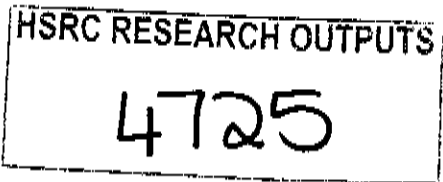


COMPARING MEDIA SYSTEMS.

WEST MEETS EAST

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Title: A Perspective from the South: Triggers and signs of change

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Abstract: In the early 1990s, South Africa underwent dramatic change in both its political system and its media system. Part of that change was a significant shift in the degree and form of political pluralism, as a wholly new (democratic) regime sought to realign media ownership, content, diversity and the regulatory framework to suit a new set of political and social priorities. Locating an African country in the Three Models paradigm casts new light on the Hallin-Mancini hypothesis. It tests a number of assumptions, some of which hold and some of which require fresh consideration. In particular, the paper highlights the triggers and signs of media system change in a brand new democracy and discusses what the implications of this are for the consolidation of democratic political systems. This clearly has significance not just for the countries of the south, but for all emerging democratic states. This paper argues that media systems in new democracies, particularly in the developing world, face the very real danger of slipping away from the homogenizing attributes of the liberal model back towards the instrumentalism and interventionism that characterise Hallin and Mancini's conceptualization of Polarised Pluralism. This paper is based on a PhD thesis – submitted in February 2007 - in which the Hallin-Mancini paradigm is applied to South Africa's political and media systems, both of which underwent radical transformation in a short period of time.

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Introduction

Unlike any of the 18 countries used to populate Hallin and Mancini's *Comparing Media Systems* paradigm, South Africa has recently experienced dramatic, profound change both in its political system and in its media sector. Indeed, if there is one defining characteristic of the South African media market over the 13 years since the country's transition from apartheid to democracy, change is probably it. Certainly, there are trends in place that were around before South Africa's first democratic election in April 1994, indeed for decades prior to that. The country's media sector is still dominated by four or five companies and their products, just as it was a century ago. But in many key areas such as patterns of ownership, diversity, products, audience and even roles and functions, the South African media now is virtually unrecognisable compared to the early 1990s.

The extent, rapidity and contemporaneity of the transformation experienced in the South African media sector offers a very particular and rigorous challenge to Hallin and Mancini's Three Models paradigm: how does it cope with change? After all, several other critical methodologies, such as political economy, do devote considerable attention to this aspect. The short answer is that Hallin and Mancini's paradigm does not cope very well. *Comparative Media Systems* does offer an account of the process of media system change, and it does set out an understanding for the direction of that change, based on the theoretical underpinnings of the paradigm as a whole. An important part of this paper will be devoted to elucidating this understanding of both the process and direction of media system change. It will argue that there are a number of key weaknesses

within Hallin and Mancini's paradigm both in how change is defined and in understanding how and why change takes place.

Change in an emerging democracy may, for instance, be quite different from the shifts and transformations that older, more stable systems undergo. This naturally has an impact on the degree and pace of change within corresponding media systems. Many post-colonial, democratic states in Africa, for example, are effectively one-party systems with many of the networks, structures and values of their authoritarian and even pre-colonial pasts still very much in evidence. This is a different kind of democracy to the versions that exist elsewhere, most particularly compared to the developed, western states that mostly populate the Three Models paradigm.

Even though mature systems go through a process of constant change themselves, as Hallin and Mancini discern, they are likely to cope with the potential triggers of change more comfortably. They are unlikely, for example, to have to manage a dramatic swing in the value of their national currency or a massive sudden outflow of foreign investment. New market entrants with global connections are unlikely to shift the whole shape of the sector. Newer, smaller systems are more vulnerable. They are buffeted and transformed by phenomena that would cause only marginal shifts over the long-term in larger, more stable systems. And, with the legacy of pre-democratic values, alliances and systems pressing for adoption and even formalisation, change may also not be in Hallin and Mancini's anticipated direction toward the Liberal model (which I have termed Liberal drift).

During the course of my own research, submitted as a PhD thesis in February 2007, I have attempted to apply Hallin and Mancini's paradigm to the specific case of South Africa. What I would like to do in this paper is not necessarily delve too deeply into the detail of this exercise, but attempt instead to draw out a number of findings and conclusions. In this way I hope to draw the attention of delegates to debates and questions that may find resonance within their own work and thinking. In this way, the intersection of scholarship is encouraged and the experiences of the south made more relevant.

In this paper, I will be focusing on four findings that I hope will provoke some debate at this conference. These findings suggest that *Comparing Media Systems*:

1. does not cope with rapid, dramatic systemic change or with divergent models of democracy very well;
2. expects too much of homogenisation, particularly in emerging democracies with powerful majority parties;
3. misses how commercialisation can actually enhance the process of political parallelism and state intervention, rather than diminishing them; and,
4. understates the diverse means by which states can intervene in media systems, particularly coercive means

Before tackling these four findings, I will briefly summarise recent developments in South Africa's political and media systems to provide the context for the discussion that follows.

The South African Experience

There will be few years in South African history with as much significance as 1994, the year the country became a democratic state, held its first elections with universal franchise and elected Nelson Mandela as its first black president.

Though the world had begun to warm-up to the idea of a new South Africa in the lead up to the April 27 election of 1994 – sanctions had eased and foreign investment had started to trickle in – the doors to the world were well and truly flung open in the heady days after the poll. The country's shift from global pariah to universal icon of hope and reconciliation was as rapid as it was largely peaceful.

Naturally and inevitably, the switch had massive repercussions on many aspects of the South African polity, not least on the purveyors of the country's newspapers and magazines. For more than a century, the print industry had enjoyed a tightly structured fraternity with barriers to entry as high as the barbed wire fences surrounding the country's military establishments. In spite of the fact that 80% of South Africa's population was black in 1994, a genuinely black press had not been allowed to develop. Indeed laws had been framed during the apartheid era that expressly forbade newspapers and magazines from reporting on black political leaders or parties or even from covering important political and social developments if they occurred in zones designated as black living areas.

With television only arriving in the mid-1970s (very late by world standards) and the broadcast sector tied up in a state monopoly until the early 1990s, there was little opportunity for the convergence of technologies or for the amalgamation of

multi-media empires that was in full force in the rest of the world. Apartheid isolation ensured no substantial foreign investment in the mainstream print sector until 1993, leaving largely undisturbed a language- and race-based oligopolistic division of the spoils between two major Afrikaans language newspaper companies, Nasionale Pers and Perskor, and two English language ones, Times Media Limited and the Argus Publishing and Printing Company. The sector was clearly ready for a major overhaul.

Media Change

In the days following South Africa's first democratic election in April 1994, an extraordinary thing happened in the country's print media sector. People stopped buying newspapers. Across the board, virtually every title, whether daily, weekly, metropolitan or provincial, experienced a significant decline in circulation (see Table 1). Cape Town's major afternoon daily, the *Cape Argus*, lost almost 20% of its readership between mid-1994 and the end of 1995. Durban's *Daily News* dropped from just under 100,000 in the first half of 1993 to 75,960 in the last six months of 1995 and South Africa's flagship Johannesburg-based daily, *The Star*, fell from 216,684 for the period January to June 1993 to 165,171 for the last half of 1995 (ABC 2006).

Collectively these declines – total daily newspaper circulation fell by 11%, or 134,564 copies between June 1994 and December 1995 (ABC) – signaled a huge loss of revenue and a dramatic shift within the market and its audience. In most cases, existing titles have been unable to reclaim the lost ground.

But it was not just the quantity of sales that fell in the wake of the birth of a new democracy. It was the quality of print media products too. In 2002, an investigation was launched into the diminishing quality of newspaper and magazine reportage. The South African National Editors' Forum (Sanef) commissioned a comprehensive skills audit of relatively senior (3 to 5 years of experience) local journalists. It was hoped the audit would provide important indicators concerning the state of South African journalism. It did, and the result, according to the then Sanef chairman and current *City Press* Editor Mathatha Tsedu, was "not a nice picture" (2002, p. 5).

Table 1: The ABC of declining Sales

Title	1994		1995	
	Jan-Jun	Jul-Dec	Jan-Jun	Jul-Dec
Cape Argus	106,574	97,996	89,014	82,774
Mercury	62,925	57,813	49,874	42,690
Sowetan	217,823	190,586	208,358	207,849
The Star	208,185	191,332	182,119	165,171
Daily News	93,247	87,814	81,032	75,960

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations 2006

The poor skills levels were worse than expected and pointed to deteriorating work force quality and thus outputs at key levels in the sector. Among the results of the Sanef audit: 82% of the South African journalists surveyed showed poor interviewing skills, many demonstrated a weak grasp of general knowledge while a low level of reporting skills in general was common (De Beer & Steyn, 2002).

Sanef conducted a follow-up study into the skills of first-line managers in news organisations, dubbed Skills Audit 2, in 2004. The results this time showed substantial management skills weaknesses. First-line (newsroom) managers felt less positive than their reporters about their working environments particularly in relation to career development and remuneration, were aware they didn't communicate as well as they should and demonstrated significant skills gaps in self-management, teamwork, strategic initiative and in coping with multiculturalism and multilingualism (Barratt 2006, p. 46).

Neither were poor skills levels the only evidence of a diminishing journalistic professionalism in this period. The major trade union for practicing journalists, the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ), collapsed and was finally liquidated in 2005. Other trade unions, such as the Media Workers Association of South Africa (Mwasa) and the South African Typographical Union (SATU) continued in the sector, but accounted for only a small proportion of working journalists. Both Mwasa and SATU were intended primarily for the print shop employees working in the presses. By 2007, no genuine alternative association to the SAUJ had been established or seemed likely.

In general terms, the support and regularisation of professionalism in the industry has now been left largely to the editors (who have traditionally and historically been antagonistic to the rights of journeymen journalists in South Africa), through their organisation Sanef. Sanef itself suffered various crises of division and disagreement from its inception in 1998 (Barratt, 2006). Nor was it only poor skills

and the collapsing state of the unions that indicated serious fault lines were appearing in journalistic organisation and reducing professionalism.

Repeated and public ethical blunders such as cases of plagiarism, biased reportage in support of political factions and wide scale inaccuracy embarrassed the industry in the post-1994 period. Major cutbacks of staff and of training budgets by most media companies in the wake of a gathering recession in the sector from 1999 to 2002 further undermined the professionalisation of South African journalists. This was worsened once more by the poor remuneration packages – that still prevail in the industry – that made offers from the private or public sector particularly appealing to young, degreed journalists still serving their apprenticeship in the industry. The result of these trends was the “juniorisation” of newsrooms and the diminishment of the role of editors relative to management. A further significant factor in the development of these trends was government’s urgent challenge to the media to transform their organisations racially.

It was not only journalistic skills, circulation figures and the racial make-up of newsrooms that began to change in South Africa from 1994. The structure and dynamics of the media market itself started to shift. The alternative press, consisting of around a dozen foreign-funded or supported but influential anti-apartheid newspapers, was mostly closed down in the face of funding and positioning problems (Opatrny, 2007). The mainstream sector itself underwent a massive overhaul as black and foreign capital entered the marketplace for the first time seizing control of a variety of significant media enterprises, including Times Media Limited (TML) and the Argus Publishing and Printing Company. By

contrast, Nasionale Pers (Naspers), a formerly unilingual and politically partisan newspaper group, expanded into an imposing, multi-platform, multilingual global presence with media activities in some 50 countries.

At present, in 2007, South Africa has 43 daily, weekly and bi-weekly commercial newspapers representing a wide range of different audiences and interests (Milne & Taylor, 2006). They are owned by four media groups (Naspers¹, Johnnic Communications Ltd, Caxton & CTP Publishers and Printers Ltd, and Independent News & Media Plc). In addition, the country has more than 50 “knock-and-drops”, or local “free sheets”, owned and distributed by the major media groups as vehicles for local advertising (Milne & Taylor, 2006). According to the most recent survey, there are around 100 authentic community-run newspapers dotted around the country ranging from regular weekly papers to sporadic newsletters distributed by hand (Hadland & Thorne, 2004).

The South African newspaper market has seen rapid growth since the year 2000, marked by new entrants into the market and rising overall circulation and readership (Milne & Taylor, 2006). Between 2000 and 2005, total circulation of daily newspapers increased by 38.4% from 1.13 million per day to 1.57 million (Milne & Taylor 2006, p. 39). Much of the circulation growth was due to newly launched titles, however, leaving the established mainstream papers in a steady downward curve, reflecting global trends.

¹ Naspers reorganised its print media business in 2000 and renamed this part of the company Media24. With the date of the change falling in the middle of the research period, I have had to use whichever name is appropriate for the citation. This is more accurate, but possibly confusing.

Overall, circulation levels and market diversity are both at very low levels in South Africa, in spite of the relatively sophisticated nature of the print media industry. By 2000, South Africa had the second lowest number of print titles in the world relative to population and a circulation per capita that is the world's fifth lowest (Berger 2004, p. 59).

One of the most striking trends in the post-1994 period has been the commercialisation of the South African print media sector. This has been evident in the rapid development of the niche, client magazine or contract publishing sector. Circulation figures from ABC show unprecedented growth in the publishing and sales of magazines. By 2005, there were about 350 ABC-audited magazine titles (or 20 million magazines) being distributed in South Africa every month. An important aspect of the upward trend in custom magazines has been the challenge it has presented to ethical standards in the industry. The blurring of advertising material and editorial content has become endemic in the South African print sector as a whole with significant consequences for media status as well as for the industry's long-term financial health (Hadland, Cowling & Tabe, 2007).

According to All Media and Products Survey (AMPS) figures from the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF), 40.4% of the adult population read a newspaper at least once a week in 2000, rising only very fractionally to 40.6% by 2005 (cited in Milne & Taylor 2006, p. 39). This is of course low by developed world standards but is skewed by the large proportion of rural dwellers (almost half of the population) in South Africa, many of whom are beyond the

reach of newspaper distribution chains, or who simply cannot afford to purchase regular newspapers. Poverty is also endemic in the rural areas.

But few developments have been more significant to the South African media marketplace in the post-1994 period than the arrival of mass-market tabloid newspapers. Hallin and Mancini state: "So far as we know, no country that did not develop mass circulation newspapers in the late 19th to early 20th century has ever subsequently developed them" (2004, p. 24). This is clearly not the case in South Africa where a brand new, mass circulation newspaper sector has sprung up within the last five years.

In 1994, the biggest selling daily newspaper – which sold an average of 191,322 copies per day in the first half of the year – was *The Star* of Johannesburg (ABC 2006). By 2006, South Africa's top-selling daily was a tabloid, the *Daily Sun*, currently selling about 450,000 copies a day. Indeed a closer look at the rise in the circulation of South African newspapers between 2000 and 2005 reveals that the 38.4% increase is entirely accounted for by the *Daily Sun* and by the new Zulu language paper *Isolezwe* (which had an average daily circulation of 86,232 in 2006).

Excluding these two publications, there has been a decline of 10.8% in the total circulation of the remaining 17 dailies monitored by the ABC (Milne & Taylor, 2006). Between them, the 11 major metropolitan daily newspapers lost 121,179 in daily sales over the period. The mainstream newspaper market is generally considered by media executives to be a "mature market" in which products are

largely competing against each other for the same audience. As the Naspers annual report stated in 2003, “most sectors of South Africa’s magazine and newspaper markets are overtraded” (Naspers 2003, 10).

The success of the *Daily Sun* from its inception in 2003 spawned other similar tabloid titles such as the *Sunday Sun* and the *Son*, both owned by Naspers and publisher Deon Du Plessis, and the *Daily Voice* (Independent News & Media Plc). Similar to their British predecessors, the South African titles were all aimed at the ‘blue-collar’ market: in South Africa’s case, lower-middle class black and coloured readers. The figures and trends suggest that rather than cannibalise the readerships of other mainstream titles, the new titles reached many readers who previously did not buy a newspaper regularly (Du Plessis 2006). In this way, a mass newspaper market was genuinely constructed from scratch in South Africa’s recent past.

A final key trend during the period has been realignment in the relationship between the media and the state. This was inevitable with the regime change from apartheid state to democracy, but it is clear in retrospect that both sides have struggled to come to terms with their new roles and responsibilities. The consequence has been heightened tension between the majority party in government, the African National Congress (ANC), and the media. Johnston identifies a series of “points of conflict” that have developed between the ANC and the print media and characterises these as follows: “At best, the ANC’s relationship with the political press has been distant and neurotically suspicious; at worst, pathologically hostile” (2005, p. 13). A number of developments serve to

illustrate this shift of relations. They include the state's growing willingness to intervene in the media in various ways, its reluctance to reform legislation affecting the media, its entrée into mass newsletter publishing and the establishment of a variety of clientelist-type bonds between government and the nascent community media sector.

The shift is also evident from the challenge both to and within the media to revisit its traditional, liberal role of Fourth Estate watchdog in a favour of a more conciliatory, less adversarial voice. This has corresponded with an increasingly cosy relationship between majority party political leaders and media owners. Clearly, wide-ranging and important changes have taken place in the South African media in the post-1994 period. And while few would dispute the broad themes of change – journalistic professionalisation, state-media relations, the proximity of the media to the political system, and the structure of the market – it is no coincidence that these are the very dimensions singled out by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as the key indicators for comparative media system analysis.

Political Change

Of course, it is not merely South Africa's media that has undergone fundamental change in the last decade and a half. Perhaps more evident to the world at large has been the seismic change in South Africa's political life. The country's relatively peaceful and rapid transition from apartheid pariah to constitutional democracy was heralded around the world as a massively important moment of human achievement. The 'miracle' of racial reconciliation delivered Nobel peace prizes to Nelson Mandela and his counterpart, then deputy president FW De

Klerk. It also set South Africa on a new path of political and economic development.

There were many hallmarks of this political journey. Some were clearly evident to the whole world, others only to the new breed of legislator who set about reforming three hundred years of statutory discrimination. As Calland observed after the country's first five years of democracy: "South Africa's Parliament is unrecognisable from the one that preceded it before 1994... Not only does its membership comprise a majority of black people who suffered under apartheid, serving political parties a number of whom were banned until 1990, but its institutional construction has been almost entirely overhauled" (1999, p. 100).

Key among these statutory hallmarks were the adoption of an interim democratic constitution in 1993 and its finalisation in 1996. These two documents encompassed a total overhaul of the country's political culture and its political, social and judicial system encompassing a Bill of Rights, broad equality and universal suffrage. This new vision of political practice was embarked upon when Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) achieved its anticipated and substantial electoral majority in 1994 and began a systematic recreation of the country's entire legislative framework, abolishing, amending or creating hundreds of laws. In fact, South Africa's first democratic government passed 534 Acts of Parliament in its first five years, in itself a "huge achievement" (Calland 1999, p. 5). As Nelson Mandela said in his farewell speech to Parliament: "These have been no trivial laws or mere adjustments to an existing body of statutes. They have created a framework for the revolutionary transformation of society and of

government itself" (cited in Calland 1999, p. 5). Not all of the laws that contained anti-press freedom elements were abolished by the new democratic state.

Horwitz has sketched the considerable volume of literature – particularly in the post-1990 period – that grapples with political transitions and the evolving architecture of new democratic institutions (2001). This "'transition theory', as it is loosely referred to, is the product of reflection upon, and abstraction from, the historically disparate paths to democracy followed in central and southern Europe and Latin America" (2001, p. 6). Horwitz identifies South Africa as an example of a 'transplacement' transition, according to Huntington's classic 1991 analytical paradigm (*The Third Wave: Democratisation in the late 20th century*). This form of transition is usually ushered in as the result of negotiations between powerful groups and most frequently occurs in conditions of stalemate. A common factor is the consensual terrain enjoined by both reformers within the ruling regime and moderates in the opposition (2001, p. 6-7). I would concur with Horwitz that this does seem to encapsulate important features of South Africa's political transition. In addition, his observation that most successful transitions from this category "produce a dispensation that is economically and socially conservative, thus maintaining the central pillars of capitalist society" is cogent (2001, p. 7). The citation of the transition theory literature serves to underline an important point: Democracy has many different forms and encapsulates many different processes. For Hallin and Mancini's paradigm to gain universal acceptance, it needs to be able to absorb, and explain, these diverse and often divergent elements.

It is necessary to say at the outset of this paper that I have focused almost all my efforts on South Africa's print media sector. This is not to negate the import of the broadcast sector nor of the new media forms that have arisen in recent years. The broadcast element of a country's media system certainly features frequently in Hallin and Mancini's model, often as an apparent tiebreaker when it comes to the task of clustering. However, while I will allude in passing to the development of the broadcasting sector in South Africa, I cannot hope to absorb its complexity and rapid evolution within the scope of this work. That must wait for a follow-up investigation. I can say that the indications certainly suggest a correlation with the findings of this paper.

In addition, scholars have noted the paucity of literature and research concerning contemporary Afrikaans language newspapers (Botma, 2006). And while I have endeavoured to include these titles and their parent companies in the current work, it is unavoidable that there is an emphasis on the English language mainstream press that reflects the topography of the available scholarship. I do mean by South Africa's media "system", however, all print media titles and their supporting organisations, including the growing community media sector, along with broadcast (television, radio and community radio) and new media outlets.

Finding One: Coping with Change

For Hallin and Mancini, change in media systems is essentially about modernity. It is about the inexorable shift toward a universalised media that is increasingly autonomous (differentiated from other social institutions), professionalised and self-assured. It reflects on an ultimate zone, if not point, of convergence in which

all media systems become essentially Liberal by nature. This homogenisation, or Liberal drift, occurs through the dual processes of secularisation and commercialisation.

In the application of the Three Models paradigm to South Africa's experience, it became clear that while both secularisation and commercialisation are real and demonstrable processes there were other critical factors that acted much more directly. I have termed these the "triggers of change". Of the seven triggers identified, several emanate from within the media itself, such as technological change, perceptions of reader sentiment and the framing of business strategy. The others stem from factors external to the sector, for instance from the global environment, from the state, from commercialisation and from the local economy.

The concept of triggers has been drawn out using the tools of political economy but perhaps the closest precursor can be found in Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) who talk about the "motors" of political communications development (p. 204). These motors are changes in technology, change in the surrounding social and political system, the relationship between journalists and politicians and the nature and interests of the would-be audience (1995, p. 204-5). While I would certainly agree, and indeed have included, changes in technology as a trigger, "changes in the surrounding social and political system" is much too broad to be a useful analytical tool. The interpersonal relationship between journalists and politicians (on which Blumler and Gurevitch focus their attention), on the contrary, is too narrow. I suggest that in order to more clearly understand the causes and forces of change, rather than just the direction and end-result, one needs to isolate the

zones in which change arises. These zones contain the potential, as they have already demonstrated, to trigger change in media institutions and quite possibly in society at large. The change generated by each trigger may either enhance or diminish the degree of dependence. This bears a conceptual resemblance to the agents within Bourdieu's fields wrestling for dominance. The difference is that these triggers cross fields and change in one field can trigger change in another. Critically, these triggers may not only generate rapid change, but this change may well not be in the direction of the Liberal model. Change is thus more complex and less linear than the Three Models paradigm suggests.

An example is state intervention. While Hallin and Mancini agree on more than one occasion in *Comparing Media Systems* that the state has "always played a large role" in media systems, particularly those in southern Europe (2004, p. 119), they do not consign adequate agency to the state in terms of its power to initiate and shape media system change. They certainly do not contend that change within a political system largely determines change within its media system. Hallin and Mancini argue that as a country modernises, the process of differentiation sees the media system and organised political groups and social institutions diverge: "Differentiation means... that the media system increasingly operates according to a distinctive logic of its own, displacing to a significant extent the logic of party politics and bargaining among organised social interests, to which it was once connected" (2004, p. 253). As this differentiation becomes more advanced, the structure of the political system affects the media system less and less deeply, because the mass media have become differentiated from it (2004, p. 283). The more advanced a media system is, in other words, the less the political system

will influence it. Conversely, the less advanced a media system is, the higher degree of political parallelism, the more impact the state will possibly have. It is this aspect that Hallin and Mancini have de-emphasised.

The South African experience – and perhaps that of other ‘emerging’ democracies – is that the political system, including the parties and actors within it, continues to impact in a profound way on the structure of the media system. In the apartheid era, it was the state that determined who could publish, what could be published and for whom. More than a hundred laws underpinned this process including deeply restrictive regulations which applied, for instance, during states of emergency.

Developments in the political system sparked equally dramatic change in the media sector. The advent of democracy itself created an ideological confusion of purpose within the alternative media sector but also dried up funding from sympathetic, anti-apartheid sources (Opatrny, 2007). The end of South Africa’s political and economic isolation, accomplished largely within the domain of the political system, also exposed the entire media sector, after decades of glorious and uncompetitive isolation, to the forces and interests of the global media marketplace.

In the post-apartheid era, state intervention continues to shape the industry in a direct way. As Teer-Tomaselli has argued, “the nation-state, far from becoming irrelevant, has become a key player in driving the project of neo-liberalism, reform and restructuring” (2004, p. 7). Many of the apartheid era press laws remain on

the statutes, in spite of repeated requests to the contrary. New, post-1994 laws on employment practice, racial transformation, cross-media ownership, black economic empowerment and foreign exchange controls continue to regulate newspaper company development. This is symptomatic of a state that has been persistently interested in harnessing the power of the mass media to consolidate its own. Even though this may ostensibly be for the furthering of democratic objectives, such as greater social equity and the consolidation of the political system, it nonetheless signals not greater differentiation between the media and the state, but indeed the opposite.

As this example suggests, when one introduces countries that have endured far more rapid, more recent, more comprehensive change, the model struggles to cope. It generalises the causes of change, assumes that change leads to greater differentiation and overestimates the power of Liberal drift. It is possible that the combination of these counter-tendencies in any one system will be sufficient to permanently constrain, or at best distort, the powerful forces of homogenisation and differentiation that underpin the model.

Finding Two: Liberal Drift

South Africa has made a recent shift from authoritarianism to democracy and this has resulted in a blending of the system's paternalistic, authoritarian (and traditional) inclinations together with more modern, pluralist elements. These elements exist in a state of tension. At root are a concentration of power and a diminishment of accountability that may exacerbate emerging democracies' vulnerability to heightened state intervention in the media.

South Africa's political context in the post-1994 era is one in which a powerfully positioned majority party, the African National Congress (ANC), dominates public life and discourse. The ANC has won all three elections in the democratic era, each with growing majorities. In the last election in 2004, the party won in excess of two thirds of the electorate's support giving it effective and substantive power at all three levels of government. The two-thirds majority also gives the ANC the power to amend the country's Constitution.

In an environment of single-party dominance within a majoritarian system with a weak level of accountability, this could lead (as it has in South Africa) to repeated bids by an active state to roll-back media power and autonomy. This does not mean that democracy itself is in jeopardy. It may mean, however, that the expansion of media freedom is less likely in a democracy that is dominated for long periods by a single political party.

Emerging democracies may present a different category of democracy in which inherent or traditional values militate against the kind of Liberal drift envisaged by Hallin and Mancini. In South Africa's case, this stems from the lack of accountability within South African's political architecture together with its consensual decision-making style rooted in ancient indigenous practice. The consequence is an increasing concentration of power that is by no means typical of the differentiated media and political systems populating the Liberal model. This lends credence, furthermore, to critics' concerns (as well as to Hallin and

Mancini's own anxiety) that the dynamics of power is an under-represented concept within the Three Models paradigm.

Finding Three: Commercialisation

Commercialisation, Hallin and Mancini argue, "has in general weakened the ties between the media and the world of organised political actors" (2004, p. 282). My research indicates, however, that far from weaken the ties between the media and the political system, commercialisation – in the South African case – has in several ways strengthened them.

Commercialisation has made the connection with political life and with political actors stronger as new opportunities arise to use the media commercially for the state, without appearing to be exerting influence that is too close. As media companies themselves diversify into different media and different forms, the ties with regulating agencies, government departments and state institutions grows. By 2004, the South African government was spending almost R50-million (about 5 million euros) a year on advertising. This outlay made it the sixth biggest advertiser in daily newspapers in that year (Nielsen Media Research cited in Milne & Taylor, 2006). Commercialisation, in other words, has not necessarily diminished the connection between the media and political structures. It has just changed it.

A variation of this trend has been evident in other countries of the subcontinent where "many state-owned media in Southern Africa are also becoming increasingly commercialised without gaining any autonomy from government

(Berger 2002, p. 37). It is indeed quite possible that commercialisation has strengthened the bonds between the two. This conclusion militates against Hallin and Mancini's notion of differentiation.

In addition, by allowing the state to pay for content, often without signaling that this constitutes advertising (see Hadland, Cowling & Tabe, 2007), the new climate of commercialisation allows for a new opportunity for indirect intervention in the print media. The supposition is supported by analysis emanating from other countries and regions, including central America and Africa. In his work on *Gacetilla* – advertising disguised as news – Jose Luis Benavides describes this form of content as a central feature in the finances of contemporary Mexican print news media (2000, p. 85). He also argues that it is a “key ingredient in a system of governmental press subsidy, essential in explaining the way in which the Mexican press has served as a propaganda tool for both the Mexican government and the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Benavides 2000, p. 85).

Benavides concludes in his work that government advertising (particularly *gacetillas*) is an important element of “press control” in Mexico (2000, p. 86).

Tettey notes the common occurrence in African democracies of the withdrawal of government advertising to starve critical media outlets of income. Commercial advertisers are also cajoled into pulling their own advertisements in newspapers considered to be at loggerheads with government. In South Africa, virtually every newspaper, including free ‘knock-and-drop’ titles and community papers, carries some form of government advertising. Commercialism, in the South African context, has thus lead to a subtle subsidisation of the media by the state. This is

creating a dependence on advertising revenue from the state for many titles but is also contributing to the deterioration of ethical values that commercialism and dependence naturally brings with it (see Hadland, Cowling & Tabe, 2007).

Finding Four: State Intervention

While Hallin and Mancini's indicators are meant to predict the likelihood of intervention *per se*, *Comparing Media Systems* does not devote much time to analysing different forms of intervention, particularly of the coercive type in young democracies. This is not surprising, perhaps, as governments in Denmark or Great Britain are unlikely to send paramilitary police into newsrooms to sort out the editor. Sadly, this is a more common phenomenon in newer democracies, most particularly in Africa.

Tettey (2001) lists a number of different forms of coercive intervention often in blatant contravention of an African country's own legal or even constitutional provisions. These, at times unorthodox, modes of intervention noted by Tettey include "various acts of silent or overt reciprocity" among African governments aimed at stifling the media, corporal punishment (as occurred recently on one editor in Ivory Coast), the use of state-owned media to discredit media critics, the passage of laws making insulting the president or members of parliament punishable offences, the withdrawal of government advertising and a number of "very indirect ways of hurting the media, by using the citizenry or their supporters as agents of intimidation and violence" (2001, 17-20).

We find in South Africa too a disconnection between constitutional rights and actual state practice. Within the deeply sympathetic framework of constitutional rights, many loopholes exist and countertendencies have apparently emerged. Old apartheid era legislation containing deeply anti-press restrictions has been used by the state repeatedly in the new democratic era (see Tomaselli 1997, p. 8). At times these archaic laws are used to demand the revelation of source's identities, at others to prevent newspapers from publishing articles. This practice has sparked the ire of South African editors and a series of meetings have been held with the highest branches of the state, including the Presidency, in the as yet unsuccessful bid to resolve the issue (see Barratt, 2006).

While the political system has seen the establishment of a constitutional and legal framework that includes fundamental protection for a free press, a powerful democratic state is also more than capable of stalling, if not reversing, the process of differentiation to ensure its own narrative is the one that predominates in the mass media. In this way, it continues to act as a key catalyst for change in the media marketplace. It also seeks continually to intervene in and shape the media system and to deepen its dependence on the political system.

Conclusion

There are elements of this analysis that may be uniquely South African, such as the very recent development of a mass press. But there is also plenty of reason to suspect that these experiences, and the modifications they infer, may well be applicable not only to emerging democracies in Africa but elsewhere in the world too. Naturally, further comparative research involving other new democracies,

particularly those emerging with authoritarian pasts and fragile presents, would allow the usefulness of the modifications I have suggested to be tested further. Certainly, scholars have expressed their anxiety that Africa “is in danger of backsliding democratically” (Berger 2002, 36) and this confers a certain urgency to the task.

Hallin and Mancini ask, “is media system change simply one result of ... changes in society and politics, or might it play some independent role?” (2004, p. 267). The answer, from the South African case study, would seem to suggest that media system change is very much the dependent variable in a context of rapid political and social realignment. This was indeed the argument in *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert et al, 1956), the predecessor to *Comparing Media Systems*. Just as it posed the question, “why is the media like it is?”, *Four Theories* continues to challenge comparative media analysis.

It also becomes evident in using the Hallin-Mancini paradigm that South Africa’s print media is headed in the wrong direction, if one supposes that the Liberal model has come to constitute a consensual position on the ideal role and function of the press. This is a worrying and perhaps controversial aspect to the exercise of locating South Africa within the Three Models paradigm.

The evidence suggests that instead of groping its way toward utopian media Liberalism, South Africa is slipping toward polarised pluralism. This can be gleaned from many traits that characterise South Africa’s media system and its inter-relationship with the world of politics.

In South Africa, political parallelism is on the rise, state intervention is increasing, journalistic professionalism is declining and the media system is shifting in a manner that will heed, and possibly reverse, the processes of differentiation and indeed of democratisation. This is a very different tale from the inexorable convergence on a homogenised Liberal model that Hallin and Mancini anticipate. Even though factors are evident that would support this Liberal drift, including technological and global journalistic trends, these may not be enough to propel a new democracy far across the matrix. Indeed, polarised pluralism beckons. And while Hallin and Mancini refuse to rank the models in terms of their democratic purity, it is evident from their prediction of the Liberal model's eventual triumph that this is the natural and indeed inevitable end-point of a global, democratic media. My research suggests that vision may be wishful thinking given the great power of historical trends and legacies and the new forms of democracy represented by the latest generation of adherents.

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INTERVIEW

Deon du Plessis, Publisher and co-owner, *Die Son*, on Wednesday 19 October, 2005 at the Media24 building in Auckland Park.