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# Parallel Media Response To Racial Policies In Malaysia And New South Africa

*Some striking parallels have emerged between post-colonial Malaysia and South Africa in terms of their social policies and political discourse and the media's response to these policies and discourses. The Bumiputera policy as developed in Malaysia in the 1970's seems to have been exported to 1990's South Africa where it is called affirmative action. This paper traces the roots of these two contemporary race-based policies back to a joint experience of British imperialism and examines the implications such race-based socioeconomic policies seem to hold for the media and media workers. Journalists and media trainers are challenged to consider ways in which the media can respond to such policies.*

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**A**s we approach the end of the twentieth century, there are still states where race lies at the very heart of social-policy. Two such contemporary societies are Malaysia and South Africa. It is no accident that both these states are products of the British Empire. The British arrived in Malaysia in 1786 and in South Africa in 1795. Two centuries later the negative effects of the introduction of Anglocentric logic into these regions are still being felt by the inhabitants of these two societies.

Malaysia's Bumiputera policy and South Africa's affirmative action policy both have their roots in the way the British economically organised and racially ranked many of their colonies. Such societies appear to throw up some dilemmas for journalists - for journalists living in such societies it creates one set of problems; for outside journalists another. But before looking at the media's relationship to such race-based societies, let us first attempt to unravel the nature and origins of such racial policies. Such an unravelling is necessary because there can be no sensible discussion of media ethics in much of the Afro-Asian world outside of an engagement with the racist past and present of societies like Malaysia and South Africa.

## **Racial Ranking In The British Empire**

The English are characteristically a class-conscious people. In building their empire they carried their class consciousness with them, but conflated it with race when ranking their new colonial societies. The result was a race ranking system. In the Empire's new social formations, one's life-chances were to be determined by one's ethnic status.

Hence, in British-South Africa, for example, the following class-race ranking emerged. British-born Anglos constituted the social elite. Next down in the social ranking order came Anglos born in the colonies. Next came non-Anglo whites (i.e. Afrikaners). Then came Indians and coloureds (mixed-race people). Next came the "mission blacks" (black people who were Westernised and able to speak English; called half-baked *kaffirs*)<sup>1</sup>, and finally all other blacks (called *Airs*). The "other black" category was itself ranked, with some tribes being considered "superior" because they had "fought bravely" (which was seemingly important for a "martial race" like the English). For example the Zulu and Matabele were judged "superior" to the Tswana or Shona. It was a ranking naturalised by the Anglo-colonial media not only in South Africa, but throughout the Empire.

But a key feature of this British Empire race ranking system was what Donald Horowitz has called "positional psychology" (Horowitz, 1985:184). In other words, racial ranking allocated group worth. Within the colonial system there were what Horowitz called "backward" and "advanced" groups, and one's worth as an individual was ascribed according to the ethnic group one was born into.

Ultimately, the Anglo media (whether in London, Sydney, Johannesburg, Singapore, Toronto or New Delhi) all circulated the same Empire-wide colonial race-ranking system -- a world view that justified English rule over an Empire of lesser human types. And echoes of this worldview can still be heard throughout the Anglo world -- hence, race-ranking may no longer be "politically correct" (and hence openly practised) in Anglo-derived societies like Australia and the USA, but at a deeper level the old rankings still resonate powerfully in Anglo hearts.

As Horowitz said, " ... the colonialists thus set in motion a comparative process by which aptitudes and disabilities imputed to ethnic groups were to be evaluated... [and] .. the evaluations took hold ... [so that] ... no one emerged from colonial rule untouched by the new standards of group evaluation" (Horowitz, 1985: 154). To be born a white Anglo was to see oneself and be seen by others as automatically superior and "advanced". To be born Malay or a black South African was to be automatically "backward". While to be born Chinese (in Malaysia) or Afrikaans (in South Africa) was to be allocated to an intermediary position -

not as "advanced" as Anglos, but not as "backward" as Malays or blacks. Anglos saw the Chinese as "cleverer" and "more industrious" than Malays. They saw Afrikaners as "honorary Europeans"; slightly "better than *kaffirs* ", but somehow tainted by their long association with Africa. It was an Anglo manufactured ascribed ranking that determined not only one's economic life chances, but also ultimately affected one's self-perception of how worthy one was. It was a social order in which non-Anglos could never feel fully "worthy" -- thus, even elite Malays or elite Afrikaners allowed to enjoy powerful political or bureaucratic positions in the colonial administrations, were always aware that the Anglo-rulers saw them as ethnically inferior.

This, necessarily produced a sense of inferiority because being in a "backward" (or intermediary) position produced a feeling of being "weak and helpless" vis-a-vis the "advanced" group (Horowitz, 1985: 170). It also produced a form of self-stereotyping in which members of the "backward" groups adopted compliant personalities characterized by unassertiveness, an unambitious demeanour and the assumption that others were more intelligent, better educated and more worthwhile (Horowitz, 1985: 170-171).

Besides being psychologically unsettling, exclusion from the "advanced" group produced feelings of envy, insecurity and deprivation (Jesudason, 1995: 7). It was this envy, insecurity and deprivation that was to have such profound effects on subsequent socio-political developments in Malaysia and South Africa because it produced what might be termed "catch-up nationalism" - e.g. Afrikaner nationalism, Malay nationalism and South African black nationalism.

In the final analysis, these catch-up nationalisms (with their policies of apartheid, Bumiputera and affirmative action) are all essentially attempts by groups "psychologically damaged" by the Anglo colonial ranking system to re-arrange the ranking order and so achieve the "same recognition" accorded to the "advanced" group (Horowitz, 1985: 165). They are nationalisms triggered by "pain". This "pain dimension" is something that can potentially distort the work of journalists in different ways.

Some foreign journalists trying to report on societies like Malaysia and South Africa will simply fail to fully comprehend the actions of players in such societies because they overlook the pain dimension (most outside reporting of Afrikaner nationalism fell into this category). On the other hand, for those foreign Anglo-journalists (i.e. Australians and Americans) who do recognise the pain (albeit from their "advanced" group position), "self-guilt" is often the response. This distorts their reporting in a different way - because they then become incapable of asking critical questions.

Finally, local journalists can have their reports distorted in a different way again because they may well be too enmeshed in local ethnic issues and local mythologies to be in a position to adequately grapple with such issues. So, in a sense, journalistic reporting on such societies will probably always be compromised by either one's own lived experience or lack of experience of such race-ranked societies and/or the Empire's ranking system. Perhaps such societies cannot be reported "properly"?

Jesudason has noted that "deprived individuals and their leaders, especially if they possess strong cultural and affective ties, are prone to using the state to ... modify the opportunity structure of society" (Jesudason, 1995: 7). The British created the ethnic ranking system and the pain associated with being ranked badly. Having done this, the conditions were created (in the many multi-ethnic societies created by the British Empire) for one or other ethnic group to seize state power in order to use the state for a group-based socioeconomic catch-up policy. It would seem the earliest such nationalist catch-up project was actually undertaken (from the 1930s to the 1960s) by an intermediary ranked group, namely Afrikaner nationalists in South Africa (see O'Meara, 1983; and Louw, 1994: 24 -27 ).

Apartheid was effectively an enormous race re-ranking and "affirmative action" project designed to upgrade the intermediately ranked Afrikaners who had been impoverished by the Anglos after the Boer War. Media reportage of apartheid was overwhelmingly negative. By and large only Afrikaner journalists had anything positive to say about apartheid, but then they were after all deriving benefit from its modification of society's opportunity structures.

Global coverage of apartheid was largely mediated through the eyes of South African-Anglo journalists who overwhelmingly opposed apartheid because it was modifying opportunity structures to the disadvantage of Anglos (who constituted the former elite). South African Anglo-journalists fed their particular interpretation of apartheid to the rest of the Anglo world via Reuters where it became enmeshed in an interesting way with the old Empire race-ranking idea -- serving to confirm the notion of retrogressive decline when Anglos did not run things.

However, in the contemporary post-colonial era it has been some of the bottom ranked "backward" groups who have come to use the state as a vehicle for modifying the opportunity structures to their own advantage. Their resultant race-based socio-economic policies have consequently, perhaps not surprisingly, taken on very similar forms in places like Malaysia, South Africa and Fiji. In

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such places, the formerly bottom-ranked groups have sought to re-rank themselves and simultaneously "punish" the formerly "advanced" or intermediary groups. As might be expected, some exchange of ideas and copycatism has even taken place, with South African ANC personnel, for example, visiting Malaysia to learn about the Bumiputera policy.

At the most elementary level, the contemporary race-based policies of Bumiputera and affirmative action are the claim (demand?) by "backward" groups that they now have a right to preferential treatment (Horowitz, 1985: 174 ). This preferential status has been associated with what has come to be termed "the politics of entitlement" or a "our time has come" psychology. In concrete terms, these policies use the state to radically improve the life chances of members of the formerly "backward" groups, and by extension, to diminish the life chances of the formerly "advanced" or intermediary groups (or more specifically, to diminish their children's life-chances). The media, supportive of the new ruling-elite, set about justifying the adoption of such a modified racial-ranking system and naturalising its outcome.

Malaysia's New Economic Policy (NEP) launched in 1970 is classic contemporary example of a "backward" group acting to modify socio-economic opportunity structures in favour of one particular ethnic group in society. The NEP set racial targets so that by 1990, 30 percent of Malaysian corporate ownership was to be held by Bumiputeras ("sons of the soil") - i.e. ethnic Malays; up from 1.9 percent Malay ownership in 1970 (Jesudason, 1995: 3-4). This was to be achieved by protecting ethnic-Malays against competition from non-Malays, especially Chinese-Malaysians (Jin, 1992: 59). It was protection developed in accordance with Prime Minister Mahathir's solution to the "Malay Dilemma" which portrayed Malays as "weaklings" (Jin, 1992: 59), or to use Horowitz's term, a "backward" group who need a leg-up.

A repeat performance of Malaysia's 1970-80's catch-up policies can be seen in 1990's South Africa, something that the world's media seems to have completely ignored in their rush to proclaim a "non-racial" future for South Africa. Post-1994 the new African National Congress government has adopted affirmative action as the states' central policy. Although the term affirmative action appears to have been borrowed from the USA, its application in South Africa is much more akin to the old apartheid patronage system, or to the Malaysian catch-up nationalist model rather than to the liberal American model.

In terms of the South African model of affirmative action, the ANC has made it clear that it expects a rapid change in the ownership and management structure of companies so as that what are called "the demographic realities of South Africa" are

reflected in future employment and ownership patterns, and "past disadvantages" are redressed (Press clipping, 1996d).

Further, black people (usually called "the majority"<sup>2</sup> or the "previously disadvantaged group") are to be given preferential employment opportunities, university placements, etc.; while whites (usually pejoratively referred to as "the elite" or "the minority"), are to be "penalized". Businesses seen to be "too white" are not given government contracts (Press clipping, 1996a; 1996f).

Indians and coloureds occupy a somewhat ambiguous position in the New South Africa -- they are not specifically "targeted" as "the elite", but in reality seem to be experiencing similar rates of "penalization". Coloured and Indian anger at such "penalization" has, however, led the ANC to give attention to this in its latest legislation (Press clipping, 1996c).

The ANC government has also set about replacing white-employees with black employees in the civil service, state-enterprises, police and armed forces, and the state has intervened to shift resources out of the "non-black" (white, coloured and Indian) sector and into the "black sector". This has caused particular resentment in coloured and Indian communities.<sup>3</sup> By 1996 the results of affirmative action are already visible: the proportion of general jobs occupied by black people has risen by 50% since 1993, and is expected to rise by another 62% over the next three years (Press clipping, 1996g). The "increases are even more dramatic in the case of managers and professionals" (Press clipping, 1996g). Many whites who are "feeling the job squeeze" are opting to emigrate (Press clipping, 1996g; 1996h).

The discourses used to justify both Bumiputera and affirmative action overlap to a considerable extent. Firstly, both the Malay and SA black nationalist ruling elites mobilise discourses that justify their race-based policies as merely unpleasant temporary expedients, designed to rectify imbalances derived from past-wrongs and so overcome their "backward" status. This "temporary" discourse ignores the way in which racial-patronage structures are being built which seem virtually certain to congeal into fixed social infrastructures.

Secondly, both catch-up nationalisms reveal their roots in the "pain" of the past by now asserting a rejection of things "Western" (in Malaysia) or "Eurocentric" (in South Africa). Thirdly, both the Malay and SA black nationalists seek to re-rank their citizens in terms of claims about a prior ownership of the land -- i.e. "who was here first" (Said, 1992: 274). It is a logic that ranks "immigrant groups" (i.e. Chinese and whites) into a necessarily secondary citizenship status (Said, 1992: 261). (Afrikaner nationalists mobilised a similar "here before you" discourse against Anglo-rule). These nationalist re-rankings have thus tended to

## **Present As Continuation Of The Past**

justify their political actions, in part, by mobilising a rescripted (and often distorted)<sup>4</sup> history which benefits the ruling elite's constituency. Such nationalist ruling elites then try to popularise their re-scriptings and new social myths through the mass media. The extent to which they are successful will, to a considerable extent, depend on how compliant "tame" local media workers are in disseminating and popularising the new script, and/or in not questioning the new script.

By building on notions of past injustice, the discourses of Bumiputera and affirmative action, effectively seem to preclude a rational discussion of contemporary injustice. By focussing on race, "historical legacies", and the "evils of the past", these discourses serve to disguise the class bias and socio-economic distortions of present day policies. The question is -- why have journalists working in these societies done so little to strip away such disguises and discuss the present day distortions? Journalistic acquiescence to ruling elite needs in such societies is perhaps an issue that deserves investigation.

Tentatively, it might be suggested that local journalists acquiesce for one of four possible reasons - they may belong to the "lucky" ethnic group deriving benefit from such racial-policies. Secondly, members of "unlucky" ethnic groups may be fearful (of, for example, losing their jobs) if they speak out.

Thirdly, some journalists from downwardly-ranked groups feel "guilt" and hence support the re-ranking exercise (a position seemingly shared by many foreign Anglo-journalists). Fourthly, some journalists function as the "organic intellectuals" of groups allied to the new ethno-elites (e.g. the Malaysian-Chinese or SA-Anglo business elite who derive economic benefit from the Malaysian or South African regimes). At any rate, the end result would seem to be a silence about certain kinds of ethno-nationalism and the racial discrimination flowing from such nationalisms.<sup>5</sup>

Simply put, contemporary Malaysia and South Africa are being re-constructed upon a sectionalist nationalist interpretation of the past such that their futures are ironically locked into a perpetuation of their racist pasts. Past distortions are modified into new distortions. The racial ranking may be changed, but ironically the race/class logic introduced by the British remains unchallenged.

In the case of both Malaysia and South Africa all that is happening is that a new (minority) privileged group is being created -- an ethnic-based bourgeoisie. Claims that the NEP benefits "Malays" or that affirmative action benefits "blacks" is



nonsense. Rather these policies are to the benefit of a small group of Malays and a small group of black South Africans - a fact that the global Anglo-journalist community seems quite content to ignore (perhaps because it serves to confirm a deep-seated and unacknowledged class consciousness about social organization?)

As Yukio Ikemoto has noted of Malaysia, "the NEP ... neglected the inequality within each race.... In the urban areas, for example, the impact of the NEP was that well-educated Malays now earned more than well-educated Chinese, while poor Malays earned less than poor Chinese" (as quoted in Brown, 1994: 246). The same pattern is emerging in 1990's with regard to black and white South Africans.

Frantz Fanon's (1963: 149-156) description of the 1960's emergence of black middle class comprador groups in post-independence Africa is of great relevance in understanding this process except that Fanon ignored the dimensions of "ethnicity" and "catch-up" nationalism. Both the Malay and SA-black nationalist ruling elites have set about the deliberate race-based construction of an ethnic bourgeoisie.

In 1996 a senior ANC politician, Jabu Moleketi, said it was now state policy to build a "patriotic black bourgeoisie" (Malala, 1996). In the case of Malaysia this project was associated with the rapid expansion of the state enterprise sector which effectively provided well-paid "sheltered" employment for Malays (Jesudason, 1995:4). Further, the private sector was forced to employ Malays in high-level positions and companies were forced to take Malay business partners on board (Jin, 1992: 60; and Bowie, 1995: 32-33). This has led to the practice called "Ali-Babaism" (Bowie, 1995:40) - i.e. taking on board "token" Malays and over-promoting Malays to comply with the Bumiputera policy.

In contemporary South Africa, the equivalent pejorative term for "Ali-Baba" is "an affirmative" (meaning "well-paid token black"). In South Africa, the process of transferring capital into black hands has been accelerated by the creation of a holding company (with strong ANC links) called New African Investments Limited (NAIL) and the National Empowerment Consortium (1996k). And just as the Anglo-colonial media failed to fundamentally question the ethno-class character of the old social order, so the contemporary SA media plays a similarly supportive role.

A key feature of the Bumiputera and affirmative action policies are that they are both effectively patronage systems. Both the new ethnic-based bourgeois groups being formed rely on the power and patronage of the state for their status and wealth. Of course, the political ruling elites in Malaysia and South Africa, in turn, are locking themselves into a (permanent?) relationship with

these new bourgeoisie groups. Dispensing patronage will presumably become central to maintaining power (Jesudason, 1995: 11). Jin, in fact, has described how the Malaysian ruling elite has already discovered how patronage has shifted alignments within its constituency and hence impacted on its future actions (Jin, 1992: 62-63). (The National Party had much the same experiences within its Afrikaner constituency as a result of the impact of apartheid patronage).

Ultimately, catch-up nationalism's system of patronage complicates the ruling group's relationship with its ethnic constituency because patronage splits the "chosen" ethnic group into two: a lucky minority becomes the ethnic bourgeoisie, while the rest derive no (or very little) economic benefit. Ironically, however, even those "backward" group members not deriving material benefits from Bumiputera and affirmative action appear not to oppose these policies (at least in the short-to-medium term). This seems to happen for two reasons.

Firstly, members of the "backward" groups who continue to be poor derive a sort of "psychological benefit" from seeing some members of their ethnic group "make it" - somehow "group worth" is improved, and the pain of being ranked "backward" within the colonial system is lessened when other Malays or blacks are seen to succeed. Secondly, even if one does not benefit presently, there is always the hope that one's children will be in the next wave to derive benefit (see Jesudason, 1995: 13).

Of course, if catch-up nationalism is to have any success, the new ethnic ruling elites need the cooperation of sections of the old "advanced" and intermediary groups - or at the very least requires their acquiescence. In fact, what seems to have happened in both Malaysia and South Africa is that the new ethnic (Malay and black) bourgeoisie have effectively forged an alliance with a section of the old elite.

As Brown has noted, the NEP actually hurt poor Malays more than it hurt wealthy Chinese because the wealthy Chinese (who got richer under NEP) were effectively bought into an alliance with the new ethnic Malay elite (Brown, 1994: 247-248; 219). In part this alliance is constructed upon the fact that both the ethnic Malay and Chinese business sectors derive benefit from being protected against foreign capital (Jesudason, 1995: 9).

The racial re-rankings being implemented in Malaysia and South Africa were both the result of crises in racially-ordered capitalist societies -- namely, the 1969 race riots in Malaysia and the 1980's anti-apartheid uprising in South Africa. Both re-ranking processes ultimately form part of an attempt to stabilize the basic outlines of the old (racial-) capitalist-system introduced by the British. Both the New South Africa and the NEP have simply

been strategies to co-opt new ethno-elites into the old system and so end these crises (which is advantageous for both local and global capital).

For non-elite Malays and black South Africans little will change. In order to camouflage this new ethno-class reality, the Malay ruling elite, for example, eventually mobilised the "ideology of Islam" to pacify non-elite ethnic Malays (Brown, 1994: 248). This, of course required the cooperation (or at least acquiescence) of media workers and the intelligentsia across the whole ethnic spectrum.

A remarkably similar picture is emerging in South Africa where the new black bourgeoisie are effectively in alliance with sections of the white-Anglo business elite. The SA ideologies of "nation building" and "developmentalism" are being used to deflect attention away from the emerging new inequalities. And the South African media are generally acquiescing to the "ideological needs" of the new ruling elite. The media owned by the Anglo-elite and the state-run South African Broadcasting Corporation are proving especially central in promoting discourses favourable to the new regime (see Louw, 1996: 79-81).

In general then, there are more continuities than discontinuities between the past and present in societies like Malaysia and South Africa. It seems the Anglo race/class-ranking model has tremendous resilience, and that it will long outlive the Empire. It would consequently seem that for Malaysia and South Africa the future looks a lot like the past -- these are societies inherently patterned and skewed by race/class hierarchies. They consequently remain tense societies, since within racially-ranked communities there will always be losers -- whose moods swing between feeling crushed, resentful, sullen, bitter or angry.

What is interesting, is the extent to which both the local (Malay and SA) media and the global media are seemingly down-playing the resentments and anger of downwardly-ranked groups like the Malaysian Chinese and white-South Africans. The resultant skewed media picture emerging from such societies throws up a number of questions about the journalistic practices of those reporting on such countries.

Reporting on societies in which ethno-elites are implementing a racial re-ranking program has, so far, thrown up three main responses. Firstly, some journalists have chosen to actively support such race policies, often because they are members of the group deriving benefit from the re-ranking (e.g. Afrikaner journalists in the 1950's-70's; Malay journalists in the 1970's-80's; and black journalists in the 1990's). Jesudason (1995:11) has noted

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that supporting such policies does not necessarily make the individual a racist in his/her personal-life - e.g. at the micro level individuals often mix together well.

However, when it comes to the macro-level, the same individual can support ethnic group actions which maximise advantages for his/her own group. Some Afro-Asian journalists who have practiced pro-government reporting have, however, deflected attention away from their personal self-interest in such policies by referring instead to the principles of "development" journalism or the New World Information Order (Masmoudi, 1979).

On the other hand, there are some journalists and foreign correspondents, (who are not members of recipient groups), who have supported such race-based policies either because of a personal "guilt" concerning past racial injustice, and/or because they see such interventions as a practical means for diffusing racial tensions in certain contexts (e.g. many SA-Anglo journalists in the 1990's appear to be adopting such a position).

A second journalistic response has been to oppose such re-rankings and to work actively to expose the racism of such policies. Such moral crusading or "exposure" journalism is undertaken either because of an in-principle ethical opposition to race-based state policies (e.g. much international media opposition to apartheid), or because one is a member of a group disadvantaged by such a policy (e.g. many SA-Anglo journalists in the 1950's-60's).

A third journalistic response has been a sort of "refusal" to deal with the racism inherent in such ethnic re-ranking programs - the "turning a blind eye" approach. Many foreign correspondents (e.g. Australians) have responded to Bumiputera and SA affirmative action in this way. The refusal to discuss the racial underpinnings of such policies seems to be tied to either a "guilt" concerning past treatment of "backward" ranked groups, or because of a fear of offending trading partners (e.g. Malaysia and Australia), or perhaps a mixture of both of these. It would be interesting to know how many foreign correspondents turn a blind eye because of pressure from their home-based editors.

In all of these forms of journalism, something is hidden from the audience. The nature of what can be and what is hidden, differs for internal and external audiences. When it comes to the journalism practised inside such race-based societies, the objective of those journalists supportive of the local regime will be fourfold.

Firstly, to try and "naturalize" and "normalise" such race-based policies for both the benefactors and victims of the state's race-based policies. Secondly, to try and "atomise" the responses of the new downwardly ranked (i.e. make any pain felt seem "personal" and "individual") and so to prevent, as far as possible, the downwardly ranked from recognising how widespread

opposition to such racial policies may be. After all, any recognition that one's own "pain" and "anger" is felt by many others could lead to the emergence of a collective counter-reaction.

Thirdly, to hide from the recipient (upwardly ranked) ethnic groups the resentments and "pain" of those ethnic groups suffering from the state's policies.<sup>6</sup> Fourthly, to hide any negative socio-economic consequences of the government's race-based policies (see Bowie, 1995: 40; and Jesudason, 1995: 7). In short, "the negative" will be avoided in favour of a "development" or "sunshine" journalism which tries to paper over the cracks and focus on the "positive". Ultimately, such journalism is counter productive because it serves to blind the ruling elite themselves, and so prevents them from taking timely corrective action for socio-economic problems that may emerge (Jesudason, 1995:15).

Of course, not all journalists in societies implementing race-based policies will be happy to promote the case of the government and its ethnic constituency. Journalists reporting "negatively" have tended to face either direct or indirect government pressure. In the case of Malaysia, direct pressure has been forthcoming -- with the government enacting legislation which effectively prevents the media from addressing the state's race-based policies (McDaniel, 1994: 93-97)<sup>7</sup>.

In the case of contemporary South Africa, however, a more indirect approach to pressuring the media has been adopted - i.e. instilling "fear" through mobilising "threats" has been the ANC's preferred approach. Thus both President Mandela and Deputy President Mbeki have warned the press for "not representing the views of the [black] majority" (see 1996j; and Ludski, 1996), and for having "too white" an ownership and staffing structure (Mandela, 1994).

There have been repeated statements that the media should report the government more "positively", and much ANC/ government pressure to appoint black journalists (1996i; 1996n). Journalists reporting the government "negatively" have been attacked (1996) and "threats" have been made that the government might become more proactive in promoting its interpretation of the news (1996m).

At the same time, the state-owned broadcaster (SABC) has actually set about changing its staff composition -1994-95 saw more than 900 (mostly white) staffers leave the SABC while 68% of new staff replacements were black (Press clipping. 1996i). (Many of the new non-black staff appointees were pro-ANC media activists in the 1980's).

Foreign journalists covering such race-based societies face a different set of pressures. In extreme cases, for example, foreign journalists can face deportation for producing "negative" reports.

Some journalists may consequently feel compelled to skew and/or tone-down their reporting. However, skewed reporting can also derive from other factors. For one thing an outside journalist is more likely to mistake "bluster" and "symbolism" for "reality" - hence, fine-sounding words from Mandela or Mahathir are perhaps less transparent to an outsider (?)

Secondly, for foreign journalists, pain felt by minority groups in Malaysia or South Africa is, after all, not "their pain" - and it may well be easier to overlook such tricky issues, rather than trying to explain to home-audiences some of the more complex sub-texts within societies like Malaysia or South Africa (e.g. Cape coloured politics in the 1990's).

Thirdly, of course, there are always (subtle) pressures emanating from home-based editors - such as a preference for "good news" stories from "post-apartheid South Africa"; or the avoidance of negative stories on Malaysia that might give the appearance that (Anglo) Australians retain a "colonial-arrogance" toward their Asian neighbours.

Post-coloniality has produced some interesting challenges and problems for media workers, not the least of which is the reporting of race-based societies in the throes of dealing with their colonial legacies. How should journalists respond to such complex and tense societies? Should journalists "assist" governments in the midst of difficult social transformations? Should journalists consider the past when reporting on the present?

When it comes to the above sorts of questions, contemporary Malaysia and South Africa might be seen to provide something of a litmus test for journalistic practice and for those concerned with media, media values and the training of future journalists. If nothing else, hopefully, this article will at least have raised a few questions that others will see as worthy of further debate. ■

## NOTES

1. The term *kaffir* was introduced to South Africa by Indonesian political prisoners sent to Cape Town by the Dutch East India Company. (The descendants of these people are today called Cape Malays). Initially, the term *kaffir* was used to describe the indigenous Khoi-San (i.e. Hottentots and Bushmen), who were, of course, non-Muslim. However, over time it came to describe indigenous black people.
2. "Majoritarianism" is central to an intertwined set of discourses that the ANC is using to justify building its race-based patronage system. The conflation of "majority" with "democracy" has also proved helpful

when selling these race-based policies to foreign journalists from societies like the USA and Australia.

3. A common rallying call in today's coloured politics is: "In the old South Africa we were not white enough. Now we are not black enough". The bulk of the coloured and Indian community have thus, somewhat ironically, shifted their political allegiance - and today support the National Party (the party that invented apartheid, which used to discriminate against coloureds and Indians!).
4. An example of how the nationalist "who was here first" history is selectively constructed is the way in which SA black nationalist historiography now chooses to ignore the way in which black people were also immigrants/settlers still engaged in the process of conquest when whites first settled Cape Town in 1652. Approximately one-third of South Africa was never settled by black people, but rather occupied by the (non-black) Khoi-San who intermarried with white people to form the coloured group. Black people only began migrating to the Western Cape in significant numbers in the mid-1980s. Under affirmative action, black people are effectively now migrating to parts of the country they never before occupied, and are being awarded choice employment opportunities there. This has become an issue of considerable irritation to Cape coloureds, who see these black people as "settlers". Given that the "who was here first" principle is so important within the black nationalist-logic, this Khoi-San/coloured issue is being ignored in today's reconstruction of South Africa's past. A similar set of silences is apparent within the construction of "Malayness/Bumiputerness" (see Kessler, 1992: 139-140).
5. The response of Anglo-journalists to contemporary Malay and SA black nationalism seems to be informed, in some way, by a residual logic derived from the old Empire racial-ranking system. The "guilt" felt by many Anglo-journalists is extended to those groups ranked "backward", but not to intermediary groups (e.g. Chinese or Afrikaners). Thus the catch-up nationalisms and the racist-logic associated with "backward"-ranked groups like ethnic-Malays or black South Africans is seemingly acceptable (and/or "excused"). But when an intermediary group has tried to re-rank itself against Anglo-rule - e.g. the Malaysian-Chinese communists (1948-60) or Afrikaner nationalists (1930's to 1950's) - this has not been acceptable or "excused" in any way.
6. One might ask why Anglo-journalists are not asking the same sort of critical questions about the racism encoded into Bumiputera or affirmative action that they asked about apartheid? Why, for example, are Anglo-journalists so silent about the discrimination currently suffered by South African coloureds? (also a group the Empire ranked in an "intermediary" position). Anglo-journalists who did a wonderful job exposing the evils of apartheid seem to have developed a blind-spot when it comes to the racial-policies in contemporary South Africa or Malaysia. Anglo "guilt" then seems to be ranked hierarchically - and it is a ranking that parallels (inversely) the old Empire-racial ranking system.
7. Under apartheid, for example, the average white person never had to confront the pain and deprivation suffered by black people. This was

- obviously helpful for the ruling elite, who consequently never had to deal with critical questions from within their own ethnic-constituency.
8. Contemporary Malaysian media legislation, in fact, has some remarkable similarities to the media laws of the old apartheid regime.

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