

DOCTORAL THESIS

Synthesising media, politics and foreign intervention: an examination into Malawi's media system transformation

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Abstract

The conventional method for studying media systems has been to analyse the relationship between media and politics, based on Hallin and Mancini's (2004) seminal research *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Their approach automatically places the nation-state as the key unit of analysis to understand why media systems are the way they are and why they change. Research that has advanced this endogenous method of analysis in countries outside of the Western, democratically advanced context, has brought to light the importance of including external factors in studying media systems. Building off this analytical direction, this thesis introduces three new external factors; foreign aid, the conditionalities attached to foreign aid, and the role of externally created Pan-African media policy agreements.

Using a case study of Malawi, a small aid-dependent country in Southeast Africa, this research interrogates these three factors to reveal that foreign aid is a coercive foreign policy tool that has been used for manipulating change and shaping the type of media Malawi has. Based on the country's recent transformation from its authoritarian populist¹ past towards the dominant liberal media model in 2012, this research also reassesses Hallin and Mancini's convergence thesis, which claimed that most countries are 'naturally' heading towards the dominant liberal media model.

Drawing on theoretical contributions made from the fields of international relations and international development, this thesis develops a critical international political economy approach to the theory of foreign intervention to challenge this claim. By including the structural and ideological power arrangements of the global economy this theoretical framework reinvigorates post-colonial thinking, as well as broadening our understanding of how power is exercised in order to capture existing international power imbalances that exogenously influence change.

¹ The term "authoritarian populist" will be used throughout this thesis as described by Reuben Makayiko Chirambo (2009) to describe the political and cultural make up of Malawi since the political leadership of President Kamuzu Banda, who was often described as a political populist.

Therefore, the general conclusions drawn from this thesis indicate that media systems analysis is best accomplished through detailed empirical case studies, which not only rely on historical insights, but synthesise the role that media, politics and foreign intervention play collectively, especially in the era of neoliberal capitalism. By moving beyond the parameters of the nation-state in this way, and examining what external forces that are extraterritorial to the nation-state, it is hoped that media systems researchers will engage more critically with factors that are opaque, and view variables such as foreign intervention as instrumental in future media system research.

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