



## The International Media and the Political Economy of Publishing

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FOR MOST PEOPLE the term *mass media* conjures up an image of the popular press or broadcasting, and occasionally, for those with long memories, the cinema. Rarely does it include that strangely neglected industry, book publishing. Yet publishing is the oldest form of mass communication, and although it has in many instances remained a small-scale, almost cottage industry, the economics of twentieth-century communications have pushed publishing along most of the paths followed by the larger media. Despite this, most analysis of the publishing industry remains sublimely unaware of these parallel developments and of their implications for publishing itself.

Discussions of mass communications rarely spend much time on the apparently peripheral trade in books. Oddly, researchers in academic media studies have largely ignored the medium right under their scholarly noses. These twin gaps — in discussions of publishing and in media studies — are important because they have prevented the analysis of two important developments which in themselves make nonsense of any analytic separation of publishing from the other media. First, diversification among media enterprises has enveloped a large part of the publishing industry, so that it has increasingly become part of the growing media conglomerates. To understand the behavior of publishers it thus becomes vital to understand the changing economics of all media sectors. Second, the internationalization of media industries has often been led by publishing; it was the earliest medium to develop an export trade and still is in many ways the most international medium. The expansion of capital and dis-

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tribution facilities which this entailed has further increased the interdependence of publishing and other media industries.

This article will first show how these parallel developments arose, then consider the place of publishing in the international media markets, and finally suggest some of the implications of these developments for publishing and cultural change in underdeveloped countries.

#### PUBLISHING AND THE RISE OF THE MEDIA INDUSTRIES

All media go through a roughly similar historical cycle. Initially, small-scale individual entrepreneurs serve a small, perhaps personal market. They perform the many functions of producer, distributor and seller themselves. Only gradually do these roles become specialized as the trade begins to extend. In England, for example, publishing and bookselling slowly emerged as distinct enterprises with the growth of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century book trade. In most media, technological developments — the mechanical press, stereotyping, machine-made paper, for example — facilitate an increase in the scale of operations and the induction into the industry of capital to finance this growth. This first part of the historical cycle creates the fully differentiated industry which, in English book publishing, was well established by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

The second period of the cycle is one of concentration. As the financial scale of the industry increases, the growing capital base becomes too vast for all but the larger firms, who begin to benefit from economies of scale. At the same time the separate functions of production, distribution and selling start to reintegrate under the umbrella of these larger firms. This process of vertical integration among firms concerned with different stages in the production process is complemented by horizontal integration among independent firms in the same stage, with all the savings of duplicated resources and extended market control this implies. These processes are accelerated by rising costs and pressures on revenue, often due to competition from other media or alternative leisure pursuits.

Of course, the details and chronology vary from industry to industry, but whatever its idiosyncracies, publishing is no exception to the general sequence. The development of integration has been comparatively recent, dating perhaps from the early postwar period when firms like Collins and Longman Green went public.<sup>2</sup> The rapid expansion of the market at that time left many firms unable to finance the necessary growth, and inevitably they were gobbled up into groups. Associated Book Publishers, comprising imprints like Eyre Methuen, Tavistock, Chapman and Hall, Sweet and

Maxwell, and so on, is a good example of such a chain. Of course, there remain many hundreds of small independent publishers, but the bulk of the trade is concentrated into the hands of these larger combines.<sup>3</sup> The traditional gentlemanly scholarship of earlier publishing days retains its stamp on much of the industry's dealings and relationships. However, it is an ethos increasingly being replaced by the realistic accountancy expressed by the chairman of Associated Book Publishers in 1976: "Our publishing program for 1975 was therefore carefully reappraised and we decided to concentrate on those areas and projects likely to be productive of the highest return and cash generation. Unhappily we were forced to cancel certain commitments."<sup>4</sup> As in the other media, the realities of day-to-day economics have come to challenge broader artistic or creative objectives.

The most significant development in this most recent stage of publishing history is what is known as the paperback revolution. Relying on large sales, extensive promotion, large stocks and warehouse facilities, and thus considerable capital support, paperback publishing has changed the economic character of publishing as drastically as the so-called Northcliffe revolution (i.e. the switch to advertising-based, low-priced newspapers) changed the British press. Neither change was so abrupt as to be revolutionary; both left their industry ready for the introduction of high finance and diversification.

Diversification has, initially at least, been the development of paperback publishing by large firms in other media sectors. Three British examples illustrate this. Granada, the group having the franchise for commercial television in the densely populated northwest area, now owns major paperback imprints like Panther, Paladin and Mayflower. The group is also involved in television rental (its main source of income), cinema exhibition, motorway services, and so on. The Thomson organization, best known as publishers of Times Newspapers, also controls Sphere Books, as well as several hardback imprints, and is extensively involved in television, travel and other activities. Penguin Books, the market leader, is owned by Pearson Longman, controller of the big educational publishing house of Longman, as well as the Financial Times, several strings of regional papers, and other specialized magazines and book companies. By the end of the 1960s it was estimated that five imprints accounted for about 70 percent of all paperbacks sold in the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, best-selling titles reflect the growing integration of books with television, cinema and records.

The second aspect of diversification in publishing, which will lead to

discussion of its international ramifications, is the rapid growth of institutional education and its unquenchable need for software of both traditional and newer, audiovisual kinds. The integration of publishing with electronics has gone further in the United States than in the United Kingdom, and it represents an extension of diversification beyond the media and into other industrial sectors. McGraw-Hill, the commanding giant of international educational publishing, like so many other large companies, has deeply penetrated the market for video cassettes and other educational equipment. In recent years McGraw-Hill has acquired Educational Development Laboratories, University Films, and Pathe Contemporary Films.<sup>6</sup> Other major electronics or communications firms have extended their grip over this new field. CBS, the world's largest advertising medium by virtue of its U.S. television network, and also the world's largest producer and marketer of recorded music, has a publishing division which includes Holt, Rinehart & Winston, a major educational publisher. The division has rapidly developed audiovisual materials, "learning kits," and what is called a Comprehensive Skills Laboratory. These all-inclusive packages combine the technology of electronics manufacturing with the educational acumen of traditional publishing in a marketing procedure which only such a large combine can command and finance.

Mattelart, in summarizing this development, notes that the diversification of hardware industries into software has resulted in the inclusion among the world's ten largest producers of educational materials of such names as Xerox, CBS, ITT, Westinghouse, and Litton, all colossi of electronics manufacturing.<sup>7</sup> Since publishing in the Third World is almost entirely educational, such diversification is of the utmost significance for developing countries.

#### THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PUBLISHING

All mass media have become international. Television programs flow ceaselessly from their manufacturers in Europe and North America to customers all over the world, who are themselves unable to meet the vast cost that production of comparable material entails. Imbalances in the flow of news through the international news agencies have dominated recent discussions in Unesco and other gatherings concerned about the international diffusion of culture. Such flows are more possible in some media than in others. Newspapers, having rapid perishability and high parochiality, travel least. Publishing has long been an international medium, its export trade a phenomenon even before television was widely established.

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Exports have indeed become vital to the book trade. Up to one-third of total receipts to U.K. publishers were coming from exports as early as 1937, and despite a slight decline in the 1940s, the figure has remained high ever since. In 1975 exports were worth £133 million (including exports by booksellers), 39.7 percent of total sales.<sup>8</sup> For many larger companies the proportion is much higher, and they have come to rely on the certainty of this expanding market to cushion the uncertainties of domestic sales.

As with other media, the most lucrative export markets are in other industrialized countries, particularly the United States and the "old" Commonwealth. The most reliable export markets, however, are the English-speaking former colonies in the Third World. This is because this market is almost entirely grounded in the educational industry, with its firmly established ties with educational institutions of the former imperial power. Because students were required to pass examinations sanctioned in London or Oxbridge, textbooks by local authors or including local material were rarely required. Students diligently worked for their Cambridge School Certificate, or College of Preceptors or University of London matriculation. The situation has changed very little: "Unfortunately, at the present time the pupil in Lesotho and Malawi is condemned to using a textbook which assumes most of its readers to be familiar not only with the game of Battleships, but with many other British institutions and pastimes."<sup>9</sup>

For many countries, imports provide the bulk of books available. The scale of imports into Africa is indicated in Table 1.

The U.S. book export industry has been rapidly expanding in recent years, totaling nearly \$243 million in 1974. Again the major markets are in Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia. Exports from both the United Kingdom and the United States include a very high proportion

<i>Country</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Imports (U.S. \$)</i>	<i>Main Sources</i>
Sierra Leone	1972	283,000	UK, 91%
Liberia	1972	418,000	USA, 53%; UK, 22%
Nigeria	1972	13,471,000	UK, 67%
Tanzania	1973	1,264,000	UK, 55%; Sweden, 23%
Uganda	1973	731,000	UK, 55%; USA, 14%
Kenya	1973	3,975,000	UK, 80%
Ethiopia	1973	892,000	UK, 27%; Italy, 17%

Table 1. Total imports of books and pamphlets in some African countries

Source: Economic Commission for Africa. *Foreign Trade Statistics for Africa, Series B, Trade by Commodity* (No. 26). New York, United Nations, 1975.

of educational and scientific material. School texts accounted for 19 percent of U.K. book exports in 1975, while technical and scientific texts accounted for a further 26 percent. U.S. book exports in 1974 included 22 percent in the category of textbooks, etc., and 17 percent classified as technical, scientific and professional, while encyclopedias and dictionaries added a further 16 percent.<sup>10</sup> Educational publishing, like paperbacks, relies on large print runs and long back lists for its profits. In educational publishing much of the profit comes from reprints, and the steady syllabus text is the most certain investment. All these factors, of course, require secure and substantial capital on a scale beyond the means of small indigenous publishers.

Exports, however, tell only one part of the story. Increasingly, profits from overseas sales are derived from the sales of local subsidiaries, so that the proportion of total profits from sales overseas is a more realistic index of internationalization than exports alone. British companies dominate educational publishing in Asia and Africa, yet direct sales to these countries actually declined in the early 1970s, with sales by local subsidiaries taking their place. William Collins, for example, Britain's largest traditional commercial publisher, derived 20.5 percent (£8.7 million) of their turnover from exports in 1975, but total group sales overseas accounted for 57 percent (£24.3 million) of all sales. By the 1970s over two-thirds of Oxford University Press's turnover in Nigeria was comprised of books produced in Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

Major educational publishers like Longman and Oxford University Press (OUP) have long recognized the advantages of this procedure. These two, together with Nelson, Macmillan, and Evans Brothers, fostered an explosion in educational publishing in Africa in the 1950s.<sup>12</sup> OUP set up a branch in Nairobi in 1963, and has been in Ibadan since 1949, although OUP's activities in Nigeria stretch back a half-century. Longman, with a staff of 100 in Nigeria alone, has enormous African interests. Concentrating on school texts and support materials, Longman has branches in Kenya, Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, Uganda, Rhodesia and South Africa, as well as Nigeria. Further subsidiaries operate in Hong Kong, Trinidad and Malaysia. This pattern has become typical. Smith has stated, "During the 1960s and 1970s six British firms, Evans Brothers, Heinemann Educational Books, Longman, Nelson, Oxford University Press, and Macmillan and Co., have continued to keep a hold on the [Anglophone African] market by increased localization."<sup>13</sup>

With other parts of the world in mind, the former chairman of

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America's McGraw-Hill has written of this change to direct local sales in glowing terms:

For McGraw-Hill it will end, I suppose, in the optimum situation — a situation in which we shall have a dual purpose company in every major country or market area of the world, and in which direct exports from New York to open markets will be a thing of the past. This is, I think, the ideal and ultimate concept, with multi-national publishing and international selling combined in one worldwide complex. Frankly, we in McGraw-Hill have come to think of the world as being our oyster.<sup>14</sup>

By the standards of multinational corporations in other sectors, these are not, as yet, gigantic operations. They do, however, represent a further stage in the expansion of international publishing. The American combines again represent the furthest development of this multinational expansion. CBS, to return to an earlier example, owns W.B. Saunders, the world's largest publisher in the health sciences, and the group's publishing arm in Latin America, NEISA, is the world's largest publisher of Spanish-language medical books. RCA, owner of another major U.S. television network, NBC, as well as such diverse enterprises as Hertz car rentals, also controls publishing houses like Random House, Pantheon Books, Vintage, Ballantine Books, and Grove Press. Electronics corporations are increasingly well placed to absorb newer educational industries, reflecting the demand that "publishers should diversify into the areas of *non-book* publishing which will match up with the market demand induced by technological development."<sup>15</sup> Educationalists in developing countries are turning increasingly to newer media, e.g., satellites, closed circuit television, radio, audiovisual packages, to augment limited supplies of more traditional resources, and in an attempt to accelerate educational progress. The concomitant rise in the capital scale of operations has left the field open to only the bigger, multimedia, multinational enterprises.

This has not been unique to the United States and the United Kingdom. The French publishing house Hachette, with extensive holdings in newspaper chains and smaller publishers, has been active in international publishing for over sixty years, mainly in French colonies and former colonies. Its earliest international ventures were, however, as widespread as Argentina, Egypt and Turkey,<sup>16</sup> and it has recently moved to a policy of publishing in English and Spanish, which has given it entry into educational publishing in Latin America, and joint exploitation of audio-

visual markets with the American group, Vision Inc. Axel Springer (Germany), Bertelsmann (Germany), and VNU (Holland) are other typical representatives of the expansion of European multinational publishing. FIAT, the Italian automobile manufacturer, owns several Italian publishers, as well as a wide range of telecommunications manufacturing; in 1974 it acquired the American Bantam Books from a big American insurance company, National General Corporation.<sup>17</sup>

In general, then, the growth of international publishing has been characterized in large part by the diversification of multinational publishers into newer media, or the consolidation of publishing into existing multinational firms concerned principally with electronics, educational technology or entertainment.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLISHING IN THE THIRD WORLD

As publishing has become an international industry, dominated by large corporations with vast resources, publishers in less industrialized countries have been forced to fight against worsening odds to establish local autonomous industries. The economies of scale are large in publishing and printing, whether achieved by a larger number of titles or bigger print runs.<sup>18</sup> By spreading costs over time, and over a range of activities and outlets, the larger organization can dominate a market and effectively prevent entry by smaller competitors. William Mitchell, former editorial manager for OUP in Nigeria, has spelled out these advantages:

The non-indigenous publishers in Nigeria have generally been more heavily capitalized than their indigenous colleagues. This may be because publishing, with the relatively slow and "difficult" returns on capital which it offers, has been less attractive to indigenous capital than other forms of entrepreneurship. Whatever the case, the willingness and capacity to deploy large sums of capital has been a central factor behind the dominance of non-indigenous publishers in Nigerian educational book markets.<sup>19</sup>

The wait for returns on capital may be longer than a small publisher can afford, unable as he is to fall back on other or larger activities for support.<sup>20</sup> One obvious source of cost-spreading is the production by multinationals of titles intended for several markets. Marketing international editions of reference books produced in the home country on a large scale is a good example of this.

A second factor giving a competitive edge to the nonindigenous publisher is the variety of subsidies which effectively cut the price of imported

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books. Most overtly this takes the form of government support for commercial publishers in mutually beneficial campaigns to win the hearts and minds of educationalists and their charges in target countries. The United States Information Agency (USIA) assisted publishers in producing 143 million copies of over 16,000 editions between 1950 and 1968.<sup>21</sup> The agency often contributes up to 80 percent of the cost of production, and by 1969 its donated books program involved 3 million volumes per year. USIA activities are buttressed by a variety of other agencies — notably the Agency for International Development (AID) — in promoting the sale of American books abroad to the mutual benefit of publishers and government. Motivations vary, needless to say, from the most cynical political and economic exploitation to an occasional and sincere, if naïve, philanthropy. The total effect is the stultification of indigenous publishing.<sup>22</sup>

Since American books are often expensive, a variety of methods are required to keep prices down in newer markets. Arrangements with local distributors for regional distribution contracts or simple reprint arrangements in return for royalty on sales serve this function; both are methods extensively used by McGraw-Hill in Asia.<sup>23</sup> Once again, the parallel with other media is notable. Television programs are similarly sold at artificially low prices in Third World countries, the costs and initial profits having been secured in the major markets in industrialized countries. They thus become too cheap to refuse, replace local production, and create a steady and expanding demand.<sup>24</sup>

A third obstacle for local publishers is the difficulty they face in attracting authors. Writers naturally seek wide sales, which only the distribution networks of the multinationals can offer them. The prestige of publication by a famous established house in London, Paris or New York is a powerful lure away from the limited — if righteous — satisfaction to be gained from patriotic or political support for a local publisher. Writers, particularly academics and teachers, are likely to be securely entwined in the cosmopolitan culture of international education, and will be fully alive to the benefits of publishing their works with a large multinational.<sup>25</sup> Even indigenous university presses are caught in this trap: “The local university presses seldom get a manuscript that has not been rejected by at least one overseas publisher.”<sup>26</sup> International publishers will also be able to offer larger advance payments and probably higher sales.

A solution to the problem of insufficient capital has been sought in some countries by involving the state in publishing. Again the parallel with broadcasting is instructive. In many developing countries the state

is the only indigenous institution able and willing to finance broadcasting. Almost invariably, help, both financial and technical, has been sought from overseas institutions, notably the BBC, ORTF, or the larger commercial stations. Broadcasting is thus established in a form evolved in another culture, and on a scale placing it irretrievably in the world market for broadcasting programs and technology.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly in publishing, state publishing establishments have very often relied on British or American commercial publishing expertise. The most familiar example is that of anglophone Africa. Macmillan and Co. organized arrangements with governments in Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Nigeria during the 1960s, which eventually became state publishing houses.<sup>28</sup> As in broadcasting, the legacy of this initial coupling is often a permanent relationship. As Nottingham puts it, "Outside interests get much of their profits from producing the material concerned outside Africa and selling it to these [state] publishing houses which become mere merchandising depots."<sup>29</sup> The equivalent of these arrangements is found in countries where state education becomes a client of one or two major multinational publishers. Mattelart notes the example of Brazil, where "in 1967 an agreement concluded between the Ministry for Education of Brazil, the National Association of Librarians and the omnipresent USAID, made the texts published by McGraw-Hill obligatory at all levels of Brazilian teaching."<sup>30</sup>

Successful attempts at setting up genuinely autonomous indigenous publishing houses have obviously been made. One prominent example, which illustrated many of the problems, was the East African Publishing House (EAPH) in Nairobi. EAPH was founded in 1965 under the aegis of the U.K. publisher Andre Deutsch with financial support from an American foundation, sufficient local capital having been difficult to raise. Despite its comparative success, EAPH was unable to find its way into world markets without making arrangements with Heinemann Educational Books, the educational wing of the Heinemann Group (itself owned by the giant U.K.-based Thomas Tilling Ltd., a group controlling companies in builders' merchandising, construction materials, electrical wholesaling, engineering, furniture, insurance, etc.). Heinemann had become well established in African publishing since the opening of their African Writers Series in 1962, an ironic comment on the oft-expressed hope that creative writing would be an expanding source for the establishment of indigenous publishing.

The problems of a house like EAPH show a further parallel with other media. Media professionals come to depend on skills, styles of work,

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routines and equipment developed in Europe or North America. Good practice and excellence are calibrated against criteria developed overseas, and very often instilled in periods of training and professional socialization. The result is that impossible and often irrelevant demands are made of media in underdeveloped societies.<sup>31</sup> John Nottingham, long the guiding influence at EAPH, has written about precisely this problem:

The educational environment was still so British that we were not able to question many of the publishing assumptions that were made by ministries. . . . I am convinced that all publishers in East Africa use unnecessarily high quality paper for many of the school books. . . . We were forced to realize that we would have to fight a battle, which should never have needed fighting, on someone else's battleground with the weapons he chose. We had to convince the East African governments that publishing was not an insuperably difficult skill which local people could not possibly achieve.<sup>32</sup>

The continuing depression of Third World publishing in the grip of these various pressures is amply illustrated by production figures. While book production in the United Kingdom in the 1970s has been up to 40,000 titles a year, in the United States over 80,000, and in France up to 30,000, figures for 1973 show Ghana's production at 136, Malawi's at 32, Tanzania's at 123, Nigeria's at 1316, Kenya's at 224, and so on.<sup>33</sup> Brazil and India have large domestic industries, but most countries are almost solely importers. Exports remain trivial; Mexico and Argentina, the largest book exporters among Third World countries, have sales well under one-tenth that of the major exporters — the United States and the United Kingdom.<sup>34</sup> The growth and diversification of the multinational publishers is already too advanced to rely on blithe optimism in predicting the future of domestic autonomous publishing in the Third World.

#### PUBLISHING, THE MEDIA, AND CULTURAL DEPENDENCY

In examining the software of contemporary international relations, many analysts have detected the replacement of military or economic control by cultural colonization. The global diffusion of ideas, values, ways of behaving and forms of entertainment represents a new and potentially more powerful means of domination. In fact, to make sense of such a concept, it is better to see cultural dependency as the complement, rather than the alternative, to economic dominance. It is necessary, too, to separate it from the deliberate use of propaganda, and to recognize the systematic and intrinsic nature of cultural control in tandem with eco-

nomic control. There is no space here to look more closely at these notions;<sup>35</sup> but the diversification and internationalization of publishing does warrant some discussion in these terms.

A first and crucial element of cultural dependency is that of language. As the medium for the transmission of ideas and culture, a foreign language is clearly a broad conduit. Most books in the Third World cater to the educated cosmopolitan readers in urban centers, and are byproducts of the multinational education system they populate. As Kaser has observed, technical and professional books do not usually: "warrant either original authorship, or even translation and publication in the vernacular, and thus these books are distributed in their original Western languages. This requires, of course, that anyone who would tap the advanced expertise of the world has to master a Western language — usually English, which has come to be a scholar's *lingua franca*."<sup>36</sup> This growing dominance of English as a global language is seen by some writers as a cultural Trojan horse, carrying alien cultures and values.<sup>37</sup>

Some evidence of the impact of this trend on indigenous publishing in the Third World is seen in the high proportion of English-language texts produced. To give just a few examples (1973 figures): in Argentina, 553 out of a total domestic production of 4578 titles were in English; in India, 6183 out of 14,064; in Malaysia, 417 out of 1082.<sup>38</sup> The converse of this trend is that English is the world's most translated language; by 1970, 41 percent of all translations were from English. The cultural impact of translations from English authors into foreign languages may perhaps be wondered at in view of the appearance of only two English authors among the world's five most translated authors, viz., Enid Blyton and Agatha Christie. Nonetheless, both trends emphasize the emergence of English to a position of "dominance as the medium of international literary culture."<sup>39</sup>

The crucial institutional form of cultural dependence is, of course, in education. Between 80 percent and 95 percent of publishing in the Third World is educational material of one kind or another. Education systems were systematically linked with those of the imperial power, and examples abound of what one writer has called "education for underdevelopment."<sup>40</sup> The flow of educational materials perpetuates this interdependence, with all its attendant problems of the brain drain, inappropriate technology, etc., which lie beyond the purview of this paper.<sup>41</sup> Very often, demands for indigenization of educational publishing are seen, probably rightly, to represent political ambitions, and are received accordingly. Writing of the potential for African involvement in African education, Alden Clark notes

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with alarm: "Unfortunately, universities in Africa tend to be suspect at this time. They harbour tight little establishments of foreigners, foment dissent, and generate worrisome ideas."<sup>42</sup> It is anxieties of this kind that lay the foundation for the links between political activities and commercial publishing noted earlier.

More generally and less conspiratorially, however, the link between publishing and cultural dependency is its conjunction with the international media and entertainment industries. Like broadcasting, publishing in Third World countries is largely run by and caters to urban elites whose tastes and values are shaped by exposure to European and American material, which either replaces local production or prompts emulation by it. It is in this incidental shaping of consciousness by the provision of cultural material that the link between cultural dependence and economic dependence is most apparent.

The main aim of this paper has been to draw attention to two aspects of publishing. The first is the extent to which developments in publishing mirror those in other communications media, and can be better understood by comparison with them. The second aspect is the extent to which the internationalization of publishing should be seen as part of the growth of multinational media generally. Both developments underline the need to consider the political economy of the media as a whole when attempting to analyze particular trends and situations within publishing.

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