Comparative Research and the History of Communication Studies

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This brief historical survey opens with a framing of its narrative. It then addresses three early classics of comparative media studies: *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956); *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Lerner 1958); and *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit / Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Habermas 1962/1989) (later referred to as *Four Theories*, *Passing*, and *Public Sphere*). Thereafter the survey trifurcates comparative research studies into those with a regional focus (e.g., Latin America, East-Central Europe); those with a medium-specific focus (television, cinema, networks); and those addressing media and society more generally, focusing on politics and policy, and minority-ethnic media.[1]

Framing Comparative Communication Research

Given the relative paucity of comparative media research, it is tempting to promise the reader a rather cursory chapter evaluating its history. Yet given the paramount importance of comparative studies for developing cogent theory, a critical survey is needed. If communication media research is to have heft, it must never be permitted to slumber inside a national cocoon. Max Weber's sociological studies of religions, Barrington Moore Jr's six-nation study *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966/1993), Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963/1989), the Princeton School's influential cross-national studies of "modernization", the four-volume *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986), and the long-established journal *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (1958–): these and others, whatever the judgments on their specifics, have helped to define properly ambitious research.

Yet a substantial number of the texts reviewed below date only from the mid-1990s, evincing the very slow expansion of this field's comparative focus until recently. Both

holistic and segmented[2] media theorizing – *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere), *egemonia* (hegemony), "mediatization", cultural hybridization, functionalism, "cultural industries", cultural capital, agenda-setting, priming, framing, and the rest – have indisputably been stunted by the failure to routinely compare and contrast between nations.

Worth underscoring, moreover, is the typically unacknowledged dismissal of the need for comparative research found in US and UK Media Studies texts, where findings drawn are repeatedly presented *and* cited as telling us something worth knowing about "the" media, that is, implicitly all media everywhere. It is a common flaw in many national studies, but given Anglo-American ascendancy in media studies this fallacy has damaging consequences (Stam and Shohat 1994; Curran and Park 2000).

Generalizations about media *as such* based upon the United States or the United Kingdom are automatically rendered flawed because of the near-implausibility of replicating them on a wide scale. Despite certain easily identifiable differences between British and US media and societies, in many ways Britain and the United States may be said to have a great deal more in common with each other than with most of the nearly 200 nations recognized by the UN: language, Protestant brands of Christianity, affluence, political stability, imperial pretensions and cultures. These are comparable but atypical nations. Many other countries have even more extreme class inequalities and entrenched exclusion of women from the political arena, and suffer from acute political instability, civil or sectarian strife, heavy dependence on foreign powers, the petroleum and minerals traps, unaffordable education, illiteracy, and ruthless regimes. As a consequence, the societal roles of their media vary sharply.

Comparative research need not only be across nation states. Highly populated nations such as China, India, and Brazil palpably offer significant internal regional variations in media practice and uses. Population size alone understates this variety. "Sub-national" nations, such as Catalunya, Québec, and Scotland, nations with linguistic–religious–regional divisions, such as Belgium and Sri Lanka, and substantially multi-ethnic nations, such as Nigeria, offer very substantial scope for comparative media research within a single nation state.

Valuable, too, are cross-national comparisons within global regions, despite the frequently negative framing of such work in response to the late Samuel Huntington's misconceived *The Clash of Civilizations* (1998). This chapter will review some comparative work on Latin America, East Asia, and East-Central Europe. The notions of geo-linguistic and geo-cultural proximity (e.g., Sinclair, Jacka, and Cunningham 1996, pp. 11–14), framed initially to analyze trade in cultural products, are germane to this dimension of comparative communication research.

Thankfully, though, the comparative media studies scenario is now changing and even picking up a little speed. Research on media in a number of nations other than the US/ UK duo is finally becoming fairly routinely available, at least permitting comparative study from secondary data. Yet even so, research on global South nations is often dominated by global North scholars or by researchers strongly stamped by Anglo-American (or Francophone) paradigms.

There are many continuing challenges. Cross-national research may be expensive and often requires cross-national teams. Furthermore, it is easy to acknowledge the language impediment in conducting comparative research, given that many researchers are monolingual, but unfortunately the hurdles cannot be reduced to that single practicality.

For example, imperial and post-imperial mentalities are evident in the way that even English language communication research routinely goes unnoticed and unreviewed in the United States and the United Kingdom, if published in Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and other countries with a significantly Anglophone academy. The hurdles are still more visible when research is on and especially *from* countries outside a tiny elite circle in the global North. EU funding has often required multiple national partners following the accession of new East-Central European nations, which is to be welcomed, but still operates within Fortress Europe.

One caveat: as Gunther and Mughan (2000, p. 412) very importantly stress, media "is a plural noun". Yet comparative media research has tremendously favored news media of various kinds over all forms of entertainment media and, no doubt in part for archival reasons, print media over others. The tendency to use "media" as a singular noun efficiently lures us into fogging vital distinctions and often claims the part (news, journalism) in synecdoche for the whole. Three further caveats must be issued: (a) the focus here is on overall contributions to comparative media research, so many tempting targets for specific empirical critique will reluctantly be passed over; (b) not reviewed here, though of great potential value, are comparative longitudinal studies within nations; (c) this chapter does not venture into intercultural communication studies, interesting and important as their focus potentially is and despite their comparativist bent.

Lastly, let us note a constructive but complicating factor in comparative communication research, namely the growth of interest in aspects of globalization. Positive in principle, obviously, but it complicates the task here inasmuch as many studies of globalization and media inevitably incorporate comparisons, whether fleeting or substantive, in support or critique of propositions concerning globalizing media trends.

Four Theories, *Passing*, and *Public Sphere*

Both *Four Theories* and *Passing* represented a critical step forward inasmuch as the former study set out the first clear schema for analyzing media in different nation states across the planet, and Lerner's (1958) work incorporated, admittedly from a pro-US Cold Warrior's perspective, the global South and global regions as a crucial terrain for media research. Indeed, at the same time as Lerner's fellow researchers in the United States were mostly insisting that media changed little or nothing in "society", he was concluding they could be significant agents of change in "society" outside the United States through spreading commoditization and entrepreneurialism ("psychic mobility").

Siebert and his colleagues (1956), in a media studies field dominated then as now by an extreme obsession with the present moment, sought to balance historical evolution and contingency with an acknowledgement of the role of differing state-forms in shaping media structures. Their model firmly eschewed media-centric analysis of media, and did not fall into the trap of concluding that research findings on US media applied to all nations. However, while they made it clear that by the "press" they intended to designate all media technologies and did give some attention to a variety of media formats, their primary focus was on news, journalism, and censorship practices. This is not in itself a

critique, as research needs to delimit, but it did anticipate the strong emphasis on these issues in subsequent comparative research.

On the debit side, Siebert and his colleagues wobbled uneasily between two approaches. At times they derived the societal organization of media historically and structurally from "the system of social control" (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956, p. 1). For example, they identified what they termed "libertarianism" with the emergence of European capitalism and scientific reasoning. At others, they sought to explain media structures in idealist terms, by recourse to the ascendancy of particular normative theories. These they defined as

> certain basic beliefs and assumptions which *the society* holds: the nature of man, the nature of society and the state, the relation of man to the state, and the nature of knowledge and truth (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956, p. 2, my emphasis).

The notion that an entire nation would subscribe to one or other of these positions – Lockean liberalism, Stalinism, "social responsibility of the press" (*á la* 1947 Hutchins Commission) – implausibly homogenized national belief-systems and enthroned them in a smoothly functionalist model.

Contestation of media structures only appears in their argument in connection with liberalism's attack on authoritarianism and, glancingly, in connection with the "social responsibility" paradigm, their solution to the negatives in monopolistic media ownership (e.g., Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956, pp. 5, 85). Otherwise their implicit image seems to be that of four theories, born from different socio-economic formations, which then, depending on the nation in question, become normatively elephantine, "the dominant ideologies" generating ongoing media performance of four different kinds. In the case of the "social responsibility" paradigm, however, this framework implicitly broke down since they argued it to be a trend in the process of becoming dominant, but had no explanation of *why* contemporary US media should follow a "social responsibility" model other than as a result of the high ethical principles of those owners, executives, and journalists who shared their vision – idealism, then, in both senses of the word.

Later proposals based upon this model and initially summarized by McQuail (1994) added development communication and democratic-participatory communication to these deontic categories. As a step toward complicating the picture, this was to be welcomed, although in practice much media performance conducted under the aegis of "development" was distinctly authoritarian in one mode or another, and democratic-participatory communication practice evinced a much larger variety of formats than conventional mainstream media, so this designation begged many questions. The latter category also destabilizes Siebert and his colleagues' implication of a homogeneous, uncontested normative paradigm.

Christians *et al.* (2009) have recently proposed a substantial departure from the "four theories" schema, focusing only on democratic regimes and on news, and generating three major categories, namely normative traditions, models of democracy, and media roles, each with four sub-categories. In the case of media roles, the sub-categories are defined as monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative. This approach is less ambitious globally and does not pivot strictly on the normative, but repeatedly runs the risk of being overly schematic.

Lerner's *The Passing of Traditional Society* was cross-national but also regional in focus, although he derided the "Western invention" of the term "Middle East" to denote the region (Lerner 1958, p. 403). He and a team of eleven conducted interviews in Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt, and Iran in 1950–1951, with country summaries updated subsequently. They sought to understand the conditions for the emergence of "modernity", which Lerner defined at one point as achieving "public power and wealth for private comfort and fun" (Lerner 1958, p. 79). Among those conditions he argued that literacy and radio were destined to be central in promoting a growing class of what he called the "Transitionals", people who embraced what he variously termed "psychic mobility" and "empathy", namely "the spread of curiosity and imagination among a previously quietistic population [through which] would come the human skills needed for social growth and economic development" (Lerner 1958, p. 412) along capitalist lines.

These were not the only decisive elements of his analysis. He also emphasized shifting definitions of old age and female gender; styles of political leadership; the importance for political stability of a slow and steady increase of Transitionals rather than a sudden rush in their numbers; the roles of marginalized subcultures in developing media; and the dichotomy, which haunts contemporary Orientalist discourse to this day concerning the Islamic world, of "Mecca or mechanization" (Lerner 1958, p. 405).

This was all a mixed bag, to say the least, but in principle represented an approach to comparative media research, which, although ethno-centric, was not media-centric; which sought to identify key determinants without homogenizing their operation; which was alert to sub-national as well as national variations within a regional context; and gave full weight to the dynamic of social change rather than presuming political stability to be the norm.

Between them, these two early US studies set out a series of parameters for comparative media research that were in many ways constructive, at the very least in pushing researchers' attention toward extending their national horizons and in eschewing media-centric analysis of media. Celebration of their own nation's culture, explicit in Lerner's case, implicit in the case of Siebert *et al.*, certainly sullied their claim to academic neutrality but did not extinguish their contributions.

Habermas' *Public Sphere* (1962/1989) consisted of a comparison between the rise and decline of public debate on political matters in Britain, France, and Germany. The delay of 27 years in its English language publication as a full text rather than fragments meant that many Anglophone researchers came to it late. His historical analyses have been challenged, notably regarding France, and the section on nineteenth-century Germany was the least developed of the three cases. Nonetheless, the 'public sphere' terminology has grown from this comparative history into a huge ongoing range of studies in many contexts, for example, the essay collections edited by Calhoun (1993) and Bastien and Neveu (1999), up to a collection of nearly forty research papers debating the applicability of the concept on the African continent (CODESRIA 2008).[3]

Comparative Communication Research on Global Regions

Some of the most interesting comparative media research has indeed taken Lerner's path and engaged with regions, not simply with individual nations, often within the context of globalizing or Americanizing trends. Examples include Latin America, East Asia, and

the former Soviet sphere of influence in East-Central Europe and the Balkans. Concepts of geo-linguistic or geo-cultural proximity have played a significant heuristic role in exploring comparative and global media change on this scale. The former term applies more closely to Anglophone, Lusophone, Arabophone, and other international language zones, while the latter is better fitted to multilingual but geographically proximate areas, for example, to East Asian cultures historically influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism, and Western imperialism.

The first comprehensive study of Latin American cinemas appeared in 1981 (Hennebelle and Gumucio-Dagron 1981). In English language studies of Latin American media, the initial major comparative works were on media and political developments (Fox 1988), social documentary (Burton 1990), trends in national cinemas (Pick 1993), and national television systems (Sinclair 1999). These were followed by Waisbord's (2000) study of the growth of investigative journalism in the region and Fox and Waisbord's (2001) edited collection on Latin American media and political change. The quarterly *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias de la Comunicación*, the official journal of the ALAIC (Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación), and Intercom's (Brazil's communication research association) *Intercom – Revista Brasileira de Ciências da Comunicação*, both have come to carry a number of comparative and regional studies, including in *Intercom* studies of Lusophone nations.

Notably, Mastrini and Becerra (2006) brought out the very first systematic study of media ownership concentration in Latin America. Their analysis covered all the continental Latin American countries except for Ecuador, Paraguay, and the Central American nations. Noting increasing marketization and the retreat of the state over the 1990s, they mapped market structures and levels of concentration, and developed a Concentration Index of the major culture and information firms. While their study is rich in details of national specifics, they nonetheless concluded overall that generally low levels of access to telecommunications and cultural products paralleled UNDP development indices; that ownership concentration in the media sector was significant and growing; and that certain firms in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, and Venezuela had developed a major regional presence. The potential political implications of their findings, however, they explicitly reserved for a later study.

Regarding the East Asian region, Iwabuchi (2002) argued for the importance of understanding media flows within East Asia's specific forms of modernity and cultural tradition, and contrasted media culture shifts in Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong to illustrate his point. His later volume with Chua on popular cultural flows between Japan and South Korea, and *Hallyu*, the regionally influential Korean "cultural wave" spreading even as far as northeastern India (Iwabuchi and Chua 2008), explored these issues further. Ehrlich and Desser's (2000) more specific comparison of Chinese and Japanese cinemas and arts delved deeply into longer-term dimensions of regional cultural flows. The journal *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (1999–) draws on a variety of disciplines to present research on eastern and other regions of Asia.

The former Soviet sphere of influence embraces, as well as sharply different nations, significantly different sub-regions, namely East-Central Europe, the Balkans, the Transcaucasus, and Central Asia. (To this writer's knowledge, little work has been

published to date on the two latter.) The focus of much of this research, not surprisingly, has been on the dynamics of media change since the 1980s.

Splichal (1995), the present writer (Downing 1996), and Sparks (1998) sought to analyze these changes somewhat differently. Splichal, focusing on Slovenia and East-Central Europe, argued the "Italianization thesis", namely, that after Communism's collapse regional news media were moving in the direction of Italy's media: strong state control, political partisanship, the integration of top journalists within political elites, and the absence of consensus on professional norms. Sparks (1998), however, marshaled evidence from Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary to dispute any radical break between the domination of media under sovietized regimes and their successors. He then built upon this analysis to argue that conventional western scholarship on media and power was deeply flawed.

The present writer compared how four interacting and mutually escalating political–economic and media–cultural processes drove the collapse of the Soviet system over time in the specific cases of Russia, Poland, and Hungary. These were (a) accelerating internal political–economic shifts; (b) insurgent and dissident media of many kinds; (c) swiftly widening cracks in the dam of official media; and (d) each country's differing relations with forces external to the Soviet bloc. He also compared the often very fraught roles of these countries' news media in the tumultuous years following 1989–1991, and concluded, somewhat like Sparks, that conventional media theories must engage far more deeply with conflict, instability and macro-political change than they generally do.

More recently, two regional essay collections were published, one entirely on East-Central European media change, the other partly so (Dobek-Ostrowska *et al.* 2010). The former text includes detailed country case studies focused on the Baltic states, Poland, Hungary, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Romania, and some comparative and conceptual overviews of the region as a whole. The focus is mostly on broadcasting, especially the key instance of television, but also maps the sudden impact of globalization in the national media systems under review. The editors, building upon Splichal's "Italianization" thesis and Hallin and Mancini (2004), argue there to be a regional trend towards the "Mediterraneanization" of media, namely their domination by governments and profit-hungry firms. Dobek-Ostrowska *et al.* provided case studies of media in Russia, Ukraine, the Baltic and Czech republics, and two in Poland, but also proposed comparisons from Turkey and two from Spain, along with several chapters of comparative analysis.

Iordanova's studies compared national cinemas in the Balkans during the lethal conflicts of the 1990s, and more generally of media and culture in that region (Iordanova 2006, 2008). They provided very searching and authoritative accounts of the region's media at a time of rapid and sometimes brutal change, and brushed away many standard misconceptions. Her focus was principally but not exclusively textual.

Balabanova's (2007) study contrasting British and Bulgarian news coverage of NATO's 1998 Serbia and Kosovo bombing campaign used the comparison to critique the so-called CNN effect and other theories of the news media/foreign policy relation for their US-centric limitations. Geographical proximity to the bombing generated twice as many Bulgarian news stories as in Britain, mostly very sympathetic to the human suffering generated. Yet it did not dent the Bulgarian government's support for NATO. British elite press coverage, while not priming the move to bomb, served to generate public

consent for bombing only in the initial month, but shifted to dispute its strategic appropriateness – though not the framing of the conflict – in the campaign's third month.

Balabanova underscored the multiple constraints operating on both Bulgaria's government and its journalists in the immediate post-Soviet era: the former determined at all costs to enter the European Union and NATO but journalists still suffering from ingrained public skepticism in the sovietized era regarding their independence. Thus government policy and news media framing were at loggerheads in Bulgaria, while in Britain news coverage came to query the bombing's strategic effectiveness while continuing to support its officially proclaimed objective.

These regional comparative studies have challenged many crude generalizations and opened important new paths to analysis. We now turn to our second category of comparative media research.

Comparative Medium-Specific Research

Under this heading are included studies of television, of cinema, and of digital information networks.

One of the most influential – and contested – comparative studies of television was by Nordenstreng and Varis (1974), who argued that national television and cultures around the world were increasingly threatened with virtual extinction by US television exports. This argument quickly developed beyond television to an argument that the contrast between the abundance of communication infrastructures, news flows, and cultural images in the Global North, and their weakness in the Global South, was growing apace. The apogee of this analysis came in the even more controversial book-length Report *Many Voices, One World* (UNESCO 1980/2003), which the Reagan and Thatcher administrations quickly targeted with a vitriolic denunciatory campaign. It served as a rationale in 1983 for both governments to pull out of UNESCO altogether. Their reasons for pulling out were several, but their endlessly repeated allegation that the Report sought to muzzle journalists proved an effective, if entirely erroneous, public smear.

This particular comparative frame for global television analysis was also assailed by a series of scholars, notably on the grounds (1) that it reduced TV viewers in the Global South to cultural dupes and confused the spread of modernity with cultural imperialism and (2) that cultural hybridization was a more nuanced concept than one-way domination. Nonetheless, few outright disputed the aching disparity between South and North in communication infrastructures and in the mutual exchange of news. Liebes and Katz (1990) produced a widely cited study of the varied receptions of the US soap opera *Dallas* in different countries, arguing from their results that active cultural frames were constitutive of audiences' appropriations of foreign televisual material. Sinclair, Jacka and Cunningham (1996, pp. 17–18), however, responded that this culturalist frame was equally reductive in its own way and cited a variety of studies of the reception of *Dallas* in different countries that illustrated the often decisive power of scheduling, program philosophy, and cultural environment in determining program popularity.

Important further steps in this debate were taken in Buonanno's edited volume comparing television fiction across seven European nations (Buonanno 1999) and in

Albert Moran's studies of program format trade (Moran 1998; Moran and Keane 2004). Their analyses in each case are too rich in detail to summarize, but it should be said that through using comparative data these volumes contributed to a far more nuanced and multifaceted analysis of television in society than the sterile confrontation between culturalists and an earlier generation of media political economists. Striking out once more in the audience appropriation direction, Straubhaar (2007) proposed a model accommodating multiple vectors around television's influence, based in part on his long research on Brazilian TV, but also on contrasts with Italy, India, Japan, and some other nations. He argued, based upon these comparative data, that in their different ways "glocalization", hybridization, and multilayered cultural identities were all essential concepts adequately to encompass the impacts of global television flows.

Surveys of world cinema and of national cinemas are quite common, but comparative studies less so. Here we will focus on just four. The oldest is the "Third Cinema" research tradition. In its major initial manifesto Solanas and Getino (1969/1983) claimed that a distinctive cinema was emerging from revolutionary movements in the Global South, representing a radical break with both Hollywood (First Cinema) and art movies (Second Cinema). "Third Cinema", they argued, was determinedly subversive, democratic in its production process, committed to interactive audience settings (and implicitly documentary in focus). Various attempts to pin down the term "Third Cinema" followed, from claiming that Global South political film-making was distinctively collectivist (Gabriel 1982) to rather exhaustive arguments that effectively seemed to conclude that "Third Cinema" and politically engaged cinema (but not, obviously, from the Right) were overlapping categories (Pines and Willemen 1990; Wayne 2001). Dissanayake and Guneratne (2003) were among the voices arguing that the comparative distinction broke down when considering many Global South movies, not least from Asia. A lively debate continued.

Three more specific but seminal studies deserve attention. Stam *et al.* (1997) developed a detailed comparison between Brazilian and US media representations of "race" and slavery, in the process successfully avoiding a long tradition of endeavoring to show one of these national histories morally superior to the other. Naficy (2001) developed a distinctive category of cinema that he terms "accented cinema", namely, the corpus of film work produced in various parts of the world by film-makers forced into political exile or experiencing diasporic uprootedness. He traced subtly and delicately the composition of diasporic "accents" in film works, ever more pervasive over the past forty years. Marciniak, Imre, and O'Healy's (2007) studies of transnational feminism and cinema pick up on a number of these issues, focusing especially on media and film representations of women as migrant workers, often "undocumented", and quite frequently working as nurses, cleaners, and prostitutes. Their own feminist position excludes facile homogenization of women's experiences, identities, or representations, and contests the "ghettoizing rubrics" (Marciniak, Imre and O'Healy 2007, p. 9) of "ethnic cinema", "minority cinema", or "immigrant cinema".

Let us finally under this medium-specific heading address a masterwork of comparative research into digital networks, namely Manuel Castells' (1996–1998/2009) *The Information Age* trilogy. Extensive comparative case studies abounded, some of them quickly dating as with his blanket dismissal of the African continent as digitally excluded,

but all of them carefully studied by his teams of collaborators. While it is common, and fair, to note that media in general are absent from his analysis, there can be no question but that by the sheer weight and global extent of his comparative research he compelled media researchers to start bringing digital networks into the mainstream of their concerns. Thus he helped gradually to overturn the crippling "division of labor" between information society research and cultural and media studies research.

Comparative Studies of Media and Society

Two[4] clusters predominated under this heading, one around media, politics, and the state, the other a smaller but growing corpus on media, racism, and ethnicity. Within the former cluster the focus varied among macro-political issues, election processes, and communication regulation. That order is followed below.

The essays in Popkin (1995) compared the roles of media during revolutionary processes, largely focusing on print. The national case studies were drawn from seventeenth-century Britain, the American and French revolutions, Germany in 1848, early Soviet Russia, China, the US Civil Rights turmoil of the 1950s and 1960s, and the "Velvet revolutions" of East-Central Europe in 1989. The contributing authors concentrated on how media have shaped "conflicts in the chaotic periods that follow the overthrow of established authority or on the media's role in the reconstruction of new institutions" (Popkin 1995, p. 10), but did not focus on their roles in building momentum toward revolution.

The introductory essay acknowledged that the terms "revolution" and "media" were being rather stretched in order to encompass the cases. However, it concluded that comparing the cases did succeed in showing

> a sudden multiplication of competing publications or media organs, a rapid shift from one dominant medium to another (from pamphlets to newspapers, for example), a marked change in the form or substance of media content, or a major alternation in different groups' access to the media (Popkin 1995, p. 4).

Popkin proposed that "there are enough suggestive similarities in the evolution of media in different revolutionary crises that one can plausibly argue for [there being] … substantial regularities". Among these are the

> explosion of new voices in the media, the invention of new forms of presentation, and the search for ways to enlarge the potential audience and shorten the time necessary for reaching it … an intensification of direct [oral] interchange, and the more structured media find their importance in the influence they exercise on this stream of spoken words (Popkin 1995, pp. 24–25).

The essays in Morris and Waisbord (2001) directly addressed the debate about the supposed contemporary etiolation of the state as a result of globalization processes by examining a variety of cross-national cases – Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, South

Africa, South Korea, and the European Union – in which the state's decisive roles regarding media and telecommunications were abundantly evident. In a different political register, the essays in Mattelart (2002) compared a variety of cases in which state censorship had been challenged from outside its borders, ranging from Iran to Cuba, North Korea, and various African nations. These studies served to confirm cross-nationally that in certain spheres of certain states, if not all, contemporary communication technologies may have an erosive potential.

Gunther and Mughan's collection, *Democracy and the Media* (2000), was unusual in that it focused both on media roles within macro-level dimensions of the political process (transition from dictatorship in Spain, Russia, Hungary, and Chile) and on its micro-level routine informational and electoral dimensions (in the United States, Japan, the Netherlands, Britain, and Germany).

From the experiences of Spain, Russia, Hungary, and Chile, Gunther and Mughan concluded that inadvertent and partial media liberalization by states – "inadvertent" in the sense that these dictatorial governments, self-evidently, did not lessen controls in order to bring down their own regimes – set up nonetheless an unstable and unpredictable dynamic, exacerbated by increasingly severe conflicts within the elite on whether and how far to permit further media freedom or retract it. The image of cracks in a dam is not one they use, but that irresistibly comes to mind.

The other essays in Gunther and Mughan strove to identify trends and dynamics in media performance in "actually existing" democracies. The conclusions were far from sanguine, not least in identifying severe problems in the framing and provision of relevant information relevant to election decisions in the United States (Gunther and Mughan 2000, p. 441) and the commercialization of the electoral process there. They noted the failure of Internet options to realize the utopian potential originally predicted by some, and identified with alarm a US trend toward knee-jerk cynicism among news media commentators concerning the political process. They also suggested a gradual process of approximation to US models in other democracies, and those democracies' consequent deterioration.

They concluded from this comparative analysis that the notion a free market automatically produces diverse and productive news media was wishful thinking, unsupported by compelling evidence. They also conclude that the public service broadcasting model, especially as realized in Japan and Britain, offered a higher level of electorally relevant information than a system dominated by the bottom line.

Ward and Lange's collection, *The Media and Elections* (2004), focused only on the micro-process through seven studies (Italy, the United States, Germany, South Africa, France, Russia, and Britain). The essays set out simply to describe the legislation addressing media conduct during elections (and did not reference Gunther and Mughan), and the comparative conclusions chapter was considerably less robust than its equivalent in Gunther and Mughan, offering a general set of principles for media election coverage to be fair and free rather than a systematic probing of the data in previous chapters. The principles set out were unexceptionable but predictable, such as journalists' need for personal security, the importance of a vigorous civil society, and the difference between the letter of the law and its enforcement.

Esser and Pfetsch's essay collection, *Comparing Political Communication* (2004), sought to advance the role of comparative study in political communication research both

theoretically and methodologically, but focusing upon Western liberal democracies and largely upon routine procedural and electoral dimensions. The essays were marked by (1) a resolute focus on defining politics as a discrete sub-system best researched by positivist methodologies; (2) an attempt nonetheless to extend political communication research in a comparative direction by using notions of political culture largely derived from its definition in Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963/1989); (3) a notable disinterest in economic dimensions of politics and media; (4) a primary focus on the procedures of liberal democracy, rather than the macro-political issues addressed by some of the Gunther and Mughan essays; (5) inattention to global South polities, balanced to some extent by several chapters addressing globalization; (6) a legacy media, rather than media-and-Internet, focus; and (7) an implicit constriction of "media" and "politics", despite using the terms "culture" and "communication", to news media and formal politics.

The editors' agenda was to advance the construct of a "political communication system", meaning the routine interface between politics and media as systems, based upon the assumption of the so-called "mediatization" of contemporary politics (Gunther and Mughan 2000, p. 387). Pfetsch (2004, pp. 359–360) proposed four categories in which the "political communication system" operates: (a) a commercial broadcasting system, autonomous press, and weak political parties, generating influential media (she instanced the United States); (b) public service broadcasting, a party-run press and strong parties, generating influential parties (she instanced Germany); (c) broadcasting with some public service attributes, a partisan press, and weak parties (she instanced Switzerland); (d) a strongly commercial broadcasting operation, a nonparty press, and strong parties (no example was cited). Four aspects of the "political communication system" the editors argue to be central to its analytical utility: political socialization; public opinion processes; political public relations; and the mutual relation of political communication structures and political culture (Pfetsch 2004, p. 389).

This collection links interestingly to Hallin and Mancini (2004), who also made use of the "system" construct. They did so less rigidly, using the term almost in the sense of "complex" or "formation", but restricted it to news media, especially print, and forms of legal regulation of news media. They conceived their prime task as developing categories capable of encompassing the news media of Western Europe and North America (minus Mexico). Early on they acknowledged the importance of "film, music, television … telecommunication, public relations" for a complete analysis of "media systems" (Hallin and Mancini 2004, p. 7), but excluded them from consideration on the ground they would demand different concepts and draw on different corpuses of research.

They emphasized four issues: the strength of news media markets; the degree of parallelism between media and political parties; the development of what they termed "journalistic professionalism" (Hallin and Mancini 2004, p. 21), by which they meant a degree of autonomy, rather than a striving for political neutrality; and the degree of state intervention into news media functioning. Overall they generated three categories, characterized in both regional and political science terms: a "Mediterranean" or "polarized pluralist" model; a "North-Central European" or "democratic corporatist" model; and a "North Atlantic" or "liberal" model.

Their text contained many well-honed analytical insights, but particularly raised the thorny issue of how best to delimit when conducting comparative media research.

There is little question but that the title of their book should have been "Comparing Print News Media and Political Life" – they spent little time on broadcast and none on internet news – rather than *Comparing Media Systems*. The failure to address media corporations as entire market entities rather than simply their news divisions, or to acknowledge the increasing dominance of public relations in the provision of news, was problematic. The dynamic linkage between the sharp growth of media concentration, neo-liberal re-regulation and the dizzying expansion of digital networks was only summarily and very hesitantly handled toward the end, where they wrote that

> commercialization seems clearly to involve an erosion of the professional autonomy journalists gained in the latter part of the twentieth century, and also, *possibly*, a subordination of the media to the political interests of business that *could diminish* political balance … (Hallin and Mancini 2004, p. 295, my emphasis).

Their overall emphasis on media history and change was most welcome, but far-reaching changes were currently ongoing and this hyper-cautious conclusion was far from giving them the weight due. However, the authors' self-restriction to the United States, Canada, and Western Europe was entirely defensible, and their plea that their three categories should not be applied to incomparable regions was perfectly sensible. Notwithstanding critiques above, their work offered an interestingly argued step in the formulation of comparative research models.

A very tightly focused example of comparative research can be found in a triangular study of news media, government bureaucracy, and foreign aid responsiveness by Van Belle, Rioux, and Potter (2004). Dwelling simply upon the press salience of particular countries (and in the US case, of disasters) and correlating that with the amount of foreign aid disbursed by the state bureaucracies responsible, produced exceptionally high correlations, supported by varied statistical significance tests. This applied across the United States, Britain, France, Canada, and Japan. (Their study was not of the so-called "CNN effect" on switches in government policy-making.)

The authors, political scientists, proposed what they called "The Cockroach Theory of Bureaucracy": "… the bureaucracy that finds itself caught out in the light – [i.e. of news media attention] – is the one that is going to be stomped on" (Van Belle, Rioux, and Potter 2004, p. 31), and therefore acts pre-emptively/"responsively" to avoid negative publicity. The *fear* of the stick (news media) they argued to be the primary stimulus to bureaucratic distribution of foreign aid. The authors did not involve themselves in detailed analysis of media operations or texts, only going so far as to argue that "corporate media [are] driven by business imperatives to seek out government failures that can be depicted as scandals" (Van Belle, Rioux, and Potter 2004, p. 32), while qualifying this with Lance Bennett's "indexation" theory (Bennett, Lawrence, and Livingston 2008) of "the overwhelming predominance of officialdom in the media" (Van Belle, Rioux, and Potter 2004, p. 145).

The studies in Goldberg, Prosser, and Verhulst (1998) addressed the changing context of communication re-regulation during the critical decade of the 1990s, with chapters on Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Hungary, the European Union and the Council of Europe, the United States, and Australia. In doing so they chose countries with differing

federal structures (Australia, Germany, the United States) and none; with differing levels of court activism (the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia); with differing levels of effective central government intervention in policy change (Hungary, Italy, the United Kingdom); and with varied regulatory bodies and processes (e.g., the US Federal Communications Commission, which has joint responsibility for media and telecommunications, as opposed to other countries with several or even multiple such agencies). All, however, were market economies, Hungary being the weakest.

The study's objective was in part to challenge the reductivist but quite dominant theses of the period regarding media "convergence", which claimed, following Ithiel de Sola Pool's *Technologies of Freedom* (1983), that digitization and massive channel diversity had rendered the need for communication regulation virtually obsolete. Their comparisons, however, indicated rather clearly that convergence theses, which saw policy in this area "as a process of resolving essentially technical tasks assumed to be similar in any market-oriented economy, neglect the particular constraints of political and legal culture which may be of the utmost importance" on the ground (Goldberg, Prosser, and Verhulst 1998, p. 295).

While less populated a research field than comparative research into media and politics in their various dimensions, cross-national research on migration, ethnicity, and media began to take root. A 1980s UNESCO project on the information rights of migrant workers, led by Taisto Hujanen and Charles Husband, began the ball rolling (see Hujanen 1988, 1989). Additional impetus was provided by Arjun Appadurai's (1990) widely cited "scapes" articles in *Public Culture* and *Theory, Culture and Society*, which pinpointed human migration and media as principal vectors of contemporary cultural change. This was followed by the research studies on migrant and diasporic media assembled by Canadian scholars Riggins (1992) and Karim (2003).

Cunningham and Sinclair's (2001) collection, focused on migrant communities' media in Australia, proposed that they represent a fresh phenomenon, namely the emergence of a series of "sphericules" rather than Habermas's unified public sphere. Browne (2005) provided short case studies of minority-ethnic media, including indigenous media, from Australia, Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States, and a scatter of fleeting examples from elsewhere. In his final chapter he isolated certain factors as being of common significance in the survival prospects of such media: finance, volunteer energy, government policies, and community support. The research essays in Mattelart (2007), introduced by his extended conceptual essay, examined transnational media whose audiences were often barred from free media access, ranging from Kurds in Turkey to Arabic-speaking minorities in France, to Cuban-Americans in Florida.

Markelin and Husband (2007), in Guedes Bailey, Georgiou, and Harindranath (2007), developed a three-way comparison of indigenous radio broadcasting among the Saami peoples of Finland, Sweden, and Norway. In Downing and Husband (2005, Chapter 5) Husband underscored "the distinctive challenge of indigeneity" for research in this area, vigorously contesting the facile lumping of diasporic and minority-ethnic media together with indigenous peoples' media. In Chapters 3 and 4 of the same work, comparisons and contrasts were firstly drawn between mainstream media coverage of urban minority-ethnic populations in some metropolitan nations. Subsequently,

comparisons and contrasts were drawn among local and international coverage of sectarian, nationalist and "tribal" issues in – respectively – Northern Ireland during its civil war, during the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath. The power of media in politically fragile and dangerous conjunctures was underscored.

Conclusions

That this historical survey has been partial, not least as a result of its brevity, cannot be gainsaid. It has sought to pinpoint some of the most energetic and stimulating features of a story whose career, despite having roots in the 1950s, has only recently begun to flower, in response, no doubt, to the tremors of globalization and the emergence of rapid access in affluent nations to information sources via the Internet. It has striven to escape from the field's inherited US/UK academic hegemony.[5]

If there is a lesson to be drawn for future research, it is that – with exceptions, such as some East-Central European scholars' uses of Hallin and Mancini's work (2004) – there is a tendency for specialists to write as though only their voice deserved to be heard above the buzzing of other voices, and thus less *careful* critique than there should be of prior comparative studies by other scholars.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Some category overlap is unavoidable, so that, for example, the Hallin and Mancini (2004) study could be covered under the regional or the media/society heading (the latter was chosen).
2. By "segmented" theorizing I denote conceptualizations focused on a particular media technology or function (e.g. news); by "holistic", non-media-centric theories (e.g., functionalism, neo-marxism, etc.).
3. I am grateful to Mr Teke Ngomba, doctoral student in the Information and Media Studies Department, Århus University, for drawing this source to my attention.
4. For reasons of space we will neglect a scatter of valuable but less easily categorized works, such as that of Drotner and Livingstone (2008).
5. A colossal gap was reflected in many syllabi and undergraduate study programs within the United States (Downing 2009), although some textbooks have appeared that bucked this trend (Chapman 2005; McKenzie 2006; and, earlier, Downing, Mohammadi and Sreberny-Mohammadi 1995).

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