The Other Information Revolution: Media and Empowerment in Developing Countries[1]

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Abstract

Too often, debate on the information society narrows quickly to information and communication technologies (ICTs), the potential of the Internet and worries about the digital divide. But another information revolution has been under way, especially in the South, less debated but equally dynamic, more pervasive and potentially even more far reaching. It concerns the "other" ICTs of radio, television and the press that determine, far more than the Internet, the type of information people get and the raw material they bring to bear in constructing and reconstructing our world. This chapter makes three claims.

First, a thoroughgoing liberalization and commercialization of media over the last decade in many parts of the world has led to a much more democratic, dynamic, crowded and complex media landscape. This is opening up new spaces for public debate and civic engagement, particularly in the field of radio; and to a more commercial, advertising-driven media where information and power divides within developing countries between rich and poor, urban and rural are growing.

Second, growing concentration of media ownership—at the global, regional and national levels—is squeezing out independent media players and threatening to replace government-controlled concentration of media power with a commercial and political one.

Third, developing countries are increasingly, not decreasingly, reliant on powerful Northern news providers, such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Reuters and Cable News Network (CNN), for their international news and information, particularly on stories of globalization, trade and international politics; and in newly democratic countries in the South, and particularly within civil society, there is a renewed and growing frustration at the Southern media's dependence on what are perceived to be partial, biased or at least

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fundamentally Northern-centric news organizations for international coverage and the setting of news agendas.

These trends play out differently within and between different regions, but their mark is everywhere. Furthermore, they are taking place largely in the absence of informed and widespread debate, and in a regulatory environment that in many cases can be described as rudimentary.

At risk here is the media's critical public interest role, and the danger of compromise by private interests. Suspicion, often understandable, of strong government action in the area of media places a heavier burden on civil society, including the emerging transnational civil society, to put pressure both on media and on government with the goal of supporting the public interest, and indeed with the goal of taking part itself in non-commercial media forms.

Introduction

The emergence, health and diversity of civil society depend on access to information on key issues that affect people's lives, and the capacity of people and organizations to have their voices heard in the public and political arena. No matter how one defines the emerging information society, this must surely be a central aspect of it.

The role of the information technology revolution and its implications for global civil society have been well documented in this respect (Castells 1998; Naughton 2001). The potential of the Internet, and mobile telephony in particular, to provide unprecedented access to information and knowledge, and their record in providing new ways for geographically disparate people to form communities of common interest, to communicate, to organize and to make their voices heard, is widely acknowledged. This information revolution—complex, unevenly distributed, creating new divides while narrowing others, but undoubtedly transformative—has overshadowed a broader, more pervasive information revolution that is less understood and certainly less documented.

For much of humanity, particularly the almost 3 billion people earning less than two dollars a day, access to information through information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet, remains a distant (though not impossible) prospect. For most people in most developing countries, it is the rapidly changing media that provide the information, perspective and analysis that enable them to make sense of their world and to engage as citizens in their society; provide an increasingly important means of making their voices heard; increasingly facilitate horizontal and interpersonal communication and debate; and provide mechanisms for the formulation of identity and the creation of community spaces. Conversely, it is the media that are often

most instrumental in creating new forms of social and political division in society, depoliticizing public debate, and fostering tension and conflict between countries and communities.

Over the last decade, and the last five years in particular, the media in most developing countries have undergone a revolution in their structure, dynamism, interactivity, reach and accessibility. This has had a profound impact on and for civil society in these countries, and very mixed implications for the inclusiveness and character of public debate, particularly in relation to the exposure of public and political debate to the voices, concerns and perspectives of the poor and marginalized in these societies. Independence, plurality and accessibility of the media constitute fundamental constituents of an environment that facilitates social change. The role of the media in fostering democratic inclusion, underpinning social and political change, economic development and empowering marginalized communities is well documented.[2]

The vibrancy, intensity and effectiveness of civil society, particularly in developing countries, are intimately related to the freedom and pluralism of the media. Civil society depends heavily on people having access to information and having channels to voice issues of concern in the public arena. If civil society organizations are to effect positive change, they need to articulate their arguments in the public arena and subject their arguments to public debate. While there are plenty of examples of civil society organizations exerting influence in closed and oppressive regimes where the media are tightly controlled, free and genuinely plural media clearly provide the opportunity and foundation for the kind of inclusive public debate where civil society perspectives can be aired, heard and tested. Freedom and pluralism of the media are both a product and an engine for an inclusive, genuinely civil society.

This chapter examines some of the changes in the media over the last decade, particularly in developing countries, and provides a broad examination of some of the implications for public debate, free expression and civil society, at both the national and international levels. It argues that, in terms of how most people on the planet access information and knowledge on issues that affect their lives, and how most people articulate and make their feelings heard in national and international public debates, the changes in structure, content, ownership and access within the "traditional" media in the last five years have been equally, if not more, profound than those occurring in the new technologies. While changes in the global media and the increased concentration of the media internationally have been the subject of substantial comment,[3] changes

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[2]   Sen 1999; Besley and Burgess 2000; Hamelink 1994; Lush 1997; Westoff and Bankole 1999; Dreze and Sen 1989.

[3]   For example, McChesney and Herman (1997); and Gerbner et al. (1996). Also see the Mediachannel Web site, www.mediachannel.org.

in the media within developing countries have received substantially less attention. The chapter argues that the implications of these changes for civil society are extremely contradictory.

Out with the Old: The Former Status Quo

Little more than a decade ago, most people on the planet accessed information from beyond their immediate communities, mainly via state-owned and state-controlled monopoly media. Throughout the Soviet Union and most of its sphere, government control of media was total. In China, the same situation applied. Throughout much of Africa and much of the rest of Asia, post-independence governments invested heavily in their radio broadcasting and press infrastructures as key tools of nation building. In these countries, governments were keen to assert strong control and monopoly ownership of the media, partly to guard against fragmentation of the media along ethnic, tribal or political lines, and partly to maximize political control over their peoples. In many countries, media systems were inherited from the former colonial powers, and in several cases, media infrastructure was non-existent, either because it had not been established or because radio stations, for example, had suffered wholesale demolition by the outgoing colonial governments.

In many cases, aspirant presidents sought to take power by making their first coup objective the commandeering of their nation's broadcasting station, and governments protective of their power have since kept jealous control of "their" media systems. The degree of control exerted over the media was generally closely linked to the autocracy of the government in power but, even in democracies such as India, governments insisted on monopoly control of the broadcast media. The print media, generally with a much smaller reach and limited principally to urban populations, were less controlled. In Latin America, tight control of the media was less often exercised through direct government ownership and more often by privately owned media whose owners' interests were closely allied to those in power or, at a minimum, served the interests of a small and wealthy elite.

Much of this control took place in the context of the Cold War when superpowers and their client states exercised definitive influence on who was in government and how long they remained in power. Much of the information available to people through the media was similarly defined by that context. This chapter is not designed to provide a detailed analysis of the history of the media over the last 50 years, and there are many examples of developing countries that have a long tradition of free and open media, as well as cases of industrialized countries seeking to keep a tight a rein on freedom of the media. But its starting point is that, for much of the post-Second World War period, the vast majority of

people on the planet had access only to information from the media to which their governments allowed them access. Although the complexity and penetration of social, community, and other informal and non-media information networks should not be underestimated, state control and influence over the media in most countries defined political and social discourse, and fundamentally constrained the emergence of non-governmental and civil society actors.

In many countries, state control of the media remains extremely powerful. While China, for example, is witnessing increasing diversity and energy within its media, they continue to operate under a tight regimen controlled by government (Sun 2001).

And, as this chapter argues, where state control of the media has declined, commercial and corporate control has taken its place. However, for most developing countries the end of the Cold War prompted an information revolution every bit as important as the digital information revolution.

Freedom, Choice . . . and Money

Since the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War, in tandem with other processes, there has been a rapid, widespread liberalization of media in general and of broadcast media in particular.

Pressures on governments to liberalize the media take a number of forms. The fall of many one-party systems of government in the 1980s across Africa, parts of Asia, in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and elsewhere led to the coming to power of many governments committed to ending state media control. They embarked on rapid liberalization, some of them from a genuine belief in the importance of free and plural media in ensuring democratic, inclusive societies, often combined with the belief in the importance of a free flow of information as a prerequisite for the effective functioning of a free market economy.

Most governments have also understood that maintaining a monopoly over their citizens' access to information in the wake of satellite, Internet and mobile telephony is no longer possible. An increasingly well-informed, powerful and pervasive civil society has reinforced that reality. This has been combined with huge international information flows that underpin the global economy and the importance for most governments of being part of that economy. For poorer countries, these factors are reinforced by pressure from donors and other international actors, and countries that refuse to liberalize media and guarantee media freedoms find donor funding and loans withdrawn.

The net result has been that in areas formerly dominated by state-controlled media systems, particularly in much of Africa and Asia, full state control over the media remains in only a few countries.

Liberalization, particularly of broadcast media, has often been partial, haphazard and evolutionary rather than revolutionary, but it has nevertheless been transformative. In other regions, such as in large parts of Latin America, which has a long tradition of community media and where government control of the media has tended to be more complex, the transformation has tended to be less dramatic.

The most immediate consequence of these changes has been far greater freedom of information and expression. Liberalization and diversification, particularly in Africa and Asia, have transformed both print and broadcast media from a largely government-owned, monopolistic and uncreative environment to a more dynamic, popular, democratic, creative, commercial and complex one.

Print media

The print media have, despite their sometimes limited readership, played a critical role in providing internal scrutiny of governments, and a free press has become increasingly regarded as both a precondition for and major indicator of democracy, effective and sustainable development, and good governance (Roth 2001). Media freedom remains under constant pressure and attack, but the general trend is of an increasing number of print titles in many countries, and while numbers rise and fall rapidly, particularly during election periods, many have been able to sustain themselves financially and have retained a genuine political independence from government.

The international image of the print media in developing countries has tended to be shaped by fiercely independent, courageous journalists exposing corruption and wrongdoing, and battling to retain their professional integrity in the face of an often brutal state. There are many astonishing and inspirational examples of this, ranging from the bombed *Daily News* in Zimbabwe continuing to publish independently of the government despite sustained and violent intimidation, to journalists such as P. Sainath (author of *Everyone Loves a Good Drought*) who spends several months of each year travelling in and reporting from India's rural villages for the *Times of India* (Sainath 1996). Throughout much of Africa, independent newspapers have played central roles in guaranteeing and nourishing new democratic systems.

These courageous examples and individuals are, however, just one side of a coin, the flip side of which is a print media sector that sees itself as increasingly serving a metropolitan business and political elite augmented by a lifestyle agenda catering for a burgeoning middle class. Journalists who want to invest time in investigative stories, stories concerning the poor, or serious and more objective analysis underlying conflict find themselves in a minority and have to struggle for the attention and respect of their editors and newspaper proprietors.

Increasingly, the media are interested only in those who have something to sell or seek something to buy. The evolution of the media is characterized by a generalized lack of interest in the fate of those who can neither buy nor sell the products the media are advertising, even though these constitute the large majority of the populations of their countries.

Proprietors are in turn becoming more and more remote and impersonal as print media, even in the poorest countries, become more concentrated in the hands of either international (global and regional) media conglomerates or narrow party political interests. India, for example, has seen a major shift in the attitude of press proprietors. Once greatly respected for their commitment to journalistic integrity, democratic principles and professional ethics, newspapers are, according to a recent report by the UK Department for International Development, "increasingly treated as commercial brands, their independence made suspect by collaborative ties with the state-owned media" (Roth 2001:13).

Print media in most developing countries are also becoming more parochial in their views. Twenty-five years ago, media in developing countries were engaged in a fierce debate and attempt to create a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), where they could free themselves from dependence on Northern news sources and create their own common news-gathering and exchange systems. They would source their news increasingly from other developing countries through information exchange, news agencies and other mechanisms designed to improve South-South communication.

While the credibility of the NWICO perished many years ago, largely because its ideals were undermined by government attempts to use the new initiative to control rather than facilitate new information flows, the extent to which these ideals have been abandoned is striking.

In an increasingly globalized world, editors find it increasingly difficult to interest their readers in stories that are not explicitly locally, nationally or regionally relevant, or are not following a global news agenda (generally set in the North). Reporting of stories from Africa in the Asian print media, for example, is rare, despite the many shared issues of trade, debt and other globally relevant issues. Meanwhile the major international agencies, such as Reuters, are increasingly focusing their reporting on the lucrative business and economic reporting markets, while their news reporting (like those of other major international agencies such as Associated Press and Agence France Presse) continues to follow a heavily Northern-focused agenda. Developing country news services, meanwhile, such as the Inter Press Service and Gemini News Service, are struggling partly because of falls in donor funding that helped subsidize them, and particularly because major developing country media are increasingly being bought up by

international conglomerates, many of whom have their own—again, Northern-focused—features services.

Many optimists in the 1980s foresaw a flowering of a new age of media pluralism and public debate as new media began to flourish in the new political dispensation of the end of the Cold War. Media freedom has increased, but while a political environment exists that enables more open public debate in the media, the liberalized commercial media are often unwilling to facilitate or contribute to such debate. As the World Bank points out, in Hungary before 1989, the relatively relaxed regime allowed many dissident writers to have their work published in ways that could stimulate public debate, but these same writers are now finding it increasingly difficult to get their work published in a profit-oriented free market (World Bank 2001). That situation pertains in many other former one-party states.

There are further trends toward sensationalism and media-fostered divides along ethnic or religious lines. Senegal, for example, has recently witnessed the emergence of a generation of highly populist and salacious print titles clearly modelled on the British tabloid papers (Diop 2001). The titles of these newspapers leave little doubt of their content: *Le Populaire, Le Tract* and *Le Scoop* deal with sex, crime, the freakish and gossip. In Nigeria, a country with a very rich tradition of public interest journalism and where journalists are often held in high public esteem for their role in restoring democracy to the country, increasing concern is being expressed at the emergence of "ethnic journalism" with media reporting and journalism increasingly fragmenting along Christian and Muslim faultlines.

The salaries and status of journalists in society have often increased substantially following liberalization, but in some of the poorest countries journalism continues to be a desperately difficult profession, both politically and economically. In Guinea Bissau, for example, journalists operate not only in a hostile political environment but also with poor equipment and even poorer salaries. The editor-in-chief of one (government) paper, *No Pintcha*, earns approximately 240 French francs per month in a country where a five-kilogram bag of rice costs between 1,250 and 1,400 FF (Diallo 2001).

Despite this, and although most media continue to serve a metropolitan elite, print media are the most important credible way of informing and stimulating public debate on key development issues, particularly the complex, contested and often technical issues of globalization. However, an ugly combination of increased concentration of ownership, a growing focus on business and lifestyle agendas, and editors' lack of interest in supporting investigative or specialist journalism on social or development issues is fatally undermining the extent to which the public in many developing countries have access to

information about, and the means to sensibly interpret, issues of globalization or those facing the poor in their countries. Even for those editors who want to cover these issues in more detail, there is a growing shortage of credible, independent, developing-country-focused news and analysis of global issues.

The print media more than any other outlet have the capacity to provide explanation, reporting, analysis and opinion on complex issues that affect their readers' lives. Print provides a medium that can deal with complexity unlike any other. But, although literacy rates have increased substantially over the last three decades even in some of the poorest countries, access to newspapers continues to be constrained by relatively low literacy rates. Even in India, which has one of the richest newspaper publishing industries in the world, national literacy levels are still as low as 51 per cent.

The print media in most developing countries are more free and more diverse than a decade ago, and have played a central role in the political evolution of many countries. But there are major questions as to whether, given their increasing obsession with commercial advantage, they are becoming more plural or are able to inform public and political debate to the extent that democratic societies require.

The rebirth of radio and a new oral tradition?

Changes in the print media, which have a long tradition of providing independent journalism including in several one-party states, are less pronounced than those in the broadcast sector. It is the broadcast media, particularly radio, that have undergone the greatest transformation in many countries, with competition ushering in a new environment of choice and creativity in programming, with many new private and (to a much lesser extent) community-owned radio and television stations rapidly establishing audience dominance over old state-run broadcasting systems. In the radio sector, liberalization has led to three main trends. The first of these is the flourishing of a new generation of commercial, generally independent FM radio stations. From Uganda to Zambia, Sri Lanka to Nepal, and in the large majority of countries formerly controlled by one-party states, a plethora of new mostly privately run and heavily commercially oriented stations has emerged. These stations, which emerged mainly in the 1990s, were dependent entirely on advertising for their funding and have often been criticized by civil society organizations for their general avoidance of public debate and political discussion. Many commercial FM stations carry little or no news, or relay brief news from an international news provider such as the BBC (thus providing little or no local analysis or news). Programming, at least in the early stages of liberalization, typically consists of music programming often originating in the North. Some

early FM stations in Africa, such as Capital Radio in Uganda, won praise from civil society organizations for their range of programmes and particularly, in the case of Capital Radio, for the development of innovative health and sex education programming, such as Capital Doctor, which was a global pioneer in addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS, and stimulating public discussion and dialogue on the issue.

However, the apolitical, non-news and music-based content of many radio stations led civil society organizations to complain increasingly that liberalization was leading to commercialization and privatization of the airwaves, with content being defined entirely by a consumer-oriented, advertising-dependent, urban-focused and generally youth lifestyle agenda. There was little or no investment in news or analysis of global or national political developments, and very little exposure or reference to the rural, marginalized majorities in these countries. While the FM stations were successful in rapidly gaining an often eager audience through more dynamic, engaging and popular programming, they had a very poor early record in addressing issues of public concern.

This trend toward an urban, consumer-oriented agenda was further reinforced by the second key trend in this sector, with state broadcasting systems plunging into crisis. The loss of monopoly effectively involved a loss of incentive by governments to invest in state broadcasting systems. These have mostly tended to try to reinvent themselves as commercial broadcasters, supplementing dwindling government subsidy with advertising income. In doing so they have followed the same content agenda as the commercial sector. They have tended to cut back on both content and infrastructure, with the most common and critical consequence being the reduction of transmitting capacity to rural areas, a shift to mainstream language programming (at the expense of minority languages), a decrease in programming aimed, for example, at education, health, environmental or agricultural support, and, with some exceptions, an unwillingness to invest in programming that provides a voice for rural communities in national debate. There are very few examples of former state broadcasting monopolies successfully transforming themselves into genuinely public service broadcasters.

A third, more positive, trend is the increasing investment in and flourishing of community radio. Originally strongest in Latin America, community radio is growing very rapidly in much of Africa and some parts of Asia. West Africa has 450 radio stations, the vast majority of which have been formed in the last decade, and South Africa has more than 100. Community radio is by most definitions taken to mean radio that is substantially owned and/or formally controlled by a community and is not run for private profit. The flourishing of community radio, although facilitated by and generally dependent on government liberalization of the airwaves, is also being driven by much lower start-

up costs, as the price of transmitters and other radio equipment falls. All the equipment required to establish a community radio station can be acquired for less than $20,000 (and a very basic set-up could be established for a tenth of that amount). Although facing problems of sustainability, with several examples of donor-funded community radio stations being initiated and then collapsing after initial investment, organizations such as the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC) are facilitating growth in this area. Community stations, such as Radio Sagarmatha in Nepal, have become increasingly professional, national and commercial entities, blending their original commitment to community issues and public debate with a commercial business plan. In some cases, original community radio organizations have abandoned their roots and transformed themselves entirely into commercial, advertising-driven organizations.

These trends, which were set in motion in the 1990s, reflect a complex picture of privatization and commercialization of the airwaves with a small window also being opened to the community sector. More recently, however, a new, largely unpredicted trend has emerged, offering major new opportunities for public debate: the rise of the talk show. Talk-based radio, involving free-ranging studio discussions, phone-ins, political interviews, interviews with celebrities and music, are becoming some of the most popular programming for FM broadcasters. Although few FM radio stations have the resources to invest in significant independent news-gathering operations, talk shows are opening up new spaces for political and public debate, and through debate to public engagement. They are, according to Muthoni Wanyeki, director general of the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET) in Africa, leading to "reinvention of the African oral tradition" (Wanyeki 2000). New radio stations specifically devoted to talk-based radio, such as Monitor FM in Kampala, are emerging. Although still heavily urban-based and urban-oriented, and with very limited access to and reporting from non-urban areas, these are creating new channels and opportunities for public debate in general and for civil society organizations in particular to have their voices heard in the public arena. The complexity and potential of radio as a reborn medium in many developing countries is further augmented by other technological developments, particularly the potential of the Internet to enable resource-poor radio stations to access and exchange content, and the telephone which, through phone-ins, is making radio a much more horizontal and interactive medium. Audio files are easily digitized and, although there are major constraints caused by poor levels of connectivity and capacity to take advantage of these technologies, there are several projects that are seeking to use the technology to

improve coverage of development issues by FM and community radio stations.

Despite this, the gaps between rich and poor, rural and urban remain. While the community radio movement is providing empowering new forms of information and communication, the movement is patchy and many governments (in Zimbabwe, for example) are refusing to grant licences to community media. More broadly, governments in much of the developing world appear content to allow a burgeoning of the FM radio sector, provided that the limited geographical reach of FM radio transmitters makes them a principally urban phenomenon. Walk more than a few miles outside of the urban centres in most countries, and this radio revolution might never have existed. While liberalization in the radio sector is a dominant trend globally, it is far from a universal one.

Governments generally are much less willing to grant licences to short- or medium-wave radio stations, which have the capacity to reach rural areas and are proving fiercely—and effectively—protective of their broadcasting monopoly in rural areas where, for many, their political power base rests. The decline in investment in state-run broadcasting systems, including the closing or breaking down of transmitters, the cutting of minority language services and lack of investment in appropriate content, means that rural areas are becoming increasingly, rather than decreasingly, marginalized from public and political debate. The urban-rural divide is intensifying in media, and in doing so reflects a similar divide in civil society, with most civil society organizations also being very heavily an urban phenomenon. Together with other more conventionally understood characteristics of the "digital divide", such as the lack of access to telephony and Internet by rural populations and the poor, this marginalization is becoming increasingly stark.

Religious organizations have also responded to broadcast liberalization with alacrity. Mostly US-based or US-funded fundamentalist religious organizations broadcast to large parts of the developing world. Religious organizations have also been quick to take advantage of new broadcast licences, sometimes with the help of strongly religious governments or government leaders. In Zambia, the first independent radio station was a Christian one; and, of six supposedly independent community radio stations recently granted radio licences, four are owned and controlled by the Catholic Church.

Liberalization is also leading to a strengthening and increasing dependence on international news networks, particularly the BBC. The BBC has always been a valued and respected news source in much of the developing world, and its value has generally risen in inverse relationship with the credibility of local news sources. The less plural, the more controlled the national media, the more people turn to sources such as the BBC for their news and information. It is perhaps curious

that, at a time of increased freedom, the BBC is on the whole thriving, reporting steadily increasing audiences for its radio output on the BBC World Service and through its strategy of becoming, in effect, a national broadcaster by securing national FM licences for its broadcasts. The BBC's growing audiences at the national level no longer reflect principally a lack of freedom in most of the countries it works in, but the inability or unwillingness of local broadcasters to access and provide news and information to their audiences in a detailed way. Although the picture is complex, and in some countries the BBC is suffering significant audience losses while in others achieving major gains, countries where the BBC's audience share tends to be low, such as in Uganda, tend to be those where domestic news sources and the domestic broadcast environment do provide sufficient, locally relevant news and information. The key to addressing the challenges of providing public interest radio in a liberalized and commercialized environment lies in creating intelligent, flexible and creative regulatory environments that encourage diversity and genuine pluralism. There are, however, very few examples where such regulation has been successfully developed and applied.

Television: Consumerism, conflict and an end to boredom

The transformation in media content following liberalization is seen nowhere more graphically than in television. Although Malawi opened its first television station only in 2000, and television signals are available to just 70 per cent of Kenyans, global access to television has grown massively in the last decade. It remains, however, a minority medium, particularly when compared with radio, and, for rural areas in Africa and Asia (but to a lesser extent in much of Latin America), television penetration remains very limited. In terms of where its content is principally targeted and for whom it is produced, rural populations in general could be on another planet.

An increasingly competitive, commercial and ratings-hungry television industry is clearly not restricted to the developing world, but the rate and scale of change in the television industry and consequent implications for public debate and social change are particularly intense in much of the South. As with radio, a little over a decade ago most governments monopolized television. State ownership and control of the media was (and in several countries still is) a fundamental pillar of oppression, disenfranchisement and control. But this has changed, and for many people its passing is celebrated almost as much for an end to boredom as an end to state control of their lives. Commercialization of this sector has, if nothing else, created television that is more dynamic, entertaining and far more popular than the state-controlled fodder that preceded it.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in the television industry anywhere on the planet has occurred in South Asia, with the introduction of mostly Indian-based satellite television (as discussed below). South Asian governments have proved very reluctant to surrender control of the broadcast media, even in India, where the birth of the satellite revolution has been rooted. But satellite television has been licensed and in a decade has transformed television, has had major repercussions for culture, regional political relations, economic development and political debate, and has impinged on almost all other aspects of life on the subcontinent. The Zee TV and Rupert Murdoch-owned Star TV networks first started broadcasting in the early 1990s. These channels, and others such as Sony TV, Gemini and Sun, are based in India but have a footprint across the South Asian region and beyond. They have revitalized media in much of the region, throwing down a gauntlet to traditional, staid programming of the monopoly broadcaster Doordarshan through a dynamic, energetic and massively popular mix of lifestyle, music, movies and news. Zee TV in particular has met with huge success through its adaptation of a general entertainment formula to the Hindi language, a process which has become known as "Hindigenization".

However, both the popularity and the content of these new Hindi language entertainment channels are, according to David Page and William Crawley (2000a), giving rise "to apprehensions that the culture of Bollywood is swamping other national cultures and even destroying the ideological boundaries of the nation state". It is also creating a new "lingua franca" for the region, a hybrid of English and Hindi developed particularly by Zee TV.

At a time of increased international tensions in the region, satellite television is leading to markedly increased suspicion and resentment of India among other populations in the region. The dominance of Hindi channels such as Zee and Star is having increasingly significant political as well as cultural repercussions, particularly feeding tensions and public resentment of India in Pakistan. Reporting and analysis by Indian-based satellite news organizations of Kashmir and the Kargil crisis are widely perceived as being biased, nationalistic and often inflammatory. Reporting on the satellite channels, which are widely accessed in Pakistan, is pushing a heavily patriotic and nationalistic Indian line on what is a regional medium. This has substantially exacerbated public suspicion in Pakistan, and satellite broadcasts were prohibited recently by the Pakistan government from being relayed on cable channels. The names given to programmes on the conflict, such as *The Big Fight,* further contribute to this feeling. The role of the satellite television media in fuelling conflict between these nuclear powers, and their unwillingness to provide a space and a voice to independent, peace-

oriented views, are a source of increasing alarm within civil society in the region. While there are some attempts by satellite television to address these issues (Star TV started but has since discontinued a regular letter from Pakistan), the overwhelming sense is of a regional media giant acting as a national and narrowly patriotic broadcaster. Nor is this confined to relations between India and Pakistan. Nepal and Bangladesh are barely featured in this South Asian regional medium, and claims have been made that Zee TV has significantly affected relations between the people of Nepal and India (Page and Crawley 2000b:386–388).

Liberalization of television is, as with radio and print, a principally urban-focused phenomenon. Sixty per cent of South Asians live in rural areas, where access to television, while beginning to spread rapidly, nevertheless continues to be limited. The social and political reverberations caused by satellite television have perhaps been felt even more strongly in the extraordinary global and regional prominence achieved by Al Jazeera television in the wake of 11 September 2001. Al Jazeera ("The Peninsula") was launched in 1996 with $137 million of funding provided by the Qatari emirate with the express purpose of modernizing and democratizing Qatar. It rapidly developed a reputation for outspoken, independent reporting, and equally quickly became the most popular television news station throughout the Middle East and beyond. It claims 35 million viewers.

Al Jazeera has become famous through its coverage of Afghanistan and its exclusive broadcasts of tapes provided by Osama bin Laden and latterly in the invasion of Iraq and its bombing by United States forces. However, it is not just the quality and independence of its journalism that has marked it out, but also its free-ranging studio discussions and phone-ins, some of them resulting in loud shouting arguments with often extremist positions. It has upset not only the United States but also many political leaders in the Arab world and has been banned from Saudi Arabia. Tunisia, Morocco and Libya recalled their ambassadors to Qatar, and Jordan closed the station's bureau after a programme critical of the government. Popular it may be, but a lucrative business proposition it was not. Advertisers were wary of being associated with controversy, and Al Jazeera generated only $15 million in advertising revenue in 2000, compared to $93 million by the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC), Lebanon's entertainment network (Zednick 2002). It was creeping slowly toward commercial sustainability before 11 September 2001 and is still reliant on Qatari funding, but since then its revenues have escalated rapidly. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine it establishing the kind of reputation it has if it had been established with principally commercial objectives. For all that, there is little evidence that it might emerge as a model for a new generation of non-Northern, Southern-based regional media capable of establishing a credible,

independent, professional—if sometimes contentious—news source reflecting the priorities of their publics.

Television remains the least plural and least democratic of all media, with ownership continuing to be concentrated in the hands of the few. In Latin America, television has long been a far more pervasive medium than in much of the rest of the developing world, with even some of the poorest communities having access, and ownership has long been tightly controlled by extremely powerful private companies generally with strong links to government. In this sense, the changes in Latin America have been less dramatic than elsewhere. In Brazil, 80 per cent of the population, amounting to 90 million people, have access to television, and glamorous soap operas have been credited with helping to reduce fertility rates as poor families aspire to the exclusive lifestyles they see on television and have smaller families as a result.

Latin America is also the home and international inspiration of a host of community and participatory communication initiatives, many of which use television to give voice and expression to people otherwise marginalized, but these are principally found outside the mainstream television infrastructure. The Brazilian initiative, TV Maxambomba, for example, uses video to record the experiences of local people, appraises what is done by grassroots or community organizations and brings information necessary to the understanding of people's rights. It also produces videos on local culture and programmes for children, with more than 100 videos being produced since its inception in 1986 (Gumucio-Dagron 2000).

There are also increasing numbers of cases where television has proved itself to be the most effective way of stimulating social change. In South Africa, the most popular television soap opera is *Soul City*, a high-quality drama series which also has a very explicit social remit. Dealing with issues of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, diarrhoeal diseases and urban violence, it has become one of the most respected examples in the world of a communication initiative which can inform, engage and entertain while having a demonstrable and proven impact in achieving change. Every three out of four television viewers watched the most recent series of *Soul City*.

Media's Cultural Dimension

The effect of media on cultures, values and consumption patterns has been the subject of vigorous debate. Many studies have sought a correlation between what people, especially young people, watch on television, and how they dress and speak, and what they buy. Studies have found strong correlations between television viewing and how this affects traditional habits among, for instance, the Caboclo in Brazil.

Similar studies in Venezuela and other parts of Asia have shown that families change their eating, socialization and time management when television is "embedded" in the home.

But there have been also studies that show a positive impact of television, which has created greater awareness of the outside world, a healthy scepticism of politicians, and in some closed Islamic societies, it has given women a glimpse of a world where women have more independence. In many other studies of media impact, it has been found that viewers take what is familiar to them from a programme, and this may not necessarily be what was anticipated by the producer.

As we have seen with news, the media tends to have an exaggerated sense of its own importance. Media is an important purveyor of news and information, and if this is selective or biased it does change perceptions. But the causal factors linking information to awareness to behaviour change, or people being swayed by a slant in information via media, is not as direct or logical as it sounds.

In fact, the absence of proportionate impact after massive advertisement campaigns about HIV/AIDS in many developing countries is evidence that the media may be able to present and disseminate information and seek to raise awareness, but there is a big gap between that and change in individual conduct. In Nepal, awareness of condoms has risen exponentially to 85 percent in the past five years, but actual use of protection (except among vulnerable groups like sex workers) has not shown a similar increase. Similarly, a pro-US slant in news and current affairs reporting on the Iraq war did not necessarily turn world public opinion in favour of America. In fact, in the Arab world, the images of the toppling of the Saddam statue appears to have had the opposite effect.

Much of the scientific research into media impact on behavioural change has demonstrated only one certainty: the uncertainty of gauging impact. In local focus group studies on the Indian subcontinent three years ago, respondents gave widely disparate answers about how media, especially television, affected their behaviour. Most tended to underestimate the impact on themselves, for instance, on the way they dressed, while exaggerating the impact on peers. But even when asked about the general effect on societal mores, there were diametrically opposed perceptions.

The presumption that soaps like *Dallas*, or *The Bold and the Beautiful* bring about irreversible and long-term changes in developing country societies is therefore not as clear-cut as some academics from the developing world itself predicted not so long ago. Many variables interact: the level of development of the society, familiarity of a particular community with Western programming, how intricately the country is integrated into the global economy, the local cultural

coherence and more. In many countries, surveys have shown that Western programming has greater viewership, and perhaps greater impact, in the beginning, but that this tails off as the novelty wears off. When pure Western content is replaced by local programming, it is always much more popular and tends to capture prime time slots. In many cases, for instance India, Egypt and East Asia, Western soaps have been progressively replaced by local soaps, and there are Hindi or Mandarin clones of the originals. In Pakistan and Nepal, domestically produced local language dramas achieve the highest rations. Given an alternative of interesting, funny, professionally produced drama about issues relevant to their lives, people in most developing countries will switch away from foreign programming.

It is not just Western entertainment content that has made inroads into the South. Among the most popular programmes in the Philippines is a Mexican soap opera. Indian musicals are popular wherever the diaspora is located, but also in Central Asia and Indonesia. In Nepal, Pakistani drama series are exceptionally popular and carry the highest ratings.

The trend toward "localizing the global" has happened also in talk shows, in news and current affairs (Al Jazeera in the Gulf, the local-language Murdoch-controlled news channels in the rest of Asia) as well as the dubbing of nature programmes into local languages (National Geographic, Discovery, and even some local productions on these channels), and of course the 24-hour movie channels showing archival Bollywood or Chinese feature films.

But measuring the impact of all this on the behaviour and attitude of viewers is less charted territory. Many opposed to the cultural media exports target multinational media conglomerates. Five to 10 years ago there may have been substance to this, as content was indeed Western-dominated, but this has since changed to comprise much more local programming. Yet the value system of the latter still projects the underlying message of escapism and consumerism. In fact, some researchers have argued that having the message in a local language is actually more dangerous because it is easier to assimilate.

Producers of entertainment content often tailor their plots, wardrobes and conduct on screen to define lifestyles that will be conducive to advertising. There is thus a natural drift toward escapism, opulence and luxury well beyond the reach of the majority of viewers. There are reports that advertisers may be permitted to screen and censor content on entertainment material, and in some cases advertising agencies hired by sponsoring companies will insist on onscreen "plugs" for their products. The media therefore prioritizes the segments of society with the purchasing power to be able to afford (or at least aspire to) some of these goods. In many developing countries, local media is therefore

urban-targeted, and advertising, entertainment and news content are aimed at the preoccupations of the urban middle class. Many channels in India, for instance, carry programmes on aerobics and weight loss. The irony of such content being broadcast in a country where more than half the children are undernourished is probably lost on the owners of the station and the sponsors. But with increasing penetration of television in rural India, weight-loss exercising is being watched in rural homes where inhabitants already get more exercise than they need.

There may be no direct partnership between manufacturers of consumer goods and of television stations, but this is not needed where a close symbiotic relationship develops between the two. The casualty in all this, of course, are the public broadcasting values that should ideally guide the medium. Public channels like Australian ABC, Canadian CBC and the BBC are mandated to provide a wholesome mix of information, entertainment and education. In many countries where the laws are either lax (United States) or non-existent (much of the developing world) over-commercialization of television has turned the medium into a carrier of lifestyle values aimed at consumers.

The advertising industry, with its psychographic research and focus group testing will find the best way to bring about not just awareness of products, but also behaviour change to incite consumers to buy their products. The cause-effect here is much more direct than with cultural products, and can be measured.

Much of the blame for this can rightly be set at the door of multinational corporations, which own the manufacturing base as well as the channels of communications. However, domestic media also depends on local big business for sponsorship of television entertainment, advertising fast-moving consumer goods, snacks, detergents and beauty products. Many of these are in fact products manufactured by affiliates of multinational companies. Though advertisers may be local, the product range broadcast during the commercial break is the same.

Why This Matters

All of the above amounts to a series of complex, contradictory trends that have major implications for social inclusion and public debate. First of all, they raise major issues of access to information which enables people, particularly poor and marginalized people, to make sense of their lives, especially in the context of an increasingly complex and globalized society; and second, they raise issues of voice, the role and potential of the media to provide a channel and space for the voices and perspectives of those most affected by these issues, in terms both of reporting from the poor and of providing a voice or space for civil society. Access to information is being transformed. There is a major and growing gulf

between information accessible and relevant to the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural. Despite new media freedoms, the liberalized environment has led to a decline in both the inclination and the capacity of media to cover complex, contentious and technical issues such as those relating to globalization and poverty. The media are becoming increasingly fragmented and politically partial, and the decline of state-run media infrastructures is, along with a welcome loss of control over information, leading to the emergence of an information vacuum for an increasing number of communities. Despite this, the traditional media remain the principal source of information for much of humanity on issues outside their community and are likely to continue to do so for decades to come. Taken as an average, every African household has a radio, whereas fewer than 1 per cent have access to the Internet. Internet access, while growing rapidly, is still available to only 3 per cent of Brazilians.

The potential of media to act as a conduit for perspectives and a voice for the poor is growing, both through the emergence of community radio and through other forms of broadcasting. Discussion programmes on new FM radio stations are creating new and unprecedented spaces for public debate and an increased political vibrancy, and these provide major new opportunities to place issues of public concern onto public agendas. However, this goes hand-in-hand with a lack of resources and the emergence of a new journalism culture that is uninterested in providing in-depth reports and analysis of major development, international or social issues, and where journalists rarely venture out of the major cities. There are many journalists who remain committed to covering public interest issues, but they increasingly operate within a media culture that neither encourages nor values their work.

In the context of globalization, these trends are particularly acute. The challenge of global inclusion is to ensure that decisions that affect peoples' lives are subject to debate by those whose lives they affect. That means a much stronger, not weaker, public understanding and engagement on issues of globalization. The media in most developing countries, despite the early promises and optimism of liberalization and the growth of new media freedoms, appear decreasingly, rather than increasingly, equipped to play this role.

These issues also raise significant questions on the sustainability and health of democracy and democratic culture, and the capacity of people to hold their governments to account; but they go deeper than this. Arguably there has never been a greater opportunity or a more critical time for open public debate. This is true for issues of globalization, but also encompasses wider development processes and strategies, which are increasingly premised on issues of popular consultation, ownership and debate. Much current mainstream

development thinking (especially from the World Bank and donors committed to new sets of international development targets aimed at halving poverty by the year 2015) stresses the importance of ownership, holding that countries should shape and drive their own development agendas and that these agendas should be informed by the "voices of the poor". Poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) that form the centre-piece of much current development thinking and strategic planning are founded on this premise. This cannot happen in an environment where the public, and particularly the poor, have so little information on the issues that affect them.

Nor has liberalization yet led to a true diversity in media ownership. The globalization, concentration of ownership and increasingly profit-oriented nature of the international media have been well documented. However, patterns of media power at the national level have been less documented. The ceding of state control of media has been far from universal, and even in more liberalized media environments, state ownership and influence often remain pervasive. According to a World Bank study of 97 mostly developing countries, the largest media firms were owned either by governments or by private families, with government ownership being more widespread in broadcasting than in the print media. The study's authors argued that "government ownership of the media is generally associated with less press freedom, fewer political and economic rights and, most conspicuously, inferior social outcomes in the areas of education and health" (Djankov et al. 2001:1).

Media freedom and media liberalization have only rarely resulted in media pluralism. This is a global trend, but one which is particularly acute in poorer countries where those with most to win or lose from political and public debate—the poor and marginalized—have least access and least representation in mainstream media.

Freedom of expression is just one essential component of a plural media. Genuine media pluralism also implies a diversity of ownership, including media that explicitly serve a public or community interest, media that are accessible by and intelligible to (particularly in relation to issues of literacy and language) all citizens, media that reflect diversity of public opinion, and particularly that give voice to and reflect the expression of the marginalized (often a majority in many developing countries) in society. According to these criteria, the global trend is moving away from, not toward, real media pluralism.

What Is To Be Done?

Analysing a communication environment as complex and fast-moving as the one outlined above is a great deal easier than identifying clear-cut policy responses to it. At the least, in the context of this book, the issue of

public access to information in developing countries should preoccupy civil society organizations a good deal more than it does. Freedom of information and expression remains the primary concern for journalists around the world, and most governments on the planet still have much to do to guarantee such freedom.

Beyond that, however, while much attention is rightly focused on the concentration of media ownership in the North, genuine global inclusion depends also on the emergence from within the fascinating media liberalization maelstrom of a stronger public interest media in the South. The most obvious solution to this—the creation of intelligent, flexible regulatory frameworks for media—is a highly sensitive issue among journalists who have fought for years to escape the clutches of government control. It is clear that a range of policy responses is required, of which regulation is just one.

The rapidity and scale of the transformation of media internationally, particularly within developing countries, over the last decade demonstrates the power and influence of the mostly economic pressures shaping the new media environment. There are many within the media who are struggling in the teeth of these pressures to retain the media's critical public interest role, but the evidence is that they are losing. While governments clearly have a major role to play in creating the legal and policy environment for free and plural media, the media generally remain distrustful and cautious about strong government action in this area. In this context, civil society has a major role to play in putting pressure on both media and government to create and support more public-interest-oriented media. It also has much to lose if media continue to develop in ways that serve the private interest and ignore the public interest. With 2 billion people in the world still living in absolute poverty, the public interest and the role of the media in serving the public interest, have never been so important.

Women and the media

Women continue to suffer marginalization in and from communication networks, and evidence of the scale of sexual harassment and discrimination within the media itself in Africa (and elsewhere) is growing. When in 1995 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) sponsored a global media monitoring project to explore the representation of women in 71 countries, it found that women made up just 17 per cent of all interviewees in the news worldwide. Women interviewees were much more likely to be lay voices, even on topics which were specifically focused on women. Male interviewees were more typically interviewed as voices of authority. Twenty-nine per cent of all female interviewees were portrayed as victims of crime or accidents, compared with just 10 per cent of male interviewees. A follow-up worldwide study in 2000 found similar results, and these are relatively consistent across regions (Spears and Seydegart 2001). Similar findings have been repeated in many national studies. A further twist in the story is the split in news coverage between urban and rural concerns, the latter receiving comparatively little attention. In one Kenyan study, rural women featured in a tiny fraction of news coverage and a striking 76 per cent of rural women who appeared in the media were portrayed as criminals or victims. Liberalization of radio and television has also prompted major concerns about the increasing objectification of women in society through advertising and highly sexualized content. Counterbalancing some of these trends is the prominent role played by the women in the new media environment, including in societies, such as in Pakistan and elsewhere in South Asia, where women are particularly prominent as editors and owners of news organizations.

Regional Trends

This section looks at some regional trends in Southern and Eastern Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Media trends and dynamics in Southern Africa[4]

The last 10 years have seen unprecedented changes on the media landscape across Southern Africa. These changes have been occurring at two interconnected levels: the global and the local. In part, these have been a function of greater political pluralism across various nation-states. Also, foreign media giants, such as CNN, BBC and others have taken advantage of this situation to export international capital to finance many of the local-foreign media ventures that the subregion has begun to witness. Locally, there have been organic media formations, such as community or alternative radio, private FM radio stations and other initiatives which, nevertheless, have ended up looking to foreign financiers for their sustainability. For instance, UNESCO has been in the forefront of supporting community radio initiatives across Southern Africa, from Malawi's Dzimwe Community Radio, through Namibia's

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4   This section has been prepared by Fackson Banda.

Katutura Community Radio Station, to Zambia's Mazabuka Community Radio Station. For all its efforts, UNESCO has been accused of failing to sustain such radio stations, with the result that most of them end up operating as though they were private, commercial stations.

The global level

The liberalization of the media industry and the attendant commercialization and privatization of hitherto state media have had a profound effect in local media spaces. The 1990s have seen the transnationalization of major world media (CNN, BBC, Bloomberg and others) as a consequence of such satellite broadcasting services as Multichoice Kaleidoscope in South Africa. Multichoice has set up agents throughout the African continent, with thousands of subscribers shifting to this multichannel television and radio broadcasting service.

The print media, such as *The Mail* and *Guardian* and *Mmegi*, are also beginning to regionalize, reaching out to such countries as Zambia, Zimbabwe and Kenya, cultivating in the process a regional media entertainment consumer network. As a consequence, many people in different countries—apparently those who can afford such continent-wide satellite broadcasting and regional newspapers—are now exposed to a lot of foreign content across different genres. This seems to be a common or homogenizing factor. It is not far-fetched to argue that an elite is emerging that may well be "delocalized" from its local cultural roots, basically united in common, cosmopolitan lifestyles, values and worldviews.

But this has raised questions about the importance of local content as a counter to any possible undesirable influences on the local cultures of the consumers of such media products.

Perhaps, given the rate at which South Africa's Multichoice Kaleidoscope is developing on the continent, there is growing concern that this economic powerhouse might, in fact, be on the verge of becoming one of the main exporters of media products to the rest of Africa. M-NET, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Africa, e-TV, Africa-to-Africa, and other South African channels are beginning to make great inroads into several countries. In fact, SABC Africa prides itself on being "the pulse of Africa", almost as though it were promoting itself as the essence of African broadcasting.

Furthermore, this trend has resulted in a realignment of the local media landscape. There appear to be emerging state-private media business alliances. For instance, the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC) has entered into strategic partnerships with M-NET, African Broadcasting Network (ABN), TV Africa and Sandon Television to bring entertainment-based television programming to Zambian audiences of the ZNBC TV. The same trend is true of Malawi,

which has just introduced locally produced television services, as well as Mozambique, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Namibia and Swaziland.

The local level

As noted above, Southern Africa has experienced a process of deregulation in which the media industry has essentially been opened up to private capital. Thus, state media have begun to face stiff competition from their private counterparts for audiences.

However, purely private commercial media are themselves coming into competition with so-called community or alternative media. With more defined audiences, community or alternative media are becoming more pronounced as agents of social and political change across the continent, although most of them are turning out to be purveyors of popular entertainment rather than serious political analysis. Over 80 community radio stations have been given licences by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA). The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting Services in Zambia has given out over 10 licences to private FM radio stations, some of which, although not necessarily owned or controlled by communities, claim to be *community* stations.

Even with all these unprecedented changes on the ground, however, little has happened in terms of consistent, coherent and comprehensive policy frameworks to deal with the ever-evolving media scenario. This policy laxity has extended to the so-called new media, such as the Internet and email services.

On the contrary, new laws and policies seem to be an attempt at *re-regulating* the media industry with a heavier hand. In Zambia, efforts to set up an independent broadcasting authority have not succeeded, with both the state and private broadcasting arenas largely filled on the basis of political caprice. In Zimbabwe, though the Broadcasting Authority of Zimbabwe (BAZ) has been established under the Broadcasting Services Act 2001, there is suspicion that the state's purported desire to finalize the drafting of the frequency map, which will allow more private broadcasters to obtain frequencies, is not likely to open up the airwaves in ways that will promote independent broadcast journalism.

Indeed, the process of re-regulation is taking place in other, more subtle ways, such as harassment of journalists, toleration of policy gaps and removal of advertising from private media.

Conclusion

The future of free media is bleak in most countries in Southern Africa, with the exception of South Africa. And even there, the highly commercialized nature of the mostly urban-based media seems to be

working against poor people's access, although this is somewhat mitigated by the mushrooming of community media initiatives. The entertainment media industry, on the other hand, seems to have a bright future. The "liberalization" of the media industry has worked to promote largely foreign music-and-movie media outlets. Local news, especially that which focuses on political issues and events, on community or private FM radio stations, has met with state censure.

Media trends in Eastern Africa[5]

Recent developments in Eastern Africa reflect the complex and contradictory character of political and social trends that have affected many other parts of the continent. Since 1990, most countries in the subregion have undergone a far-reaching political transformation, mostly by replacing former one-party regimes with nominal multiparty democracies. Freedom of expression, press freedom and media diversity have become critical indicators of the health or otherwise of democratic transition in the subregion.

On the whole, the transformation of the media landscape over the last decade has been impressive. The political transitions from monolithic one-party rule, as well as external and internal pressures on governments of Eastern African countries for constitutional and legal reforms—including calls to "free the airwaves"—have substantially changed radio and television broadcasting regulation and ownership in the subregion. Where governments previously retained broadcasting as the preserve of the state and the ruling party, now most have accepted the establishment of independent, private broadcasters and in some cases community radio stations.

Most countries in the region now have a nascent private broadcast sector, and citizens have access to alternative voices. But as a publication from Panos Eastern Africa points out, "While it is easy to track quantitatively the number of new broadcasters, it is less easy to assess qualitatively their ownership, content and meaning to their audiences. The real impact of independent, private broadcasters on access to and dissemination of information in the subregion is as yet unknown, as is the potential role of regulation in directing the development of broadcasting so that it brings real and widespread benefits" (Wanyeki 2000).

Thus, while media freedom has undoubtedly advanced, the record of the media in contributing to more informed, inclusive and democratic societies in the subregion is much more mixed. New FM radio stations are beginning to emerge, creating a highly populist, music-based

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[5] This section has been prepared by Njonjo Mue.

programming while, at least in some cases, also providing new ways for people rarely heard in public domains to have their say through live debates and phone-in discussions. But many more of the media emerging in the region are heavily advertising dependent and consumer oriented, and have limited interest in highlighting issues of concern to people in the rural areas. Indeed, one of the greatest challenges emerging from the way media are developing in the region is the dichotomy between metropolitan areas—with a diversity of print, electronic and new media—and the rural areas, which have largely remained neglected and where government propaganda remains the only source of news and information.

Governments in the subregion have also been reluctant to loosen their grip over state broadcasters. In spite of campaigns by civil society groups to have these transformed into public broadcasters representing all the viewpoints in society, all state broadcasters in the subregion have remained mouthpieces for the ruling party. The distinction between public and government broadcasting is not widely recognized, and there is little clear policy articulation of the necessity for retained public service broadcasting and of a revised role in this respect for the public broadcaster.

New information and communication technologies, and trans-national satellite broadcasting, are so far available only to those with disposable income in urban areas. The implications of technological convergence are as yet unknown. But the likely impact on the region of the international trend toward the consolidation of media ownership can be inferred from the case of the Nation Media Group, which owns the largest circulation daily in East and Central Africa, the only regional weekly newspaper, and radio and TV stations in Kenya and Uganda, and which has plans to rapidly expand its dominance. This highlights issues of regulation of cross-media ownership, which has not been regarded as a priority by regulators in the subregion.

Print media continue to play an important part in creating democratic space in the subregion, but are hampered by draconian legislation, some dating to colonial rule, which severely restricts media freedom and exposes journalists to harsh punishments for transgression and therefore promotes self-censorship.

As the media landscape in Eastern Africa changes rapidly, the key challenges remain those of providing regulatory frameworks that can cope with the rapid developments; providing content that is relevant to the context and developmental challenges of the subregion; and enhancing the capacity of journalists to provide professional and quality services in one of the fastest-growing sectors in the subregion, to enable it to play its historic role in the promotion and entrenchment of democracy, good governance and development in this part of the world.

Media in Asia[6]

Only a fluke of history lumped Asia together as one continent. There are at least six Asias: the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. Media trends and dynamics in these regions vary widely. But two threads run through them all: the links between technological leaps brought about by convergence, and media globalization and ownership.

As leaders in hardware production for the information revolution, the East Asian tigers have been at the forefront of a great leap forward in the advancement of computers and telecommunications, and the media rode the crest of this wave. Paradoxically, information content in some of these countries has not kept pace with hardware development. Countries that have hitched their wagons to the IT revolution, like China, Malaysia and Singapore, keep tight restrictions on access to information by their citizens and on political freedoms. Two of these East Asian tigers (Taiwan Province of China and the Republic of Korea) have in the past decade made the full transition from authoritarianism to democracy and a free press. Partly, the push for reforms has been a result of the nature of the development of new media. These two countries have been able to play catch-up with Japan (the Republic of Korea, in fact, has overtaken Japan in broadband access and is much further ahead than the United States), and both have a vibrant and creative media sector (Patelis 2000).

We see that the role played by the media is determined not just by the technology, but also by the freedom to use new media (as Marshall McLuhan said in the 1960s, "the medium is the message"). Singaporeans may have broadband access through their home computers simul-taneously to cable movies, Internet and streaming television news, but the content of that information has not changed all that much from pre-Internet days. Curbs on Internet use, surveillance, severe penalties for accessing restricted sites and crackdowns on independent news portals carrying non-official sources of information have dampened the initial euphoria in East and Southeast Asia over the Internet playing a leading role in "democratizing information" (Keniston 1998).

The other hope was that information technology would level the playing field and bridge the digital divide. Nowhere is this digital divide more glaring today than between South Asia and East Asia. Despite India's entry into the IT age with the emergence of Bangalore's "silicon plateau", the region lags behind in phones per capita and Internet connections. The joke used to be that 95 percent of Indians are waiting for phone lines, and five percent are waiting for dial tones (Cherribi 2003).

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[6]   This section has been prepared by Kunda Dixit.

But, as Bill Gates himself admits, the world does not just have a digital divide between rich and poor. There is also a school divide, a hospital divide and a literacy divide. We do not need just to leap-frog technology, we need to see how media can help societies leap-frog in social and political reform. But the corporate values that drive the information revolution are the same ones that drove the industrial revolution, and technology by itself is not going to provide answers to deep-seated structural problems of governance, social justice and equity. This can be best seen in the spread of the supranational media conglomerates and their reach in Asia. Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation, for instance, is now aiming to capture the gigantic 2.3 billion-strong Indian and Chinese markets. When Beijing found a BBC news broadcast objectionable seven years ago, Murdoch's Star News channel dumped it from its Northern feed. On the subcontinent, Star takes an Indian-centric line on news and current affairs even though its footprint extends across several regions. Star's entertainment channels now reach up to 50 million households in East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Star's viewership is already half the population of India: it reaches 80 per cent of urban households and 40 per cent of rural ones. But it is East Asia that is the big prize. Star already reaches 65 per cent of homes in Taiwan Province of China, and through the Hong Kong-listed Phoenix TV, Murdoch reaches 45 million households in China alone. China's television viewership has grown from 18 million in 1975 to 1 billion in 1995, and state-owned CCTV has 900 million viewers. News Corporation is getting greater access to the cash-rich Guangdong province in exchange for beaming CCTV to the US market. In Japan, News Corporation has partnered with Japan Sky Broadcasting Company (Herman and McChesney 1998; Thomas 2003).

The international and regional patterns of big business owning media is repeated within countries. There has been a boom in television channels in South India, especially Tamil Nadu, with a dozen new channels going satellite. This is television without borders, as Tamil and Malayali channels reach the diaspora in Sri Lanka, Malaysia and the Middle East. Similar trends can be seen with Bengali channels with regional footprints, and new Nepali channels beaming via satellite from India to Nepal, and vice versa, to Nepali-speaking populations.

Satellite television is essentially an entertainment medium. News and current affairs do not normally even appear among the top 10 rated programmes in India. But in times of crisis, such as border clashes with Pakistan, or hijackings and terrorist attacks, 24-hour news channels attract large transboundary viewership. Internationally owned channels with regional footprints, however, can be as nationalistic as a 100 per cent national television because the owners prioritize the main market that they target.

Yet all is not gloom. When cable television and the music channels first started broadcasting in East Asia, most analysts wrote obituaries to local cultures and said they would soon be devoured by the "global industrial monoculture" of Hollywood and American pop music. Yet, 10 years down the road, we can see that the opposite has happened. Across China, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Taiwan Province of China and Thailand, there has been a phenomenal increase in local content. Instead of stifling local music, dance and drama, television has done the opposite.

In news and current affairs, however, the power of television has turned the tables. It used to be that daily newspapers set the news agenda; now television increasingly calls the shots. Newspapers and magazines compete not with each other so much as with television, and across the region we see them becoming less text-heavy, more visual and graphics-rich. This "tabloidization" of the print media can be seen even in the established papers in New Delhi, Bangkok, Manila and the Middle East.

The greatest opportunities, perhaps, have been missed in radio, especially in the poorer parts of Asia. Nothing competes with radio for access and affordability, yet probably because of this, information on radio has been tightly controlled, even in that bastion of democracy, India. Especially on the subcontinent, radio has been used as a public address system for government propaganda, and its potential for development communication has been squandered.

The paradox is that officialdom in these countries does not regulate the newest communication technologies (private ownership of satellite television is allowed in India, for example). No one controls private cable operators, there is competition among mobile phone operators and there is a choice of Internet service providers. And yet radio, the one medium that can reach the maximum number of people, is still under the grip of most governments. States have become more sophisticated in controlling information, and they do this through private monopolies as well as pressuring the business owners of media. Political leaders in many countries have spawned mini-Berlusconis. Both the show-biz nature of television and the power of its new programmes have proved irresistible to politicians, who either own media through intermediaries, or, as media personalities, have propelled themselves into politics using their broadcast personas as launch pads. Thailand's prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, owns one of his country's largest telecommunication companies and has exhibited intolerance of media criticism of him in the mainstream press.

But there are signs of local resistance. Media activists in Nepal lobbied for five years for the government to deregulate FM licenses. Nepal became the first country in South Asia to have a public radio service, and today has a network of community radio all over the country.

India is finally allowing private companies to start commercial urban-based FM, and Sri Lanka has also allowed private FM.

Despite the seemingly unstoppable juggernaut of the concentration of media ownership and multinational control over content of media, there are pockets of resistance across Asia. More encouraging, examples of local cultures and voices are asserting themselves, using the very technologies that people thought would dominate them.

Media trends in Latin America[7]

One of the most telling ironies of contemporary Latin America is the presence of a media-rich environment amid alarming levels of poverty. While social inequalities widened in the past two decades, the media landscape experienced formidable transformations. Video, cable and satellite technologies have increased the number of television hours. National television and radio networks have been consolidated. Internet kiosks have boomed in metropolitan and urban areas. Although print media is scarce in rural areas, low-budget tabloids and other publications proliferate in urban centres. The number of movie theatres has declined dramatically, but commercial and non-profit video clubs have mushroomed.

By all accounts, there are more places for citizens to get information than in the past. Even a significant number of poor citizens own radio and television sets, or have access to them in common public spaces (bars, community centres, streets and buses). However, cable and Internet fees (let alone access to computers and telephone connections) are out of reach for the immense majority. Likewise, the downward trend of newspaper and magazines sales confirms that income strongly limits access to any "pay-per-view" medium. For example, every time a financial crisis and subsequent economic collapse hits the region, the consumption of print media and cable television remarkably declines.

Shadows and lights in audiovisual industries

This technological explosion went hand-in-hand with the implementation of market policies, which contributed to a consolidation of the power of private owners. The structure of the Latin American media has historically been a mix of state and private ownership (Fox and Waisbord 2002). Public institutions have never been the backbone of media systems. Threatened by the political ambitions of government officials and the greed of captains of industry, public service media has been weak. Public broadcasting has been notoriously underfunded, and operated according to a mix of commercial and political expectations.

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[7] This section was prepared by Silvio Waisbord.

Recent privatization and the removal of cross-ownership regulations have strengthened the position of private groups and accelerated the formation of vast multimedia conglomerates.

Most Latin American media markets are imperfect duopolies in which two conglomerates control the lion's share of media properties, advertising and audiences (Waisbord 2000a). Some of the biggest global media groups, such as Brazil's Globo, Mexico's Televisa and Venezuela's Venevisión, are based in the region. Historically, they used their quasi-monopolistic control of the domestic market to launch regional and international business. Globo, for example, has an estimated 80 per cent of the television audience and 60 per cent of annual media advertising in Brazil, as well as a wide diversity of interests in media (newspaper, cable, satellite television, publishing, film, music) and other industries. Likewise, Televisa has had a choke-hold on Mexican media for several decades through the virtual monopoly of television, radio, music and film.

The affirmation of private media has not made governments irrelevant, however. The latter are still in control of substantial resources that affect media dynamics and content. Quid pro quo dealings between officials and business are customary.[8] The intertwined relationships between political and economic powers underlie media policy making and daily news management. When governments control decisions that affect media economics (for example, the allocation of broadcasting licenses, advertising budgets, import permits and state-owned bank loans), business courts officials and cozies up to them. If big media interests and governments maintain a close proximity at the national level, there is virtually no separation between government and the media in local politics. Typically, political bosses control the media directly (as owners) or indirectly (through nepotism and family ties).

Such dealings are expressed in the overall treatment of news and information. At times, media organizations reward favours by keeping silent on thorny issues involving government officials; at other times, they punish or put pressure on officials by bringing out damaging information. During military dictatorships, the big media generally ignored human rights abuses and corruption, and actively collaborated in the regimes' media propaganda. During the tenure of elected governments, the patterns are more complex. There is rarely a unified media bloc that takes a single position vis-à-vis governments. More frequently, media organizations are divided according to political and economic interests. In some cases, the largest media groups mobilized the population to overthrow the government as happened to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. In other cases, such as that of the Alberto Fujimori government in Peru in the 1990s, the government assiduously cultivated

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[8]   See Fox and Waisbord (2002); Rockwell and Janus (2003).

relations with media owners, and gave bribes and favours to secure a propaganda machine. In yet other cases, newspaper and television stations owned by rival business groups adopted diametrically different positions vis-à-vis the government, for example, during the Alfonso Portillo administration in Guatemala.

Community media and other "small" media outlets provide opportunities for the expression of voices and ideas that are largely absent in the big media. Latin America has a rich tradition of alternative media that, despite continuous problems to stay afloat given economic and legal difficulties, still manage to survive. Some are government-funded projects such as indigenous radio stations in Mexico; others are community-based efforts operated on a shoestring by youth groups, religious organizations and non-governmental organizations (see Gumucio-Dragón 2001).

While some audiovisual industries produce a considerable amount of content, particularly in large countries (such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela), others have limited production capacity and largely rely on foreign (both regional and US) content. There has been a boom in domestic television production in the past decades, and many companies have successfully exported programming. Latin American *telenovelas*, particularly from Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela, are ubiquitous in television markets worldwide. The number of productions is strongly dependent on the situation of the economy. In times of recession and crisis, fewer programmes are produced and production is limited to low-cost programming (such as news, talk shows and game shows).

Press and journalism

Journalistic practice differs across the region as a result of editorial policies, economic conditions, political environment and professional culture. There are journalists who, against all obstacles, report on powerful actors involved in wrongdoing and produce in-depth and well-researched stories. Investigative journalism showed remarkable vigour and played an important role in holding government accountable during the last two decades (Waisbord 2000b).

The achievements of watchdog journalism in holding authorities accountable, however, are only one side of the reality of the press in the region. Most reporting is superficial, timid and formulaic. Working conditions in most newsrooms are not conducive to hard-hitting, high-quality reporting. With a few exceptions, reporters are notoriously underpaid and have scarce resources to produce stories. Unwritten rules about subjects and sources limit what is news.

While journalists in metropolitan newsrooms are mostly expected to report news, their colleagues in the interior generally moonlight as

advertising salesmen for their employers. While some practice fair and responsible reporting, others favour sensationalistic information and use reckless news-gathering techniques. While some reporters enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy, others act basically as stenographers to owners.

In terms of freedom of expression, the present situation is better than when authoritarian governments ruled, but it falls short of being ideal. Many press laws grant substantial power to authorities to prosecute critical reporting. The overall legal framework promotes the formation of large media conglomerates rather than nurturing media diversity. Anti-press violence continues, particularly in Colombia. Journalists reporting on human rights violations, police brutality and drug-trafficking, mostly working for news media in the provinces, are generally the victims of the attacks (Waisbord 2002).

Conclusion

No broad-brush conclusion accurately describes the complexities of media systems in the region. Whether in terms of access, production capacity, and quality and practice, important disparities remain in media organizations across rich and poor countries, and metropolitan and rural areas. The media are largely oriented to the interests of powerful officials, advertisers and elites. However, there are pockets of news and entertainment in both commercial and community media, which push the boundaries to present a diversity of ideas and voices. This is remarkable considering they subsist in an environment that favours submission over criticism of well-entrenched political and economic powers.

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