MEDIA IN AFRICA

Political, Cultural and Theoretical Trajectories in the Global Environment

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Abstract / This article tackles assumptions made by Louise Bourgault in her pioneering book, *Mass Media in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The article discusses her claims about African journalism in relation to her engagement with western approaches, and with regard to issues of orality, the Shannon and Weaver communication model and to the megadiscipline of media studies. Short case studies are provided of the emergence of print media in several African countries (Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya and South Africa), with the South African analysis looking more in-depth at the political economy of print media in the context of post-apartheid ideologies. The article concludes by positioning media studies in Africa against western media studies, and media studies as a 'megadiscipline', the intention being to account for and explain some of the disparities between North–South media studies and print media economies.

Keywords / Africa / communication models / journalism / orality / political economy

The globalization thesis views the contemporary economic and political agendas of the 'West' as a revival of 19th-century 'liberalism'. 'The West' is something of a straw man as a result of this. In particular, the relation of global politics/economics to media is a special case of a broader trend in the modes and relations of production. Media are simply the most *visible* manifestation of a neopolitical economy, which subjects populations to abstract market/financial forces. This places new borders on peoples, usually in terms of some transnational self-definition of 'culture'. Finally, this developmental trajectory as a form of political economy shifts the theoretical focus from that of interpretive comparative studies, to political comparative studies.

Our study follows a form of political pluralism based on Agnes Heller's various analyses of modernity (Heller, 1984, 1987; Heller and Fehér, 1988). This is both 'liberal' and 'culturalist', deliberately drawing on the apparent contradiction between these trends to emphasize the *synthesis* that global conditions require. Freedom is the principal political value idea. The term relates to the Kantian practical imperative, which considers people as ends in themselves and never mere means. Our analysis is also 'culturalist', precisely because people are ends in themselves (Guambe and Shepperson, 1997).

The contemporary situation in Africa is politically and culturally in flux. The political condition is obvious (whether in pain or in celebration) to all. With regard to

South Africa, for example, Keith Windschuttle (1998: 112) says he 'know[s] more about [South Africa] than . . . of most countries of the world, thanks largely to the journalists . . . who have kept me informed over the past several decades'.[1] Most obviously, people who were born within the boundaries set by the 1910 Act of Union are represented equally *as* South Africans in a unitary constitutional state. Indeed, most of the 'information' people like Windschuttle gathered about South Africa concerned the conflict anti-apartheid groups carried on to put just such a system in place. This kind of 'knowledge' is *mediated* in several ways. Scare-quotes around the word *knowledge* indicate some scepticism on our part about the extent to which such mediation actually constitutes information as a ground for political decision-making. However, as is discussed in the next section, it is the sort of scare-quotes that people might place around subsequent information that limit our approach in this article. Because we argue that *people* make knowledge, *media* in themselves do not represent either knowledge and truth, or opinion and falsehood. Media *represent* nothing, but do present content that people can *constitute* as knowledge or opinion, truth or falsity. This relation is the political interface between media and culture.

Critique of the Definition of Media

To provide a 'critique' of a concept is to undertake an exploration that establishes the self-defined limits beyond which that concept cannot speak without recourse to other laws and concepts. For Kant, the critique of pure reason defines the boundary across which logic, the sole 'legitimate' science of *pure* reason, cannot make claims.[2] The raw materials of logic, thus, are phenomena. That which is the source of phenomena but which are not themselves phenomena are beyond the knowledge claims of pure reason. It is therefore not surprising that Kant also developed critiques of other forms of reason (practical reason, judgement): he may be seen as attempting to constitute 'sovereign discourses' in a way that ultimately could communicate with each other in terms of some protocol of *communicative action*.

The end of the 20th century saw a world where 'media' is a dominant concept. John Thompson (1990) devotes much energy to examining the 'mediatization of culture'; Jürgen Habermas (1987a, 1987b, 1989) explores the modern tendency towards 'mediatization' of power. Placing the term 'media' at the centre of such weighty considerations indicates that as a concept, 'media' is a central feature of power relations. For half the 20th century, intellectual consideration of the term 'media' involved a stance towards a specific publication, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's (1949) book *The Mathematical Theory of Communication*. We are being explicit about this, so that readers will not accuse us of smuggling mechanistic concepts based on 'illegitimate' Communication–Medium–Recipient (C–M–R) theories of transmission (Maras, 1998: 199). Our reason is that when people contest the 'legitimacy' of a concept's theoretical deployment, then it is necessary to establish critically the internal laws of that concept, and the limits these laws determine. For the present, we take a somewhat fundamentalist view of 'media', based on Shannon's work, as those *channels/media* along which *information* passes in *coded* form, en

route to some form of *reception*. Channel and medium, in this context, are synonyms for a specially ordered technological system designed to transfer some form of transformed data in ways that permit the data to be reconstituted in another place or at a future time.

We therefore exclude cognate references that crop up in, for example, linguistics (code-switching) or literary studies (reception theory). We focus on instances in the African media environment, examining issues that impact on the ownership of, access to, management and distribution of media/channels. Our analysis covers the ways in which new dispensations have changed (or seek to change) representation and distribution of print media in this restricted sense.

The 'Western' View: An Example of US Media Studies in Africa

Our commentary and method hardly differs from, say, Raymond Williams's (1961) studies on the growth of the English media industry. In general, it is reasonable to suggest that such a study in Africa must be valid for only a limited media audience. Louise Bourgault's (1995) studies of Nigerian, Zambian and Kenyan newspapers among the Anglophone sector of postcolonial Africa are relevant in relation to the special place of the English-language press in South Africa. We focus on Bourgault's study, which was the first by a non-African to really break with received western libertarian notions of the press in Africa.[3] A strength is that she tries to understand the workings of the African press and broadcasting from local perspectives and practices – rather than via imported theories of media alone. In opening up this new approach, however, we also argue that some conceptual problems arise. We deal with these later.

Nigeria

Nigeria's pre-independence press was controlled by a range of local and metropolitan interests (Bourgault, 1995: 154–7). Local interests produced papers reflecting anti-colonial sentiment, ranging from expatriate-owned urban sheets (*Lagos Weekly Record*) to indigenous press chains producing regional weekly and daily titles (e.g. Nmamde Azikiwe's *West African Pilot*, *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* and *Southern Nigerian Defender*). After the Second World War, the nationalist resistance acquired its own mouthpiece in the form of the *Daily Service* (Bourgault, 1995: 155–6). The technical production quality of most of these titles was rudimentary. When the London-based Mirror Group bought up several papers in Anglophone West Africa, their capital advantage changed matters drastically. Recapitalization of these titles brought:

> . . . *numerous innovations to Africa: tabloid page makeup, liberal use of illustrations and photos, human interest stories, short paragraphs and sentences – all of which were highly successful at home among the British working class. The indigenous press found itself out-competed. Circulation grew [rapidly to become] the highest in West Africa. (Bourgault, 1995: 156)*

Other British news corporations followed, notably the Thompson Group. Local titles were either bought out, or went out of print. Political movements, like the Action Group, produced their own 'campaigning broadsheet[s], staffed by political hacks rather than journalists' (Bourgault, 1995: 157).

Ghana

After independence, the metropolitan press groups quickly allied themselves with the new governments. In Ghana, the Mirror and Thompson titles allowed themselves to be taken over by a Press Trust (Bourgault, 1995: 157). In Nigeria the corporate press continued more or less as before; however, the state established the Nigerian National Press Limited in 1961 to produce its own titles (Bourgault, 1995: 159). Although these indigenous titles mirrored the oral style of the less educated mass readership, the foreign-owned press 'ominously' continued to present a 'Western view' (Bourgault, 1995: 186–199, 159).

Zambia

Zambia (originally Northern Rhodesia) had little in the way of an indigenous press under colonialism (Bourgault, 1995: 161–3). What titles it had were local expatriate organs like the *Northern News*, which served the Copperbelt region. However, other titles owned by one Alexander Scott had taken a more African-oriented line than the *Northern News*, amalgamating after 1960 to become the *African Mail* (later the *Central African Mail*). A corporate press only evolved after 1951 when South Africa's Anglo-American Group of mining, industrial and media companies bought out the *Northern News*. On independence, Anglo-American sold its share of *Northern News* to London-based Lonrho, which consolidated its press holdings into the *Times of Zambia*, the *Zambia Daily Mail* and the weekly *Sunday Times of Zambia*. These titles retained a strong expatriate influence. Financial burdens facing the more locally focused *Central African Mail* led to the state buying out Scott and renaming the paper *Zambia Mail* (later the *Zambia Daily Mail*). Ultimately, the ruling party that transformed Zambia into a one-party state in 1972 took over the Lonrho papers.

Kenya

Kenya's press history exhibits an interesting contrast between locally owned titles serving settler interests, on the one hand, and a foreign-owned group, on the other hand, that engaged with African issues (Bourgault, 1995: 163–7). The local press group was started in 1902 by a Mombassa businessman of Asian origin, and expanded from a single title, the *East African Standard*, into the regional Standard Group of newspapers. Right up until independence, Standard titles reflected and defended only white and Asian expatriate interests even though owned by local business. Bourgault (1995: 163) records media scholars' reports of the 'shock and dismay of many readers when the British government finally announced that Kenya would be independent. The *Standard* had largely ignored the "winds of change" sweeping over Kenya and the British Empire in the 1950s.'

The expatriate press group began publishing in 1960, when the Aga Khan and the Ismaili Muslims financed the Nation Group, or the East African Newspapers Limited (Bourgault, 1995: 164). Advanced printing techniques and bold publishing gave the Nation Group titles wide appeal, and with 'the most extensive string of correspondents in all of East Africa' (Bourgault, 1995: 164) they were able to cover indigenous issues widely.

However, indigenous ownership of newspapers in Kenya and the rest of East Africa was not as extensive as that among expatriates. The indigenous population in East African colonies did not develop trading and labour classes as occurred in West and Southern Africa (Bourgault, 1995: 164). Indigenous-owned presses came and went, in Kenya many of these under the guidance or encouragement of Jomo Kenyatta. Eventually, the colonial authorities sanctioned the establishment of the Kenyan Vernacular Press in 1952 (Bourgault, 1995: 165). After independence, the Kenyan state more or less encouraged the continued existence of a pluralistic independent press, although the broadcast sector was rapidly nationalized (Bourgault, 1995: 166–7).

Evaluation

In all three regions, Bourgault finds post-independence press practice in something of a professional dilemma. On the one hand, there is the need to produce a professionally competent product. Since independence, most titles upgraded technically and developed their staff's capacity to use the new equipment – indeed, Bourgault herself spent many years as a volunteer trainer in West Africa. On the other hand, journalists encountered problems of publishing within the political constraints entailed by a readership who were members of an essentially oral culture. Bourgault (1995: 185–99) analyses many examples of oral cultural qualities embodied in actual reporting practice. What is important is her further analysis of the relationship between these reporting styles and the political culture that evolved along with the alienated elites.

Bourgault's general analysis of 'mass media' in Africa begins from the premise that the early media-in-development theories of Daniel Lerner and Wilbur Schramm overestimated the behavioural C–M–R effects of mass media messages. Bourgault (1995: 7–18) uses Walter Ong's (1982) analysis and description of oral societies to make theoretical sense of how colonialism influenced post-independence politics that rely on pre-modern meanings for legitimacy. According to Ong, 'western' media follow a form of language and argument that mirrors a linear, sequential and consequential logic. On the other hand, media messages in sub-Saharan Africa make sense to their audiences when they mirror the oral tradition's logic: they are additive, aggregative, agonistic and homeostatic (Bourgault, 1995: 8–15). Thus postcolonial media in Africa also operate in as far as they reflect a certain conservatism associated with oral societies. The essentially 'mnemonic' character of knowledge in oral society militates against innovation 'because novelty represented a possible overload of the human memory circuits [*sic*]' (Bourgault, 1995: 12). Indeed, the concept of 'news' is a problem in orality, as is metaphor, for things are what they concretely are, and the words used express things they are (Tomaselli and Sienaert, 1990: 73).

Bourgault (1995: 2–4) follows Clifford Geertz (1973) in arguing that leaders in oral and traditional society are the 'spiritual symbol of a people', not subject to the same laws and necessities as ordinary community members. Whether ordered along kinship lines or beginning to develop into larger units of organization, power in traditional society has a special relation to the spiritual status of those who possess it (Bourgault, 1995: 4). The effect of colonialism on pre-colonial properties of African life was to encourage the growth of 'alienated elites' (Bourgault, 1995: 21–32). This 'alienation' evolved from the special tension that grew between elites' domestic and international obligations. On the one hand, as leaders of the newly independent nations they needed to forge national identities compatible with those in the already developed world. For this they needed to use their 'western' education for forging economic, political and other ties (Bourgault, 1995: 39). On the other hand, these same leaders also had to develop some kind of national consciousness among the populace. And not least, these elites formed part of the comprador bourgeoisies working on behalf of imperial capital. As such, they cultivated their spiritual statuses as a means of hegemony.

This combined 'underdevelopment', dependency and oral majority encouraged 'Big Man' power relations increasingly tied to systems of patronage (Bourgault, 1995: 34–7), especially during the Cold War. A 'cultural lag' emerged between the beliefs that had built up among Africa's indigenous 'oral majority', on the one hand, and the small, closely knit elites of administrators and party cadres on the other (Bourgault, 1995: 33–4, 227). Employment in both the media and other aspects of the formal economy therefore became a function of personal and party loyalty. Actual administrative and technical merit were secondary, even negligible, considerations (see Zaffiro, 1991). The elites' insecurity in the face of multi- and international economic demands, and the jarring class inequalities within their own societies, impacted on the ways in which the press went about its business (see Zaffiro, 2002).

Crucially, news stories touted the 'national identity' discourse, identifying the nation (or the national interest) with the 'Big Men' who controlled the systems of national, regional and local patronage (Bourgault, 1995: 34–7, 178). In effect turning the oral tradition (which had maintained social cohesion under colonialism) against the people who still adhered to it, the African press:

> . . . *has supported and bolstered corrupt systems of political patronage. In the post-colonial era the vehicle or channel of this ideology has been primarily the African mass media. In promoting patronage, the media have manipulated the symbols and misapplied the values of precolonial Africa in their bid for national unity. In the process they have become the* griots *or praise singers of the modern political order which has governed Africa for the last thirty years. (Bourgault, 1995: 227)*

For Bourgault, the solution lies in recognizing modernity's failure. She cites some examples of movements away from the social and cultural orders of modernity within the developed world (Bourgault, 1995: 231). These include a growing trend among younger Americans to settle in small towns; and the major influence of 'civil society' to mitigate against the 'by-products of modern life, with its never-ending cycle of industrial production and consumption' and the 'effects of hyper-individualism'.

For Bourgault (1995: 246) the solution lies in new social and political 'communitarian values' based in 'workers' cooperatives, peace movements, ecological movements and feminism'. These models, combined with those offered in various African community initiatives, will 'help to mitigate, in the short term, some of the nefarious effects and contradictions which the nation-state model and the modernity paradigm have imposed upon African government media' (Bourgault, 1995: 256). Yet Bourgault's resolution depends for its plausibility on several unsubstantiated assumptions about the modern condition. These assumptions about modernity ignore the political norms of emancipation, humanism and global equality that separate the modern (literate) era from preceding (oral) ages. For the present, we note that Bourgault's review of the historical trajectory of the press in Africa considers only the cultural and political environment of independence. She tends to shy away from the problematic of the *social realm* of modernity. This realm, as we discuss later, evolved within the different stages of national development since the European power system was negotiated at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648.

South African Print Media after Apartheid

The history of the South African press differs from that of the other African countries examined via Bourgault. The South African case is the history of ideology, political economy and neocolonialism and its opponents. Specific sectors of the press aligned themselves with different political tendencies after 1918. The English press, associated with English South African-dominated mining capital until 1996, provided a sustained defence of capitalism, and a muted criticism of apartheid, at least until the mid-1970s. The pro-apartheid Afrikaans press, connected to the ruling government (1948–94) was for, until the early 1980s, anti-capitalist and pro-Afrikaner national socialism. The less capitalized black and alternative presses were always anti-apartheid, largely anti-capitalist and pro-democracy (Tomaselli and Louw, 1991). All three presses arose out of literate cultures, servicing readerships themselves in political, class and economic antagonism vis-a-vis apartheid.

The end of apartheid in the early 1990s signalled new discursive and ideological terrains. The previous domestic ownership patterns were weakened as foreign capital invested in one of the four major press groups, and black-dominated capital bought into print, television and the entertainment industries, instantly catapulting it into the global economy. Labour now owned whole sections of the South African media, in conjunction with other conventional stock exchange shareholders. The previous ideological cleavages disappeared, and profit became the overriding concern within a free-enterprise economy. The viability of the internal market, the extent historically of investment in media and the power of South African capital ensured during apartheid that local media companies were largely protected from foreign ownership. Historically, apart from broadcasting, only the print media really crossed racial and class readerships, nearly always in the cities. In comparison, then, to Bourgault's analysis of other African countries, apart from radio (Mkize, 1992), orality was not the only factor impacting journalism or popular expression. The media were always of a high quality appearance, innovative in design, highly capitalized and South African-owned.

Even the Afrikaans press, though subject to internal division within Afrikanerdom, remained privately owned (Muller, 1987). Only one newspaper, *The Citizen*, like broadcasting, was under the direct influence of the apartheid government.

In general, local studies of the South African press have incorporated historical materialist analysis as far as anti-apartheid scholars have been concerned. In contrast, those supportive of the state examined the media within frameworks amenable to authoritarian control. Liberal analysis, which is also the preferred approach of foreign scholars, simply assumed metropolitan liberal discourses that elevated the English-language press as the only viable role model. Usually missing from these analyses is the political economy of the distribution of newspapers and magazines. Most scholars concentrated on issues of press freedom and state control. Thus Bourgault's emphasis on ways of understanding the daily operation of media within oral assumptions is entirely new.[4] Questions of structure, and how staffers resist or work within them, have been the emphases of the South African work.

Although there is a high level of illiteracy in South Africa, print media distributions do sometimes reach peri-urban areas, because of a more comprehensive transport infrastructure. Other communications infrastructures (wire-loop and cellular telephony, among others) also make it possible for news stories from these areas to reach the newsrooms. Thus even partially literate or illiterate people *know* that when some event strikes their community, somebody can get information about this to a newspaper in which (hopefully) the story will appear. It is worth noting that these infrastructures were already in place – albeit to a limited extent – in the 1950s. As provision was rolled out, so it became possible for news items to reach one or other of the print media. Since 1994, this 'connectedness' has become denser in leaps and bounds. The issue, then, is to account for the differences between South African media experience and that of the rest of the continent.

Africa and the Profusion/Confusion of Modern Consciousness

The various *imperial* powers subjected their African possessions to different styles of administration and control. Scholars have distinguished between the styles of British, French, Portuguese, Belgian, German and Spanish colonial regimes. However, the same scholars usually, like Bourgault, treat the result of different colonizations as the *uniform* imposition of the nation-state form *implicit* in the colonial project. Some have, however, questioned whether the concept of the nation-state is merely a '19th Century invention of Western development' based on 'politico-administrative zones for the efficient organization of industrial capitalism' (Shepperson, 1995). In short, a 19th-century political economy seems too narrow a base for covering the full historical and conceptual scope of the relation between colonialism and the national idea.[5]

At the end of the 20th century, the national idea stands at the summit of the following different historical phases (Shepperson, 1996):

1. An initial phase in which regional centres of spiritual and political power arose as Rome lost its control over Western and Central Europe. During this period

(the Renaissance) the idea of the nation takes root, associated with a specific language. Simultaneously, different groups struggle within proto-national territories over both linguistic *and* religious loyalties.

2. The crisis of the first phase (see Toulmin, 1990: 56–87) was resolved during this second phase. Between 1610 and 1690, national powers entrenched their identity around strong political centres. As the fallout of the Thirty Years' War settled, modern nations like France, the Netherlands and England identified themselves with both language and 'national' churches.

3. The rise of the Napoleonic Empire signalled the crisis of the second phase. The third phase of national development resolved this crisis through socioeconomic centralism (Arendt, 1958a). From around 1830, the national idea became identified with national arrangements for control of the means of production. This is the period in which national powers, established during and after the second phase, aspired to constitute themselves as Great Powers, national consciousness coming to depend on disposal of an empire (Kennedy, 1989).

4. The third period reached its crisis in the events of 1914–45 (Arendt, 1958b; Kennedy, 1989; Pirsig, 1992). The economic reductionism of the previous concept of nation gave way to a new phase, which put greater emphasis on intellectual issues. Politics and economics became increasingly an object of the sciences rather than subject to the calculus of utility of power. Former Great Powers allied themselves ideologically into 'Super' power blocs, following adherence to the super-ideologies of capitalism and socialism (Kennedy, 1989).

5. With the final collapse of 19th-century colonialism after 1945, the conception of the nation as the basic unit of liberation emerged (Nkrumah, 1970). Based on the Versailles model imposed on the territory of the erstwhile Austro-Hungarian Empire, newly independent states constituted themselves in the form of *nation-states*.

This periodization reveals a *confusion of national consciousness* (Shepperson, 1996: 399–401). All these influences are present to some degree in all kinds of national groupings.[6] However, there is a more germane reason for taking this view of modernity's development: the time at which 'media' become a reality and not just a retrospective potential. This is important, because locating the beginning of the material history of a sphere permits one also to relate this realization to other parallel developments.

Ong's orality thesis proposes that Gutenberg's 'technologizing of the word' is the definitive beginning of the end for European (and later, of course, of global) oral culture. This essentially reproduces McLuhan's (1962) conception of the 'Gutenberg galaxy', in which with hindsight the invention of moveable type printing brought about a fundamental reordering of the total human condition. We are aware that our own periodization of the modern era is equally as arbitrary. However, our point is that the media that form the object of media studies did not emerge the day after Gutenberg released his Bible. The first media *product* of the era that fits the bill for what we today call media studies was the national daily newspaper. It is equally decisive that the 'medium' of this product was not only the steam-powered press,

or the hot-metal typesetting machine, or whatever, but also the nationwide railway network.

Two elements of our argument have to be brought together here. First, the fundamental importance of Shannon's mathematical model of communication: no matter what theory one uses to analyse and criticize the encoding and decoding and other steps in the communications chain, the *means of transmission* for the first 'mass media product' – *as media studies understands the concept* – was the railway. This introduces the second point of our strategy: the railway becomes a reality (in C.S. Peirce's sense of some practice that people can use in their everyday environment) during the third stage of the Modern Age according to our period-ization. However, this was the period of the Great Powers, before the Allied powers of 1939–45 conceived the nation-state as a solution to Great Power problems. At the dawn of the media age, still other developments were taking place aimed at resolving the crisis of the second stage of modernity:

- The entrenchment of political institutions arising from the Congress of Vienna (1815) at which the Napoleonic War had been resolved (Kennedy, 1989: 178–80).
- The institutionalization of systems of public finance that enabled great national projects to be underwritten (Kennedy, 1989: 184–5).
- The growth of specialized systems of technical education in the service of the armed formations needed to maintain the balance of power resolved at Vienna (Kennedy, 1989: 184–5).
- And the 'steady and then (after the 1840s) spectacular growth of an integrated global economy, which drew ever more regions into a transoceanic and trans-continental trading and financial network' (Kennedy, 1989: 183).

These developments signify the entrenchment of the 'Social Realm' (Arendt, 1958a). Before the explosion of imperial activity after 1870, the social realm was by no means as pervasive a phenomenon as Arendt saw it a century later. Yet the settlement of the Napoleonic conflict permitted a stable realm of administrative competence to evolve, ensuring that producers could carry on their business and distribute and trade their goods more or less unhindered.

This emerging realm of competencies removed responsibility for and decisions about the distribution of messages from the ideological control of political actors. They could still generate public messages, but they did not directly control who received them. In effect, this 'social' realm intervenes between the spaces in which people enact their cultural experience (Shepperson, 1995) and the 'public' realm of political and ideological action (Arendt, 1958a: 60–5). Because the boundaries between these spaces of everyday life are very fluid, Habermas (1989: 176) observes somewhat pessimistically that the 'process of the politically relevant exercise and equilibration of power now takes place directly between . . . private bureaucracies, special interest associations, parties and the public administration'. Yet in the third and fourth stages of the development of modern nations, the subjection of these transactions to regulation permitted regular services to develop, not exposed to arbi-trary political impulses. It is important that along with the growing competence of

service providers like rail operators there was also a growing sphere of administrative competence: media became a sphere of administrative, financial and distributive competence in their own right. Crucially, a media sphere was only possible in relation to competence in the technological and operational advances in nationwide transportation. Professional regulation and relatively reliable infrastructures are what differentiate South Africa from other African countries.

Why the Rest Lost the West

The foregoing interpretation of the origin of mass media is relevant for postcolonial media studies because it challenges development theory in a different way. The problematic of postcoloniality becomes clearer when one looks more closely at the collapse of the empires within which were established the colonies in the first place. The major imperial centres after 1884 were powers established under the trajectory of the first two phases of modernity.[7] This kind of nation essentially bled to death at Tannenburg, Caporetto and on the Marne between 1914 and 1918. This concept of nation reached its financial limits, its identity as a means of waging war, at Versailles (Kennedy, 1989: 358, 373–4) and Brest-Litovsk. The compromise concept that the victors imposed on those nations decreed on dissolving the Habsburg Empire was the first embodiment of the nation-state. To describe the development from a media studies point of view, the nation-state in crisis under globalization is a construct imposed three-quarters of a century ago onto an already globalizing economy. Those who imposed the idea did not necessarily do so with the intention of reconstituting their own countries in the same way.

For the problem of media, media studies and development, this analysis defines the political status of the West. Politically, the West differs from the developing world because the former *does not comprise nation-states at all*. The West comprises those powers that defined themselves during the second and third phases of the evolution of the national idea into material realities. What media studies tends to assume is that the entire trajectory leading to the present-day media infrastructural and administrative capacity is an *ideal*. If therefore one proposes that media studies can be detached from its 'western' influences, then it is incumbent to show how media are possible without the structural, technical and administrative bases of the West. This is where studies of orality come into their own (Ugboajah, 1986). Oral performance often defines the content of the new electronic media, extending literacy into what McLuhan calls secondary orality (broadcasting) (McLuhan and Fiore, 1967). This still requires a social realm in which to operate and administer distribution of these kinds of messages.

To return to our 'fundamentalist' position on the concept of a medium: for a people (whether as a nation, a region or a transcontinental grouping) to attain media independence means that they must nurture and reproduce a cadre of competent persons (a class, if you like) who will find their vocation in the social, economic and political structures that make media possible. The Third World cannot hope to develop a media system that is somehow detached from the West until such time as Third World people can independently build, maintain, extend, innovate within

and sustainably operate these structures. This conclusion demands that we clarify our position on existing media studies based, like Bourgault's, on interpretations of what defines the 'authenticity' of postcolonial society. Put differently, what about oral traditions? What about the natural community of indigenous peoples? Does our interpretation invalidate all the research into different receptions of media products? In the next section, we argue that these studies are perfectly valid in their own right; however, we conclude that as *media research* they are presently perfectly superfluous outside the developed world.

Media Studies as Pseudo-Knowledge

Media require the infrastructure and competencies necessary to sustain the material bits and bobs for information distribution. To know that a community has a special kind of oral cosmology neither empowers that community nor entails any greater compassion on the part of members of other societies. If this sounds callous, it is worth recording an African thinker's response to another African's reflections on the purported nature of 'authentic' African Being. Leopold Senghor (1964) held that the African personality was more attuned to nature than the western personality. In effect, Senghor used 1920s European phenomenology to paint a picture of *negritude* that coincides almost perfectly with Ong's description of the oral tradition (Hickey and Wylie, 1993; Masolo, 1994).

Responding to this, a Kenyan philosopher has called into question the independence such a portrait allows African people. Already a concept 'modelled and moulded' in a foreign debate sparked by the collapse of the Great Power system, Senghor imposed these notions on:

> . . . the man of negritude, compelling him into withdrawal and mere exhibitionist demonstration. The man of negritude is a victim of intellectual, cultural, economic, and political castration. In negritude, black people are represented as having felt satisfied with merely singing praises in admiration of each other, exalting their ontological essence – blackness. While black people engaged in this pressure exercise, the cunning white man took advantage of their passiveness and continued to exploit them. (Masolo, 1994: 36)

The thrust of the African Authenticity tendency *within Africa* thus leads to a politics of inwardness, rejecting the means whereby African (and other Third World) peoples can contest their subaltern status. It is instructive to compare the orality and *negritude* theses with 19th-century British bourgeois class analysis. George Eliot, for example, in her capacity as editor of the *Westminster Review*, describes the 'servant classes' in terms that are almost identical to both ethnic and oral discourse (Eliot, 1963).

The point is that to study the experiences of such oral communities is to erect a cultural curtain around them. Media studies that begins from the idea that orality is a *counter* to the stresses of modernity already places a bar on overcoming the political contradictions of modernity. The communal space of oral experience is common to *every* human being (Tomaselli and Shepperson, 1997): the problem is that people without literacy are trapped inside their communities unless they can converse in the oral style of other communities. Modernity is indeed a literate condition, but

literacy is always a 'supplement' to the oral condition (no matter how dangerous). Decisively, the *social realm* is a literate one within which people as members of communities can in fact belong to several. As Heller and Fehér (1988: 97–103) have stressed, the spread of modernity across the globe has made it possible for people in the social realm to become the kinds of organizations Bourgault believes are the solution to modernity!

What media studies in the non-western world must reflect on is whether it does not end up isolating the cultures whose identity it advocates. This isolation will most surely be aggravated if practitioners in the field teach their students that audiences must simply continue, 'satisfied with merely singing praises in admiration of each other, exalting their ontological essence' (Masolo, 1994: 36). The media as 'praise singers' has become a problem all over Africa (Bourgault, 1995: 182). This kind of knowledge, the ethnography of authenticity, creates media that entrench the divide between the West and the rest. What will break this divide is the establishment of the missing social realm, the whole historical evolution of which is entrenched in western national powers but absent (more or less) from African nation-states. Media studies, with its focus on cultural issues, cannot in its present forms do this. Media *research*, on the other hand, can do a whole lot.

Conclusion: Redisciplining the Disciplines

The social realm covers, coordinates and where necessary regulates the competencies needed to sustain and expand the infrastructures of modernity. These infrastructures and their associated fields of competence are the precondition for media. We have examined print, strategically choosing it because it most radically demonstrates the structural and material bases of media practice, and the schism between orality and literacy. If print relied on railways and later air transport, then information technology media rely even more on space travel structures to get communication satellites in place. These considerations place a clear imperative on those wishing to tackle the West and its values on equal terms: get better than them. For media to make their non-western mark outside the powers of the West, non-western nations must develop their social realms.

This means, for example in South Africa, extending to the previously disenfranchised those infrastructures and the associated expertise denied them by apartheid. This does not mean taking on volunteer media producers who will broadcast or distribute recordings of local storytellers. It does mean expediting school building programmes. It means expanding the stock of skilled builders, technicians and administrators needed for building schools – and roads, hospitals, housing, factories and everything else.

From the media point of view, strengthening the social realm requires research into how societies can lessen their dependence on the western powers' near-absolute monopoly on competence. This is not purely an intellectual property issue, but certainly media research will seek to delineate shortfalls in local copyright protection and marketing structures, administrative competence and technical capacity. These are not the teaching content of media studies, but of finance and

accounting, law, engineering and the hard sciences. Media research can harness these competencies, but media studies cannot teach them. The Third World concern with media, in other words, is the need to carry out research into just what *isn't there* as a precondition for an independent media-social realm. Yet there remains the combined appeal of media studies and the intrigue of 'undeveloped' cultures. Steven Maras (1998: 202) considers the potential for faculties to embrace communications studies as 'a way of "harvesting" overseas full-fee paying students . . . fulfilling the imperative for the Humanities to become more entrepreneurial'. Dress this need up in an appeal for First World students to experience Africa's 'enchanting darkness' (Hickey and Wylie, 1993), and the Third World ends up once again as a resource-base for western (academic) adventurers beefing up their *curricula vitae*.

In the postcolonial world, media studies suffers from the First World tendency towards the emergence of 'megadisciplines' during the 1980s (Maras, 1998: 203ff.). Maras (1998: 205) uses both communications studies and cultural studies as examples of this tendency for using their defining topic as 'a fiction against which to disarticulate the primacy of other disciplines'. To return to our earlier, brief discussion of the notion of critique: what internal dynamics drive the kind of decisions that lead Third World universities to establish media and communications courses when the material conditions for media are rudimentary at best and non-existent at worst?

We think our approach to the concept 'media' through the notion of the social realm clarifies, to an extent, some of the confusion prospective Third World students confront when they enter universities. Specifically, what can one make of the options available from, among others, the following sample of course offerings?

- Journalism and media studies;
- Cultural and media studies;
- Media and policy studies;
- Media and development studies;
- Media and reception studies;
- Gender and media studies;
- Media and political studies; and so on.

In discussing the trajectory of Australian academia, a space within a far more developed social realm than is the case in Africa, we agree with Maras (1998: 203) that this is largely a 'methodological' problem relating to issues of curriculum development and pedagogical strategies. In the absence of a fully developed social realm, on the other hand, where do graduates go in, say, Uganda, where whole areas have lost a generation because of AIDS?

The megadiscipline of media studies may certainly have its place in institutions that need to compete for funding with other institutions in an educational system endowed with an embarrassment of infrastructural riches. By setting itself up as a 'fiction' to 'disarticulate the primacy' of more traditional areas of study – engineering, the hard sciences, mathematics and so on – media studies even helps to mask the shortfalls of First World secondary school systems that do not prepare prospective students for value-added careers in production. In the Third World, these

manoeuvres almost appear to be a surrender, an admission that the postcolonial condition will be a continuation of the imposed subalternity of the independent peoples.

In this context we conclude that one central strategy in loosening the West's stranglehold on intellectual competence is to begin dismantling the megadiscipline tendency. Media studies is as good a place as any to start, although in South Africa it is becoming clear that a growing number of academics are turning to cultural studies to cement their institutional security (Cooper and Steyn, 1996; Murray, 1996; Nuttall and Michael, 2000; Steyn and Motshabi, 1996; van Staden, 1996). In closing, we should urge those who want to study media issues in the developing world to recognize the trends that make the megadiscipline of media studies attractive to western academics. In doing this, the *pseudo*-disciplinary essence of the kind of 'field studies' we listed above will become clear, especially in relation to what *other* disciplines can show about the condition of developing countries' social realms. Yet this does not rule out multidisciplinary research into the postcolonial world's media matters. It simply means that researchers must counter the pseudo-disciplinarity of imported media-theoretical models. By synthesizing all those non-media findings that define the (lack of) the existing social realm, it will become possible in the end to present something relevant to teach to undergraduates.

Notes

1. Windschuttle was making a distinction between 'media studies', which obfuscates, and 'journalism', which tells the truth.
2. Critique, according to Immanuel Kant ([1781/7] 1933: 9), is a 'call' to that which is subject to critique, 'to undertake anew the most difficult of all its tasks, namely, that of self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to [it] its lawful claims . . . not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own . . . laws'.
3. More recent publications on the African media have, of course, been published since. See, for example, Nyamnjoh (2005) and Hyden et al. (2002) Our dialogue, however is with Bourgault.
4. Oral analysis has been, however, applied to cinema (e.g. Tomaselli et al., 1999).
5. Bourgault (1995: 247, n. 22) summarily dismisses the political economy of the nation-state in a footnote:

   *The period of mercantile capitalism of the sixteenth century is said to have given rise to the nation-state and to the scientific method. The scientific method had a penchant [*sic*] for objectification of things and people.*

   This is the limit of what Bourgault has to say about the central political problem facing the postcolonial global world. This kind of assured and unreferenced assertion assumes that 500 years of history is something that needs no critical analysis. Given the sort of millenarian new-age claptrap one reads on conspiracy-theory websites, Bourgault comes across more as reciting a mantra instead of developing scholarship.
6. Aside from affecting modes of national identity in Africa's postcolonial sovereign nation-states, they also influence:

   • Linguistic-ethnic minorities who lay claim to national recognition; this covers Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo Province of Yugoslavia, Basques in Spain, the Ainu in Japan and the Zulu of South Africa, among others;
   • Long-established settler populations in old colonial territories, like the Afrikaners in South Africa, the Protestants of Northern Ireland and Americans of African origin in the US; and

- Local majorities in dispersed nations, like the community of Bougainville in the Solomon Islands and the Moro peoples in the Philippines.

However, these different collectivities are part and parcel of the modern era. At the same time, each takes recourse to concepts or values deriving from the historical development of the national idea, and which remain sedimented in contemporary discourse.

7. Germany and Italy may appear to be special cases, but the impetus for their respective national formations remained rooted in earlier rather than contemporary conceptions of nationality. See Owen Chadwick (1975).

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