

Comparing media systems in new democracies: East meets South meets West



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ABSTRACT: The paper presents a comparative framework for understanding the emerging media systems in so-called third-wave democracies. Three pathways of democratization are distinguished – from communist oligarchy in Eastern Europe, from military dictatorship in Latin America, and from one-party dictatorship in Asia and Africa. Following Hallin & Mancini's approach the paper then discusses for each of these pathways the particular patterns of transition of media markets, state-media relationships, political parallelism, and journalistic professionalism. The paper concludes by arguing that Western models of media systems cannot be easily applied to new democracies. Instead, new hybrid forms of political communication are emerging that blend liberal ideals of a free press with the trajectories of the past, indigenous values and the constraints and experiences of transition.

KEYWORDS: new democracies, transition of media systems, Hallin & Mancini models, comparative political communication



INTRODUCTION

The last decades of the 20th century saw an unprecedented wave of democratization with dozens of countries around the globe abandoning autocratic rule. One of the most spectacular events of this development was undoubtedly the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of communist rule in Eastern Europe soon thereafter. However, the so-called third wave of democratization (Huntington, 1991) began already ten years earlier when numerous countries in Latin America and Southern Europe (Spain and Portugal) established democratic institutions after long years of dictatorship.¹ Democracy subsequently spread quickly to other parts of the world, most notably to countries in Africa and Asia where democracy had been largely unknown so far. Yet in many of these countries democratic rule remains uncertain and fragile and some, for example Russia, have slipped back into autocratic practices. In fact, students of democratization are reluctant to attribute the simple word 'democracy' to many of the newcomers and have therefore endowed them with

¹ Beyme (1994) regards the transitions in Eastern Europe as a distinct, fourth wave of democratization because it differs in many respects from those in other regions.

a range of qualifications, such as 'partial' or 'defective' democracies (Potter et al. (eds.), 1997). The success story of the countries in East-Central Europe almost seems like an exception from the rule, in spite of the problems and setbacks that exist there as well.

While transition studies have become a major area in political science, communication scholars have paid much less attention to the democratization of the media and the problems involved in this process. Most of the existing literature on the mass media in new democracies is largely descriptive and confined to particular countries or areas. Important as this research is there is also the need to move forward to a more analytical and systematic approach. Comparative research helps to broaden the perspective and to address a range of questions that cannot be answered in the context of single-country studies. For example: Why are some countries more successful than others in democratizing their media systems? What are the reasons for the similarities and differences between media systems of new democracies? And is there something like an ideal media system that serves the needs of democratic consolidation best?

This paper aims to develop a comparative framework for analyzing the structure and dynamics of media systems in new democracies. Particular emphasis will be laid on the political role of the media and their relationship with the political system. As 'new democracies' I shall regard the countries of the third wave of democratization that include those that embarked on democratic transition some 25 years ago as well as more recent cases where democratic rule is still struggling to take roots. Third-wave democracies encompass a large diversity of countries from different continents and with different cultural and political traditions. Some have advanced economies, others are part of the developing South. However, what unites all these countries is the attempt to establish democratic institutions and a democratic media after substantial periods of autocratic rule and censorship.

TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK OF MEDIA IN NEW DEMOCRACIES

Comparative research of political communication in new democracies has to strike a balance between taking sufficient account of these countries' diversity while at the same time identifying dimensions that are abstract enough to allow for meaningful cross-national comparisons. In my paper I will draw on approaches from both communication studies, most notably Hallin and Mancini's book on *Comparing Media Systems. Three Models of Media and Politics* (2004) which is the most advanced attempt in comparative media research to date, and political science transition research.

The communications perspective: identifying key problems of media transition

Hallin and Mancini (2004) confine their analysis to established democracies, more specifically to Western Europe and North America. Their categorization builds on

two conceptual elements, namely four individual dimensions and, based on the specific configuration of these dimensions, three models of political media systems. The resulting models are labeled the 'polarized pluralist model', the 'democratic corporatist model' and the 'liberal model', each being associated with a particular geographical area, that is Mediterranean countries, countries in North and Central Europe and the North Atlantic countries respectively. While this range of countries covers a substantial part of contemporary democracies the study excludes not only some important established, non-western democracies, such as India, Israel and Japan, but also the large number of new democracies that have emerged over the past quarter of a century. What kind of media systems have been established in these countries? And to what extent can the models proposed by Hallin and Mancini be employed to understand these emerging media systems?

Media systems in some established and new democracies share various features that may justify the expansion of Hallin and Mancini's models beyond the countries that form the basis of their study. For example, Splichal (1994) points at the 'Italianization' of the media in East-Central Europe involving a combination of extensive commercialization of the press and a high degree of state interference into public service broadcasting. These similarities suggest that at least the new democracies in East-Central Europe could be grouped together with the Mediterranean countries. Besides these particular cases there are also more general arguments that imply a convergence between the media systems of new and old democracies. First, policymakers in new democracies regularly turned to established democracies in search for blueprints and advice when re-organizing public institutions, such as electoral systems and legal systems. The same applies to journalism and the media (Splichal, 2001). Second, it can be argued that cultural differences are becoming less relevant giving way to a global media industry that is dominated by few international conglomerates that distribute their products around the world. Linked to this process, Hallin and Mancini (2004) expect a general trend towards the liberal model that dominates the media system of the United States and other North Atlantic countries. Third, international agencies such as WTO and EU, have a significant impact on institution building in new democracies. As they urge for market-oriented reforms and privatization of the media, which are believed to curb the legacy of state interference and autocracy, these organizations exert additional pressure on new democracies to adopt the liberal model of public communication.

However, these similarities might be misleading, as they relate to just a few characteristics while disguising the complexities of political media systems in new democracies. As Hallin and Mancini (2004, p. 11) point out, the pattern of the relationship between the media and politics is the result of specific cultural, political and historical developments in a particular country. Further, even if countries adopt institutions that exist already elsewhere these institutions usually have different meanings and implications when transplanted into a different context. Some new

democracies embark on democratic politics for the first time in their history, others can relate back to indigenous democratic traditions. Some have developed striving economies under autocratic rule, others still suffer from severe underdevelopment. Hence, we can expect distinct political media systems to emerge in new democracies that differ significantly from their Western counterparts.

Instead of jumping into a three-models-fit-all approach the following analysis will depart from a lower level of conceptualization by using Hallin and Mancini's (2004, pp. 21–45) four dimensions as a guideline to identify the similarities and differences between political communication systems in new democracies. These dimensions can be argued to represent the key problems policymakers have to address when re-organizing the media after the breakdown of the old regime.

The first dimension – development of media markets – describes the relationship between the media and their economic context both nationally and internationally. It denotes the ownership structure of the media, competition from other media, the degree of concentration and diversity. Media markets also include audiences and their inclination and ability to consume media products, which is affected by factors such as purchasing power and literacy. Essentially, the dimension specifies the nature, source and range of financial resources the media have to their disposal to run their day-to-day operations. Economic strength is a necessary, albeit not a sufficient, precondition for the media to take on an independent role in the new democratic order. However, the highly instable period of transition from the old to the new regime often has dramatic consequences for the national economy in general, and the media market in particular. Underdevelopment is another obstacle that can hinder the media to develop their full potential.

The next dimension – the role of the state – is crucial to understanding the situation of the media in new democracies. Since all autocratic regimes use the media for their own purposes and as an instrument to stabilize the political order the transition to a media systems that operates independently from the state is bound to trigger conflicts between political power holders and the media. Even though the inclusion of press freedom and freedom of expression in the new constitution (or the revised existing one) is usually undisputed subsidiary legislation relating to the protection of sources, libel, defamation of state authorities and central values, such as the nation or religious beliefs, often remains a mechanism to exert control over the media. Television is particularly vulnerable to persisting state interference, especially where former state television is transformed into some form of public service broadcasting. Another disputed area is the question whether and to what extent the media should actively promote certain goals. In most established democracies the media are expected to serve the public good (McQuail, 1992). In new democracies there is often the claim that the media should put themselves into the service of national unity, political stability and economic development. While these are

legitimate normative debates, they are frequently instrumentalized by governments to curb the independence of the media.

The third dimension – political parallelism – refers, in its broadest sense, to the relationship between the media and their societal environment. Initially, the concept of ‘press-party parallelism’ has been put forward by Seymour-Ure (1974) to describe the close relationship between political parties and the press that developed in Western Europe during the 19th century and still continues to shape the content of political reporting in many countries. However, conceptualizing political parallelism exclusively as alliances between individual media and political parties, or related ideologies, does not sufficiently capture the nature of political conflicts in new democracies. In many of these countries political parties are not the central organizing force in political life, as they lack the organizational strength and clear ideological profile of their Western European counterparts. Instead, other divisions and group interests shape the political contest, for example ethnicity, religions, regional affinities, clientilism or simply individual charismatic leaders. In some instances the conflict between support of the old and the new regime has become a new conflict line in its own right. For the present discussion political parallelism therefore denotes any ties between individual media and particular societal divisions be it partisanship, ideology, group interests, religion or personal loyalties.

The last dimension – professionalization – refers to journalistic practices and self-perception and how this is reflected in the quality of political coverage. Professionalization precludes dependency on outside powers that are in a position to impose their norms and rules on journalists and the way in which they cover political matters. However, it is difficult to specify what exactly can be regarded as professional journalistic performance. Not only is there a wide gap between theory and practice, there is also considerable variation of accepted practices both within and across countries. Even within established Western democracies journalistic role perceptions and journalistic practice vary considerably (Donsbach, Patterson, 2004; Weaver, 1998) indicating that notions of professionalization in journalism are to a large extent contingent on cultural norms and historical traditions (Chalaby, 1998). Transitions from authoritarian to democratic rule pose a particular challenge on journalistic professionalization, as the regime change also involves a change in the norms and standards by which journalistic quality is being judged. The coexistence of old and new norms frequently causes considerable confusion and conflicts amongst journalists as to their role in the new democratic order. Do they adopt the Anglo-American model of journalism or do they follow their own traditions? And to what extent are these traditions compatible with the democratic functions of the media? Another normative dilemma arises when the fragility of the young democracy and social tensions seem to require restrictions on the coverage of certain issues or public criticism of political authority.

The political science perspective: pathways to democracy and the democratization of the media

Apparently, new democracies do not follow the same pattern of transformation and vary in their success in consolidating the new democratic order. One explanation to account for these differences is the path dependency of democratic transitions (Hollifield, Jillson (eds.), 2000). According to this theory the structure and performance of the new regime are determined by the specific characteristics of the old regime from which it emerges. After the breakdown of the old regime there is no *Stunde Null*², or a vacuum that would allow policymakers to start from scratch and implement some kind of textbook model of democracy. Instead, choices are constrained by existing institutional structures and arrangements, value systems persist and shape the behavior of elites and citizens alike, and – last not least – many of the decisions made immediately after the breakdown of the old regime are dictated by the drama and urgency of the situation rather than longterm visions of an ideal democracy. The same considerations can be applied to the emerging media systems. Existing media organizations continue to operate and journalists apply the norms and rules they are familiar with from their professional life under the old regime. Hence, the media systems of new democracies can be expected to be significantly different from their counterparts in established western democracies, as they encompass both elements of political communication of the specific past of their countries and those that are the result of decision making and re-socialization after the regime change.

Political science transition research distinguishes between the following main pathways of democratization (Hollifield, Jillson, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). Each of the pathways is based on a particular type of autocratic regime that predates the new democracy and dominates a particular geographical area:

- transitions from communist oligarchy in Eastern Europe,
- transitions from military dictatorship in Latin America,
- transitions from one-party dictatorship:
 - a) under the conditions of statism and accelerated modernization in East Asia;
 - b) under the conditions of unfinished nation-building and ethnic fragmentation in Africa.

The clustering of similar patterns of democratization in neighboring countries is due to the fact that geographical proximity leads to a higher density of interactions and consequently to similar responses to societal and political problems. It has to be kept in mind that the pathways mentioned above are ideal types of democratization which, for the sake of abstraction, simplify the wide range of variation that

² The German expression *Stunde Null* means 'Zero Hour' and refers to the post-war myth of a completely new beginning after 1945 that ignores the extent of continuity between the past and the young Bundesrepublik.

can be found even within the same category. In addition, in spite of regional predominance particular regime types can also be found elsewhere, for example military dictatorships in Asia or communist regimes in Africa. Nevertheless, the pathway approach is a useful analytical tool to explain the similarities and differences across new democracies. Since media systems are closely linked to the development of the political system we can expect distinct structures of public communication to develop in each of the pathways. The following discussion of the individual pathways aims to identify the particular structure of political communication and its relationship to the political system old and new. The analysis is guided by the four dimensions of media systems as proposed by Hallin and Mancini and discussed in the previous section.

THE MEDIA IN TRANSITIONS FROM COMMUNIST OLIGARCHY

Communist regimes are unique in that their legitimacy is based on an elaborated ideology that plays a central part in guiding political decision making and in shaping the relationship between politics and society. The power, and to some extent the appeal, of communist ideology derives from its utopian spirit according to which people will eventually be freed from the yoke of capitalist exploitation and enjoy an equal share in the economic wealth. The reorganization of the economy was therefore a central part of communist politics. But communist regimes aimed to move beyond material politics. They also set out to create the 'new socialist personality' who sees the meaning of life primarily in the well-being of the collective rather than in individual self-realization. To achieve this goal communist regimes not only suppressed oppositional opinions, but employed extensive propaganda campaigns and ideological indoctrination to re-educate their citizens.

The two features that characterize communist regimes – nationalization of the economy and ideological legitimation – also shaped the role of the media and how they operated. From early on, communist leaders regarded the media a key instrument in the political mobilization and re-education of the masses. The media were obliged to serve as mouthpieces of the government and the ruling party, and political coverage was aimed at conveying a political message rather than covering facts and events. Not surprisingly, objectivity was dismissed as a bourgeois ideology (Voltmer, 2000a). In spite of the complete lack of press freedom the media were also beneficiaries of this system. As long as they did not overstep the accepted boundaries they were released from the risks of market competition and the necessity to respond to volatile audience tastes. Journalists could also see themselves as part of a utopian project of historical dimensions even though in practice much of their output never made it to publication.

Of course, the relationship between politics and the media was not static and there were significant variations between countries. For example, in Hungary, the suppressed revolt of 1956 led to a new balance between society and the political

regime that included some more leeway for the media in covering political matters. Meanwhile, the situation in the GDR, Bulgaria and Romania remained tight until the collapse of the regimes in 1989. Poland is a special case in communist history in Eastern Europe in that there developed a strong civil society with *Solidarność* as its most prominent representative. Closely connected with these groups there existed a vivid and diverse clandestine press, or *samizdat*, that played an important role in keeping these groups alive. Arguably the *samizdat* press was not autonomous in the liberal sense, as it served as instruments in the hands of the opposition and, thus, was still subjected to 'political logic' rather than to 'media logic' (Mazzoleni, 1987).

The transition from communism to democratic rule is viewed as particularly complex and prone to setbacks because it involves not only the transformation of political institutions but also the re-organization of the economy both happening at the same time and both being the precondition for the success of the respective other (Linz, Stepan, 1996; Offe, 1991). This dilemma of a 'dual transition' applies equally to the media and is the cause for many problems public communication in post-communist countries is facing today. The commercialization of the media and the simultaneous withdrawal of the state from providing subsidies hit most of the media organizations completely unprepared and drove many of them into bankruptcy. Ironically, it were the former state organs that managed best. They had enough financial resources and managerial know-how to position themselves in the new market conditions while only few opposition media were able to survive the advent of democracy, one prominent example being the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Political interference remains a recurrent problem throughout the region. Especially the relationship between governments and the former state broadcasters turned public service broadcasting organizations has been highly disputed over years. It does not make much difference whether the government is formed by former opposition parties or the successor organizations of the communist parties. One reason why politicians are so reluctant to accept the autonomy of the media and continue to maintain control over the public agenda is that the media are virtually the only channel of communication with voters, and thus the only route to power. Alternative means of mobilization, such as effective party organization in particular at the grassroot level and strong alliances with other societal groups, are largely missing (Donges, 1997; Voltmer, 2000b).

Meanwhile, the press remains highly politicized along partisan lines. In most post-communist countries newspapers take unanimously side for a particular party or candidate. Where religion has emerged as a strong force in society, like in Poland, media have also rallied around religious organizations and movements to promote their views. Similar parallelism can be found with regard to ethnic groups. The result is a pattern of external diversity (McQuail, 1992), which rarely generates an overall balanced representation of voices in the public sphere. Political parallel-

ism in Eastern Europe is fostered by a self-image of journalists as intellectuals who are leading and shaping the public debate. This role perception might resonate with the role of the media under communism as educator of the masses, but also has its roots in a tradition of European journalism that predates the general acceptance of the American journalistic model of objectivity and detachment. In Eastern Europe elegant style, poignancy and opinionation are regarded elements of good journalism whereas just reporting the facts according to a rather mechanical format – pyramidal structure, the five Ws – enjoys much less status (Voltmer, 2000a).

While taking side for a particular cause might not necessarily corrupt journalistic professionalism spreading *kompromat* certainly does. The Russian word denotes unproven allegations and gossip aimed at destroying the political enemy and has become a notorious weapon during election campaigns (De Smaele, 2006). The practice not only violates basic rules of fairness, it also exacerbates hostilities between political camps and undermines the willingness to accept compromises.

THE MEDIA IN TRANSITIONS FROM MILITARY DICTATORSHIP

For most of its modern history South America was dominated by brutal military dictatorships, as were Spain and Portugal at the southern fringe of Europe where autocratic rule lasted for almost half of a century. Political power of the military was often legitimized by the alleged looming threat of a communist take-over. Hence, in many respects military dictatorships appear like the flipside of communist regimes. To begin with, one of the key elements of anti-communist politics under military rule was the protection of a free market economy of which the media were an integral part. Apart from a few government organs the media operated as commercial enterprises and benefited from government schemes to modernize the national economy and technological infrastructure (Fox (ed.), 1988; Tironi, Sunkel, 2000).

As in any autocratic regime the media under military rule were subjected to rigorous censorship. However, unlike under communism military dictatorships mainly employed censorship to suppress oppositional views to be expressed in public, whereas propaganda with the aim to re-educate the masses played only a marginal role, if any. The reason for the limited role of the media lies in the fact that, except occasional anti-communist rhetoric and nationalist appeals, military dictatorships do not have an ideology beyond holding on to power. Power was secured through fear and public quiescence rather than through the mobilization of popular support (Linz, Stepan, 1996). As a consequence, public life under military rule was almost entirely de-politicized.

Meanwhile, the media were able to hibernate without excessive state interference provided they stayed away from sensitive issues and open criticism. Journalists who were brave enough to brake this silent consensus had to pay with their freedom, their health and often with their lives. The best way for the media to avoid the

risk of a confrontation with the power holders was to confine themselves to entertainment content. In fact, the dominance of entertainment programs in Latin American television was – and still is – unsurpassed. American soaps were imported in large quantities providing the cultural underpinnings of the political alliance between the US and the military regimes in their Latin American ‘backyard’.

Given the before mentioned problems of dual transitions in the post-communist pathway one would expect as less troublesome transformation of the media in Latin America. However, this is not the case. As it turns out, a commercialized media is not a safeguard against political interference. Instead, political control is exerted in indirect ways through the ownership structure of media organizations. Most of the major television channels are in the possession of politicians or their families leading to an immense accumulation of power in the hands of a small clique of the rich and powerful. The merger of political and media power proves particularly problematic during election time when oppositional voices are systematically excluded so that outsider candidates have little chances to mobilize a winning majority.

However, this picture has dramatically changed over the last couple of elections in the area. In several Latin American countries outsider candidates with less privileged or indigenous background managed spectacular electoral successes in spite of not having the vast resources of their established opponents. Bolivia, Brazil, Peru and Venezuela are examples for this new trend. The success of this new type of candidates was built on the attention they received from the media. They developed a new campaign style which differed markedly from that of established candidates, invented telegenic symbols (for example Evo Morales’ striped sweater that became his trademark) and turned election rallies into colorful parties. In short, these campaigns perfectly matched the newsvalues of the media and satisfied television’s hunger for attractive footage. Arguably, the success of these new populist leaders can be seen as an indicator for the professionalization of the media who no longer put the interests of their masters first but followed their own logic of news selection and formats of political coverage (Waisbord, 2003).

Yet this kind of professionalization is of mixed blessing given the weakness of political institutions in Latin American countries. Without exception have post-autocratic policymakers opted for presidential systems after the demise of the old regime, thereby institutionalizing a high degree of personalization and centralization of power that leaves little room for institutional checks and balances (Linz, 1993). As Waisbord (1995) points out, the symbiosis of highly commercialized and sensationalist media on the one hand and a personalized political style on the other might be a severe impediment on the way to a consolidated democracy: ‘Television may contribute to the formation of “delegative democracies” and exacerbate personal leadership in political systems that constitutionally confer great powers to the Executive’ (p. 216). The dynamics between media logic, personalization and presidentialism is particularly evident in countries where political parties are too weak

to play a significant role in the selection of political leaders and the mobilization of political identities. Chile and Uruguay are exceptions from the general picture, as political parties were able to maintain their ties with their constituencies during the years of autocratic rule. Consequently, the media are less dominant in electoral politics than in countries where political parties did not take roots after the regime change (Espindola, 2006).

Outside election campaigns politics plays only a rudimentary role in an otherwise predominantly entertainment oriented television program. Even political news are dominated by 'soft news' such as celebrity gossip and sport. In this respect little has changed between the media under the old and the new regime. Meanwhile, newspaper readership that has been traditionally low remains confined to the educated middle class and the elites whereas the majority of the population depends exclusively on television.

THE MEDIA IN TRANSITIONS FROM ONE-PARTY DICTATORSHIPS

The third pathway is extremely diverse as it includes countries from two continents. However, the common overarching theme of this pathway is development. For decades, the attempt of overcoming poverty and underdevelopment has been used as a justification for curbing democratization and a free and diverse press with the argument that the development project requires centralized and efficient decision making which would be undermined by party-ism and group conflicts (Clark, 2000).³ To account for the immense historical and cultural difference the following discussion will cover both areas separately.

a) East Asia

East Asian countries look back to a long tradition of a strong, centralized state. Etatism, a powerful state bureaucracy and strong hierarchies in social life were easily integrated in the political power structure of the autocratic regimes that succeeded feudal reign. Huge conglomerates of industry and bureaucracy, central planning and protectionism from external competition were then the driving forces in the economic development of the so-called tiger states, most notably Taiwan and South Korea. The media were part of this state-centered industrialization project. Their role was to legitimize and promote government policies and to generate consensus and support for the development goals of the country. It can be argued that similar to the media in communist regimes, but unlike the media in military dictatorships, the media of the third pathway were expected to play an active role in political and social life. Even though this role involved strict censorship, the media

³ The justification of so-called development dictatorships has been widely challenged; see for example the work by the Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen (2004).

flourished economically and developed into strong industries that are now key players in the global media market.

One of the striking features of regime changes in East Asia is how little actually changed. There was no need for an economic re-organization of the media. The coincidence of regime change and the digital revolution further strengthened the media's economic power, as new products met a well educated, media savvy population that has enough purchasing power to generate enormous consumer demand. In many East Asian countries the Internet has developed into a mass medium with South Korea being now the country with the highest rate of broadband Internet subscribers (OECD).

Meanwhile, the state keeps strict control over the media. All main television stations and many high-circulation newspapers are still owned by the government, in some cases even by the military. As a consequence, political coverage mainly serves the interests of the government and the ruling party while opposition parties and civil society are largely excluded from access to the mainstream media. However, due to the advanced media infrastructure alternative political actors can circumvent these constraints by using new media technologies that escape central controls. In recent elections in South Korea the Internet provided oppositional groups an effective forum to address issues that are usually excluded from the mainstream media agenda. The Internet was also the ideal platform for the challenging presidential candidate Roh in the 2002 election whose discussion forum quickly became the most popular site and mobilized a young, urban, well educated constituency for whom participating in online communication is part of the daily routine (Kim, 2007). In Taiwan, satellite television has played a similar role in creating alternative channels of public debate (Ferdinand (ed.), 2000; Rawnsley, Rawnsley, 1998).

Political parallelism in East Asia follows very different lines from those in Eastern Europe and Latin America. While in both areas political conflicts have been shaped by the left-right divide, this ideological frame is largely unknown in Asian political thinking. Instead, politics is structured by personal alliances and clientelism. In this system powerful local patrons offer rewards for political support, which can even take the form of straightforward vote buying. During elections local and regional campaigning is therefore of pivotal importance, in which the media follow the political divisions and rally around particular candidates (Rawnsley, 2006).

An important issue for the professionalization of journalism is the discussion evolving around so-called Asian values. This set of values has its roots in Confucian tradition that emphasizes social harmony, deference to authorities and discipline. Because of the uniqueness of Asian values it is argued that Western models of democracy and journalism cannot be transplanted to the Asian context. Objectivity and neutrality are understood as specifically Western values that emerged from the European enlightenment and therefore cannot claim universal validity. According to the concept of Asian journalism the role of the media is to maintain social

and political stability and assist in the economic development of the country. It is obvious that this view of journalism sits uneasy with newsvalues such as conflict and negativism. It also contradicts notions of an autonomous media that act as a watchdog who holds political authorities accountable to the general public (Massey, Chang, 2002). While many journalists have bought into the framework of Asian values at least to some extent, it should not be overlooked that the issue is highly disputed in the journalistic profession. A significant number of journalists have openly criticized the current rediscovery of traditional values as an attempt of the government to stifle controversy and criticism.

b) Africa⁴

For a long time dictatorships were one of Africa's chronic diseases, as was a downward spiral of poverty and endless civil wars. In contrast to the pathways discussed so far, the media have played only a marginal role in the power structure of African dictatorships for the simple reason that they hardly reach the majority of the population. Even though these problems still exist, the last decade has seen significant progress on many of these problems. Numerous countries have introduced democratic institutions, often with considerable success, and there is significant economic growth. So far there exists only very little literature on the media and their political role in Africa with the exception of the South African case, which has been widely researched (Hyden et al. 2003; Horwitz, 2001; Okigbo, Eribo, 2004; Wasserman, de Beer, 2006). The discussion that follows should therefore be understood as a preliminary attempt to understand media and democratization in Africa in a comparative context.

New democracies in Africa are facing a variety of problems that have their roots in the past. Many countries gained independence from colonial rule only between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s, often without having the necessary institutional infrastructure and administrative know-how to run their countries. State institutions are still weak and inefficient, and corruption is a pervasive problem throughout Africa. It is therefore not surprising that some of the new democracies have slipped back into autocratic rule. One of the heritages of colonialism is a state territory whose boundaries have been drawn on the green table of the former colonial powers without taking the habitat of ethnic groups sufficiently into account. As a consequence, national identity is still fragile and national territories are frequently challenged by ethnic groups that live on either side of national boundaries. Even more destructive and a threat to democracy are ethnic conflicts within countries. Since access to resources and power are largely determined by ethnic identities they frequently cause hostilities that are difficult to keep under control.

⁴ The following discussion includes sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Africa only.

Last but not least, poverty and underdevelopment remain a pervasive problem that has recently been exacerbated by the dramatic spread of AIDS.

The media, in particular television and the main newspapers, have always been owned by the state, and this has usually remained so after transition to democratic rule. Like in other new democracies, political elites are reluctant to give away this instrument of power. But another important reason for persisting state ownership of the media is the lack of resources. African populations are usually too poor to generate state-independent resources, for example through license fee, not to mention the logistical problems of collecting them. In addition, advertising, another independent income stream for the media, is still underdeveloped due to the weak consumer market. Given the dependency on state subsidies it is difficult for the media to engage in investigative reporting. Journalists who, for example, dig into corruption cases are frequently harassed or even physically attacked.

With only few exceptions the media are closely linked with particular ethnic groups. This includes government owned media since the government is usually formed by members of one particular ethnic group. The resulting pattern of ethnic parallelism might give each group a voice in the public sphere, but fails to provide a much needed forum where all groups can talk to each other and learn about the views and needs of the other side. Hence, the structure of the media system frequently contributes to perpetuating ethnic hostilities rather than providing the kind of information that facilitates mutual tolerance and the willingness to accept compromises.

One of the main obstacles to journalistic professionalization in Africa is the shortage of resources. Therefore, radio plays a key role for public communication. It is cheap both with regard to production and reception, and it is flexible enough to evade government interference, thus making it an ideal medium for oppositional and marginal voices (Myers, 1998). Many radio programs operate as pirate stations in confined local areas; and even though music dominates most of the air time many radio stations are committed to conveying information that is relevant to their communities.

Furthermore, African journalists are facing similar challenges to their autonomy as their colleagues in Asian countries. Given the pressing problems of underdevelopment the media are widely expected to actively promote policies and ideas that are believed to improve the situation of the people and the country as whole. So-called development journalism is devoted to these objectives even if it implies abandoning principles and practices that constitute professional 'media logic.' It is interesting to note that Western donor organizations, such as the World Bank, UNESCO and numerous NGOs, are becoming increasingly aware of the necessity of developing the media in Africa (GFMD, 2007). An independent and vibrant press is regarded an effective force in fighting corruption and irresponsible politicians. At the same time NGOs are hoping to use the media for their own development projects – an apparent contradiction to the objective of media independence. The debate

around media development illustrates the dilemma between the principle of journalistic autonomy on the one hand and the immediate needs arising from the specific problems of democratic transition and development on the other.

CONCLUSION

This paper presented a first exploration towards a comparative framework for the study of media systems in new democracies. Distinguishing between three different pathways to democracy the discussion demonstrated how the role of the media during the autocratic regime determines their structure and performance in the process of democratization. Even though similar problems can be found in the media systems of established and new democracies, such as commercialization and political parallelism, the paper argued that the media systems of new democracies cannot easily be classified into the three models proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Instead, the specific empirical configurations of the relationship between the media and their political, economic and cultural environment suggest that emerging democracies develop unique types of media systems that differ significantly from those in established democracies.

From a normative point of view the analysis of different trajectories of media transformation show that there is no single 'good' model or 'good' solution to the key problems of public communication. Whether particular institutional arrangements and forms of journalistic practice are detrimental or beneficial for the consolidation of a new democracy depends on the overall context and the interaction with other elements in the system. A brief discussion of the four dimensions of media systems that have guided this analysis will demonstrate this point.

Commercialization of the *media market* is often seen as the best way of securing the media's political independence. However, this is not the case. Especially the experience from Latin America and post-communist countries shows that ownership is frequently highly politicized in that influential actors – politicians or oligarchs – purchase media outlets in order to bring them under their control for the purpose of instrumentalizing them for their own political ambitions. The outcome of privatization of the media depends to a large degree on the market structure in which they operate. If the purchasing power of the wider public is weak, then the advertising market will also be underdeveloped, thus forcing the media to seek funding from alternative sources. Usually this is the state, political parties or political entrepreneurs who still expect support for their own interests in return.

The *role of the state vis-à-vis* the media is usually regarded an antagonistic one, especially in new democracies where censorship and state interference is one of the main legacies of the past regime. However, this view is only part of the picture as it overlooks the positive role of the state through implementing legislation that enables the media to operate on their own terms and through providing funding. The

so-called 'media wars' that broke out in many East-Central European countries in the years after the regime change demonstrate that the lack of regulation does not mean more media freedom. To the contrary, it exposes the media to unmitigated instrumentalization by the political majority of the day. Whether the state is detrimental or beneficial for the development of an independent media depends, first, on whether state institutions are efficient enough to pass relevant legislation and, second, whether they are willing to act in the public interest rather than serving particularistic demands. Both conditions usually take years to develop. Hence, paradoxically the successful democratization of the media depends – at least to some extent – on a strong state.

In most new democracies *political parallelism* appears more the rule than the exception. Even though alliances between the media and certain groups or ideologies violate the journalistic norm of objectivity and neutrality external diversity can be a viable form of representing a broad range of voices in the public domain. Like in the early days of press-party parallelism in Europe biased media can serve the function of cristallizing and mobilizing interests. However, the effects of political parallelism on the functioning of democracy depends on a variety of factors. Political parallelism becomes problematic where partisanship not only involves advocating a particular political cause but goes further to engage in defamation and hatred of the political opponent. In this case parallelism undermines the idea that building democracy is a joint project that involves all citizens and requires cooperation across the lines of ideological and societal divisions.

Finally, *professionalization* turns out a rather elusive criterium of media transformation since the understanding of 'good' or 'bad' journalism is embedded in the wider cultural traditions of a country and, last but not least, reflects the needs and expectations of the audience. In addition, circumstantial challenges like underdevelopment or the instability of the transition itself might pose particular constraints on journalists and the range of issues they cover. It should also be kept in mind that even in established democracies 'media logic' does not necessarily produce the kind of information that contributes to citizens' empowerment or to effectively keeping officials to account. The large variation of what is regarded professional journalism across democracies both old and new and the emergence of new approaches, such as public journalism, demonstrate that it would be misleading to judge media performance in new democracies on the ground of a single model, that is the one that dominates journalistic practice in the Anglo-Saxon world.

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