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The dominance of the Great Four - outcome of profit and loss.
An attempt of sociological operationalization with using participating observation.

It been said for almost half a century that in today is world - apart from some Third World countries – in order to overthrow a government, one does not need to bring tanks into the streets, but simply take a control of radio and television stations. The regime of the media, which is reluctantly mentioned in the case of democratic countries can affect every system, every society and nation. This is not about severe censorship performed by the political elites or authorities, but about ostensible freedom of speech and information pluralism. The individual's lack of the choice of media and the possible lack of pluralism and diversity of media content should be, according to Jakubowicz, interpreted as limiting the freedom of the media audience, and thus restricting its right to information.¹

Reasons for this state of affairs is attributed to the globalization of political and economic processes in the world where the media are an important distributor of information and media systems of values represented by dominant systems. The consequences not only lead to centralizing the activities of international political and economic issues, but also to the unification of the cultural values system. According to B. Ociepka, the globalization in relation to the media runs on five areas: globalization of media forms, media companies, the global flow of information, the effects of globalization and the emergence of a global audience.² It is believed here that these phenomena may lead to a blurring of boundaries between different systems and not just media. As a result, the functioning of the world's few large media concerns, and as a transfer of their unified value arises a real threat to freedom of expression and the right of access to information. According to German scholar W. Schulz, a contemporary development of mass media on the one hand threatens the fundamental

¹ Jakubowicz K., (2008), *Media Policy and Electronic Media, (Polityka medialna a media elektroniczne)*, Warszawa: WAiP, p. 100

² B. Ociepka, (2002), *The International Communication, (Komunikowanie międzynarodowe)*, Wrocław: Astrum, p. 82

principles of free democracy in the context of making the integration of technology, internationalization, commercialization and supply of information explosion, on the other hand is essential to its development. Schulz, defines this phenomenon as self-intensive or "virtuous circle".³

It seems that the category of globalization is increasingly being understood in a way that obscures the proper picture of the situation in which we have more to do with the dominance of the great of this world rather than erasing borders, differences between operators. Such a mistaken approach may provide another category of publicity and the idea of a global village that the modern world through the media, especially Internet shrunk to the size of the village, where everyone knows everything, in which contact between its inhabitants is direct, and the distance between houses can virtually embrace. Certainly, this impression may participate in the communication, but it does not mean that it is so. The problem of the global village lies in the fact that not all inhabitants of the world will comply to the fact of being villagers. The distance separating them is much greater for there is a number of cultural barriers and ways that can move it to global village paths. That again may be able to move only by means of special mobiles as they can only manage to circulate within the village.

Therefore it seems important to distinguish two other categories: of media pluralism and diversity. On one hand, these terms refer to media pluralism and diversity which are concepts related to the pluralism of media; and on the other, to the different content of particular media thus to the so-called internal pluralism or diversity of content. According to van Cuilenberga this diversity can be divided into two categories : "mirror" and "open". The first reflects the diversity of society in all its aspects. The second stems from a normative rejection of unequal treatment of majority's and minority's tastes and needs.⁴ The plurality of sources of information and the program, which today acts as a result of technological development, concentration of capital in the global media market and the globalization of communication and culture, being an increasingly rare value, should be added to this. As highlighted by Street, a transfer of globalization should arise an international concern. There is only place for information of the global factor while news of local importance are omitted. Global news gives a monolithic image of the world, in which regional and national

³ Schulz W. (1995), *Political Effects of Media*, (*Polityczne skutki działania mediów*), „Zeszyty Prasoznawcze”, Krakow, nr 1-2, p. 68

⁴ van Cuilenburg J., *Media Diversity, Competition and Concentration: Concepts and Theories* [in:] de Bens E. (red.), *Media between Culture and Commerce*, Bristol: Intellect Books, p. 25-54; for: Jakubowicz K., *Ibidem*, p. 101.

differences fade away and one measure is used for all.⁵ The process of standardization and concentration concerns the production of information and the creation of culture goods, evoking concern about identity and diversity. However, instead of diversity, as Barber notices, we have a "McWorld."

The issue of the lack of information of pluralism sources and the concentration of capital in the media markets has been present in the international debate for nearly fifty years. There was an initiative promoted at UNESCO forum by Third World countries concerning "new information order". Its intention was to limit the U.S. media industry position in the world and to provide a more balanced flow of information. As a result, United States withdrew from UNESCO and the African countries have still not been sufficiently represented in the global flow of information. According to a study commissioned by the UNESCO, it has been repeatedly indicated that the global news agencies, which are the main distributor of foreign news editor for the majority of the world's information, focus their attention primarily on issues related to North America, Western Europe and Near East. They pay least attention to Latin America and Africa. The agencies select reports from the world according to their importance in the national or local scale. The economic aspect of the hierarchy and the selection of information is also noted. The stronger economic ties – meaning the more important a country as a trading partner is - the more attention is paid to it in the information.

The international media policy is manifested not only in terms of relations between states, whether states and international organizations but also between countries, international organizations and business. Certainly, the actions of international organizations often conceal the interests of members states which means that the interests of national firms. Thus it may be presumed that all reports on the international media policy is an effective relationship between the business community. Politics of nation states, in which major global agencies have their head offices, promotes their dominance as a major source of information. Although, the majority of agencies declare independence from those governments and countries, there are many factors, including financial and structural, which can cause a dependency and so an unbalanced flow of information and opinion. Such factors may be found during qualitative research of the policy of Reuters.

We would like to start exemplification of the description conceptualized above from the process of production of features. Genre of these texts appears to be more spectacular and

⁵ Street J., (2006), *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy*, (*Mass media, polityka, demokracja*), Kraków: WUJ, p. 150-151

attractive for the audience than common news and flesh-stories, furthermore it is treated as a significant factor of image of the newsroom for consumers connected with a marketing label of the media subject. Praiseworthy activity of writing features with its social and softer economic background may also support a process of constructing reporter's self-identity. Roots of the genre make us focus on its modern shape although we should be fully aware of limited representativeness of given texts for the whole production of the media concern and its lower quantitative significance in a media discourse.

A transformation of the production of features connected with strengthening the division of marketing gives indication of relocation from previous relative journalistic subsidiarity (less standardized activity of the reporter) into centralization and standardization of all the creative process. This directly results in objectifying the stringer, causes changes in a hierarchy of importance of media workers and concentration or homogenisation of the symbolic sphere. The foregoing internal monopolization is inducing hypotheses on impairment of the monitoring post of media to setting up, peculiarly taking into consideration the autopoietic Luhman's prism.

Conceptualization mentioned above stands for finding expression in qualitative measurements constructed with such several indicators that we could be described by cases discovered during our measurement. It has been observed while working for Reuter's Press Agency that the newsroom in Warsaw used to project softer economic and social features time to time, ordering quotations from the stringer.

The reporter which was delegated into the countryside, has been told to generate determined phrases each time. These phrases were previously designed by the publisher in the head office. The editor drew his knowledge not that much from direct observation of the social life, but from the participation and consumption of the virtual media discourse.

Quotations were designed *a priori*, taking into consideration production standards which would guarantee the product quality. Those standards were connected directly with an economics of the production and with easiness of the consumption. They were also referring to standard demands of caring about the quality of the media discourse. However, these demands were being carried out not basing on the individual ethos of the journalist's mission, but for in order to construct messages relatively objective, according to recommendations of the German school of the journalism which is lively so far. This objectivity was being carried out through simple techniques of creating or discovering antagonisms which were dividing actors of the event, as well as selecting contrasting quotations, which were supposed to confirm or to contradict theses put by the publisher. Quotations which were denying the

thesis, in addition usually performed the decorative function mainly, they were weaker substantially from quotations confirming the thesis.

According to this mechanism a stringer who was supposed to go to the museum in Aschwitz to write a feature about the March of Alive has been ordered as follows: „Find an old Jew who was in a concentration camp and will say it was a hell. Find a young Jew who will say it is an interesting lesson for him. Find a young Pole who will say he is already fed up with the camp in Auschwitz, he would prefer so that in the place of the museum of the martyrdom a disco was erected”. Stringer was searching for adequate persons and he was modeling discussion so long, until at last he found (or created) quotations similar to these ordered by the head office.

By analogy, when stringer was sent to the Polish village in order to show what "simple souls" think about the entry of Poland to the NATO, he was told to find enthusiasts and sceptics of the Polish accession. The polarization of the opinion previously designed in the editorial office turned out to be difficult to show in practice. Farmers satisfied from the entry of Poland to the NATO gave their opinion willingly, however their argumentation turned out to be different from predicted. So that the respondents used to say that thanks to the Polish accession they would be able to import second-hand cars from Western Europe cheaper, most clearly identifying the access to the NATO with the access to the European Union.

In so far as an occurrence of *a priori* projecting story by an editor and ordering quotations that are stimulated next by the stringer are demonstrated by recalled cases – international examples show also building stories with no indicating sources and using unobstrusive quotations that had been previously artificially integrated into the feature without any real interview. This is visible while analysing a casus of covering a papal visit in Kazakstan in 2000. where constructing artificial story about supporting bombardment of Afghanistan by John Paul II was indicated by our participatory action research. The feature produced by Reuters with no using any real quotation was repeated by CNN that appeared to be the catalyst of diffusing the news and replication of the statements by weaker players, regional newsrooms, operating on mezo-dimension (J. Morawiecki, Kazachstan osmego dnia, www.tygodnik.com.pl/numer/2739/morawiecki.html). Our more detailed presentation will also focus on some reasons of the activity mentioned above, taking into consideration such indicators as wider media context and the pressure of a system producing sequences of the news covering specified political events (the visit could not generate real international stories so the feature had to be stimulated and linked into makro-media construct of the war in

Afganistan; Kazakstan would sound similar to Afghanistan even if there was no any real significant political connection between these two events).

Yet, everyday common stories produced by big players give us less spectacular examples of the media mechanisms working in practice. It is just probably a reason for marginalising such sociological presentations which would describe a lifestyle of the reporter, his hierarchy of values, motivation, identity or a set of rules of routine work of a journalist. With specificity of the work of the reporter of Reuters Agency follow such factors as: a repetitiveness, a monotony and a conventionality of economic interviews, but also closed thematic frames, clear priorities, the clearly scraped group of recipients and the outline of the communication in the company. To resulting advantages of such a manner of the work we can also rank: straight evaluation, fast, standardized system of the valorization of texts and the field work of a stringer.

Amongst negative phenomena of the modern agency journalism one should articulate such processes as: stylistic impairment, radical limiting creative autonomy (an eight-hour rhythm of the work of the editor enables writing books after duty or during a lazy weekend), but also unquestioned subordinating to market rules and following homogenization and impoverishing a message that resembles rather a semi-finished product, substitute than a ready text if using categories of more literary tradition of the documentary or newspaper relations.

On the other hand, more brightly formulated rules of production of a text, which is treated as a special marketing product, enable to mark borders of the self-censorship which is being started only in narrations developed as part of the service for the customer.

It seems that so hard and transparent objectifying a stringer allows to reduce the phenomenon of totalization of a creative process which is characteristic for other concerns that are extending beyond the economic subject matter and entering territory of social affairs. We mean areas which previously were booked for left-wing descriptions, carried out as part of the tradition of intelligentsia, having an affair with the art and the ideological journalism. The modern opposition is being built up on stretching between the ethos of the journalist and free market rules to which the reporter is supposed to submit. However, this ethos can be partly carried out through the struggle with weaker players from the level mezo, it is with regional-national political entities. Let us notice that a reporter's mission is brought about only for relating the political in this case. So simplified and the qasi-romantic image of the journalist is intensively exploited by the sphere of the pop culture.

A reality reduced in the way mentioned above turns out to be easier for rationalization, legitimization of self-activity and simpler to integrate such activity into the image of a path of career. That is because policy is more conventionalized than a subject matter of social affairs and Goffman's drama of an everyday common life.

Entering more complicated, diversified and multidimensional fields, concerning the area of the everyday life with such variables as a social tie or social rules of living in smaller communities, describing a private life with its diversity of meaning may paradoxically cause appropriating much wider areas through the centre of power decision-making and stronger consequences of the self-censorship. We are putting such a hypothesis basing on premises resulting from our measurements - the dominance of economic arguments at the production of texts seems obvious. Formal frames, restrictions and preferences of the selection of contents aren't usually articulated directly but in the allusive way. Whereas functioning in world of secret and not added rules is stimulating the self-censorship that is described as more effective than any external censorship, as J. Thompson claims. That divergence between motivation of the entry for the journalistic environment and rules made aware in more late stages of a reporter's work cause drainage of the human resources in mass-media: leaving newsrooms by more experienced front reporters, moving to PR companies, universities, niche subjects (vide: www.online.journalism.utexas.edu). The promotion can also be carried out through automediatization, constructing own image of a showman, participating celebrities. Yet, this narrow path does not make up for the deficit of positive sanctions for the army of experienced but low-stage reporters. Furthermore Reuters does not let carry the career of the pop-star out. However, in exchange for it the concern lets be promoted to a clerk-editor that means working in a head office.

The exploitation of the ethos can be replaced through the adrenaline of the work of the news-gunman, and through a short-distance satisfaction from own self-efficiency. Motivation is also being built by seeming overcoming the social segmentation – contact with faces of big players, face-to-face conversations with chairmen of the corporation.

The longer career in the agency will also enable a strategic exit and participation the profits of exploitation of a prestigious label of Reuters. A conscientious work in the army of the player of the Great Four is giving the chance of going down the macro level on mezo and keeping a relative autonomy on the national level. This would happen under the condition of getting about less strategic areas, on which large concerns are not operating. Otherwise – according to the theory of impairment of the horizontal canal to the benefit vertical – the reporter usually gives for the old employer, the way other journalists of the national editorial

sections are making it up. How the journalist of Polish Press Agency said, while copying the controversial telegram without sources and quotations: „I know the feature is probably false. But if I won't send the story, they will have my balls on breakfast by it in Warsaw. CNN has been repeating the story for two hours. That is why it became real. I am enough late, I must chase them”.