After 5 decades, the future depends on ability to adapt

The Nation has become a journalistic mzee of East Africa, writes HIS HIGHNESS THE AGA KHAN

As THE NATION MEDIA Group (NMG) marks its 50th anniversary, it would be too limiting to perceive this occasion as a mere milestone in a history of a media organization, no matter how successful. The Nation’s path has been closely twined with the history of Kenya, East Africa, and the entire continent during a period filled with momentous developments.

NMG itself has undergone a remarkable transformation. From two struggling Kenyan newspapers, one Kiswahili and one English, half a century ago, the group has grown into the largest multi-media enterprise in East and Central Africa. At the same time, the organization has evolved from a small private company into a publicly-traded corporation, one of the largest on the Kenya stock exchange, with a majority of its shares owned by individual East African shareholders.

My own role in the Nation Media Group has also evolved considerably. Seven years ago I gave my personal shares in NMG to the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED) – the economic development arm of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The move not only gave NMG a new source of corporate strength but it also anchored the company in a broader development philosophy designed to bring excellence and best practices to societies in the developing world. It also allowed NMG to benefit from the Network’s significant experience in East Africa.

The Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development is neither a charitable foundation nor a vehicle for wealth generation. It is a for-profit, international development agency that, because of its institutional background and social conscience, invests in projects, which will make a positive contribution to the quality of life for those who are impacted by their activities.

The broader philosophy of the Aga Khan Development Network is founded on the premise that developing societies deserve the best and that settling for less, though often tempting, is an increasingly dangerous option. Our world is competitive: like other AKFED companies, the Nation Media Group must strive to meet world-class standards if it is to thrive and grow in the globalized world of the 21st century.

Our Network, I should also emphasize, is active in a broad range of development fields, from environmental, humanitarian and civil society projects to microfinance and infrastructure investments, to cultural, health-related and educational support. East Africa has been an important setting for our work in all of these arenas, including, most recently, major new initiatives in education.

For example, Kenya is the home of the first functioning Aga Khan Academies, one of the region’s first schools to provide world class primary and secondary education to talented students in 14 countries across three continents. I am pleased that East Africa will also host the continent’s first faculty of Arts and Sciences of the Aga Khan University (AKU) as well as the university’s new Graduate School of Media and Communication. It is my sincere hope that the school, which will be initially located in Nairobi and later extended to the new Arusha campus, will help Africa in particular and the developing world in general to develop an ever-stronger corps of owners, media managers, public-spirited professional journalists who will be able to adapt and excel in a rapidly changing media environment.

I believe that the media in general and the Nation Group in particular can play a central role in the shaping of the region and the continent in the years ahead, as part of the growing influence of civil society institutions in an increasingly pluralistic environment. Indeed Koit Annan, arbitrator of the post-election reconciliation agreement in Kenya, acknowledged the Nation’s work in mobilising the forces of civil society in the cause of stability.

Anniversaries tend to lend themselves to reminiscing about the past— and, most appropriately, to saluting those who have been a part of that past, as I am pleased to join in doing. But commemorative occasions also present an excellent opportunity to look toward the future. NMG has had an impressive record of post achievement, dealing successfully over five decades with a wide variety of challenges and opportunities, and emerging as what some have called a journalistic “Mzee” of East Africa. But now, NMG’s future will depend on its continued ability to learn and to adapt, to attract leaders and employees of the highest quality, and, driven by an ethic of responsible service, maintain the confidence of its reading, viewing, advertising and shareholder constituents.
We can’t go too far wrong when a nation talks to itself

By PHILIP OCHIENG

When I first joined the Nation as a cub reporter in 1966, I never ceased to be intrigued by a message in large print pinned on the inside walls of the old Nation House in Nairobi’s Tom Mboya Street. It read: “A free newspaper. I suppose, is a NATION talking to itself.”

Whoever chose it as the Nation’s motto – probably Michael Curtis (the founding managing director) or John Bierman (the founding editor) or the Aga Khan himself (the investor) – it was a most appropriate dictum for the circumstances in which the newspaper was being born.

For it was a brilliant play on the word “nation”. It sought to identify their coming publication with the problems and aspirations of another nation in the last years of gestation – the Kenyan nation.

By naming itself NATION and giving prominence to the dictum on the walls, the instigators of the Nation were clear that their aim was for the Nation to be born together with the other nation, so that, thereafter, the two nations could grow up together in symbiosis.

Would one nation (the people and their new state) help the other nation (the newspaper group) to make its mission manifest by gathering, editing, commenting on and disseminating information countrywide and internationally – freely and without any fear of retaliation?

One of the more interesting features of the first edition of the Nation was a cartoon depicting the Nation as a baby boy sleeping in its cot, watched by the redoubtable Tom Mboya and Ronald Ngala among other nationalists. Underneath the cartoon, one commented: “He’s a cute little boy, but will he behave?”

The question could, of course, also have gone the other way.

By midnight on December 12, 1963, watched as the Union flag was lowered for good for Jomo Kenyatta to hoist in its place our new red-green-and-black standard.

Have the newspaper and the state maintained their initial “good looks”? Have they behaved with admiration? Have they proved of adequate mutual assistance? The probable answer is: Not as much as the two might have hoped for as they celebrated their first anniversaries.

Yet, of course, the answer to the last question must be a big “Yes”. The two nations have been almost identical-minded on a large number of objective national interests.

However, one nation appears to have progressively lapsed in delivering its promises to the people – in terms of quantity, quality and speed – and the other nation has tried to discharge its duty in the division of labour – by reminding its older twin of this lapse.

This has necessarily created tension between the two nations, a tension which has increased with age.

Policemen have invaded newspaper offices and confiscated or incapacitated their equipment. They have clobbered journalists and destroyed their cameras on public occasions. Merely for doing my duty with a critical pen, I have had to spend harrowing days in squalid police cells.

Having edited an official newspaper, I know, however, that many statesmen recognise that the state desperately needs an independent press.

The editors, for their part, know that, despite this unreliability of the political class – nay, probably because of it – it is the political class that promises to provide the newspapers with the biggest, raciest and most lucrative headlines.

Between our two nations, it might be called rikia rivalry or sibling jealousy or – as with the gods of mythology – “fraternal contending”.

The task is to guide the contention in such a manner that it throws more light than heat into the social arena of contention. Let neither of the two nations forget the words of that London newspaper proprietor: A newspaper can be free only if it is a Nation talking to itself freely, boldly, knowledgeably and with a clear national purpose.

The first Nation published on March 20, 1960. It sold for 30 cents.
By any measure, 1960 was an epoch-defining year. At a time when the Cold War between the Kremlin and the West held a fearful world in its grip, American spy pilot Gary Powers was shot down over Soviet territory. France tested its first atomic bomb, Fidel Castro nationalised industry in Cuba and Nikita Khrushchev angrily pounded a desk at the United Nations.

A spread of smuggled photos “Black Monday at Sharpeville.” A stream of captured photographs showed the scattered bodies of 69 South African blacks gunned down by Sten-gun armed police during a demonstration against that country’s draconian pass laws. Ten of the dead were children and eight were women; 180 others were injured.

“There was no warning,” reported The Nation’s special correspondent, “no shots over the heads of the crowd, not even firing at the feet. It was a concentrated, cold-blooded burst after burst into the packed crowd.”

The massacre prompted widespread outrage and international condemnation and became a turning point in South African history, driving the regime deep into isolation until the fall of apartheid many decades later.

But first, another South African sensation grabbed headlines in Kenya. Just two weeks after Sharpeville, a pro-colony anti-apartheid white farmer shot Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd twice in the face. The tough old Afrikaner survived but in 1966, he was stabbed to death in the Cape Town parliament building by a messenger who was later declared insane. Few new newspapers could have feasted on such a significant diet of events of immediately relevant import.

The Nation was a Sunday paper, changing its title to Sunday Nation shortly before the Daily Nation was launched seven months later. It was not the sort of newspaper Kenyans were accustomed to read. For a start, it

**1960-1985: The long journey for**

The Nation was born at a time of turbulent world affairs on March 20, 1960, and it described itself as East Africa’s newest, liveliest Sunday newspaper

*After Banda, Jomo*

“After Banda, Jomo” ran a front page story on April 3, 1960. The release of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda in Malawi had set off a settler community. By this time it was felt enough to cause panic within the settler community. Although Mau Mau activities had long ended, a state of emergency was still in force, the economy was fragile, land values were plummeting and the talk among farmers was of selling-up and fleeing south.

On the day after The Nation’s birth, a Johannesburg township became an international byword for atrocity and the newspaper’s second issue carried the heading, “Black Monday at Sharpeville.”

A spread of smuggled photos showed the scattered bodies of some 69 South African blacks gunned down by Sten-gun armed police during a demonstration against that country’s draconian pass laws. Ten of the dead were children and eight were women; 180 others were injured.

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Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.
Nation from conception to maturity

The Nation’s support for majority rule as declared in its launch issue, while proclaiming where the group’s sympathies lay, boldly challenged the establishment’s accepted scenario for the path to independence.

The choice of newspapers in colonial Kenya was limited. For English speakers, in addition to the Standard, there was the Sunday Post and a small number of weekly magazines, prominent among them the Kenya Weekly News published in Nakuru. Ethnic newspapers were available, mainly Asian, but including Barza and Jicho in Kiswahili. To these had recently been added Taifa Leo, the first Kiswahili daily and the Nation Group’s first publishing effort, which it developed in 1959 from a weekly bought from private interests. There were also publications devoted to specific African community interests and written in the languages of those communities.

There was no doubt where Kenya’s established English-language publications stood politically — four-square behind the Governor and the colonial government which in turn acknowledged the authority of the British government in London. Indeed the East African Standard carried Britain’s coat of arms on its front page until the day before Kenya achieved independence, December 12, 1963. Thus The Nation’s stance made it a hostage to fortune, since illiteracy among its target African audience was high, while most of those with consumer power found its political stance too radical by far. It was evident that if the new paper were to succeed, it would be a long and punishing journey. It proved to be so. The commitment to African majority rule was no accident.

Back in 1957, the Aga Khan, leader of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims worldwide, had been talking with young African nationalists such as Tom Mboya and Julius Kiano about what lay ahead in African politics. The formation of Kanu, a coalition of political parties, was a milestone in Kenyan politics. Uniting different politicians who were leading small parties was no mean task. It was no wonder that Kanu faced managerial problems. The stewardship at headquarters was left to Mr Mwai Kibaki, a young economist who had been brought from Makerere to help craft the party manifesto. Kanu received popular support among the Luo, Kikuyu and Kamba and became the majority party. But some of the early problems within the party persisted and the Nation expressed concern that the internal wrangles might blow up in government once Kanu took power.

“The Daily Nation asks it publicly because we believe it is in Kanu’s interests that these internal doubts and quarrels should be faced squarely, openly and as quickly as possible. There can no longer be any doubt that something is seriously wrong with the party. Its senior office holders do not act as a team and there still appears to be no proper machinery for ensuring that policy statements are agreed before they are issued to the public and the Press,” wrote the Nation in December 1961. “Kanu has a duty to itself and to Kenya to deal with the trouble-makers swiftly and ruthlessly. In Mr Kenyatta, Mr Gichuru and Mr Mboya, Kanu possesses formidable leaders of calibre and character.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6
A long and punishing journey for the paper

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

in Kenya’s future.

The Aga Khan assumed leadership of his community at the age of 20 on the death of his grandfather. Having lived in Kenya as a boy, in a house in a Nairobi suburb, his association with the country was no accident. He was well aware that most newspapers in East Africa tended to be mouthpieces of the colonial governments, denying any platform for the aspirations of up-coming African politicians. Believing they were entitled to a full say in the independence debate, he determined to start a newspaper that would be open to all voices.

The Aga Khan’s media aide at the time was Michael Curtis, a former editor of the News Chronicle in London, and it was Curtis who became the architect of a group which grew eventually to dominate the East and Central African publishing market. In the straitened circumstances of the time, however, outside investment proved impossible to secure and so funding of the venture, with all its concomitant risks, came ex-clusively from the Aga Khan. John Bier-man was hired from Fleet Street to be editor and editorial and production staff were recruited, mainly from Brit-ain because of the paucity of trained African journalists and managers. The aim, however, stated and much repeated, was to create a newspaper that would be “written and managed by Africans for Africans.” Curtis rented a former bakery on what was then Victo-ria Street in central Nairobi, it was adapted for newspaper production and the foundations of the group were laid.

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How Nation echoed the national story

WILFRED KIBORO:
Former Group Chief Executive officer of Nation Media and currently the Group’s chairman.

I came to a small company with turnover of around one billion shillings and profit a quarter of a billion shillings but our vision was very clear - we wanted to be the leading media house in Kenya, Ugan-da and Tanzania and later, the Media of Africa for Africa. However we were too depend-ent on one product – the Daily Nation – which contributed 95 per cent of our revenues. We decided to diversify into radio, television and digital. We also introduced daily magazine inserts to generate new revenue streams.

But those were rough times and in many ways the Nation Media Group story became the national story - the story of how Kenyans struggled against single party dictator-ship and for the expansion of the democratic space. After a long struggle for li-cences and then frequencies, we got into broadcasting with a bang. People loved what we were putting out and advertis-ers flocked to us. With time we expanded our broadcasting reach from Nairobi to other towns such as Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu.

With the 2002 election, the people who had been agitat-ing for change came to power and we had to redefine our re-lationship with them to fulfill our mandate of keeping the government on its toes. One of the key goals that kept us focused generally was the dream of joining the billion shilling club in terms of prof-its.

We achieved this in 2002 or 2003 and the Group is now on track to hit the two billion shilling mark. When I joined in 1993 adver-tising revenue was something like Sh20 million a month. By the time I left it was around Sh20 million a day. The two defining moments of my tenure were installing a new Sh750 million printing press and our entry into broadcasting.

Another key time was the 2007 election when we de-liberately tried to maintain balance in our reporting. We worked hard to try to bring the country together. Now Nation must move with the times and we have to reen-gineer ourselves into the dig-ital world to stay relevant. Radio, television and the In-ternet will merge and in ten years time although our core business will still be informing people and linking consum-ers and others, our structure and the way we work will have changed radically.
Think Big

At Safaricom, we understand the importance of Thinking Big, which is why it gives us great pleasure to congratulate a company that took a big idea 50 years ago and has turned it into one of Africa’s leading media conglomerates.

Here is to 50 more years of Thinking Big.

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I have known the company from birth to jubilee and can say our performance has been gold standard

By GERRY LOUGHRAN

I cannot be sure when the idea of writing a history of the Nation group first emerged, but I have a memo in my files dated October 1995 stating that there were strong reasons for publishing such an account.

It said: “The proprietor’s vision and strength of will (and investment commitment) have never been properly acknowledged, nor has the courage of our editors and reporters. Finally, the whole thing is a darned good story and if we don’t tell it now, it will be too late.”

We did not tell it immediately, indeed we took nearly 15 years to do so, but that had more to do with bureaucratic and political vicissitudes than with editorial sloth. And when the story was finally set out in a book, Birth of a Nation, it proved, though I say it myself, to be a very good story indeed.

That I was commissioned as author was probably inevitable, since not only was I available, I had experience with the Nation across the years – from the earliest days (1960-64 as a sub-editor and assistant editor), again in 1983 (executive editor) and in the era of expansion and maturity (1993-98 as a consultant editor). Over many of these years, I contributed a weekly Letter from London to the Sunday Nation, and indeed still do.

Thus tasked with telling a story dating back 50 years, what is the first thing an historian would do? He would race to gather the memories of the pioneers—young men and women in the 1960s but now long retired, scattered far from Africa, perhaps physically not too well. Written sources could be scanned later.

The search proved long and arduous but exciting, too, as retirees were located one by one and happily committed to tape memories that were wholly truthful and authentic as they remembered them, if occasionally roseate and sometimes uncomfortable, too.

Charles Hayes was the ex-colonial government officer who sold the weekly Taifa to the Nation, thus starting the company down the publishing road, and became the group’s first editorial director. I found him in British Columbia, Canada, where he had edited his own local paper for many years along with his wife, Margaret, a one-time Nation stringer in Nakuru and a Kenya memoirist in her own right.

Hayes had owned Taifa jointly with Althea Tebbutt, who became the Nation’s first advertising manager. She lived in New Zealand, but I caught up with her on a visit back to Britain.

I renewed contacts with Errol Trezinski, one of Mrs Tebbutt’s original sales team. Still resident in Kenya, she was by then an international figure known for her writings on colonial-era personalities like Denys Finch Hatton, Karen Blixen, Beryl Markham and Lord Erroll. Her book, Silence Will Speak, was the prime source for the Oscar-winning film, Out of Africa. She lives in a gracious 18th century house on the island of Lamu.

The first managing director, Frank Pattrick, had died in South Africa when my search began, but his successor, Stan Denman, lived in Dorset and invited me over. The hunt for journalists and managers, both with the Nation and opposition media, took me to Geneva and Schonried in Switzerland, Galway and Dub...
lin in Ireland, Dubai, Italy, Australia, and in Britain to London, Cheltenham, Stowmarket, Dover, Newcastle upon Tyne, Nelson Colne, Brighton, Bideford and Devizes.

Recollections arrived by mail and email from Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe and South Africa and many interviews were concluded during return visits to Nairobi. There, Nation officers opened the company’s books to me freely and without restriction.

The greatest prize, however, a treasure trove of information, was made available by Michael Curtis, effectively architect and builder of the whole venture. At 34, Michael had been one of Fleet Street’s youngest editors, piloting the News Chronicle through difficult times. But he disagreed with the owners’ militantly pro-government stance over Britain’s invasion of Suez and resigned on principle.

Joining the Aga Khan as a Press advisor (and much more) shortly after the young prince succeeded his grandfather, Curtis accompanied him on a world tour of his Ismaili community. Confronted with the self-serving and tendentious nature of the colonial-era media, the Aga Khan conceived a vision of an independent Kenya newspaper which would be open to all races, honest and objective, and dogged in the pursuit of truth. It was Michael Curtis who, in 1959, began to turn this dream into reality.

As chief executive, he piloted the organisation through its testing first decade before he relocated to France to assist the Aga Khan in a variety of his other interests. Even then, as a long-time Nation board member, he maintained meticulous files, gold to any prospector.

Invited to stay at his lovely country house near historic Senlis, I spent endless hours perusing minutes, memos, notes and directives about the problems and triumphs of the early years, along with hundreds of letters, telegrams, faxes and old-style “dictabelts” (a distant ancestor of the audio tape) which were exchanged between Michael and the Aga Khan. This information was supported by files at the Aga Khan’s secretariat at nearby Aiglemont and generous assistance from Gerry Wilkinson, a former managing director who, with almost four decades under his belt dating back to 1971, was the company’s longest serving director.

Very few ex-Nation people declined to talk to me, even those whose memories were not entirely positive, though a handful did not respond. Many more politicians did not grace my requests with a reply.

Doing the interviews was mostly a personal pleasure. Not only did I meet up with many old friends, but I made the acquaintance of others of whom I had heard a great deal but never met.

Mostly the sessions lasted a couple of hours, with the interviewee talking into my tape recorder. But for some key people, we held several meetings over a number of days.

I always transcribed the tapes in full, though perhaps as little as five per cent might be used. I felt it necessary to get a feel for the conditions of the time and if the subject wandered off topic, that was fine. How accurate were the recollections? I like to think they were very close to total truth. When possible, I asked other interviewees identical questions and vague memories of dates and times could often be checked in the Nation’s own back copies.

Written information piled up inexorably and I ended up with

**RECOLLECTIONS**

Keeping the author on the right lines

BY GERRY LOUGHRAN

A major fear for authors writing on historical events is of going astray on subjects outside of their expertise. Writing most areas of the group’s history, “Birth of a Nation,” I felt confident and secure because I knew journalism, I knew East Africa and I knew the Nation group. And where I was unsure, there were sources aplenty to confirm or correct the facts.

But in arcane matters of nuance, personal history and the effect of public affairs on private lives, I quickly decided I would need guidance and, happily, I was recommended to a retired Kenyan advocate, Mr Anil Ishani. I quickly realized I could have found no keener or subtler mind to assist in my work.

Anil qualified as a barrister in London in 1959, spent several years back in Kenya with the family firm, Ishani and Ishani Advocates, returned to the UK in 1972, qualifying as a solicitor with a city firm of solicitors, and became a specialist in commercial property matters.

At the same time, he enjoyed the confidence of the founder and begetter of the Nation group, His Highness the Aga Khan, and held a variety of leadership positions in the Ismaili community. Making his home back in Kenya, from 1997 until retirement in 2007, he was Resident Representative of the Aga Khan Development Network. Having served the Aga Khan for 48 years, his guidance was certain and assured.

I have stated elsewhere that I wrote “Birth of a Nation” without direction or restriction and this is true. But as a rally driver depends on his co-pilot, so I needed Anil’s assistance in navigating esoteric areas beyond my ken.

It worked like this: Anil would take away a draft of relevant chapters, peruse them in his meticulous and lawfully way, then return and set out his arguments for change, rephrasing, removal or retention. Sometimes I had simply got my facts wrong – titles, dates, forms of address; in other areas, he might support the facts but question my interpretation or use of language.

For instance, though I knew Kenya, I had not worked there for some years, whereas he had. Gently, he questioned whether my indignation over perceived injustices by officialdom was not more of an outsider’s point of view, a failure to acknowledge success in the face of huge difficulties and to give credit where it was due. In most cases, I have to confess, his judiciousness brought balance to the page, substituting calm level-headedness for unbridled rhetoric.

It was not without apprehension at our several meetings that I glanced at the many yellow stickers jutting from his draft copy. But happily these were not always queries of fact or interpretation but often reminders of supplementary evidence or additional arguments on a question under discussion.

Anil was by no means the only outside source I resorted to in my research for “Birth of a Nation,” but it is fair to say that without the depth and breadth of his knowledge and the accuracy of his perceptions, the book would have been a distinctly lesser achievement.
The Nation editors I have known, from 1964 to 2009

By PHILIP OCHIENG

Although George Githii and I later clashed frequently, I am always grateful to him for opening the gate of journalism to me. It was Githii, editor-in-chief of the Nation, and Michael Curtis, managing director, who offered me my first job as a reporter.

George was also the most remarkable editor I have ever served under. Other editorial pontiffs I have worked with in Kenya include Hilary Ng’weno, Boaz Omori, Joe Rodrigues, Peter Mwaura, George Mbugguss and Wangethi Mwangi.

George was fond of transferring into his articles material from a book he had just read to help him floor his interlocutors. Moreover, his newspaper had a predilection for pursuing to their ends certain burning social issues of the day. I have never seen his equal in the practice of taking a hot topic and charging his investigative reporters to dig down to the taproots.

One day in 1967, after furnishing me with all kinds of literature on Jomo Kenyatta, George locked me in a room where I spent many long weeks studying, making phone calls and then writing numerous lengthy biographical stories on the Grand Old Man.

My articles were then locked up in a safe where they underwent the “criticism” of time for a whole 10 years. It was not until 1978 – when the President died (and long after Githii had left Nation House) – that my articles were retrieved. They were what chief sub-editor John McHafie splashed all over the place (minus my byline) on that fateful day.

Unwittingly, my efforts may well have contributed to George’s departure from the Nation. Some Kenyatta sympathists – perhaps allied to Dr Njoroge Mungai – had heard of them and told the Old Man that George Githii had been “scheming” his death. Mungai’s partisans had a good reason for hating Githii.

It stemmed from the extreme one-sidedness with which his newspaper reported a perennial rivalry between Mungai and Charles Njonjo, the Attorney-General, sometimes known as “Sir Charles.”

The intriguing thing about it was that Githii, Njonjo, Mungai and Kenyatta came from the same political parish in Kiambu District. Before joining the Nation, George had been Kenyatta’s private secretary. Did Githii know something between Njonjo and Mungai which the editor was not sharing with his readers?

But the point is that, while Njonjo was invariably reported in the most brilliant light, what the public read about Mungai was certainly not that. That was the problem. Although an editor has the right to take sides on any issue, he is professionally called upon to back up his position with correct facts, accurate figures and cogent argument.

Knowledge of my “canned” articles may have had something to do with George being arrested and held one day.

But only Githii could have been intrepid enough to sue Bernard Hinga, the police commissioner, for “wrongful confinement.” The court proceedings must have been embarrassing to the government. Although the case was withdrawn, only Mzee Kenyatta could have ordered Githii to pack it in.

However, the most probable immediate cause of George’s departure from Nation House was that he had been writing and publishing some embarrassingly adventurous, one-sided, almost hysterical articles and editorials on such controversies as Israel, the Soviet Union, Shah Reza Pahlavi’s Iran and the leader of the Bora community.

Much cooler headed and hardened was Hilary Ng’weno, the Nation’s first indigenous editor-in-chief. It appears that Hilary and the Aga Khan had been at Harvard together. Hilary might have impressed the future Ismaili chief through a series of cyclostyled newsletters to all African students in the United States. At any rate, the Aga Khan’s new newspaper in Nairobi latched onto a man still only in his twenties when he returned to Kenya in 1964. But, by the time I joined Nation House in 1966, Hilary had resigned to return to Harvard for courses in filming and international affairs (where, he once told me, Henry Kissinger was one of his lecturers).

Ten years later, however – after he came back from Cambridge, he held the job successfully until his retirement in 1991.

One of the Nation’s pioneers, he rose from Taifa reporter to Taifa editor and steered the Kiswahili daily along a steady path, fully earning his promotion to the new position of Group Managing Editor.

Perceptive, socially conscious and academically gifted, he assumed the editorship at a difficult time. State authorities had the Nation group in its sights and there were changes at executive management level. He resigned in 1983.

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Wangethi Mwangi

Mwangi succeeded Mbugguss and steered the papers through political turbulence and an era of technological revolution. He was appointed Editorial Director until his retirement and replacement by Joseph Odindo.
Going places and making the right connections

By JOHN FOX

Freda, the taxi driver, picked me up to take me to the airport. “So where are you going this time, Mr John?” she asked. “Vietnam,” I replied. “Oh, so you are going to the war?” she said.

And that was the starter for my piece on that trip. Especially when, while I was in Hanoi that time, an article appeared in the local paper claiming that Vietnam had become the safest tourist destination in the whole world. There was the connection I was looking for.

I’m a very lucky guy. Over the last 24 years, my consultancy job has taken me to Asia, to many countries in Africa – and to every district in Kenya. When I am not travelling I can always find a new restaurant, an art exhibition, or an event in Nairobi like the Concours d’Elegance or the Shaggy Dog Show to write about.

But when I’m writing about somewhere outside Kenya, the challenge is how to make it relevant to Kenyan readers. Somehow, there has to be a reference back to home. Just as Freda said.

It was back in the late 1980s that George Mbeggug, then the Nation’s Group Managing Editor, encouraged me to write for the paper. One of the most memorable interviews was with Mr Kenneth Matiba about his plans to climb Mount Everest.

Matiba put his love of mountains down to his Outward Bound climb on Mount Kilimanjaro when he was an Alliance High schoolboy. He also told me about the character assessment given by the expedition leader: “Kenneth, you are a very strong boy. You were the first to the summit. Well done! But there is one criticism I have to make – you forgot about all those weaker brethren struggling up behind you.” “That was true,” Matiba said. “And it is still so true. These days when I am discussing with my colleagues, I am thinking, planning – and I realise that they are struggling up miles behind me…” At the time, he was a member of President Moi’s Cabinet.

I was told that, in the months leading up to the first multi-party elections, at an editors’ meeting, George suggested that I should be asked to write some ‘colour pieces’ about the campaigns. “But George,” someone said, “I think John would prefer to keep his work permit.”

But George did inveigle me into writing about the Safari Rally – despite my protestations that I knew nothing about rallying. Less than a year later, I was amused to see in the by-line of an Indian newspaper that had reprinted one of my Safari stories that I was ‘East Africa’s motor sports expert’. Nevertheless, when George offered me the choice of being the Motoring or Travel Correspondent for the Sunday Nation I quickly deferred to Gavin Bennett’s much greater knowledge – and wit – about cars.

My first Going Places pieces were describing a hotel in terms of its facilities, prices and how to get there. Until I got a different kind of encouragement from Bernard Nderitu, then the Editor of the Sunday Nation.

One evening, when I was sitting having a beer on the terrace of the Castle Hotel in downtown Mombasa, I saw this girl. She was wearing a black boubui. She was walking up and down the pavement outside the terrace. I was watching her and wondering what she was doing – until a car drew up, the window was wound down, and the girl leaned inside to negotiate terms.

That was the encounter around which I made an impressionistic piece about how it was to be sitting on the terrace of the Castle Hotel and watching the after dark life of Mombasa’s Moi Avenue.

‘I like that,’ Bernard Nderitu said. ‘That’s how Going Places should be.’ And that’s the advice I’ve tried to follow for all of twenty-something years.

My first Going Places pieces were describing a hotel in terms of its facilities, prices and how to get there. Until I got a different kind of encouragement from Bernard Nderitu, then the Editor of the Sunday Nation.

Pride of place on the world stage

The Nation was founded by His Highness the Aga Khan as a voice for the majority of Kenyans who clamoured for independence. After Uhuru, the Nation became an effective voice of the people. I must pay tribute to the founder, and equally important to successive management for steering the company to become the undisputed media organization in East Africa.

Indeed, the story of the Nation has become synonymous with the story of Kenya being agemates as Kenya attained independence three years after our first newspaper rolled of the presses.

Today, though media freedom is perennially under threat, the situation is much better than it was in the sixties, and certainly better than most African countries. As we celebrate 50 years, the biggest factor in the Nation’s success is that the founders were genuine in their desire to have an independent media group. Over the years, the group has established and maintained very high ethical and governance standards. As we march into the future, one promise I would hope that we could get the members of the fourth estate in one room and reflect on our past performance even as we make promises for the future. Nevertheless, I hope that this could become a regular initiative around Africa.

This future will however not be handed to any media on a silver platter. The media landscape is changing rapidly and it is only those who evolve faster than the change who will succeed. To this end, we shall continue to evaluate our traditional media platforms and ensure they remain relevant to an even more demanding needs of our readers and readers even as we invest aggressively in new media and new geographies.

Finally I would like to thank everyone who has helped Nation Media Group to be what it is today.

Asanteni Sana!
Meet the editors of Nation papers

MUTUMA MATHIU
Managing Editor
Daily Nation

I have edited many newspapers; none is like the Daily Nation. We do it with a fine blend of love and violence. Love because this newspaper is our life, our life’s work. Mario García, the newspaper designer, told us once that modern editors are just undertakers, washing and preparing for burial the bodies of their dead newspapers. But we are not. We are guardians, custodians of great institutions. The Daily Nation will be there for many years to come, we shall hand it over to the next generation, and the one after, in good shape.

Violence because we are such a brutally efficient news operation. Our capacity to mobilize coverage of a breaking story, even for those of us who have done it many times, is a marvelous spectacle. I only wish we could work with the same efficiency in covering the small story.

I edited my first newspaper, a now-dead periodical called the Nairobi Law Monthly, when I was all of 25 years old. That, and many other newspapers that I have seen since, lacked the Nation’s clarity of values. When I am confronted with a big news decision, there is never an iota of conflict in my soul, what my duty is, what the Daily Nation stands for, what I should do.

The Daily Nation stands for the truth. Our methods might not always be efficient and our findings might not always be accurate. But there is no conflict, at all, about our purpose and motivation. The Daily Nation stands with

Nicholas Muema
Managing Editor
Taifa Leo

As the Managing Editor of Taifa, my main task is to select suitable content for publication and determine the best ways of projecting it in the paper so as to meet circulation targets. It is also my duty to ensure that the paper is consistent in quality and tone, and is consistent with the company's editorial policy. I was appointed early last year at a time when there was a steady decline in circulation of Taifa, hence the main task has been to reverse the trend. The figures have improved and stabilized.

For the period I have worked in this position, it has been a daily challenge to go to press without either affecting one’s temper. However, the challenges attached to this position give me job satisfaction and justify my pay at the end of the month.

Julius Maina
Managing Editor
Saturday Nation

It’s just over a year since I took over as editor of the Saturday Nation. It was not long before I realized that Saturday Nation’s main challenge was – and to some extent remains – to pack a bigger punch than just the ground-breaking and highly successful Saturday Magazine insert. The magazine is still a big pull but many will agree that the Saturday Nation is also much more these days – readers have come to expect much more from us after a series of major people stories and indepth special reports. The most memorable perhaps is the special pullout on the 40th anniversary of Tom Mboya’s assassination last July. Thanks to great team work, we covered an “old story” with refreshing new facts. The results: A well-received newspaper and even higher expectations.

JAINDI KISERO
Managing Editor Investigations and Economic affairs.

My job involves investigating and developing mostly business, economic, enterprise issue-oriented stories. As a managing editor, I get to oversee those stories as well as writing opinion pieces. The biggest challenge is lack of space for the stories. It’s harder to sell a business story, but it is certainly better now than a few years back.

The fact that we even have a full business publication on a daily basis, is a great achievement for the group.

In the investigative reporting that I do, you get to rub a lot of people the wrong way. Stepping on a few toes is part of the job really.

In this business, some of your best sources end up being disgruntled contractors who when denied a tender, manage to find information that leads you to something.

ERIC OBINO
Managing Editor
Sunday Nation

Sunday Nation is Nation’s highest circulation Newspaper and has been for a while. Taking up this position, as the paper’s managing editor comes with a lot of expectation; my own expectation to keep the product at its best and also that of the team.

Sunday Nation has over the years thrived on analyses on the week’s stories and one of the challenges is that an issue deserving to be the main story could be preempted by the other publications on the market.

The task is to second-guess the other publications on their angle.

The best feeling for me is driving on the way to church and see people with a copy, or to find people discussing the news and telling each other, “Its in today’s Sunday Nation.” It is quite a feeling.

NICK WACHIRA*
Managing Editor, The East African

The East African targets a regional readership with a more sophisticated taste in news that cuts across the boarders and as a publication we are able to capture activity in the various sectors and their implications.

It’s the first paper presidents in the region would go for to get all they need to know about what is happening or going to happen. Business can pick it up and be advised on whether to set up shop in the region because we give you the information you need to know: To capture the vast readership in different culture zones, The East African has to find a common ground that would interest its target in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and even Rwanda.

The challenge has however been to find a team from all the represented countries but the progress made so far is good.
Changing face of a friend

By FRANK WHALLEY

A
S THE FACE OF A GOOD friend alters over the years, so has the face of the Nation changed. But like that same friend, it has remained recognisable, wearing a warm smile that makes it a welcome guest in so many households.

The key has been to ensure that the newspaper’s appearance signals the quality of its content. Several factors govern that.

First is the paper’s position in the market: a paper for the working man or woman, a paper for top decision makers, or a paper for the family?

Another factor is size – traditionally broadsheet for upmarket and tabloid for rancier stories and faster consumption – although now boundaries have blurred, with upmarket tabloids and the occasional middle or downmarket broadsheet.

Yet another factor is the choice of typefaces. That used to be easy: tabloid and downmarket meant chunky sans faces, broadsheet and upmarket meant elegant serif. That, too, has changed.

The Nation’s masthead changed as well, to Clarendon, no longer reversed and with what became the trademark style of having the word Daily in upper and lower case (like this text) lined up with the top of the much larger word Nation in capital letters.

It was a brilliant mix, and the British trade paper for journalists, the UK Press Gazette, was quick to admire it, commenting: “It is an offset litho sheet which for clarity, colour and crispness surpasses many of our own offset publications.” It was the friendly face of a friend who was beginning to mature.

The next main change came from British designer, Jeannette Collins, whokept the main faces, tightening the Clarendon masthead and increasing the size of the word Daily. A new slogan was introduced: The newspaper that serves the nation.

The main change was to make the pages modular, a style in which all the headlines, pictures and text of one story are contained within rectangles which sit alongside or above and below each other.

The Collins revamp stayed valid until 2001, when the vastly experienced American, Lou Silverstein, who had shaped the New York Times, took things in hand.

The Silverstein look was launched on June 30, 2001. The main headline face had been adapted to Armstrong’s design with a version of Century, this time 1TC Century, squeezed to 70 per cent of its normal width to give, as Silverstein said, “more pep.”

The titlepiece was, importantly, still Clarendon although the word Daily became even larger and now sat on the bottom of the line next to Nation, still in caps.

There were further (and controversial) changes to the masthead in the Saturday Nation and the Sunday Nation, where the titles were double-decked with Saturday and Sunday on top.

This was a friendly face with the self-confident smile of successful middle age.

Silverstein’s look for the Nation lasted four years, until 2006 when, faced by rapidly updated opposition newspapers, another redesign was needed.

This time the experts were the Scottish firm of Palmer Watson, a new but respected team that went on to redesign Le Monde among many other famous titles.

Ally Palmer and Terry Watson took the paper further upmarket, dramatically widening the distance in quality between the Nations and any opposition.

Today’s paper might not immediately look like the edition that launched a legend back in March 1960, but the family resemblance is still strong.

Frank Whalley is a former Nation training editor, resident in Nairobi and specialising in reporting on the fine arts.

It was a brilliant mix, and the British trade paper for journalists, the UK Press Gazette, was quick to admire it, commenting: “It is an offset litho sheet which for clarity, colour and crispness surpasses many of our own offset publications.”
The man who made the nation laugh

By GAKIHA WERU

Sometime at the beginning of the 1980s, a master’s degree student at the University of Nairobi saw an advertisement in Nation Newspapers, announcing vacancies for sub-editors. He applied and was hired. “I was under the impression that a sub-editor was a pretty senior fellow. I was terribly mistaken,” the student recalled years later. The student was the late Wa-home Mutahi. Over the next two decades he was to tantalise readers with a rare and unique brand of humour.

Through his column, “Whispers,” Mutahi became an integral part of the Nation stable and the Sunday Nation was incomplete without an article from “the son of the soil.” So huge was his following that when Mutahi left to join the competition, he was hired right back, the company having found that when he moved house, thousands of readers moved with him. His satire was unforgiving and his family members were permanent caricatures in his column. There was his mother, Appepe, his wife, Thacher. Whiz Junior aka the domestic thug and daughters Pajero and the Investment. So much was his family part of his satire, his wife Ricardo Njoki recalled later, that at Murang’a district hospital where she worked, few people knew her real name. They all called her Thatcher.

Mutahi laughed at himself, at those around him and at society in general. In turn, Sunday Na-tion readers laughed with him and loved him too, “I can laugh at anything with the exception of God and disability,” he once said. His satire and did not spare the political class either. Using analogies, former President Moi became the “main headmaster.” Mutahi’s pen was at its sharpest at a time when the Moi regime could not countenance any form of criticism. It was therefore not entirely surprising when Mutahi was arrested and jailed on trumped up charges in 1986. He was handing away on his typewriter at old Nation House in Tom Mboya Street when the Special Branch officers walked in and demanded to see him. After a brief chat at reception, he went back to his desk and collected his jacket. Out in the street he was surrounded by other officers and led away and nobody knew his whereabouts for days on end.

Like many other people who were jailed for sedition at that time, Mutahi was to appear in court one day late in the afternoon. With him was his young brother, Njuguna Mutahi. As everybody did in those days, they pleaded guilty to charges of sedition. It was common knowledge that people who admitted such charges had pleas of guilty beaten out them at Nyayo House. Mutahi’s book, Three Days On The Cross, tells of his experience at the hands of his torturers. Mutahi was a top feature writer who inspired scores of journal-ist and personally mentored many of them including this writer. He was also a great thespian and playwright. He penned many plays, among them Mu-gathe Mbogothi and Ngoma Cia Aka. He also has several books to his name.

When Mutahi died in July 2003, the country was stunned. It was only then that it became clear that through his column, he had touched a generation in a very special way. His death, too, was tragic. He had gone on March 7 to Thika District hospital for what was to be a minor operation. Something went terribly wrong and Mutahi went into a coma from which he never woke up. He died three months later at Kenyatta National Hospital.

The Sunday paper seduced readers with its verve, but the daily limped

askance at ‘The Nation’s politics, they were quickly seduced by its energy, liveliness and humour and the fresh and aggressive approach it demonstrated towards reporting public affairs. The March 20 launch issue sold 17,500 copies and quickly the figure soared to 24,000, reaching 30,000-plus in August.

This dizzying success owed much to coups such as a world exclusive in June, headlined, “The old man who waits at Lod-war.” This was a spread of photog-raphs of Jomo Kenyatta, the man the colonial government vainly hoped had been forgotten, then in detention in the North-ern Frontier town of that name. “He digs his arid little garden,” a caption said, “he lounges with his books and newspapers, listens to the ever-present radio – and waits for the day of his return.” The coverage electrified Africans, angered the colonial government and infuriated many settlers who charged with impartiality.”

If conditions within the East African nations were superficially peaceful, underlying tensions were constantly fuelled by turmoil beyond their frontiers. Independence in the former Belgian Congo was followed immediately by rioting, looting, mutiny, rape
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Driving into a past of empty streets… and no matatus

By GAVIN BENNETT

F ew things in life evoke past eras quite so precisely and powerfully as the car. The imagery is so strong and clear that movie makers can locate their audience in time and place with a single shot of cars on a street.

So what would strike us most — carwise — if we watched a film clip of Nairobi on the day the first copies of the Nation came rattling off the presses in 1960? It would be a cine film of course. Video bado.

Obviously, all the vehicles would be models from the 1950s, cruising around on almost empty streets between low-rise buildings (a queue of 10 cars was considered a traffic jam; the terms “parking space” and “open road” were things that actually existed, rather than just being hoped for). But beyond the most obvious long-distance observations… There would be no SUVs, no hatchbacks, and almost no pickups or matatus. The only 4WD would be a Series II Land-Rover, with its headlights still mounted in the radiator grille (not out on the wings). The biggest trucks would be what we now call 7-tonners. And in these and any other classes, there would not be a single vehicle from Japan (where today 80 per cent of our road-fall comes from). Zoom in a little closer and there would be more to surprise today’s memory. All would be running on cross-tyres (though radial was about to arrive as the Michelin X, which everybody thought needed to be pumped up more). None would have door mirrors, all the bumper bars would be chrome plated, with over-riders (and badges), the number plates, fore and aft, were black with silver-grey lettering (mostly starting in the K-C-KF range). Many would have roofracks, sun visors and mascots. The latest fav was a little perspex gizmo mounted on the front of the bonnet, billed as a “fly deflector.”

To get in, each door would have to be unlocked individually, and once inside even the plumpiest models would seem Spartan. No seatbelts at all. Radios were optional extras. All windows were wound by hand.

There were no buttons and aids were few – speedos (in mph), temperature gauge (in Fahrenheit), fuel gauge, kick-down. Automatic transmissions went all the way to help all cars into the largest media house in East and Central Africa. From a wader thin Kiswahili title beloved of nationalistic Kenyans, the group runs newspapers and broadcast stations in Uganda and Tanzania and might soon venture into Rwanda. In half a century of writing headlines, we have had our share of disgrace and our moments of glory. We stood up for Kenya’s independence, championed the return of multiparty democracy and exposed Goldenberg and Anglo Leasing, along with countless other injustices against our nation.

Of course, people buy newspapers for many reasons. Sometimes it is to read the pioneering obituary pages, or notices of college admissions and new products. Welcome, too, are advertisements for jobs or cars and even pets. All is grit to the mill; part and parcel of a great daily read. Perhaps the greatest challenge yet faced by journalists across all our media was the post election violence that rocked Kenya following the 2007 poll. It tested our courage and impartiality, our ability to stand back from the turmoil and report without bias. We triumphed in the end, but learnt painful lessons along the way.

Any newspaper is a microcosm of the society it covers. Just as our countrymen and women were driven by conflicting loyalties, so divisions crept into our newsrooms. Yet it is immensely to the credit of Nation group journalists that they were, finally, able to put aside any differences and determine that together their primary task – in addition to reporting the news – was somehow to help heal the country; to bring harmony where there was discord.

I am proud to have been part of that Nation team, and I am even prouder now to lead it.

Gado: Every which way but loose

I t is Pulitzer winner Dough Marlette who once remarked: “Good cartoons are like visual rock and roll. They hit you primitively and emotionally, turning you every which way but loose.”

Award winning Nation Cartoonist Godfrey Mwamembwa a.k.a Gado has been rocking our world with good cartoons, albeit controversial at times. But in between he has emerged as perhaps one of the most outstanding African cartoonists in recent years. His editorial cartoons have often rubbed authorities the wrong way and entertained readers with the same zeal.

Gado picked the mantle from the likes of Frank Odoi and Paul Kelemba who had graced the editorial pages in the 80s and has stuck like a permanent outbreak in the op-ed pages of the Nation.


He has won several local awards. In 1996 he was honored by the International Olympic Media Award in Print Media and in 1999 was named Kenya Cartoonist of the Year. He has exhibited his works in Tanzania, Kenya, France, Norway, Finland and Italy. A painter in oils and watercolours, Gado is a member of Kenya Union of Journalists, the Association of East African cartoonists, Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate (C&W) and a Board Member of Cartoonist Rights Network.

At the moment Gado is the most syndicated political/editorial cartoonist in East and Central Africa. His works have also been published in Le Monde (France), the Washington Times (US), Des Standard (Belgium) and Japan Times. He has published two books: Abunuswasi (1996) a short story comic book and DEMOCRACY!, a collection of his editorial cartoons.
We knew we were involved in something special

By JOHN McHAFFIE

Visitors to today’s Nation Centre cannot fail to be impressed by its grandeur, looking as it does every inch the flagship headquarters of a large and dynamic media group.

But, whenever I walk through its St Peter’s-like doors and into its marble halls, I allow myself a rueful smile as my mind goes back over three decades to a time when Nation newspapers were put together in far humbler surroundings.

The old Nation House, opposite the fire station in Tom Mboya Street, was a very different proposition. The long, two-storey building had few of the features of its illustrious successor. There was no need for snazzy TV or radio studios, since liberalisation of the airwaves was still years away. No need either for fancy reception areas or elaborate security desks to screen visitors, since terrorism had not yet visited us and passers-by could, and did, wander onto the editorial floor after the most cursory of checks.

The newsroom itself exuded a noisy vibrancy, missing now in the almost monastic silence of today’s push-button, cyber journalism. It was an “old school” newsroom, with news agency machines chattering by the windows, reporters pounding manual typewriters, chained to their desks, and all around the shuffling of short typewritten pages known as “takes” as sub-editors on the news, sports and features desks prepared stories for the next day’s paper.

But, if our editorial surroundings were workaday, we still knew that we were pioneers, involved in something special. Our photo-typesetting technology and web-offset printing process were way ahead of London’s mighty Fleet Street. The ability to print full-colour pictures was one such innovation, although (at least at first) considerable preparation time was required. A full-colour picture tended to appear in the features pages, which were planned days ahead. Our first opportunity to put colour to the test was the crash of a Boeing 747 of Lufthansa Airlines in Nairobi. Over time we got better and faster, and colour became a more regular occurrence, eventually paving the way for a triumphant double-page “Final Farewell” edition for President Kenyatta’s funeral.

But newspapers, perhaps more than any other enterprise, are a people business, a team endeavour, and when I look back, it is the people who spring to mind: Joe Rodrigues, editor supreme, the rock around which the Nation swirled – known as “Joe”, because his original European colleagues could not get their tongues around Jawaharlal.

Irrepressible Joe Kadhi of the booming laugh who now passes on his vast experience to a new generation of journalists as a professor at USIU in Nairobi.

George Mbegguss and Bob Muthusi, who in the early days steered Taifa Leo, to its pre-eminent position in Swahili publishing.

Polymath and resident lexicographer Phillip Ochieng, who succeeded me as chief sub, and is still strutting his stuff in the Sunday Nation.

And then there were the young lions of the time, who became the grizzled veterans of later times — Wangethi Mwangi, Joseph Odindo, Tom Mshindi. After me, other chief subs were: Phillip Ochieng, Ali Hafith, Wangethi Mwangi, Joseph Odindo, Kibe Kamunyu, Julius Maina, Pamela Makotsi, Timothy Wanyonyi and presently, Mbugua Ng’ang’a.
Briton sentenced to death for killing a Kenyan

The Daily Nation hit the streets on Monday, October 3, 1960, repeating the company’s promise to “do our utmost to help Kenya and the other East African territories make the perilous transition to African majority rule and full independence as peacefully and constructively as possible.” Cautiously, it mentioned no times frame but pledged to act as a watchdog for the common man, “guarding the liberty of the individual against bureaucracy and totalitarianism, however they may manifest themselves.” In repeating its commitment to African majority rule, the newspaper referred not only to Kenya but to all of East Africa, a regional perspective which, at the Aga Khan’s behest, the company’s newspapers were to maintain throughout their history. For many years, this stance flew in the face of cool if not disdainful attitudes towards regional co-operation by the governments themselves, fired as they were by the euphoria of national sovereignty.

The colonial power had been an enthusiastic proponent of common services, creating such institutions as East African Railways and Harbours and the East African Currency Union. In 1961, an attempt was made to harmonise the economies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika/Tanzania when the East African High Commission became the East African Common Services Organisation, which in turn became the East African Community in 1967. Due to differing political philosophies, this entity effectively stopped functioning in 1972 and collapsed in 1977. It was revived in 2000 with the intention of paving the way to a full-scale federation comprising Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. The five members would effectively become a single state within the African Union, hopefully by 2013. Despite a long history of federal failures, the Nation’s faith in a strong regional presence never wavered and year after year it called for new efforts towards integration.

Unlike its Sunday sibling, the Daily Nation’s growth was to prove slow and painful. The choice of a launch date, for example, was questionable. A Monday paper has to carry news from Sunday and there is often not much happening on the traditional day of rest. So it was to prove on the weekend of October 3, 1960 and the paper’s own launch was promoted to second lead on Page One. The main story told of the return home of the Sultan of Zanzibar after hospitalisation in Europe, describing him as “fit as a fiddle.” He died within weeks. Writing 25 years later for the paper’s silver jubilee celebrations, Right: President Jomo Kenyatta chairs his first Cabinet meeting. On his right is Vice-President Jaramogi Oginga Odinga.

A letter from a reader said, “The mountain has laboured and brought forth a mouse.” Stung, the newsroom fought back. Through initiative and hard work and driven by Bierman, reporters brought in a series of exclusive front page stories on widely different topics which kept people talking about the paper, even if not enough were buying it. “It was hard and often heart-breaking work,” Bierman recalled, but it did finally pay off. Putting sales back at a modest 200 per week, circulation rose slowly to a point of viability. But it took more than five years to cross the 20,000 barrier, which
Path to Uhuru full of problems

At heart was a failure by politicians to understand the difference between being independent and being hostile to government. Almost to a man they hewed to the Biblical adjuration, “He who is not with us is against us.”

The path to independence was cluttered with problems but in retrospect its achievement was inevitable. In January 1960, some 50 Kenya delegates attended the first constitutional conference at Lancaster House in London. Flying together on the same airplane were a group of African nationalists including Mboya, Odinga and Daniel Arap Moi – but not Kenyatta, who was still in detention; moderate Europeans led by Michael Blundell; and a party of settlers headed by Group Captain “Puck” Briggs. A proposed multi-racial constitution was accepted by Blundell and, reluctantly, by the Africans, but rejected by the settlers. Clearly more talks were needed and the Kenyans flew back to Nairobi, where a settler threw 30 silver sixpences at Blundell and cried that he was “a Judas.”

When a second round of talks took place in London in 1962, Kenyatta, now freed from all restrictions, led the African delegation. Kanu’s men pressed for centralism while an opposition African group, the Kenya African Democratic Union led by Ronald Ngala, argued for regionalism or majimbo. A framework constitution was eventually mapped out and taken back to Nairobi to be refined. A new Governor, Malcolm MacDonald, threw out the planned timetable for an election; moderate Europeans led by Michael Blundell; and a party of settlers headed by Group Captain “Puck” Briggs.

It argued that Kanu had more talent in its ranks than Kadu and that a centralised form of government was preferable to regional rule. Typically, it also claimed that a political party has endorsed a political party.

In the election, Kanu won two-thirds of the vote and formed a strong government with Kenyatta as prime minister. The Nation, in a landmark decision, printed the headline, “Kanu for Kenya,” the first and so far the only time it has endorsed a political party.

It argued that Kanu had more talent in its ranks than Kadu and that a centralised form of government was preferable to regional rule. Typically, it also claimed that a political party has endorsed a political party.
Vidyarthi: Pioneer photojournalist

By SHRavan Vidyarthi

Born in Nairobi in 1944, Anil Vidyarthi began taking pictures with a Box Brownie camera at the age of 16. Anil’s father, G.L. Vidyarthi, had established Kenya’s first anti-colonial newspaper in 1893 as well as a host of vernacular newspapers.

It was at his father’s printing press that Anil would watch his cousin, photojournalist Priya Ramrakha, processing pictures of leaders like Jomo Kenyatta, Tom Mboya and Daniel arap Moi.

Anil bought his first Nikon camera in 1962. He was working then in a dark room on River Road. On the recommendation of reporter Chhotu Karadia, Nation editor John Bierman agreed to bring Vidyarthi on board.

There were few photojournalists in those days, and most photographers plied their trade in Nairobi’s studios. Caleb Okwera, who worked alongside Vidyarthi, was the only black African photographer at the Nation before independence.

Vidyarthi’s first assignment was to photograph a derailed train near Nairobi. He recalls: “We jumped on a plane to get an overhead shot. I started shooting with a camera provided by the Nation and the film ran out after two exposures. To save film, photographers would leave unexposed frames in the camera. I had no idea that was the case when I started, but luckily I still got the shot!”

Vidyarthi became a staff photographer at Nation in 1963 and covered Kenya’s Independence celebrations in December of that year. Many Kenyans will remember his photo of Jomo Kenyatta jumping over a stream in the Maasai Mara game reserve on his way to greet American astronauts vacationing in Kenya.

“Before the astronauts arrived, President Kenyatta and politician JM Kariuki were taking a walk near a small stream,” Vidyarthi says. “Then Kenyatta jumped over it. I had three cameras around my neck and quickly, without focusing, clicked the shutter a few times. There were 30 photographers waiting, but I was the only one who got the shot. The picture was on the front page of Nation the next day and Kenyatta ordered hundreds of prints to send to leaders around the world whenever they inquired about his health.”

Vidyarthi left Nation in 1967 for a brief stint in the printing industry and then joined Derby College of Art in England to pursue a two-year degree in photography in 1969. He moved to New York in 1971 and found casual work at Life magazine.

He returned home in January 1972 and took up work in the printing industry. In the early 1980s, he returned briefly to photography and covered President Moi’s state visit to India for Viva magazine. Anil is now the managing director of Colourprint Limited printing press.

The Nations’ photo aces

Photography has played a major role in Nation journalism. Among key photographers was YAHYA MOHAMED, who worked for Nation between 1971 and 1992.

An amusing but also tragic assignment for him was one of a robbery at the Queensway branch of Barclays. After robbers took the money and fled, he recalls, they took refuge in a house at Uhuru estate in the city’s Eastlands.

The police followed them there and after the door to the house was broken down by firemen, a police inspector shot himself in the foot.

P"The inspector was drawing a gun from his holster but it went off and a bullet went through his foot. I got the picture, and earned myself an immediate promotion,” Yahya recalled. The robbers were caught.

SAM OUMA, worked for Nation between 1981-1988 and then for a second stint between 1990 and 1998. He remembers the 1982 coup attempt as one of the most memorable and also traumatic times. He was with a neighbour of his near the Nyayo National stadium when a shot rang out. His neighbour fell dead. He had been shot by security forces.

Sam says he had warned him that leaving the house would be dangerous, but his neighbour did not listen. The 1998 Nairobi bomb blast will touched him in a personal way. He says that five minutes before the bomb went off, he had received a mysterious call in the office from a man with an Arab accent, who said that “a building in Nairobi will dance today”.

YUSUF WACHIRA worked for Nation from 1988 to 2001 and remembers the day when Alexander Muge, the Anglican Bishop of Eldoret’s church service in Kirinyaga was disrupted by a chief who wanted to slap the bishop. The congregation booed the chief out of the church leading to riots in Kirinyaga town.

Other notable photographers have included Joseph Odhyo, who has since died, and Joseph Thuo.

– Compiled by Kibe Kamunyu
Challenge to the constitution

1971: Uganda's General Idi Amin Dada comes to power through a military coup
1978: A front and back spread of Kenyatta's funeral.

Right: 1980/81: It was a tragic New year's eve when a powerful bomb ripped through part of the Norfolk Hotel as guests gathered for a party.

Below Right: 1978: Israeli hostage after their release following a commando raid on Entebbe.

Extreme Right: 1978: Daniel arap Moi is sworn in as Kenya's second president.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19

ber 12, 1963, the Union Jack was lowered and Kenya's new flag – a shield and crossed spears on a red, black and green background – was raised in its place. The Nation's front page declared “Kenya Free!”

As the new government struggled to find its feet, so the Nation began to flex its muscles. Michael Curtis recalled: “We became the first newspaper to distribute nationwide from our presses in Nairobi. We did what everyone in Nairobi told me was impossible and ran our Land-Rovers the whole of the 300 miles to Mom- basa on what was then only a murram road infested with wild animals and subject to sudden floods.” The Nation had become a truly national newspaper and it was clear the time was ripe to appoint a Kenyan to lead the editorial team.

The Board’s choice was a Harvard graduate and journalist who had already made his mark as a feature writer, Hillary Ng’weno. The new editor brought an African perspective to reporting and writing, clearly demonstrated by the upheaval in the Congo following the murder of Patrice Lumumba. As international news agencies focussed their reports on the fate of white missionaries, Ng’weno saw to it that the slaughter of thousands of Congolese Africans was brought to the attention of news-hungry Kenyans.

In government circles there were signs of the uncertainty that affected many new nations when its inexperienced politicians were suddenly handed power. In the belief that newspapers should act as an arm of development, the Information Ministry tightened its grip on the flow of government news, taking control of the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and changing its name to the Voice of Kenya.

It also deported a number of former colonial government officers and foreign reporters, the first journalist being Tony Dunn, the Nation’s man in Dar es Salaam. Dunn was originally expelled by the government of Tanzania, and thus automatically on a one-party state. The Ministry of Home Affairs was taken from VP Oginga Odinga and given to Daniel Arap Moi.

As the decade moved on, developments emerged which were to become recurring motifs in the Kenya story such as corruption scandals, quarrels about free expression and constant scrapping over political power.

When a maize shortage hit the nation, an inquiry was ordered into suspected thievery at a high level. There followed scandal at the West Kenya Marketing Board, with allegations of a cheque being signed for a Mercedes car and outrageous payments to MPs. The entire board was sacked and staff suspended.

Assurances of Press freedom by Attorney-General Charles Njonjo were received with reserve by the Nation and an editorial said, “While newspapers understand the problem which the Government faces, it is only fair that the Government and politicians understand the troubled political waters through which newspapers must walk.” When in May 1966 Kenyatta named Joseph Murumbi as Vice-President, Odinga resigned and soon afterwards announced formation of the Kenya People’s Union with 28 other dissident legislators. Since MPs joining a new party were required to resign from Parliament, a “little general election” was held for 30 seats. The result was a major victory for Kanu, which won 21 of the available seats. Said Kanu secretary-general Mboya: “The KFU is dead and the voters buried it.”

The Sixties ended in darkness. On July 5, 1969, Tom Mboya, aged 38, was shot dead coming out of a chemist’s shop barely 100 yards from Nation House. The Nation described it as “the most horrific
The success story of any media house is inevitably interspersed with the sort of failures and blunders which make those discreet, bottom-of-the-page “Corrections and Clarifications” required reading by journalists and consumers alike.

Nation Media Group has been no exception. Mostly, these blunders just made the newspapers look silly. On the lighter side, Daily Nation librarian ANNIEL NJOKA recalls two such stories:

**Driving in reverse claim**

This saga started in 1985 when Eric Awori, a scion of East Africa’s well-known Awori family and a Rugby player with Kenya Harlequins, was reported to have driven a car in reverse all 500kms from Mombasa to Nairobi. It eventually turned out it was all false. He was arraigned in court on fraud charges and fined.

**He did not milk an elephant**

In November 1998 a small news item was written that a Kenyan became a global celebrity for the Driving in reverse claim. In November 1998 a small news item was written that a Kenyan became a global celebrity for the Driving in reverse claim. It eventually turned out it was all false. He was arraigned in court on fraud charges and fined.

By JOHN KAMAU

**Tom Mboya is gunned down**

On a Monday morning, October 14, the Court of Appeal for Eastern Africa delivered its final verdict on the murder of Tom Mboya, a high school student and avid newspaper reader at the time. As a high school student and avid newspaper reader at the time. I followed the keenly the aftermath of the brutal murder of Kenya’s most popular politician.

I remember clearly the initial shock and disbelief; the riots in the streets and the open rebellion in Parliament.

The screaming Daily Nation headline that Kenyans woke up to one morning in early March 1975 read, “JM in Zambia.”

If the headline was meant to reassure Kenyans that all was well after the popular maverick MP had been reported missing, it turned out to be a cruel joke. For that very day, J.M. Kariuki’s mutilated body was found at the Nairobi City Mortuary, tagged as an “unknown male African.”

As the country struggled to come to grips with the assassination of the fiery MP for Nyandarua North and the government of President Kenyatta reeled under the public anger, the Nation Group hung its head in shame. The headline — and the entire story that recounted JM’s friendship with Zambian Cabinet minister Vernon Mwaanga and even provided details of where he was staying in Lusaka — lacked any shred of truth.

The Nation eventually recovered the public’s confidence but the JM falsehood remained a stain on the history of the newspaper.

By MACHARIA GAITHO

JM Kariuki’s murder: Reflections

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Githii was a political animal, but it is puzzling that he might have tried to aid a Kanu faction, the so-called Kiambu Mafia around Kenyatta, that he would probably have preferred to battle.

The Nation editor was seen as close to the Kanu faction grouped around the then Vice President Daniel Arap Moi and Attorney-General Charles Njonjo. The group was involved in a power struggle against the Kiambu Mafia represented by such stalwarts as former Foreign Minister Njoroge Mungai, Defence Minister James Gichuru, Lands Minister Jackson Angaine, Housing Minister Paul Ngei and Gema boss Njenga Karume. These made up the core of a group that later came to mount the “Change the Constitution” campaign to prevent Moi from succeeding Kenyatta. Mr Njonjo was hostile to Dr Mungai, and there found an invaluable ally in the Nation editor.

And one must go back then to the battle for Dagoretti at the 1974 general election. I was in Form 2. I still recall the almost daily reports on the front page of Nation detailing in breathless prose how Dr Johnson Muthiora, a newcomer and political non-entity straight out of studies in the US, was giving Dr Mungai a run for his money on the campaign trail. Mungai was one of the most powerful figures in the Kenyatta court. He had served as Foreign Minister and Defence Minister and doubled up as the elderly President Kenyatta’s physician. He was also the favourite candidate of the Kiambu group to succeed Kenyatta. Looking back, it becomes almost obvious that were it not for the Nation’s brazen campaign for his opponent, Dr Mungai would not have lost the Dagoretti seat.

Dr Mungai still remembers. Many years after that climactic Dagoretti campaign, I was part of a Nation Media Group team that was touching base with all the key political groupings ahead of the 2002 General Election.

In the process we hosted the key campaign strategists and advisors for Kanu presidential candidate Uhuru Kenyatta, son of the late President. The team was led to Nation Centre by nine other than Njoroge Mungai. Even before he took his seat in the boardroom, Dr Mungai remarked that he had never been hosted by the Nation since the paper had beaten him in the battle for Dagoretti in 1974!

It was not a good start to the conversation, especially because the Uhuru team was not comfortable with the way the Nation was covering the campaign.

Dr Mungai seemed to think that it might be a repeat of Dagoretti ’74 all over again. It took quite some effort to convince him that this time the campaign he was now heading would get fair treatment. The Dagoretti campaign coverage and the JM in Zambia report caused Nation some serious credibility problems.

While it would be convenient to lay all the blame on one maverick editor-in-chief, it might be more accurate to look at the failings of the management and oversight system, abetted by a culture of the time which seemed to dictate that the editorial desk be under the stewardship of a personality who was tightly embedded in the political system.

The headstrong Githii was finally dismissed after he went overboard with personal campaigns and openly defied the Board of Directors.

His mercurial reign forced a major re-evaluation of Nation editorial policies.
When soldiers attempted a coup

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 21

event,” that has taken place in the short history of our young republic.”
Changes at Nation House saw Hilary Ng’weno resign in 1965 to go into book publishing. He was followed by the truculent and charismatic George Githii, from the President’s Press team.

With characteristic gusto, Githii attacked growing official corruption and led a vigorous campaign against the government’s Public Security Bill which he charged would restrict citizens’ freedoms and lead to detention without trial. When students at Nairobi’s University College protested against the measures, waving placards saying “Not Yet Uhuru” – the title of a recent book by Oginga Odinga – the government closed the college. Githii resigned in 1968 to take up a place at Oxford University and was succeeded by the quiet and subtle Boaz Omori.

The Sixties ended in darkness. On July 5, 1969, Tom Mboya, aged 38, was shot dead coming out of a chemist’s shop barely 100 yards from Nation House.

The Nation described it as “the most horrific event that has taken place in the short history of our young republic.” On September 10, Nahason Isaac Nyenga Njoroge was sentenced to hang for the murder. He said, “All I know is that I did not commit this offence.”
Reactions as controversial as the ruling

By KIBE KAMUNYU

S

M Otieno, a criminal lawyer of no mean repute, died on December 20, 1986. His death sparked a huge controversy over customary and common law in Kenya. Silvano Melea Otieno was born at Nyalgunga village in Siaya, in Nyanza Province. After his death, Nyalgunga became a by-word for village in the popular Kenyan patois.

Otieno had married a Kikuyu, Virginia Wambui Otieno. When he died, she declared that he had wanted to be buried at his farm in Ngong on the outskirts of Nairobi. But the lawyer’s Umira Kager clan said their Luo tradition required that he be buried in his ancestral home. They went to court, setting the stage for a massive legal dispute.

The case went through the High Court, then to the Court of Appeal and on February 13, 1987, the Umira Kager clan received a ruling in their favour. In the following day’s Nation, the headline read, ‘Song and dance holds up city traffic.’ Reporter Irungu Ndirangu, wrote: “At 12:15 sharp, Mr Joash Ochieng Ougo, the younger brother of the late criminal lawyer, Mr S. M. Otieno, stepped out of the High Court buildings and thundered: ‘Nyalgunga! Nyalgunga! Nyalgunga!’ his hands punching the air.”

His booming voice drowned the voices of about six women intoning solemn Christian tunes in Dholuo and marching before him as in a funeral procession.

The crowd responded by whistling, dancing and clapping as hundreds of Umira Kager clans-people gathered on City Hall Way and along Wabera Street.

The cry of Nyalgunga! Nyalgunga, was repeated countless times and Mr Ochieng said, “I am happy that the Kenyan Government has allowed justice to take its course.”

Reactions to the court ruling were as controversial as the case.

One Nation reader wrote, “To my mind it was not Mrs Otieno or the Umira Kager clan that were on trial. At the dock was the very existence of Kenya as nation. What is the future of mixed marriages in Kenya? What protection does the law provide to a nucleus family in the event of the male spouse passing away? The judges, the High Court and the Court of Appeal failed to address themselves to these poignant questions. Here was an opportunity for the judges to reject ridiculous practices in favour of progress and good taste. But they refused to take it, and in so doing, have spelt disaster for many families. The injuries caused by the Court of Appeal ruling will take a generation to heal.”

Another reader, Kunga wa Rutere, said: “The learned judge’s ruling that Mr Otieno be buried in Nyalgunga should make it clear to every woman who wishes to be married across the tribal barriers that she should be ready to embrace and identify fully with the ways of her, hopefully loved husband.

This is not only where inter tribal marriages are concerned. Even where the couples belong to the same tribe, it should be obvious to the wife that she is expected to cuddle most lovingly to the ways of the family of her husband because that is where she now belongs.”

Principle of Investment No. 1

Don’t invest in the dark.

No one should think of investing anything anywhere without a properly tailored investment plan. The plan should take account of your needs, circumstances, goals and expectations. It should illuminate areas of risk as well as opportunity. It should be reviewed at regular intervals with an enlightened and experienced financial adviser.
The important events in a country’s history do not always follow neatly year by year or come handily packaged by the decade. More often, trends and signals will show up coyly on the political scene, their significance unrecognised; for months or even years, they disappear from view, only to explode at some future point in full historical fury.

This was often the pattern during the second half of the two nations’ story (country and newspaper) as events which impacted volcanically on both the country and the newspaper alternated with fallow years of quiet and progress.

A mature, educated Kenyan, looking back over the last quarter century, would probably identify 1986 and 1987 as the years of the notorious Mwakenya scare, when lots of innocent Kenyans were locked up on dubious grounds of sedition. In the midst of all this, Parliament found time to confer more power on the head of state.

Mention 1988 and the word mlolongo would probably enter our observer’s mind, for that was the year Kenyans queued up behind large photographs of candidate MPs in what became known as “the selection within the election”.

By any standards, 1989 was one of the volcanic years: Internationally, the collapse of Communism, nationally the bloody fight for multi-partyism, Matiba/Rubia/Hempstone/Saba Saba.

Into the 1990s: Ethnic clashes and the deaths of Robert Ouko and Bishop Alexander Muge. New opposition parties are formed, but do not unite and President Moi and Kanu win the first multiparty election since 1963. The Nation group moves into a new headquarters on Kimathi Street, creates its first new paper for years and builds a state-of-the-art press hall. A new word enters the Kenyan lexicon: Goldenberg.

International terrorism afflicts the region in 1998 as bombs explode at the American embassies in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Memories of Mwakenya are aroused by reports of another dubious enemy of the nation, the February Eighteen Revolutionary Army. It proves as hard to track down as its predecessor.

NMG marks the arrival of the second millennium with a flurry of expansion, going into television and acquiring print and broadcast outlets in Tanzania and Uganda.

At least 44 Kenyans were jailed despite lack of evidence that Mwakenya really existed.

The opposition to Kanu finally unites and Mwai Kibaki becomes head of state in 2002 in succession to the long-serving President Moi. Promises to end corruption are belied by new scandals involving government ministers.

Amidst anger and disenchantment, voters reject a proposed new constitution in 2005 and after the 2007 election, Kenya is seized by a paroxysm of ethnic violence which kills an estimat-
The 1982 coup attempt seriously blemished Kenya’s hitherto benign international image and amidst the uncertainty and tension that followed, human rights emerged as a serious issue for the first time. It was widely known that many students were foremost in supporting the coup rebels and by 1986, graduates, university lecturers and professional people began disappearing from the streets in growing numbers.

When they reappeared it was usually for brief court hearings where they were accused of possessing seditious documents and/or belonging to a seditious organisation and/or failing to report the existence of such an organisation. The accused often bore injuries from their cells, invariably pleaded guilty and usually drew jail terms.

Between March and September of 1986 alone, some 44 Kenyans were convicted of sedition. The notorious organisation in question was Mwakenya (Union of Patriots to Liberate Kenya) which to this day remains a thing of mystery. Kanu supporters denounced Mwakenya as a revolutionary underground movement operating from London with the aim of overthrowing the government by violence.

Many MPs reported receiving subversive literature anonymously and a 1987 statement, purportedly from Mwakenya, denounced Kanu and “the cynical philosophies of Harambee and Nyayoism.” The statement, couched in classic Marxist phrasology, said: “The basic means

Mention 1988 and the word ‘mlolongo; would probably enter our observer’s mind, for that was the year Kenyans queued up behind large photographs of candidate MPs in what became known as ‘the selection within the election’. 1989 was one of the volcanic years

ed 1,200 people and displaces at least a quarter of a million. Two months of negotiation and the threat of international pariah status lead to peace under a new power-sharing arrangement.

Such is the nature of day-to-day life, it is the negative that catches the attention while incremental progress goes scarcely noticed – in Kenya’s case, the easing of civil oppression, release of political prisoners, the demystification of the presidency, the willingness of Kenyans to stand up for themselves, the disappearance of petty party dictators, unprecedented freedom of the media to criticise and complain.

The following articles attempt to address the high points of 1986-2010 in greater detail.
Parliament bans the Nation

Deputy Speaker Kalonzo Musyoka led MPs in denouncing The Nation, leading to the newspaper being banned from covering the House.

Security officials claimed that Mwakenya was led by Kenya’s famed writer-dissident (and one-time Nation columnist) Professor Ngugi wa Thiong’o, while academic studies of the era have named various well-known Kenyan politicians as members.

But the organisation remained a chimera to the Kenya media.

Reporters knew no Mwakenya officials and received no calls, manifestos or Press releases from them.

There were no known office locations or telephone or fax numbers. Everything that came to the media and appeared as trial evidence was from the government.

The seditious documents produced in court were always photocopies, never originals.

It was not only university people who were victims of the security dragnet – civil servants and journalists, too, were picked up, including Wahome Mutahi, the author of Whispers, a widely popular Sunday Nation column, who received 15 months in jail on Mwakenya-related charges.

But there seemed little doubt that the crackdown confronted the universities with the stark reality of state power, undermining the academic capacity for independent thought and exploration in the political arena.

In ironic juxtaposition to the unhappy national scene, the Nation group itself was doing well at this time, benefiting from a significant increase in capital expenditure which had been agreed at the birth of its second quarter-century.

The company invested in a computerised input system for editorial, classified advertising and some production functions.
I joined The EastAfrican as editor when it was 10 years old. The founding fathers conceived of it as a business-oriented regional weekly with a hybrid content: investigative reporting, analysis and interpretation of major trends in the political economy of the region.

The landscape of economic and business journalism had changed dramatically between 1994 when the paper was launched and early 2005 when I came in.

In the first place, newspapers in the region generally were beginning to devote much more time and space to economic and business content. In Tanzania, new English-language newspapers had emerged, all devoting space and an expanded news hole to public policy issues.

The same thing was happening in Uganda. Like their Kenyan counterparts, the major papers there offered weekly pull-outs devoted to business and economic reporting.

In terms of design, The EastAfrican was positioned a good notch higher than the daily newspapers.

The design was more sophisticated, in keeping with its predicted core audience of educated readers looking for quality information beyond the reprocessing of Press releases, reports of politicians’ public meetings, the reproduction of unanalysed stock tables and routine reports from central banks and state-owned statistical agencies.

By 2005, all the major daily newspapers in the region had adopted modern, upmarket designs with colour photographs, front-page digests and teasers. The gap between The EastAfrican and the rest of the media world had narrowed significantly since 1994.

Against this backdrop, we at The EastAfrican had to re-think our sense of place and re-invent ourselves. The aim was to offer more than East Africa’s daily dailies were offering and to place ourselves at the head of the new dispensation.

Daily newspapers tend to concentrate on politics. And the stories are usually so parochial and personality-based that if you are, say, an investor sitting in European trying to follow what is going on in East Africa, you will largely be baffled. Because such reporting is personality-based, the reader needs special skills to discern the significance in terms of political risk.

The niche left for The EastAfrican was to popularize issue-based economic and business journalism while keeping the focus on regional factors. In terms of business journalism, Kenya led its neighbours. Indeed, the Nation Group produced the first daily newspaper in Kenya dedicated to economic news: Business Daily.

But the field remained wide open for presentation of such journalism in Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.

When The EastAfrican broke stories, there was always a policy issue -- privatization scandals, reforming financial systems, restructuring of parastatals, mergers and acquisitions and dealing with widespread distress in the region’s banking sectors. The paper established itself as a premium product, especially in Uganda and Tanzania, concentrating on issues that commanded the attention of influential people in industry and government.

Even the “softer” sections of The EastAfrican offer content likely to be of interest to international audiences: the environment, museums, books and culture and in sports such as horse racing, cricket and golf.

As a weekly, there are occasions when it reports on news that is already out there. In such circumstances, the challenge has been to provide background, offer analysis and beate the story in a regional context. The EastAfrican has also been very strong on opinion pieces, showcasing powerful opinion writers.

It sees itself as the newspaper for thinking East Africans.

Tanzania is a challenging environment for specialist writing. The country is an economic writer’s gold mine mainly because of the rate at which capitalism and commerce are spreading, the growth of a consumer culture and the explosion of the property market.

Today, Dar es Salaam is the fastest growing metropolis in the region. One of my first responsibilities was to travel to Dar to understand and gauge the news environment there. I had meetings with CEOs of leading commercial banks, representatives of leading NGOs, the major lobbies and business associations, international financial institutions involved in the economic reform programme such as the World Bank and the European Union, members of the parliamentary opposition and the Speaker of the National Assembly.

It dawned on me how most journalists in East Africa knew very little about what was happening in the three countries. I began to appreciate how The EastAfrican had played a major role in developing a new cadre of journalists, those with the remit of keeping tabs on major trends in the region.

In the past, Tanzanians looked upon Kenyans as flashy people who liked ostentations living. But I found attitudes had changed as Tanzania society entered a state of ferment. Look at the cars on the city streets, for instance.
On February 22, 1988, Kanu selected its candidates for the March 21 General Election by requiring party members to queue behind a large photograph of their preferred leader. Voters quickly realised who they were meant to vote for, regardless of their personal preference. Party officials used trucks to bring in people, including children, and provided them with food and drink. The length of the queue soon made it plain who was the favoured candidate.

Since there was a rule which allowed any candidate who received more than 70 per cent of the party vote to enter Parliament unopposed, only about two-thirds of the 188 parliamentary seats were contested by secret ballot on March 21. It became known as “the selection within the election” and “I was rigged out” became the widely-heard complaint of the losers.

But the losers, in a sense, became the winners, for this farcical charade created a new group of oppositionists, not lawyers, columnists or churchmen, but hardened politicians with street-fighting instincts who became the most serious focus of discontent since the coup attempt. Rigged-out heavyweights such as Charles Rubia and Kenneth Matiba were wealthy establishment figures who knew the whereabouts of the levers of power. Coming together at a time of growing pressure for multipartyism and with sympathetic support from much of the Western world, they brought about a sea-change in the way Kenya was governed.

When former Nairobi mayor Charles Rubia and wealthy businessman-politician Kenneth Matiba moved to avenge their ejection from power in the 1988 selection process, they went for the jugular — Article 2A of the constitution, a 1982 amendment which had turned Kenya into a

Clockwise from right: Politician JJ Kamotho at the head of a queue in the infamous 1988 queue voting.

Voters queued behind the picture of their preferred candidate.

Anglican Eldoret Bishop Alexander Muge, who died suspiciously.
de jure one-party state.

In a joint statement, the two men called for repeal of 2A, for presidential tenure to be limited to two four-year terms and for a public referendum on Kenya's political future.

They were ploughing fertile soil. Communism was disintegrating in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the Cold War was no more and Western nations were reshaping their policies towards the Third World. Aid, they made clear, was no longer necessary to counter Soviet might and in future would go to those countries instituting pluralist systems and demonstrating respect for human rights.

In Nairobi, US Ambassador Smith Hempstone led the offensive. Uneasy at the growing support for this new system, the government restored the secret ballot for election nominations and agreed to restore security of tenure to judges and high state officials. But there was no retreat on the one-party state and Matiba and Rubia announced a rally in Nairobi for July 7, 1990. Days later, both men were arrested and detained.

Thousands gathered at the Kamukuji meeting ground for an event that has gone down in history as Saba Saba (for the seventh day of the seventh month). Violence quickly broke out and crowds demanding the release of Rubia and Matiba surged into the city centre where they were met by riot police with tear gas and batons. Shops were looted, properties set on fire and disorder spread to Central Province towns and Kisumu. The rioting lasted three days.

Matiba and Rubia were released a year later, both in poor health after their detention, to find opposition to one-party rule gathering strength. The Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (Ford) was founded, securing support from many of the country's political heavyweights.
Githongo lifts the lid on Anglo-Leasing

The bill for looting government coffers during the Kanu years was commonly set at around $3 billion, enough to pay for primary schooling for every Kenyan child for 10 years. Thus, Kibaki’s inauguration day promise to put an end to this perpetual scourge was received with delight by indigenous Kenyans and by supporting developed nations.

To wide acclaim, Kibaki appointed John Githongo, a one-time columnist for The EastAfrican and a former head of Transparency International, as the first Permanent Secretary for Governance and Ethics.

Githongo quickly realised that the leopards of officialdom had not changed its spots, however. He industriously bored into Nare-era deals such as the Anglo-Leasing affair, a multi-million contract for passport equipment, the British High Commissioner handed the government a dossier which he said contained evidence of 20 corrupt procurement deals which had cost the country $526 million.

Details of the Anglo-Leasing scandal were exposed by the Nation.

Githongo conscientiously talked to government officials and cabinet ministers, secretly taping some of them. He concluded that the Anglo-Leasing deal involved 18 fraudulent contracts and implicated several senior government members.

Githongo said anti-corruption chief Aaron Ringo era told him there would be no Anglo-Leasing prosecutions before the 2007 election, if ever. He was also told by senior government people to drop his investigation into Anglo-Leasing, that “what I was doing was dangerous to my physical security”. Fearing for his life, Githongo fled to London. Nation editors Wangethi Mwangi and Joseph Odindo met him secretly in London and later compiled the first detailed account of the headline “Anglo-Leasing: The Truth”.

Long history of crusades by Nation against corruption

For 10 years, the Nation’s editorial cartoonist, Godfrey Mvampembwa (popularly known as Gado), has caricatured the corrupt and the mighty strutting through Kenyan society.

He has five characters he considers members of his personal “Animal Farm,” recalling the great George Orwell satire of that name.

They are human but have the mouths of pigs, leopards, hyenas, crocodiles or wild dogs, “animals associated with greed.”

Like Orwell, Gado uses the characters to depict the wickedness, deceit and indifference of a sleaze society where those with power happily steal from and defraud their compatriots.

“The five are clearly associated with excessive eating,” he says. “They encompass the class that everybody knows. I don’t have to name names.

Rather, I use the characters. Gado’s work is part of a long NMG tradition to go to battle against the swindlers of the public entrusted. From its earliest days, the Nation has crusaded for an end to corruption and creation of a just society that will not tolerate fraud.

Awareness of the problem may have peaked with the infamous and devastating Goldenberg scandal, but NMG’s flagship publications, Daily Nation and Sunday Nation, had worked in the public interest since the early 1960s — against suspected malfeasance in the public sector. The Daily Nation was the first newspaper to highlight the Goldenberg story on April 13, 1992. Its then Business Editor, Peter Warugtere, wrote in a lead article on Page One that “a company given exclusive rights by Treasury to export gold and jewellery is involved in a multi-billion shillings deal that observers describe as ‘a scandal of major proportions’.”

A year later, writer Sarah Elderkin told all in a Nation serialization that outlined the amazing affrontery of the culprits. It was investigative work of a quality which in a country such as the United States would probably have won her a Pulitzer Prize.

Over many years, Nation writers exposed the sale of university degrees, the theft of land and the irregular excision of forests. Nation Media Group has been instrumental in its steadfastness. “Even during emotive times and issues, the group’s faithfulness to ideals such as democracy, truth, balance and justice seems steadfast,” said TI Kenya executive director Job Oginda.

“We have watched with pride and gratitude as the Nation took enormous political, legal and financial risks on behalf of the citizens of Kenya. We salute your whistle-blowing on issues of governance and we appreciate your keeping in the forefront seemingly mundane but pertinent accountability issues.”

In Kenya, fighting corruption can be frustrating. Those implicated blandly deny charges and often are appointed or reappointed to plum jobs. Courts have mostly proven irrelevant in dealing with major scandles, tending to target petty theft instead.

Years after the multi-million-dollar losses to the economy caused by the Goldenberg fraud, massive frauds were still being perpetrated in numerous official areas.
In the 1970s, Kenya’s economy was dealt two trade shocks in quick succession and stubbornly failed to make policy sense out of either.

The first came in October 1973 when Arab members of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) withheld oil from the rest of the world to protest against US assistance to Israel during the Yom Kippur war. The embargo lasted up to March 1974 and damaged export-reliant Third World nations like Kenya as other OPEC members took full advantage, sending cost-push inflation and unemployment, as well as trade imbalances, spiralling out of control.

Naturally, Bretton Woods’ pressure mounted on Kenya to devalue its currency and exercise fiscal discipline to reflect the real situation. That would wait for another two decades, thanks to the second shock. In short, Kenyans would remain shielded from high prices by a grossly overvalued currency and its inefficient “infant” industries from the world.

On July 17, 1975, a freezing wind blew from Antarctica and the subsequent frost destroyed at least two-thirds of coffee berries in southern Brazil. Countries including Kenya, previously bemoaning low prices, jumped in delight as the world prices tripled in the New Year. This trade shock, locally referred to as the “coffee boom”, would last from 1976 to 1979.

Naturally, the Kenyatta regime was only too happy to shelve the reforms that would have liberalised the economy and wrought much pain on the increasingly disenchanted masses.

The trade imbalance was overnight rectified and coffee growing areas were soon booming with construction of new concrete houses. The Ugandan dictator, Idi Amin, would only ice the cake by withholding coffee exports in replication of the Arab boycott, triggering massive smuggling of the Mount Elgon coffee beans into Kenya until the newly installed President Moi put a stop to the lucrative trade.

Kenya miserably failed to take advantage of the newfound wealth for a number of reasons. One, with the revenue it maintained price and currency controls and cocked a snook at anyone who suggested reform. In turn, the private sector had no capacity to absorb the new cash by for instance swiftly importing machinery and intermediate goods.

Secondly, the state cranked up expenditure and made machinery too expensive for the private sector. Thirdly, there was no effort at sterilising (delaying absorption into the consumer economy) the inflows and avoiding the sudden demand-pushed inflation.

As fiscal discipline was destroyed in the 1980s, the world had entered an era of falling commodity prices and Kenya would pay the ultimate price. In 1993, Kenya agreed to float its currency, ushering in nearly 10 years of hyperinflation, stagnation and high poverty rates.

At the change of presidencies in January 2003, the coffee boom was a distant memory. The number one foreign exchange earner was third to tourism and tea with the coffee industry in the firm grip of rogue directors straddling all its institutions. The happy generation of ‘coffee children’ had long been superseded by poverty-stricken Mungiki adherents in the prime growing of Central Kenya.
Government efforts to dominate, intimidate and control Nation newspapers in the founding years — to the extent buy a controlling interest in the group — are recorded in declassified archival documents from the 1960s.

Nation journalists were spied on under the first Minister for Information, Broadcasting and Tourism in independent Kenya, Achieng’ Oneko, and some of his successors. Editors were lectured and threatened.

At a Kenya Intelligence Committee briefing, buying shares in Nation Newspapers was floated as a means of controlling a group that was demonstrating persistent independence. The idea was not pursued, presumably because the authorities realised the newspapers’ content would then be seen as evident propaganda.

The idea of buying shares was floated during an intelligence briefing but this was abandoned after some time.

The East African Standard was considered acceptable to the Jomo Kenyatta government, the Nation group resisted being treated as a semi-official arm of development and this worried and angered government officials unused to free Press traditions.

Attacks on the Nation also reflected fault lines between the right and left in government, represented by Tom Mboya and Oginga Odinga.

A brief written by the strongly left-wing Oneko described the Nation as “reactionary” and a paper that had “no place in an African state”.

Intelligence officers and the Kiambaa-born Peter Gachathi, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information, kept watch on the work of several journalists, investigated their background and opened files on them. Some of the files are now declassified and are available at the Kenya National Archives, the national depository of government documents.

In one confidential letter, Gachathi asked the minis-
Kanyotu kept his eye trained on journalists

try's Senior Press Officer, A.J. (Tony) Hughes, to check the recent writings of John Dumoga, foreign editor of the Nation. The feisty Ghanaian had crossed Kanyotu's regime in Accra and become a hate figure in Kenya government circles. Gachathi wanted him deported.

In his reply dated July 29, 1965, Hughes wrote: “You have asked me to check the recent writings by John Dumoga. In the last month, I have only traced one article appearing under his byline. This was on Saturday, July 17, headed “And the Nation Foreign Editor says Prove It”. This was a criticism by Dumoga of the white minority government in Rhodesia.”

This was three months before the November 11, 1965, unilateral declaration of independence by Ian Smith, the Rhodesian Prime minister. But Gachathi appeared to suspect that Dumoga had penned an article criticising the Organisation of African Unity, predecessor of the African Union.

Hughes went on: “I understand you have reason to believe that the story on Page 1 of the Nation of July 20 headed “OAU Facing Crash Crisis,” bylined Nation Foreign Editor, was in fact written by him (Dumoga).”

“I do not feel that either of these articles warrants action. I do believe that past articles by Dumoga have been objectable (sic). I propose that I keep an eye on journalists. In one of his letters to Oneko, Hughes refers to an item headed “Tragedy of Vietnamese Refugees”. The Nation had apparently used a picture of American soldiers helping refugees. This did not go down well with the left-wingers in the Kenyatta government.

Hughes wrote: “As far as I am aware, our government has not stated its attitude on the overall Vietnam situation nor has it mentioned upon any particular aspects of the war. By the use of such feature articles the Daily Nation appears to be attempting to influence public opinion in Kenya in a particular direction, that is to say, in favour of the American position. “While the Daily Nation has a right according to the freedom of the Press to take what view it wishes of the Vietnam situation, it has a duty to bear in mind Kenya’s non-aligned policy in regard to the cold war.”

Moreover, if it wishes to declare support for the American position it should come out in the open and do so instead of using these underhand means by planted stories of how nice the Americans are to refugees. Why not balance this report with something from the Viet Cong about the American news of napalm and poison gas? “I therefore propose that the Editor of the Nation (Hilary Ng’weno) be informed of our views on this particular issue,” said the lengthy letter.

It was not the first time that Ng’weno would hear from Hughes. On February 14, 1964, Hughes wrote to the Nation’s first African editor, telling him that the paper’s tone was “completely inappropriate to the conditions of Kenya today”.

Hughes wrote: “I think you should try and have our agreed meeting as soon as possible to discuss these matters and perhaps to arrange for you to see (the PS) and the minister,” said the letter. There is no record of Ng’weno’s reply.

Diplomatic complaints were raised too. In March 1965, Guinean diplomat Barry BoCar Biro complained about a Nation article and Hughes alerted Oneko: “I agree with the substance of the complaint. All too often, newspapers of the Nation series spoil their other attempts to work with the government by using some article which is completely contrary to the interests of Kenya.”

On April 13, senior editors of Nation were summoned before Minister Oneko, who read them the riot act, though his comments were never publicly reported.
Telling the story of Dr Robert John Ouko’s disappearance and subsequent death placed me in the direct path of his unseen assassins.

On February 15, 1990, news Editor Mutegi Njau was on the line: The minister for foreign affairs had vanished from his Koru home. At 8.30 the following morning, sweating and trembling, I was staring at the minister’s smouldering body. I had left for his farm at Got Alila from the Nation’s Kisumu bureau where I was a reporter. Squads of security men were combing the dry grassland and I wandered away from a group of General Service Unit officials. A few minutes later, I found myself paralysed and staring at the smouldering body. Suddenly a police truncheon landed on my face. Bleeding profusely, my instincts glued me to the scene. I knew I was the only journalist who had seen the remains and I had to tell the story through the newspaper.

At 6.30 pm, as darkness descended on the eerie hillside, a helicopter carrying the Permanent Secretary in charge of Internal Security, Hezekiah Oyugi, and Commissioner of Police Phillip Kilonzo landed. With them was the Chief Government Pathologist Dr Stanley Ndaka Kaviti.

The trio summoned reporters to confirm what we had all been waiting for, the identity of the body found at the foot of Got Alila hill. “Yes, this is Ouko’s body. You can now go and write your story,” Oyugi told us.

The pathologist took one look at the burnt body, shook his head and concluded that the minister had committed suicide. The other two concurred with smiles.

I had observed the weather and vegetation at Got Alila and it was dry and hot. I knew that if the body had been burned on the spot, the fire would have spread through out the hillside. I stated in my story to Nation that the fire which consumed an adult man only burnt a small portion of grass below his trunk. University students quickly spotted the contradictions between my reporting and the official version.

On the Sunday that my story, I started receiving death threats: “You think you are the one who knows how to describe scenes in English? We shall deal with you. Tutakufanya kama Ouko” (We shall deal with you like Ouko). Violence engulfed Kisumu for days.

Mr Atemi was a reporter at Nation in 1988 to 1999 and is now a communication consultant and biographer.
Nation editors down the five decades

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Massachusetts, and had set up The Weekly Review and after I had returned from a three-year tour of duty in Dar es Salaam—Hilary hired me as his assistant editor (The two Nairobi dailies had rejected me because of my “Tanzanian communism.”) Hilary was as engaged by the Cold War as were Githii and Henry Gathigira of The East African Standard and I still have the hand-written note in which he banned me under all the above editors-in-chief. He was the man who made the paper happen. And in the top editorial job, he was different because he never involved himself in petty partisan politics.

He was also the first editor-in-chief who was ready to help out a hard-pressed chief sub-editor. Joe told me that he needed only my skills in English and page layout. I knew the Board was against my hiring because of my supposed left-wing views, so Joe compromised by undertaking not to allow me to do any writing. It was thus under Joe the workhorse that I moved from editorial copy reviser to become the Daily Nation’s first black chief sub-editor, taking over from John McHaffie. Sadly, Joe died in Nairobi early in the 1980s, soon after he had retired from Nation House.

He was replaced by Peter Mwaura and thus began one of the most tumultuous eras in the company’s history. Peter was probably the most perceptive and socially conscious editorial chief up to that time. His drawback was that having spent his time in communication theory at the School of Journalism of the University of Nairobi, he had no experience in newspaper production. His problems were compounded when Dugal Nisbet-Smith arrived from The Times in London as managing director of the holding company. In 1981, I was among those who resigned amidst the internal convulsions thus occasioned.

In 1983, Peter Mwaura was replaced by George Mbogguss, another workhorse who rose from the ranks to become managing editor of the Kiswahili Taifa newspapers.

George it was who in 1984 convinced the board to hire me back, this time as associate editor to write editorials, take charge of the commentary pages, edit the letters and the Op-Ed section. George Mbogguss (aka “Mbogguss”) was a man of a special intelligence.

With only eight years of formal education and having joined the newsroom as a messenger, he picked up enough reporting technique and enough English to pilot the Kiswahili papers quietly through turbulent times when the English-language products were coming frequently under fire.

In 1988, Joe Kadhi (as his deputy) and I (by then managing editor of the daily) became his chief lieutenants. The three of us would lock ourselves up in George’s office for long hours discussing the news, rewriting page-one stories, suggesting the Page One lead headline and designing the page. It was perhaps the happiest and most productive period in the Nation’s history.

Unfortunately, it did not last. Later the same year, President Moi invited me to take over from a Briton called Ted Graham as editor-in-chief of The Kenya Times. The challenge was irresistible for a man like me whose career was mostly playing second fiddle in newsrooms.

In 1991, I retired from day-to-day newspaper work.

That same year, Mbogguss and Kadhi retired and their places were taken by Wangethi Mwangi and Tom Mshindi. In 2000, Wangethi invited me to the new Nation Centre in Kimathi Street to take charge of editorial quality control.

Perhaps Wangethi was the shrewdest of them all. As the group’s internal “stabiliser” and external “shock-absorber,” he presided over the company’s most revolutionary period in terms of capital expansion, technological composition and relationship with the political regime.

Throughout most of his Nation leadership, the larger nation itself was in the throes of upheaval, the demand for multi-partyism proving, when it did eventually come, to be almost unmanageable.

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The Tanzanian bomb killed 11 people and injured 85. In Nairobi, some 270 people were killed, at least 5,000 injured and scores buried under masonry. Twelve Americans were killed, including the Nairobi consul-general and his son, but the vast majority of victims were locals. The injured included Kanu secretary-general Joseph Kamotho, who was visiting an embassy official when the explosion occurred.

The attacks, attributed to local members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, brought Bin Laden to American attention for the first time and the FBI placed him on its Ten Most Wanted list.

Investigators reported that the bombs were massive, 2,000-lb devices made of 400-500 cylinders of TNT about the size of soda cans. They were detonated by suicide volunteers.

In response to the bombings, President Bill Clinton ordered a series of cruise missile strikes against targets in Sudan and Afghanistan. One of the strikes destroyed a pharmaceutical factory which made many of Sudan’s medications. Apparently unreliable intelligence had claimed chemical weapons were developed there.

Twenty-one people were indicted for various alleged roles in the East African bombings. Four are serving life in prison without parole, four were reported killed in Afghanistan or Pakistan and one died of leukaemia while under arrest.

The attacks were attributed to local members of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad.
and Dar in coordinated bomb attacks
Nation’s battle for a TV broadcast licence

The Years Between 1990 and 2000 saw dynamic expansion in the Nation group; a new headquarters in downtown Nairobi, a new upmarket weekly, The EastAfrican, a $12 million ($750 million) press hall on the city’s outskirts with the latest in printing technology, entry to the internet and, crucially, a move into the broadcast media.

Capital expenditure soared to $12 million ($65 million) from $1.6 million ($85 million). The group’s new home was the custom-built, multi-storey Nation Centre on Kimathi Street designed by Danish architect Henning Larsen. The new building was owned by Industrial Promotion Building Ltd., an affiliate of the Aga Khan Fund for Economic Development, in which the Nation had a 20 per cent interest. The newspapers took four floors and their neighbours included prestige tenants such as the Nairobi Stock Exchange and Diamond Trust Bank.

Staffers who had spent years in the stuffy, cramped, chaotic confines of Nation House were delighted to move to their new quarters in a light-filled, spacious, airy, noise-controlled, no-smoking and air-conditioned ambience.

A major boost to journalistic morale at the time was editor Joseph Odindo’s creation, The EastAfrican, the group’s first significant new editorial product for many years. Devised to meet growing interest in the East African region at a time when relations between Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania were warmer than they had been for years, the newspaper presented as handsome and indisputably authoritative. Little more than a year later, the International Press Institute described it as “one of the best, if not the best, of regional newspapers in sub-Saharan Africa”.

It was 1991 when the group took the first step on a long and arduous journey into the electronic media by applying for a licence to broadcast. The government response was negative, presumably because of the Nation’s independent editorial line, so chief executive Wilfred Kiboro organised the purchase of a controlling interest in East Africa Television Network Ltd., (EATN), which already had television and radio licences.

The government promptly cancelled EATN’s licences on grounds there was a dispute about the transfer of shares to the Nation. There ensued a series of court hearings, postponements, statements and objections which Kiboro characterised as “a merry-go-round of delay”.

Seven years after its first application, the Nation was awarded TV and radio licences, but for Nairobi only, not countrywide. Negotiations ensued about frequencies, microwave links, the siting of transmitters and the strength of signals. As the millennium moved to a close, the group restructured, partly to reflect its entry into broadcasting, and changed its name to Nation Media Group Ltd. A subsidiary company, Africa Broadcasting Ltd., set up to handle TV and radio, was merged into a divisional structure within NMG and Nation TV (later NTV) was born.

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Dogged pursuit led to radio and television stations in Nairobi and Kampala. Sheilla Mwanyigah presents a programme for EasyFM.

The issue is whether there is a systematic bias that is symptomatic of society and our times. Why, historically, have women at Nation newspapers been under-represented in editorial positions of influence -- managing editor level and above?

Granted, many women are senior sub-editors, reporters, columnists and photographers. One of them is Dorothy Kweyu, who holds a senior position on the copy desk as a revise editor. She has a 31-year association with the Nation, almost half of those years on active service, and feels strongly about the subject.

“Most great women of the Nation have been forced to seek solace elsewhere,” she says, “Some beat a retreat like the proverbial Luhya woman, who goes looking for another husband, only to return for ‘burial’ because, somehow, Number One was the best.”

The fact that they are welcomed back and allocated other duties proves they were good, after all. The following question arises, she says: “If the Nation has as many good women journalists as men, why are its women not rewarded with the biggest jobs in the newsroom? Many of them end up in areas such as women issues and entertainment.”

In all of top management, there is only one woman, the Human Resources director, and there is no woman on the Board of Directors. Editorial Director Joseph Odindo said: “The idea is to strike a balance between attracting, retaining and promoting the right women journalists and affirmative action. If you look at the Media Lab, there is a very healthy balance between male and female journalists, and that’s the way things ought to go.” Mr Odindo said the company had moved to even things up through the MediaLab, one of Kenya’s most competitive training programmes. It recruits the best university students from graduating classes in Kenya, Uganda, and

Name: Njeri Rugene
Position: Parliamentary Editor
Memorable story: Exposing corruption in Parliament where legislators were being paid to ask questions. An MP disputed the story and asked that we name the people involved, but the Speaker is yet to deliver a ruling.

Name: Lucy Oriang’
Position: Columnist and former Managing Editor (Magazines).
Memorable stories: Ms Oriang has been a strong voice in championing women’s rights in the media and is known for writing that pulls no punches when it comes to bad behaviour in the corridors of power.

Name: Rita Tinina
Position: Senior Reporter, NTV
Memorable Stories: “Troubled Waters”, a documentary feature about the Nairobi River that took about three weeks to put together, and shed new light on this topic.

Name: Wangui Maina
Position: Business Reporter, Business Daily
 Joined: September 2006
Beat: Tourism and Transport
Memorable Stories: Covering the aviation sector, especially the Kenya Airways crash in Doula, Cameroon and its harrowing impact on families. The global financial crisis was an eye-opener.

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One step at a time, women climb the ladder

Name: Kui Kinyanjui
Position: Business Reporter, Business Daily
Joined: September 2006
Beat: ICT
Memorable Stories: Covering the rise of a new breed of ICT entrepreneurs. I am pleased the one-off project later drove the development of BD’s weekly pullout, called Digital Business.

Name: Joan Pereruan
Position: Photo Editor
Joined: 2006
Beat: Photography for Daily Nation, Taifa, Business Daily, Sunday Nation, Saturday Nation and The EastAfrican
Memorable Stories: The exhumation of a 72-year-old woman killed and buried by her last-born son in a shallow grave.

Name: Sara Bakata
Position: Deputy Chief-Sub, The EastAfrican in charge of the magazine
Joined: April 2002
Most memorable moment: Every week brings new challenges on the sub’s desk and there has never been a shortage of hilarious moments from copy as well as colleagues!

Name: Dorothy Kveyu
Position: Staff writer-Revise Editor, Daily Nation
Joined: February 1979-November 1987; December 2003 to date
Memorable stories: A riveting pullout on the malpractices of a major tobacco firm, and irresponsible pharmaceutical firms that were selling to Kenyans drugs that had been banned elsewhere.

Name: Mary Wasike
Position: Revise Editor, Daily Nation
Joined: October 2005
Memorable Stories: When First Lady Lucy Kibaki was in the building. It was scary because of all the security people she had come with. While she was still around, a story was being written, which she knew nothing about.

Name: Millicent Mwololo
Position: Features writer, Living Magazine
Joined: July 2007
Beat: Features
Memorable Stories: I still hear the cry of this widow and her eight malnourished children at their home in Makuyu, Kamiti location, Maragua district. I met them in January 2008 at the height of drought and famine.

Name: Njeri Kihang’ah
Position: Features correspondent, Daily Nation
Joined: June 2008
Beat: Features (entertainment and careers)
Memorable Stories: How US rapper Jay-Z and others weave Masonic symbolism into their music and merchandise.

Name: Ruth Lubembe
Current Position: Editor-Quality desk, Daily Nation
Joined: August 2004
Beat: Features
Memorable Stories: As editor of Living magazine, I met childless couples trying desperately to have children. These stories made me realise that family really is at the heart of everything.

Name: Adhyambo Odera
Position: Buzz Magazine Editor
Joined: 2005
Memorable moment: When the Nation Media Group launched its culture change programme. The initiative shows what NMG as a company stands for. Ever since its launch the positive energy around the newsroom has been amazing.

Name: Mejumaa Mharuku
Joined: March 2003,
Position: Editorial graphic designer
Most memorable story: Designing the page of ‘My brother’s keeper’ by Millicent Mwololo. It ran in Living Magazine about a woman’s experience of having to take care of her brother who suffers from a rare condition.

Tanzania and gives them one year of in-house training and on-the-job experience on full pay. These journalists are then deployed to various outlets throughout NMG. And certainly progress has been made. When the question of women’s promotion was raised in the 1970s and 1980s, someone would always raise the question: “How do you expect a mother to leave her house at midnight to go report on a fire in Mathare?”

The 1990s and this side of the century have brought changes that have been reflected in NMG newsrooms. In Nairobi, Dorothy Kveyu became the first female news editor, Catherine Gichuru served as an investigative reporter and later as news editor, Njeri Eugene is parliamentary editor, Lucy Oriang’ rose from copy editor to managing editor, Ruth Lumenbe was editor of Living and Rhoda Ongeno edits Saturday Magazine.

In Tanzania, Sakina Datoo was managing editor and Usia Mkoma news editor at The Citizen, while Betty Dindi was appointed managing editor at NTV Uganda.

Management points out that these appointments stem from a decision aggressively to recruit and mentor young women journalists either through direct hires, internships, or NMG’s annual training and general management career rotation programme.

The papers give major play to stories such as the UN conference on women in 1985. Topics such as poverty, sexual violence, health, education and female circumcision continue to drive coverage.

Lucy Oriang introduced the International Women’s Day special project into the Nation in 2000, which she registers as one of her main achievements.

Many women join journalism straight from university and start families early in their careers. “It’s doubly challenging to balance journalism with a family since the job can take over your life with its sometimes un holy hours, travel and risk,” observes Kathleen Openda, once a current affairs editor with the Nation.

“Many women grow up and have the ‘I’ll find a rich guy to sort me out’ plan in their heads and therefore do not pursue their careers with the zeal of their male counterparts, developing networks, looking for opportunities for self-development.”

Human Resources Director Mwikali Muthiani says she would be happy to see more women taking senior positions. But the rules will not be bent to favour a female candidate.

“We are an equal opportunity employer but based on merit. I, for one, would feel bad to be picked for a position just because I am a woman, so I extend the same courtesy to others.”
Covering culture in Kenya: A privilege and a paradox

Cultural controversy provided the grounds for healthy, constructive debate in a democracy

By MARGARETTA WA GACHERU

Covering culture in Kenya for nearly a quarter-century – almost half the length of the Daily Nation’s life – was both a privilege and a paradox. It was a privilege because I interviewed everyone from playwrights and poets to pop stars, politicians and prime ministers. Of the playwrights, I recall the late Robert Serumaga and John Ruganda as well as Francis Imbuga, David Mulwa, and even Gunter Grass. Poets included Okot p’Bliek and Grace Ogot, and the pop stars were Mick Jagger, lead singer of the Rolling Stones, and Lauren Hill of Fugees fame, among others. From differing areas of achievement were Prime Minister Gro Brundtland of Norway, paleontologists Richard and Meave Leakey, Mwai Kibaki when he was a government minister, and preacher and social activist Rev Jesse Jackson.

Indeed, just as celebrity sports star Serena Williams came to Kenya recently, so back then we got used to seeing Hollywood stars Meryl Streep and Robert Redford on a regular basis. Since culture is all about ideas, I learned early on (while still a student at University of Nairobi) that theatre can play not only in entertain people but in rousing their awareness of important social issues.

Ever since the late 1960s when Ngugi helped to spearhead a cultural revolution in Nairobi, most Kenyans believed theatre was for the elite, the expatriates, the Europeans; it had little or nothing to do with them.
How we made ‘The EastAfrican’ a reality

BY NICK CHITTY

The first challenge I encountered during my 10 years with the Nation was to train the systems staff. They were only seen on the cutting edge of high-technology newspaper production. Some of our processes and practices were not even being attempted in London’s Fleet Street or by British provincial newspapers at that time, either because of restrictive union practices or lack of investment.

Nation had a far-sighted management policy that saw where the technology was going and decided early on to be part of it.

A huge investment was made in the new Nation Centre and at roughly the same time, a new printing press.

It is pleasing to see, even after my time, that there is still that far-sighted approach. New editorial and advertising systems have been installed and of course the transition has been made to publishing online. I now sit in an armchair in London with my laptop and read about Kenya and the rest of East Africa merely by logging on.

To my mind, The EastAfrican was the most adventurous, exciting and rewarding project I had the pleasure to be involved with. I had been doing some work on new publications in the UK at the Independent and The Correspondent but I had never had to plan from scratch how to launch a new publication from a systems point of view. So, when we learned that a new regional-oriented paper was being researched we had to think fast on how we could achieve this goal.

The most important aspect for any new publication is the design. If people don’t like the look of your new paper they won’t buy it. A great deal of thought was put into this and design consultants were hired. The onus was for the systems team to interpret the various design specimens.

Muumbo Muyanga was assigned this task and did a heroic job, spending many long hours with The Editor, Joe Odindo’s editorial team and designers, putting the finishing touches to various dummies.

Eventually, a mountain of dummies was whittled down to the last dozen or so. These were then laid out on the board-room table for a final choice to be made.

There were a multitude of other minor problems to overcome in the run-up to the launch. One of the ATEX computer software programmers was asked to come over and get up the telecommunications link between Dar-es-Salaam, Kampala and Nairobi. Luckily, Malcolm Jarrett had been with us before and managed to get it all working.

Nick Chitty was Systems Operations Manager from 1991 to 2001. He now lives in London and runs a property maintenance business.

He is married to Kenya-born Medrine who also worked for the Nation, and they have two boys.

I have enjoyed my work for 40 years

by Noorbegum Kanani

Noorbegum Kanani, supervisor of the photo library at Nation Media Group, has seen it all, at least from the time the Nation was just 10 years old.

Ms Kanani joined the classified advertising department in 1970 and now ranks as the company’s longest serving staff member. She will celebrate her 40th year with the Nation in October.

From the advertising department she was appointed photo library supervisor. Among the pictures in her custody are many going back 50 years and beyond, some of which have been used in this souvenir issue.

How does it feel to be with one company for half a lifetime? “I have enjoyed working with the Nation for all these years,” she says. Born in Homa Bay, she has two sons and two granddaughters. Her husband died in 1995.
The day Jesus preached to the newsroom

By DICK DAWSON

Few newspapers could have got off to a better start than the Daily Nation, mainly because many of the journalists who came out from Britain were extremely talented, young and energetic and very excited about starting a new paper in Africa. Having people around like managing director Michael Curtis, former editor of Britain’s News Chronicle, and John Bierman, an experienced Fleet Street operator who was our first editor, gave us local recruits a great opportunity to learn the sort of journalism which was then unknown in Kenya.

The strength of the paper was in part its recognition of the importance of pictures in a tabloid and our photographers were chosen with care. One of the best was the diminutive Caleb Akwera, who was blessed with a great sense of humour and often returned from assignments with idiomatic and witty photographs that nobody else had noticed.

There was a minor rumour when Kanu held a march through Nairobi and Caleb noticed a cat walking in front of the procession. The picture caused much mirth, but the leaders of the march considered it insulting to Kanu and wrote a letter of complaint, which was duly published. I heard later that they wished they had never sent the letter because people kept making jokes and asking if the cat was a good leader.

A major error I remember from those pioneer days was a front-page lead, “Man Killed by Lions in Game Park,” only inches away from an advertisement showing a lion’s head and the invitation “Come to East Africa’s glorious game parks.” I seem to remember advertisement contracts were cancelled for some time.

One time, the Mayor of Nakuru invited me to go with him to Molo and interview Man Mau freedom fighters who had decided to surrender after years in the forest. As the only mzungu, I felt slightly apprehensive and it was quite a dramatic moment when about 30 of them came out from the bush.

One of the men looked at me and put his hand in his pocket and, frankly, I wondered if it would come out with a pistol. But it was a hand-written Press release and he said he would be really pleased if I could put in the paper for him. In fact, I found the ex-freedom fighters rather timid and very pleased to be photographed.

In the early days of the Nation, many potential politicians, self-styled leaders and eccentrics flocked to our offices opposite the fire station, in what was then Victoria Street, now Tom Mboya Street. One of the latter arrived one day dressed in flowing white robes, told us he was Jesus Christ and he was going to give us a sermon.

He then got up on a desk and preached in loud tones and at some length. Finally, John Bierman said “Thank you, but please do not come back.” However, Jesus said he could not obey such a request. There followed a lengthy negotiation and it was eventually agreed he could come once a month and preach to a strict time limit of five minutes. This arrangement appeared to be satisfactory to all parties and, after a while, we got so used to him that we hardly noticed him. Unfortunately one day, in the middle of a tour of the newsroom by a group of VIPs, Jesus arrived for his monthly visit, mounted on a desk and began delivering his usual booming sermon. Bierman was conscientiously explaining how the paper worked when he realised that his listeners were somewhat distracted. “Er, who is that chap?” asked one. “Is he staff?” Our editor’s skill with words was seriously taxed to explain this bizarre situation.

But that was the Nation and Nairobi half a century ago.

Dick Dawson worked as a reporter at the Daily Nation from 1960 to 1964.

I held my breath in terror as we lifted a £1m computer

BY PETER CHADWICK

After 40 years in the British newspaper business it was a major culture shock to find myself in Nairobi on a three-year contract. In 1990, Nation Centre was just a hole in the ground and democracy was a murky concept to Kenya’s political classes, though the Nation – under the redoubtable George Mbuuguu was doing its level best to hold them to account.

The one-time bakery that was our head office on Tom Mboya Street was not the most salubrious of workplaces, but I perceived an energy, a determination to tell the truth – often at great personal risk to the writers – and an overall feeling of wanting to serve the people which were irresistible. Having chafed at the covert political bias adopted by most of the UK media, I found it refreshing to work for newspapers which tried to tell the truth free of political, religious and tribal influences.

The big event during my three years was the move to the newly-built Nation Centre on Kimathi Street. I had worked on the building and development of two newspaper offices in London but nothing on the scale of this project. That everything went like clockwork on the night of the move was a tribute to the planning of Nguchi Gathogo and his department and to the brilliant computer expertise of the team led by Nick Chitty.

I remember holding my breath in terror as a £1m motherboard was carried in a tarpaulin down the stairs of the old building by some 20 brawny men – one slip and the whole paper’s future was in jeopardy. But all went well and we produced a full Sunday edition of the paper only 20 hours after closing down in Tom Mboya Street.

My policy about editorial content was that it was the business of the editors – after all, they were Kenyan, they understood their country and if they ran the risk of upsetting the authorities without having the option of leaving the country, it was not up to me to advise them. But I will take credit for one innovation, the phenomenon that became The Cutting Edge.

My feeling was that the papers were often too serious and needed a lighter touch here and there and so I suggested to Managing Editor Wanjiru Mwangi that we should have a chatty column. The only place available for it, due to advertising requirements, was the outside column of Page 7 which led me to suggest the name Outside Edge. The team did not care for the name but liked the idea and so The Cutting Edge was born.

The column took off immediately and quickly developed into a popular outlet for the ordinary Kenyan to vent his spleen at the inefficiency and corruption of petty officials. It still gives me a lift to see the column’s name on the website where I read the Nation. When I knew that I was coming to Nairobi I suggested to a colleague from the Daily Mail, Stuart Martin, that he should apply for the post of Finance Director and in fact he actually moved to the Group slightly before me.

We quickly decided that the Nation’s approach to finance was conservative for a publishing house which dominated the marketplace so completely and, under the guidance of group chief Albert Ekirapa, we instituted a much more aggressive revenue policy.

I hope it is not presumptuous to suggest that our efforts were at least partly responsible for funding the growth of NMG into the media giant which it is today.

Peter Chadwick was Managing Director of Nation Newspapers from October 1990 to October 1993. He has been retired for almost 15 years and lives happily in the beautiful Cotswold area of Britain with his wife, television dramatist Adele Rose.
Gearing up for the titanic battle of 2002

IN MARCH 1999, President Moi confirmed that, in accordance with the constitution which barred him from a further term, he would step down at the December 27, 2002 election. There ensued a whirlwind of political horse-trading.

Kanu formed an alliance with Raila Odinga’s National Development Party and Odinga became a cabinet minister in a precedent-setting coalition. Subsequently, the NDF was absorbed into Kanu, of which Odinga became secretary-general, forcing out the long-serving Joseph Kamotho.

Four months before the election, Moi named Uhuru Kenyatta as the man who should step into his shoes as Kanu’s presidential candidate. Uhuru, son of the late President Jomo Kenyatta, was just 35 and had minimal ministerial experience. The move angered many Kanu veterans and some 30 MPs boycotted the party conference which endorsed Uhuru’s candidacy.

On that same day, October 14, across Nairobi in Uhuru Park, Kanu’s main opponents finally formed a grand alliance, having learned the lessons of presenting multiple candidates in 1992 and 1997. Combinations of smaller parties produced the National Rainbow Coalition (Narc) with Mwai Kibaki at its head as the sole presidential candidate.

Kenya’s newspapers front-paged an historic photograph of friends and former enemies all sitting at the same table: Kibaki, Moody Awori, Charity Ngilu, George Saitoti, Kalonzo Musyoka, Raila Odinga, Simeon Nyachae, Kijana Wamalwa and Parah Maalim.

It was a formidable line-up and Kanu zealots realised they could lose an election for the first time.

In the final weeks before polling day, there was an upsurge of dubious dealings at official level, duly reported by the Nation’s investigations desk, including looting of the NSSF, the National Hospital Insurance Fund and the Kenyatta National Hospital. Partly, the cash thus secured was used to make

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In the run-up to the 2007 election, the economy was forging ahead, the media enjoyed unusual freedom, there were no political prisoners, primary school children were getting free education, tourism was booming and Kenya enjoyed a generally good name in international circles.

But official corruption continued to flourish, there was lingering anger over the failure of constitutional reform and the spectre of tribalism was inescapably visible in the line-ups for the poll.

Mwai Kibaki, Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka were principal candidates for the Presidency while two political groupings dominated the parliamentary scene – Kibaki’s Party of National Unity, backed by the traditional Gema alliance, and Odinga’s Orange Democratic Movement, which brought together Luos, Kalenjins and some Luhya.

Early returns looked bad for the ruling regime as the ODM outpolled the PNU two-to-one and a raft of heavyweights were rejected, including Vice-President Moody Awori, Njenga Karume, Nicholas Biwott and Gideon, Jonathan and Raymond Moi.

Then when the presidential result was finally announced – 4,584,721 votes for Kibaki against Odinga’s 4,352,993, violence broke out but what was shocking was the extent and depth of the fury.

In the worst convulsion in its independent history, 1,200 Kenyans were killed with many thousands injured, in Western Kenya, the Rift Valley, Nairobi, Mombasa and elsewhere. Tribal gangs attacked their perceived enemies with pangas, clubs and fiery torches, prompting reprisal raids.
The torching of a church containing 30 people, many of them women and children, near Eldoret, was emblematic of the unleashed hatred. As many as 600,000 people were rendered homeless and refugee camps became permanent elements on the national scene. Economic damage was counted in billions of dollars. The Daily Nation declared: “This madness cannot be allowed to go on.”

The international community, in the form of the African Union, the United States and Britain, stepped in and made it plain that the crisis must be resolved without delay. Kibaki and Odinga began fitful peace talks but it was only with the arrival of the former secretary general of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, on January 22 that designated negotiating teams began meeting.

Since it was now crystal clear that power-sharing was the only realistic solution to Kenya's problems of ethnic division, some form of coalition government became the fundamental objective of the negotiators. But with the two sides finding it difficult to shift from their entrenched positions, Annan moved the talks to a secret location and demanded a news blackout.

Under the National Accord and Reconciliation Act, signed by Kibaki and Odinga on February 28, 2008, the parties agreed to form a grand coalition government. Kibaki, who had been sworn-in as president and Odinga became prime minister.

The pact was widely welcomed.

Heading towards its own 50th anniversary in 2013, independent Kenya faced some fundamental, divisive issues which needed to be resolved once and for all if the country was to move safely forward.

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The Kriegler Commission concluded that Kenyans would never know who won the election because it was impossible to establish reliable results.

This conclusion satisfied many peace-lovers. The Waki Commission handed a list of alleged perpetrators of the violence to Kofi Annan, who passed it to Luis Moreno-Ocampo, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Kenyanas experienced virtually every painful emotion known to man as violence threatened to tear the country asunder.

The International community pressed Mr Kibaki and Mr Odinga into a power-sharing arrangement that brought peace to the nation. The brokers included President John Kufuor of Ghana (below), Mr Kofi Annan and former Tanzanian President Ben Mkapa.
2007 Election and the violent aftermath

There was heartfelt relief all over Kenya when the two giants at the heart of the crisis signed on the dotted line in a deal brokered by Kofi Annan (above)

Luis Moreno-Ocampo the ICC chief prosecutor pursuing the masterminds of the post elections violence.

The proposed position of a government-cum-financial advisor was split after a candidate earmarked for the position failed to meet conditions set out by donors.

The two US presidential aspirants Barack Obama and Hillary Rodham Clinton each...
Scaling new heights in the training of young journalists

By DAVID ADUDA

Nation Media Group has a long history of fostering journalistic talent and professionalism. From the outset, in 1960, its founder, His Highness the Aga Khan hired seasoned editors and reporters from London and mandated them to design and undertake an aggressive training programme to foster a new cadre of African media professionals, providing them with the necessary journalistic and managerial skills and offer them ongoing opportunities to excel professionally.

In-house training was institutionalised with the appointment of training editors, whose brief was to offer apprenticeships to local journalists; taking them through all elements of journalism, ranging from news writing to copy editing and newspaper production. An early beneficiary was Philip Ochieng’, who was plucked from government service, where he had served as a protocol officer in the Division of External Affairs, then under the Prime Minister’s office. Ochieng’ rose from a cub reporter to become managing editor of the Nation and, later, editor-in-chief of the Kenya Times, which was then owned by the then ruling party, the Kenya African National Union.

Another early beneficiary was Joe Kadhi, who started his career as a reporter for Taifa Leo, but was later absorbed in the Daily Nation stable after a training stint at the newly opened School of Journalism at the University of Nairobi. The School itself had been established with the collaboration of the Vienna-based International Press Institute, which had close links with the Nation. Kadhi rose through the ranks to become Assistant Group Managing Editor of the newspaper division and established himself as a popular social and political commentator with his weekly column in the Daily Nation titled Joe Kadhi asks WHY? Today he mentors and teaches young journalists in the United States International University in Nairobi.

The appointment of Hillary Ngweny, a Harvard trained physicist, as editor-in-chief only two years after Nation’s inception was the strongest signal of the desire to empower Africans to chart the destiny of the nation. He played an instrumental role in initiating training plans for Nation journalists. Besides in-house training, various programmes helped to mentor and enhance journalistic skills. Among others, the Nation entered into a twinning partnership with the St. Petersburg Times newspaper in the US, where Nation journalists would be sent on fellowships to learn best practices abroad. (A similar partnership was cemented in later years with the Kansas City Star of the US) More initiatives followed such as sponsoring journalists for internships and journalism training abroad and at the School of Journalism.

As the Nation Media Group expanded, so too did its training and professional development needs. In particular, the Group’s expansion into Uganda and Tanzania and diversification into broadcasting and digital media in the 1990s and 2000s exposed the dire shortage of trained journalists in the wider region - as well as critical skill and experience gaps in traditional and new media formats. A strategic response – namely, creating a pipeline to identify, nurture and retain talent – was imperative.

That response was the Nation Media Lab, established in 2007 to incubate talent and develop media professionals with the broad range of skills that matched the groups expanding needs. Specifically, the purpose of the Lab was to identify fresh university graduates from different professions and take them through an intensive hands-on craftsmanship to turn them into journalists.

It was styled a “laboratory” deliberately – both to signal the Group’s purpose of creating a hub for journalistic talent and to distinguish it from other journalism training models.

Three years after inception, the Media Lab had admitted and trained 60 recent graduates from universities across East Africa. Rather than focus solely on mass communication graduates, Media Lab trainees spruce up for graduation.

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Battle for democracy picks up momentum

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political payments to swing the election and partly to offset individual bank accounts in a last-chance raid on the Treasury’s coffers before an expected change of regime. Although Mwai Kibaki was injured in a car crash and sidelined for several weeks, the extraordinary spectacle of a united opposition excited Kenyans as never before. The campaign was unusually free from violence, as if the dirty-tricks specialists had already given up the ghost, and the anti-Kanu forces duly won an emphatic victory in both presidential and parliamentary contests, ending nearly four decades of uninterrupted Kanu rule.

Kibaki took the presidency with 62.3 per cent of votes against Uhuru Kenyatta’s 31.3 per cent and Narc won 125 of 210 available parliamentary seats. Kanu was reduced to 64 and FORD-People won 14. The election turnout was a high 56.1 per cent.

Though confined to a wheelchair with one leg in plaster, Kibaki presented a formidable figure at his inauguration, condemning Kanu’s years of misrule and declaring that “corruption will now cease to be a way of life in Kenya.”

The new government embarked on a whirlwind of change. Its most popular decision was to initiate free primary education for all children, but Kibaki also appointed bodies to investigate Goldenberg and the murder of Robert Ouko, opened detention cells in Nyayo House for public viewing, oversaw the start of a constitutional review conference and began moves to rid the judiciary of corrupt magistrates and judges.

Kenyans had seen nothing like it and briefly the nation seemed united and at one. Democracy was at last in sight. Inevitably, however, the honeymoon did not last. The bill for looting government coffers during the Kanu years was commonly set at around $3 billion, enough to pay for primary schooling for every Kenyan child for 10 years. Thus Kibaki’s inauguration day promise to put an end to this perpetual scrouge was received with delight by indigenous Kenyans.
At the heart of popular culture

The Nation covered the origins of Benga music, from the Lake Victoria region

Just as the Nation in its early days set out to give a voice to African political leaders ignored by the colonial Press, so it opened its pages to the vibrant indigenous music in a burgeoning entertainment industry.

You can look through the Nation and trace the careers of some of today’s most famous musicians.

In the early 1960s, Kenya’s white-oriented newspapers concentrated on dog shows, pony gymkhanas, visiting entertainers at the New Stanley Grill Room (comedian/violinists such as Vic Oliver) and plays and musicals at the Donovan Maule Theatre. The songs and stories that captured the rich depth of African cultural life found no space.


A great musician, whose career the Nation tracked for years was Fadhilli William. He was best known for that great song, Malaiaka. But controversy grew about its genesis following reports in the early 1960s that Grand Charo was in fact the original composer. Fadhilli, it was said, simply popularised the song in new versions, as did many other international artists.

Other noted numbers by Fadhilli were Taxi Driver and Uwe Wangu. With Malaika, Fadhilli put Kenya on the international music scene. The song was later redone by Miriam Makeba, Boney M and others.

Fundi Konde, one of Kenya’s greatest composers, was born in Kilifi District in distant 1924. He had strong Kiswahili lyrics and mostly wrote love ballads.

Fundi entertained troops in South Asia during the Second World War and had many hits, including Mama Sowera, Majengo Siendii Tena, Kipenzi Waniua Ua, Jambo Sigara and Tausi. He died in 2000. The original “Dreva Kombo” was done by Paul Mwachupa.

Veterans of the 1960s will recall David Amunga particularly for Journey from America to Africa and Jane is Pretty. Amunga throughout the years was a keen advocate against piracy through various organisations.

Veteran TV comedians Mzee Pembe, Mama Toffi, Kipang’a were amply profiled in both Daily Nation and Taifa Leo, as was veteran actor Joseph Olita who played the starring role of the dictator in the 1981 movie Amin: The Rise and Fall. Most of this movie, directed by Sharad Patel, was shot in Kenya. Olita also played the part of Amin in the 1991 Hollywood movie Mississippi Masala.

The Nation covered the origins of Benga music, from the Lake Victoria region, in which Daniel Owino Misiani, Ochieng Nelly, “Dr” Collela Mazee, George Ramogi and others played major roles. Benga was later to provide an inspiration to world-famous Lingala musicians. The invasion from Democratic Republic of Congo through Uganda of musicians seeking greener pastures. Others kept moving between Tanzania and Kenya.

Also in the Nation archives is the story of Tanzanian music. There were musicians and pop groups which fled the socialist re-

ABOVE: Members of Equator Sounds Band, Nashil Pitchen, Fadhill William, Charles Soko, Peter Soko with an unidentifi ed fan. The band went on to record the classic “Pole Musa” which burst charts in the late 60s.

RIGHT: Singer Miriam Makeba (far left) with government minister James Gichuru and other guests at the 1963 Uhuru celebrations.

Veteran actor Joseph Olita played the starring role of the dictator in the 1981 movie Amin: The Rise and Fall
gime to make money in capitalist Kenya, such as Mbaraka Mwin- shehe and Simba Wanyika.

In 1996 came the huge Nation/ House of Manji Benga music extravaganza at the Nyayo National Stadium. To get in you needed either a copy of Taifa Junapili or a packet of House of Manji biscuits. The show was a platform for exposure to leading Benga musicians like the late Okach Biggy and Heka Heka Band, Princess Jolly, DO Misiani and Sukuma Bin Ongaro.

Veteran broadcaster and music promoter Fred Obachi Machoka praised the entertainment coverage of the Daily Nation. “We have been able to keep up to date with most of the happenings on the entertainment scene over the years,” he said. Popular music apart, the Daily Nation has also been involved, since the 1990s, in the sponsorship of schools drama and music festivals.

By PHILIP MWANIKI

Kenyans once looked up to the heroes of yesteryear—the Mau Mau freedom fighters, the Second Liberation warriors, musicians such as Daudi Kabaka and Fadhilli Williams, brilliant footballers like Joe Kadenge and actors like Mzee Ojwang and Mama Kayai. But, with time, the Kabanga generation was brushed aside by new kids on the block—Nameless, Hardstone, 5 Alive, Redkyulias, Kalamashaka, Prezzo and Nikki.

Nation Media Group embraced the new look showbiz and the celebrity culture was in. From the 1990s, the Nation has dedicated more and more pages to entertainers. It started off as two pages, but the fans of celebrities wanted more. They wanted a relationship with their stars. They wanted to delve into their lives and lifestyle. They wanted to know what their pet peeves were and who they were dating, marrying or divorcing.

Media personalities had their own stage. Hamisi Thermo, Nyaga Francis, Elizabeth Omollo, Ann Wafuya and Ken Obachi Machoka were viewed strictly as professionals. This new breed had star quality.

The Nation granted the new stars more space on its pages. Out were the more space on its pages. Out were the two pages, in came Young Nation. The fans could now read about their favourite stars’ fears, ambitions and even hitherto well-kept secrets. People could relate to them better through the pages of the Nation. The stars used those same pages to promote their gigs. They had their upcoming albums and they saw sales go up.

It was a two-way relationship and a generational shift from traditional celebrities whose claim to fame was that they could sing, look good on television or sound nice on radio. Soon, other entertainment magazines arrived on the scene. But none were really as exclusive to celebrities as Buzz, a free magazine that came with the Sunday paper. This was the home of celebrities. The public loved it and sales climbed. The magazine set the standard and the topic. You cannot talk about the Kenyan entertainment industry and fail to mention Buzz, which heralded a new era in “celebville” and covered every detail about the celebrities and their art. As Buzz concentrated on celebrities, there was still a neglected audience out there and the Nation soon came up with ZuQka, a weekly lifestyle and entertainment magazine. The mature yet still celebrity-hungry group who would rather listen to Eric Wainaina than Jamwat and Mejia found their place here. This generation ushered in the celebrity craze in the 1990s and can hardly keep up today with the fast rising young stars.

Through the Nation, Kenya has a vibrant entertainment industry and even the corporate world is taking notice. Where it used to be only “real” heroes who were awarded Presidential awards and medals of honour, that list now boasts names such as Eric Wainaina.

From Tanzania to perform plays when television was launched in Kenya in 1962. One of their first appearances was in the show “Top Life.” Among other popular programmes were Vision. Mahakamani, Vittimbi, Felheba and Kazi Bure and others. Some leading comedians in these shows include Mzee Ojwang Hatari (Benson Wanjau), Mama Kayai (Mary Khavere) and Mongo Mture. Radio listeners will also remember the hilarious Job Isaac Mwambo who presented the popular “Torojo” radio programme on the then VOK radio.

Many of the older Kenyan listeners will recall his witty humour.

The show was a platform for exposure to leading Benga musicians like the late Okach Biggy and Heka Heka Band, Princess Jolly, DO Misiani and Sukuma Bin Ongaro.

Veteran TV comedians Mzee Pembe (Omari Suleiman), Mama Toft (Fatuma Saleh) and Kipanga (Kipanga Athumani) who tickled TV viewers were also profiled in both Daily Nation and Taifa Leo. The trio were popular in the 1960s and the 1970s with programmes such as “Kivunja Mbavu,” Cheka na Kipanga” and “Janja ya Mzee Pembe.”

The popularity of the programmes was mainly based on the social themes touching on family issues. Before independence, they were among the first Africans alongside Mzee Tamaa Bin Tamaa (Peter Lu-koye) and the Frank Sisters from Tanzania to perform plays when television was launched in Kenya in 1962. One of their first appearances was in the show “Top Life.” Among other popular programmes were Vision. Mahakamani, Vittimbi, Felheba and Kazi Bure and others. Some leading comedians in these shows include Mzee Ojwang Hatari (Benson Wanjau), Mama Kayai (Mary Khavere) and Mongo Mture. Radio listeners will also remember the hilarious Job Isaac Mwambo who presented the popular “Torojo” radio programme on the then VOK radio.

Many of the older Kenyan listeners will recall his witty humour.

Celebrity culture takes root in media

Mzee Tamaa

Mr Peter Lukoye (above) was active for decades as a radio and television comedian. He will be remembered as a writer with the Nation Media Group who wrote a popular column in Taifa Leo “Viunbe Vinaryoishi” . The gifted comedian once said: “My greatest challenge as a journalist has been the move from the old typewriter to the computer.” Between 1966 and 1977, he acted in Korti ya Kiberenge, Kivunja Mbavu and Vioja Mahakamani. All these were covered in the Daily Nation and Taifa Leo.

The trio that thrilled us on telly

Veteran TV comedians Mzee Pembe (Omari Suleiman), Mama Toft (Fatuma Saleh) and Kipanga (Kipanga Athumani) who tickled TV viewers were also profiled in both Daily Nation and Taifa Leo. The trio were popular in the 1960s and the 1970s with programmes such as “Kivunja Mbavu,” Cheka na Kipanga” and “Janja ya Mzee Pembe.”

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Many of the older Kenyan listeners will recall his witty humour.
Getting home a healthy message to the media

Back in 2003, while organising my first HIV/AIDS print reporting workshop in Accra, Ghana, I could not have predicted the extraordinary impact it would have on my career. I also could not have dreamed the experience would eventually lead me to East Africa during a time of unparalleled achievement and promise for one of the most vibrant media companies on the African continent.

At the time, I was a reporter for National Public Radio in Washington, DC, focusing primarily on social policy affecting poor Americans. Ironically, what I was doing in the US wound up fuelling my African journey. As a woman born in poverty in the richest nation in the world, I became a journalist because I wanted to explore and illuminate the reasons why so many Americans were still struggling. I also wanted to help improve access to the basics of the “American Dream” — education, health care, employment and so on. It was a lofty goal, but I was determined to help “give voice to the voiceless.”

Fast forward seven years to my tenure as a consultant/trainer for the International Centre for Journalists, based at the Media Lab in Nairobi. Through the centre’s fellowship, I am tasked with helping improve the coverage of health-related news. I have been pleased with the strengthened writing and reporting skills of several staff reporters, and have also mentored some promising freelance writers.

There is also more analytical coverage of policy, such as how government utilises — or squanders — health cash. Most importantly, top newsroom editors are now vastly more willing to prominently place health-related news. I could give myriad examples, but I am probably proudest of a story about an increase in childhood obesity that was on Page 1.

Rachel Jones is a former radio and print journalist from the US. She reported on social policy for National Public Radio in Washington DC, from 1998 to 2007, and for the St. Petersburg Times, the Detroit Free Press, and the former Knight Ridder News Service.

Scaling new heights in training journalists

A class in progress at the Media Lab in Nation Centre.

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the Lab deliberately seeks to recruit graduates of law, security, social sciences, business and economics, as well as those originally trained in mass communication.

Underpinning this model is the fact that consumers of media products are increasingly discerning, inquisitive, analytical and sophisticated. They seek information in a form and depth that not only suit their interests but satisfies their intellectual curiosity.

News items that barely scratch above the surface; that do not delve deeper into the sub-text, provide the context or add intellectual spice hardly jell with readers, viewers or listeners. The corollary is that news must be well-grounded and contextualised, hence the increasing need for subject specialisation and investment in ongoing professional development.

Training at the Media Lab is intense and practical. Trainees are exposed to the art of doing journalism, and for that matter doing it thoroughly well. New and emerging concepts are tested and implemented. Trainers are a blend of practising journalists and journalism experts. In-house staff infuses experience and practice. The trainees routinely go out to the field with seasoned reporters to understudy them; learn how to handle news conferences, ask right questions, conceptualise and develop stories, and establish contacts.

Past Media Lab graduates have demonstrated dynamism, creativity and leadership in their respective fields of specialisation. The investment has not been in vain. Already, one of the pioneer graduates is heading a bureau, at Gulu, one of Uganda’s toughest of terrains.

While the Media Lab has proven to be an effective means for the Nation Media Group to foster and retain its own in-house talent, its experience has under-scored the wider challenges and capacity gaps that constrain the role and effectiveness of media in East Africa. That experience has also been corroborated by a December 2009 study by Dr. Peter Mwesige, a former Nation training editor, on university-level journalism, media and communication education in East Africa.

The study identified critical gaps in basic writing and communication skills; poor analytical skills; and limited specialised knowledge in key areas such as business and economics, philosophy, science and technology, and the arts and culture. As well, few aspiring and practicing journalists and media managers have the ability to work across multi-media formats.

And perhaps most troubling, the study identified significant gaps in intellectual curiosity, confidence, and ethics and integrity. As the Nation Media Group commemorates its 50th anniversary, the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) is planning a new initiative that will build on the Nation’s experience, knowledge and resources to provide a broad institutional platform for addressing the challenges facing the media sector in Africa today – with a mission of fostering a vibrant, diverse, ethical and professional media that contributes more effectively to the development, good governance and pluralism of the societies in which it operates.

Compiled by Gerry Loughran, David Aduda and Carrie LaPorte

Past Media Lab graduates have demonstrated dynamism, creativity and leadership. Already, one of the pioneer graduates is heading a bureau, at Gulu, one of Uganda’s toughest of terrains.
Nation scholars making a mark

To her father, Caroline Biegon will always be ‘Miss Nation’ following her four-year scholarship

By WANGUI MAINA

To mark 25 years of Nation newspapers, the company offered four-year secondary school scholarships to the best primary school candidates from the 1985 KCPE exam. Two students, the best boy and the best girl, would be selected from every district in the country.

The following are a selection of some of the beneficiaries and where they are now:

Patrick Onyango Sawa
District: Siaya
Primary: Sega Boys
High School: Alliance

Patrick Onyango's father could not have met his fees since his two siblings were also in national schools. After high school, he joined Moi University and studied medicine and then University of London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine for a diploma.

Now a father of two, he is a specialist in malaria. His working career began in the Ministry of Health but he left to join the International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology on Mtito Campus, South Nyanza. He has been published in various peer-reviewed international journals and has his sight on a PhD in the near future.

Florence Neema Mturi
District: Mombasa
Primary: Aga Khan
Secondary: Alliance Girls

Neema Mturi received a Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery in 1997 from University of Nairobi. After her MBA, she began her career at the Coast Provincial General Hospital and worked with Kenya-Wellcome Trust Research Programme in Kilifi as a medical officer.

Caroline Biegon
District: Kericho
Primary: Sirigoi
Secondary: Mary Hill

Caroline Biegon is currently at Kabarnet High School in Baringo, teaching German as a foreign language. She is also an aspiring writer who hopes to publish her stories some day.

David Scott Omuntiba
District: Bungoma
Primary: Lugulu
Secondary: Alliance High

He graduated from the University of Nairobi with dental surgery in 1996 and was employed by the Ministry of Health for 10 years before moving into full time teaching. The father of one lecturers at the school of dentistry at his old alma mater, Moi.

Godfrey Allan Otieno
District: Mombasa
Primary: Ziwa
Secondary: Maseno High

Now a specialist in paediatrics and child health, he was undaunted by student riots and lecturers' strikes in the mid 90s that caused a seven-year delay. Godfrey was finally granted his much coveted degree in medicine in 1997. He currently works as a paediatrician and research officer in Kisumu.

Naeem Samnakay
District: Kisumu
Primary: Aga Khan
Secondary: Alliance High

Naeem topped the first KCPE exams in 1985 and four years later, he again topped the 1989 Fourth Form final exams after scoring an average A in 10 subjects. He went to the University of Western Australia in Perth to study medicine. The father of three now works as a consultant paediatric surgeon and paediatric urologist at the Princess Margaret Hospital for Children in Perth, Australia.

Millicent Kavugila
District: Siaya
Primary: Mulaha
Secondary: Limuru Girls

Millicent Kavugila works at Techno Brain, an international IT company. She went to Kenyatta University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Education in Science degree.

She went off to teach but switched her career to information technology. She became a training consultant at the Institute of Advanced Technology. A couple of years later she moved to Ison Future Systems and Techno Brain Limited and worked in Enterprise Resource Panning.

She has worked in a range of organisations in Africa as a consultant.
The rapid rise of Kipchoge Keino

Kenya's sensational athlete Kipchoge Keino knocked six-and-a-half seconds off the 3,000 metres world record in Halsingborg, Sweden, Keino clocked 7mins 39.5 seconds in the race, astonishing a delighted crowd at the Scandinavian meeting. East German Siegfried Herrmann had set the record only a week earlier and no one had expected it to fall so quickly or so definitively. When Keino left Nairobi at the beginning of the week, he told reporters that his main ambition was to break a world record to add to his two gold medals from the recent All Africa Games; he did just break the record but shattered it. Second place runner Britain's Geoff North took over eight minutes to complete the course, a full 20 seconds behind Keino. The policeman's achievement was particularly special for, without someone pushing behind you, it is very hard to run at your best. "This implies that he could do even better," said an Amateur Athletics Association statement.

President Kenyatta sent a message to Sweden, hailing the achievement: "Many congratulations on breaking world record for 3,000," said the telegram. "By this great achievement, you have put Kenya on the map of world sport. Government of Kenya is very proud of your record."

Fifty years of covering sporting events

The country owes much of its reputation to its talented runners—Kipchoge, Temu, Biwott

By HEZ WEPUKHULU

I n the half-century since the Nation first saw the light of day, much has happened in the field of sport. Kenya has enjoyed success not only in athletics, its traditional strength, but also in football, rugby, boxing, basketball, swimming, cycling, cricket, hockey, motor racing, horse racing, tennis, volleyball and netball.

The country owes much of its reputation to its talented runners, including the legendary Kipchoge Keino, Naftali Temu, Amos Biwott, Julius Sang, Charles Asati, Henry Rono, Moses Kiptanui, John Ngugi and Paul Tergat.

Since writing my first story for Taifa in 1961, I have reported on many great sporting events, including the 1962 Commonwealth Games in Perth, Australia, and the Fifa 1974 World Cup in West Germany.

Back then we relied on cables and teleprinters to file our stories and the delays were unendurable. I remember that one of my dispensations from the recent All Africa Games did not reach Nairobi until after I returned home.

It was vastly different in Germany 12 years later. Football matches were covered in detail by the international news agencies, to which the major Kenyan newspapers subscribed, so my job was to write a personal report on the aftermath, requiring in-depth analysis of the game.

I actually travelled to West Germany as a representative of the then East African Standard (where I worked before joining the Nation) and the Nation itself was represented by its senior sports writer, Norman da Costa.

Among the games I remember was the closely fought final between West Germany and Holland which the hosts won 2-1, to claim the coveted trophy at the Olympic Stadium in Munich.

Back home, I covered local and regional football including the Gossage Cup, precursor to the East and Central Africa Senior Challenge Cup, the Remington Cup and the Kenya National League.

Organised sport in Kenya did not begin in any serious way until after the Second World War. Today sport is largely about money. No soccer player is ready to change and take to the field unless he is well paid and kitted out.

Pele versus Matiba

Pele, the world's greatest football player, left Kenya for Uganda at the end of a tour mired in controversy and recrimination. Kenneth Matiba—the chairman of the Kenya Football Federation—jeopardised the visit by having a spat with one of Pele's entourage; it almost led to the Brazilian World Cup star cutting short his ground-breaking trip. The incident happened at a reception welcoming Pele to Kenya.

Matiba was upset because he had not been consulted about tour arrangements and approached Steve Richards of drinks group PepsiCo about the subject. PepsiCo was sponsoring the tour. It was understood that Richards, a British former sports reporter, told Matiba that he had not been consulted regarding arrangements for Pele's visit here because Matiba was "just a publicity seeker." Richards was promptly dismissed and flown back to London, but the sacking did not satisfy Matiba, who announced KFF's complete withdrawal and dissociation from all arrangements made for Pele. At a press conference, Matiba said: "We place the blame squarely on the organisers of his programme. No doubt they will wish to explain why they chose to have things entirely their own way in complete disregard of opinions from Kenyan authorities—both Government and soccer administration."
Football League, which was introduced in 1964, the qualifying rounds of the African Nations Cup and the regional inter-club competitions which Kenya hosted at different times.

Kenyan track stars, rugby players and women's volleyball players have subsequently left an indelible impression on the world stage, though development has been slower in other sporting areas.

That said, it must be remembered that organised sport in Kenya did not begin in any serious way until after the Second World War. Today sport is largely about money. No soccer player is ready to change and take to the field unless he is well paid and kitted out. In the past, sportsmen and women were happy and proud to wear the national colours and play for love of game.

The demand for money and huge allowances seems sadly to be here to stay.
Juha Kalulu, 60 years and counting

Gitau is an ordinary fellow who has done extraordinary work in shaping cartooning landscape

By DOROTHY JEBET

You can’t do anything about the length of your life, but you can do something about its width and depth – Shira Tzahani

This motivational quote sums up the width and depth of the past six decades that have seen Edward Gicheeri Gitau churn out his comic strip, Juha Kalulu.

His fans call him Juha Kalulu because they think that is his real name. “Even my own children call me Juha Kalulu,” says the veteran cartoonist with a twinkle in his eyes.

Gitau is an ordinary fellow who has done extraordinary work in shaping the cartooning landscape in East Africa and Kenya in particular.

At 80, he is still drawing. It all started when he fell 25 feet while working as an electrician with the Ministry of Public Works in 1950. The fall broke his arm and it was 10 months before he could use a screw-driver again. “That fall really scared me. I never went back to fixing electrical wires,” he says.

As he lay in what is now Kenyatta National Hospital, he began to think more and more about cartoons. In March 1951, he joined the Fine Art Photo Engravers Company and made his cartoon debut working for six months for the weekly newspaper, Jicho.

When Jicho folded, he moved to another weekly, Tazama, and when that went to the wall, Gitau joined Baraza, a Kiswahili weekly published by the East African Standard group. In 1960, Baraza followed Tazama into oblivion, but not Juha Kalulu. Another small weekly was on the streets called Taifa, later to become the Nation group’s Kiswahili daily, Taifa Leo, and Gitau and his popular character, Juha Kalulu, pitched tent. It was a partnership that has lasted 50 years, and counting. All said and done, Juha Kalulu is himself all of 60 years old.

He has a huge following among Taifa Leo readers and if for any reason the cartoon strip is not published, there is uproar among readers. “If we fail to publish for a single day, there will be no peace for the newsroom,” said Gitau as he started drawing cartoon when he fell 25 feet while working as an electrician with the Ministry of Public Works in 1950. The fall broke his arm and it was 10 months before he could use a screw-driver again.

‘Nation Man’ title I wear with pride

By FREDD NDUNGU

I was 20 and the Nation group six years old when I joined The Nation as a typesetter in 1966. For the next 27 years I pounced away at my Olivetti typesetter, mostly in the smoky, noisy, sauna that was Nation House in those days.

But the Olivettis went the way of all the old technology when the Ateo system arrived. There was resistance from a few reporters, but it was soon overcome.

Of the people I worked with, I have fond memories of my immediate boss, friendly George Mbaggua, the serious sub-editor, Harry Sambo, humorous Edwin Omori and mischievous Njorge wa Karuri, all of whom are now departed.

I also remember the erudite Phillip Ochieng, hawk-eye photographer Joseph Thuo, fearless editor Joe Kadhi, quiet Wainaina Kiganya and born-again editor’s secretary Irene Karanja.

It is 18 years since I retired, but my heart is still with the Nation, which I read every morning. The people in my village of Kino, just outside Nairobi, call me, “The Nation man.” It’s a title I wear with pride.

Successes and problems of Kiswahili newspapers

By NATION REPORTER

Taifa Leo occupies a special place not only in the NMG stable, but more importantly, in Kenya as the only remaining Kiswahili language newspaper.

It marked the Nation Group’s arrival in the country in 1959, when the founding company, Nation Newspapers Ltd., acquired a weekly paper called Taifa from Charles Hayes and Althea Tebbutt, two former employees of the colonial government’s Information Department.

After a few months at Nation House in Tom Mboya Street, Nairobi, Taifa became a daily, Taifa Leo, leading the way to the English-language Sunday Nation and then the Daily Nation in 1960.

Taifa Leo, like the English papers, pressed the fight for the release of Jomo Kenyatta and early independence, which was achieved in December 1963.

The daily, eight pages, rising to 16 and then beyond, became a unifying factor among Kenyans at a time of rising literacy levels and circulation soared, especially in the rural areas. A Sunday day product was added, Taifa Juapili, and additional sections, including sports news, fattened the product.

In the 1970s, Taifa Leo began to experience competition from the English newspapers, including its own stablemate, the Daily Nation. The problem was that in the face of commercial and educational imperatives, ever more Kenyans learned to read English, which had already been declared the official language.

The role of the indigenous lingua franca as a unifying factor in a country by then secure in its own sovereignty became irrelevant.

Commercially, the purchasing power of Kiswahili-speaking Kenyans was also less than among the English speakers, with deleterious effects on advertising revenue. Strong competition came from Kiswahili FM radio stations, which mushroomed over the last 10 years. Because many stations reported and analysed Taifa Leo content over the air, readers began to abandon the newspaper itself.

Loyal readers of Taifa Leo today are mostly above 45, posing an obvious challenge to attract new, youthful, progressive (and usually English-speaking) readers.

Questions about the relevance and future of Taifa Leo as a newspaper seem to focus on the continuing strength of Kiswahili and the paper’s niche as the only remaining one in Kiswahili in Kenya.

Its supporters say Taifa Leo has unique content that makes it a viable alternative source of news and entertainment.

Market research has discovered loyal readership among Kiswahili-speaking communities at the Coast and in country’s urban centres.

Investigators have also established that Taifa Leo is the highest placed and most respected Kiswahili newspaper in the world, making it key reference material for teachers, students, scholars and researchers, both locally and internationally.

However, industry experts believe that while Taifa Leo’s print version remains relevant, there is a need to take the paper to the next level, that is, online.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) website has an option of news in Kiswahili, which is fast gaining a following. Five years ago, Google also launched a Kiswahili website under domain .KE in order to reach a wider audience.

Kiswahili has been integrated by various international websites including social sites such as Facebook, prompting more people to surf in Kiswahili.
Reporting for Kenya from UK

By PAUL REDFERN

When I spotted an advertisement in The Guardian in the late 80s for a full-time UK-based correspondent for the Nation, I was intrigued. Working with the development agency Christian Aid, I already travelled to Kenya periodically.

Thus when an advert was published, I was already in a sense hooked on Kenya. I joined in 1990 and my role in London was swiftly clear: To write the things that were not being said in Kenya.

Scotland Yard was called in when the then Foreign Minister, Dr Robert Ouko, was murdered but the Kenya government failed to publish the report of the investigation by Chief Superintendent John Troon, which remained shrouded in mystery. It took time, but eventually Troon agreed to meet me. He then spelled out, in a series of interviews for The East African, how and why his inquiries were thwarted.

The man who led the pluralism campaign of that era was Kenneth Matiba, then ill and recovering in London. When I first met him, he was still having trouble with his speech but his mind was crystal clear. In exclusive interviews he spelled out his vision.

When he eventually flew back to Nairobi, a huge crowd gathered at the airport to greet him. By then, multipartyism had become a reality and Matiba entered the battle against President Moi in the 1992 election. But with the opposition unable to agree on a single contender, the anti-Kanu vote was split and Moi was returned to power. It was 2002 before a new era dawned under President Mwai Kibaki.

He faced an immediate problem. Vice-President Michael Wamalwa was known to be in London, his return to Kenya constantly postponed. Speculation was rife that he was dying and the Nation newsdesk wanted me to find out what was happening. Wamalwa’s aides kept promising me an interview at his London hospital, but then kept backing down.

I turned up anyway, in time to see a group of solemn Kenyan politicians leaving his room. Had he died? I was told he was resting and would see me in time.

I waited...and waited. I said I had to go and would write what I had seen. They said, Come and see him. Wamalwa had not died but was unable to speak. He was drifting back to sleep and was clearly seriously ill. He died a few days later.

I was glad to convey the truth to Kenyans, though it was hard to rejoice in my privileged access.

In the spring of 2008, Prime Minister Raila Odinga led a ministerial delegation to London for government-to-government meetings.

One scene springs to mind. The delegation was booked into a central London hotel to address UK-based Kenyans and the media. But they had seriously underestimated the numbers. The result was like the “black hole of Calcutta” with thousands struggling to get into an airless basement conference room designed for a few hundred people.

It has not all been politics. In the early 1990s, an investment conference was held for Kenya in London. The guest speaker was President Moi, who was introduced by the then deputy British Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine.

The briefing by his civil servants was clearly not all it should have been since Heseltine referred to Kenya’s leader throughout as “President Mwa”, apparently in the belief Kenya was a French-speaking nation.

Paul Redfern has been the Nation correspondent in the UK for 20 years.

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DEBT-FREE AND buoyant at the end of 2002, the Nation Media Group took steps to implement a board commitment to pursue “other opportunities beyond our current area of operations” and turned its attention to its neighbours in Uganda and Tanzania.

Having already acquired a feisty, but hard-up, Kampala tabloid, The Monitor, NMG launched by the quality of existing media, into trouble NMG soon ran out of money. Then in 2001, NMG started a rare English-language radio station, Monitor FM 93.3, by President Yoweri Museveni, Uganda by President Yoweri Museveni, and turned by the quality of existing media, turned to address UK-based Kenyans and the media. But they had seriously underestimated the numbers. The result was like the “black hole of Calcutta” with thousands struggling to get into an airless basement conference room designed for a few hundred people.

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Nation moves to Kimathi street

The shift from Nation House to Nation Centre wasn’t just about distance, it was about nostalgia, about bridging the technological divide.

By KEN OPALA

Moving the Daily Nation and Taifa from Nation House in busy, bustling Tom Mboya Street to the ultramodern, multi-storey Nation Centre on Kimathi Street, was a logistical nightmare. It was just a street away, a distance of only 200 metres (which Usain Bolt could demolish in under 20 seconds), but it took days of physical movement. It unleashed a rush of emotions and exposed reporters to a huge technological test.

The date was June 5, 1992. Nation, the leading media house in east and central Africa, was moving out of its abode into a new 16-storey architectural marvel. “Turning a Page” is how the Daily Nation captured its own relocation, in its front page.

“It was a great moment, like the Biblical move from Egypt to Canaan,” said Bob Okoth, then deputy managing editor of Taifa Leo. “On that day most of our work got delayed. We couldn’t meet our deadlines.”

Emman Omari, then Political Editor, captured the excitement thus, “It was like moving into a new home, like moving house from Eastleigh to Runda.”

Some Nation staffers took days to accept that they had shifted base. A story goes that the then chief sub-editor of Taifa Leo, Obere Akaranga, went for lunch just before Nation moved. On the way back to the office, he found himself heading automatically for the old Nation House.

The shift from Nation House to Nation Centre wasn’t just about distance, it was about nostalgia, about bridging the technological divide (discarding the typewriter for the new gizmo), about abandoning a long, low, two-storey building for a massive, self-contained, two-tiered home. It was a requiem for the ‘Teles machine’ whose clacking noise awoke the newsroom (when it sparked into life you knew a new international story had arrived!)

It was nostalgic because “31-odd years cannot be wiped off the slate of a lifetime, forgotten just like that,” as George Mbugu, then the Nation’s Group Managing Editor, noted. “The new home was not just another building, but a landmark that became the talk of the town.”

For some staff, the move was apocalyptic. The new office disallowed smoking, so it was tough for those used to puffing on a cigarette while hitting the typewriter keys.

And then there was the Atex machine, a system tailored for Nation’s in-house use which turned around the way the newspaper was produced. With Atex, the newspapers would be produced centrally (the same machine would be used fo filling stories, editing, design and layout). It rendered typesetting obsolete. Soft-spoken Briton Nick Chitty, helped to run Atex and would fret when there was any breakdown in the system, while working with his IT colleagues on the fourth floor, Martin Muyanga and Dave Orwa.

Yet for many correspondents, Atex was difficult. Kibe Kamunyu, chief sub-editor of the Daily Nation, would spike (kill) our stories as we worked on them. Here was technology that enabled the boss to trash your story even before you were through writing it!

Atex was magic. But there was apprehension, as usual with new technology. For obvious reasons, some staff foresaw massive sackings with the advent of the computer. The prediction never came to pass. “To some journalists, it was a matter of ‘better the devil you know than the devil you don’t,’” declared a group IT expert who worked at the old office. “Whereas the production department embraced the new technology very quickly the editorial department appeared less enthusiastic. There was some fear. It was hardly surprising.”

Plans to move house had been in the pipeline since 1988. The company was in dire need of more space to introduce new products – magazines, more newspapers (such as the The EastAfrican) -- and set up TV and radio space. The old newsroom was squeezed and next to the newsroom was a cramped library headed by Charles Mallei.

According to the Daily Nation of July 16, 1992, the birth of Nation Centre started in 1988 when the owners of the centre, Industrial Promotion Buildings, decided to build for the city and themselves a modern communications centre that would also house their head offices.

“The 73-metre building is made up of reinforced concrete frame structure to withstand earthquakes in accordance with local conditions,” the statement said. “Columns are used both for structural and aesthetic effect. The total floor area is 21,500 square metres, including the basement. The three basements, well below the foundations of adjacent structures, had to be excavated with great care to ensure the safety of other buildings in the vicinity. The structural steel mast rises from the third floor to a height of over 81 metres and acts as a focal element for the building,” the write-up shows.

And in another commemoration of the relocation, A.H Rashid, the then chairman of Industrial Promotion Buildings, observed: “The Twin Towers sitting on top of the podium provide a panoramic view of the city and has a noise-free atmosphere. The building has a comprehensive fire fighting system, including an automatic sprinkler system in the car parking areas.

For some staff, the move was apocalyptic. The new office disallowed smoking, so it was tough for those used to puffing on a cigarette while hitting the typewriter keys at the Tom Mboya Street office.
Giving back to the community becomes a way of life

After the success of the Aberdare project, the company turned its attention to the Mau

Having grown from small beginnings through tough times to great things, the Nation was keenly aware of the debt to its early, loyal core readership of ordinary Kenyan Africans. Thus, seeking to give back something to the community, the Nation Media Group adopted a policy of Corporate Social Responsibility, one of whose flagship projects was the Save-A-Life-Fund. Partnering with East African Breweries and Standard Chartered Bank, it was launched in the 1990s. The programme saved the lives of thousands of people faced with hunger. It was re-launched in 2008 to help victims of the post-election violence.

The company’s Corporate Social Responsibility policy goes beyond feeding the hungry.

A keynote project was helping to fence off the Aberdares mountain range, one of the country’s five water towers, north of the capital city.

The range is the water catchment for Sasumua and Ndakaini dams, which provide most of the water for Nairobi. Before NMG came into the picture, joining hands with the charity organisation Rhino Ark, the range was rapidly losing its cover to illegal settlers and loggers while human-animal conflict was another problem.

The media group and Rhino Ark, with the help of other companies and charitable organisations, funded a 400-km fence around the 2,000-sq.km forest.

Mr Wilfred Kiboro, a member of the Rhino Ark Board of Trustees and chairman of Nation Media Group, said a fund had been set up that will be managed by trustees from the Kenya Wildlife Service, the Kenya Forest Services and Rhino Ark.

After the success of the Aberdare conservation, the company turned its attention to the Mau, another major water tower faceing destruction. Under the leadership of NMG’s chief executive officer, Linus Gitahi, the Save the Mau Fund was launched with other environmentally aware companies such as East African Breweries and Equity Bank.

Experts say its 400,000 hectares, the biggest water supply area in Kenya lost 107,000 hectares or 25 per cent of its cover due to tree felling. The forest also feeds Lake Victoria and the White Nile, and its destruction.

The other project of note was the Save-A-Life-Fund set up in 1999 after the Daily Nation carried an in-depth investigation piece of famine in Turkana District.

The picture of a four-year-old Aro Koriang, wracked by hunger and begging for food, appeared on the front page of the Daily Nation publication of November 22, 1999 and revealed the gravity of the problem.

Aro Koriang’s picture became the face of the Nation’s donations hot-line logo. Aro, was airlifted to Nairobi and received treatment at Gertrude’s Garden Children’s Hospital. In a show of unity, the hospital waived her Sh325,736 medical bill.

The Nation Media Group and other charitable organisations also offered to educate the young girl, who is now 14.

Clockwise from above: A section of the Mau forest; malnourished Aro Koriang; then Chief Executive Wilfred Kiboro (left) after the helicopter he was in crashed as it was about to land in the Aberdares during campaigns to build the park fence in 2006, and a hale and hearty Koriang after being saved from hunger.
Looking to the future with optimism

Throughout the years under review, catastrophic headline events were accompanied by instances of economic and social decline and charges of official corruption, both high and low. Accurate as they were, such negative developments did not tell the whole, complex nature of the Kenya story, blurring merit-ed perceptions of the progressive and the positive.

Good news will always take second place to bad – in the gossip between politicians and the conversations of ordinary people as much as on the front pages of newspapers.

But this should not disguise the fact that Kenya has consistently produced good people doing good things, and that does not always exclude the government.

Musing on this situation in cyberspace recently, a Kenya blogger pointed out that “there has been an improvement in our health care system and now you can safely take your sick one to a government dispensary and get medicine for free”. Nurses and teachers had been recruited widely in the public sector, thousands of new electricity connections were made through the Rural Electrification Programme and if power and water were periodically rationed, the role of drought and rains failure could not be ignored, he said.

As little as 10 years ago, many children could not afford primary school fees, there was no Constituency Development Fund, harambees were the order of the day, and, as the blogger recalled, “We had to beg our MPs for handouts.”

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Aid flows continued generously but the competitiveness of the national character seemed proof against any relapse into aid de-pendency.

Kenya’s blend of beautiful landscapes and wildlife has made it one of Africa’s top tourist nations and also one of the world’s top five bird-watching destinations. Whatever turbulence the nation undergoes, it never seems to take long for the tourists from Europe, America and, increasing, East Asia, to return.

Looking to the future with optimism