

CONTENT ANALYSIS IN MEDIA RESEARCH : A METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

RESUME

Le contenu des médias est toujours inspiré et déterminé par le contexte qui est une espèce de mélange du mode de production, de la structure de la société, de la culture politique et des relations du pouvoir qui déterminent les politiques. Cette situation existentielle du contenu des médias rend nécessaire l'évocation de certaines questions d'intérêt méthodologique pour l'Afrique.

C'est dire que le contenu des médias n'équivaut pas seulement à l'érection d'une structure du pouvoir dont la préoccupation majeure est :

- a) la prédilection pour l'unanimité ;
- b) la privatisation et la concentration du pouvoir personnel;
- c) l'incitation à une insécurité généralisée chez des personnes réprimées, déprimées et chez des masses dépossédées ;
- d) et l'isolement de ces mêmes masses à travers la réduction des moyens de communication importants.

En conséquence, la simple quantification en guise de méthodologie ne répond pas vraiment à ces questions critiques, notamment dans un contexte où de sous-développement colonial et néo-colonial, la décapitalisation, la dénationalisation et la recolonisation prévalent.

Il est question, bien entendu, du contexte africain. De ce fait, tout point méthodologique de départ qui se préoccupe essentiellement d'une analyse sur le plan quantitatif, systématique et "objectif" en dehors du contexte historique et matérialiste est in conséquent, non instructif et non théorique.

SUMMARY

Media content is inspired by, and demonstrative of, its context which is a mixture of the mode of production, the structure of society, the political culture and the power relations that determine policies. This existential position of media content compels the raising of some questions of a methodological import to Africa. That is, has media content not only amounted to the erection of a power structure concerned primarily with :

- a) The predilection for unanimity;*
- b) The privatisation and concentration of personal power;*
- c) The promotion of general insecurity among the repressed, depressed and dispossessed masses; and*
- d) The isolation of the very masses through the diminution of relevant communications FLOWS ?*

The methodology of mere quantification therefore fails to answer these critical questions, particularly in a context where colonial and neocolonial underdevelopment, decapitalization, denationalization, and recolonisation hold sway.

This is the African context. And any methodological points of departure whose major concern is with quantitative, systematic and «objective analysis» outside the historical-materialist context is irrelevant, uninstrusive and atheoretical.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Methodological issues or problems in the conduct of inquiry serve as a crucial focus for some of the more interesting and significant disputes in contemporary social thought. (1) The argument here is that a good explanation of an ill-defined phenomenon is no better than a weak explanation of well-defined events, though the latter is to be preferred, perhaps, as less likely to be misleading and more easily corrected.

These methodological disputes, however, have deeply-rooted historical origins. Historically, the contemporary phase of methodological controversy begins with the fragmentation of *mater scientia*. This fragmentation is evidenced by the attendant proliferation of academic disciplines and the spectacular success of the physical sciences. The proliferation and success have therefore raised the old methodological questions in a new and challenging context.

Of course, the methodological questions are based on the perennial truism that the aim of scientific inquiry is the acquisition of knowledge. But, what indeed constitutes an adequate claim to know? What kind of evidence should be accepted in argument? And, how does the nature of the subject-matter influence the conduct of inquiry?

The importance of these questions notwithstanding, social scientists are still a long way from agreement on many of them. Nevertheless, every social scientist must willy-nilly come to terms

with methodology since the elimination of intellectual debris at all levels of inquiry is a worthy undertaking. The reason is that in spite of the toothaches and pimples, methodological criticism is inevitably one of the mainstays of any study of science.

For instance, many of Aristotle's criticisms of Plato are methodological rather than substantive. Perhaps, this is why both the Platonic errors, if such they be, and the Aristotelian criticisms remain very much in evidence. And these criticisms invite scholars to take a hard look at now-trendy-concepts and research methods.

One of these now-trendy-methods is Content Analysis in communication research, a method orphaned by research scholars themselves. As Hur remarked :

Despite the plethora of research in... Communication there has been little systematic attempt to accurately reflect the State of the art' in research and theory in pertinent areas of (mass) communication... As a result... Communication as a field of study remains largely *undefined and fragmented* across different disciplines (emphasis added) (2).

The «undefined and fragmented» nature of the method of Content Analysis thus demands what Rogers refers to as «research on research, the analysis of analysis».

This «research on research» (3) is the modest ambition of this critique. It is hoped that the discussion may :

(a) Serve as an important corrective to such unilinear conception of content analysis in media research :

(b) Stimulate scholars and students to escape from conventional methodological ruts and think for themselves on a live and controversial issue like content analysis :

(c) Demonstrate how general historical trends, for example in Africa, affect the way the media function and also affect certain basic values; and,

(d) Show how content analysis has become a toothless methodological slogan in underdeveloped and developing countries.

The method of content analysis has its unique history. Content Analysis can be traced back to World War II, when allied intelligence services monitored the number and types of popular songs played on European radio stations. Music played on German radio stations was compared with that on other stations in occupied Europe. And the allies were thus able to measure with some de-

gree of success the changes in troop concentration on the continent.

After the war, content analysis achieved wide popularity among researchers studying propaganda in newspapers and radio. Recent concern over the portrayal of violence on television and the treatment of women and minority groups in print and television advertising and in music videos has further popularised the technique of content analysis among mass communication scholars (4). But, what indeed is the methodological point of departure called content analysis ?

2. CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis has been defined as a method of studying and analysing communications in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner to measure variables. This definition, the heart and soul of content analysis, is a summary of a group of definitions which provides six distinguishing characteristics of the phenomenon, thus (5)

- 1 - It applies only to social science generalizations;
- 2 - It applies only, or primarily to the determination of the effects of communication;
- 3 - It applies only to the syntactic and semantic dimensions of language;
- 4 - It must be objective;
- 5 - It must be systematic;
- 6 - It must be quantitative.

The first three characteristics define content analysis so narrowly, that only Professor Kerlinger's definitional keystones necessitate elaboration here. First of all, Content Analysis must be *systematic*. This systematic character of the content-analytical approach implies that the content of any communication to be analysed has to be selected according, to explicit and consistently applied rules. That is to say, the sample Selection must follow proper procedures, and each item must have a chance of being included in the analysis.

Furthermore, the process of evaluation must be systematic in that all content under consideration must be treated in exactly the same manner. In sum, there must be uniformity in the coding and in the procedures of analysis as well as in the length of time that coders are exposed to the materiel. In fact, any researcher usually

has a choice of research designs, methods of observations, methods of measurement, and types of analysis. All of these must be congruent. They must fit together (6).

Secondly, content analysis must be *objective*. The claim to objectivity here is that personal idiosyncrasies and biases of the investigator should be snuffed out of the findings. The reason is that if replicated by another researcher, the analysis should yield the same results. In other words, explicit operational definitions and rules for classification of variables which fully explain the sampling and categorization methods should be used to ensure reliability.

Thirdly, Content Analysis should be *quantitative*. Content Analysis aims at an accurate representation of a body of messages. Quantitative aims at an accurate representation of a body of messages. Quantitative studies are therefore important in fulfilling that objective of statistical precision. Indeed, Berelson lists five major units of analysis which can aid quantification : words, themes, characters, items, and space-and-time measures.

Systematization, objectification and qualification are therefore the cardinal ingredients in the content-analytical approach.

Perhaps, it is for the attractiveness of these concepts that Content Analysis has been broadly recognised as one of the most powerful empirical research designs in the social sciences.

Indeed, Leites and Pool have enunciated four «functions» of Content Analysis as follows :

- (a) To confirm what is already believed and disconfirm what is thought invalid;
- (b) To correct the «optical illusion» of specialists;
- (c) To settle disagreements among specialists; and
- (d) To formulate and test hypotheses about symbols.

These four premises of Content Analysis, as a methodological approach, compel a scrutiny of the method to see whether it stands head and shoulders above the bounds of criticisms of its claims to scientificity, or it is an attempt to buttress both disagreements and «optical illusions» among scholars.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CRITIQUE

The basic goal of any scientific study is the explanation of observed phenomena - the organisation of previous observations and experiences into general propositions and theories whose

effect is to lead us to expect particular phenomena to occur in given circumstances. This is why science, then, relies upon empiricism, abstraction, generalization, and explanation. Its methods include analysis, experimentation, observation, and measurement. It eschews moral valuations of any sort.

Content Analysis is considered to be a method of observation and measurement. Its claim to scientificity is that instead of observing people's behaviour directly, or asking them to respond to scales, or interesting themes, the researcher takes the communications that the people have produced and asks questions about such communications.

These fairly straight-forward principles may appear little more than generalized common sense, useful in any field of inquiry. Far be it. Science insists that adequate criticism of thought must go beyond internal consistency and discuss the relations between concept and concrete phenomena. And, any scientific approach to the study of any phenomenon which cannot accommodate even eccentricism is condemned to waste out its inane lute in an orgy of incest. It can only look forward to a succession, first of mediocrity, next of nonentity, and, third, of a generation of academic robots and idiots.

In the area of Content Analysis, the reasons are not far to seek. One, spoken language predates writing. And language is a system of arbitrary vocal and written symbols by means of which members of a speech community communicate, interact and transmit their culture.

African languages are no exception. They are not only used for communicative purposes but also as vehicles of change. The notion of change as it is propagated in this paper can best be explained using Professor Mazrui's concept of «cultural engineering» which he defines as «the deliberate manipulation of cultural factors for purposes of deflecting human habit in the direction of new and perhaps constructive endeavours» (8).

In effect, change is not used in the revolutionary sense of outright rejection of the old order but for «indigenizing what is foreign, idealizing what is indigenous, nationalizing what is sectional, and emphasising what is African» (9).

Most African languages are unwritten. Yet, they transmit «a birthright, the capsule summary of all previous societal experiences» (10).

Unfortunately, Content Analysis, according to its high priests, is condemned to examine recorded Communication so as to spell out its concern for semantical and sometimes syntactical features of

signs, for political discourse and for statistical formulations and empirical problems (11).

Lasswell and Kaplan point out that such data need to be arranged in a way permitting such an analysis (12). Quantitative Compilations ?

Is it not essential therefore to violate the code of silence to which most scholars in underdeveloped societies seem to abide the methodology of Content Analysis propagated by the academic «gurus» of the North, because of the dominance of oral communication ? Would one soberly claim that oral communication data cannot «be arranged in a way permitting such analysis?»

It is noteworthy here that methods of communication that have been part and parcel of social life in Africa for thousands of years - traditional music, dance, art, oral history and literature - still survive and communication by word of mouth continues in scores of different languages and dialects.

Any attempt, therefore, to dismiss oral communication from being content-analysed can conveniently lead to selective academic hyperopia of the imperialist variant. That is to say, it is an attempt to perceive and draw theories and methodologies only from happenings in one's history and from sources of one's national chronicles and then seek to impose them as universal. This is what the scholars of Content Analysis seek to do - impose cultural imperialism on the south.

The rejection of cultural imperialism is not synonymous with a rejection of all cultural values from the North. The reason, aptly stated by Nyerere is that :

A nation which refuses to learn from foreign cultures is nothing but a nation of idiots and lunatics. Mankind could not progress at all if we refused to learn from each other. But to learn from other cultures does not mean we should abandon our own. The sort of learning from which we can benefit is the kind which can help us to perfect and broaden our own culture (13).

Two, Content Analysis has problems of reliability as well as validity. These problems arise because all studies of the mass media in Africa carried out by western scholars and their ilk are off-shoots of theories which institutionalize the notion that the ways of life of the Africans and other third world peoples are inferior. Examples are not far-fetched. Daniel Lerner excitedly proclaimed that :

... the Western model of modernization exhibits certain components and sequences whose relevance is global. Everywhere... increasing urbanization has tended to increase media exposure, increasing media exposure has «gone with» wider economic participation. The model in the West is a historic fact... the same basic model reappears in virtually all modernising societies on all continents of the world, regardless of variations in race, colour, creed (14).

It is noteworthy that in his subsequent research in communication and development, Lerner rejected most of his earlier sweeping propositions : Nevertheless, his patronizing academic ethnocentrism (if not «academic imperialism») is bound to raise a cloud of dust in this era of a new world information and communication order. It is an attempt to foist Western cultural values, with their explicit prejudices, on research into cross-cultural media systems.

The critical Canadian scholar, McPhail, has put this succinctly : given its predilection with audience research, American Mass Communication study has not concentrated upon research, investigating the ties which bind media institutions to other sources and structures of power, whether domestic or international. In essence, development communication experts have taken for granted that more Western-type technology and hardware was beneficial to more Western-type economic growth which was equated with development. In fact the policies they supported did not advance development and quality of life, but tended to foster a colonial-type dependence on the West, to aggravate an unbalanced distribution of benefits by concentrating new communication power in the hands of ruling elites, and to create tension and frustrations in less developed countries by promoting inappropriate and inaccessible Western ideals and further expand the economic gap between the West and the less developed countries (15).

Lerner's sweeping propositions contrast seriously with those of McPhail and reinforce as well as advance the maintenance of neocolonial media structures in developed countries. In these countries, communication policies and structures serve mostly the urban population at the expense of the bulk of the needy. Any communication theories, policies and structures capable of catering for this needy majority must, according to Hamelink, be:

Democratic, meaning shared control;
Participatory, meaning many talking to many;
Diachronic, meaning a pooling of resources;
Horizontal, meaning flows in many directions
with similar impact and;
Egalitarian, meaning co-intentional communication
without experts' privileges (16).

Lerner may grudgingly accept this epistemological framework needed to make the new world information and communication order a reality. But, if his condescending conceptual and analytical procedures are not consistent (like any other ones) or if the document chosen for examination is not appropriate, the findings of such content analytical study must be doubtful and problematic. Else, how does one come up with a scientifically reliable and valid study of the problems inherent in content-analyzing African mass media, whereas one is not part of its social, economic and political set-up? Certainly, it must be difficult for such a scholar to come up with mental reflections on the laws governing the development and/or under development of African society. These laws of motion themselves are recurrent and necessary relations existing independently of the mind and discovered by concerned scholars as they investigate African society and its thought, expressed through the mass media.

Three, the methodological design of Content Analysis condemns empirical studies to be mostly descriptive and less complicated types in terms of their research constructions (17). This is why most Content Analyses have not been done to measure variables as such. Rather, they have been used to determine the relative emphasis or frequency of various communication phenomena : propaganda, trends, styles, changes in content, reliability, etc.

Few scholars today dispute the validity of the empiricist's claim that data must refer to experience in some sense of the term. However, extreme empiricism is philosophically untenable ; it leads to solipsism and to various other undesirable consequences (18).

For example, there are indeed «two essentially distinct conceptions of journalism» in the world today, where the press is an arm of the state, there can be no room for the exercise of independent professional judgement by journalists. A code of ethics that would be compatible with such a system of political control must necessarily be rejected by journalists who see their role as independent of the state and, indeed, as decently skeptical of governmental authority (19). In fact, what is involved is an incompatibility

between two essentially distinct conceptions of journalism.

The use of empirical observation as a limiting methodological device seems a necessary prerequisite to the cumulation of systematic and reliable knowledge. Of course, the claim of the mystic, idealist, or intuitionist cannot be repudiated by empiricism. But it cannot be affirmed either. And if the purported description of either Third World optimistic journalistic pap or Western sensationalism and consumerism cannot, even in principle, be related to some kind of human experience, we are entitled to regard it with extreme suspicion.

Furthermore, the most common error in handling description is to differentiate adequately between fact and concept. Indeed, the confusion of fact and concept may be a more serious hazard in mass communication research than the widely heralded confusion of fact and values. Strictly speaking, a fact is the sum of an observed set of properties, whereas a concept is a rule for dealing with such observations. Usually, facts are stipulated in terms of space, time, frequency of occurrence, genres, etc. In Communication research, even properties like colour can ultimately be reduced to such samples. Concepts are inferences manufactured by human beings like Daniel Lerner for their own purposes, and not discoverable in nature.

Four, Content Analysis alone cannot serve as an accurate basis for making authoritative statements about the effects of content on an audience. The reason is that it is methodologically incomplete, incomprehensive, shallow and impressionistic. For instance, saying that 80% of radio programmes contain commercial for beer does not imply that a researcher can claim that listeners would want to buy beer. And to lay such a claim would be preposterous because it would demand an additional study of listeners' attitudes towards beer.

Hence, Content Analysis is not a sole basis for claims about media effects. Listeners could even tune to such a radio station but fail to listen to what is being broadcast. This is simply to uphold Edelstein's suggestion «that under some conditions mass communication affects a few people very much and/or a few people very little, and that under all conditions mass communication affects everyone somewhat - how much, we do not know» (20). Not even the methodological «gurus» of content analysis can find the «how much».

Finally, the findings of a particular Content Analysis are restricted to the framework of categories and definitions and category systems to measure a concept. Perhaps, this is why «Content

Analysis stands or falls by its categories... since the categories contain the substance of the investigation, a Content Analysis can be no better than its systems of categories» (21).

Indeed, the use of different measuring instruments will naturally lead to different conclusions. Or, «Content Analysis studies done on a hit-or-miss basis, without clearly formulated problems for investigation and with vaguely drawn or poorly articulated categories, are almost certain to be inconsistent or of low quality, as research productions» (22). This is why the formulation and definition of appropriate categories should always take on central importance.

For example, the limitation of papers to be studied according to Kayser is instructive. He says the study is limited :

To papers which correspond to information that can be presumed normal and also normal papers which can be regularly altered in content or presentation by the events of the day or period of presentation (23).

These definitions of «normal» information and «normal papers» not only fail to be universal but are confused and confusing. It is therefore more rewarding to grasp at the meaning rather than merely at the dimensions of content. In other words, emphasis should be laid on "what" instead of on "how much of what".

WHICH WAY ?

This study has attempted a methodological critique of Content Analysis in media research as articulated by the «gurus» of the North and swallowed hook, line and Sinker by their running dogs in the South. The implication has been a transparent concern with identifying the contradictions, strains or dissonances embedded in the content analytical method.

The aim of this critique has thus been to see the methodological approach as efforts to reduce, control or remove the contradictions, strains or dissonances as well as a concern with the resulting development of Content Analysis in media research in the underdeveloped societies.

One task of the critique has been structural : that is, to lay out and exhibit the elements opposing one another. Another part has been dynamic : that is, to explore the elements of that opposition.

From the standpoint of critique, therefore, both the structure and dynamics of opposition are understood as achievements brought about by those holding the methodological point of departure, being maintained partly by their commitments and partly by the conditions within which these are lived in developing or underdeveloping countries.

This is in line with the method of dialectical materialism, a science of studying and apprehending nature and society whose method is dialectical (the law of contradictions), and whose theory is materialist (the primacy of matter over mind). In other words, critics of the like of the «gurus» would be uncomfortable with dialectical materialism and hasten to prescribe not only studies on Content Analysis based on a sender's viewpoints (e.g. using Content Analysis alone) but also those with participatory considerations (e.g. using survey or experimental designs is typical of the metaphysical method which views phenomena in their separateness, in their abstraction from the totality, not as part or a connected whole but as something that can be understood if taken by itself). The attempt to abstract natural phenomena from their total environment in order to observe them more closely under laboratory conditions is typical of the method of bourgeois social sciences.

Historical materialism is the very opposite of this method because experimental science is impossible in the study of social relationships (24). The reason is that such experimental studies are dated and enjoy no predictive certainty since they lean heavily on deductive reasoning from a priori (first principles) and appeals to authority and orthodoxy. Historical materialism rejects this metaphysical conception of social life outrightly. In other words, Content Analysis of communication in society is inseparable from men, even analytically. Communication of content, like any aspect of social life, begins with concerted human beings whose needs lead them to interact through social production.

Therefore, there can be no human order outside that created by historical or social interaction. The reason is that history is a living phenomenon. And like all living phenomena,

It unites the past with the present and the future. Therefore, its living characteristics are displayed by history analysis when the latter identifies a pressing contemporary problem, traces the pattern of its emergence from the past, thereby exposing causality and movements in its transformation and

thus indicating its direction of development in the future (25).

This brief sketch impels the raising of some illuminating questions, First, what has been the economic sub-structure of African Society in which mediated communication has thrived? Second, what has been the political repercussion of this economic sub-structure? And, third, what historical role have media played to reflect these socio-economic and political structures?

a) Economic structure

Historically; the economic context in which mediated Communication has grown in Africa has been that of,

- (i) depopulation
- (ii) decolonisation
- (iii) decapitalisation
- (iv) denationalization, and now,
- (v) recolonisation of the continent through trans and multi-national corporations.

During the period of Slave Trade and Slavery, European mercantilism generated a process of rapine carnage in Africa which ferociously went on for some four hundred years unparalleled in the diabolical annals of human oppression (26).

Through this trade, Europeans and Americans made huge profits, produced the direly-needed raw materials which stimulated their various industries and created the needed capital and all these contributed to their subsequent industrialization.

Africa's gains in return were indicative : trinkets, guns and powder and hot drinks which enabled the chiefs to constantly engage themselves in wars that provided the Europeans with slaves.

Later, the invention of the wheel in Europe altered the demand for slaves. Africa became a hunting ground for raw materials. To ensure that African raw materials and markets came under direct control, Europeans fashioned a relationship of unequals - rulers and ruled, superior and inferior - and also established political, «educational» and legal systems to maintain and perpetuate this supremacy and domination (27).

Colonial media played a specific role witnessed by this unreserved opinion about the «Lentsoe»

(It served as).....
The Voice of the Government, or
Europeans, of capitalists, of Exploiters,
whose only interest is to squeeze the
last penny out, of the already empty purses
of the Basotho (28).

In a word, Europe colonised Africa even using instruments of social communication.

Contradictions of colonial domination, exploitation and dehumanization of the African led to anti-colonial struggles. These Struggles gave birth to a nationalist press to counter the alien mass media. The anticolonial media became organs of protest and political agitation (29).

And «withdrawing in deep water, colonial powers left behind them far greater problems than any they had ever proposed to solve» (30). Africa's troubles, difficulties and problems today therefore stem from the solutions they «proposed».

Withdrawing, colonialists proposed and promoted the ideology of developmentalism. This ideology is predicated on increased cash crop production for export, import-substitution and industrialisation with high import content and loans and foreign «aid» to build the infrastructure to service the export-oriented economy (31).

This ideology of developmentalism has led to the decapitalisation and denationalisation of African economies with an attendant recolonisation of the continent by international finance capital. This historical process has had its political repercussions.

b) Repercussions

The primary objective of the state in Africa has been reduced to ensuring that the ruling class (alien) and the governing class (domestic) establish, protect and enhance alien economic, political and cultural interests and suppress those of the ruled (32).

In fact,

The economic crises have, as it were, drawn the lid off the ideology of developmentalism. The truth is that the economic crisis has revealed that no real and sustained economic development has taken place since independence but meanwhile people have lost their political freedom as well (33).

In other words, African «people have their political freedom»

curtailed drastically through :

- a) the depoliticisation of the masses ;
- b) erection of personal rule (34) ;
- c) ideological masturbation ; and,
- d) outright repression.

Media content has therefore been a reflection of the power structure dominated by the :

- i) predilection for unanimity,
- ii) privatisation and concentration of power,
- iii) promotion of general insecurity among the depressed and dispossessed masses ; and the
- iv) isolation of the masses through the diminution of relevant communication flows.

This epistemological foundation of the historical materialist method is very critical to the understanding of messages communicated by the media in Africa. It could enable scholars understand why any instrument of social communication in the hands of an overbearing, opulent, corrupt, self-aggrandising and repressive governing class must necessarily be a sycophantic and kept press. Such a class, on the one hand is numerically small and ideologically bankrupt and must fight for statisation of the media, of popular organisations such as trade unions, professional bodies, etc.

This concrete situation may give rise to several responses from the media men. On the one, the media men may practise «lackeyism» or use the media for the :

- a) resolution of personal problems ;
- b) escaping from oppressive social realities ; and,
- c) compensating for social deprivation.

On the other hand, wherever a modicum of the ideological crystallisation of popular radicalism exists, the media men may tend to pinpoint those who plunder by the ton and give by the ounce, those marionnettes of multi-nationals and those who are exploited and oppressed in the historical process.

Indeed, the media men will tend to play a deviant role of :

- a) conformity : deferring to official dictation ;

- b) innovation : rejecting normative means of achieving, professional success and turning to unprofessional, if not, deviant means ;
- c) ritualism : becoming a stickler for rules and clinging to red tape with little regard for professional ethics
- d) retreatism : rejecting both the professional goals and the institutionalised means of achieving them ; and,
- c) rebellion : rejecting both the professional goals and the institutionalised means while demanding their replacement by different goals and means.

This implies that Content Analysis cannot seek to paper over the cracks of social, political and economic differentiation by adopting so-called neutral analytical categories. Categories in contemporary Content Analysis in media research reflect ideological consciousness about commercialism and are therefore one-sided and openly unscientific. Patient effort is therefore required from the researchers to reconstitute the data on a fully scientific basis because :

Within the competitive system of capitalism the press cannot function in accordance with a strict regard for the facts... (35).

Nkrumah's reason for this argument was that the motivation of the capitalist press was profit and the news-gathering and reporting functions were merely secondary in that,

The journalist is forced into arranging news and information to fit the outlook of his journal. He finds himself rejecting or distorting facts that do not coincide with the outlook and interest of employer or the medium's advertisers. Under the pressure of competition for advertising revenue, trivialities are blown up, the vulgar emphasised, ethics forgotten, the important trimmed to the class outlook. Enmities are fanned and peace is perverted, the search is for sensation and the justification of an unjust system in which truth of the journalist must become the casualty (36).

No doubt, every science evolves its own concepts for the purpose of giving a more precise view of the objects and processes it studies. But concepts and categories are not some form of fixed knowledge. As Lenin says.

If everything develops, does not that apply also to the most general concept and categories of thought ? If not, it means that thinking is not connected with being. If it does, it means that there is a dialectic of concepts and a dialectic of cognition which has objective significance (37).

In the history of scientific thought, the role and place of individual categories change. The content of the categories is particularly mobile. One has only to compare, for instance, how an article of reportage on President Mobutu is understood in Zaire and how this same category is interpreted in the contemporary picture of United States journalism.

How then does a mere quantitative use of item count, space allocation, journalistic genres, layout, captioning, etc as a methodological approach distinguish between such understanding in Zaire and that in the United States of America without a sound historical materialist explication?

Needless to say a national station in Gabon, for instance, does not necessarily mean a Gabonese people's medium. It is for president Omar Bongo.

Surely, categories reflect the properties, connections and relationships of the material world. And, these categories therefore point up their tremendous methodological value and the need to apply them in the study of the concrete phenomena of nature, society and thought : The theoretical reproduction of this reality of nature, society and thought, the trends and patterns of its development and its practical transformation can only be accomplished with their help (38). Hence, it would be naive sermonizing to claim that categories of analysis of realities of «free» mediated communication in Zaire, etc. are the same as those in France, Britain, etc.

Content Analysis in media research must meaningfully not be limited to their superficial descriptions as it is the case. «Such fact need to be explained to disclose the essence of the historical process of the reality under study» (39). These explanations must be made within a theoretical framework of underdevelopment in the colonial and neo-colonial contexts. This is because media content can never fail to be inspired by, and demonstrative of, its context which is an unconscious mixture of the mode of production, the structure of society, the political culture and the power relations that determine both domestic and foreign policies.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1) Those who lack adequate background in methodological questions should probably begin by consulting one of the available volumes on the subject, viz: - Eugene J. Meehan, *The Theory and Method of Political Analysis*; (Dorsey Press, 1965); Abraham Kaplan, *The Conduct of Inquiry: Methodology For Behavioral Science*, (Chandler Publishing Co, 1964); Gibson, Q; *The Logis of Social inquiry*, (London Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).
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- 17) See Robert Bierstedt, «A Critique of Empiricism in Sociology» *American Sociological review*, Vol, XIV, n° 5 (October, 1949).

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- 23) For a further elaboration of this view see Mao Tse-Tung, «On Contradiction.
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- 27) Quoted in Ainslies, Rosalynde, *The Best in Africa*, (London : 1966).
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- It must be noted that by several criteria, the contents of mass media do not reflect the «real world». Media content is strongly directed and limited by the norms, values and craft practices of media men, form of institutions and their resources. There is thus pessimism as to whether media content has moderated divisions, discontinuities and ignorance among men. See Denis Mcquail, «International Information Flows. The evidence of Content Analysis», in Uamaja Kivikuru and Tapio Varis (eds.), *Approaches to International Communication*, (Helsinki : Unesco, 1986), pp. 146-147.