Communication Studies in Africa:
The Case for a Paradigm Shift for the 21st Century

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Abstract
The paradigm for communication education in African universities has historically revolved around a mass communication or media-centered perspective. This orientation of the discipline in the African continent resulted from structural forces that derived from historical legacies rooted in Africa's colonial past as well as the theoretical attraction of the mass media as agents of change. Additionally, the need to train university graduates for careers in journalism, broadcasting, public relations, and advertising has helped to entrench this paradigm as the cornerstone of communication education in Africa. Elsewhere however the discipline has experienced widespread growth in human communication specialties in such areas as intercultural communication, speech communication, interpersonal communication and others. This paper argues for a paradigm shift asserting that the time is ripe for the discipline at African universities to expand by shifting towards greater emphasis on human communication. Such a transformation would permit better understanding of the African communication environment as well as enable scholars to better respond, from a communication perspective, to the challenges of development in such areas as conflict resolution and, interethnic disputes among others. To achieve this, it is suggested that a consortium of communication scholars and other

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stakeholders convene to engage in discussions on new ways of thinking about communication education. The dialogue would need to be sensitive to past forces that have catalyzed change in meaningful directions.

Key terms: paradigm shift, communication education, communication studies, media-centered model, structural forces, training curricular, ferment, human communication, civil society, stakeholders, consortium of universities.

Résumé

Dans les universités africaines, le paradigme employé dans le cadre de l'enseignement de la communication a toujours porté sur une certaine perspective centrée autour de la communication de masse ou les médias. Une telle orientation s'explique par les dynamiques structurelles résultant de l'héritage historique colonial, mais également de cet intérêt théorique pour les médias, considérés comme des acteurs du changement. De plus, ce besoin de former des diplômés en journalisme, en sciences de la radiodiffusion / télévision, en relations publiques et en publicité, a contribué à considérer ce paradigme comme étant la base de l'enseignement de la communication en Afrique. Dans d'autres contrées, cependant, cette discipline a connu un véritable essor dans le domaine de la communication humaine, à travers de multiples matières, telles que la communication interculturelle, la communication discursive, la communication interpersonnelle, etc. Cet article prône un changement de paradigme, en affirmant qu'il est grand temps que cette discipline enseignée dans les universités africaines s'oriente davantage vers la communication humaine. Cela permettrait de mieux comprendre l'environnement africain de communication, tout en permettant aux universitaires de mieux relever les défis de développement, en se servant d'une perspective de communication, ceci dans divers domaines, tels que la résolution de conflit, les querelles interethniques, etc. Pour ce faire, nous suggérons la tenue d'un consortium réunissant les universitaires spécialisés dans la communication, ainsi que les diverses parties prenantes, afin que ceux-ci puissent engager des discussions sur les éventuelles nouvelles orientations de l'enseignement de la communication. Ce dialogue devra prendre en compte les dynamiques du passé qui ont servi de catalyseur aux changements.

Mots clés : changement de paradigme, enseignement de la communication, études en communication, modèle centré sur les médias, dynamiques structurelles, programme de formation, ferment, communication humaine, société civile, parties prenantes, consortium d'universités.

Introduction

Few, if any, scholars would argue with the notion that understanding human communication is a prerequisite for human development, and societal progress including the maintenance of peace. This realization

has produced enormous growth in communication education at universities in North America and Western Europe over the past thirty years. Many communication degree programmes at those universities have grown from emphases in speech communication, mass communication and journalism to include several of the so called 'human communication' specialties in intercultural and international communication, interpersonal communication, organizational communication and instructional communication.

Indeed, since the 1970s the study of communication at Western universities has witnessed large-scale transformation that produced ferment in the field and the maturation of various theories and perspectives. These developments were largely in response to the critical issues of the times. For example, intercultural and international communication grew in a bid to extend abstract anthropological constructs to the world of international relations and international diplomacy. This area took on further momentum in response to the emerging domestic and international imperatives of the times. In the United States, for example, by the 1970s there was increasing intercultural mix in the population, producing a need for improved race relations. At the same time, business leaders saw the onward march of overseas competitiveness producing a need for better understanding of international business communication so as to maintain competitive advantage. Similar responses to societal and theoretical crises can be offered for the growth of the other specialties in communication education at Western universities. The practical outcome of this continued maturation of the discipline is that since the 1970s, Western universities have produced thousands of well-trained communication professionals and scholars who have been responding to the challenges and opportunities of their societies and serving in such myriad fields as heath communication, political communication, communication education, cultural studies, and gender communication.

Unfortunately, these developments which have shaped the growth of the discipline internationally have found little ground in the communication studies curricula of most universities in Africa. In the late 1970s, the Nigerian scholar Professor Alfred Opubor[1] lamented that everything known about communication education in Africa is mass communication-oriented. Opubor, then head of the department of mass communication at Nigeria's University of Lagos, was concerned that the curricula of communication education in Africa, with its apparently heavy focus on journalism and mass communication, was ill-prepared to deal

with the emerging challenges of civil strife and political turmoil that was gripping the continent.

Established largely as training centers for journalism education across the continent, the defining feature of communication studies remains mass communication and journalism education. As part of this media-centered approach, several African universities have also included programmes in public relations, advertising, and development communication. Although many of the communication degree programmes particularly in Nigeria, South Africa, and Ghana include classes in the human communication areas, none has been able to fully develop and graduate students in one or more of the human communication fields. Nearly four decades after Professor Opubor's prophetic remark, communication education in Africa is still designed to produce journalists and mass communication practitioners.

Clearly, this overriding paradigm for communication education in Africa which revolves around a media-centered model is inadequate to respond to the requirements for building a civil society and the development and human resources needs of the continent into the 21st century. The prevalence of interethnic and religious conflict, the struggle to build the vital habits of democracy, the impact of modernisation on family relations and family communication patterns, the spread of AIDS and other robust diseases, the importance of greater competitiveness and comparative advantage in international trade and diplomacy offer only a microcosm of the evidence that the need to expand communication education in Africa is vital, crucial, and immediate.

Another element of this need lies in the absence of African-centered explanations and theoretical constructs suitable to explain the human communication phenomena for African societies although Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997) proposes an 'indigenisation' perspective. The few faculty members who teach introductory classes in some of the human communication subjects in Africa have come to rely on research findings and textbooks that are often unsuitable to explain and predict the African communication experience. Even against this background recent efforts to strengthen communication training in Africa have merely served to reinforce the mass communication bias of the perspective. For example, UNESCO's (2002) model curricular for communication training in Africa (project coordinator, S.T. Kwame Boafo, 2002) identified eight areas for non-degree and degree programmes—all with mass media emphases. The areas include print journalism, advertising, broadcasting (radio and television), publishing and cinematography. It seems reasonable to assert therefore that the situational contexts in Africa, the dearth of

communication research from an Afrocentric perspective, and the inadequacy of new training curricula compel the need to rethink the nature and direction of communication education in Africa. When fully conceptualized and implemented, the new paradigm would serve to enhance the available pool of communication experts for various societal development needs as well as augment our theoretical knowledge of African communication phenomena.

In this paper, we discuss the several issues related to the status of communication education in Africa around our thesis that the time is ripe for a paradigm shift towards greater embrace of the human communication disciplines. The discussion is organized into four parts. First, is a review of some structural influences that have shaped communication education in Africa. Second, is an analysis of communication training curricular from selected African universities. Third, is a discussion of past attempts made to address the deficits inherent in communication education and training in Africa, and fourth, is a discussion of the implications of the current approach to communication studies at universities in Africa.

Structural Influences shaping communication education in Africa
The emergence and development of communication studies in African Universities around a media emphasis can be linked to a number of socio-structural forces that responded to the needs of the times. Specifically, a number of historical legacies, the push towards technological determinism as a cure for Africa's development goals, the intellectual paradigm that linked mass media to national development and the sheer need for training of journalists and other media professionals propelled an intellectual tradition that has remained robust, dynamic, and resilient to dramatic changes occurring in the discipline elsewhere. Each of these elements is discussed below.

Historical legacies
History to a large extent has shaped the landscape of communication education in Africa. Among the major historical considerations are the colonial experience and that relationship to the spread of journalism in Africa. Others include the 1960s shift in theory towards psychologically-based solutions to communication problems, and the 1970s emphases by African communication scholars exploring how modern mass media may appropriately respond to the African socio-cultural background. This approach is regogitated contemporarily by Ansu-Kyeremeh (1997, 2005) in his 'indigenisation' thesis and Wilson (2005) in his 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' models.

The colonial experience

A major historical element relates to the colonial experiences of many African nations. Nearly every one of the countries in Africa was colonized by a European power. Most were colonies of Great Britain and France. The colonial experience produced two important dynamics in the growth and spread of journalism. They were (a) the emergence of print as advocacy journalism, and (b) situating early broadcasting as a mouthpiece of government. By the early 1800s, a number of newspapers in Africa served as the mainstay of campaigns for political leaders to advocate for national independence from the colonies. Setting up print was not difficult technologically and so as many as wanted to could utilize the print avenue to mount anti-colonial campaigns. The press became a magnet for politically conscious individuals who began to see journalism as an attractive career option. Many of Africa's pre-independence leaders (among them Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere, Leopold Senghor, and Kenneth Kaunda) wrote pieces that mobilised their nations for change.

Not surprisingly, the need grew for the establishment of journalism training centres to equip journalists with the knowledge, skills and values to support a growing press industry. Some of the earliest training centers were established in Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa. In South Africa especially, the authoritarian media system denied access to the anti-apartheid movement, members of which found the printed press as the most effective organ to mobilize citizens for majority rule. The printed press had maintained this role across most of Africa and even today, the privately owned ones largely function as independently owned entities serving as surveillance watchdogs of their environments and often publishing spirited editorials and critical pieces. As more and more economies are liberalized, so too have the numbers of independent publications increased. In addition, the continuing attraction of journalism as a career in Africa makes the demand for journalistic skills even more urgent. The universities have a high demand for journalism students and lack the resources to meet those demands (Nwosu *et al*., 2003).

By contrast, the colonialists introduced radio broadcasting into West Africa around 1933 and placed them directly in the hands of the colonial governments. For example, broadcasting was introduced in Sierra Leone in 1933 as a branch of the public relations office of the Governor-General. Initially, the programmes were relayed directly from the BBC in London with a few local spots for the announcement of official activities. Eventually, more and more local programmes were introduced and this

created a need for training in the art and practice of broadcasting (Taylor 1981). Many of the earliest African broadcasters were sent on 3–9 months training programmes in Europe, notably attached to the *BBC* in London for English speaking nations. After independence, those nations needed to start their own training programmes as training abroad became more restricted and limited. This was even more crucial with the advent of television in the 1960s across most of the independent African nations. To satisfy this professional niche, universities began to include broadcast training options in both their non-degree and degree programmes in communication studies. Again, with limited resources and an ever growing need for trained broadcasters, many of the universities could mostly deliver a media-oriented curriculum.

The emergence of psychology-based solutions to media uses and effects

Another historical factor can be linked to the impetus given to psychological explanations about media/audience relations in the 1970s. Specifically, the maturation of journalism and broadcast education programmes in the United States about thirty years ago coincided with the expansion of communication studies to reflect a new psychology-oriented superstructure for the discipline. Indeed, many of the human communication specialties that emerged into communication studies at about this time were pretty interested in seeking measurable solutions to social problems. Communication scholars were attracted to exploring and testing causal inferences for a plethora of communication behaviours. Cronen (1998) has described this shift as replacing the classical focus of public communication with what he described as the 'wreckage of the psychology project' (Cronen 1998: 21). The psychology project held out great promise not only for the new and emerging specialties of the discipline but helped to situate mass communication firmly within the fabric of a social psychological framework.

Against this background the new African communication scholars such as Frank Okwu Ugboajah, attracted to the elegance of social scientific approaches, became very interested in such concepts as modernisation, development and change, diffusion processes, and the influences shaping public information campaigns. Scholars were interested in assessing various hypotheses about media/audience relationships and especially to know the contingent conditions under which the mass media could propel change. Indeed, Ugboajah (1985) became especially interested in learning how to integrate oral media into the mass media in order to produce

effects. Other eminent scholars of the time gave further support to these perspectives (Asante and Blake 1979). In historical terms, this new preoccupation with the social psychology of communication helped to give academic vitality to professional journalism training programmes. Conceptualized as mass communication, this new academic focus was established at par with the traditional social science degrees offered at African universities. Even till today, many African universities offer either non-degree training programmes for various media-oriented professions or a fully-developed mass communication degree programme grounded in theory and social science research.

Taken together, these historical legacies provided the backbone for the conceptualization of communication studies in Africa from a media-bias perspective.

Technological determinism as a cure all

Another major structural influence that has contributed to the status of communication studies in Africa relates to the positive value placed on technology as the driving engine of change, and in particular information and communication technologies (ICTs). We currently live in a world that has been aptly described as either the 'information age' or the 'information society.' The information society is characterized by the 'information revolution.' The information revolution reflects rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) that produce vast amounts of knowledge and access to various resources instantly around the world. In this context, national progress is being measured in part by a nation's ability to acquire, manufacture, process, distribute, store, retrieve information faster and accurately for multiple purposes. Unfortunately, African countries have not fared well on any of these measures, which in part may account for major setbacks in economic development on the continent.

In the Western industrial nations, more than fifty percent of the workforce is employed in ICT-related services accounting for rapid economic growth. These technological developments have included major transformations in the use of radio, television, cable, wireless, computers, the Internet, and various multi-media technologies that can deliver information rapidly to large segments of society in specially targeted ways. With the growth in digital technologies, these technological developments now make limitless the boundaries of possibilities for their application to communication. Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that in the information age, possession and expert use of these ICTs is a

sine qua non for development and global influence. Not surprisingly, therefore, the countries seen as more advanced are also sometimes described as information-rich while the countries that are less advanced, the nations of Africa being examples, are sometimes described as information-poor. Clearly, the ever-widening gap between the information rich and the information poor is of tremendous concern to all interested in the development of Africa with clear calls to bridge the 'digital divide' (Taylor 2002).

The quest to bridge the digital divide has led to extraordinary emphasis and focus among development enthusiasts to push for the use of ICTs both as a panacea for change as well as the means for catching up with the technologically with leader nations. This is widely reminiscent of the earlier linear paradigm of development that advocated the use of the mass media for national development. These days, discussion at various world fora on Africa's development tend to focus on ICTs. The principal objective of the Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005 United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) (WSIS 2003) in particular, is to assist developing nations in Africa and elsewhere understand how the information revolution can be used to transform their economies in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals identified for those countries (see www.itu.int/wsis). These fora are also aimed at identifying strategies and action plans for more effective uses of ICTs in those countries.

In this context, African media systems are seen as pivotal to help build the information society through adoption and use of the available means of technology. Once again, communication degree programmes remain the principal university avenue to acquire these necessary skills for African nations to respond to the opportunities of the information age. Thus, rather than transforming curricula to engage the emerging contours of the discipline in human communication, most of these programmes have strengthened their focus to reflect the need for training in ICTs. Clearly, this need is realistic. The South African commentator Lyndell Shopa-Mafole (2004: 11) noted in an article in the *Rhodes Journalism Review* that 'the role of journalists is to influence the direction of the information society by acting as the catalyst' for applications of the new technologies. This reinforces the paradigm of a media-centred model of communication education and further solidifies the value of mass communication/media studies programmes to supply vital skill needs of the information society as proposed by Olorunnisola (1995); Mukassa (1995), Alali (1995), and Taylor (2002).

The intellectual paradigm of the mass media and national development

The paradigm of a media-centred approach for development in Africa has been attractive for quite some time and is a central factor in the structural sustainability of mass communication as a focus of communication studies in Africa. The preceding discussion about ICTs is to some extent an extension of the model that saw it's beginnings in the late 1950s with the work of Lerner (1958) and notably Schramm (1964). The perspective of these and later scholars suggested that the mass media were powerful agents of change and would be influential in transforming audience members' ways of thinking to assist in the modernization process. Initially, the model proposed that audience members were mostly passive and would easily succumb to the modernizing messages of the mass media. The model, to some extent, also lays blame on individuals' lack of empathy (Lerner 1958) and the entrepreneurial spirit (McClelland 1961) for the low levels of development in Africa and other less developed nations. As discussed earlier, this was probably the beginning of the wreckage of the psychology project in communication studies (Cronen 1998). It saw the introduction of western social psychology concepts into discussions about media studies and opened up a vibrant research agenda for three decades or more of research by the new African mass communication scholars.

From a developing region context of communication and transformation of society, work by Nwosu *et al.* (1995) provide a useful insight into the various research attempts, including those by Taylor (1995), Ozoh (1995) and Nwosu (1995), that first dethroned the earlier formulations and later exhorted multiple possibilities for use of the mass media in development. The thrust of the African media research agenda has certainly been grounded in this intellectual tradition and indeed shaped the doctoral dissertations of many African scholars who studied abroad especially in the United States of America and in Africa. Although these scholars had disagreed with the earlier proponents of a powerful-media with passive-audience approach, they nevertheless stayed true to an eventual role for the mass media if planners employed indigenous media (Awa 1995, Blake 1971; Ugboajah 1968) or employed a dualistic participatory approach that engaged audiences in planning (Nwosu, 1995) or assessed the needs of the audience (Moemeka 2002; Ozoh 1995; Taylor 1995). In each of these and several others, the researchers have sought to identify various contingent conditions in which the mass media could serve as agents of change.

Given their roles as educators in universities in developing countries, it is not surprising that these scholars have found in communication degree programmes a nexus between media use and national development. But, as many of these commentators have noted, development is a complex process and even any influence by the mass media must be understood in the context of other forces that may themselves be influencing the pace and direction of change. Again, the interethnic and religious conflicts coupled with the often elusive attempts to secure entrenched institutions of democracy are instances where communication research could help to advance development from a non-media perspective.

Indeed, to some extent, the focus on mass media and development has limited media research into what we know about the effects of the mass media in Africa. Those effects such as the cultivation of western cultural values through cultural homogenization/cultural imperialism, agenda setting and issue salience in the body-politic, the role of media violence in the escalation of aggression and physical harm to others, and emotional reactions to exposure to the mass media, including the brain-drain, seem to have suffered as the drumbeat for mass media and development reaches a crescendo. Perhaps some movement in mass media effects research in Africa might spur significant interest in the human communication domain than has been so far.

Need for training of career professionals

Another major socio-structural influence for the status of communication studies in Africa relates to the urgent need for skilled manpower. In the African environment, most universities see their role as fulfilling both the intellectual and occupational needs of their nations. The majority of universities exist through public funding where the primary goal is to produce an educated workforce in areas earmarked by government as central to achieving development goals in sectors such as health, education, agriculture, and business administration. In all of these areas, career opportunities exist for mass communication, journalism, advertising and public relations graduates working as change agents, information officers, and others. In addition, the explosive growth of newspapers, radio, and TV stations, as well as film production studios has added to the demand. Employers have become accustomed to an understanding that a communication degree in Africa is linked to some form of media training. These expectations are embodied in the structure of the various degree and non-degree programmes in communication studies offered at African universities.

In sum, the growth of communication education in Africa has been hampered by several socio-structural forces—historical legacies informed by colonialism, perceptions about media/audience relations, the value placed on technology as the driving engine of change, the intellectual paradigm about media's role in national development, and the apparent focus on producing professionals to satisfy the perceived occupational needs of the continent.

Status of communication education in Africa

In this section, we review the structure and content of communication education and training in Africa. To date, there are well over 100 institutions in Africa that offer various programmes of study in the discipline of communication education. About 60 percent of these institutions are universities and polytechnics, while the remaining 40 percent consist of private tertiary and vocational institutions. Mohammed (1995) reports that most of the communication training institutions are found in West Africa (58 in number), while Central and Southern Africa account for 17; East Africa accounts for 10; and North Africa has 10 such institutions. Most of the courses offered in these programmes focus on journalism training and several examine strategies for enhancing the application of mass media in societal change. For example, about a quarter of the 100 institutions offer, at least, one course in development communication.

To provide a closer assessment of the various curricula offered at these institutions, we reviewed data from eight universities that were selected to reflect the broad range of communication studies degree programmes offered at universities in each of the sub-regions of Africa. Moreover, because of language-resource constraints we focused on universities that offer an English-based curriculum. The review offers a vivid illustration of the media-emphasis described earlier.

Brief overview of communication studies curricula at eight selected universities: A preliminary assessment from Anglophone Africa

Based on criteria outlined earlier, we selected the following universities to guide our review of curricular emphases in communication studies. Table 1 sets this out.

Information about these communication programmes was compiled using UNESCO documents, websites of the universities, as well as printed resources from the sampled institutions. Findings are discussed in terms of three categories: non-degree programmes, degree programmes, and curricula foci.

Table 1: Selected Institutions and Communication Studies Focus

Region	Institution	Area
West Africa *(Nigeria)*	University of Nigeria University of Lagos Institute of Management & Technology, Enugu	mass communication mass communication mass communication
Southern Africa *(South Africa)*	The University of Natal University of South Africa Rhodes University	media and cultural studies communications journalism and media studies
East Africa *(Kenya)*	University of Nairobi	journalism
North Africa *(Egypt)*	Cairo University	mass communication, journalism, advertising, and public relations

Non-degree programmes
Typically, two kinds of non-degree programmes (Table 2) are offered at our sample institutions.

Degree programmes
There appear to be several emphases for students pursuing degree options in communication studies at the selected universities (see Table 3).

Communication curricula
Our examination also shows that programme curricula for both degree and non-degree programmes in communication studies in these institutions draw from the following subject areas:

1. Print media (reporting and news production)
2. Electronic media (news reporting, news production and programming)
3. Advertising and public relations
4. Media management and economics
5. Media history
6. Communication policies
7. Media law and ethics
8. Communication theory and research
9. Communication for development
10. Communication and society
11. International communication
12. Social marketing

Table 2: Types of Non-Degree Programmes

Non-Degree Programmes	Duration	Description
Certificate programmes	3-6 months	In-service training and workshops in a variety of areas such as photo-journalism, film/documentary, television, video and radio production. These workshops are offered to non-traditional students already in career-oriented professions in the industry or with the public sector. These classes typically entail training on the technical material needed to support appropriate skills. Examples are: video editing, audio functions, lighting, introduction to scriptwriting, and so forth.
Diploma programmes	Two years	In-service training in journalism, mass communication, and film production, and are designed for those interested in entry-level careers in journalism and/or mass communication. Some of the subjects taught in the diploma programme include introduction to reporting, report writing, script writing, radio, television and film production.

In addition to coursework in these subject areas, students at the institutions in Nigeria and South Africa may also choose elective courses from the following: interpersonal communication, intercultural communication, public speaking, organizational communication, and conflict resolution. The journalism programme at the University of Nairobi, Kenya, requires students to take courses in performance studies. The availability of introductory courses in the human communication subjects reveals faculty awareness of the value of these areas for strengthening of communication education in those places where such courses are offered. Yet, after nearly four decades none of these core areas have risen to the status of a stand-alone degree programme. Stand-alone degree programmes help foster the development and institutionalization of human communication as a major part of the communication discipline in the continent.

Table 3: Types of Degree Programmes

Degree Programme	Duration	Description
B.A. in Journalism	Four-year programme of coursework	Offered in a variety of subject areas, and includes a capstone project. The B.A. in journalism provides career options in the mass media—radio, television, and newspaper/magazine industry.
B.A. in Mass Communication	Four-year programme of coursework	Offered in a variety of subject areas, and includes a capstone project. The B.A. in mass communication provides specializations for career options in journalism and public relations.
Postgraduate Diploma	One-year programme of coursework (after a B.A.)	Offered in journalism, mass communication, or television and radio production, and includes such courses as media law and ethics. There is also a final research report.
M.A. Mass Communication	Two-year programme of coursework	Includes a research project in the form of a thesis.
M.A. Communication Arts	Two-year programme of coursework	Includes a research project in the form of a thesis.
Ph.D. Mass Communication		The only one of its kind in Africa, offered at the University of Lagos, Nigeria.
Ph.D. Media and Cultural Studies		Offered at the University of Natal, South Africa

As electives, however, they serve the intellectual rather than the professional needs of students while lacking the depth and breadth to foster an appetite for enthusiastic research in those areas, development of new theories, applications to critical issues of the times, or expanding employer expectations of what graduates can do with a communication studies degree. In part, as stated earlier some of the structural impediments lie in the ever-challenging resource constraints that restrict faculty opportunities to explore new areas. Specifically, they include the

following: lack of textbooks and other African-centred curriculum materials in the human communication areas, and absence of a voice that helps showcase the value of human communication to university authorities as well as among major employers such as the government. Other constraints include the very few faculty who possess doctorate degrees and have an active programme of research in these areas, and the brain-drain wherein many African communication scholars trained overseas remain abroad for several reasons. So while the need to expand communication education in Africa has been apparent for some time now, the struggle has faced monumental challenges that have made movement difficult.

Attempts to refocus communication education & training
To address these challenges some important efforts have been made over the past twenty years to respond to the crisis in communication education. There have been two major attempts by UNESCO since the 1980s to redirect and refocus communication education and training in Africa. These projects have focused on textbook development and curriculum enhancement. The Textbooks Project (1986–1987) identified the limitations regarding communication textbooks and study materials in African countries. The major conclusion drawn was the need to support the development of communication textbooks and study materials in the discipline by the 1990s and beyond. Progress thus far indicates minimal increase in the number of textbooks published in the 1990s (Nordenstreng and Boafo 1988). General reader texts with a bias towards communication and development, public relations and advertising, training manuals and guides, as well as texts in media ethics have been published. The Textbook Project (Nordenstreng and Boafo 1988) has not produced works in communication theory and intercultural communication nor in any of the core areas of human communication studies .

The second project on curricula review (1996–2000) was a response emerging from a proactive dialogue on curriculum review that began at the 1996 African Council for Communication Education (ACCE) biennial conference in Cape Town, South Africa with the goal to expand communication education and training. The major conclusion drawn from the project revealed the need to expand the curricula of existing training institutions to cover the broad spectrum of communication studies, rather than the narrow focus on journalism and communication. Some of the new concentration areas proposed include: interpersonal, intercultural, organizational, inter-ethnic communication and new communication and

information technologies. These proposals are outlined in the UNESCO (2002) publication, *Communication Training in Africa: Model Curricula.*

While the UNESCO projects reflect some progress towards advancing communication education and training, they both failed to address the structural deterrents that have impeded the growth of communication studies at African universities.

Impact and consequences of media-centred curriculum emphasis

To understand the impact and consequences of these interrelated factors, it is useful to borrow from Cushman's (1998) conclusions regarding the then state of communication studies in the United States. Cushman (1998) spoke about an academic environment that had produced both 'retarding and catalytic' forces in our discipline. Using those concepts, Cushman (1998) saw the retarding forces as those intellectual traditions that failed to break out of the box. It reflected a sense of being limited by the earlier definitions, approaches, theories and perspectives. The catalytic forces on the other hand indicated the movements that thrust forth new ideas, planted new seeds and blazed forth new horizons that allowed for a richer understanding of human communication. Though separate, it is sometimes the interactions and struggles between these two forces that lead to paradigm shifts and the onward growth of a discipline. The status of communication studies in Africa can similarly be assessed against this yardstick.

Clearly, there have been several retarding forces limiting the growth of the discipline in the continent. Together, these forces have placed a restrictive environment in a field that can be a critical player in the service of national development. Some of the deficits have wide reaching implications. For example, the nature of inquiry that has dominated the African communication environment in the last thirty years can be seen as stifling. Scholars have churned out the bulk of their work supporting the media superstructure of the discipline thereby further legitimizing its strategic priority.

A cursory review of all issues of *Africa Media Review*, the premier communication journal in Africa, from 1986 when the journal began publishing to date, paints a clear portrait of this bias. Indeed, the very fact that the leading journal coming from communication scholars in Africa is entitled *Africa Media Review (AMR)* is a vivid illustration of the stifling nature of the discipline in practice. Except for a few articles about human communication processes and patterns in Africa (see for example Blake 1993; Opubor 2004), most of the research on

communication in Africa by scholars in Africa has been about mass communication. Certainly, a number of African scholars outside the continent (for example Awa, Moemeka, Nwosu, Taylor and Blake, to name a few) have written extensively about the need to expand communication studies in Africa to incorporate a human communication emphasis. A good illustration of this approach from outside the continent is reflected in the new journal entitled *Journal of African Communication* published from California State University at Bakersfield, California. Against this background it seems evident that there is a dearth of research on important aspects of human communication that Africans have not been able to respond to in any systematic ways.

Another related deficit, and an important one, is that very little work has emerged regarding theory building about African communication practices. Frey *et al.* (1991: 11) have noted that 'A theory is . . . a useful explanation to the extent that it excites us about inquiry, organizes our knowledge, leads us to expect certain outcomes to occur, and focuses research efforts.' This is why Opubor's (2004) discourse in a recent issue of *AMR* represents a good starting point for theorizing about human communication in ways that advance our understanding of such processes and patterns in Africa. One might ask: What theories guide the teaching of such elective courses in intercultural communication that are currently offered in some universities in South Africa and Nigeria? In general, we have relied on theories developed in western societies for the purposes of explaining western rationality and communication phenomena to explain African rationality and communication practices. As Taylor and Nwosu (2001) point out, the need to understand how Africans interpret reality must become the indispensable starting point for studying communication in different contexts in Africa.

> At a minimum, it needs to present a new imperative of integrating an understanding of the core value boundaries that guide African rationality into communication problem solving in that setting. Any assumptions of universal or homogenous African processes and patterns are considered in relation to cultural variability, unique cultural experiences, and environment-specific factors that make Africans similar but yet different in their communication experiences (Taylor & Nwosu 2001: 301).

One of the long-term objectives of communication education and training in Africa is the need to develop and adapt communication curricula relevant to the social and development goals of African people. Whilst numerous efforts reveal progressive response towards this

objective, more effort is needed in the way of connecting content and context.

Here lie the catalytic forces that are moving us towards a review of the content and curriculum. In the past decade, for example, ACCE and UNESCO have been vocal in calling for a change in the African communication studies curricula, but changes in the greater information and communication environment call for communication scholars and practitioners in Africa to be more proactive and to find new possibilities that connect content and context and forms the foundation of communication education and training in the continent. For example, the declaration of principles spelled out in two the major World Summits namely the 2000 Millennium Summit and the 2003 World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) outline the agenda to meet the challenges facing a majority of the poor in the world. Similarly, previous dialogue on the same subject held during the 1996 ACCE Biennial conference in Cape Town, South Africa and recommendations made during the 2003 ACCE 13th Biennial Conference in Abuja, Nigeria to review the communication curriculum, inform the urgency of the matter.

The assumption behind the new urgency is that communication can 'invent' fixes for solving both our material and social problems. However, our review of the status of communication education in Africa tells us that there is no guarantee that our institutions of learning can provide these anticipated quick fixes unless we can engage in the search for new modes of thinking about the social organization of meaning and how it is negotiated by different actors in a diverse African communication environment.

Since communication is a process, content and context play crucial roles in the construction of meaning. By raising the question about content and context, we are opening room to ask how the communication discipline in Africa can be altered to meet different goals and objectives. In essence, we invite a proactive follow-up action of previous dialogues concerning communication education and training in Africa that have suggested the need to explore new grounds of scholarship relevant to the African environment. Our purpose in this paper reiterates the vision of UNESCO and ACCE in the late 1980s to support the development of communication teaching and study materials relevant to the African environment. By redirecting teaching and research to African needs, we are building on the successes of African communication research, and so improve the prospects for human survival and advancement in Africa.

Conclusion

The challenge ahead for expanding communication education in Africa is great, and the task is enormous. Our call for a paradigm shift suggests that the current focus on journalism and mass communication is problematic. A paradigm shift towards greater embrace of the human communication disciplines is timely for communication degree programmes in Africa. The degree programmes should develop in ways that respond to the new communication challenges such as community and nation building, conflict resolution, leadership, international relations and diplomacy, and intercultural communication. As we have noted in this discussion, the call for broadening the contours of communication inquiry is not new. What is new is the urgency for Africa. In the preceding sections, we have laid out a compelling case about the intellectual and historical conditions that have shaped and retarded the discipline's status and growth in the last century. We have also made a case about the rising catalytic forces that must propel new scholarship in the service of the discipline and of national development. The 21st century is now the time to begin in this new direction. Without doubt, catapulting the discipline to newer heights will require comprehensive and systematic planning and implementation. It will also require collaborative effort among key stakeholders that would span several years until the field's maturation.

What is needed then to begin this important process is the coming together of a consortium of communication scholars, government, industry and donor agencies from Africa and the African Diaspora to engage in new modes of thinking about communication studies in the continent. The new mode of thinking would require undertaking such activities as creating the institutional mechanism to support, coordinate and manage the expansion of communication studies; and conducting in-depth regional assessments of the structural impediments to such expansion that identify the unique challenges and promises for each region. The new mode of thinking would also require a new framework for implementation of the recommendations emanating from the assessments, including the use of an incremental strategy for meeting specific goals on a pilot basis in select universities for each region; periodically assessing progress, promises and challenges and reporting back to the consortium. Any progress in paradigm shift must, however, begin with a reorientation of the mindset in African universities, and in both the public and private sectors that see communication education as only education about journalism and mass communication.

Notes

1 Opubor is with the West African Newsmedia and Development Centre, Cotonou, Benin Republic.

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Researching Radio Audiences in an Emerging Pluralistic Media Environment: A Case for the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Method

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Abstract

The central thesis of this article is that the focus group discussion method of the qualitative research methodology has huge and largely unexploited potentials for use as a tool for audience research in a new democracy with a newly liberated media environment. It argues that the use of the method by Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton and their colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University to gauge audience responses and reactions to propaganda and radio broadcasts set the pace for its use in audience research. Through extensive use in, and adaptations to, different research environments, focus groups have demonstrated an ability to function as fully-fledged methods of data collection. The article examines literature on the history, development, and use of focus groups in many fields of study including media and communication to show that the method has advantages for audience research in a competitive media market. Through this perspective, and with reference to a number of studies carried out by the author in Ghana using this method, it recognises focus group research as an appropriate method for researching media, especially radio, audiences and recommends it to media owners.

Key terms: Focus groups, audience research, radio, pluralistic media environment

Résumé

La thèse centrale défendue par cet article est que la méthode d'enquêtes qualitatives participant de la méthodologie de recherche qualitative comporte d'énormes avantages et potentiels, et peut être employée comme un outil de recherche d'audience dans une nouvelle démocratie dotée d'un environnement

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de médias nouvellement libérés. Il affirme que l'usage de cette méthode dans la recherche d'audience a été initié par Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton et leurs collègues du Bureau de la recherche sociale appliquée, à l'Université de Columbia, qui cherchaient à mesurer les réactions de l'audience face à la propagande et aux émissions radio. Du fait de leur adaptation à divers environnements de recherche, ces enquêtes qualitatives se sont révélées être de véritables méthodes de collecte de données. Cet article examine la littérature relative à l'histoire, au développement et à l'emploi des enquêtes qualitatives dans divers domaines d'étude, incluant les médias et la communication, et vise à montrer que cette méthode comporte de nombreux avantages en matière de recherche d'audience, dans un contexte de marché médiatique très concurrentiel. Sur la base de cette perspective et d'un certain nombre d'études menées par l'auteur au Ghana, relativement à cette méthode, cet article conclut en affirmant que la recherche à travers les enquêtes qualitatives est une méthode fort bien adaptée à la recherche d'audiences médias, particulièrement d'audiences radio, et qu'elle est à recommander aux propriétaires de médias.

Mots clés : enquêtes qualitatives, recherche d'audience, radio, environnement médiatique pluraliste

Introduction

Media pluralism, actualised in Ghana in the mid-1990s, has expanded the country's informational environment in ways hitherto unimaginable in its media history. Though broadcasting commenced in 1935 with the inauguration of radio (followed by television in 1965), it operated as a state monopoly until 1992 when Ghana's fourth republican constitution provided for a liberalised media environment. This changed the country's media landscape by introducing private and commercial radio (and later television). Despite initial hiccups with *Radio Eye*, the first private attempt at radio, the establishment of *Joy FM* in 1995 broke state monopoly of the electronic media (Koomson, 1995). Similarly, the maiden telecast of *TV3* programmes on October 1, 1997 broke Ghana Television's 32-year old monopoly (Ansu-Kyeremeh & Karikari 1998). The number of FM radio stations licensed to operate in Ghana today, according to a National Communications Authority (NCA) documentation, stands at about 200 with representation in all regions and many districts. Programming and transmission of these radio stations reflect both the multiplicity of languages spoken in the country and the varied interests of audiences.

Though stemming from different reasons and with different degrees of intensity, changes that have taken place in the Ghanaian media environment are akin to those observed elsewhere in more developed

democracies. Whereas new media, particularly the Internet, have been accredited with such changes in the west (Newbold *et al.* 2001), changes in Ghana (and indeed much of Africa) are largely due to the birth of independent broadcasting with a multiplicity and diversity of traditional/ old media outlets, particularly radio (Karikari 1994). In both cases, however, traditional vertical modes of communication operated on the principle of 'one-to-many' appear to have given way to a horizontal communication environment within which communication is essentially from 'many-to-many' (Newbold *et al.* 2001: 376–422). Through audience interactive programmes that incorporate text, fax, email and phone-in segments, and other discussion programme formats sometimes with studio audiences, hitherto vertical communication structures have yielded to audience inputs to expand along more horizontal lines.

As the number of radio stations increase, there has emerged competition among station executives aimed at capturing sizable portions of the audience/market in order to secure the needed publicity and advertising revenue to finance programmes and operations. Competition has dictated and accelerated change in Ghanaian radio by providing audiences with choice not only of stations but also of programmes. In response, radio stations must study their audiences to understand how interactions with them could affect programme content and programme scheduling. They must explore and investigate (not assume) audience needs and interests, likes and dislikes, as well as their expectations so as to tailor programming and programme content to audience requirements. This might be one way of heeding Halloran's (1998) caution that the media should not be seen as isolated institutions but as one of a set of social institutions which interacts with other institutions within the wider social system. Audience research offers useful ways through which interactions between the media and other social institutions are studied.

Audience researchers have traditionally used the survey, the individual in-depth interview, and to some extent, the focus group method to investigate interactions between audiences and the media (Vandebosch 2000; Downing 2003) and to collect information about station, programme and/ or content preferences of audiences. Although useful as a method for audience research, surveys fail to move beyond individuality and superficiality and thereby fail to provide in-depth analyses of audience needs. They fail to capture the subtle nuances of audience tastes and tend to de-emphasise the collective, discursive nature of their interaction with media programme content. Qualitative research appears more appropriate for such studies especially in the African context because of its natural environment of social group bonding, which often dictates the kind of

responses given to stimuli (Obeng-Quaidoo 1985; Bourgault 1995). In most cases, the preferred qualitative approach is the individual in-depth interview usually used to discover motives, rationale and motivations for participation or non-participation in specific media activities (Vandebosch 2000).

The individual in-depth interview, however, has the tendency to yield individualistic data without being able to capture the discursive nature of real-life situations where media audiences actually discuss media content with relations, friends and acquaintances (Liebes & Katz 1995). Data gathered using this approach tend to be 'an aggregation of interviews' (MacDougall & Fudge 2001: 118) containing individual responses to the media whereas such responses are more meaningful if they are collectively generated or groupthink. The interactivity of a group concept in focus groups appears suited both to the communal life system into which the African is socialised and to the collective discussion that characterises audience reactions and responses to media messages. Though not as extensively used as the survey or the in-depth interview in previous audience research, the focus group discussion method does contain possibilities capable of overcoming a lot of the constraints identified in both the survey and the interview (Lunt & Livingstone 1996; Hansen *et al.* 1998). Researchers contend that the group interaction in focus group discussions can yield more and richer information than individual interviews even when the same participants are used (MacDougall & Fudge 2001; Asbury 1995).

The essence of this paper is to advance arguments in support of the use of focus groups in audience studies as a method with the capability to provide detailed research results for decision-making in media/communication, public relations and market related research. Through a discussion of the tenets, history, development, uses and strengths of focus groups, the paper contends that the method has the potential to provide the required in-depth information to make content, programming, product, service delivery and audience decisions. It highlights the usefulness of focus groups for studying group dynamics and enabling researchers examine the experiential and subjective aspects of phenomena thereby illuminating the social and cultural contexts that inform these experiences (Frith, 2000). It uses experiences and lessons from conducting focus groups in Ghana (though mainly in areas other than the media) to argue that radio stations would benefit from using focus groups. The method will enable them do more than gather information on audience experiences and preferences including total amounts of listening time, and amounts of time devoted to listening to their preferred programmes (Vandebosch, 2000).

They would also benefit from an understanding of audience motivations for, and the importance they ascribe to such media activities. This will help to examine and understand levels of audience gratification with specific media activities and to assess and collect opinions on programming and content to improve production and patronage.

Central tenets of the focus group discussion method
Focus group discussions are variously referred to as 'focus group interviews', 'group interviews', 'group depth interviews', 'group discussions', 'focused interviews', or 'focus groups' (Merton 1987; Frith 2000). They are focused discussions involving a small number of participants talking about topics of special importance to the investigation under the direction of a moderator or facilitator. The focus group literature provides abundant information and useful 'advice on process issues such as designing interview guides and structuring and moderating groups' (Kidd & Parshall 2000: 295). For instance, they are said to be typically composed of between six and 12 members, plus a moderator, and that a popular size for focus groups is eight people because groups below six or above 10 or 12 are usually difficult to manage (Bernard 1995). According to Broom and Dozier (1990: 147), '. . . the moderator guides the group discussion to elicit qualitative data on knowledge, opinions and behaviour of participants regarding the focus topic.'

Like all qualitative research, focus groups are based on the critical perspective—the belief that social reality is derived and formed from people's interaction with their environment. Priest (1996: 4) puts focus groups in the category of interpretive methods because they 'make use of (rather than try to eliminate entirely) the thoughts, feelings, and reactions of the researcher.' Focus groups are 'based on the assumption that people are an important source of information about themselves and the issues that affect their lives and that they can articulate their thoughts and feelings' (Winslow *et al*. 2002: 566). They 'rely on the dynamic of the group interactions to stimulate the thinking and thus the verbal contributions of the participants, and to provide the researcher with rich, detailed perspectives that could not be obtained through other methodological strategies' (Asbury 1995: 415).

In focus group discussions, 'a small group of people engage in collective discussion of a topic pre-selected by the researcher. The aim of the group discussion is to gain insight into the personal experiences, beliefs, attitudes and feelings that underlie behaviour' (Frith 2000: 276). Researchers, therefore, constantly probe participants through open-ended discussions that the focus group environment creates. This aims at obtaining a

wealth of information and gaining deep understanding of respondents' motives and motivations for given actions. The richness of information generated through focus groups in terms of both quantity and quality of information and understanding would otherwise be lost through other less interactive methods of data collection.

Although earlier prescriptions of how to conduct focus groups advocated for participants previously unknown to each other (Merton 1987; Bernard 1995; Lunt & Livingstone 1996), many contemporary studies that utilise the FGD technique have used pre-existing groups. These are considered more natural and germane to the interactional dynamics of the group (Kitzinger 1994; Lunt & Livingstone 1996). Examples include Philo's (1996) media and mental distress study, Kitzinger's (1993) understanding AIDS study, and Liebes and Katz' (1995) cross-cultural *Dallas* study. These considerations, perhaps, explain Barbour's (1999: S19) definition of the focus group as 'either a naturally occurring or researcher selected group convened for the purpose of discussing a specific research topic.' What this means is that focus group discussions can take place either among groups assembled by researchers in synch with their research needs or among already existing groups depending on the purposes of the research and its objectives.

Decisions with regard to the number of groups required for a given study are made based on its specific requirements. The literature shows wide variations in numbers of groups used in different studies conducted to research various issues. This author has used groups ranging from eight to 21 in various focus group studies conducted in Ghana with participants per group of between six and ten people. The key is to be able to determine the level at which saturation is reached and beyond which no new ideas emerge. In spite of wide variations in the sizes and numbers of groups per research, however, a group size of between six and eight participants and a number of eight to ten groups for a study could yield useful data to produce valid and reliable findings. Ultimately, however, the total number of group sessions for a given study would depend on the number of variables to be considered and resources available for the research. In order to aid comparisons, more than one group session should be conducted in various locations and with different samples of the population reflecting different group characteristics.

While some studies cover a few geographical areas, others span an entire country or a substantial part of it. A study by Knodel *et al.* (1984), for instance, covered the whole of Thailand while one by Nkwi (1992) covered both the Francophone and Anglophone parts of Cameroon. Conversely, in two recent studies this author conducted in Ghana using focus

groups, one study covered four out of the ten regions of the country, while the other focused on four districts of the same region. These variations in geographical areas covered in focus group research are usually based on the objectives of the study. In all cases using focus groups, selection of participants is done very carefully, often spreading recruitment over a wider geographical area and spelling out detailed criteria for selection to meet all required variables, attributes or dimensions under study.

History, development and use of focus groups

'Focus group methods evolved out of research methods designed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, and colleagues at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University to gauge audience responses to propaganda and radio broadcasts during World War II' (Kidd & Parshall 2000: 295). It is significant that the focus group method was first developed and used in media audience and communication research principally to guide interpretation of data to radio audience research at the University of Columbia and to research on film audiences (Kidd & Parshall 2000; Stycos 1981; Obeng-Quaidoo 1987). Hansen *et al.* (1998), on their part, indicate that Merton's work with Patricia Kendall (Merton & Kendall 1946) and that with Kendall and Fiske (Merton, Fiske & Kendall 1956: 258) 'are reckoned to mark the birth of the method for the study of media audiences and communication processes.' Since 1922, the United States has used focus groups for communications research, propaganda analysis, public opinion research, and research in broadcasting and marketing (Obeng-Quaidoo 1987; Merton 1987; Kidd & Parshall 2000).

Despite this early history, the functional utility of focus groups became noticeable only from the 1960s. Since the 1980s, the method has become increasingly popular not only in market research but also in research in both the social and health sciences with 'an unabated stream of publications' (Kidd & Parshall 2000: 293). During its journey of over half a century, focus groups have experienced several modifications, adaptations and streamlining (Lunt & Livingstone 1996) to pass the litmus test of a bona fide research method in the social sciences. 'In recent years, focus group methods have become increasingly popular as either an adjunctive or primary data collection approach in the social and health sciences and in evaluation research' (Kidd & Parshall 2000: 293). This popularity has been attributed to the rise in 'reception studies' as distinct from the traditional 'effects studies' in media research (Hansen *et al.* 1998). Lunt and Livingstone (1996), and Hansen *et al.* (1998) see the rekindled

interest in focus groups as both a rejection of the quantitative methodology and a move towards the qualitative. The latter provides 'insightful findings and ecologically valid, interpretative techniques' (Lunt and Livingstone 1996: 79) not only in media and communication research but also in other areas of social science research.

> For examining the dynamics of what experiential knowledge and frames of interpretation audiences bring to bear in their use of media content, what role media use has in the everyday life of audiences, or how audiences use the media as a resource in their everyday lives, it is necessary to turn to more qualitative methods, which allow us to observe in a more 'natural' setting than that of the survey or the laboratory experiment how audiences relate to media (both as technologies and as content) (Hansen *et al.* 1998: 257).

There is extensive use of focus groups in the social sciences, widely used in both basic and applied research (Bernard 1995) in most areas including media studies. Social scientists have for many decades used it to collect qualitative data for several purposes (Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981; Morgan & Spanish 1984; Stycos 1981). These include generating constructs, developing models, generating data for the development of products, and for evaluating new programmes and products (Winslow *et al.* 2002). Winslow *et al.* (2002: 566) report that throughout the 1990s focus groups were used to 'gather in-depth views and opinions of homogeneous groups of people for social science research,' including its use in shaping political campaigns in the western world. In the field of social communications, focus groups have had a long history of usage as tools for both media and market research for purposes of marketing (Calder 1977; Folch-Lyon & Trost 1981), business studies (Blackburn & Stokes 2000; Buttner 2001) and advertising (Wang 1997).

  Since Merton's (1946 & 1956) works with his colleagues marking the beginning of focus groups in communication research to study media audiences and communication processes (Bernard 1995; Lunt & Livingstone, 1996; Hansen *et al.* 1998), there have been many other examples. Morley (1980) conducted 29 focus groups in his study of the audience for the news and current affairs programme *Nationwide*. Corner, Richardson, and Fenton (1990) used focus groups to explore respondents' reactions to messages on nuclear power while Schlesinger *et al.* (1992) used it to study perceptions and reactions of women viewing violence on television. To study audience understanding of AIDS, Kitzinger (1993) conducted 52 focus groups while Philo (1996) used the method to study media and mental distress. Liebes and Katz (1995), on their part, conducted 66 focus groups to explore different patterns of audience

involvement with the American soap *Dallas* among different cultural groups.

The literature also shows extensive use of focus groups in health research (Frith 2000; MacDougall & Fudge 2001). Its use in the area of health includes primary health care, attitudes, practices and utilization patterns (Borkan *et al*. 2000), family-planning and contraceptive use (Folch-Lyon 1981), sexuality, reproductive and sexual health knowledge and sexual behaviour (Frith 2000; Robinson 1999); lesbianism and violence (Corteen 2002); sexuality, STDs and HIV/AIDS (Benkert 2002; Frith & Kitzinger 2001); dyslexia (Dale & Taylor 2001); stress (McCallum *et al*. 2002; Majumdar & Ladak 1998); and violence against women (Poorman 2002).

Focus group research in Ghana: Experiences and lessons

Over the last couple of decades, focus groups have been used in Ghana to research various topics ranging from market concerns including social marketing and health to media and communication issues for both academic purposes and for industry. Although the use of the method in Ghana does not compare with its use elsewhere, various organisations including those in manufacturing, commerce, media, non-governmental and social services have used focus groups to research and to interact with their audiences. They have used the method to establish how and what specific messages of products and services communicate to audiences and consumers, and to gauge public reception and perception of those messages. Though the majority of these studies are health-related, there are many others that are in the domain of media and market research. These studies have proved extremely useful in that sponsors/organisations have been able to assess the effectiveness of their communications in order to map out ways of adapting to audience/client needs. Recommendations from the studies have equally been useful providing sponsors ways of strategising for the future in order to take advantage of prevailing conditions and to have an edge over competition.

In the area of health and related research, which appears to dominate the focus group literature in Ghana, there have been a number of sponsored studies whose reports are privately held. Published works in this area, however, include one by DeRose *et al*. (2002) who used focus groups to examine fertility, reproduction and power relations among young Ghanaian men and women. Asenso-Okyere *et al*. (1998) investigated the impact of cost-sharing policies introduced in Ghana in 1985 by the Government of the PNDC on people's health care seeking behaviour using

focus group discussions of cohorts of the Ghanaian population. Studying the period between 1985 and 1992, the authors combined focus groups with in-depth interviews conducted with health workers and selected opinion leaders in three districts of Ghana to obtain a broader perspective of any such impact. Obeng-Quaidoo (1987) reports of twelve focus groups conducted in four cities in Ghana to find out people's perceptions of family planning and their contraceptive use.

In the specific area of communication research, the dearth of published works using focus groups in Ghana shows in the fact that only one recently published article was found for the present study. Kwansah-Aidoo (2002) conducted 12 focus groups and 120 in-depth interviews to investigate Ghanaian media coverage of the environment and how that affected educated urban dwellers' awareness of environmental issues. In spite of this shortcoming, there are numerous unpublished reports of studies that have used the focus group research method mainly in the field of market research to examine communication strategies. The author of this article has over the last 15 years undertaken many commissioned studies for industry using focus groups. Many of these studies have aimed to develop, pre-test and post-test large numbers of advertising concepts and messages while others have sought to research product concepts and their acceptability to intended targets. Some other studies have focused on product images; consumer/public perceptions of and reactions to various products/services and their communications; as well as audience reactions to and evaluation of specific radio and television programmes to enable their fine-tuning.

In a recent study to assess participants' responses to the messages of a service provider, we conducted seventeen focus groups composed of between eight and ten participants each in four out of Ghana's ten regions each of which had peculiar realities and difficulties vis-à-vis the provision of that particular service and its communication patterns. Recommendations from this study resulted in the translation of communication content or messages into all major languages of the catchment areas. Other studies conducted for some other service delivery organisations resulted in the use of pictures and symbols in communication to offset problems of illiteracy (and in one case, hearing impairment), which was endemic in those areas studied. In a radio-specific study to assess audience reactions to and evaluations of some programme series of a local-language community radio station, we conducted 21 focus groups in four districts of a region in Ghana which constituted the coverage area of the station. In this particular case, a major recommendation resulted in a

significant change in programme content: adapting the language of transmission to suit everyday usage rather than the formal 'dictionary-based' language, which tended to be misunderstood by the youth, and poorly understood by many others. The findings of another focus group research engineered the streamlining of a radio station's programming to be in sync with audience expectations thus resulting in programme-time changes.

Despite the fact that recommendations from some of these studies have been both insightful and useful to patrons and audiences or targets, most of the studies have been sponsored and paid for by business, commercial concerns and organisations in the health sector. Consequently, as Downing (2003: 633) observed, their findings are 'strictly reserved for contracted firms' and are thus unavailable to the public. These organisations dictate the design and budget of the studies as well as control the publication of research findings.

Strengths of focus group research

Hansen *et al*. (1998: 258) proffer two reasons why focus groups are preferable in studying the dynamics of audience-media relationships. First, focus groups are 'more cost-efficient than individual interviews – a wider range of people can be interviewed within the same limitations of time, resources, and research money.' Secondly, 'groups allow the researcher to observe how audiences make sense of media *through conversation* and interaction with each other'. In the opinion of Lunt and Livingstone (1996:93): 'The group acts as a context that challenges, asks for elaboration, and demands examples of claims that people make.' Cutlip *et al*. (1994: 331) believe 'the major strength of focus groups is the open, spontaneous, and detailed discussions they generate, even among people who did not know each other before the session began.' Similarly, Priest (1996:66) sees group interaction as the strongest point of focus groups:

> ... the real advantage of a focus group is that the researcher can gather data on participants' interaction with one another. A richer picture of how information is processed and conclusions are drawn can be constructed in comparison to what can be understood from the narrower data produced in an interview situation. Participants may say things to one another that they would not bring up in a one-on-one conversation, such as arguments they consider persuasive and associations they make in response to others' comments. They may also more easily forget that the researcher is present, so their conversations and reactions more closely approximate normal conditions.

Focus groups have the advantage of cultural appropriateness, which allows them to adapt to peculiar environmental conditions in the context within which research is carried out (Vissandjée *et al*. 2002; Williams, 1999). The method provides a more naturalistic approach to research by using the narratives and oral traditions of different cultures (Russon 1995). It is therefore suited to African cultural, traditional, and environmental circumstances including its informal, open and group bonded nature, strong narrative and oral traditions. The richness of Africa's local languages (including those of Ghana), the continent's communal audience listening and viewing nature with a concomitant richness of audience interaction and discourse evident in participation in radio phone-in programmes make the method particularly preferable. The ability to use local languages in conducting focus groups enables participants to express themselves adequately and researchers to understand and capture participants' beliefs, values, communication and ways of interaction, among others. The rich nuances and subtleties of these languages allow researchers into the deeper meanings of participants' words and expressions sometimes impossible to capture in a second language like English or French.

Focus groups are usually neither constrained by limitations of access, and resource constraints of the participant observation, nor the rather more time-consuming and individualized approach of the one-to-one interview. There are enormous advantages in focus groups' ability to collect data from people within groups that are, in general, difficult to reach. These groups include people who are disadvantaged such as minorities and illiterates, or people who are disenfranchised (Barbour 1999). Esposito (2001: 569) argues that focus groups are an excellent way of identifying the needs of populations that are under-researched and they also 'allow participants a voice in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of interventions.' Frith (2000) outlines three key advantages of the method. Firstly, it is useful for exploratory research into under-researched topics and for speedy policy analysis. Secondly, it enables researchers to learn the language and vocabulary typically used by respondents to talk about phenomena under investigation. Finally, it provides conditions under which people feel comfortable discussing issues including some that are personal and sensitive like sex and sexual experiences about which people would usually be bashful. Fontana and Frey (1994: 36) summed up the advantages of focus groups as 'being inexpensive, data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding and cumulative and elaborative.'

Conclusion

Focus groups as tools of audience research have the inherent quality and ability of enabling researchers take advantage of group dynamics and interactions to yield rich original data to streamline content and programming. Radio stations in competitive markets (such as Ghana) need to research using methods that transcend the superficiality of the survey (Hansen *et al*. 1998) in order to answer questions relating to the *why* and *how* of audience-media relationships. Focus groups do provide that opportunity. They have the capacity to probe deeper into audience motivations, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour in more natural and realistic settings that match normal human group dynamics (Morley 1980; Folch-Lyon 1981; Frith 2000). Using focus groups in audience research replicates the normal ways through which audiences attend and respond to the media, and discuss media content with others in their immediate environment. The method thus has the potential to deliver to station managers what audiences require with regard to their radio listening experiences.

The extreme popularity of phone-in programmes and the responses they evoke from listeners show the enthusiasm of listeners to get involved as active rather than passive audiences. This provides pointers to a hidden and untapped potential of the focus group to research radio audiences in the booming electronic media market in Ghana. Focus groups demonstrated their ability to research audiences since the days when a 'group of people listened to a recorded radio programme that was supposed to raise public morale prior to America's entry into World War II' (Bernard, 1995: 225). Through experience of their use in Ghana, although relatively minimal, one can vouch for their usefulness in communication-media-audience research. It is time to exploit fully their unique potential to study the interface between audiences and the media, particularly radio, in a liberalised pluralistic electronic media environment such as Ghana.

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African Media and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) Agenda for Africa's Emerging Democracies

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Abstract

The paper discusses the peculiar location and roles assigned to media of communication in the democratic ideal. It makes a modest attempt to identify the share of the media in the creation of the problems commonly identified by the leaders in the continent. There is also a critique of the roles assigned to the media on the defined path to recovery.

It begins with an examination of the model advanced by Habermas. This is a model based on the Libertarian principles upon which Western societies are founded. The paper identifies some of the contrasts between this Libertarian orientation and other theories of the press, and argues for what should be the ideal role of the media. To this end, it explores the location of the media in the aspirations of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

Key terms: New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), media in emerging democracies

Résumé

Cette communication porte sur la position et le rôle particuliers des médias de la communication au sein de l'idéal démocratique. Elle débute par l'étude du modèle avancé par Habermas. Il s'agit d'un modèle basé sur les principes libertaires sur lesquels sont fondés les sociétés occidentales. Cet article explore les contrastes

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entre cette orientation libertaire et les autres théories des médias, dans le but d'établir le rôle idéal de ces derniers. Pour ce faire, cette communication analyse la position des médias dans le cadre des ambitions fixées par le Nouveau partenariat pour le développement africain (NEPAD). Cet article entreprend ensuite d'identifier la responsabilité des médias dans la création des problèmes généralement identifiés par les dirigeants africains. Il comporte également une critique du rôle assigné aux médias dans le cadre de la poursuite du développement.

Mots clés : Nouveau partenariat pour le développement de l'Afrique (NEPAD), les médias au sein des démocraties émergentes.

Introduction

Communication is a major enabler for individuals and societies. It is a lubricant for democratic governance which in turn facilitates national development. It is expected, then, that the initiative which seeks the development of the emerging western-type democracies in Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) would incorporate an important role for the media. In this paper, an attempt is made to examine the symbiotic relationship between the media and society. The context of communication is examined to highlight those social structures required for the democratic ideal to occur. The paper argues for an appreciation of those often neglected aspects of society that undermine the democratisation process. It is with due consideration for these that the media can engage in those tasks required to lubricate the wheels of the social system. The paper seeks, essentially to identify the responsibilities, opportunities and challenges to the media in Africa's emerging western models of democracy particularly, in supporting an accelerated development effort.

NEPAD and the Media

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) has adopted a radical view of democracy which emphasises both political participation and economic development. It is radical by itself in that it is an initiative of African leaders themselves, rather than the effort of donors or civil society. The document has candidly outlined the challenge of underdevelopment that African states have to confront. It recognises the need to harness human, material and technical resources, and to adopt a style of leadership that will make for sustainable human development. The defined priorities require Africans to renew their mindset, and unite in order to rise above the limitations that had hindered the accomplishment

of development goals. The media has helped raise awareness of the problems that the partnership seeks to address, and media exposure of world events attests to the consistency of these goals with global trends. Media advocacy for good governance and better standards of living, and images from certain media spectacles (the fall of the Berlin Wall, riots at Tien-An-Men Square in China) are pieces of evidence of the winds of change that has been blowing around the world.

Although it must be criticised for its failure to spell out the role of the media in the programmes of action, NEPAD's agenda is largely consistent with the conditions of good governance. To further enhance this, distinct ways of engaging the media within the NEPAD development framework is hereby proposed. To start with, there should be an acknowledgement of fundamental issues, such as the challenge of the media in convincing the African people of the sincerity of the NEPAD initiative. Africans have been let down too often even by their leaders, and apathy to government initiative among media audiences is understandable but should not be condoned. A proactive role for the media would include providing constructive criticism instead of fanning scepticism. The media should help create awareness of the potential benefits of the programme, candid discussions of its chances of success, the critical players and stakeholders. The media should assist in making the policy and the programmes of action more accessible by interpreting and analysing these for less savvy constituents in the polity.

Paragraph 67 of the NEPAD document stresses the need for sustainable goals. It would be helpful for the media to promote behaviour change and the adoption of appropriate lifestyles that will endure particularly in poverty reduction, health, and food security. More rural based or at least decentralised media that will project the views, fears and aspirations of rural dwellers have been recommended in the past (Moemeka 1983, 1994). The radical complements or alternatives that ICTs present should be explored. As proposed in the policy, much of Africa's potential lies in the natural resources and the custodians of these are the rural dwellers. These segments of the population need, therefore, to be better connected with the wider world, so they can build up their knowledge base and be better able to engage profitably within the fiercely competitive trading environment. By getting their case on the media agenda, for information generation and dissemination, the chances of reducing urban bias in public spending may be improved. Improved media attention may also help attract and mobilise the much needed human and fiscal resources that will hasten development. Rather than the sporadic media campaigns or temporary synergies arranged within the industry for specific national or

continental events (All Africa Games, Festival of Arts) there should be greater cooperation on a continuous and consistent basis.

As confirmed in the NEPAD agreement, there are enough challenges that pervade the continent[1], albeit in varying proportions. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are opportunities for the media to be proactive in promoting the actualisation of the collective aspirations. Creative means of appraising, and communicating the desirability of expected outcomes is required. This may be better served by a media that is perceived by the populace as independent, not merely the masters' voice.

Conflict prevention and management is one of the key objectives identified by NEPAD. Without doubt progress is possible in an atmosphere of peace and stability. So far, the media have demonstrated their weakness in preferring the spectacular to the substantive. They are wont to ignore discourses of discontent that fester as undercurrents, whilst a semblance of normalcy is maintained (Kellner 2003; Fiske 1996). The pattern of reporting that fails to raise alarm about impending conflicts is not acceptable any more. Accordingly, a paradigm shift in news practices and deployment of resources within the media is required. The media need the infrastructure to support them in the discharge of such a crucial surveillance role. They equally need the clout and the capabilities to generate rational discussion and debates. Media institutions should be strengthened along with selected regional and sub-regional institutions in the four key areas—conflict prevention, management, resolution as well as peace making, keeping and enforcement. Other areas are post-conflict reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstruction. The integration of the indigenous modes of communication could be valuable in this regard, especially with conflicts that are at the local level and still at the embryonic stages.

There is much to be said about the democratic ideal media system that is relevant to the initiatives of governance. Just as individuals need role models, institutions and societies adopting democracy require mentors for their political and economic programmes. Though they are to evolve their plans of action, exposure to the experiences of others can liven up the discussions in the public sphere. African media should generate interest in these issues at different levels of governance.

Media advocacy in the global arena is also required to address and foster understanding of African concerns such as trade imbalances, international finance and the gap in technology as pertains to the digital divide. Even when they are supportive, Western leaders are still accountable to their citizens, hence the need to extend the advocacy on

the continental programmes to citizens of the rich industrialised nations, who can put pressure on their leaders.[2] In turn, African leaders ought to appreciate that they are still accountable to their citizens, even where there is external support from the industrialised countries. The media can assist in fostering such continental and international dialogues by taking advantage of the global revolution facilitated by ICTs.

Communication and democracy

Democracy, with a vibrant media at its core, is the form of governance that has the capacity to liberate the Third World from underdevelopment. At least, that is what international financing agencies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund would want one to believe by instituting it as conditionality for funding programmes in critical sectors such as health, education, water and communication as well as good roads that will facilitate trade. Actually, NEPAD seems to have assumed that democracy is the one distinct feature of advanced societies that should be emulated. Having adopted that thinking, it is backing democracy as the ideal form of governance that will facilitate the much desired development of the otherwise marginalised continent. For example, Paragraph 71 of the NEPAD policy document states:

> African leaders have learned from their own experiences that peace, security, **democracy, good governance,** human rights and sound economic management are conditions for sustainable development. They are making a pledge to work, both individually and collectively, to promote these principles in their countries and sub-regions and on the continent [my emphasis] (NEPAD Policy 2001: 18).

Recent experiences in the Republic of Togo suggest that military regimes in whatever guise are no longer tolerated in Africa (BBC News, February 11, 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4243477.stm [viewed 2005–03–14]).

Other nations from around the world, including nations in transition from Eastern Europe, and more recently the Middle East, have imbibed this thinking and are also struggling to adopt or adapt this prescribed model of governance. So crucial is this that deliberations on the quality and attainment of democracy have become the focus of the comity of nations. There have been five International Conferences on New or Restored Democracies, with more than 100 countries in attendance at the fifth session which was held in Mongolia. At that conference six critical benchmarks required of members to be democratic is that their society should:

- be just and responsible,

- be inclusive and participatory,

- promote and protect the rights and freedoms of all its members,

- be open and transparent,

- function under agreed rules of law and accountability regardless of the challenges they may face,

- show solidarity toward others (Ulaanbaatar Declaration, Fifth ICNRD September, 2003) .

The type of society described above, resonates with the order in the model of the public sphere presented by Habermas (1996). For Habermas (1996), the ideal democratic state requires a process through which individual positions can contribute to the construction of pubic opinion. Furthermore, there should be processes which ensure that public opinion helps to maintain the collective existence in the social formation. This order of participation and collective self-determination is crucial to achieving the democratic ideal. In the final analysis, the Harbemasian democratic system consists of the government, those with responsibility for managing the society, and individuals who have rights as citizens. The assumption is an egalitarian society, where there is equity among members within the community.

In his model of democracy, Habermas (1996: 55) considers the media as central in the constitution of the public sphere because of the large and complex organisation of social life in contemporary times. It is assumed that there would be a freedom of assembly, of expression and dissemination of the views formed therein. In Habermas' (1996) words 'access to the sphere is open in principle to all citizens.' Consequently, assumptions can be made about certain rights that individuals who participate in the sphere possess. Citizens should not be subjected to political coercion, and the dealings in the free market place should be free from social forces.

In spite of these liberating characteristics, one can argue that the Habermas (1996) model is not as inclusive as its chief advocate would have liked, for there is the assumed premise that every member of the society will be accepted as a citizen. This is not always the case. In reality, there are formal and informal criteria for assessing citizenship. Though universal suffrage had been in existence in many societies by middle of 20th century there were still barriers in the path of certain segments of the population. This was often due to their social class, race, ethnic

affiliation, or gender. At the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, it was agreed that

> Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. (Paragraph 13, Beijing Declaration and UN Platform for Action 1996)

In paragraphs 181–189 of the same document the obstacles to the effective participation of women in the public arena and decision making organs in the polity were discussed. An indication of the magnitude of institutionalised discrimination against women in different societies, in spite of their declared citizenship is evident in that section of the UN document. Paragraph 182 for example, speaks of the under-representation of women at most levels of government. Similarly, Section J documents the inaccessibility of the media to women. One can deduce that the dominant discourses proceeding from the media marginalise the viewpoint of the woman. But, the actualisation of the citizenship rights of the woman cannot be ignored. There, indeed, has been some progress in the actualisation of women's citizenship rights since the 1995 Beijing Conference, though the situation is still far from the democratic ideal.

Another assumption implicit in the Habermas' (1996) model of the public sphere is that people in positions of authority will recognise the trust that accompanies the office that they hold. Accountability of officials rigorously enforced through the guarantee of press freedom is an expected attribute of democratic governance. From the print media through the broadcast media to current ICT-based communication systems, including the Internet, the media must be alive to the duty of monitoring and holding public officers in check, lest they adopt authoritarian tendencies. This requires the survival and well-being of the media institutions themselves.

Organising the media for development in the Context of NEPAD
There are a number of advantages to be found in the traditional liberal model of the media in a democratic society that was advanced by Habermas (1996). It has often been regarded as the ideal, but it has also been subject to critique. In Curran's (2000) view, it is a limited model of the democratic system. He described as archaic, the view which assumes that the political system is made up primarily of government and individuals, and that does not give adequate attention to the variety of mediating institutions in operation in the body polity of contemporary societies. These organisations have differing political, cultural and

commercial interests.

For instance, Sobowale (1985) acknowledges the critical role of Christian missionaries in the development of the press in Nigeria in the nineteenth century. From the religious inceptions, the press in Nigeria was both commercial and political as Omu (cited in Adebanwi 2004) shows. The press was subject to pressures that were not accounted for in Habermas's (1996) initial conception of the public sphere. If the distinction between political and social life was a criterion to be followed to the letter, those earlier incarnations of the press would not constitute a form of the public sphere. In that case, the contribution of much of the indigenous forms of communication that served African societies politically would also be disregarded, as their operations occurred in other social institutions besides the political.

Ugboajah (1985), however, demonstrates how these were crucial and are still relevant in the process of governance. His oramedia[3] forms include the marketplace, which is more than a venue for trading in material goods.

> Marketplaces in Africa in themselves are veritable communication forums... Market places are not just where people go to buy or sell but are diffusion forums for important social interaction . . . vogues are copied in marketplaces. They also constitute places of censure (Ugboajah 1985: 169).

The fact that marketplaces are a forum for the convergence of women, from different classes is a compelling reason why such forum should be seriously considered if institutionalised marginalisation of almost half of the population is to be avoided.

Other examples of the oramedia cited include the songs, drum beats, dances, parables, riddles and even the town crier which all help to create a sense of worth for the individuals and the community. A lot of these are still in use particularly in rural parts and urban squatter settlements, but they may face stiffer competition in the urban areas with the adoption of more expensive and less culturally appropriate mass media. Whilst much of the oramedia may be effective for communicating within groups, attempts to use them to communicate between groups in the context of inevitable global media operations may be more challenging. Still these are not insurmountable challenges with a bit of creativity. Using oramedia forms could in deed be opportunities to present the African societies more accurately to wider audiences. The biggest advantage here will be if the audiences appreciated the relevance of the forms.

Comparative media models

The foregoing discussion demonstrates the weakness of a model that discounts the importance of taking a comprehensive view of the social system, to the political system. Delineating politics from other aspects of social life, has contributed to the misjudgement of what media service should be. The democratic ideal calls for media service that does more than privilege politics and politicians; it should not marginalise significant proportions of society. Since politics had been construed in a particular male domain at the time captured in the model, there is a sense in which prioritisation of politics in the media had worked against women and the less powerful members of society. This prioritisation becomes a mechanism for classification of both media forms and their consumers (audiences). And as Bourdieu (2000) would show, it is evidence of a struggle. Fiske demonstrates that there is a hegemonic struggle implied in the dichotomy between news and social entertainment; what has been classed as serious versus trivial aspects of media service, and the public sphere model fails to account for this. By so doing, the model fails to acknowledge audience behaviour, and the complex sorts of *debates* that occur in the public sphere.

> . . . there is a continuous and necessarily uneven and unequal struggle by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms. There are points of resistance; there are also moments of suppression. This is the dialectic of cultural struggle. In our times it goes on continuously, in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battle field. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost. (Hall 1981: 233)

This model is thus deficient in addressing the needs of a democracy in contemporary times when there is so much tied to such extensive cultural industries. Acknowledging the variety of cultural forms and the tensions that exist around them, both at the moments of production and reception, now becomes even more crucial if as current consumption patterns suggest, the society places a high premium on them, though political communication that defines what is significant in politics ignores a good proportion of the masses.

Irrespective of the forms that they adopt, the media have the duty to circulate information that will enlighten the citizens and facilitate their rational and critical deliberation of issues of public interest. Individuals

can then perform their civic duties, whether this be the choice of suitable candidates for office, or the ratification of options presented by office holders (as in the case of a referendum on public issues or those with more personal dimensions), they can make informed choices that are in the best interest of all.

The libertarian system assumes that individuals are rational and sensible enough to moderate the market place of ideas, by giving heed to that which is ***useful***, what is the ***truth***, thus set the standards of acceptable values collectively, and regulating the excesses within the society and its media system. On the surface, it will appear that power, in such a society is with the people. This view resonates with Golding and Murdock's (2000) account of Adam Smith's concepts of the efficiency and moral superiority of the market place. But the flaw in this position has been highlighted in the foregoing discussion, and the Social Responsibility theory of the press. Besides, there are potential merits in a measure of Authoritarianism which have not been discussed here, but what these point to is the need for a clearer framework of the power relations within the media. Barnett (1997) discusses the contradictions evident in the experiences and orientations favoured in African states. There are differences within and between states over which philosophy to subscribe to and what routes to embark on for development. Suffice to say that the role assigned to the media in these varying paths may have been contradictory.

The media have been cast in roles that have called them to deploy different performance strategies. Olukotun (2000) speaks of two of these: heroic crusaders that seek to obstruct authoritarian governments and the facilitators of civil governance. 'One luxuriates in defiance, rebellion, rough tackles, the other requires agenda setting in an intra-mural context, enlightenment, advocacy and networking' (Olutokun 2000: 95). There are other dilemmas about the degree of media involvement in a democratic dispensation. This is as imposed by the ethics of the journalism profession that require objectivity, accuracy, fairness, and balance between responsibility and profitability, creative consideration of the vested interests of proprietors and operators. These are long standing and fairly universal concerns (Golding and Elliot 1976).

With regard to the organisation of the media, there have also been differences between print and broadcast media; between private and public (government) owned. In any case, there are too many unseen hands that have not been accounted for. Adebanwi (2004) in his analysis of the press of coverage of the Ogoni in the Nigerian press illustrate the complexity of the struggle of the media to facilitate the democratic ideal. This included

professional dilemmas encountered in raising the voices of a marginalised minority to speak up against the dominant political elite's in a culturally diverse society; and the facilitation of debates within a global context. The role of external social factors (such as business and civil society) as well as intrinsic professional factors (generic news conventions, narrativisation) was highlighted along with the usual factors of ownership and control that had been subject of scholarly concern. His discussion of the hegemonic struggle also calls attention to the importance of giving due consideration to the audience.

The liberal model proposed by Habermas had assumed that there is equal access to the media through which information is disseminated. This raises quite fundamental questions about audience practices, for it is after all, the audience who will adjudge the utility of the message, or the veracity of the truth. The polysemic nature of messages need to be taken into account here, as much as the hegemonic struggles that occur at various points media reception. Semiotics shows the social constructedness of meaning in media messages. The encoding of messages relies on socially agreed patterns and conventions. The meaning that is conveyed in media messages is therefore not as transparent as the guarantees of openness in the sphere of communication will seek to purport.

Another assumption which the model makes is that the information available is adequate. Yet, by focusing on political communication in particular, the model adopts a restricted agenda of the media. From inception of societies, there have been a variety of messages in the public arena. Though politics may have been privileged, there were other aspects of life that captured the attention of the media. That selling and entertainment were featured in all four theories of the press, is sufficient basis for regarding these as important to the healthy functioning of society. This indicates the complexity of the performance of the media which audiences will have to judge. It calls attention to other influences which may impinge on the organisation of the media and the usefulness of the messages.

There is a danger implicit in any suggestion that the prevailing social system in more traditional or transitional societies is inappropriate to support a media system that facilitates the democratic ideal, especially if it is based on the possible assumption that citizens of such societies are incapable of being rational. This is not likely to be the case as there is no evidence of inherent incapacitation. Attention should therefore be directed the failure of the media systems to meet conditions of media ownership and organisation that should safeguard its freedom of the media to perform.

We should return our focus to the following basic questions.

- What constitutes the media of communication?
- Who owns the media and why?
- How are these media of communication organised (funding and regulation)?
- How are the priorities expressed because of the above?

The answer to these questions should give an indication of how free the media are to inform, convene, and represent the views of private citizens on issues of general concern, and to supervise the running of government—which is the democratic ideal.

The core tasks of the media remain consistent in the threefold mission (to inform, educate and entertain) though details of how these should be articulated need to be spelt out. Concluding on his revisit of the symbiosis between the media and democracy, Curran (2000) presents a complex set of requirements for a democratic media system. He identifies an improved model of the public sphere; one that acknowledges the intervening agencies in operation within the state and amongst the governed. These include institutions of governance (civil service, judiciary parliament, political parties and constituted government), the institutions with delegated regulatory authority, other groups, unions and organisations that wield an influence in public life and moderate the power blocs. The new view of the public sphere suggests more clearly that it is a network for communication, information and expression of opinions and views. It shows that there is disparity in the proximity of the interested parties to the government and its direct agencies which are at the core. For the ideal to be achieved these have to be considered. From this we can deduce that the media should

- empower and inspire people irrespective of their identity or location within the sphere;
- monitor and give access to the known sectional interests existing in society,
- articulate coherently the diverse positions within such groups;
- explore, evaluate, protect and promote the viewpoints of the underclass,
- transmit social concerns from the periphery of the sphere to the centre.

With these, the media system may ensure that collective decisions are founded on 'open working through of difference, rather than a contrived consensus based on elite dominance' (Curran 2000:148). These are some of the key issues that the new initiative seeking to establish the democratic ideal (NEPAD) ought to address.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that ICT is the only aspect of the media that was mentioned specifically in the programme of action in the NEPAD policy. Even then, there is some ambiguity in the reference. It appears that the provision of new technologies has been stressed without consideration of the more complementary media of mass communication. Mass media are experts at disseminating standardised messages and these can foster social cohesion. Production practices within these media organisations can be strengthened by improved ICTs. This may mean they are better able to serve the marginalised, expand the scope for discussion, document, and analyse public opinion. It may also improve the working conditions of the staff, the aesthetic quality of media output can be improved and perhaps there can be more experimentation with different formats of presentations. On the other hand the ICT provision may aim to facilitate direct access to the end users. It may thus help to construct more insular communities and when these fail to engage in dialogue or debate, the gulfs in society increase, and the democratic ideal remains a mirage. A clear articulation of a media programme can prevent such ambiguity. This is one conspicuous difference between NEPAD and the Africa Commission Report (ACR)[4] given the scope of this paper.

Having identified the inadequacy of good intentions, in Paragraph 44, of chapter 4, the ACR speaks of the need to provide mechanisms that will ensure voices of all citizens are heard in the interest of accountability of powerful groups. The report also adopts a wider definition of powerful groups so that this is no longer restricted to those in government alone. With regard to participation, as has been argued in this paper, the ACR reiterates the importance of participation in decision making. A unique contribution made on that subject is the call for a reverse in orientation within message production in which experts know best. The report acknowledges the culpability of the speed and routines of production, as they constrain flexibility in the identification of other sources. Thus as argued earlier, the paradigms in news production in particular should be reviewed to enable media explore the merits in the contributions from less usual sources. This will convey some respect on the views of the less

powerful members of society, and may make their citizenship status more meaningful. This may help redress the systematic exclusion of groups on the fringes of the sphere such as ethnic minorities, women and children, migrant populations, refugees, and the rural dwellers.

The media may be credited for their effort in harnessing their potential for nation building. This is evident in the emergence of democracy over oppressive authoritarian African regimes. The Togolese example mentioned earlier is a case in point. Progress recorded in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa are just a few of the examples of the workability of these ideas, when there is adequate support. Much of the success can be attributed to the determination of the media, civil society and entrepreneurs in the sector.

There has been an acknowledgement of the variety of channels through which information flows within Africa and the obstacles within the system. This confirms the wisdom in the argument advanced above for an integration of different forms of expression including traditional media, community radio and new ICT. The appropriate media mix must be practical, logical and culturally relevant. Media programmes for development work tend to reflect these. Even political campaigns do too. Information about Africa also needs to be communicated abroad to correct the poor balance of coverage of the continent and help nations within to find opportunities for trade and economic activities. African programming can now be received in Europe and America via satellite channels. Likewise, publications are available in specialised outlets. But perhaps the most radical medium has been the Internet. Within Africa, there is evidence of improved cooperation and networking as exemplified by the TV Africa initiative. This is still very restricted to a few countries. Greater government support will be welcome. In the spirit of NEPAD, the leaders should now match their political will with real action by adopting a clear media programme of action.

As has been argued here, the Africa Commission Report identified the media as a catalyst for change, along with being an instrument for education, and a key source of information. If properly supported and organised, media are critical to the actualisation of the development goals and they should have sector goals and clearly articulated plan of action. This should cover issues of media independence, responsibility, funding, and regulation as discussed above. Training and networking will further facilitate professionalism, and elevate consideration for audiences, particularly the oft ignored segments. Audiences can then be brought into the centre of media service. The media can be made to represent a wider shade of interest groups besides the political elites. These are issues

for further academic consideration.

Notes
1 This includes but is not limited to issues of poverty, HIV /AIDS, marginalization of women, educational attainment, gender inequality, competitiveness and globalization.
2 The Make Poverty History campaign preceding the July 2005 G8 summit in the U.K is an example.
3 'Oramedia or folk media are grounded on indigenous culture produced and consumed by members of a group. They reinforce the values of the group. They are visible cultural features, often strictly conventional, by which social relationships and a world view are maintained and defined. They take on many forms and are rich in symbolism.' (Ugboajah 1985: 166)
4 The Africa Commission is an independent group set up by British Prime Minister to define the challenges facing Africa, and make recommendations on how best to support the poverty reduction initiative for the African continent.

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Towards an Environmental Communication Conceptual Model for Enabling Socio-economic Development in Africa

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Abstract

Africa has vast natural and human resources and thus great potential for socio-economic development. Yet, very few countries on the continent have been able to utilise their resources fully and to reap the expected benefits from that potential. Many of the factors for this failure to boost socio-economic development and improve the lives of individuals and groups on the continent have been well documented. However, one factor that is often glossed over is the role of negative environmental behaviour on development. This paper argues that there is a strong relationship between the two and suggests a viable framework for integrating these two issues/areas by providing a theoretical model for incorporating environmental communication, and subsequently environmental consciousness, into socio-economic development programmes.

Key terms: Environmental communication, communication for environmental consciousness, development communication and environment.

Résumé

L'Afrique possède d'énormes ressources naturelles et humaines, et dispose ainsi d'un fort potentiel de développement socio-économique. Pourtant, très peu de pays africains sont parvenus à employer ces ressources de manière efficace, et à tirer les bénéfices escomptés à partir de ce potentiel. La plupart des raisons à cette incapacité à générer le développement socio-économique et améliorer ainsi

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le quotidien des individus et des groupes de populations du continent ont déjà
été établies. Cependant, il existe un facteur qui est souvent passé sous silence :
l'effet de nos comportements négatifs envers l'environnement sur le
développement. Cette communication affirme qu'il existe un fort lien de cause à
effet entre ces deux éléments et propose un cadre viable d'intégration de ces
éléments dans un modèle conceptuel. Ceci permettra d'inclure la communication
environnementale, et de là, la prise de conscience environnementale dans les
programmes de développement socio-économique.

Mots clés: communication environnementale, communication pour la
sensibilisation à l'environnement, communication et environnement pour le
développement

Introduction

> Africa is in environmental crisis . . . The continent has overdrawn its environmental
> accounts and the result for most of Africa south of the Sahara has been
> environmental bankruptcy. Bankrupt environments lead to bankrupt nations and
> may lead to a bankrupt continent (Timberlake 1985:18).

Time and again, African governments have drawn up highly optimistic
development plans which they hope will move their countries forward
and bring about the much desired development or improvement in the
socio-economic well-being of their people. Yet, despite such positive plans
and the real prospects for this to happen, genuine socio-economic
development has become highly elusive to many an African country.
Incidentally the few countries, including Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and
Egypt in the north, and South Africa in the south, which seem to be
succeeding happen to be those that have integrated environmental issues
in their development plans.

In the mid-1990s, Amoakohene (1995) observed paltry environmental
reporting by Ghanaian newspapers. A wider pervasive negative
environmental behaviour on the continent has been attributed to minimal
environmental awareness (Nwosu 1993; Timberlake 1985). This is along
with a lack of understanding about the benefits of acting otherwise in
their pursuit to survive in a generally harsh economic milieu. As a result
of these factors, most people have abandoned the traditional African
wisdom of holding the environment in awe and respecting it, in return
for the life-sustaining merits that it provides for individuals and
communities. It is the contention of this paper that the failure of the peoples
of the continent to actively promote and maintain an environmentally
conscious lifestyle, consequently results in harmful environmental

behaviour, which affects socio-economic development in Africa. The significance of this particular problem arises out of the fact that more often than not, an attitudinal change is required before it can be resolved. In other words, people need to change how they perceive the environment before they can make any effective changes in their behaviour or interaction with it.

In this paper, I argue that there is a direct link between environmental consciousness and socio-economic development, on the basis that negative environmental behaviour is anathema to socio-economic development. I also maintain that communication is a key ingredient in engendering environmental consciousness and trying to get people to act in ways that will not harm the environment, and be encouraging of development-related activities. This is more so because each society constructs its view of environmental problems within the context of its cultural values and its social and political forces (Szagun & Pavlov 1995). Consequently, using the social exchange theory as a basis, I propose a conceptual model aimed at resolving the situation through communicating the message of environmental protection and the benefits of creating or ensuring an enabling environment that will be conducive to socio-economic development. Although, 'toward' in the title suggests that the work presented here is evolving, I am confident that the approach I am suggesting can help African countries to prompt their citizens to engage in responsible environmental behaviour, and ultimately help them to gain the necessary benefits that authentic socio-economic development will bring.

The model can guide governments, environmentalists and interest groups in Africa, working closely with communication specialists, to embark on programmes that will succeed not only in educating the general public about the real dangers of environmental degradation, but also in motivating them to act in environmentally friendly ways and thus pave the way for real socio-economic development on the continent.

Relationship between the environment and development
In more than one way, the opening quote (observation) by Timberlake (1985) provides a basis as well as inspiration for the approach to socio-economic development in Africa that this paper is advocating. What the quote shows is that, there is indeed an inextricable link between environment/environmental behaviour and the socio-economic (development) status of a people, and/or poverty. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP 1997) report notes that poverty is a prime

cause of environmental degradation, and also mentions that the problem is, many times over, more prevalent in developing/least developed countries, than it is in the developed countries. Also, the fact that the *World Development Report* of 1992 was based on 'Development and the Environment' is a clear indication of how paramount the relationship between the environment and development is.

Environmental issues are issues of development and these apply to developed, developing or least developed countries. For example, in the developed nations of the world, environmental problems appear to be a result of industrialisation and the enjoyment of other good things of life that come with technological advancement. Thus, acid rain, pollution by exhaust fumes and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) are some of the environmental concerns of the developed world. On the other hand, some of the environmental problems that plague the developing or least developed nations are in the form of dwindling forest resources as a result of over-reliance on wood for fuel and export, unclean water resources as a result of human and animal pollution, over-exploitation of the land as a result of over-dependence on agriculture, and a host of other poverty related problems. Tutu (1996: 107), for example, observes that,

> While environmental degradation can be viewed globally, it is possible to be more concerned about the ones that are closer home . . . environmental problems in Less Industrialised Countries (LICs), such as unsafe water, inadequate sanitation, soil and forest depletion, indoor and outdoor polluted air are different and more life threatening than those associated with rich countries such as carbon dioxide emissions, depletion of stratospheric ozone, photochemical smogs, acid rain and hazardous wastes in industrialised countries.

A theoretical example of the link between the environment and development can also be found in the definition of development offered by Wang and Dissanayake (1981: 217) who define development as,

> The process of social change which has as its goal the improvement in the quality of life of all or the majority of the people without doing violence to the natural and cultural environment in which they exist and which seeks to involve the generality of the people as closely as possible in this enterprise, making them masters of their own destiny.

This definition shows the linkages between development, the environment and communication, which are core concepts in this paper. Tutu (1996: 107) also points out two ways in which environmental problems can undermine development.[1] He argues that (a) good

environmental quality means an improvement in the welfare of people and therefore if the net financial benefits from an activity are outweighed by the costs imposed by it through environmental degradation, then this cannot be development, and (b) environmental degradation can affect the future negatively. For example, degraded soils prevent the opportunities of utilising the soil for higher output in the future.

On a more practical note, an example of this relationship is offered in an article published in the magazine *New African*. In this article, Ghana's President (J.J. Rawlings) is said to have admitted that mining companies in the past operated with scant regard for the environment, health and livelihood of local people, and that the Ashanti Goldfields in Obuasi have a duty to protect the environment in the Obuasi community (Sarpong, 1993). On another occasion, he was reported to have said, after commissioning a new shaft as part of the mine's expansion, that the mine forms part of the country's lifeblood and everything should be done to prevent any disruption of work at the mine (Sarpong 1993). Herein lies the dilemma of the developing African country. Should a country develop at the expense of the environment while playing down the long-term effects of environmental degradation? In this dilemma also one finds an unmistakable link between the environment and development. Vyas and Reddy (1998:48) capture the essence of this dilemma when they observe that,

> Though environmental protection and economic development are compatible on a theoretical plain, in practice a trade-off exists between them. This is more so in the context of developing countries which are presently striving to achieve high growth rates in order to attain the standards of living of the industrialised countries.

Elaborating further, Vyas and Reddy (1998) note that for developing countries striving to achieve high growth rates there is always a trade-off between environmental protection and economic development.

In the same light, Bowyer-Bower notes that in Zimbabwe, environmental legislation allows for application to the controlling authorities for exemption from compliance, thus leaving 'a path by which environmental needs may be sacrificed in favour of development projects' (1996:10). He singles out the Mining and Minerals Act of Zimbabwe for criticism on the grounds that it has "provision to override environmental protection measures stipulated in other laws" (Bowyer-Bower 1996: 10).

While the examples cited so far deal with the relationship between development and the environment at the macro level, it is possible to outline a similar relationship at the micro level as well. For instance,

individual behaviour or activities such as littering and improper waste disposal, that harm the environment, can scare away investors and tourists (especially the foreign ones) whose activities create jobs and contribute directly to the socio-economic development of a country. Further, unfriendly environmental acts such as indiscriminate bush burning, misuse and overuse of natural resources, pollution of water bodies through the use of unwholesome fishing methods, all go to impoverish the environment and in the long run destroy some of the basis for socio-economic development. It is such anti-environmental behaviour (at the micro level), that the model proposed in this paper seeks to address. These observations are ample indication that at both the macro and micro levels of society, no meaningful development can occur without environmental implications. In the light of this, it is appropriate that development programmes do not lose sight of the environmental perspective—about awareness and attitudes. All development programmes must necessarily include an environmental awareness component.

Concept of social exchange and socio-economic development
The theoretical concept of social exchange suggests that social life is a series of exchanges and that an individual's voluntary behaviour, will be motivated by the benefits expected (Blau, 1964, Mackey 2004). Thus, they will be driven by their self-interest in the formation of their attitudes and perceptions (Berscheid and Walster 1978). According to the theory, 'the outcome of any form of social or human interaction is the combination of rewards and costs involved in the interaction' (Mackey 2004: 66). As Thibaut and Kelly (1999) note:

> People strive to minimize costs and maximize rewards, as with economics, and then base the likeliness of developing a relationship with someone on the perceived possible outcomes. When these outcomes are perceived to be greater, we disclose more and develop a closer relationship with that person.

When applied to socio-economic development programmes, it is suggested that the benefits that individuals seek (e.g. employment opportunities; improved lifestyles) in return for the benefits (e.g. support for socio-economic development) they offer for socio-economic development programmes, will shape their attitudes and perceptions towards the environment. Those desired positive outcomes, as a matter of self-interest, leads to positive attitudes towards socio-economic development (Mowforth and Munt 1998). However, in practice, the expected positive return and thus the desired host attitudes and perceptions that foster socio-economic development, will be subject to a number of

moderators. For example, development programmes may generate jobs, which in principle, is a positive return. Despite this, if a community considers the nature of the jobs generated as being unsatisfactory because of the low wages paid relative to the hours worked, then support for that specific development programme may not be forthcoming. More importantly, the availability of incentives for environmentally conscious behaviour, which supports socio-economic development, will be crucial to the formation of positive attitudes and perception towards development.

Concept of environmental consciousness
Environmental consciousness can be broadly defined as the acquisition of knowledge about environmental problems or issues that translates into attitudinal changes and subsequently results in a tendency to act positively towards the environment. The concept of environmental consciousness defined this way, is similar to what some scholars describe as environmental concern or environmental awareness (see, for example, Suhonen 1993; Grob 1995; Szagun and Pavlov 1995; Wall 1995; Gooch 1996). It comprises both an intellectual and an affective element. This means that the individual who is said to be environmentally conscious would possess a body of knowledge of specific environmental problems. In addition to the intellectual, the individual would demonstrate a desirable way of relating to those problems that crystallises into positive attitudes towards the environment. Following on, the individual would be awoken by that knowledge to act appropriately in concrete situations (Rannikko, 1996). Such appropriate behaviour represents the affective dimension of environmental consciousness.

Proposed model
The model consists of four components: environmental communication; environmental awareness; positive development related environmental attitudes/behaviour; and conducive environment for socio-economic development (Figure 1). Each component consists of a number of core activities, issues and/or sub-components.

- The environmental communication component consists of the gathering and dissemination of important information about environmental issues related to socio-economic development, including actual communication activities and strategies that are aimed at informing people about those issues, the appropriate behaviour expected of individuals and communities and the need to exercise vigilance on behalf of the environment in order to boost socio-eco-

nomic development. It also includes information about the expected benefits of socio-economic development aimed at inducing people to see the required positive environmental behaviour as a social exchange where benefits accrue to both individuals and the society at large.

- The environmental awareness/consciousness component consists of two sub-components i.e. recognition of environmental problems, including specifically, development-related environmental problems, and factual knowledge about development's relationship with the environment.
- The positive development related environmental attitudes/behaviour component includes a desirable target audience perception of the environment, a tendency to act positively on behalf of the environment, undertaking explicit activities which have a positive bearing on the environment; a tendency to get involved in activities aimed at promoting socio-economic development.
- The enabling environment for socio-economic development component consists of a milieu that is conducive to socio-economic development, all activities that actually boost socio-economic development and real evidence pointing to an improvement in the socio-economic lifestyles/status of people.

Having described each of the components, each component's role in the model will be discussed in turn.

Environmental communication component
The take off point of the proposed model is the understanding that development activities and also environmental protection/awareness activities are information-based or information-related. Environmental communication enables the target audience to be informed about deve-lopment-related environmental issues, including how they might tackle environmental problems. Such an effort requires the gathering and dis-semination of relevant information in order to first create a climate for environmental change through motivation, education and mobilisation (Ansah 1985), all of which need communication to succeed. This component also includes communication aimed at appealing to the self-interest of community members as posited by the social exchange theory. Such communication will place emphasis on the benefits of socio-economic development that individuals could see as incentives. Thus, for target audiences to make the right decisions on behalf of the environment they need some
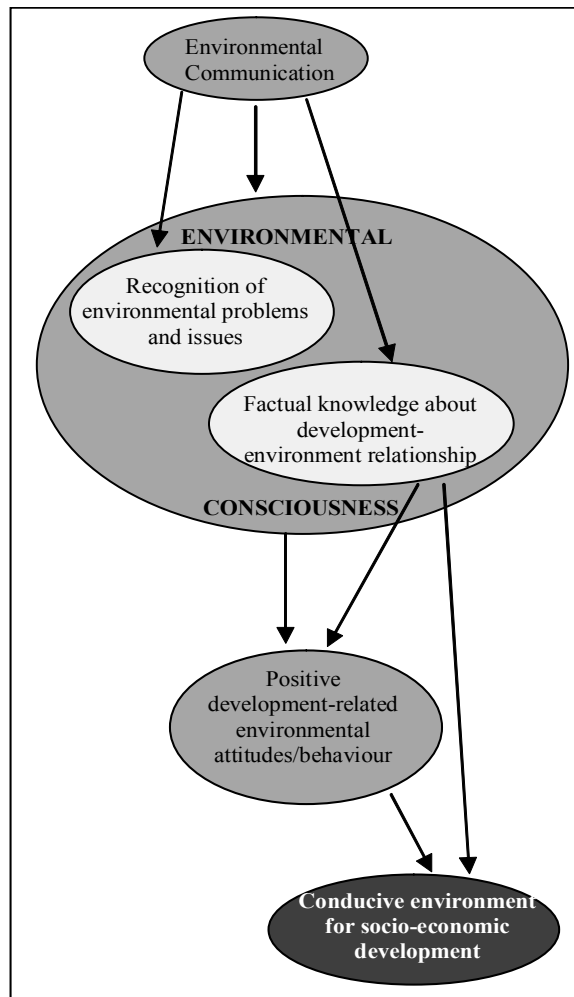
Figure 1: Model of environmental consciousness
and socio-economic development

basic information and guidance, the provision of which, the model takes as its starting point. As shown in Figure 1, environmental communication can directly affect each of the sub-components in the environmental awareness component. At the same time, environmental communication is expected to bring about general environmental awareness/consciousness. The ultimate goal of environmental communication is to bring about positive environmental change, which will put a stop to environmental degradation.

Environmental awareness/consciousness component

Environmental awareness, as Vyas and Reddy (1998: 53) note, '. . . is the prerequisite for effective tackling of environmental degradation.' Without awareness of the enormity of environmental problems, individuals and other stakeholders may not even recognise environmental problems let alone take steps to tackle them. The model proposes that the more aware people are of the state of their environment, the more appropriately they will behave (Grob 1995). The environmental awareness component in the model consists of environmental knowledge, including specific knowledge about development's relationship with the environment, and the ability to recognise environmental problems. In terms of knowledge about the environment, it is suggested that the more people know about their environment, the more aptly they will behave (Borden & Schettino 1979; Katzev & Johnson 1984; Grob 1995). It is also said that the more an individual recognises environmental problems the more appropriately he or she will act (Grob 1995), a view, which is widely supported (see, for example, Schahn & Johnson 1990; Kwansah-Aidoo 2003). It is also expected that, because the ultimate goal of the model is socio-economic development, this part of the model will also entail factual knowledge about the relationship between the environment and socio-economic development. This is to be brought about largely through environmental communication aimed at drawing attention to the not-so-obvious relationship between environmental behaviour and socio-economic development. It is expected that, when individuals know about both the positive and adverse effects that their interaction with the environment can have on development and development programmes, they will be prepared to behave appropriately. This expectation holds particularly true, when considered in the light of social exchange theory, as discussed earlier.

Positive development-related environmental attitudes/behaviour component

It suggests that when people have acquired factual knowledge about the

environment and can also recognise environmental problems and issues, they will be inclined to see the environment in a positive light and ultimately adopt pro-environmental behaviour. In addition to suggesting that general environmental awareness will encourage positive attitudes and behaviour towards the environment, it is also suggested that recognition of environmental problems and issues, especially those related specifically to development, may be enough to engender positive environmental attitudes and behaviour from individuals. The above view is partly supported by Grob (1995), who argues that recognition of environmental problems and issues might be enough to engender pro-environmental behaviour. It is also expected that out of an understanding of the relationship between the environment, individual behaviour and development, people will be more inclined to perceive the environment and also socio-economic development in a different light. In addition, an expectation of benefits from socio-economic development as proposed in the social exchange theory, should help bring about the expected change in perception. A positive change in perception in this regard, should make individuals want to participate in activities that, in their view will enhance socio-economic development. Involvement in such activities could be both at the micro and macro levels of society.

Enabling environment for socio-economic development component
The ultimate aim of the model is to create a milieu that will be conducive to socio-economic development. This component suggests a direct linkage between environmental consciousness and an environment that will enable development activities to flourish. This is on the basis that when individuals within societies are environmentally conscious and consequently do not engage in negative environmental behaviour, they do not only avoid harm to the environment and enhance the viability of the environment, but also they help create a milieu that is highly favourable to socio-economic development. Thus, for African countries to utilise their potential for development and reap the benefits thereof, they must make a deliberate effort to include the promotion of environmental consciousness in their socio-economic development programmes.

Discussion
In the attempt to boost socio-economic development, the specific environmental problems encountered are diverse. They include bush burning, misuse and overuse of natural resources, pollution of water bodies, and the acceptance of the concept of sustainability (Ayres 2000). In many instances, they are fundamental to socio-economic development

and thus critical to success if not adequately resolved. The development of environmental consciousness is a necessary step for the resolution of these challenges for '... out of increased environmental consciousness, micro and macro levels of social organisation would, more or less of their own volition, start to make the changes necessary to solve environmental problems' (Morrison 1986: 187).

The link to socio-economic development is obvious in the sense that development programmes designed at a macro level of social organisation incorporates the relationship between specific developmental activities and the state of the environment, which is by and large influenced by human activities or human interaction with the environment. At the micro level, the actions of individuals either affect the environment positively or negatively. What individual societal members do therefore has a direct link to the environment. These linkages and relationships can either work to produce an environment that enhances or works against development programmes. It is clear then that socio-economic development cannot be devolved from the environment and the behaviour that goes on within this environment. Thus, if the environmental challenges are to be minimised in order to boost socio-economic development, then individuals, communities and other stakeholders should move beyond just being aware of development-related environmental problems. They should prepare and put themselves in positions where they are willing and able to participate in environmental reform (Morrison 1986) and focus more intently on positive environmental behaviour. In communication terms, people should be made aware of the consequences of their negative environmental behaviour on socio-economic development and hopefully that will influence them to behave positively towards the environment. In addition, people should be made aware of the expected benefits of socio-economic development so that they can feel incentivised to put up the expected behaviour. In other words, communicators must harp on the would-be positive outcomes in order to appeal to the self-interest of individuals and communities. This appeal to self-interest will hopefully yield the fruit of positive attitudes towards development programmes thereby creating a veritable situation of social exchange.

In any attempt at engendering environmental consciousness, I propose that due regard be given to the continent's indigenous body of knowledge and beliefs. I refer specifically, to a particular African traditional view of the environment that encourages people to behave positively towards the environment. As Quarm (1995: 99) has rightly noted, traditional African

wisdom holds the environment sacred and sees it as having the 'actual and potential ability to give birth and sustain human beings adequately if they pay her reciprocal duties of awe and care'. The environment in this sense is seen as continuously bearing the vital gifts of the earth. The incorporation of such themes in any environmental communication effort, particularly at the micro levels of African society, can provide a basis for the much-needed environmental consciousness that will ultimately prove beneficial to enabling an environment that is conducive for socio-economic development.

Conclusion
The principal position in this paper has been that there is a direct and undeniable link between the state of the environment, individuals' behaviour within this environment, and socio-economic development. This is because negative environmental behaviour is anathema to the creation of a milieu that encourages or enables socio-economic development. When people engage in undesirable environmental behaviour such as littering and bush burning, such behaviour can be seen as conceptually and practically damaging to the development agenda and therefore discouraging to overall socio-economic development.

I have also noted that people's awareness of this relationship is vital for their participation in activities aimed at boosting socio-economic development. As a result, I have argued that there is the need for African countries to incorporate environmental consciousness into socio-economic development plans and programmes. Specifically, I have suggested a model that seeks to integrate the two areas of endeavour so that the right conditions can be created for a general improvement in the lives and lifestyles of people in the various countries that make up the continent. The model's viability hinges on the fact that social exchange theory provides a feasible basis for making such a proposal. It is based on my belief that in addition to all the other factors discussed, an appeal to individual self-interest by way of the expected benefits from socio-economic development will encourage the expected positive behaviour that will then help engender an enabling environment for socio-economic development on the continent. In all this, communication is expected to, and rightly plays a central role. It is only when the right messages have been communicated to people, who are mostly ignorant of these issues/ linkages, that they can begin to understand, and perhaps contemplate behavioural change.

Although, as discussed earlier, I recognise that there are moderating

factors that can intervene either positively or negatively in the process/ model of socio-economic development I have suggested here, I believe that such an approach will yield useful results and help African countries to reap the expected benefits of socio-economic development that has so far proved elusive for most countries on the continent. In view of this I propose that long-term communication plans should be put in place aimed at ensuring that the general populace in African countries recognises the intricate relationship between the lives of human beings and their environment, and the necessity of adopting the positive attitude of environmental responsibility to enhance socio-economic development.

Notes
1. Tutu (1996: 107), in this regard, refers to development as implying 'the existence of opportunities that enable people to exploit their potentials'.

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Hegemony, Ideology and Political Journalism in Democratic Malawi's Broadcasting Media

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Abstract

For the first three decades following independence from Britain in 1964, the governance of Malawi was a political dictatorship under President Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda and his Malawi Congress Party (MCP). The country adopted a multiparty constitution in 1993 through a national referendum. Bakili Muluzi and his United Democratic Front (UDF) emerged winners of the 1994 general elections and formed a government. The UDF also won the 1999 and 2004 elections. In a multiparty democracy, the right to freedom of expression should ideally empower journalists to provide in-depth and balanced reporting on issues that affect the disadvantaged populace, the majority of which lives in abject poverty. The media's attempts at providing accurate and balanced information have, however, intensified tensions with the ruling politburo. Building on the case of four journalists who were dismissed from the country's public broadcaster, the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio, this paper draws from Gramscian concepts of ideology and hegemony to critique the practice of political journalism in Malawi's broadcasting media. It seeks to explore how oppressive political regimes stifle media freedom and how all this leads to the emergence of popular culture as a form of alternative media.

Key terms: Hegemony, political journalism, alternative media, political broadcasting.

Résumé

Au cours des trois premières décennies après que le pays se soit affranchi de la tutelle britannique, en 1964, le Malawi était soumis à une dictature politique, sous le règne du Président Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda et de son Parti malawite

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du congrès (MCP). Le Malawi a adopté une constitution multipartite en 1993, grâce à un référendum national. Bakili Muluzi et son Front démocratique uni (UDF) ont remporté les élections générales de 1994 et ont par la suite formé un gouvernement. L'UDF a également remporté les élections de 1999 et de 2004. Dans une démocratie multipartite, le droit à la liberté d'expression devrait, de façon idéale, permettre aux journalistes de produire des informations bien fiables et impartiales sur des sujets affectant les populations défavorisées, dont la majorité vit dans une pauvreté abjecte. Les efforts des médias, visant à fournir des informations exactes et objectives n'ont fait qu'intensifier les tensions avec le Politburo au pouvoir. Cette communication est basée sur le cas réel de quatre journalistes qui ont été renvoyés de la radiodiffusion publique nationale, la Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Radio, et s'inspire des concepts gramsciens de l'idéologie et de l'hégémonie, pour critiquer la pratique du journalisme politique au sein des médias radiotélévisés du Malawi. Cet article cherche à étudier la manière dont les régimes politiques oppressifs étouffent la liberté de la presse, ainsi que les conséquences d'une telle situation, notamment l'émergence d'une culture populaire, comme forme médiatique alternative.

Mots clés : hégémonie, journalisme politique, médias alternatifs, radiodiffusion politique.

Introduction
Four journalists, Patrick Mphaka, Rusk Mkwapatira, Geoffrey Msampha and the late Tom Chisuse of the public radio broadcaster, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC), were fired soon after Malawi's 1999 general elections. By January 2003, the Office of the Ombudsman was holding a public inquiry into the 'unfair, summary and politically motivated' dismissals of the four journalists, fired for 'allegedly sympathizing with the opposition' in the run-up to the 1999 general elections. Testifying at the inquiry, former Chair for the Malawi Electoral Commission's Media and Public Relations Committee, Flora Chirwa described the dismissals as a 'normal trend,' since 'these things always happen' (Chimbuto 2003: 3; Chirwa 2003: Interview). In 2004, the inquiry established that the 'termination of the services' of the four journalists 'was unfair and abuse of power' (The Ombudsman 2004:33).

This discussion builds on facts of the dismissal of these journalists and critically examines Chirwa's claim that the events represent a 'normal trend'. The study defines and critiques the practice of political journalism in Malawi's broadcasting media. Critical research on Malawi's political journalism within both the print and broadcasting media is patchy and without theory-based reference to cultural studies discourse on ideology

and hegemony (Manyozo 2003). Drawing on the Gramscian concept of ideology as expounded by Stuart Hall *et al.* (1977), the examination exposes the nature of what Louis Althusser (1971) terms ideological and repressive state apparatuses in inculcating 'common sense' into the practice of political journalism (Tomaselli *et al.* 1987:7). The discussion contends that when hegemony begins to lose legitimacy and consensus, it uses force or Althusserian repressive state apparatuses, in order to maintain leadership, and such repressive apparatuses involve suppressing media freedom, as is the case in Malawi, which forces the subaltern classes to employ popular culture as an alternative media.

Malawi's media between 1964 and 1993

During its three decades of dictatorship (from independence in 1964 to 1993), Malawi had MBC *Radio* as its only broadcasting outlet, and one newspaper, *The Daily Times* with *The Malawi News* as its weekend edition. There was no television station. The other newspaper in existence, *Odini* and the monthly magazine, *Moni* were published by the Catholic Church's Montfort Press and dwelt on development and religious activities. The Department of Information published *Boma Lathu* (Our Government) in indigenous *chiChewa,* through which the state kept rural people in touch with political developments, focusing on the achievements of President Hastings Kamuzu Banda and the ruling Malawi Congress Party (MCP). In dictatorial Malawi, there was therefore no alternative media. Since MCP officials censored print and radio news, Malawi subscribed to the Soviet and authoritarian press paradigms. The only alternative media trickled in through the short waves from *chiChewa* services on Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation and South Africa's Channel Africa Radios.

The advent of multiparty politics in 1993 resulted in media reforms and diversification. MBC still dominates the radio market with its two stations, Radio One and Radio Two FM, which rely on one newsroom and both of which, footprint Malawi's major population centres. News coverage clearly favours the ruling United Democratic Front (UDF) government (Jodal 2004; Mochaba *et al.* 2003 and Msampha, 2004). Free-to-air television broadcasting was introduced by the government in 1997 with MBC-like editorial control, probably because Television Malawi (TVM) is in reality, 'privately owned' by 'some individuals' (Senior MBC Broadcaster 2003: Interview). There are also several commercial and community radio broadcasters. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) began to provide FM services in 2001. In 1998, the Malawi

Parliament enacted the Communications Act, under which the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority (MACRA) was formed and empowered to provide broadcasting licenses. Malawi also became a signatory to the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Freedom of Expression, which, itself, is grounded in press paradigms of social responsibility and democratic participation.

Ideological and repressive state apparatus versus radio broadcasting

Acknowledging Vladimir Lenin (1962) as the originator of the concept of hegemony, the influential Italian communist thinker, Antonio Gramsci, conceives a hegemonic class as one, which has been able to articulate the interests of other social groups to its own means of ideological struggle (Mouffe 1979, Gramsci 1971, Hall *et al.* 1977). Whereas Lenin (1962) had conceptualized hegemony as the dictatorship of the proletariat, Gramsci's hegemony is to be found in the indissoluble union of political, intellectual and moral leadership (Mouffe 1979). Considering the ideological differences in the allied classes, visionary leadership helps the hegemonic class to negotiate the acceptance of its own ideologies. Thus, ideology becomes a 'cement which holds together' a social structure (Hall *et al.* 1977: 53; Gramsci 1971). In fact, Hall *et al.* (1977: 49) observe that Gramsci himself 'rarely uses the term ideology' in the *Prison Notebooks,* but instead uses terms such as philosophies, conceptions, systems of thought, or forms of consciousness to refer to what he terms as 'lived relation' or 'common sense.' Introducing concepts of political, intellectual and moral leadership by the 'best and most conscious comrades,' Gramsci no longer applies hegemony to the strategy of the proletariat, as Lenin had proposed, but uses it to describe the practices of the ruling classes, through which subordinate classes 'borrow corporate consciousness' in order to illuminate their understanding of the world (Gramsci 1974: 3; Hall *et al.* 1977: 53).

Attempting to expound on Gramsci's ideology, Keyan Tomaselli *et al* (1987: 7, 23) borrow from Louis Althusser's notion of material existence, defining ideology as 'an ongoing social process,' through which corporate 'common senses' are 'produced, conveyed and received' in everyday 'social situations.' Tomaselli *et al.* (1987) further note that ideology holds societies together mainly through 'social reproduction of capitalist relations and values' through both ideological and repressive state apparatuses. Institutions such as the church, the law, the police, the military and others help the hegemonic bloc establish consensus among the allied

and subordinated groups. Gramsci's concept of ideology therefore provides a springboard for scholars and researchers to 'move beyond idealist' notions of political power, helping them understand how media structures and texts are 'controlled and appropriated' (Tomaselli *et al* 1987: 8-11).

Origin of political journalism in multiparty Malawi: The church as the intellectual class

In 1992, Malawian Catholic Bishops wrote and published a Pastoral Letter criticizing President Kamuzu Banda's hegemony for human rights abuses, which prompted the government to attempt to arrest and assassinate them. Mijoga (1996: 55) looks at the Letter as a 'public declaration of the hidden transcript.' His critique of the dichotomous Church/government relationship is, however, essentialist as it looks at the two categories as different classes. By Church, the discussion refers to the three dominant religions in Malawi; Roman Catholic, CCAP and Islam. Mijoga (1996) also looks at this alliance and cooperation as having only been due to 'the totalitarian character of the government which made it impossible for the church to enter into any meaningful dialogue.' The Church, however, had alternative choices, as demonstrated by Jehovah's Witnesses in rejecting any alliance with the MCP government. It, therefore, became the ruling class's organic intellectuals as it had a 'definite class affiliation,' thus, the Church became MCP's 'permanent persuaders' (Gramsci 1971: 10).

Introducing and defining the concept of intellectuals as a 'category' of those with 'the task of organizing, disseminating and conserving skills and ideas associated with mental rather than manual labour,' Gramsci identifies two kinds of intellectuals: organic and traditional (Hall *et al.* 1977: 50; Gramsci 1971:10-15). Organic intellectuals represent particular ideological elements whilst traditional intellectuals are non-allied though they may not be objective. By cooperating with dictatorial MCP's oppressive leadership, the Malawian Church became, not only part of the ruling class, but *metamorphosed* herself into the ruling class, thus becoming 'organically bound' as the 'dominant group's deputies, exercising subaltern functions of social hegemony and governance' (Gramsci 1971: 12). Gramsci thus denies the independence of the Church as traditional intellectuals, who are supposed to 'lack affiliation' and he notes that in history, the Church has been a 'category of intellectuals organically bound to the aristocracy' (Gramsci 1971: 12; Hall *et al.*: 50). With increasing international pressures against the 'hegemony-in-crisis'

of the MCP, the Church elements attempted to reclaim its aspired *status quo* of traditional intellectuals by 'detaching themselves' from MCP, which 'marked and ratified' the crisis of the MCP state (Gramsci 1971: 270). The Church however immediately became organic intellectuals for the UDF, for which it campaigned vigorously in the 1994 and to an extent, the 1999 general elections.

The 1992 Pastoral Letter therefore, ratified the 'crisis' of the MCP hegemony, a crisis which occurs when a dominant class has lost consensus among the groups it is leading (Mouffe 1979; Gramsci 1971). This crisis led to the 1993 referendum and consequently, the 1994 general elections, which were won by Bakili Muluzi and his UDF. Having won the 1994 elections, the UDF 'identified, conquered and assimilated' traditional intellectuals into becoming its organic intellectuals, so as to 'give itself homogeneity and an awareness of its own function in the economic, social and political fields' (Gramsci 1971: 5, 10). This process involved appropriating Aleke Banda's, first vice-president of UDF, *The Daily Nation* and *The Weekend Nation* newspapers as official government newspapers considering Aleke's position as First Vice-President of UDF. Radical journalists such as Willie Zingani and Ken Lipenga were offered some government posts. When the opposition *Daily Times* and *Malawi News* continued reporting embarrassing stories, the government ordered all its ministries and statutory corporations to stop advertising in the two newspapers, which was a financial blow, considering that the government is Malawi's biggest advertiser.

Political journalism and 'normal trends'

Focusing on language, discourse and discussion, McNair (1995) conceives political journalism as verbal, written and symbolic 'commentary about' politicians, political actors and allocation of public economic, social and cultural resources. McNair's conceptualization has a centralized media which links the political organizations and the citizens. Political journalism is thus viewed as a process through which media 'transmits, reconstructs, transforms and mediates' messages of and about political organizations through 'commentaries, editorials and interview questions' (McNair 1995: 45). Similarly, Black (1982) defines political journalism as an empirical practice by journalists through which the media 'restructures' political reality. In political journalism therefore, journalists are preoccupied with reproducing political events as they happen and as they see them with the aim of helping citizens acquire a kind of 'second-hand experience,' thus a reconstructed reality (Black 1982: 6). This means

that journalists are no longer only 'senders of political messages,' but rather like film producers or photographers, they are constructors of reality in their own right; for, they are responsible for formulating specific meanings into information by preferring, judging, choosing and arranging it. To achieve this, journalists require space and freedom to interpret events so as to enable them properly communicate messages from political actors to 'desired audiences' (McNair 1995: 11).

In Malawi, UDF has monitored and policed the process and structures through which Malawian journalists construct political reality and has done this through the employment of many forms of 'normal trends,' especially in the wake of worsening poverty and a slumping economy (UNDP 2003). Yet, even though Section 20 of the Malawian Republican Constitution (1994), Section 51 of the Communications Act (1998a) and Section 63 of the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act (1994) provide for balanced and equitable reporting during election periods, broadcasting journalists have faced numerous problems in attempting to meet these constitutional requirements. This discussion critiques the major forms of 'normal trends' in political broadcast journalism. The realities of state oppression on political journalism in broadcasting media in democratic Malawi were also manifested in the refusal by most broadcast journalists to participate in interviews, 'through refusing to return calls, faxes or emails' and if some of them accepted, they preferred not to have their names disclosed (Mochaba *et al.* 2003: 2, 8, 10).

1. Unconstitutional employment policies

The firing of four MBC journalists after the 1999 general elections led the Office of the Ombudsman to investigate government interference in political reporting by the broadcast media. During the hearings, MBC argued it had a policy through which it could fire any employee without giving reasons, which the hearing established, was unconstitutional (The Ombudsman 2004). The development leading to the firing, as established by the enquiry, began soon after the 1994 general elections, when the UDF government 'dished out unreceipted' MK50, 000 (then equivalent to US$4400) to each of the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) Party Members of Parliament (MPs) in an attempt to court the latter party into a coalition government. Though Gramsci notes of hegemony as 'based on voluntary and spontaneous consent,' AFORD in a Malawi representative democracy still failed to consult its constituents about the proposed coalition (Hall *et al*. 1977: 51).

UDF's and AFORD's consensus was therefore based on personal

economic benefits, and not on negotiation as Gramsci propounds. To defend itself, the government argued that the money was for development projects within respective constituencies, but the question was, why did the opposition MCP MPs not get the money as well? The government indicated that MCP had refused the money (The Ombudsman 2004: 9). The current affairs team at MBC, led by Mphaka and Msampha sought the views of the leader of opposition, Gwanda Chakuamba, who noted that the money had been secretly given to UDF and AFORD MPs and that MCP was never approached, hence, observing that the 'MCP was segregated against' (The Ombudsman 2004: 9). Immediately after the airing of the story, the then Head of Current Affairs at the MBC, Albert Ndalama 'had his services terminated immediately,' whilst Msampha and Mphaka were 'transferred' to the Programmes Department as part of MBC's 'restructuring process,' which was only hastily arranged to deal with these journalists (The Ombudsman 2004: 9-10).

After the 1999 general elections, Msampha and Mphaka together with two others were 'summarily dismissed' for 'terrorizing their fellow employees, insubordination and bias towards the opposition' and were not given a chance to be heard (The Ombudsman 2004: 32-33). Both the allegations and dismissals were criticized by the public inquiry as contrary to principles of 'natural justice' and consequently ordered MBC to 'compensate, reinstate or consider them having reached mandatory retirement age' (The Ombudsman 2004: 33). Based on such cases, many journalists are forced to become unprofessional to avoid being sacked because even if they have to take their employers to court, the process is long, which also leaves the 'journalist economically stranded' (Msampha 2004: Interview).

Similar strategies have also been employed at the community religious broadcaster, *Radio Islam*. In 2003, America's professed global war on terror was taken to Malawi, where five alleged Islamic fundamentalists were working on Islamic development projects. President Muluzi, a Muslim himself, allowed the suspects to be whisked away from the country to be questioned without proper legal procedures. A few months later, the suspects were released from American custody, having being exonerated of any wrongdoing. The president invited the wives of the five suspects to discuss issues pertaining to their husbands. A community radio, *Radio Islam* broadcast a news item, reporting that the president 'had felt ashamed of what he had done and had apologized sincerely' (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster One 2004: Interview).

Immediately after the story was aired during a lunch hour news bulletin,

the *Radio Islam* Director, a Muslim Arab himself, 'stormed into the newsroom and he was very furious', telling his journalists that the 'authorities were not happy' with the way the journalists had reported on President Muluzi's discussion with the suspects' wives (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster One 2004: Interview). He expressed 'concern' that there was 'too much pressure' from 'these authorities,' pressure that resulted in suspensions for a senior reporter and head of news, and suspensions, which the Director told them, 'were not on record' (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster Two 2004: Interview). The then head of news, Amadu Mapira, was subjected to the humiliation and embarrassment of being made to stand up by the Director as his suspension was announced verbally during an editorial indaba (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster Two 2004: Interview). Such experiences 'frighten newcomer journalists,' making them 'obey everything they are requested' and probably 'making them function like robots' (Senior MBC Broadcaster 2003: Interview). By functioning like robots, journalists would, thus, have 'borrowed' the 'corporate consciousness' and thereby ensuring that ideology as a 'practice' would have 'succeeded in producing a natural attitude' (Tomaselli *et al* 1987: 24; Hall *et al*. 1977: 53; Gramsci 1971: 328)

2. Watchmen journalists: The MBC *Media Task Force*

During the 1999 general elections, Mphaka and Msampha became part of the official MBC Elections Task force. Section 57 of the Parliamentary and Presidential Elections Act mandates the Electoral Commission to ensure fair radio and television coverage of all registered political parties during election period, but does not specifically define the expression, election period or its length. In Gramsci's 'war of position,' organic intellectuals bound to different classes, engage in the process of 'articulation and disarticulation' in an attempt to win over non-allied classes and thus 'validate' particular ideologies (Mouffe 1979: 182-183; Hall *et al*. 1977: 53). MBC is a public broadcaster serviced with public funds. In Gramscian terms, it is traditional intellectual. The UDF however established an unofficial UDF Media Task Force within MBC to help the party execute its propaganda, although the party itself had come to power on the 'promise of media freedom' (The Ombudsman 2004; *Article 19* 2000). Membership of this particular force comprised senior broadcasters including Eunice Chipangula, Stanley Kachipeya, Moffat Kondowe, Maxwell Kasinja, Tailosi Bakili, George Ngaunje and Grecian Lemani, membership to and existence of which, was denied by both Chipangula and Kachipeya (The Ombudsman 2004; Article 19; Chipangula and

Kachipeya 2004: Personal Correspondence). Article 19 (2000) also observes that UDF provided finances, cars, cell phones and other strategic resources to help facilitate this Task Force's activities, which centred around a campaign of disinformation whilst keeping watch over journalists who tried to be professional (Article 19 2000; The Ombudsman 2004).

To keep watch over 'controversial journalists' such as Mphaka and Msampha during the 1999 general elections, the MBC 'increased the number of journalists' in the official Elections Task Force to which the two belonged. The reason for the increase was an 'anticipation that there was going to be too much work' though in reality, the Coordinator of the Task Force, Matthias Manyeka admitted, that the 'number increase' was because he was 'just carrying out orders' as 'authorities felt that the official Force was full of opposition sympathizers' (The Ombudsman 2004: 10). In Allthusserian terms, the UDF Media Task Force can be described to have been an ideological apparatus by the UDF government with which to validate its consciousness of what was and is newsworthy. Likewise, Chipiriro Matiya (2003: Interview) compares the UDF Media Task Force to his own experience as a *Television Malawi* producer, when 'some journalists' were 'pressurizing authorities' to have him fired for 'being an opposition plant' and 'anti-government.'

3. Considerations and 'Poison in a honey bottle'

Msampha observes the ineffective and outdated editorial policy at MBC, noting, 'nothing has really been reformed from the dictatorship days,' a view shared by the Article 19 (2000) Media Monitoring Project of the 1999 Malawi elections. He observes that though democracy entails freedom of expression and even when bosses at MBC encourage journalists to be free and professional, 'journalists have learnt to be careful,' self-censoring, because the 'authorities' are actually 'giving us poison in a bottle that has been labeled 'honey', and if you try to eat, you are in trouble, big trouble' (Msampha 2004: Interview). As if concurring with Msampha, Mphaka gives an example of a news item regarding a Mrs Chaponda, a staunch supporter of the opposition MCP who defected to the ruling UDF, which had been 'hastily included' in the lunch hour *chiChewa* news bulletin. Because the bulletin was already late by two minutes, the Chiponda defection story could not be read as it had been placed last. The Duty Editor, Stanley Kachipeya was very furious with Mphaka, noting he was going to 'report him to the authorities' for not being 'patriotic to UDF' and for 'sympathizing with the opposition MCP' (The Ombudsman 2004: 9-10).

Tomaselli *et al.* (1987:24) borrow and introduce the concept of 'considerations' as a practice through which journalists shape, choose, prefer and judge what is newsworthy especially in the absence or disregard of editorial policies. Similar 'considerations' at *Television Malawi* were also observed by former producer, Matiya (2003: Interview), who recalls that during editorial conferences, 'it was obvious that a story from the opposition would be nipped in the bud' and in some cases, he was 'queried by 'people' for passing a story that had heavy leaning towards the opposition'. Mphaka's failure to read Chiponda's defection story due to time considerations, Kachipeya's subsequent disappointment with Mphaka's time considerations and *Television Malawi*'s news considerations are just ideological terrains on which the ruling UDF is attempting to entrench its corporate consciousness. Matiya also notes that despite the daily morning briefings during editorial conferences, the public television had 'no editorial guidelines spelling out criteria for news' but still reporters and producers were able to make sure there was 'a news blackout of the opposition.' Thus, television journalists were employing Tomaselli *et al.*'s considerations in overlooking the opposition, as such, validating UDF's consciousness (Gramsci 191).

The management of *Radio Islam* has also attempted to validate corporate consciousness in the journalists' considerations, through its own forms of 'poison in a honey bottle'. During the Al Qaeda debate mentioned hitherto, the journalist who was accompanying the wives of the suspects as they went to meet the President, had been 'advised' by the Director to 'ask his questions properly,' despite the emphasis on 'professionalism and balanced coverage' by the Director himself. (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster One 2004: Interview). After the Islamic and political 'authorities' expressed displeasure with the report indicating that President Muluzi was ashamed and apologetic, the Director put up posters in the newsroom, decreeing, 'airing of controversial matters is not allowed in this newsroom,' and the journalists were later verbally ordered 'never to talk about the UDF government, the Muslim Association of Malawi and President Muluzi' (*Radio Islam* Broadcaster One 2004: Interview). Gramscian common sense therefore was employed using intimidation, and with time, journalistic considerations have ensured that *Radio Islam* journalists 'become very careful when handling information on the ruling party and the President' (Radio Islam Broadcaster One *2004*).

In spite of the Director's decree, some Radio Islam journalists continued airing controversial material through the 'Contemporary Issues' phone in and discussion programme, which was very critical of the Muslim

Association of Malawi for not having defended the interests of the 'Muslim brothers' when they were being whisked away by American intelligence officers. This prompted 'authorities' to suggest ways of 're-editing broadcast material' before being aired. Like in the case of the UDF Media Task Force at MBC, Radio Islam employed organic intellectuals sympathetic to UDF and the Muslim Association to monitor its own journalists. The Director ordered that after post-production of broadcast material ready for next-day's airing, 'experts would be coming in the evening to re-edit the material and arrange it accordingly,' which disappointed all broadcasters as 'people who were not part of our system' would be 'structuring and re-editing news' (Radio Islam Broadcaster Two 2004: Interview). However, 'we found ways to deal with that' (Radio Islam Broadcaster Two 2004: Interview). By requesting further 'expert' considerations to work on the finished broadcast material, Radio Islam's Director can be said to have been applying certain corporate professional decisions in expressing dissatisfaction with the considerations of his journalists.

4. Structuring of news

Translations are some of the ways through which ideological common sense covertly entrenches the capitalist social values. During the 1999 general elections, the then UDF representative, Sam Mpasu, who was also the Minister of Information, would give different versions of an answer in English and *chiChewa*. With regard to the arguments that 'smaller parties' were not being accorded equal and enough air time on the public radio as stipulated in Malawi's constitution, Article 19 (2000) notes that Mpasu observed in an English interview that 'UDF has gone all the way backward to give non-existent' parties a voice on the radio, 'which does not happen in Britain, Germany, America or anywhere else in the world.' In the *chiChewa* interview however, Mpasu changes his story, defiantly contending that 'some small parties whose existence was not known to many people' should not be heard or 'allowed to campaign on the radio' because they 'do not have supporters' and are 'failing to campaign in the villages.'

The differential broadcast translations by the minister were a public relations showcase, to overwhelm the common illiterate villager about UDF's generosity to these seemingly unimportant parties, whilst assuring the international community that the government was committed to fair and balanced coverage of all political parties. Such abuse of public broadcasting media for UDF is statistically recorded by the Norwegian

Centre for Human Rights (NORDEM), which observed in May 2004, that MBC allocated 97.7 per cent whilst TVM allocated 79.5 per cent of election coverage to the ruling UDF coalition (Jodal 2004: 10-11). Similarly, structuring of TVM election programming also involved journalists' professional considerations, which were openly biased against the opposition, as auto-ethnographically observed by independent election observers:

> On Saturday 22 May, about 36 hours after the voting in Malawi's third multiparty election had ended, Television Malawi televised 'Election Update 2004', [which] started with a live broadcast of the opposition coalition's press conference, [whose] spokesperson complained that the Electoral Commission [was delaying] announc[ing] the result. […] After five minutes, the transmission was cut off. Instead, the viewers got music videos! Ten minutes later, the programme resumed. The journalist opened by stating his surprise that the opposition questioned the counting procedures [and] said 'in order to balance the view by the so-called coalition, we have now invited the publicity spokesperson of the UDF to present the government's views of the alleged delays [by the] Malawi Electoral Commission. […] The publicity spokesperson spoke for about ten minutes [without] interruptions, stressing that the government had full confidence in the MEC and that he was surprised that the opposition displayed so little patience [and suggested] that the coalition was scared of losing. […] The journalist did not question the UDF spokesperson's statement or why it had taken longer to announce results. […] Then the journalist asked the UDF representative: 'Do you have anything to add, Sir?' (Rakner, Bakken, Svasand and Tostensen 2004: 3).

By employing professional considerations which seemingly favour the ruling UDF, some broadcast journalists have, in Gramscian sense, *metamorphosised* themselves into becoming deputies for the ruling party, thus organic intellectuals.

5. Concerned authorities

In response to a Capital FM radio's phone-in programme in 2003, during which many Malawians criticized the brutality of the Malawi Police Force, dismissing its reform programme as a 'sham', the Inspector General of Police 'expressed concern' with the 'insults' in the programme. Some 'concerned officers' requested the Station Manager, Aladin Osman to visit the Southern Region Police Headquarters for a 'friendly chat' over the contents of the programme, to which Osman refused, requesting them, 'in turn to contribute to the programme if they felt they had anything to say' (Osman 2003: Interview). Osman therefore refused to borrow and employ UDF's corporate consciousness in developing Capital FM's professional considerations of what is newsworthy (Hall, Lumley and

MacLennan 1977).

The question of anonymous 'authorities' looms large in discussions with journalists. Radio Islam suspensions of Mapira and Lameck Masina were executed because of 'pressure' from 'authorities', which even involved an 'angry email' ordering the Director to 'immediately do something' about 'particular broadcasts' (Radio Islam Broadcaster Two 2004: Interview). The same 'concerned authorities' were not 'happy with the Malawi Institute Journalism (MIJ) Radio for its coverage of issues that 'seemed to sympathise with the opposition' (Senior MBC Broadcaster 2003: Interview). Because of 'these authorities' MBC refused to air paid adverts by the opposition announcing a calendar of their rallies during the 2004 campaigns, despite the broadcaster's crippling debts which resulted to confiscation of some of its property by tax authorities (Manyozo 2003). The political nature of 'concerned authorities' was evident during the Ombudsman's inquiry, during which it was established that the then MBC's Acting Director General, the late Wilson Pamkuku, had once been a personal assistant to Mpasu. Pamkuku would later on request Mpasu to fire the four journalists, which on record, the Minister refused to have authorized (The Ombudsman 2004).

6. Policing political journalism

Sections 41 and 43 of the Communications Act (Malawi 1998a) empower the president or the police to 'seize a radio station' in the 'best interest of the public.' For community broadcasters, Section 51 of the Communications Act restricts them from airing political broadcasts during elections, and restricts them from airing programmes in 'support of democracy,' despite mounting evidence that democracy and politics are big development items because they determine the process that could improve a people's status quo (Malawi 1998b). Against the provisions in the Communications Act, MBC consistently denied the opposition candidates access during the 1999 and 2004 presidential and parliamentary election campaigns. President Muluzi banned all public debates and demonstrations against his party's intentions to manipulate the constitution and allowed him to stand for an unconstitutional third term, despite lack of support for the bill in Parliament.

Policing political journalism has also involved the use of force, brutality and physical harassment of broadcast journalists, the imprisonment of MIJ Radio journalist, Maganizo Mazeze and the dismissals of MBC journalists being examples. Soon after the third multiparty general elections, in 2004, *MIJ Radio* was 'unconstitutionally' closed down by

the police 'in public the interest' for featuring a live interview with an opposition spokesperson, who rejected the results of the elections and threatened demonstrations. Thus, despite democracy, the practice of political journalism continues to encounter Chirwa's 'normal trends.' In fact, the term 'normal trend' could have been former *The Daily Times* journalist, Joseph Chimbuto's interpretation regarding what Chirwa actually said during the Ombudsman's inquiry. Chirwa contends that the question posed to her was 'Were you surprised that Mphaka was dismissed after getting a recommendation letter?' to which she maintains she had replied 'No, I was not surprised, after all this happened to me'. In elaboration, she however notes 'when one gets employed, they should expect to retire, to resign or to be dismissed, because when you are employed you can be dismissed, so I was not surprised, because these things happen' (Chirwa 2003). Chimbuto's concept of 'normal trend' is therefore not very far from Chirwa's notion of 'these things happen,' for in both cases, employers overlook the ethical and the constitutional provisions on fair labour practices by firing employees without giving them reasons.

Malawi's popular music as alternative media

Gramsci (1971) observes that if an aspiring class or power bloc fails to provide a conducive environment for a democratic production of knowledge, allied ideological elements withdraw their support and later on begin to oppose the aspiring hegemony. He terms this failure to maintain an alliance a crisis in hegemony – 'a crisis of authority' (Gramsci 1971: 210; 275). At this stage, a ruling class, is 'no longer leading but only dominant' as people have become 'detached from their traditional ideologies' (Gramsci 1971: 276). In a democracy, the existence of both the Hegelian thesis and anti-thesis facilitates the process or war over position, thus, synthesis. In the absence of alternative media, or even in the presence of weak anti-thesis, there emerges the unofficial anti-thesis, which is a popular method of producing and circulating subaltern consciousness, which is usually in direct opposition to the dominant consciousness and lies outside state control (Gramsci 1971; Storey 2003).

Gramsci notes that when a state is oppressive, and loses its legitimacy to lead by consensus, thus 'prolonging' the crisis in hegemony, the 'representatives of the new order in gestation' or the subordinate classes, led by a new aspiring hegemony, inspired by 'rationalistic hatred' for the crumbling hegemony, 'propagate utopias and fanciful schemes' (Gramsci 1971: 242). Gramsci's fanciful schemes refer to popular culture, itself

constituting what John Storey terms an 'arena of hegemony,' a 'key site for the production and reproduction of hegemony' (2003: 48-49). Storey's hegemony is not Lenin's unilinear hegemony, but rather a Gramcsian hegemony, itself a process of negotiating consensus, thus hegemony is conceived as a 'compromise equilibrium' between contradictory forces (Storey 2003: 49). John Fiske (1989: 1-2) argues that popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that contradictorily serve the interests of the dominant. Taking a culturalist stance, Fiske (1989) observes that popular culture is made from within and below, noting that there is an element of popular culture that lies outside social control.

In Malawi, UDF's organized attempts at stifling political reporting have resulted in the emergence of political popular music, which heavily criticizes the government over issues such as inflation, human rights abuses, corruption and mismanagement of taxpayers' resources. Much of this music draws from indigenous folk tales or Bible stories, in which case, the subordinate classes create their own meanings. Thus, popular musicians including Mlaka Maliro or Billy Kaunda constitute opinion leaders or intellectuals organically bound to the subordinate ordinary Malawians. Relying on oral texts and the depth of Malawi's indigenous languages with parables, idioms, riddles and proverbs, popular music therefore provides an alternative public sphere for political journalism, whose media texts lie outside state control, for their meaning is derived from pleasure. In the popular song, *Chinyengo* (hypocrisy) for instance, Mlaka Maliro draws on the Bible story of Isaac and Jacob, noting that hypocrisy is like Jacob's sheepskin, which will be found out. This song narrates the story of a promiscuous uncle who has divorced his wife due to adultery. Without mentioning places and names, Maliro is able to offer a social commentary on former President Muluzi's widely publicized separation from his first wife, Anne. Though the official announcement deliberately omitted the reasons for the separation, an omission repeated by all media in Malawi, *Chinyengo* is able to tell us about the adultery of the woman, the uncle's wife. Similarly, Kaunda's song *Agalatiya mwataya chipangano* (Galatian, you have broken the promise) criticizes the UDF government for its failure to reduce poverty as per its 1994 promises. Evison Matafale's *Watsetsereka* (You have fallen) narrates a traditional tale of a greedy ant to symbolically warn of the impending fall of the greedy UDF government.

Separating 'serious' from 'popular music,' Theodor Adorno (1994: 206-209) argues that popular music is composed in such a way that the

process of 'translation is already planned and achieved within the composition itself,' a kind of 'multiple-choice questionnaire,' in which a listener can 'cross out' what he does not like and 'check' what he likes.' Even though some of the popular musicians have been verbally attacked by UDF politicians, their music has continued to enjoy air time on MBC, thus ensuring the continued existence of alternative media texts within the heavily monitored public media. Hall (1994: 463) introduces the concept of 'cultural struggle' to describe a process through which members of a particular cultural community distort, resist, negotiate or recuperate meaning. In the absence of an anti-thesis, many Malawians are able to 'rearrange' and 'rearticulate' dominant messages coming out of MBC by means of consuming popular music.

Afterthoughts

Despite the constitutional recognition of democracy as a form of governance, contemporary Malawi faces increasing political and socio-economic challenges, which require strong political will, accessible public spheres as well as a committed political journalists to facilitate the process of accountability. The majority of Malawians are rural, poor and illiterate, which places a massive responsibility on the broadcasting media to educate, inform and challenge people to actively perform their citizenship obligations. Unfortunately for Malawi, lack of political legitimacy through massive election irregularities especially in the 1999 and 2004 elections and the lack of community consultation by political parties have resulted in the lack of consensus for the dominant allied classes, thus UDF is 'no longer leading but only dominant' since the village-based alliance partners have become 'detached from' its 'traditional ideologies' (Gramsci 1971: 276). The reason for continued media suppression under democratic dispensation could be explained by the fact that Malawi never actually transformed from a dictatorship, thus only achieved a form of what Gramsci (1971: 58) terms 'transformismo' or a passive revolution, in which the old MCP found itself ruling as UDF. Media suppression can also be explained in the fact that major political parties conceptualize media freedom as increased structures and advanced technology not as a set of journalistic practices (Manyozo 2003: 15). Importantly, continuing media suppression in Malawi is a manifestation of a protracted crumbling of the UDF hegemony.

   The foregoing has therefore established that Gramscian concepts of hegemony and ideology make amenable the examination of issues of political power and how ruling parties maintain it, through both ideological

and repressive state apparatuses, resulting to many forms of 'normal trends' and 'poison in honey bottles.' From this position, the study has argued that popular music texts provide an alternative public sphere where musicians become traditional intellectuals providing an unofficial anti-thesis, the official forms having been suppressed by the dominant class. Drawing on specific examples from Malawi, the discussion has established how UDF as a crumbling hegemony employs many forms of 'normal trends' to ensure opposing views are excluded from the contents of the public broadcasters, MBC and TVM. Musicians such as Mlaka Maliro however, have employed folk media in providing an alternative political media, itself a site where meanings of alternative popular media texts are negotiated by the subaltern classes (Storey 2003).

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BOOK REVIEW

Akoto Ampaw (Compiler and Editor), 2004, *Legislation on Media, Speech and Expression in Ghana – A Source Book*. Media Foundation for West Africa**.** 1193 pages. ISBN: 9988–7901–8–X; Price: ¢400,000 (circa USD 34)

Reviewed by Kofi Kumado*

This book is an edited compilation of various pieces of legislation on the media and freedom of expression in Ghana. The book reflects the author's continuing interest in being useful and helpful to society and not to be content with his new status as one of the leading lights of the legal profession in Ghana.

For a growing and expanding media industry and a social institution at the core of the democratisation process, books of reference for the media, such as this, are needed. These are times when no one really knows what should be done with our media and how they should be managed. For example, recent events at the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation where the removal of the Board by the National Media Commission (NMC) raised concerns about the role of the Commission simply heighten the importance and urgency of such a quest. What is clear is that there are no easy solutions. Or, perhaps no solution is possible. It will remain a continuing quest.

The title of the book suggests that it is a 'source book.' To be specific, it is a publication for sourcing legislation relating to the media, speech and expression in Ghana. It is not a book on the law relating to these matters. It does not, for example, address judicial decisions. The contents are confined/limited to enacted (primary and subsidiary) law. In fact, they are thin on expression. The concentration is on legislation on the print cum electronic media and the wire services.

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Its title might mislead some people into thinking that it is a book for journalists and media practitioners only.

This will not be correct rather, it is a book for the ordinary person, with Ghanaians as the contextual audience. The individual who is contemplating the value and place of expression in society is a prime target. But a journalist, as a front-liner in the media business, will find this book a more than convenient companion. One should hasten to add, though, that while a journalist may find it useful, it may not be helpful to him/her; unless he or she has had some basic training in deciphering legal language. The value to the media practitioner, though, is so great that one wonders whether the NMC would not consider directing the governing bodies of the state-owned media establishments to procure a copy for each journalist working in those establishments.

The book lists 199 enactments; and the reader learns that 67 of these are still in operation. The prefatory pages have the table of contents, a rich foreword by the late Justice D. K. Afreh, Justice of the Supreme Court, a preface, and a very useful list of abbreviations.
The 1194 pages are organised into two parts. Part one is the introduction and is written by the author. It covers some 79 pages including five pages of a list of references. Upon reflection, the introduction is organised in a manner that makes it possible to consider the book as actually two books.

The introduction is not a commentary on the source materials. It is partly an advocacy for reform of the existing law, especially its alignment with the 1992 Constitution. It is also a critique of the existing law as it has evolved. Further, it is a lesson in the history of the media and governance in Ghana. In particular, the author demonstrates vividly how much continuity in outlook towards the media Ghana has had from various governments since the colonial times.

The author uses the Introduction to unburden some of his own views on the reader. It reads in part like a piece which got another lawyer, the editor, and publishers of the *Legon Observer* into trouble some years ago for contempt by prejudicing a fair trial. Times have changed such that this reviewer cannot contemplate the Ghanaian Attorney-General commencing contempt proceedings against the author for those views. These days he can sleep in relative safety. It seems, though, that the author could have been a little more sympathetic with the judges than he has been with respect to those judicial decisions he seems to disagree with. After all, it is the law one is dealing with. And one has to admit, that, in law, two honest minds can genuinely disagree, without necessarily labeling such a view as 'progressive' and 'conservative.'

Contained in the introduction is a fair amount of comparative material. The laws of the US, Canada, Australia, Nigeria, to mention a few, are discussed in relation to the practice in Ghana. However, it is unclear what the author wishes his reader to make out of the comparisons. For, as he himself states, the constitutional platform is different in each case. In this connection, one might add that the constant reference by the author to 'liberal democracy' may be seen as somewhat undermining the universalist message that he obviously advances with the comparative materials. After all, the book has a lot of relevance to the current robust democratisation process inside the African continent. Incorporated in that process is an expanding media space, the articulation and actualization of which, stand to benefit from the Ghanaian experience documented in the book.

The introduction seems to have been written a long time ago, in separate parts and then pieced together. It contains some inaccurate statements. For example, we learn on page 21 that the coup which brought the National Redemption Council into power occurred in February 1972. That coup actually took place on January 13, 1972. One remembers this because the 13th January man used to be "venerated". How times have changed!

The preceding comments, notwithstanding, the introduction is one of the reasons why readers should be grateful to the author and the publishers for this invaluable book. The introduction adds a value, which the source materials alone would not have provided. It establishes beyond any reasonable doubt that the author is an expert on speech law and practice, that he has been a keen follower of the governance process in Ghana and that his is indeed a powerful voice for human rights in Ghana.

Part two of the book records the actual source material and it includes legislation which is no longer in force. The decision to include this type of legislation will be welcomed by researchers, present and future. It would also be useful for those who seek to construct the historical progress of freedom of expression legislation in the country.

Part two actually brings together under one roof the relevant pieces of legislation. It thus enhances access to these primary materials. This accessibility would, in all probability, enhance the determination of the reform agenda as well as advocacy for reform. The accessibility produces some startling insights. For example, on the lighter side, the reviewer has noticed that the title of the legislation repealing criminal libel (Act 602) is almost as long as its substantive part!.

In the best traditions of Oliver Twist, one would have wished that some indicator is used in the main text to separate the legislation which

is still in force from those that are not. Of course, this takes nothing away from the listing which is good.

This is a reference book. It is voluminous. Will this affect its usefulness? Probably not. Is a CD-ROM version needed? Definitely. And a 'pocket' edition? Absolutely.

The fact that the book does not contain juridical decisions, a learned commentary, or other sources of law may have been an issue of volume. Perhaps, the publishers would consider commissioning companion texts to complete this phenomenal work.

The details of the voluminous book are avoided here for want of space. The reviewer would not want to contest the huge size of the book.

Nothing written so far, is intended to detract from the invaluable service the author and the publishers have rendered to consolidating democracy in Ghana by the publication of this book. As the late Justice Afreh wrote in his foreword to the book, this book provides the 'raw material.' All who want to dig into, study, and understand the history and the evolution of law-making relating to the media and speech issues in Ghana will find this book a one-stop shop.

Protagonists and antagonists of freedom of expression both ought to be indebted to the author and the publisher. The book is commended to all Ghanaians, and indeed other Africans as well as others interested in the media in Ghana, as a 'must-have' in all homes and offices. The cost per copy might this, perhaps, less possible. However, any effort at procuring it would be worthwhile.

Indeed, the author of the book, Mr. Akoto Ampaw and the publishers, the Media Foundation for West Africa should be congratulated for a solid book.