

Journal of African Media Studies

Volume 3 Number 1

© 2011 Intellect Ltd Article. English language. doi: 10.1386/jams.3.1.7_1

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Global flows, media and developing democracies: The Ghanaian case

ABSTRACT

This article presents a combination of factors as a framework for examining how globalization and media impact developing democracies in the Global South. In particular, it pays attention to the interplay of changing technologies, regulatory regimes and local entrepreneurs with global expertise (obtained primarily through education overseas) and their combined impact on the media ecology in such countries. Using a historical analysis of the trends that started in the early 1990s, the article shows how countries like Ghana took advantage of key changes in globalization to create a vibrant media ecology that directly impacts the role of citizens. Specifically, the author posits that in Ghana the liberalization of the broadcast industry, the expertise of 'glocal' entrepreneurs, and the explosion of 'new' communication technologies like the Internet and mobile phones have led to a reconstitution of the public sphere and the creation of a new cultural elite.

KEYWORDS

Ghana
radio
globalization
media
developing
democracies
hybrid mediaspaces

INTRODUCTION

On 28 December 2008, Joy FM, an Accra-based radio station in Ghana decided to 'call' the ongoing presidential elections and announce Prof. John Atta Mills, candidate of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) as winner (Joy Online, 2009). The ensuing furore was mainly a function of how close

1. Jake Obetsebi Lamptey, NPP Campaigns manager, 28 December 2008 as quoted by the *Chronicle* Newspaper in Ghana (Accessed June 2009, via AllAfrica.com) <http://allafrica.com/stories/200812300823.html>. See also <http://www.ghanatribune.com/joy-fm-calls-election-for-mills-npp-disputes-claim/>

the race was and the particular prestige of the radio station on the Ghanaian airwaves. Already, there had been a run-off in the election race and with one constituency yet to vote there was now, as it were, a run-off to the run-off. Predictably, the party that was projected to lose, the incumbent New Patriotic Party (NPP), immediately issued a strong statement denouncing Joy's action calling it 'highly speculative and premature'.¹ On the streets, NDC supporters immediately began celebrating the perceived win, while radio stations all over the country joined in the pandemonium by either calling for reason or inciting listeners, depending on their particular political bent. For those of us outside the country and following online via either live streaming, Twitter or 24/7 news updates, it was clear that the Ghanaian media, especially radio, and in particular Joy FM, were playing a key role in these pivotal elections.

The NPP's response to Joy FM's actions and the subsequent response from all parts of the country, even in places where the station's frequency could technically not reach, was an indication of its impact. Other radio stations and some television channels re-broadcast their prediction, sparking off a nation-wide debate about what it would mean if the Electoral Commission (henceforth referred to as The EC) results matched or did not match Joy's prediction. On their website myjoyonline.com and other popular sites like ghanaweb.com, comments were forthcoming from all parts of the country and the diaspora (mostly the United Kingdom, United States, Europe, and other parts of Africa).

Such active and engaged commentary from different parts of the political and national divide based on one private broadcaster's actions provides impetus for examining the role of media in a relatively young democracy today. When one considers Joy FM's initial appearance in the Ghanaian media market and how they evolved into the media giant that was confident enough to say their system of tallying results was parallel to, perhaps even better than, the national institution put in place for that purpose, one sees an indication of how transformations in the media landscape in Ghana have led to important shifts in the form and nature of public discourse.

It calls for a critical assessment of how radio, as an industry, technology and cultural form, has changed over the past ten to fifteen years in Ghana. This article examines how radio has changed in that country's history and how that change impacts the role the listening public plays in public discourse. Using Joy FM as the focal point, I situate media in Ghana within economic and political reforms, show how that led to a programme of liberalization and argue that the way in which Joy FM and other broadcasters responded to technological and cultural changes, particularly as a result of globalization, led to the creation of a hybrid mediascape in which radio plays a prominent role. Further, I show that these changes need to be examined alongside the emergence of a new cultural elite, comprising of a class of 'glocal' entrepreneurs and a young, educated, and urban population that is key in setting the public agenda. By situating Joy FM at the locus of what has become a vibrant independent and influential media landscape in Ghana, I will provide both a historical and contemporary basis for understanding how these forces have together transformed radio and redefined the listening public in Ghana.

This work joins a small but growing literature on media and globalization in Africa. While the factors examined here have been discussed elsewhere,

Africa is missing in these analyses, and there is often a tendency to transfer insights and conclusions from the rest of the world uncritically to its shores [...] generalizations are of little use in analysing the phenomenon

such as it presents itself on the continent [...] It calls for serious reflection on the interaction of culture, politics and shifting economic landscapes in Africa – reflection that, without conceding exceptionalism, engages with the continent on its own, specific terms.

(Jacobs 2007: 866)

This article will do that and engage other works on what globalization and changes in media suggest for public discourse, especially when culture, history and economics are put into a proper context.

The method I use is informed by Caldwell's integrated cultural–industrial analytic approach, which examines 'data from four registers or modes of analysis: textual analysis of trade and worker artefacts; interviews with [film/television] workers; ethnographic field observation of production spaces and professional gatherings; and economic/industrial analysis' (Caldwell 2008: 345). I draw mostly on interviews with radio professionals from Joy FM, textual analysis of Joy FM's content (both on air and online), and media industry reports, including news reports to provide the context for situating the changes that occurred during the early days of privatization in conjunction with these different registers.

1. CENTRE STAGE IN AN ELECTION

The events surrounding the December 2008 elections and Joy's prominent role began with a closely contested presidential race. According to the programme manager, Kofi Owusu who is responsible for major decisions on what is aired, these elections were 'particularly important and almost dangerous because the stakes were very high' (Owusu 11 May 2009 Interview). Certainly, the close nature of the elections had raised tensions and the nation was aware that the rest of the continent was closely observing the proceedings. According to Owusu, there were 'loads of calls coming in' from listeners and the station's website experienced a few outages because 'many people were going to the site for up-to-the-minute information'. The volume was so much that they had to upgrade their bandwidth to stay online. Initially, they had 'pictured bandwidth for 2000 concurrent users. So when it was crashing and people were complaining, [they] really had more, had more than 2000 people accessing [their] site. And then [they] increased it to 4000; 4000, which sort of worked, till the election was over'. Thus 'listenership was heightened, this number of people were listening in Ghana and beyond'.

From Owusu's account, it appears that it was not only the station's regular listeners but also non-regulars who were going to their website for information. There were many other avenues for news updates: radio and television for those in Ghana and multiple online resources (Twitter, the Electoral Commission's website and the hugely popular news site Ghanaweb.com) for those outside the country. Yet, the fact that other media reported Joy's news suggests that there may have been some redirection of listeners and readers to Joy. It is conceivable that overall, more people were tuned into various radio stations across the nation during that time; thus Joy's reported increase in and of itself is not that significant in terms of sheer numbers. However, it is the fact that many of the local stations carried Joy's results and used Joy's network with over 30 other stations that suggests that perhaps what many Ghanaians heard across the country during that time came from this one station based in Accra.

As far as Joy was concerned, they had invested much into their coverage system to ensure that they would 'know the outcome of the elections

2. Ghana's historical timeline post Independence follows the number of changes to the constitution. Each republic reflects a major change and the last time this was done was in 1992, the fourth time since 1957, the year Ghana ceased to be a British colony.

way ahead of [their] competitors' (Owusu, 11 May 2009 Interview). Detailing their process to cover each stage, Owusu revealed a system parallel to that of the EC's. Their real-time updates made them highly relevant to the anxious people waiting to find out how voting was going on in different parts of the country. This being the third consecutive time they were using this system to track the nation's few democratic elections, Joy was extremely confident in the system they had put in place. They worked with their affiliate stations and hired equipment that 'could easily and quickly capture data'. They had 'key stringers around the country [...] so that [they] could cover the major consensus almost simultaneously' (Owusu). Each constituency had a reporter who stayed at their base throughout the elections and there were others who went to the polling stations just to observe activities during the day. They pooled reports from these stringers into one database, along with the contact information of each reporter, and sent that across to all their six co-owned stations and 38 affiliates across the country. That way,

any station in our partnership or our network can pick the sheet or can go to the computer and say 'I'm looking for Bantama constituency, the results, who is the reporter there?' You can find the name of the person, find his phone number, probably more than one number, call the person and get the information so that you always stay, you know, on point as to what is happening here, what's happening there because listeners will be calling, and be waiting for us have to tell them something on air.

(Owusu, 11 May 2009 Interview)

The fact that these updates were put on-air and online in real-time made Joy's coverage more current and consistent than the EC's. According to Owusu, Dr Afari-Djan (The EC commissioner) had no problem with that because 'if you wanted to call the results, you should be ready to defend it [...] if you have a good means of catching the data, why not?' According to Joy's account and reports about the elections, the political parties as well as other media were all tracking the election proceedings. Anecdotal evidence suggests that even voters were also tallying the results based on what they heard from different sources. None of the media was bold enough to call the results before the EC, and the political parties gave the impression that it was not the accuracy of the prediction they were worried about per se, but the implication of the actual announcement on how the overall elections would turn out.

Could this whole scenario have played out the same way prior to the Fourth Republic (1992 – present)?²² Media history in Ghana suggests otherwise. Private media ownership is relatively recent, having only been allowed in 1994/1995 and the circumstances that led to the very liberal mediascape today is essential for understanding how that has changed radio and redefined the listening public in Ghana.

2. RADIO AND THE GHANAIAN MEDIASCAPE

Radio is said to be the most widespread medium across Africa (Afrobarometer 2008) and that is certainly the case in Ghana (GSS 2007). It plays a pre-eminent role in Ghana's broadcast mediascape, compared to television and the print media. In fact, private radio stations outnumber privately owned

television stations by a ratio of about 10:1.³ Print media, especially newspapers outnumber television stations but still fall short of radio's large numbers. In the past decade or so, the nation has grown to have one of the most liberal and independent media environments on the continent. In 2007, Ghana was the second highest-ranking African country on the World Press Freedom Rankings (Freedom 2007). This has not always been the case. For decades after Independence, the nation was under military rule, where dissent was brutally squashed and state-controlled media was the only source of news and information. In fact, up until the early 1990s, media, especially broadcast media, was always the under the purview of the ruling government.

Two factors – liberalization⁴ and hybridization⁵ of media – have played a key role in why Ghana has such a high standard of press freedom, and why radio is still important. This article brings some focus to the impact of a decade of media regulatory reforms that took place largely in developing countries during the 1990s. While countries like India, Hong Kong and Ghana were embroiled in negotiations with the twin Bretton-Woods institutions (The World Bank and International Monetary Fund), others, such as South Africa, were slowly succumbing to globalization pressures that required changes in governance and policy. The impact of those changes were not the same across countries, and as Banda shows, two countries within the same region (for instance Zambia and South Africa) sometimes had two very extreme results based on the pressures globalization and local structures exerted on local policy. In Ghana, regulatory changes were primarily focused on privatization of erstwhile state-owned industries with media liberalization forming part of a push to open up the economy. This was partly a function of the government's dalliance with the IMF and World Bank, and partly due to internal political changes.

Media and politics in an era of state control

Radio broadcasts began with colonial rule when, in 1935, the British government, in the then Gold Coast, set up a relay service in Accra and Cape Coast to broadcast the Empire Service from London. This service, called Radio ZOY, reached a limited number of subscribers (about 300) via a wired distribution system in Accra (Ghana Broadcasting Corporation 2009). Records show that a few years later, the governor, Hodson, asked the Colonial Office in London for a transmitter in Accra to facilitate 'independent broadcasting to reach out to 'members of the community in addition to teachers and school children whom it is intended to reach' (Hodson 1939, c.f. (Alhassan 2005). The transmitter enabled the relay system to be extended to other parts of the Gold Coast and even neighbouring territories in West Africa (GBC) and facilities were put in place for school children to listen to radio broadcasts in seventeen towns. This rhetoric of education (Alhassan 2005), that is using radio as a tool to educate the citizenry, was the basis for keeping radio under state control.

When Ghana became independent in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah's government used the same rhetoric of education to justify keeping media, and radio in particular, under tight government control. It was necessary to re-educate the citizenry and build the nation in terms of a national and African consciousness, he argued. However, due to the fact that this government had a huge developmental agenda relative to its available funds, radio expansion (in terms

3. According to the author's calculations that are based on a count of radio and television stations as well as newspapers.
4. Liberalization refers to 'the opening up of the market, largely in anticipation of competition' while privatization refers to 'a situation in which the state ceases to own businesses and sells them off to private hands' (Banda 2006: 460). In Ghana, many industries, such as the gold mining industry, were privatized. Others, such as media and telecommunications, were liberalized. That is to say, the government still maintained a presence in the radio, television and cellular phone markets. The Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) however, has morphed from a state radio into a public service/community organization with various radio stations and a television channel that aim at a pluralistic society (through offerings in the various Ghanaian languages, not just the lingua franca) and contribute to a national culture through local programming (Banda 2006).
5. Hybridization refers to the convergence of 'traditional' media like radio and television with Internet and mobile phone technologies.

6. There were a number of coup d'états continuously for two decades after that.

of infrastructure) slowed down. In 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown and the subsequent military governments⁶ kept a tight control on media.

Military rule came with economic hardships, which, in turn, gave the governments a reason to go to the IMF and World Bank to borrow funds. Those two institutions gave loans with tight restrictions, least of which was requiring loaning governments to make major regulatory changes. Privatization was the key word and many state-owned media were diversified with the government retaining less than 10 per cent interest in many industries. Even though different military governments borrowed money from these two banks, it was not until the early 1990s that the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) under Jerry Rawlings, through the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) made media privatization a policy.

Media liberalization amid structural adjustments

Alhassan argues that the state-owned media has always been viewed with apprehension in Ghana, and justifiably so, given its close association with 'abuse of civil liberties' (Alhassan 2005: 224). Up until the time the PNDC decided to allow a multi-party system, there was what historian Adu-Boahene called a 'culture of silence' (Gocking 2005) in which people were afraid to voice their dissatisfaction with or disapproval of the military government. The murder of high court judges had sent a chilling message that this was a government that did not tolerate a plurality of voices. However, eventually, the combination of the government's need to make regulatory changes, amidst internal decisions to turn to a multi-party system led to the freeing of independent press like the *Chronicle* and *Catholic Standard* to operate. One could say it was a combination of the importance attached to privatization by the World Bank and 'shifts in development theory and ideology as well as the political liberalization of the 1990s' (Appiah-Kubi 2001) that led to this change in policy. In any event, radio, for the first time was allowed to operate outside the state-controlled system.

This was in 1995, when the Multimedia Group, formed by Kwasi Twum, a Harvard Business school graduate, was authorized to operate the first private radio station. They named it Joy FM, and a year later launched its website called Myjoyonline.com and described it as the 'first Ghana based news site streaming live radio' (Multimedia Ghana Ltd, 2009). Joy FM, according to the founders, 'went on air [...] to provide alternative news and programs to listeners in and around the Greater Accra Region'. Table 1 shows the number of radio stations in Ghana in the year 2002. That year, the Multimedia Group 're-organized, formed [a] corporate centre and [...] radio stations became decentralized business units' (Multimedia Ghana 2009). By then the Group owned two other stations (Adom and Luv FM in Tema and Kumasi respectively) in addition to Joy and Myjoyonline.com. Today, the group owns six other radio stations, one news website (myjoyonline.com), one social networking site (mypaddies.com) and recently, 'Ghana's first multi-channel digital satellite free-to-air TV, MultiTV' (Multimedia Ghana Ltd., 2010). The other radio stations are based in the three major metropolitan centres: Hitz FM and Asempa FM in Accra, Adom FM in Tema, Luv FM and Nhyira FM, in Kumasi. The company also maintains, through a 'management services unit', a vast network of affiliations with about 38 other local stations and thirteen stations in Europe, which carry their flagship stations' programming. This is done through a 'satellite-based content distribution technology' (Joy Online, 2009).

Region	Percentage of national population*	Number of FM stations (2002)	
		FM licenses issued	On air
Greater Accra	15.8	17	14
Ashanti	17.3	12	9
Western	10.0	3	3
Central	8.6	6	6
Eastern	11.5	5	2
Brong Ahafo	9.9	8	8
Upper West	3.1	2	2
Upper East	5.0	1	1
Volta	8.8	3	3
Northern	10.1	2	2
Total	100	59	49

* Population estimate for 2002 figures are from 2000, approximately 18.9 million people. Estimated population for 2009 was about 20 million.

Sources: Alhassan 2005, ChangeGhana.com 2011 (accessed March 2011 via <http://change Ghana.com/home/featured-articles/commercial-fm-radio-stations-in-ghana-2009>), Ghana Statistical Services 2009, National Communication Authority Annual Report 2008.

Table 1: The distribution of private FM radio stations in Ghana.⁷

Joy FM is arguably the Multimedia Group's most recognizable brand because, in addition to its longevity on air relative to other stations, its offline activities ensure that it remains salient as a brand and cultural presence to its audience. The station hosts several annual events that have become part of the Accra scene. For instance, the hugely popular 'Old Schools Reunion' event brings alumni of the nation's secondary schools together for a funfair every year, and generates a lot of buzz all over the city before the event happens. The station also holds charity events for street children and runs annual donation drives by stressing philanthropy as a social responsibility on air. Joy's off-air (or on the ground) activities have helped to establish it as one of the most influential private media corporations in Ghana right now.

Tables 1 and 2 compare radio and television in Ghana in 2002 and 2009. The media landscape today is similar to what it was then, with more radio than television (see Table 2), which makes sense, given how much easier it is to deploy radio than it is television (ITU 2009). In 2000, there were 219 radio receivers per 1000 people, compared to thirteen television receivers per 1000 people (Abbey-Mensah 2001). In 2009, the number of radio stations on air in Accra was 24, Ashanti was 29, Central was nine and northern was four – all indicating increases. Joy FM's share of the radio listening market in Accra as of January 2010 was 9%, second to Peace FM (19%), the popular Twi language station whose meteoric rise to the top of the airwaves deserves a full paper on its own. Adom, Joy's sister Twi station that Multimedia established to compete with Peace FM also had a 9% share of the Accra market, totalling 18% for the Multimedia Group covering both English- and Twi-speaking listeners in Accra alone (Synovate 2010).

7. These are commercial stations and do not include the GBC radio stations.

Region	Per cent of national population*	Number of TV stations		
		TV licenses issued	Operational	Non-operational
Greater Accra	15.8	10	6	4
Ashanti	17.3	5	4	1
Western	10.0	2	2	0
Total	43.1	17	12	5

* The population estimates here are also based on 2000 figures, approximately 18.9 million. (Ghana Statistical Services). Only three urban regions have TV stations. The remaining seven, being predominantly rural, do not have any and so are not listed.

Source: Alhassan 2005.

Table 2: The distribution of TV stations in the country as at June 2002.

3. MEDIA, NETWORKED PUBLICS AND NEW CULTURAL ELITES

'Glocal' expertise and new elites

In addition to the structural and policy changes described above, we need to also understand the interplay of global phenomena such as technological changes and the movement of highly skilled labour and financial capital on Ghana's media landscape. Globalization draws our attention to the constant movement, interaction, change and interconnectedness of countries, individuals, cultures, economies and ideas. One could use people (individuals) as a basic unit of analysis, seeing how they often carry with them knowledge and information, capital and technology. However, the movement of all of these things does not require the physical movement of people. Technology, particularly the Internet, affords the flow of ideas, capital and intangible goods. That said, the issue of people moving back and forth between countries and cultures must not be underplayed. Policy changes in recent years have given us new ways in which to examine migration and the impact of this flow of people has been given much attention in the literature, showing its impact on the source and destination countries of the people crossing borders.

In general, the flow of people is not commensurate with the flow of ideas, capital, technology, services and information in today's globalized world. The apparent tension between states that must promote local interests and private enterprises that must compete globally creates many complications for skilled professionals who are constrained by the bureaucratic process (World Bank 2006). Dani Rodrik finds that labour from the South is effectively shut out of the North's markets (Rodrik 2007). This presents interesting implications for how migration affects industries in developed countries that have over 60 per cent of the world's migrants (United Nations 2005). The number of foreign-born residents in developed countries has generally increased but the UN report found that South-South migrations have also increased. The constraints and challenges in the migrant situation continues to be negative attitudes towards migrants, even though often foreign workers contribute to whole sectors and different levels of the economy, and the inability of policy-makers in both developed and developing countries to formulate strong migration policies (United Nations 2005).

However, the story is not that simple nor does it end there. Wadhwa et al. (2008) show that skilled migrants have had tremendous success in engineering and technological start-ups in the US and have contributed significantly to the country's economic development and global competitiveness. The ability of skilled labour to move internationally does not benefit just the developed country because the restrictive migration policies of countries like the US are serving as a boon to developing countries as skilled labour are taking their higher education and expertise back home (Wadhwa et al. 2009). Some leverage their diaspora networks while in the developed country and over time invest in industries directly by moving back or by providing the capital needed for entrepreneurs back home, as, for instance, was the case for many South and Eastern Asians (e.g. Indians, Taiwanese, etc) in the Silicon Valley (Saxenian 2006). In recent years, the increasingly difficult nature of the US immigration system has precipitated a reverse brain drain that has been discussed as 'America's loss' but 'the world's gain' (Wadhwa et al. 2009). It seems paradoxical that scholars would report a simultaneous increase in migration and a tightening of migration policies and yet this trend is also reported by the Global Commission on International Migration (United Nations 2005).

As Saxenian points out that, 'highly skilled emigrants are now increasingly transforming the brain drain into 'brain circulation' by returning home to establish business relationships or start new companies while maintaining their social and professional ties to the US' (Saxenian 2002). These people have been called 'talents' or 'individuals of high impact'. That impact can be in science and technology, business, culture and politics (Yevgeny Kuzenetsov, 2006 c.f. (Patterson 2007) or telecommunications and media. They embody the flow of knowledge, information and capital across regions. As Sparks points out, 'at best, the 'cosmopolitans' who inhabit global culture are a relatively small number of people, at least at present, but they are relatively influential, since they tend to be occupationally involved in intellectual and cultural niches. They, and the products that they produce, dominate the international circulation of cultural commodities ...' (Sparks 2007). Further, these 'entrepreneurs and their far-flung networks now play a vital role in the technology industries' global expansion – and make an increasingly important contribution to economic growth and development more broadly' (Saxenian 2006).

Ghana is an especially interesting case given its democratic and economic progress relative to the rest of the African continent over the past twenty years. The brain circulation that happens with respect to Ghana, I hypothesize, takes place independently of a specific policy to leverage their talent and resources, a prerequisite for brain circulation to be effective according to Patterson (2007). These 'new Argonauts' (Saxenian 2006) or global cosmopolitans, I argue, are at the forefront of what is becoming a new cultural elite in countries like Ghana and are contributing to a small but growing brain circulation between Ghana and the United States, United Kingdom and other western countries. Some of the biggest and most successful business corporations in Ghana were set up by new Argonauts. The Multimedia Group (owner of the first private radio station, Joy FM), Databank Group (first and largest private capital market firm), Ashesi University (internationally known private liberal arts college), SOFTtribe (first and largest software company), among others, were all started by individuals who either went overseas for their undergraduate or graduate degrees, worked a while in the West and returned to Ghana to start up these companies. They returned early, at the onset of liberalized policies, leveraged their global contacts, dug deep into the local

networks and till today continue to collaborate on a transnational level with their contemporaries. This is not unlike cases in India, Taiwan, Thailand, etc, where Silicon Valley entrepreneurs have been documented to return and set up some of the most competitive and lucrative local (and increasingly global) businesses that rival their western counterparts.

Keeping our focus on radio and Ghana's first privately owned station, I present here the singular case of Kwasi Twum, the founder of Joy FM and current chairman of the board of Multimedia, who received his Bachelor's degree at the University of Ghana and his Masters of Business Administration (MBA) at Harvard Business School. Twum returned after getting an advanced degree in a wealthier country and chose to return and invest in a market that had hitherto been untapped. The network he created overseas, combined with his knowledge of the local economy positioned him well to take advantage of policy changes. As a 'glocal' entrepreneur, his ability to tap into a global network and use that in a local setting has profited him and others like him who made early investments in the Ghanaian economy as it began to open up. I characterize him as part of the first wave of global cosmopolitans turned 'glocal' entrepreneurs because they were the first on the scene post policy liberalization of the 1990s and about the time the Internet was booming as a new medium. Their contributions are mostly in media, telecommunications, finance and education and a future paper will document the specifics of their contributions across sectors based on interview data.

As a cultural elite, Kwasi Twum's business model does not allow him to perpetuate the old status quo but, in fact, creates a new one that complicates what we know of the nation's media history. No longer is it the sole purview of the political elite (read government) to determine what is heard by the nation. Instead, a young urban group of people may now have its voice heard, quite powerfully, over the airwaves. This educated and fairly wealthy group is defined by its education and access to information and by the dint of technology is a vocal co-creator of what goes on the airwaves. As Burgess has eloquently noted, often 'to be young in Africa really means "being disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginal in the political and economic sense"' (Burgess, 2005: cf. (Jacobs, 2007). Yet, this particular group of young people who listen to Joy FM and participate in programmes, both on air and online, are neither spectacularly disadvantaged nor marginal compared to the majority of the (largely rural) population. They are secondary school or college educated, live in the city (but are not hustling or sleeping on the streets) (Jacobs 2007) and have extensive exposure to other cultures. It is they, and the 'glocal' entrepreneurs who set up the media (and telecommunications) companies that enable them to participate in agenda setting and decision-making who together constitute this new cultural elite.

New communication technologies and new publics

The term 'networked publics' describes 'participation in public culture [...] that is supported by the Internet and mobile networks. The growing availability of digital media production tools and infrastructure, combined with the traffic in media across social connections and networks, is creating convergence between mass media and online communication (Yochai Benkler 2006; Mizuko Ito 2009; Henry Jenkins 2006; Clay Shirky 2008; Kazys Varnelis 2009)' (cf. (Ito et al. 2009) and we are now 'communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side'

(Ito 2008). This is related to the idea of 'mobile publics', which 'on one level [...] relates to the emergence of a hybrid mediascape and the development of technological and cultural capacities to circulate and share ideas, images and information in ways that were not possible earlier (Punathambekar Forthcoming). Punathambekar's view of 'mobile media' draws our attention to the need to recognize how technologies like mobile phones and the Internet expand and re-configure the communicative affordance of radio.

The hybrid mediaspace created by Joy FM and myjoyonline allows the networked public in Accra to be engaged within the public sphere and partake in public discourse. Specifically, myjoyonline.com complements on-air content that constructs an ideal, engaged audience by giving them a platform to dialogue back with one another in a public space. Layered within this symbiotic relationship is a re-definition of the public space and a re-writing of cultural scripts. The Habermasian notion of a public sphere (Habermas [1962] 1989), in its very basic form, is seen here in an almost egalitarian way in which listeners and readers discuss policy and cultural issues outside of a central authority. On myjoyonline, the asynchronous affordances of the Internet allow people who may not have the time to immediately respond to on air broadcasts engage with each other on matters of importance to them. Every news item on the website allows comments, which, in turn, widens the space of public discourse on just about every issue. While Habermas' displeasure with the Internet as a useful location for public debate may be legend today, I argue that the hybrid media space brought on by the web enables radio texts to be discussed and debated and creates a more participatory culture.

This participatory culture is not pluralistic, however. The dominant voice that emerges from a combination of Joy's audience and its influence both in the mediascape and socially is one that is limited to a certain socio-economic class. The public sphere may have become more participatory in theory, but it is disproportionately filled with the participation of a class that has a higher education attainment and income than the rest of the nation. Therefore, while people in the northern part of the country may hear a Joy or Adom FM newscast through their local station, they cannot necessarily respond to what is sent out, unlike the recent college graduate sitting in an air-conditioned office in Accra whose online questions might have led Joy reporters to dig deeper into a story or chase a different angle. This close association of the gains from convergence with the socio-economic status and precise demographic of Joy FM's imagined audience, combined with the structure of the station's influence in the nation, creates some tension between our understanding of the liberal public sphere and what exists in contemporary Ghana. Joy's affiliations with 38 stations outside the seven that they own, means they technically reach as potentially as vast an audience as Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) radio – the national/state-owned radio – which has programming in all the local languages. One only needs to compare the websites of the two organizations to see which one's listeners participate more in news and programming. In many ways, GBC still reaches out to that 'national' audience and takes the primary function of informing and educating the public. That listening public plays a somewhat different role from Joy's if only because they are not as involved in the public discourse generated by the station. Arguably, the use of mobile phones to call into stations like Obonu FM (the GBC's Accra Ga language station) gives them some degree of interactivity. However, I still submit that Joy's interactivity goes a step further to include the Internet and a more responsive audience that

8. Joy's primary group of listeners is primarily based in Accra, where most of the nation's most sophisticated socio-economic networks can be found. Accra is also the most diverse city in Ghana, with the most number of different groups of people from other regions and countries.

includes Ghanaians overseas. This interactivity, combined with Joy's status as an influential station that government and policy-makers take seriously gives its participatory audience a greater influence on public discourse.

Joy claims that 'radio is about the people and nothing else' (myjoyonline 2009) and its success can be linked to how well it defines, imagines and constructs a listening public. One could argue that the state-owned radio views the whole nation as audience, and until the fourth republic in Ghana, the colonial power, first Ghanaian government and subsequent military rulers certainly saw radio's audience as one homogenous nation whose only role was more passive. Even though media studies in general have moved from the assumption that 'the audience' is one 'unified aggregate that receives a fixed message' (Spitulnik 2002), it nevertheless does not preclude the fact that state broadcasters viewed their listening public as such. Radio prior to liberalization could be described as a 'ruling party propaganda mouthpiece' (Banda 2006), solidified through the rhetoric of education used by both the colonial powers and the first Ghanaian government. On a very basic level then, there simply was no interactivity in Ghanaian radio prior to Joy FM.

Joy introduced 'phone-in' programmes and SMS text-ins at a time when both land lines and cell phones were limited to the wealthy and urban population. This use of communication technologies is currently standard on the Ghanaian airwaves but Joy's introduction changed the lack of interactivity that existed up until that point. Even more significant was the difference in Joy's target audience. They focused on a very specific group of people, one that fell within a particular demographic: a higher educated ('at least secondary school' as stated by Isaac Yeboah, the online editor), middle class, between the ages of 18 and 45 years, and mostly based in the capital city Accra. These characteristics were spelled out in the interviews with each of the Joy personnel that I interviewed for this article.

According to the programmes director, Kofi Owusu, many Joy listeners 'listen from their cars', on their way to work early in the morning and have jobs that may not allow them to listen to the radio in the office. They, however, have access to the Internet at work or elsewhere and daytime participation via the Internet is consequently higher than live on-air participation (which is not surprising given the fact that only a limited number of people can be allowed to talk and text live per time anyway). The interesting point here is what it reveals about their ideal (and it appears, actual) listenership – an affluent urban white colour population in the nation's most thriving city.⁸

It is not that Joy is unaware of how small this actual demographic is (relative to the rest of the nation), but rather, that it is a manifestation of *how* they intend to 'influence not just society, but decision makers' (Owusu May 11 2009 Interview). To them, anyone who listens to Joy FM is a 'discerning listener' who is able to 'discern' first, that Joy has a quality that sets it apart from other stations, and second that the issues and agenda set on-air must be engaged in a way that will influence public discourse in Ghana. One could extrapolate that Joy values its audience as a key player in public discourse, and sees it as one that also has the power to make changes. We see this in the ways in which the website and programmes are structured. On the myjoyonline.com website, there are comment spots for every news item posted and the most popular show on the station, the Super Morning Show (SMS) is highly interactive in both the on-air dialogue and the use of interactivity on the website (polls, comments, text-ins, etc). The host of that show, Kojo

Opong-Nkrumah has a Twitter account where he announces what will be discussed in the upcoming shows as an added level of direct engagement with his listeners.

When Joy began broadcasting to that very narrowly defined audience, the Internet and cellular phones were not as popular as there are today. Shanti Kumar, in her discussion of television, highlights that there is a (digital) convergence of communication technologies that were traditionally distinct, which enables media networks to broadcast globally, locally and simultaneously for multiple audiences. In Ghana's case, the historically distinct technologies of telephone, radio and Internet have come together to form a hybrid space where a symbiotic relationship is established between the private media and its listening public. This is comparable to other developing nations where it is hard to draw easy distinctions between 'old' and 'new' media, especially as it relates to how the public uses these technologies.

Joy's online content competes with a wider market – international news agencies (of which only one, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), has a notable presence on the Ghanaian airwaves), as well as social media and user-generated content. To make sure that they are a credible source of information for news on Ghana, they must constantly update the content – both news items and comments by readers. In this way, the asynchrony of the Internet closely mimics the 'live-ness' of the radio and does not necessarily push away 'traditional' media but rather enhances and facilitates its use. The Internet allows Joy FM's listeners to be even more narrowly defined – people who have access to both technologies and can use that to access information. These already relatively highly educated people characteristically would tend to be more informed than the average Ghanaian and Joy's online platform allows them to take part in the news-making and agenda-setting process. Isaac Yeboah (Online Editor) indicated that the online team often takes news investigation and reports further than the on-air team. The Internet allows them to put up complete interviews, follow-up pictures and comments – things that the airtime restricts. The ever-open comment feature allows them also to gauge what the audience is paying attention to or considers important, which may, in turn, trigger further reports or more detailed investigation. In this way, the interactive nature of the Internet makes the Joy audience co-creators of what eventually becomes public discourse.

The online world that is myJoyonline.com is more than a web supplement to Joy radio. It is an entity on its own that draws in much more audience participation from Joy's international audience. It draws the occasional Diaspora reader and the local loyalist who does not get the chance to listen on air. According to Isaac Yeboah, myjoyonline.com's primary motivation is 'relevance'. He and his team of editors keep in mind readers based in other time zones and update the content 24 hours/7 days a week in order to stay current even as they are aware that their core readers are actually based in Ghana. About 80 per cent of all site hits come from within Ghana (myjoyonline.com's Google Analytics, 2009), likewise advertising revenue. He lists the United Kingdom and the United States in second and third place, respectively, while other countries in Africa such as Nigeria, in Europe (particularly Germany) and even China all have hits. The relevance for Yeboah is thus making sure that the news and related comments are timely and in-depth in order to keep readers coming back to Joy even though they could get the news elsewhere. He finds the comments as important as the news and makes sure

those are not outdated in relation to the news items. As far as he is concerned, 'you're relevant only because people think they will get what they are looking for from your end' (Yeboah 5 June 2009 Interview), suggesting that they also anticipate what readers will look for.

This hybrid mediaspace has enabled the cultural elite I have described to have a fairly loud voice in public discourse. The basic premise of the public sphere is that reasoned public debate should exist for democracy to grow. While this is true in the very vibrant media all over Ghana, Joy's initial presence as the first private radio is some ways sets the agenda for other private radios. The very narrow definition of Joy's audience, and that audience's very active engagement with the station affects what Joy currently produces and even if that is further transmitted across the nation, it is to an audience that is relatively less empowered by technology to re-engage. Joy's history as the first private station and leader in innovative technologies, production techniques (including a relatively sophisticated method of tracking presidential elections), and overall social capital means they are able to influence public discourse more so than other radio stations and their listeners/participants get to directly and indirectly partake in that influence.

4. CONCLUSION

Liberalization of the broadcast industry in Ghana first of all made radio a key arbiter in shaping public discourse. Radio became a site for engaged participation; where as before it was merely an informational tool for the political elite, it became a site for public discourse, the theoretical inclusive coffee shop in Habermas' notion of the bourgeois public sphere (Habermas, [1962] 1989), but with participants who are drawn from a percentage of the population that is urban, young, educated, with access to a hybrid mediaspace and not particularly representative of the nation's largely rural population.

I have argued that that the demographics of Joy's listenership shows a cultural elite that is different from the one that existed prior to the 1990s. During the colonial and earlier republics, the cultural elite was also more-or-less the political elite. In a non-democratic society, it is the most politically powerful that tends to have the most widespread influence and in colonial times, this comprised a mix of traditional rulers and British-appointed public officers (under the policy of Indirect Rule). The parties that developed over the years along the political fault lines, even during military rule, have always been seen as the cultural elite in Ghana. These were led by people who often had received their education outside Ghana, either in Europe or the United States, and were most vocal about their ideologies and could influence the socio-political climate in the country. This group also extends to the few in Accra and every now and then the wealthy in the rural areas, who have a high level of education and are wealthier than the average Ghanaian. The age demographic tended to be on the higher end, especially when one considers the deference given to elders in the Ghanaian culture. There is an overlap between this group and those dwelling in the urban centres, with the commonality being their high education, often outside the country.

Further, global flows of highly skilled labour suggest that people such as the founder of Joy FM, Kwasi Twum and others like him, play a key role in that they accompany the flow of ideas, capital and technology in and out of the country and help to position changes in who gets to engage in the public

discourse. As a 'glocal' entrepreneur, Twum, and others like him, allow us to look at different dimensions of globalization, especially the interplay of brain circulation, transnational networks and media communications.

This article is an initial attempt to bring these different analytic mechanisms together to show a more holistic view of the changes in Africa's mediascape over the past two decades. I used one radio station in Ghana as a case study to illustrate the interconnection of these different mechanisms and borrowed from the ideas on 'brain circulation' of global talent, networked publics and mobile publics, keeping in mind that

mobile publics are more than just collectives that are informed and/or networked through new communication technologies and managed by media industries and other powerful interests [...] [T]hey need to be understood more broadly as interventions – not stable formations – that evince, if only momentarily, new cultural and political possibilities within the realm of everyday life.

(Punathambekar, Forthcoming)

Indeed, the scope and evidence presented here only set the stage for delving more deeply into both a theoretical and empirical analyses of the questions raised by the flow of people, technologies and policy changes in media, and their implications for democracy and daily life in developing countries.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author would like to thank Aswin Punathambekar for his comments on previous drafts of this article.

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SUGGESTED CITATION

- Avle, S. (2011), 'Global flows, media and developing democracies: The Ghanaian case', *Journal of African Media Studies* 3: 1, pp. 7–23, doi: 10.1386/jams.3.1.7_1

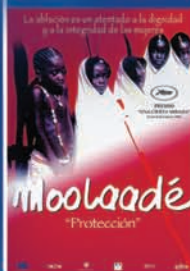
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