Past and Present of Siebert & Colleagues' Four Theories of the Press: Sequential Modifications of Press Theories Associated with the Media's Social Obligations within the Framework of the Social Environment of the Day

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an introductory-level discussion of theorization of the dynamic relationship between press, culture, and society. The introduction summarizes two epochal interpretations of this dynamic as advanced by Nerone and Barnhurst's analysis of the history of newspaper forms and its relation to civic society, as well as Curran's historical content and processes interpretations of media and society. The bulk of the first part discusses Siebert and colleague's four theories of the press and some of the modifications made to these theories and the ideas that led to changes in the conceptualization of the press. The main thesis of the paper the idea of sequential modifications of existing press theories that focus on the press' social responsibilities within the framework of the social environment. Subsequently, the second section discusses recent trends in conceptualization of media systems.

Keywords: *Press theories, Libertarian Press theory, Authoritarian Press theory, Soviet-Communist Press theory, Social Responsibilty theory*

INTRODUCTION

A discussion of the dynamics between press, society and the cultures prevalent or created within a society can be approached from multiple angles. On the one hand there are macro-level questions of political-economy and media practices. On the other hand there are micro-level concerns of social and individual media reception. The dynamics between these two elements present yet other approaches (McQuail 1987).

While printed media is only one of several different types of media, a discussion of press and society must be done with a consciousness of the intertwining and overlapping nature of media today. From a media-as-power political economy perspective, the corporate policies of these transnational media empires determine media content. They also control the media that transmit these contents; all the variations of printed media, all the variations of electronic media, all the variations of the internet, as well amalgamations of these variations and media types.

From a related media-as-industry perspective, technological advancements have blurred the boundaries that demarcated the domains of printed and electronic media; newspapers have printed, online and even teletext editions, and television can be viewed on the television set, surfed on the net, and even accessed over one's mobile telephone.

The dynamics between media and society, therefore, cannot be thoroughly understood through a uni-media approach. However, it cannot be denied that the complexities of a multi-media approach would render such an analysis overly voluminous. That being said, one pragmatic way of looking at the relationship between media and society would be to concentrate on one type of media and at the same time, retaining consciousness of the complex intertwining and overlapping nature of different types of media and their implications on both the individual and the society.

Approaching media and society from such an angel, printed media would be a good starting point, as it is the press that is the predecessor and earliest form of contemporary mass media. Again, there are numerous ways of approaching the relationship between press and society.

PLACING THE PRESS IN A NETWORK OF REPRESENTED RELATIONSHIPS

Nerone and Barnhusrt (2003) place the press in a "network of represented relationships". Tracing the history of newspaper form and its relationship with a continually changing civic society, they surmise that "changes in (news) form signal deep changes in the role the newspaper has played in the civic life of the nation" (Nerone & Barnhurst 2003: 111). Newspapers play important roles on both a concrete, as well as a socially constructed level to both reflect and shape the nature of society.

Newspapers represent material economic relationships between various identifiable parties. Salaries are exchanged between newspaper owners and staff. Payments are exchanged between publishers and their suppliers and vendors, their sponsors (advertisers) as well as their consumers. These relationships spell out the press' role in the economic organization of a given municipality.

On a less tangible, but perhaps more pervasive level, newspapers also represent relationships between socially constructed structures of society through the daily repeated, and therefore ritual, formats that it takes. The press constructs a polity for individual readers to connect to. This polity is in turned reified by common concerns of people whose attention are summoned daily when they read the newspaper.

Similarly, the media is also an element in the relationships between agenda setters, gatekeepers and the news audience. The news media represents an environment that *empowers* people to experience events beyond their physical reach. In a democratic society, the press also empowers the people by representing their needs, desires, and voices. On the other extreme, in a more autocratic society, the press facilitates the *subordination* of the masses by ultimately representing the powers that be, and transmitting their ideologies through carefully crafted news stories.

CURRAN'S SIX INTERPRETATIONS

Curran also traces the history of the press to understand the dynamics of the press-society relationship, but with a rather different approach. He begins with the "long-term changes in society" before considering the connection between press development and societal changes

(Curran 2002: 135). An analysis of media content of a particular time and place, he posits, should be compared with what is known of society.

Curran presents six interpretations of the relationship between press, culture, and society.

- The Liberal interpretation: freedom and empowerment
  The main thesis of the liberal interpretation is that democracy is advanced by the mass media when press is free from government control. A free press, in turn, empowers people because it gives them access to political information and processes. At the same time, it is also an 'educational' tool for grassroots politicians; acquainting them with the issues important to the people. As a result, the system of government becomes "more open and accountable" (Curran 2002: 136).

  Wider circulation and greater coverage of public affairs also helped to expand the political community both h*orizontally* to include places geographically far from political power centers, and *vertically* to cut across all classes of societies. When political debates, disagreements, and rivalries are played out in the press, the entire political community becomes privy to the dealings of the political elite. As a result, public opinion increasingly becomes an important and sometimes mediating factor in political processes.

- Populist interpretation: cultural democracy
  The populist interpretation is grounded in two related narratives; one that celebrates the consumer society and another that chronicles the process of legitimizing mass culture. It follows the greater value placed on the views, thoughts and preferences of the people advanced by the liberal interpretation.

  The first narrative asserts that the consumption of market goods is a cultural phenomenon that allows consumers to express their individuality as well as their connection with society. The masses were given the chance to enjoy material goods that were affordable enough for the common man, and not just by the privileged. The culture of the masses, or popular culture, is seen as legitimate as the high culture of the elite. The press celebrates this democratization of culture consumerism, and thus further encourages it.

  Despite certain efforts by society's elite to bastardize popular culture, and certain other efforts by the same elite to dilute popular culture by introducing high culture to the masses, the overriding practicality and ease of diffusing the culture of the masses helps to facilitate acceptance. The press' role in this can be seen in the more reader-friendly layout, highly tolerant tone and greater newshole allocated to issues and human interest stories more relevant to ordinary citizens, as opposed to political or corporate elites.

  The media and society in general accorded cultural validity to the preferences of ordinary people, and encouraged the absorption of popular culture into "the rituals of family and social life" (Curran 2002: 143).

- Feminist interpretation: advance of women
  As the masses were being given greater voice and popular culture legitimized, women, as a formerly subjugated segment of society, were also given increasing due attention. As in greater society and media would at times reinforce stereotypical gender roles of the ideal wife and mother, while at other times, give partiality to the

empowerment of women. The issues related to women and the way women were portrayed in the press would often correspond to either one of the views on women. Either way, women were considered as a legitimate segment of society.

- Libertarian interpretation: culture war
  As a result of the increasing level of cultural pluralism described above, of the masses and of women, a sort of war of cultures took place in which people with diverse sexual preferences, as well as society's various other outgroups, also sought cultural validation. In this interpretation, the press followed the same pattern of tolerance shown in the case of popular culture in legitimizing once unacceptable practices and customs. While necessarily in tandem with each other, this empowerment of homosexuals was also paralleled by the empowerment of ethnic minorities.

- Anthropological interpretation: national identities
  As a result of the validation of all sorts of cultures, ethnicities and groups, the formation of a national identity which excluded no one becomes easier. As in the above interpretations of the history of press and society, national identities are reflected in and advanced by media.

  Curran's patriotist approach can also transcend national boundaries to further the idea of a global identity and citizenry. Such a citizenry can celebrate the diversity of cultures, traditions, and beliefs of the people of the world, and it can also be in the form of hegemonic imposition of a dominant culture, i.e. American culture.

- Radical narrative: reassertion of elite control
  This final interpretation is very much along the lines of political economy of the media. Contrary to the liberal interpretation's thesis of people empowerment, the radical narrative sees the later development media systems as facilitating the passive and hidden subordination of the people. This "refeudalization" of society takes place when, instead of advancing 'rational-critical' public sphere debates, media systems "increasingly offer(s) pre-packaged, convenience thought; presented politics as a spectacle; and foster(ing) consumer passivity." (Curran 2001: 146)

PLACING THE PRESS AND SOCIETY IN AN EPOCHAL CONTEXT

An interesting similarity between Barone and Barnhurst's and Curran's reading of the media, culture and society, is that they take a historical approach in analyzing society and in analyzing the media. This seems to indicate that the dynamics between media and society change over time. Although the theorists themselves make no overt claim of placing the press in an epochal content, Siebert, Peterson & Schramm's famous *four theories of the press*, is also a chronological description of media and society. Upon reflection, it is clear that the history of the *theories of the press* is characterized by *sequential modifications and alternatives* to existing theories.

Sequential Modifications of Normative Press Theories

Models of the press are always formed around the *social and political heritage* of the time (and the place) and the ensuing relationships that exist between society and state. New theories and models address the limitations of earlier models. Often, these limitations are that existing

systems contain some inherent flaws, or that they lose some of their relevance as *society-state relationships*, and thus press environments, change over time.

The very first documented theory of the press was the *Authoritarian* model of *late European Renaissance* (1500's–1700's). The ruling elites of the time were considered as being superior to the common man. Thus it was both the right and the obligation of the ruler to "guide and direct" (Siebert et al. 1976: 2) the people. As engines of disseminating knowledge and royal decrees, the press therefore belonged to the ruler.

When the Renaissance period gave way to the *Enlightenment* (1800's), the relationship between society and state also changed. The common man was no longer seen as a disciple in need of righteous guidance from the ruler, but as a rational member of society capable of thinking for himself. Thus a press system that dictated right and wrong, as the government saw it was no longer appropriate. The press adopted *Libertarian ideals* wherein it became a free means for society to freely gather and disseminate knowledge as it pleased. Contrary to press of earlier times that served as a government instrument of control, the Libertarian press became the people's instrument to monitor the establishment.

The Libertarian press theory emerged as an alternative the Authoritarian press theory. The next sequential adaptation of the press system emerged with the coming of the *Industrial Revolution* (1900's) when the relationship between society and state changed again. This time, two divergent political and social systems stood out. One was *democracy*, and the other was *communism*. Democracy stressed the *rights* and *freedom* of the individual where one's gains were a reflection of one's efforts. Communism stressed the *welfare* of the masses, where one contributed as much as one was able to and received as much as one needed, not more and not less. Press in the democracy was still rooted in the ideals of Libertarianism. These ideals were realized by the *free-market press system* where information became a *commodity* to be bought and sold by those who could afford to. Press in the communist state was still authoritarian, but became highly systematic and organized, placing high value on the interests of the masses, as long as they were in line with Marxist ideology.

Sequential Modifications and Alternatives to Existing Theories

Changing political and social landscapes drove the shift from the Authoritarian press system to the Libertarian press system. Consequently when the state became more aware of the people's interests and needs, refinements were made to these two earlier systems. *Schramm's Soviet-Communist theory* was a conceptualization of the Soviet Union's Marxist ideological implementation of the authoritarian press system. Likewise, *Peterson's Social Responsibility theory* was formulated to address certain undesirable effects of a completely free press as touted by the Libertarian model.

Libertarian theory is a modification of the Authoritarian press, and consequently, Soviet-communist theory is a modification of authoritarian theory, as the Social Responsibility model is a modification of the Libertarian press. This chronology of theories demonstrates a *sequence of modification* to existing theories when they prove inadequate or irrelevant.

Likewise, later theories are sequential modifications of the original *four theories* that address the limitations of these earlier systems in describing political reality, and in meeting the people's needs. Thus, within the political-ideological framework, new press system theories outline the press' duty to serve society's interests.

FOUR THEORIES OF THE PRESS

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm's book *Four theories of the press* came at a time when the United States and the former Soviet Union were engaged in the *Cold War*, and international alliances were divided along the lines of the free vs. the communist worlds. Accordingly, the *four theories* were also categorized in a way that reflected the *world order* of the time. Just as importantly, the essays that produced the book "were prepared in connection with a study on the *social responsibilities* of mass communicators" (Siebert et al. 1976: preface page).

These are significant facts as repeatedly seen in the themes of subsequent press theories. *Modifications to the original four theories are always along the lines of the press' social obligations within the political framework of the state.*

- Authoritarian
  Authoritarian press systems are characterized by media subordination to government. Government control can be moderate with emphasis on certain ideological and policy issues, or all encompassing. Media practitioners are not free to print or broadcast content that may in any way undermine the government or local sensitivities. Government control may come in the form of legislation or licensing, or even violent force.

  Authoritarian press systems are monolithic, representing only the culture, ideology and opinions of the ruling power. The press is usually owned by a ruling dictator, or a ruling party, or powerful private individuals, in an autocratic political system. The powers-that-be unilaterally decides what is fit for public consumption.

  Authoritarian press systems exist not only under repressive and dictatorial governments, but to a certain extent, in more democratic societies as well. Even when a government officially subscribes to a different press theory, elements of the authoritarian system may exist since it is in the state's interest to maintain control over the press.

- Soviet-Communist Theory
  As mentioned earlier, the Soviet-communist theory of the press is Wilbur Schramm's normative conceptualization of the Soviet Union's systematic implementation of the authoritarian press system with the slight modification that it is also to look after the welfare of the people and not just the interests of the ruler.

  In a Soviet-communist press system, media is controlled by the state, especially in matters of ideology. As an extension of the state, the press performs many functions. It spreads government propaganda, indoctrinates the people with communist ideology, performs surveillance of public moods and activities and assists in implementation of state policy.

  However, the media also functions to serve the needs and interests of society. Within the constraints of state ideology, the press serves to educate the people on political, social and economic matters, and aid the communication of public opinions and grievances. As such, media practitioners are expected to adhere to high standards of professionalism.

- Libertarian
  Libertarian theory asserts the right of anyone to publish anything he wants without fear of censorship or the constraints of licensing. This model of the press is completely

free from government control, even to the point of allowing attacks on establishment. The rationale is that in an environment where ideas and opinions can be disseminated and received freely, the best ideas and the soundest opinions will prevail over "bad" ones. This model employs the concept of a "free marketplace of ideas" where ideas were seen as commodity to be freely traded in the market. The individual was free to read the newspaper, and free to not read it, just as he was free to believe or not to believe what he read. Likewise, anybody who wished to express his ideas was free to do so, regardless of their merit.

A very significant precept of the Libertarian model is the press' functions as a "watchdog" of the government, ever vigilant of government wrongdoing. Freedom of expression is a highly valued principle that allows the media to gather and disseminate information without interference of censorship, or contamination of propaganda, from the government.

- Social Responsibility Theory
  Social responsibility theory grew from growing concerns that the Libertarian press model was not delivering the benefits it promised to society, allowing the flourishing of dubious media content, and the rise of an elitist class. Social responsibility theory encourages pluralism and diversity in the media, giving voice to individual members of society.

  Nonetheless, adhering to its label, this model places greater value on informing, educating and aiding social progress of the people, than it does on freedom of expression. Thus, media content is a result of conscientious reporting that steers clear of 'bad' ideas, or information, that can be detrimental to society.

  This model of the press maintained that the media had a moral obligation to safeguard social peace and stability, and to create an informed citizenry. This obligation would be met through self-regulation of the media through media councils and codes or ethics, as well as public opinion and consumer reactions. At the same time, while the media is privately owned, government monitoring is allowed to assure that it truly serves the people. As such, both media organizations, and journalists, are accountable for the contents that they disseminate.

Strengths and Limitations of the Four Theories

In so far as they were meant to provide *normative guidance* to media practitioners and scholars, these models are widely accepted and referred to. However, the explanatory abilities of the *four theories* are restrictive. Firstly, just as there are many countries that are not based on either a fully democratic, fully Communist or fully authoritarian governing system, so are there many press systems that can not neatly fit into one of the four models. Secondly, these models are all normative models that describe what a national press system should be, and not what they truly are like. Another significant and contemporary criticism of the *four theories* is that in a *post-Cold War world* these theories are *no longer relevant*. Rapid developments in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), most notably the Internet and Satellite television, lend weight to this third criticism.

NEW MODELS OF THE PRESS
Earlier Modifications
Earlier theorists who found issues with the *four theories of the press* made modifications that they saw fit. On the whole, these were adaptations designed to create *better-fitting categories* for nations whose press systems were not identical to the US or the USSR.

In 1981, William Hachten suggested an adapted version of press systems theories. On top of the original Authoritarian and Soviet-communist theories, he combined Libertarian and Social Responsibility theories and termed them "Western" theory of the press. In addition to these three existing concepts, Hachten proposed two new press models; the *Revolutionary* and the *Developmental* theories of the press. Two years later, Dennis McQuail also came up with his version of normative theories of the press. While he stuck with the original labels for Authoritarian and Social Responsibilities theories, McQuail relabelled Libertarian theory as "*Free press*" theory and Soviet-communist theory as simply "Soviet" theory. In addition, he introduced the *Democratic-participant* theory as well as a new (yet similar to Hachten's) "Development" theory.

Hachten's Revolutionary Theory of the Press
"Revolutionary press" refers to *subversive* media aimed at overthrowing an existing government or colonial powers. The proponents of revolutionary press are people who believe that the people's interests and welfare are not duly served by the rulers. Their need to go subversive in disseminating ideas and information stems from the refusal or inability of legal press to air their grievances.

Historical examples of revolutionary press are the French underground press under Nazi occupation, Ayatollah Khomeini's photocopied and audiocassette-recorded speeches while in exile that sparked the Iranian Revolution and the wrestling of radio stations by rebels in various African coup d'états.

More current revolutionary press elements can probably be found in the World Wide Web pages devoted to condemnation of the Saudi royal house, and possibly whatever mechanisms that Iraqi Resistance are employing to facilitate guerrilla attacks and anti-American sentiments in the post-Saddam era.

The main traits of revolutionary press are that it is most likely *unlawful* and operates outside of the legal framework of a country. Its circulation among the people is abetted by *modern technology* such as fax-machines and the Internet. Finally, its existence is *transitory*, either effectively eliminated by authorities, or losing relevance when its objective of desired regime change is met.

Development Media Theory
William Hachten and Dennis McQuail, theorizing separately (Mohd. Safar 1996, 4), found that the basic *four theories* of Siebert et al. were inadequate in describing the functions and roles of the media in *developing countries*, even in a normative way This was mainly due to the great variance of political, economic and social conditions of the numerous developing countries that prevented association with any one of the four theories.

Hachten's typology of the developmental press system arises from the *indigenous traits* of developing nations that are distinct from their former Western and Soviet colonialists. The original *four theories* largely grew "from values represented in a common religious, cultural and socioeconomic heritage" (Lambeth 1995, 14), be it Anglo-Christian vs atheist values, liberally "Enlightened" vs. working class society, or capitalist vs. socialist economy. While

some colonized countries absorbed certain elements of such foreign heritage, local heritage remain inarguably manifest.

For these countries, independence meant a political and economic shift from being subservient to the interests of colonial powers to being independently responsible for their own development. Taking into consideration the developmental needs of such new states, the developmental press model stresses *nation-building* above the principles of earlier press system models. McQuail posits that in so far as developing countries are conscious of the similar conditions and interests of other developing nations, a separate theory that focuses on the press system of such countries is needed, as compared to models that describe press in the developed world.

Several common characteristics of developing countries are the inadequacy of resources to develop media systems comparable to that of developed nations (McQuail 1987, 120). Without proper media infrastructure and qualified professional media practitioners, it is highly unlikely that developing nations can fully emulate either one of the four systems. In addition, the level of literacy and purchasing power (i.e. to buy newspapers and television sets) in the more underdeveloped of these countries may not be high enough to create a proper audience for the press. Consequently, people in poorer developing nations may not be able to fill the role that audiences play in Libertarian, Soviet-Communist, or Social Responsibility systems of the press, where they contribute either, ideas and opinions, or feed-back, to the media. In developing countries that are comparatively more developed, the system of government may be different from the kind of democratic or communist systems found in the developed world, where the state is not as autocratic as a communist regime, but neither is it as liberal as a fully matured democracy.

The pressing conditions of developing nations legitimize a *partnership* between the press and the government where both work together as twin agents of progress (Altschull 1984, 286) with the overarching goal of nation-building. As the media and the government need to work closely, it is acceptable that the media is partially controlled by the state. Legislation, licensing, and censorship are considered legitimate and acceptable.

The developmental system is a half-way alternative to the more rigid state-controlled models and an extension of the media-autonomy principles of earlier society-based models. Instead of political-subservience as a government's engine (Soviet-Communist and Authoritarian) or being regulated only by consumer market forces, developmental theory posits that the press is at once self-regulatory, answerable to the people, and compliant with the government.

Summarizing UNESCO's acknowledgement of the needs of developing nations, Hachten conceptualizes five principles of the Developmental press model (Hachten 1981, 73):

- All the instruments of mass communication…must be mobilized by the central government to aid in the great task of nation building: fighting illiteracy and poverty, building a political consciousness, assisting in economic development.
- The media therefore should support authority, not challenge it. There is no place for dissent or criticism, in part because the alternative to the ruling government would be chaos.
- Information (or truth) thus becomes the property of the state … Information is a scarce national resource; it must be utilized to further the national goals.
- The individual rights of civil liberties are somewhat irrelevant in the face of overwhelming poverty, disease, illiteracy, and ethnicity.

- In international news, each nation has a sovereign right to control foreign journalists and the flow of news back and forth across its borders.

Altschull's Criticism of Press System Labels

While Hachten and McQuail were more concerned with normative categorizations to differentiate between different press ideologies and practices, J. Herbert Altschull posited that these types of *labels are misleading and divisive.* They are misleading because they tend to stress *superficial differences* and are blind to their *inherent similarities*. They are divisive because they tend to be bigoted in that proponents and practitioners of one model condemn the ideologies and resulting practices of another, believing that their system is superior to others. In so far as this classification is the efforts of Western scholars, they propose that Libertarian-type systems are superior to authoritarian-type systems and developing-type models. (Interestingly, Altschull himself seems blinded to his own self righteous condemnation of the supposed rivaling advocates of these systems.)

Nevertheless, Altschull's criticism of press system labels is well intended. He proposes that introspection is due upon proponents and practitioners of each press system so that weaknesses of each system may be addressed.

To do away with the superior connotations of the terms "liberal", "free", and "first" and to do away with the condescending connotations of the term "developing" and "third world", and also to do away with the denunciative connotations of "authoritarian" and "communist", Altschull opts to identify these press systems as *market*, *Marxist* and *advancing*.

In contrast to the normative descriptions of other scholars, Altschull instead describe the *realities* of each system. The supreme reality of all is that all press systems are essentially, even if hazily, similar in their relationship with the state and their declared service to society. Ever mindful of this reality, Altschull unearthed seven "*laws of journalism*" that characterize the news media (Altschull 1995: 440-441):

- In all press systems, the news media are agents of those who exercise political and economic power. Newspapers, magazines, and broadcasting outlets are not independent actors, although they have the potential to exercise independent power.
- The content of the news media always reflects the interests of those who finance the press system.
- All press systems are based on belief in free expression, although free expression is defined in different ways.
- All press systems endorse the doctrine of social responsibility, proclaim that they serve the needs and interests of the people, and state their willingness to provide access to the people.
- In each of the three press models, the press of the other models is perceived to be deviant.
- Schools of journalism transmit ideologies and value systems of the society in which they exist and inevitably assist those in power to maintain their control of the news media.
- Press practices always differ from press theory.

For Altschull, the most important *goal of journalism is to help solve the world's problems and make it a better place for all human beings*. To strive to meet such an end, journalists must be ever open and accepting to heritages other than their own, and they must be willing to self-

criticize. The media, he contends, must "cease serving as a force to divide humankind and … begin serving as a force to resolve the terrible challenges we face …" (Altschull 1984: 298).

Community / Civic / Participatory Model of the Peoples' Press

In meeting Altschull's recommendation for the press, theorists are looking for a new model that truly serves the people as opposed to the political or economic elites. One that modifies the status-quo from press control/press liberalism to press responsibility. Merril, Hachten, Altschull, McQuail, and McManus among others see the need for people play more active roles in press content. Participation in press content is conceptualized as *the* way to ensure that the press truly served the people. McQuail's Democratic-participation model is a modification the Social Responsibility and Libertarian models.

The Democratic-Participatory Model

Two main tenets of the democratic-participant model are that it places great emphasis on *public interactivity* with the media, and thus, with the democratic practices of public discourse. What the model essentially proposes is that the media should be accessible to the public. *Public accessibility of the media* will give room for media content that serves the individual's needs and interests in a democracy. Individuals are not only given the "right to relevant information" (McQuail 1987, 122) and the options to respond to these information, they are also able to use media as a means for "interaction in small-scale settings of the community, interest group (or) subculture" (ibid).

The model allows for reciprocal message-sending between media institutions and the public, as well as interaction among the audience, thus *empowering the audience*, and not just serving their interests as original models philosophized. In addition, media institutions will be more intimate with their audiences, as opposed to a relationship mediated by state policies or market forces. This supports the model's condemnation of the more exclusive and discriminatory state or market controlled systems of media.

In 1987, McQuail listed several media outlets as "practical expressions" of the democratic-participative model, among them the underground press, pirate radio, and community cable TV. He asserted that "new communications technology opens more opportunities via cheaper reproduction, and access to electronic media channels" (ibid, 123). He also maintained that "small scale, interactive and participative media forms are better than large-scale, one-way, professionalized media" (ibid). The rise of the Internet some 15 years later has realized McQuail's contentions, with its interactive dimensions, affordability and accessibility.

The Kibaru: A Malinese Rural Press

A "practical expression" of such a participatory press exists in Mali. Although the brainchild of Swiss researcher Roland Schreyer, the *Kibaru* is thoroughly a local people's paper serving the everyday needs of common people. Instead of political news, its focus is the social conditions of the people, aiming to *raise their living standards* as well as *civic consciousness*. More importantly, it allows and requires readership involvement in defining the news. Newspaper staffs are told by local villagers what issues need attention and together they discuss how to address those issues. In addition, the paper is financed by the people's own monetary contribution. Thus it is the people who are the '*paymasters*' and the *agenda setters* of the newspaper (Altschull 1995: 430-431).

Democratic-Participatory Theory Modifying Social Responsibility Theory

While the Social Responsibility model of media led to the formation of media institutions (i.e. public broadcasting stations) more responsive to the interests of the people versus the state's or the market, reality does not meet the expectations of idealism. Such media outlets were often found to be overly dependent or intimate with the ruling or economic elite, hence advancing paternalistic media content; messages that were informative and 'good' for the people, *as seen by the elites*. This trend, however, is understandable as such outlets highly dependent upon government subsidies or corporate sponsorship since for funding (see Baoill).

Thus, McQuail sees the democratic-participant model as addressing audience disillusionment with the way democracy is practiced and advanced by their liberal societies. The Social Responsibility system of the press impede public discourse and has the tendency to treat audiences as one 'mass-society', instead of advancing pluralism and the people's voice. In addition, this system is thought to be highly bureaucratic.

The democratic-participant model addresses these Social Responsibility weaknesses and encourages greater and freer participation of the people. It also addresses the fallibilities of the economic limitations that the Libertarian system imposes upon public access to the media.

Democratic-Participatory Theory Modifying the Libertarian System

A significant criticism of Libertarian theory is its over-emphasis on ideas and opinions (or information) as a commodity that is reliant on market forces. Siebert's contention that the market-place of ideas would regulate itself to thus automatically purge 'bad' ideas and advance "good" ideas did not quite materialize. Instead, commodification of information has led to the limitation of access to the press. Instead of being a public means of expression, media and its audience has become a complex money-making tool for profit-oriented corporations, many of them oligopolies (see Cohen 2003). Corporate policies, and not public good, single handedly determine media content, focusing on revenue-generating content above other considerations (McChesney 2003, 128).

Audience attention is sold to advertisers for advertising revenue, with media content chosen on the basis of audience-ratings (McManus 1994, 5). This ratings-based 'regulation' of media content does not necessarily eliminate 'bad' content as audiences do not disregard sensationalistic and dramatic news, even ones with little informational soundness. Journalists under the employ of profit-driven corporations consciously frame their news reports to fit such newsworthiness criteria, inadvertently downplaying the more serious and more consequential aspects of the news (Callaghan & Schnell 2001: 186).

Realism and New Models of the Press

Earlier models of press systems often focused on the need for the press to be more socially responsible in executing its duties to the people. In the face of such idealism, it is not surprising that press theories tend to be normative rather than realistic. Nevertheless, a new effort has been made to break away from normative idealism to present more realistic models of the press. Realism demands that a model must consider the *political system* as well as *everyday journalistic practices* while allowing room for new media and changing systems and practices. In addition, it must be *empirically testable*.

Ostini & Fung's (2002) new press systems classification are based on the interaction between *structural governmental factors* and *professional journalistic factors*. Within general labels like capitalist/socialist or democratic/authoritarian, structural factors also need to consider the economic, local-political and social subsystems that govern a country. And besides the

society-state relationship, a more realistic press model must also consider the routines and ethics of journalists, as individual people and in collectivity.

Acknowledging the meso-processes of journalistic professionalism working within macro-systems constrains of governmental policy, four new press system models were created; *democratic-conservative*, *democratic-liberal*, *authoritarian-conservative* and *authoritarian-liberal*. Newspaper content analyses of four countries empirically determined a nation's media system within this classification.

- Democratic-conservative media systems reflect the democratic political system of the country and the more conservative nature of journalists where they value the status-quo such as in *Japan*.
- In democratic-liberal media systems, political dissent is acceptable in the journalistic professional system and allowed by the political system, as in the *US*.
- Authoritarian-conservative media systems work under more restrictive political controls that are supported by professional journalistic ethics and routines, as in *China*.
- The authoritarian-liberal media system's official policies inhibit dissent but are not supported by more reform-minded journalistic practices, as in *Hong Kong*.

Ostini & Fung's new press system classification has moved beyond mere normative "concepts of what the press should be and do" (Siebert et al. 1976, book title) to categorically describe what different media systems *are* and *do.* A significant contribution of this is the *multidimensional* nature of the classifications which allow movement within the categories when change occurs (i.e. new media, changing norms, shifting political landscapes), as compared to modifying an existing model to create a new one.

CONCLUSION
Addressing Western Control of Press systems Theorizing

Earlier normative inquiry on world press systems are very much influenced by Western heritage, unsurprising as the West is an undisputed power in the world order. However, other parts of the world are catching up with Western political and economic development and a *new world order* seems to be struggling to emerge. Samuel Huntington's thesis that Muslim and Sino civilizations are making their marks is true in the realm of intellectual theorizing.

Scholars of such traditions are realizing the need of more multi-cultural theories that will better explain the social world, which is not inhabited solely by Westerners. On a more pragmatic level, existing press theories that produce current global news outlets portray world events from the Western eyes. While significant efforts are being made at advancing different perspectives (e.g. al-Jazeera, ABN), a theoretical framework of the *four theories'* standing that truly reflects the various communicatory heritages of non-Western news media has not yet emerged.

Edward Said's *Covering Islam* is an effort at building a Muslim media paradigm. With the focus of his book being the highlighting of Western media's disparaging coverage of Muslim world issues, he lays the groundwork rationale of the need for a Muslim perspective in light of Western bias. Merrill (2000) calls this "the Enlightenment bias" (p. 36), whereby Western values are imposed upon other traditions in the arrogant belief that they are superior. McQuail (2000) also notices this paradigm bias and highlights the need for media theories to be less Euro-centric and more accommodating of other cultural values.

However, efforts at a new paradigm, such as Hamid Mowlana's 'Islamic communication', face the fundamental problems in that it is so much more difficult to synthesize the different sub-traditions of Islam and the East (see Wang & Shen 2000) to create one or even two perspectives for looking at the press. In contrast, the Western paradigm that consists of the original and modified versions of the *four theories of the press* is a straightforward paradigm with two distinct perspectives (Libertarian vs. Authoritarian). Adding to this difficulty are the varying degrees of 'westernization' that have infiltrated other civilizations, especially in the form of Western media education, technology and norms.

Nonetheless, the very fact that such realizations are taking place indicates that a new, different kind of press theory may emerge in the future that is distinct from the sequential modifications of the *four theories of the press.*

Theories of the Press and Utopia

Siebert et al.'s work is a pioneering effort in looking at the macro-level of news media. It came at a time when communication theorists were somewhat errantly focusing on the effects of the media on the audience to the exclusion of the greater media environment; that is the over-arching system dictating the media.

Even if inaccurate, and as some argue later, irrelevant, the *four theories of the press* is a significant theoretical concept because it has succeeded in generating discourse about the nature of the press under different political environments. To this day, these early models still serve as a major source of reference for the field of journalism. To the extent that numerous modifications have sprung from them, these early theories have enriched the search for an *ideal media system*. Although the likelihood of reaching such a utopic state is small, the journey itself brings benefit as time and time again the press is scrutinized and modified to better meet society's needs. Thus, Altschull's dream of a press system that would make life better for all people on earth and unite the world, is not so much a goal as it is a never-ending, yet never-failing, journey.

Does Media Shape Society or Does Society Shape Media?

Human civilizations and the different societies that make up these civilizations have all been characterized, in some way or the other, by their cultural norms. Culture "order(s) the world and render(s) it intelligible" (Murphy 1986, 14). It is the cultural values of a society that influences political systems and processes that impose order upon society. It is in part the cultural values of the masses and elites involved that determine the success or failure of a political system, and this in turn determines whether a society thrives or disintegrates.

The birth and evolution of modern news media's predecessors illustrate how the press has always been an important political element. Nonetheless, human civilizations, and political systems have existed and functioned without news media for millenniums. However, news media cannot function, or even exist without society. It is society that provides news events to cover, sources to obtain information from, issues for discourse, an audience for the news content, and even potential consumers for modern advertisers to hawk their goods to.

As mentioned earlier, an interesting similarity among the three approaches presented in this essay, is that all of them approach the dynamics between the press and society through an epochal comparison of the press and society at different times and social environments. What can be surmised from this is that the dynamics between press and society are constantly changing with time, and that there is no one objective relationship that can adequately describe

press and society. That being said, it is difficult, if not impossible to ascertain whether the press shapes culture, and therefore society, or vice versa.

However, whether the media is just a reflection of society, or whether it is the creator of modern society, it does not matter. Because in the end, even if though media is given its standing by society, the pervasiveness of the media makes it so, so that people are entrenched in an environment that is media-saturated. Newspapers, television, radio, the Internet, billboards, magazines, and even mobile telephones acquaint us with occurrences and issues that would otherwise be unknown, and therefore unimportant to us. In very much the same manner, clout and influence over one area can also be beamed around the world to result in clout and influence in other places.

The ubiquitous omnipresence of the media in modern society makes everyone a media consumer, if not directly, then by way of the influence he receives from other media consumers. Similarly, just about all aspects of society find its way into the media, as sensationalistic issues, commentaries, or at the very least, as obscure but documented facts.

In any modern society, it is imperative that its members are aware of the media, not just of its information and entertainment functions, but of the intricacies of what goes on between the lines and behind the scenes in the production of media messages, and of the end effects of these messages. People need to be able to read the fine print and to not take media messages at face value because behind these messages are gatekeepers with vested economical, political, and even pure economic interests for whom the trust and vulnerability of the media consumer is essential. Even without such sinister motivations, the hidden messages and overall effect of certain types of media messages have the potential to influence the way people think and behave, and ultimately the potential to influence societal norms.

On the other hand, people also need to be aware of the innate potential of society to dictate media content and processes. At the end of the day, media needs to have an audience, and only content that is relevant to the audience has the staying power needed for lasting impact on the norms and values of society.

Thus, the press of any given time is undoubtedly a reflection of the social, political, economic, cultural and even geophysical environment of its coverage and reach. However, in this age, social, political, economic, cultural and even geophysical environments are all touched, directly or indirectly, by the long and nimble fingers of the mass media. Over time human society invents new uses for the press, new media to carry the press, and new cultures for the press to report about and debate upon. Intellectuals in society conceive new theories to make sense of this ever changing, yet cyclic, relationship between society and media.

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