Matin's* chief political writer. Either interns or correspondents write the remaining stories. It is difficult to ascertain the number of interns who work at *Le Matin*. Two are listed in the newspaper's editorial box; however, many more come in and out of the newsroom during the day and night. The editorial box lists six correspondents from the various states that make up Benin. These are not full-time writers but are the same as stringers or freelancers who write for Western papers. They are paid on a per-story basis.

Tossou had an interesting observation concerning the lack of in-depth reporting in nearly all of Cotonou's daily newspapers. He said it is a combination of two facts.

"Journalists don't like to do investigative-type stories," he said. "It takes a great deal of time and money to put together those types of stories. With just four [full-time] reporters [counting the sports editor], it is difficult to just get enough stories to fill the paper each day."²⁴

The second reason is purely economic. He said most of the newspapers in the city are stretched too thin financially to budget money for enterprise and investigative reporting. He said *Le Matinal* is probably the exception. As Cotonou's largest privately owned newspaper, *Le Matinal* has a much larger reporting staff, and the paper also has bureaus in Parakou, Bohicon, Porto Novo, and Natitingou.

Tossou, who began writing at *Le Matin* right out of college in 1999, said there are many potential enterprise stories that the paper could be doing. He said within the last five years a large cotton business in Benin went bankrupt costing investors more than 10 billion francs. The government stepped in and has been running the business, but, Tossou said, no stories have been written detailing what happened to the business and the investors' money.

"Reporting political news is easy and cheapest for the newspaper," he said. "We do many of our stories by cell phone. There is so much work to do we don't have time to go out and meet people [to get information]." ²⁵

In one sense, Tossou believes the political coverage provides a window for the average citizen to view his or her government. He said most people know their living conditions are bad, but when they are able to see what is going on within the government (through the political reporting) they feel as though they are participating.

"It seems as though most of our coverage is political," Tossou said. "But we do regularly run other stories on the front page. Many times in the past year we have had police stories and stories reporting hold ups at banks. These papers sell well also because the stories make the people feel as though they are on the scene." ²⁶

Tossou, like so many of Cotonou's other journalists and directors of publication, did not study journalism in college. He received a bachelor's degree in geography and also worked for one of the two student newspapers at the National University. He answered an advertisement for an internship at *Le Matin* and was eventually hired full time. He received three months of journalism

training from representatives of France's Lille Journalism School who held seminars in Cotonou.

"I would leave journalism for a job in geography," Tossou admitted. "But jobs in geography are difficult to find. I like my job here. The future depends on who runs the paper."²⁷

Euloge Gandaho, *Le Matin's* chief political reporter, admits that political news dominates the coverage in Cotonou. He cited two reasons for the lack of investigative and enterprise reporting. First, he said, reporters will not dig deep enough for investigative stories. Since many newspapers have only a few full-time reporters and rely heavily on interns who often do not have the experience to do this type of reporting. The second reason deals with potential sources. He said if a sensitive story is being investigated, key sources do not cooperate because they fear for their safety or their jobs.

Like Tossou, Gandaho also majored in geography at the National University and eventually earned his master's. He specialized in economic and urbanization geography, taught in a high school for several years, and worked for a public relations firm before coming to *Le Matin* in 1998.

"I enjoy covering politics," he said. "And I like my job here. If working conditions remain good, I will stay."²⁸

Sohoundé Péréripé was far more critical of the political coverage. He termed it, "a mistake." He cited a story about a new appointment to a parliament position that had run in the July 16 edition of *Le Matin* as an example.

"I was not here last night [July 15]," he said. "Or I would have objected to this story being used as the lead. This was not an important enough story to lead the story. Money probably exchanged hands."²⁹

Sohoundé Péréripé's comments, candid as they may be, are a good reflection of journalism in Cotonou. As was noted in Chapter Four, politicians and businesses do sometimes pay money to have their stories displayed prominently, and the cash-strapped papers many times accommodate them. The pressure to maintain essential operating capital typically blurs the rules of good journalism.

Sohoundé Péréripé said many good stories exist. He said all of the municipalities around Cotonou must post billboards outlining the repair projects planned. This is a natural story, he said, for a newspaper to illustrate where and how the municipalities' money is being spent. However, all of the papers ignore these types of stories.

The future of journalism in Cotonou concerns Sohoundé Péréripé. In fact, he was not sure where the excessive political coverage could end. "It concerns me," he said, sitting behind the large desk in his office. "That is one reason I started my own newspaper that focuses only on sports. At least I feel as though I have that [to fall back on] if there is no daily paper."³⁰

Ignace Fanou smiles when asked if he thinks the city's daily newspapers concentrate too heavily on political news, but his answer is very firm: "This is what the majority of our readers want."³¹ And he means every strata of the population. He is quick to add, "Even the zemidjan drivers are interested in political news."³² As an example, he mentions a kiosk in the southern sector of the city that sells all of the city's newspapers. Each morning when the newspapers are delivered to this kiosk, scores of zemidjan drivers, dressed in their signature yellow shirts with their identification numbers stenciled on the back, crowd around the kiosk looking at the various papers. Some of the drivers,

it was pointed out, cannot read but either look at the pictures or have one of their fellow drivers read the articles to them. This underscores the need for a good headline, he said. The vendors who sell the papers in the street do their own form of marketing, Fanou said. They tend to display the most creative headlines in front of the more mundane.

“The wide interest in politics has a lot to do with the Marxism era,” Fanou said. “There was no freedom then, no privately owned newspapers. People did not know what was going on in the government. As the censorship [during the Marxism era] began to lessen, newspapers began criticizing more. Now you are free to say what you think, and people appreciate that greatly.”³³

Fanou notes that the freedom to say – and in the case of newspapers publish – nearly anything has tempted many papers to overstep the boundaries of good taste and fairness. That is why the number of lawsuits greatly increased in the first five years after the National Conference. He pointed to papers such as *Tam Tam Gazette* and *La Gazette Golfe* – the same newspapers Megnassan noted – as being instrumental in setting the tone for political and social criticism. The present publications, he said, are continuing that form of criticism.

There is another reason for the critical tone of the contemporary political coverage by the newspapers. Fanou said as new political parties are being created, more new papers also are being created, many funded by members of these parties who use the media as a vehicle for self-promotion.

“I think there probably are too many newspapers in the city,” Fanou said. “Many of them are not really daily. They publish for a while, then disappear, then come back. In some ways this gives a bad name to journalism, but in

another way it reinforces the credibility of a paper like *Le Matin*. We have been here for more than 10 years now. We have seen a lot of papers come and go.”³⁴

Closing thoughts

The observation of the daily operations of *Le Matin* provided an excellent, up-close view of journalism in Cotonou. While the newspaper encounters many of the same institutional problems as Western papers, i.e., staffing, overall space limitations, and competition, the notion of objectivity continually arises, especially in light of the preoccupation with political news. Economics is a huge issue in the operation of any business. Western papers are frequently accused of being too preoccupied with the bottom line than with providing a form of journalism that is beneficial for the masses. Economics is certainly a powerful force in Cotonou also perhaps even more powerful than in the West, and basic survival instincts appear to be the primary reason newspapers flock to political coverage. As has been echoed several times throughout this chapter and this dissertation, political news sells.

But does a newspaper have to compromise objectivity and its mission of responsibly informing the public in order to make money? That is the question editors at *Le Matin* as well as Cotonou’s other newspapers must answer. All would, no doubt, insist that they are responsibly informing the public, but to observe the operations on a daily basis presents different evidence.

First, *Le Matin* should be commended for keeping its staff small in order to insure long-term profitability. But a full-time writing staff composed of a sports writer, an assistant editor, a political reporter, and a political/sports writer is stretching a staff about as thin as possible. However, it is still possible to report

objectively and comprehensively with a staff this thin. One of the first newspapers at which I worked was composed of a staff exactly the same size as *Le Matin's*: a sports editor, an editor, and two reporters. The daily circulation of that newspaper was 6,800, more than twice *Le Matin*, so size of staff, though certainly a key element, is not an insurmountable obstacle. Granted, a solid home-subscription base buoyed the newspaper to which I refer, something *Le Matin* does not have, but the basic reporting done by the staff is the primary reason for making the comparison.

Organization may be one way to make better use of the staff of the newspaper. Several of *Le Matin's* editors and reporters noted that interns frequently are sent to cover stories only to return with nothing. This is more than likely attributable to a lack of experience. It must be remembered that Benin's National University does not have (at the writing of this dissertation) a journalism program. Therefore, all of the interns have been trained in other disciplines. They simply do not know how to find a story or develop a basic idea by interviewing multiple sources. One suggestion would be to have the interns work on stories (in the office) under the tutelage of the more experienced reporters.³⁵ Only after several of these supervised stories are written should the interns be sent out on their own to report a story. The vast majority of these interns are very young. A certain amount of fear should be expected.

By utilizing interns in a more efficient fashion, *Le Matin's* experienced reporters could spend more time expanding stories and reporting them in more detail. The stadium stampede has already been critiqued, but it bears revisiting. This story was a missed opportunity for *Le Matin* to step to the forefront of Cotonou's newspapers. Two of the reporters and the photographer (as well as

the sports editor) all had incredibly detailed information that never made it into the final stories. Instead the published stories offered merely a surface look at a story that deserved much deeper coverage.

Second, overall organization could benefit *Le Matin* in other ways. The news meetings, at the time the research was done, were held in a haphazard manner. They were scheduled for 8 p.m. but frequently did not occur until well after 10 p.m. and sometimes later than that.³⁶ News meetings provide a forum where the core of the newspaper's coverage is solidified. Good journalism expands from the ideas launched at these meetings. Too often, at *Le Matin's* meetings, stories ideas are bantered about, then assigned to a reporter, sometimes at 10 p.m. or later. This is too late to assure quality reporting. Breaking news is one thing. A newspaper must report the news no matter the conditions under which it occurs. However, basic news stories that are of a non-deadline nature must be reported and edited by a reasonable hour. Otherwise, it pushes the entire production process to critical limits.

Third, it is necessary to return to the issue of political news. Editors and reporters at *Le Matin* insisted that their readers want (and insist upon) political news. Changing that formula results in lower sales. It is apparent from observing all of the daily newspapers that they appear to be trying to outdo one another concerning political news, even when a large, banner headline on the front page usually leads readers inside to a story that is only four paragraphs long. This formula may provide short-term financial benefits, but sooner or later readers will learn that large headlines do not always promise readable stories.

A suggestion might be to make subtle changes in the mix of news on the front page, perhaps segmenting the page graphically to promote one well-

written political story along with two or three other non-political stories. A few papers are doing this now (*Le Matin* included); however, as Voglozin, the scholar interviewed in Chapter Two, noted, the manner in which most of the papers prioritize news is skewed in favor of political and bizarre news. Economic, scientific, and educational news must be given a higher priority. If Benin is to continue to develop as a nation, it will be the latter three, not the former two, which will play a large part in the process. Politics is possible *because* of education, science, and economics.³⁷ As the news in Cotonou was being reported in 2003, one was left to assume that politics generated everything else.

Finally, *Le Matin* must realize the power and inherent advantage (from a marketing perspective) of history. The editors and reporters know *Le Matin* is the oldest privately owned daily paper in Benin but more must be done with this concept. For example, a market campaign should be undertaken to associate *Le Matin* with in-depth, honest, and objective reporting. When people buy a newspaper, the choice should be between *Le Matin* and the other, lesser publications. As things stand, particularly from a reporting perspective, all of the newspapers look the same and all report political news with the same fervor. *Le Matin* must strive to lead the way – perhaps in the slow, incremental steps as mentioned above – to break the trend of knee-jerk political coverage, and gravitate toward reporting that informs and educates. This form of reporting can include political coverage, but it must be coverage that involves multiple viewpoints. Including the voices of readers within these political stories could broaden the stories' scope and, at the same time, begin the form a stronger bond between *Le Matin* and its readers.

Marketing campaigns and in-depth reporting cost money, and this is a challenge in an economic climate as poor as Benin's. A newspaper such as *Le Matinal* may have a built-in advantage with the deep financial resources it possesses, but *Le Matin's* historical significance is something money cannot buy. However, it cannot be actualized unless action is taken in the present.

Chapter Six

*Conclusion and observations:
Moving toward a keener sense
of professionalism in Benin's print media*

In journalistic terms, Benin is entering perhaps its most exciting period. The post-democratic print media, just 13 years old, is still defining its boundaries within the broader backgrounds of freedom and democracy. The question each Beninese reporter, editor, and director of publication must ask is: *How is the print media going to respond as Benin's overall institution of democracy grows and gains a deeper, more textured historical background?*

The forces of politics and economics, both of which have played paramount roles in Benin's journalistic and cultural stories, will play a large part in how the print media responds to democracy. Arguably, these two forces exert enormous pressure on the media around the world, but in Benin the two are particularly intertwined, and the power of economics is evident in the most visible way, poverty.¹ Unemployment hovers around eighty to eighty-five percent², and, with the notion of democracy still quite young, politics is a very popular way to elicit change and assume a role within the existing power structure.

The print media connects these two concepts and since each, in turn, exerts a great deal of counter force, change must be initiated from within. Cotonou's newspapers need to refocus their attention not only on economics and politics but also on other peripheral issues such as education, the environment,

science, and poverty. This move will allow the media to act more as an advocate for the polis than a crony for political special interests.

The introduction of this dissertation notes the outward dissimilarities between the United States and Benin. But in terms of each country's media and how that media developed throughout history, there appear to be many more similarities than differences. The historical moment of Jefferson and Madison included a media much like that of Benin's pre-democratic period in that it operated within a vituperative model. The enemy in both cases was clear: For colonial America it was the throne of England; for Benin it was the French colonization. Neither model could conceive of an alternative method to practice journalism. Professionalism was not an immediate consideration. Victory was a more pressing objective.

Economics played a significant role in the development of journalism in the West and still exerts a great deal of influence from the perspective of advertising. The penny press era in particular was associated with the growth of a free-market economy.³ This period also began a notable divergence between the sectors of public and private. During the eighteenth century, for example, a lawyer was viewed as a public figure responsible to a larger community. In the nineteenth century, as Gaye Tuchman writes, the lawyer was a professional responsible to only a client, "... whether the client were an individual or a railroad."⁴ The distinction between public and private clearly began to blur.

The penny papers also valued political independence and news, not opinion. "Factual news," Tuchman continues, "attracted readers, and so affirmed the notion of popular democracy explicit in the capitalist challenge to the colonial mercantile society."⁵ This manifested itself later in the nineteenth century when

economic gain (i.e., profit) became paramount for nearly all American newspapers, which further blurred the perception of public and private, not to mention the overarching notion of objectivity, one both Tuchman and Michael Schudson term a construction since it has changed throughout history.

Different social and political forces have forged different perceptions of objectivity. The papers of Jefferson and Madison's time were vehicles for opinion, primarily political opinion. Advertising largely did not exist (to the extent that it does today) and the audience was, for the most part, a known entity. The vast explosion in the size of newspapers during the penny press period changed this. The readership became a generalization and an abstraction. Objectivity became a moving target, particularly with the newspapers of William Randolph Hearst.

Benin's print media mirrors the press of early America, especially in terms of the political connection. Political news far outweighs other coverage, and, during my visit in 2001, advertising, like America's colonial media, was noticeably scant in most publications. That has changed quite remarkably. In 2003, advertising was more prevalent and new construction in Cotonou suggested a slight turn toward more promising social growth. However, the preoccupation with political coverage has held fast. One of the greatest challenges for the media is to respond to these hints of social and economic change by balancing the political coverage with the aforementioned in-depth stories addressing other issues pertinent to the populace. Mere information, be it political, economic, or sports coverage, is not enough for citizens of a complex democracy, according to Edmund Lambeth. As he writes in *Assessing Public Journalism*:

In a pluralistic society with contending stakeholders on public issues, the news media must cover the competing choices, the associated values and possible compromises, in ways that maximize the quality of public judgment.⁶

For the most part, Cotonou's daily newspapers report primarily surface political issues and are still searching for ways to report the choices, values, and compromises about which Lambeth writes. As many of the journalists said in Chapter Four and Chapter Five, economics (as in lack of staff) is one reason for the lack of in-depth coverage. Education appears to be another. The training many journalists receive gives them the basics to report stories, but the training may not be intensive enough to emphasize the value of in-depth reporting. Suggestions on how to improve education are made later. For now, it is important to mention additional connections between the media of the West and Benin.

Governmental involvement with the media is one of the obvious connections and is one that has further eroded the notion of objectivity in the West. The media of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Tuchman writes, "... tends to play down the heady involvement of the corporate sector and the government in one another's activities."⁷ The Newspaper Preservation Act of 1970, for example, was designed to help financially strapped publications and ultimately increase the number of published viewpoints for the population. However, as Tuchman continues, by interfering in the realm of publishing (a private sphere), Congress has once again blurred the distinction between private and public rights, "... and so opened the door to limiting the freedom of speech as the freedom of newspaper owners."⁸ The increased number of corporate-

controlled newspaper conglomerates is evidence of this and further complicates the objectivity debate.

Benin's print media has not reached this point. Most of the papers are privately owned. The government's involvement is limited to the High Authority of Audiovisual Communication (noted in Chapter Four) and that body's power is greatly limited by the republic's constitution. The republic has entered a period of individual performances. How these individuals perform in the short term will eventually affect the long-term historical story of the media.

Journalistic professionalism is still developing throughout Benin, and, because of the republic's economic state, many newspapers face the week-to-week challenge of merely staying in business. There is no easy formula for assuring the development of professionalism. Tuchman defines professionalism as "... knowing how to get a story that meets organizational needs and standards."⁹ One of the most critical elements of journalistic professionalism is the involvement of the community. Clifford Christians notes in a discussion of public journalism that it "... is not merely a set of techniques for revitalizing journalistic practice."¹⁰ Instead, public journalism is one of the basic connections between democracy and journalism and insists that democracy "fulfill its historic purpose."¹¹ The fate of this community-wide form of professionalism (and journalism), like the overall notion of objectivity within the republic's media, is still developing. Here are some recommendations, framed in the educational praxis of Paulo Freire, which may assist with this transition:

Needed: An accredited journalism school

Perhaps foremost, the National University of Benin should consider establishing an accredited school of journalism.¹² At present, the only training most aspiring (and practicing) journalists receive is through seminars offered by the West African News Agency for Development (WANAD) and various seminars conducted in West Africa by French journalism scholars. These seminars bring up the debatable difference between journalism *training* and journalism *education*. Although training has a certain immediate value, education involves more intellectual depth and breadth. Since the National University does not have a journalism program, any form of training is better than none.

Most of the journalists interviewed received training through these two outlets (or through journalism seminars in Senegal), and they perform their duties at an acceptable level. However, receiving journalism training that is supplemental to previously earned college degrees such as geography, linguistics, philosophy, and law is different from studying journalism as a selected field. The former is additive training in order to perform a job. The latter is learning via an incremental process where courses play off one another in a collective fashion that prepares one for a career.¹³ Building the previously mentioned professionalism involves viewing journalism as a professional career, not something one does because no positions were available within his or her chosen field.

This discussion must again include the issue of economics, which is prevalent in every society but particularly noticeable in Benin given the large number of unemployed professionals and the ever-present scourge of poverty. At present, training is the only avenue these professionals have to learn the

technical side of the journalism. The theoretical side appears largely unknown, based on the observations made at *Le Matin*. The journalism deontology (see Appendix B) may forbid sensationalism or unethical tactics, but when a newspaper is faced with going out of business because of shrinking readership, the temptations to resort to such tactics may be overwhelming.

The atmosphere within a school of journalism or in a program that specializes in communication, rhetoric, and ethics helps to build a foundation that is further enhanced by the technical experience gained in the field. Too many journalists in Cotonou have at their disposal only technical knowledge. They are then forced to move directly into the real world.

At the time this dissertation was written, the National University had two student-staffed newspapers, yet no course of study was available in journalism to feed these two newspapers. This seemed odd. A number of the journalists interviewed said they enjoyed working for the student papers and would have studied journalism had it been offered as a course of study. If a journalism program were available at the National University, perhaps more students would be interested in studying journalism as an initial major, not as a secondary interest driven by financial needs.

The logical first question is: How would such a school be funded? Since many politicians are already investing money to establish newspapers in Cotonou, perhaps several could pool their money and establish a school for the good of democracy and journalism as a whole. Such a move has enormous potential from a marketing standpoint.

Another potential funding source might be some of the more lucrative newspapers in Benin, the most obvious being *Le Matinal*. Charles Toko, *Le*

Matinal's general director and part owner, is a progressive visionary who is well known as a person who welcomes business ventures. What better venture than investing in Benin's future? Investing in a journalism school seems like a gamble that would pay nothing but high dividends in the form of national pride and further economic and educational growth.

If several individuals or businesses stepped forward to collectively establish a program, the republic would further insulate its fine democratic reputation.¹⁴ Benin's has a rich history in which journalism has played an enormous role. An established journalism program would, no doubt, also greatly improve the quality of newspapers throughout Benin. Students could study the history of Beninese journalism and compare it to European and Western journalism histories and learn from the various triumphs and mistakes. Not everyone will agree with the views of Jefferson, Madison, Lippmann, and Dewey that have been used to frame the Western notion of freedom in this dissertation. However, by studying different, and sometimes conflicting views, a vital sense of praxis ultimately can be achieved.

Praxis at the roots of better journalism

Realizing a greater sense of praxis, or theory-informed action, should also be a primary objective for all journalists in Benin. There is no question that journalists know the basics of reporting and writing stories, but a greater sense of how theoretical concerns such as the long-term affects of publishing sensational or under-reported stories needs to be engaged.¹⁵ *Le Matin's* reporting of the concert stampede (in Chapter Five) is an excellent example. This story had far-reaching implications that could have potentially affect the vast majority of

citizens in Cotonou. However, only the most basic facts were reported. To *Le Matin's* credit, some follow-up reporting was conducted and with positive results, but the nagging question of why such a senseless tragedy occurred was never reported, even though a number of writers and editors apparently knew them.

Praxis can benefit any organization and lead to deeper professionalism. American journalism certainly can benefit from a more in-depth sense of praxis. However, the type of enterprise reporting done by American papers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* can transcend cultural differences and positively benefit Beninese journalists. Basic factual and fair reporting may be considered Western constructions, but they have been adopted and received as universal tenets of professionalism in free countries. The journalists of Benin have a distinct sense of this basic mission of the media. They simply need to engage it in a more active way. This could be accomplished by resisting the urge to publish stories based solely on their sales potential and instead concentrate more on the forces that lie beneath politics. Those forces and issues – such as poverty, economics, and education – are what drive politics. They are also the issues that *directly* affect the polis. Politics is merely a surface phenomenon.

It is easy to recommend changes to improve Benin's media. It is far more difficult to apply them, and the main fear, i.e., losing readers and going out of business, is a valid concern. However, the long-term damage that can result from shoddy journalism should be more frightening.¹⁶ After interviewing all of the directors of publication and touring *Le Matin* for nearly one month, I was left with the sinking feeling that perhaps journalism in Benin will have to get worse before it gets better, just as America learned from its yellow journalism period

and improved in subsequent decades. Within the last 20 to 30 years, however, American journalism has again declined. Selfish episodes of fabrication by Janet Cooke, Stephen Glass, and Jayson Blair (and there have been many more) have cast a cloud of distrust over the print media that can be changed only by admitting the infractions, investigating them, and then doing everything possible to improve the profession.

Organization at every stage of journalism

A greater sense of organization should be applied to the daily operations of journalism in Benin. The daily news meetings at *Le Matin* that were touched upon in Chapter Five are a valid example. Holding meetings at a regular time may seem small and petty, but a successful organization is a collection of small, seemingly insignificant, building blocks. The importance of organization also must be instilled within the individual reporters. The observations at *Le Matin* pointed toward a lack of organization on the part of not only editors but also reporters. Many Western newspapers challenge their reporters to act as mini-editors when out in the field, weighing potential story ideas and bringing those ideas back to the news meetings. Aside from the constant political stories – many of which are surface in nature – few of these front-line journalism tactics appeared to be taking place.

The general packaging of nearly all of the newspapers – perhaps with the exception of *Le Matinal* – also hints at a need for more organization. The majority of the papers are too tentative about undertaking special projects or repackaging their papers when special events occur. Evidence of this was when Benin's soccer team qualified for the African Nations Cup tournament in July 2003. It was

refreshing to see all of the papers back away from political coverage for this historic event. However, within two days, things were back to normal.

Benin was favored in the match against Zambia. This presented a perfect opportunity to re-package the newspaper, offering more of a variety of stories on the upcoming match. Perhaps peripheral topics, such as how a big match would affect the economy of Cotonou or a historical piece on the African Nations Cup, could have been written. These stories – or even a complete special section – could have been promoted days before the match and sold at the stadium where a captive audience of eager fans would have been willing to spend money for a souvenir edition.

The entire concept of marketing is a secondary issue to organization, but it is one that also could help the newspapers of Cotonou. This would not necessarily require the addition of a marketing department. Marketing on a small scale, such as the above-mentioned special soccer section, require only front-end planning and organization. It could be accomplished with exiting staffs. By taking greater steps toward knowing its readership¹⁷, each newspaper in Benin can better respond to the needs of that readership. The benefits of these suggestions are unlimited. The challenge is to overcome the tendency to respond to immediate needs and look more toward establishing long-term goals and objectives that can help both the newspaper and the entire republic.

Concluding thoughts

This dissertation has asked the question: *How does a developing West African democracy blend elements of a Western model of democracy with its core pan-African values?* The observations in the preceding six chapters will hopefully begin a new

dialogue between journalists in the West and journalists in Benin. Freedom is an embedded term that reappears within successive historical moments, whether defined by Jefferson, Lippmann, or any director of publication at a daily newspaper in Cotonou. For journalists, freedom serves as a core value of professional practice.

Certainly there are similarities and differences – culturally and professionally – between journalists in the West and in West Africa. However, within these similarities and differences is where productive discussions can begin.

Chapter One examined freedom as defined in late eighteenth, early nineteenth, and mid-twentieth centuries. The philosophers of Jefferson, Madison, Lippmann, and Dewey underscored the need to involve the voices of many if freedom is to be achieved. In the cases of Jefferson and Madison, this was particularly difficult in the late 1700s because of the ever-present issue of slavery.

The Constitution for which they fought so hard was, after all, based on the notion of freedom for all. Slavery was an issue with which they had to tread lightly. Openly opposing it would assure that the Constitution never would be ratified. The economy of southern states in particular was contingent on slavery as a cheap source of labor. Favoring slavery, however, was impossible since it directly contradicted the Constitution. The easiest course of action was no action. Jefferson and Madison gambled that by not addressing slavery directly, the Constitution would be ratified, thus giving the young nation additional time to build a more solid historical base.

The still young democracy of Benin is much like the America of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in that a historical narrative is still

building. The great success of the National Conference in 1990 sent positive reverberations throughout West Africa and set a solid foundation for productive change. The narrative fidelity of democracy was debated, weighed against the past and determined to be the best for all Beninese. The challenge to the media is to become a reliable outlet to which people can turn for fair and truthful information or to voice their own opinions.

Unfortunately, the media have not made this transition as effectively as many observers had hoped. The intertwined forces of economics and politics again continue to cause most newspapers to be reactive, not proactive. They react to the temptation to make fast money by publishing often-sensational political stories that may sell papers in the short term but they do nothing to build long-term credibility and historical respectability. Very few of the newspapers visited in 2003 were proactive. One of the few journalists who used proactive means to write enterprise stories that addressed key issues such as poverty and education was Thomas Megnassan, who retired in 1987. The significance of this type of journalism cannot be underscored enough. When informed and educated by a proactive and ethical journalism, a polis can be better equipped to contribute to good of all. The theoretical concept of the public moral argument, discussed at the end of Chapter Four, is one way to mediate this on-going debate.

Part of the reason for the media's tentative nature is the layered, tension-filled history of Benin that was addressed in Chapter Two. The rich West African values of the region were severely impacted by the French colonization at the end of the nineteenth century. A new language was introduced and the French did little to preserve the pre-existing values. The result of the colonization has

been that Benin, and perhaps much of West Africa, now suffers from a form of cultural psychosis.

Because of an active, dissident media¹⁸, however, independence was achieved in 1960. Unfortunately, much damage had already been done. A series of *coups d'état* further complicated the cultural landscape during the next 12 years and eventually set in motion the Marxist regime of Mathieu Kérékou.

Marxism was not kind to the media, but it challenged journalists to again speak out against the government and remind people of the value of freedom. Journalists such as Maurice Chabi willingly worked within the regime, in his case as editor of the state-operated newspaper, and took advantage of any opportunity to inform the people of what was actually occurring within the power structure of the regime.

Democracy has been both good and bad for the media of Benin. The number of independently owned newspapers naturally increased after the National Conference and more continue to be established today. However, one thing remains obvious: All of the newspapers rely heavily on political coverage. The large number of papers has brought with it a tendency to push the limits of taste and fairness in order to stay in business. Papers such as *Le Récade* (published by Megnassan) and *La Gazette du Golfe* (the version that was published prior to the democratic era) were tenacious papers that were not afraid to publish challenging opinions as well as enterprise projects. Cotonou's twenty-first century journalism is at a critical stage and is still navigating its way through the multiple influences that have affected (and are still affecting) the culture.

Early America experienced many of these same influences. Its break from the bonds of monarchical Great Britain was not clean. The early colonies still reflected many aspects of the British culture; however, America quickly began to develop its own cultural identity. Benin is still finding an identity that truly reflects freedom and preserves the core pan-African values. The effects of the colonization will take many decades to intertwine with core pan-African values, but a free society that embraces a free media is the perfect environment in which to appreciate and preserve those values.

Chapter Three profiled two of the most powerful influences in West Africa, the oral and the written traditions. By viewing these traditions through the lens of culture and then defining them, the power each exerts on the West and West Africa becomes evident. Paulo Freire's educational praxis is critical if both the West and Benin are to learn how to recognize and appreciate the influences of these two traditions. Orality has been present in Africa for hundreds of years, and, in urban areas such as Cotonou, it is now mixing and further conflicting with the written tradition. For the media to achieve its potential, journalists must understand the inherent conflicts that occur between these traditions.

Chapter Four presented a macro view of how freedom is defined by each director of publication at a daily newspaper in Cotonou. The ways in which they define freedom are very eloquent and at times almost poetic. Nearly every director is well educated, but again this is evidence of economics affecting journalism in a very non-Western manner. Many, perhaps most, of the journalists and directors of publication in Cotonou have gravitated into journalism because they could not get positions in their chosen fields. Some genuinely love

journalism and their passion shows in their writing or in the way they direct their newspapers. Too many others, however, appear to have turned to journalism because it is an effective way to make money. These individuals are not to be faulted. They are doing what needs to be done in order to make a viable living; however, a broader realization of the advantages of a praxis-driven journalism, not one that is merely practiced in a technical fashion, would help to further deepen the media's valuable historical background.

Chapter Five presented a micro look at *Le Matin*, Cotonou's oldest privately owned daily newspaper. This chapter captured the personalities of the individual editors and journalists as well as their hopes, aspirations, fears, and general opinions of journalism. Recounting the manner in which *Le Matin* reported, edited, photographed, and followed up the concert stampede provided some crucial examples of how this sensitive story could have been covered in a deeper and broader manner that would have better benefited the community.

In many ways, the practice of journalism in Benin is very much the same as it is in the West, and Chapter Six noted suggestions on how to broaden and deepen journalism for the future. This chapter pointed out how the print media of early America responded to the changing culture, particularly the changing economic culture. The number of newspapers in America, as well as how those papers responded to their audiences, changed remarkably during the penny press era. Objectivity changed and later even the role the government played in the day-to-day operations of many papers also modified. The realms of private and public became more invisible.

The government of Benin also can get involved with newspapers, but that role is greatly restricted by the republic's constitution. Like the print media in

America's post-yellow journalism era, Benin is developing a journalistic story through a pragmatic process. The key to making this process positive could be the realization and application of praxis, a notion that connects the historical, social, journalistic, educational, and organizational components of this dissertation. Praxis is why the founding fathers of the Constitutional era were able to build so many safeguards into that critical document. Praxis also can be applied to simple journalistic training and turn it into valuable education.

The most critical element for praxis to work, however, is the human element, and this is a challenge for each member of Benin's media. It is also the most productive manner to end this dissertation. By linking the major philosophers utilized thus far, a critical component emerges: *the individual*. Jefferson and Madison recognized and built upon the embedded nature of freedom in democracy. They took the necessary steps – including not acting on slavery – to assure that the Constitution would be ratified. Addressing slavery was left to a time when the narrative of freedom had developed the needed fidelity with all Americans.

More than a century and a half later, Lippmann and Dewey constructively criticized elements of the media – a crucial component of any democratic society – in order to re-energize the individual. Lippmann criticized journalism from the perspective of the ideological stereotypes held (usually unknowingly) by every journalist. Instead of ethically informing the masses, Lippmann accused journalists of reinforcing pre-existing stereotypes. Knowledge and a recognition of the power of each individual, he writes, are ways to build a better journalism.

Dewey further expands on Lippmann's notion of the individual. When the individual is heard, Dewey writes, there is hope of achieving a movement

toward his theoretical Great Community, where all opinions are heard and weighed in a fair manner.

The writings of these four philosophers achieve a greater sense of applicability when viewed via Fisher's narrative paradigm. Narrative provides the necessary gestalt to weigh each philosopher individually and yet appreciate the collective contributions of all. Fisher frames his paradigm in the logic of the ancient philosophers of Isocrates, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and others, but the applicability of narrative is as significant today as in ancient times. By recognizing the story of freedom – and studying the various forces that have shaped and informed that story – journalists in Benin and the West better equipped themselves to face the future.

For this narrative process of studying, weighing, and learning to function properly, an ethical component is necessary, and that is provided in Chapter Three by the writings of Paulo Freire. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire is challenging all of to look and listen before acting. By looking at a person's environment and listening to his or her fears and aspirations before teaching, we are able to educate in a transactional and empowering manner. Learning then becomes beneficial for both the student as well as the teacher.

By utilizing this ethical approach to learning and teaching, the freedom of Jefferson and Madison can achieve a new dimension: the sense of individualism expounded upon by Lippmann and Dewey. Benin's media have the power to look and listen, as Freire teaches, and then ethically inform and educate the masses, thus empowering that polis. This dissertation offers steps toward accomplishing this transformation. It continues a conversation that has been informed by journalists and researchers such as Campbell, Bourgault, Christians,

Schudson, Fisher, Tuchman, and others. In the final analysis, though, the journalists of Benin will provide, on a day-to-day basis, the true test of this research.

Notes, Introduction

¹ Reporters Without Borders 2003 world rankings: <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=8247>. The United States tied with Greece for the 31st ranking. Finland was ranked No. 1, and North Korea was ranked 166th.

² Porto Novo, approximately 15 miles east of Cotonou, is Benin's official capital. Cotonou, however, is where most of the governmental buildings are located.

³ According to many of the directors interviewed, owning a press provides them with the opportunity to make additional money from printing contract work.

⁴ During the summer of 2001 there were 17 daily newspapers. In 2003 there were 19. More than 40 journalists attended the seminars, which were held at Agence Benin Presse in Cotonou.

⁵ Louise M. Bourgault, *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1995): 23-24; and W. Joseph Campbell, *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Cote D'Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy* (Praeger: Westport, CT: 1998): 39-40.

⁶ Michael Ryan, "Journalistic Ethics, Objectivity, Existential Journalism, Standpoint, and Public Journalism." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 2001. 16 (1): 3-22. The definition of objectivity that Ryan uses is based on several researchers, including E.E Dennis; G. Gauthier; N. Koertge; J. Merrill and R. Lowenstein; R. Merton; M. Nanda; T. Parsons; L. Switzer, J. McNamara, and M. Ryan; and G. Tuchman. Michael Schudson also looks at the historical connections of objectivity in "The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism." *Journalism*, 2001. 2 (2): 149-170. See also David T.Z. Mindich, *Just the Facts: How 'Objectivity' Came to Define American Journalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁷ Abraham Voglozin, interview with author, Thursday, July 3, 2003.

⁸ Benin is a diverse republic in terms of religion. According to United Nation's figures, 15 percent of the population is Christian, 15 percent are Muslim, and the remaining 70 percent practice various traditional African religions, voodoo being the most popular. A number of the journalists interviewed suggested that religion often carries over into the professional sphere.

⁹ The particular perspective to be used in this dissertation is that of Walter Fisher as detailed in his book *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987).

¹⁰ The position of director of publication in Benin is close to the Western concept of a newspaper publisher, according to Yaovi Hounkponou, director of Agence Benin Presse.

¹¹ See Paul Ricoeur's three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988); and Fisher 1987.

¹² Blaise Fagnihoun, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.

³ Fagnihoun, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.

¹⁴ Fagnihoun, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.

¹⁵ Ron Scollon & Suzanne Wong Scollon, *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1995): 245-48.

¹⁶ The primary texts utilized in this dissertation that reflect these concepts are Campbell 1998 and Bourgault 1995.

- ¹⁷ Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books. A Division of Random House, Inc., 2000): 4-5.
- ¹⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): 9.
- ¹⁹ See Michael Schudson's *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
- ²⁰ Thomas Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ²¹ The United Nations List of Least Developed Countries.:
<<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0909763.html>>.
- ²² Fernando Hessou, interview with author, Wednesday, June 4, 2003.
- ²³ Hounkponou, interview with author, Monday, June 2, 2003.
- ²⁴ This figure was provided and confirmed by many of the reporters and directors of publication.
- ²⁵ Hounkponou, interview with author, Monday, June 2, 2003.
- ²⁶ Cornelius Pratt, "Fallacies and Failures of Communication for Development: A Commentary on Africa South of the Sahara." *International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*, 1993. 52: 93-107. See also: Cornelius Pratt, "Ethical Perspectives on Communication Research for Africa's Development: An Extension of the Agenda-Dynamics Model." In Lent, John, ed., *Social Science Models and Their Impact on the Third World* (Williamsburg, Va.: Department of Anthropology, College of William & Mary, 1991): 71-93.
- ²⁷ Carl Bernstein & Bob Woodward, *All The President's Men* (New York: Warner Books Edition, 1976).
- ²⁸ James Fallows, *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy* (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1997).
- ²⁹ Garry Wills, *James Madison* (New York: Times Books: Henry Holt and Company, 2002).
- ³⁰ Benin's first "official" president following Kérékou's reign as dictator was Nicéphore D. Soglo, the interim prime minister. He served one term and then was defeated by Kérékou in a controversial election which included rumors of coup-plotting throughout the country. Kérékou was re-elected to his second and final five-year term in the spring of 2001. As of 2003, Soglo was mayor of Cotonou.
- ³¹ Campbell 1998, 31.
- ³² The term "esoteric ethnography" should be credited to Dr. Kathleen Glenister Roberts, assistant professor of communication and rhetorical studies, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa. The ethnography is esoteric because I am a journalist with 25 years of experience going into a different culture to observe the practices of other journalists, in this case the journalists of Cotonou, Benin.
- ³³ John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: on Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998): xi. In addition to Van Maanen, the ethnographic work of three other researchers also was consulted: Kadiatu Kanneh, *African Identities: Race, Nation, and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism, and Black Literatures* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Roy Richard Grinker and Christopher B. Steiner, eds., *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997); and Andrew Moemeka, "Socio-Cultural Environment of Communication in Traditional/Rural Nigeria: An Ethnographic Exploration." *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook*, 1984. III: 41-56.
- ³⁴ Barney G. Glaser & Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1967/1999).
- ³⁵ Dickson A. Mungazi, *Gathering Under the Mango Tree: Values in Traditional Culture in Africa* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1996): 51.
- ³⁶ Scollon & Scollon 1995. See also Shelley Brickson, "The Impact of Identity Orientation on Individual and Organizational Outcomes in Demographically Diverse Settings." *Academy of Management Review*, 2000. 25: 82-101.
- ³⁷ The primary texts to be applied in this chapter are: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983); Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983); and Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000).

³⁸ When this research was conducted, *Le Matin* was Cotonou's oldest privately owned daily newspaper at 10 years old. The reporters and editors took a great amount of pride in this distinction and were eager to be the focus of academic research.

³⁹ Voglozin, interview with author, Thursday, July 3, 2003.

Notes, Chapter One

¹ Ellis 2002, 4-6.

² *Ibid.*, 231.

² Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York Free Press Paperbacks, 1997): 18.

⁴ See also Fallows 1997; Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); A.J. Liebling, *The Press*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1961).

⁵ Adrienne Koch & William Peden, *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: The Modern Library, 1998): 187-91.

⁶ Wills 2002, 31.

⁷ Fisher 1987, 67. See also Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, W. Rhys Roberts, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1954): 22.

⁸ Ellis 2002, 5.

⁹ E.M. Halliday, *Understanding Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Perennial: An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2001): 128-29.

¹⁰ Ellis 2002, 9.

¹¹ Paul M. Zall, *Jefferson on Jefferson* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002): 78.

¹² Ellis 2002, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁴ Koch & Peden 1998, 216-17. See also Ellis 2002, 143.

¹⁵ Ellis 2002, 10-11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 102-22.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 206-248.

¹⁸ Koch & Peden 1998, 237-48. See also Robert Allen Rutland, *James Madison: The Founding Father* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987): 70.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ Irving Brant, *James Madison: The Virginia Revolutionist* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941): 49.

²² Jean M. Yarbrough, *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People* (Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 1998): 55.

²³ Rutland 1987, 70.

²⁴ Gaillard Hunt, *The Life of James Madison* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968): 369.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970): 91; Willard Stern Randall, *Thomas Jefferson: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993): 276-277.

²⁷ Halliday 2001, 156.

²⁸ Ellis 2002, 93.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 114.

³⁰ Halliday 2001, 154-157.

³¹ Ellis 2002, 158.

³² Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1991).

³³ Rutland 1987, 246.

³⁴ *Ibid.* See also Ellis 2002, 93.

-
- ³⁵ Peterson 1970.
- ³⁶ Douglass Cater, *The Fourth Branch of Government* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959): 75; See also Adrienne Koch & William Peden. eds., *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: The Modern Library, 1998): 381.
- ³⁷ Adrienne Koch, *Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950): 116-117.
- ³⁸ Hunt 1968, 235.
- ³⁹ Cater 1959. See also Peterson 1970.
- ⁴⁰ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁴¹ Peterson 1970, 464.
- ⁴² Ellis 2002, 217.
- ⁴³ Ellis 2002, 228.
- ⁴⁴ Wills 2002, 29-35.
- ⁴⁵ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison & John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*. Garry Wills, ed. (New York: Bantam, 1982]: ix.
- ⁴⁶ Wills 2002, 30.
- ⁴⁷ See Wills 2002 as well as Ellis 2002, and Rutland 1987.
- ⁴⁸ Hamilton et al., 1982: 44.
- ⁴⁹ Rutland 1987, 30.
- ⁵⁰ Hamilton et al., 1982: 43.
- ⁵¹ Rutland 1987, 31.
- ⁵² Ellis 2002, 234. It also must be noted that the ruling elitists set the tone of freedom in both America and Benin. Both democracies are established on a “by the people” foundation, but the power structure of both governments is definitely a locus of elitist participation.
- ⁵³ Hamilton et al., 1982: ix. Garry Wills makes this claim in the introduction to this edition of *The Federalist Papers*.
- ⁵⁴ Hamilton et al., 1982: x-xi.
- ⁵⁵ Schudson 1995, 43-4.
- ⁵⁶ See also Schudson 1995 and Fallows 1997.
- ⁵⁷ Fallows 1997, 81.
- ⁵⁸ Walter Lippmann, *Liberty and the News* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995): 44.
- ⁵⁹ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997): xiii.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, xii.
- ⁶¹ See also Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).
- ⁶² Paul Ricoeur writes about characters, plot, and narrative in his three volumes of *Time and Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, 1985, 1988). In Vol. 2, Ricoeur breaks narration down to the four components of plot, historicity, event and character. The “doing” of our lives occurs, he writes in Chapter Two, between these four. The doing essentially assumes the role of character, which is embedded within the narrative.
- ⁶³ Lippmann 1997, xii
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.
- ⁶⁵ James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 77.
- ⁶⁶ Schudson 1978.
- ⁶⁷ Ben Bradlee, *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures* (New York: Touchstone, 1996): 383.
- ⁶⁸ Lippmann 1997, 226-27.
- ⁶⁹ Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996): 171.
- ⁷⁰ Lippmann 1997, 227.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*

-
- ⁷² Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999): 93.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, xxxi.
- ⁷⁴ Lippmann 1995, 44.
- ⁷⁵ Lippmann 1999, 26-27.
- ⁷⁶ This figure was arrived at by consulting the classified advertisements in several editions of *Editor & Publisher*, a weekly journalism trade magazine.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁸ Fallows 1997.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-83.
- ⁸⁰ Stanley Deetz, *Transforming Communication Transforming Business: Building Responsive and Responsible Workplaces* (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, Inc., 1995): 71-74.
- ⁸¹ Both Giddens and Foucault address the issue of identity. See Anthony Giddens, *The Transformation of Intimacy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. J. Faubion, ed. (New York: The New Press, 1998): 205-222.
- ⁸² Lippmann 1999, 86. Schrag also writes about the notion of distancing in communication. See Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1998).
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 93.
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.
- ⁸⁶ Carey 1992, 80.
- ⁸⁷ See Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947/1965) and Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London: Collier Books, 1931/1969).
- ⁸⁸ Carey 1992, 81.
- ⁸⁹ Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that various human practices are key components of community in *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
- ⁹⁰ John Dewey, *The Public & Its Problems* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954): 26.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁹² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Thomas Burger, trans. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000): 55.
- ⁹³ Dewey 1954, 18.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁹⁵ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁷ Dewey 1954, 76.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83-84.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 147.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-127.
- ¹⁰¹ Throughout this dissertation, I am suggesting that journalism is an embedded agent within freedom, a term often attributed to Martin Heidegger. In Chapter Five of *Being and Time*, for example, Heidegger discusses the "they" self and the "we." These notions are rooted in an appreciation of the human being as an embedded agent. *Being and Time* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996): 123-125.
- ¹⁰² Fisher 1987, 18.
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, ix.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ¹⁰⁶ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*. Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 2nd ed., 1987). See also Ronald C. Arnett and Pat Arneson, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999): 128.

Notes, Chapter Two

¹ Campbell 1998, 29.

² Fisher 1987, 65.

³ Allen W. Palmer, "Reinventing the Democratic Press of Benin," *Press Freedom and Communication in Africa*, Festus Eribo & William Jong-Ebot, eds. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1997): 246.

⁴ Ibid. Concerning voodoo, Palmer also writes, "Benin has a distinctive tie to Haiti because much of Haiti's population originally was transplanted to the New World by slave trade. Rituals and fetish practices in Haiti have been traced to southern Benin, as well as names, clothing and oral traditions." See also W.J. Argyle, *The Fon of Dahomey* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966); and Robert Cornevin, *Historie du Dahomey* (Paris: Editions Berger-Le Vrault, 1962).

⁵ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.

⁶ Thomas Megnassan outlined these four key historical stages during his interview with me. They are also addressed in the research of Campbell, Bourgault, and Palmer.

⁷ Ibid., 247.

⁸ R. F. Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

⁹ In this section, Issac Obeng-Quaidoo uses the term "core African values." This pre-supposes a similarity of values across the entire continent. Other researchers, including Dickson A Mungazi in *Gathering Under the Mango Tree: Values in Traditional Culture in Africa* (New York Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1996); John Mbiti in *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971); and Jerzy Jaroslaw Smolicz in "Cultural Values and Scientific Development in *Cultural Heritage vs. Technological Development*, R.E. Vente (ed.); R.S. Bhathal, R.M. Nakhoda; Maruzen, Asia, 1981, have made similar connections, though not exactly the same as Obeng-Quaidoo. To bridge these differences, I will use the term "pan-African values" throughout the dissertation. For a broad-base look at values, see Milton Rokeach's *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1968).

¹⁰ Issac Obeng-Quaidoo, "Culture and Communication Research Methodologies in Africa: A proposal for Change." *Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*, 1985. 36:111.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Andrew Moemeka, "Socio-Cultural Environment of Communication in Traditional/Rural Nigeria: An Ethnographic Exploration," *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook*, 1984, III: 41-56.

¹⁵ Figures provided by Father Andre Quenum, a native of Benin.

¹⁶ Obeng-Quaidoo 1985, 112.

¹⁷ J. Mbiti, J., *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971): 17.

¹⁸ Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969).

¹⁹ James J. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 15.

²⁰ See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999).

²¹ Cornelius Pratt, "Fallacies and Failures of Communication for Development: A Commentary on Africa South of the Sahara." *International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*, 1993. 52: 93-107. Another reason for communication conflicts between Africa and the West is the clash between the oral and written cultures. African culture is rooted in the oral tradition whereas the West is based on the written word. Chapter Three will deal exclusively with this phenomenon.

²² Obeng-Quaidoo 1985, 113.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1964): 214.

²⁵ Obeng-Quaidoo 1985, 113.

²⁶ Ibid., 114.

-
- ²⁷ The king's comments were translated by Father Andre Quenum following a meeting with him at the Port of Cotonou in June 2001.
- ²⁸ Bourgault 1995, 226.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.
- ³⁰ Henry Bretton, *Power and Politics in Africa*. (Chicago: Aldine, 1973): 43-46.
- ³¹ Leslie Rubin & Brian Weinstein, *Introduction to African Politics: A Continental Approach* (New York: Praeger, 1974): 42-46. Cited in Bourgault 1995, 23.
- ³² Bretton 1973, 169.
- ³³ Bourgault 1995, 23.
- ³⁴ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ³⁵ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ³⁶ Campbell 1998, 32.
- ³⁷ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ³⁸ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ³⁹ Campbell 1998, 37-40.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.
- ⁴¹ Palmer 1997, 249.
- ⁴² Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁴³ Campbell 1998, 34.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.
- ⁴⁵ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁴⁶ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁴⁷ Campbell 1998, 41.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ "Dahomey: Elections Suspended: Secession Threat," *West Africa* (4 April 1970): 374.
- ⁵⁰ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵¹ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵² Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵³ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵⁴ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵⁵ Voglozin, interview with author, Thursday, July 3, 2003.
- ⁵⁶ See "French Radioactive Waste Is to Be Buried in Central Benin," *Africa Analysis* (1 April 1988): 1. See also Samuel Decalo, *Coups and Army Rule in Africa: Motivations and Constraints*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Cited in Campbell 1998, 46.
- ⁵⁷ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵⁸ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁵⁹ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁶⁰ CFA stands for the French Colonies of Africa. On average, \$1 in United States currency can equal between 600 and 700 CFA.
- ⁶¹ Campbell 1998, 43.
- ⁶² Campbell 1998, 46.
- ⁶³ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁶⁴ Palmer 1997, 253.
- ⁶⁵ Campbell 1998, 59.
- ⁶⁶ Abraham Voglozin, "L'Etat du Benin en l'an 2025 ou le voyage prospectif pour le developement national: 1- Le secteur de la communication en question!" *La Nation* (2 November 1995): 5.
- ⁶⁷ Abraham Voglozin, interviewed by author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁶⁸ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁶⁹ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁷⁰ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁷¹ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁷² Bruno Dossou, interview with author, Friday, July 4, 2003.
- ⁷³ Marie-Louise B. Matchoudo, interview with author, Friday, July 4, 2003.
- ⁷⁴ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.

⁷⁵ Fisher 1987, 65. See also J. Goody and I. Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 1962-63. 5: 304-26, 332-45.

⁷⁶ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.

⁷⁷ Fisher 1987, 68.

⁷⁸ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.

Notes, Chapter Three

¹ Mungazi 1996.

² Pratt 1993.

³ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.

⁴ Schudson 1978, 61-63.

⁵ Ryan, 2001.

⁶ Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World* (New York: Routledge, 1989): 31.

⁷ Ong 1989, 79. See also Plato, *Phaedrus*. In Patricia Bizzell & Bruce Herzberg, eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition* (Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1990): 113-143.

⁸ Campbell 1998, 39.

⁹ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 440-441.

¹⁰ Geertz 1973, 6.

¹¹ Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1983): 23

¹² Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man: A Survey of Human Behavior and Social Attitudes* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1949).

¹³ Geertz 1973, 4, 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁵ Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck, *Variations in Value Orientations* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1961). Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's list is featured in Martin J. Gannon's *Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys Through 23 Nations* (2nd ed., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001): 8-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 47. Geertz quotes these key ingredients of culture from Sir Edward Tylor.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹ Geertz 1983, 75.

²² *Ibid.*, 76.

²³ John A. Wiseman, *The New struggle for Democracy in Africa* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1998): 56. Cited in Campbell 1998, 14.

²⁴ Geertz 1983, 143.

²⁵ James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Bourgault 1995, 7.

³¹ Carey 1992, 21.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Schudson 1995.

³⁴ Dewey 1954.

³⁵ Campbell 1998. Megnassan also made several references to these "disastrous consequences" during his interview.

- ³⁶ Ong 1988, 7.
- ³⁷ Ibid., 11.
- ³⁸ Ibid.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 42.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid., 43-44.
- ⁴¹ Eren Giray, *Nsiirin! Nsiirin! Jula Folktales from West Africa* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1996): 20-21. See also: Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias' article "The *Gesere* of Borgu: A Neglected Type of Diaspora," in Ralph A. Austen's *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999): 141-169. See also: Isidore Okpewho, *The Oral Performance in Africa* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited, 1990): 160-184.
- ⁴² Ibid., 55-55. See also Aleksandr Romanovich Luria [also Lurriia], *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*. Michael Cole, ed. & Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976).
- ⁴³ Tiburce Adagbe, interview with author, Tuesday, June 3, 2003.
- ⁴⁴ Article 14 of the Deontology Code for the Benin Press (Appendix B) stresses the need for professional honor and ethics.
- ⁴⁵ Ong 1988, 86.
- ⁴⁶ Ong 1988, 102.
- ⁴⁷ Walter Ong, *Interfaces of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977): 53-81.
- ⁴⁸ Abraham Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁴⁹ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁵⁰ Ong 1988, 121.
- ⁵¹ In the United States, newspapers such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have built their reputations on objective reporting. Other "entertainment" publications such as the *Weekly World News* and *The National Enquirer* frequently pay money for news stories and publish marginal stories that often involve celebrity gossip.
- ⁵² Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2000): 72.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 75.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., 79.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 80.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid., 88.
- ⁵⁸ The notion of public or civic journalism is debated in Edmund B. Lambeth, "Public Journalism as Cultural Change." In Edmund B. Lambeth, Philip E. Meyer, and Esther Thomson, eds., *Assessing Public Journalism* (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1998): 232.
- ⁵⁹ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., 92.
- ⁶¹ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.
- ⁶² Ibid., 141-142.

Notes, Chapter Four

- ¹ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.
- ² Maurice Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ³ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ⁴ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ⁵ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ⁶ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ⁷ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ⁸ Chabi, interview with author, Tuesday, July 22, 2003.
- ⁹ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁰ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹¹ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.

-
- ¹² Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹³ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁴ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁵ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁶ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁷ Chabi, interview with author, Friday, June 13, 2003.
- ¹⁸ It must be remembered that Raymond Fadonoughbo, the chief of the national police force profiled in the Introduction, actually had a good deal of journalistic training. His problems, according to the journalists involved in the arrests, appear to have been linked to the power he had as police chief.
- ¹⁹ Hessou, interview with author, Wednesday, June 4, 2003.
- ²⁰ Hessou, interview with author, Wednesday, June 4, 2003.
- ²¹ Hessou, interview with author, Wednesday, June 4, 2003.
- ²² Tiburce Adagbe, interview with author, Tuesday, June 3, 2003.
- ²³ Vincent Folly, interview with author, Friday, June 6, 2003.
- ²⁴ Folly, interview with author, Friday, June 6, 2003.
- ²⁵ Reporters pushing the envelope is an international phenomenon among free countries. See also: J.M. McLeod and S.E. Hawley, "Professionalization Among Newsmen." *Journalism Quarterly*, 41: 529-538, 577; and M. Allison, "A Literature Review of Approaches to the Professionalism of Journalists." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1: 5-19.
- ²⁶ Patrick Adjamonsi, interview with author, Thursday, June 6, 2003.
- ²⁷ Adjamonsi, interview with author, Thursday, June 6, 2003.
- ²⁸ Hounkponou, interview with author, Monday, June 2, 2003.
- ²⁹ Hounkponou, interview with author, Monday, June 2, 2003.
- ³⁰ Folly, interview with author, Friday, June 6, 2003.
- ³¹ Sylvestre Fohoungo, interview with author, Wednesday, June 11, 2003.
- ³² Fohoungo, interview with author, Wednesday, June 11, 2003.
- ³³ Akuété Assevi, interview with author, Tuesday, June 10, 2003.
- ³⁴ Assevi, interview with author, Tuesday, June 10, 2003.
- ³⁵ Assevi, interview with author, Tuesday, June 10, 2003.
- ³⁶ Assevi, interview with author, Tuesday, June 10, 2003.
- ³⁷ Kokou Antoine Ogawin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 11, 2003.
- ³⁸ Agapit Maforikan, interview with author, Thursday, June 12, 2003.
- ³⁹ Maforikan, interview with author, Thursday, June 12, 2003.
- ⁴⁰ Maforikan, interview with author, Thursday, June 12, 2003.
- ⁴¹ Sylvia d'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴² D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴³ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁴ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁶ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁷ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁸ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁴⁹ D'Almeida, interview with author, Tuesday, June 24, 2003.
- ⁵⁰ Brice Houssou, interview with author, Monday, June 16, 2003.
- ⁵¹ Clément Adéchian, interview with author, Monday, June 16, 2003.
- ⁵² Adéchian, interview with author, Monday, June 16, 2003.
- ⁵³ Campbell 1998, 39.
- ⁵⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2nd ed., 1984). A book Fisher uses as an example of a moral work is Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* (New York: Avon Books, 1982).
- ⁵⁵ Fisher 1987, 70.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 71. Aristotle addresses "untrained thinkers" in *The Rhetoric*, 1.2.1257 10.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ MacIntyre 1984, 11.

⁵⁹ An argument could be made the *La Nation*, since it is funded by the government, may not face the same pressure to consider the financial bottom line as the privately owned newspapers of Cotonou. However, during my visit in 2003, *La Nation* routinely had a broader advertising base than nearly all of the other papers. This, perhaps, was due to its larger circulation and *La Nation's* reputation of running all governmental news. *Le Matinal*, the largest privately owned newspaper, also had an impressive ad base.

⁶⁰ A number of the directors and reporters admitted this during their interviews. *Le Matin's* sports writer Félix Sohoundé Pépéripé was particularly vehement about it.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 71-2.

⁶² Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.

⁶³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998): 24.

Notes, Chapter Five

¹ Ignace Fanou, interview with author, Sunday, July 6, 2003.

² Fanou, interview with author, Sunday, July 6, 2003.

³ Fanou, interview with author, Sunday, July 6, 2003.

⁴ Gilles-Hervé da Silveira, interview with author, Wednesday, July 2, 2003.

⁵ Da Silveira, interview with author, Wednesday, July 2, 2003.

⁶ Ange Gnacadja, interview with author, Thursday, July 10, 2003.

⁷ Gnacadja, interview with author, Thursday, July 10, 2003.

⁸ Fanou, interview with author, Tuesday, July 8, 2003.

⁹ Ryan, 2001.

¹⁰ Schudson 1995, 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Dr. Mario Garcia's eye-track studies at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., revolutionized readership studies. His original studies were conducted in the 1970s. They have served as the basis for studies on how readers read newspapers, view photographs and graphics is a popular issue of study in journalism.

¹⁴ John Huxford, "Beyond the Referential: Uses of Visual Symbolism in the Press." *Journalism*, 2001. 2 (1): 45-71. Huxford utilizes three classifications of photographic symbolism in the press: temporal, in which time frames are evoked and utilized within the news page; metaphorical, where analogical associations are employed; and synthetic, representations that entail gross distortions of reality.

¹⁵ Sonja K. Foss, "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery." *Communication Studies*, 1994-95. 45 (3-4): 213-224. Foss specifically looks at images such as the AIDS quilt or a stylish chair as violating their functions. The quilt, because it is used as a message vehicle, utilizes panels that are the size of a human coffin. The stylish chair violates its function because it is not comfortable and thus launches its user into activity.

¹⁶ Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

¹⁷ This information was provided by a number of editors and reporters at *Le Matin*.

¹⁸ The concept of good journalistic taste is often debatable. One reporter or editor's acceptable or tasteful story is sensational to another reporter or editor. Generally, however, most mainstream Western journalists consider good taste to be that which is acceptable to family readers.

¹⁹ Renita Coleman, "Use of Visual Communication in Public Journalism." *Newspaper Research Journal*, 2000. 21 (4): 17-37. Coleman's article brings to the forefront the function of the public in journalism, something both Lippmann and Dewey (as well as Jefferson and Madison) advocate in Chapter 1. Foss's article, mentioned earlier, argues for the importance of recognizing the rhetorical function of visual imagery. My claims for more vivid and tasteful words and photographs are, therefore, steering away from "functionalist" research that establishes the truth claim that "photos make a difference," and instead argue

that from a rhetorical perspective, filtered through the lens of public journalism, the inclusion of more photographs is symbolically, rhetorically, and professionally necessary, because it permits the professional journalist to make a statement about the public good, i.e., such tragedies should not happen; we must prevent them.

²⁰ Kokou Antoine Ogawin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 11, 2003.

²¹ Fanou, interview with author, Sunday, July 6, 2003.

²² Félix Sohoundé Péréripé, interview with author, Wednesday, July 9, 2003.

²³ Sohoundé Péréripé, interview with author, July 15, 2003.

²⁴ Blaise Tossou, interview with author, Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

²⁵ Tossou, interview with author, Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

²⁶ Tossou, interview with author, Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

²⁷ Tossou, interview with author, Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

²⁸ Euloge Gandaho, interview with author, Tuesday, July 15, 2003.

²⁹ Sohoundé Péréripé, interview with author, Wednesday, July 16, 2003.

³⁰ Sohoundé Péréripé, interview with author, Wednesday, July 16, 2003.

³¹ Fanou, interview with author, Thursday, July 17, 2003.

³² Fanou, interview with author, Thursday, July 17, 2003.

³³ Fanou, interview with author, Thursday, July 17, 2003.

³⁴ Fanou, interview with author, Thursday, July 17, 2003.

³⁵ These suggestions are based on the professional practices of Western newspapers. The challenge to newspapers in Cotonou appears to be more of an identification issue. See George Cheney's "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." In Steven R. Corman, et. al., *Foundations of Organizational Communication: A Reader* (White Plains, NY: Long Publishers USA, 1995):196-208.

³⁶ This could be an example of cultural differences. American businesses usually adhere to rigid time schedules. Other cultures, particularly Africa, view time differently, as Obeng-Quaidoo's work suggests in Chapter Two. See also: Larry A. Samovar & Richard E. Porter's *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (Eighth Edition. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1997): 394-395.

³⁷ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.

Notes, Chapter Six

¹ Hounkponou, interview with author, Monday, June 2, 2003.

² This figure was confirmed by a number of the journalists and scholars interviewed.

³ Schudson 1978, 14-31.

⁴ Gaye Tuchman, *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality* (New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978): 158-159. Alexis de Tocqueville also captures the flavor of the pre-Constitutional era in *Democracy in America* (New York: A Bantam Classic Book, 2000). This tension is expanded upon by Daniel Boorstin in *The Americans: The National Experience* (New York: Random House, 1965) and *The Americans: The Democratic Experience* (New York: Random House, 1973).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Edmund B. Lambeth, "Public Journalism as Cultural Change." In Edmund B. Lambeth, Philip E. Meyer, and Esther Thomson, eds., *Assessing Public Journalism* (Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1998): 232.

⁷ Tuchman 1978, 163.

⁸ Ibid., 169.

⁹ Ibid., 66. See also: Allison 1986; and McLeod and Hawley 1964.

¹⁰ Clifford G. Christians, "The Common Good as First Principle." In Theodore L. Glasser, ed., *The Idea of Public Journalism* (New York: The Guilford Press: A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc., 1999): 67. Christians also writes about the common good in an earlier essay in *Mixed News: The Public/Civic/-*

Communitarian Journalism Debate, Jay Black, ed., (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997): 18-33.

¹¹ Davis Merritt, *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough* (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995): 114.

¹² Independent panels undertake accreditation of Western colleges and universities. One of the most notable ones for journalism programs is the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC).

¹³ John Henry Newman provides guidelines for an effective liberal arts education in *The Idea of a University* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996).

¹⁴ A Western example of this would be the Pew Center for Civic Journalism in College Park, MD. The center was “created by the Pew Charitable trusts to help stimulate citizen involvement in community issues,” according to the center’s site at <http://www.pewcenter.org/>

¹⁵ Voglozin, interview with author, Wednesday, June 25, 2003.

¹⁶ Megnassan, interview with author, Saturday, July 5, 2003.

¹⁷ One of the best-known organizations for evaluating media staffs and resources is the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla. <http://www.poynter.org/>

¹⁸ Campbell 1998.

Appendix A

Daily newspapers in Cotonou visited in June 2003

<u>Publication</u>	<u>Contact</u>
1. La Nation (state-operated newspaper)	Akuété Assevi
2. Le Matin	Kokou Antoine Ogawin
3. Le Matinal	Agapit Maforikan
4. Les Echos du Jour	Maurice Chabi
5. Le Progres	Tiburce Adagbe
6. Le Point au Quotidien	Fernando Hessou
7. L'Aurora	Patrick Adjamonsi
8. Liberté	Sylvestre Fohoungo
9. La Cloche	Vincent Metonnou
10. La Depeche du Soir	Mouléro Soton
11. Fraternite	Malick Gomina
12. La Pyramide	Christophe Hodonou
13. Le Republicain	Isidore Zinsou
14. L'Informateur	Clément Adechian
15. La Nouvelle Tribune	Vincent Folly
16. Le Telegramme	Etienne Houessou
17. L'Evenement du Jour	Septime Tolli
18. Nókoe	Sylvia d'Almeida
19. L'Araignee (Internet-only publication)	Brice Wilfrid Toffoun

Appendix B

Deontology Code for the Benin Press

Approved: September 1999

Preamble: National associations of professionals of media and communication claim their commitment to perpetuate the traditions of the struggle for a free press.

They also commit themselves to promote a democratic culture in conformity to the December 11, 1990, constitution that made provision for a free press.

They are convinced the responsibilities that are bestowed upon journalists are priorities, especially regarding the employers and their readers.

They reaffirm that this mission can be accomplished only according to professional ethics. They, therefore, decided to work out a deontology code that clearly sets forth the rights and duties of a journalist in his everyday work in Benin.

National association of professional of media and communication agree with this declaration. They commit themselves to fully respect in their everyday work the principles that the deontology embodies for the dignity, the credibility, and the prestige of journalism in Benin.

Declaration of a Journalists' Duties

In his search for information and in the manner in which it is reported and/or broadcast, the journalists' duties are the following:

Article 1: Honesty and the right of the people to receive true information.

Because of the people's right to know the truth, the journalist is bound to report an event as accurately as possible, no matter how difficult that may be.

Article 2: Social responsibilities.

The journalist will publish only information of which the source, the truthfulness, and the accuracy, are established.

Even the slightest doubt compels him not to publish or to openly express his doubt.

Information that is likely to endanger society needs to be accurate and, at times, may even require a certain amount of reserve.

Article 3: Publishing corrections, and the right of a reader to reply.

When incorrect or inaccurate information is published, it should be corrected or clarified immediately.

The right of a reader or an organization to reply should be done according to existing laws.

All responses should be published or broadcast by the medium that originally published or broadcast the story in question.

Article 4: The respect of privacy and of human dignity.

Journalists respect the individual's right of privacy and human dignity. Only public interest can justify the publishing of information dealing with a person's privacy.

Article 5: Professional integrity, gift, and remuneration.

Beside his base salary, the journalist must refuse money or any other gifts from any person connected with his services no matter what the value or the motivation.

He may not succumb to any pressure or accept any editorial directive from anyone except his editor.

Article 6: Plagiarism.

Plagiarism, libel, defamation, insult, and false accusation are forbidden.

Article 7: Professional secrecy.

The journalist keeps a professional secret and must not divulge the source of information obtained under confidentiality.

Article 8: The difference between stories and editorials.

A journalist has the liberty to take a side on any given issue.

He has the obligation to separate commentaries from factual stories. In the case of commentaries, he must properly balance each opinion.

Article 9: The difference between news and advertisements.

News and advertisements must remain separate.

Article 10: Racial and ethnic hatred.

The journalist must refrain the publication of any material that would incite racial, ethnic, or religious hatred.

He must refrain from all forms of discrimination. And he cannot excuse the committing of any crime.

Article 11: Sensationalism.

The journalist must avoid sensational headlines that have no connection to the corresponding story.

Article 12: Restrictions of information.

No information should be altered or deleted unless it represents a danger to national security.

Article 13: The presentation of information.

The journalist, in agreement with his supervisors, is responsible for the publication, the choice of pictures, sound bites, images, and commentaries.

When a story has been reconstructed, the journalist must explicitly indicate this to the audience.

When archived material is utilized, this also must be noted to the audience.

Article 14: Professional honor.

The journalist must refrain from using unethical methods for gathering information, pictures, and illustrations.

Article 15: Protection of minors.

The journalist must respect and protect the rights of minors by not publishing pictures and identities.

Article 16: Violence and obscenities.

The journalist must refrain as long as possible from publishing violent, graphic, and obscene images.

Article 17: Confraternity.

The journalist must seek confraternity. He must refrain from using the media for personal revenge.

The journalists must not solicit the position of his peer. He must not offer to do the job for less, resulting in his peer to be fired.

Article 18: Incompatibility between the positions of journalists and press secretary.

The duties of a press secretary, public relations professionals, and other similar functions are incompatible with the cumulative exercises of the journalistic profession.

Article 18: The duty of competency.

Journalists must take into account the limit of their skills and knowledge before publishing an article or producing a broadcast.

The journalist can only undertake topics after a minimum effort and investigation. The journalist must constantly strive to improve his professional skills and talents by deepening his general knowledge and participating in seminars sponsored by professional organizations.

Article 19: Jurisdictions.

The existing self-regulatory media institutions must sanction any violation of the present code of deontology.

The journalists must accept the jurisdiction of his peers and the decisions of the self-regulatory institutions.

Journalists are obliged to know the legislation regulating the press.

Declaration of Rights

In the exercise of their profession, journalists must claim the following rights:

Article 21: Free access to sources.

In the exercise of his profession, the journalist must have access to all forms of information. He has a right to investigate all facts affecting public life.

Article 22: The refusal of subordination.

The journalist must have the right to resist all subordination contrary to the editorial line of his news organization.

Article 23: The clause of conscience.

In the exercise of his profession, the journalist must invoke the clause of his conscience. He can refuse to write or broadcast commentaries or political editorials that conflict with the professional code of the deontology. He cannot censor the work of his peers except for professional reasons.

In the case of a conflict with his conscience, the journalist can free himself of all contract with his news organization, and he is entitled to the same rights as he would if he were laid off.

Article 24: The protection of the journalist.

Everywhere in the country, and this with no condition of restriction, the journalist has the right to the security of his person, the security of his professional equipment, the right of his legal protection, and the right of the respect of his dignity.

Article 25: The obligation of consultation.

The editors must be informed of all significant decisions that affect the news organization. They must be, at least, consulted about all definitive decisions affecting the composition of the editorial staff: hiring, layoffs, and promotions or other changes.

Article 26: The contract and remuneration.

In consideration of his function and responsibility, the journalist has the right not only to benefit from collective conventions, but he also has the right of an individual contract guaranteeing his material and moral security as well as a remuneration corresponding to his social role and that can lead to his economic independence.

Cotonou, September 24, 1999

Bibliography

- Allison, M. "A Literature Review of Approaches to the Professionalism of Journalists." *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1986. 1: 1-19.
- Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Aristotle. *The Rhetoric*. W. Rhys Roberts, trans. New York: Modern Library, 1954).
- . *The Politics*. T.A. Sinclair, trans. New York: Penguin Classics, 1992.
- Arnett, Ronald & Pat Arneson. *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope, and Interpersonal Relationships*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Auerbach, Erich. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. W.R. Trask, trans. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swindler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985.
- "Benin." *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1993-1994*. New York: Freedom House, 1994.
- Bernstein, Carl & Bob Woodward. *All The President's Men*. New York: Warner Books Edition, 1976.
- Betts, R.F. *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961.
- Black, Jay. (ed.). *Mixed News: The Public/Civic/Communitarian Journalism Debate*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1997.
- Boorstin, Daniel. *The Americans: The National Experience*. New York: Harvest, 1965.
- . *The Americans: The Democratic Experience*. New York: Random House, 1973.
- Bourgault, Louise M. *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Bradlee, Benjamin. *A Good Life: Newspapering and Other Adventures*. New York: A Touchstone Book. Published by Simon & Schuster. 1995.

- Brant, Irving. *James Madison: The Virginia Revolutionist*. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941.
- Bretton, Henry. *Power and Politics in Africa*. Chicago: Aldine, 1973.
- Brickson, Shelley. "The Impact of Identity Orientation on Individual and Organizational outcomes in Demographically Diverse Settings." *Academy of Management Review*, 2000. 25: 82-101.
- Buber, Martin. *Between Man and Man*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.
- . *I and Thou*. Ronald Gregor Smith, trans. 2nd ed. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987.
- Campbell, W. Joseph. *The Emergent Independent Press in Benin and Cote D'Ivoire: From Voice of the State to Advocate of Democracy*. Westport, CT.: Praeger, 1998.
- Carey, James. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Carver, Richard. *Truth from Below: The Emergent Press in Africa*. London: International Center Against Censorship, 1991.
- Cater, Douglass. *The Fourth Branch of Government*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.
- Cheney, George. "The Rhetoric of Identification and the Study of Organizational Communication." In Steven R. Corman, et. al., *Foundations of Organizational Communication: A Reader*. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers USA, 1995. 196-208.
- Christians, Clifford G. "The Common Good as First Principle." In Glasser, Theodore L., ed., *The Idea of Public Journalism*. New York: The Guilford Press: A Division of Guilford Publications, Inc., 1999.
- Coleman, Renita. "Use of Visual Communication in Public Journalism." *Newspaper Research Journal*, 2000, 21 (4): 17-37.
- Deetz, Stanley. *Transforming Communication Transforming, Business: Building Responsive and Responsible Workplaces*. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press, Inc., 1995.
- Dewey, John. *The Public & Its Problems*. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press, 1954.
- Ellis, Joseph J. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 2002.

- Fallows, James. *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc., 1997.
- Farias, Paulo Fernando de Moraes. "The Gesere of Borgu: A Neglected Type of Diaspora." In Austen, Ralph A. *In Search of Sunjata: The Mande Oral Epic as History, Literature and Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 1999.
- Faringer, Gunilla. *Press Freedom in Africa*. New York: Praeger, 1991.
- Fisher, Walter R. *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia, SC.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987.
- Foss, Sonja. "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery." *Communication Studies*, 1994-95. 45 (3-4): 213-224.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. (P. Rabinow, ed.). New York: The New Press, 1994.
- . "What is an Author?" In *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*. J. Faubion, ed. New York: The New Press, 1998. 205-222.
- Freire, Paulo. *Cultural Action for Freedom*. Cambridge: Harvard Educational Review, 1980.
- . 1970. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. M. Bergman Ramos, trans. New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc. [2000].
- Gannon, Martin J. *Understanding Global Cultures: Metaphorical Journeys Through 23 Nations*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretations of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- . 2000. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. Third Edition. New York: Basic Books, Inc. [1983].
- Giddens, Anthony. 1992. *The Transformation of Intimacy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Giray, Erin. *Nsiirin! Nsiirin! Jula Folktales from West Africa*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press. 1996.
- Glaser, Barney G. & Anselm L. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter [1999].
- Grinker, Roy Richard & Christopher B. Steiner, eds. *Perspectives on Africa: A Reader in Culture, History, and Representation*. Malden: MA: Blackwell, 1997.

- Gutting, Gary. (ed.). 1994. *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *A Theory of Communicative Action*, 3 vols. Boston: Beacon, 1983.
- . *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. T. Burger, trans. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000.
- Hall, Edward T. *The Hidden Dimension*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969.
- Halliday, E.M. *Understanding Thomas Jefferson*. New York: Perennial: An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers, 2001.
- Hamilton, Alexander; James Madison & John Jay. *The Federalist Papers*. G. Wills, ed. New York: Bantam, 1982.
- Haule, John James. "Old Paradigm and New Order in the African Context: Toward an Appropriate Model of Communication and National Development." *Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*. 1984, 33:3-15.
- Hauser, Gerard A. *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1999.
- Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Hunt, Gaillard. *The Life of James Madison*. New York: Russell & Russell, 1968.
- Husserl, Edmund. *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. London: Collier Books, 1969.
- Huxford, John. "Beyond the Referential: Uses of Visual Symbolism in the Press." *Journalism*, 2001. 2 (1): 45-71.
- Kanneh, Kadiatu. *African Identities: Race, Nation, and Culture in Ethnography, Pan-Africanism, and Black Literatures*. New York: Routledge, 1998.
- Kluckhohn, Clyde. *Mirror for Man: A Survey of Human Behavior and Social Attitudes*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1949.
- Kluckhohn, Florence & Fred Strodtbeck. *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, 1961.
- Koch, Adrienne. *Jefferson and Madison: The Great Collaboration*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950.

- Koch, Adrienne & William Peden, eds. *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. New York: The Modern Library, 1998.
- Lambeth, Edmund B. "Public Journalism as Cultural Change." In Lambeth, Edmund B.; Phillip E. Meyer & Esther Thornson, eds., *Assessing Public Journalism*. Columbia, MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1998.
- Lasch, Christopher. *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996.
- Liebling, A.J. *The Press*. New York: Pantheon Books. 1961.
- Lippmann, Walter. *Public Persons*. G. Harrison, ed. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1976.
- . *Liberty and the News*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1995.
- . *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997.
- . *The Phantom Public*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers. 1999.
- Luria [also Lurriia], Aleksandr Romanovich. *Cognitive Development: Its Cultural and Social Foundations*. Michael Cole, ed. & Martin Lopez-Morillas and Lynn Solotaroff, trans. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 2nd ed., Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984.
- . *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998.
- Martin, Robert. "Africana: Building Independent Mass Media in Africa." *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 1992. 30 (2): 331-340.
- Mbiti, J. *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971.
- McLeod, J.M. & S.E. Hawley, Jr. "Professionalization Among Newsmen." *Journalism Quarterly*, 1964. 41:529-538, 577.
- Merrill, John C. *The Imperative of Freedom: A Philosophy of Journalistic Autonomy*. New York: Freedom House, 1974.
- . *The Dialectic in Journalism: Toward a Responsible Use of Press Freedom*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.
- Merritt, Davis. *Public Journalism and Public Life: Why Telling the News Is Not Enough*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1995.

- Mindich, David T.Z. *Just the Facts: How 'Objectivity' Came to Define American Journalism*. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Moemeka, Andrew. "Socio-Cultural Environment of Communication in Traditional/Rural Nigeria: An Ethnographic Exploration." *Communicatio Socialis Yearbook*, 1984. III: 41-56.
- Mungazi, Dickson A. *Gathering Under the Mango Tree: Values in Traditional Culture in Africa*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 1996.
- Newman, John Henry. *The Idea of a University*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996.
- Obeng-Quaidoo, Isaac. "Culture and Communication Research Methodologies in Africa: A proposal for Change." *Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Studies*, 1985. 36:109-120.
- Okpewho, Isidore. (ed.). *The Oral Performance in Africa*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books Limited. 1990.
- Ong, Walter. *Interfaces of the Word*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977.
- . *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Palmer, Allen W. "Reinventing the Democratic Press of Benin." In Eribo, Festus & William Jong-Ebot, eds., *Press Freedom and Communication in Africa*. Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, Inc., 1997. 243-261.
- Peterson, Merrill D. *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- The Pew Center for Civic Journalism. College Park, MD. Retrieved from <<http://www.pewcenter.org/>>. 2004.
- Plato, *Phaedrus*. In Bizzell, Patricia & Bruce Herzberg, eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition*. Boston: Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, 1990.
- The Poynter Institute for Media Studies. St. Petersburg, FL. Retrieved from <<http://www.poynter.org/>>. 2004.
- Pratt, Cornelius. "Ethical Perspectives on Communication Research for Africa's Development: An Extension of the Agenda-Dynamics Model." In Lent, John, ed., *Social Science Models and Their Impact on the Third World*. Williamsburg, Va.: Department of Anthropology, College of William & Mary, 1991. 71-93.

- . “Fallacies and Failures of Communication for Development: A Commentary on Africa South of the Sahara.” *International Journal of Mass Communication Studies*. 1993. 52: 93-107.
- Randall, Willard Stern. *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1993.
- Reporters Without Borders. Retrieved from main page <http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=20>. International rankings for 2003: <http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=8247>. 2004.
- Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 1. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- . *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 2. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.
- . *Time and Narrative*. Vol. 3. K. McLaughlin & D. Pellauer, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Rokeach, Milton. *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers, 1968.
- Rubin, Leslie & Brian Weinstein. *Introduction to African Politics: A Continental Approach*. New York: Praeger, 1974.
- Rutland, Robert Allen. *James Madison: The Founding Father*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987.
- Ryan, Michael. “Journalism Ethics, Objectivity, Existential Journalism, Standpoint Epistemology, and Public Journalism.” *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 2001. 16 (1): 3-22.
- Samovar, Larry A. & Richard E. Porter. *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*. Eighth Edition. New York: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1997
- Schell, Jonathan. *The Fate of the Earth*. New York: Avon Books, 1982.
- Schrag, Calvin O. *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*. Bloomington, IN.: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Schudson, Michael. “The Objectivity Norm in American Journalism,” *Journalism*, 2001. 2 (2): 149-17.
- . *The Power of News*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995.
- . *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1978.

- Scollon, Ron & Suzanne Wong Scollon. *Intercultural Communication: A Discourse Approach*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers Inc.
- Sheldon, Garrett Ward. *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1991.
- Siebert, Frederick S., Theodore Peterson & Wilber Schramm. *Four Theories of the Press*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956.
- Smolicz, Jerzy Jaroslaw. *Cultural Values and Scientific Development in Cultural Heritage vs. Technological Development*. R.E. Vente, R.S. Bhathal, R.M. Nakhooda, eds. Maruzen, Asia, 1981.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. H. Reeve, trans. New York: A Bantam Classic Book, 2000.
- Tuchman, Gaye. *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*. New York: The Free Press, A Division of Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978.
- Van Maanen, John. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Weber, Max. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: The Free Press, 1964.
- Wills, Garry. *James Madison*. New York: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2002.
- Wright, Bonnie. "The Power of Articulation." In Arens, W. & Ivan Karp, eds. *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. 39-59.
- Yarbrough, Jean M. *American Virtues: Thomas Jefferson on the Character of a Free People*. Lawrence, KS.: University Press of Kansas, 1998.
- Zall, Paul M. *Jefferson on Jefferson*. Lexington, KY.: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002.