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# Specialized News Services' Fortunes Follow

By Jacqueline Trescott

Walking around the small, cramped offices of the African Bibliographic Center, Dan Matthews chuckles, a laugh touched with skittish disbelief.

For 11 years Matthews, the center's director, has been waiting for a break—working without vacations, accumulating a personal debt of \$10,000, weathering accusations that he was a spy, surviving a broken first marriage and, at times, subsisting on pork-and-bean suppers.

He's been waiting for better times, for Africa to become the news of men, not giraffes, and things are beginning to look up.

"Now that Africa is numero uno we have

people bouncing off the walls in here," says the 44-year-old Matthews, whose scarecrow frame (155 pounds, 5 feet 11 inches) is one sign of his sacrifices. "And, 1978 will be the first year that I will be able to properly clothe myself and my wife."

Matthews is representative of one of a half-dozen specialized outlets of African news in America and abroad. They range from daily audio services to glossy magazines and are now finding their fortunes on the upswing.

News from Africa is now more often on the front page, and parts of the continent are moving toward bloody conflicts, making the small

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News of Africa

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## News of Africa and Fortunes of

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group of specialized news services more important.

Jimmy Carter, both as a candidate and President has given interviews to two African-specialty magazines. On the cover of the December issue of Africa, a 6-year-old news-monthly published in London with a circulation of 123,000, a very serious Carter is peering into a relief map of Africa, his chin almost resting on Angola.

Just as the Vietnam war gave birth to an alternative press a decade ago, so has the Africa of the 1970s. Some of the same people are involved. Internews, an international news agency based in Berkeley, Calif., grew out of the antiwar newspaper, the War Bulletin.

Today, as in the Vietnam war era, the interest is high and the need for supplemental news exists. No longer are the names—Ian Smith, Julius Nyerere, John Vorster, Steve Biko and Kenneth Kuanda — unfamiliar. No longer do Reed Kramer and the rest of the African News staff in Durham, N.C., have to defer their \$250-a-month salary for operating expenses. Gone are the extra dishwashing or teaching jobs.

"We do have a sense of accomplishment," says Kramer, 30, "but especially because the Africans appreciate our work. When President Samora Machel (Mozambique) was at the United Nations, he was deluged with interview requests. And he turned down all except ours."

News gathering is the first function of the audio and print services but they also have become valuable sources for the major media. Initially the relationships were mildly antagonistic since the alternatives were founded to fill gaps and reverse stereotypes in the general news media's reporting. In recent years, partly with the alternatives' help, major media

have taken African news more seriously, says David Wiley, chairman of the African Studies Center of Michigan State University.

"When we first started, news directors would ask, 'What's happening in Africa that our listeners would be interested in?' The big guys never called," recalls Kramer, one of the founders of the African News Service. Established four years ago, it has a weekly news digest, which has jumped to 450 circulation since September, and a temporarily-suspended audio feed. "But recently we have been deluged for background information. Within the last three months we have had calls from 'Sixty Minutes,' NBC, The Washington Post, the L.A. Times, The New York Times, The Boston Globe, and Canadian and British Broadcasting. Most are now regular subscribers to the digest."

But the impact of these news services is broader than the consciousness-raising of other media. When Sen. Dick Clark's staff needed background on American opinion in the Angola War for congressional hearings, they called Matthews' Bibliographic Center. Each day the German Parliament monitors Habari, the center's 2½-minute daily capsule, reached by a routine telephone call. At Michigan State University, the African Studies Center uses both Habari and the African News Service for their summaries and local broadcast feeds.

"Both of them are unique because they have access to different sources," says David Wiley. "In the last five years there have been increments in the quality of reporting from the major papers and networks but it's still uneven in quality. Some of the old cliches of Africa are still reflected in the regular, major coverage."

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By Gerald Martineau—The Washington Post

Dan Matthews

nations that comprise the African continent adds to the newer sources' sensitivity and contacts. Jennifer Davis, the head of a collective that produces Southern Africa, a New York-based monthly magazine, is a white South African who left because she feared her political views would lead to her arrest. Crispin Chindongo, the editor of African Directions, a new journal, was an active politician in Malawi before he came to Washington as a diplomat.

During the first days of the Soweto riots in 1976, the staff of African News made phone calls directly to the black township outside Johannesburg. They had made contacts; everyone else relied on the police reports. "Overall their experiences give the alternatives a different perspective."

Over

# Specialized Agencies Increase

says David Lampel, the news director of WBSL-FM in New York City, one of the highest-rated stations in the country. He uses both Internews and African News. "In the 44-station market of New York, we have to have an advantage, we believe those services give us an edge."

Reliability is often a question with burgeoning news services. "We have had no problems with either Internews or African News since we went on the air a year and a half ago," says Jim Lee, the news director of WBSP, a 50,000-watt FM station in Warren, N.C. "What is important is that the alternative services have not only reported the struggles in Ethiopia and the Southern Sahara before anyone else, but they place things in context. Recently an activist in Namibia made a strong statement criticizing South Africa. And Associated Press ran a story describing him as a SWAPO militant, with his remarks. Internews reported the same statement but added that it came in the wake of some executions and arrests that had been questioned by the West Germans, British and the Americans."

"Is the Nixon-Kissinger tar baby still with us? Well, according to the maiden issue of *Washington Intrigue*, one of its legacies still is, that of the report of the supersecret national reconnaissance office on South Africa's military might which made it possible for Washington to back a mandatory U.N. arms embargo against Pretoria. The report influenced the formulation of Carter's presidential review memorandum, PRM 4, on South Africa. As a result, *Washington Intrigue* concludes that the U.S. remains 'stuck to the South Africa tar baby.'"

Reberl broadcast, Dec. 6, 1977.

The style of the alternative news sources ranges from the dry and staid to the lively and passionate.

*Hubari* has a breezy tone. Produced by 17 volunteers from the Bibliographic Center and the *Washington Task Force* on African Affairs, it is compiled from overseas radio broadcasts, the daily press, congressional reports and some firsthand reporting.

It has many roles. It reports (and occasionally scoops): for example, covering the African objections to Nathaniel Davis as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in 1975, three months before the major press. It serves as a hotline, answering hundreds of calls from Nigerians living in the United States after a coup in 1975.

Though they are located in Durham, N.C., the seven-member staff of *African News*, supported by their half-dozen stringers in Africa, has been able to break some important stories. Very early, the service reported the signs of CIA-covert involvement in Angola, the war in Western Sahara, and the viewpoints of the Eritrean guerrillas in the Ethiopian conflict. Durham was chosen, says Tami Hultmar, 30, who recently traveled to Morocco and Algeria and reported on the Sahara conflict, "because the expenses are minimal, the rents are cheap and the radio reception is good." African News hopes to reinstitute their audio service next month.

"At this stage of the liberation process we have become very sensitive to the role played by the world's big powers in affecting the direction of that process. In a sense America, your country, has played a shameful role in her relations with our country."

Steve Biko to Sen. Dick Clark, part of a letter reprinted in *Africa Report*, November-December, 1977.

The Africa-specialty magazines have a longer history than the audio services but, in the last few years, have turned to broader political reporting and analysis. *Africa Report*, the journal of the *African American Institute*, and the oldest of this group, has moved away from a cultural emphasis to a political one under its latest editor, *Anthony Hughes*.

Hughes, 43, is a former journalist and government press officer in Kenya and Tanzania. The latest issue contained three stories on South Africa, an interview with the U.N. Commissioner for Namibia, reports from Botswana and Zimbabwe among its 60 pages.

All of the magazines available in Washington — including *Africa* and its companion magazine, *Africa Woman*, and *Jeune Afrique* — are still striving to bring a different point of view from that the major media offer. Sometimes that effort is not financially successful. *First World*, an Atlanta-based black magazine that attempts to bring "a pan-African interpretation of world events," has temporarily suspended publication.

The survival tactic of the alternative press, as the major media covers its once-exclusive ground more thoroughly, is to stay ahead. Right after the U.N. Security Council voted for a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa, most of the daily papers detailed the vote and the status of South African military power.

But Steven Talbot of *Internews* explained how an economic sanction would be much more effective. Two weeks later the other media began exploring the feasibility, and impact, of the U.S. investments in South Africa. "All we can do is anticipate the next crisis area, or the next diplomatic debate, and hope the others follow our lead," says Talbot.