Beck, Rose Marie & Frank Wittmann (eds.) 2004.
African Media Cultures - Transdisciplinary Perspectives. Cultures de médias en Afrique. Perspectives transdisciplinaires - Topics in African Studies, Vol. 2, Köln: Köppe Verlag, 320 pages, 2 b/w photos, 17 tables, 15 graphs, €34,80

Helma Pasch (Köln, 2006)

<1>

Beck and Wittmann's volume is a most welcome contribution about types and uses of traditional and modern media in Africa. Their volume is divided into fifteen chapters preceded by a comprehensive introduction and followed by some information about the authors (profession, affiliation, post and email-address):

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In the introduction "**Close up: Encounters with African Media Cultures**" (7-16) **Beck and Wittmann** explain the reason for publishing this volume. They want to meet the desideratum that studies on media in Africa do not abound and that "academia has not yet discovered the variety, diversity and originality of media phenomena." The explicitly stated aim of the volume is to "unite scholars from across disciplines to map the media cultures in […] Africa in past and present" (9) . Quite convincingly, they outline a wide range of media that all deserve consideration in communication studies. Beyond the media commonly discussed with regard to the western world it comprises proverbs, (popular) music, speaking objects (e.g. the East African *lessos* or *kangas*), surrogate languages (talking drums, gongs, cf. Pasch 2005) etc. They deplore that although the globalization paradigms of 'Media and Cultural Studies' do consider the importance of culture "African social science has not adequately dealt with the cultures of media in Africa" (8f).

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Nana Grey-Johnson in "**The Story of the Newspaper in the Gambia**" (17-41) outlines the development of newspapers in Gambia, which despite the relatively low number of consumers have always exerted strong political influence. Efforts to improve conditions in the country by publishing their protests in English newspapers, e.g. The African Times (online), showed some effects: Gambian journalists were inspired by the benefits of newspapers in other West African countries. They struggled first against the interests of European colonists and finally newspapers became a fighting tool for the Gambians who wanted to take charge of the country. It becomes apparent that it is not the newspapers as institutions which can exert influence but that the influence depends on the personality of the leading managers.

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In his article "**Breaking the Taboos. The Senegalese Tabloid Press as a Motor for Social Change**" (43-57) **Frank Wittmann** outlines in what way the tabloid press functioned as a motor of social change in Senegal. Different from the quality press the tabloid press implicitly satisfies entertainment, curiosity, interaction, rumour and voyeurism. It reaches new readers such as literate teenagers and middle class women who did not read before, but also illiterate citizens, who enjoy the pictures (46). Therewith it has an influence on enhancing literary in the country.

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The title of **Jürg Schneider**'s contribution is **"Speaking in Bubbles. Press Cartoons and Comics in the Cameroon"** (59-81). After an introduction into comic research and theory the author investigates the tradition of comics. The focus is on political comics in Cameroon in the 1990s and early 2000s. The topic is concerned with freedom of the press in the country.

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Verena Böll investigates **"Wall Paintings in Ethiopian Churches"** (83-98). Her paper reads like a guided tour into Ethiopian churches. The reader learns about ecclesiastical architecture, the history and techniques of painting and the religious, cultural and historical functions of paintings in churches and – nowadays – also profane cultures. The reader is fascinated to get an insight even into the interior circles which allegedly are closed to the public (85), as if tourists would not get access against money.

<7>

Rose-Marie Beck's study **"Speaking Potlids from the Lower Congo (Cabinda/Angola)"** (99-122) which is not based on field research but on secondary sources, investigates communication by means of proverb-carrier potlids in the Lower Congo area. Women use them as speaking objects in order to communicate a conflict when serving their husbands and his guests food. Husbands – if at all – make indirect use of potlids, and chiefs may use them in order to represent authority. After her studies on the use of lessos by Swahili women as speaking objects (2001a, b) this is a new example of a communication strategy based on speaking objects for women in African societies. Beck investigates all facets of the communicative potential of the potlids but appears reluctant to adopt Mantuba-Ngoma's (1989: 168) view and consider them social tools of keeping women silent. Women are not expected to solve marital conflicts by discussing them directly with their husband. They should rather withhold it or make it public, by means of the potlids to the husband's guest. This means that only men decide whether and how to react.

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In **"La communication par les proverbes du fongbe (Sud-Benin)"** (123-134) **Eric Adja** describes the function of Fongbe proverbs in traditional and modern communication. Their use in political statements is particularly noteworthy. Adja's research shows that proverbs are not only social discourse but also "technologies of intelligence." He concentrates on the interactive type of proverbs, where one speaker gives the first part while his interlocutor gives the completion, the proverb itself serves as an instrument to begin a conversation and as a means to modify and enlarge the cognitive environment of the speakers.

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Christine Glanz's article **"The Challenges of Local Language Writers in Uganda – The Case of two Luganda Authors"** (135-157) is a well organized study on status and use of local languages, particularly Luganda, in Uganda from pre-colonial times until today. Her detailed analysis focuses on the enormous efforts of two individual authors to overcome the difficulties of publishing in the present day situation and of marketing their texts.

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In **"Le Griot comme média (Niger)"** (159-169) **Sandra Bornand** investigates the traditional medium griot and its social and communicative functions on the basis of the jasare of the Soŋay in West Niger. These griots are related to the nobility, and in pre-colonial times their

tasks were to praise their lords (by whom they were paid), disseminate information, and strengthen given social values and to entertain the audience. Since the criterion for the message is not objectivity, but its adaptation to the ruling ideology listeners may doubt the credibility of the griots. As a result of colonization the griots lost their strategic position, remaining merely the genealogical memory of families. With the introduction of the radio and TV their function as entertainers came to an end, and 'white' schools and qur'anic schools have taken over the education of children. Being deprived of their traditional income they had to find other sources of income and work for the rich people and/or a second income, which has given them the reputation of being greedy and uncultivated persons.

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Taarab, the first musical form to be commercially recorded in East Africa, is the topic of **Werner Gräbner's** study "**The Interaction of Swahili Taarab Music and the Record Industry. A Historical Perspective (Tanzania)**" (171-192). He gives a thorough analysis of its development from the beginning of the 20ᵗʰ century with regard to the ethnic origin of the stylistic features and the influences of innovation on the form of the songs.

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In "**La chanson populaire politique face à la violence politique au Congo-Zaïre post-Mobutu**" (193-214) **Bagalwa-Mapatano** gives a comprehensive study of the political situation in the decade 1990-2000, when Mobutu's regime came to an end, and he finally was overthrown by LD Kabila. The focus is on the different political participants responsible for the tragic developments: the two presidents, the armies of some of the eastern neighbouring states and the western world.

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Popular music in the four national languages, in particular in Lingala, has been used since colonial times as a nation-building tool. While Mobutu used it for his political purposes, some musicians used their popularity to express political criticism which finally drove them into exile. The breakdown of the musical industry let the best musicians emigrate, and under Kabila, opposition if expressed at all in popular music, came from abroad.

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Wisdom J. Tettey in "**The Politics of Radio and Radio Politics in Ghana: A Critical Appraisal of Broadcasting Reform**" (215-239) shows in what way privatization of media, in particular radio, has changed the function of the latter to become "veritable channels for the promotion of civic education and political participation" (215). In Ghana, as in most African countries, the radio remained a state monopoly from colonial times through much of the post-colonial period. Governments argued that in a multiethnic country central media systems are conducive to nation-building. But the educational function of the media turned out to be coterminous with state-controlled propaganda. The decision in 1967 for commercialization – yet without privatization – resulted from fiscal and entrepreneurial expedience. Only in 1995, the first privately owned radio stations began to broadcast initiating a development which led to more political and media pluralism.

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André-Jean Tudesq's contribution "**La télévision en Côte d'Ivoire**" (241-262) is a history of television in that country. Starting from the occupation of the TV broadcasting station by the military in 1990 he analyzes the political involvement of national television and its societal importance, which is greater than that of the radio. In this country where, different from

anglophone countries [1] print media did not play a significant role in the fight for independence, the mobilization of the masses has always been in the hands of the ruling parties.

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A video poster of "Hellraiser 3" showing a scene that does not at all appear in the video constitutes the starting point of **Tobias Wendl**'s article "**Wicked Villagers and the Mysteries of Reproduction. An Exploration of Horror Movies from Ghana and Nigeria**" (263-285). Wendl investigates the relationship between traditional mythologies and modern horror videos in Ghana. He argues that the videos from Ghana and Nigeria, often called popular cinema, comprise the genres melodramas, comedies and horror films. Horror videos do not only draw on imported horror films, but also – in a way similar to Western horror films – on traditional representations of evil in sculptures, masquerades, theatre and story telling. The way they borrow, transform and process motifs and iconographies is compared by Wendl to "sampling" leading to "a highly original, hybrid cocktail." Horror videos constitute new mythologies and combine local fairytales, western horror films and elements of the expanding 'occult economies' in order to respond to the issues of modernity (= world turned upside down) and reproduction. Ghanaian and Nigerian videos are negative about cultural heritage. They focus on the "village – city" dichotomy based on the older topographic dichotomy of "wilderness – village." This latter dichotomy is now seen from the perspective of the city and the village being in the position of wilderness (i.e. origin of evil, cannibalism, witches, jujumen, psychopaths, snakemen). The article reads with fascination and the reader feels like watching at least some of the videos discussed. Wendl gives comprehensive references, but the reader would appreciate to know where one can see the films. Which ones can be found in Europe, in the USA, Asia and Australia? Which ones can be purchased and where?

<17>

Uwe Afemann's description of the history of the "**Internet in Senegal**" (287-310) shows its embeddedness in international connectivity, access to computers, telephones and electricity. Websites by the government and the various embassies have become normal pieces of infrastructure, and the internet is also used by e-commerce enterprises, who serve mostly customers abroad. Furthermore, the internet was introduced quite enthusiastically for secondary and tertiary education, but there evaluations on the effects are not yet available. Afemann discusses mainly technical prerequisites (electricity, telephone lines, and computers with modems) for the use of internet facilities and their costs, putting these in relation to the GDP. Best serviced are the urban centres and the roads connecting them. As most people cannot afford the high costs of installation, subscription fees and telephone tariffs, telecenters have emerged which are frequented primarily by foreigners, well-off people, small-scale economic agents and – as tariffs lower – by average Senegalese with family members abroad. In these centres communication via the internet is becoming cheaper than telephone and fax, gradually replacing these latter facilities.

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Adolphe Samon in "Le cellulaire au Burkina Faso" (311-317) presents a description of the development and diffusion of cell phones in Burkina Faso, the competition of the different foreign and national telephone companies, their impact on the users and the reactions of the latter.

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The tariffs force the users to behave according to their socio-economic situation. Particularly interesting is the way in which rich cattle owners in rural areas carry out their phone calls in order to demonstrate their status.

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In his denouncing the apparently bad 'show-off' habits with regard to the increasing use of cell phones in public the author does not only make himself a moral judge but he is highly subjective. In conditions where for a number of reasons appointments have to be constantly postponed and arrangements modified, cellphones become a medium sine qua non. This attitude is underlined by his putting Burkina Faso, a country of slightly over 13.5 million inhabitants in position 2 in the ranking of nations on bicycles after China (1.3 bill. inhabitants).

Conclusion

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Even though the editors claim that with regard to Africa there is a wide range of media that deserve investigation, a number of both traditional and new media are not discussed in the volume. Among these are: dance (Gross 1997), masks, surrogate languages (Pasch, forthc.) and e-mail. With regard to e-mail this is the more striking since large conferences as big international conferences such as WOCAL 3 in Lomé in 2000 could not have been organized without communication by e-mail (Kezie Lebikaza, pers. comm.), and the same holds true for WOCAL 5 in Addis Abeba in 2006.

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Wittmann (43) argues that when dealing with African communication scientists focus on the communication infrastructure too often, rather than on the uses and effects of the media.

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The questions of the editors "What changes and discourses have emerged in African societies as media forms become culturally accepted? What kinds of communicative strategies were developed by individuals and pressure groups at different time periods?" are answered only partially. An overall answer for the whole continent is not yet given, but a first big step is done and further publications will add to these answers. This volume is not intended to put an end to the discussion, but rather to stimulate a discussion on media in Africa. The editors explicitly state that they want to provoke (15).

<24>

Afemann's contribution, while highly technical, stands out in showing how the new media connect the population in Senegal with the world abroad. Online radio programs address the Senegalese in the Diaspora, and so do some newspapers which are available on the internet. Two Senegalese Universities are participating in the African Virtual University.

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The book is not divided into sections, but an ordering of contributions according to the following semantic criteria becomes apparent:

- Mass media (newspapers, tabloids, cartoons, wall paintings)

- Proverbial communication (potlids, Fongbe proverbs)
- Individual authors (authors writing in Luganda, griots)
- Music as medium (*taarab*, chanson populaire politique)
- Broadcast and video (radio in Ghana, TV in the Ivory Coast, horror movies)
- Interactive new media (internet, cell phones)

A clear indication of these sections and the criteria defining them would be useful for the readers, since certain other criteria would recommend a different order, e.g. the political impact of some media, which has been observed in particular by the African authors. The reviewer would have preferred the following organization of the volume, with section titles given in the headlines.

Author	Medium	Country
Frank Wittmann & Rose Marie Beck	Close Up	Burkina Faso
Architecture/wall painting as medium		
Verena Böll	Wall painting	Ethiopia
Print media		
Nana Grey-Johnson	Newspaper	Gambia
Frank Wittmann	Yellow Press	Senegal
Jürg Schneider	Press Cartoons	Cameroon
Christine Glanz	Luganda writers	Uganda
Proverbs as media		
Rose Marie Beck	Speaking potlids	Congo
Eric Adja	Fongbe proverbs	Benin
Music		
Sandra Bornand	Griot	Niger
Werner Gräbner	Taarab music	Tanzania
Jules Bagalwa-Mapatano	Political pop-songs	Congo
Radio/TV		
Wisdom J. Tettey	Radio	Ghana
André Jean Tudesq	Television	Côte d'Ivoire
Tobias Wendl	Horror Movies	Ghana

Interactive media

Uwe Afemann	Internet	Senegal
Adolphe Samon	Cell phone	Burkina Faso

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The reviewer would also have appreciated an index of where to find references to the use of terms like 'secondary/tertiary education,' 'nation-building,' 'alphabetization,' 'African vernaculars as media,' [2] 'city-village dichotomy,' 'Diaspora' and many others which play a role in several articles.

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A more careful editing would have increased the value of the book. While the majority of contributions conform to formal academic standards, some contain serious mistakes resulting from computer-editing, from wrong use of grammatical forms or simply miss-spellings. With regard to sources which are not easily available, i.e. grey publications and videos, the reader would have appreciated to know where access to them is available.

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Despite these critical annotations it cannot be denied that the book is a valuable contribution to communication science and African Studies and it fulfills the editor's ideal of a comprehensive volume on the variety of media in Africa to a high degree.

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[1] Tudesq refers to Cameroon as an example.

[2] This topic finds amazingly little attention in this volume, Glanz' article being the only exception