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Albert Sharra, Jimmy Kainja, and Anthony Mavuto Gunde (Eds.), **The BBC's Legacy in Africa: Continuities and Change,** London, UK: Routledge, 2026, 190 pp, $200.00 (hardback).

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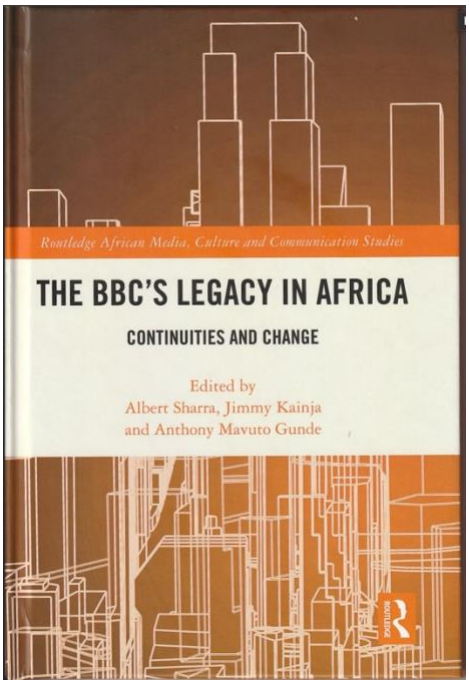

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recently celebrated its centenary as one of the oldest public broadcasters in the world. As African media systems continue to evolve in the digital era, questions about what colonial broadcasting legacies endure, and how they have been renegotiated or resisted, remain pressing. ***The BBC's Legacy in Africa: Continuities and Change***, edited by Albert Sharra, Jimmy Kainja, and Anthony Mavuto Gunde, all based at the University of Malawi or the University of the Witwatersrand and working at the intersection of journalism practice and academic research, offers a timely and critically grounded contribution to this debate. Published within the Routledge African Media, Culture and Communication Studies series, the volume gathers 13 chapters from scholars and researchers whose work centers on African media, communication, and broadcasting, producing what may be the most geographically and thematically comprehensive examination of the BBC's role in shaping African broadcasting to date.

The context for this volume is both historical and contemporary. The BBC's centenary has reopened scholarly interest in its global influence, but existing literature, including Simon Potter's (2012) *Broadcasting Empire: The BBC and the British World, 1922–1970* and Gordon Johnston and Emma Robertson's (2019) *BBC World Service: Overseas Broadcasting* 1932–2018, has largely focused on policymaking in London and the BBC's relationship with the British government. The editors explicitly position this volume as a corrective, centering African voices and experiences rather than viewing the BBC's legacy from the metropole outward. This departure from established scholarship is the most distinctive contribution of the book and its primary strength.

The introductory chapter frames the central argument of the book: The end of British colonial rule has not erased the BBC's influence on African broadcasting. The editors trace the BBC's entry into Africa from its shortwave transmission experiments in 1927, through the launch of the Empire Service in 1932, to the postindependence era, showing how BBC-inspired programming formats and journalistic standards continue to define African media practice. They note that by 1971, Africa south of the Sahara had 43 national sound radio services, a development they attribute largely to BBC expertise, with more than 2,000 African broadcasters having visited BBC offices in Britain for professional training. The introductory chapter is dense with theory, drawing mainly on decolonial frameworks, cross-cultural media models, Pierre Bourdieu's

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journalism field theory, constructive journalism, and cultural hybridization, and this theoretical breadth, while commendable, occasionally overwhelms the readability of the opening argument.

The substantive chapters draw case studies from across the continent and are organized around two broad categories: traditional broadcasting and new media, with additional attention to the evolving culture of African correspondents working for the BBC. The volume's geographic range is one of its genuine strengths. While most chapters focus on anglophone Africa—that is, Malawi, Uganda, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe—the editors deliberately include lusophone Mozambique and francophone Benin as cases of indirect BBC influence, demonstrating that the corporation's legacy transcended the boundaries of formal British colonialism. Mawerenga and Mkhutche in chapter 2 examine Malawian radio through a historical lens, arguing that decolonizing the medium demands a thorough reckoning with the colonial past while embracing a hybrid broadcasting approach. Lukanda and Kaija in chapter 3 apply cultural hybridization theory to the Ugandan context, showing how broadcaster ownership patterns, language use, and journalist training continue to reflect BBC influence decades after independence.

Two chapters stand out for their originality. In chapter 5, Matingwina applies constructive journalism frameworks to analyze the BBC's flagship Africa-focused program, *Focus on Africa*, finding that while the program has made genuine efforts to amplify African voices, further improvements remain possible, particularly in ensuring that African experts, rather than Western correspondents, lead the storytelling. In chapter 6, Mathe examines the influence of the BBC's *HARDtalk* program on political interviews in Zimbabwe, arguing through Mouffe's theory of agonistic public spheres that the *HARDtalk* format has paradoxically enabled vibrant political debate among Zimbabwean journalists even within restrictive media environments. Both chapters demonstrate the volume's commitment to moving beyond historical description toward critical, theoretically informed analysis of contemporary media practice.

The institutional case studies are equally illuminating, if somewhat uneven. Lumbe, Mwale, and Sungani in chapter 11 argue persuasively that the presence of state rather than public broadcasters across much of Africa illustrates the limits of BBC influence: The corporation may have exported journalistic standards and programming formats, but it failed to transfer the institutional autonomy and editorial independence that define genuine public service broadcasting. Chaunza in chapter 12 makes a similar point about the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, showing how an institution initially shaped by BBC ideals was ultimately repurposed as a vehicle for ruling-party propaganda. These chapters offer a good critique of the BBC's legacy, and they are stronger for it.

Where the book is less convincing is in its limited engagement with East Africa as a case study. Kenya, which hosted the BBC's first relay station in the region, appears only fleetingly in the introductory discussion. The volume would have benefited considerably from a dedicated chapter on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and its complicated negotiation of BBC influence. Similarly, the volume's focus on radio, while historically appropriate, leaves the BBC's influence on African television and digital media platforms largely unexamined. Given that the BBC has accelerated its shift to online broadcasting in Africa, a development briefly acknowledged in the introduction, this gap is notable. Future editions should address how the BBC's digital strategy is reshaping its legacy in real time, particularly as community radio, mobile journalism, and social media platforms transform African media consumption.

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The volume is intended for scholars and researchers in media and communication studies, African studies, and decolonial studies. It will also be valuable for journalists, broadcasting policy makers, and practitioners interested in the historical foundations of African media institutions. Its multitheoretical approach and rich use of country case studies make it a strong pedagogical resource for graduate courses on African media history and postcolonial media studies. Scholars working at the intersection of global media and local agency will find it an essential reference point.

Compared to existing literature, this volume fills a meaningful gap. While Nyamnjoh's (2005) *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging* provides a broader picture for understanding African media systems, it does not focus specifically on the BBC's institutional role. Potter (2012) and Johnston and Robertson (2019) offer meticulous histories of BBC policymaking but largely from a British vantage point. This volume gives African scholars and practitioners the platform to reframe those histories from the continent outward, and that reframing is long overdue.

The BBC's Legacy in Africa: Continuities and Change is a significant addition to the literature on African media history, postcolonial broadcasting, and decolonial studies. Its geographic reach, theoretical diversity, and commitment to centering African perspectives make it a must-read for anyone seeking to understand how colonial-era institutions continue to shape contemporary media landscapes. Future research should examine how the BBC's growing digital presence in Africa is producing new continuities and new contestations in the decades ahead.

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