

# Technologies in the South: between industrialization and culturalization

**Keywords:** provocative, that seems, communication, controversy, activity, cartography, complex

## Introduction

Can African media industrialize? The question may seem provocative and trivial. It is however serious and makes it possible to question this loan to think that seems to constitute the problematic of the cultural industries, even if such a questioning is not new in CIS. As Bernard Miège observes in a small founding text,<sup>1</sup> the cartography of the economic positions on the communication activity is since the twenty-first century extremely diversified and complex and, dare we add, controversy. If we add the communicative perspectives of the media economy and in particular the critics of the Frankfurt theory of cultural industries, the objections sometimes reach a quasi-hysterical dimension that is not conducive to renewed reflection.<sup>2</sup> In fact, many researchers have been particularly interested in the communication or even the media industries, marking by this renewed interest a heuristic distance or even a break with the debates around the global approaches of the cultural industries and the critical theory of the media, for that it is necessary to return to it only as a reminder. The reflection on cultural industries is indeed a field of intellectual fertilization stirring which we have reached today, conceptual reworkings in theoretical renouncements and highlighting especially the specificities of these industries (financing, production, distribution and consumption), to underline the fundamental characteristics which make it possible to stabilize an almost precise knowledge on these kinds of industries. What is the point of returning to it today? What more can I say that has not been said? How can one resist the temptation to repatriate a somewhat dated debate in Africa that can hardly escape the two types of operations inherent in importation, namely simplification and exemplification? Does the update of this debate go through a simple tropicalization of its stakes? The question of the industrialization and/ or the industrialization of the African media, even beyond the actuality of such a perspective, could still suffer, like so many questions, from two congenital defects: conceptual mimicry on the one hand, and that of the adaptation or substitution of theoretical investments on the other. How to escape this double trap? Our aim here is, first of all, to highlight the particular nature of this double trap with a view to guarding against it and circumventing its risks by reformulating the hypothesis of a third-sector media<sup>3</sup> composed of organizations Low Intensity Cultural Heritage (OCFIN). Such an hypothesis has two fundamental objectives: to deconstruct the structuring character of the economic analysis which sees in the media activities a control of the conditions of production, distribution and consumption relatively controlled by laws which draw on the market and the state regulation, Firstly; recognize the constructed character of the media, as the effect of social relations, such as these, affect the meeting of supply and demand that influence each other without ever stabilizing, on the other hand. In this shifting and permutating encounter, the cultural imperative seems to keep the industrial imperative constantly in check. In short, it is a question of proposing for reflection two entries in the problematic report of the media to the cultural industries: what happens when the culture seizes the industry? And what does the industry do to culture? The example of the media illustrates

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Marie-Marcelle Mpressa Mouangue,<sup>1</sup> Laurent-Charles Boyomo Assala<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Advanced School of Mass Communication, University of Yaounde 2, Cameroon

<sup>2</sup>Department of Communication and Civilization, University of Yaounde 2, Cameroon

**Correspondence:** Laurent Charles Boyomo Assala, Department of Communication and Civilization, Professor ESSTIC- University of yaounde 2, Cameroon, Email [cboymo@yahoo.fr](mailto:cboymo@yahoo.fr)

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First of all, the place of the media in the analysis of cultural industries should be defined in a more or less appropriate way from our assumption of the existence of OCFIN. The Frankfurt theory of the cultural industries has been the subject of virulent criticism over the last forty years and more particularly in its relationship with the mass media so that it is not allowed to erase it once again. However, we can retain some synthesis efforts that are quite revealing of our perspective. One starts from very simple observations: one can find in every work of art at the same time a value of the spirit and a market value. The cultural industries amplify the contradictions related to these two aspects by introducing, through the multiplication of the work, intermediaries between work, author and public. The different actors or institutions of production and diffusion are thus confronted at every level with this double dimension: creative on the one hand and merchant on the other. Let us summarize here after many authors a synthesis of some of the epistemic issues of these debates:

Mass culture is for everyone at the same time. It targets the greatest number while addressing the individual in what he has more specific. How to propose products common to all when the heterogeneity of the public grows with its number? This contradiction is conjugated with this other contradiction that is played out between creation and reproduction. The new, the original is needed to capture new viewers, and at the same time what has already worked is assured of a certain audience. As Edgar Morin pointed out, “the standard benefits from past success and the original is the guarantee of new success”, but “the already known risk to weary and the new risk of displeasing”.

Mass culture, cultural democratization and the cultural dimension of development seem to be both near and far, with mass culture itself close and different from popular culture. The notions of cultural exception, cultural diversity and the globalization of culture all come together in one way or another to open debates on these notions of cultural industries and mass culture. Mass culture can equally be considered as an alienation/domination of thought by the powers (economic, political, ideological) that control the cultural industries but also a democratization/liberation of culture and works of the mind for the more citizens. This double dimension is present from the appearance of the press, in the 17th century. The struggle for freedom of the press merges with the struggle for democracy, while considering the press as a means of propaganda and manipulation of the masses.

(“Every newspaper maker must pay tribute to Malin” La Fontaine). As we can see, the directions of a problematic of cultural industries are numerous, the paradigms various, the stakes multiple. By integrating Frankfurt’s theory of cultural industries into communication studies, Edgar Morin is the forerunner of a set of issues that point to the efforts to separate economico-cultural analysis of the media from the cultural industries approach Morin observes. In particular that said approach is too homogeneous and unfit to include creativity within the cultural industries. The notion of the mass in particular is the object of virulent criticism, in that it nourishes a “pathetic vulgate” according to the terms of Bourdieu and Passeron.<sup>4</sup> The most radical objection, however, will come from the reception theorists, for whom the Frankfurt analysis takes away from the mass media all capacity for interpretation, reappropriation and even resistance. “The latter would be unable to see for themselves the conditions of the media. oppression in which it is located - which would then require a theoretical distance capable of unveiling this submission”.<sup>5</sup> These positions, which are very critical of German theses, will themselves be the subject of much criticism, tending to rehabilitate an “original” conception and a coherent theoretical program of criticism of media culture. In re-reading the chapter of the *Dialectic of the reason* of Adorno and Horkheimer which deals with the cultural industries, Voirol raises five particularly enlightening contributions.

- a) In the type of capitalism which develops from the beginning of the 20th century, the commercial valorization does not limit itself more to the exchange of the workforce in the economic sphere, as in the times of Marx, it now extends to areas of “culture” (art, media, knowledge) previously spared, partly from less, by the latter.
- b) This submission to market valuation is not without consequences on the content of cultural goods: it is their “internal qualities” that are degraded and impoverished as soon as they become homogenized and standardized to become “Products like the others” in the capitalist market. It’s “the chain” that produces movies, radio and television shows, music hits, like any other mass consumer product.
- c) Subject to exchange value, culture is mobilized for instrumental purposes: from “finality without end” (Kant), it becomes “operational”, with vocation to “serve” certain ends.
- d) The modern media (radio, television, cinema) do not question the world “as it is” but bring it back into conformity at all times-even as they feed on a force of their own. Cultural attraction whose springs are precisely based on the distance to “what is”.
- e) These same media produce images and speeches that permeate the consciousness of “weak individuals” and incapable of reappropriating them in a critical way; they are not-or more-able to effectively resist the products of the mass media.

Although the works of the Critical School and in particular those of Adorno, militate for what he calls an “aesthetic break” which makes it possible to separate as a founding paradigm, the different cultural products between them (popular music/ music scholarly at Adorno) and to lead to multiple and differentiated typologies (music, literature, cinema, architecture, or minor art, major art, etc.), the global approach of the so-called cultural industries remains significant in the analyzes. The typology of Voirol that does not escape, however proposes to renew the criticism of the media, to better understand the transformations, in terms of reports social, economic and cultural issues that contribute to the emergence of subjects willing to rely without resistance on powerful institutions, including the media. He

advocates for a rehabilitation of reception, this time re-inscribed in a series of processes that do not directly concern the media as cultural industries but which inform the types of relations that social subjects have with them.<sup>6</sup> This renewal of media criticism, however, remains faithful to the Critical Theory project, which aims to capture historical transformations and social processes by apprehending them as modes of manifestation of the societal whole (thanks to an interdisciplinary approach). The critical model inserts the study of the media into a diagnosis of the historical situation and links it to an analysis involving all social institutions-notably the evolution of capitalism and the future of the individual.

### Media, memory and time or when culture meets industry

As a result, there is a demand for media products distinct from an offer of the same products, both of which balance each other in a market that is difficult to analyze. The first results from the sum of individual purchase decisions. It depends on both the price and the level of the characteristics of the product sold by the firm. The second is based on economies of scale and is based on a minimum efficient size corresponding to the quantity for which the revenue obtained from the sale covers the production costs of that quantity. This minimum efficient size varies according to the type of press and the periodicity of the titles, the profit being as for any economic activity, the difference between the production costs and the receipts. This confrontation between supply and demand determines the price of information.

On the African level, however, this neoclassical model does not stand up to analysis, as the media market is marked by the existence of numerous imbalances, particularly in the advertising sub-sector on which, besides the state budget allocations, the essential, the financing of the media. Since this subsector has been dominated since the 90s by a “febrile protectionism” resulting from a sort of regulatory intoxication. The notions of media cultural industries can therefore only be grasped at the intersection of two complementary paradigms: the recognition of the market’s “failures” due in particular to the presence of the state operator constructing information as a collective good ; the uncertain economic value and asymmetry of the African media. To give an account of these two paradigms, we can first of all put forward two opposing “African” positions, common in any innovation that captures the challenge of the cultural industries on the continent: on the one hand, the optimists who see it as a form of resistance to the threats of Westernization of the world, by promoting a cultural sector of culture likely to promote African cultures, but especially to provide means of living to African creators; on the other hand, the pessimists, even the realists, who see on the contrary a renewal of capitalist domination by a vast movement of economization of culture, and which, moreover, ends up erasing differences and imposing Western culture on the whole world.<sup>7</sup> These theses are not new far from it. We find the accents of debates around the critical theory mentioned above. Beyond this old debate raised by Adorno and Horkheimer on whether the global movement of production of cultural goods as merchandise or product does not constitute a real threat because of the impoverishment of the contents of cultural products that led the commercial logic, and which would lead to the bankruptcy of culture, it is necessary to retain in any case a weakness of African cultural production on the world market, whose acuteness does not weaken because of the incantation of the supposedly globalized culture . In fact, the level of (under) development of the third sector of the media industries does not sufficiently verify the upward performance of the general macroeconomic indicators to deduce a satisfactory economic

dynamism of the African media. What relationships, then, maintain media content with economic processes?<sup>8</sup> Are they the products of these processes and whose mechanisms they update? On the contrary, are they the founding principles? To what conclusions can the scrutiny of the contents of Voirol help to avoid the direct causality between the type of economic and social structure in which media discourses are produced? of equal development compared to Senegal, Benin and Ivory Coast, in terms of media/public coverage ratio, advertising volume and contribution to GDP. It is also the country where state competition for media funding is the weakest and the fuzziest. In other words, if one of the main difficulties of the media in the economic analysis concerns their modes of financing, their economic structure and the nature of their activities are nonetheless a challenge of another nature. They include them in what we call a low-intensity cultural organization whose four basic characteristics are as follows:

### These are labor-intensive structures with the exception of the media

A state whose cost of human capital is borne by the community, the staff of these organizations rarely exceeds ten employees, at least as long as we can consider the remunerations that are periodically served as wages. These media are in fact a kind of platform around which, alongside some seasoned professionals, there are a certain number of agents who provide or even tinker with information without being the source of it, owner-delivery men, peddlers more or less appointed with little news<sup>9</sup> or verifiable. Journalists, editors, reporters, editorialists, photographers are categories of analysis, formal requirements not referring to specific practices but to kinds of simulations reproductions of machined writings without search for originality other than indecency and blasphemy information is an ephemeral, evolutionary, biodegradable and subject to the dictatorship of the market either because of the importance of advertising in the financing, or the need to publish the most sensational news. In addition, there is a great deal of disuse in the marketplace, related to the gap between public opinion, the political image of the media as a result of the treatment of certain topical issues, and the cost / price to pay to access the media. On segments such as the industrial production of content or the composition and management of the digital multiplex, for example, the contribution of the private audiovisual sector is zero; the role of advertising in media funding is central, but the advertising market is marked by non-market forms of coordination including the plurality of stakeholders, the multiplicity of conflicts between competitive oligopolies and the partisan role of the state-advertiser-regulator;<sup>10</sup>

-the customer, central character, however remains an economic unthought. Important both in the legitimation of products, the one in whose name these products are delivered on a market, that in the financing of its purchases and on behalf of whom the media expresses and assumes its existence, it appears in the complexity of this dual role, as an insolvent consumer, a buyer without the under, an impecunious public, which makes the weight of its purchases on the community, in the name of the general interest.

### The scandal industry

Low-intensity cultural organizations place an oblique eye on the economic analyzes used to theorize cultural industries. They push to re-examine the very notion of cultural industry and its ability to account for phenomena that are built on the margins of conventional economic conditions. Taken as a whole, the media culture cuts across the economic status of media audiences-internal and external-by

imposing an aesthetic break between social categories whose meeting on the market is carried out in a polemological and therefore imperfect manner. It is clear that the most problematic feature of my presentation is the use I make of the notion of industry, although I am less acute in the low intensity phrase. In this respect, the Cameroonian media are difficult to extract from a certain culture of the poor who operates at the “end of the industrial chain” to take up the excellent formula of Dominique Augey.<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence that the most important recipes of the newspapers are realized during the occasion of media “blows”, most often involving the decay of the great and the rich and, on the contrary, a form of triumph for the small, the poor, common. The criteria of a lectomat that classifies the articles and the media according to these successes thus prove to be inversely proportional to those of the classic social success in their explanatory capacity. The theoretical metaphor of the just war seems more apt to account for the preponderance and popularity of radio prosecutors and court broadcasts that stigmatize the lies of the leaders, the hypocrisy of the powerful, rich and literate and that make the exemplification of these vices tribute to virtue as a form of moral and messianic obligation. It explains why, to stick to the market, the media rise to the assault of the public with scoops of more or less counterfeit in scathing titles which constitute so many ephemeral niches re-activable in an industrial strategy of the scandal.

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### Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

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