

Reform and, outreach: Analysing Southern African media

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The decade of the 1990s has seen significant shifts in the political economy of Southern African media. These have been led by dramatic changes in South Africa following the demise of state-sponsored apartheid and the re-structuring of its supporting media apparatus throughout the region. More broadly, however, media in other member countries of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have also been affected by political events and by global technology and policy changes. The ownership, content, delivery systems, users and audiences for a range of media services are under review.

The SADC area consists of Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The population of the region as a whole is over 143,235,123. South Africa operates as a regional centre, hosting the continent's most developed physical, financial and media infrastructures. Political, economic and cultural changes, wars, natural disasters, the AIDS/HIV epidemic, and instances of deepening democracy have all had their impact, to varying degrees, on media systems and practices in countries of the region. In these countries, and in South Africa especially, regulatory institutions, media companies and para-statal have been struggling anew with 'Visions?', 'Missions?' and other declarations of intent since the democratic transition in Pretoria began in February 1990.

Transformation, however, is more than changing the discourse and demographics of an organisation: it is about changing the structures and the ethos in the way people go about their business in the workplace, in civil society, and in the conduct of affairs of state and politics.

Communications reform and policy trends

African broadcasting traditionally has been considered part of the civil service. However, since 1990, and in the wake of democratising and privatising impulses stemming from the post-apartheid transition, Southern African governments have begun to re-regulate the airwaves, permitting private satellite transmission via both encryption and free-to-air broadcasting, in addition to public service and commercial channels.

In print, state-owned newspapers are now in competition with commercial ventures, some of which are funded by global interests. In telecommunications, monopoly providers dominate the public switched telephone networks (PSTN) of the region. In South Africa, the state owned PSTN monopoly Telkom is playing a major role in upgrading and standardising other sub-continental infrastructures. However, as in many other regions, there are trends towards privatisation, while private cellular providers offer what is increasingly seen as parallel telephony services, often in partnership with the parastatal landline providers.

Countries previously without TV are now planning its introduction (eg. Malawi and Botswana - Fako and Nyamnjoh 2000), while in all SADC countries issues of freedom of the press have been hotly reignited by de-regulation and re-regulation policies, and liberalisation of national economies. In general terms, the following processes emerged after the demise of apartheid:

- a) globalisation of ownership and control, what with foreign interests purchasing shares in local media; and local media gaining international interests;
- b) black empowerment, especially in South Africa, whereby union-dominated capital now owns shares in a variety of major media industries;
- c) state controlled media coming into conflict with privately run media, which are more critical of government, and which highlight freedom of speech issues; and

d)privatisation, whereby governments have sold off blocs of shares to commercial investors - local and international.

In debates around freedom of the press, some countries have become progressive beacons when compared to regressive processes occurring in other countries.

Political economy seminar

This issue of Media Development is dedicated to presenting aspects of the above as a basis for wider regional and global analysis and understanding. The articles were among papers presented at a highly successful seminar on the Political Economy of Southern African Media held at the University of Natal in Durban, South Africa in April 2000. The international seminar, sponsored by WACC and the Graduate Programme in Cultural and Media Studies (CMS), aimed to build a more active working relationship among Southern African universities and academics, media firms, practitioners and development NGOs.

The Seminar also incorporated valuable inputs from the Caribbean, Europe and the United States, in an effort to facilitate capacity building and networking in global level media research and the wider dissemination of African thought and publications within global contexts. Twenty-seven delegates came from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Malawi, Jamaica, Norway, the United States and the UK. These scholars and practitioners were joined by CMS's graduate media students, who acted as facilitators and paper discussants. The origins of these students included Lesotho, Nigeria, Norway, the USA, Germany and India. Previous WACC-sponsored workshops on the topic of media ownership and control were held on other continents during 1997, 1998 and 1999. The Durban Seminar was a continuation of this discussion in an African context and was linked to WACC's five-year programme on 'Communication and Human Dignity'.

South African sponsors who played an active role in the Seminar were the National Research Foundation (NRF), which facilitated participation of three African delegates in the seminar and in subsequent events organised at other South African tertiary institutions. The NRF also provided other support. Independent Newspapers KwaZulu-Natal hosted a number of events linked to the Seminar. This publishing group facilitated very extensive press reporting, and inaugurated the annual Independent Newspapers Prestigious Lecture on Freedom of the Media as part of the seminar programme. The sponsorship of this event was an important symbol of the constructive relationship which emerged between the Durban media industry and the academic community during the Seminar.

The inaugural Lecture on the Freedom of the Media was delivered by Jane Duncan, researcher from the Freedom of Expression Institute in Johannesburg. Her presentation on post-apartheid media, regulation and ownership in relation to public policy and democratisation, was a benchmark analytical intervention whose significance was further enhanced by the large and responsive gathering assembled in the large lecture hall of the University of Natal. Given the power and critique of Duncan's address, we decided on immediate web dissemination via The Media Channel, the Communications Law in Transition Newsletter^[2] and in print form in *Communicatio*. The article will be updated for a book to appear from the Seminar, *Media Democracy and Renewal in Southern Africa* (2001).

The Seminar recognised the need for more regionally focused analyses and publications. One of the few books dealing with Southern Africa as a whole was compiled by Seminar participant Fackson Banda (1998). *Up in the Air? The State of Broadcasting in Southern Africa* gives a variety of data and brief overviews relating to population, area, GNP, literacy, media pluralism, newspaper distribution, legal and regulatory frameworks, language policies, in six SADC countries. This useful compilation follows Francis Kasoma's (1992) *Communication Policies in Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland*. These two multi-country studies are supplemented by a variety of national evaluations published by the Universities of Oslo/Zimbabwe and University of Natal/Anthropos ^[1]. Other publications by Kasoma (1984) on Zambia, Zaffiro on Zimbabwe

(2001) and Botswana (1991), Similane (1995) on Swaziland and Lejekane (1997) on Lesotho, amongst others, are among a growing corpus of excellent indigenous research and publication produced in co-operation with international scholars and publishers. These research works examine both historical and contemporary processes relating to media and democracy, ownership and control, regulatory issues and freedom of the press. An earlier seminar on 'Identities, Democracy, Culture and Communication in Southern Africa?', held in Durban in January 1996, brought together media studies scholars from South Africa, Zimbabwe, the UK and Norway and established a research network linking scholars from these countries (Teer-Tomaselli 1997; Waldahl 1998).

At the April 2000 seminar there was a similar recognition of the need for parallel interventions drawn from other regions or written from a more global perspective. Despite the considerable work being conducted in and on each of the SADC countries, only a small amount of African scholarship evidences a transnational, regional emphasis, where interrelations are examined. The majority of existing research tends to be nation-specific, and therefore lacking in consideration of the broader regional processes now having their impact in the SADC area.

In this regard, the opening paper of the Seminar, presented by Hopeton Dunn (1995, 2000) provided a useful analytical framework for consideration of pan-regional and global policy trends, with particular reference to the imperatives of the Global South. Other contributions from Europe [Scannell (2001), Ronning (2001), Paterson (2000), and Svendsen and Groetan in this volume] also responded to this need and complemented the many indigenous papers discussing national, sectoral or institutional developments in Southern Africa.

The articles which follow represent one of three publications to emerge from the April 2000 Seminar. The others are a book, *Mediating Democracy and Renewal in Southern Africa* (in press), which offers a more extensive and theoretical treatment of the issues, and a theme issue of the journal *Critical Arts* on the notion of 'cultural economy?'. The three publications will be presented during 2001 as an interrelated trilogy. This Media Development issue offers articles of a mainly descriptive nature, providing detailed information on current developments in media ownership and control, issues of press freedom and specific national case studies.

Where possible we have linked such local case studies to an explanation of global processes. In other instances, the case studies stand alone: for example, Judy Sandison's engaging account of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's collaborative project with the Vodacom cellphone company to create the 'NewsBreak' venture (see also Rama 2000), and Ben Zulu's description of the African Script Development Fund. Both these ventures are fascinating, but still too new to offer any conclusive observations. However, they are worth watching for the lessons which they could offer in the innovative management, production and dissemination of media content.

This issue, then, offers a high degree of contextual empirical information in articles which should be read in their own right as contributions to a changing policy environment. But they can also be read in relation to the more theoretical interventions (and historical articles) to be published in the book.

Parallel book and journal publications

Media Democracy and Renewal in Southern Africa, to be co-edited by Tomaselli and Dunn and published by International Academic Publishers (Denver USA) is expected out in late 2001. Its aim is to contribute to the application, re-constitution and development of theories of political economy and related discourses on regulation and policy in the Southern African and global contexts. The theory building is offered in relation to much broader issues and emerging trends, including globalisation and localisation of media and cultural practices. While received Western theories of political economy tend to (over)emphasise structure at the expense of human agency and experience, the book will examine how people, communities and cultures negotiate structures in pre-modern, modern and post-modern contexts.

The special issue of Critical Arts will continue with its debates on indigenisation of theory within African contexts, and aims to publish critical responses to current theoretical concerns relating to the Southern African media. Sonja Laden's pioneering concept of 'cultural economy', for example, to be discussed in the book is debated, evaluated and critiqued by Prosper Luthuli in this issue of Critical Arts (2001/2), available from CMS at the University of Natal. Other articles on political economy have been secured and will considerably widen the scope of the debate initiated by the April seminar.

Culture, context and globalisation

All three publications have been thematically structured to reflect the relations between core and periphery, the global and the local, and to encourage transnational and global-level research. They are intended as an active intervention in revitalising media research in Southern Africa and other parts of the underdeveloped world. By critically engaging and incorporating Western concepts, theories and methods within African and Caribbean contexts, these publications will hopefully be of benefit to academic research, public policy analysis and planning within the industry.

The three publications are further expected to interrogate received paradigms - whether American, European, former Soviet or African. While doing so, this and the associated publications do not seek to inculcate essentialistic or Afrocentric approaches, but rather the development of interventions which are sensitive to context, history, geography and national development periodisations. These social elements are not the same in any locus - in the West, the East or the North. Neither are they the same even within the same regions within continents or even countries.

If the emerging field of cultural studies examines agency and resistance in relation to imperialism and imposition, then the prime object of study must be the nature of the engagement, the outcomes of such encounters, and the ways in which the local is reconstituted in relation to the global, and vice versa. Hegemony is always negotiated, it is never complete. Culture is always appropriated, dis-articulated and rearticulated, into new and different contexts, ways of making sense, and forms of expression. It is never monolithic or complete. Ideology is always subject to contradictions, disbandment and re-incorporation. Its work is never done, no matter the class, constituency or group in power. The analyses of the Zimbabwean situation by Susan Manhando and Tim Nyahunzvi in this issue are clear testimony to the nature of and vicissitudes of the relations between domination and resistance. The articles on Malawi, Swaziland and Lesotho too deal with issues of media freedom and media-state relations.

Project continuity

In practice, these and other contributions emerging from the Seminar, are part of an on-going and accelerated process of intellectual re-gearing. The initiative sparked by the initial WACC sponsorship of the Durban meeting has been offered continuation funding from another of the Seminar's major sponsors, the South African National Research Foundation (NRF). This interest from its International Science Office, now called Knowledge, Networks and Partnerships, has as much to do with political economy as it does with South Africa's post-apartheid need to reintegrate into both Africa and the world at large. The Project's Focus Areas include:

• Freedom of the Press - Media Ownership

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• Policy and Regulatory Issues

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∑ Gender, Identity and Issues of Representation

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∑ The Political Economy of the Media

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∑ Telecommunications and New Technologies

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∑ Intercultural, youth, and media studies

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∑ Cultural Industries, Cultural Tourism

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The Project will be located within one of the NRF's new Focus Areas: 'Socio-political Impact of Globalisation: the Challenge for South Africa', and also traverses two related Focus Areas: 'Information and Communication Technology and the Information Society in South Africa' and 'Unlocking the Future: Advancing and Strengthening Strategic Knowledge'. These Focus Areas emerged from the NRF strategic plan and provide a framework for bringing together researchers in various disciplines. Our Project, known as the Southern African and South-South Cultural, Media and Communication Working Group, is being designed to extend co-operation to SADC and with other international scholars in continuing the process initiated by the WACC/CMS initiative. For further details please go to the Project's web site (www.und.ac.za/und/ccms -and to the appropriate hyperlinks).

Notes

1. These are contained in two book series: a) 'Studies on the South African Media' published by Anthropos in association with James Currey (and later, Intervention Press). The early titles of this series were partly subsidised by WACC; and b) The University of Oslo's series, on Zimbabwean media published in association with the University of Zimbabwe Media Studies Programme.

2. Organisations which endorsed the Seminar included the Bellagio Alliance on Media Law, Policy and Research, the Programme in Comparative Media Law and Policy, Wolfson College, Oxford University, with which the Newsletter is associated, the Cultural Environment Movement, and the Media Institute for Southern Africa. Sponsors included WACC, NRF, Telkom, and Independent Newspapers KwaZulu Natal. We are also indebted to Marlan Padayachee who assisted in Seminar organisation, publicity, reporting of conference activities, and for raising additional sponsorship for the event.

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