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## Book review

# Media and communications industries in Nigeria: impacts of neoliberal reforms between 1999 and 2007

Babatunde Ojebuyi

A.A. Olorunnisola, ed. 2009. *Media and communications industries in Nigeria: impacts of neoliberal reforms between 1999 and 2007*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press. 278 pp.

The eight-chapter book is a bold attempt at making a pioneering and pragmatic assessment of the operations of media and communications industries in Nigeria, within the complex context of neoliberal policy agenda – a pro-entrepreneurial economic philosophy that encourages free-market economics. Specifically, the eight-year period from 1999 to 2007, which witnessed a progressive implementation of neoliberal reforms in Nigeria, and the implications of these reforms for the media and communications industries within the democratic environment, form the focus of the contributing authors.

The editor, Anthony Olorunnisola, uses the introductory chapter to provide a clear background to the central concept of the book, by cataloguing the evolutionary phases of Nigeria's economic policies. According to him, Nigeria went through a phase of protectionism – the indigenisation era of the nation's economic policies, mostly dominated by the ruling military juntas – before graduating to the more recent age of neoliberalism which, under democratic rule, has exposed the country to international market forces, and opened the nation's economy to foreign investment.

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are not in Africa, bearing a condescending tone which does not see the constant negotiated lines of alliances and cleavages between rulers and the ruled, especially in Cameroon. They argue that Mbembe sees the power of the rulers as absolute, and the powerless are discussed as people who are all too willing to enter into relations with the authority that dehumanises them.

A different kind of criticism is leveled at the Ugandan scholar Mahmood Mamdani, on the question of genocide, in Chapter 4. The authors lament Mamdani's problem of privileging a lean and brittle understanding of genocide. They question his reductionist use of Holocaust theories as a paradigmatic means for exploring genocide in Africa, which undermines the understanding of the peculiarities of the epistemic conditions for genocide. They argue that he creates a theoretical scope of deploying historical exceptionalism when explaining genocidal situations. As a result, he wrongly views the geographical boundary of Rwanda as a geographical boundary of knowledge. For that reason, he views upheavals in Rwanda ultimately as a crisis of citizenship in postcolonial Africa, but ignores multi-ethnicity and the unequal distribution of resources. As such, he downplays the influence of the outside world, for example European colonial power. Mamdani is also accused by the authors of making misleading assumptions about linearity between colonialism and nativism, and by perpetuating the myth that pre-colonial society was peaceful. In so doing, he is reductionist by seeing dual dichotomies between the ruled and the natives, and by creating a misleading distinction between customary and civil law. The authors argue that Mamdani wrongly uses race as an explanatory factor in incidences of genocide, and so his thesis privileges the Tutsi and not the Hutu. Invariably, his argument can support the authoritarian regime of Paul Kagame, as he describes the Tutsi as a singularly victimised ethnic group. Ultimately, he does not see genocide in Darfur against all evidence that 200 000 people were killed through state sponsorship. They claim that he makes misleading assumptions that the minority is always poor and necessarily weak.

In these criticisms, the authors condemn the 'return to the European source', since that does not negate intellectual imperialism which is a counterproductive tendency in intellectual/scholarly circles to denigrate, dismiss and attempt to quash alternative theories, perspectives or methodologies arising from the African experience. Molefe Asante invariably characterises these scholars as capitulationists, Europeanised loyalists and maskers who immerse themselves in alien philosophies and do not believe that Africans should be considered agents since they seek to please the colonial master. The criticisms bring a sense of *déjà vu* to these scholars – especially to Appiah and Mbembe, since they are not new. However, the innovation of the book is in the manner in which it highlights ways by which Mbembe and Appiah's above-cited books are closely linked to a dehistoricised understanding of the postcolony and the contradictory human agency that define this context. As a compilation of

criticism the book reflects the cleavages of approaches in the arts, careers and politics of theorising African cultures. The authors condemn moral indifference in the arts, reject irresponsible and opportunistic career moves, and motivate for a Cabralian political conscientiousness.

But the authors can be criticised for evoking a coercive illusion of fixed and bounded identity locations, since they see these writers as ethnicised scholars. It is as if being black/African invites one into a unilateral protocol of reading politics of the continent. Somehow, the authors generate an essentialised sense of being African, as if being African dissolves choices for arguing against your own kind. The point must be made that while the books written by Appiah, Mbembe and Mamdani may show a deleterious quality to Africa's character, they reflect their life-worlds and reflexive positions at a point in time. These books, however, do not define their totality – rather they are episodes of writing in the array of shifting and changing spaces of their imaginations.

Chapter 5 looks at the history of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). The authors question the view that IKS is static and bemoan the undermining of indigenous knowledge as superstition or non-existent. They note that IKS is perceived in terms of homogeneity, purity and savagery, and it is not accorded the same respect due to the lack of a literary tradition. The authors acknowledge the work of Ranarjit Guha as a pontiff of challenging Eurocentric views in subaltern studies, as well as Dipesh Chakrabarty, Edward Said and Gyan Prakash, as major challengers of these negative perceptions. However, the authors horn in the argument of plurality within the subaltern studies. They also acknowledge that principles of 'attach and defend, offend and oppress' are within the subaltern, by using examples from Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. In so doing, they acknowledge that they are many 'sources' of subaltern inspiration.

Chapter 6 is about knowledge production. The authors look at knowledge production and publishing in Africa as part of a broader colonial power dynamic. They trace the inequalities to the ownership of material production and technological know-how. They argue that the definition of what knowledge is and what it is not, determines the knowledge that is published and the identities that are made visible. They assert that publishing is selective since it is mitigated by power, the market, class and form. Knowledge production still bears notable biases: written information still commands a great deal of respect from both African and non-African intellectuals. Invariably, postcolonial African governments do not invest in the book industry and African intellectuals are subordinate to their European counterparts. In other words, Europe is still used as the pivotal 'source' of influence in the production of knowledge in Africa.

In Chapter 7, the authors are critical of the narrow view of the African renaissance for bearing a northbound gaze, looking north to Europe for theoretical approval of

its inspiration. They argue that its narrow economism, together with its indifference to the psychological damage inflicted by apartheid, undermines the African course. They want to promote an African renaissance that is seen in plural terms and one that is informed by the past, present and future. They want it to be defined by all forms of history, looking at the cultural, economic and political aspirations of the people and considering all struggles and mass participation in order to stay away from empty rhetoric. They argue a return to the 'source' is a return to a mix of the global and the local.

In Chapter 8, the authors place the focus at the intersections between Cabral's cultural writings and some African novels: *Mission to Kala* (1958) by the Cameroonian, Mongo Beti; *Harvest of thorns* (1989) by the Zimbabwean Shimmer Chinodya; *Devil on the cross* (1982) by the Kenyan Ngugi wa Thiong'o; and *Nervous conditions* (1988) by Tsitsi Dangarembga, also a Zimbabwean. In *Mission to Kala*, the Western-educated Medza goes to Kala on a civilising mission. Upon arriving at Kala, his conscience is changed when he discovers that his education is not useful compared to that of the Kalans. This makes Medza realise that colonial education creates an educated class that is detached from the interests of the ordinary people. He concludes that Africa is ruled by people who are mis-educated and became critical of colonial education. In a typical Cabralian argument, the authors reflect that the 'return to the source' is a return to the ordinary people.

In analysing *Harvest of thorns*, the authors show that the struggle against colonial domination is fragmentary and episodic, even amongst the oppressed. The oppressed experience the encounters of the class struggle in different ways – as different accounts attest. *Harvest* shows multiple ways towards the truth. The truth can only come out by using the multiple 'sources' of all those who were involved in the struggle.

In *The devil on the cross*, the author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, goes back to his native language as the 'source' – by writing in Agikuyu. While written in oral tales of his native language, Wa Thiong'o displays the Cabral revolutionary spirit of fighting class struggle by carrying struggle messages even in an indigenous language.

*Nervous conditions* picks up on the issue of class struggle and sees many enemies <besides colonialism and class but sexism>, culture and men. The novel is made up of women characters who reject colonial and patriarchal oppression. The book points at ideological deficiencies in the liberation struggle, and the authors acknowledge the resourcefulness of the selective application of colonial education. 'Returning to the source' here paradoxically becomes a discovery of freedom for the marginalised, using the same colonial education. In *Nervous conditions* the source becomes colonial education itself. This is not just a reversal of the Cabral maxim, but a reinvention and a recast in recognising the utility of colonial education.

Chapter 9 focuses on 'Perspectives of Africanising educational curricula in Africa'. The authors look at Afrocentricism, Afrikology and neoliberalism. Afrocentricism



is rejected by the authors, because it views identities essentially as a means of informing cross-currents of knowledge from other non-African cultures. Afrikology is also dismissed, since it views tradition as the source to inform cross-currents of curriculum change. The neo-liberalists are approved of, since they call for a mix of 'multiple sources.' However, the writers caution that this approach is a technical process often motivated by conforming to European standards – (playing 'catch up') that lacks an ideological standard defined in context. Also, while some eclectic neoliberals are amenable to cultural mix, some people are not comfortable with the inclusion of Africanisation, since they see it as a source of decline.

The forgoing two chapters on knowledge show the multiple centres of thought and diversity of 'sources' of knowledge. The sources are not stereotypes, but multivariate factors of change, often found in the difficult and daunting circumstances of African struggles.

In the final chapter, the authors reflect on postcolonial South African writings from voices on the margins. The authors bemoan the paucity of black literature, arguing that the lack of space for black writers results in marginalisation. They see a persistence of binaries, slanted towards minority cultural production. The outcome of this is the construction and reconstitution of African writers in the mould of minority culture. For that reason, major journals such as *English Academy Review* ignore most African writings and focus only on South Africa, but also on literature produced by white writers. At the end of the day, there is a 'return to the white South Africa' as a source which gives rise to the dominance of a totalising discourse in the literature.

This book is an act of courage and conviction. It rows against the tide of sycophantism and dismal academic fatalism which maintains a portrayal of blacks as stupid, brutal and oversexed. The book is about how some of our notable African scholars are recognised in the academy. It highlights the loss of the struggle against colonial hegemony and signifies moments of cooption. What is most valuable about the book is its reflection of the sheer weight of prejudice, as expressed in multiple forms of negative stereotypes. It examines these as they appear virtually in all genres of African literature. In the end, the reader is forced to confront how oblique and steady the barrage of negative images really is, and in how many aspects of life these images are imposed. While this inconvenient truth is abrasive to some of us, it is an indictment and a counter-signal that speaks to the conscience of every writer on Africa to re-inspect and re-orientate themselves.

The main subject of this important book is neither Europe nor Africa, but everyone who cares for Africa. The book brings to bear Cabral's revolutionary conscience. This is a timely publication that reflects increasingly the strong concerns against the analogy which pitches Western experiences as universal. While the book is bound to trigger debate, it is an act of advocacy. It is an invaluable publication to academics and students of African history, cultural and media studies. I anticipate this book to



Close to the sources: essays on contemporary African culture, politics and

be of great appeal to those who teach postcolonial studies and the social sciences in general. It is a book that speaks to the conscience.

## Notes

1 Molefi Kete, Asante. A quick reading of rhetorical jingoism: Anthony Appiah and his fallacies.

<http://www.asante.net/articles/11/a-quick-reading-of-rhetorical-jingoism-anthony-appiah-and-his-fallacies/> (accessed 3 May 2010).

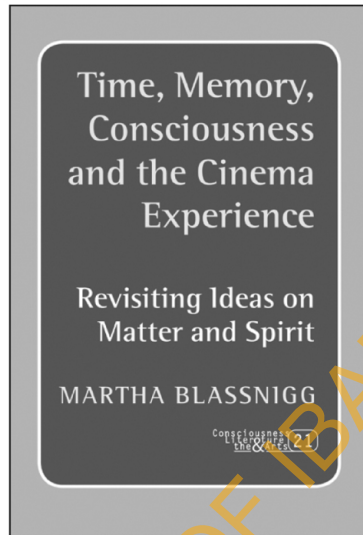
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# Time, Memory, Consciousness and the Cinema Experience

## *Revisiting Ideas on Matter and Spirit*

Martha Blassnigg



In this book cinema spectators are presented as 'observing participants', that is, agents who take part in their own perceptual processes. It takes experience into the centre of its investigation to propose the spectators' active participation. It applies this to understanding cinema, from its outset, as a philosophical *dispositif*. To this end, the book explores crucial interconnections between the various constituencies that shaped moving image technologies and their reception at the nexus of

science, art and popular culture at the end of the 19th century and some of the prevailing concerns about time, movement, memory and consciousness. It discusses in particular the interrelations between the works by the philosopher Henri Bergson, the physiologist Étienne-Jules Marey and the art-historian Aby Warburg's intervention with the *Mnemosyne Atlas*. Bergson's main themes germane to these concerns are discussed in detail in order to show how, during the perceptual processes, the seemingly contradictory tendencies of the mind — intellect and intuition — can help us understand the so-called 'spiritual' dimension of the emerging cinema from the perspective of the spectators' cognitive engagement. This perspective invites us to include the experiential qualities of mental processes, such as the interaction between affect, thought and action and the interrelation between memory, perception and consciousness in the study of audio-visual media and elsewhere.

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