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Whose News? Control of the Media in Africa

Anita Franklin & Roy Love

In deciding to devote an issue of the Review to ‘the media’ in Africa it soon became obvious that we would have to be selective. There is no way that a single issue of a journal devoted to continental coverage could accurately reflect what is a vast and heterogenous field, containing widely differing interpretations of the term ‘media’. The usage of the term ranges from references to the various means of popular entertainment, mainly via radio, television and film, through to news reporting by a variety of channels, both internal and external to the country being reported on; and it may also apply to other information processing and transmission, often for educational purposes at popular level such as AIDS awareness or public health programmes, while finally it can embrace the subtle and not so subtle world of advertising and product promotion by international and local companies. The very act of selection, however, also serves to highlight a substantial gap in outlets for debate and analysis of contemporary trends in Africa in this important area.

In the western academy the study of ‘media’ tends to be a sub-set of the more broad ranging and eclectic discipline of ‘cultural studies’. Although the use of post-modernist approaches can seem rather esoteric and removed from political economy, insights from that quarter can nonetheless generate an awareness of how messages and meanings are created and controlled and have lessons for observers of and in Africa. The construction of messages during the ‘encoding’ of news, or entertainment production, passes through filters of language, often one alien to the viewers and listeners, of ideology, usually a westernised capitalistic one, and of history, usually that of the powerful, in an interlinked network which not only predetermines the message and its form but also the world view of the recipient through past contacts from related sources. None of this is new, of course and classic analyses are found in the work of Gurevitch et al. (1982) and in Herman and Chomsky (1988) and in the implications of communications theory when overlaid with dominant beliefs and values (Fiske, 1990).

In recent years a greater awareness of media bias at various levels has emerged, prompted in many respects by the aftermath of the Gulf war on the one hand and by confusion and doubt over the role of media in complex emergency situations such as those witnessed in recent years in central Africa. Increasingly we find ourselves asking to what extent has the media become an (over-influential) actor in the events which it portrays?

Care is needed, however, in distinguishing between overt political control of media content, whether from national or international state controlled agencies, in both peace and war situations, and the less explicit forms which permeate like an ‘argument of insidious intent’ through the filters described by Herman and Chomsky in their ‘propaganda model’: filters, that is, of ownership, advertisers, news sources,
and what they termed ‘flak and anti-communism’. As institutionalised phenomena such filters are the more threatening to freedom and democracy in the long run. This distinction between open and institutional forms of control is paralleled with another; that of ownership and ideology. To the extent that one still talks about the concentration and centralisation of capital the pattern that appears to be emerging in international and national media ownership conforms with expectations. Although scope exists within the technology for smaller independent operators (and some of these possibilities are indicated by Paterson in this issue) the larger scene is increasingly dominated by multinationals like Time-Warner, Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation and Sony. The political economy of media ownership, its concentration and its implications for programme content (whether in TV, film, video, radio, newsprint, or electronic form) is as much a matter of concern as is dominance of the food, armaments or automotive industries within a globalised capitalism. This presumes private ownership of course, and given this, the primary objective in content selection must remain the presentation of receptive audiences to advertisers. Concentration in one sense is therefore irrelevant while the dominant parameters are dictated by the market. Globally, however, multinationals are more effective deliverers of a uniform neo-liberal world view.

In linking news, entertainment and information content to capitalist market forces it becomes evident therefore that the values and beliefs, the ideology, of that set of social forces must permeate the production, dissemination and absorptive process. This, of course, is nothing new, and it is the prior dispensation through colonial discourse and its subsequent manifestations within neo-colonial dependency mechanisms that makes so much of contemporary media content from the west appear uncritically acceptable to audiences elsewhere around the globe. This extends to the respect given to BBC world news, and to the apparent authority with which other international news broadcasters are received. In other words, it is not only the purveyors of news and entertainment, the ‘encoders’ in Hall’s terms, that carry the cultural legacy of colonialism within their discourse but also the recipients as they ‘decode’ with a mixed set of values from that same past.

At least two major strands may be picked up from this. One is the perception of Africa itself that is portrayed and another is the accusation of cultural imperialism. A third aspect relates to the increasing technological sophistication which allows ever greater ‘time-space compression’ and the implications of this (see Barker, 1997). On the one hand, perhaps the latter marks greater opportunities for ‘local’ participation in the media, via internet, digital television. Who can say what difference this kind of participation could make to localities who are not seen as major players in the media? On the other hand, those with access to these new forms of media participation may not use them in ways that challenge the status quo.

In recent years public perception of Africa in the west has been dominated by images of famine, war, refugees and state collapse, images that give credence to certain political analysts who forecast a ‘coming anarchy’ or Huntington’s ‘new barbarism’. and yet, paradoxically, there are other images of game parks, palm lined beaches, and colourful local customs which continue to be promoted in a different literature, that of the travel brochures for Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Gambia and South Africa, for instance. A ‘white’, sanitised view of Africa perhaps, but so too is the other, chaotic, view ‘white’, reflecting essentially racist constructions of African people and cultures as at once attractive and ‘primitive’ that has been endemic to the European view for several hundred years.
Said (1993) and other cultural critics have taught us that the west has been able to define and control the world’s problems, not only at the level of the material, which political economy is happy to explore, but just as importantly, at the level of ideas. In other words, what is considered worth knowing about the world is defined and controlled by the west. And the media in all its globalised forms can be seen as an agent in this enterprise. What needs further exploration is the way in which the west’s explanations for events in Africa become common-sensical and ‘only natural’.

It is also easy to find examples that would provide evidence for the transference of a dominant culture in all its forms. From the transmission of soap operas, sporting events, game shows through to the format of news programmes, the dress of presenters and their age, appearance and sex, a standardised, patriarchal, conforming set of social relations is imparted in the international media. Where other regions of the world are represented it is most often in the context of disaster caused by nature, corruption, or terrorism and/or in terms of how the events affect the west. Thus, although there has been considerable emphasis on the financial crisis of the industrialised Asian nations this is merely a continuation of an interest in their financial prosperity for business investment that predates the crisis. Thus it is that in Addis Ababa, for instance, one can have a more accurate forecast of the next day’s weather in Hong Kong from CNN satellite than for drought prone regions in Wollo further north in Ethiopia itself.

Yet the accusation of cultural imperialism has been contested, not least in the sense that it implies an ineffective response from local journalists and creative artists, and neglect and disinterest by governments. It also overlooks the intense debate in recent years over the issue of hybridity, post-coloniality and the social values that are imbued in a ‘traditional’ culture. This is an area in which there are no easy insights for political economists and in which the scope for cultures of protest and resistance is often under-recognised. An analysis is offered by Hall (1992) who identifies a global mass culture which has emerged in the west, but which fails to become homogenised. Hall believes, in those spaces which are not homogenised exist the possibility for resistance, localised and vital, parts of which in turn are often later claimed (frequently via commercialisation) into global mass culture.

This Review has not been a forum for such cultural discourse analysis but some awareness of how debates in this area engage with the realities of power, official propaganda and the pervasiveness of dominant ideologies should inform the political economy of the media in Africa as a vehicle for the propagation of a given array of ‘unthreatening’ values.

Much has been written about the effect of the rapid speed with which electronic technology can transmit news and information from spatially distant parts of the world, and of how compact equipment means that both visual and sound reports can be filed from almost any part of any continent with relative ease. One consequence is that little time is available for considered analysis because of the competition between reporters to get ‘hot’ news to western TV news desks as rapidly as possible. In such contexts, preconceived ideas, prejudices and misinformation is all the more likely to be included. Images of catastrophe becomes increasingly important in order to attract attention of editors, and an impression of urgency and immediacy is essential if the attention of TV viewers is to be maintained. On the other hand, the very facility with which such information can be recorded and transmitted means that its repetition dulls viewer and reader critical perception, thus building a cumulative reinforcing of imagery of African countries and other ‘trouble spots’ such as Bangladesh as
perpetual ‘basket cases’, somehow outside the nexus of ‘progress’. This immediacy and technological facility on the other hand has had effects within the countries of Africa too, particularly in situations of civil strife, where there is competition for any lines of communication. In Khan’s article about Sierra Leone we see how a BBC interview was used for imparting information to one of the warring sides from its leader, and international journalists increasingly report a raised awareness amongst warlords, militia leaders and others of how the media could assist them. This, in turn, has caused journalists to reflect on the effects which their presence can have on the events that they are attempting to cover, and considerable reflection on this phenomenon has emerged from the reporting of the crisis in Rwanda from 1994. The reporter thus becomes part of the event being reported, adding a new dimension to the construction of that ‘event’ which may be hidden as far as the reader or viewer is concerned.

The articles included in this special issue address some of these fundamental issues concerning the role and performance of the media in Africa. We begin with Barnett’s important record of the struggle to control and determine the future direction of TV broadcasting in South Africa following the arrival of majority rule. Relationships between state and market took peculiarly contradictory forms during the apartheid period and the SABC was a characteristic legacy of that time. In the contest to control the future of TV in the country the interests of the old SABC itself, the ANC and its diverse constituents, various interested business parties, plus the ethnic objectives of Afrikaners struggled to maintain an influence. Barnett traces how the initial, prior to election, aims of the ANC gradually altered when in government, what role special commissions served, and observes the decline in influence of the IBA (Independent Broadcasting Authority) in the face of the powerful business lobby and its desire to annex the lucrative advertising potential of the South African market. In the process, state control also strengthened over non-commercial activities by bringing responsibility under the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Broadcasting. In a more wide ranging paper, Chris Paterson reviews the various ways in which TV broadcasting has been spreading across the entire continent, of how new technology allows for some smaller scale local forms of transmission, of how governments manage to control content (by prohibiting news programmes where commercial licences are in operation) and of how satellite broadcasting tends to be geared to the audiences and markets of the more affluent Mediterranean and Asian geographical areas, though still able to be picked up in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

In an important section of his paper Paterson shows the dependency of most news reporting within Africa on a handful of western owned agencies such as Reuters and AFP, thus underlining the point made earlier in this editorial of how ‘news’ is manufactured through foreign reportage for consumption not only by audiences in North America and Europe but for recirculation back to other parts of Africa. In a sense this phenomenon is a reflection of the resource limitations that affect many fields, in this case the training of journalists and provision of adequate equipment to be able to compete against the international agencies. The consequences are evident in the poor quality of local newspapers in many countries. In another sense, however, there is often a failure to recognise that the format of news reporting in the west is the result of a long process of challenge to official propensity towards secrecy which has evolved the lobbying and investigative methods that are now expected. Where countries are still ruled by relatively small and exclusive elites this sort of public challenge is not easy to follow through and goes against customary ways of communication. The problems to which this can give rise are vividly illustrated by
Khan in his account of reporting on the conflict in Sierra Leone. Here the difficulties faced by reporters and newspaper managers in keeping distant from a partisan position are described in a way that indicates very clearly how media control lies at the very heart of politics.

In turn this raises questions about the role of media in the democratic process which Berger discusses by drawing parallels with debate about the media and 'development'. In demonstrating the limitations of the traditional 'modernisation' model, through the limitations of its contacts only to the elite in many countries and through the ways in which state ownership in many cases creates severe limitations, he comes round to the ongoing struggle in many countries between individual journalists and the authorities. The dangers introduced by official accreditation, which has been threatened in Zambia, are recognised and it is at the level of 'professionalisation' in the training and education of journalists that Berger sees the main arena of conflict that will determine the nature of the media's relationship to democracy. In a concluding section he also points to the increasing importance of the internet as a resource that is, so far, less easily controllable by the state, and which can serve to strengthen international solidarity in the struggle to maintain freedom of speech.

Negative stereotypes of Africa in the west have been framed over long periods and it is not difficult to find contemporary examples in the likes of *National Geographic*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, in numerous official brochures that emanate from aid agencies and western governments, and in travel brochures. Images of Africans in subordinate or picturesque roles quite simply reinforce those stereotypes which allow those in the west with their own agendas to project horrendous pictures of an Africa in incompetent chaos, and feeding their own domestic racism. This has been particularly significant in the United States and Karnik continues a line of research on media perceptions of Africa projected by US news reporting (Hawk, 1994) with a piece on how the *New York Times*, by reporting selectively, succeeds in perpetuating a simple explanation of the Rwanda conflict which projects blame on a supposed African propensity to 'tribal' violence, and which feeds on white fears of immigration, disease and criminal dependency. His article helps to map out the trends in coverage of this crisis and is particularly illustrative as a reminder that such conflict had most of its origins during imperialism. It is also of some importance that many journalists, through lack of historical knowledge, gave confused and garbled reportage – no doubt because the overall story was supposed to fit within the frame of tribal conflict, ignoring too the more technical backdrop of IMF inspired structural adjustment which narrow the boundaries of economic struggle.

Finally, in his analysis of the impact of adjustment, both external and what has been called 'revolutionary self-adjustment', in Burkina Faso, Ernest Harsch demonstrates how important an independent press can be in articulating criticism of government and in mobilising opposition, while at the same time providing a crucial resource for those like Harsch who provide the comment and analysis which enables the rest of us to arrive at the better understanding of the adjustment experience. There are, however, as we indicated in our opening paragraph, clear areas of omission in our coverage of 'media'. One of the most glaring to many readers will be the limited gender references, with the exception of the short piece by Patricia McFadden who has notably kept gender issues to the fore in her regular contributions to SAPEM (*Southern Africa Political and Economic Monthly*). To be sure, this probably reflects patterns of male dominance more generally in the areas associated with the production and distribution of media services, especially journalism, that we
ourselves are picking up. But this, and, increasingly, the extent to which 'new' technologies exacerbate the invisibility of African women and/or create new inequalities between then genders is an area to watch. We have also ignored the areas of cinema, music and video production and distribution. The constraints of space and time have led us to concentrate on 'news' related issues. In no way should it be construed from this that these areas are outside the remit of the Review or beyond the scope of analysis offered by political economy. In addition to questions of ownership and commercial exploitation there are not only those of cultural hegemony but also the related covert role which Western agencies have played in the past in attempting to infiltrate national creative circles in music, literature and art, and even in open propaganda. We would certainly welcome future critical contributions from those who are working or researching in such fields.

References


The Contradictions of Broadcasting Reform in Post-apartheid South Africa

Clive Barnett

This article examines the process of mass media reform in South Africa during the 1990s, with particular reference to broadcasting. It identifies tensions between the attempt to restructure broadcasting as a public sphere capable of supporting national unification and democratisation, the existence of socioeconomic differentiation and cultural diversity at sub-national scales and the pressures which impinge upon the broadcasting sector as a result of policies aimed at internationalising the South African economy. The formulation of broadcasting policy between 1990 and 1995 is reviewed, and the changes that have taken place during the implementation of restructuring and re-regulation from 1996 to 1998 are critically assessed. The article concludes that the intensified commercialisation of broadcasting is at odds with political objectives of transforming the mass media into a public sphere supportive of a diverse and independent civil society.

Media Globalization and Nation-building

The contemporary globalization of economic processes is often presented as undermining the ability of national governments to manage and regulate the economic activities located within their territorial jurisdictions. Rather than presenting an opposition between a globalising market and the nation-state, it is more appropriate to conceptualise a restructured nation-state as playing an active part in promoting those processes routinely subsumed under the convenient rubric of 'globalization' (Weiss, 1997). This alternative perspective on globalization is illustrated by the case of the media and telecommunications industries. In recent years, a series of global media and communications corporations have been formed through mergers and acquisitions. This concentration of ownership has been in turn associated with increasing convergence between the media and telecommunications technologies. Far from being a natural outcome of a self-generating process of inevitable economic evolution, the globalization of media and telecommunications industries and markets has depended on specific institutional conditions. Foremost amongst these has been the widespread shift from state regulation to market regulation in the 1980s and 1990s. This has been facilitated by state policies promoting the commercialisation, internationalisation, and sometimes the privatisation of industries and institutions previously constrained in the scale of their operations by specified public service considerations and overseen by particular forms of regulatory regimes. The state has therefore played a constitutive role in shaping the processes of restructuring which have led to the emergence of a transnational media system (Mosco, 1996).
The media and communications industries are central to the contemporary reconfiguration of political and cultural processes in two ways. First, mass media technologies and institutions serve as the medium of democratic communication and citizenship (Garnham, 1992). Different ways of financing, organising, and regulating the production and distribution of culture, information, and knowledge have consequences for the range and diversity of discourses and representations which circulate in and are accessible through the mass media. The processes of concentration, convergence, commercialisation, and deregulation which underlie the globalization of media economies have potentially negative implications for pluralism of access and the diversity of representations in the media. Second, the individual and group identities upon which political mobilisation is founded are increasingly formed using symbolic materials produced and circulated by modern mass media and communications technologies (Thompson, 1995). The new scales at which media economies are organised is often interpreted as threatening to erode the ability of national governments to regulate media and communications in the interests of national economic priorities and as a medium for national citizenship. The globalization of media and communications therefore represents a challenge to current understandings of the scales at which processes of political participation and identity formation can be articulated together. This article explores the ‘re-scaling’ of economic, political and cultural practices in a period of rapid globalization by critically examining the processes of media reform in South Africa since 1990 (Swyngedouw, 1997).

Broadcasting in South Africa has not historically provided a common space for public communication. Radio services have historically been used to reproduce notions of separate and distinct populations, with their own separate cultures, living in particular geographical spaces. Television, only introduced in the mid-1970s after bitter disputes within the ruling National Party (NP) over its possible deleterious effects (see Nixon, 1994), was tightly controlled by the state and explicitly organised along the lines of separate services for black and white audiences. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) has dominated broadcasting, and up until the early 1990s it served as the mouthpiece for the National Party’s apartheid ideologies. In the 1990s, the broadcasting sector has been reconfigured around the normative ideal of the electronic media serving as a single public sphere at a national scale, providing a space for democratic communication and national unification. During this period, public service broadcasting and its practicability in the South African context have been reconceptualised (Mpofu et al., 1996; Teer-Tomaselli and Tomaselli, 1996; Teer-Tomaselli, 1998).

South Africa is not the only example of the attempt to shape media policies with the aim of ensuring collective stability, political order, and national identity through the use of public communication systems. Such policies presuppose a congruence between the scales at which economy, polity and culture are organised (Collins, 1990). However, these assumptions, which have historically underwritten notions of public service broadcasting, are under intense pressure internationally. National unity as the normative ideal of broadcasting and telecommunications policy has come under increasing strain due to a complex combination of technological change, shifts in regulatory policies, corporate restructuring, and the globalization and de-territorialisation of cultural identities (Morley and Robins, 1995). Policy goals of integration different social groups ‘vertically’ into a single nation-state are increasingly in tension with the ‘horizontal’ integration of individuals and social groups across national boundaries that transnational systems of production, distribution and consumption of cultural commodities has facilitated (Collins, 1991). In fact, processes of economic
and cultural globalization have various potential consequences for patterns of identity formation: they might lead to the erosion of national identities; they might strengthen defensive national or exclusivist local or regional identities; or they might facilitate the development of new forms of syncretic, hybridized and less territorialized identities (Hall, 1992). In South Africa, one can observe traces of all three tendencies. With the end of apartheid, however, the dominant political imperative since 1994 has been to find new ways of building and promoting an inclusivist model of political integration which combines diversity within overall norms of unity. At the same time, there has been a steady drift towards a neo-liberal economic policy which prioritises integration into international networks of commodity production and distribution. In the print media, broadcasting, and telecommunications sectors, domestic markets have been opened up to penetration by foreign capital for the first time. While this strategy of internationalisation brings with it the likelihood of increasing regional, sectoral and socioeconomic inequalities across and especially within nation-states, the strategy simultaneously involves a relinquishing of certain traditional instruments of economic policy and management and therefore diminishes the abilities of national governments to manage these social tensions and contradictions.

Within both policy-making forums and broadcasting institutions in South Africa, understandings of the relations between the media and democracy have been tied closely to the rhetoric of nation-building. There are three broad understandings of this connection between broadcasting and nation-building. Firstly, there is the notion that radio and television can be used to disseminate symbolic representations of national unification and reconciliation. Secondly, the media and communications sectors are seen as being highly important strategic sectors in the process of economic development and reconstruction. Thirdly, the mass media have been identified as having a crucial role to play in extending processes of democratic participation. In the African National Congress’s (ANC) blueprint for post-apartheid transformation, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), democracy is conceptualised as being based in large part on widespread popular participation in decision-making processes. This was seen as necessitating a democratic communications and information policy, which envisaged a central role for a transformed media and communications system in the extension of democracy (ANC, 1994:133-135). These three notions of the relations between mass media and nation-building have not equally informed policy implementation. The role of the mass media in disseminating appropriate representations of national togetherness which also reflect South Africa’s cultural diversity has been given high priority since 1994. This symbolic notion of nation-building dovetails with an instrumentalist conception of the relationship between the mass media, diversification, and democratisation. Given the history of monopolistic broadcasting and an oligopolistic print media in South Africa, the ANC has equated democratisation with the introduction of more competition and the entry of so-called ‘black empowerment’ capital into the print and broadcasting media (Tomaselli, 1997).

The period since the ‘liberation election’ of 1994 has seen a dramatic upheaval of the broadcasting environment. This has primarily involved the transformation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) from a state-controlled broadcaster into an independent public service broadcaster. A new independent regulatory body, the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA), has overseen the transformation of broadcasting. This process has also provided the opportunity for the entry into this field of a number of new private sector interests. There have been rapid changes in programming formats on both radio and television (Maingard, 1997). The period
since 1994 has also been characterised by the embrace by the ANC-led government of a neo-liberal economic agenda aimed at re-inserting South Africa into the international economy. The treatment of the media and telecommunications industries as part of this strategy has had significant consequences for the path of broadcasting reform. The political and cultural considerations which follow from treating the media as essential to the maintenance of the public sphere imply an orientation towards national and sub-national scales of organisation and the creation of a robust and independent regulatory regime for broadcasting. On the other hand, the economic treatment of media and communications implies an orientation towards the international economy, and a shift in the approach to broadcasting regulation. The attempt to construct a media system capable of sustaining a pluralistic national identity and equal access to information does not necessarily sit comfortably with the imperatives which follow from considering the media and communications industries primarily as part of a general economic strategy of reconstruction and development.

**Formulating Broadcasting Policy**

The early 1990s witnessed a series of intense debates over the future role of the mass media in South Africa, with various interests developing positions on issues such as the future role of the SABC, the need for independent regulation, and the financial basis of a restructured broadcasting system (Louw, 1993). These positions evolved during a period when the National Party was endeavouring to unilaterally restructure the SABC prior to any political settlement. In response to these efforts, three broad tendencies emerged in broadcasting debates during the period from 1990 to early 1992 (Horwitz, 1996:42-43). First, a number of civil society groups on the left, including representatives of trade unions, church organisations, academics and lawyers, argued for a strong public service broadcasting sector, as part of a pluralistic broadcasting environment regulated by an independent agency which would guarantee diversity by extending the scope for both commercial and community broadcasting (Jabulani, 1991). Second, representatives of existing and prospective private commercial broadcasters argued for a more thoroughgoing deregulation of broadcasting and for greater commercialisation. Finally, there was a more centralist, statist position with strong support within the ANC, which mistrusted moves towards re-regulation as attempts to deny any new government the same media power available to the outgoing one. Internal debates within the ANC culminated in the publication of a Media Charter in January 1992 (Teer-Tomaselli, 1993). Reflecting the ascendancy within the ANC of the pluralist position promoted by the civil society organisations, the Media Charter recognised the right to receive and disseminate information as a basic requirement of democratic citizenship and participation, and established a commitment to an independent public service broadcaster regulated by an independent body (ANC, 1992).

During the 1990-1991 period, there emerged a broad consensus on the principle of establishing an independent regulatory authority to oversee the transformation of the mass media. This was also a primary recommendation of the government appointed Task Group on Broadcasting in South and Southern Africa which reported during 1991 (RSA, 1991). Thus, when during political negotiations at CODESA (Convention for a Democratic South Africa) in early 1992, one of the few concrete issues settled was agreement to the principle of an independent regulatory authority for broadcasting and telecommunications. When multi-party negotiations resumed in 1993, the technical committee charged with working out the details for an Independent
Telecommunications Authority decided to separate telecommunications from broadcasting and put it to one side. This decision was made in the light of 'the need to create independent broadcast regulatory mechanisms as a matter of urgency', since elections were now imminent.' This decision did not preclude the merging of broadcasting and telecommunications regulatory structures at a future date. As a result, an Independent Broadcasting Authority Act was passed by the Transitional Executive Authority in October 1993 (RSA, 1993).

The IBA Act was the product of the political consensus that had emerged on the need to ensure that broadcasting be taken out of control of cabinet ministers, and made independent of direct government interference. The IBA is meant to establish an institutional framework which secures a plurality of independent broadcasters. This implies both the deconcentration of media industries and the separation of media from the state. The IBA Act provides for the regulation of broadcasting to promote the provision of a diverse range of sound and television services on a national, regional and local level which, when viewed collectively, cater for all languages and cultural groups and provide entertainment, education and information.

There is a strong emphasis upon regulating the market for broadcasting services in the interest of viable competition and diversity, by limiting crossmedia ownership and encouraging ownership of broadcasting services by 'historically disadvantaged groups'. But the IBA Act is also shaped by the political compromises of the period of negotiated transition which bought apartheid to an end. Most significantly, the IBA Act entrenched the rights of existing broadcasters. The IBA is bound by its founding legislation to 'protect the integrity and viability of public service broadcasting services'. This effectively translates into a responsibility to protect the financial viability of the SABC. And the IBA Act also guaranteed the existing broadcasting rights of the most important broadcaster after the SABC, M-Net, the private subscription television station set up with government agreement in the 1980s by the major Afrikaans and English-language press groups. The IBA's terms of reference mean its ability to reregulate the broadcasting system has been significantly constrained by the entrenchment of these existing interests.

The actual transformation of broadcasting could not proceed before the completion by the IBA of inquiries into three related issues: the means of protecting the viability of the public broadcaster; limitations to cross-media ownership; and local content quotas on South African radio and television. The ensuing 'Triple Inquiry' was a model of the new spirit of openness and consultation, although the extent of popular participation in the process tended to be rather limited (Martinis, 1996). The two main issues facing the Triple Inquiry were how much of the broadcasting market the SABC should be allowed to control in the future, and the related question of how a transformed SABC should be financed. Most groups who made submissions during the Inquiry agreed that the SABC should be significantly streamlined in order to open up space for new entrants. There was also widespread agreement that the SABC should reduce its dependence on advertising revenue. From the perspective of commercial broadcasters, the SABC took up too much of the available share of advertising expenditure, and thus restricted the potential growth of new broadcasters. Commercial broadcasters and advertisers sharply differentiated public service broadcasting from commercial broadcasting. For them, public service broadcasting should be the sole responsibility of a non-commercial broadcaster delivering educational, religious, and cultural programming which was not financially viable for commercial broadcasters; commercial broadcasters should be freed from public
service obligations to concentrate on their main task of delivering audiences to advertisers and profits to shareholders. In its submissions to the Inquiry, the SABC also worked on the assumption that public service broadcasting obligations were not likely to be imposed on new commercial entrants. It presented a centralist conceptualisation of public service broadcasting as the responsibility of a single, national public broadcaster. For the civil society organisations, the SABC's continued reliance on advertising revenues compromised its new public service mission. These groups conceptualised public service broadcasting as a set of obligations and responsibilities that extended to all broadcasters, including private commercial broadcasters. Given the likelihood that the SABC would continue to depend at least to some degree on advertising revenues, the failure to extend public service broadcasting provisions to new commercial broadcasters would put the national public service broadcaster at a serious competitive disadvantage, and thus threaten its long-term financial viability.

In contrast to the SABC's centralist model of public broadcasting, a more pluralistic, diversified, and regionally decentralised conceptualisation of public service broadcasting was presented by the influential 'Group of Thirteen' civil society groups. The Group of Thirteen represented community broadcasters, trade unions, churches and other organisations on the left who had been at the centre of campaigns for media reform since the early 1990s (see Currie and Markovitz, 1993). The issue of the scale at which public service broadcasting should be organised was in turn related to issues of cultural diversity, language, and the balance of power between national government and provincial authorities. A range of arguments were aired in favour of developing regional and provincial broadcasting services. The Group of Thirteen proposed that both provincial public broadcasting systems and community broadcasting at a local level be given equal priority alongside the restructuring of the national public broadcaster. The Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Corporation, based in the former homeland, also argued for a plurality of regional and national public service broadcasting systems as part of its efforts to retain its own independence. Privately-owned commercial broadcasters argued that regionally based broadcasting was a means of tapping unrealised advertising markets. This position has been articulated in particular by private broadcasters based in Cape Town, who have consistently argued that the economy of the Western Cape is the one province other than Gauteng that could sustain a regional commercial television station.

Amongst a range of independent civil society groups there was broad agreement that the role of broadcasting in representing and promoting the linguistic and cultural pluralism of South Africa, would be best served by a diversity of public and commercial broadcasters operating at both national and regional scales, rather than by a single, centralised national public service broadcaster. These diverse groups privileged a particular understanding of public service broadcasting in defining the relationship between broadcasting and nation-building. This understanding was shaped by a minoritarian impulse, whereby public service broadcasting was seen as a system which served a plurality of diverse publics rather than a single, integrated national audience. The political problem for this minoritarian conceptualisation of broadcasting in the South African context of the 1990s, was that it implied a regionally decentralised broadcasting system, and this carried too many echoes of the old-style of apartheid broadcasting, as well as running counter to the deep suspicion within the ANC of regionalist or federalist proposals for a restructured South African polity. The SABC, on the other hand, presented a 'nationalist' or majoritarian conceptualisation of broadcasting which prioritised the need to constitute diverse publics into a single national audience. The assumption is that a unifying national identity can be
developed through the collective consumption of programming. This vision has been vigorously pursued through the SABC's coverage of a series of media events as diverse as President Nelson Mandela's inauguration, the successes of national sports teams, and the annual Miss South Africa pageants.

Debates during the Triple Inquiry over the question of the scale at which broadcasting should be organised cannot be separated from the question of language in the new South Africa. Given that language policy was central to the old SABC's policies of separate channels and programmes for distinct racial and ethnic audiences, the reformulation of the language philosophy behind broadcasting has been central to the transformation of the public broadcaster in the 1990s. The Interim Constitution of 1993 recognised eleven official languages. This recognition was premised upon the functional multi-lingualism of most South Africans, but the decision is full of political ambiguity. On the one hand, this was a compromise decision that entrenches apartheid language policies by enshrining the status of nine standardised African languages along with English and Afrikaans. On the other hand, the Interim Constitution clearly prioritised individual rights over group rights, and included a clear commitment to upgrading the nine African languages from merely regional status to national status. The importance of this lies in the break it inaugurates with the conceptual triad of language-ethnicity-region upon which apartheid language policies, including broadcasting policies, had been based. The implementation of this new language dispensation involves the practical reconciliation of two apparently contradictory principles which underwrite the compromise enshrined in the new constitution: on the one hand, the commitment to extend and promote the use of previously marginalised African languages; and on the other hand, the principle of non-diminution of existing language rights upon which the compromise of eleven languages rests (Sachs, 1994).

The SABC has been the first institution to undertake the task of translating these general principles into practical measures (Heugh, 1994). It had been revising its language policies following the appointment of a new representative Board in 1993 in line with its new statement of 'Vision and Values', which committed it to providing fair, equitable, and accessible programming to all South Africans and rectifying past imbalances (SABC, 1993:1). The language issue was central to the SABC's submissions to the Triple Inquiry, being the basis of the defence against arguments that the corporation should be significantly downsized and that public service broadcasting should be decentralised. The main aim shaping the SABC's submissions to the IBA was the defence of its own financial viability from the imminent increase in competition which would result from the opening of the airwaves to new commercial broadcasters. The SABC translated the broad constitutional principles on language into an argument concerning the corporation's responsibility to provide equitable broadcasting coverage of all eleven of the new South Africa's official languages. It argued that the task of providing national broadcasting coverage in all eleven official languages was its sole responsibility, making the assumption that no public service obligations with respect to language would be imposed by the IBA upon new broadcasters. The language question thus provided the basis for the argument that the corporation should retain a much greater share of the available broadcasting spectrum than was being suggested by the other main interests lobbying the IBA. This stood in contrast to the arguments of the main civil society organisations. They argued that the SABC broadcast in only the four or five main national languages, and that provincial public broadcasters be set up to broadcast in the main languages of respective regions. From their perspective, one of the strongest arguments in favour of provincial broadcasting lay in the practical possibilities it offered to dealing with
the question of language diversity at both national and provincial scales. They argued
that the SABC was invoking an overly rigid interpretation of its language mandate as
part of an expansionary counter-thrust to the arguments that it needed to be slimmed
down. These disputes centred on the SABC’s television portfolio. Civil society groups
and prospective commercial broadcasters argued that the SABC should be limited to
just two television channels. This would make it less dependent on advertising
revenue, and the vacated third channel would be re-licensed as a commercial network
of regional stations. On its part, the SABC proposed retaining all three of its existing
channels, along with a full complement of eleven separate language radio stations.

The IBA’s Triple Inquiry Report was finally published in August 1995. In its main
proposals, it compromised between the centralist position of the SABC and the
pluralist position most forcefully articulated by the Group of Thirteen civil society
groups. While largely accepting the SABC’s own model of its language mandate, it
held that these could be met with only two television stations. It proposed that the
SABC be limited to only two television channels after 1998, with its third television
channel being re-licensed as a new commercial station with significant public service
obligations. The public broadcaster would also be obliged to sell eight of its
commercial regional radio stations, and further private metropolitan radio stations
would be licensed (IBA, 1995:912). The publication of the IBA’s blueprint was
followed by a period of intense lobbying of Parliament, which had final authority to
approve or amend the IBA’s proposals. In response to powerful representations by
the SABC, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Communications amended the
Triple Inquiry Report in February 1996, allowing the SABC to retain two of the
original eight radio stations earmarked for sale, and more importantly, all three of its
television channels. This decision revealed the political influence that the restructured
SABC carried with the ANC-led government. It represented a significant political
rebuff for the IBA, one which raised questions about its ability to implement policies
which impinged too closely upon established interests in the broadcasting sector.

Transforming Radio and Television

The completion of the Triple Inquiry opened the way for the systematic transforma-
tion of broadcasting to finally get underway. In February 1996, the SABC went ahead
with a long-planned re-launch of its television stations. The changes were heralded as
finally ending apartheid television. New channel identities explicitly reflected the
ethos of ‘rainbow’ broadcasting: SABC1’s new signature, for example, was ‘Simunye:
We Are One’. Rather than separating white and black audiences on separate channels
as in the past, the new portfolio combined and mixed different language groups in
different proportions on different channels. The previously mainly black channel
CCV-TV was re-launched as SABC1, the white channel TV1 as SABC2, and the third
channel upgraded into SABC3. SABC1, with a broadcast footprint covering about half
of the country, would focus on programming in the main Nguni languages, Zulu and
Xhosa, as well as English. SABC2, with the largest footprint covering about three
quarters of the country, would cover the main Sotho languages of Sepedi, Sesotho,
and Setswana, plus Afrikaans. SABC 3 is a commercially oriented English language
channel. Largely restricted to metropolitan areas, it is meant to cross-subsidise the
public service programming which would be mainly concentrated on the other two
channels with the more extensive broadcast footprints.

These changes marked the ascendancy of English as the dominant broadcasting
language on South African television, which now accounts for more than 50 per cent
of total coverage during prime-time on the SABC’s three television stations. The
SABC’s own research had established that English was the overwhelming preference
of programming in a second language (Thirion & van Vuuren, 1995). But the
dominance of English is also a reflection of the relative costs incurred in buying
imported English-language programming, especially from the United States, com-
pared to producing programming domestically in up to eleven languages. One of the
effects of the changes to television programming, highlighted by the ascendancy of
English as the main language on the SABC, has been the decline in the overall amount
of Afrikaans-language programming on SABC television. This is just one factor
behind the changing audience profile which has emerged since the television re-
launch. In the six months following the changes, while overall audience figures
remained largely unchanged, the balance of television audiences shifted significantly.
The proportion of ‘CIW’ viewers (Coloureds, Indians and Whites) fell, but this was
offset by an increase in black viewers (Financial Mail, 30 August 1996). This shift has
significant financial implications for the SABC. While its new television program-
ming portfolio reflected national population demographics, it did not reflect the
optimum commercial demographics for a broadcaster still heavily dependant on
advertising expenditure. The ‘CIW’ population remain the demographic groups who
are the main target audience for the South African advertising industry. The changes
meant that advertisers had fewer opportunities to reach affluent consumer audiences
through the SABC’s television services. For this reason, the changes in television
audience profiles during 1996 led to important changes in the distribution of
advertising expenditure across different media forms. For the first time since the
introduction of advertising on the SABC in 1978. Television’s share of advertising
expenditure declined relative to other media outlets in 1996, mainly due to a shift to
newspapers, especially to the Afrikaans-language press.

The changes to the SABC’s television portfolio contributed to an emerging financial
crisis at the corporation that became increasingly evident during the course of 1996
and early 1997. This was further heightened by the sell-off overseen by the IBA of six
(rather than the eight originally recommended in the Triple Inquiry Report) of the
SABC’s commercial regional radio stations. These profitable stations were a
significant source of revenue for the public broadcaster. This was the first opportunity
for black South Africans to gain access to ownership in the broadcasting sector. In line
with the IBA Act and Triple Inquiry Report, the successful bidders would have to
have significant shareholding representation from ‘historically disadvantaged
communities’. The regulatory framework for the sales therefore obliged white-owned
capital to forge partnerships with black empowerment consortia. The IBA’s criteria
for the regulation of radio included limitations on cross-media ownership, a concern
to ensure a viable market for diverse radio broadcasting, and a commitment to
promoting diversity of both ownership and programming. This meant that it did not
simply award each of the SABC’s commercial stations to the highest bidder, the
course favoured by the SABC itself. In September 1996, all six of the stations were sold
to groups with significant ‘black empowerment’ stakes. The completion of the sale
was hailed as ‘the first privatisation deal in South African history’ (Mail and Guardian,
20 September 1996). It marked an unprecedented restructuring of the ownership of
radio broadcasting, breaking the SABC’s sixty-year monopoly in this field, and
allowing the entry of black-owned and controlled groups into broadcasting, in
partnership with existing white-owned companies. The sales raised a combined total
of R521 million. This compared to the R606 million which would have been raised had
the SABC’s favoured highest bidders had been successful in each case. The highest
single sum of R320 million was paid for Highveld Stereo in Gauteng province, which
was awarded to a consortium composed of the burgeoning media and entertainment conglomerate Primedia Broadcasting, and the investment groups of the National Union of Mineworkers, the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union, and the Women's Investment Portfolio. Each of the other stations was sold to consortiums with significant representation by black empowerment capital and trade union investment groups. Other major black empowerment groups such as New Africa Investments Limited (NAIL) and Kagiso Trust Investments also acquired partial ownership of radio stations.

The restructuring of radio continued in late 1996, when the SABC re-launched its remaining portfolio of radio stations, breaking the model of radio used since the 1930s with new channel identities which did not refer explicitly to language or ethnicity. In March 1997, the IBA awarded seven new metropolitan radio licenses, four in Johannesburg and three in Cape Town. The IBA again ensured that the successful applicants had strong black empowerment credentials. With these stations expected to come on air in late 1997 and 1998, the IBA has overseen the successful diversification of radio broadcasting in terms of both ownership and programming, increasing the choice for listeners and facilitating the entry of previously marginalised groups into structures of ownership. Since 1994, the IBA has also licensed more than 100 community radio stations, more than 70 of which were on air by the end of 1996. This has created a whole tier of broadcasting that previously did not exist. Taken together then, the re-regulation of the radio sector can be seen as a strong vindication of the IBA's originally conceived role to oversee the opening up of the airwaves in the interests of diversity and democracy (Currie, 1996).

The changes to both radio and television during 1996 and 1997 provided the context for the worsening financial position of the SABC during this period. In mid-1997, the public broadcaster announced that it had registered a deficit of more than R60 million in the financial year 1995-6. This compared to a surplus of R106 million in 1994-5 (SABC, 1996). The causes of the SABC's financial problems are many and varied. They include the effects of the television re-launch and of the radio sell-off, which meant both a loss of revenue and an increase in competition. The SABC's annual expenditure has increased to cover the costs of increased local content and African language programming; of introducing regional splits on television, covering such important events as local elections, the proceedings of Parliament, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the integration of the former homeland broadcasters. The SABC's investment in satellite television, in the form of the analogue AstraSat system, has yet to show any significant return. And the level of non-payment of license fees has progressively worsened, reaching almost 60 per cent by the end of 1996.

The combined effect of all of these factors, in the continued absence of general government funding, is that the SABC has become even more dependent upon commercial revenue sources in the course of its transformation into a public service broadcaster independent of the state. The percentage of its revenue derived from advertising has increased from 71 per cent in 1992-1993 to 78 per cent in 1995-1996. In the same period, revenue from license fees has fallen from 23 per cent to 17 per cent (SABC, 1996). As this dependence upon advertising revenues increases, so the potential impact of any further increase in competition from new entrants into the television market become that much more serious. While the SABC's changes to programming introduced in 1996 were consistent with its new public service mandate, they tended to cater for what, in strict commercial terms, are marginal rather than cost-effective audiences. Given the structure of income distribution in
South Africa, the latter is composed of a very narrow segment of society. The conundrum that faces the SABC is that, as a public broadcaster with a mandate to reflect and promote cultural diversity, and provide educational, entertainment, and informational programming in eleven languages on a national scale, it has found itself increasingly reliant upon ‘a funding source that is under no obligation to ensure its continued existence’ (Freedom of Expression Institute, 1996:2).

With the onset of its financial crisis, in late 1996 the SABC undertook a Resources Review, with the aid of an international financial consultancy. The resulting McKinsey Report, published in March 1997, recommenced major cutbacks in programming, in-house production, and staffing levels. It was argued that this would cuts costs by R450 million immediately and reap R340 million in extra revenue. The report essentially proposed the sort of pruning that had been suggested by both civil society groups and commercial broadcasters during 1994 and 1995. The SABC’s management immediately accepted the proposals, despite protests from unions. By the end of 1997, the implementation of these recommendations had begun to restore a degree of financial stability to the corporation. Nonetheless, the overall effect of the changes in 1996 and 1997 has been to further entrench the SABC’s dependence on commercial revenue sources, a dependence which has significant practical and political implications for its ability to fulfil its public service mandate.

### Changing Attitudes to Independent Broadcasting Regulation

The reform and restructuring of a broadcasting and telecommunications sector previously tightly controlled by the apartheid state has involved an increased role for private capital and the market. The central policy question arising from this scenario is how this liberalisation can be regulated and made consistent with the aims of nation-building, reconciliation, democratisation, and cultural diversity. The mediation of these aims and objectives has been the task undertaken since 1994 by the IBA. The performance of the IBA since 1994 has been caught up in wider political processes: the SABC’s uneasy relations with government, and its ongoing battle with M-Net; in legal challenges by Afrikaner cultural organisations unhappy with the treatment of the Afrikaans languages in the revamped broadcasting environment; in the re-alignments of capital, eager to secure positions in the rapidly expanding and highly profitable media and communications industries; and by the ongoing evolution of the ANC’s political and economic agendas for transformation. The different interests between which the IBA has been meant to adjudicate have exercised greater political muscle than a body which remains financially dependent on the government.

The legitimacy of the IBA has been seriously weakened since 1994. Financial mismanagement has hindered its operations, and raised wider questions about the relationship between the degree of effective independence and the financial accountability of bodies such as the IBA which are meant to ‘support constitutional democracy’. The IBA’s handling of television restructuring has also led to increasingly frequent attacks on its credibility from all sides. Contrary to the commitment to holistic policy implementation promised by the Triple Inquiry, the IBA’s actual performance with regard to television has tended to be piecemeal and lacking in integration. While the IBA has, then, not always helped itself, it has also had its legitimacy called into question by other players in the broadcasting sector. The IBA’s uncomfortable position was highlighted during the process of consultation and deliberation on the new private television license in 1997. The independent regulator
was criticised by prospective bidders for the new license for acting too slowly; by the SABC for acting too prematurely and against its own statutory obligation to protect the public broadcaster viability; and by community broadcasters and independent production sector for not imposing adequate public service obligations on the new entrant.'

The delayed process of licensing a new private television station also highlights the centrality of M-Net's position to many of the disputes in which the IBA has been engulfed. The status of M-Net's license impacts not only on the SABC's financial standing but also on those of prospective new television broadcasters. The IBA has been caught in a developing dispute between the SABC and M-Net. The SABC alleges that M-Net has unfairly exceeded its advertising quota, operates a second channel without a proper license, and that it broadcasts live sports events, which are understood to be a national asset, in encoded form. But to a large extent, the regulator's hands are tied with respect to M-Net by the vague conditions of the station's original license and the decisions made in 1993 that protected existing rights and licenses. After considering the possibility of amending M-Net's license during 1997, the IBA decided to leave it largely unchanged. The overall effect of its handling of the dispute between M-Net and the SABC been only hasten calls for a revamp of the IBA Act.

This is just one example of a more general issue that stands behind the crisis of legitimacy that has gradually overtaken the IBA. With lengthy procedures for applications, consultations, hearings, recommendations, and appeals, and with a mandate which prioritises the long-term viability of the broadcasting environment, the IBA has increasingly been seen by business, government, and the SABC as an encumbrance to their very different interests. This emerging animosity might be best understood as flowing from the divergence between the IBA's administrative rationality on the one hand, and the economic rationality of both business and of the government (Horwitz, 1989:19). In line with experience elsewhere, as these forms of rationality diverge, one would expect to witness a growing move to transform the current regulatory arrangements. This is exactly what transpired in 1997, during which the view that the current regulatory regime needed to be overhauled gained increasing ground amongst a number of different interests. There has been a widespread tendency to present the IBA as inhibiting further transformation of the broadcasting sector, a position articulated by groups with otherwise very different political and economic interests in the process of media reform.

**Shifting Priorities in Broadcasting Policy**

The transformation of radio and television since 1996 has taken place within a wider political and economic context which has important consequences for the pattern of further reform in this sector. The process of broadcasting reform has become inextricably caught up in the political calculations which follow from the adoption of a neo-liberal economic programme by the ANC, and the related policies for the restructuring of state assets. With the end of apartheid, there has been an uneasy realignment of business with both the new political regime and organised labour. As part of this process, the economic ideology of the ANC has undergone significant revisions (Lazar, 1996; Nattrass, 1994). The RDP established a broad commitment to redistribution within a broadly Keynesian framework which premised economic growth and development upon reconstruction and redistribution (Fine and Van Wyk, 1996). Since the 1994 election, there has been a slow movement away from the original
RDP blueprint. This culminated in the release in June 1996 of a new economic policy framework document, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR). GEAR marks a decisive shift of emphasis, reflecting pressure from international financial institutions, aimed at boosting international investor confidence. It has been described as representing ‘the substantive abandonment of the RDP as originally formulated’ (Adelzadeh, 1996:67). Prioritising fiscal prudence, GEAR posits redistribution as an outcome rather than condition of economic growth, and implies a clear commitment to reducing state involvement in the economy in order to reduce public expenditure.

The most dramatic and visible change in the South African economy since 1994 is the rapid emergence of black-owned corporations. The much trumpeted process of black economic ‘empowerment’ through the extension of equity shareholding has been facilitated by corporate unbundling, a process driven in no small part by the political imperative for white-owned corporations to reposition themselves and redeploy capital in response to domestic and international political transformations. 1996 witnessed highly publicised black empowerment deals involving the unbundling of assets by the mighty Anglo-American Corporation. NAIL led the National Empowerment Consortium in its acquisition of the industrial holdings group Johnnic, while another black empowerment company, Capital Alliance, secured control of Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI), marking the first time that black South Africans have acquired ownership of a mining house. While the increase in the share of black ownership of capital has been impressively rapid since 1994, questions remain regarding the extent to which this increase in ownership actually involves a fundamental transformation in the patterns of corporate control in the South African economy. A feature of this process of ‘empowerment’ through corporate unbundling has been the involvement of trade union investment groups. They have been able to leverage the capital accumulated during apartheid in the savings and pension funds of their memberships in order to secure strategic equity stakes in companies and representation on their boards. Corporate investment by trade unions is just one of the sources of growing tension between the leadership and rank-and-file memberships of organised labour unions (Gall, 1997; Uys, 1997).

In contrast to unbundling, the restructuring of the economic assets of the state is a much more contentious political issue, cutting to the heart of the political alliance between the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party. During the course of 1995 and 1996, the embrace of privatisation by the government gave rise to increasing tensions between the government and COSATU. While centrists within the ANC have adopted capitalism as the route to black economic empowerment, critics express concern that both unbundling and privatisation promise only the enrichment of a few rather than the genuine economic empowerment of the majority of South Africans. In the context of the political tensions aroused by the issue of privatisation, the example of corporate unbundling has been used as a way out of the political impasse over the restructuring of state assets. Such schemes have become the model through which the partial privatisation of state assets has been politically legitimised. The favoured model, exemplified by reform of the telecommunications sector, involves the formation of partnerships with private corporations in which the state retains a controlling stake. By reserving a proportion of the shares in any state-owned company for black businesses and for employees, this is presented as a means of increasing the opportunities for black South Africans to participate in the economy.
The shift of emphasis implied by the move from the RDP to GEAR, and the embrace of privatisation as a route to black economic empowerment, provide the broader economic policy context in which the restructuring and re-regulation of the mass media in South Africa has been undertaken. Both unbundling and privatisation are most advanced in the media and communications industries. Ownership of the South African press has been restructured since 1994, through the entry into this sector of both international capital and domestic black empowerment groups. And the restructuring of broadcasting has served as the opportunity for the entrance of black empowerment groups such as NAIL and Kagiso as well as trade union investment companies, in particular by acquiring ownership of privatised and newly licensed radio stations. During 1996 and 1997, the ANC moved to assert more direct control over the path of media reform as this sector became the focus for industrial competition policies. As broadcasting and telecommunications have become identified as primarily economic assets, so the political and cultural imperatives which to a considerable extent shaped policy formulation up until 1995 have become subordinated to economic concerns. This process was explicitly marked in the announcement at the beginning of August 1997 by Jay Naidoo, the Minister of Posts, Telecommunications, and Broadcasting, of a thorough broadcasting policy review process. Since taking up this post in March 1996, Naidoo has expressed concern over the lack of authority his Ministry has over the IBA. He has made it clear that he sees the future of the IBA solely as a regulatory and licensing body, and his department has taken over the formulation of broadcasting policy that has up until now been the responsibility of the IBA. The explicit agenda behind the policy review is to wrest back control of broadcasting policy for the government.

The broadcasting policy review needs to be placed in the context not only of the progress of broadcasting reform, but also that of telecommunications restructuring. Telecommunications is a much more significant sector of the economy than broadcasting, but the fortunes of the two are closely linked. The important point to note about the implications for the broadcasting sector of this policy shift is that telecommunications reform, which has been driven by the economic considerations of international competitiveness which are set to guide broadcasting reform in the future, has been undertaken in an increasingly centralised, statist fashion which circumvents previous processes of consultation and participation (Horwitz, 1997).

Naidoo was appointed with an explicit brief to speed-up progress on the restructuring of the telecommunications parastatal, Telkom. In March 1997, Naidoo, a former Secretary-general of COSATU, secured the agreement of the trade unions for the partial privatisation of Telkom. In the same month, a 30 per cent stake in Telkom was sold jointly to the American company SBC Communications and Telekom Malaysia. The deal was heralded as the biggest capital investment in the new South Africa which would kick-start a multi-billion Rand infrastructural development programme. The political legitimacy of the deal was secured in April 1997 when it was announced that a further 10 per cent of Telkom shares would be sold to black business and labour. The Telkom deal exemplifies the ANC-led government’s determination to open previously closed sectors of the economy to foreign capital and also to extend the operations of large corporations such as Telkom into the broader Southern African region.

In contrast to the broadcasting sector, telecommunications ‘privatisation’ has not yet been accompanied by market liberalisation. Telkom’s monopoly position remains protected for an unspecified period. One consequence of this difference is that the new South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA), lacks the same degree of independence that the IBA has. SATRA is answerable directly to the
Minister, rather than to Parliament as is the case with the IBA. It is this difference between the extent of independence from government of the two bodies that is central to the debate over the imminent merger between IBA and SATRA, scheduled to take place by the end of 1998. As an institution created in the policy-vacuum regarding broadcasting that existed in the early 1990s, the IBA was always likely to be vulnerable to changes in the balance of political forces that enabled it to be established in the first place. Some commentators fear that the merger will enable the government to impose greater control over broadcasting than it currently has. This concern is animated by the persistent criticism that has been directed at the media by leading ANC figures. The ANC has grown increasingly concerned about its ability to manage news presentation and the flow of communications about its policies (Louw, 1995).

Taking advantage of the financial crisis at the SABC and the crisis of management and financial accountability which engulfed and partly paralysed the IBA during 1997, Naidoo's policy review essentially drew a line under the process of broadcasting reform begun in the early 1990s.

It indicates a clear shift of emphasis in regulatory policy. This follows from the treatment of broadcasting as a 'cluster of industrial policy' aimed at making the South African economy globally competitive (Naidoo, 1997). A Green Paper on Broadcasting Policy published in late 1997 confirmed the re-location of broadcasting squarely into the sphere of industrial and competition policy, and a White Paper in 1998 confirmed the government's intention to merge the IBA and SATRA. This shift of emphasis rests upon the mobilisation of the contemporary rhetoric of convergence between information, telecommunications, and broadcasting technologies. The new agenda aims to boost manufacturing capacity and international competitiveness. This implies that a more interventionist position by government be taken regarding the setting of media policy than has so far been the case. The justification for the regulation of broadcasting and telecommunications has been altered in the process. In place of a political and cultural justification based on a definition of 'national interest' which prioritises democracy and diversity, the 'national interest' in the communications sector has been redefined primarily in terms of economic development and growth. As a consequence, the emphasis which has been accorded to developing and regulating broadcasting to ensure a democratic and diverse system of communications, in the interest of cultivating an independent and vibrant civil society, has been significantly downgraded.

**Commercialisation, Diversification, and the Contradictions of Post-apartheid Broadcasting**

South African broadcasting has been fundamentally transformed during the 1990s. This dramatic transformation has been overseen by the IBA, which was created to ensure the democratisation and diversification of broadcasting. Broadcasting is a more competitive sector now, but even after the unbundling of the print media and the re-regulation of radio, the media sector remains characterised by a highly concentrated structure of ownership. The restructuring of broadcasting has been the basis for the consolidation of the position of new, private sector media conglomerates such as NAIL and Primedia Broadcasting. This points to the limitations of conceptions of 'freedom', 'diversity', and 'democratisation' in the media that considers these values to be equivalent to or guaranteed simply by the legal right to ownership in media organisations. This conflation tends in turn to equate greater numerical choice of channels and programmes with diversity. The question of the
right not only to receive information, but of access to the means of communication in order to produce and distribute information, tends to slide from view in this economistic understanding of diversity.

The assumption that greater diversity of ownership will lead to greater pluralism of opinions and programming is certainly attractive in a South African broadcasting system previously dominated by a monolithic and politicised entity like the SABC of old, but it is severely limited as a vision of the long-term future. A market-driven model of broadcasting reform is limited as a means for the development of broadcasting as a medium for democratic communication and nation-building not least by the relation between the financial imperatives of commercial broadcasting on the one hand, and the structure of the market for broadcasting services in South Africa on the other. More stations does not necessarily equate with more listeners or viewers, but has led to greater competition between stations for existing audiences. In commercial broadcasting in South Africa, as elsewhere, the aim of programming is to produce audiences with specific demographic characteristics for advertisers. And in South Africa, the demographic characteristics looked for by advertisers are concentrated in a very narrow segment of society, a historical product of radicalised patterns of accumulation and income distribution. Economistic understandings of media democritisation tend to finesse this relation between the financial imperatives of commercial broadcasting as a process of commodification on the one hand, and the structure of the market for broadcasting services in South Africa on the other. More stations does not necessarily equate with more listeners or viewers. The expansion of channels and diversification of ownership has led to greater competition for what is still a relatively small portion of the South African population, the affluent, mainly white minority who remain the main target audience for advertisers. The end of apartheid and the re-regulation of broadcasting is bringing about a proliferation of media outlets at a faster pace than the growth of advertising expenditure. The result is the increasingly careful targeting of audience segments by advertisers, already an observable trend in the radio sector. One of the possible effects of the liberalisation of South African radio and television is an even greater degree of fragmentation of media audiences as broadcasting is transformed into commercially driven narrow-casting.

Any realisation of the ideal of broadcasting as a democratic public sphere and/or as an instrument of nation-building in the South African context is faced with the dual hurdles of extending access to the means of communication in both technological and cultural terms. First, the aim of constituting the media as a public sphere supportive of a diverse and independent civil society can only be realised once access to the basic technological means of communication has become much more equitable. As we have seen, the restructuring of telecommunications infrastructure is now closely tied to a neo-liberal agenda for establishing international competitiveness and attracting foreign investment. Second, the question of access in cultural terms, in the case of radio and television, has centred on the question of language. The attempts to realise the ambitious but vague constitutional principles of language equity led to the project of extending access to mass mediated information to all South Africans irrespective of the language they speak and the place they live in. But the commercialised nature of broadcasting in South Africa imposes a definite limit upon the extension of access through equitable coverage of eleven languages on a national scale in two ways. The SABC’s ability to cater for the full diversity of South African society has been severely constrained by its particular funding structure. If it is to maintain its financial viability, it must compete with new broadcasters for a relatively small and only slow
The Contradictions of Broadcasting Reform in Post-apartheid South Africa

The growing amount of advertising revenue, which involves duplicating programming in trying to attract affluent audiences. If it targets wider and more diverse audiences, then in strict commercial terms this is not cost effective because they do not attract the same level of advertising revenue.

The aim of organising broadcasting as an instrument of national unification in South Africa is therefore complicated by the interplay of two sets of forces, one set operating above the scale of the nation-state, the other set below the level of the nation-state. The economic policies of the ANC-led government, shaped by broader international processes, is leading to the increasing commercialisation of the broadcasting system even as it embraces a new public service credo. On the other hand, the task of nation-building has to address a series of sub-national identities which reflect entrenched patterns of socioeconomic division. To a considerable extent, in South Africa cultural and linguistic differences correspond with stark and entrenched socioeconomic inequalities. The interaction of the economic dynamics of commercialised broadcasting with the structure of social economic and cultural differentiation thus render it difficult for the broadcasting system to successfully bind together diverse identities and audiences into a single national public while at the same time maintaining financial viability.

Conclusion

Tracing the progress of media reform during the 1990s raises two related questions regarding processes of democratisation in South Africa. First, to what extent is the direction of policy in this sphere indicative of a set of economic priorities which adequately address the material inequalities which arguably pose the greatest challenge to the long-term sustainability of democracy in South Africa? Second, and more specifically, to what extent are the economic policy imperatives shaping the transformation of broadcasting and telecommunications consistent with the broad aim of constituting the media as a public sphere supportive of a diverse and independent civil society? The pace of change in the South African broadcasting sector since 1994 has been remarkably rapid. ‘Nation-building’, understood in terms of a series of symbolic ‘media events’ portraying appropriate images of national unity, and the economic imperatives derived from the government’s economic agenda, have together provided the main impetus behind the transformation of broadcasting. In contrast, progress towards the realisation of greater accessibility to means of communication has been slower. For example, while community radio has been given a significant boost, representatives of this sector complain that community broadcasting has been generally sidelined in the rush to restructure the SABC and lay the basis for new commercial broadcasters. The process of broadcasting reform reflects the more general waning of the influence of ‘civil society’ organisations which came to the fore in the struggle against apartheid in the 1980s and maintained a considerable influence, especially in broadcasting, in the period from 1990 to 1994. The positive impetus for independent broadcasting came from civil society groups aligned with the mass democratic movement. The IBA was the product of a period of intense political campaigning and intellectual debate in the early 1990s which produced a consensus on the need to ensure that broadcasting be taken out of control of cabinet ministers, and made independent of direct government interference. These arguments informed the ANC’s Media Charter, with its vision of the media as a means both for the receipt of information and a means of expression, and the vision of a democratic information and communication policy present in the RDP. The period since 1994 has seen a decline in the influence of civil society groups. Their
independence has been diminished and compromised by their inevitable incorpora-
tion into state apparatuses, by explicit moves by the state to manage more closely the 
activities of NGO's, and also by the drying up of international funds following the end 
of apartheid in 1994 (James and Caliguire, 1996). This pattern is clearly witnessed in 
the broadcasting sector, where the influence of civil society groups has decreased as 
the reform process has become inevitably bureaucratised, through the formation of 
the IBA and the emergence of industry-based lobbying bodies (Van Zyl, 1994).

Broadcasting in and of itself cannot secure democracy nor succeed in the task of 
nation-building. It can be argued that the primary conditions for democratisation in 
South Africa lie less in securing widespread identification with symbolic representa-
tions of national unity within a plural society, but rather in the successful economic 
and political incorporation of the majority of citizens (Cherry, 1994). This depends 
upon the implementation of development programmes to alleviate poverty and 
economic inequality, and upon the extension of forms of democratic decision-making.
The reform of the broadcasting sector suggests a trend towards the subordination of 
developmental and redistributive imperatives to the priorities of a neo-liberal 
programme of economic growth. And the concrete implementation of policies for 
infrastructural development is increasingly leading to the attenuation of institutional-
ised forms of participatory decision-making and independent regulation that only 
very recently were considered a cornerstone of any democratic transformation of the 
South African media system. Broadcasting therefore reflects a larger tension 
emerging in the ongoing process of democratisation in South Africa. As long as 
democracy is understood as a process which must unfold in accordance with the 
requirements of international capital and globalised markets, this threatens to 
entrench socioeconomic inequality and limit the extension of participatory forms of 
popular democracy (Saul, 1997).

As economic policy is increasingly represented as a set of imperatives imposed by a 
monolithic global capitalism, so democracy in turn is subordinated to the rhetoric of 
nation-building and easily reduced to a set of practices for managing the effects of 
policy implementation and winning consent. A vision of democracy as a process of 
informed deliberation and participation in the formation of choices about the path of 
economic reform implies a more decentralised and dialogical conceptualisation of the 
media than has so far been pursued. This conceptualisation can only be realised if the 
distance between state and civil society is maintained, and if the nominal 
independence of broadcasting institutions from both state control and capture by the 
 imperatives of private capital and the market is given firm foundations.

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Notes

1. First Report of the Multi-Party Negotiating Council's Technical Committee on an Independent 

2. The Bophuthatswana Broadcasting Corporation continued to operate independently, with the 
support of the government of the Northwest province, until finally integrated into the SABC in 
early 1998. With the completion of the integration of the broadcasting services of the 'TBVC' 
homeland states (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, Ciskei) into the SABC, the option of developing 
decentralized public broadcasting services at the provincial level was effectively closed for the 
foreseeable future.
3. The transformation of broadcasting has been the occasion for widespread lobbying by Afrikaans language and cultural organizations in defense of the perceived threat to the status of the language. For a discussion of the economic and political influence of this infrastructure of organizations on the progress of broadcasting reform, see Barnett (1998).

4. The process of licensing the new television service was completed in 1998. The successful applicant was Midi TV, a consortium with 80 per cent shareholding with trade unions and 'black empowerment' groups, and a 20 per cent stake from the US-owned communications giant Time Warner.

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Reform or Re-colonisation? The Overhaul of African Television

Chris A. Paterson

The African television broadcasting sector is undergoing a rapid and long awaited process of liberalisation. This article examines key aspects of that process with geographic focus on sub-Saharan Africa. Specifically addressed are what has recently changed, and more crucially, not changed, in the politically charged arena of television newscasting. Throughout the continent broadcasters, whether privately or publicly financed, are finding a wide variety of creative solutions to technological and economic challenges as they rush to cultivate an audience among the urban middle class. But the rapid shift from public to frequently foreign private ownership of television may be symptomatic of a broader re-colonisation of Africa by US and European multinationals that has been euphemistically heralded as Africa’s Renaissance.

Introduction

A new wave of television signals is arriving which has nothing to do with the national broadcasting policy. Governments will find this disconcerting (from a presentation by the South African satellite television service Multi-choice to the North American National Broadcasters Association, Toronto, May 1998).

There have been several substantial and valuable studies of African broadcasting dating back to the 1960s (Doob, 1961; Head, 1974; Bourgault, 1995), but there remains little published analysis of the sweeping changes of recent years in the political economy of the African mass media sector. The exceptions relate primarily to South Africa (Tomaselli, 1997; Horwitz, 1997; Steyn & de Beer, 1997; Paterson, 1993), where a rich tradition of (internal and external) communication scholarship continues. Here we keep the focus to the north, for the complexities of South African broadcasting are treated elsewhere in this issue.

Similarly, inter-industry analysis has typically spared little space for detailed consideration of African broadcasting, with the exception of a report examining audiences in several countries, undertaken by the BBC in the early 1980s (Mytton, 1983). A recent exception is the most recent yearbook of Television Business International (TBI, 1998), a costly tome published by the Media and Telcoms division of the British Financial Times. Their data form the basis for this analysis, along with a pilot survey of and interviews with African private and public broadcasters, comprehensive literature review for a study of news flow in Africa, and my own extensive research on international television news.
The Television Explosion

Before proceeding, a review of relevant technologies may be useful. Since television broadcasting began in Africa, as early as 1959 in Nigeria and as late as the 1990s in other countries, the norm has been terrestrial broadcasting, typically in the very high frequency (VHF) wavelengths and at very high (and therefore expensive) power levels. Even with powerful transmissions, coverage was typically limited to major cities, and the costs of program production and acquisition have traditionally kept programming so bland as to build very little audience loyalty outside of a wealthy urban elite. Typically, programming has been limited to a few hours per day by the high costs of foreign program acquisition and of local production.

Broadcast restructuring typically comes as a result of economic and political pressures, both internal and external, but such pressures have only led to substantive change with the recent availability of several key technologies. In some cases, African entrepreneurs are pioneering TV program delivery systems that have seen little use elsewhere. Systems such as encrypted low power terrestrial broadcasting and microwave multi-point distribution (MMDS) are being deployed commercially in several African cities in a manner paralleling the rapid growth of entrepreneurial satellite master antenna (SMATV) systems that swept through urban Indian in the 1980s (a form of highly localised cable television distributing programming from satellites).

Many broadcasters have had some success in the use of television in education and in support of development, but the high cost of production has more often than not outweighed its benefits over other channels of communication (Wedell, 1986; Haule, 1984). Radio has long been recognised as a vastly superior mass medium for use in developing regions (McAnany, 1980; Nasieku, 1989). Television has demonstrated its best potential for development when it is free of the limitations of transmission. Video can be an effective tool in rural education, as with the South African project, Rural Television Network (RTV). This small, innovative effort provides televisions and videocassette players to remote, rural audiences, and distributes educational programming for them to view. Viewing centres are usually the verandahs of rural trading stores. When examined in 1994, over 500 such video displays screened at least six hours of material daily, but there was poor coordination between this project and other rural development communications efforts (Paterson, 1994).

Radio is thus widely regarded as the most important mass medium in Africa, and any public expenditure on television has been commonly seen as a tragic waste of resources to permit elites to talk to elites. Even in cases where a large television audience has been built across all social classes, as in South Africa, viable finance schemes for public broadcasting have yet to be found, and until recently, commercial broadcasts saw little market potential.

That perception has changed dramatically in recent years, with broadcast investors eager to build audience loyalty across socioeconomic strata and to extend the advertising reach of television. Sophisticated audience research in South Africa played a role in changing perceptions within the commercial broadcast sector and attracting European and US broadcast investment to Africa as a whole. For example, during the height of debate over post-apartheid broadcast restructuring in South Africa, despite widespread distrust of the SABC, use of electronic media was found to be extremely high even among the South African poor.
AMPS (Associated Media Products Survey) is South Africa’s major commercial audience survey, and is widely used in both administrative and academic analysis of South African media. AMPS found that in most of the country a larger proportion of Africans, of all ages and incomes, watch television than read newspapers, and that 27 per cent of the ethnic majority African population watched television daily (Paterson, 1994). More recent AMPS data show steadily increasing levels of viewership among black South Africans (Multi-choice, 1998).

A variety of technologies are being employed to exploit the potential television audience, where governments have so permitted. The most common alternative to broadcasting in developed countries has proven to be of almost no interest to Africa: cable television. The implementation of a cable system is massively capital intensive and requires a network of utility poles or underground wiring conduits to carry the cables. Neither the economic capital, nor such physical infrastructure, are common in African cities.

MMDS gained popularity quickly in Africa even as it remains unfamiliar in many developed countries. MMDS, often erroneously called ‘cable’ in parts of Africa (TBI) and ‘wireless cable’ in the US, encodes several television channels in a microwave signal broadcast in all directions from a tall building. Subscribers must be located close to the transmitter, and clear of any obstructions blocking the signal. The range of MMDS is very limited, but repeater stations can easily and inexpensively extend its range, and overall costs are low.

Reception of programming from satellites has long seemed Africa’s best alternative, but several factors have prevented widespread satellite TV reception until recently. Most importantly, satellite program choices for African viewers have been sparse. Satellites carrying television programming are grouped in equatorial orbits over the Americas, over the east Atlantic for Europe, and over south Asia.

Satellites with steerable transmissions – typical of direct broadcast satellites operating in the high power Ku-band – have had their signals carefully tailored for best reception in the wealthiest nations: Western Europe, North America, and the Pacific Rim. Satellites carrying programming which is not intended for direct reception by viewers, but for re-transmission by cable operators on the ground, typically operate in the older, and weaker, C-band, and cannot be as precisely directed. Their weaker signals require large and costly reception dishes. Few are sufficiently proximate to Africa to offer adequate signals; the investors who launched them and lease capacity on them never saw a viable enough African market to consider a placement more beneficial to Africa.

The problem has for decades isolated Africa in another way: not only was reception of international television difficult, but so too was transmission to international television. Very few options existed for sending a TV signal to an international satellite, and in many regions, none existed at all. As a result, the international television news companies like VisNews (now Reuters Television) typically ignored African stories they would otherwise have covered, or covered them long after the fact through airmailed film or videotape.

This phenomenon goes a long way toward explaining persistent negative reporting of Africa in western media. More routine, less negative stories (the missing ingredient for news balance) are generally known to western media, but often go unreported due to the cost and complexity of satellite transmission. The inequitable pricing structures
enforced by the international satellite communications body INTELSAT compounded the problem by penalising African telecommunications organisations with far higher costs than were charged to more frequent users in developed countries (Holmes, 1996; Paterson, 1996).

Rapid growth of satellite television in Africa finally came with the adoption of technical advances developed for the booming European DBS market. The satellite industry embraced digitalisation and signal compression as a means of maximising the use of limited bandwidth. Encryption, or scrambling, of satellite television signals is now also common to ensure that only customers who have bought or rented a decoder can receive transmissions. Typical satellite television transmissions now are digital, and are often compressed and encrypted. Compression technology is rapidly increasing the number of DBS services available. Most of the satellite television services available to Africa are in a DBS format allowing direct-to-home (DTH) reception via small dishes. DBS technical standards vary among the services however, generally requiring a separate decoder box for each.

Though African states have typically led international efforts to prevent trans-border television broadcasting via satellite, for fear of detrimental cultural and political effects, actual regulatory responses to DBS have been widely mixed. For example Tunisia, officially an outspoken critic of western dominance in satellite programming during the New World Information Order debates in the United Nations in the 1970s, in the early 1990s passed legislation guaranteeing free access to DBS programming (Adhoum, 1996). Several governments, or ruling parties, in other parts of the continent have invested heavily in satellite television. There is little indication of any large scale efforts to ban satellite TV reception, as have occurred in parts of the Middle East.

The major technical boost to satellite television in Africa was the 1995 launch of PanAmSat's PAS-4 satellite, with transmission capabilities designed specifically to include southern Africa. PanAmSat is a commercial satellite operator based in the US, established during the 1980s to compete with INTELSAT. Recent data suggest that most of sub-Saharan Africa can now 'see' at least seven satellite television services (most offering multiple channels). The number of available services increase the further east or north one goes. North African countries have access to most European DBS services, within the limits imposed by local governments on reception. Adhoum (1996:54) noted that this could include at least fifteen channels, all familiar to European viewers.

With the most developed television industry on the continent, South Africa eventually pioneered an African satellite service. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) implemented a DBS service in September 1995 after years of hand-wringing over the issue. They were joined within months on the PAS-4 satellite by a South African commercial DBS service, Multichoice Limited (Gifford, 1995). Multichoice is owned by the massive South African consortium Consolidated Investment Corporation through its subsidiary NetHold, in partnership with Canal Plus of France (TBI, 337). Consolidated has considerable holdings in all major South African media and telecommunications industries, and extensive media holdings throughout Africa. Its roots in the Afrikaner press and tangled branches are well described by Tomaselli (1997).

Multichoice is the most successful of the DBS providers, with 44,000 subscribers in South Africa and another 22,000 in other southern and central African countries (TBI,
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Since merging with the French conglomerate Canal Plus, Multichoice operates the major North African DBS service as well, Canal Plus’ Canal Horizons (Ibid.). The Nethold/Canal Plus partnership thus has absolute dominance over Africa satellite broadcasting at the moment. The French music TV satellite channel MCM claims 100,000 home viewers in Africa, according to TBI, but their estimate seems exaggerated.

### The Major Satellite Broadcasters for Continental Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Host Country</th>
<th>Channels Offered</th>
<th>Encryption / Other Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DStv (Multichoice)</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>28+</td>
<td>Enc./Digital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABC</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>3+</td>
<td>Un-enc./Analogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hey-U</td>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(status uncertain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEC</td>
<td>Swaziland</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>(status uncertain)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCM (music)</td>
<td>France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>DTH and rebroadcast ICA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV/Intersputnik</td>
<td>Russia/France</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>service for re-transmission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nilesat (Egypt govmnt.)</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>(status uncertain)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Gifford, 1995; TBI)

Satellite television has increasingly threatened traditional, public broadcasting by pulling away audiences and available advertising funds (as it has done in Europe), but African state broadcasters were already endangered before the onslaught of DBS. Government, or ruling-party, managed parastatal broadcasters have been hearing ever louder threats to their government grants. The Swaziland Television Authority, for instance, reportedly faces the imminent threat of closure due to a cut off in government funds and weak advertising revenues and license fee collections (TBI, 372). Ironically, a commercial DBS venture based in Swaziland seems to be doing well (Gifford, 1995).

Broadcast liberalisation has come quickly to most other countries on the continent, the result of the influx of satellite channels, external pressures for economic restructuring and democratisation, and increasing commercial interest in Africa as television market. Nigeria approved a massive communication sector liberalisation in 1992 (Enyia, 1993; Ibie, 1993), which seemed to serve as an impetus for many other countries to do the same. For example, following a long deliberative process, Benin recently authorised a private television station and additional satellite based services.

Typically, media reports there noted extensive criticism that new terrestrial channels would benefit only those in the capital city (IPS, 12 December 1997). Legislatures have been hard pressed to find benefits in broadcast liberalisation for rural populations, but the embrace of satellite technology – free of geographical restrictions – provides a face saving opportunity to do so. However, the typical satellite program content consisting of sports, American movies, and European and American newscasts would seem to offer little of actual value to Africa’s rural poor – generally the dominant constituencies of the legislators embracing the new services.

Cataloguing political turmoil resulting from broadcast privatisation in Africa is well beyond the scope of this project, but a limited review of news reporting on the process makes clear its extent. Debates are raging in Zimbabwe, Kenya, South Africa, Benin, Malawi, and other countries over the degree to which ruling parties, government officials, and government ministers are connected to commercial broadcast compa-
nies. The connections, frequently, are strong. In many countries, broadcast regulation and liberalisation processes remain far from transparent, and controversy is likely to continue (for example, Zaffiro, 1992).

In an example that is not untypical, a former French and Beninese football star named Christian Laginde found the unusual combination of investment capital and government acceptance to start La Cellule 2, a commercial broadcast station in Cotonou, Benin. By Laginde’s own admission, government oversight was lax. While privatisation regulation called for a minimum of 30 per cent locally produced programming, La Cellule 2 could manage only 20 per cent, importing the rest from France. Just as his fledgling news department was receiving praise from the US Information Agency for ‘report(ing) local news much more aggressively than the state station’, and Laginde completed a USIA funded trip around the US in search of financing, he was given a cabinet post by Beninian President Mathieu Kerekou. The Panafrican News Agency (13 July 1998) reported that Lagnide ‘is said to be very close to Kerrekou, though he has no political affiliation’ (also USIA, International Visitor Program information, April, 1998; interviews).

Several alternative forms of broadcast liberalisation exist. In several countries, originally publicly operated channels are being leased by the parastatal broadcaster to private companies. This permits governments to reduce their financial burden by turning money losing channels into money earners, while maintaining a significant degree of influence over program content – with all its political and cultural implications – through such partial privatisation. Adhoum (1996) observes that deregulatory legislation has normally been carefully structured in many countries to maximise financial benefits in both private and public sectors, while preserving a considerable degree of control over electronic media content.

Recent sectoral developments have placed the larger parastatal broadcasters under intense pressure to close departments, discontinue local programs, and lay off vast amounts of staff. Often, the pressure has come from external consultants retained by government broadcasting ministries. SABC has laid off over 1,000 employees in recent months (TBI, 337). South African and Zimbabwean union protections and employment codes have offered some protection to broadcast employees threatened by layoffs, but extensive cutting is expected to continue (Broadcast, 21 March 1997; TBI, 378).

In Zimbabwe, efforts to implement fully privatised broadcasting have been slow and highly politicised. Three of four government owned channels are being leased to private broadcasters which are funded by commercials. TBI (TBI, 378) reports that one of the companies, Joy TV, pays one million Zimbabwe dollars (approximately US$33,000) per month to rent one of the channels from 5 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. for its popular commercial programming.

While a few private television broadcasters were licensed in the late 1980s (for instance, Morocco’s 2M, later to be nationalised), the majority have come on the air only during the last three to four years. TBI (1998) lists scores of such television broadcasters in some fifty-one African countries. As with most data presented here, these numbers should be treated as rough approximations, for TBI’s data are generally between one and three years old, and little newer data exist to supplement it (I have done so where news reports, survey data, or interviews permit). The TBI data are also occasionally vague through inconsistent reporting or due to new TV companies being almost – but not quite – on the air as the data were compiled.
Determining which of these have made it to air, and how many others have since folded, is beyond the scope of the current research.

TBI suggests twenty-five to thirty subscription broadcasters are in operation in about twenty countries (at least four of these stations are owned by the nations' public broadcasting companies), and nearly forty private commercial broadcasters now exist in about twenty countries. While most companies in the latter category broadcast using traditional terrestrial transmitters, either purpose built or leased from a state broadcaster, the category contains several more inventive approaches.

Most companies opt for un-encrypted broadcasting and sell commercial time to local and international advertisers. But with little capital available for television advertising in Africa, many sell subscriptions to their broadcasts, normally by encrypting transmissions and leasing a set-top decoder box to unscramble their signals. The process was pioneered in Africa by South Africa's M-Net, available to urban South Africans for nearly a decade.

The SABC rebroadcasts (via its terrestrial transmitters) the encrypted programming of M-Net, a very successful set of news and entertainment channels along the lines of the original US satellite programmer, Home Box Office. M-Net is owned by a consortium of South African newspaper publishers. Although most of M-Net's programming consists of foreign films, they have had a huge impact on South African broadcast restructuring, serving as an influential lobby for the pro-free market position which gradually came to dominate negotiations toward restructuring. M-Net is now being rebroadcast by subscription services throughout the continent, and is involved in privatisation ventures continent-wide (Blignaut, 1997).

Other innovative companies previously alluded to include MMDS operators (companies in Malabo, Equitorial Guinea and Lome, Togo are examples), while others are localised DBS services, geared toward their own national audiences but generally available (with suitable dish and decoder) throughout a wide region. Swaziland's African Television Entertainment and Malawi's Hey-U Entertainment are examples. TBI indicates that extensive cable television exists only in portions of Nigeria, where in excess of thirty private cable companies operate, and Tanzania, home to four cable companies. Another source indicates higher rates of cable penetration, with some form of cable system in place in at least 18 countries (Satellite Communication, 1996). TBI (337) reports that DBS has reduced the subscriber base of one South African MMDS provider, Orbicom (a subsidiary of Multichoice), but that they have succeeded in relocating their systems to other countries.

When added to previously existing public channels, the new operations bring the total of separate TV programmers in Africa to well above 140, up from about sixty stations reported just a decade earlier (Salama, 1989). In the case of a few countries, any television broadcasting remains quite new, and in such cases generally remains the purview of a parastatal corporation (for instance, Tele Chad, established in 1987; TBI). Even in several of Africa's largest countries, television remains entirely the purview of a government authority, as is the case in Egypt, Algeria, and Angola. This does not mean that satellite transmission from other countries are not routinely viewed.

Return on investment is often a long time coming in African broadcasting, however, and many upstart broadcasters have already folded. Against all odds, others hang on. An example is Niger's privately held subscription television service, Tele Star. This
company offers Niamey viewers five channels of imported programming for about US$40 per month, but was reported to have fewer than 500 subscriptions after more than a year of operations (TBI, 363). A more typically successful local TV service is Aerial Empire in Madagascar, where 20,000 subscribers pay US$19 per month for CNN and a variety of US, European, and South African channels (Satellite Communications, 1996:24). This source quotes the South African CEO of Aerial Empire, Antony Glass, as explaining, 'The only choice for upwardly mobile professionals throughout Africa is to have a satellite system and pay TV'.

The pressure to commercialise has been especially intense from western media conglomerates and western governments (with substantial coordination from the US propaganda bureau, USIA). It has been especially successful in South Africa. It may be argued that this commercialisation does not come without a high price, including the importation of alien values and the erosion of broadcasting support of national development (see, for example, Leslie, 1995; Paterson, 1993 & 1994). A repercussion of the South African rush to privatise is that country's dominant position in satellite broadcasting continent wide.

**News on New Channels**

In some cases, broadcasting legislation geared toward privatisation has specifically prohibited new broadcasters from the practice of journalism. Tunisia, as a case in point, banned the transmission of news by the popular public channel Antenne 2 and struck an agreement preventing the private channel Canal Horizons from broadcasting news. French and local investors, led by the French television network Canal Plus, were content to accept the prohibition on news in return for access to the Tunisian audience. Canal Horizons was later permitted to offer news via subscription broadcasting only (TBI, 374; Adhoum, 139). Other governments have allowed new commercial broadcasters to air news, although reports of governmental harassment of journalists representing corporate media are common. Commercial stations in Uganda, Nigeria, and Kenya air locally produced news.

Where news programming does exist, it is limited to extremely localised reporting, or it is highly dependent on a few Anglo-US sources for international images and information; few African stations have the resources for original foreign coverage. Thus, as I have argued elsewhere, the highly touted impact upon public information resulting from growth in available channels is largely illusory – for the newly available news services contain nearly identical programming and draw from the same few sources for most of their images and information. Those few sources are the global television news agencies, the only organisations routinely covering stories in developing countries. I will return to more detailed analysis of these news providers.

Satellite TV providers find no fault with CNN, BBC World, and other European news channels, for they consistently prove popular with audiences. Dominant provider Multichoice boasts that 'news-only TV becomes a main source of news among upper income subscribers very rapidly once introduced'. They explain that such services offer 'objectivity, (and) unbiased reporting' and that viewers 'get news on their own country that they don’t get internally (for example, Kenya, Nigeria)' (Multi-choice, 1998). This is an especially ironic claim from the same South African business sector that only a few years earlier lamented the biases of the big western broadcasters in covering the troubles of their country.
The lack of localised news in Africa (and subsequent dependence on non-African sources) is also a result of the poor track record of Afrovision, an exchange of television news material modelled on the Eurovision system operated by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). Successful television news exchanges have existed outside of Europe and the US for some time, providing daily feeds of news pictures of regional interest to public broadcasters at low cost. These often have actively contributed stories to the major western TV news distributors, such as the commercial television news agencies VisNews and Worldwide Television News (WTN). (These are now Reuters Television and APTN, respectively.)

The major examples are the Asia/Pacific Broadcasting Union (APBU), which, although coordinated from Tokyo, has a mostly developing world membership, and the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), coordinated from Tunis, which covers most of the Arab world including north Africa. Both systems had been operating from the early 1970s, even before satellite distribution was widely adopted. In 1984 another TV news exchange spun off from these two well established exchanges. Asiavision was linked to the regional co-ordinating centres for APBU and ASBU, as well as to Africa’s Union of National Television and Radio Organisations of Africa (URTNA) facility in Algiers.

URTNA was a UNESCO attempt in the 1970s to facilitate regional program exchange in Africa and to decrease dependence on US and European media. Because there were few television news broadcasts in Africa and little opportunity for television relay between countries when URTNA was established, the organisation traditionally facilitated the exchange of longer form programs, like documentaries on African subjects, via mail.

If African news were well recorded by African broadcasters and put on a daily satellite feed, western broadcasters would no longer be able to argue that cost or lack of access has denied them pictures of African stories. African broadcasters could run pictures of Africa taken by Africans, not Europeans and Americans, thereby doing their part to correct news flow imbalance and western biases. Since television news exchanges have so effectively redressed the news flow imbalance in other parts of the developing world, why not in Africa?

According to Tony Liddel, who long represented WTN in Zimbabwe, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has also spoken of setting up an African news exchange, but has had no success in organising it. One long time observer of the media of southern Africa told me that the news exchange failure stems primarily from the political nature of news – African governments were typically unwilling to cooperate on so sensitive an issue. URTNA was so cautious that the project did not proceed beyond the design phase until Afrovision, as a systematic exchange of television news items, was established in 1991 (Hjarvard, 1994:10).

Hjarvard (1994) surveyed the various regional television news exchange mechanisms, contrasting them with the purely commercial approach to news distribution practised by the agencies. He noted, ‘there isn’t a stable pattern of cooperation between regional networks and TV news agencies’ (Ibid, 27). When asked, WTN staff were unsure about their ability to use Asiavision material, suggesting the question rarely comes up; none could recall use of Afrovision material in their daily feeds to the world’s broadcasters. Participation by African broadcasters in the exchange remains sporadic. According to former Reuters Nairobi Bureau Chief, the late Mohamed Amin,
URTNA is an organization that is very political, totally incompetent, and politics makes all the decisions ... all you're getting is propaganda (interview).

Recent interviews suggest his views are widely shared by African broadcasters. The URTNA study in 1979 did examine a number of problems standing in the way of an African news exchange, most of which remain relevant. The greatest burden to developing nations' broadcasters wishing to participate in international arrangements are satellite transmission costs imposed by INTELSAT, as mentioned earlier. URTNA also noted that many broadcasters they visited did not have even the minimal facilities required to participate in an exchange – video recording facilities, telex machines, and even reliable telephones. This situation has almost certainly improved, as many African countries, including Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Mozambique, have spent heavily on their television operations during the eighties.

A number of national broadcasters also argued that an African news exchange is unnecessary because they receive news from so many other sources already. A great many receive a daily Reuters feed or the weekly Reuters 'Africa Journal', although some countries have had to drop agency subscriptions because of the cost. Visnews representatives told me in 1990 they occasionally reduced fees for developing nations' broadcasters, but were unwilling to give their service away. Many countries that do not receive a Reuters or WTN satellite feed have subscribed to 'week in review' programs produced by both companies and distributed by airmail.

A French newsfeed, from the network FR-3, has for many years been transmitted to North African broadcasters on INTELSAT. Reportedly Cameroon, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Jordan, Mauritania, Senegal, Togo, and Zaire have all routinely used it (this was in the early 1990s – it is unclear how many of these broadcasters continue the service). The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) is speculating about establishing a daily news feed service of its own for all of Africa, but has yet to announce details (Lord, 1997).

In southern Africa, localised alternatives to the continent-wide Afrovision exchange have recently emerged. The SABC co-ordinates an occasional exchange of news pictures with broadcasters in neighbouring countries. A separate exchange of story scripts, run from Harare, is underway between several countries (interviews and survey data). The emergence of such localised exchange mechanisms among African broadcasters may be the final blow to the struggling Afrovision system.

While globalisation trends suggest substantial growth of television news channels at the local, regional, and global levels, the sources for international television news – the television news agencies – remain a highly concentrated few. African television journalists surveyed for this study consistently identified only a small set of large European and American companies as their primary sources for international material, and consistently complained that few, if any, sources of local and regional news – apart from the under-utilised Afrovision – were available to them.

Common international sources include CNN, often available for free or at little cost, Deutsche Welle, the BBC, Reuters Television, and WTN (now owned by the Associated Press). One station reported regular use of 'Worldnet', a collection of American TV newscasts and United States Information Agency (USIA) produced programs distributed each day for free by USIA in their effort to provide the world with US viewpoints. In earlier research I demonstrated that major western broadcasters like the BBC and CNN draw a large portion of their pictures and
information, and story ideas, from agencies Reuters and WTN. Dependence on the agencies is greatest for African stories, for few broadcasters base correspondents on the continent anymore (Paterson, 1996).

International television news agencies, all based in London, form the core of the global television news distribution system. The elimination of foreign newsgathering resources by television networks worldwide has increased the influence of these institutions in manufacturing the television viewer's image of the world. Cutbacks by major broadcast networks, particularly those in the US, spurred the growth of the television news agencies (Paterson, 1996; Waite, 1992). The BBC and CNN are important clients of the news agencies, sometimes competitors to the agencies, and almost always agenda-setters for them.

My extended ethnographic research with television news agencies demonstrated that they are more inclined to treat major corporations and western governments as acceptable sources (of information or video images) than broadcasters from developing countries, and that management and news processing structures are designed not to insulate journalists' decisions from commercial considerations, but to ensure that such considerations prevail at all levels of news production.

There is mounting evidence that the choices made by television news agencies do carry through to the stories that are broadcast, especially in the case of smaller broadcasters so dependent on agency product. Television coverage of the developing world is already deplorably infrequent and misleading. Africa appears now to be more excluded from contribution to the global flow of television news than it has ever been. This author sees no basis for the common refrain that the CNN and BBC will democratise Africa (Freedom Forum, 1998; Steyn and Debeer, 1997).

I have argued elsewhere (Paterson, 1998) that a distinctive way of seeing the world comes with the images and information supplied by the western TV news services, an ideological perspective with little regard for the priorities of African broadcasters and audiences. The current system of intensive dependence on these services by any broadcaster wishing to provide international coverage to their audience means that alternative interpretations of the world's news are sharply reduced. Television needs images – without them stories often go unreported – and if the only source for images (and usually, the accompanying information) are the few commercial mega-broadcasters and news wholesalers described here, their perspective must prevail.

For example, a lack of familiarity with and understanding of non-western cultures is a factor negatively influencing coverage of developing countries. Measurement of such influence is elusive, but clear-cut cases emerged during my research. For example, while I conducted extended participant observation in the Reuters Television newsroom (in 1995), a story about the peace process in Angola arrived via satellite from the Reuters Africa Bureau in Nairobi.

Much of the tape contained footage of a traditional Angolan celebration involving dance. The acting ‘Output Editor’ commented in disgust, ‘that's an entertainment story, isn't it? Six minutes, a bit of music, a bit of drums ...’ He deemed it to be improper illustration for a political story (according to his preferred news frames), and ordered old file footage of Jonas Savimbi attending meetings from the company archives to illustrate the story in place of the current footage. African audiences who might well have understood the meaning of the celebration would never have seen it, for Reuters, and their editorial choices in London, substantially dictate what the continent sees.
Conclusions

The flood of commercial entertainment channels into Africa offers few genuine benefits for the continent. Experience has shown that where mass media is employed in Africa to serve the information needs of the majority, community newspapers and radio prove far more accessible and useful than television. The rapid spread of entertainment television in the developing world often proves more a disruption to traditional social structures than an agent of progress, and the encouragement of mass consumerism that comes with commercial television can only lead to waste and classism in African societies which can ill afford either.

One emerging genre of television does show promise for contributing to development, but high production costs with only moderate advertising potential mean commercial media will be slow to embrace it. The telenovela, pioneered in Brazil, has demonstrated some success in disseminating ‘pro-social’ messages, promoting birth control, effective health practices, and political participation, for example. Pilot ‘edutainment’ programs following the telenovela model are proving effective in Egypt and South Africa (Paterson, 1994b). Such programs are now being evaluated in many countries for their effectiveness in contributing to development goals.

As satellites fill Africa’s skies we should treat with caution ecstatic predictions of an end to African crisis and isolation. The trends identified here suggest that the commercial broadcasters swarming Africa with the backing of global media conglomerates will continue to sing the praises of ‘reform’ and a new dawn in Africa, while ignoring the information requirements and social realities of the audiences they so eagerly court. Nations seeking the benefits of liberalisation must craft legislation which ensures that financial control remains local but excludes members of government from positions of control; that demands a high percentage of local content to revitalise indigenous cultural production and to serve local information needs; and that demands that programmers respect the culture and needs of the audience in return for access to it.

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Journalism & Armed Conflict in Africa: The Civil War in Sierra Leone

Amadu Wurie Khan

Unusually for discussions of the press in West Africa, this article is written by a journalist-academic, who for a large part of 1990s worked for the Sierra Leonenan human rights newspaper *For Di People*, reporting on and analysing the civil war in Sierra Leone. Drawing on his experience, he sets out in detail the nature of accusations of bias against the local and foreign media in Sierra Leone, accusations made not only by interested parties, but also by a wide range of readers or listeners, and which have been seen as materially affecting the course of the war and attempts at mediation and peace-making. A variety of reasons for vulnerability to such accusations are then examined, including the exigencies of war reporting, journalistic practice in Sierra Leone, the political economy of the press, and the problems created both by harsh government restrictions on press freedom and the media’s response to them. The article argues that while there are instances of overt and calculated bias in reporting of the civil war, it is very difficult to draw a clear distinction between ‘intended’ and ‘unintended’ bias.

Introduction

A large body of opinion among journalists, peace mediators and factions involved in the war in Sierra Leone would claim that the news media have been a ‘third party’ in the conflict. Each of the factions embroiled in the war, and successive governments of Sierra Leone, have persistently complained that the local and international media helped to peddle propaganda for their opponents. For instance, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader Corporal Foday Sankoh accused the Sierra Leone media of propagating hostile press reports ‘orchestrated by press men who are in the pay of politicians’ (*Daily Graphic*, 16 April 1996). Similar accusations were made by the NPRC junta Minister for Information, Arnold Bishop-Gooding, who claimed that the international media ‘is a propaganda machine for terrorists … in their determination to de-stabilise the government …’ (*West Africa*, 1995; quoted by Abraham, 1997:112). Recently, on the eve of escalating armed hostilities in Sierra Leone and before the 25 May 1997 coup, the elected civilian government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah banned the ‘Expo Times’ newspaper. Its editorial staff were charged with treason after publishing an article the government considered to be subversive and threatening to the peace process stemming from the Abidjan agreement (Leonenet, 1998).

The assumption on both sides is thus that the analyses, comments, opinions, interviews and reportage in general of the war by the media tend to be ‘slanted’ in favour of one faction or the other, in Sierra Leone as elsewhere (Hiebert, 1995). This
assumption may impact on the war, influence its prosecution, and undermine peace initiatives. Whether or not these accusations of 'bias' and 'hidden agendas' by the press in the coverage of the civil war in Sierra Leone were true or misguided continues to be debated. More importantly, it is still to be determined whether this alleged role of the media is deliberate or inadvertent. The latter question forms the focus of this article, but before the accusations are discussed in more detail, it will be helpful to provide background on the recent events in Sierra Leone, and on the development of the press in the last decade.

The Media and Political Change in the 1990s

During the 1990s, radio broadcasts have been the most popular and widely-consulted news medium. In addition to the national radio station, there were several privately owned FM radio stations up to the time before the 25 May 1997 coup: about five in the capital, Freetown, and one in each of the three provinces. Besides local radio broadcasting, the international media particularly the BBC, Radio France International and the Voice of America also compete for audiences.

The print media or the press have in the past also enjoyed a substantial clientele. At present there are over fifteen newspapers with the status of national newspapers (compared to only a couple in the 1970s and early 80s). They represent both the government controlled and independent press. For instance, the Daily Mail and Freedom Now have allegiance to the ruling Sierra Leone People Party (SLPP) government of Tejan Kabbah, and Torchlight is the mouthpiece of the largest opposition party, United National People's Party (UNPP). The rest are independent, some having particular political orientations. On average, the newspapers publish three times a week and have over 3,000 sales per issue.

Television broadcasting is limited to Freetown, the rest of the neighbouring Western Area and a few areas in the Provinces. Due to its prohibitive cost, erratic electricity supply, reception being limited to certain areas and there being only about eight hours of telecasting, this medium has a small audience (Khan, 1997) in comparison to radio and newspapers. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), has been the only professional body coordinating and safeguarding the interests of journalists. It is normal for all practising journalists to register with the association.

Throughout the post-independence period the media have struggled for survival in the midst of civilian and military dictatorships. In the 1990s, this struggle to uphold the freedom of the press and access to information has been met with various forms of persecution by successive regimes, notably draconian Press Laws and repression of any form of political opposition. To fill the democratic space and protect their profession and the freedom of expression of the individual a radical brand of journalism gradually evolved.

Sierra Leone has experienced several different governments in the 1990s, each embroiled in a brutal war with RUF insurgents. After almost two decades of kleptocratic civilian single-party dictatorship under the All Peoples Congress (APC), led by Siaka Stevens, power was transferred by Stevens to Major-General Joseph Momoh, in the mid-1980s. This was against a background of mass dissent characterised by student and labour strikes over accelerating economic decline. Popular expectations that Momoh's regime would provide better leadership and improvements in the standard of living faded not long after his assumption of office, as he presided over a government of corruption, ethnocentric bigotry and repressive
dictatorship. In the prevailing climate of hardship, an insurgent faction calling itself
the Revolutionary United Front/Sierra Leone launched an all-out war to overthrow
the Momoh regime on 23 March 1991. Its aim, as given by its leader Foday Sankoh in
an interview in the BBC ‘Focus on Africa’ programme was ‘to overthrow the
centralised, corrupt and repressive All People’s Congress (APC), and to revamp the
economy by wrestling control of the national mineral wealth from foreigners’ (Muana,
1997:77). This insurrection has continued to be a threat to the survival of successive
regimes, and has created worsening relations between them and the media in Sierra
Leone as the latter tried to report on the war.

Thus in the face of hostile publicity by the press in relation to the government’s
inability to bring the war to a speedy end, the Momoh regime intensified censorship
of both the local and international media. A law demanding that reporters must seek
clearance from the Public Relations Office of the Sierra Leone military was passed,
which not only led the ordinary Sierra Leonean to treat the war with apathy, but also
prevented the press from alerting government to the climate of antipathy pervading
the army in the theatre of operations. All that was reported by the government
controlled media was propaganda favourable to the government. Many observers
believed that the coup by the military which toppled the Momoh government in April
1992 would have been nipped in the bud had the media not been muzzled.

When on 29 April 1992, young junior officers led by Captain Strasser overthrew the
Momoh regime and put in place the National Provisional Ruling Council Mark 1
(NPRC1), there was popular support from all sections of civil society. SLAJ
immediately issued a statement pledging support for the coup and the eradication of
a regime opposed to press freedom. Strasser, broadcasting to the nation over FM 94, a
radio station he had earlier occupied to announce the coup, promised a speedy
conclusion to the war, a return to multi-party democracy and the safeguarding of
freedom of expression for all Sierra Leonians. The commitment by the junta to
promote a free press was underlined when it appointed as Secretary of State for
Information Hindolo Trye, a former crusading journalist and victim of press
persecution under the Stevens government. However, this romantic interlude
between the press and the junta was short-lived. As the military junta and their
clientelist followers indulged in abuse of human rights and corruption, the radical
press started to question their excesses. Like their predecessors, the junta passed
harsh decrees requiring journalists to seek clearance before publishing any story
considered to be sensitive to its war prosecution and state security, imposed high fees
for registration and imprisonment for any breach of the Decree. The SLAJ Executive
condemned this attempt at muzzling the press, and called on its members to boycott
media practising until the Press Decree was revoked. In a bid to step up its
propaganda campaign against the RUF and to (mis)inform the public, the Junta set up
a newspaper, Liberty Voice. It also appointed the elder brother of a key member of the
junta, Martin Mondeh, as editor to the government Daily Mail newspaper.

When it became clear that the NPRC1 was using the war to prolong its stay in power
amid unrelenting corruption and abuses perpetrated against the populace, the media
articulated the call by civil society for the junta to negotiate a peaceful resolution to
the conflict and a return to multi-party democracy. On 16 January 1996, a palace coup
removed Strasser and ushered in the NPRC Mark 2 government, led by his second-in-
command, Brigadier-General Julius Maada Bio. The reasons advanced for this putsch
by the Public Relations Office of the emerging leadership was the desire by the rest
of the members of the NPRC to prevent Strasser from derailing the democratic
timetable.
The radical press led by *For Di People* was hostile to the coup, seeing it as machinations by the military to hang on to power. When it became clear through reportage by the media that the NPRC2 was manipulating the peace talks with the RUF to postpone the holding of free and fair general elections, the poor relations between the media and the junta worsened. The incidence of attacks by junta elements against journalists particularly editors and publishers increased. On 26 February 1996, the NPRC2 succumbed to pressure from the press and the local and international communities to hold Presidential and Legislative elections. On the following night soldiers botched an assassination attempt against the Editor-in-Chief of *For Di People*, Paul Kamara.

This climate of hostility between press and government continued under the civilian regime of President Kabbah, elected in 1996. Like all its predecessors, the SLPP government reneged on their pledge to guarantee freedom of the press and expression, and the formation of a Press Council on terms drawn up by SLAJ. It went on to enact a Newspaper Act reminiscent of the draconian Press Decrees of previous governments. This act was awaiting Presidential Assent when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) coup was launched in May 1997 by Major Jonny Paul Koroma, whose regime quickly allied with the RUF. Koroma claimed in his take over speech that the Kabbah government's clampdown on the press and freedom of expression was among others the main reason for the coup, but the new regime soon became repressive against the media. SLAJ was one of the pressure groups that condemned the coup and called upon the AFRC/RUF alliance to reinstate the ousted government. Major newspapers including the *Vision*, the *Standard Times*, the *Democrat* and *For Di People* ceased publication in protest at AFRC hostilities against journalists.

In their desperation to counteract a hostile international response, the AFRC used the state-controlled media. Both the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) radio station and a privately owned FM98 station were used to wage a campaign of misinformation and propaganda against the Nigeria-led ECOMOG initiative to dislodge them from power and reinstate the ousted government. The Kabbah government installed the FM98.1 FM station in Lungi to mobilise support against the organisers of the coup. Throughout this period, segments of the radical press continued to publish information considered to be subversive by the AFRC junta.

The AFRC/RUF alliance was finally driven from power in February 1997 by the Nigerian-led ECOMOG forces, and the civilian government reinstated under Kabbah. Very soon the perceived subversive agenda of the media became a sore point in the media-government relations. It is ironic that a president who has thanked the media and the Executive of SLAJ for their pivotal role in championing democracy and freedom of speech, so enabling his reinstatement, should pass a decree aimed at muzzling the media's activities. The Minister for Information, Julius Spencer (1), demanded that all publications relating to the war must seek clearance from the Nigerian-led ECOMOG High Command. As it has always been, media practice would continue to be seen as suspect and enmeshed in a 'hidden agenda': in the words of the Deputy Minister for Defence, Hinga Norman, 'in the current climate of civil war all journalists are collaborators' (Hinga-Norman, quoted in Leonenet, 1998). We may now examine why this perception of bias should have been so ubiquitous.

**Manifestations of 'Bias' in Reporting**

From 1994 to 1996, I was involved as a working journalist in hundreds of formal interviews and informal discussions with local and international journalists covering the civil war in Sierra Leone. I interviewed government forces including commiss-
sioned and non-commissioned officers, military commanders and privates in the battle fronts, RUF prisoners, human rights activists, peace mediators and negotiators, humanitarian aid workers, and other officials in government and civil society. It became clear from these discussions that the media were perceived to be ‘biased’ in their war coverage in the following ways:

**Pejorative Language**
The language of the media is seen as pejorative against one faction or the other (as has been observed elsewhere: van Dijk, 1991; Fowler, 1991). A typical example cited by interviewees was the use by some of the media of the term ‘sobels’ (soldiers-cum-rebels) for government forces, whilst the RUF rebels were in most cases referred to as ‘liberators’. Most preferred the RUF to be presented and constantly referred to as ‘terrorists’. However, they pointed out that whilst the independent media used these terms haphazardly, the state-controlled media (the SLBS and the *Daily Mail*) always used derogatory epithets against the RUF, and avoided the term ‘sobel’. The interviewees tended to agree, particularly the key parties (government and RUF) to the conflict, that the manner in which language was used in war reportage was an indication of prejudice.

**Skewed Presentation**
The presentation of atrocities committed by the factions was also of concern to them. Those newspapers and radio stations supporting the government provided graphic details and exaggerated portrayals of the burning and looting of towns and villages, and the maiming and killing of civilians perpetrated by the RUF. Very few and in most cases no reports were made of appalling atrocities committed by government troops. News of human rights abuses such as summary executions of POW’s and suspected RUF collaborators exposed by the human rights newspaper *For Di People* (FDP) and the BBC’s Focus on Africa (henceforth Focus) were seen by the government and their sympathisers as ‘propaganda’. They thought this was aimed at discrediting the government and demoralising its soldiers.

**Timing and Frequency**
The timing, frequency and amount of air-time and space given to coverage of activities of the factions and their spokespersons were not evenly balanced. The common view was that these were slanted in favour of the media’s ‘vested interest’. A typical accusation was that Focus had more frequent interviews and longer air-time with the RUF spokesmen Fayia Musa and Abu Bakar Sankoh whenever the RUF was launching an offensive. Many believed the BBC had lent itself to manipulation by the RUF. For instance, at the height of the war, the RUF spokesman Fayia Musa exploited this in making a claim that they were in the outskirts of Freetown, and about to launch an attack on it. Many political observers believed this was an effective strategy by the RUF to boost morale among its fighters, spread panic among the large civilian population of the capital, and impede the rapid mobilisation of material by the military. A few days later, the NPRC Public Relations Officer, Colonel Kerefa Kargbo, accused Focus of using this strategy to spread panic among the civilian population which would affect morale among the military. The arrest and detention of the *Expo Times* editorial staff was, according to SLPP government sources, due to a story published by the journalists which was perceived as aimed at laying the ground work for an RUF offensive (FDP, 1996).
Misinformation
Blatant misrepresentation of the facts, particularly by the international media, was also given by those interviewed as an index of taking sides in the conflict (see also Herman and Chomsky, 1989). A glaring example was during the ECOMOG offensive against the AFRC/RUF junta. The broadcast by the Focus war correspondent, Mark Doyle, that civilians were fighting alongside the unpopular junta in Freetown was categorically denied by other journalists, and by political and military observers. A similar position by the ousted government was expressed in an interview on Focus by the Sierra Leone ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. James Jonah, who accused Doyle of misrepresenting the facts in order to subvert the ECOMOG offensive (Leonenet, 1998).

Selectivity
It was also asserted that although some media organs do not misinform the public, they nonetheless publish stories and facts favourable to one faction and were unfavourable to the other. Those interviewed from the government and its military high command associate this practice with the FDP press. They cited the example of a front-page publication in FDP showing a group of soldiers slaughtering a suspected RUF collaborator. Even though they agreed that the picture was genuine, they saw it as intended to discredit the military, and argued that similar pictures of RUF atrocities had never been published in FDP. The Information Minister of the government, George Banda-Thomas, and military chiefs interpreted this as a calculated action by FDP to undermine the efforts of government to improve civilian-military relations. They lamented that they expected the media to complement the efforts of government in improving the strained relations between the civilian population and their army rather than indulging in what they considered to be ‘negative publicity’.

Consequences of ‘Slanted’ Journalism
These instances of ‘biased’ journalism given by the interviewees were also largely believed by them to have affected the temper of the war and its outcome, in the following ways.

Morale Factor
Top military commanders directly in charge of the planning and execution of military strategy in the war with the insurgents claimed that the ‘derogatory’ reportage against the military had a demoralising effect on their troops in the battle fronts (see also McQuail, 1992). For instance, they argued that the exaggerated presentation of defeats inflicted by the rebels juxtaposed with low-keyed reporting of the military’s successes dampened their troops’ appetite to fight. This view was endorsed by soldiers themselves who confessed that they were ‘ordered’ not to listen to radio broadcasts as a countermeasure to this phenomenon. A similar ‘news blackout’ strategy was employed by the RUF who executed any rebel or civilian caught with an unauthorised radio set (interviews with war victims, 1993-1996). Some RUF captives and defectors spoke of the impact of the Focus broadcasts about the humane treatment given to RUF prisoners after surrendering. They agreed that they were motivated to surrender after listening to broadcasts about offers of amnesty by the government. In this way, even though this might be seen by peace mediators as positive, there was an undercurrent of the media influencing the attitudes and decisions of combatants.
Mistrust and Animosity

Both the government and army alleged that the critical reporting of their conduct in the war, such as the brutal treatment of suspected civilian RUF collaborators, was largely responsible for alienating them from the masses. Branding the soldiers as 'sobels' who rape, loot, burn villages and massacre civilians in the process, was the most potent press slur detested by the military. Government frequently accused FDP of causing 'bad blood' between them and the military. This was with particular reference to the news reports that huge financial, material and moral support was being given by the Kabbah government to the Civil Defence Militia (CDF) or Kamajohs. An article I wrote entitled ‘The Military-Kamajoh feud’ (FDP, 28 September 1996), questioning the constitutionality of these actions and their impact on politico-military relations in privileging an ethnically-based paramilitary over the national army was strongly condemned by the Deputy Minister of Defence, Hinga Norman (himself a kamajoh; see Muana, 1997). In his view, the publication was aimed at inciting revolt by the military against his government. He labelled FDP an instrument of the RUF orchestrating a strategy aimed at driving a wedge between the government's strained relations with the military.

Intelligence Networking

Many regarded what the government had referred to as ‘timely’ and ‘coordinated’ news reports as suggestive of a ‘hidden agenda’ by the media. These included news about troop deployment and procurement of military hardware by the army on the one hand, and on the other, the conducting of interviews over Focus with RUF spokespersons during an offensive. The military's Public Relations Office was adamant that these were avenues through which the RUF could obtain and coordinate ‘intelligence’ information (Press Conference, 1995). A salient example of the media being portrayed as ‘aiding and abetting’ the war by serving as conduits for ‘intelligence’ and information networking among rebels was the 1997 coup and the creation of the junta’s alliance with the RUF rebels. According to another human rights journalist in Freetown (name withheld for security reasons), the organisers of the coup would never have received support from the RUF but for an interview conducted by Focus with the RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, who was then under house arrest in Nigeria. Although the coup organisers had called upon the rebels in the rural areas to join them in forming a government, the appeal fell on deaf ears. Subsequent broadcasts over the junta radio that Sankoh had endorsed the partnership continued to be received with caution by the rebels. A message by Sankoh was then broadcast over the junta radio station telling his rebel commanders to join the junta, and adding that they would get confirmation of his message over Focus. In a subsequent interview on this programme, the RUF leader ordered his troops to mobilise and enter the city to join the coup organisers.

Whether these events amount to a coordinated networking of intelligence orchestrated by the BBC continues to be debated. What this narrative serves is to give credence to the view that the media had been another player in escalating the conflict and undermining the peaceful resolution of the crisis which mediators were attempting to broker (for non-Sierra Leonean parallels, see McQuail, 1992; Marris and Thornham, 1996). In fact, some political observers argued that a deal would have been struck by the United States-led diplomatic community with the leaders of the coup to reinstate the ousted civilian regime. These circumstances might have been pure coincidence, but they are in harmony with the belief that foreign media have encouraged or peddled propaganda for factions in other countries' civil wars (Hiebert, 1995; James et al.1996; Herman and Chomsky, 1998).
So far I have done no more than report allegations, mostly by interested parties, about the media and their impact in a war situation. Have these allegations themselves been taken out of the context of war reportage? Do they have any basis? If these observations are true is the perceived ‘bias’ premeditated or inadvertent? To answer these questions, we must examine the dynamics of war journalism and the general features of the journalistic tradition under which the media operated in Sierra Leone.

Eyewitness Accounts
Reliance on eyewitness accounts after the event has been a prominent feature of media practice in Africa particularly in the coverage of insurgencies. There are a number of reasons for this. First due to the impoverished nature of their economies and infrastructure, most if not all local news media – unlike their foreign counterparts – are discouraged from live coverage of conflicts. No Sierra Leonean medium took out insurance against loss of life or expensive equipment, and war correspondents were afraid of putting their safety in jeopardy in order to embark on first-hand reporting. Cases abound where journalists have been captured and held hostage, tortured, and deliberately or accidentally killed whilst covering civil wars in Africa. A typical example in Sierra Leone was the death in a road ambush of the war correspondent of the *Expo Times* newspaper, Eddie Smith. Such acts of callousness and savagery by the insurgents against journalists, who were often believed to be agents or spies of government, made them give the battlefront itself a wide berth. The only alternative that was professionally reputable was to ferret for news among displaced persons fleeing an area of attack.

Second, it was part of journalistic tradition to give credibility to any reporting by quoting from eyewitnesses interviews and press statements released by the factions. In both instances, the factions exploited this practice to their own advantage. As later press investigations revealed, the propaganda machine of the RUF resorted to a strategy whereby they infiltrated sympathisers to work as intelligence and propaganda agents among the fleeing civilian population. They often gave doctored versions and propaganda favourable to their cause and agenda undetected at the time by journalists who depended on eyewitness accounts. The government also cashed in on this, by dishing out information through press statements and interviews that promoted their own propaganda efforts.

In both circumstances, as is often the case with wars, ‘the first casualty is truth’ as reporting is short of ‘hard facts and unbiased accounts’ (Hiebert, 1995; James et al.1996). Although this manner of reporting the war in Sierra Leone by the media is prone to falsity misinformation and one-sidedness, it cannot for that reason be seen as a deliberate attempt by the media to use eyewitness accounts to serve as conduits of propaganda for the parties to the conflict.

A Credulous Readership
The clientele of news media in most African societies are prone to see the Fourth Estate as the arbiter of truth, factual authority and objectivity. Even though in most cases the fact that a report was based on eyewitness accounts and press statements was duly acknowledged by the reporter, the readers unfortunately failed to recognise this. Most cannot differentiate, in terms of degree of authenticity, between first-hand reporting and second-hand information elicited from eyewitnesses. For a population that is seventy-five percent illiterate, any information that came from the media is regarded as authoritative. This is not to say that the populace never view the news
coming from certain organs such as the state-controlled radio or press as suspect: during the war in Sierra Leone, many people came to take the news from the government news organs with a pinch of salt. Normally however, the bulk of the local media was highly depended upon by the average Sierra Leonean for news and considered to be trustworthy.

This was even truer of the international media broadcasting into Sierra Leone. By virtue of the fact that they were foreign and stationed outside the country, they were regarded by many listeners as independent, being outside government and RUF manipulation, and so objective and ‘unbiased’. For instance the BBC’s Focus on Africa, which enjoys the largest percentage of listeners in the English speaking countries of Africa, was seen as reporting ‘facts’ and perceived to be objective by the average Sierra Leonean. Even though more often than not it relied on eyewitness accounts and press statements from war factions, their listeners accepted these versions as the ‘gospel truth’, even sometimes failing to differentiate between information quoted from ‘unconfirmed’ sources or eyewitness accounts, and those from ‘authoritative’ first-hand sources. Therefore it is very likely that Focus has – wittingly or unwittingly – disseminated potential misinformation or propaganda based on press releases of war parties, and thus inadvertently influenced their listeners’ perception of the war. It was commonplace for critics of Focus, who accused them of having a ‘hidden agenda’ in the war in Sierra Leone, to fail to convince members of the public that a particular newscast was not based on concrete facts, being often rebuffed with the rejoinder: ‘The BBC said so! – it is true’.

Interest vs. Objectivity

Some at least of the Sierra Leone media were patently partisan and bent on advancing the position of their proprietors. This is inevitably the case with the state-controlled media (Korzenny et al. 1992). They made no apologies for this and never pretended to be neutral in their undertakings. To this category belong the media owned and controlled by successive governments prosecuting the conflict. For example, FM98.1 which was preoccupied with the restoration of democracy became a propaganda instrument of the ousted Tejan Kabbah regime. It was seen by many, even the opponents of the AFRC/RUF junta alliance, as broadcasting purely anti-junta news. It never gave an objective account of the AFRC/RUF position and conduct in contrast to its claim to espouse democracy and freedom of expression. A similar policy was pursued by the junta’s radio station FM 98. In what became the battle of the ‘air waves’ both the AFRC/RUF and pro-democracy media engaged in peddling propaganda, ‘slanted journalism’, and misinformation during the Nigerian-led intervention against the AFRC/RUF alliance (to such a degree that the media clientele gradually came to realise the modus operandi of these propagandist media houses).

Other forms of partisanship could be no less influential, and were no less likely to lead to accusations of biased journalism. Most of the Sierra Leone media are (or were) offshoots of various political persuasions, interest or pressure groups, each with their distinct political stances. For instance, in crisis and post-crisis Sierra Leone, the FDP newspaper became an instrument of advocacy for and promotion of human rights and democratic values espoused by the National League For Human Rights and Democracy (NLHRD); and the New Breed newspaper (now defunct) was committed to agitating for the introduction and participation of ‘new breed’ manpower resources and new initiatives in all spheres of human endeavours in the country. This backgrounds coloured their analyses, features, comments and overall reportage of issues as far as this resonated with their position. It was common for FDP as
champions of civil liberties and human rights to cover the atrocities, inhuman abuses and hardship inflicted by the government and its armed forces against both civilians and prisoners. Typical examples included its questioning of the constitutionality of the Tejan Kabbah-led SLPP government in equipping and supporting the ethnically-oriented civil militia, the Kamajohs, and the government forces' strategy of large scale bombings of RUF controlled civilian settlements in the hinterland of the country. The FDP was subsequently accused of 'aiding and abetting' the RUF as well as subverting the government's prosecution of the war. Although, similar stories perpetrated by the RUF had been carried by FDP newspaper, this was never taken into account by the government.

Patronage and the Press
Running a newspaper is an expensive business in Sierra Leone, in large part as a result of legislation. It has been the strategy of postcolonial Sierra Leone governments to have a stranglehold on freedom of the press by putting into place highly restrictive press legislation. Recurring themes in such legislation have been the levying of prohibitive registration fees and the requirement that huge sums be deposited as collateral in case of lawsuits. The Ministry of Information under the NPRC junta levied a collateral amount of $2000 for newspapers, and stipulated that private individuals could serve as guarantors of this collateral (Leonenet, 1998). In addition, expensive preconditions for registration had to be satisfied, were such as the employing of six permanent staff. The Tejan Kabbah government was also about to sign into law a new Press Bill (The Newspapers Practitioners Bill), which imposed huge registration fees, before it was overthrown in the 25 May coup.

This has given rise to two sets of evils. One was that media ownership is transferred to the hands of the wealthy and commercial class as those media practitioners who are financially weak forge new partnership with the economically powerful. Journalists also sought patronage ties with the rich and politically well-connected to eke out the sums of money required. This explains why some newspapers in Sierra Leone like Liberty Voice during the military dictatorship of the NPRC was sponsored by the junta's Minister of Information Hindolo Trye, Torchlight was patronised by the political tycoon Reverend Y M Koroma, and Freedom Now registered by the SLPP political party under the SLPP reign. Although it could be argued that these presses were politically-oriented, the bottom line was that most journalists were left with no choice but to work for vested interests.

Political and economic heavyweights exploited this to their advantage. More often than not they either made financial contributions to presses or provided certain facilities such as office space, printing equipment and running adverts in these papers to boost their financial turnover. In return for their financial assistance, journalists often compromised their journalistic obligation to be neutral and impartial. The emergent double standard of morality in which certain so-called patrons were exempt whilst others received the critical gaze of the media made the profession culpable of 'bias' and vulnerable to accusations of providing clandestine support for war factions.

There was also the unethical and corrupt phenomenon of 'blackmail journalism' that had eaten into the moral fabric of journalism in Sierra Leone (Olu Gordon, 1996:5). This was known by a variety of names such as 'cheque-book', 'yellow', 'attack-collect' or 'brown envelope' journalism. This was the situation whereby corrupt journalists extorted moneys from individuals and establishments in exchange of favourable press coverage or to stop an ongoing negative reporting of an individual or
establishment. It also involved the receiving of bribes from a source to launch a defamatory attack on an individual or establishment (FDP, 1996). Examples of these actions that received the scrutiny of the SLAJ included the Ojukwu-S A J Musa saga, in which the Second in command in the NPRC junta, Lieutenant S A J Musa alleged that he had been blackmailed by the editor of the Pool newspaper (now defunct), Ojukwu Sesay, into awarding an overseas scholarship to the latter in exchange of his shelving of an ongoing pen lynching against S A J Musa.

It was highly likely that politicians who had manipulated the press before in this manner, and were now at the receiving end of negative media reportage would see the media as being in the employ or receiving pay packets from their opponents with whom they were in an armed struggle. This may be partly responsible for the hasty and unsubstantiated labelling of journalists as ‘agents’ of dissidents in Sierra Leone, and for their coverage during wars continuing to be perceived as suspect and contentious.

**Low Standard of Expertise**

Many participants in the war, its management and resolution have attributed the seeming subjective and irresponsible war coverage to the abysmal level of professional training possessed by journalists. The view was that a fair percentage of the editorial and reporting staff of the news media did not have the technical competence required for war reporting and coverage. In readers’ polls conducted by FDP on numerous occasions between 1995 and 1996 on this issue, the general consensus was that the ‘bias’ of the media in their coverage of the war was due to lack of professional training by journalists. Similar views were expressed in an article in another national newspaper, the Concord Times. A columnist blamed the ‘inadequacy in terms of resources and trained personnel to understand the primary press functions of research of stories, proper analyses, coverage and presentation of events and trends in government and society’ (Concord Times, 4 December 1996:3) as largely responsible for this phenomenon plaguing the media in Sierra Leone.

**News Gap**

In the absence of a formidable and officially recognised political opposition in postcolonial Sierra Leone, the media gradually emerged to fill this democratic space. This was against the background of the stifling of freedom of expression and a free press under successive governments. There emerged an overriding desire by the ‘radical left’ (Rashid, 1997) within civil society to articulate the ‘voice’ of the underprivileged majority to hold the ruling elite accountable. This culminated in the rise of radical journalism. Examples include the Tablet (under the one-party Stevens era) and For Di People (in the post-1985 period), whose journalists and proprietors had a pedigree of student radicalism and anti-government agitation in the late 1970s and 80s. The belief that the media could serve as a ‘shadow opposition’ and a medium for articulating society’s conflicting views may have been responsible for their so-called exaggerated portrayal of the activities of the RUF. It was, I may suggest, a purely professionally-driven motive to let their readers know ‘the other side of the story’ in a society where the government controlled the broadcast media of radio and television. Therefore it became an ethical obligation to present the RUF version as a dissident group contesting the political hegemony of the ruling establishment. In their enthusiasm it became inadvertent that some of these presses devoted much reportage to the insurgents to the extent that they were perceived as propagandist and sympathisers.
Press Vendetta

The common occurrence of mudslinging which has characterised the journalistic tradition in Sierra Leone may be further factor to account for the accusations of ‘slanted’ journalism. In addition to hostile comment from participants in the war themselves, there have been accusations by journalists against each other of being propaganda agents and surrogates of the RUF. A striking example was the protracted press vendetta between the new Shaft and For Di People newspapers. Bunting Davies, editor of the Shaft, alleged that the editors of For Di People were in clandestine contact with the RUF with the connivance of the entire Sierra Leone Association of Journalists Executive, prompted the association to take disciplinary action against Davies. Unfounded though it was, these allegations provided ample ammunition for a government which has always been sceptical of the role of the media in the conflict to effect a crackdown on some media houses. Furthermore many of those interviewed thought this had an effect on their view of the media’s role in the conflict. They argued that if SLAJ members themselves could make these claims, then it was not superficial for the public to think that a sector of the media was indulging in ‘bias’ reportage to advance the war propaganda efforts and public profile of the RUF.

Conclusion

Throughout this discussion, I have tried to problematise the role of the news media as an information and communication institution in the civil war in Sierra Leone. In reviewing the ways in which the media may be seen as negatively impacting on the war and subverting its peaceful resolution, I have tried to critique the journalistic traditions and configuration of the social and politico-economic forces that shape these traditions and perceptions. It cannot be denied that the media may be biased and abused during wars for partisan purposes. A plethora of evidence has been adduced to buttress this fact as seen in the Rwandan civil conflict and as some instances in the Sierra Leone experience have shown. More important is to identify the types of bias in news reportage of wars and the extent to which bias arises from the owners’ or journalists’ intentions, or from artefacts of the political economy of journalism and publishing in Africa, and the exigencies of reporting in civil wars. This is no less true of the international media, such as the BBC’s Focus on Africa programme, as it is of the local media; this case study of Sierra Leone has indicated how difficult it is to make a sharp distinction between ‘intended’ and ‘unintended’ bias in reporting civil wars.

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Endnote

Julius Spencer, a former journalist once prosecuted by the AFRC regime, had run the pro-Kabbah FM98.1 radio station.
References

Much of the material for this article is drawn from author's own experience, or from the files of For Di People and other Sierra Leonean newspapers. Other material used includes:


Leonenet (1998), A Forum of Discussion by Sierra Leoneans through the Internet.


Media & Democracy in Southern Africa

Guy Berger

A Southern view of media and democracy can benefit from the insights produced by theories of media and development. These highlight critical political questions on the reach of media, its content, state control, alternative media, journalists and public participation, and ultimately the impact of the media. The same theories can also give insight into the understanding of the media and the 'public sphere' in the South, and their place in southern democracy. In the end, the question of democracy and media in the South also needs to be understood in relation to democracy and media in global terms.

Introduction: Working Definitions

What is a Southern view? Paul Ansah (1994:231) has noted that perhaps there is a common field of experience that distinguishes African society from others, but that one does need to qualify this if one is going to speak of a cultural or world view. In the same vein, it is rather sweeping to generalise about North and South. The remarks in this article should therefore be taken in this light: they are generalisations that do not adequately reflect the variety of conditions in either North or South. For instance, is South Africa classified as North or South?

Probably, the terms North and South are best understood as heuristic devices that help to caricature certain trends against which the differential realities can be characterised and assessed. In this light, it makes sense to define the one in relation to the other, which is to say that the significance of the features of each is primarily in their difference to the other. A southern view (which of course is wider than an African view, although that is the colouring in this paper) is based on salient features of difference. But which is the starting point? Which is the norm in relation to which the other is different? You don't have to guess here: the Southern view has typically taken its cue from the North. It measures its difference in relation to the conditions of the North. If the North has representative parliamentary democracy and a primarily privately-owned press, this becomes the standard against which deviance can be gauged. The limitations of Northern institutions are underplayed; the potential to measure both North and South against a third standard – perhaps an ideal of participatory democracy and public access to the media – remains hidden. It may very well be that on balance, many more people would opt for conditions of the North than for those of the South. But that should not blind us to the narrow parameters of such choices, and to the need to be more critical and more creative about other options.

This kind of definition of South in relation to North is a function of real power in the relationship between the two. And yet, it remains important to try to find something that can transcend these limits. This means we need to ask why democracy, why media? And it also means that if we take a Southern view, we need to go further than
bemoan our backwardness in relation to the North. Indeed we should go further than even critiquing the dominance of the North (the fact that we are not in that dominant spot). We need, rather, to take the vantage point of neither Northern nor Southern models or conditions, but something better than both.

It is also, naturally, important to say what one means by democracy. I do not want to get tied up into debates about whether democracy means individual rights versus majority opinion, local as against national, or representative vs. participatory institutions. I also leave aside questions about the separation of powers, checks and balances, and transparency as key components of democracy. (It can be asked in passing, whether democracy is only about pluralism, political competition and accountability of elected government – or whether other principles like solidarity have some part to play. I return to this question at the end of the article).

For the purposes of this article, therefore, I am using democracy in a very minimal sense: that of participation by means of real electoral choice in matters of government. It can refer, too, to significant participation in the media, by right, of stakeholders like journalists or members of the public.

Why such a basic, shallow view? Why not mention things like gender and democracy? Or information and democracy? Do I forget that many people oppose dictatorial regimes while being far from democratic themselves? These are all important. But for the purposes of this paper, I anchor myself in the conditions of the South – especially Southern Africa. And here, the number one question of democracy remains that of the franchise in a multi-party polity, followed closely by access to media power. Why this level of democracy in this particular context? For two reasons: one, these fundamental issues are a means to further ends – to economic and social goals, as well as to democratic participation in other realms of society (even if a meaningful vote and media access are only necessary and by no means sufficient, conditions for such ends). Two, as Ralph Dahrendorf has pointed out, democratic institutions and practices are an end in themselves: they represent cherished values and noble principles for which many people have striven; in a sense they are an integral part of being human and exercising human rights, responsibilities and freedoms.

Media and Democracy: A Framework for the South

There is no need here to repeat tautologous clichés about freedom of expression and press freedom being an indispensable component of democracy. We all know the rhetoric about the press as a ‘fourth estate of government’ and a ‘watchdog’ on the authorities. That these are conceptions originating in the North does not render them irrelevant to the South. However, it helps little to simply transplant them to Africa. Certainly, one can measure the reality of Africa’s media against these ideal types, and proclaim the evident shortfalls. To ‘understand’ this very African reality, however, is the real challenge. This requires a different methodological approach: one that tries to assess, in its own terms, the role of media in democracy in this part of the world.

While much has been written about the media’s role in development in the South, there has been comparatively little about its democratic significance. But to analyse the role of the media vis-à-vis democracy, it is useful to look at the paradigms and the historical periodisation of the media’s role vis-à-vis development. The former role refers primarily to the political – that is, the character of the state; the latter role refers largely to the economic – the level of productive capacity and its significance for
different classes in the society. My argument is that how the media has been explained in relation to the economic has a bearing on how it can be explained as regards the political. There is a rich tradition of analysing the role of media in development in the South that can be drawn upon.

Adapting largely from Robert White (1994:250), one can distinguish four paradigms for understanding the role of media in development. Although these have evolved out of different historical generations, it is noteworthy that none is yet dead.

1) Modernisation: media is seen as incorporating countries into world communications as a mechanism for the spread of the ideas, attitudes and behaviours, as well as the technologies, of developed Western countries.

2) Disassociation: This national independence paradigm sees media as part of cultural imperialism and a factor in perpetuating underdevelopment. It looks to the state as a foundation for media that could promote indigenous development and cultural identity.

3) Liberatory: in this view, the media is seen as supporting neo-colonial elites, and a focus has developed on alternative media (independent, folk, grassroots) as a means to develop subordinate classes, especially in cultural terms.

4) Negotiation and integration model: here media is seen as part of the articulation of contradictory social relations, and its role in development is subject to continuous negotiation. Media is also seen to potentially play a role within Development Support Communication, that is as a dependent and supplementary factor, rather than as independent cause of development.

All of these paradigms have some value for understanding the role of media in ‘development’ (though they tend to mean very different things by development, they still provide insights into the question of development as defined as exponential productive capacity – see Berger, 1992). It is my contention that these paradigms are also of value to the understanding of the role of media in democracy.

**Media Development Paradigms and Democracy**

Translating – or rather – applying these paradigms to politics, one derives valuable insights into the role of media in democracy.

To start with Modernisation, its infrastructural focus on the reach of media has a bearing: much media in the South did not, and still does not, reach beyond the elite. From a political point of view, the media in the South tended historically to serve the narrow interests of the colonial power and/or local settlers, and – since independence – those of an indigenous ruling group.

Media in this paradigm is of little help in terms of mass democracy. Indeed it is very often in direct contradiction to democracy if one utilises the focus of the Disassociation paradigm in looking at the content of this media. Disassociation also gives a framework for analysing the partial rise of nationalist media in much of the South, and which media after independence often became combined with colonial media (private and governmental) under direct state control. (In practice, state control has meant party control rather than public empowerment, but more on this shortly). In a country like South Africa, the aggressive role of the state in reshaping broadcasting since majority rule, reveals the continuing power of disassociationalism.
Elsewhere in the South, the involvement of the state has typically consolidated a new order and new ruling class that has not been much of an advance over the previous period, when measured from a democratic point of view.

The Liberation paradigm stresses the growth of media that could challenge the neo-colonial order. Independent publications in Africa have played a major part in the last decade, and there have been cases of the use of other communication devices – like culture and literacy training – in the same mode (see Chimombo and Chimombo, 1996). The limited reach and credibility of mainstream media has meant there has been space for these alternatives, which have either been given a new lease of life or been created from the beginning.

Finally, negotiation and limited power has seen the beginnings of a contestation of access and control over media, not least by journalists themselves who have kicked against their conversion into propagandists for ruling interests. But the media in the meantime seems to have lost not only its putative role as a force of development, but also much of its alleged political power. A free press in Nigeria has not succeeded in ushering in democracy in that country. Zambia’s Post can do exposés continuously, with little apparent effect on the accountability and restraint of government. (And even where the media may have influence, as Eapen reminds us, this is not the same as attitude change: effects are not the same as effectiveness (1994:280)

In short, much media in the South is – at best – constrained in its contribution to democracy by its reach, its content, and state control. More likely than not, it actually works against democracy. But alternative media, and contestation around the media as a site of struggle, are working towards democratisation.

**North-South Media Worlds**

It is illuminating to contrast the situation in the South with that in the North, drawing on the four paradigms. Taking, first, the Modernisation paradigm, there has been an assumption amongst many (articulated originally by W W Rostow) that economic development leads to democracy. This is a crude determinism that ignores cases ranging from Nazi Germany to contemporary China. While it assumes that the growth of modern mass media (public and private) is by definition an element of a democratic dispensation, this too ignores the role of media in helping to maintain domination within particular societies (such as in apartheid South Africa). In all cases, however, the assumption is that media does impact on power relations. But, as Ansah (1994:231) writes:

> Whereas access to and availability of mass communication facilities are fairly even and widespread in the west, one notices glaring disparities in Africa. On the one hand, there is a relative abundance of mass media facilities in the urban areas, where the elite minorities live and where the situation is close to what obtains in western societies; on the other hand, there is a media scarcity in the rural areas, where the vast majority of the people live. This means that in terms of penetration and possible effects, the situation is not comparable to that of the west, and in the African situation it may be more accurate to examine issues at two different levels.

He adds (1994:232): ‘the impact of the modern mass media on the rural dwellers is limited, or in any case not as marked or decisive as is the case in the industrialised countries.’ In his view, the majority of rural dwellers are generally untouched by western culture, and the social elite who are astride two cultures and heavily consume

... the organisation of communications is not only constituted by the general dynamics of modernity but is constitutive of them, and ... comes to play an increasingly central role in shaping both institutional and cultural formations and the textures of everyday life (1993: 522-3).

This remark needs to be rather qualified in the South, especially when related to Ansah's points and the factors listed in the previous section. The media ‘may’ be central to democracy (this claim should be taken with a pinch of salt) and the exercise of political power in the North; its limited infrastructure gives it less of a role in the South. This is not to say that media cannot have an influence out of all proportion to its actual reach, but to say that such influence is likely to be a lot less than it could otherwise have been were the media infrastructure far more widely spread.

Reflecting the outcome of the period that spawned Disassociation, Ansah points out that environments within which media operate are also different. The west has largely private ownership, and a comparatively competitive, free, market-oriented system. In much of Africa, there is a largely publicly owned, highly centralised, monopolised and controlled system that acts as an instrument for political legitimation and is only theoretically geared towards public service objectives. He concludes:

*Given these different environments, it should be obvious that media performance will be different in the two contexts, and that the approaches and philosophical underpinnings for assessing it automatically be different* (1994:234).

The point to take from this is that there are different assumptions at work in North and South. Northern pluralistic countries – at the level of ruling myth value a diverse and oppositional media (even if the reality is often not quite like that); many Southern countries – as part of a nation-building and elite consolidation mission – have developed monopolistic media systems. For the elites in the two kinds of societies, the rationale for media is different. Thus, media has a high entertainment premium in the North, while the South has a system that stresses educational functions of media. Much information is a commodity in the North, less so in the South (although the situation is changing as Paterson shows in this issue).

In the North, amongst the issues relevant to media and democracy are: protection of culture and language in the face of transnational flow of media; and the concentration of private ownership. Financing public broadcasting is an issue. Convergence of media is debated as is increasing access and potential free flow of ideas (in particular around the Internet). At the same time, there are concerns about falling circulations of print media, the traditional fourth estate of government. There is the problem of decreasing stature and credibility of journalism. Some theorists draw attention to information overload and its disempowering effects – ‘the more you watch, the less you know’, according to media activist Danny Schechter. Neil Postman (1997) speaks of the problems of ‘info glut’. Hamelink (1994:393) believes that communications can manufacture a sense of participation, and in so doing can undermine formal democracy. There is concern especially in the USA that journalism is dealing in trivia, and there are calls for a kind of public journalism that gets closer to communities and utilises the accessibility of journalistic language to empower audiences to get involved in issues (see Rosen, 1993; Rosen and Merritt, 1994; Clark, 1994).
In the South, the issues are far more basic. Protection of cultures is often less important than trying to forge a national culture and a *lingua franca*. While this issue shares with some countries in the North the aspiration of doing so in the face of transnational communication flows, the weakness of local production capacity means that the construction of a national culture is often in dependent relationship with foreign media content. For pro-democracy journalists, it is concentration of media in the hands of government that is the problem, rather than in the private sector. Like the North, however, there is a shortage of funds for state-financed media. Convergence is still embryonic, such that what is 'old media' for many Northerners is still 'new media' for many in the South (Maphiri, 1997). It is often these old media that need to be democratised, rather than looking to new media to supplant them.

In the South, especially in places like India, the circulation of print media is growing. The market, far from being saturated as in the North, can only expand with increased urbanisation and literacy. Journalism often assumes heroic purposes – as in the case of Pius Njawe, Cameroonian publisher, who was released from prison in 1995 after huge crowds turned out in protest at his arrest. Information overload is far less a problem than information irrelevance: one only has to look at much US-originating religious broadcasting in Africa to recognise this. The credibility of media in the South tends to be low where there is tight government control, and there is little sense that it plays a real part in the manufacture of consent (which is not to say that it goes as far as fostering a culture of dissent).

The big democratic issue in the South is the global imbalance between information rich and poor nations, and the even bigger imbalance between elites and masses in the latter. For democrats, the internal is probably the bigger question.

If the media is a factor (though not necessarily the pivotal one as often claimed) in democracy in the North, can it come to play this role in the South? The concept of the 'public sphere' can help answer this question.

**The Public Sphere in North and South**

Paul Ansah (1994:236) asks the question: How applicable are theories based on liberalism, rationalism, realism, and pragmatism to social contexts and cultural environments that are not guided by such philosophies? It is possible, he says, that these theories may be universal, but they have to be tested first. This remark is especially important for conceptualising the general role of the media in democracy by utilising the Northern-generated concept of the 'public sphere'. According to RA White (1994:251):

*Descriptively, the public sphere refers to that dimension of social action, cultural institutions, and collective decision making that affects all people in the society and engages the interests of all people in the national body. A This level differs from particular spheres of class, religion, ethnicity, region, locality, though it takes them into account.*

The 'public' sphere concept has been widely criticised for its inaccuracy *vis-à-vis* the actual situation in Northern countries (see Curran, 1994). But if one sees it more as a prescriptive than a descriptive concept, it becomes possible to draw a link between media and democracy whether in the North or in the South. In short, if a media system is such that it represents a wide spread of society, and services the same, a participatory space is created for – amongst other things – a politics which (for all its heterogeneity) has a critical bearing on that key public institution: the state (at its
various levels). Not that either realm – the public sphere or the state – exists in isolation of major contextual arrangements, such as economic or gender power.

Rather than interpreting the media as a free-floating ‘watchdog’, it is part of society – as is the state. On its own, the media may harbour illusions about its role and power as regards democracy in the state. Seen as part of the public sphere, it is located in a nexus of relations, and like the state, the media is usually dominated by the more powerful partners, or factions of these partners, within these relations. It is within this context, where there is an articulation between media and state – via the public sphere – which helps explain the implications for democracy.

This is not to underplay some aspects of the institutional specificity and relative autonomy of the media, nor its role in creating constituencies and setting agendas. But it is a reminder to us not to be media-centric in our analysis of media and democracy. And it is a way to locate the media – within the public sphere which in turn has a key bearing on the state and democracy.

With these remarks in mind, I turn now to the utility of the concept of the public sphere in countries of the South. Even as regards the North, this concept has been ‘de-romanticised’ from its original version developed by Jurgen Habermas. It has been pointed out that a public sphere is not necessarily about rational thought, nor pure information (as opposed to a mass of entertainment) (Curran, 1994). Nor is it about democratic groups being represented. There are bodies in the North like the fundamentalist Christian groups and anti-immigrant movements, as well as progressives like the anti-landmine campaign (cf. Dahlgren, 1994). These have a bearing on the South, where one ought to recall that a public sphere, outside the control of government, may well include tribalist or warlord interests. Still, one can argue that the sheer existence of spaces outside of monopoly control of governments constitutes a valuable diffusion of power on the whole. The role of a public sphere outside of a single source of power seems to be something that transcends both North and South, and has value for all societies.

Dahlgren (1994:17) claims that the creation of publics in the North is more-or-less impossible without the role of media at the same time as reminding us that there is a distinction between audiences, which are commodities to be sold to advertisers, and publics, in much Northern media. In the South, this is far less the case: in fact, it is more likely that publics precede media in these kind of societies, rather than vice versa. This implies a far lesser role for media than in the North. Yet, there is still a role, even if not as pivotal. Journalism as a practice needs to be part of the public sphere by definition; and its significance is arguably a potential widening of the space of the public sphere.

According to White, ‘the creation of the institutions and culture of a public sphere has been a paramount task for the new nations’ (1994:251). Periodising the public sphere through three of the four paradigms, he starts with the Modernisation focus and its legacy. He argues that the most evident problem in developing the public sphere in the South is infrastructure, although he cautions that the technology is not a solution on its own as the Modernisation paradigm implies (1994:252). There are also issues of common language, symbols of identification, systems of coding and epistemologies arising from diverse philosophical and religious backgrounds. Then there is the no small matter that much – if not most – information in the sphere is neither neutral nor objective.
The public sphere, in the South, has taken on very different sizes and shapes in different historical periods, and in some cases media has been so controlled as to fall primarily into governmental space rather than public sphere. Thus, whereas writers like Curran (1994) have advocated public media (with bi-partisanship), plus civic media plus private media as the best recipe for a vibrant public sphere, almost all of these in the South have typically come under (direct or indirect) control of government. The result has been not public, civic nor private media, but government media, and a minimal (and even counterproductive) impact on the public sphere. In the public space in the South, historically, traditional cultures and media systems were expected to wither away in the face of the modern – and did not do so. In the post-independence period,

... although the state defined itself as a service for the development of the whole population, the operative public sphere was a kind of political clientelism between political leaders and a new technical-economic bourgeoisie working within or in close association with state planning (1994:257).

Utilising the Disassociation model, White comments that State media became instruments of mobilisation and planning, and fostered expedient historical myths in this regard. Thus,

... in an atmosphere of national mobilisation and political clientelism, the media rarely developed into an open and public sphere for cultural or political debate, and the creative community, especially those sympathetic to the popular classes, not infrequently developed into a core of political and cultural opposition (1994:257-8).

Moving to the Liberatory paradigm, he notes that the rural and urban poor in the South (as in the North, but the proportions of the societies are different) generally have little independent sociopolitical organisation to represent their interests in a public sphere centred around the new technical-economic classes. While the urban middle class has a transnational culture, leaders of the poor see popular classes as source of authentic culture (1994:259).

Dissident elites often build alliances with popular mass movements and use their organisational and political skills to help mobilize: the way in which Paulo Freire brought his capacities to the popular classes. In the next phase, there is a push for alternative media to be ‘considered part of the public media, and deserving of legal, financial and policy support, alongside a more diversified mass professional media’ (1994:263).

White does not apply the fourth paradigm discussed earlier in this paper, but one can begin to point to the negotiation of power by journalists, contesting control and access to the media. This is a hugely important struggle to keep the public sphere from shrinking and merits special discussion due to its contemporary relevance in southern Africa.

Journalists Contesting Control and Access

February 1998 saw leading Zambian lawyer and human rights activist Sakwiba Sikoto warn that ‘the democratic process in southern Africa is seriously in danger of reversal’. According to him, ‘in some states of southern Africa the right to assemble, associate and hold opinions is constantly under threat.’ He went on to refer specifically to the harassment of members of the press (Namibian, 25 February).
At the same time, a senior Zimbabwean media executive denounced what he termed a culture of fear which has hampered journalists from exposing rapidly spreading corruption in his country. Editor-in-chief of the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency, Henry Muradzikwa, attributed the prevailing culture of fear among Zimbabwean journalists to subtle and direct pressures exerted on editors to enforce compliance with the ruling ideas. Even the media, Muradzikwa said, has been co-opted into corruption by dimming its lights in the face of this abuse. He also criticised legislation which sought to curtail press freedom and singled out Zimbabwe’s libel law, saying it was among the harshest in the world (PANA, 6 November 1997).

The Regional Information Co-ordinator of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA), Bright Mwape, has highlighted increasing competition against independent papers – by which he seems to have in mind government allocation of advertising and subsidy. Governmental intervention is also coming to the fore in South Africa. There, the Freedom of Expression Institute has warned that draft legislation may compromise the independence of the public broadcaster, the SABC, by corporatising the institution and making it accountable to the Minister of Communications as representative of government as the major shareholder (Mail and Guardian, 20 February 1998). The same lobby group has also sounded alarm bells about the South African government’s intention to amend the constitution in order to make the Independent Broadcast Authority – the body that issues broadcast licences – accountable to the minister in a merged form with the SA Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, instead of it reporting to parliament as is currently the case. If these threatened controls are discouraging from a point of view of a distinction between public and governmental broadcasting, and a subordination of the public sphere to governmental interests, the situation in other SADC states is even more depressing. Governments in countries like Zimbabwe still drag their feet in relinquishing their complete state – or, rather, governmental – monopoly on broadcasting. While other states have expanded access by allowing private broadcasters, this has been with insufficient institutional independence in their licensing process.

These are serious concerns for anyone with an interest in media and democracy. Granted, they are not as crude as the fate of Pius Njawe in Cameroon, sentenced to two years imprisonment in January 1998 ‘for spreading false news’ after reporting in December that President Paul Biya might be suffering from a heart condition. (In a letter smuggled out of prison, Njawe described how his pregnant wife lost the child after being physically abused by a jailer when she came to visit Doula Central Prison.)

Journalists across the continent have been very active in lobbying against these violations of the public sphere. Over the past few years, another concern has arisen. Far from the media contributing to democratise the state, the latter is often trying to do the opposite to the media. In Uganda, journalists have now taken the government to court over a 1995 law which provides for annual licensing of journalists. One of the requirements before a journalist can be licensed is that he or she must hold a university degree in journalism (PANA, 4 June 1997). This kind of state control is now the subject of contestation in southern Africa. According to the Executive Director of MISA, Jeanette Minnie, Botswana, Swaziland, Malawi and Zambia have all attempted to introduce media councils that would govern the running of the media (PANA, 3 May 1997).

In August 1997, the Zambian high court found that the government’s decision to create the Media Council of Zambia would have an impact on the freedom of
journalists to assemble and associate freely with other persons. The draft bill had envisaged compulsory registration of journalists and set minimum qualifications for anyone intending to practice. It was also to institute a disciplinary body for media practitioners. The council, appointed by the government, would have had the power to reprimand, suspend or withdraw accreditation to offending journalists. Under the proposed law, journalists wanting to practice would be at least 18 years old, hold a Bachelor's degree in Arts or Mass Communication obtained from a university or institution recognised by the council. They would also be required to have completed at least two years training in journalism. Those without a license would have been liable to a three-month jail term or a fine or both.

In countries like Zambia, where an outcry blocked passage of draft legislation, governments have typically suspended the threat rather than scrapping it. In the meantime, Zambian journalists, like their Swazi counterparts, responded to the pressure by working on the introduction of their own self-regulatory body which they say would not need legal backing. The new body in Zambia is a voluntary, independent media-driven, non-statutory and self-monitoring body with powers to censure erring journalists. Journalists in the state-owned media have set up a separate council.

But in Tanzania, this kind of response has come under fire for being ineffective. According to a news report by PANA (3 May 1997), the National Media Council of Tanzania had failed to monitor professional ethics effectively because of the weak composition of its leadership, according to Harrison Mwakyembe, law lecturer with the University of Dar es Salaam. The media council was formed in 1995 after a public outcry over a government bill seeking the licensing of journalists. The bill has since been shelved. Mwakyembe said most council members were incapable of conducting surveillance exercises on the media because they do not belong to the profession. He also charged that several of the Council's members were selected on the basis of political affiliation and not professional inclination or merit. Clearly, the make up of such councils is a key area in terms of negotiating for a preservation of public space - not only keeping it out of government control, but also of opening up access to the public to the media.

However, rather than propose a different kind of council, Mwakyembe has suggested the creation of a statutory body to take care of what he referred to as professional admission requirements for intending journalists. The body would curb the escalating frequency of the entry into journalism of unqualified individuals and the formation of dubious media institutions in the industry. The democratic change of such an arrangement is readily apparent.

The moral of the story: journalists are bullied into getting their own house in order through the threat of legislation, and if they don't succeed in curbing criticism of government, they will be forced to do so through legislation. The trick proposed by governments is to demand training - and here is the sting - which they will accredit. Journalists should not fall into the trap of training as a prerequisite for people to exercise freedom of expression. They also need to be sure that training, where it exists, produces journalists with integrity and a concept of journalism that differs from that of public relations. If anything, good training for journalists ought to cause more trouble for governments that have ills to conceal, rather than turn out sycophants.

This battle is still being fought. The stakes concern access to the mass media, in a context where governments wish to curtail the public sphere. A government victory
in this negotiation would be inimical to even basic democratic arrangements. Yet if there is one thing that characterises Southern journalists at this juncture, is their commitment to maintaining the independence of the profession. In the North, greater knowledge about what is happening in the South could provoke greater appreciation of the liberal public space that Northern journalists inhabit. Such knowledge could also stimulate solidarity from the North with journalists fighting against this kind of anti-democratic action by governments.

Conclusion: Global Democracy
The four paradigms discussed in this paper have been eclectically tapped to gain insight into the role of the media in democracy from a Southern point view. Two that derive from the 1960s and 1970s are the Modernisation and the Disassociation formulae. While Modernisation stressed a non-contradictory global scenario of development, Disassociation delighted in visions of autarchic development. The 1990s have brought a new paradigm to the table which supersedes these two incompatible directions. I refer here to globalisation. This most people now recognise, refers to an integrated – but uneven and contradiction-ridden – whole. While the whole is not purely good for the South, as the Modernisation model implied, it is also not purely bad as the Disassociation model would have.

Talk about media and democratisation can profitably take account of this new paradigm of a global picture and its mixed blessings and curses. The call is increasing for global institutions like the United Nations to become more democratic. There is equally concern about the power of global media conglomerates like CNN or Murdoch’s News International. But in my view the media institution that will face the greatest test of both its accessibility to those outside of government, and its contribution to democracy, is not satellite television. It is the Internet.

The Internet is predominantly American in content and technology, and pre-eminently in the English language at present. It also represents, though, one of the lowest cost entries into media and one of the hardest media for governments to regulate. Its reach extends beyond the nation state and creates communication between, inter alia, people of the North and people of the South, whereby journalists amongst others can discuss what to do about non-democratic states. In this manner, it is a transnational public space. While the reach of the Internet in the South is currently even lower than that for newspapers, the potential for it to grow is there – and the possible impact upon its users far greater.

The Internet can be a medium that is much more empowering than traditional media because of its unparalleled information resources, interactivity and ability to construct communities of interest across all geographical boundaries. If Internet users are therefore more easily and deeply enriched by this medium, their contribution to the question of democracy can exceed that of people restricted to other media. Of course, the strength of the Internet as a medium does not automatically translate into a strong democratic factor: reactionary elites can also use their access to the Internet to strengthen themselves and consolidate anti-democratic trends. But the medium is there, it is growing, and even if we resist the temptation to overrate the political power of the media in relation to developing democracy, it will have significant impact.

It is often said that the South represents the information poor, the North the rich. What the Internet makes very visible, however, is that the information rich’ are in fact
extremely information poor when it comes to information about the information poor. The Internet, however, does create the opportunity for journalists to help remedy this problem. And if knowing what happens in the South is good for democracy in the North (such as encouraging a principle of solidarity), that in turn can only be good for democracy in the South.

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Rwanda & the Media: Imagery, War & Refuge

Niranjan S Karnik

This article critically examines The New York Times photojournalistic coverage of Rwanda from 1989 through the events of 1994. It shows which stories were left out (French/South African arms sales, Belgian colonial heritage, and World Bank/IMF interventions) and which errors were retained (tribalism as causation, dark continent/exoticisation theories). The images that the media projected to the United States public show the multiple ways in which agency remains unproblematised especially with regard to gender and stigmatisation. Through these images, the rhetorics of journalism frame much of our understanding of global events and consequently our responses to them. Finally, this article ends by making an argument for using critical social theories to engage the media and politicians for change.

The camera has an interest in turning history into spectacle, but none in reversing the process. At best, the picture leaves a vague blur in the observer's mind; strong enough to send him into battle perhaps, but not to have him understand why he is going (Denis Donoghue, 'The State of the Language', Radio Talk, 1980).

Introduction: Imagery and Death

Over the course of 1994, many watched with horror the images of slaughter and death that were beamed from Rwanda each evening to international television and covered the pages of many newspapers. As the focus of these images shifted from civil strife and genocide to those of malnutrition and disease, there was little explanation of why these people were killing each other and why did children have to die of treatable diseases? In the search for answers to these questions I came across many disturbing and disquieting findings concerning the media and international humanitarianism.

The media as an institution has a great deal of power. Traditionally, most members of the media prefer to see their role as reflectors of information. They take information, transform it into news by compacting and simplifying it, and then project this news to the public. The public then takes in the relevant information and acts upon it to affect governments, institutions, locales, and other people. Some scholars have termed this as the 'CNN Effect' where the news initiates action. The degree of effect and the nature of response continue to remain open for debate, and a small number of observers continue to deny any direct connections (Nastios, 1996). Nevertheless, such a model only sees the media as acting in one direction – that is as objective transmitters of information.

A second and perhaps mirror view, sees the steps of information gathering, transformation and projection as being inherently constitutive of the way that the
information is made and used. Stuart Hall's essay 'Encoding/Decoding' (1980) examines the steps involved in creating news particularly for network television. He describes several steps and possible readings that can result and thereby complexities the audience position from a homogeneous singular. Nevertheless, given that the public only acts upon what it knows and what it hears, it is important to consider the quality of reporting and the nature of stories that move toward the public sphere. What happens when the news itself is constitutive of violence in some ways?

This article attempts to directly address the nature of the imagery of the Rwandan conflict, the stories that were omitted, those that were retained, and the powerful relationships that the news media has with regard to constructing events and influencing their course. By focusing exclusively on the imagery or the photojournalism that defined the Rwanda crisis, it becomes possible to begin to see some of the dynamics of the stories themselves. While the relationship between text and image is close, it is not precise and therefore my analysis points to general trends rather than highly specific occurrences. This stems from a belief that the overall trend of stories impacts people in a more profound way than one individual story. The mundane aspects of photojournalism are forefronted here while continually keeping in mind the tragic and extraordinary nature of events that were occurring in Rwanda at the time.

A Brief Argument for Interpretive Work

The study of western news coverage of Africa and the dynamics of differential reporting has occupied a key position in the field of African Studies. Scholars such as Beverly Hawk (1992) have pioneered works which compare coverage amounts and analyse tendencies in content between situations in Africa and others in Asia, Europe or the United States.

This article is an empirical and interpretive analysis (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994) of The New York Times coverage of Rwanda from 1989 through 1994 focused primarily on the photographic images presented. I chose The New York Times because of its status as 'a paper of record' and based on the belief that the best newspaper in the country should have the best reporting.

A precedent for using The New York Times as a case study was set by Larry Kramer's critiques of The New York Times which appeared regularly in the Village Voice during the early coverage of AIDS (Crimp, 1988). In addition, scholars of Africa have consistently noted differential coverage of Africa by major news media sources in the United States (Hawk, 1992; 1994); this article does not seek to follow this route directly. The study of coverage amounts while yielding valuable information on the quantity of media attention does not address the unique dimensions of the stories themselves. Many have noted the repeated and often distorted claims of tribalism, and have on occasion linked these to wider dynamics of Orientalist thought (Africa News Service, 1995). Simply increasing the amount of coverage is unlikely to change the nature of the distortions that occur and the violence that they produce. The very nature of the stories themselves must change and the dynamic relationship of the media with the audience must also change in order for Africa, its many cultures and countries, and its people to be taken seriously by an often blind western world.
No Images of Death

As early as 1990, human rights monitors were warning of the impending danger of a significant civil war in Rwanda (Amnesty International, 1995; Africa Rights, 1995). These monitors noted consistently that the level of angry rhetoric had increased and that significant centrist/moderate leaders had either disappeared or been killed under suspicious circumstances. All of these calls went unheard by the major media sources of the western world. In 1990, the year that the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda from Uganda, the only images in sixteen *New York Times* stories are two pictures and two maps. The first photo (23 October 1990) shows a refugee camp in southern Uganda where there is a large sea of people standing in an open field. In the foreground stand a woman and child. The scene is one of refugees patiently waiting for the distribution of humanitarian supplies. As the year came to a close, the RPF and Rwandan President Habyarimana appeared to be on the road to a peaceful settlement. The images of death and destruction remain hidden quietly behind the veneer of humanitarian aid and international disinterest.

In 1991, *The New York Times* returned to its standard third world topics by presenting articles on AIDS and birth control in Rwanda with a brief mention of ongoing civil unrest, evacuation of foreign nationals and another peace accord. Such a myopic glance toward Africa and the third world demonstrates the exoticising that takes place when covering the third world. Many have noted that when covering Africa, western writers seem to only focus on AIDS and monkeys, and their theoretical interrelations (Treichler, 1992; Wilton, 1992).

The extent to which simians resurface in narratives about Rwanda is indeed surprising. On 29 May 1992, the world is shown the first casualty of the Rwandan civil war. The headline reads ‘Famous Ape, Tourist Lure, is Shot Dead’ and the first photo shown of an individual killed by the Rwandan civil war is of a silverback gorilla (Endnote 1) named Mrithi.

The article portrays Mrithi’s killing as one of mistaken identity by claiming that a Rwandan solider or RPF rebel probably mistook Mrithi for an enemy solider and shot in panic. This explanation at once conveys moral outrage at the killing of a basically peaceful animal while on some level legitimating the possible murder of an ‘enemy’. By depicting the gorilla as the innocent victim and the humans as rationalist soldiers who are caught in the midst of an ‘ethnically based war’, the story and image serve to strip away the immorality of killing itself in favour of eliciting a sympathetic and angry response from the reader. And, there can be little doubt that the story and an editorial that followed in March 1993 by anthropologist Dieter Steklis helped to engage international support for these animals.

I do not wish to minimise the fact that a great animal and endangered species was killed needlessly, but I do want to draw attention to the way in which this story obscures many others and appeals to a type of pop-psychology journalism where the minuscule is made large and the significant made small. What of the hundreds of people who were simultaneously being killed because of their political views? Loss of tourist dollars due to the reduction of a wild-type safari seems to herald greater international attention in this circumstance than political and social repression. We still do not hear the voices of the human dead or see their faces until well into 1994.
Images of Tribal War

The magic of photography is metaphysical. What you see in the photograph isn’t what you saw at the time. The real skill of photography is organized visual lying (Terence Donovan, The Guardian, 19 November 1983).

Significant news coverage of the Rwandan civil war and depiction of deaths appear in The New York Times beginning on 7 April 1994. This is one day after the aircraft carrying President Juvenal Habyarimana of Rwanda and President Cyprien Ntaryamira of Burundi was shot down during a return trip from a conference of African leaders. President Habyarimana was in the process of negotiations with the RPF to establish a power-sharing regime outlined in the Arusha Accords. The peace plan and concurrent ceasefire collapsed completely after the downing of the aircraft. Many scholars and human rights activists have outlined and examined in detail the politics of these assassinations and have generally concluded that Habyarimana was targeted by hard-line members of the Hutu elite (of which he was a member) who did not want to share power with the RPF consisting of Tutsi members (Endnote 2).

The images that began to assail the world were largely centred on the human dimensions of war and violence: tens of thousands of people were killed. Initially Hutu were slaughtering Tutsi then, as the RPF remobilised, Tutsi began to kill Hutu. The numbers killed and the scale of refugee migrations were and are still staggering. Up to one million dead and as many as 2.2 million people displaced (Sparrow, 1994; UNHCR, 1995).

It is difficult to be critical of news coverage of crises of this magnitude. Many defenders of the media may claim (perhaps somewhat correctly) that it is a small miracle and a testament to the reporters of the various news agencies who place themselves in these difficult circumstances that enable people around the world to witness first-hand the violence and horror that exists in our modern world. Nevertheless, while I am hesitant to lay blame directly on individuals, there can be little doubt that news coverage not only portrays situations, but also shapes them and affects them in multiple ways. An awareness of this is critical both for the viewers and for the reporters/photographers who create the images and stories we read and see. Here I wish to bring critical spotlights to key factors that recur in media portrayals of the ‘third world’ or ‘developing world’ (Endnote 3).

The western media portrayed the Rwandan conflict as a product of tribal factions. On the surface, this is exactly what Rwanda embodied - Hutus killing Tutsi and Tutsis killing Hutus. Journalists unaware of the history or politics of the region, who dropped into Rwanda for the few months of the conflict, were unlikely to uncover any deeper stories. Nevertheless, long term observers and regional specialists have produced a strikingly different, a much more subtle and fearfully complex narrative which implicates the countries in the west quite directly in the tragedy of Rwanda.

Several scholars and journalists have detailed some of the external international connections which were obscured by major western news media and continue to remain hidden (Bourmaud, 1995; Shalom, 1995). They show that three significant policies have evolved into producing the human dimension of destruction in Rwanda. First, Belgian colonial policies formalised and standardised the tribal classifications that we now know as Hutu and Tutsi (Newbury, 1995; Prunier, 1995; Newbury, 1988). These classifications originated from local tribal groups and have extended from the end of the Belgian colonial occupation post-World War II to the
present. In terms of physical differences, the tribes are not always distinguishable; therefore, without identity cards (also a Belgian colonial tool) with which to specify tribal grouping, it would have been difficult to distinguish Hutu from Tutsi.

*As the stereotypes of physical characteristics do not always provide sufficient identification – and can even be totally misleading – it was the identity cards demanded at the roadblocks set up by the militias that acted as the signature on a death warrant* (Destexhe, 1995:31).

In many respects, the identity cards imprinted with tribal group served the same purpose that eyeglasses served for the Cambodian massacres and circumcision for the Jewish Holocaust by the Nazis. Combine these markers with angry rhetoric against the enemy (Gutekunst, 1995), and you have given the tools of violence to an entire population. This is not to strip the Hutu and the Tutsi of their cultural and social specificity. That these groups existed in the historic past cannot be easily denied. Rather, it is to say that the terms of ‘Hutu’ and ‘Tutsi’ have been mediated by colonialism and are inextricably tied to that legacy as well as any cultural history that each group many have.

Second, Smyth (1994), Bourmaud (1995), Shalom (1996) point to the growing evidence that the French and South African governments supported the Hutu government with arms and weapons, because they found their politics much more appealing. These connections remain squarely outside the highly focused media narrative which plays to ‘ancient hatreds’ and ‘tribal wars’. The small handful of historical pieces in the mainstream media emphasised the ways in which previous slaughters by one group or another led into the current round of violence. None of these stories sought to show how the residues of colonial policies combined with current French foreign policy (Kolodziej, 1987) to favour certain classes of Rwandan society and in turn fed the hatreds which appeared as ethnic and tribal conflicts.

Finally, one of the most important stories which was left out of mainstream reports centres on the critical role that international economic institutions played in producing the conflict in Rwanda. The pictures that assail us through *The New York Times* simply are unable to capture the institutional roots of the conflict. Michel Chossudovsky (1996) has traced out many of these factors in his paper ‘Economic Genocide in Rwanda’. In it he argues that the actions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in their zeal to ‘reform’ Rwanda’s economy and remove it from international assistance programmes, forced economic policies on the Rwandan government which removed all official economic safety nets and left the Rwandan economy in shambles after the collapse of the international coffee market in the late 1980s. With the price of coffee plummeting and the Rwandan franc repeatedly devalued (by order of the World Bank and IMF) the general population, which depended on coffee production as the country’s major industry, was left destitute and impoverished.

This created conditions in which power hungry officials and leaders could sow the seeds of civil war and genocide. Hatreds, which in a prospering economy could not and would not have surfaced, soon became apparent followed by the collapse of civil society. Where are the World Bank and IMF in the depictions of genocide and mass death that coat the pages of *The New York Times* in 1994? *The New York Times* staff would have done better to show a picture of the World Bank headquarters in Washington alongside the destruction in Rwanda rather than trying to hoist the blame on the implausible and racially biased depictions that ‘tribal war’ stories showed. The World Bank and IMF while not directly responsible for killing people in Rwanda are
images of the institutions whose actions are critical to understanding the dynamics of genocide and mass death in Rwanda.

Images and Agency

*In America, the photographer is not simply the person who records the past, but the one who invents it* (Susan Sontag, 1977).

Agency plays a critical role in evaluating imagery from Rwanda. The ways in which agency is ascribed or stripped act as a powerful medium through which to influence public policy and international perception. Agency and its related topic 'power' figure prominently into current academic debates. Anthropologist and philosopher of science Bruno Latour has demonstrated the importance of bringing both human and non-human actors into discussions of social phenomena (Latour, 1987). Such an equalisation has produced a great deal of insightful scholarship in social studies of science and many other fields. Nevertheless, as Susan Leigh Star (1991) has shown, focusing purely on agency risks reifying existing power relations. In such a frame, looking for the absent agents (or those who fail to act) becomes just as important as examining existing actors.

In Rwanda, an initial view could equate disease and warfare; the former is largely a non-human agent and the latter is the human agent. In several respects, the media accomplished this task by showing that both disease and war killed significant numbers of people in Rwanda. Such a simplistic, one-dimensional analysis leaves the nature of non-human agency in this context unexplored and the layers of human agency beneath disease escape unexamined. In fact, Rwanda demonstrates some interesting rhetorical manoeuvres. Disease becomes more like war and the agency of war almost disappears. As Alain Destexhe (1995:6-7) has argued:

> there is a great danger in the way the media applied the term 'Holocaust' to the devastation wrought by the cholera epidemic in Goma, which has the largest concentration of Rwandan refugees in Zaire. This puts the medical disaster that resulted from the massive influx of refugees as a consequence of genocide on the same level as the genocide itself, a premeditated mass crime, systematically planned and executed.

The images that the media sent to the United States show the multiple ways in which agency remains unproblematised especially with regard to gender and stigmatization. Placing disease on the same moral and agency plane as warfare hides the subinteractions produced by these phenomena and risks placing undue emphasis on the non-human aspects of agency. Responsibility is easier to abrogate if a non-human agent can be blamed for causing the deaths in Rwanda.

President Clinton failed to use the term 'genocide' with regard to the events in Rwanda until after cholera began spreading through the camps of Goma (Shalom, 1996). It was not until 1998 during his Africa tour that President Clinton acknowledged and apologised for failing to recognise the political genocide that was occurring.

President Clinton failed to use the term 'genocide' with regard to the events in Rwanda until after cholera began spreading through the camps of Goma (Shalom, 1996). It was not until 1998 during his Africa tour that President Clinton acknowledged and apologised for failing to recognise the political genocide that was occurring.

*The international community, together with nations in Africa, must bear its share of responsibility for this tragedy, as well. We did not act quickly enough after the killing began. We should not have allowed the refugee camps to become safe haven for the killers. We did not immediately call these crimes by their rightful name: genocide* (Clinton, 1998:A12).
The Clinton Administration had early warnings from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that conditions in Rwanda were deteriorating and that some type of civil war seemed imminent. In spite of these warnings, the Administration gave explicit instructions to its spokespeople not to use the term ‘genocide’ in reference to Rwanda (Weiner, 1998). In this circumstance, the Clinton Administration used the disease tragedy which followed the political and civil one, to avoid any culpability. They simply stepped in, called the disease genocide, and offered limited humanitarian assistance as long as African countries and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) shouldered most of the burden of action. Hence, responsibility was reassigned from human actors to non-human ones, thereby avoiding key ethical and moral questions.

The inversion of morality and culpability questions some of the very basic tenets of the new world order and its concomitant dissolution of humanitarian norms and boundaries. Can cholera ever be genocidal and if so then what of other non-human agents? Will the future of moral judgment rely exclusively on the destructive capacities of non-human agents? Finally, will citizens continue to allow their politicians and leaders to escape through rhetorical holes by merely examining the superficial aspects of social and political events?

**Gendered Soldiers/Ungendered Diseases/Gendered Sufferers**

The imagery from Rwanda seems to play with issues of gender by constantly switching between highly gendered scenes to ungendered depictions centred on the destruction wrought by infectious diseases. In the early phases of media coverage (that is, April and May 1994), soldiers and the military play prominently in stories on the front pages of *The New York Times*. These images are almost exclusively of men holding and carrying weapons or riding in trucks with other soldiers. Guns and the power that they portray depict a country in the midst of a military coup and the shifting of power from one masculinist centre to another. As the tables turned and the RPF gained some success, and the Hutus began fleeing the country, a radical shift in imagery occurs. With the first few killings, when single bodies are the focus of images, they appear to be largely male. Political violence seems to be the preserve of males and, as objects and actors, they retain the central thematic power. Women and children (Endnote 4) become the centres of attention as ‘refugee’ becomes a keyword in the stories originating in Rwanda. When the crowds of people begin flowing into neighbouring countries, they are portrayed as women and children or the very old and infirm. These are the people who deserve protection and are not the killer males who originated the violence, or so the international humanitarian mantra goes. Nevertheless, males did flee just as often as females – the able bodied as often as the old or young. The complex environment of refugee camp life is never explored in these images. Guilt is levelled on all the refugees for harbouring some (perhaps even many) Hutus who committed many of the atrocities that characterise the Rwandan conflict. But this was hardly true for all the refugees and the camera, rather than the court of international law, became the judge for these refugees who were constantly characterised as the guilty perpetrators. Here the nexus of story and picture plays a key role. While the text explained to readers how Hutu militia men were hiding among the refugees, the pictures showed primarily the women and children of the refugee camps. This type of depiction makes these groups culpable in some respects for ‘hiding’ the guilty Hutus. The situation was likely more complex than that especially when the people in these camps were simply trying to survive. Considerations of guilt or innocence could hardly have taken place until their personal lives and the camp situation had stabilised well toward the end of 1994.
The regendering of violence takes place again when refugees begin to have skirmishes with the Zairian soldiers guarding them in Goma and other refugee camps. The media reports once again are filled with masculinist narratives that Hutu rebels were rearming and retraining themselves in the camps; gender becomes essential to creating a threat.

Late in the summer and fall of 1994, infectious disease once again shifted the imagery of Rwanda to an ungendered phase. Bodies dying of cholera were shown stacked and thrown, pushed into mass graves and buried in open ditches. These bodies have no specific gender, they are simply deaths attributed to infectious disease and contaminated water supplies. Absent from these images are the actors who could have prevented these deaths; the international community and United States remain silent. Western countries had the portable water purification systems, food and medicine that could have saved many of the ungendered bodies who died in the camps of Goma. In a desperate attempt to bring in needed supplies, international humanitarian aid agencies began their own media campaign by regendering these bodies (Endnote 5). The standard humanitarian image became that of a child left motherless because the parent had died of cholera. After weeks of stalling, the United States and international humanitarian bureaucracies (which in many circumstances can respond overnight), began to flow into the beleaguered refugee camps. Gender in this context served a powerful role in defining the nature of both war and disease and their relation to international humanitarian action.

**Stigma: A Very Old Killer**

Sociologist Erving Goffman argues that ‘an attribute is a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive; sometimes it is also called a failing, a shortcoming, a handicap. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity’ (1963:3). He continues by saying that ‘not all undesirable attributes are at issue, but only those which are incongruous with our stereotype of what a given type of individual should be’.

Cholera played a powerful role in stigmatizing Rwandan refugees because of the links between disease and international asylum procedures. International law recognises the rights of the refugees to seek protection and sanctuary in foreign countries. Although recently many western governments have begun to restrict and reduce their generous asylum laws, the possibility still existed for many refugee women and children to gain protection in the west. As soon as the stigma of infectious disease was placed on these refugees, asylum became a virtually impossible outcome. Recent reports concerning infectious disease have created the concept of ‘emerging infectious diseases’ and portrayed them as significant threats to the United States (CDC, 1994). Invariably these diseases originate from the wilds of Africa or Asia and threaten the safety and security of the United States and its European neighbours.

Ebola, Richard Preston’s *Hot Zone* (1994), and the blockbuster movie *Outbreak* (1995) have all fed the fears of US citizens about infectious disease (McGee, 1996). Refugees who carry cholera became seen as harbingers of death via disease, and resettlement in the west became a risky political move for government officials. What community would want to have cholera-stricken children in their midst? What about our ‘American’ children and their health? These fears, originating from the lay understanding of infectious disease, never consider the fact that cholera is largely treatable through Oral Rehydration Therapy or that cholera and many other
infectious diseases are endemic to North America, as well as Africa and Asia. The few cases that do emerge in the United States are successfully identified and treated by the current health care system.

Nevertheless, the stigma of disease has played and continues to play a significant part in the portrayal of immigrants, refugees and minorities as threats to the national safety of US citizens. Historian Alan Kraut shows how the fears of disease have always accompanied successive waves of immigration to the United States (Kraut, 1994). The current wave of anti-immigrant rhetoric which fills much of the airways of US media can be seen as part of a greater whole which perceives all outsiders as potential threats. Refugees from Africa labelled with the infectious diseases of cholera and dysentery can hold little hope of finding a sponsor country to take them in. This diverges significantly from the rhetoric that came forward through Bosnia where Europeans were being slaughtered. Initially, the United States rescued many Bosnian children through foster care and special refugee resettlement programmes. Nevertheless, in the Bosnian example, religion played a role in stigmatizing refugees. In the current politics of international refugee protection, you are more likely to be saved by western governments if you are a white Christian girl from Europe, rather than a black Muslim man from Africa. The stigma of disease is disproportionately carried on the back of the latter rather than the former, for no other reason than this is where people want to see the stigma. It is far easier to deny refugees asylum because they are a potential disease threat than it is to deny them on the basis of religion or race. Given these circumstances, Rwandan refugees hardly stood a chance.

### Structural Violence and International Humanitarianism

Paul Farmer (1996) has taken several initial steps to define a pragmatic analytical conception of structural violence. He argues that simply pointing to factors is insufficient and that these factors need to be seen in the light of a geographically broad and historically deep political economy of suffering. He suggests two axis, along which suffering can be analysed: gender and race/ethnicity. These are hardly the only axes along which to trace analytic thinking but they are ones which shape events in significant ways. Farmer then goes on to argue that cultural explanations that stress the plasticity and diversity of human experience cannot and should not be used as a justification of suffering.

> In short, it is one thing to make sense of extreme suffering — a universal activity, surely — and quite another to explain it ... The social and economic forces that dictate life choices in Haiti's Central Plateau affect many millions of individuals, and it is in the context of these global forces that the suffering of individuals receives its appropriate context of interpretation (Farmer 1996:272-3, ellipses added).

In essence, this article has been an initial attempt to trace out the dynamics of just one of the forces that Farmer alludes to in the latter part of the quote: the media. As one of several social forces, the media exerts a strong structural influence on the lives and outcomes of catastrophic events and deserves some degree of focused analysis to understand its effects.

What does such an analysis bring to the study of imagery from Rwanda? This analytic model allows us to see the multiple ways in which agency, exoticised tribalism and gender play into the narratives surrounding Rwandan refugees. The media created false or error-ridden stories, intentionally or unintentionally (the former due
to planned violence, and the later due to ignorance). In either case, these stories made use of the very markers that we traditionally rely on to make judgments as to who deserves humanitarian assistance. By taking Farmer's conception of a political economy of suffering seriously, we find that the structural violence wrought upon Rwanda through preventable disease and internationally supported warfare was one in which international institutions manipulated other structures leaving the pawns (Rwandans) to die for causes whose purposes may never be absolutely clear.

The debates that came forward through the structures of media and government were those that had no answer. Were the Hutu using refugee camps to hide, re-arm and enter into more violence? Should humanitarianism turn a blind eye to these actions, or should they act punitively against the entire refugee population by shutting down all relief operations? Such questions have no answer because they hinge on each individual person's or organisation's moral position. Nevertheless, it is certain that these media-influenced debates had a chilling effect on the goals and actions of humanitarianism. The costs of inaction in these circumstances can be counted in bodies. Structural violence is a complex phenomena, because it originates from policies and institutions put in place by, for the most part, well-meaning individuals.

The Importance of Theory in a Crisis

The greatest felony in the news business today is to be behind, or to miss a big story. So speed and quantity substitute for thoroughness and quality, for accuracy and context. The pressure to compete, the fear somebody else will make the splash first, creates a frenzied environment in which a blizzard of information is presented and serious questions may not be raised (Carl Bernstein, The Guardian, 3 June 1992).

Given Bernstein's rather dour pronouncement on the state of mass media, the importance of theory becomes obvious. Paula Treichler argues that in cultural studies debates and the 'culture wars' more generally

not only are the basic definitions and self-images of these constituencies at stake but also the institutional and cultural structures that shape their relations to each other and their relative empowerment and effectivity within the culture as a whole (1991:97).

In examining the plight of refugees, we can draw many of the same conclusions that Treichler does. Questions about the nature of images of refugees, disease and warfare not only raise questions about fairness in reporting and gendered depictions of suffering but also question the very nature of humanitarian protection, the agencies which participate in this process, the many violations of human rights, and the culpability of governments and international institutions.

The simple recommendations are as follows: insist upon greater accountability from the media and recognise that the media is an institution just as governments, international agencies and corporations are. In this regard, calling for institutional controls and monitoring is both important and fair. These need not mean censorship; instead it could involve a critical dialogue over how to cover crises and in what ways to gather information so that vital stories do not disappear.

A more complex recommendation stems from the recognition that viewers must be ever vigilant about the media and its role in society. It is not sufficient for viewers to sit passively in front of their televisions or newspapers. Social theory in this regard can and should play a central role in helping to focus and understand actions. The
Rwandan conflict seen through the multiple lenses of culture, gender, human rights, post-colonialism and medicine, give startlingly different pictures of the course of the conflict. Some may argue that there is little time in the midst of a crisis to consider the role that all of these embedded social forces play. Nevertheless, it is precisely due to the new speed of the media that we must have able eyes and ears that can watch and listen for problems in the media.

Speed distorts images and understandings at a faster pace than before, and theory is all that we have to check our understanding against those that the media delivers. The media can be just as culpable as governments and institutions to produce what Farmer (1996) terms structural violence. Our best defence against this type of violence and the destruction it can play directly or indirectly is, therefore, to have a sound critical sense. Theories about gender, post-colonialism, race/ethnicity, and post-modernism in and of themselves do not provide the answers, but simply provide the tools to be critical; it is up to the viewer of images to deploy these tools to question and reconsider what is beamed into their televisions or printed in their morning paper. Therefore, it is both fair and vital for critical viewers to judge, for example, how the short-term gains in newspaper dramatics due to exaggerations of the health dimensions of the Rwandan conflict weigh against the long-term stigmatizing effects of the labels of infectious disease. It is also important to gauge what international actors are left out by highly contextual depictions of suffering and what their roles are in producing suffering. Finally, the roles of gender and race/ethnicity need to be carefully traced to see who benefits, who is harmed and how. In addition, these same types of critical comparisons need to be carried out with regard to the multiple ways in which disease and war become conflated and confused.

In many respects such a complex understanding of the media, and our interpersonal relationship to it, may move social theory to its most fruitful and productive position. By recognising the everyday nature of social theory and its usefulness in daily lives, we may move our ideas from the realm of theory into practice.

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Endnotes

1. These gorillas were made famous by the movie *Gorillas in the Mist* in which Sigourney Weaver plays the part of anthropologist Dian Fossey.


3. Several readers have suggested that I am unfairly picking on the media. I will not defend media studies as a discipline; I will simply argue that there is a desperate need for a Critically Applied Media Studies that attempts to engage in constructive conversation regarding the media, so that the media will use its power over opinion more responsibly. My hope is that this article is one of many entry points into this conversation.

4. Children in this regard can be seen as part of the gendered or feminised picture because of their close association – especially at young ages – to maternal reproduction. The point at which young boys become classed as masculine is not clear, but in the case of war and violence, the age at which a young boy can hold a weapon or carry a gun is undoubtedly significant.

5. I have elsewhere (Karnik 1998) done a more detailed analysis of these humanitarian images.
References


Burkina Faso in the Winds of Liberalisation

Ernest Harsch

A decade after the end of Burkina Faso’s ‘democratic and popular revolution’, the Sahelian country has graduated to the top ranks of the World Bank’s select class of model reformers. The regime of President Blaise Compaoré is frequently praised not only for its pursuit of economic liberalisation, but also its seeming commitment to the donor institutions’ current assortment of favoured notions: multiparty democracy, good governance and human development. But beyond such facile external perceptions, the daily reality in one of the continent’s most underdeveloped countries is far more complex, with an impoverished populace ill-disposed to the traumatic imposition of market dominance and a political elite unsure of how far it can open up without weakening effective control.

Introduction

In the first few years after taking power in a military coup on 15 October 1987, the government of President Blaise Compaoré used the occasion of the anniversary to reinvigorate its political supporters, trumpet its achievements, and offer up more promises for the future. But after Compaoré for the first time won an (unopposed) electoral mandate in 1991, and exchanged his uniform for civilian attire, the official anniversaries gradually receded in importance, now awkward reminders of the manner in which he originally acceded to office. By 15 October 1997, the anniversary was formally marked by little more than a declaration by the ruling party and a photo exhibition of Compaoré’s ‘ten years of service’.

In striking such a low key, the government also chose not to compete with those who preferred to commemorate the other side of the anniversary – the death of the popular revolutionary leader, Thomas Sankara. Most years since his assassination, ‘Sankarists’ used the occasion to propagate the late president’s views and denounce the policies of the government. Initially small and subject to police harassment, the annual pilgrimages to Sankara’s gravesite gradually began to attract thousands. By the tenth anniversary, it was a major national event. The Burkinabè press gave pages to assessments of Sankara’s life, achievements, and political legacy; even the government-owned daily ran a commentary acknowledging Sankara as a ‘national hero’ (Sidwaya, 15 October 1997). A symposium on Sankara’s ideas brought participants from throughout the country, and beyond. Following a memorial mass, thousands trouped to the cemetery to lay flowers and rally around the gravestones of Sankara and twelve slain aides. They heard a message from the widow, Mariam Sankara, currently living in France, and political speeches from leaders of the country’s various Sankarist parties. Vendors made a brisk trade in cassette tapes of Sankara speeches and in T-shirts proclaiming ‘Thomas Sankara still lives’.
Government officials and some press commentators tended to explain this turnout as an expression of nostalgia for a turbulent but exciting political era that, despite its controversial aspects, brought a rejuvenation of national pride and a significant mobilisation of public energies. But many participants in the anniversary events were in their early-to-mid-teens, too young to have had much direct recollection of Sankara’s ‘democratic and popular revolution’. For them, marching to Sankara’s grave was one way to vent frustrations over the country’s current political and economic course in a very public and symbolically charged fashion. But it has not been the only way, as shown by numerous student protests, labour strikes and other signs of social tension.

Such public disgruntlement has been especially worrying – and puzzling – to the authorities, since it has come at a time of renewed macro-economic growth. Following a period of virtual stagnation in the early 1990s, Burkina’s gross domestic product grew by an average 5.5 per cent over 1995-97, while the spike in consumer prices caused by the 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc was brought down to a 2.8 per cent annual inflation rate by 1997. However, with little tangible improvement in the daily lives of Burkina’s 10 million people, the tendency of President Compaoré and other officials to publicly boast about the higher growth rates seems only to have sharpened frustrations among ordinary Burkinabè.

The sour popular mood also runs counter to the rosy pronouncements of the donor governments and international financial institutions, which had pushed hard for the Compaoré government to embark on the road of economic liberalisation. The World Bank, in a major assessment of structural adjustment in Africa, ranked Burkina among just six African countries judged to have had a ‘large improvement’ in their macro-economic policies between 1981-86 and 1987-91 (World Bank, 1994:58; 138). In subsequent years, repeated missions to Ouagadougou by staff of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) almost invariably ended with declarations expressing satisfaction with the government’s reform efforts and the economy’s overall performance.

Western governments likewise have been full of praise for the relatively orderly manner in which the affairs of state are managed (‘good governance’), and especially for Burkina’s political democratisation: the adoption of a new constitution in 1991 establishing a formal multiparty system, followed by a succession of presidential, legislative, and municipal elections. Yet, as in earlier periods in the country’s history, corruption and patronage continue to tarnish public life, while elections have brought little genuine political pluralism. Rather, as critics have charged, a virtual ‘party-state’ has been erected, with the ruling party machine using public power and resources to co-opt potential challengers and reduce the parliamentary opposition to just a token 10 (out of 111) seats in the legislature. Human rights groups credit the government for releasing most political prisoners, and public life has been enriched by the emergence of an independent press and radio, along with numerous civil and professional associations. But the most outspoken critics continue to face threats, harassment and occasional detention, the police have been known to torture and kill suspects, and the authorities have pushed through legislation to restrict the right to demonstrate.

The upbeat official rhetoric thus masks a more complex – and sobering – reality. In both the political and economic spheres, the process of liberalisation has been uneven and has had contradictory effects. Some have benefited, others have not. In one of the poorest countries in Africa, where social stratification so far has been relatively limited, attempts to impose market mechanisms, in a rapid, hothouse fashion,
threaten to bring very unsettling changes. Fearful of the popular reaction, but also under pressure from their external patrons, the authorities are uncertain of how hard to push on the economic front. Well aware of the political instability in some neighbouring countries – not to mention Burkina’s own turbulent history – they also are reluctant to loosen the political reins beyond the minimum deemed necessary for international consumption.

A ‘Tradition of Adjustment’?

Burkina was one of the last West African countries to sign a structural adjustment package financed by the World Bank and IMF. Although the Compaoré government had requested IMF support for an agricultural sector loan in mid-1988, just months after seizing power, and the following year announced that it had opened talks for a more comprehensive adjustment programme, it was not until March 1991 that the first such agreement actually was signed with the IMF.

The government did not portray the adoption of the programme as a sharp break with past policy, but as an extension and deepening of a process of ‘self-adjustment’ begun years before. As for the World Bank, it had earlier argued that the country ‘has been taking, since mid-1984, a number of adjustment measures … [which] are beginning to bear fruit’ (World Bank, 1989:108). Such an assessment helps explain the Bank’s seemingly peculiar decision, in its 1994 ‘Adjustment in Africa’ report, to rank Burkina among Africa’s top reformers on the basis of policies adopted over 1987-91, that is, mainly before the formal adjustment programme began.

Pascal Zagré, who as planning and cooperation minister helped negotiate the adjustment programme, has put forth the most detailed treatment of the ‘tradition of adjustment’ argument. In 1984, he notes, the Sankara government imposed ‘strict budgetary rigour’, successfully slashing the budget deficit from FCFA 24.5bn to FCFA 4.5bn by 1985. Although the deficit grew once again in 1986 and 1987, it nevertheless remained at about half its 1984 level. This was accomplished, among other measures, through a 25-50 per cent reduction in indemnities, allowances and bonus payments to public sector personnel, the elimination of fictional employees from the payment rolls, sharp cuts in perks to high-level officials, and major drives to collect taxes and customs duties (Zagré, 1994:131-38).

Some of these measures were unpopular with public sector personnel and the extended families that depended on their salaries, but such austerity was made more politically palatable by the government’s parallel and very extensive crackdown on high-level corruption and bureaucratic self-enrichment, a point that Zagré notes, but does not emphasise. Before large crowds and with their sessions often broadcast live over the radio, People’s Revolutionary Tribunals tried and sentenced hundreds of former political figures and bureaucrats, raised billions of francs through the recovery of embezzled funds and stemmed the further hemorrhage of scarce state resources. This anti-corruption stance was made part of the new national identity of the country, renamed in 1984 from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso (‘land of the upright’).

Whatever the limitations and contradictions of the Sankara government’s efforts to cleanse and transform the inherited state apparatus, its broader social agenda meant that ‘budgetary rigour’ was accompanied by initiatives quite unlike those usually associated with structural adjustment policies. Rather than cutting back on vital services and economic activities, the government expanded investments in health, education, and basic infrastructure, relying partly on budgetary reallocations, but
also on local financing and labour through campaigns of popular mobilisation. In 1984, virtually all children were vaccinated against the most deadly childhood diseases. By 1987, some 7,500 primary health posts (averaging one per village) had been set up and several hundred new classrooms were built. To combat the effects of desertification and improve rural water access, hundreds of mini-dams, reservoirs and wells were constructed, while millions of tree seedlings were planted to help slow soil erosion. The railway line running from Abidjan to Ouagadougou was extended 100 kilometres deeper into Burkina’s northeast, relying almost entirely on labour mobilisations by civil servants. Most studies of this period – even those critical of commandist excesses – acknowledge the scope of these achievements and the genuine national enthusiasm that accompanied many of them (Asche, 1994; Englebert, 1996; Guissou, 1995; Harrison, 1987; Jaffré, 1989; Zagré, 1994; Ziegler and Rapp, 1986).

Although Burkina remained highly dependent on external aid, many of these efforts were undertaken in the absence of additional outside financing. In fact, a number of traditional donors pulled back, alarmed by the nationalist and anti-imperialist declarations of the Sankara government. Burkina received no new World Bank funding for projects or sectoral programmes after January 1985, and while France continued to provide project assistance, it dropped its budgetary support from 1983 until the end of the decade (Zagré, 1994:164,176). Justin Damo Barro, briefly a finance minister under Sankara, later revealed that he had tried on four occasions to persuade Sankara to ask for IMF assistance, but Sankara declined on the grounds that IMF conditionality would spell the end of the revolution (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 27 July 1988). The absence of a serious economic crisis and the relatively small size of Burkina’s foreign debt undoubtedly made it easier to hold such a stance.

Taken in isolation, some of the more stringent policies of the Sankara government could be described as a form of ‘self-imposed adjustment’ (Savadogo and Wetta, 1992). Or, placed in their specific political and social context, they might better be considered an example of ‘revolutionary self-adjustment’ (Guissou, 1996:164), involving an attempt to shift scarce resources away from the privileged and better-off, toward the previously neglected urban and rural poor, and without following external dictates.

This approach was brought to an abrupt halt by the 1987 coup. Although sectors of the higher civil service, professional strata, merchants and traditional chieftaincy expressed relief over Sankara’s ouster, the coup was widely unpopular among the poor and the urban and rural youth, as expressed by sporadic protests, overt hostility to the new authorities, and the virtual collapse of most mobilisation efforts. Even among those who felt aggrieved by the previous regime, many were upset by the brutality of Sankara’s assassination and the invective the coup-makers initially directed against him (Harsch, 1988, 1989).

Aware of the unpopularity of their action, Compaoré and his colleagues presented the change in regime as a ‘rectification’ of the revolution, and retained for several years some of the outward trappings and symbols of the 1983-87 era. But to compensate for their weak social base, they meanwhile reestablished close relations with France and conservative neighbouring regimes, and sought new bases of domestic support, offering posts to figures from the old political parties, reinstating dismissed public employees, lifting restrictions on trade, and allowing customary chiefs to play a more prominent political role. In light of such moves, René Otayek, one of the sharpest academic critics of the Sankara era, gave little credence to the revolutionary rhetoric of Compaoré’s new Popular Front coalition. Underlaying the rectification, he
observed, was a clear shift in orientation away from the rural poor and back toward the predominantly urban elites: ‘the new regime is doing everything it can to reconcile with the bureaucracy and to reassure the holders of capital’ (Oytek, 1989:8).

For a time, the regime maintained some of the public sector projects initiated earlier, terming its approach ‘state capitalism’. But this was undermined by a gradual worsening of the government’s financial position. The abandonment of Sankara’s disciplinary measures contributed to shortfalls in tax collection, a revival of bureaucratic corruption, and greater losses in some state-owned enterprises. The relaxation of fiscal policies triggered an accumulation of payment arrears, so that by 1990 domestic and external arrears had mounted to nearly $300m. Spending on urban services and public salaries increased, as the government’s domestic political difficulties impelled it to try to buy some measure of social acceptance. Meanwhile, national income was hit by a sharp decline in remittances from Burkinabé migrant workers in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire, as a result of that country’s increasingly serious economic difficulties; equivalent to 128 per cent of Burkina’s export earnings in 1986, such remittances had plunged to just 54 per cent by 1990 (Zagré, 1994:185).

The pressures thus mounted to seek new external financing. For that, an agreement with the Bretton Woods institutions was seen as essential. Prime Minister Youssouf Ouédraogo saw no other option:

> When a country has not embraced a structural adjustment programme, there are even financing possibilities ... that it can no longer benefit from, because it cannot implement a package of conditions which the international community, at a given time, has come to regard as compulsory (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 26 June 1992).

### Conditionalities, Cutbacks and Sell-offs

With a structural adjustment loan in hand, Burkina soon became one of Africa’s most favoured aid recipients. Over 1991-95, total aid receipts averaged about $450m per year, with France generally accounting for about one-fifth and the World Bank share steadily increasing from $40m in 1991 to $81m in 1995. Beginning with a generous debt rescheduling by the Paris Club of official creditors in 1991, a variety of debt relief packages followed. In 1997 the IMF and World Bank agreed that Burkina would be the second African country (and third worldwide) to benefit from their Highly Indebted Poor Countries initiative, set to receive a $115m debt reduction in the year 2000 – if it continued to implement agreed-upon economic reforms in the meantime.

That caveat has been a standard feature in virtually all of Burkina’s external agreements. In exchange for continued financing or an easing of debt repayments, the government must follow a detailed list of conditions included within the various accords it has signed with the IMF, World Bank, European Union and other bodies. But Burkina’s trade unions and opposition parties see the conditionalities as a loss of national sovereignty. ‘We take our instructions from the IMF and World Bank like the good pupils we are’, opposition leader Joseph Ki-Zerbo bitterly commented (Courier, January-February 1997:21). When the government was late in submitting its 1995 budget to parliament – then called the Assemblée des députés du peuple (ADP, Assembly of People’s Deputies) – an opposition deputy charged the delay was because the budget first had to be submitted for approval to the IMF and World Bank, which functioned in effect as a ‘super-ADP’ in Washington (Sidwaya, 27 December 1994).
As in many other adjustment programmes, a central element in Burkina’s agreement has been reducing the budget deficit and achieving ‘sound’ fiscal policies. This has included widening the tax base, in part through the introduction of a new (and regressive) value-added tax in January 1993, as well as rationalisation of direct taxes and reform of customs duties. On the expenditure side, the government has pledged to contain public-sector wage costs, which in recent years have amounted to about $120m annually (for about 39,000 public workers and another 10,000 military personnel). This goal was compromised during the early 1990s as the government granted modest salary rises, recruited more personnel and increased other spending in an effort to secure political support during election years. Subsequently, however, the government held its ground against union demands for large salary hikes in the wake of the January 1994 devaluation of the CFA franc, arguing that major increases would compromise investment plans.

Significant new public investment, however, was one of adjustment’s early casualties. When the National Planning Council unveiled its five-year development plan in March 1991, the same month the first adjustment deal was signed, projected investments had been scaled back to $1.8bn, from $3.6bn in an earlier draft (Harsch, 1991). The railway extension project which Sankara had launched and Compaoré continued for a time, was shelved at the insistence of the IMF (Guissou, 1996:174-75). Later, public investments in infrastructure and other sectors improved somewhat, at least for projects approved by the World Bank and IMF.

Overall, the accent has been on reducing the role of the state, in favour of the private sector. This is despite the fact that indigenous private capital is very limited and the country’s tiny business class (mainly merchants, but also a few manufacturers) has developed largely thanks to its links with the public sector (Labazée, 1988). Nevertheless, the government has been obliged by its external funders to pull back sharply. The domestic grain-marketing enterprise was liquidated, virtually all import restrictions were abolished, and price controls on most domestic and imported goods were gradually eliminated. Burkina’s second Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility with the IMF, for 1996-68, stipulated further deregulation, as well as opening up the utilities to private participation. The general investment code was revised in 1992 to provide foreign investors with greater incentives, while revisions of the mining code in 1993 and 1997 contributed to a prospecting boom. By July 1997 the government had issued 150 prospecting permits, mainly for gold – and mainly to foreign companies – with prospecting investments reaching nearly $60m, the third highest level in Africa, after South Africa and Ghana.

While such new foreign investments have not raised much controversy, the sell-off of existing enterprises has. Of 18 state firms privatised by the end of 1997, six went to foreign interests. These generally were the largest enterprises sold: the railway, a textile factory, two breweries, a pharmaceutical distributor, and a cement plant. The opposition and unions frequently castigated the government over such sales, charging that it was simply giving away the country’s ‘national heritage’. The sale of the CIMAT cement plant to a Dutch firm stirred a particularly heated debate in parliament in late 1995, with deputies from both the ruling and opposition parties questioning the lack of competitive bids and the protectionist tariffs erected to help the newly privatised firm win dominance over the domestic market.

The sale to Burkinabè investors of the twelve other enterprises aroused nearly as much bitterness, amid opposition accusations that they were sold at low prices and through restricted insider bidding to businesspeople close to the ruling Congrès pour
la démocratie et le progrès (CDP, Congress for Democracy and Progress). A parliamentary commission headed by a leading CDP politician issued a report in 1996 acknowledging some shortcomings in the privatisations, including inadequate bidding procedures, low sales prices, and excessive benefits accorded to the new owners.

While under pressure domestically, the government at the same time faced insistent demands from the World Bank that it speed up the privatisations, in particular by moving toward the sale of some of the country’s largest state-owned enterprises, including the Faso Fani textile factory in Koudougou and the Société sucrière de la Comoé (SOSUCO) sugar complex in Banfora. In response, Prime Minister Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo agreed in 1997 to streamline the privatisation process, with another thirteen enterprises slated for sale, including Faso Fani and SOSUCO. This, however, threatens a possible confrontation with the unions (see below).

‘Human Development’ in Theory and Practice

Shortly after the first adjustment programme was adopted, then Prime Minister Youssouf Ouédraogo responded to domestic critics concerned about the potentially negative social impact of the programme. Ouédraogo assured them that Burkina had ‘benefited from the experience of countries that preceded us’, in that Burkina’s programme incorporated from the outset a ‘special chapter’ designed to mitigate some of adjustment’s more ‘ruthless effects’, although it would still be necessary for the ordinary Burkinabé to ‘tighten his [and her] belt’ (Foreign Broadcast Information Service, 26 June 1992).

Burkina’s late entry into the adjustment fold does seem to have been fortunate, since it thereby managed to avoid the kind of earlier adjustment programmes that featured virtually indiscriminate cuts in government spending. Instead, Burkina’s various agreements included provisions to secure budgetary allocations for primary education, basic health care, clean water, additional teachers, and so on. The second Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility, for example, declared health to be a priority sector, set specific targets for increasing the school-going rate, and pledged to pay special attention to girls’ education (Burkina Faso, 1995:93-97). The concept of ‘human development’, with its strong emphasis on poverty-reduction, improved health and education, advances for women and protection of the environment, has entered the standard vocabulary of Burkina’s economic managers and of the IMF and World Bank staff who routinely visit the country.

In practice, such concerns have not prevented an erosion of income levels and social services for many Burkinabé. A report the government presented to an October 1995 donors’ roundtable, organised by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), was quite frank in its acknowledgement of people’s poor living conditions, resulting, in part, from the ‘lack of a coherent strategy for long-term development’. It reported that GDP per capita fell by 9 per cent in real terms over 1988-94, that 55 per cent of the population lived below the poverty level, and that the share of government expenditures on social sectors fell from 28 per cent in 1991 to 23 per cent in 1995 (Burkina Faso, 1995:125-30).

Health care appears to have experienced the greatest deterioration, despite the fact that budgetary spending on the sector actually increased from 5 per cent in 1991 to 7.8 per cent in 1995. A UNDP report on ‘sustainable human development’ in Burkina found a sharp decline in visits to public health centres, due to the high costs and low
quality of service, with only 18 per cent of the population making at least one visit to a centre in 1995, compared with 32 per cent in 1986. On top of the expense of new user fees, the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994 greatly increased the cost of medicines, the bulk of which must be imported. Medicine prices shot up by 50 per cent in the wake of the devaluation, while informal 'pharmacies' proliferated, often selling outdated and unsafe medicines on the streets at more affordable rates. The maternal mortality rate for women registered at health clinics rose from 350 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 492 in 1995; since only a quarter of deliveries were monitored by the clinics, the total rate was actually much higher, estimated at around 900 in 1997 (UNDP, 1997a:81-86; Agence France Presse, 6 October 1997).

Education, in contrast, continued to show some improvement, although from levels exceptionally low even within Africa. The primary school-going rate rose from just 23.9 per cent of the relevant age group in the 1985/86 school year, to 37.7 per cent in 1995/96. Over the same period, the number of classrooms more than doubled, as did the number of teachers. The adult (15 years plus) literacy rate paralleled this upward trend, rising from 14.4 per cent in 1984 to 22.2 per cent in 1996. Disaggregated, the literacy rate amounted to 48.8 per cent in urban areas against a bare 9.7 per cent in the countryside in 1991 (UNDP, 1997a:66-79). Critics of the government’s educational reforms argue that the increased emphasis on primary education, while essential, has come at the expense of the tertiary level, where admissions have been made more restrictive and scholarships and allowances have been slashed. The unions representing primary and secondary teachers, meanwhile, suggest that the increase in the school-going rate at those levels may have eroded the quality of education, with instructors' average teaching load increasing from 30 to 42 hours per week and secondary school classes often reaching 100 or more students (L'Observateur Paalga, 22 March 1995; Sidiwaya, 14 December 1995).

The government and its donors have taken some pride in their programmes to promote women's political and social advancement. In 1997, although Burkina ranked 172nd out of 175 countries according to the UNDP’s overall 'human development index', it moved notably up the ladder to the 144th place when ranked according to the 'gender-related development index' (UNDP, 1997b:151). This ranking was due primarily to women's relatively high participation in salaried employment in Burkina, mainly in the civil service, where they make up one-third of all personnel, and to their prominence in political and administrative positions, including several cabinet ministers and 10 out of 111 deputies in parliament (UNDP, 1997a:93-94). Both factors pre-date the era of liberalisation. Because of the very large historical out-migration of young males to neighbouring countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire, it has long been relatively easier for literate women to obtain public sector jobs in Burkina than in a number of other African countries. Then in the 1980s the Sankara government adopted a policy of naming women to prominent positions in the cabinet, administrative departments, judiciary, and public enterprises, a practice that has continued to some extent. Such advances for a minority of urban women should not obscure the extremely difficult conditions confronting the bulk of Burkina’s female population. Only 14.6 per cent of all Burkinabè women were literate in 1994, compared with 30.2 per cent of men, while just 30.4 per cent of primary-school age girls actually went to school, compared with 44.7 per cent of boys (UNDP, 1997a:67-68). Women have very limited land rights and virtually no access to formal sources of credit. Female genital mutilation, while formally illegal, is still widely practiced in the countryside, and forced marriage of young girls is not uncommon.
Women make up a disproportionate share of the very poor, and face particular health risks, as shown by the high maternal mortality rate.

Employment figures are often inconsistent, but they generally point to a contraction of the public sector and a rise in both unemployment and informal sector activities. The annual rate of job creation in the formal sector fell from 7 per cent between 1980 and 1990 to 3.5 per cent over 1990-93, while the public sector's share of formal employment fell from 33 per cent in 1985 to around 24 per cent in 1995. The official national unemployment rate was still a bare 2.6 per cent in 1994 (up from 1.1 per cent in 1991), but rose to around 18 per cent in the two largest cities, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso. Such figures greatly understate the problem, since they do not include those who have gone into risky and low-paying occupations in the informal sector, which now accounts for more than half the economically active urban population. The Ministry of Labour has estimated underemployment in the informal sector at around 40 per cent (UNDP, 1997a:56-58; Le Pays, 14 December 1995).

The government has occasionally justified its austerity policies on the grounds of shifting resources and services from the 'privileged' urban areas to the impoverished and neglected countryside. But for most rural Burkinabè, who live under some of the most difficult conditions on the continent, little improvement has been evident. Out of 45 provinces, according to the 'sustainable human development' study, only four had average annual per capita incomes above $100, while most provinces without major cities were far down on the health and education rankings as well (UNDP, 1997a:154-55). When President Compaoré or other high-level officials make occasional tours of the countryside to meet with farmers, the latter sometimes manage to present a cahier de doléances, or list of grievances, which almost invariably cite such common problems as the lack of roads, potable water, health care, or affordable agricultural inputs (Sidwaya, 24 April 1995 and 11 March 1996).

Numerous official rural development programmes have been launched over the years, often with donor funding, to address some of these problems. There is evidence that sectors of the rural population have benefited. But in a context in which rural marketing systems have been liberalised and most credits and agricultural inputs have gone to producers of export crops, above all cotton, the impact has been highly inequitable. Those who already had accumulated a certain amount of wealth, or had established favoured access to official suppliers or market outlets, appear to have realised the greatest gains.

Rural social stratification, while limited by the very low productivity throughout most of the countryside, has become more evident in recent decades (Kohler, 1971; Reyna, 1983; Tallet, 1984), with cotton playing a major role in the process (World Bank, 1988:56-73). Rural inequities most likely will be exacerbated by the strong push, since around 1995, to revitalise cotton production, which had gone into a slump in the early 1990s. From a low of 117,000 tons of seed cotton produced in the 1993/94 season, the harvest nearly tripled to 334,000 tons by 1998/99. This recovery resulted from significant new investments in feeder roads and ginneries, steady increases in the official producer price, and ample credits for fertiliser, insecticides and high-yielding seeds, almost all provided by the cotton parastatal, Sofitex (Société des fibres et textiles), 34 per cent of which is owned by the French Compagnie française pour le développement des fibres textiles. Significantly, the inputs were channeled through new cotton producer associations, the Groupes de producteurs de coton (GPCs), directly promoted by Sofitex to prevent these resources from 'leaking' to non-cotton
activities. Within a year, by 1997, the GPCs claimed 160,000 members, or about 80 percent of all cotton farmers. Unlike the old groupements villageois (village associations) that preceded them, the GPCs do not even pretend to address the broader concerns of rural communities, but mainly the immediate economic interests of cotton producers, thus leaving poorer villagers even further on the margins.

In both the cotton-growing regions and other areas covered by official irrigation projects, a new type of social elite is developing. Commonly called 'new look' farmers (the English term is often used), these are mainly former unemployed graduates or redundant civil servants whom the government has resettled and organised into cooperative enterprises. In June 1993, for example, 51 university graduates were transplanted to an irrigation scheme in the Sourou Valley, where they were organised into 11 farming and livestock cooperatives. On average, each participant had access to 5 hectares and within a few months their cooperatives obtained small tractors from the state, while other farmers who had been in the valley for as long as 6 years had only an average of 0.5 hectares each and could not yet gain bank loans to buy plows. President Compaoré's visit to these 'new look' farmers in August 1993, and the swift attention given to their requests for telephones, video players and other amenities, demonstrated their privileged position. As Tcha-Koura has noted, for the authorities, the creation of a seemingly prosperous rural elite 'permits an impression to develop that the living conditions of rural people are gradually approaching the quality of life of urban residents' (1995:172-77).

**Elite Recomposition**

Whatever local elites may be emerging in parts of the countryside, it is those residing in the major cities and operating at the national level which have been most visible—and have aroused the greatest public resentment.

> In a country with a profoundly egalitarian culture and a tradition of peasant modesty, the appearance of big Mercedes, large villas, and a business elite has provoked sharp reactions. In the land of the upright, the enrichment of some has brought accusations of corruption and shady dealing (Jeune Afrique, 2-8 December 1997).

This national elite comprises several components, some long-established, others relatively new. Their interests are far from identical, but many of the most influential members are linked together through complex webs of personal, family, ethnic, and social ties, often under direct state patronage. These networks straddle most formal distinctions: military and civilian, 'traditional' and technocratic, public and private. There has been, to use Bayart's somewhat inelegant phrase, a 'reciprocal assimilation of elites', that is, a fusion of elites within a single state matrix (1993:155-79). This has been one of the evident accomplishments of the Compaoré regime over the past decade. Not all elite elements are within the dominant bloc, and those that are do not always pull in the same direction, but it has been stable enough to permit the central authorities to survive both the difficult transition to multiparty politics and the unsettling impact of structural adjustment.

Although historically small, the sphere of private, national business has been expanding somewhat with the process of economic liberalisation. A 1995 directory of registered enterprises listed 1,656 businesses, compared with 710 in a similar 1986 directory (CCIA, 1995; INSD, 1986). Most are extremely small, however. Although no figures were given on the size of operations in 1995, only 96 of the 710 listed in 1986 retained more than 50 employees, while just over half (361) employed fewer than 10.
Moreover, relatively few of these businesses are engaged in manufacturing. Of those listed in 1995, some 982, well over half, were classified as commercial or trading enterprises, 179 as artisanal, 300 as service or ‘diverse’, and only 195 as industrial, of which 102 were construction firms. Market liberalisation, by drastically reducing protective tariffs, appears to be reinforcing the bias toward commerce. Burkinabé industries are especially vulnerable to competition from imported goods, since they are small, weakly capitalised and unable to rapidly adjust to changing market circumstances (Ganne and Ouédraogo, 1994).

Under such conditions, the more successful Burkinabé entrepreneurs generally are those who have forged alliances with foreign capital and/or have direct access to the resources and other favours of the state. The former type is exemplified by Alizéta Ouédraogo, who in the late 1980s bought a majority holding in a French furniture marketing enterprise and in 1995 opened a leather goods company in partnership with a Spanish firm, and Dianguinaba Barro, who in 1995 joined with a Côte d’Ivoire-based company owned by the Aga Khan to buy up the privatised Faso Plast food packaging enterprise (L’Observateur Paalga, 1 August 1995; Jeune Afrique, 2 December 1997). These and other entrepreneurs also have maintained close contacts with state officials, with some suspected of benefiting from insider deals allowing them to buy privatised firms under exceptionally favourable conditions. But it is El Hadj Oumarou Kanazóé, construction magnate and Chamber of Commerce president, who perhaps best illustrates the cozy relationship between private operators and the government. Over the course of 1997 alone, according to various news reports, he secured contracts to rehabilitate the Ouagadougou-Pô highway, dig an irrigation canal near the Bagré dam, put up two luxury villas in the Ouaga 2000 conference complex, and build a new 15,000-seat sports stadium in Ouagadougou, projects worth a total of about FCFA 20 billion ($32 million), funded by the government, French aid agencies and other sources. Kanazóé is widely considered Burkina’s biggest billionaire (in CFA franc terms), and is nicknamed ‘the President’.

Some government officials, party leaders and senior bureaucrats also have been busy enriching themselves. Occasional scandals have erupted, and a few officials (in the budget office, state mining enterprise and elsewhere) have been dismissed or even imprisoned. But overall, controls have been relatively lax. A 1995 law required all cabinet ministers, heads of public institutions, and elected officials to make full declarations of their property and assets, but these are kept confidential. Unable to verify the sources of income of public officials, some opposition parties have questioned President Compaoré’s own displays of wealth, such as the construction of a new presidential palace in his hometown, Ziniaré. One of Burkina’s independent magazines commented:

*Officials have stolen in the full knowledge and view of everyone. They have become arrogant millionaires in our cities. Acting with impunity, they have an easy time of it... [and are encouraged by] the policy of laissez-faire, the appeals to all-out enrichment, illicit and unpunished by the regime (L’Indépendant, 20 June 1995).*

Asked in an interview about the frequent accusations of corruption and embezzlement, President Compaoré replied, ‘Is there a government in the world that doesn’t have such problems? Even so, Burkina appears a paradise compared to the others’ (Sidwaya, 30 December 1994). Some scholars concur, arguing that corruption remains fairly minimal in Burkina, especially set against the staggering scale in some neighbouring West African states (Englebert, 1996). That is probably true. Burkina’s meagre state coffers provide much smaller opportunities for embezzlement, theft, and
other abuses, while the country's often-cited culture of frugality sets some social constraints. However, by the same token, cases of even small-scale corruption can provoke considerable public outrage. From the ouster of the first president, Maurice Yaméogo, in 1966 (Guirma, 1991), through the food-aid diversion scandals of the late 1970s, to the well-publicised trials of the Sankara years, corruption has been a volatile political issue. More recently, the declarations of trade unions and opposition parties have been filled with denunciations of high-level corruption and of the government's general failure to act against those implicated. Whatever the actual scale of the phenomenon, the public perception is that corruption has worsened. In a sample survey of 956 people in Ouagadougou in 1996, a Burkinabè polling institute asked respondents whether they thought corruption had diminished, worsened, or remained the same over the previous five years. Some 27 per cent gave no opinion, 17.7 per cent thought corruption had declined and 8.4 per cent, that it remain the same; but nearly half, 46.8 per cent, felt it had increased (Journal du Soir, 6 March 1997).

Whatever corruption's economic and social features, permitting at least a certain level to take place has proved politically functional, providing some of the mortar to hold together the Compaoré regime's structure of political patronage. In the immediate wake of the 1987 coup, the rapid loosening of disciplinary controls helped win support among sectors of the civil service that had felt aggrieved under Sankara, at a critical time for the new regime. The ability to offer high-level posts, with all the perks and possibilities for self-enrichment that came with them, also made it easier to coopt sections of the old political elites.

This was especially useful during the political turbulence of 1990-92, when the regime came under considerable pressure from the mushrooming opposition parties and from street demonstrations, sometimes violent, demanding multiparty democracy and respect for human rights. The demonstrations were contained with repression and intimidation, while opposition calls for a broad national conference (such as the one that swept away the regime in neighbouring Benin) were ignored. Instead, the ruling Popular Front and its foremost component, the Organisation pour la démocratie populaire–mouvement du travail (ODP-MT, Organisation for People's Democracy–Movement of Labour), organised a constitutional conference on their own terms. The new constitution provided for a formal multiparty system with a strong presidency, but the opposition boycotted the presidential election that December, leaving Compaoré as the sole candidate. The opposition's rejectionist stance was subsequently broken when several key figures, including Hermann Yaméogo (son of the country's first president), accepted senior government positions. In disarray, the opposition parties decided to take part in the May 1992 legislative elections, in which the ODP-MT secured a comfortable majority of 78 out of 107 seats (albeit with just 48 per cent of the official vote), and several of its allied parties took an additional 6 seats.

The government and ODP-MT then offered cabinet and other posts to selected opposition leaders and deputies, reducing the parliamentary opposition to an even more marginal force. The ODP-MT's power at the local level was demonstrated in the February 1995 municipal elections, in which it won all but a handful of towns, thanks to its direct access to the state apparatus, its unequaled ability 'to distribute prebends', and its rather systematic policy of selecting as its candidates the most influential local notables, be they merchants, chiefs, or other dignitaries (Loada and Otayek, 1995). The ruling party's role as a patronage machine and its success in winning political acquiescence were captured in the popular wordplay on its acronym, ODP-MT: 'Office de distribution du pain; mange et tais-toi' (Office for bread distribution—eat
and shut up). In early 1996 the ODP-MT absorbed a dozen smaller parties, including from the opposition, forming the new Congrès pour la démocratie et le progrès (CDP). In the May 1997 legislative elections, the CDP reinforced its parliamentary domination even further, securing 101 out of 111 seats, a crushing majority that some party leaders themselves found embarrassing. It did not take the wordsmiths in Ouagadougou long to rechristen the CDP the 'Congrès pour la distribution des postes'.

Although the CDP government could not claim to represent Burkina’s entire elite, it did encompass a number of its major components. Beyond the surviving military and civilian factions that had made up the early Popular Front, these included a number of ostensibly ‘non-ideological’ technocrats and professionals, who were put in charge of most of the economic ministries. Their most prominent representative has been Kadré Désiré Ouédraogo, a former deputy-governor of the CFA zone central bank, the BCEAO (Banque centrale des états de l’Afrique de l’ouest), who returned to Burkina the same month as the CDP’s creation to become prime minister. A handful of former leaders of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also have been brought into the party, including Bernard Ledéa Ouédraogo, the internationally celebrated founder of the Naam village cooperative movement, who was named mayor of Ouahigouya. The CDP likewise attracted prominent entrepreneurs, such as the construction magnate Kanazoé (at whose home CDP candidate selection meetings were held), and a number of politicians with roots in the old political parties. Of particular importance at the local level has been the direct incorporation into the party leadership of traditional chiefs. The Larlé Naaba, the Mossi emperor’s ‘minister of war’, became one of several chiefs sitting as CDP deputies in the National Assembly. The ruling party does not have a monopoly on chiefs, however. One of the deputies of Joseph Ki-Zerbo’s Parti pour la démocratie et le progrès (PDP, Party for Democracy and Progress) is Salfo Théodore Sawadogo, the king of Boussouma, one of the four most influential Mossi chiefs. He also happens to be a nephew of Prime Minister Ouédraogo, demonstrating yet again the multiple links among various elite sectors.

The remaining parliamentary opposition was not stretching it too far in complaining that a de facto one-party state had been created. As with any large patronage machine, however, the ruling bloc is not free of factional and other internal tensions. The arrest in October 1996 of nearly two dozen presidential guards and the flight of their commander (who had played a central role in the October 1987 coup) provided a reminder of some of the fissures that may exist below the surface. A major social crisis or a decline in the resources needed to keep the CDP’s patronage system functioning smoothly could create other rifts.

**Popular Perceptions, Tentative Reactions**

Of particular concern to the authorities has been the strong undercurrent of popular dissatisfaction. In the 1996 opinion survey in Ouagadougou mentioned above, fully a third of the respondents, 33.6 per cent, believed that democracy was not functioning well, against 44.6 per cent who thought it was and 21.9 per cent who were unsure or did not reply. Even more telling, while 59.8 per cent said they preferred a democratic regime, 7.6 per cent would choose military rule and 17.5 per cent favoured a revolutionary regime (Journal du Soir, 6 March 1997).

The remaining opposition has sought to play off this discontent to some extent. But it is fragmented along ideological, personal, historical, and other lines, coming together only occasionally to issue statements against electoral fraud or political repression
and rights abuses. Within the parliamentary arena, the largest opposition force is Ki-Zerbo's PDP, with six seats in the National Assembly. The party describes itself as social democratic, and is the latest manifestation of a political current that began in pre-independence days and played a role within the military government of 1980-82. Ki-Zerbo and other PDP leaders often have criticised the government's structural adjustment policies as harmful to national interests and, although offered a cabinet post in 1997, refused to enter government. The next in importance is the Alliance pour la démocratie et la fédération-Rassemblement démocratique africain (ADF-RDA, Alliance for Democracy and Federation-African Democratic Rally) of Hermann Yaméogo, holding four seats. It traces its origins to the old RDA of Maurice Yaméogo and generally favours economic liberalisation, but has criticised the government's implementation, in some instances for not going far enough in reducing the state's economic role, in others for failing to guard against adjustment's social impact.

Dozens of other parties exist, including several that claim adherence to 'Sankarism', although the latter differ over strategy as well as which points of that political legacy to emphasise. Three Sankarist parties fielded candidates under separate banners in the May 1997 elections, and together gained 50,000 votes. In addition, numerous Sankarist youth groups and 'study circles' have sprung up in recent years, generally operating autonomously from the registered Sankarist parties.

As throughout much of the country's post-independence history, youth, especially university and high-school students, have been particularly combative. After the pro-democracy demonstrations of the early 1990s, students repeatedly mobilised against efforts to impose austerity in educational institutions. In late 1992 and early 1993, University of Ouagadougou students struck against delays in scholarship payments, but also out of frustration over the decline in public sector positions available to graduates. The following year high school students boycotted classes to protest poor living and studying conditions and limitations on university admissions. Then in April-May 1995, they launched a series of demonstrations around the country in solidarity with striking teachers; when two young students were shot to death by police in Garango, more protests followed. At the start of 1997, the University of Ouagadougou was shaken by a bitter, two-month student strike, the longest in the country's history, over cutbacks in amenities and financial assistance. The protests quickly spread to secondary-school students and occasionally led to violent street clashes with security forces.

The trade unions, which had a well-deserved reputation for militancy in the past, were somewhat passive during the first half-decade of structural adjustment. Even the abrupt devaluation of the CFA franc in January 1994 did not bring much of a response from Burkinabé labour (although it did in some neighbouring franc-zone countries). One factor appears to be the union movement's fragmentation. There currently are five separate trade union federations, plus another dozen or so autonomous unions. Earlier, union pluralism was seen as an advantage, making it virtually impossible for successive governments to impose a single union structure tied to the state (Kabeya-Muase, 1989). But recently, it has come to be regarded more often as 'balkanisation', marked by a proliferation of competing union structures, sometimes within the same enterprise. Another factor in some of the unions' relative quietude may be their leaderships' past links with elite party patronage machines. When these parties were in conflict with the regime, the unions linked with them were more apt to engage in strikes. When not, mobilisation has been less likely. The success of Compaoré's CDP in coopting some of the old parties thus has had a dampening effect on sectors of the labour movement.
The teachers' unions, some of which have historical links with Ki-Zerbo's political current, have remained active, repeatedly striking against cutbacks and restructuring within the educational sector. Of the federations, the Confédération générale du travail du Burkina (CGTB, General Labour Confederation of Burkina) has been the most militant, both politically and in supporting strike action. Formed in 1988, it is the youngest of the federations and includes unions in both the public and private sectors. It is commonly understood that key CGTB leaders belong to the Parti communiste révolutionnaire voltaïque (PCRV, Voltaic Revolutionary Communist Party), a small 'underground' party aligned with Albania in the 1970s and 1980s. When asked directly in an interview if he was a member of the PCRV, CGTB General Secretary Tolé Sagnon evaded the question, but went on to denounce 'world capitalism' (Le Pays, 19 January 1997). It was partly because of the CGTB's political stance that the government reacted sharply in June 1997 when the federation's health workers' union launched a partial strike for essentially economic demands. Compaoré explicitly condemned the strike as a 'political provocation' and his government declared it illegal, ordering the dismissal of the union leaders. This heavy-handed response backfired, however. The health workers escalated to a full national strike in July, and won wide backing from other unions, the opposition parties, human rights groups and much of the public. Having misjudged the union's tenacity and level of public support, the government was forced to back down, reversing its sanctions and agreeing to consider the union's demands in exchange for an end to the strike.

There has been some stirring among other sectors of the labour movement as well, partly in reaction to new repressive legislation. In the aftermath of the health workers' strike, the legislature adopted a law limiting public demonstrations, while the CDP released a draft bill to restrict the right to strike, especially among public employees. This brought sharp condemnations and warnings from all the unions, and led the authorities to place the anti-strike bill on a slow track. The ongoing privatisation programme also has aroused unionists' anger over job losses. At the Faso Fani textile plant in Koudougou, the announcement of privatisation plans brought work stoppages and direct assaults on management personnel over several months in 1997. Later that year, the CGTB and the 'Collective of 13', comprising the other federations plus some autonomous unions, began exploring coordinating mechanisms for common action against privatisation. During the first half of 1998, the two union groupings staged a series of protest marches and civil service strikes against legislation intended to erode public workers' job security and advancement prospects.

In the countryside, large numbers of village associations, cooperatives, self-help groups and other rural organisations have developed since the early 1980s, so that Burkina is often cited in donor and NGO circles as an example of rural empowerment (Atampugre, 1997). Most such groups remain local, however, focused on immediate production, environmental or social concerns, with little coordination among them. While some are responsive to the interests of ordinary villagers, others represent local elites, depend on external financing, and/or have become tied to political patrons. In October 1996, 14 commercial farmers' associations and provincial coordinating committees joined to form the Fédération nationale des organisations paysannes (FENOP, National Federation of Farmers' Organisations). Its declarations often have been critical of official agricultural policies.

Sometimes rural conflicts erupt into violence, thereby gaining at least passing notice in the national press. In May 1996, for example, villagers sacked and burned the police post in Réo, a village near Koudougou, after a farmer was shot and killed at a police
inspection roadblock. Citing similar confrontations in recent years, Burkina’s main human rights organisation took up the case, leading the government to dismiss the policeman involved. In another incident, in Fada N’Gourma, the capital of one of Burkina’s more impoverished provinces, young protesters demonstrated for several days in March 1998 to demand the mayor’s resignation, in a scandal involving the corrupt allocation of land titles. Several protesters were wounded when the mayor ordered police to fire into the crowds (L’Observateur Paalga, 13-15 March 1998; Journal du jeudi, 19-25 March 1998).

Contrary to the image of political stability and social calm that the government seeks to maintain, the situation on the ground is far from tranquil. And as the inequities of economic liberalisation continue to upset social relations, while Burkina’s political structures offer few avenues for popular dissent, the ‘Social Tempest in Burkina’ is likely to build up force, as the cover headline of a new Burkinabè monthly magazine proclaimed in its inaugural issue (Nouvelle Afrique, October 1997). The archbishop of Ouagadougou and nine other prominent Christian leaders pointed out with alarm a few months earlier that Burkina is becoming polarised. At one end, their declaration said, is ‘the abundance of wealth of a privileged class’, in a context of ‘flourishing corruption, lies, and even waste’. At the other is ‘the extreme poverty of the many, caused in part by privatisations, numerous cutbacks and generalised unemployment’. As a result, they said, ‘the social climate is disturbed’, carrying with it the potential for serious conflict (Sidwaya, 1-2 March 1997).

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Debate

The following article by Giles Mohan was published in ROAPE 76 (June 1998). In the same issue John Saul and Colin Leys took up the ‘invitation to the debate’ and in this issue, it is followed by Bonnie Campbell’s contribution.

Radicalism, Relevance & the Future of ROAPE

Giles Mohan

ROAPE was established at a time when critical scholarship on Africa was rare. Most Africanist journals bore the marks of their colonial origins in that they were generalist and highly empirical. In contrast, ROAPE was set up to provide a radical forum for politically engaged scholars who explicitly challenged neocolonialism in its various guises, especially the pervasive (and continuing) tendency to privilege the voices of European scholars over those of Africans living and working on the continent.

The journal was also theoretically informed by marxist political economy which was challenging the ideologically charged, but apparently commonsensical, modernisation approaches. Marxist scholars attempted this through various theories of the world system, but what marked ROAPE out as unique was that contributors developed these theoretical insights through engaging, often practically, with struggles on the ground. ROAPE was not simply an ‘armchair decoloniser’, but sought to analyze common struggles over the meaning and content of ‘development’. The editors were self-consciously involved in undermining what they saw to be the causes of Africa’s underdevelopment in the post-colonial, cold war cauldron.

ROAPE has never towed a particular left position dogmatically and has continuously engaged with the spectrum of radical perspectives. For me ROAPE has made a number of critical interventions. First, is a concern with power and social class. Although debates have raged about the nature of classes in Africa it cannot be denied that certain political and economic interests are closely tied. Throughout its history ROAPE has shown how class forces have impinged upon national politics, especially the position of the bourgeoisie vis-à-vis imperialism. Second, has been broadening our conceptions of imperialism and the conflicts this creates. Whether it be militarisation during the cold war or policy conditionality under SAPs, ROAPE contributors have retained a view which accounts for the interaction of international and global/local forces. Third, the journal has not been tied to a rigid class line, but sought to create dialogues with other powerful structures within society, most notably gender differences. Fourth, the articles, while theoretically informed, have never been detached from the needs and agendas of radical political activists in Africa either within the state or working in opposition to it.

For these reasons, and many more besides, ROAPE has successfully straddled the divide between academic journal and political mouthpiece. Over the past few years changes have taken place within academia as well as with regard to the causes of and reactions to African underdevelopment. This introduction is not the place to begin to unravel these various strands. While I do not wish to characterise these trends in any simple soundbite, I think it is fair to say that more and more areas of our lives are being subjugated to
the dictates of capitalist logic. Whether we call this 'globalization' or 'neo-liberalism' we have seen, over the past two decades, a deepening and widening of market discipline. And all this is set, perversely, against debates in European and American universities in particular about the fragmentation and difference brought about by/through post-modernism.

So what is at stake is the role that scholarship and activism by scholars can play in continuing to challenge the causes of Africa's underdevelopment in a radical and relevant way. Hence, we hope this debate will chart some key priorities for the future. It was in response to some of these movements that I decided to initiate this debate. I invited a number of ROAPE editors and like-minded colleagues to candidly respond to a series of questions about the political role that ROAPE has played and can continue to play. The aim was not to indulge in self-congratulation, but to build on the past and set out broad agendas for the future. This is important because most universities are increasingly tied into the state's neo-liberal agenda. Certainly, in British universities our work is being more tightly monitored and evaluated and various 'quality assurance' exercises have begun to instil a strong sense of what 'valuable' academic work entails.

For our colleagues in Africa, authoritarian governments have often attempted to silence critical academics so that scholarship is a key site of political struggle. Indeed, in this regard, the fact that ROAPE is not based on the continent is a source of political power itself, enabling a level of critical debate that would be difficult in many of these countries.

Although I did not want to lead the debate in a given direction I did suggest some broad questions which could guide these contributors. They were not intended as a prompt to recall hazy, halcyon days or to encourage narcissistic catharsis, but to stimulate some thoughts about how we might build productively and critically for the future. They were: What do you consider to have been ROAPE's strengths and weaknesses? What do you consider are ROAPE's present strengths and weaknesses? Is there a place for an area-focused political-economy journal given the tendencies towards globalisation and neo-liberalism? What role should radical academics play in political struggle? Should we and how could we involve more non-academics? What forms of research might open up or develop non-repressive political spaces?

The debate is ongoing. While we welcome contributions from anyone, we cannot guarantee that they will be published. This is not a form of censorship; we want the debate to be as open and honest as possible, but ROAPE's normal standards for submissions do apply. We also want the debate to be as dynamic as possible so we welcome contributions sent electronically which means that they can be typeset and published quickly; deadlines for 1999 are: 15 January, 26 March, 15 July and 5 October. Please send contributions to: Giles Mohan, Department of Geography, University of Portsmouth, Buckingham Building, Lion Terrace, Portsmouth, PO1 3HE, UK. Tel: 44 + (0)1705 842768; Fax: 44 + (0)1705 842512; e-mail: mohang@geog.port.ac.uk.

Bonnie Campbell

Among the questions raised by the Editors of ROAPE who have called for this debate was the following:

Is there a place for an area-focused political economy journal given the tendencies towards globalisation and neoliberalism?
My answer is simple: there has never been as great a need for a journal such as ROAPE.

Over the past 24 years, ROAPE has been an extremely useful vehicle of critical thought and information which has enriched the teaching and research on Africa and has done so in such a manner as to contribute to progressive change. That the trends and developments — none of which any of us could have predicted — which have taken place since the creation of ROAPE should lead us to reflect on the future role of the journal seems both timely and opportune. That the journal has kept swimming against the tide is in itself an eloquent tribute to the individuals who are responsible for this feat! Bravo to Editorial Working Groups and its pillars!!

**Where Do We Go From Here?**

This is not the place to attempt an elaborate characterisation of the political and economic context in which the debate over the political and academic role of ROAPE must be situated. It is nonetheless essential that discussion of the potential uses of this vehicle be reset in an analysis of the present political conjuncture.

In this perspective, I would like to suggest a few ideas for debate, concerning areas of potential focus for ROAPE, and raise questions concerning our working relations with African colleagues, social actors and researchers, with a view of illustrating the continuing potential importance of the journal.

Perhaps I should mention that some of the ideas I am putting forward come out of the experience of organising the francophone interdisciplinary workshops for African doctoral students on the theme: ‘Conceptualising research for development: theoretical, methodological and practical perspectives’. This is part a five year programme, now in its third year, entitled ‘African Development Dissertations Workshops’, involving nine or ten workshops yearly across North America and funded by the Rockefeller Foundation.

Another source of reflection for the ideas put forward is my current research of the human rights, environmental and more generally, developmental implications of the rapid expansion of mining activities in Africa, in the context of ever-increasing liberalisation and state withdrawal.

Among possible academic and political roles, I would suggest that the journal might usefully contribute to the following five:

1) **Deconstruction of dominant paradigms & discourse.**

Africa’s integration into the ‘global economy’ has taken very specific forms. While in no way making a case for the ‘specificity’ of the continent, an approach which has the danger of casting Africa as somehow ‘delinquent’ in relation to universal norms or patterns, it is important to reflect on the particular forms of the continent’s integration into the world market. One obvious point is the degree of state deregulation and delegitimisation which, while part of trends which affect all continents, has no parallel either in form or in depth with what is going on elsewhere.

The strategies and mechanisms by which this process of the dispersion and internationalisation of what were formerly roles and functions associated with the state, has and continues to take place, are occulted by a skilful discourse produced by the multilateral and bilateral financial institutions. One may cite as just a few recent examples: the World Bank’s discourse on ‘governance’, or its proposed redefinition of the role of the state as contained in the same institution’s quite incredible 1997 World Development Report: *The State in a Changing World*. One may also mention the ambiguity of the
discourse of Western bilateral agencies which contribute to fueling public confusion by continuing to use development assistance terminology to promote their own national economic and commercial interests and propose to introduce similar 'development strategies' in situations as different as South East Asia, Eastern Europe and the poorest countries of Africa. There is a certain irony to the fact that the specific forms of integration of Africa in the world economy in the 1990s, as revealed by the direction of private capital or trade flows for example, which are quite different from other areas of the world and the mediatic use of human suffering in Africa, appear to have become a pretext for the manipulation of public opinion in countries such as Canada, to promote the internationalisation of national private enterprises with the help of the aid budget.

The ideological power of the discourse in these various key areas rests on the absence of informed debate capable of challenging the premises on which this discourse rests - premises which are usually carefully dissimulated. Consequently, there seems to be a timely place for critical deconstruction of dominant paradigms, undertaken in such a way as to be accessible to those who are not necessarily academics whether in Africa and elsewhere.

2) Creating space for conceptual & methodological reappropriation by African researchers.

It has been fascinating to see through the experience of the Rockefeller Foundation supported dissertation workshops, the extent to which the research interests of African doctoral students (there are presently between 5,000 and 6,000 of them on student visas in North America) are molded into the acceptance of methodologies, concepts, comparative studies etc. and even the definition of dissertation research topics, which have often little pertinence for the situations from which these students originate and in the most extreme cases, may well, because of their training, make these privileged actors of social change, dysfunctional when they return to Africa.

It would be extremely interesting for ROAPE to become a vehicle for raising awareness of these issues which have very far-reaching implications for the African reappropriation of medium and longer-term solutions to the challenges of social and economic development. This could be done by contrasting concrete examples of positive and negative experiences of research training undertaken abroad and by producing information for circulation in Africa, concerning research networks in Europe and North America which are sensitive to the issue of conceptual and theoretical reappropriation and which have thought through ways to encourage such research strategies.

3) Producing critical information & attempting to counter current tendencies of disinformation or the absence of information.

Contrary to the predominant view which suggests the inevitability of the process of globalisation due to the operation of market forces driven by the pressures of ever growing competitiveness, when one carries out empirical research on specific sectors and actors of 'global markets', one is presented with a quite different perspective. In the latter view, the constructed and institutionalised relations of political and economic power on which global relations are built entail the reproduction of very precise forms of control for which specific actors are responsible, whether these be multinational companies, states, multilateral or bilateral agencies etc. If alternative strategies are to be put forward or the outcome of negotiations among these actors and local communities, unions and other social groups modified, as a first and fundamental
condition, there must much more complete information available to all parties concerned than is increasingly the case.

In the work which we have undertaken collectively on the mining sector, we have seen that the results of negotiations – whether with regard to the unionisation of workers or the setting of the export prices of raw materials – have taken a quite different turn because of the availability of information in the hands of those who often do not have such access.

The production of information to feed the negotiations or the decision-making processes which help shape the precise forms which globalisation takes on, is often the result of critical analysis and an extremely important contribution could be made in this regard by those of us in countries which are close to the sources of power and therefore information.

At present, and in my own experience there are not many journals which share these preoccupations. On the contrary, it is becoming more difficult to publish material of this nature. To the extent that the written media rather than the internet remains the key vehicle for the circulation of information in Africa, this role continues in my mind, to be particularly important.

4) Reinforcing the work of researchers in Africa.

Very often it is assumed that the resources and conditions for doing research in Africa do not exist and consequently, there is a tendency to expropriate this process rather than to see under what conditions local initiatives could be reinforced. Obviously, the results will most likely be quite different depending on the circumstances under which research is carried out.

To give but one recent example; in the context of the considerable interest of foreign capital in the mining potential of the D. R. of the Congo (former Zaire), human rights activists are concerned to know what labour standards, salary scales and safety and environmental norms etc. are to serve as the guidelines for the international NGO’s invited at present either by private companies or by bilateral aid agencies to produce the needed infrastructure (build roads, etc) and to monitor the activities of the mining companies. In fact, and contrary to what might be expected because of the degree of disarray of former Zairean society, local research groups do exist, groups in touch with organised labour and therefore potentially, in a much better position to translate past experiences, notably concerning unionisation, than foreign NGO’s, which have no first hand knowledge of these experiences. The reinforcement of such local initiatives prepares the possibility that it be national groups which are in a position to take the leadership in the subsequent monitoring the activities of foreign companies, while international NGO’s merely work from the outside to supply support. By reinforcing local research groups, one can see a real possibility of contributing, even if very modestly, to halting the current process of the dispersion and externalisation of national social and economic norms, actively being promoted by certain international NGO’s and academics, with the critical implications these questions raise for longer term social coherence and equality.

5) Clarifying the issue of positioning.

I do not think there has been sufficient thought concerning the issue of ‘from where’, ‘for whom’ and ‘for what’ we speak as ‘politically active left academics’ to use the term proposed by the Editors. The complexity of emerging African internal social, ethnic, and political dynamics serves to underline the importance of refusing to impose foreign models and practices on African realities. On the one
hand, this takes us back to thinking through ways to help encourage a process of conceptual and methodological reappropriation on the part of African researchers and social actors (point 2 above). On the other hand, we need to be particularly attentive to the emergence and active in helping to make better known, ongoing initiatives; for example, the current attempt by CODESRIA to rethink the appropriateness of the analytical categories we are using around the project: 'Acteurs sociaux, sociétés civile et transformation de l'espace public en Afrique'.

While we can certainly contribute to such debates in a modest way, and thinking back to some of the political lesson which can still be drawn from the way in which the 'dependency debate' was formulated in the 1970s, I am convinced that we cannot substitute ourselves for those who are to initiate and carry through the needed process of conceptual and theoretical reappropriation concerning the study of the political economy of Africa but there are few journal as well placed as ROAPE to contribute to this process.

**Bonnie Campbell**, Département de Science Politique, Université du Québec à Montréal.

Editor's Note: And in this vein, *ROAPE* will be re-starting its conferences beginning in January 2000! Given the incredible situation in Africa today and the need to encompass debate across all the 'boundaries', we have already begun discussions with both our Francophone & Lusophone colleagues. Details in the next issue of the journal, out in March 1999.
The National Institute of Studies & Research of Guinea-Bissau Endangered by War

Peter Mendy

Pages of the History Risk Being Blank

The war which flared up in Guinea-Bissau on 7 June 1998, between the military junta representing 90 per cent of the armed forces reinforced by veterans of the armed struggle for national liberation, and the remaining 10 per cent supported by troops from Senegal and Guinea-Conakry solicited by the Head of State, has already exacted a heavy toll, even if the precise details still remain unclear. To the unknown number of deaths, can be added some 250,000 displaced persons and refugees, and the enormous material destruction caused by intense bombardment with heavy artillery during 50 days of confrontation.

Among the infrastructures most affected by the destruction is the Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP), which is the largest and most active research institution in the country. The complex housing INEP is located less than a kilometre from the initial front-line of the hostilities. It has been transformed into an advanced post of the Senegalese troops. The transformation of the complex into an army barrack and the adverse bombardments it consequently attracted have caused immense damages.

Thanks to the ceasefire signed on 25 August 1998, a few staff members of INEP were authorized, after enormous difficulties, to visit their place of work. The preliminary balance-sheet can be summarized in one word: DISASTER.

All the workrooms were forcibly opened, emptied of their contents and transformed into dormitories for soldiers. All work documents were thrown outside and left exposed to the elements. The stock of dozens of computers containing databases on all aspect of Guinea-Bissau, compiled carefully and painstakingly during the past fifteen years, has disappeared. The computers left behind have been disemboweled. Sensitive and very rare equipment, such as the only digital cartography table in the country, is thrown outside and left exposed to dust and rain.

The INEP Library, embryo of the National Library and reference centre of all publications in the country as well as for certain United Nations agencies like FAO and UNESCO, is roofless and damaged on the sides. The torrential rains which have fallen on Bissau since the end of June have constantly entered the building. Its three floors – first, ground and basement – have been transformed into pools where thousands of soaked and irrecoverable books and journals float.

The National Archives at INEP are scattered, shredded and exposed to rain and dirt. Hundreds of audio cassettes which record the history of the national liberation struggle, as told by its actors and witnesses, cannot be found. Hundreds of audio cassettes which record the oral history of the different regions of the country have disappeared. Photographs and films from the Audiovisual Archives are found dispersed and lying in the mud outside. In other words, entire pages of the history of Guinea-Bissau risk being irredeemably blank or illegible. This is particularly serious in view of the fact
that no general history of Guinea-Bissau has yet been written, and that all recent efforts of the Institute have been geared towards this objective.

To summarize, the damages suffered by INEP have reduced to zero the enormous efforts made since Independence to provide the country with a centre of documentation and research useful to all those interested in Guinea-Bissau.

At the time of writing, INEP continues to be a military camp, in spite of the ceasefire. The staff of the Institute is forbidden to engage in work to rehabilitate or save it from further destruction. Relentlessly, the disaster continues. This letter to inform is also an SOS for the largest research institution of Guinea-Bissau which is threatened by extinction.

0 Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa da Guine-Bissau Posto em Perigo Pela Guerra

Paginas Inteiras da Historia do Pais Correm o Risco de Ficar em Branco.

A guerra que rebentou na Guiné-Bissau no dia 7 de Junho de 1998, entre a Junta Militar representada por 90 por cento das forças armadas reforçadas pelos antigos combatentes da luta de libertação nacional, e 10 por cento das forças armadas apoiadas pelas tropas do Senegal e da Guiné-Conakry solicitadas pelo chefe do Estado, já tem um balanço pesado, apesar de estarem imprecisas. Ao balanço dos mortos ainda desconhecido, juntam-se alguns 250.000 deslocados e refugiados e enormes destruições materiais causadas pelos intensos bombardeamentos à arma pesada que marcaram os cinquenta dias de confrontação.

Entre as infraestruturas mais afectadas pela destruição figura o Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisa (INEP), que é a maior e a mais activa instituição de pesquisa do país. O complexo abrigando o INEP situa-se a menos de um kilometre da linha de frente no início das hostilidades. Foi transformado em campo avançado das tropas senegalesas. A transformação do complexo em caserna e os bombardeamentos adversos que ela inevitavelmente atraiu sobre a zona causaram enormes danos.

Graças ao cessar-fogo assinado no dia 25 de Agosto de 1998, alguns funcionários do INEP foram autorizados, depois de enormes dificuldades, a visitar o seu lugar de trabalho. O balanço das suas primeiras constatações resume-se numa palavra: DESASTRE.

Todas as salas do trabalho do Instituto foram abertas por força, limpas dos seus conteudos e transformadas em dormitórios para os militares. Todos os documentos de trabalho foram deitados para fora e expostos às intempéries. O stock de várias dezenas de computadores contendo as bases de dados minuciosamente constituídos no decurso dos últimos quinze anos sobre todos os aspectos da Guiné-Bissau desapareceu. Os computadores que não desapareceram foram desventrados. Equipamento sensível e raríssimo, como a única mesa de cartografia digital que possui a Guiné-Bissau, é exposto fora à poeira e à chuva.

A Biblioteca do INEP, embrião da Biblioteca Nacional, e centro da referência para todas as publicações do país e algumas agências das Nações Unidas tais como FAO e UNESCO, está sem tecto e estragado nos lados. As chuvas torrenciais que caem sobre Bissau desde o fim do Junho entram constantemente na biblioteca. Os seus três níveis (a cave, o réz-do-chão e o primeiro andar) transformaram-se em lagos onde flutuam milhares de livros e revistas que se tornaram irrecuperáveis.
Os Arquivos Nacionais que abrigam os edifícios do INEP estão espalhados e esfarrapados, e expostos à água e à lama. Centenás de cassetes-audio gravados sobre a história da luta de libertação narradas pelos seus actores e testemunhos estão perdidas. Centenás de cassetes sobre a tradição oral das diferentes regiões do país desapareceram. As fotografias e filmes dos Arquivos Audiovisuais estão dispersos e aviltam-se. Por outras palavras, páginas inteiras da história da Guiné-Bissau correm o risco de ficar irremediavelmente brancas ou ilegíveis. Isto é particularmente grave considerando o facto que a história geral da Guiné-Bissau não está ainda escrita, e que todos os recentes esforços do INEP tendem para este objectivo.

Numa só palavra, os danos sofridos pelo INEP reduziram a zero os resultados dos esforços feitos desde a Independência para dotar o país de um centro de documentação e de produção intelectual. E a todos aqueles que se interessam pela Guiné-Bissau.

No momento em que se escrevem estas linhas, o INEP continua a ser um campo militar, apesar do cessar-fogo. Os funcionários do Instituto não podem já trabalhar para o rehabilitar ou salvá-lo de mais destruição. O DESASTRE prossegue inexorávelmente. Esta carta que vem informar-vos é também um SOS para a maior instituição de pesquisa da Guiné-Bissau ameaçada pela extinção.

Assim que o INEP deixar de ser uma caserna, um balanço mais detalhado será efectuado e estará disponível. Será seguido pelo nosso projecto de reconstrução.

Pedimos que divulguem esta mensagem aos amigos do INEP que conhecem, e também a todas as instituições e pessoas que dão valor à produção intelectual.

A Direcção do INEP
12 de Setembro de 1998

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**Greed or Need? Genetically Modified Crops**

Bumper harvests and food for all, or monster tomatoes and bio-pirates? It is still too early to know what impact genetically modified (GM) crops are going to have. They are provoking opposition from experts and the general public in Europe and some developing countries (see ROAPE 77). But many scientists argue that much of the criticism is ill-informed and sometimes ‘hysterical’, fanned by an ‘irresponsible’ media. It is true that many people tend to be suspicious of big companies and indeed scientists, and react strongly to scares about the safety of food. But the race is on to win the hearts and minds of people in developed and developing countries alike.

Supporters argue that the world desperately needs GM crops to ensure food security and sustainability. GM crops, they say, will produce higher yields of more nutritious food, with less use of chemical inputs. Opponents fear that the driving force behind GM crops is greed, not need.

Monsanto, the world’s largest GM seed company, foresees three waves of beneficial products: ‘The first consists of genetically modified crops which are resistant to insects and disease, or tolerant of herbicides. These will allow farmers to meet the growing demand for food ... The second wave, due to begin in five years’ time, will see genetically induced ‘quality traits’ in food, such as high-fibre maize or high-starch potatoes, some of which will help doctors to fight disease. And in the third wave, plants will be used as environmentally friendly ‘factories’ to produce substances for human consumption’.

But a growing coalition of dissenting specialists, farmers, citizens’ groups, scientists and ordinary consumers, North and South, is becoming vociferous in its warnings of possible dangers from GM crops and the need for caution – at least – in their introduction. The criticisms range
Greed or Need?
Genetically Modified Crops

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from challenges to the scientific assumptions of the technologies, through questions about the motivations of the biotechnology industry, to arguments that such meddling with the genetic make-up of plants is immoral or sacrilegious.

Environmental campaigners in Europe are so concerned about the potential dangers of GM crops that they are prepared to break the law to disrupt testing, and the cautious attitude of the European regulatory authorities is symptomatic of public concerns about GM technology in food production. Opponents argue that increasing crop yields is not the solution to food insecurity, and warn that GM crops will bring dangers to the environment and human health, as well as negative impacts on farmers’ livelihoods, especially in poorer countries. Many are uneasy with the fact that the biotechnology industry, and an ever larger proportion of the whole agricultural supply and distribution system, is controlled by a small number of giant corporations.

Companies are racing to claim patents on genetic materials from all over the world on which they hope to reap large profits – in order, they argue, to fund research and innovation. But the new technologies raise many new questions of science, law, ethics and economics, and patent and intellectual property laws have not kept up. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) will be under pressure in 1999 from the agricultural biotech industry side to globalise and strengthen patent protection – while opponents will argue that plant varieties should be excluded and new mechanisms found for sharing the benefits of genetic material with communities and farmers who may have nurtured and used it for generations.

The debate over GM crops and their patents rages around the world, whether on farms or in law courts. Key to its resolution will be people’s access to accurate, understandable information, not public relations hype or scaremongering.

Key Facts

- An estimated 30 million acres (12 million hectares) of genetically modified (GM) crops were sown in 1997, up from 4-6 million acres in 1996;
- 64 GM crop varieties have been approved in the USA and Canada, 20 in Japan and eight in Europe;
- The physical form and chemical composition of a typical crop plant is determined by up to 80,000 genes, or sections of DNA found in the nucleus of all cells. Genetic engineering enables scientists to insert new genes into an individual plant cell, which is then grown in tissue culture and can be used to regenerate full sized plants;
- The world market for agricultural seed is worth an estimated US$45 billion a year, of which one third is commercial proprietary seed (i.e. seed uniformly produced in bulk by commercial companies), one third is produced by governments or publicly funded institutions and one third is the value of seed saved by farmers for their own use in future crops;
- The commercial development of genetically modified crops is dominated by Monsanto and five other major agrochemical companies: Dupont, Dow Elanco, Novartis, AgrEvo jointly owned by Hoechst and Schering) and Zeneca.
- The efforts of these companies have so far been concentrated in high-volume crops which offer the most opportunity for sales large enough to recoup research costs and generate profits. The main targets have been soya beans, maize, cotton, oilseed rape (canola), potatoes and tomatoes;
- The US biotech industry and its allies are becoming increasingly frustrated with the reluctance of European countries to accept the technology. They have urged the US government to take their case to the World Trade Organisation if Europe introduces a compulsory labelling sys-

NEWSPEG, World Food Day, 16 October
Examining Myths of a Democratic Media
Patricia McFadden

The following is taken from a presentation by Patricia McFadden, a feminist activist who is working in Harare, Zimbabwe. She presented it during a seminar on 'Women and the Media in Africa', hosted by Nisaa and Lola-Press in November 1997 in Johannesburg, South Africa. McFadden was born in Swaziland 46 years ago and works mainly in the Southern African region, teaching, training and doing feminist advocacy. The presentation has been shortened and edited for publication (reprinted courtesy of SAPEM, Harare).

I want to start by arguing that the notion of democracy is categorised by three elements which are similar to those of the media. These three elements show themselves clearly in the political definition of democracy and also within our experience with what we call the media. They are exclusion, privilege, and maleness.

For me, democracy and the media are intersected by these very central characteristics, which have detrimental consequences to women and other marginalised groups. For Africa, the situation of exclusion, privilege and maleness as a gender construct is aggravated by the repressive macro-economic policies which have been re-imposed by a continued post-colonial economic relationship with the North (i.e., neo-colonialism). This situation creates a dichotomous relationship between, on the one hand, a neo-colonial state that is disempowered by macro-economic policies, and on the other hand, a civil society that has merged as a result of anticolonial resistance. This story is very true in Southern Africa. As the state loses legitimacy (because of unpopular macro-economic policies), the civil society which played a critical role in liberating Africa from colonisation becomes a threat. Women embedded in that civil society are the easiest to scapegoat, attack, and disempower. The nascent civil society is not ready to protect its membership or constituents. This is what is happening in many African countries.

I would like to speak about these three categories in relation to feminist activism. I would like us to think about exclusion, privilege and maleness in relation to feminist activism, especially around the issue of power and how the media is really about exercising and using power. This power is very much reflected in terms of who has information, who constructs identity, and how those identities shift people from being centred in power to being marginalised from the edges of it. I would also like to raise some questions about how we could begin to change the media by constructing new expressions of media. For example, Lola Press (1) is to me a product of feminist activism, feminist thinking, feminist interrogation about the written media. Even the size of Lola goes against the conventional academic structure of how a journal should look, how many pages it should have – even the writing style. All these are expressions of feminist resistance. So, I would like to look at this issue of constructing new expressions of media in relation to Africa, but also as an internationalist group. What is happening in Africa is what is happening to the world.
Examining Myths of a Democratic Media

Patricia McFadden

The following is taken from a presentation by Patricia McFadden, a feminist activist who is working in Harare, Zimbabwe. She presented it during a seminar on 'Women and the Media in Africa', hosted by Nisaa and Lola-Press in November 1997 in Johannesburg, South Africa. McFadden was born in Swaziland 46 years ago and works mainly in the Southern African region, teaching, training and doing feminist advocacy. The presentation has been shortened and edited for publication (reprinted courtesy of SAPEM, Harare).

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As I speak of the issues that I feel I have encountered working as an activist, I would like us to think about the media as an important mechanism of identity construction; as a space that is contested and highly political. I want us to understand that it is a form of expression that takes on various meanings and expressions. And lastly, we need to be aware that it is a critical feminist tool in terms of celebration and transformation.

I think the issue of ‘voice’ in Africa is important, especially when approaching the issue of democratisation. We need to understand voice. Whose voice is heard in terms of women generally? In terms of women of colour? And what are the ideological and political issues that intersect in our hearing of that voice?

The tendency of course is to homogenise the voices of women not only in Africa but globally. It is easier to manage this ‘exotic different’ if it is locked into particular stereotypes. We see these stereotypes continuously reproduced in the global media, whether at CNN or in the newspapers. If we don’t consider the issue of voice, we lose the ability to understand the way in which the global media works – an enterprise that is owned by a small clique of white men who are based in the North. This denies us the ability to understand the specific issues that affect women of colour, in particular, and women in the South, in general.

The noting of different voices amongst African women is critical. But we also need to be aware of whose agenda these voices in the media are authenticating. Often the agenda that is authenticated by the so-called African women’s voice is actually sifted through other people’s mouths, usually those of white male journalists and increasingly black male journalists. For example, when you turn on the BBC in the morning, you are hit with a barrage of sexist, chauvinistic, patriarchal expressions in the form of proverbs on who Africa is and who African women are (2). And, usually it is a conservative black male voice or conservative black female voice reading the proverb. The BBC serves as this very interesting vehicle to reproduce patriarchy on a global scale and people think that this is cute! It is nice until you actually go behind and ask whose voice it is.

I think we also need to ask how the homogenisation of an African identity in the media as a moderate conservative conciliatory identity affects us. How does it muzzle and silence the feminist voices of Africa? Why is it that when African women have been engaged in a battle against patriarchy for centuries, they have to contest – they still have to struggle so much – to be recognised as feminists. We, as African feminists, still have to explain. Some of us are still apologetic. I think it is because that feminist voice has been muzzled by the by conservative elements who dominate the media.

I think another dangerous element in the homogenisation of the African woman is the idea that Africans invented heterosexuality and that really and truly anything else is not African. It is an amazing relationship of sexual identity and composure that reflects itself in these stereotypes about the African woman. You can see it in the statements about reproductive rights and health; the media uses these images (of strict heterosexuality) to argue a very conservative agenda for African women, especially in relation to issues of choice and control over reproduction.

I also think when we look at issues of democratisation in the media in Africa, we need to actively look for ways of creating spaces where we can engage and tackle issues. First, even as journalists feminist journalists – we tend to find a way of explaining the privilege we may enjoy, whether it derives from a racial ideology, from class, or from the access we may have to information – this needs to be examined. Secondly, how do we, in creating these spaces, consolidate a na-
tional, regional and global feminist agenda? And, thirdly, how do we relate to the issue of state control over the media – a major problem for Africa women activists? Across the continent, those regimes that enter into state power via a liberation war or national anti-colonial resistance assume total hegemony over the mechanisms through which people express themselves. If you look, for example, at the cases of South Africa, Angola, Mozambique, or Zimbabwe, it is the liberation movements that now control the area of discussion, the radio, the journals and of course the way in which they are intolerant of feminist issues.

It is in this post-colonial period that a so-called free press emerges. But, I think it is a contradiction to entertain the notion of a free press when it is exclusionary. The press cannot be free if it excludes the expression, the experience, and the opinion of women. As long as democracy excludes the human rights, the physical integrity, and the right of women to speak for themselves, it is not adequately democratic.

I would like to emphasise that the media is exclusionary and that this exclusion is clearly expressed in terms of class and gender. The media controls the representation and images of the continent and its people. Africa is a perfect example of how mythical the idea is that the media is a democratic organ which facilitates democratisation. It is very clear on the African continent that the voices, experiences, and opinions which we hear are predominantly classed and conservative. It is also very clear that black and white men have created alliances which re-enforce stereotypes about women at the national, continental, and global levels. For example, if we look at ways in which the media approaches the issue of women’s sexuality, I think all of us can see the traditional stereotypes that label women’s sexuality as dangerous, dirty, evil, threatening, and out of control, especially if that sexuality is embodied in feminist politics. You can have a British journalist cover the issue of sexuality in Africa exactly in the same way that a black journalist from Somalia or Ethiopia will. What they think women should be doing is very clear. If you open the newspaper, the traditional representation of women as mothers and nurturers is continuously reproduced.

Another issue which I think is important is the fact that the representation of women in the public and the private spheres are common across cultures within Africa and globally. This shows clearly the essentialism of patriarchy as a male-owned ideological system which goes beyond issues of difference amongst men and beyond race in particular. The media is a powerful homogenizing tool which establishes male superiority and supremacy, whether it is the white male in Europe or the exotic male in Guinea. For example, there can be an image of the exotic male dressed in minimal clothing, as well as the white European head of a big industry, and supremacy of maleness runs through both of the images.

The media in Africa isolates and demonises women who dare to challenge the status quo. We can see this is in the good-woman-bad-woman dichotomy. It is important to be vigilant about the dichotomisation of women because it is through these dichotomous categories that the media can claim a particular voice of, for example, Latin America women or Asian women. We have seen it in South Africa in the demonisation of women like Winnie Mandela.(3) She became unacceptable as a black, political woman. So the media re-focused its positive attention on a more acceptable, more demure, more stereotypical female who is not seen as a threat – Graca Machel, Nelson Mandela’s new romantic interest.

Graca Machel is represented as a woman who is a real woman. She loves children, she works with UNICEF (United Nations Childrens Fund), she fights for the rights of the child. She conforms to this public mothering image, and is politically ac-
ceptable. She allows Nelson Mandela to be the star, but she is still there – the strong woman behind the great man. She has restructured herself in incredible ways, and the white liberal male press loves it. You can see it very clearly – the ways in which women’s identity can be so cleverly manipulated. Winnie Mandela who comes from the same tradition, becomes the demon because she refuses to be a signifier for a traditional stereotype of submissiveness, the nanny, the woman who stands behind her husband, the woman who is willing to accept the status that is offered her. She is instead a loud mouth. She raises the issue of race which is problematical because South Africa is building a rainbow nation and they don’t want anyone to rock the rainbow nation boat. So you have these dichotomies. Two women, both of them incredible resources, role models for the feminist movement and the women’s movement in this region. One demonised and marginalised and the other glorified. And how do we as feminist activists, as women, how do we respond to that? How do we come to the support of women even if we disagree with some of the things that they do? There are so many contradictions and often we get caught up in those contradictions.

And finally in terms of the media and globalisation, we need to look carefully at the way in which African women are used as metaphors for the statement about being developed and not developed – the statement of being civilised and chaotic and war-like. You can see it inscribed on women’s bodies – those images of women dying of starvation and famine as a statement of hopelessness in Africa. When it is about Africa it is about the hopelessness and uselessness of African governments. But as feminists when we look at this issue, we can see how the global media can manipulate and misrepresent. African women are the representation of the passive subject, always represented without sound, voice or opinion. They are used as metaphors for poverty and ignorance.

I think a very important issue about being a South African, is the role of the white male in the press and the stereotype of the black women. We attack black women who are political. The subtext to that attack is: ‘Who does she think she is? Kaffir’(4). The black woman is’ never political. She is never a contender for power. When the colonials were attacking Africans, African women ran between the colonial guns and the African man and sometimes they lifted their skirts or took their clothes off to shame the white man and dare him to touch their men. But after that, after taking that risk, the women disappear. They are only an exotic statement about the black and white man’s battle for power.

How then do we use the media as a democratising vehicle? How do we approach this very critical resource which is institutionalised, global and very powerful? First of all, we have to question the effectiveness and appropriateness of the existing media. This will be our principle goal as feminists. Too often we use the given forms. We adapt them a little bit, but I don’t think that we are sufficiently right in the way in which we interpret and transform the media. I think we need to ask ourselves, how these media forms can be made more inclusive. How can we insert new forms into the media space?

I think we need to understand the patriarchal function of the media, especially in terms of the backlash. How do we as feminist activists respond to the backlash using the different types of media we are allocated. We can’t assume that because we are feminists and have the interests of all human beings at heart, that we are going to be loved and not attacked. We, as feminists, repeatedly come under tremendous attack, and when we do there seems to be so few of us. We are so thin on the ground and so faraway from each other that we end up shattered by the time we come through our battles.

What we find in the media is support and tolerance of well-fenced activism, and a demonisation and rejection of feminist
politics. The good woman is the one who appears on the TV and talks about how the women's organisations are supporting AIDS victims and helping women to cope with home-based care. The one who is saying 'we want civil integrity, bodily integrity, we want reproductive rights' - those are the bad women, It is a convenient construction and invention of categories which serves to exclude women. We have to be creative and courageous. We have to be brave and angry and insist on being citizens in the media and in our societies. We have to raise issues of democracy. We have to defend our rights to experience democracy through the media. We have to be vigilant of the stereotypes about Africa which reinvent colonial and racist myths. We have to develop a feminist knowledge that provides an understanding of the experiences of women in Africa and globally.

Endnotes
1) Lola Press is an international feminist journal that was started by a group of Frauenanstiftung-sponsored organisations.

2) Every morning on the African Service of the BBC, African proverbs are read. They are sent in from readers. Some listeners have complained that the proverbs are condensing to Africa and Africans, particularly to African women.

3) Winnie Mandela was lambasted by the press during her case in front of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in late 1997. Among other things, she was portrayed as an evil woman, who doesn't like children and was not a faithful wife. Winnie Mandela is the former wife of South African President Nelson Mandela.

4) Kaffir is a derogatory Afrikaans term for a black person. Its literal translation means 'the unbelievers'.

The Africa Centre in London
Anthony Acheampong

In the thirty years or so since independence, says Dr. Adotey Bing, Africa has chalked up some impressive advances in literacy, education, the output of raw materials, science and technology, and enlightened social policy. And it has had some notable achievements in the artistic, intellectual and sporting fields. Despite this, he bemoans the fact that the rest of the world tends to ignore the continent or to focus almost exclusively on the negative aspects. Africa persistently suffers from an unfavourable media profile, he acknowledges, portrayed as a place wracked by political crisis, endemic corruption, social disintegration and self-induced penury.

Dr Bing, who is the Director of The Africa Centre in London, is unhappy about this one-sided view of his native continent. And he is in the business of trying to redress the balance. He believes that the Centre he runs has a special role to play in ensuring that Europe gets a more balanced picture of African affairs, and in offering a platform for African opinion leaders (outside the usual diplomatic channels) to get their views across.

The Africa Centre is an independent charity located at Covent Garden in the heart of the British capital. For more than three and half decades, it has been a focal point for African culture in the UK. Leading African artists, writers, politicians, business-people and musicians have met there over the years to draw inspiration from each other and to share their vision with people in the host country.

The Centre was set up in 1961 with the aim of informing the British public about Africa. It was officially opened in 1964 by Kenneth Kaunda, the first President of Zambia. Over the years, it has become something of a 'home from home' for members of the African community in
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London including artists, musicians, writers, intellectuals and political exiles. It is also a focal point on Africa for the British population.

The Centre houses, among other things, a gallery, two meeting halls, an African restaurant and bar, a craft centre, and a bookshop specialising in publications from and about the continent. It is also home to the African Education Trust. Around 80,000 people make use of its facilities every year.

The Centre has attracted many notable speakers including President Yoweri Museveni, Julius Nyerere, OUA Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Sir Shridath Ramphal, Wole Soyinka, Maya Angelou, Graca Machel, Chinua Achebe and Bernard Chidzero. Among the British politicians who have addressed meetings there are Malcom Rifkind, Baroness Chalker, Barbara Castle and David Steel. Its exhibition of Zimbabwe stone sculpture, staged at the Barbican in 1988, was opened by Prince Charles.

Mary Robinson, the former Irish President, who is now UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, was a recent visitor. She delivered a lecture entitled: 'Africa and a Rights-Based Approach to Development'.

The Centre was also instrumental in organising the European musical tour Women of Africa featuring Oumou Sangare, Hanitra Rasoanaivo, Sally Nyolo and Sibongile Kumalo.

**Objectives**

The objectives of the Centre, as set out in its mission statement, are to:

- organise performances and exhibitions of African art and culture;
- provide opportunities for collaboration between African and European artists, and between leaders in cultural and intellectual circles;
- encourage the cultural activities of African communities in Britain and Europe;
- organise talks, lectures, briefings and conferences on social, political, and economic issues concerning Africa;
- act as a resource centre for information on African art, culture, and society.

Its programme is organised around four areas:

- A Resource Centre providing information on Africa, including newspapers, magazines and journals. There is a reading room with seating for 15 people;
- Performances and exhibitions of African art and culture;
- Talks, lectures and conferences on social trends in contemporary Africa;
- Talking Africa, a weekly radio discussion and phone-in programme, broadcast on Saturdays on Spectrum Radio (558AM/MW).

**New Projects**

Recently, the Centre has embarked on a number of new initiatives in pursuit of its objectives. In 1997, it launched Managing Contemporary Africa, a series of lectures by eminent Africans. The aim here is to facilitate dialogue between decision-makers in Africa and those in Britain and other European countries whose actions have a bearing on the continent. Keynote speakers so far have included Cyril Ramaphosa and Prime Minister Hage Geingob of Namibia. 1997 also saw the establishment of a monthly literature forum called 'Kulture Klash'.

Key initiatives begun this year have included a monthly seminar on investment and trade prospects in Africa (especially for small and medium sized enterprises), the establishment of the Africa Centre Business Club which is open to firms with business interests on the continent, and a further forum entitled 'Under the Baobab – talking till we agree?' This last is a monthly discussion meeting.
led by a prominent African journalist which explores contemporary issues and developments.

**From Focal Point to Flagship**

The Council of Management recently agreed that the profile of the Centre should be raised. They want to make it a ‘flagship’ for Africa in Europe, promoting the best of the continent’s art, culture and opinion. The decision is based on a business plan that seeks to ensure the Centre’s long-term financial viability in Covent Garden which some regard as the cultural heart of Britain. Detailed work by architects and consultants has produced a package combining programme ideas (some of which are outlined above) and an architectural scheme. The intention is to redevelop the attractive listed building where the Centre is located to provide modern conference facilities, a cinema, an art gallery, a business club, a music venue and a modern computerised information centre. There are also plans to refurbish the restaurant, cafe, bookshop and craft centre. The total cost is estimated at around £4.3m. The proposals, designed to take the Centre into the new millennium, have already attracted interest from bodies as diverse as the Organisation of African Unity, the UK Government, the EU and the Covent Garden Trust. The Centre has obtained a provisional award from National Lottery Funds, through the Arts Council of England, for updating the feasibility study. The Centre, for its part, must demonstrate a strategy to raise £1 million towards the redevelopment. Assuming all goes according to plan, the work should be completed by early 2000.

It is an ambitious scheme which Dr Bing hopes will enable the Centre to build a bridge to a new era of relations between Africa and Europe.

**Yemen & Eritrea: Friends once more?**

*Martin Plaut*

On the 9th of October the Tribunal established under the Permanent Court of Arbitration, delivered its verdict on the dispute between Yemen and Eritrea over the Hanish islands. Their decision, produced almost exactly three years after the Tribunal came into being, was a masterly piece of judgement. In 157 pages it wound its way through a labyrinth of maps, claims, charts and memoranda to produce a report that finally settled the fate of these islands that lie between the two countries at the mouth of the Red Sea.

On the face of it the islands have little to commend them, a point not lost on the Tribunal. The disputed islands and islets range from small to tiny, are uniformly unattractive, waterless, and habitable only with great difficulty. And yet it is also the fact that they straddle what has been, since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, one of the most important and busiest seaways in the world (The Eritrea – Yemen Arbitration. Phase 1: Territorial Sovereignty and Scope of Dispute. p.29).

But it was not shipping that brought these two former allies to the brink of war. It was oil, or rather the prospect of finding oil in the sea surrounding the islands. An entire chapter is devoted to this subject, and to recounting the exploits of oil multinationals in their attempts to find it.

But first a brief recap. As outlined in *ROAPE 67* (March 1996) matters came to a head in December 1995 after Yemen had granted a German company, Konzeptbau, permission to build a luxury hotel and scuba diving complex on Greater Hanish. Eritrea objected, declaring that the island was under its sovereignty. Yemen demurred, and stationed troops on the island, despite Eritrean warnings that it would not take the matter lying down. Although it had neither a navy nor an
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Eritrea succeeded in attacking the island, taking 195 Yemeni prisoners of war. The authorities in San’a were furious, but impotent. Following mediation undertaken by a number of countries, including the United States, the UN Secretary General recommended that the French be brought in an attempt to settle the matter. A diplomat, Francis Gusmann was duly appointed, and by May 1996 the principles of arbitration had been agreed.

The arbitrator’s decision is based on fairly straightforward principles. It rejected Yemen’s claim that it had an ancient title to the islands, dating back to the medieval period, since it was then ‘... mainly a mountain entity with little sway over the coastal areas ...’ (p.46). Similarly it rejected Eritrea’s claim that it had inherited the islands from Italy (and subsequently from Ethiopia) at the end of the colonial period. Rather, the Tribunal placed great emphasis on the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923, which stripped Turkey of its former colonies. The Treaty left the status of the islands undecided. It was this ‘indeterminate’ status that Britain, as the predominant power in the region, consistently upheld until it withdrew from Aden in 1967 (p.134). The Tribunal was presented with a mountain of maps, some dating back hundreds of years, and notes rather dryly that it has seen

... more maps of every conceivable period and provenance than probably have ever been seen before, and certainly a very much larger collection than will have been seen at any time by any of the principal actors in the Red Sea scene (p.144).

While indicating that this evidence is contradictory and confusing, it asserts that Yemen does have a marginally better case.

A good deal of information comes out about the role that the islands played during the war between Eritreans and the Ethiopian government in the 1970s and 80s. Both the Eritrean liberation movements (the ELF and EPLF) used them to resupply their forces during the war of independence. Although Yemen did little to discourage either party, the Tribunal does not believe this proved where sovereignty over the islands lay. Nor does it give much weight to the various concessions granted to oil companies, since these were more interested in exploring the sea bed than the islands themselves.

In the end the case was decided on two grounds. The Mohabbakah islands were awarded to Eritrea because they were mostly within 12 miles of their coast, and therefore within their territorial sea. The Haycocks and the South West Rocks were also awarded to Eritrea because they were part of the territory administered from the African coast during the Ottoman Empire, which preceded Turkish rule. The remaining islands, including Greater and Lesser Hanish, were awarded to Yemen, on the grounds that they had come under the jurisdiction of the Arabian coast during the Ottoman Empire and that ‘... there had been a persistent expectation reflected in the British Foreign Office papers submitted in evidence by the Parties that these islands would ultimately return to Arab rule’ (p.151).

The Tribunal’s decision is, on the face of it, a victory for Yemen. It is awarded the largest of the islands in the group, with Eritrea having to make do with a small chain of what amount to little more than bare rocks. But the Tribunal, in a decision that would have done justice to Solomon, managed to find a means of softening the blow, particularly for the one group of people to whom these islands mean something: the fishermen who use them from time to time. It decided that: In the exercise of its sovereignty over these islands, Yemen shall ensure that the traditional fishing regime of free access and enjoyment for the fishermen of Eritrea and Yemen shall be preserved for the benefit of the lives and livelihoods of this poor and industrious order of men (p.155).
The Tribunal’s work is not complete. In July 1999 it will open oral hearings on its second task; deciding on the maritime boundary between the two nations. As indicated above, this will be at least as contentious, since it could decide which country has the right to exploit the oil reserves that apparently lie under the sea bed.

Unsurprisingly, the adjudication has been welcomed by Yemen, which broke into its normal television transmissions with the news. Eritrea has accepted the outcome, as it had promised it would. Relations between the countries, which were already on the mend, have taken a marked turn for the better. Eritrean president, Isaias Afeworki phoned President Ali Abdullah Salih of Yemen, and the two reportedly expressed an ‘eagerness to turn over a new leaf in the distinguished relations between the two neighbourly countries’ (BBC Monitoring, Republic of Yemen TV, 12 October 1998). Flights between San’a and Asmara are to be resumed and ministerial visits planned.

At least as important are the regional consequences of the arbitration. Yemen has a long, largely undefined and frequently contested border with Saudi Arabia. A number of islands are also in dispute between them, and the two exchanged artillery fire over Duwaima island in the Red Sea as recently as July of this year (International Herald Tribune, 27 July 1998). While King Fahd of Saudi Arabia congratulated the Yemeni government on being awarded the majority of the islands in the current arbitration, but the Yemeni opposition was quick to point to the possibility of employing arbitration in delimiting the Yemeni border with Saudi Arabia.

There is also the vexed question of Eritrea’s border with Ethiopia. The two countries came close to all out war in May, following a border incident. Ethiopian spokeswoman, Salome Tadesse told journalists that the arbitration sent a clear message to Eritrea. ‘There are standards and norms that have to be followed and in compliance with these laws they should withdraw from Ethiopian territory and avoid unnecessary bloodshed and humiliation’ (Agence France Presse, 11 October 1998). Without going into the rights or wrongs of the competing claims, Eritreans could just as well claim that they have shown a willingness to submit their case to international adjudication, and had proved their determination to abide by a ruling, no matter how distasteful it might be.

The Tribunal’s arbitration, and the willingness of both Yemen and Eritrea to accept its outcome, is a vindication of the sometimes neglected skills of diplomats and lawyers. In a world so troubled by poorly designated borders it leaves one wondering how many more disputes might not be amenable to their ministries. The adjudication is also a testimony to the work of generations of unsung heroes in the Foreign Ministries of Britain, Italy and Ethiopia. Without the efforts of librarians and archivists the maps, minutes and treaties that formed such an integral part in the Tribunal’s work would long ago have been lost to history.
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