

Teaching journalism or teaching African journalism? Experiences from foreign involvement in a journalism programme in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Journalism programmes across the African continent have different attitudes to the issue of universal vs. local values in journalism. This article discusses the issue in light of a post-graduate journalism programme that opened at Addis Ababa University in 2004. In its 5-year implementation phase, the programme engaged educators from Europe and North America in addition to local instructors. Thus, one could expect a potential conflict between Western and Ethiopian approaches to journalism. However, on the basis of experiences with the Addis Ababa programme, the present study questions the assumed dichotomy between Western and Ethiopian (or African) journalism discourses. Tensions did indeed come to the fore when the programme was planned and implemented, but they were defined by determinants such as professional background and personal preferences of the instructors involved rather than by geographical and cultural origin.

Keywords

African journalism, cultural values, universal values, journalism education, Ethiopia, international media support

Introduction

An important issue for any journalism programme in Africa is the question of whether journalism should be taught according to an established Western tradition or in a distinct African way. Obviously, local knowledge is mandatory in journalistic performance, but it is less clear

whether the fundamental ideology of journalism should also be locally contextualised in teaching and practice, as expressed in the term “African journalism” (Shaw, 2009). This is the central issue to be discussed in the current contribution. The article finds its source in the author’s involvement in a master’s programme in journalism that commenced at Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia in 2004. Being the first graduate degree in the field of journalism studies in Ethiopia, the programme relied heavily on foreign personnel both in the day-to-day teaching and in the foregoing planning process. The foreign involvement was funded through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), which is a Scandinavian-style development agency fully backed by government subsidy and policy.

The external academic coordination of the programme was undertaken by the Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, which is a Norwegian higher learning institution. Instructors in the implementation phase came from a total of 10 countries, including four countries in Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Zimbabwe and South Africa), four countries in Europe (Norway, Sweden, UK and Austria) and two countries in North America (USA and Canada). By the end of the implementation phase, however, which lasted for almost five years (March 2004 to December 2008), the instruction was fully taken over by the academic personnel at Addis Ababa University. The programme has thus been through a comprehensive local take-over process, as intended by the initial scheme. The programme today (2011) only occasionally makes use of foreign lecturers in the teaching.

By the end of 2008, when the formal implementation phase ended and foreign funding ceased, 102 candidates had graduated from the programme with a two-year MA degree in Journalism, spread over four student intakes (24-30 students were enrolled every year). Since the foreign withdrawal in 2008, the yearly student enrolment has slightly increased and there are ambitions to expand the programme with at least one general communication degree and in the long run a PhD programme as well. The academic unit, which began as a School of Journalism and Communication in March 2004, became a fully acknowledged faculty at Addis Ababa University in February 2007 (named Faculty of Journalism and Communication; FJC). In 2006, the unit

incorporated the state-operated journalism school Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute (EMMTI, established in 1996) as an undergraduate division. The total Faculty of Journalism and Communication at Addis Ababa University today accommodates approximately 70 students in the graduate division and approximately 600 students (full-time and part-time) in undergraduate programmes.

This article is concerned with the discussions and tensions that came to the fore during the preparation of the programme from 2002 onwards. As is clear from the details above, the foreign engagement meant that there were potential areas of tension between a Western approach to journalism and a local Ethiopian approach. The tension would possibly materialise both in issues of journalism theory, journalism practice, and the way journalism ought to be taught. Adding to the challenges was the fact that a high number of foreign instructors were to be used in the different parts of the programme (more than 40 expatriates were deployed to a lesser or larger extent over the five-year period), which meant that competing preferences in journalism and communication theory could not be streamlined into a unified teaching model (Jones, 2005). Nor was it the intention of the programme to streamline the teaching approaches.

To the contrary, it was seen as beneficial for the course to invite instructors representing a diversity of academic and professional backgrounds. Not only did they differ along the university vs. school divide, but the instructors also had different views with regard to the contextual vs. fundamental dimensions of journalism theory. Thus, the extent to which one should adjust to a potentially local understanding of journalism was frequently discussed among the instructors. The core dilemma might be encapsulated in a somewhat tabloid -- though not necessarily precise -- question: Should we teach journalism or should we teach African journalism? That dilemma is also the departure point of this article. In addition, the article aims to summarise the history of journalism education in Ethiopia, which is not yet formally compiled.

Diverse attitudes towards the content of African journalism programmes

The debate concerning which style of journalism to teach in African journalism programmes is not new, though only sporadically addressed in academic literature until the late 1980s. Back in 1968, when journalism training in Africa was mostly confined to short-term courses, William A. Hachten warned against the type of patriotic journalism that post-colonial governments wanted to see in the media. To counter this tendency, professional journalism education -- in those days understood as 'Western' journalism education -- had to be introduced to the African media, according to Hachten. He thus forwards, "the push for Africanization of the news media exacerbates the urgency of training African journalists" (Hachten, 1968: 103). Journalism training at that time was largely a matter of transferring Western media knowledge to the African continent, and journalists were often brought to Europe or North America to get training. However, Hachten maintains that "it is highly desirable that Africans train Africans" because they have the best knowledge of local conditions, and journalists were more likely to stay in the profession if they were trained locally (Hachten, 1968: 108). The degree to which media education was Africanised mainly meant ensuring that journalists had a grasp of local culture and politics (cf. Watts, 1968).

However, some years later, journalism and communication training in Africa became subject to more principal discussions, notably around the environment surrounding the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE, established in 1976) and its journal *African Media Review*, established in 1985. A number of media trainers had growing concerns with the way journalism was researched and taught on the continent and asked whether it was merely a reproduction of Western ideologies rather than a scholarly and vocational practice that was in harmony with African ideology and conditions (Okigbo, 1987; James, 1990). In relation to journalism education curricula, two worries were posted. The first was that the education appeared not to meet the socio-political challenges of various African regimes which were purportedly marked by "authoritarian leadership and the constant threat to press freedom" (James, 1990: 12). For example, Western journalism programmes tend to ignore the condition of "clientelistic media cultures" (Mfumbusa, 2010), even though the concept is essential to understanding the prevailing contestation between professional and private interests in African media practice. When raised in

the 1980s, and still being the case, such concerns did not necessarily mean the rejection of Western-inspired liberal journalism ideas, but implied that media training of the day was not sufficiently tuned in with the political and social climate in which journalists practiced.

The second concern raised a more principal ideological issue and criticised existing journalism and communication education for being in conflict with African ontology and epistemology. This view maintained that African education generally relied on Western philosophy in its interpretation of society and mankind. In the words of Usman Jimada, mass communication lecturer at University of Maiduguri, Nigeria:

Institutionalized education in Africa has had but one goal: to make Africans seem like Europeans in their thoughts, speech, attitudes, and behavior. Thus the curriculum, the textbooks, the structure of courses, and indeed the whole training pattern is delivered to us without regard to our knowledge and culture (Jimada, 1992: 367).

Specifically in relation to media education, liberal ideas of media organisation and journalistic practice were seen as a Western intrusion of African thought and philosophy. Professionalisation of the Third World media was in reality a transfer of Western ideology, warned Peter Golding (1977). Similar criticism of ideological imperialism in media education continues to be an issue in academic circles today. Fackson Banda explicates the misfortune of Western impact in media education as such:

“It is characterized by the liberal journalistic epistemic orientation which privileges dispassionate media work over civically active media practice” (Banda, 2009: 226).

Banda traces the Western influence in media education to colonial legacy, as do other scholars (Murphy & Scotton, 1987; Wasserman, 2006; Salawu, 2009). Although there may sometimes be

reasons to refer to Western influence in African media education in general terms, the influence is not uniform and does appear in different forms. There are thus analysts who differentiate between various types of Western-inspired journalism curricula, with a main distinction between North American and European influences. Looking at journalism schools in various African countries, Murphy & Scotton (1987) found that many programmes preferred an American style to a European because the former was seen as more practically-oriented than the European (often British) model, which had a stronger academic tint. Kwame Nkrumah's own journalism programme at the Ghana Institute of Journalism in 1958 was thus a direct import of American curricula, although this could also be explained in terms of the strongly-felt need to break sharply with British colonial history (Murphy & Scotton, 1987).

Writing from the perspective of Nigeria, Jimada (1992) makes a similar observation and finds that journalism training in his country shifted from a British to an American approach after independence (cf. Salawu, 2009). The American impact is still visible in the names of many journalism schools in English-speaking Sub-Saharan Africa which contain "mass communication" in the title. There are for example at least 11 "mass communication" institutes or departments in Nigeria (Wimmer & Wolf, 2003), which indicates a continuing influence of the American media research tradition, in contrast to the European approach which tends to use broader terms when naming their institutes, such as "media" or "communication", thereby implying a wider understanding of media communication -- alternatively "journalism" if the institution concentrates primarily on the journalistic craft.

A type of foreign influence in African media education that has been much less discussed is the impact of training offered by Eastern European countries. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and its allies were active in educating various sectors of the African society, including the media industry. Hachten (1968) thus reports that there was competition between Western and Eastern European training institutes to pick the best African journalists for training. In East Africa, the Tanzania School of Journalism conformed with official socialist ideology in their training programme, which meant that several of its instructors obtained their diplomas from

East Berlin (Murphy & Scotton, 1987). In Ethiopia, the former general manager of Ethiopian Television, Amare Aregawi, was frustrated with prospective reporters who came to the institution with credentials from the Soviet Union but who had not been specifically exposed to journalism: “People came to me with MAs in journalism, but when I saw their CV, it had two years of learning Russian, visiting Azerbaijan et cetera – but no journalism!” (Amare Aregawi, personal interview, 16 November 2009; cf. Amare, 2009: 27). Pratt (1996: 42) argues that African governments in the 1980s saw the exposure to communist ideology in journalism education as a way to avoid press censorship because the journalists would have a sound understanding of the “proper” state-media ideology, but the ideologies eventually turned out to be less relevant for the continent’s development needs. Too little is however known of the impact that communist-inspired training have had on media practice in Africa¹.

Recently, the discussion of foreign dependency in African journalism has been taken a step further when asking whether new media technologies imply continued and reinforced Western dependency in local media practice. Evidently, cost-demanding technologies tend to depend on Western capital in one way or the other (but one must not forget that Asian capital has a great share in these technologies as well). The question thus becomes whether this also means ideological influence. Mfumbusa (2008) concludes pessimistically, arguing that media convergence and digitisation imply further dependence on Western media systems in Africa.

However, one could also argue that new media -- for instance mobile phones -- represent a technology that activates citizens throughout the African continent to a much larger extent than what has been possible before. Cheap new technologies are key instruments in, for example, civic journalism -- a reporting philosophy which some scholars maintain as being more in harmony with genuine African communication than liberal, capital-driven journalism (Banda, 2009; Fackler, 2003). Whatever the case, developments in new media technology and increased

¹ An interesting contribution is that of Charles Quist-Adade (2005), which looks at the linkages between African countries and the former Soviet Union in the media domain. Quist-Adade’s analysis of three Russian newspapers from 1985 to 1992 finds that socialist-oriented countries in Africa (like Ethiopia and Zimbabwe) received better publicity in the Russian press than did non-socialist countries (like Kenya and the Central African Republic).

global exchange in the information sector demonstrate that no area is exempt from the discussion of international dependency in media education and practice.

Journalism training in Ethiopia

Ethiopia got its first permanent journalism school in 1996 when the previously mentioned EMMTI (formerly known as MMTI and MMTC) established its diploma programme. However, a great number of training sessions took place long before that. NGOs and international organisations were engaged in journalism training both during the imperial years of Haile Selassie (until 1974) and during the Derg regime (1974-91). The motivation for the training sessions was mainly to equip journalists with basic writing and reporting skills and, from the government's side, to (at least moderately) professionalise the state media which was, for all practical purposes, a tool for political leadership. Organisations involved in such training were for instance UNESCO (Murphy & Scotton, 1987: 15) and the British Thomson Foundation, the latter of which contributed in journalism courses at Addis Ababa University when these were introduced at the national university in the 1980s.

One of the instructors who taught in Ethiopia as far back as 1963 was Mal Goode, the American “Dean of black journalism”, in a two-week course organised by the African American Institute (Peabody, 1995; Hachten, 1968). What influence Goode brought to Ethiopian journalism is uncertain, but whatever ideas he wanted to convey they eventually needed to be accustomed to the media ideology of the empire, which basically meant portraying Emperor Haile Selassie positively and supporting Ethiopian pride. The government stronghold of the media continued during the Marxist Derg regime (1974-91) which designated all media channels to political propaganda and effectually forbade the exercise of independent journalism (Janas, 1991).

With the overthrow of the Derg in 1991, Ethiopia became much more open for international organisations which had an interest in arranging trainings and workshops. Since then, a vast number of NGOs and international organisations have been engaged in journalism training in the country, particularly in the capital city of Addis Ababa.

Some examples are the International Press Institute (IPI), the Carter Center, the Knight Foundation, the International News Safety Institute, BBC World Service Trust, and Internews². Internews, for example, has trained more than 500 newspaper and radio journalists in Ethiopia on HIV/AIDS reporting³. It is, in fact, so common to participate in short-term training convened by international organisations that experienced journalists are sometimes able to cite more than ten international training institutes they have been exposed to. However, even if press organisations have been active in the training of journalists in Ethiopia, social awareness organisations have been even more so. Thus, the bulk of short-term journalism training in the country concentrates on social awareness issues for media workers in areas like HIV/AIDS, reproductive health, trachoma, children rights, gender equality, anti-corruption, and so forth. This training rarely comes with a cognisant ideology of journalism, apart from aiming to equip journalists with “expert” knowledge on a topic and convince them that the particular topic is very important for the public and needs more media coverage.

One could argue, of course, that the topical orientation of these courses support the official development journalism policy of the Ethiopian government because the training advocates the usage of the media for development purposes (Skjerdal, 2011). International partner organisations also usually find it easy to collaborate with local authorities when conducting training sessions on “soft” topics because it is in the interest of the government to support development initiatives. Critical journalism training and conferences, on the other hand, are generally felt to be less appreciated by the authorities. This in fact came to be a point of tension between the university and the government in relation to the donor-funded journalism programme which is discussed in this article.⁴

² On a global scale, Lee B. Becker and Tudor Vlad (2005) report that more than 70 Western donor organisations, plus American organisations, are involved in media assistance in the South, spending close to 1 billion US dollars annually.

³ <http://www.internews.org/regions/africa/ethiopia.shtm>. See also Kent and Taylor, 2011.

⁴ It is obviously difficult to determine the lasting effect of short-term training programmes. Studying journalism trainings in Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda, Anya Schiffrin (2010) claims that such initiatives only have “piecemeal effect” (p. 412) if not complemented with new business models and reformed media legislation. However, seen together, the trainings may also have an effect as an impetus for change in the general media policy.

There has been a glaring lack of collaboration between the different journalism training initiatives in Ethiopia. In many cases, a foreign stakeholder will conduct a training course for journalists, sincerely believing (and perhaps announcing) it is a first-of-its-kind training in the country, although there is all likelihood that similar training has been conducted before on the same topic -- perhaps even taking place simultaneously with that particular course. Also, the arrangers of short-term training may not have the total overview of the local expertise that exists in Ethiopia, resulting in foreign personnel being brought in when there are local resources available. However, participants in the courses are often found to appreciate foreign trainers because they are believed to introduce new ideas and represent a political and ethnic “neutrality” that Ethiopian instructors may find it more difficult to redress.

Training sessions conducted by foreign stakeholders habitually invite journalists from both the private and the state media. However, several conveners have had similar experiences to that of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) when it began to arrange training in Ethiopia from 1997 onwards: Almost only journalists from the private press showed up. One reason for this may have been the outspoken objective of USAID to strengthen independent journalism, which could have posed a dilemma for officers in charge of training in state media institutions (cf. Ogundimu, 1997). According to Wall (2001), in one incidence at least the failure by the state media to show up at a training session was interpreted by the American host as a political reaction as well as a rejection of a Western understanding of journalism.

Training sessions conducted by local Ethiopian organisations tend to fortify the polarisation between the private press and the state media as well. It is particularly the state media institutions which have been active in organising training, and they are usually designed as in-house training for the official media outlets. Nowadays, the recently-established Office for Government Communication Affairs (OGCA) have started to conduct week-long sessions for the state media on development journalism, which has been introduced as official media policy by the government (EPA, 2008).

As already mentioned, the first permanent journalism school which gave formalised programme courses in journalism in Ethiopia was launched in 1996⁵. The school, initially named Mass Media Training Center (later Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute, EMMTI), is presently located at the very media production site at Abune Petros in Addis Ababa from where the final victory over the Derg regime was broadcasted on radio in May 1991. State-run, EMMTI offered two-year diploma trainings for government journalists mainly although the programme was also open for journalists from the private media. UNESCO supported the programme with USD 150,000 in its inception years 1996-98⁶. Within its first ten years of existence, by 2006, EMMTI had graduated 639 media practitioners in its regular and extension programmes (Ethiopian Mass Media Profile, 2006: 55). About 20 percent were female journalists. By then, EMMTI had advanced by opening a full BA programme and the institute had become part of Addis Ababa University's School of Journalism and Communication.

Addis Ababa University on its part did not provide a full study in journalism until the establishment of the graduate programme in the School of Journalism and Communication in 2004. Single courses in journalism and mass communication did however exist within various departments at the university, notably the Institute of Language Studies (ILS). Lecturers in these courses had been introduced to journalism theory at various universities around the world: the US, the UK, Italy, the former Soviet Union, India, Egypt, and probably several other places (Ethiopian Mass Media Profile, 2006). Again, one notes that there is not a distinct Western tradition that has informed Ethiopian journalism education, but a variety of traditions.

With the opening of the graduate programme in journalism at AAU in March 2004, a further complicating factor was brought into common portrayals of African journalism dependency theory as an extension of the coloniser/colonised discourse. In the Addis Ababa programme, by contrast, there was neither a coloniser nor a colonised. Ethiopia has never been colonised, and

⁵ Formally acknowledged by the Council of Ministers Regulations No 19/1997

⁶ UNESCO project code PDC/16ETH/01 352-ETH-61

the foreign donor to the journalism programme, Norway, has never been a colonial power. Descriptions of media dependency syndromes towards a colonial backdrop (Banda, 2009; Wasserman, 2006; Salawu, 2009) would therefore seem insufficient in this case.

AAU's graduate programme in journalism has served Ethiopia's higher education community by educating academic personnel for several new diploma and undergraduate programmes. The first university courses in journalism outside of Addis Ababa were opened at Bahir Dar University in 2003 (Amol, 2008). Today, in 2011, journalism courses or degrees (BA, diploma or single courses) are offered in at least eight regional universities (Axum, Mekelle, Dehub, Bahir Dar, Dilla, Hawasa, Arba Minch and Jigjiga). Journalism and communication courses are also offered at two private institutions: Rift Valley University College and New Generation University College. Unity University College, also a private institution, opened a diploma study in journalism in 2000 with assistance from two American universities, but the programme currently has a very small student body.

The MA programme in journalism at AAU, which is the object of this study, remains the first and only postgraduate programme in journalism at the Horn of Africa so far (Skjerdal & Ngugi, 2007). The programme opened on 15 March 2004 with a student body of 24, five local academic staff members and initially 14 international instructors who were going to be used during the first semester in 2-to-3-week periods.

Research approach

This study is characterised by a participatory, "embedded" research approach. I am largely writing from my personal experiences as a contributor and former external academic coordinator of the programme in question. Representing the Gimlekollen School of Journalism and Communication, I was part of the planning team of Ethiopian and Norwegian scholars that drafted the original curriculum in 2002. When the programme opened two years later, I lectured in various courses and supervised thesis students. From 2004 to 2006, I served as external academic coordinator of the degree programme, and from 2006 to 2008, external MA thesis

coordinator. My responsibility was, inter alia, to hire international instructors and introduce them to the programme. Towards this backdrop, it is obvious that I come to the present research with a certain degree of subjectivity, and my analysis is necessarily marked by my personal involvement in the programme. That said, I strive to remain fair to diverse views and experiences when describing the programme and its evolution.

In terms of data which informs the article, I draw on internal and external evaluation reports plus instructor reports which lecturers were obliged to submit after each teaching term. Equally important, however, are informal talks and discussions that I have had with local staff, expatriate instructors, media actors and policy makers in Ethiopia since the programme started. The period that this article concentrates on is the implementation phase from 2004 to 2008, in other words the 5-year period when the programme was mostly carried by foreign funding.

The two questions I want to discuss in particular, are:

- What were the ideological tensions in the approach to journalism education among the persons involved in the planning and implementation phase of the MA programme?
- Did the tensions follow cultural demarcation lines or did they follow other demarcations?

Discussion

It must be pointed out at the onset of the discussion that the journalism curriculum at AAU was formed at a time when the Norwegian donor NORAD had sharpened its policy in media support with the view to focus more strongly on free media and independent journalism⁷. While many previous media projects of NORAD were fragmented and suffered from a lack of direction, the new policy aimed at concentrating media support around projects which clearly promoted human rights, open democracy, and good governance (Skjerdal, 2009: 24). All of these are values that concur with a liberal understanding of the role of the media and could be taken as an indication of Western-imposed journalistic norms.

⁷ 'Guidelines for support to free media in developing countries', Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004. Retrieved 3 August 2011 from the World Wide Web: http://www.norad.no/_attachment/125090/binary/42138?download=true (accessed 3 August 2011).

Consequently, the final project proposal submitted by AAU to NORAD highlighted these values and argued particularly for the importance of training *critical* journalists in Ethiopia. The project objectives make clear that “the programme particularly emphasises the integration of critical journalism with media theory, democracy theory and human rights” and that Addis Ababa University “aims to become the leading institution in training critical journalists for the national media” (AAU, 2004: 11). Furthermore, the project proposal is openly critical of the close relationship between the state and the major media institutions in Ethiopia and emphasises that large sections of the media remain a mouthpiece of the government (pp. 11, 20). The proposal contains no direct calls for a distinct Ethiopian approach to journalism practice that could serve as an alternative to conventional critical journalism, such as development journalism. On the contrary, it warns against seeing the media as instruments for “good causes”:

“The media should not be viewed merely as means to social transformation, but as statements of human rights in themselves” (AAU, 2004: 11).

At the same time, it was deemed important to Ethiopianise the programme, thus resources were allotted to build a specialised media and communication library where literature specific to Ethiopia and Africa would comprise a significant proportion. As of 2009, the post-graduate library had about 1,700 titles on its shelves, and although the majority of the volumes represent European or North American publishers, there is a considerable size of local material and reports as well. Instructors were also requested to use local examples in the teaching where possible, which resulted for instance in the production of new reading material on Ethiopian media law.

Even if the donor gave some pointers, much freedom was given to the university and its academic partners to shape the contents of the programme. The curriculum contained a combination of practical and theoretical courses since the entrants had undergraduate degrees in both journalism/media studies as well as other fields of study. It was the intention of the programme to encourage professional diversity in the media sector by accepting students from a variety of occupational and educational backgrounds.

One evaluator subsequently described the programme as a “hybrid programme” because it contained elements from both a practically-oriented BA in journalism and a theoretically-based MA programme in journalism/media studies (Eide, 2005: 18). In the final agreed curriculum, 1/4 of the course content was practically-oriented and 3/4 theoretical. Interestingly, this is in line with UNESCO’s subsequent model curricula for journalism education for developing countries and emerging democracies (2007) for MA students who have little or no journalistic background⁸.

Table 1: List of courses, 2-year MA programme in Journalism, Addis Ababa University

Course	Credit hours
JOUR601 Introduction to Journalism	3
JOUR605 News Writing for Print and Web <i>or</i> JOUR610 Radio and TV Reporting	2
JOUR615 Communication Theory	3
JOUR607 Newspaper and Web Production <i>or</i> JOUR611 Digital Editing	3
JOUR617 Media Law and Media Ethics	2
JOUR620 Media and Democracy	3
JOUR625 Research Methodology for Media Studies	3
JOUR602 Internship, 4 weeks	1

⁸ In the model curriculum, UNESCO (2007: 15) warns against MA programmes in journalism which are purely theoretical and which are “made up largely of coursework and research in the field of mass communications”.

JOUR604 Investigative Journalism	3
JOUR606 Feature Writing and Editorial Writing <i>or</i> JOUR612 Radio Documentary <i>or</i> JOUR613 TV Documentary	3
JOUR616 Media and Globalization	2
JOUR626 Master Thesis	One semester

(Note: The table illustrates the initial curriculum of the programme 2004-09, which is the focus of the current article. The course structure was revised in 2009, when students were no longer divided into print/web and broadcasting streams.)

The Addis Ababa curriculum indeed largely follows the later proposed UNESCO outline for MA degrees in journalism, although with a somewhat less proportion of practical skills courses than UNESCO's model curriculum. AAU's curriculum appears to put slightly more emphasis on democratisation issues through its tailored course Media and Democracy while UNESCO instead recommends a more general course entitled Media and Society. Also, AAU offers Media and Globalization as a compulsory course with the view to analyse media practices in a wider global context, whereas UNESCO has no such equivalent, perhaps because the topic is regarded more of a media studies subject than journalism proper.

In both curricula, the MA thesis in the final year comprises only one semester while the standard in many MA programmes elsewhere -- and the general rule at Addis Ababa University -- is a full-year thesis on postgraduate level.

A standing difference, however, is that UNESCO presumes that the MA thesis be a journalistic product (with an accompanying theoretical report), while AAU only gives the student the option to do a full theoretical/academic thesis.

Three areas of tensions

As already indicated, the planning and subsequent implementation of the Addis Ababa programme unearthed some ideological differences in the view of journalism teaching and practices among the actors involved. The differences can be summarised in three areas: (a) tensions in curriculum design; (b) tensions in normative journalism theory; and (c) tensions in preferred public appearance of the programme.

a) Tensions in curriculum design

Two contesting views emerged during the curriculum development process in relation to the subject orientation. One view favoured a curriculum with clear focus on journalism while the other argued for a programme where general communication subjects should be included as well. For the latter, it was argued that public relations in particular should be part to the programme on par with journalism. The main argument in this regard was that many more persons were employed in the public relations sector in Ethiopia than in journalism; besides, journalists could gain from knowledge about public relations too. In this case, “public relations” mainly pointed to communication officers in public offices and NGOs rather than commercial public relations.

The other view, which favoured a clear distinction between journalism and public relations, argued that a mix-up of the subjects could lead to confusion concerning the role of reporters vs. the role of communication officers. This position also displayed a stronger favouritism towards the fourth estate model, arguing that the media and the government should be aware of their role as distinct estates.

The differences that surfaced gave the contours to subsequent discussions. The tendency from the very beginning was that the ideological differences in the preparation committee did not follow cultural or geographical lines, but professional boundaries. Those with a background in journalism -- both in practice and teaching -- favoured a clearly focused journalism curriculum while the members of the committee with other vocational backgrounds were more likely to support a more general communication curriculum. The outcome of the discussion, as evident in the final curriculum (table 1), was that the degree would mainly focus on journalism subjects. The degree would also include Communication Theory and a few other courses which would give the students an overview of general communication as well. It was also decided that the school would later open a degree in communication that would serve as a general alternative to journalism (not yet implemented).

The students who were accepted in the programme during the first phase turned out to be far apart on the continuum from strict journalism to general communication in terms of professional experience and study interests. Although some had a clear ambition to work or teach in areas of journalism, there were others whose interests lay more in general communication, for example with a prospective career as a communication officer in an NGO. A survey among the first 41 graduates showed that nine were hired as information or communication officers within the first year of completion of the study; 15 began working as journalists or editors; and 16 were employed by universities as lecturers, mostly in media-related subjects. That a fairly high percentage of the graduates (22 percent) ended up with jobs in the general communication or public relations sector was taken by the Norwegian academic partner as a somewhat pitiful sign that powerful international organisations in Addis Ababa (such as the UN) could snatch resourceful candidates from the media industry because they offered much better salaries and benefits⁹.

⁹ The defection from journalism to public relations is a well-known phenomenon in African journalism education. Schiffrin (2010) reports that the defection rate between the two professions is higher among students who get a scholarship to go abroad for media studies because they get additional qualification (e.g. language skills) which makes them attractive for better-paid jobs when they return to their home country. The PR industry generally offers better salary than journalism institutions.

What appeared to be “defection” to the communication industry was however also a result of the obligation of individual students to return to their previous organisations for a duty service period. During the selection of topics for MA dissertation work, it also became clear that a number of students preferred general communication topics above controversial journalism topics in their research. Because a communication degree is not yet in place at AAU, the journalism programme has so far allowed MA research topics in the wider communication domain -- although students have been discouraged to choose such topics since the core focus in the programme is on journalism.

Among the 102 graduates in the first four student cohorts, 12 ended up choosing research topics within the broader field of communication while the remainder focused on journalism or media studies. Furthermore, of the topics which could be regarded as journalistic research topics, many tended to be non-political and non-controversial in nature, dealing with issues such as development and gender representation. Such issues also turned out to be more popular among the students because they could attract additional research support from international NGOs, like Save the Children, when choosing a topic close to the heart of the donor organisation. These factors notwithstanding, 26 (one fourth) of the 102 completed MA theses covered rather controversial research topics such as Ethiopian media law, self-censorship among journalists, and ethical challenges in the state media¹⁰. Some of the students saw it as a convenient push when expatriate guest lecturers from both African and European countries encouraged them to pursue research projects which involved a critical scrutiny of Ethiopian media policy and practice.

That the programme adopted a critical approach to journalism is evident by the curriculum which includes the courses Investigative Journalism; Media Law; and Media and Democracy (table 1). All of these were mandatory courses. In contrast to various other journalism programmes in African universities (Wimmer & Wolf, 2005), and despite the Ethiopian government’s development journalism policy (Skjerdal, 2011), development journalism does not appear as a

¹⁰ The theses are available on the World Wide Web:<http://mhg.sornett.net/filer/aau/index.htm>.

distinct course in the Addis Ababa programme. The subject is instead covered in the course Media and Democracy. That development journalism is not offered as a distinct course reflects the drafters' view that the basic principles of journalism exist regardless of social and political context and that development journalism could easily end up being a disguise for manipulative practices. Also, a course in development journalism would run the risk of signalling that the programme was aimed at educating state media journalists only, which would be a false message to the media industry and the public. At the same time, development journalism is aptly treated in other relevant courses.

In retrospect, an evaluation report suggests that the local leadership of the journalism programme felt that the Norwegian academic partner was too dominant in determining the profile of the programme (Wirak, 2008). The discontent was not the least a result of the critical approach to journalism theory and practice that permeated the curriculum. The school's leadership was less in favour of a critical, so-called Western approach because it was regarded as counter-productive for Ethiopian development purposes.

However, this was not a unison view among the local staff. Other staff members (below management level) favoured a more professional conceptualisation of journalism, arguing that the role of the journalist ought to be clearly distinguished from those of information and public relations officers. This half of the staff took it as a sign of political inclination (in favour of the government) when the leadership of the school supported a softer type of journalism.

b) Tensions in the view of normative journalism theory

It follows from the previous section that there were differing views of normative journalism models among the personnel involved in the programme. Broadly speaking, one side favoured a developmental approach to journalism while the other favoured a more independent or libertarian approach. The former, represented by the leadership of the school and some of the expatriate communication scholars, emphasised that since Ethiopia is in a transitional situation, local journalism ought to have a different ideology than that of Western countries.

Journalists' core duty, they contended, is to contribute to social progress and national cohesion. As expressed by one of the interim deans, journalists ought to work together with a number of other actors in society to reach these goals, because the ultimate obligation of the media is to "contribute to the political and cultural development of Ethiopia" (Abiyi Ford, introductory remarks, evaluation workshop, Gimlekollen, Norway, 2 March 2005).

To illustrate what he saw as the normative differences between journalism in Ethiopia and in the West, the dean used the metaphor of driving a car: "You can't drive at a speed of 100 miles an hour on a rocky road. Likewise, you can't take the media in the West and place them in Ethiopia and expect them to function properly. You need to adjust." This line was indeed supported by several international guest lecturers who corroborated the idea that a most comprehensive ground for alternative journalism is to be found in African philosophy. For example, Prof. Mark Fackler (Calvin College, Michigan, USA), who lectured Communication Theory in the programme, argues that the true ideal for African media practice should be sought in local communal philosophy which, in Fackler's view, challenges Western ideologies of privacy and consumerism (as elaborated in Fackler, 2003). In translating the philosophy into journalism practice, Fackler and others suggest that the African way of life represents a communitarian ideology that can be transformed into civic journalism (i.e. people-driven journalism).

Among the more traditional journalism instructors who taught in the programme, on the other hand, there was only modest support for an alternative journalism model that saw African journalism as fundamentally different from other types of journalism. For example, Joe Kadhi, a journalism instructor with long experience in the Kenyan media as former editor-in-chief of *Daily Nation*, candidly proclaimed that "there is no such thing as African journalism" (personal communication, 13 October 2004). Kadhi maintains that values such as accuracy, impartiality, fair play, decency, responsibility, and independence are inherent to journalism practice regardless of culture (Kadhi, 1999) He consequently argues that the fundamentals of journalism should be taught the same way everywhere. Supporting this stance, instructors in the Addis Ababa programme raised concerns that the less confrontational journalism ideology of the

school's leadership would result in a press void of criticism, unfit to cater for the vibrant public debate needed for the democratisation process in Ethiopia. "I think there is an obligation on a programme of this kind to put itself clearly on the side of media freedom," wrote one South African instructor in his report after teaching in the programme during the ensuing political tensions of the national Ethiopian elections in 2005. He and others felt that the school should strengthen its relationship with the critical media sector in Ethiopia, i.e. the private media. The impression among several of the instructors was that the school was more interested in nurturing a relationship with government stakeholders than with the professional media. Again, as illustrated by the Kenyan and South African instructors cited above, this criticism did not follow a Western/libertarian vs. African/developmental dividing line, but rather went along demarcations of professional background. Those with backgrounds in journalism, regardless of geographical origin, were more likely to think that the Ethiopian media need professionals who first and foremost subscribe to "universal", fourth estate, critical journalism values.

c) Tensions in public promotion of the programme

Tensions also surfaced in the views of how the programme should be promoted in the wider society. The school's leadership, in particular, hoped that the school would be associated with a responsible attitude towards democratisation and national development. This view concurs with the government's development journalism ideology (Skjerdal, 2011). Accordingly, the school has collaborated with state enterprises on various occasions, such as on Press Freedom Day 2009 when the university's journalism faculty and the Office for Government Communication Affairs co-arranged a seminar for journalists and other professional media actors¹¹. The seminar characteristically carried the title "The role of the media in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation", indicating a consensual approach to the role of the media.

Students were not entirely enthusiastic about the soft attitude they felt some of the representatives of the faculty exposed towards the government in public. On several occasions, students expressed that they would like to be engaged in bold and courageous reporting, and they

¹¹ UNESCO sponsored the event.

were hoping to get support from the journalism programme in this regard. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, a print journalism student wrote a commentary piece which regretted the docile attitude of the Ethiopian media during the tense political situation. The commentary was posted on the school's student training website (accessible to everyone), but persons in the university administration reacted and maintained that students should be careful not to express opinions that could ignite controversy among the wider Ethiopian public. The dean of the journalism programme was of the same opinion, thus requesting the piece to be removed since it could be misinterpreted as the university's official view. The incident illustrates how the university favoured a consensual and uncontroversial media strategy above critical and independent reporting. The underlying reasoning, it must be argued, is that the journalism students were regarded as accountable to the university rather than to the public.

Concluding remarks

This article has discussed ideological tensions in a foreign donor-supported journalism programme at Addis Ababa University. On the basis of a large body of literature on journalism theory in African contexts, one would perhaps expect tensions between Western and African journalism models and ideologies to be most perceptible in the programme since it had a mixture of local and international contributors. However, the experiences stemming from this particular programme appear to confuse the commonly assumed cultural differences that are often believed to exist between various parts of the world in approaches to journalism theory, practice, and teaching.

Programme contributors teamed up in mainly two groups, and the groups did not follow geographical or cultural demarcations. The first group consisted of instructors and staff who wanted to see the programme as an exponent of "universal" journalism values such as media independence and critical reporting. This group was less inclined to accept a wide variety of communication courses in the curriculum, such as public relations. The other group consisted of instructors and staff who emphasised that local circumstances demand a journalism ideology that is rooted in African or Ethiopian thinking (cf. Shaw, 2009) and that the media should be

consensual rather than confrontational. This group was also more in favour of including other communication topics along with journalism in the curriculum. Importantly, each of the two groups consisted of both local personnel and international instructors.

The main view emerging from this discussion, then, is that tensions in relation to journalism ideology is not essentially a geographically and culturally bound subject matter, but depends on individual factors such as professional background and view of society. Hence, the overall research question that the article began with -- “Teaching journalism or teaching African journalism?” -- is somewhat misleading as it may convey the impression of a fixed schism between an African journalism philosophy and a general journalism philosophy. The argument of this article, based on experiences from the Addis Ababa programme, instead supports an approach to journalism which maintains rigidity on the principal level while still being open for contextual influences in journalistic style and performance.

Acronyms

AAU	Addis Ababa University
FJC	Faculty of Journalism and Communication (AAU)
OGCA	Office for Government Communication Affairs
EMMTI	Ethiopian Mass Media Training Institute
EPA	Ethiopian Press Agency
MMTC	Mass Media Training Centre (equivalent to MMTI)
MMTI	Mass Media Training Institute (equivalent to MMTC)
NGO	Non-governmental organization
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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Note: Ethiopian references are listed according to the local name tradition, i.e. by first name. The author's father's name is added for clarification.

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