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Contents

Volume 1, No. 3

Review Article:

**The role of media in democratic governance
in Africa**

Robert A. White,
St. Augustine University of Tanzania 269

**A critical overview of media research in South
Africa: Communication, democracy and
transformation**

Keyan Tomaselli and David Nothling,
University of KwaZulu-Natal -
Durban, South Africa 329

**Investigative journalism and democratisation in
Nigeria**

Vitalis Torwell,
University of Iowa - USA 357

**Journalism research and democracy
Moving out of the Western orbit**

Beate Josephi,
Edith Cowan University -
Perth , Australia 385

**Public confidence in media reporting of elections:
A step backward in Nigeria**

Peter Esuh,
University of Uyo - Nigeria 405

Book Reviews: 427

Announcements 433



REVIEW ARTICLE

The role of media in democratic governance

By Robert A. White

Abstract

There is widespread consensus that a major obstacle to development in Africa is bad governance and the lack of control by the public over governance through elections and influence on parliamentary and administrative decisions. In democratic theory the public gains information necessary to evaluate and control governance largely through the media. The present article reviews and summarises the research that evaluates how effective the media in Africa have been in political education of the public, building interest in and identification with the nation state, representing the interests of the public in the political arena, leading the public in a debate on major political decisions, becoming involved with elections and major political decisions and then helping the public to critically evaluate the implementation and administration of legislation.

Key words: media and democracy, democratisation, freedom of the press, civil society, media and political accountability, media and elections

Introduction: The slippery subject of media and democracy

Goran Hyden, Michael Leslie and Folu F. Ogundimu (Eds.) *Media and democracy in Africa*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002.

Isaac Blankson and Patrick Murphy (Eds.). *Negotiating democracy: Media transformations in emerging democracies* (2007). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007.

Over the past thirty years, virtually all discussions of African development point to bad governance as a basic obstacle to socio-economic development in Africa. Political leaders in Africa often do not see election to office as a call to efficient public service, but rather as an opportunity for personal enrichment and the enrichment of one's circle of friends. Democratisation has become a code word for the reform of these abuses,

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for making political office a responsible, accountable and professional service to the electorate (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 1-4).

Also, over the past few decades, media theory has come to focus on the development and maintenance of political democracy as a central *normative* role of journalistic media and public media in general - that is, what the role *should be* (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Christians, McQuail, Glasser, Nordenstreng, White, forthcoming 2009; Gans, 2003). Thus, the theme of this review of research in *African Communication Research* touches on a central question in media studies in Africa: what has been the role of media in democratisation or, more basic, how can we conceptualise the role of media in democratisation.

This review begins with two relatively recent books dealing directly with "the role that the media play in the ongoing process of democratisation in sub-Saharan Africa" (Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu, 2002, p.vii). As the editors of *Media and Democracy in Africa* note, since 1990 virtually all countries of Africa have introduced major reforms attempting to move away from autocratic, neo-patrimonial regimes. There have been constitutional changes to defend freedom of the press, introduce multi-party elections, and limit presidential terms (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 1-4).

Virtually every factor of democratisation has been widely researched: the influence of civil society, strengthening multi-party democracy, introducing new anti-corruption offices enforcing open accountability, greater participation in local government, the impact of human rights movements, and the honesty of the judiciary in enforcing the rule of law (Hyden, Olowu, Ogendo, 2000). Surprisingly, however, there has been little published research dealing with the influence of the media in Africa on the six issues considered central in democratisation: (1) greater equality of opportunity, (2) strengthening the rule of law, (3) greater citizen participation in all aspects of government decisions, (4) freedom for competitive political proposals, (5) vertical and horizontal accountability to reduce corruption, and (6) greater public control over elected officials (Diamond and Morlino, 2005, pp. ix-xliii).

The books of Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu and Blankson and Murphy attempt to fill this gap. A third important book dealing with this topic, Nyamnjoh's *Africa's media: Democracy and the politics of belonging* (2005), is also discussed later in this review.

A systematic framework for analysing media and democratisation

One of the problems in bringing together the immensely varied research on media and democracy is how to present this in a relatively coherent order. One of the results of the vigorous theoretical discussions of democratisation and national development over the last fifty years is the realisation that the process of democratisation has many phases, dimensions, and conditions, all of them important in the overall movement toward what many would term a "mature democracy". Some research deals with media and freedom, media and political socialisation, media and civil society, others deal with media and elections, and so forth. Is an explanation of the role of media in honest elections *the* central explanation of media and democratisation or simply one aspect of it? And, if it is an aspect, what aspect? Part of the research implied in this review was the hope that we might find in the current literature a more comprehensive framework for bringing together the different aspects in a more coherent *explanation* of how media influences democratisation and vice versa.

The collection of Hyden, Leslie and Ogundimu is particularly noteworthy because the different essays outline varied models to explain how the media are a causal factor in democratisation. The chapters in the book began as papers for a conference in 1997 that managed to bring together eminent media scholars of Africa in a face-to-face discussion on media and democracy (2002, pp. viii). The papers were later revised for publication.

The opening chapter by Hyden and Leslie proposes that to have a *comprehensive* explanation, one must make sure that four different disciplines are included: the *political*, the *economic*, the *technological* and finally the *cultural* factors. In effect, the authors focus on the four central issues in each of these disciplinary traditions: freedom of critical expression (political), new methods of providing broader access to information to more people (technological), ownership of media (economic), and the protection of African values and forms of communication (cultural). These are central issues in democratisation, but, in fact, the authors do not define what they mean by democracy and democratisation - even in the broadest sense - so they are not able to explain how each of these factors is related to the overall process of democratisation. For example, how does greater freedom of expression contribute to greater public participation in political decisions?

Applying Huntington's wave theory of democratisation

Hyden and Okigbo in their chapter do not present their discussion in terms of the four disciplines, which is supposedly the organising framework of the book, but introduce still another theoretical explanation of media and democratisation based on Huntington's (1991) "waves of democracy" thesis. The metaphor of the *wave* implies that socio-political pressures build up enough force to introduce, against autocratic resistance, major democratic institutions and then recede. Each wave is constituted by an internal socio-political movement and a complimentary external international pressure forcing ruling elites to concede to demands for more participatory governance. The media are seen as an important factor articulating and formulating the specific demands for more democratic governance.

In the view of Hyden and Okigbo, the first major wave of democracy in Africa (an aspect of Huntington's "second wave") were the independence movements that set up the post-colonial states while the second wave built up in the 1980s and brought major changes in constitutions, especially the possibility of multi-party elections, in the 1990s. The authors argue that the media have been far more important than most political analysts have recognised.

The first wave, in the 1950s, was brought about largely by the swelling of internal discontent with colonial rule but more especially by the ability of pioneer leaders such as Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Kenyatta and Nyerere. Their use of both direct rhetorical appeal and the press articulated the yet vague restiveness of the African people into clear demands for independent, self-reliant African statehood. In the view of Hyden and Okigbo, the second wave, in the 1990s, was brought about largely by external forces, the changing international conditions such as the break-up of the Soviet Union and, one might add, the political and economic reforms imposed as a condition for financial help from the Bretton Woods agencies. The authors ridicule internal forces such as the civil society as existing only in name and see the domestic pressures as largely top-down demands of African intellectuals and elites for political reforms.

The limitations of the wave theory become apparent in the weakness of its explanation of the role of the media in the second wave. The increasing multiplication and diversity of the media is recognised as well as the greater freedom of the media to critically evaluate governance, but the wave theory does not direct attention to the *steady*

build up of changes in African societies that have made the major democratic political reforms of today possible. The diverse and vigorous voice of the media today would not be feasible without the *steady* improvement of the professionalism of journalists supported by professional associations and professional journalism training in both African universities and in international training opportunities (Diedong, 2008, p. 210).

The diversity of the independent media would also not be probable without the *steady* development of the managerial and investment capacity of African entrepreneurs since independence. Neither would the constitutional reforms have taken place without the relentless increase of influence of the African legal and human rights activists. Underlying this is the perpetual rising education and increasing importance of African professional associations demanding greater accountability.

Media in a long-term, but fragmented process of democratisation

One way out of the problems of the wave theory is the view of Sklar (1996), frequently cited by authors studying media and democracy, that democratisation in Africa is a process, but a fragmented, halting, backward and forward process that is best characterised by “conjunctural events”. In this perspective, as Ogundimu proposes in the concluding chapter of the book edited by Hyden et al.,

“democracy does not happen at the systemic level. Nor is it always useful to make assessments based on broad regime changes. Instead, Sklar argues, and we agree, that democracy comes in fragments, often in a disjunctive manner. . . The value of this approach is that it recognises that many small incremental changes often result in a more catalytic reform as the accumulated effects of these minor steps begin to add up” (2002, pp. 216-217).

This perspective suggests that the process of democratisation needs to be broken into its more fragmented component parts, but in a way that relates each aspect to a more coherent conception of democracy and democratisation. This, for me, led back to a framework that I have long used in analysing the development of democracy, an adaptation of the schema of Gabriel Almond (1960), useful because it makes a form of communication central in each phase of the democratic process. This framework assumes that democracy, in the broadest sense, is defined as

the collective participation (in some form) of citizens in the process of making public decisions and guaranteeing implementation of these decisions. The following adaptation of Almond's categories breaks the democratic process into component parts, all of them important in collective decisionmaking:

- (1) *Political socialisation*: bringing the citizens into the democratic political culture of the society. This includes learning political contestation, that is, developing in citizens the capacity to continually assess, criticise, structure and restructure the political decisionmaking system so that it responds to demands for justice, equality and freedom.
- (2) *Constructing the national community*: creating national identity and the national system of political communication.
- (3) *Interest articulation*: presenting the varied proposals of different interest groups for deliberation and decisionmaking.
- (4) *Interest aggregation*: the deliberative process in a democracy which takes many proposals and reduces them to a major alternative representing in some way all of the interests of the nation.
- (5) *Authoritative decisionmaking*: done in a way that gains the maximum legitimacy among various interests.
- (6) *Implementation of authoritative decisionmaking*: and the capacity of the public to monitor and evaluate the response to the will of the people in the implementation.

This model of participatory collective decisionmaking provides a framework for locating virtually all of the research on media and democratisation and for evaluating how it contributes to citizen participation in public decisionmaking.

The role of the media in civic socialisation in Africa

Michael Bratton, Robert Mattes and E. Gyimah-Boadi. *Public Opinion, Democracy and Market Reform in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

The socialisation of citizens into the values, knowledge and activities of democratic governance and a democratic society is widely acknowledged by political scientists as fundamental for the development of democratic political systems (Clausen & Mueller, 1990). Those elected to public office are expected to learn from childhood how their system of government is supposed to work and to incorporate into their personalities a commitment to values such as the

rule of law. Likewise citizens must have this same set of understandings and commitments to demand that political leaders live up to these values. Students of political socialisation have studied virtually every factor that can form “the democratic personality” - the family background, the school context or associational life of youth (Almond and Verba, 1989). The role of media in democratic socialisation has been widely studied (Buckingham, 2000), but there is relatively little research on this in Africa.

The study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) provides some of the most significant recent data on the role of the media in preparing the public for democratic participation in Africa. The focus is on the formation of public opinion which, as Ogundimu argues in his chapter in *Media and Democracy in Africa* (2002, p. 214), is one of the roles of media that tends to be overlooked in the analysis of media and democratisation (Katz, 1995). In Ogundimu’s view, the media open a communicative space in which people can comfortably discuss politics to form opinions on subjects of importance to them. The media do not “cause” opinions, but suggest themes that can be thought about, discussed or enquired about.

The study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) was carried out with state-of-the-art survey methods in 1999 in 12 countries of Africa, interviewing representative samples ranging from 1,200 in Tanzania to 3,600 in Nigeria in order to make general statements about the opinions of Africans on democratic governance. A central question was to what extent do Africans demand democratic governance and how do they evaluate the governance which is provided them?

The survey results, based mainly on item correlations, reveal that the major expectations of activities of elected political leaders are good services in the area of education, health, and job creation. But also most important, Africans value democracy in terms of civil liberties, especially the ability to speak their mind without reprisals, travel without hindrance and conduct affairs without extortion (p. 344). Those most strong in their appreciation of civil liberties were Africans who had witnessed the worst of the years of repressive regimes in the 1980s and 1990s.

How do the media influence the demand for good governance?

As this study indicates, use of the media provides access to knowledge of government activities, but the higher the level of education the greater the access to the media, especially the print

media which provides much more in-depth information. Knowledge of the current government and having higher expectations of governance are directly related to level of education and the use of mass media (pp. 208-211). Also, the higher the level of education and the use of media, the more *critical* is the evaluation of government performance and the greater the ability to point out specific deficiencies of government. Less-educated, lower-status people also have relatively high levels of political knowledge and political awareness if they are more faithful in the use of the radio medium.

The authors are clear about the importance of the use of media. "As people gain access to news media, so they come to support democracy and reject authoritarian rule...(but) listening to the radio is most likely to increase support for democracy. As might be expected, reading newspapers... has more impact on democratic attachments than watching TV" (p. 210). Another important factor is discussing issues among members of associations, which could include any organisation from churches to labour unions. Uganda leads in tendency to engage in discussion of public affairs, although Tanzanians also rate high in the level of discussion of public affairs (p. 212).

These data suggest that in Africa the use of media is the single most important factor in active, knowledgeable capacity to participate in democratic governance, but higher levels of education and participating in organisations where political issues are discussed increases this capacity still more. A factor which is also correlated highly with the demand for good governance is the experience of years of military governments, arbitrary patrimonial rule or the coercive state (pp. 290-291). Middle-aged people who passed through the worst years of repressive, inefficient government are sharper in their concern for democracy than younger people in the survey.

The relative importance of newspapers, TV and radio

Consumption of news reports is associated with higher popular support for economic reform programmes and lower satisfaction with the way such programmes have been implemented. The most important medium for critical awareness of development progress is the newspaper medium, but, since so few people have access to newspapers, the newspaper is, on the whole, of less importance (pp. 210-211).

Only 25 percent of the respondents say that television is an important source of political information, and only one out of eight (i.e

12.5 percent) say that newspapers or other print media are important in their political knowledge. In fact, the authors observe that the print media have progressively less political significance in Africa because newspapers are becoming relatively more expensive and fewer people are reading them (p. 209). South Africa leads in media use with over 70 percent listening to radio news daily, 60 percent seeing TV news and 24 percent reading a newspaper. Countries such as Mali are at the other end of the spectrum with only two percent reading a newspaper and six percent seeing TV news.

Rural dwellers in Africa have much less access to media. While 44 percent of urban dwellers see TV news and 23 percent read a newspaper, only eight percent of rural dwellers see TV news and only six percent of rural people read a daily newspaper. Sectors of the public which have no access to media except through the state-controlled media and less education - typically the rural peasant farmer population - tend to have a kind of blind loyalty to whatever government is in power (p. 209). In general, newspaper readers are much more likely to rate political competition such as opposition parties and the strong voice of the civil society as important.

This suggests that the tradition of one-party, patrimonial rule is much more likely to be tolerated in countries such as Tanzania with a large peasant farmer population and the extension of the rural among poorly educated people of the semi-urban slums of the mega cities such as Dar es Salaam. In countries such as Kenya with a much higher level of education and higher media penetration, attempts to manipulate elections, thinking that the rural and urban lower-status population is passive and tolerant, can be explosive - as the violent reactions to the 2007 Kenyan elections proved.

When asked what public institution they trust the most, surprisingly it is the national (usually government) broadcasting services, with two-thirds of those interviewed across twelve countries indicating that they find official news pronouncements reliable (p. 229). Trust in official media is highest in Mali (88 percent) and lowest in Zimbabwe (40 percent). The least trusted public institution is the police force, and the public has very low trust in the judiciary system. Just why there is such high trust in the public broadcasting system is not clear, but it very likely has to do with the apparent veracity, even when the range of information is very much controlled by authorities.

Those with more education and greater use of the media tend to see democratic performance more in terms of procedural dimensions -

freedom in voting, honest election reporting, allowing opposition parties unhindered campaigning - while those with less education and use of the media evaluate democracy more in terms of its capacity to resolve immediate problems such as unemployment, reducing the price of food and having good, cheap transportation.

The role of the media in knowledge of government affairs

The study also sought to measure the degree of "cognitive awareness", that is, the exact knowledge of government such as knowing the names of prominent officials and knowing the details of important current governmental affairs. As expected, cognitive awareness is much higher among people of better education and greater media use. Cognitive awareness rises at the time of elections when government affairs are being debated and evaluated, but dissipates when people are not so strongly encouraged to actively participate in politics. Surprisingly, in Botswana, a country rated high in its democratic performance, there is a relatively low level of cognitive awareness. It may be that in countries where government is meeting expectations, people tend to turn their attention to personal career aspirations.

The more that people read newspapers in combination with TV and radio, the more people are aware of corruption charges and the more they are concerned about corruption. The correlation between media use and knowledge of corruption revelations is highest among urban news consumers who have greater proximity to investigative journalism (p. 234). The study shows, however, that Africans tend to perceive much more corruption than they actually experience. In Tanzania, for example, the opinion that much corruption exists is almost twice as high as the actual experience of having to pay a bribe or other forms of coercive corruption (p. 234). The study notes that in some countries with a large rural, peasant population which has little access to media - Tanzania is again given as an example - a vague perception of widespread corruption is combined with a kind of blind fatalistic trust in the ruling political parties (p. 235).

The study found that the degree of "cognitive engagement", that is, the interest in discussing issues of politics, is not associated with a critical evaluation of government performance. Only education and especially media use are consistently good predictors of a strong demand for good government performance, expectations of accountability and ability to understand how government functions.

The authors propose the likelihood that discussion is more likely to be found among lower-status Africans who live in an oral culture and seek information in the rumors, personal stories and listening to opinion leaders of the *radio trottoir*, the sidewalk radio (pp. 211-213). Since these Africans are less likely to use the media, they belong to that mass of somewhat older, isolated people who have a general attitude of traditional satisfaction with political icons stretching back to the era of strong early independence-days leaders.

Is democratisation a “wave” or a “long learning process”?

This study provides less support for the wave theory and suggests rather that the capacity and demand for democratic participation among Africans has been a long *learning experience* which has been growing with increasing levels of education and greater exposure to media as the density and diversity of media increases (pp. 289-294; 347-349). There is a greater capacity for critical evaluation of government activities as the professionalism and investigative capacity of the media increases. What Hyden and Okigbo see as the withdrawal of the first wave - the onset of the repressive one-party and military governments - may have been, in fact, a very important part of the learning experience. The strongest supporters of democratic civil liberties are those who personally experienced the coercion of repressive governments. The popular debates in the independence movements promoted by the media in countries such as Kenya, Tanzania and Ghana were carried on with relatively shallow understanding and untested convictions regarding democratic institutions.

The promoters of the independence debates were themselves authors of the “repressive reversal” that Hyden and Okigbo refer to. The data of this study tend to support the view of Sklar (1996) that democratisation in Africa is a long-term process, indeed a fragmented, backward and forward process with its conjunctural events that are important as a *learning process*. This study also suggests that democratisation varies throughout the world and has to be constructed by the searching experiences of people trying to find out what is the best way to develop a democracy in each unique socio-cultural context.

The role of the media in building a sense of national identity

Goran Hyden and Charles Okigbo, The media and the two waves of democracy. In Goran Hyden, Michael Leslie and Folu F. Ogundimu (Eds.), *Media and democracy in Africa* (2002, pp. 29-54). New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

A premise in democratic theory is that citizens must first have a sense of common national identity, with relatively common values and goals, in order to form and maintain a state that is continually accountable to them (Shapiro, 2003, pp. 10-34; Tordoff, 2002, pp. 42-75). Nationalism cultivates a sense of working with others in interdependence so that the promotion of the welfare of the nation promotes the welfare of each and all who live in the nation.

Although most citizens are motivated primarily by the profit of their personal livelihood, they also realise that their productivity will benefit the common good and that the common good will, in turn, benefit all individuals. The mass media, which daily inform the public of the state of well being of the nation, are expected to be a major factor in creating this "system awareness" and the sense of interdependence.

As Olukoshi and Laakso point out, African independence leaders took over the principle that identification with a national community is essential for a strong state, but, rather than build the state on the nationalist movements that were emerging in the late colonial period, they instead decided to use the state to build a sense of nation (1996, pp. 11-16). For the state to take on this task in the context of Africa assumed virtually unlimited financial and administrative resources available to the state, the capacity of political leaders to "command" the semi-subsistence farmers to engage in commercial production and excellent transportation and communication into the interior. Little of this was, in fact, available, and the state-driven project came crashing down in the 1980s. Olukoshi and Laakso argue, however, that the need for nation building was correct and that the process of nation building must be reconstituted in the form of "a democratic process which permits the participation of popular social movements and limits the influence of statism" (1996).

Hyden and Okigbo, in *Media and Democracy in Africa* (2002), offer one of the few analyses of the role of media in the process of nation building and strengthening national identification. They argue that the media are more important for nationalism when these are independent of the state and provide a mouthpiece for nationalist

leaders attempting to bring together various movements, a process that, in fact, supports the thesis of Olukoshi and Laakso. The role of the print media in the independence movements, what Hyden and Okigbo term the first wave of democratisation in Africa, offers something of a model of this.

The role of the press in creating African nationalism

In the late colonial period African societies had a vibrant associational life ranging from cooperative savings groups to dancing clubs. Africans did not identify with the colonial state and could not engage in politics so they found other organised ways to realise their rising desire for modernity. The colonial government controlled the radio, but independence leaders quickly discovered that the press, even with its limited circulation, was very useful for transforming the rather limited parochial interests of trade unions, syncretic churches and social clubs into nationalist aspirations.

The rhetoric of rallies could raise enthusiasm and get identification with independence personalities, but the press was a better medium for somewhat more abstract, generalised goals and policies of a new nation. Many of the independence leaders such as Kenyatta in Kenya, Azikiwe in Nigeria and Nkrumah in Ghana had worked as journalists and knew how to use the press to move public opinion. Fred Omu (1978) has outlined in great detail how the independent press in the Lagos area built a reading public in opposition to the colonial government.

Different kinds of print media tended to mobilise different publics and bring these publics into a united independence movement. The native language press, especially strong in East Africa where Swahili was a symbol of opposition to the settler groups, was an especially important means for stimulating demands of lower-status native groups for employment, education and better health facilities. The European language press, stronger in Francophone Africa and West Africa, was important for setting out aspirations for more democratic procedures in the face of the colonial autocracy. The metropolitan press, especially active in France, was a better instrument for developing the more abstract philosophical goals of independence such as Senghor's *Negritude*. Hyden and Okigbo emphasise that the press was important for developing a "discursive realm" that set down the foundations of incipient African nationalism. They outline at least five different aspects of the role of media in forming national identity.

Firstly, the press provided a common language for an emerging community of young, better-educated young Africans, who were trying to carve out an economic, administrative or professional role for themselves in a field still dominated by expatriates. Secondly, the press provided a forum for independence leaders to de-legitimise the colonial right to govern by showing that their autocracy and arrogance were a violation of their own Western principles of liberal government and civil servant ideals. Thirdly, the print media, before and after independence, introduced a discursive space to deny that it was necessary to become European to become modern and to gradually sketch out an African model of modernity. Olukoshi and Laakso (1996, p. 14) add to this analysis the fact that all African nationalists attempted to develop unifying ideologies: Nyerere's *Ujamaa* socialism, Nkrumah's socialism and pan-africanism, Kaunda's African humanism, Kenyatta's *Harambee* and Mobutu's *authenticité*. The nationalist movements also invented father-figure titles to emphasise that all formed one family: *Mwalimu* for Nyerere, *Mzee* for Kenyatta, *Le Vieux* for Côte d'Ivoire's Houphuet-Boigny and *Le Grand Syli* for Guinea's Sekou Touré. Fourthly, independence leaders began to formulate the principles of rights and duties that Africans would be expected to live up to in an African nation. Finally, there was great emphasis on cutting ties of dependence on Europe and finding ways to chart a course of self-determination and self-reliance.

Using state-controlled media to build a sense of nation

After independence, single-party and military presidents attempted to use the media following the socialist model of building national identity by authoritarian "re-education". However, this did not work, in large part, because the discourse was not that of indigenous communities but the modernisation language of the colonial bureaucracies inherited by post-colonial state agencies. The language came across as official propaganda, and people could not identify with this. As Hyden and Okigbo note (2002, p. 40), The circulation of newspapers fell off. It often took the national broadcasting service years to build up a system covering the whole nation, and there was no programme of reporting from the interior regions so that the broadcasts would be truly national.

It would be wrong to dismiss the importance of government central broadcasting services as a means of building national identity. In the

interior, the state-run broadcasting is virtually the only more in-depth information service reaching most people. Although commercial broadcasting is expanding rapidly, for most Africans the government broadcasting system is still the major source of national news and national information that brings with it a national calendar and nationalistic symbols of identification. The study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi reveals that, when people were asked what public institutions they trust most, the national broadcasting services got the highest rating (2005, p. 229). It helps to place this in context by noting that the respondents rated the national court system and especially the police as the least trusted public institutions. Trust in the national electoral system is high in countries such as Ghana where successive elections have been well administered, but low in countries such as Zimbabwe where elections have been clearly manipulated. Perhaps the most worrisome aspect of nationalism in Africa is that, according to the study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, pp. 231-232), the higher the degree of education and the more the use of the mass media, the lower the trust in the state institutions. As was noted above, the lack of trust in the state is directly related to the perception of corruption and the continual autocratic abuse of the rule of law that comes from the daily reporting in the independent mass media (2005, pp. 232-235).

The degree of nationalistic identification among Africans

Key analysts of media and democracy in Africa such as Francis Nyamnjoh (2005, pp. 17-25) contend that a fundamental problem of democracy in Africa is the tendency not to identify with the nation-state but with one's ethnic-linguistic group and with one's village of origin within the ethnic grouping. Theoretically, every citizen has the right to equal treatment before the national legal system, but in practice those holding public office will tend to give preference to those of their own ethnic grouping and will tend to expect preferential treatment from those of one's ethnic background.

Matthew Kukah, in his book *Democracy and civil society in Nigeria* (1999), shows, in a detailed description of the history of Nigerian civil society organisations such as the bar association, labour unions, student movements and women's organisations, that Nigerians lack a sense of the common good of the nation. This, he argues, is, in part, the deliberate result of the strategy used by Nigerian political leaders of

“dividing and destroying” civil-society organisations by buying off, harassing, exiling or isolating leaders of these movements.

The Nigerian Osaghae comments that the lack of identification with the nation-state in Africa has its roots in the oppressive experience of the colonial state. “...the state and government which animated it were approached as alien institutions which belonged to the *oyibo* (white man), were not deserving of the citizen’s obligations or duties, could be plundered to feather private nests, and whose survival only the few who benefited directly from it were prepared to fight for...It is a popular Nigerian saying ...that ‘government’s business is no man’s business’” (1998, p. 21).

Although the primacy of village and ethnic groups in African identity is clear, this may not rule out the importance of national identity. The data of the study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005, pp.186-193) suggest that social identification is a fairly complex configuration. Most of the respondents in the survey, 40 percent, say their primary identity is their occupation, 32 percent say that their primary identity is ethnic, and 17 percent their religious identity. But virtually all, 95 percent, could simultaneously feel pride in being a national of their country and want their children to think of themselves as national citizens. Still, when respondents were asked whether, in the case of a clash between nation and ethnic group, they would prefer the nation or the ethnic group, 70 percent said they feel closer ties to their ethnic group (2005, pp. 191-193). This is especially true among Nigerians where ethnic conflict has been so strong, while Zambians and Tanzanians have much stronger national identity.

In general, there is much evidence that, in this period of rapid urbanisation and globalisation in Africa, identity is a process of search. Africans clearly want to affirm their African identity, but do not feel that the institutions of Westernised urban life, especially the state apparatus, provide the kind of values that make them proud of being Africans. African imaginative media - literature, music and now African popular film - tend to portray the city as the site of alienation and the return to the village as the return to satisfying values. The proudest moment in one’s life is to do something for one’s village - not doing something for one’s nation (Uwah, 2008).

Olukoshi and Laakso may be correct in stressing that the nation-state and African common identity must be constituted in order to motivate the personal energies of Africans in national development (1996, p. 33), but it must be constituted by building from a sense of

village, intervillage linkages and regional interdependence. Faniran, in his analysis of African values of community, shows how successful politicians have mobilised a following by bringing local, ethnic, religious and regional symbols of identity into common national symbols that all can identify with (2008, pp. 238-246). Creating national symbols of identity is part of the long learning process, and the national media, in attempting to reach the largest possible market in a nation, are the leaders in creating these common symbols.

The role of the media in civil society and the interest-articulation process

E. Gyimah-Boadi. Civil Society and democratic development. In E. Gyimah-Boadi (Ed.), *Democratic reform in Africa: The quality of progress* (pp. 91-119). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2004.

The process of direct participation of the public in democratic decisionmaking begins with the formulation by citizens of proposals for policy, legislation, administrative action or other authoritative decisionmaking (Diamond and Morlino, 2003, pp. xvi-xvii). Interest articulation begins outside the structure of the state in the political space where the civil society faces the state (Almond, 1960, p. 33). The independence movements constituted some of the first significant interest-articulation of the rich associational life in the late colonial period in the creation of the African nation states. In many cases the cooperative movements, labour unions and other organisations that existed at the time of independence were absorbed into the corporatist power structure of the single-party and state system that was established in many African countries in the 1960s, and the external interest-articulation process atrophied. Clientelist patronage systems became a kind of interest-articulation structure, but for personal needs. With the breakdown of the state capacity in the 1980s, there was a rapid rise of interest-group activity in the 1990s outside the governments, especially among labour unions, the churches, student organisations and human rights groups (Bratton, 1994, pp. 51-81). These movements translated the deep dissatisfactions of the African middle classes into articulate proposals for multi-party democracy, guarantees of free elections, protective measures for media freedom and introducing offices in governments for monitoring corruption and accountability.

Interest articulation is most evident in relatively permanent institutions such as churches, educational systems, transportation and electrical power networks or in major permanent voluntary associations such as labour unions, manufacturing associations or professional associations. However, in Africa non-associational social formations such as ethnic groups, kinship and lineage identities may play an important role in voicing discontent. Even more important are relatively spontaneous outbursts of small traders, student protests, or consumer anger over sharp price rises (Almond, 1960, p. 33). The central goal of all interest articulation is to communicate into the public sphere the needs, identities and problems of a given social sector in order to influence public opinion, get the defending support of the political structures such as political parties and administrative offices and eventually get the authoritative decisionmaking power of the state to legislate action.

The rise of civil society in Africa

Extensive research on the development of interest-group activity in Africa, was carried out in the 1990s under the rubric of the "civil society", and edited books on the civil society were brought out by Harbeson, Rothchild and Chazan (1994), Kasfir (1998), John and Jean Comaroff (1999) and Wohlogemuth, Gibson, Klasen and Rothschild (1999). Gyimah-Boadi (1994; 1999; Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005) has been one of the most consistent chroniclers of the development of civil society in Africa, becoming more optimistic about the possibility of civil society in this continent over the years. Bratton (1994) points out five aspects of how "civil society" articulates and defends the interests of citizens' associations:

- 1) They remain steadfastly committed primarily to the interests of the groups they represent, and they resist being absorbed into political parties, legislative coalitions and the corporate power of the states. This is particularly evident in the case of the leadership of peasant or labour organisations that maintain commitment to its peasant or labour identity and refuses to become an instrument of political parties that are seeking power and upward social mobility for the leaders of the party. A prime example is the case of Chiluba in Zambia who began as a labour leader, but as president was quickly absorbed into the cultural practices of neo-patrimonial autocracy, clientelism and massive corruption that are part of the governance institutions of Africa (Ihonvbere, 2003, pp. 51-84).

2) Civil society associations also resist being co-opted into the corporate structure of the state which exercises the power and coercive force of the state - in spite of the advantages that state power offers. They remain voluntary associations committed to realising the cultural identity and the way of economic life that this identity implies.

3) In the interest-articulation activities, however, civil society associations aim to get the support of the rule of law that the state provides because this may be the only way that their own cultural identity can be maintained. Typical examples of this are the human rights organisations that can defend rights only by getting the backing of the state's capacity for maintaining law and order.

4) Although civil society remains radically distinct from "politics" and the state, the state finally must find its legitimation in the articulated wishes of the people, and the civil society finds its legitimation in its continual promise of reform of the state.

5) Lastly, Bratton emphasises that civil society associations are extremely heterogeneous and that the concept remains a theoretical construct rather than a distinct empirical reality. In Africa one can detect four major kinds of civil society groupings, differing precisely in the form of communication that they engage in: a) community-service, local government organisations, b) associations with economic goals ranging from labour unions to federations of small entrepreneurs, c) human and civil rights organisations, and d) professional associations.

Community governance and the political process

The present-day structure of voluntary organisations serving as local village governance and with lines of communication with higher levels of local government at the district and regional level to represent interests and needs has a long history in Africa. In the pre-colonial past, village communities certainly had some form of local governance, and where regional political structures developed, this governance had some representation in the kingdoms such as those of Ghana (Anzu-Kyeremeh, 2005, p. 40). The colonial governments brought this into the system of indirect rule, and when tribal groups saw that their future lay in modernisation, village leadership began to take initiatives to establish schools, improve roads, promote marketing of crops such as coffee and build linkages with colonial governments.

Virtually all independence governments introduced state-led development structures reaching down to the village level, and governments encouraged the active initiative of local communities to

establish schools, local health dispensaries, agricultural and other development programmes. The classic model was Tanzania's programme of establishing councils in all villages, but similar approaches were introduced in Kenya with the Harambee concept (Leonard, 1991, pp. 228-233; Olowu and Wunsch, 2004, p. 35), by the Rawlings government in Ghana (Ayee, 2004, pp. 125-154) and, more recently, by Museveni in Uganda (Wunsch & Ottemoeller, 2004, pp. 181-209). Given the emphasis on the corporatist central planning, this was much more of a command and control structure with initiative taken by regional units of central government.

In the 1980s many central state governments had to cut back their support of schools, health dispensaries and other services. Without the support of the central government, many communities in Africa began to activate traditional communitarian self-help groups based on kinship and friendship. A major question is whether these local organisations are simply self-enclosed attempts to enable communities to survive or whether they are interest-articulating initiatives linked into the national development process (Taylor & Mackensie, 1992, pp. 225-232). Claude Ake, writing in the mid-1990s notes, "In the last decade, there has been an explosion of associational life in rural Africa. By all indications, this is a by-product of a general acceptance of the necessity of self reliance, yielding a proliferation of institutions such as craft centres, rural credit unions, farmers' associations...community-financed schools and hospitals. . . even community vigilante groups for security" (1997, p. 47). In Nigeria the local directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure encouraged the development of local associations, provided matching funds of locally-raised capital and linked the associations to government programmes (Guyer, 1994, pp. 222-224). Given the shortage of funds for development that African countries are facing, many African governments now have programmes of promising to provide teachers for schools or local paraprofessional nurses if the local communities will mobilise their own resources to build and maintain the school buildings or dispensaries. Regional and district government offices will make efforts to respond to requests if local communities take the initiative to request help. Given the inability of governments to carry out major programmes of rural development and forestry management, governments have promoted community-based reforestation programmes under the direction of local communities (Havnevik, 2006, pp. 165-190).

In the 1990s the expansion of NGOs with funding through major international aid organisations has begun to provide some regional coordination and both technical and financial assistance to local community associations. What is distinctive about the present NGO approaches to community governance is the training of the local leadership to respond to the needs of local communities and to maintain a type of continuing responsibility for solving local community problems.

The principle guiding the emphasis on local voluntary and elected associations active in maintaining the quality of services such as education, health, roads and transportation or security is that local people are more directly concerned and motivated than distant bureaucrats. The extensive research on local government in Africa, especially that of Olowu and Wunsch (2004, pp. 254-271), has revealed a series of four basic conditions which support the success of grassroots service provision through voluntary, elected associations.

1) A supportive national political context which encourages local associations to take initiatives and requires local governmental bodies and service bureaucracies to respond to and assist the initiatives of local associations according to equitable and consistent legal guidelines. Olowu and Wunsch stress that this is possible if governments are guided by the rule of law, not the patronage system that only rewards those who support partisan political ambitions. Local associations generally tend to get better support for their initiatives if they are federated in a regional association that has a secretariat of full-time trained personnel fully accountable to local associations with responsibilities of training local associations, negotiating resources with ministries and NGO donor agencies and available to solve problems of local associations (Tarawalie, 2008).

2) A policy of central government guaranteeing financial and other resources for local association initiatives if these follow established guidelines.

3) A policy of encouraging local initiatives in areas of services where there is likely to be strong motivation to have good services which benefit the community as a whole. For example, community associations in Chad maintained schools well because the whole community progressed economically in cotton production and marketing if there was good basic education (Fass and Desloovere, 2004, pp. 162-172).

4) There is good communication between the leadership of the local associations and the people of the community so that the people themselves define actions and direct local leadership on what they want done. Also, there is good communication between the leadership of the local associations and local government, offices of government service ministries, supportive NGOs or secretariats of federations of community associations. This kind of good communication has been facilitated especially well by regional community radio stations that take up issues such as education, the marketing of local products, or local health problems and bring all the communities and agencies of a region to discuss how to deal with these problems (Alumuku, 2006).

Organised sectors of the economy as interest groups

Labour unions, farmers associations, and manufacturing associations have played an important role in virtually all of the coalitions that have brought significant political changes in Africa over the last twenty years because they are close to the economic development planning of the nation and because they can easily disrupt public life with industrial action or other measures if they are not listened to. Labour unions played a key role in the transitions in Zambia (Bratton, 1994) and in South Africa but also in Nigeria (Kukah, 1999, pp. 154-158; cf article of Torwell in this issue of *African Communication Research*), and Kenya (Bratton, 1994).

Farmer's organisations in Côte d'Ivoire were able to get the government to introduce some significant legislation, in part because of the ability to use the media (Widner, 1994, pp. 191-214). Guyer (1994, p. 220) argues that manufacturing associations in Nigeria are an example of how industrial leaders are able to present policy proposals to governments. The Manufacturers' Association of Nigeria has as its aims "influencing general policy in regard to industrial, labour, social, legal training, and technical matters...to develop and promote the contribution of manufacturers to the national economy through representation on all reputable bodies, government and otherwise, whose work may affect directly or indirectly the interests of manufacturers".

Labour unions, manufacturers associations and other occupational interests in Africa are often part of larger international organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) that can help local groups formulate an ideological mandate, make specific government policy proposals and present concrete plans for legislation. Organised

sectors of the economy such as labour unions have a distinct internal communication advantage in their concentrated interaction and sharing of similar interests. In Zambia, punitive action against labourers such as the removal of food subsidies in the copper mining sector in 1990 set off a major movement that ended the regime of Kaunda. The raising of taxes on imports or exports gets an immediate reaction from manufacturers. The leaders of economic organisations often make both immediate and long-term gains by refusing to be co-opted by hegemonic interests and holding out for the benefits of radical social change. Chiluba refused a post in the official party of Kaunda in 1990 and, instead, demanded the free, multi-party elections which eventually gave himself personally and the unions greater power and much greater economic rewards. (Bratton, 1994, p. 71). In the long run, however, both Chiluba and the labour movement in Zambia lost out because Chiluba and his close friends were co-opted into the corrupt culture of the ruling elite in Zambia (Ihonvbere, 2003, pp. 79-81).

Economic interest groups typically have good relations with the media and are often adept in influencing public opinion as Widner shows in the case of the farmers' association in Cote d'Ivoire (1994, p. 207). Industrial action or threat of such action by teachers associations causes an immediate national public disruption that gets the front-page of newspapers and coverage by other media.

The great preponderance of African economic activity is in the informal sector which has little organisation and little capacity to project its interests into the public sphere through the media. A number of studies of the informal small-trader networks, especially among women, indicate that the socio-cultural changes in African society often have their roots in the informal interpersonal networks (MacGaffey, 1994; Tripp, 1994). The study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) shows that education is a long-term fundamental influence, and the raising of the educational standards is often achieved through the informal interpersonal networks of families and friends. Virtually all African countries now have major programmes of micro-finance, and this tends to strengthen the informal economy, especially among the women. The investments of the informal economy often go directly into education and to improved use of the media. One of the first things that a family gets with its improved income is a television set.

There is considerable debate as to whether organised economic interest groups such as manufacturing associations have much influence in state policy and legislation. Tangri argues that industrialists in Africa are much more likely to seek individual, personalistic advantages, such as getting an import license and reducing import taxes as a personal favour. African businessmen tend to work through the neo-patrimonial, clientelistic relationships (1998, pp. 108-122). It is significant that manufacturers are continually complaining in press statements that their competitiveness suffers because of a lack of electrical power, good roads, and effective communications, but in most African countries these manufacturing associations over forty years have not been able to influence the quality of governance to get the infrastructure improvements they need. In part, the problem is that the capacity of the state to effectively implement policy has continually declined over the last thirty years, and the indigenous policy-making processes, starting with interest-group proposals and reaching implementation within the various ministries, simply are not working (van de Walle, 2004, pp. 50-54).

In the long run the expansion of the informal economy, which is far more self-reliant, and the educational system with a greater rationality and system of interdependence - the long learning process that Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) speak of - may be the most important factor.

Human and civil rights groups as authors of political reform

Most of the movements for democratisation in Africa have begun *outside* the realm of the political parties and the state in broad coalitions of civil society groups working in the name of human, civil and political rights (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 6-9). Examples are the conferences in Francophone Africa and the coalitions of the 1990s particularly in Zambia, Kenya and Ghana, but present in some way in virtually all African countries. These groups have been very heterogeneous in their specific origins and goals, but a common denominator has been the tendency to rise above any particular interests to a justification in terms of the most fundamental human and social values. Although international donor agencies and the changing geopolitical order in Eastern Europe and in countries such as China may have played a role in democratisation in Africa, the major impetus has come from cultural movements in Africa that argue that the present socio-political system in Africa is a violation of human dignity

and social justice. A major weapon of these groups has been their attempts to work closely with the independent, non-partisan, investigative media that have justified their own existence in terms of truthfulness and public transparency (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 103-106).

Especially prominent in these initiatives are the independent research and monitoring institutes, centres for building human rights coalitions, and centres for election and corruption monitoring that now exist in virtually all African countries (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 102-103). While many groups may enter into coalitions at critical moments, these institutes are permanent and are continually monitoring and formulating actions for institutional change. Frequently, they are doing the background research for new legislation or administrative reform. Typical is IDASA (Institute for Democracy in South Africa) that played an important role in conceptualising the truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa and has been monitoring the fiscal discipline and civil rights record of the government (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 101). In Ghana the CCD (Centre for Democratic Development) works with the parliamentary Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to reveal corruption and draft legislation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 101). In Benin the Groupe d'Etude et du Recherche sur la Democratie et le Developpement Economiques (GERDDES-Afrique) played an important role in the democratic election of Kerekou in 1995 (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 101). In Nigeria in the late 1990s a coalition of The Constitutional Rights Project, the Civil Liberties Organisation and the Center for Democracy and Development maintained the pressure against the military governments in the protracted transition to democratic elections (Kukah, 1999, pp. 246-255; Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p.100). In Burkina Faso the Burkinabe' Movement for Human and Citizens rights led the Coalition of Human Rights Organisations to pressure the government into an inquiry into the death of the investigative journalist, Norbert Zongo. Most African countries now have national-level chapters of Transparency International carrying on independent research to back up the official anti-corruption agencies that are too often constrained by their political ties.

In many African countries women working in media have formed associations to get issues of women's rights into the media. TAMWA, the Tanzania Media Women's Association is a good example.

The election monitoring organisations in nearly all African countries have formed around the issue of political rights. In Zambia the Foundation for Democratic Process played an important role in monitoring the transition elections in 1991. Civil society groups are now available for election monitoring in almost all African countries and have experience in mounting coalitions to monitor elections. In Ghana in the 1996 elections, the network of Domestic Election Observers was considered important in guaranteeing relatively broad acceptance of election results, and in the 2000 elections in Ghana over twenty civic bodies recruited, trained and deployed over 5,000 people to monitor the polls (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 103). This has contributed to the development of a political climate in Ghana of peaceful regime transitions such as occurred in 2008.

Another area in which civil society groups are active is a new form of civic education that is moving away from the agitprop type of mobilisation of youth, women and peasant farmers typical of the single-party regimes from the 1960s to the recent past. Non-state civic education bodies are encouraging more critical, reflective understanding of voting and demanding accountability of elected officials. The Ghana Legal Literacy Resource Foundation and the Uganda Human Rights Education and Documentation Center are cited as examples of this (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 103-104).

Another type of rights-based group particularly active in interest articulation are the networks and coalitions of women's organisations that exist in all African countries. Women play an important role in economic production, especially in the informal economy, in family health and in family support, especially as regards education. Aili Mari Tripp (1994, 160) has described the efforts of women's organisations in Tanzania to challenge the government policy of refusing loans to women because only men are recognised as having property rights and therefore possessing collateral for loans. Women's organisations have got the government to set up special tribunals to deal with harassment of women, refusal of equal opportunity for jobs and equal access to public services. The women's organisations have brought about change in marriage legislation and other laws that discriminate against women regarding the custody of children, domestic violence, division of matrimonial assets, divorce and maintenance (Tripp, 1994, p. 162). The networking of women's groups tends to be much more informal in order to avoid the pressure of political maneuvering to co-opt, repress

and harass officially registered groups (Tripp, 1994, p. 160; Mongula, 2008, p. 123).

In the 1990s the churches were much more prominent in leading coalitions to end autocratic governance. Particularly noteworthy was the leadership of the late Isidore de Souza of Benin and Archbishop Fanoko Kpodro of Togo in the national conferences that forced neo-patrimonial executives to step down. These religious figures provided the "broad credibility, political skills and commitment to broker agreements in bitter political conflict between intransigent autocrats and impatient democrats" (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 100). Priests working in the Justice and Peace Departments of the Church offered clear concepts for democratic reforms. The Catholic newspapers provided clear leadership in this regard. The *Catholic Standard* in Ghana pointed out the violation of human rights in the Rawlings government (Asante, 1996, p.108) and the church-owned *National Mirror* in Zambia clarified the illegal and anti-constitutional procedures of the Chiluba government (Kasoma, 1997, p.142).

The groups which are promoting respect for human and civil rights depend very much on the institutions which are doing research, monitoring government actions and developing proposals for better flow of information. Typical of these are the Centre for Policy Studies and IDASA in South Africa, the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Centre for Policy Analysis in Ghana, the Centre for Basic Research in Uganda and Kenya's Research on Poverty Alleviation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, 106). These centres can be effective only if they can get access to information. South Africa was successful in getting passage of a "freedom of information" law. In Ghana organisations such as the Media Foundation of West Africa and the Centre for the Development of Democracy are seeking similar legislation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 107). Also important is the freedom and competence of the media in getting this information into the channels of public opinion and debate. The Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) now has sections providing training and research on investigative journalism in many countries of Eastern and Southern Africa, and media councils are also very important in promoting freedom of the media.

Professional associations promoting the rule of law

A fourth major interest group sector very much oriented toward the political process in Africa are the associations of lawyers, medical

doctors, the business and administrative professions, economists and, not least, the associations of journalists and public relations specialists. Appiah, Chimanikire and Gran (2004) have documented well the clash of professional cultures and the neo-patrimonial, clientelist cultures in government administrations of Africa. Young professionally-trained graduates coming out of universities and going to work in ministries are formed in the rationalism of a science and an ethics grounded (however vaguely) in a system of social morality and the discipline of public service. Young university graduates going into government jobs find themselves in a culture of corrupt kickbacks, political favouritism and an ethos of staying in power at any cost. The clash of professional and neo-patrimonial political cultures has its pragmatic side also. Medical doctors are continually decrying the state of public hospitals because the medical doctor can gain the trust of patients only if the hospitals are well-equipped and well-staffed. Lawyers, likewise, can defend their clients only if the system of courts abides by the rule of law.

The law section of *The Guardian* newspaper in Nigeria regularly gives the Nigerian Bar Association the podium to project its image. The headlines of the law section of January 15, 2008 are "How Judiciary stopped crude challenge of constitutionalism by politicians". For January 22, 2008, "Judicial activism sanitised the polity in 2007". For January 29, 2008, "How NBA (National Bar Association) killed the third term bid (of Obasanjo)". *The Guardian* in Nigeria regularly features sections for all the major professional associations, and the logic of the communication is the same: the rational order of practice based on a science, the ethics of public service and some form of the rule of law.

The culture and interests of the professions in Africa have always been relatively distinct from the political culture. Most of the present-day government bureaucracies were a continuation of the imperial, colonial services with the culture of the colonial state apparatus: the arbitrary, neo-patrimonial decisions of colonial governors through equally autocratic, arbitrary indirect-rule chiefs, a depreciation of the native people in the interior, and repressive laws against press freedom and any public criticism of the colonial government. The universities, in contrast, formed at the end of the colonial period were established directly from universities in Britain or France. The professionals, medical doctors in particular, working in Africa tried to have connections with the professional associations of the metropolitan

countries with the same kind of professional ethos and with relative independence from the colonial government (Michelsen, 2004, pp. 125-129; Illiffe, 1998, p 123).

As Gyimah-Boadi points out, the professional associations, especially the various branches of the legal profession, played a major role in challenging the arbitrary, personalistic, illegal and unconstitutional action of Jerry Rawlings throughout the 1980s (1994, pp. 129-130) and in the early 1990s (2004, p. 109). Legal associations played an important role in the transition to constitutional governments in virtually all African countries (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 49-55). The legal professions and the bar associations, because of their familiarity with existing legislation and constitutional foundations, often work closely with economic interest groups and human rights groups in formulating legislation. For example, the Federation of Women Lawyers in Ghana mounted a successful campaign against the traditional practice of *Trokosi* (a form of customary female servitude). Through a media campaign, the Federation of Women Lawyers gained wide public support and inspired parliament to pass a bill outlawing these practices (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 104-105).

Journalist associations have not always been effective in Africa (Kasoma, 1997, p.152), but in some countries, such as Ghana, the journalist associations have been important in regulating the ethics of members, rewarding outstanding journalists with annual awards, and enabling official media commissions or semi-official media councils to function more effectively (Koomson, 1996, p. 58; Hasty, 2005, pp. 98-106; Diedong, 2008). The Nigerian Union of Journalists was important in taking legal action against the government's attempt to introduce gag laws and helping to mobilise the Nigerian public against the general repression of major newspapers (Olokotun, 2000, pp. 104-105).

Media and the deliberative, interest-aggregation processes of democracy

Francis Nyamnjoh, *Africa's Media: Democracy and the politics of belonging*. London: Zed Books, 2005.

The media in Africa are today playing an increasingly important role in bringing the demands and proposals for legislation or administrative action of interest groups, human rights movements and professional organisations into the arena of public debate. But are

citizens and the organised interest groups actually influencing the authoritative decisions of the state? Much depends on the intermediate step of *interest aggregation* - reducing the many proposals for decision to a few major options and deliberating on what is in the best interest of the whole country. This deliberative process in which all participate and try to formulate a decision which respects the interests of all and serves the common good is much weaker in African political systems.

As Nyamnjoh points out (2005, pp. 20-25), African political systems tend to stress more the liberal democratic tradition in which the state exists to serve the individual goals of actors in the market place. This is the Anglo-American tradition of the English political philosopher, John Locke, who emphasised the free, competent citizen who uses the state for his or her own ends (Habermas, 1996). Interest-aggregation and deliberation is a process of negotiation to get what each interest group wants. This easily feeds into a system that serves particular ethnic groups or degenerates into a clientelist, patronage system. The civic republican tradition, which is said to have its origin more in the thinking of the Frenchman Rousseau, stresses the common deliberation of the citizen to determine what action is for the common good of all (Habermas, 1996). When Africans think of deliberation in common they more likely think of deliberation at the local community level, the traditional palaver (Bujo, 2001), or at the level of their ethnic group (Nyamnjoh, 2005, pp. 34-35). In mature democracies, however, the major function of the state is precisely the deliberative process in political parties, in legislative branches of government and within the discussion that goes on in the executive branch.

Discussions of deliberative democracy assign to interest aggregation a number of objectives in the democratic process: (1) Examine which among proposals serve the long-term common good of the nation, however that is defined at a given moment (Elster, 1997, p. 4); (2) Devise a plan of action which, as much as possible, takes into consideration all of the interests, especially minority groups; (3) Choose a plan of action which recognises the limited resources and capacities of the nation; (4) Weigh the level of motivation and determination of the major actors to actually implement a given plan of action. To engage in this kind of deliberation, citizens and leaders must identify strongly with the common good, and, in the opinion of Nyamnjoh, Kukah (1999, pp. 214-245) and many others, the sense of the common good is still lacking in many African countries. Others, however, think that, in

spite of the tradition of an autocratic state and the tendency to draw all deliberation into the dominant party, there are, in fact, deliberative institutions growing in Africa.

The conferences in Francophone Africa

Most political analysts date the turn in Africa toward the greater public involvement in a common deliberative process with the "conference" institution that began in Benin in 1990 and was adopted as a model throughout Francophone Africa in Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Gabon, Mali, Niger, Togo and Zaire (the Congo) (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 84-85). In Benin and in other countries, the background was a virtual collapse of the state with the corruption, incompetence and failure to bring about the benefits that the socialist governments had promised. The people who suffered the most were the middle classes who faced unemployment for themselves and their children, inflation, loss of buying power, import restrictions, collapse of health and educational services and rampant black market prices. In Benin, President Kerekou had lost the support of even his most trusted cadres, and he himself convoked the conference as a desperate attempt to rally support and keep himself and his friends in power. The significant thing about the conference was that it included all major interest sectors of the country, "not only representatives of the government and opposition parties but also trade union leaders, religious leaders, representatives from voluntary associations and women's groups, several former heads of state, and a variety of other public figures making a total of just under 500 persons in all" (Wiseman, 1996, pp. 85-86).

The conference in Benin elected as president a non-political leader, the Archbishop of Contonou, Isodore da Souza, a symbol of the return to basic human rights and the common values of all. What da Souza did was to guarantee to all present the right to have an equal voice in the discussion and to allow the common will of the people to take its course. The conference began with no particular agenda, but within a few days the conference declared itself the sovereign political authority in the country, and Kerekou accepted this knowing that he could not rely on the support of the army if he rejected it. The conference, above all, asked for free elections. Kerekou had to accept elections, he lost, and the new president moved to implement the proposals of the

conference, dismantling much of the central state apparatus Kerekou had constructed.

The reporting of the Benin conference in the newspapers, radio and television created great interest throughout Africa, and a two-hour video of the highlights of the conference was seen widely throughout Francophone Africa (Wiseman, 1996, pp 86-87). The conferences in other Francophone countries had varying effects: the changing of constitutions to permit the introduction of multi-party elections, the introduction of parliaments and restrictions on the power of the executive.

The “coalitions” in Anglophone Africa

In Anglophone Africa, the deliberative process was instituted more by broad coalitions seeking fundamental constitutional and political reforms. The motivational background was general material deprivation that the middle classes were feeling in the late 1980s and through the 1990s. The immediate precipitating factors of coalition action were the provocative repressive actions of autocratic rulers such as Moi in Kenya. The action was initiated by organisations such as teacher labour unions and the churches with mass memberships that cut across occupational and geographical lines.

In Zambia the solid, mass organisational base of the coalition was the labour unions involving virtually all wage earners - miners, teachers, government employees - but the university students added a vocal element of protest, the Law Association of Zambia provided evidence of legal violation, the churches pointed out the moral degeneration in the government, the women’s groups articulated the violation of human rights and the unjust exclusiveness of the existing political order, and the media were heavily involved (Bratton, 1994, pp. 64-75). The precipitating factor was the elimination of the gratuitous maize rations to the miners, and Chiluba as a labour leader led the coalition. The coalition achieved its objectives of multi-party elections and introduced other constitutional changes, but it did not change the political culture significantly.

In Kenya, the coalition in the early 1990s was led by the churches, but again the students were a vocal element and the Law Society of Kenya brought forward concrete proposals for constitutional reforms (Bratton, 1994, pp. 64-75). In the late 1990s reformist lawyers again brought proposals for constitutional reform, and a broad coalition of NGOs and the Citizens’ Coalition for Constitutional Change formed a

National Convention Executive Council with a proposal for a National Constitutional Assembly similar to the conferences in Francophone Africa (Barkan and Njuguna Ng'ethe, 1999, p. 188). The world-wide media publicity of Moi's ordering of the tear-gassing of a public rally in July 7, 1997, vividly picked up by CNN, brought national and international pressure that led to major concessions by Moi and the ruling elite in Kenya (Barkan and Ng'ethe, 1999, pp. 190-191).

In Ghana the coalitions tended to rally at the time of elections (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 102-103). The strong support of an increasingly independent press was also an important part of the coalitions in Zambia (Kasoma, 1997, pp.138-149). in Kenya (Barkan and Ng'ethe, 1999, p. 189; Heath, 1997, p. 46) and in Ghana (Gyimah-Boadi, 1999, p. 174).

In all cases the coalitions built upon widespread deprivation and the appeal to the broadest issues, especially the growing gap between the wealth and privilege of a ruling elite and the extreme poverty of both wage earners and the mass of peasant farmers (Bratton, 1994, p. 69).

The development of parliamentary deliberation in Africa

In the view of Gyimah-Boadi, "After years of marginalisation, parliaments have begun to emerge as key institutions in African governance" (2004, p. 7). This is due in part to the constitutional changes which give parliaments greater powers, in part, due to the growth of multi-party politics, in part, due to greater grassroots interest in what is done in parliaments (Gyimah-Boadi, 1999, pp. 41-45). The deliberative shaping of policy in parliaments, especially legislation which affects the interests of various groups is more evident. Parliaments "are attempting to enforce new and unprecedented levels of oversight over the executive and other branches of government" (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 7). The media are playing an important part because reports of debates in parliaments are dramatic, interesting and attract different groups of readers with different opinions. Tanzanian television presents live broadcasts of parliaments in session, and this attracts considerable public interest. There are increasing opportunities for citizens to contribute to public debates through radio phone-ins and letters to newspapers (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 8). Most African countries now have a large number of national daily newspapers which are involving the public in discussions of every major political issue. Public opinion is playing an increasingly important role in national decisions, and it is much more difficult for neo-patrimonial executives

to push through decisions in behind-the-scenes maneuvering - as Obasanjo discovered in his unsuccessful attempt to impose his desire for a third term in Nigeria.

The rural and urban poor are excluded from deliberation

The most vigorous public debates are reported in the newspaper media, but this has a circulation mainly among an educated urban elite. Commercial broadcasting reaches the masses, but broadcasting licenses are given to commercial elites closely linked with neo-patrimonial governance and political control. Commercial radio programming is little more than continuous advertising, popular music (often of global origin) and snippets of superficial news (van der Veur, 2002, pp. 100-101). Most governments are very hesitant to give licenses for community radio which might open a local sphere of public debate. The lack of access of the rural and urban poor to media which open a space for deliberation and debate is one reason why the study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi found in the rural and urban poor a kind of blind, unquestioning loyalty to the traditional neo-patrimonial governance. This helps to explain why the traditional government elites (regardless of the party they operate in) find it relatively easy to mobilise the mass of lower-status people to vote for them in the periodic elections.

What about the role of Internet and small media in the process of democratisation? Michael Leslie in his chapter dealing with the role of Internet in the book, *Media and Democracy in Africa*, concludes, "There is little or no evidence to suggest that the Internet is an independent variable of any significance when it comes to democratisation" (2002, p. 124). Although his main data is old for a medium such as Internet, a 1996 study in Zambia, there is little data to suggest that this conclusion is not still true in most parts of Africa largely for the reasons that he gives: Internet is not a medium of political communication, but largely a medium for sending emails.

Leslie does suggest, however, that if we wish to examine the role of Internet or other forms of alternative media such as photocopying, CDs and mobile phones, we need to look at local protests over conditions that cause immediate hardship (2002, pp. 124-125). Clemencia Rodriguez (2001) argues that this is not the age of the great social class movements, but little movements reacting to sudden sharp repressions such as student protests over housing or scholarships, discrimination

against women in the workplace, expelling small vendors from marketing areas or the dramatic death of poor people because of overcrowded hospitals or lack of medicines in dispensaries. Autocratic rule is not just the action of a corrupt, dictatorial president, but a pervasive culture that characterises all institutions - churches, universities, urban neighbourhoods, even labour unions - and is resented and resisted everywhere. If, for example, the police begin an unjustified, brutal crackdown on the bitter, frustrated, unemployed youth in urban slums, this may cause an immediate outburst of protest. In this context, the most likely media are ones constantly used such as mobile phones, raising a buzz of calls to local radio stations - if they are open to this - or to young reporters working with tabloid newspapers. In many African countries the little conflicts have generated an opposition discourse of protest expressed in graffiti, popular songs and cynical slogans that have supported major political transitions (Spitulnik, 2002, pp. 196-197).

Isaac Blankson (2007, p. 21), in his analysis of the role of media in democratisation, cites a description of the political role of popular media by the president of the Ghana Bar Association, Joseph Ebo Quarshie:

On the day of the (2000) elections there was a polling station in Accra where soldiers started destroying voting boxes. Immediately, someone called an FM station and it was reported on the air...minutes later I got a call from JOY FM...I read over the radio the article in the Constitution which says that citizens had the right to resist interference in a polling station. JOY FM kept playing my interview over and over. A couple of hours later the soldiers were chased off by voters (Tettey, 2002, quoted from Friedman, 2001).

Barbara Spitulnik, in her chapter in *Media and Democracy in Africa* (2002), suggests that popular media are important for democratisation in the non-formal sector: popular music, popular drama and, one must add, the home video. It should be remembered that the autocratic regimes are kept in power by the mass of lower-status voters and only when these voters become disenchanted do they change their options. The circulation of cassettes in Kenya against Moi in the mid-1990s was the beginning of the end of Moi (Spitulnik, 2002, pp. 192-194) and the reworking of popular songs ridiculing Kaunda spelled the end of the Kaunda regime (2002, pp. 194-197). The popular web sites in support of the Ogoni people in Nigeria have been important in building support for the Ogoni people.

The state of deliberative politics in Africa

One of the best indicators of the maturity of a democratic political system is the degree to which it has achieved a just, equitable and reasonable deliberative, interest-aggregation process that is able to draw up proposals for policy, legislation and administration which integrate the needs and goals of different sectors under a set of national, long-term policies. The awareness of the *common good* of the political community that Nyamnjoh (2005), Blake (1997), Kukah (1999) and others see as currently lacking should be taken into consideration. Especially helpful in this regard is the research providing a general assessment of the state of democratic reform such as the book of Gyimah-Boadi with that title, *Democratic reform in Africa: The quality of progress*, because it comes out of Gyimah-Boadi's own centre for assessment and consultation with many other centres of assessment in Africa. Gyimah-Boadi's introductory chapter and Diamond's concluding chapter are, in themselves, very useful summary assessments. The edited book of Hyden, Olowu, and Okoth Ogendo, *African perspectives on governance* (with a chapter on the media and governance), is another useful reference point, although it is now ten years old.

One of the indicators of a just, equitable and reasonable deliberative process that Gyimah-Boadi and others refer to are successive stable and genuinely multi-party elections in which citizens are reasonably content that a political leadership team and a set of policy proposals has been chosen which represent the best interests of the many sectors of a nation and the good of the nation as a whole. Another indicator is the quality of the legislative debates producing long term policies for national development that are addressing national problems in a just, equitable manner that takes into consideration the capacities and needs of all sectors. Another indicator is the freedom and inclusiveness of the communication process that enables all interests to be taken into consideration in policy and legislative proposals. Still another is the universal acceptance of the rule of law assuming that a law is the most reasonable (the best means to achieve a given goal) and just course of action. The acceptance of the rule of law is, in itself, an indicator of universal "system awareness", that is, the awareness that if I do my job well according to the norms set down, it will be for the benefit of all in the society and return to benefit me and those close to me.

What is particularly lacking in Africa are current and ongoing assessments of the state of the communication process in the context of the mass media (a national deliberative process can be carried on only through mass media) evaluating the degree to which this communication process is free, inclusive of all sectors, responsible and truthful, balanced in setting the agenda of public debate and effective in informing public opinion. What is important, of course, is real dialogue and cooperation among communication researchers in Africa.

The role of media in the legitimacy of authoritative political decision making

Staffan I Lindberg, *Democracy and Elections in Africa*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

The crucial moment in the democratic decisionmaking process is precisely the point when proposals for decision have been justly deliberated on and a decision which represents the will of the collective community is to be taken. The central question is whether this decision will be perceived and accepted by the public as legitimate in the sense of having the consent of all involved and therefore cooperated with fully, whether it satisfies all of one's particular interests or not. In pluralistic societies no public decision responds fully to all interests, but it is accepted as the best solution under the circumstances. A major aspect of the legitimacy is the concession that the state may use its monopoly of coercive power to implement the decision. Many of the procedures of representative democracy have evolved as a means of getting the agreement by all citizens that collective decisions will be taken as legitimate and may be implemented by the power of the state. Obviously in a large mass society the media play a vital role in enabling the citizens to collectively consent that a given decision is legitimate and acceptable.

There are two important moments in the legitimacy of authoritative political decisionmaking: the election of the regime or government which will play a dominant role in shaping legislation and, secondly, the debate and decisions on particular pieces of legislation. Usually, the election of the government is considered more fundamental for legitimacy and consent because, in selecting a party for election, the public is supposedly also selecting a series of preferred policy

proposals, preferred legislation and preferred forms of implementation of all actions of the state. In fact, in the African context virtually all of the research on the role of media regarding the legitimacy of authoritative decisionmaking deals with the election of governments. The research on media and elections in Africa is still relatively fragmentary, so this section of the review article focuses more on what *could be* the role of media in elections.

Staffan I. Lindberg (2006, pp. 34-45) has outlined ten dimensions of elections in Africa with a high degree of democratic legitimacy, each of which suggests one of the roles of media in elections:

- (1) high voter turnout;
- (2) competitive party participation suggesting that there will be greater representation of diverse views and debate of policy proposals;
- (3) the autocratic personalities and influences (such as the military) are not influencing outcomes;
- (4) the winner's share of votes is not overwhelming, suggesting that the election has been a significant debate, that the winner has been tested and that there will be a significant opposition demanding accountability;
- (5) the winner has a significant but not overwhelming share of seats in the legislative assembly;
- (6) the opposition has a significant number of seats in the legislative assembly to represent minorities and demand accountability;
- (7) the incumbent government is ready to turn over power in a relatively cooperative manner;
- (8) the election has legitimacy in that losers will accept the results in a cooperative spirit, especially where incumbent parties managing the elections are the losers;
- (9) the results are accepted as legitimate and the turnover of power is peaceful;
- (10) the political leaders and voting public confirm the process as legitimate and are committed to continue the above procedures according to constitutional guidelines.

Lindberg also argues that repeated free elections with all of the ten dimensions he outlines raise the motivation of the public to participate in the political process, for example, in the interest articulation and deliberation processes (2007, pp. 99-141). Likewise, a political atmosphere which allows greater freedom and aggressiveness of the media in elections is one of the major stimulants of strong public

political participation. Blankson (2007, p. 20), citing a publication of Paul Ansah (1994), states that the repression of the media and obstruction of fair elections by Rawlings in Ghana dampened the interest of the public in democratic participation. However, in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa, once the liberal reforms and media freedom were introduced, there has been a strong revival of interest in civic and state matters.

Lindberg (2006, p.107) also proposes that if governments go through at least the formalities of constitutional guarantees in elections this opens a space for the civil society and the media to gradually institutionalise and consolidate their role in elections. He cites Barkan's study of the Kenyan elections in 1997, noting that, although the Moi government did clamp down on the media, still, with elections, the media became more aggressive, forcing the Moi government to eventually back down. "...looking at six African nations, Barkan (2000) concluded that the preparations for and holding elections gave rise to increased room to maneuver for actors, even when the elections were flawed. The space for civil society and the media thus increases, and a gain made in the political arena is often used to increase more freedom in the social sphere" (Lindberg, 2006, 107). In Ghana, for example, as one moves from the 1992 elections and then to subsequent elections in 2000, 2004 and 2008, there is progressively greater freedom for the media to keep the public fully informed, greater legality of the elections and greater public satisfaction with the elections (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, pp. 102-103).

Although there has been limited research on media and elections in Africa, it is evident that the media are active in all ten of the dimensions described by Lindberg. With multi-party elections more common, candidates are much more aware of their accountability to the public. Akpabio (2005, pp. 77-82) carried out a study of campaign advertisements in the 2003 elections in Nigeria, focusing mainly on the advertising of candidates for state governors. In most cases the adverts made detailed lists of the improvements the incumbent candidates claimed to have carried out during their first terms: construction of roads, potable water systems, schools, economic investments, electric power, and health care. In some cases, opponents took out ads to challenge the accomplishments which set off a war of newspaper ads. The impact of this debate was not revealed, but, in fact, one of the candidates, whose long list of accomplishments was questioned by opponents, lost the election.

Blankson (2007, pp. 21-22) states that "Africa's emerging media have become important sources of political education, mobilisation and advocacy. They are educating African citizens on democratic principles and their constitutional rights and providing them with platforms for diverse political discourses". He gives the example cited by Tetey (2002) of Joy FM, a community radio station in Accra which introduced a Cross Fire programme modelled after CNN's *Crossfire Forum* for debate on political issues. One might question, however, whether many commercial radio stations have the civic commitment, expertise and freedom to do what community radio stations such as Joy FM is doing.

Blankson also states that, in some countries at least, the media have helped "to minimise election malpractice and brought some transparency to the process" (2007, p. 21). He gives the example of independent media in Senegal reporting "vote buying, ballot stuffing and other irregularities that embarrassed President Diouf and prevented more extensive fraud". As was noted above, Blankson also gives the example of Joy FM in Accra, Ghana broadcasting phone calls from people reporting in the 2000 elections that soldiers were destroying ballot boxes. The radio station responded by reading on live broadcasts the constitutional right of citizens to resist interference in a polling station. The people in the audience reacted by coming to chase away the soldiers (2007, p. 21).

Much depends on how the independent media encourage their audiences to habitually make telephone calls complaining when there is a lack of good services. An evaluation of the educational-development radio station in Tanzania, Radio Kwizera, revealed a constant telephoning to the station when public services were not meeting expectations - teachers abusing female students, lack of medicines in dispensaries or market places becoming unhygienic. Not surprisingly, this caused a continual debate with local authorities that had to be handled with great diplomacy (White, 2007). Much depends on a broadcasting station cultivating a culture of public protest over bad services, and this is relatively rare in the case of commercial media in Africa.

The role of the media in the implementation of democratic decisionmaking

Festus Eribo and William Jong-Ebot (Eds.), *Press Freedom and Communication*

in Africa. Asmara, Eritrea: Africa World Press, 1997.

The classical role of the media in the democratic process is to act as an independent “trustee” of the public to continually monitor and evaluate whether the government is implementing the legislation and providing the services that this legislation implies (Carey, 1999, pp. 50-55; Schudson, 1999, pp. 119-122). The media in Africa have been struggling for more than fifty years since independence to know how to exercise this trustee role and develop the competence that this role demands. The first challenge has been to educate politicians to accept that in a democracy the trustee role needs a free, independent and non-partisan editorial space in which to operate and that government must allow the public to have access to information on government activities through the media. A second challenge is how to develop a balance between aggressive correction of the worst forms of autocratic governance and responsible, judicious support of the government’s attempts to implement policies. The most difficult challenge, however, is how to set the agenda for debate on the implementation of procedures of democratic governance when neither the intellectual leaders, the politicians nor the public know clearly how democracy should work in the conditions of African culture and history. This was part of the long learning process in creating a sphere of public communication in Africa.

One can detect four phases in the development of a free and independent media in Africa:

- (1) *1960-1980*, when the post-colonial state with its central planning model of development was not ready to allow an independent media and the media were content with a compliant “development journalism”;
- (2) *The 1980s*, when the public began to look to the media to support its moves against autocratic governance and media professionals were trying to respond to their critical role;
- (3) *The 1990s*, when governments were learning to accept independent media, and the media were developing far greater competence in their trustee role;
- (4) *The 2000s*, when the media have begun to play a much more significant role as the fourth estate in African countries.

(1) 1960-1980: The media as an instrument of independence policy

Most of the strong independence leaders such as Nkrumah were suspicious of watchdog journalism as a colonialist Western mentality that had to be eradicated, and they seized the media to indoctrinate the public in their own radical socialist or state-directed reforms (Anokwa, 1997, pp. 11-13). Leaders such as Nyerere and Kaunda were more representative of the view that the media were meant to educate the masses in matters of citizenship (patriotism), health, agriculture, and community development (Grosswiler, 1997, pp. 105-106). The presidencies during this period maintained a tight-grip censorship including over their own government-owned media. The governments would not hesitate to sack any journalist who did not exactly follow the opinion of the presidency (Anokwa, 1997, pp. 12-13; Grosswiler, 1997, pp. 105-106). In practice, the media became a continuing unimaginative report of what the various ministries were doing. As Mytton notes (1983), the media were often run by people in the national capital with the mentality of the national capital and for an urban audience in the national capital. There were very few trained journalists in this period able to enliven news, and audiences of both print and broadcasting declined (Robins, 1997, p. 123). Media use, especially the press, remained largely restricted to the national capital. (Grosswiler, 1997, p. 106). At best, the media in this period did create an identification with the new nation and with the father-figures such as Kaunda and Nyerere who guided the nation.

The major area of independent thinking about governance in this period was in the vigorous intellectual life of the new African universities - not infrequently clashing with the autocratic independence presidents. Many of the critical journalists who would emerge later were being formed in the universities at this time.

(2) 1980s: A period of political-economic crisis and the origins of professional journalism

The 1980s were years of great economic hardship in Africa, and the emerging middle classes were deeply dissatisfied with the fumbling governance of the period. The public was increasingly impatient with government-controlled media - dishonest, boring, uninformative - and a better educated public was looking for a forum for voicing their criticism of the repressive, autocratic governments, the rampant corruption, and the declining quality of services. By the late 1980s the movements were beginning to form which would bring forth the conferences in Francophone Africa and the demands for constitutional

reform in Anglophone Africa. A new generation of African intellectual leaders such as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa’Thiongo were beginning to invent a language of penetrating criticism of the shortcomings of African political leadership, and this discourse would be the basis of the independent journalism from the 1990s to the present.

The journalism schools established around Africa in the years after independence, and international journalism training programmes such as that of the International Press Institute, the BBC, and the Friederich Ebert Foundation were now graduating journalists much more skilled in the “trustee journalism” tradition (Eribo, 1997, 71). This was a period when UNESCO was leading a debate regarding communication policy in Africa, and many teachers in schools of journalism were involved in this discussion (Ugboajah, 1986). Leading journalists and journalism teachers in different countries began to set down the elements of the policy of journalistic self-regulation later outlined by Cecil Blake (1997) and cited by Francis Nyamnjoh (2005, pp. 268-272). In some countries such as Ghana, journalists were beginning to form professional associations and to formulate codes of ethics that defended freedom but also set down norms of responsibility to gain public confidence in their independence (Koomson, 1996). The annual prizes for good journalism began to define what trustee, watchdog journalism could mean in Africa. Journalist associations were often linked to scholars in the university schools of journalism such as Paul Ansah in Ghana and Francis Kasoma in Zambia, and these researchers began to set down criteria for journalistic evaluation of democratic governance that made sense in the African context (Ansah, 1996). There were the first moves to establish media councils or media commissions to adjudicate cases of repressive action against journalist freedom, but also to defend the public against cases of irresponsible, libelous and defamatory publications. Also beginning to emerge were the independent institutes and NGOs evaluating the current status of journalism, providing training and documenting major cases of violation of press freedom.

During the 1980s, with the support of a public demanding critical analysis of autocratic governance, African journalists began to develop a professional identity as tenacious defenders of human rights and freedom of expression. As Ogbondah (1994) comments regarding Nigeria in the 1980s, virtually all newspaper editors and leading journalists suffered detention, interrogation, destruction of newspaper production premises, and other forms of government harassment. The

response of Zambia editor Fred M'membe to government threats summarises well this tradition: "Our journalists have been arrested and detained several times over the past eight years. But none of this frightens us...Eight years of hardship and struggle, of unyielding tenacity and experience are not worthless" (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 67, cited from *Rhodes Journalism Review*, 1999, p. 10.)

Already in the 1980s African journalism began to develop its own style of flamboyant investigative journalism - something that still remains to be more thoroughly researched. Some of the best examples of this are the news magazines of Nigeria which developed strategies of delegitimising the use of the ideology of neo-patrimonial governments to cover the corruption, clientelism and inefficiency of their regimes. Dele Giwa, founding editor of the Nigerian news magazine, *Newswatch*, who was assassinated by a letter bomb, remains something of a hero among journalists in Africa to this day. Some of what passes for investigative journalism is not well-researched (Ogbondah, 2003), but this has led the way toward much more systematic approaches to journalistic research on government corruption.

(3) The 1990s: Legal support for freedom of expression and the growth of the civil society

The abolition of the one-party constitutions in the early 1990s with their severe prohibition of all public criticism of the government opened the way to independent media (Ogbondah, 2002, p. 56). All over Africa there was a rapid increase in the independent media in the 1990s (Olokotun, 2000, pp. 94-97). In Tanzania, for example, when the first non-government newspaper since independence was opened in 1987, an article criticising the corruption in the Nyerere government provided a pretext for confiscating the copies and closing the newspaper (Grosswiler, 1997, p. 107). In 1992, however, two independent weeklies appeared, *The Express* in English and *Mwananchi* in Swahili. Within a year their circulation began to equal that of the government newspapers. As the private press began "publishing stories critical of the government's shortcomings and failures in issues such as management, theft and corruption" (Grosswiler, 1997, p. 109), the public began to turn toward the independent press. When the opposition parties prepared for elections in 1995, the independent media became the forum for their proposals. All this forced government newspapers to also become much more informative and objective in their reporting on government activities (Grosswiler, 1997,

p. 109). Kasoma (1997, p. 140) remarks that in Zambia “by 1994, there was practically nothing against the Head of State that Zambian journalists could not broadcast or publish in the newspapers”.

The constitutional changes permitting multi-party political competition, greater powers for parliaments and contested elections automatically opened a space for the media to exercise their skills in demanding accountability by reporting oppositional views (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 106; Grosswiler, 1997, pp. 108-109). During the 1990s, evidence of responsive, efficient and honest governance became one of the conditions for continued support of international financial assistance to African governments, and the ability of the press to publicly evaluate delivery of services - and at times force government changes - became one of the indicators validating support of the donor agencies. A number of international aid agencies began to provide training in accountability journalism as one of the measures toward government reform (Ogundimu, 2002, p. 209; Diamond, 2004, pp. 280-284).

The evaluative role of the media depends very much on the freedom that governments legally allow and how much access to information governments will give. Ogbondah (2002) has provided a particularly good analysis of these constitutional and legal changes. The first major constitutional changes were the removal of the one-party and president-for-life provisions and the introduction of multi-party elections, which automatically implied free public debate of political issues. A second change was the limitation of the state-of-emergency legislation - which always included measures to limit media freedom - or taking the right to declare a state of emergency out of the hands of the executive, which usually meant arbitrary, self-serving applications - and putting the decisions in the judiciary (Ogbondah, 2002, p. 57). This limitation on the executive is operative only if there is a clear separation of the executive and the judiciary - something which is frequently lacking in the constitutions of African countries (Ogbondah, 2002, p. 63). A third major change was the general opening of licenses for various types of independent media: commercial, religious, educational, institutional (universities) and community media.

Ogbondah notes, however, the presence of “claw back” provisions which enable the neo-patrimonial executives to punish journalists on any pretext. The Kenyan constitution, for example, states the freedom of expression and the right to receive ideas and information, but then

immediately limits this freedom with a long list of vague conditions that can be declared operative almost at will: national defense, public safety, public order, public morality or public health. A favourite restriction (frequently invoked in Nigeria during the military dictatorships of the 1990s), redolent of the autocratic pomp of African government, is disrespect for the honour and majesty of rulers. Cameroon, Central African Republic, Ivory Coast, Namibia, and Ethiopia all make it a crime to insult the head of state or members of the legislature (Ogbondah, 2002, p. 65). In Zambia, journalists can be taken to court for criticism that ministers or members of parliament find "abusive" (Ogbondah, 2002, p. 64).

The media's role in evaluating government service delivery was supported by the growth of the organisations of the civil society and the media's objective, disinterested reporting (not expressing personal opinion) of the independent critical voice of these organisations (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 106). In some countries the labour unions of teachers, hospital personnel, or transportation workers are vocal and, with the investigation of media, could provide alternative and more accurate information about the real state of the economy and the weakness of the public services. The associations of lecturers or of students in universities at times have been important sources of a critique of government services of higher education. The church publications, such as the weekly *Catholic Standard* in Ghana (Asante, 1996, p. 108) and the church-owned *National Mirror* in Zambia (Kasoma, 1997, 141) became important sources of alternative information. The professional associations, the NGOs, women's organisations, the movements - from environmentalists to human rights movements - have provided a daily critique of the weaknesses of government services. The "freedom of information" movements which would open up access to information on government activities, such as that promoted by IDASA in South African and that currently promoted in Ghana, are of major importance in improving the media's trustee, watchdog role (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004, p. 107).

The introduction of independent broadcasting in the 1990s has been an important potential source of diversity of views, but most observers argue that it has not fulfilled the promise because it is limited to advertising and superficial news. Politicians realise that radio has a much larger and more volatile audience and have restricted licenses to political allies or politically safe entrepreneurs (van der Veur, 2002, p. 100). One of the exceptions to this has been the introduction of the

phone-in formats and the nearly universal adoption of this by virtually all radio stations (van der Veur 2002, p. 101). Kasoma mentions the effectiveness of a programme which invited government ministers and even the president to take any phone-in questions from the audience (1997, p. 149).

The international broadcasting institutions, especially the BBC foreign service, played an important part in the opening of public debate because of their relative independence of typical political restrictions within African nations (Ogundimu, 2002, p. 222). Most African broadcasters now relay some foreign news services, but in the 1990s virtually all educated Africans were regular listeners to the BBC, Voice of America or other international broadcasters to get a more independent accurate view of their own politics. Evidence of the "bite" of these broadcasts is the fact that from time to time CNN television crews or BBC correspondents have been ordered out of African countries.

(4) The 2000s: The media become a forum for public debate about governance

There has been relatively little systematic research on media and democracy in Africa over the last ten years. However, with the occasional reports of media councils and the websites of foundations such as Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), it is possible to piece together the major trends.

There has been a rapid increase in the investment in commercial media and a great diversity of newspapers, broadcasting networks and Internet providers by African entrepreneurs. This is more significant in countries such as Ghana, Nigeria and Kenya which have a more highly developed economy, but the impact is more noticeable in smaller economies such as Tanzania (Media Council of Tanzania, 2007, pp 22-27). As late as the mid-1990s the independent media in Tanzania consisted of a few struggling weekly newspapers. Today, there are fifteen daily newspapers with national circulations (five English and ten Swahili language), several thick Sunday editions, twenty-five weeklies and numerous other small newspapers and magazines (Media Council of Tanzania, 2007, p. 22). In addition there are three competing television and radio networks, two of them with broadcasting stations in all major cities and towns, and some twenty community/educational radio stations (most of them church-related). However, the largest and best-equipped television network is that of the government. The large

government radio station, with news and informational programming, now with regional sub-units, increasingly enters the homes of virtually all Tanzanians, especially in rural areas. Both the government and independent educational/community radio stations have adopted popular serial fiction, “soap opera” formats with large audiences among lower-status sectors. The serial fiction programme of the government radio stations, *Twende na Wakati*, dealing with health, HIV/AIDS, abuse of women and other typical (more rural) social problems, not only has a large audience but is internationally recognised for the quality of its production.

The major limiting factor in less economically developed countries such as Tanzania is that the print media reach only a small elite - the largest Swahili daily, *Mwananchi*, has a circulation of only 30,000, and none of the five English-language dailies has a circulation of more than 10,000 (Media Council of Tanzania, 2007, p. 22). Virtually no print medium reaches into rural villages which make up the great majority of the 40,000,000 Tanzanians. The independent radio broadcasting medium, which is the most widely followed medium among lower-status sectors, has only superficial news and an occasional brief programme for specialised groups such as women or farmers.

A major trend throughout Africa is the concentration of the ownership of the media in a few major media companies in each country (Tomaselli, 2002). Each of these entrepreneurs, to get some economy of scale, has a flock of newspapers, television and radio stations, magazines and other media outlets. Again, Tanzania would be a typical case (Media Council of Tanzania, 2008, p. 17). Frequently these media companies are part of a large entrepreneurial complex which has the managerial capacity and capital to move into virtually everything that generates some income. These media groups not infrequently are owned by businessmen close to the ruling elite if not the ruling party and, although they are continually taking swipes at the corruption, inefficiency and incompetence of particular government ministries and offices, when election time comes they often close ranks behind the government which has given them their licenses. No major media group will seriously support an opposition party, and most are blatantly biased in favour of the “ruling party” that has been in power since independence (Tanzania Media Council, 2007, p. 19). Journalists working within these media groups soon learn that they are never to touch the far-flung business interests of the particular entrepreneur, the allied advertisers, government friends, ethnic brothers and other

interests favourable to the media group (Ogongo-Ogong'a and White, 2008). It is significant, however, that these media groups are generally locally owned (Tanzania Media Council, 2007) and often have the general objectives of socio-political reform. Typical are *The Guardian* in Nigeria, owned by the Ibru family, *The Nation* group in Kenya, owned by the Aga Khan (Ogongo-Ogong'a and White, 2008), and one could include IPP Media of the Reginald Mengi family in Tanzania (Media Council of Tanzania, 2008, pp. 17-18).

The support of MISA and other major foundations for strengthening investigative reporting in Africa is generally felt to be a significant influence in improving the critical evaluation of government accountability during the years 2000 (Nyamnjoh, 2005, p. 84).

In many African countries all of the competitive daily newspapers are available on the same newsstand throughout a nation, and each newspaper rarely repeats what is in another newspaper or at least takes a different perspective on a given event. People of the literate elite often read all or several of these dailies. A typical daily will have twenty-five to thirty pages and *The Guardian* in Nigeria will typically run sixty to eighty pages every day. Some 60 percent of the news is political. Many higher-status people will also be watching the evening news on major television stations and will be reading news magazines. Most ministries, government offices, major businesses and public service institutions in Africa now have public relations officers providing information on their services to the media. Most newspapers have special sections on education, health, the arts, industrial development, and new technology, with evident intent to raise the awareness of the public regarding these cultural areas. African newspapers typically are much more "educational" and even moralistic in style. Many higher-status Africans also listen to the BBC foreign service or other international broadcasts. All of these media are taking a pro-democracy stance and provide the milieu of the pro-democracy culture that the study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi (2005) reveal.

One of the typical news genres of African newspapers, still very much under-researched, is the almost daily revelation of corruption scandals in government. Most governments now have anti-corruption departments that are continually handling charges and complaints. The frequent charges of corruption are public matters in the various levels of the judiciary. These are part of the regular "beat" of journalists, but most of the corruption stories come through tips from

sources on the inside of the government. Young journalists, who write on a story-by-story basis, often get their material from the reports of problems of hospital overcrowding, food shortages, blatant violation of human rights such as the attacks on albinos, police abuses, or death-dealing fires in the pitiful housing conditions of the slums. Most young, recently-graduated journalists live close to these conditions and get their stories from direct contact with these problems (Ogongo-Ogong'a and White, 2008, pp 165-169). In Tanzania some newspapers and news magazines have specialised in investigative reporting and have been recognised as a major factor in charges being brought against government officials (Tanzania Media Council, 2008, pp 20-21). Investigative reporting in Tanzania is considered a factor in the resignation of ministers of government over corruption charges. The report of the Media Council of Tanzania states:

it is worth noting that whereas critics complain that the standards of journalism are low, the fact is that there are many media outlets that are serious, informative, and educative, which have provided a forum and space for public debate over pertinent issues of the day *in ways never experienced before* (italics added). These are media outlets that have gone to great lengths to reveal abuse of power, human rights violations and misappropriation of public funds (2008, pp. 20-21).

In short, the literate elites in African countries now have available to them a great deal of information about government performance, although much of this is quite superficial. There is relatively little of this that analyses the *causes* of poor government performance, a type of journalism that could be covered in-depth only by good news magazines. Better-educated Africans know that something is wrong, but they do not have a very complete picture of *why* their world is not working well, that is, a grasp of the line of causes that produces the problems they face every day.

The fact that the daily newspapers not only in Tanzania but throughout Africa are bringing out increasing evidence of corruption, inefficiency and mismanagement in government is certainly having a growing impact on public opinion, as the study of Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi has shown. The correlation between media use and awareness of specific practices of corruption is highest where urban news consumers have access to investigative journalism reports (2005, p. 234). There is no doubt that the media in most countries of Africa

are growing in their capacity to carry out the trustee, watchdog role - largely through the self-regulatory model proposed by Blake and Nyamnjoh. Experienced analysts of democratic reform, such as Gyimah-Boadi in Ghana, are convinced that this is making a significant contribution to more responsive and effective government. But as anyone experiencing daily life in Africa will contend, there is still a long way to go!

Conclusions: What has been the long learning experience

Many of the studies of the role of media in democratisation in Africa have stressed that democratisation has been a long learning experience since independence. What has been this learning experience?

When the first African leadership took over the governments they found virtually no African entrepreneurs, almost no trained African professionals, no schools and especially no universities to train professionals and little more than a uneducated peasantry to build on. The structure of the colonial state they inherited was radically anti-democratic, with only a minimal sense of public service to the indigenous African people. The indigenous people had little or no control over the colonial state and had no power to make colonial civil servants accountable to them. The independence leaders had little alternative but to make a centrally-planned state bureaucracy the instrument of nation building, but were unclear about how to make the state accountable to the people. The mistake, as Nyerere was later to admit, was to eliminate or absorb into a socialist party structure the movements and associations that were the foundation of the independence movement.

The root of the democratisation process has been the sense of dignity, initiative, freedom and equality in the African people. This is expressed especially in the struggle of families to make a living, educate their children as well as they can, maintain the health of family members and provide a decent home environment. The problem is that education, health, security and so many other basic services depend very much on the state, and the state is not providing this. One must recognise, of course, that to provide these services requires enormous investments that simply are not available to Africa. Although private entrepreneurs and movements are taking over many of the services of the state, the people see that their personal well-being rests in making the state accountable to the people and enabling the people to get sufficient control over the state. This is a very difficult

process in Africa as it is in other post-colonial societies such as Latin America because a ruling elite which has its roots in the privileged people of the colonial period is gaining an ever stronger control over the state. The formation of a power structure is a theme that almost none of the political scientists and communication specialists currently doing research on media and democratisation are addressing.

The most evident aspect of the learning process in Africa regarding media and democratisation is the great increase in the number, diversity and quality of media and the improved quality of political reporting and general reporting on the state of development of a country. Members of the literate elite can be informed and can be evaluating the actions of their government and their nation.

The other very evident development in Africa is the growth and maturing of the civil society. The media have become far more important in this evaluation of the actions of political leadership at two crucial moments: the time of elections and the times when there are major coalitions of all organised sectors of civil society - labour unions, professional associations, churches, rights movements - focused on a particular set of political problems in a country. The ineffective governments stay in power largely by manipulating the election process. Coalitions are more likely to come into existence when there are major economic crises and there is deep and widespread economic suffering among the middle classes, that is, the people who are leaders in all of the major civil society sectors. Coalitions are also more likely to come into existence where there are not major ethnic, religious and cultural divisions. The media can be more effective at the crucial moments of elections and crises if they can make a concerted effort at accurately explaining in more popular language what are the political-economic causes of the problem and what is to be done.

The media are better able to accurately explain if they have access to a research establishment in centres, institutes and universities which are analysing and monitoring the causes of social, political and economic problems - gathering together and analysing the available information. The growth of these centres of analysis is another major part of the learning experience in Africa. This analytic, intellectual capacity of a country is more mature where there is a more highly developed body of academic analysts *within* a country and these analysts are interacting among themselves.

This wedding of popular communication and more research-based synthesis and analysis seems to be most mature in two countries of Africa: Ghana and South Africa. In some countries, such as Nigeria, this capacity for more in-depth analysis and synthesis has declined, and in most countries of Africa it has had a very weak development. Although almost all of this research and analysis is supported from outside Africa, it probably rates as one of the best investments to promote the eventual democratic self-reliance of the continent because it promotes Africa's own reflexive self-understanding of itself.

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A critical overview of media research in South Africa: Communication, democracy and transformation

By Keyan G. Tomaselli and David Nothling

Abstract

The key media research themes in the context of democratisation in South Africa include transformation of power structures, resistance to change and black economic empowerment. The political economy and histories of print and broadcasting have been extensively studied, supported by analysis of regulatory and policy issues in the five journals and other numerous publications in the field of communication in South Africa. This article will briefly sketch the main analytical trajectories of past and current research regarding South African media and democratisation.

Key Words: South Africa, media, research, political economy, democratisation, transformation

Where is South Africa Going?

The research dealing with media and democratisation in South Africa, not surprisingly, has been strongly influenced by the profound struggles in social power that led up to the political changes of 1994, and those which have ensued since then. Much of the political drama has been played out in the shifts in media ownership. Although the changes have often been made in the name of greater democratisation, it is not always certain that the appearance of new faces has, in fact, led to greater accountability and responsibility in the media. Political-economic analysis and media research in South African has responded to the need to gain a critical understanding of these transformations in ownership and control of the media. Transformations in South Africa involve not only a new political dispensation (see Duvenhage, 2005), but fundamental redistributive economic policies centred on black economic

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empowerment (BEE).

The media as an institution was the first sector of the South African economy to engage in transformation. This was evident in terms of shifting patterns of ownership which started as early as 1993 and which saw the Anglo-American conglomerate disinvesting from the media industry which it had always needed for self-protection and for legitimating English-dominated capital, and, indeed, for the protection of capitalism itself. For the first time in over one hundred years, ownership of Anglo's two huge press houses, Times Media and Argus, found new owners. Times Media was bought by black-owned union pension capital, Argus by Irish interests, and *The Sowetan* was sold to a black entrepreneur.

Transformation needed to occur not only at a national government level but also to filter through to all aspects of political and social life, including public and commercial media (Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 2001; Wasserman, forthcoming). During the country's transition to democracy in the 1990's much attention was paid by political parties and social organisations to the idea "that a 'New South Africa' ha[d] to be built" (Louw, 1993. p. 4). In so doing, one of the main objectives of the new unity government led by the previously exiled resistance movement, the African National Congress (ANC, 2007), was to transform South Africa from a previously closed and racially discriminatory society to one that represents the cultures, beliefs and ideas of the majority¹. The media were recognised as a key site in this process (see Louw, 1993; Jabulani, 1991; Van Zyl, 1994). This period saw the formulation and implementation of a transformed policy regarding the media, so as to stimulate transformation and reconstruction. Research on the media, and democratisation was thus dominated by how various actors perceived the best way forward in terms of new policy and appropriate regulation of the media (Collins, 1992; Kaplan, 1990, 1992; Mpofu et al., 1996; Jabulani, 1991).

The ANC shifted from a Stalinist to a libertarian position in the early 1990's (Teer-Tomaselli, 1993). It thus shed its largely socialist agenda in favour of globalising neo-liberal economic policies. Ownership in the print industry, cinemas and subscription TV shifted dramatically as black-dominated capital bought out white-owned conglomerates, especially Johnnic, owner of Times Media (Tomaselli, 1997). Policy developments paralleled these mergers, acquisitions and buyouts. The resultant policies enacted during this decade of the 1990s permitted a relatively unrestricted and self-regulated media, allowing for a speedy reintegration into the global economy (Olorunnisola and Tomaselli, forthcoming). The organic un-

regulated shift to black ownership between 1993 and 1996 was spurred on by BEE² legislation across the economy as a whole, encompassing all sectors. The exception was Argus, now called Independent Newspapers, which remained in foreign white hands, though the company moved fast to promote blacks to editorships on its major titles (Berger, 2001).

The current ANC party president, Jacob Zuma, whose sometimes-bizarre personal behaviour has been pilloried in the press, is a proponent of a directly transformative role for the media. His instrumentalist development agenda emerged early on in an address to the South African National Editors Forum in 2001. His recent position, though, stems from his increasingly desperate attempts to stave off corruption charges that resulted in his dismissal as Deputy President in 2005. Zuma's counter-offensive has been predicated on the assumption that the media is driven by self-interest. The rationale provided by Zuma for a more compliant media include the taming of the economic forces at play within the free market; the alleviation of race-class disparities; and a rhetorical developmental agenda where the media are harnessed to the interests of the state / party (Zuma, 2008). The current transition of power and the likelihood of a Zuma succession to state president in April 2009 will bring about new state-media relations and, with it, new challenges for the media. The questions to be asked are: will the demise of the Mbeki neo-liberal economic faction of the party result in new media policies, now led by the populist South African Communist Party and trade union fractions? Or, as Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli (2008) argue, is the system relatively the same (as in the apartheid years), the main difference being the actors? (For intensive debates on this question see Berger, 1999; Boloka and Krabill, 2000; Duncan, 2000; Steenveld, 2004; Wasserman and De Beer, 2006).

Framing media research in South Africa

Political economic studies have been predominant in South Africa, so much so that Alexander Johnson notes that "[i]nsofar as the political roles of the media have been discussed [...], it has been solely in terms of ownership and broad policy discussion [...] as well as matters internal to the media industry itself such as the racial transformation of the work force." (2005: 19). He claims that there is a lack of systematic research and discussion of other topics such as mediated politics and political communication. This lacuna was addressed in a theme issue of *Critical Arts* (2005) edited by Ruth Teer-Tomaselli which built on her prior studies, including her work on voter education (1996, 2006a; see also Fourie and Froneman, 2001; Fourie, 2008a; De Wet, 2004).

The political economy approach initiated by K.G. Tomaselli, R. Teer-Tomaselli and other leading researchers in South Africa (K.G. Tomaselli, R. Tomaselli and Muller, 1987; R. Teer-Tomaselli, K.G. Tomaselli and Muller, 1989), followed through to Olorunnisola and Tomaselli (forthcoming) and their respective authors, examines how texts (representation) negotiated their contexts (industry structuration, politics and economics) in response to changing political economic conditions. The focus on state-media relations must remain a priority in a transitional society where struggles over the ownership and control of capital, representation, markets and audiences plays out in a milieu where both economic and racial issues remain foregrounded in an industry itself undergoing rapid change globally (Tomaselli, 2009).

"Discussions of issues of 'position' are [...] fundamental in cultural and media studies research and teaching (in South Africa), and were especially so for those of us who helped develop the field during the 1980's" (Tomaselli, 2005, p. 35). The primary contradiction in South African media studies is between the interpretative and positivist positions. The former tend towards cultural and media studies, including audience (Fourie, 2005a) and reception analysis (Strelitz, 2005). The latter tends towards the uncritical and often socially a-theoretical analysis of corporate and organisational communication, PR and communication management (see Tomaselli, 2001, and Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008), for a critique of these opposing positions). There certainly is, however, a dearth of applying content analysis or studies of the newsroom (Fordred, 1999, 1997 is the exception; see also Moritz, 2008). Applications of discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis are on the rise, most notably in journal articles but also in dissertations. The media textual analysis that does occur, mainly in MA dissertations and PhD theses, are, regrettably, unlikely to be converted into peer-reviewed publications and few are available electronically.³ Only one study linking texts with shifting political economic contexts in the advertising industry: Alex Holt's 1998 PhD on "Advertising in the Period of Reform", from which two chapters have been updated for publication (Holt, a and b forthcoming). Another example of a study of textual and content analysis is Corrie Faure's (2005) examination of investigative journalism in the South African newspaper, *Mail and Guardian*. Faure examines newspaper articles through content analysis and agenda-setting theory

Media education and publication

A critical overview of processes and practices in higher education within media and communication studies is offered by Danie Jordaan (2004). Jordaan analyses the changing demographics of students and staff (faculty) at the institutional level, as well as curricular change that is strongly influenced by political and economic reform. Not only have the media we study been affected by social and democratic transformation, so too have the institutions and practices that teach these transformations. Jordaan's criticism is aimed at the instrumentalisation of higher education with its emphasis on quantification, quite irrespective of social needs. De Beer and Steyn (2002) link these processes and practices to the newsroom.

Regarding educational materials, a series of cutting-edge text books on media studies penned by Pieter Fourie (2001, 2007, 2008a) and Arrie de Beer (1998) have educated thousands of students on developments in the South African media. For the most part, the individually authored chapters are based on empirical research and written in an accessible style. These are studies which attempt to contextualise international theory within the the South African context: students learn about the South African media industry while the books simultaneously teach them about conceptual frameworks and paradigms. *Ecquid Novi: African journalism studies* has published works by various academics geared towards the practice of journalism and journalism education (Fourie, 2005b; Wasserman, 2005a). Issues of transformation in journalism education were the province of Lynette Steenveld's (2004) work while she held the Independent Newspapers Chair of Media Transformation at Rhodes University (see also Wasserman and Botma, 2008).

Various studies and reports claiming academic status but aimed at practitioners largely operate on the basis of exclusion of the seminal studies conducted especially by academics during the 1990s. For example, Adrian Hadland's (2005) book on the changing of the fourth estate is notable for the seminal studies it does not cite, rather than for the few they do. This category of research includes a number of reports and anthologies aimed also at the non-academic sector (see also Hadland et al., 2008). *Media and Democracy in South Africa* (1998) edited by Jane Duncan and Mandla Seleokane is one such example, commissioned by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI). This anthology combines essays by a number of social actors

on a variety of topics relating to how various sectors of South African society perceive the media in South Africa's democracy.

The strong tradition of research and publication in media studies in South Africa

South Africa has no less than five peer-reviewed journals publishing broadly in the areas of cultural and media studies, journalism and mass communication. It is significant that these journals attract many contributions from outside South Africa and Africa. The scope and differing philosophies of these publications are critically discussed in a series of reports on the State of the Discipline: Communication Studies commissioned by the National Research Foundation in the late 1990s (See for example, Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2000, 2003; De Beer and Tomaselli, 2000).

Two of these journals reinvented themselves as they moved more deeply into interpretative analysis of the political economy of the media. *Critical Arts: A Journal for South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, now published by UNISA Press and Routledge, shifted from a concern largely with critical African cultural and media studies couched within an implacable anti-apartheid stance to post-apartheid issues of policy, the diasporas and other issues while maintaining a keen eye on issues relating to the South African media. It now frames these debates within critical examinations of South-North relations and expanded its editorial base to include members from Africa, China and India. *Ecquid Novi*, always an ideologically eclectic forum, changed its subtitle in 2007 from "South African Journal for Journalism Research" to "African Journalism Studies". In the same year Herman Wasserman took over the editorship, with the founding editor Arnold de Beer becoming managing editor. This journal which started life within a relatively conservative functional-interpretive framework has rearticulated its orientation into more critical media and journalism studies. It has repositioned itself from South African to African in scope, but also publishes on topics of broader international interest. It often publishes theme issues on journalism education. Having been published (and still owned) by the Institute for Media Analysis of which Arnold De Beer is director, it is now published under contract by the University of Wisconsin Press. Both journals have published self-reflexive historical critiques of their respective contributions, philosophies, impacts and objectives (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 2002; Wasserman, 2004). As such, they offer nuanced ways of reading their authors' intersections with wider paradigms, with a keen eye to historical moments,

paradigmatic contestation and debate. *Ecquid Novi* especially encapsulated in its articles often strongly opposed political positions during the 1980s, thus offering itself as an ideological crossroads for pro-and anti-apartheid studies.

Communicatio: The South African Journal for Communication Theory and Research is now also published by UNISA / Routledge, edited by Pieter Fourie. The first such sustained title to appear on the subject in the mid-1970s, *Communicatio* has matured from an innovative departmental journal to one with international reach and relevance, along a specific South African-Low Country axis, drawing on the work of its northern partners, especially in Belgium (see e.g. Burgelman, 1994; Fourie and Van Audenhove, 2003). The journal lives in two different paradigmatic worlds: media studies on the one hand and organization, marketing communication on the other, usually publishing sections on each.

Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa in 2004 delinked itself as the official journal of The South African Communication Association (SACOMM) and is now published by the Department of Communication at the University of Johannesburg. This journal, though quite eclectic in its articles, authors and paradigms, tends towards communication science, especially in the area of corporate communication.

Communitas: Journal for Community Communication and Information Impact continues to be published by the University of the Free State with a mainly local authorship.

A more popular journal but also publishing studies with a political-economic orientation is the *Rhodes Journalism Review* which publishes quite substantial articles (including references) of interest to students, the profession and academia. In the professional arena is *The Media* which has carried two articles by Ruth Teer-Tomaselli (2007 and 2008a) in which she explains the nature and relevance of academic research in terms that can be appreciated by hard-nosed industry researchers. Academics are also regular contributors to this magazine. *The Media Online* is the sister e-zine which carries articles of a more breaking news nature. *Global Media Journal – Africa*, made its appearance in 2002, edited by Gabriel Bothma. Based in the Western Cape, this is an edited but not peer-reviewed journal.

The political economy of research in South Africa results in state subsidies paid to universities in which the authors are employed or registered as students. Local journals “accredited” by the Department of Education and those listed on the International Scientific Index (ISI) and the

International Bibliography of Social Sciences (IBSS), attract such research incentive funding. The intention of the subsidy, introduced in the 1990s, was to stimulate the process of research and publication in refereed journals, the financing of research capacity, and the building of a Research and & Development environment. Journals' costs are to some extent recovered by page charges invoiced to the universities where their South African authors are located. Others are funded partially or in full by their host universities. If used properly, the incentive can be used strategically to build capacity, to enhance productivity and to train new researchers in publication.

Unfortunately, many worthy journals, and consequently authors, not noted on these official lists are disqualified from state subsidy for research output. This subsidy/research incentive is one reason why so many local peer-reviewed journals are able to continue publishing in a highly congested market. The incentive also explains why so many South African authors eschew international titles not on these lists, including some of the foremost journals in the field (e.g. *Journalism Studies* does not appear on the ISI list, though it is on the IBSS list). Consequently, an article by a South African author in, for instance, *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* does not count towards state subsidy as it does not appear on either IBSS or ISI. If one is only concerned with product (the publication itself) appearing in an "accredited" journal (which unlocks the loot), then the researcher may have lost sight of the academic enterprise (production of knowledge).

The advantages and disadvantages of this system are continually debated (see Byrne, 1996), but in the view of some, another of the perhaps unintended consequences is the increasing parochialisation of South African authorship as scholars and universities chase the incentive funding rather than also thinking about impact on the discipline globally, or about the value of critique and debate (see Tomaselli, 2005). This focus on the "money" - most universities transfer a percentage to the author's research account - means that South African authors are unlikely to publish in unlisted journals like *African Communication Research* - no matter the international reputation that it has garnered in its thus far short life. The incentive was surely not meant to restrict South African authors from publishing research books and or chapters, but now many shy away from these due to the fact that university research administrations and DoE only fractionally credit such output. The subsidisation of journal articles on the (DoE), IBSS and ISI lists also has the compounding negative effect on scholarship in the sense that South African authors eschew academic

research books, even those published by foremost academic publishers such as Oxford University Press, Pearson or Routledge, because such chapters “count” for only a fraction of a fraction compared to an article published in a DoE approved journal.

However one views this political economy of research and publication, it has produced a vigorous debate regarding different research perspectives and has stimulated a great deal of research and publication on communication policy in South Africa. The direction of media expansion is increasingly researched and how this serves the socio-political democratisation is a major topic of this research.

Politics, policy and economics

Media and cultural research in South Africa since its inception in the early 1980's when *Critical Arts* first started publishing has been largely concerned with issues relating to political economy, resistance to oppressive power in South Africa, policy and regulation. In the early years of research the political economy of the various forms of the press and public broadcasting were explored mainly from a position of resistance to the apartheid regime. This political economy focus expanded during the post-apartheid transition: “[a] great deal of scholarly literature on South Africa since February 1990 has been concerned with plotting the process of the political transition and with analysing the design of institutions coming out of it” (Horwitz, 2001; see also Olorunnisola, 2006; Tomaselli, 2004; Tomaselli and Dunn, 2001). The process of transition was focused towards social, political and economic liberalisation, including the media and communication institutions. The restructuring of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) was examined mainly by two scholars. Ruth Teer-Tomaselli a two-time SABC board member who managed the Corporation's voter education programme during 1993-1994 (1996), has published extensively on public service broadcasting and the transformation of state-owned enterprises (see, e.g., 2004, 2005, 2006b, forthcoming). A directly activist anti- neo-liberal approach is taken by Jane Duncan (n.d.) who is director of the Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI). FXI is extraordinarily active as a watchdog nationally.

The current period of late capitalism has resulted in a stronger analytical focus on global and economic determinants such as convergence and digitisation within the South African media, coupled with “the demise of socialism and communism, and of historical materialism (Marxism) as a critical method” (Tomaselli and Dunn, 2001: 1-2). This reform in political economy research both globally and within the African con-

text has resulted in new methodologies and theories. The focus of research within the South and Southern African contexts, and the central theme of Tomaselli and Dunn's (2001) anthology, is to mesh these new paradigms with the often complex political, social and cultural circumstances found in specific contexts (see also Heuva et al., 2004).

Perhaps central to media and democratisation research in South Africa, in terms of its political economy, is the recognition that there must be an interaction between the multifaceted social, political and cultural determiners of the country on the one hand and the economic forces at play on the other. How transformation occurred and the way the media frame nation building and the quest for a unified identity has become a key prism for analysis (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001; Tomaselli, 2003; Narunsky-Laden, 2004, 2008; Wasserman, 2005b). These various issues, perspectives and theoretical approaches concerning political economy research in South Africa can be further highlighted and critiqued by offering, where appropriate, a comparative analysis of political economy research in other parts of Southern Africa and the globe (Thomas and Nain, 2004; Zaffiro, 1991 and 1992; Waldahl, 1998, 2001; Opoku-Mensah, 1998; Nyamnjoh, 2005; Hyden et al., 2002; Zhuwarara et al., 1997). The debates and studies presented in all these publications impinge directly on a broadening academic exchange which now examined the region in relation to South Africa, and South Africa in relation to the region. Their histories are indelibly intertwined through the common experience of British colonialism (see also Tomaselli, 2009).

A regional approach to media studies was developed by the Southern African and South-South Working Group on Media, Culture and Communication. The idea for this initiative emerged at the 1993 University of Zimbabwe meeting (Zhuwarara, 1997), followed by global seminar at the University of Oslo (Anderson, 1996), and a series of bi-annual seminars held at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban between 1996 and 2004 (see, e.g., Teer-Tomaselli and Roome, 1997; Waldahl, 1998; Thomas and Lee, 2001; Tomaselli and Dunn, 2001; Rønning et al., 2006). The seminar's research partners include academics from the universities of Zimbabwe, Oslo, Westminster, and Rhodes, amongst other institutions in the UK, Africa and USA. The publications which emerged from these meetings opened up South African scholarship to regional perspectives, new themes and international collaborations (see e.g. Chapman, 1998).

Liberal and libertarian commentaries

Libertarianism attempts to understand the location of the media within democratic contexts (Harvey, 2007), especially in cases of transitional democracies like South Africa. Libertarian commentaries during the 1980s were largely penned by influential editors such as the *Sunday Times's* Joel Mervis, (1989), *The Star's* Harvey Tyson (1987; 1993) with a more generic paper written by *The Witness's* John Conyngham (1997). These are important reference points written by the practitioners themselves, while Conyngham offered a clear libertarian perspective rare in the media world in the context of a broader debate (see also Blatchford, 1997; Rich, 1997). The work of US scholars Tony Giffard and William Hachten's (1984) is also of relevance in this category (see also Phelan, 1987; Jackson, 1993). These authors examined how the media functioned under apartheid, drawing detailed sketches of the contestation between a brutal authoritarian government and a liberal English-language press attempting to resist it, while simultaneously advocating capitalism as the preferred mode of production over that of Afrikaner National Socialism. The English-language Press (with the exception of the government-owned *The Citizen*) generally, was anti-apartheid, but often ambivalent in its critique. Many of the English liberal press editors, however, played key roles in exposing government wrongdoing and significantly shaped political outcomes.

Situated within a normative paradigm, academic libertarian studies place the media within a libertarian system (see Siebert, et al., 1956; Giffard and Hachten, 1984; Jackson, 1993). Libertarianism proposes freedoms and liberties for citizens as opposed to state control. This is translated to media research and the industry itself, in, for example, the expected freedoms and responsibilities within the jurisdiction of the press in a democracy (McNair, 2001). The over-arching national premise in South Africa at the time of transition was to transform the country from an exclusive and closed society under apartheid rule to an open democratically-governed one. However, this is perhaps now qualified by a revisionist authoritarian model in light of the current political transition from Mbeki to Zuma (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008). The current moment when the media find themselves under attack recalls the specter of Arnold De Beer's (1989) four scenarios of a post-apartheid media in which he sketched different forms of control depending on the political outcome (see also Tomaselli, 1994 for a critique of de Beer's analysis at the time). These included: either an authoritarian media, a developmentalist model, a Soviet-like system or, an optimistic outcome, of a social responsibility / libertarian system.

Democratic transition has been successful in few countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In most, a mixed system prevails, which has prevented the beginnings of a rational and legal administration asserting itself against continuing patrimonial power structures. African states tend to function not solely on the basis of institutionalised rules, but also in terms of personal relationships and patronage (see Hyden et al., 2002). Much early research into the media in many African states relied on the Siebert et al. (1956) "four theories" method of classification, in terms of what system a country's press / media would fall under, or best fit (e.g. see De Beer, 1989 and 2009). This was due mainly to the lack of research and understanding regarding the various social, political and cultural dynamics of these "newly independent states" (Zaffiro, 2002: 27-28). This is something that a political economy perspective is more likely to uncover, in so far as this approach attempts to understand the relationship that exists between elites in power, whether they are state governments or advertisers, and the functioning of the media.

Political economy analysis, the alternative press and public broadcasting

Libertarian principles have not always been the norm in South Africa as is the case with Western states (see De Beer, 2009). Media research during the 1980's and early 1990's critiqued the then corporate and state media for their hegemonic position in supporting racial capitalism that apartheid had become (Saul and Gelb, 1981). A book series entitled "Addressing the Nation", sponsored by the World Association for Christian Communication, critically examined the history of the commercial press, broadcasting and the "alternative" presses in South Africa. *Narrating the Crisis: Hegemony and the South African Press* (1987; Currey [London] and Lake View [Chicago] editions, *The Press in South Africa*) was the first in the series. Its authors tackle theoretical issues of hegemony and ideology with regard to social control in the newsroom, and ideological trajectories and ownership wars between conservative and more liberal fractions of Afrikaner capital, amongst other topics. Overall, the book examines how, on the one hand, the different pro-apartheid and largely anti-capitalist Afrikaner press supported apartheid, while, on the other, how the anti-apartheid pro-capitalist press critiqued apartheid, and how they responded to reformist elements within it. The second of these case studies is Ruth Tomaselli et al's (1989) *Narrating the Crisis: State Broadcasting in South Africa* (overseas edition: *Broadcasting in South Africa*). This anthology examines the history of the broadcast media, both radio and televi-

sion, in promoting apartheid. This work contains chapters on representation and how depictions of racial separation derived from apartheid. It also examines the technical solutions developed by the SABC to ensure racially segregated signal distribution. Under the spotlight also are case studies on how SABC staffers resisted and subverted apartheid as they sought to inject a modicum of libertarianism into the public broadcast institution. The third title, *The Alternative Press in South Africa*, is edited by Tomaselli and Eric Louw (1991). Its authors covered late apartheid and the transition, focusing on the history of "black" newspapers and the roles they played in nurturing literacy, social organisation and resistance, in pursuance of democracy and social justice. Also relating to the alternate press are Les Switzer's (1997, 2000) historical anthologies examining developments in the black and alternative presses since the 1820s. Outside of this series, William Heuva (2001) offers an analysis of the history of the alternative anti-apartheid press in Namibia while that country was under South African administration until 1989.

Robert Horwitz's (2001) *Communication and Democratic Reform in South Africa* examines the telecommunications sector, one that saw significant reforms during this period. Studies of public broadcasting, in the case of the SABC, were examined especially by Teer-Tomaselli (2008b) and Fourie (2003). These works explore the "impact of the neo-liberal agenda on the part of the South African government towards the 'structuring' of state-owned enterprises", such as the public broadcaster (Teer-Tomaselli, 2004; Teer-Tomaselli, forthcoming). Broader issues relating to public broadcasting such as news production and educational programming are discussed in the anthology, *Public Service Broadcasting: Policy directions towards 2000* (Mpopu et al., 1996). This study was commissioned by the Film and Allied Workers Organisation in the late 1990s in its attempts to critically examine commissioning procedures.

The Political Economy of the Transformation of the South African Media edited by Anthony Olorunnisola and Tomaselli will publish original studies relating to the 1990s by a variety of established South African-based researchers, and draws on previously unpublished MA and PhD research. This work offers the most detailed and comprehensive analysis available on the exact mechanisms by which BEE was implemented, in relation to broader transformation issues.

Policy, regulatory, legislative and empowerment issues

Most research focused on the political economy and regulatory issues during the 1990s. The "Addressing the Nation" series included Louw's

(1993) *South African Media Policy: Debates of the 1990s* which brought together academics, political actors and major political parties involved in the transition. The latter anthology is a veritable encyclopaedia of debates, studies, positions, policies and manifestos under scrutiny at the time. Policy debate and formulation by various parties in the early 1990s was dominated by two schools of thought, namely those on the center-right (National Party) and those on the center-left (ANC and its allies). This occurred not because of “communication considerations” but rather for political and ideological reasons (Louw, 1993). Issues of openness, ideological freedom and democratisation within the media were major themes of policy debate in this period out of which emerged key statements such as the ANC’s *Media Charter* (cf. Teer-Tomaselli, 1993: p. 231) and the *Jabulani Freedom of the Media Conference* report (1991). These debates and manifestos as well as the later development of the South African Constitution (1996), had a significant impact on media policy during this period.

These earlier works were followed up in Tomaselli and Hopeton Dunn’s (2001) anthology; *Media, Democracy and Renewal in Southern Africa* dealing with the Southern African region. Its authors explore the then transformation of the media (1993 – 1999) during which time the “unbundling” of print (newspaper) media groups and “black economic empowerment” were major themes of transformation (Teer-Tomaselli and K.E. Tomaselli, 2001: p. 131). Transformation should not only concern race but should be assessed in terms of two other aspects: transformation from a non-democratic dispensation, and from economic underdevelopment to one of development (Berger, 2001: p. 151). This moment also saw the publication of a *Critical Arts* theme issue, “Transformation of the South African Media” (2004) and “Political Communication” (2005), in which the questions and critiques raised in previous works are further explored. Current state-media relations are the focus of literature at this point, due mainly to another political transition post-Polokwane, which has seen the transition of elites within the ruling ANC (see Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008).

A key UNESCO-sponsored intervention was the study of human resources policies in 16 media institutions including affirmative action and gender relations, conducted by Farhana Goga (2000, 2001). This study applied both quantitative and qualitative research, and aimed to dramatize experiences of staffers. Goga and her co-researchers presented the results to the SA National Editors Form, and the institutions concerned.

Global and Indigenisation issues

The re-introduction of South Africa into the global economy presented new opportunities as well as challenges for its institutions and democracy. One such challenge was to transform media institutions into a *bona fide* fourth estate, this in light of the global trend of neo-liberalisation. The liberalisation of state-owned media enterprises like public broadcasters and *The Citizen* was seen as imperative to this, and in line with global standards (Hueva et al., 2004). Aside from globalisation in terms of political economy, research relating to global issues affecting media and democracy have also been produced. This broadening topic responding to global issues is found in the *Critical Arts* theme issue on Intellectual Property Rights (2006), and on issues relating to debates about racism in the media (Durrheim, et al., 2005; Shepperson, 2008; Berger, 2003; Luthuli 2004; Tomaselli, 2001). The latter topic was also the subject of a theme issue published by *Ecquid Novi* in 2000

Issues of indigenisation (theory) relating to South Africa and the continent have been studied in relation to globalisation. Indigenisation is not the same as Africanisation or Afrocentricity which simply puts the book on the other foot (Shepperson and Tomaselli, 1993). Where the former recontextualises international theories into local contexts, resulting in theoretical localisation and critical hybridity, the latter is muddied with alarming tendencies towards essentialism and reductionism (see Sesanti, 2008). Jeffrey Mabelebele's (2006) challenging critique of the *imbizo* (a forum for enhancing dialogue and interaction between government and the people) similarly cautions appeals to the essentialist notion of African values. Exhortations on the use of indigenous practice, codes of conduct and philosophies such as that of *ubuntu* (a way of being or collective African consciousness, see Fourie, 2008b), Afrocentricism and the notion of African values etc., have been cautioned by Ngaire Blankenberg's (1999) critique of communitarianism. Pieter Fourie's (2008b) comparison of values of ubuntuism with other discourses, such as the apartheid emphasis on Christian National Education, is a warning of how ideology is legitimated by claims to culture, often resulting in political censorship and cultural autocracy. In his work on media ethics Wasserman (2006) engaged critically with the globalisation of normative theories for media from a South African (and more generally comparative postcolonial) perspective (Wasserman and Rao, 2008). In writing on the nature of the *kgotla*, David Kerr (2001) and Diedre Donnelly (2001) for example, attempt to theorise this popular form of village gathering (in Tswana the term refers to a public assembly run in a fairly democratic process, where leaders

can be held accountable to “the people”). The *kgotla* is a micro public sphere and is contrasted with the fear of communication, which Kerr experienced in a much more authoritarian society, Malawi. In a similar theme Mashilo Boloka (2001) and Anthea Simoes’s (2001) examination of media in remote communities took the analysis out of the big cities, examining the transformation of social relations in rural communities in relation to globalisation and new technologies.

In conclusion, a look to the future

The central thrust of research on media and democracy in South Africa, as alluded to in the above discussion, has been a political economy perspective. Transformation from apartheid to democracy is a common theme running through political economy research in most African states including South Africa. However, where South Africa has differed from many other African states, and which is reflected in much of the research in the 1990’s, is that the democratic processes of policy formulation and the implementation of regulatory standards, managed by semi-autonomous bodies, has largely prevented political elites from meddling in the running and control of media institutions. A patrimonialist type of rule as seen in many African states has posed a threat to the freedom of the media in the ongoing political transition seen in these states (Ogbondah, 2003: 55). Other than being an active player in the formulation of policy and implementation of regulatory bodies, the state has been relatively tolerant of the commercial media, which is largely self-regulated. However, recent developments, such as the *Film and Publications Bill*, (2008) that would grant oversight over content of television, cinema screens and print media to the state has raised questions as to the patrimonial type of stance the current political administration is taking towards the media (see, Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008: 174). They also argue that the SABC, which had transited from a state broadcaster to a public broadcaster, returned to playing roles reminiscent of its apartheid past. Former President Mbeki’s government influenced the selection of the Corporation’s board to create room for cronies in the news division of the SABC that was run like a propaganda arm for the Mbeki fraction of the ruling party (see Olorunnisola and Tomaselli, forthcoming; Duncan, 2008).

Whilst the intra party (ANC) political struggles over and within the SABC continue, a shift in allegiance towards the Zuma faction is likely in the near future. This was much the case in the 1980s under apartheid rule, as different sectors of the press and broadcasting media were co-opted by each of the opposing parties even as intraparty factions fought

for dominance (see Tomaselli et al., 1987). Twenty years later, the same process has occurred; only this time the political actors have changed. The dominant party is now the ANC rather than the National Party. Yet, just as it seems that all has changed, so it becomes clear that all is the same (Tomaselli and Teer-Tomaselli, 2008: p. 172). The challenge going forward, under a banner of democracy will be for the now greatly transformed corporate media to, continue the trends of independence, freedom and plurality as established during the early years of transition. This is likely, as a result of the above-mentioned political developments, to be a challenging task, but one that is not new to many states in Africa in their quest for a more democratic media.

Footnotes

¹ ANC National Policy Conference (2007), "Transformation of the media".

² BEE (Black Economic Empowerment) proposes certain policy instruments to achieve economic development and transformation agendas. These include legislation and regulation, preferential procurement, institutional support, financial and other incentive schemes. In addition, government will seek partnerships with the private sector to accelerate the BEE process. By definition a black-owned enterprise must comprise 50.1 percent black ownership, while a black empowered enterprise, must comprise only 25.1 percent. (See *South Africa's Economic Transformation: A Strategy for Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment*, available from <http://www.dti.gov.za/bee/complete.pdf>).

³ Some exceptions are those published on the CCMS website. (<http://ccms.unzn.ac.za/>)

deriving from some University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) students. This leakage occurs because of inadequate post-doctoral funding to resource graduates to convert their theses into publications. This is coupled with the need for graduates to pay off their debts by seeking employment, and the lack of permanent job opportunities in the academic sector, compounded by huge teaching loads, administration and committee work for those who remain academics.

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Investigative journalism and democratisation in Nigeria: The discursive strategies in Nigerian news magazines

By Vitalis Torwel

Abstract

Neo-patrimonial regimes in Nigeria have been forced by international pressure and domestic public opinion to give at least the appearance of the rule of law to legitimise their corrupt patronage and maintain public support for their inefficient and unjust governance. The Nigerian news magazines such as *Newswatch* and *Tell* have developed investigative reporting methods and discursive strategies to reveal the lack of constitutional legitimacy of this dishonest governance, delegitimize these coverups and rally public opinion to support civil society organisations such as the labour unions. In the specific issue of petrol prices the public pressure brought former President Obasanjo to back down from attempts to override legislative assemblies and the judiciary.

Key words: African governance, investigative journalism, discursive analysis, democracy, civil society in Africa, labour unions in Nigeria, legitimization and delegitimation

In recent decades there has come into existence in many African countries a much more aware and active civil society that demands compliance with constitutional democratic procedures. African states have been forced to move away from blatant repression, centralised control, and emasculation of civil society to more subtle forms of control of public opinion that at least gives the appearance of seeking public consent. But neo-patrimonial modes of governing and the interests this favors are deeply entrenched. As Gyimah-Boadi (2004) notes,

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“Africa’s newly ‘liberalised autocracies’ comply with the laws and constitution only in the most minimal way to push through amendments and enact laws that contravene democratic norms, then *rationalise such undemocratic actions on the untenable and backward grounds of consistency with what prevailed in a previous undemocratic regime*” (p. 10, emphasis mine).

Many African autocratic rulers are using the language of apparent democratisation to gain legitimacy for continued neo-patrimonial governance. This leaves the public, including the educated elite, suspicious of the intentions of political leaders but hesitant or even confused about what to do, as it is often difficult for the public to find the evidence to show that the use of democratic language is deceptive double talk. Investigative journalism has gradually developed in Africa as a means of revealing the lies that are being thrust upon the public by political leaders.

This article examines how the investigative journalism practices in Africa, taking the news magazines of Nigeria as a case, confront government attempts to legitimise particular self-serving government decisions. In fact, many government actions are not legitimate in terms of the established democratic procedures of the nation and the will of the voting public. It is argued here that investigative journalism in Africa has developed skills in revealing the lack of legitimacy of many government actions and in setting the agenda of public opinion.

Legitimation/delegitimation in the news media are rhetorical or discursive processes that create a reasoned argument for accepting or rejecting a particular worldview or social order that a given political action is based on. To better understand and evaluate present methods of investigative journalism in Africa and in Nigeria in particular, we wish to examine the discursive processes in Nigerian news magazines that attempt to reveal the falsity of continued neo-patrimonial arguments, delegitimise these arguments and bring greater honest accountability to the public (Lewin, 2007).

Legitimation defines particular ideas and actions as positive, beneficial, ethical, understandable, necessary or acceptable for a specific community. Delegitimation constructs a given set of ideas and actions as harmful, intolerable or morally reprehensible. The political significance of delegitimation is to provide the public with evidence and good reasons for questioning or rejecting the proposals of the political authority in question (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, pp 793-794). Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, in their analysis of global industrial restructuring,

draw on the pioneering work of Van Leeuwen, best summarised in his recent book (2008) on discursive legitimation, to outline five discursive strategies used in the media. Among these, authorisation, rationalisation and moralisation have been adopted by the present study, with some modifications, to examine how these discursive strategies are employed by news magazines in Nigeria to promote political accountability (Lewin, 2007).

Authorisation legitimises or delegitimises a political action or social order “by reference to authority” (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, p. 799). Discursive authorisation addresses the question of whether an action is legal or arbitrary. It questions if the actor operated within the purview of the law, whether constitutionally established legislative, advisory or judicial bodies were consulted or whether decisions have been approved by proper authorities in carrying out the action. Have executive bodies over-stepped authorised bounds and sought to act outside the law. In reporting the government’s policy actions, investigative journalists employ authorisation as a discursive strategy to mobilise against autocratic and unilateral decisionmaking processes by highlighting any abuses of power and lack of due process in government’s actions.

Rationalisation legitimates or delegitimates a political action or social order “by reference to (its) *utility*” (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, p. 800). Thus, discursive rationalisation provides a “utilitarian rationality” (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 80) to justify or or show the lack of justification of an action by focusing on “the benefits, purposes, functions, or outcomes” (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, p. 800) of such action for the affected population. A tacit question that discursive rationalisation answers is: of what benefit is the action to the general public? In democratic terms, discursive rationalisation legitimises government actions that benefit the general population of the people and delegitimises government actions that benefit only the ruling elites or their associates. In reporting the government’s policy actions, journalists employ rationalisation as a discursive strategy to delegitimise and mobilise against actions that are self-serving and not in the general interest of the people. For instance, in the aftermath of the annulment of the 1993 June 12 Nigerian elections by the Ibrahim Babangida administration in Nigeria, the media delegitimised this action as not in the interest of democracy and mobilised resistance against Babangida’s administration leading to his stepping down as president on August 27, 1993 (cf. Olukotun, 2004a; Olorunyomi, 1996).

Moralisation shares with rationalisation interest in the value of an action for the affected population (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, p. 801). But in addition to questioning the utility of an action, moralisation evaluates the ethical basis of a government activity in order to analyse whether this is justified or unjustified (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 73). Moralising discourses debate issues in terms of respect for human rights, the social justice of an action, and the service to the common good. It also responds to questions of the truth or falsity of reasons on which a political action is based by asking if the action served the purpose for which it was designed or it served a different purpose? In democratic terms, discursive moralisation tries to match political rhetoric with reality. Moralisation, thus, shares with investigative journalism the evaluative element of questioning the “underlying realities of political issues” (Carragee, 1991, p. 11).

Investigative journalists, unlike reporters superficially covering routine “beats”, with reasonable time and autonomy, go beneath the surface and the main headlines to question the taken-for-granted. They attempt to provide alternative viewpoints as part of their mission to “uncover hidden wrongdoing by powerful individuals and institutions” (Feldstein, 2007, p. 501), with the aim of altering societal agendas and producing “reformist outcomes” (Protess et al., 1991, p. 6). In reporting the government’s policy actions, investigative journalists employ moralisation as a discursive strategy to uncover any fraudulent and self-serving government policy positions by juxtaposing them with alternative positions as counter-evidence.

By exposing and delegitimising illegal and unconstitutional actions of autocrats, investigative journalists in Africa are significantly building mass public opinion against continuing dictatorial rule and are creating support for democratic order in Africa. A recent study on public opinion and political attitudes in Africa has found a strong correlation between news media coverage and popular awareness of public affairs as well as public support for democracy and rejection of authoritarianism (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyima-Boadi, 2005, p. 210).

The significance of the fuel-policy debate in Nigeria

Nigeria’s oil boom has enriched mainly political elites, but public pressure has forced some redistribution of this bonanza to the people by keeping fuel prices relatively low. The continual attempts of political leaders to get back some of this concession has generated the so-called “fuel policy crisis”. In this article a step-by-step analysis of the

coverage of one phase of the fuel policy crisis in *The News, Tell*, and *Newswatch*, Nigeria's leading investigative news magazines, attempts to further an understanding of how investigative journalism in Africa is promoting democratic accountability. The fuel policy crisis as an ideological contest involving the Nigerian government and the Nigeria Labour Congress (hereafter NLC) offers empirical evidence to examine the discursive processes and strategies investigative journalism employs in promoting democratic accountability in Africa. The analysis will be guided by the following research questions.

How did the three major news magazines of Nigeria, *The News, Tell* and *Newswatch*, use the discursive strategies of authorisation, rationalisation, and moralisation to legitimise or delegitimise the competing policy positions and the major actors in the crisis?

Then, what evidence is there that the news magazines influenced public opinion, and what evidence is there that the construction of the policy crisis in the news magazines promoted democratic accountability?

Before responding to the research questions, the next section will briefly discuss the background to the policy crisis to provide a context for understanding how the three news magazines constructed the meaning of the government's handling of the fuel policy .

The Context of the Fuel Policy Crisis, 1999 - 2004

The fuel policy crisis had many facets, but above all it was an ideological battle between the Nigerian government and the NLC over the decision by the government to increase fuel prices. The decision by the Nigerian government to remove fuel subsidies and increase fuel prices was part of the larger economic reforms the Nigerian government embarked on after 1998 to move Nigeria away from state-control towards the market economy. The Nigerian government argued that a market economy would reduce the opportunities for corruption, improve the quality of social services, and expunge "the virus of state intervention from the Nigerian economy" (*The Economist*, 2000, p. 8). According to the Nigerian government, satisfying the demands for deregulation of the Nigerian economy by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank was important towards getting future support from these lending bodies to recover from Nigeria's deficit of over 30 billion dollars in foreign debts (*The Economist*, 1999, p. 42).

But despite the promise of the economic reforms, many Nigerians were skeptical about the government's intentions. First, past IMF-led

reforms under President Ibrahim Babangida, beginning in 1986 made similar promises but failed and caused many untold hardships to Nigerians (Ihonvbere, 1991; *The Economist*, 2000). The rise in fuel prices immediately affects the cost of living of all lower-status Nigerians in a country where there is already very unequal distribution of wealth. The prospects of another IMF-led reform, thus generated much skepticism and resistance from civil society groups led by the NLC, Nigeria's "most high-profile opposition movement" (Limbe, 2004). Second, the shoddy handling of the maintenance of Nigeria's local oil refineries and the extravagance of Obasanjo's government with oil revenues raised questions about president Obasanjo's accountability regarding oil sales.

The failure to resolve the contest between the government and the NLC through dialogue led to a series of strikes (June 2000, January 2002, June-July 2003, June 2004 and October 2004) initiated by the NLC to force the government to reverse the fuel price hikes. With the Nigerian government attempting several times during the period between 1999 and 2004 to hike fuel prices, the news media in Nigeria became an important site of struggle for political control by the government and the NLC. Each side looked to the wide reach of the news media to mobilise popular support and legitimacy for its position. In this way, the news media in Nigeria played an important mediating role in the public's understanding of the politics of the fuel policy in Nigeria. *The News*, *Tell*, and *Newswatch*, as investigative news magazines, in particular played a significant ideological role in shaping the public's understanding of, and response to the competing policy positions.

The Three News Magazines

The News, *Tell*, and *Newswatch* news magazines have a distinguished investigative journalism history. The major news magazines are not without their academic critics (Ogbondah, 2003), but to date they represent the most important investigative journalism in Nigeria. These three news magazines have built their credibility in Nigeria as "intellectual and competently produced journals" with a drive for "investigative and in-depth" coverage of events (Olukotun, 2004a, p. 79). During the military regimes of Generals Babangida, Abacha, and Abubakar (1985 – 1999), these news magazines distinguished themselves by consistently holding these regimes accountable for their actions (Olorunyomi, 1996; Ojo, 2007; Olukotun, 2004a; Oyeleye, 2004).

The three magazines are also politically significant. They enjoy wide readership among different segments of the Nigerian society (Ette,

2000). There are 78 regular newspapers and 45 magazines in Nigeria (Olukotun, 2004b). But despite the relatively large numbers of news magazines in Nigeria, the national readership and high profile of these three news magazines endear them to the middle class and government officials who read and care more about what these magazines say, as attempts by past presidents to muzzle or co-opt these news magazines on their side demonstrate (Ekpu, 1992; Nwachuku, 1998; Olorunyomi, 1996; Olukotun, 2004a).

Newswatch was founded in 1985 by a group of Nigerian journalists. It has a weekly circulation of 100,000 and is funded through sales and investments (*Newswatch: Nigeria's weekly newsmagazine*, 2009). *Newswatch* has a high reputation among journalists and great popularity among readers for its blatant stress on investigation. *Newswatch's* fearless investigation of corrupt military activities cost it its founding editor, Dele Giwa, a former reporter at the *New York Times*, who was killed with a letter bomb in 1986 (Ette, 2000). But Ekpu (1992), *Newswatch's* current chief executive officer, insists that the magazine still believes that the government must be held accountable to those whose taxes pay for it (p. 189, 194). In 1987 the *World Press Review* recognised the investigative efforts of *Newswatch* by naming its editor the International Editor of the year (Ekpu, 1992, p. 199).

Like *Newswatch*, *Tell* was also founded by a group of journalists in 1991 and is also noted for its "anti-establishment and societal support" (Olukotun, 2004a, p. 29). *Tell* has a weekly circulation of 80,000 and is funded by sales, adverts and personal investments (About Us, 2009). *Tell* defines its philosophy as "fairness and truth, and the promotion of social justice, economic advancement, good governance and national development" (About Us, 2009).

The News, founded in 1993 by another group of journalists, is known for its "professional integrity and a sense of mission" (Olukotun, 2004a, pp. 29; 84). *The News* has a weekly circulation of 50,000 and is funded through sales, investments and adverts. On its corporate profile webpage *The News* defines its core values as "the cultivation and protection of core liberal and democratic values" (thenewsng.com).

Methodology

To answer the research questions a qualitative textual analysis of stories of the coverage of the fuel policy crisis in *The News*, *Tell* and *Newswatch* was conducted. News texts were primarily used for the

study because it is within news texts that the struggle over meaning and legitimation/delegitimation takes place (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p. 305). The time frame, 1999 to 2004, was the period of persistent fuel crisis in Nigeria during the presidency of Olusegun Obasanjo. The analysis examined relevant stories on the fuel crisis in the three news magazines determined by the theoretical interest of the study in understanding how the news magazines legitimised/delegitimised the contending policy positions on the fuel policy. Based on the theoretical interest, stories with a coherent representation of the contending policy positions or the actors were coded as relevant for the analysis. All theoretically relevant stories were analyzed to eliminate the problem of news sampling, which greatly “hampers an understanding of the development of a news story through time and restricts the ability of the researcher to document recurring patterns of interpretation” (Carragee, 1991, p. 7). Analyzing the relevant news texts in the three news magazines helped to trace the evolution of the reports and to interpret more reliably the ideological representation of the competing perspectives on the fuel policy in the magazines. Examining all theoretically relevant stories of the fuel policy crisis guaranteed both the reliability and validity of the findings, which are measured by “the degree to which a research finding is consistent and independent of accidental circumstances of the research” (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 20).

Legitimation in texts happens through emphasising the justification, the value and the benefit of an action, while delegitimation happens through emphasising negative information about an action by representing it as not in the general interest of the people. Therefore, the analysis paid attention to how the competing policy positions of the government and the NLC were represented and how the fuel price hikes and the subsequent fuel strikes were portrayed in the news stories. The analysis examined the stories of the crisis for the arguments they made, for what, and in whose interest. In Foss’s (2004) terms, the analysis probed *The News*, *Newswatch*, and *Tell* news magazines for what they wanted their readers to believe about the fuel price hikes, the fuel strikes, the NLC, and the Nigerian government. It probed the ways of thinking about the fuel policy, the strikes, the NLC, and the Nigerian government the news magazines promoted and marginalised.

Analysis

The findings of this study indicate that *The News*, *Tell*, and *Newswatch* constructed the fuel policy crisis around carefully selected

sources and images that legitimised the ideas of the NLC and promoted them as representing the best interest of every Nigerian. The reports also legitimised and mobilised support for the fuel strikes by portraying them as the only viable option to force Obasanjo's "insensitive government" to listen to its people. The news magazines built resistance to the autocratic process of the Obasanjo administration on the fuel pricing policy by delegitimising the government's reasons for hiking fuel prices as fraudulent, self-serving and not in the general interest of the Nigerian people. Although the magazines maintained the journalistic standard of balance by quoting both sides of the argument over the fuel price policy, the reports' evaluation of the arguments promoted the ideological position of the NLC, which argued that the price hikes were unnecessary and of no benefit to Nigerians.

The next three sections have outlined the three discursive strategies the news magazines employed in delegitimising Obasanjo's government and its fuel policy position while legitimising and mobilising public opinion in support of the NLC and its populist position on the fuel policy.

Discursive authorisation

Discursive authorisation legitimises or delegitimises a political action by questioning whether such action is legal or arbitrary. In line with the democratic principle of due process, arbitrary political actions are delegitimised as undemocratic. Employing this discursive strategy, the magazines, first, delegitimised the actions of the Obasanjo administration by showing that his military-style leadership violated democratic principles. Secondly, through discursive authorisation, the news magazines legitimised the NLC as acting lawfully by opposing the government's arbitrary fuel price hikes. In this way, the news magazines contributed to mobilising public opinion against the arbitrary fuel price hikes and support for the NLC-led fuel strikes, which crippled government activities and forced the Obasanjo government to revisit the fuel price policy in favor of public demand.

The news magazines portrayed Obasanjo as a dictator who made decisions without due consultations and literally "ordered" the fuel policy without discussing it with Nigeria's democratic decisionmaking apparatus of congress. Describing Obasanjo's decision to hike fuel prices as undemocratic, *Tell* argues that,

The move could not have been less military. It came about in laser-precision surprise. Call it a strategic ambush, if you like, Olusegun Obasanjo's Aso Rock, obviously tired of the burden and wears and tears of consulting with the same people who elected the famous former prisoner their president, ordered the price increase without ceremony (*Tell*, June 19 2000, p. 7).

Another report in the June 26, 2000 edition of *Tell* showed that neither the National Council of State, the National Economic Council, headed by the vice president, nor the Federal Executive Council was informed about the decision to hike fuel prices. This demonstrated the internal dissention within the Obasanjo administration on the fuel price policy and it further reinforced the undemocratic nature of the decision by Obasanjo to hike fuel prices. According to *Tell*,

How much trouble the non-consultation would be, was clear, when the strike started. The governors felt embarrassed that they knew nothing of the increase made June 1, same day they had a Council of state meeting in Abuja (June 26 2000, p. 21).

Newswatch edition of June 19, 2000 cited top members of congress who spoke against the fuel price hikes and suggested the president did not consult with them before making the decision. According to Senator Idris,

The presidency was insensitive to have increased the pump price despite the legislature's allocation of N104 billion in the budget to subsidise the product (*Newswatch*, June 19 2000, p. 15).

The Speaker of the House of Representatives was cited immediately to corroborate the senator's argument, that

There was no basis for the increase as N104 billion was provided in the budget to ensure that the government did not withdraw the subsidy on petroleum products (*Newswatch*, June 19 2000, p. 15).

The magazines presented President Obasanjo's military-style posture in policymaking as a danger to Nigerian democracy. According to the *Newswatch* edition of July 7, 2003,

The federal government's decision to increase fuel prices was arbitrary, since the relevant organs, including the National Assembly were not

involved. Since the house members were true representatives of the people, they deserved to know the reasons behind the increase in the pump price of fuel (*Newswatch*, July 7 2003, p. 31).

The News edition of June 26, 2000 argued that,

The National Assembly and even many top government functionaries were kept in the dark. Rather, government decided to present its reasons for the price increase to brainwash the public (p. 27).

In the June 26, 2000 edition, *Newswatch* highlighted the helplessness of the Nigerian vice president and legislators with president Obasanjo for not discussing with them the fuel policy. Senator Idris Abubakar, for example, was quoted arguing that,

The refusal of President Obasanjo to consult the national assembly before embarking on the price increase was a breach of trust and a breach of obligation to the people (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 16).

The reports also detailed president Obasanjo's disdain for other people's opinions and total disregard for the democratic process. The reports constructed president Obasanjo in the image of "Mr. Know All" who never listened to the opinion of others. In *The News* edition of July 14, 2003, a senator recalled that,

At meetings, the President does all the talking. He has his opinion on everything. He would attempt to impose his opinion. And when one is talking, he hardly listens. It is either he is fiddling with a file or a document or he is answering a phone call (*The News*, July 14 2003, p. 22).

The *Newswatch* edition of June 28, 2004 questioned president Obasanjo's autocratic running of Nigeria's oil industry like a personal estate. A government official was quoted complaining that,

Obasanjo who doubles as president and sole administrator of the petroleum ministry has kept all information about the refineries closely to his chest. The president does not bring memos on oil issues and information on petroleum matters to meetings of the Federal Executive Council. As a result, issues on oil matters are shrouded in secrecy (*Newswatch*, June 28 2004, p. 19).

The News cited a university don at president Obasanjo's home state of Ogun to mobilise public vigilance against President Obasanjo's autocratic tendencies:

Nigerians should be vigilant about the arrogant President that they have. This is because Obasanjo has demonstrated that you can take a man out of the bush, but you cannot take the bush out of the man. The president's heart is still military (*The News*, June 26 2000, p. 28).

Discursive authorisation was also used to legitimise the NLC and the fuel strikes as legal. The magazines portrayed the NLC as a lawful political opposition and praised it for mobilising public opinion against the arbitrary fuel price hikes. Writing on the success of the fuel strikes in forcing the government to back down, *Tell's* editorial in the edition of June 26, 2000 hailed the NLC for bringing President Obasanjo to his knees before the people:

Thanks to the NLC that rammed some sense into the heads of the policy makers. This is unquestionably a good one not only for workers but for the country's infant democracy. For Obasanjo, the crisis he didn't need but which he created taught him a few lessons about the efficacy of wide consultations, especially on matters that impact on the lives of the people, before decisions are taken on them (*Tell*, June 26 2000, p. 13).

Tell further legitimised the NLC by portraying it as representing the democratic struggle of the entire people of Nigeria. According to the editorial of June 28, 2004 edition,

In the absence of a virile opposition in our peculiar multiparty democracy, organized labor thankfully fills the vacuum and provides succor. Which is why the NLC can be excused the charge of constituting itself as an opposition to the government of the day. The NLC deserves support and commendation in its protests against unpopular policies now and in the future (*Tell*, June 28 2004, p. 18).

The above representations served to reinforce awareness of the authoritarian tendencies of the Obasanjo administration and to alert the public and mobilise public opinion against the autocratic tendencies of the administration.

Discursive rationalisation

Discursive rationalisation provides a "utilitarian rationality" (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 80) to justify or unjustify an action by focusing on "the benefits" (Vaara, Tienari & Laurila, 2006, p. 800) of an action for the affected population. In democratic terms, discursive rationalisation legitimises government actions that benefit the general population of

the people and delegitimises government actions that benefit just the ruling elites or their associates. In reporting the fuel policy crisis the three news magazines delegitimised the fuel price hikes by rationalising that they did not benefit the entire Nigerian population, but president Obasanjo and his cronies. The news magazines also legitimised the NLC as concerned about the welfare of every Nigerian and as working in the general interest of the people.

The government's main argument was that the gains from the fuel price hikes would be channeled towards rapidly developing the economy and improving social services. But the news magazines argued that the price hikes were not designed to benefit the people. *Tell's* delegitimation of the fuel policy of the Obasanjo administration as not in the interest of the Nigerian people was well rationalised by a bold caption on the October 25, 2004 cover page, "Obasanjo's Revolt Against the People." *The News* presented evidence to show that president Obasanjo hiked fuel prices "to satisfy importers at the expense of local refineries" (*The News*, July 7 2003, p. 34). *The News'* special report titled, "A President's Oily Fraud," portrayed president Obasanjo as refusing to repair the refineries so as

to benefit certain shadowy individuals and major oil marketers to import refined fuel and sell at prices regulated strictly between government and the importers themselves (*The News*, October 18 2004, p. 28).

According to the report:

Government officials, their wives and children as well as their cronies fall over themselves to reap millions of dollars from importation of refined fuel, while local refining takes a back seat and Nigerians are further impoverished by the treachery of the government (*The News*, October 18 2004, p. 30).

Newswatch reasoned similarly that the refinery repairs were poorly done to serve the interests of oil importers:

The reason for the shoddy job was to ensure that the refineries do not achieve optimal performance. It was also meant to allow for the continuous importation of petroleum products by oil marketers said to be cronies of Obasanjo and other political jobbers (*Newswatch*, June 28 2004, p. 14).

Tell's editorial of June 28 2004 titled, "A Call to Reason" argued that the government's decision to hike fuel price was a gross lack of concern for the governed. Challenging the argument for price hikes by Rasheed

Gbadamosi, chairman of the government's petroleum regulatory agency, the editorial postulated that,

the government's logic is a demonstration of the level of alienation of the ruling class from those they govern. It means that the authorities do not buy the submission of the NLC that the purchasing power of Nigerians was being overstretched (*Tell*, June 28 2004, p. 18).

The news magazines, conversely, legitimised the NLC as having a genuine concern for the Nigerian people. This image of the NLC was forged by rationalising that its leaders were resolute in their desire to see that government actions were in the best interest of the people. A report in *The News* edition of January 14, 2002 described the NLC as

"an effective weapon against government's oppressive tendencies" (*The News*, January 14 2002, p. 38).

The News also legitimised the NLC by portraying it as magnanimous and concerned for the peace and welfare of the Nigerian people. The NLC's concessions to the government on the fuel price policy were cast in this image of concern for peace, describing the concessions as NLC's

symbolic token of concession to keep Nigeria going and to return peace and stability to help strengthen the (Nigerian) democratic project (*The News*, June 26 2000, p. 28).

The image of the NLC's concern for the welfare of the country and the people was further promoted by citing the NLC leadership proffering solutions to the problems in Nigeria's oil industry. The edition of July 21, 2003 quoted the NLC mandating the government to:

Repair the nation's four refineries so that the importation of fuel, which occasions price hikes, will stop;" as well as "put in place measures that would ameliorate the impact of the price increases on the poor masses (*The News*, July 21 2003, p. 44).

The reports also legitimised the position of the NLC on the fuel policy as more purposeful and representing popular opinion. According to *Newswatch*, the NLC's argument was clear "on why the increase was unnecessary and the negative impact it would have on the generality of Nigerians" (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 13). Justice Karibi-Whyte was quoted commending the NLC's position as "good for all Nigerians and not workers alone" (*Newswatch*, October 18, 2004, p. 26).

The reports rationalised that the fuel strikes were beneficial to the general population by rallying and empowering the people to effectively force the Nigerian government to review its arbitrary fuel policies. According to *Newswatch* the confrontation between the government and NLC was a struggle that was

not just the workers' affair, but a resolve by all Nigerians to stop what they see as IMF interference and manipulation of our new and delicate democracy. The IMF and its entrenched interest in Nigeria have subverted the welfare of the people and dispensed poison as medicine to the problems of our country (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 15).

A report in *The News*, which hailed the NLC-led resistance against fuel price hikes presented the strikes as empowering Nigerians to "regurgitate the mess" of price hikes the president forced down their throats (*The News*, July 14 2003, p. 20).

The News highlighted the subsequent reduction of the fuel prices by the Obasanjo government as one benefit of the fuel strikes for the people, describing them as "an effective weapon against government's oppressive tendencies" (*The News*, January 14 2002, p. 38). According to *The News* edition of June 26, 2000,

The NLC, which skillfully combined strategies of consultation, consolidation, confrontation and, of course, public support, reacted like a rattle snake, making the country difficult to govern for the president, who used threat, near-blackmail, illogical statistics, and stealth to make his scheme acceptable. With its back to the wall, however, the federal government shifted its position by making public, new pump head prices for the products (*The News*, June 26 2000, p. 26).

The fuel price drop as a result of the fuel strikes was portrayed as "the triumph of the will of the people" (*The News*, January 14 2003, p. 44).

A special report on the benefits of the fuel strikes titled "Obasanjo Blinks," *The News* presented the strikes as an important rallying point that enabled the people to exercise their democratic rights. Referring to the effectiveness of the fuel strikes the report argued that,

For two weeks or so, the NLC and President Obasanjo, like two cocks, landed themselves on a swinging rope over prices of petroleum products. While the nation watched in apparent agony the eyeballs contest between the two, President Obasanjo at a point was forced to blink, a disposition that underscores the people's power in a democracy (*The News*, June 26 2000, p. 26).

The portrayal of the fuel strikes as effective in forcing the government to reverse the price hikes legitimised and promoted support for the strikes as serving the people's interest. According to *Newswatch*,

When he (Obasanjo) waged a war against 100 million Nigerians by increasing petroleum products prices without consultation, he had no option but to capitulate after one week of nationwide strike that paralyzed economic activities throughout the country (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 11).

Another *Newswatch* report argued that the government's compromise with the NLC on the fuel price policy came only after "a massive protest by labor, students and the general public" (*Newswatch*, January 7 2002, p. 46).

The reports also legitimised the fuel strikes by rationalising that the fuel strikes benefitted Nigerians by protecting them from paying through their nose at the pump. In the June 30, 2003 edition, for example, *Newswatch*, reiterated the argument of Solomon Onaighinon, general secretary of Trade Union Congress, that,

there is need to insulate the masses from the adverse effects of the vagaries of international oil price politics (*Newswatch*, June 30 2003, p. 53).

The rationalisation of the fuel price hikes as not benefiting the people and the strikes as working for the common good of every Nigerian legitimised and influenced the public to strongly support the strikes, which contributed to forcing the Obasanjo administration to review the fuel price policy in favor of popular demands.

Discursive Moralisation

Discursive moralisation evaluates the ethical basis of a political action in order to justify or not justify such action (Palazzo & Scherer, 2006, p. 73). It responds to questions of the truth or falsity, justice or injustice of reasons on which a political action is based by asking if the action served the purpose for which it was designed or it served a different purpose? In democratic terms, discursive moralisation tries to match political rhetoric with reality. Employing moralisation as a discursive strategy, the three news magazines investigated the underlying reality of the government's reasons for hiking fuel prices and showed that the evidence did not support the government's claims. The news magazines in a dialectical fashion examined each of the government's main arguments for hiking fuel prices and presented counter evidence, which showed that the reasons advanced by the

government for the fuel price hikes were fraudulent. And, in this way, the reports effectively delegitimised the government's arguments and provided reasons for the Nigerian public to doubt the government's sincerity on the fuel policy.

First, the news magazines raised doubts about the government's claim that removing fuel subsidies was necessary to curtail losses in the oil industry. The magazines showed that in reality the Nigerian government was making huge gains from its oil industry and not losses as it claimed. *Tell's* edition of June 14, 2004, posed and answered a question which challenged the government's claim of incurring losses and portrayed it as deceptive. The report inquired,

But what about the pool of funds provided by the excess earnings from crude oil? By official account, over N209 billion has accrued to the country from the windfall. The windfall ought to be used by government to stabilise domestic prices (*Tell*, June 14 2004, p. 72).

Newswatch questioned the truth about the government's claim that removing fuel subsidies was necessary to assist the government offset the extra cost incurred to import the product. According to the *Newswatch* edition of June 26, 2000, the Nigerian government no longer subsidised fuel prices as the Obasanjo administration claimed. Therefore,

The idea of subsidy on fuel is a deceit on the part of Obasanjo's government. There are no more subsidies on oil because the subsidy was removed when Abacha moved the price from N3.25 a liter to N11 (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 16).

Abacha had in 1994 publicly provided Nigerians with a formula, which showed that the Nigerian government no longer subsidised fuel prices and that a profit margin of at least 50 per cent of the cost of production was built into the fuel prices. Reference to this formula reinforced the idea that the reasons the government was advancing for removing fuel subsidies and increasing fuel prices were nothing but fraudulent.

The Nigerian government's argument about operating at a loss because of the oil subsidies was also challenged as fraudulent by *The News*. According to the edition of June 26, 2000,

The NNPC lied about incurring a loss of N19.3 billion in the first quarter of the year (when) it made a profit of N9.5 billion. The corporation claimed that it bought a total of 29,272,430 barrels of crude oil at \$275,080,085 (N23.27 billion) at N85 to \$1.00. But 11.77 million barrels, representing 40

per cent of the total crude, were supplied to the refineries which actually processed only 10,209 million barrels (p. 27).

The representation of the argument above in numerical figures suggested the fraudulent activities going on behind the oil industry and delegitimised the government's argument about incurring losses in the oil industry.

The reports delegitimised the government's argument that monies accrued from the removal of oil subsidies would be used to improve social services, by arguing that gross mismanagement and embezzlement of the proceeds from the oil industry would make this unlikely. *The News* edition of October 18, 2004 chronicled similar promises made by the government in the past, which were not honored and projected that the present case would not be different. According to *The News*,

The President (Obasanjo) promised to tackle the crisis in the energy sector, food shortages and the maintenance of law and order. He promised also to improve the dilapidated national infrastructure, especially the network of roads...In the past four years, the president has only observed all his promises in the breach (*The News*, July 14 2003, p. 21).

The News edition of January 14, 2002 questioned the morality of government action arguing that the extra charges would be "diverted into private pockets in the long run" (*The News*, June 14 2002, p. 36). According to *The News* edition of October 18, 2004, president Obasanjo grossly embezzled oil revenues for his political gimmicks as "booty" to settle political scores. Legislators cited affirmed that,

about N2 billion of oil money came from NNPC to the legislators to stave off the impeachment sword that dangled over the president (*The News*, October 18 2004, p. 29).

The three news magazines further discredited the government's arguments for hiking fuel prices by scrutinising the government's transparency about subsidising domestic fuel prices. A report in *Tell*, for instance, argued that:

The NNPC is always quick to point out that the government spends more than \$2billion to subsidise the price of fuel in Nigeria. But most of this so-called \$2billion subsidy is actually stolen or lost through carelessness and incompetence (*Tell*, June 26 2000, p. 3).

The Nigerian government's argument that domestic fuel prices were increased to reflect international standards, such as the United States, was challenged as unrealistic. A report in *The News* edition of June 26, 2000, for example argued that if the government wanted to compare fuel prices with the United States it should do the same with salaries, arguing that:

In the United States, an unskilled worker earns \$6 (N624) per hour, while a Nigerian is paid N10.41, when calculated with the minimum wage of N7500. The unskilled worker in the US can afford 16 liters (4 gallons) of fuel sold at \$1.15 per gallon, his Nigerian counterpart needs three hours to buy one liter of petrol at N30 (p. 27).

The news magazines analysed the ethical issues by going behind the headlines to investigate the problems underlying Nigeria's oil industry and uncover government's mismanagement of the oil industry as a major reason for the price hikes. The investigations also revealed that an official conspiracy was behind the poor state of the refineries because it benefited some government officials and their cronies. This revelation further delegitimised the government of Obasanjo's fuel policy position and indirectly mobilised against the policy.

Newswatch delegitimised President Obasanjo by indicting him for conniving with contractors and oil merchants to import petroleum products and sell at exorbitant prices instead of making the refineries function. According to the report,

The conspiracy between the NNPC management and oil marketers as well as other Nigerians who are importing fuel have made it impossible for the refineries to work. Government would put money to the refineries in billions of dollars and they would use their agents to blow up the refineries, so that importation will continue (*Newswatch*, July 14 2003, p. 50).

According to one report,

Port Harcourt refinery has been experiencing operational constraints over the years owing to lack of proper maintenance. The contractor was said to have done a poor job he did not get any query because of his connection with powerful people in the government (*Newswatch*, June 26 2000, p. 14).

In a special investigative edition titled "N90 Billion Deals that Killed the Refineries: The Men Behind Them," *Newswatch* moralised the same way that Nigeria's oil refineries which gulped over ninety billion Naira in repairs were not functioning because Obasanjo's administration gave

contracts for their maintenance to political associates. According to the report,

The question many Nigerians have been asking is why Obasanjo has not sanctioned the contractors he claimed to have done shoddy jobs to serve as a deterrent to others. *Newswatch* investigation revealed that Obasanjo kept a blind eye to the extremely poor jobs by contractors, particularly Chrome Consortium because, Offor its owner...donated a huge sum of money towards Obasanjo's presidential campaigns in 1999 (*Newswatch*, June 28 2004, p. 18).

Tell argued the same way by rhetorically asking:

If you put \$1 billion to repair refineries and they were not repaired, who took the money? Whom did you give the contract to and you paid him and he did not perform? What steps did you take to bring him to justice? Why should Nigerians now give you more money to waste in the same manner? (*Tell*, July 14 2003, p. 22).

The magazines also highlighted the problem of fiscal discipline as a major reason for the fuel price hikes. The Nigerian government was discredited as wasteful and unaccountable for oil revenues by highlighting NNPC's extravagance in the expenditure of oil revenues as represented by Jackson Gaius-Obaseki, the group managing director of NNPC, who spent four years in an expensive hotel on NNPC expenses. According to *The News* edition of October 18, 2004,

The erstwhile MD was comfortably ensconced in two suites at the prestigious NICON-Hotel, Abuja. For the period, his accommodation bill, borne by the NNPC, ran up to N500 million (4 million U.S. dollars). When *The News* interviewed him on the impropriety of his accommodation choice before he was kicked out, he simply replied his long stay at the five class hotel was a sacrifice to the nation (*The News*, October 18 2004, p. 29).

Conclusion

This study has explored the role of investigative journalism in promoting democratic accountability in Africa. The study found that Nigerian journalists used the three analytic discursive strategies of authorisation, rationalisation and moralisation to bring evidence against the arbitrary actions of the government and mobilise public opinion. In constructing the competing positions on the fuel policy the news magazines employed rationalisation as a key discursive strategy to examine the benefits or non-benefits for the Nigerian people of the

policy positions of the government (fuel price hikes) and the NLC. The findings show that, based on this criteria, the news magazines provided evidence that the policy position of the Nigerian government to hike fuel prices did not benefit the general public. Moralisation was employed as a key discursive strategy to examine the reality and justice of the government's claims for hiking fuel prices. Using their flexibility and investigative strength the news magazines went behind the headlines and evaluated the truth or falsity of the government's arguments for the fuel price hikes against alternative viewpoints. The findings indicate that the news magazines found the government's claims fraudulent, self-serving, and not in the best interest of the people. Authorisation analysis was used to examine the legality or arbitrariness of the government action to hike fuel prices. The findings show that the news magazines highlighted and mobilised against the dictatorial tendencies of president Obasanjo's administration and policy-making process as a violation of due democratic process.

Conversely, the NLC and its position on the fuel policy were legitimised as reasonable and as serving the best interest of the Nigerian people. The NLC was construed as fighting for the welfare of ordinary Nigerians. The NLC was legitimised as an effective weapon against government's oppressive tendencies and as representing the people's power in democracy. The leadership of the NLC was portrayed as more sincere and honest in its opposition to the fuel price hikes and in its desire to see that government actions were in the best interest of the people. The NLC-led fuel strikes were legitimised as in the national interest and as a democratic struggle of the entire people of Nigeria and portrayed as the only effective way to force the Nigerian government to act in favor of popular demand.

Perhaps even more important than the delegitimation of the neo-patrimonial ideology is the discursive work of journalism in Nigeria to construct and legitimate an alternative political culture of participatory, popular governance. This is particularly evident in the discourse on authorisation. In criticising Obasanjo's arbitrary, extra-legal manipulations, the news magazines affirm the superior authority of the legislative branches of government, the authority of the congress that Obasanjo ignored, the state governors who were not consulted, the authority of the Federal Executive Council, the authority of key ministries, the authority of technical consultants and, most important, the authority of the general public. The journalistic discourse continually legitimates the people's will as the fundamental authority of the govern-

ment. The decision to speak through the voice of the labour unions, a symbol of lower-status, popular interests, is particularly effective in emphasising the authority of citizens themselves.

Likewise, the rationalisation discourse not only challenges the irrationality of the neo-patrimonial ideology, but insists on the classical rational deliberation process stressed by Habermas and others as essential in a democracy (Cohen, 1997). While autocratic discourse tends to justify itself on some form of higher, extra-societal authority, democratic deliberation insists on reasons drawn from the empirical life context of the society and the justification in terms of the common good of the people. The neo-patrimonial discourse has always tended to justify its actions in terms of some remnants of the geopolitical structure that was the basis for imperial occupation of Africa (Chabal & Daloz, 1999, p.123). The appeal to the geopolitical order has always been a cover for the hegemonic interests of the collaborators with an autocratic government. In this case, the Obasanjo government is appealing to the economic policy dictates of the Bretton Woods institutions, while the investigative journalism discourse is appealing to the concrete evidence of economic performance in Nigeria and the well-being of the Nigerian people.

Again, the delegitimizing discourse strikes at the very heart of the neo-patrimonial ideology of moral justification in terms of superior knowledge. This harks back to the justification of the colonial occupation in terms of the inherent superiority of European culture, education and capacity for governance, but ignores the deprivation the people would suffer in terms of higher transport fares. The investigative journalism discourse rejects this moral justification in favor of the issues of justice and well-being of the people as moral criteria for action. The discourse introduces a new set of moral justifications in terms of the sufferings of the people and the principles of contributive and distributive justice.

Furthermore, by supporting the claims of the labour unions and other popular organisations, the journalism discourse is supporting the civil society as the major source of political action. Obasanjo is portrayed as using the brute power of military force instead of responding to the will of the people expressed in popular organisations. The NLC and its position on the fuel policy were legitimised as reasonable and as serving the best interest of the Nigerian people. The NLC was constructed as fighting for the welfare of ordinary Nigerians. The NLC was legitimised as an effective weapon against government's oppressive

tendencies and as representing the people's power in democracy. The leadership of the NLC was portrayed as more sincere and honest in its opposition to the fuel price hikes and in its desire to see that government actions were in the best interest of the people. The NLC-led fuel strikes were legitimised as in the national interest and as a democratic struggle of the entire people of Nigeria and portrayed as the only effective way to force the Nigerian government to act in favor of popular demand.

In conclusion, how did the legitimation and delegitimation processes in the three news magazines build support for democratic accountability? First, the news magazines' delegitimation of the government's autocratic policy position and the legitimation of the NLC's populist position created an awareness of the effects of the price hikes on the public and built popular support for the NLC-led strikes against the arbitrary fuel price hikes. Second, the fuel strikes, which literally crippled economic activities across Nigeria and made effective governing impossible, forced the Obasanjo administration to give in to the demands of the people. Because the fuel strikes crippled economic activities throughout Nigeria, a downward review of the fuel prices to meet public demands was the only option for the Obasanjo administration to re-legitimate itself and regain effective control of the country. In this way, it can be concluded that the three investigative magazines contributed to democratic accountability by mobilising against autocratic processes and structures through delegitimation discourses, which force the government to re-legitimate by acting in the public interest. Pressure group politics literature conceptualises this role as "conflict expansion" (Kollman, 1998, pp. 3-4), which is "the effort to spread news about the negative or positive consequences of a policy issue" (Kollman, 1998, p. 103) with the aim of changing how the public thinks about the policy and inducing increased or decreased popular support for the policy. The three news magazines performed their democratic role by exposing the half-truths about the government's fuel policy and its negative consequences for the people, and this contributed to decreased popular support and the reshaping of the policy in favor of the people.

The findings in this study are not an isolated incidence. African history is replete with examples of the political engagements of the news media which have shaped the African political landscape. In the colonial era, many journalists and newspaper publishers played significant roles in the nationalist agitation for self-rule (Jibo, 2003; Omu,

1978). During the military era that engulfed Africa in the 1970s and the 1980s investigative news magazines took over from newspapers in expressing support for civil society groups that demanded an end to military rule (Olorunyomi, 1996; Olukotun, 2004a; Oyeleye, 2004). This study affirms that news magazines, with their flexibility of time and indepth coverage of issues, have continued to lead in this role of demanding accountability from political leaders in Africa. This is significant for democratic consolidation in Africa given that lack of vertical accountability, the investigation in the public sphere, is one of the major weaknesses of governance in Africa. Likewise the weakness of horizontal mechanisms of democratic accountability, that is, the offices of internal evaluation, are deficient in most African countries. The investigative press is important in for developing the logic and the discourse for both types of accountability.

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VITALIS TORWELL

384



Journalism Research and Democracy: Moving out of the Western orbit

By Beate Josephi

Abstract

As the news institution develops in non-Western socio-political contexts, normative theories of good journalism and journalism education are changing from the earlier Western models. Although journalism practice continues to be a challenge to political accountability in various socio-cultural contexts, the journalism-democracy paradigm that has developed in the West during the 20th Century may not be the best model for normative theory of journalism and journalism research in new, globalising political realities. Journalism research needs to expand its understanding of the normative relationship of journalism and responsible exercise of political power.

Key words: journalism, journalism research, journalism and democracy, journalism and politics in non-Western contexts, journalism education, journalism and new technologies.

Journalism research, in the first decade of this century, is undergoing a major directional shift. From being US/Western European centred it is taking far more note of what is happening in Asia, Latin America and Africa. In 2000 an important volume with an equally important title was published, *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (Curran and Park, 2000). The title of the book recognised a widely perceived need, and shows that journalism and journalism research have been moving away from Western paradigms with steadily increasing momentum.

This article will look at the implications of this change of direction for journalism research. First, it will recall earlier dominant paradigms and examine the models that have emerged since. Second, it will move to a question that can no longer be avoided, even though it is far from being answered: Are journalism and Western models of democracy inextricably linked? The third section assesses the role of journalism

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education. Fourth, the importance of affluence, and the impact it has on journalism will be queried. Fifth, it will look at the current debate about the influence of new technologies on journalism. Lastly this article will turn to emerging research.

The media systems framing journalism: Earlier dominant paradigms and current models¹

In journalism studies no other book has been as influential as Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). One of the reasons for the long life of *Four Theories* can be found in the simplicity of the binary of libertarianism and authoritarianism, positioning every press system somewhere on a sliding scale between a free press, interpreted as free from state intervention, and a not-free-press, subordinated by an authoritarian government. *Four Theories of the Press* has been incisively criticised by Nerone et al, pointing out that the book "does not offer four theories: it offers one theory with four examples" (Nerone, 1995, p. 18) – and that the one theory is most closely aligned with the theory of liberalism. Despite this and other critiques (Merrill & Nerone, 2002, Curran & Park, 2000, pp. 3-4) and a wide acknowledgement of it being outdated (Sparks, 2000, pp. 36-37) its basic approach lives on in many works, also those addressing themselves to different times and places (Zhao, 1998, p. 8).

John Merrill has already having expressed his longstanding admiration for the *Four Theories* (Merrill & Nerone, 2002). Merrill writes in the fourth edition of *Global Journalism – Topical Issues and Media Systems* (de Beer & Merrill, 2004) that there are "really only two fundamental kinds of theory of press-state relations, authoritarianism and libertarianism, and all media systems ... fall somewhere along that bipolar spectrum" (Merrill, 2004, p. 5).

Merrill is very aware of accusations of a "Western ethnocentric bias" in this view. He concedes that there are societies "where stability, religion, and social order take precedence over free press" and where press freedom is seen as harming social unity and community and could destroy religious integrity (Merrill, 2004, pp. 6-7). He also acknowledges that press freedom is interpreted along the lines of the American understanding, defining it as "*free from government interference*" (italics in the original) as did the *Four Theories* without questioning interference by "corporate powers, advertisers, civil pressure groups, publishers, editors, and so on" (Merrill, 2004, p. 8). The fifth

edition of *Global Journalism*, which is just about to be released, may well show considerable changes which reflect the shift away from its original, American-conceived paradigm.

What is as relevant as ever is Merrill's belief, held over decades, in journalistic autonomy (see Merrill, 1974): "But at the core of all various meanings is the concept of journalists being able to make their own decisions, and to take their own actions" (Merrill, 2004, p. 8). His demand for journalistic autonomy links to the current debate over which normative ideals journalism should uphold.

The book that has contributed most to replacing the old *Four Theories* paradigm is Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). In this volume Hallin and Mancini have undertaken a major step to show that the Anglo-American model is not the one that fits the rest of the world. They have developed two further models from the media systems of European countries. In fact, one of these, the "Mediterranean or polarised pluralist model" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, pp. 89-142) offers an appropriate starting point for developing countries to explain their current state of the media other than to explain it as "development journalism".

Reasons that prompted Hallin and Mancini to set out on this task were manifold. They wanted to finally conquer the still lingering *Four Theories* binary; they wanted to demonstrate the evident inapplicability of the professional journalistic model of objectivity to many European countries and most nations around the globe, and they wanted to rethink the place of normative theory in journalism. However, the primary focus of the book is on the relationship between media and political systems, the analysis of journalism and the news media, and also media policy and law. The latter are chiefly investigated in relation to the regulations of broadcast media.

But in one very important aspect the authors chose not to stray from familiar ground. As the scope of their study they have decided on Western Europe, the United States and Canada – all democratically ruled countries. Hallin and Mancini argue that choosing a "most similar systems" design benefited their study, in that it provided them with sufficient existing literature and comparable data. When exploring the system of political parties, the pattern of relationship between economic and political interests, the development of civil society and other elements of social structure, Hallin and Mancini strongly draw on media historical accounts of the countries included. This emphasises

their approach that only by appreciating the historical development and political circumstance can the current state of the media be understood.

In their exploration of the media systems of Western Europe, the United States and Canada, Hallin and Mancini provide what could be seen as a blueprint for the study of any country's media system: a brief history of the last two centuries; literacy levels; development of the media; the role of the state in the development of the media; the political and literary roots of journalism; the state of the press and broadcast media today; media ownership structures; the legal framework for press and broadcast; professional education; professional organisation: strength and weaknesses; journalistic autonomy versus instrumentalisation, and clientilism (meaning a media dependent on the state, political parties, the church, or wealthy private patrons). Examining the foregoing points, Hallin and Mancini found three patterns of media systems in the countries studied. The three models are "the Liberal Model, which prevails across Britain, Ireland, and North America; the Democratic Corporatist Model, which prevails across northern continental Europe; and the Polarised Pluralist Model, which prevails in the Mediterranean countries of southern Europe" (2004, p. 11). France is discussed in relation to the Polarised Pluralist Model, though it is something of a mixed case, also tending towards the Democratic Corporatist Model.

Literacy emerges as one of the decisive markers for the later development of media and journalism. Countries which did not have high literacy levels and a high uptake of newspaper consumption at the beginning of the twentieth century, later never developed one. The newspaper reading patterns established then continue until today. Leading are still the Scandinavian countries, followed by Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Germany, whereas the Mediterranean countries of Spain, Italy, Portugal and Greece have a low readership, and newspapers are, in the main, "addressed to a small elite – mainly urban, well-educated and politically active" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, pp. 22/23).

Hallin and Mancini point to the strong political parallelism in the media in that every newspaper has a "line" and a political leaning which is manifest from information gathering and news sources to the recruitment pattern of journalists (2004, p. 26). This finding contradicts the notion that journalism world-wide follows the ideal of objectivity. They similarly question accepted notions of professionalisation by

contrasting the concepts of journalistic autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation with instrumentalisation, either by political or commercial forces, or both (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 37).

In establishing these three models and demonstrating their validity, Hallin and Mancini relegate the Liberal model, which was the only model to date, to being just one amongst several. This relegation in itself is the most decisive challenge to the previous "universalistic approach". Especially the Polarised Pluralist model opens up the way to outline the relation of media systems to society in a number of African and Latin American countries.

The Polarised Pluralist model with its low development of a mass circulation press, high political parallelism, low professionalisation and high state intervention is the very opposite of the Liberal model. However, unlike the old authoritarian model, the Polarised Pluralist model is not unlinked from democracy. Interestingly, three of the countries discussed in this model, Spain, Portugal and Greece, did have periods of fascist or military rule after the Second World War. It is precisely this "impure" history which could make this model so useful. It allows for scenarios where "political parties have powerful control over decision making ... [and] media owners and even individual journalists have incentives to form alliances with party actors" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 297). The authors rightly conclude that scholars working in many parts of the world will find relevance in the analysis of "Southern Europe, including the role of clientilism, the strong role of the state, the role of the media as an instrument of political struggle, the limited development of the mass circulation press and the relative weakness of common professional norms" (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 306). The only major criticism of Hallin and Mancini's book to date is that it did not include countries other than the United States, Canada and the Western European nations, thus leaving a gap that covers much of the globe. But this gap will be difficult to fill.

Journalism and democracy

In the course of the past decade, scholars undoubtedly have become far more aware of those regions in the world they previously rarely took into consideration. This also means that they have to confront the reality of the degrees of media freedom around the world. In its yearly table of global press freedom rankings of the 195 countries in the world for 2007, Freedom House listed 74 as free, 58 as partly free and 63 as

not free (Freedom House, 2008). In percentages, this is 38 percent free, 30 percent partly free and 32 percent not free. When seen in terms of population, the percentages change to 18 percent free, 39 percent partly free and 43 percent not free. While many of the countries in the partly free category are classified as democracies, most of those in the not free category are not. This means that journalism in at least a third of the countries of this globe is not produced in democracies, or is produced in pseudo or semi-democracies. So far, few scholarly attempts have been made to explain the workings of these systems. As George (2007, p. 127) says in his highly commendable article, "Consolidating authoritarian rule: calibrated coercion in Singapore": "Authoritarian rule is often regarded as simple for states to execute and unworthy of scholarly analysis".

However, one theoretical trend in trying to explain more of the world's media systems could be observed. This is to call media systems in countries that are undergoing major political, economic and social changes "transitional". This term was initially applied to the countries of the former Communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe, but has been subsequently used for countries in Asia and Africa as well. This somewhat convenient label of "transitional" is not without its critics. One of the most incisive appraisals has recently been made by Colin Sparks. In his article, "Media systems in transition: Poland, Russia and China" (2008, p. 8-9), he outlines several established paradigms of "transitology" which, not unlike the authoritarian – libertarian binary of *Four Theories of the Press*, aim to explain the political change from dictatorial regimes to democratic rule. In fact, these teleological theories hark back to the outdated *Four Theories* paradigm in more ways than one, in that the really existing media of the transitional countries is measured against the U.S. liberal media system model. To Sparks (2008, p. 9) in discussing the variations within transitology, the "seemingly endless proliferation of different intermediate stages between democracy and dictatorship not only reduce the elegance of the paradigm but also bring into question its explanatory power".

To overcome these deficits, Sparks (2008, pp 10-11) offers a "theory of elite continuity which lays its primary stress upon social continuity in societies in transition, rather than assuming that the process was essentially one of democratisation". The degree of democratisation, unlike in the transitional theories, "is secondary in this model". Sparks' "theory of elite continuity" permits him, especially in the case of China

and Russia, to explain a process of marketisation which leaves democratisation and independence of the media and of journalism contingent on the state or government.

The entry on "Journalism" in the new Blackwell *International Encyclopedia of Communication* (2008) similarly does not make democracy one of the markers of journalism. This lengthy entry, written by Kevin Barnhurst and James Owens, looks at aspects of practice, at differentiation among journalists, news work and the academy, and scholarly study and prospects. Barnhurst and Owens, though trying to be inclusive, cannot help the fact that most of their examples come from the United States, and that the literature they refer to (and there is a very long list of suggested readings), are all drawn from the dominant Anglo-American discourse about journalism. Interestingly, the authors conclude:

Although the definition of journalism itself varies across academic disciplines and across dominant and alternative forms of practice, the main issue facing journalism is power. While scholars debate the power relations to journalists in media and political systems, journalists see multiple threats to their powers to practice in safety, to retain political autonomy, and to resist losses in their tenuous professional status. (Barnhurst & Owens, 2008, p. 2565)

In pitting journalism against power rather than defining it as a pillar of democracy, Barnhurst and Owen open a wider setting for journalism. Journalism as the sparring partner of power encapsulates journalism's informative and questioning, deliberative character while leaving it open as to who the power is that needs scrutinising. Like Sparks' "elite continuity", which can occur in democratic, semi-democratic or non democratic countries, Barnhurst and Owens similarly do not define journalism in terms of one context only, that of being the fourth estate.

The issue of journalism and democracy has been forced, more than anything, by the emergence of China as a world power on the political and economic stage. Its marketisation without democratisation severely questions the already ailing assumption that the market can be trusted as a guardian of media freedom. In his article on elite continuity, Sparks (2008, p. 20) comes to the conclusion that capitalism and communism may not be as incompatible as long thought and "that a great deal of the debate over the relative merits of state and market in

the provision of democratic information were, not so much mistaken, but certainly over-inflated". While Sparks shows up the deficits in the teleological nature of transitological theories, he does not go as far as to pose the question as to whether this should spell the end to the journalism – democracy paradigm.

In fact, one does not need to leave Western Europe to find examples to question this paradigm. Italy, a functioning democracy which goes to the polls more often than most nations, all the same is only partly free with regard to media freedom due to its prime minister being the country's biggest media magnate. As Paolo Mancini has suggested numerous times, a situation like this should not be taken as an anomaly but as an example worth examining as a pattern that can occur in other parts of the world (Mancini, 2000; Mancini, 2003; Mancini, 2007).

Journalism education around the world

One area that can provide an answer to the essentialism of the journalism – democracy paradigm is journalism education. Twelve case studies of journalism education in countries that are either partly or not free with regard to media freedom, edited by the author of this article, show surprising similarities in the norms and values taught. The chapters in *Journalism Education in Challenging Environments* (Josephi, forthcoming b) confirm that the teaching of skills or craft competencies is almost universal (also see de Burgh, 2005a, p. 6). Where, unsurprisingly, differences can be found is in the teaching of theoretical knowledge on communication, in particular the role of media in society. Yet it is startling to discover that the Western paradigm of a media informing citizens, acting as watchdog of government and commenting on societal affairs is also trending to become universal.

This contradicts the assertion made by de Burgh in the introduction of his volume, *Making Journalists* (2005a). He describes the aim of the book as "exorcising homogenisation by demonstrating that the old fallacy that all journalisms were at different stages on route to an ideal model, probably Anglophone, is passé" (2005b, p. 2). In the laudable effort of assessing journalisms the world over, de Burgh has underestimated the pull of the ideals of liberal journalism.

When examining norms and values taught on four continents for *Journalism Education in Challenging Environments*, the findings showed surprising accordance on these, in that they were modelled on the Western notion of journalism. The journalism studies curricula in

countries as diverse as Russia, Singapore, Oman and Palestine bear witness to that. This is in line with Benson's remark in his encyclopaedia entry on "Journalism: Normative Theories" (2008, p. 2593): "Even in the most repressive authoritarian states the language of democracy has become commonplace".

Such a comment carries the undertone that talk is cheap, and the teaching can easily be undone in newsrooms, as is indeed the case in many countries with state-controlled media. Yet there are also examples to the contrary. McNair, in his chapter on "Journalism and Democracy" (forthcoming) points out; 'There does now seem to be an acceptance, however, from the offices of *Al Jazeera* to the boardrooms of the BBC and CNN, that the normative principles of liberal journalism ... have a general applicability' (also see Benson, 2008, p. 2593).

Examples like *Al-Jazeera* point to the fact that the political form of a state is no longer a certain indicator of the journalism that can be practiced in that country. In other words, if journalists and editors (and authorities) can create spaces in which to contribute to a deliberative society, as they do at *Al-Jazeera* in Qatar, then the political system of that state becomes of secondary importance. What seems of greater significance is that the essentials of journalism – to be informative, critical and analytical – are observed. Defining journalism in this way puts the agency into the hands of journalists rather than the political form of the state. Yet, attractive as this reassigning of journalism to its primary producers may be, it has to be tempered by the realisation that their influence has its limitations (Reese, 2000).

Putting journalists at the core of journalism is not new (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, pp. 63-103; Weaver, 1998; Zelizer, 1997), and journalism education has done so all along. By educating young journalists it is hoped to influence the quality of journalism they later produce (UNESCO, 2007; Josephi, forthcoming a). In fact, there have never been more journalism study programs in the world than at this moment (World Journalism Education Council, 2008). The number of tertiary institutions offering mass communication or journalism courses has increased exponentially in the last two decades, and this is as much the case in countries like Tanzania and Kenya as it is in Brazil. China now has more tertiary journalism programs than the United States (He, 2007) – 661 compared with 463 (Weaver, Beam, Brownlee, Voakes & Wilhoit, 2007, p. 33).

While this has to be viewed as a beneficial development, one must also ask how much influence journalism education has had to date.

Evidence can best be found in countries that are partly free or not free with regard to media freedom. This is one of the questions pursued in *Journalism Education in Challenging Environments* (Josephi, forthcomingb), and, unsurprisingly, it was found that the way journalism is practised in the majority of countries differs considerably from the normative principles of liberal journalism taught in journalism schools. The ones bearing the scars of this disjuncture between ideal and reality are the journalists who in their journalism education have been familiarised with the ideals of a journalism beholden to society but which, in reality, is beholden to government. This can bring journalists into direct confrontation with the powers that be, and, in extreme cases, can lead to the journalist getting imprisoned, tortured or murdered. More widespread, though, are frustrations suffered from working in a reality very different from the normative expectations learned in journalism education. "Believing in one thing but [being] forced to comply with another and to express ideas through its ritualised rhetoric is the dilemma faced by many Chinese journalists today ... This is exactly what social psychology would see as dissonance" (He, 2000, p. 604; also see Zhao, 2000). This dissonance can be found in many countries, be it Singapore (George, 2007; Josephi, 2002), Ethiopia (Skjerdal, 2008) or Oman (Al-Hasani, 2003).

The above examples are a clear reminder that, in Barnhurst and Owen's words, the main issue facing journalism is power. Media freedom and journalistic autonomy rest with the powers that be. They rest with governments, with government legislation and, more often than not, with government-aligned media proprietors. Any purely normative discourse about journalism education in countries with partly-free or not-free media, which does not take this power relationship into account, misses an essential point.

Yet the severe frustrations experienced by journalists around the world are not simply a sign of defeat. They are also an indication that the awareness of the possibilities of a journalism as civic rather than governmental agency has been seeded. Even if journalists cannot as yet fully enact their civic agency, they learn of an ideal that underwrites an informed and deliberative society, in which conflicting ideas and opposing interests can be voiced and discussed. In generating this awareness of what journalism can be, directional imaginaries are created, and journalists, when given a chance as happened with *Al-Jazeera*, can enact what they have learned.

In many countries the ideals of journalism meet with the very basic and real hurdle of poor pay and conditions. But this has not stopped the ideals of journalists being the guardians of good governance and agents of participatory debate taking root. In fact, affluence is no guarantee of good journalism.

Journalism and affluence

Affluence here is meant in two ways, the affluence of nations and that of journalists. With regard to affluence of nations and journalism education, *Journalism Education in Challenging Environments* (Joseph, forthcoming) shows up an interesting divide between the wealthier nations and those countries dependent on monies from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The latter, as a condition of their being granted funds, are tied to programmes that ensure a participatory, transparent and accountable governmental system. Using the countries' journalists as "agents for transparency" (Romano, 2005, p. 11) has seen them "entrusted with the task of exposing official conduct in order to create pressure for governments to act responsibly and efficiently". In other words, journalism education following the Western paradigm can be established and taught by (Western) NGOs in those countries where, due to the economic developmental level, these NGOs have sufficient influence and access to implement programmes accordingly. The regions largely following this pattern are Southeast Asia, Africa and post-Communist Europe.

Affluence and stability are not necessarily a sign of media freedom. The wealthier and therefore more sovereign a nation, the more it is able to set the terms of their journalism education themselves. Examples are nations such as Singapore, China, Russia, and the oil-rich states in the Middle East. Yet in all these countries journalism education is, as mentioned earlier, largely based on the Western paradigm.

One explanation for this is that the media in many affluent countries are striving to address the public as consumers, and journalism education is needed to meet professional demands. Becoming a well-paid writer for a glossy magazine is seen, for example, as very desirable in Russia. Having to satisfy the market also makes for an ever more blurred boundary between journalism and public relations. Since more students graduate from journalism studies than the media in most countries can accommodate, many find jobs in other communications fields. In Tanzania and Kenya, for example, it is mostly the NGOs

which absorb the majority of the journalism graduates whereas in the not-free countries, such as Oman, it is the governmental sector. Other factors in this choice are salary and job security.

While journalists are vital for an informed and deliberative society they are, on the whole, not well paid. What has been said about Portugal (Pinto & Sousa, 2003, p.181) applies to many countries: "Traditionally, journalism has not been a prestigious profession. Censorship and the non-existence of specific academic qualifications made it a low-qualified and low-paid profession."

Even in countries where journalists are well paid, journalism is not an occupation that makes people rich. For Britain, which until recently preferred on-the-job training for journalists, Delano (2000) had to conclude that there were no signs of improved job aspects in a hundred years of journalism. Data from the National Union of Journalists (NUJ, 2004) backs this up. In 2004 nearly half of all British journalists earned less than the national average wage of £26,151, and almost three-quarters of journalists earn less than the UK average wage of a professional worker of £35,766.

If this is the situation in one of the places of origin of news journalism, then understandably the situation in the developing world is worse. When the International Journalists' Network (2007) asked its members whether their pay seemed adequate, the overwhelmingly negative answers came mostly from Africa, the Arab world, Latin America and South Asia. One email put it succinctly: "In Malawi's case, most journalists resort to getting money from people they are not supposed to. This is because they are underpaid" (IJN, 2007; also see IFEX, 2006).

Affluence, it has to be concluded, makes countries and journalists independent, although this does not always have the desired consequences for media freedom. In wealthy countries with restrictive media freedom, such as in Southeast Asia and the Arab world, this has the effect of an emerging or extant participatory sphere of the Internet, which has led to a large number of studies on the influence of new technologies on journalism.

Journalism and new technologies

Nine years into the new century the picture has become clearer as to how the Internet affects traditional journalism. When Internet forums and weblogs first emerged, optimistic predictions were made that a new era of participatory journalism had dawned, and that the

“many-to-many publishing networks would create a new egalitarian communication culture” (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008, p. 4). Traditional journalism was seen as having “distanced itself from civic society in its pursuit of non-partisanship” (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008, p. 5). However, it is precisely the subjective and interpretative character of weblogs and user content sent to the media, which is seen as the main reason why it has not impacted more on journalism (Domingo & Heinonen, 2008; Paulussen & Ugille, 2008; Örnebring & Tapper, 2008).

As Domingo and Heinonen write (2006, p. 6), “blogs are not just technical applications, but a set of socially defined habits”. In this way bloggers are as much as journalists a community with shared values (Lowrey cited in Domingo & Heinonen, 2008). When it comes to user-generated news in the traditional media, these values clash. As far as the media perceives it, these “amateur journalists may not live up to the standards of objectivity, independence and accountability the way professionals do” (Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p.36). This means that to date “direct user involvement in news gathering, news selection and news production is minimal” (Örnebring cited in Paulussen & Ugille, 2008, p.26). In their findings Paulussen and Ugille (p. 37) observe that: collaboration is not fostered by the present newsroom structure ... In such an environment, it is difficult to establish a culture of interactivity and participation. .. especially in a context of high workload and lack of time and resources, journalists tend to fall back on the routines and sources they are most familiar with.

Web-blogs, all the same, can put into the public arena what the traditional media do not publish or cannot publish. For this reason the Internet is seen of greater importance in countries with little or no media freedom rather than in those with free speech. However, here too it is a country-by-country case. While the Internet is embraced by citizens as the public forum in some contexts, it is denied elsewhere. George’s (2006) study, *Contentious Journalism and the Internet. Towards Democratic Discourse in Malaysia and Singapore*, shows how Malaysia has embraced the Internet – to the degree that it played a key role in the March 2008 elections. While in Malaysia ‘voters flocked to alternative online news sites and blogs, rejecting government media’, reducing the ruling coalition from 91 percent to 63 percent of the votes (Hon, 2008), no such trend has emerged for Singapore. This tallies with the findings of a BBC poll, carried out in December 2007 in 14 countries, which shows Singaporeans preferring stable government to media freedom. That same poll, taken just before the Kenyan election,

showed that over 80 percent of Kenyans valued media freedom very highly, whereas only 36 percent of Singaporeans did (BBC, 2007).

The degree to which the Internet can form a civic sphere also depends on the degree to which the country is wired up technologically. This is a factor when considering the role of the Internet in the Arab world, where it is an important discussion forum (Hamdy, 2008). However, it is only available to the wealthier classes, which limits its function as a truly participatory forum. The same goes for African nations, though most of these enjoy far more media freedom than the Arab world.

The influence of technology on newsrooms shows that “convergence occurs throughout the news industry, affecting most if not all practitioners in the way they work” (Deuze, 2008, p.9). While routine cooperation with news sources has changed little, work routines have been transformed. On the one hand, reporters spend more time at their desks, thus spending more time socialising with their colleagues, and on the other they have become more individualised. The so-called “backpack journalists” (Stevens cited in Deuze, 2008: 15) “are sent out on assignment alone, being solely responsible for shooting video, recording audio, writing text and putting it all together in a coherent news package”. This type of work is becoming mainstream. In the United States, for example, news organisations are closing their bureaux in a few cities and replace them with individual “backpack” journalists in far more cities. It is then the task of the central newsroom to decide what makes it into the pages, onto the airwaves or the screen. As Paulussen and Ugille write (2008, p. 38),

There is indeed a strong belief that the primary role of journalism lies in the selection stage of the news making process. Their gatekeeping skills are among the major traits through which professionals distinguish themselves from amateur journalists. Concerns are raised about the low newsworthiness, the personal tone and the subjective bias of user contributions.

In other words, the new technological possibilities have not eroded the need for trained journalists, but have emphasised their necessity.

Conclusion: future directions

It will be some time before American resources in journalism research are “matched elsewhere: a large number of well-endowed universities with big journalism schools, wonderful libraries and well over one hundred university presses” (Curran, 2005, p. xi). As yet, the

books on journalism in American bookshops are, as Curran observed, "apart from a tiny number, are overwhelmingly about American journalism. It is assumed that everything that is worth saying about journalism – how it is practiced, how it is shaped, how it influences society – can be confined more or less to one country: the United States" (p. xii). Western Europe similarly "advances confident generalisations on a wide variety of subjects ... often based on evidence and examples derived from a small number of unrepresentative countries in Western Europe and North America" (p. xiii).

All the same, the de-Westernisation of communication and journalism studies has progressed and is gathering pace. New journals, such as the *Chinese Journal of Communication*, are founded, and Africa is seeing the emergence of two new communication journals this year. This change in attention is underpinned by the world's economic developments. Not long ago, "Asia, Latin America and Russia were on financial life support from the International Monetary Fund and World Bank" (Davis, 2008, p. 21). But this has changed dramatically: "borrowers shun the IMF and World Bank ... Sovereign wealth funds from Asia and the Middle East are now propping up wobbly financial institutions in the US and Europe" (Davis, 2008, p 21). The idea of a "flat world", ruled by an American-driven globalisation, has made way for a far more complex picture, in which the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) states and other countries play an increasingly prominent role (also see Chakravartty & Zhao, 2008). This undoubtedly will lead to research into and recognition of journalism acting as an agent in political forms other than fully fledged democracies.

New communication technologies will continue to change the communication sphere, but their impact will no longer be seen as teleologically leading to more participation in journalism. Further research into user-created content and web-blogging may in fact help appraising as much journalism's strength as its weaknesses. It may become ever clearer that journalism's strength is founded in its norms and values, even if objectivity and advocacy and standards of independence and accountability will always be debated.

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Public confidence in media reporting of elections: A step backward in Nigeria

By Dr. Peter Esuh

Abstract

This article reports a study of three aspects of the 2007 national elections in Nigeria: (1) the active intimidation of the media in opposition by the ruling PDP party, (2) the balance and fairness of the coverage of the various parties by print and broadcast media and (3) a national survey of the publics' confidence in the fairness of the reporting toward the various parties. The results show that the public in Nigeria sees the independent media as relatively fair, but clearly perceived the bias toward the incumbent PDP party in the state-controlled broadcast media and attributed this to the irresponsible and anti-democratic control of the state media by the governing elite of Nigeria. The public does not think that journalists enjoyed freedom to report the elections, but also distrust the ethics of journalists in affirming their freedom.

Key words: media coverage of elections, public confidence in the media, state-controlled media in Africa, independent media in Africa, Nigerian elections, media freedom in Africa.

Isaac Blankson comments that "perhaps the most significant watchdog function assumed by Africa's independent media in the democratic process is effectively demonstrated through their monitoring and coverage of political elections" (2007, p. 21). Blankson argues that the media help to minimise election malpractice and bring greater transparency to the process. He points to the role of independent media in Senegal's 2000 presidential elections reporting cases of vote buying, ballot stuffing and other irregularities that embarrassed President Diouf and prevented more extensive fraud (2007, p.21 citing Tettey, 2002). Media researchers also show that in Ghana's 2000 presidential elections, independent radio played an important role in foiling the attempts of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) party to rig the elections. Independent radio stations immediately reported irregularities and

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aroused the fierce opposition of public opinion that forced the ruling party to back off from the clumsy attempts to prevent free voting (Blankson, 2007, p. 23).

Political analysts in Africa point out that regime transition, the power of the electorate to vote out a government that has not performed well, is one of the most crucial elements in the process of democratisation. For this reason autocratic political leaders in Africa may allow considerable freedom of media to criticise government inefficiencies and corruption in the ordinary political reporting. Such investigative reporting is often helpful publicity justifying the elimination of political rivals. Governments can indicate to the Bretton Woods supervisors and to donor agencies that seemingly they are allowing press freedom. But when it comes to elections when the dominant regime could be threatened by the voting electorate, African neo-patrimonial political strategies come into play and the repression and manipulation of the media become particularly active.

Demands for democratic procedural rules in elections in Africa almost always include guarantees for the freedom of the media (Cowen & Laakso, 2002, pp. 129, 242), and the media often become a central battleground in elections (Cowen & Laakso, 2002, p. 305). In this moment ruling parties begin to argue that in developing countries all media should be loyal to the cause of solidarity in nation building and that too much freedom can be harmful to a fragile democratic process (Domatob, 1983). Political leaders allege that the threat of former colonial powers is too great to permit open debate (Nderi, 2008). This has been the typical electioneering discourse of Mugabe in Zimbabwe during the 1990s and 2000s, Paul Biya in Cameroon in the 2004 Cameroon elections, Henri Konan Bedie in the 2000 elections in Côte d' Ivoire and in many other African countries (Blankson, p. 23). Repression of the media is justified in the name of preventing violence, not confusing the people, maintaining good relations with allied governments, avoiding a bad public image in the international media, and other similar smoke screens to mollify the alarm of embassies and others who want to monitor elections.

Where the government media or independent media linked to government dominate the election information flows, the governing regime moves to dominate the airwaves in time of elections. In Tanzania, Mkufya (1995, pp 5-6), in a survey of the changes in political coverage in Tanzania's first multi-party elections in 1995, found that the

bias in government-owned stations was greatly increased during election periods. Content analysis showed 87 percent of the broadcasts dealt with the accomplishments of the governing party, but allowed only 5 per cent of the time to other parties and only 13 percent to other miscellaneous political issues. The media monitoring team overseeing the freedom of the election concluded that “instead of performing the functions of informing, educating and persuading the electorate, most media organs did the opposite. Most journalists and the media ran untruthful, inaccurate, biased, malicious and shallow stories with the aim of either favouring or tarnishing a candidate and his/her party. Although Tanzania prides itself on progressing toward greater media freedom, the analysis of the coverage of the 2005 elections that brought in Jakaya Kikwete, the presidential candidate of the incumbent party, reveals similar bias in the media (*The Guardian* [of Tanzania], 2006, September 14, p. 4).

Otieno Ong'ayo (2008) reports massive bias in the media coverage of the 2007 Kenyan general elections that resulted in the re-election of the incumbent President Kibaki. In “*The Kenya Case and Media Bias*” (2008), Otieno states that bias was blatant in the coverage by the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation and in most of the major newspapers. In the debates in the media the leading intellectuals, opinion leaders and church leaders, instead of guiding the public to look at the issues in a more dispassionate way, often took a self-serving, biased position. Even the blog sites were little more than biased arguments. All this affected public trust and confidence in the media and increased the wild flow of emotions that eventually erupted in the violent clashes in Kenya (Raheem, 2008). The Kenya case shows that continued distorted media coverage in government media and media supportive of government tends to influence the violent conflicts that eventually can lead to genocides such as occurred in Rwanda.

The importance of elections in the Nigerian political culture

Although since independence Nigeria has been ruled for 29 years by different military regimes, the Nigerian political system is rooted in a multi-party culture. The people always expect with some degree of confidence that an election will bring them a civilian administration with honest, efficient governance.

Olusegun Obasanjo entered the presidency in 1999 with the promise to end the repressive regimes of the military and, especially, to open a space of freedom for the civil society and the media. The 1999 elec-

tions renewed the hopes of the people that Nigeria could return to a normal election process. Obasanjo insisted on his support of fair elections, and in the 2003 general elections the people renewed their confidence that after his second term Obasanjo would respect the transition to a new regime.

The respect for the freedom of the media during the elections of 2007 was widely regarded in Nigeria as the crucial test of the sincerity of the intentions of political leaders to introduce truly democratic governance. Like so many African countries, political leaders in Nigeria were under pressure in the 1990s to liberalise the media, but this has been done in a way to maintain the control of the governing elite. Nigeria is a case where the dominant regime has done everything possible to maintain itself in power and prevent truly free elections while maintaining the appearances of democratic elections. Obasanjo, while campaigning for Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the governing party, said during the campaign in Ibadan January 2007, "for me the election is a do or die affair". The blocking of the attempt of Obasanjo to avoid elections entirely by forcing the national assembly to change the constitution and allow him to stay in office for a third term then made the 2007 elections an important test of whether the process of democratisation in Nigeria had truly progressed.

Various studies have been carried out on media and elections in Nigeria, especially the 2003 election (Lewis 2003, Le Van et al 2003). Especially significant are the studies of the reporting of the 2003 Nigerian elections which indicate the weakness of professionalism among journalists and the lapses in journalism ethics (Orhewere, 2003 and Pate, 2003).

So far there have been relatively few research reports on the role of the media in the 2007 Nigerian elections. One of the few studies is that carried out by Open Net Initiative (ONI), focusing on the government's repression of the media during the 2007 elections. ONI gave four reasons for its study: the need to uncover and analyse evidence of electoral manipulation, the critical nature of the election as the nation's first transfer of power from civilian government, Nigeria's importance as a bell weather of reform for Africa, and the government's growing interest to regulate the Internet (ONI, 2007).

The central questions in the present study are (a) whether the public has confidence in the free and fair access of all candidates to the media, (b) whether there was fair, unbiased information on the pro-

posals of candidates, and (c) whether the public has confidence in the adequate and unbiased reporting of the media. Confidence of the public in the media during elections is particularly important. Virtually the only way that the public can monitor the activities of elected representatives is through the fair and accurate reporting of the media. If the public loses hope that the media are capable of reporting governance activities well, interest in political participation begins to die. As Blankson (2007, p. 20) notes in the case of Ghana, the continued suppression of the media by the Rawlings regime in the 1980s brought a "culture of silence". The people's use of the media declined and many simply became passively resigned to the increasingly repressive actions of the Rawlings government.

The present study was planned as an evaluation of three aspects of media's fair and balanced reporting in the 2007 elections: (1) whether there was intimidation of the media, especially the private media, by actual or threatened violence or other forms of reprisals; (2) whether all parties received fair and balanced coverage and (3) the perception of the public that the election coverage was fair and that the public could have confidence in the professionalism of the media. Although the study gathered some data on the first and second aspects of the freedom of the media, a major focus was on the degree to which the public is growing in its trust in the ability of the media to carry out its role fairly and without bias.

The Nigerian media certainly has the physical capacity to carry out coverage of national elections competently. As the European Union EOM report states:

As of April 2007, there were 298 television and radio stations registered and operating in Nigeria. The Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) that are both state-owned national broadcasters, operate a network of some 140 offices and stations throughout the country. There are also local state-owned radio stations and television channels broadcasting in all the 36 Nigerian states. Whilst the Nigerian audio-visual sector remains dominated by the state-owned media, there are approximately 60 private broadcasters operating in Nigeria and the private media is expanding....There are approximately 100 print media outlets in Nigeria and all are privately owned (Cited in *The Guardian*, September 7, 2007).

The mass media were deeply involved in the 2007 general elections in three phases: the pre-election awareness raising and publicity encouraging voting, the election coverage, and the post election coverage

and information management. However, this involvement, in itself, is not a guarantee of good coverage.

Evidence of the government's intimidation of the media

The public's confidence in the fairness of the reporting depends, in part, on the perception of the freedom of the media. There were ominous signs during the second term of Obasanjo that the freedom of the media would be curbed in the elections of 2007. In 2004 the broadcast regulatory agency announced that it would begin to enforce a section of Decree No 38 which bars broadcasters from the live transmission of foreign news, citing the danger that these broadcasts pose to national interests. More ominous still was the closure of a number of private stations that had been more outspoken in their critical reporting of the government activities (Onwumechili, 2007, p.131). As Onwumechili (2007) points out, the majority of the broadcasting stations are operated by the government and, although the number of new licenses awarded for both independent radio and television increased, many of the licenses were given to members of the ruling People's Democratic Party and to the close friends of party leaders. Thus the great majority of the broadcasting stations in Nigeria continue to be solid supporters of the ruling party.

There were also signs that the state media would be ready to compromise its ethical and social responsibility in the elections of the Houses of Assembly which took place in April 14, 2007 and in the gubernatorial elections April 21, 2007. The state media were giving overwhelming support to the PDP candidates, and the private media were evidently timid and cautious in their criticism of the government procedures in these elections.

Although freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Constitution and the audiovisual sector is technically protected under the supervision of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission (NBC), the actions of state security agencies repeatedly undermined the principle of protection. The final report of the European Union on the 2007 elections (cited in *The Guardian*, September 7, 2007) shows that there was active intimidation of the independent media. Members of the State Security Service (SSS) suspended broadcasts of the Lagos-based private television station Channels TV, Gotell and Radio Unity FM, and sealed their premises on 11 April 2007. Neither of these broadcasters re-established their operations during the campaign period. On 17 April 2007 the SSS also raided AIT TV's Abuja-based office and stopped the airing of a paid

programme which was critical of the incumbent party. In the raid, the SSS confiscated working materials and a number of tapes with recorded programmes, including the tape of a paid programme.

During the campaign a number of other intimidating and repressive actions were recorded. The Lagos-based AIT and Ray Power transmitters were destroyed by fire on 15 April, 2007. Broadcasters did not identify the source of the fire. The transmitter of the Kano-based private radio station, Freedom, was also destroyed on 2 April by several hundred people attacking the premises of the station. While this attack was supposedly motivated by religious tensions fuelled by the stations alleged hostile coverage related to the Islamic festival marking the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, representatives of the station perceived the attack as a politically-motivated attempt to silence the station. In two separate incidents, NTA and AIT TV staff were physically assaulted by groups in Delta and Zamfara States while reporting on the 14 April election day developments.

The balance and accuracy of the coverage

A second aspect of this study touches on whether, quantitatively, the media gave sufficient time to the elections considering the relative importance of the presidential, governorship, and other elections and gave fair amounts of time to all parties. The Nigerian newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Nation*, carried out an assessment to evaluate the quantity, fairness and tone of coverage, and this was supported by an assessment made in the European Union Election Monitoring Report as well as the Open Net Initiative Report (2007).

The results shows that, overall, national broadcasters allocated the majority of their election coverage to the presidential elections and, in some instances, to the governorship elections. News and current affairs programmes of private and state broadcasters focused on a limited number of parties: predominantly the major parties, PDP, AC and ANPP. The tone of their coverage of the candidates showed attempts on the part of journalists to maintain a neutral or positive attitude, although, as we shall see, the state-owned broadcasts gave much more time to the incumbent party candidates. The level of coverage focusing on these main three parties reflected to some extent their position in opinion polls.

There is evidence that there was adequate preparation on the side of the media for the coverage of the 2007 elections in Nigeria. The evaluation from the NUJEST (Nigerian Union of Journalists Election Survey

Team) (2007) and CePSERD(Centre for Peace Building and Socio-economic Resources Development)(2007) provide evidence for that.

However, the fact that there was a total of 50 registered parties and varying levels of campaign intensity by the smaller parties made fair reporting very difficult. The lack of capacity of the media to sufficiently cover the campaigns of all the parties, especially the smaller ones, made it very difficult for the media to provide equal coverage of *all* the contesting parties' campaigns. The more serious lapse was the failure to cover adequately the larger opposition parties, (See Figure 1) and it is a just conclusion that the media failed to adhere to their legal

Figure 1 – Percentage distribution of broadcast time of major broadcasters among major political parties

National Television Authority (state-controlled):

PDP	-	51 percent	PDP presidential candidate
			30 percent
AC	-	12 percent	
AANP	-	11 percent	

Capital FM (Private):

PDP	-	52 percent	PDP presidential candidate
			52 percent
AC	-	13 percent	
AANP	-	10 percent	

ERCN (state-controlled) station in Kaduna

PDP	-	46 percent
AC	-	16 percent
AANP	-	12 percent
DPP	-	9 percent

Peace FM (Plateau region, ruling party in the State is the PDP)

PDP	-	79 percent
AC	-	7 percent
AANP	-	5 percent
DPP	-	5 percent

Radio Kano (State owned, the local ruling party is ANPP)

PDP	-	19 percent
ANPP	-	56 percent
AC	-	22 percent

Lagos-Based, Channels TV- Private TV

PDP	-	31 percent
AC	-	24 percent
Small parties	Seven small parties received 5 percent each	

AIT-TV (A nationwide private television channel) and Radio Station, Ray Power

Both of these stations are owned by DAAR Communication. Although percentages were not available, the distribution between PDP, AC and other major parties was relatively equitable. This station allocated the largest amount of time given to presidential candidates to Atiku Abubakar, but this focused more on his legal disputes regarding his disqualification as a candidate.

Nagarta FM, Kaduna

PDP	-	80 percent
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Aso FM

PDP	-	55 percent
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Lagos-based Unity FM

PDP	-	39 percent
AC	-	30 percent

Radio Freedom, Kano

PDP	-	30 percent
ANPP	-	44 percent
AC	-	15 percent

obligations on equal coverage. The media gave a disproportionately extensive coverage to the incumbent People's Democratic Party (PDP), dominated by the outgoing president, Obasanjo. One would have expected the media to give coverage to new parties and new proposals to enable the public to make a more adequate choice. The media, however, bowed to the power of the information machine of the government in power. The state-owned broadcasters in particular failed to comply with the requirements to provide balanced coverage.

The news and current affairs programmes of the state-controlled television network National Television Authority (NTA) and state-controlled Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), which should

have been a model of public service broadcasting, demonstrated considerable bias in favour of the incumbent PDP. On these channels the PDP received a larger amount of airtime than all of the other political parties combined (2007).

The European Union's EOM's final report on the 2007 elections, cited in *The Guardian*, September 7, 2007, supports this view that the reporting was generally biased in favour of the incumbent party, but also questions the professional capacity of journalists:

The media environment is characterized by financial instability, a lack of independence of the regulatory bodies and inadequate training of media professionals that leads to lack of high quality journalism. The low income of journalists also exposes them to offers of payment in return for favorable reporting. The practice of so called "brown envelops", cash payments some journalists receive from various sponsors on top of their official income, is reported to be widespread (*The Guardian*, September 7, 2007).

The study of the public's confidence in the media

The third and most important part of this study was the research on the public's perception and evaluation of the media coverage of the elections. To gather data in this part of the research a national survey of voting-age people was carried out in all major regions of Nigeria. An eleven-item closed-ended questionnaire was developed and administered to six hundred subjects in cities from the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. It was considered important that all major socio-cultural regions of Nigeria be represented because the religious and cultural factors of the regions do influence how people perceive the political process. For example, the fact that the presidential candidate of the incumbent party was a Muslim from the north could influence the perception of how the media covered the election process. The cities covered by the study were: Kaduna (North West), Abuja (national capital and for north central), Maiduguri (north east), Lagos (south west), Uyo (south south), and Umuahia (south east). Apart from Abuja (the national capital), all other cities selected are state capitals. This provided for adequate national demographic configuration for the study. Within each of the five zones a total of 120 persons were selected to fill out the questionnaires, using a dimensional sampling approach to make sure that dimensions of sex, age and education, and SES would be represented.

The study was carried out with the help of research assistants drawn from universities in the states covered by the study over a

period of two months, May to June 2007. This was the period immediately following the elections when the memory of the media coverage was more likely to be fresh in people's minds. A total of 480 (80 percent) of the 600 questionnaires distributed were completed and returned.

The results of the survey

An initial question asked respondents was whether they were generally satisfied with the coverage of the elections by the media with the intention of eliciting the views regarding the *amount* of coverage. This initial question was framed in a way to indicate a general value-free orientation in the questionnaire. As was noted above, all of the media throughout the country cooperated in providing a general programme of news and information in preparation for the elections, good coverage during the elections and good evaluation after the elections. The public recognised these good intentions in that all showed some degree of satisfaction (480 or 100 percent) with the amount of coverage.

Table 1: The degree of satisfaction of the public regarding the amount of coverage of elections by the media.

Were you generally satisfied with the amount of coverage of elections by the media? If you were satisfied, to what extent were you satisfied?

	Number	(%)
Very satisfied	264	55
Fairly satisfied	216	45
Total	480	100

Table 1 shows that although all of the 480 respondents were generally satisfied, 264 (55 percent) were very satisfied with the media awareness campaign of the 2007 general elections but 216 (45 percent) of the respondents had reservations about the coverage and were only fairly satisfied with the exercise.

Table 2: Evaluation of the amount of coverage by electronic media in contrast to print media

Between broadcast media (Radio/TV) and print media (newspapers/magazines), which of these media gave you a more comprehensive account of the 2007 general elections?

	Number	(%)
Broadcast Media	307	64
Print Media	173	36
Total	480	100

Table 2 shows that 307 respondents (64 percent) agreed that broadcast media gave them a more comprehensive account of the 2007 general elections while 173 respondents (36 percent) gave credit to print media. In general, in Nigeria, more people get their news from radio.

Table 3: The perception of the public confidence and trust of the performance of the public, state radio and TV stations.

How would you rate the performance of public radio/TV stations in the coverage of the 2007 elections in terms of public confidence and trust?

	Number	(%)
Very high	43	9
High	173	36
Low	264	55
Total	480	100

Table 3 is a crucial question and the responses indicate a general climate of distrust of the public media. Only 43 respondents (9 percent) rate the public broadcast media very high. In a contrast between high and low, 173 respondents (36 percent) rated the performance of public broadcast media in the election high, while a solid majority, 264 respondents (55 percent) perceive the state media in terms of low performance in election coverage in contrast to private media.

Table 4: The evaluation of the election coverage by the private media.

What is your assessment of private radio/TV stations in the coverage of the 2007 election in terms of public confidence and trust?

	Number	(%)
Very impressive	211	45
Impressive	269	55
Not impressive	-	-
Total	480	100

Table 4 clearly indicates that people rate the coverage by private media as better in contrast to the state media. A total of 211 respondents (45 percent) rated as "very impressive" the performance of private broadcast media while the remaining 269 respondents (55 percent), described the performance of private radio/TV stations in the country during the election as "impressive". Surprisingly, not a single respondent rated the private media as "not impressive".

Table 5: Evaluation of the performance of the print media in the election coverage.

Was the coverage by the print media (newspapers and magazines) in the 2007 elections balanced, objective and fair?

	Number	(%)
Balanced coverage	-	-
Objective coverage	130	27
Fairness to all parties/candidates	43	9
Unbalanced coverage	307	64
Total	480	100

One of the most surprising results of the survey is that none of the respondents in any of the regions of Nigeria perceive the print media as balanced in their coverage of candidates while 307 (64 percent) perceived the print media as unbalanced. Table 5 shows that only 130 respondents (27 percent) identified the performance of the print media during the 2007 elections as objective and only 43 (9 percent) as fair to

all candidates. This response came as something of a surprise since the private broadcast media are rated high while the print media, which are private, are rated low. This finding merits a more detailed analysis to find out why the print media are rated as less balanced and what type of print media are perceived as unbalanced. The quality press in Nigeria is generally reliable and balanced, but is expensive. For example, the daily, *The Guardian*, costs 150 Naira, more than one US dollar, and is out of the reach of most people. It could be that our respondents are referring more to the tabloid press which often is quite irresponsible. Are the respondents referring to news magazines, generally provocative oppositional media? Unfortunately, the survey instrument, aiming to be simple and easy to respond to, did not have more investigative questions.

Table 6: The general perception of the public regarding the freedom of journalists.

Did journalists enjoy reasonable press freedom during the 2007 election which would have heightened public confidence and trust?

	Number	(%)
Yes	67	14
No	413	86
Total	480	100

Table 6 shows that out of the total number of 480 respondents, only 67 (14 percent) think that journalists were working under conditions of reasonable press freedom during the 2007 general elections while 413 (86 percent) claimed there was no reasonable press freedom. Most respondents would not have a very clear or detailed understanding of how journalists work, but there is a widely shared perception that there are not conditions of freedom of expression in Nigeria.

Table 7: The perception of the public regarding the balanced coverage

During the 2007 general elections, was there equal coverage of political parties and candidates by media establishments?

	Number	(%)
Yes	43	9
No	437	91
Total	480	100

Table 7 shows that only 43 respondents (9 percent) agreed that there was equal coverage of political parties and candidates during the 2007 general elections. However, 437 respondents (91 percent) said there was not equal coverage of political parties and candidates by media practitioners during the election. It was not easy for the press to give balanced coverage because the opposition is splintered and opposition parties tended to be regionally based, but there was a general perception that the media were not providing a balanced, fair coverage of different political options other than that of the incumbent party, the PDP.

Table 8: How perception of the public regarding the differences of public and private media affected trust and confidence in the media?

During the 2007 elections, were there some differences between the public and private media organizations in the coverage of events that affected your trust and confidence in the media?

	Number	(%)
Yes	350	73
No	130	27
Total	480	100

Table 8 shows that out of the total number of 480 respondents, 350 (73 percent) agreed that there were some differences between the public and private media organisations in the coverage of the 2007 general elections. This was the only open-ended question in the ques-

tionnaire and attempted to ascertain why the public thought the state-controlled media did not merit the trust of the public. The majority of the respondents' answers were concerned with government media not giving access to other parties, but viewers also accused the government media of undermining the candidates' opposition to the incumbent government through blackmail, propaganda and unsubstantiated claims.

Table 9: The perception of bias in the media's handling of the 2007 elections

Were there elements of bias in the handling of the 2007 election by media organizations?

	Number	(%)
Yes	480	100
No	-	-
Total	480	100

Table 9 indicates that all the respondents agreed that there were some elements of bias from the media in the coverage of the 2007 general elections.

Table 10: Opinions regarding the sources of bias in the election news

If yes, what was responsible for the biases in news and other reports by the media during the election?

	Number	(%)
Ownership control	264	55
Brown envelope syndrome	154	32
Irresponsible/partisan journalism	62	13
Total	480	100

Table 10 shows that 264 respondents (55 percent) identified ownership and control structure of media organisations as a major reason for biased reporting during the 2007 general elections. Only 154 respondents (32 percent) blamed the scenario on the brown envelop syndrome in the media circles while the remaining 62 respondents (13

percent) identified irresponsible journalism for bias in news and other reports during the 2007 general elections.

Table 11: The public confidence in the media announcements and comments on the results of the elections

Were you confident in the results of the elections as announced by the media?

	Number	(%)
Yes	53	11
No	427	89
Total	480	100

Table 11 shows that out of the of 480 respondents, only 53 (11 per cent) said they were confident in the results of the elections announced by the Nigerian media. The great majority, 427 respondents (89 per cent), claimed that they were not confident in the result as they could not trust most of the media houses, especially government-owned media organisations.

There were widespread unofficial reports and a wave of rumors of fraudulent reporting of voting statistics in the elections. For example, there were reliable eye-witness reports by people working in the counting and reporting of votes that members of the incumbent PDB party had prepared lists of voting results before the elections. The counted votes ready for reporting were ignored, and the pre-prepared lists were sent into the central voting-tabulation office for calculation of voting results. There were many charges of voting fraud, and in the period after the elections legal suits were brought to the tribunals with accusations of fraud. Because many of the accusations immediately following the elections were not official, the media were constrained to publicise what was official, but the public tended to believe the unofficial reports. In the end, because the media did not have the resources to thoroughly investigate the unofficial accusations of election fraud, even the private media lost credibility in the eyes of the public.

The public obviously considered the state media as controlled by the governing elite, but the public generally questioned whether journalists might be in collusion with the political leaders of the incumbent party. In any event, the public did not think that journalists had the freedom to report the truth, and many thought that the "brown enve-

lope syndrome" or other dishonest practices of journalists might be operating.

Conclusions

The present study was carried out on the premise that the role of the media in monitoring election processes is one of the most crucial functions of media in the development of democracy in Africa. Further, the test of the media's ability to earn the confidence of the public is in the media's capacity to cover elections accurately. The media's presentation of the policy proposals of candidates, without bias and in a complete and balanced way, is of great importance in a mature democracy. The public participate in the election process largely through the media, and the public confidence in the media draws the public out of their "culture of silence" into the vigorous debate of the public forum.

As tables 9 and 10 above clearly indicate, the Nigerian public overwhelmingly perceived bias in the media's coverage of the 2007 elections. The public recognises that the media gave sufficient broadcast time and newspaper space to the election coverage, but, for various reasons, the public does not have confidence in how the editors used that time and space. Some media and some journalists may think that they reported the election as well as they could, but the data provided above shows that the media in Nigeria have failed badly the test of gaining the public confidence in the media. The people in Nigeria simply do not trust the media in elections.

There are various reasons for this lack of confidence in the media, but the major reason is that the ownership control, especially the control of the state media (so dominant in Nigeria) by the governing elites, does not permit the media to report elections in an accurate, balanced and complete manner. One wonders why the directors of the state-controlled media continue to manipulate their editorial offices so shamelessly when it only leads to greater lack of credibility in the eyes of the public. The state's attempt to maintain an unprofessional and biased reporting not only in elections but in other broadcast content is so self-defeating for the governing elites themselves. One of the reasons for the collapse of the Communist regimes of East Europe was that the continued lies in the state-controlled media undermined their credibility. On the basis of the present study looking at three aspects of the media in the 2007 elections in Nigeria (freedom from harassment, balanced coverage of all parties, and perception of media coverage by

the public), the following conditions for confidence of the public in the media during elections seem important:

- The major concerns and interests of the public should be articulated by the statements of the candidates and their parties.
- The media should be perceived as professionally balanced, objective, representative of all major positions and free of major influence of powerful elites so that the public can enter into the debate.
- The professional staff of the media should be perceived as competent, accurate and neutral in all of their reporting.
- The media reporting of the elections should be widely accessible to people of voting age throughout the nation.

Few of these conditions were fulfilled by the media in the 2007 Nigerian elections. The post-election editorial of one of Nigeria's top quality newspapers, *The Guardian*, entitled "The EU, 2007 elections and INEC", in its citation of the EU report released by the Chief Observer of the EU Mission, Mr. Max Van den Berg, summarised well what Nigerians thought about the elections. *The Guardian* editorial argued that the report was in conformity with what other election observers have noted.

The EU report contained two clear messages. First, that the 2007 elections lacked credibility, were marred by lack of transparency, fraudulent conduct and procedural irregularities. Second, that urgent and comprehensive reform is required to improve the framework and conduct of future elections in Nigeria. According to the EU, very poor organization, substantial evidence of fraud, widespread voter's disenfranchisement, lack of equal conditions for political parties and candidates, and numerous incidents of violence compromised the integrity of the elections. Some other local and international observers have already pointed out these flaws (*The Guardian*, September 7, 2007).

The editorial asserts that there is "universal consensus that the 2007 elections were a charade, and, on a comparative scale, the worst election conducted in the Nigerian history". Peter Takirambudde, Africa Director of Human Rights, asserted that "the Nigerian government failed completely in its conduct of a free and fair election" (ONI 2007). To the National Democratic Institute, the 2007 elections is "a step backward in the conduct of elections in Nigeria".

On the whole, except for some sectors of the private media, in the eyes of the public, the media in Nigerian were in collusion with this "worst election conducted in Nigerian history". The greatest offenders

were, of course, the state-controlled media, but these media are also staffed by professional journalists, most of them graduates of Nigerian schools of journalism. In the view of the public, the media directors do not allow journalists to operate in freedom to report honestly and accurately according to the dictates of their conscience. But the journalists themselves are not free of blame in the view of the public. Nearly half of the respondents in this survey thought that the bias in the election reporting was due to the journalists' willingness to accept bribes and to their irresponsible, partisan reporting.

The performance of the media in the Nigerian elections is one of the reasons why the public seems to have such a low estimate of the ethics of journalists in Nigeria (Akinfeleye, 2003). In many other African countries, in comparison with the public perception of other professions such as medical doctors, journalists consistently have a very low rating. All this merits serious assessment and reflection by the journalists' associations in Nigeria and the leaders in Nigeria's schools of journalism. Nigeria is outstanding for the courage of some of its journalists in maintaining professional independence, but the profession as a whole is not gaining the confidence of the public. We do need more research on the ethical commitments of journalists, and we need more research on how our schools of journalism are teaching professional ethics.

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PETER ESUH

426



Book Reviews

Do the media support... or hinder democracy?

The Media and Political Process

Eric Louw. Sage Publications, London, 2005. US\$ 40.00 (paper) pp 311.

Media and Democracy: How the media colonize politics

Thomas Meyer with Lew Hinchman. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2002. Eur 14.94 (paper) pp 166.

Both of these authors chart the radical changes in political communication that have taken place since the beginning of radio broadcasts that brought the voice of candidates into the living rooms of the public. More in detail, they describe the visual impact since television brought also the faces of politicians directly to people. Both Louw and especially Meyer think that the mass popular media, especially television, are increasingly an obstacle to the kind of reasoned public debate of issues that democracy presupposes. The general assumption in both books is that in representative democracy citizens elect politicians to carry out their will. In fact, the ordinary citizen knows relatively little about how to manage public services of education and health, and citizens delegate to politicians the job of setting up and regulating public services. The politicians get their ideas for public policy decisions from the elites among interest groups who are specialists in education policy, health policy and the hundreds of other areas of public services and regulation. Still, ordinary citizens know that they must constantly monitor and evaluate what their elected representatives are doing. The politicians know that they must get the consent to the public approving the design of public services. And to get consent, the politicians must, theoretically, constantly inform the public about how their expert action will serve the needs of the public.

Getting the consent of the public became increasingly problematic as the voting franchise was extended to more people, and the public became more differentiated. Often political leaders had access to far more information or could see that certain policies were much better in

the long run. In all cases the politicians are under pressure from the powerful interests that may or may not be in the interest of the people. But to convince a whole nation to support these moves has meant using the mass media and all the tricks of the new mass-media political rhetoric. Louw is particularly good in explaining how elites in Western democracies have learned to manage the masses.

The evolution of the new political rhetoric

Louw's analysis is much more nuanced because he takes into consideration the audience side of the communication process and the importance of personal identities in giving one's "consent" to elected representatives and the proposals that elected officials make. Spin doctoring depends on discovering different identities and attracting their identification. Louw traces the rise of nationalist identity and the attempts of political leaders to get consent by linking themselves and their proposals to national identity (the ability of Hitler to mobilise Germany around national pride would be a good example). In the early era of the mass political parties mobilisation was built around mass identities such as farm-labour identities. By the 1960s identities in the industrial and post-industrial world had been splintered into pieces by the rising educational levels, the multiplication of professions, the loosening of personal attachments to institutional religion and weakening attachments to other mass institutions. Furthermore, identities centred around religion, ethnicity, race or social class began to become much more mobile and difficult to pin down. With reduced working hours and much more leisure time, identities began to form around hobbies and other leisure-time activities. The hundreds of channels of TV further "channelised" identities. In this context politicians (and all forms of marketing) began to reach out to public relations spin doctors to do the enormous background research on identities, constantly polling political preferences, knowing how to correctly connect with identities, find strategies on how to ward off the opposition negative images of various identity groups and how to bring the "single-issue" interests of a vast number of identities into consent around a single set of party or candidate proposals.

A second factor that both Louw and Meyer touch on (but Louw seems to explain better) is the transformation brought about by direct broadcasts of first radio and then television. One of the first of these innovations that coincided with the spread of nationwide radio in the 1930s was Franklin D. Roosevelt's "fireside chats" to the American

public, full of his warm, resonant personality. Most contact of candidates previously was in large halls, sometimes in huge spaces. Now it became important to be attentive to personal presentation. People could now have a close up view of how a candidate thinks and acts—and the people now could judge a candidate not only on the policy platform, but on how the person might perform as the commander-in-chief of a nation. The film industry, photographic reproduction in magazines, billboards, all this make the image and the symbolism of image of candidates as celebrities far more important. Expertise in personal image creation to convince the public that the candidate is the kind of *personality* they would trust now became part of the entourage of the political candidate.

What concept of democracy?

Where Louw and Meyer diverge is in their concept of what is ideal democratic political communication. Louw's concept of democracy is based on the Lockean principle of the capacity and duty of every individual to participate in governance of the local and national government by elections and to control representative through the information of the media. The emphasis is on "freedom" and liberal democracy. The purpose of the state is to create conditions which further the individual interests and to defend personal creative and entrepreneurial initiative with the least interference of the state. Louw provides a fascinating description of how the communication processes centred on the English parliamentary system evolved into the modern media watchdog, non-partisan, objective reporting system—to enable the ordinary citizen to make decisions in a Lockean fashion. This Anglo tradition tends to assume that all people have an inborn rational capacity and supports the summary of the liberal tradition attributed to Abraham Lincoln, "You can fool some of the people all the time; you can fool all the people some of the time; but you cannot fool all the people all the time."

When the politician—or any other institution—wishes to use the media to reach the public, it is necessary to adapt to the thousand rules that the media have evolved in order to communicate with the shifting interests of the audience. Meyer is particularly good at analysing the "logic of the mass media" (although a bit depreciative of the "popular language" of the media): the typical stage managing that media use, the adaptation of political messages to the genres geared to particular audiences, image creation, the artistry of entertainment, constant

ratings consciousness, and a host of other strategies to get attention and maintain a focus on the image that they are selling.

Both Louw and Meyer also note the importance of “hype” and “theatricalisation”. The ability to create an emotion-filled public event that was typical of professional sports, promoting the circus coming to town, the religious revival, and other means to get public attention had long been a part of political campaigns in the United States with the attempts to distract the public from the real issues and interests and to cover over the real objectives of the politicians. Good, multi-party debate in elections and in discussing legislation can, however, point out what are the real issues and the real interests of the people.

Meyer defines political communication in the framework of Habermas’ theory of communicative action. The ideal public communication, for Habermas, must be rational. That is, it must be based on participants trying to decide together on the best means to carry out a common action. Rationality means that participants must be able to provide evidence understandable to all other participants to show that their proposals for action are the best way to achieve the common good. “We must never lose sight of the fact”, Meyer argues (p. 81) “that communication cannot fulfil its political function of democratic legitimation unless it maintains a nucleus of *rationality* (italics added), discussion and reliable information, unless it is subject to argumentative accountability and capable of generating consensus...If the rational core should ever disappear from communication, it would no longer be political in the sense of democratic legitimation...Democracy reduced to entertainment ceases to be democracy”. Meyer, with a German background, feels much more at home with the European continental conception of democracy as a process of deliberating together to find the most rational means of achieving the common good. Rationality is not inborn, but lies in the free discussion among relatively small groups.

Needless to say, in Meyer’s view, the theatricalisation, hype, spin, and image creation that are currently being used by politicians to get the consent of the public leave little room for rational reflection on the part of citizens. Meyer explains the manipulation of the media in terms of Habermas’ concept of colonisation where sectors with political and economic power begin to occupy the life space of free human endeavour, human initiative, creativity and exploit this human activity for their political-economic interests. Politicians hire media consultants and public relations experts at increasingly greater cost to help them sway

voters to support them. Once the media and the consultants are hired, they attempt to fulfill their contracts by using all of the tricks of the trade to help their politician win. The media think the politicians have the ethical responsibility and the politicians think the media consultants are responsible. Journalists say that they are simply reporting objective facts fed to them. In fact there does not seem to be any ethical responsibility for what is done.

Louw thinks that the best defense against the manipulation of citizen consent is through what he calls "critical constructivism". Constructivism argues that all human knowledge is, to some degree, constructed in the mind. There is no completely empirical knowledge of the world around us. Critical constructivism recognises that even so called "objective" accounts of a news event are in some way still influenced by the subjective perspectives of journalists. Critical constructivism takes into consideration that the hype and image creation uses all the measures of non-partisan journalism - objectivity, balance, fairness, etc. - to construct a biased perspective, but one can become aware of this to some extent by knowing how the media consultants working with politicians construct their perspectives. For example, if one becomes aware of how television presentations of candidates are designed, one can "see" the biased construction.

It is significant that, in proposing remedies for the possible distortions in political communication that spin doctoring may cause, Louw coming from the Anglo tradition and Meyer from a more continental tradition, see the remedies in a very different light. Meyer thinks that regulation from citizen's groups or from the state should be introduced. Louw thinks that self-regulation is a far better solution. He explains in some detail how deceptive spin-doctoring frequently backfires on its own authors and brings them into serious troubles that destroy their own agenda-setting efforts. Many in the public relations and media consultancy professions are now beginning to realize this and see that efforts to maintain honesty and respect for the freedom of the consent of the public is the best policy.

One is left with the question, "Is Louw too optimistic and is Meyer too pessimistic"? How can democracy deal with the world of the spin doctor?

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