SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY THEORY REVISITED

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PUBLIC JOURNALISM AND DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNALISM

SHELTON GUNARATNE

MOHD. SAFAR HASIM

Introduction

Developing or Third World countries have used the social responsibility theory, a mid-twentieth-century Anglo-American concept primarily associated with the Commission on Freedom of the Press (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956), to explain their own press systems. In the aftermath of the New World Information and Communication Order debate and the dissolution of the U.S. National News Council, however, conservative American scholars like William Hachten (1992) and R. L. Stevenson (1994) have dropped the social responsibility theory from their press theory schema and adopted a so-called Western concept, which they equate with "a free and independent press."

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when the information-flow phenomenon caught the attention of the non-aligned nations, Asia-based scholars and practitioners started paying attention to the role of news coverage in developing countries. Alan Chalkley (1968) and others associated with the Press Foundation of Asia in Manila, as well as several Philippine communication scholars, began to use the catch phrase developmental journalism. They organised courses on developmental journalism in Manila, Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur and other cities. For some time, developmental journalism became a popular phrase associated with news reporting.

As the NWICO debate in the late '70s and early '80s progressed in UNESCO, Anglo-Americans, deliberately or otherwise, succeeded in dissociating developmental

Shelton Gunaratne is Professor at Mass Communications Department, Moorhead State University, Minnesota 56563
Mohd. Safar Hasim is Associate Professor at Department of Communication, University Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi, Selangor D.E.

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journalism, which they branded as "government-say-so journalism," from developmental communication, whose origin they traced to U.S. agricultural extension service projects. Social responsibility theory itself fell out of favour in their attempt to promote the U.S. constitution's First Amendment virtues and demote government intervention on matters relating to the press.

However, a movement is now in progress in the United States — broadly called public journalism — that emerged around 1989 following the discovery of massive public dissatisfaction with the performance of the press that had resulted in a steady decline of daily newspaper circulation per capita.

This review will examine the two concepts of developmental journalism and public journalism. Has the so-called Western concept (or libertarianism) failed as the daily newspaper circulation data seem to indicate? Has the social responsibility theory returned to respectability? Developmental journalism started about a quarter century ago. Is public journalism a sort of developmental journalism in disguise? These two concepts, despite their controversial nature, may occupy our attention well into the turn of the century and beyond.

Developmental Journalism

Developmental journalism has its roots in development communication, which goes back to the work of agricultural extension carried out by large land-grant state universities in the United States (Stevenson 1994, 232). Eventually, it developed into a coherent doctrine, and a 1964 seminar convened by the East West Center in Honolulu formalised the concept (Jayaweera and Amunugama, 1987). Journalists became a part of the picture simply because of their crucial role in communication. The term "developmental journalism" goes back to the Philippines in the 1960s (Stevenson 1994, 239). The Thomson Foundation sponsored a course called The Economic Writers' Training Course, Aug. 14 to Sept. 5, 1968, when the seminar chairman Alan Chalkley coined the term "development journalist."

Chalkley (1968) explained that a journalist's main task was to inform and give his or readers the facts. His or her secondary task was to interpret, to put the facts in their framework and, where possible, to draw conclusions. Chalkley said that these were the tasks of political journalists, as well as of crime reporters, society-page writers, human story writers and every other journalist. The development journalist, Chalkley said, had a third task, a positive one that one might call "promotion": not only to give the facts of economic life and to interpret those facts, but also to promote them and bring them home to the readers. "You must get your readers to realise how serious the development problem is, to think about the problem, to open their eyes to the possible solutions — to punch that hole in the vicious circle," Chalkley said giving his initial definition of developmental journalism. No concrete definition of the concept has emerged since then although scholars and practitioners have presented their different visions.

Chalkley (1968) also pointed out at the outset that developmental journalism was not for the elite but for the ordinary people. Therefore, the task of a development journalist was to use simple terms and to avoid jargon.

Gunaratne (1978) described developmental journalism as an integral part of a new journalism that involved "analytical interpretation, subtle investigation, constructive criticism and sincere association with the grass-roots (rather than with the elite)." He

argued that developmental journalism was not compatible with either the libertarian concept, which defined the function of the mass media as providing information and entertainment, or the authoritarian concept, which stifled "criticism of political machinery and the officials in power" and imposed a "top-down approach to problem solving."

Aggarwala (1978) also noted that Western critics had erroneously equated development-oriented news with government-controlled news. He argued that the development newsbeat involved reporting on the relevance of a development project of national and local needs; the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation; and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and its actual impact. Ogan (1982, 10) identified developmental journalism as the critical examination, evaluation and reporting of the relevance, enactment and impact of development programs by a mass media independent of the government. Fair (1988) conceptualised developmental journalism as news that related to the primary, secondary or tertiary needs of a country's population; news that satisfied the needs of a country's population and contributed to self-reliance; and news that related to development or to social, economic or political problems.

Despite such analyses of the concept early on, contemporary conservative scholars (e.g., Stevenson 1994) have gone out of their way to debunk developmental journalism as an adjunct to authoritarian and communist concepts of the press in their eagerness to prove the victory of the so-called Western concept in the 1990s. They have ignored the thrust of developmental journalism embodied in scholarly analyses or as practised by alternative news services such as Inter Press Service, Depthnews, Gemini and South-North News. As Ali (1996, 30) points out: "The concept of development journalism is good, and always was, so it is a pity it became embroiled in the acrimonious debate surrounding the New World Information Order."

If one were to conceptualise a contemporary framework for developmental journalism, taking into consideration the discussion that has gone on for well over a quarter century, one might take into consideration the 10 proposals for a development-oriented news media put forth by Galtung and Vincent (1992). The task of the journalist, they argue, is to unravel the threads of the development drama that takes place both in the Centre and the Periphery, pick them out of the intricate web of relationships, "hold them up in the sunlight, and demonstrate the connections to readers, listeners and viewers" as IPS attempts to do at present (Galtung and Vincent 1992, 146). They point out the inherent drama in development, democracy and participation, all of which are interconnected. "The problem, however, is that when this drama is written out, the underlying text tends to be about the same in all cases: imperialism, exploitation and other 'leftist' themes" (Galtung and Vincent 1992, 150). Is it any wonder, then, that Anglo-American conservative scholars tend to debunk developmental journalism?

Galtung and Vincent (1992, 151-165) outline their 10 proposals as follows:

1. Whenever there is a reference to development, try to make it concrete in terms of concrete human beings. Thus they urge journalists to relate development to "people." Journalists can discuss the human needs for survival, well-being, identity and freedom in terms of age, gender, race, class and nation. They should report people as subjects, actors and agents rather than as objects or victims with "needs deficits." They should define problems and solutions as clearly as possible, taking ecological balance into consideration as well.

2. A development-oriented mass media should focus not only on the economics of development, but also on military, political and cultural aspects. Thus, developmental journalism has to focus on more than economics because all of them (military power, political power, cultural power, etc.) have to do with development in one way or another. Journalists should get people to reveal their inner agenda because that constitutes drama that would make journalism more similar to literature.
3. Mere economic growth data will never do without accompanying dispersion data. Journalists must look at the income of the bottom 50 percent or 10 percent, as well as of the top 10 percent or one percent.
4. Focus on relations, not only differences; and do so not only within countries, but also between countries. Thus the journalists must cover both differences and relations. They must substantiate the relational aspect between the rich and the poor: how, for instance, wages may be frozen but not prices so that those who live from moveable prices for their goods and services benefit whereas people on constant wages do not.
5. A development-oriented press would do well to focus on the totality of concrete life situations. This means focusing on concrete life situations as when British television took up the development problematique by selecting a family unit from each of five world regions to represent the well-to-do, the middle class, the working class, the poor and the dirt poor.
6. A development-oriented journalism would never forget the dimension of democracy. "The task of the media is to report what the system is doing. Democracy can only function when there is a free flow of information between people, the system and the media. Using the media to make the people visible, both as objects and as subjects, becomes one task. Using them to expose the system through investigative reporting is the second. Using the media to expose the media that fail to do their job is the third." The development journalist may have to do investigative reporting more subtly where such reporting may antagonise government sources: the report can contrast government statements with development reality without necessarily implying that there is a link between the two.
7. There is always the possibility of reporting about development, not critically in terms of problems, but constructively in terms of positive programs. Success stories may contribute to a general sense of optimism that can generate more momentum for democracy and development. People in similar situations elsewhere can benefit from such success stories if the report is adequately concrete.
8. Allow the "people" to talk. This means giving a voice to the people. A useful approach is for journalists to sit down with people from high to low discussing the meaning of development thereby generating "an enormous range of visions" as well as "how-to" insights. Thus people get a voice as experts in line with the seven preceding ideas. Community cable channels in the United States enable this to happen to some extent.
9. Go one step further, and let the people to some extent run the media. This means giving people some media control. Letters to the editor and the op-ed pages have space constraints. The next stage is to let people write and produce much of the newspaper or broadcast/television program thus enabling them to provide their own knowledge, experience and expertise. The extent to which this happens can become a criterion of mass media quality in a country.

10. Let people run more of society, and then report on what happens. This is what ought to happen in a democracy. People's movements and organisations do precisely this. Development-oriented media should report more on what popular movements are doing — not only their successes but their failures too.

While no definition of developmental journalism may satisfy everyone, it is hard to disagree that Galtung and Vincent's 10 proposals provide a reasonable framework to understand the essentials of the concept. That framework will enable us to compare developmental journalism with its new-born cousin that calls itself broadly as public journalism.

Public Journalism

Public journalism (Charity 1995, Charity 1996, Merritt 1995a and 1995b, Rosen 1992, Rosen 1994, Rosen 1995, Rosen and Merritt 1994) is also variously known as civic journalism (Lambeth 1994), community journalism (Lauterer 1995) or conversational journalism (Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg 1994). Just as there is no standard definition of developmental journalism, there is no standard definition of public journalism. Merritt (1995a, 114) says that "for any one editor or institution to define public journalism concretely would also mean limiting the possibilities." One can say the same about developmental journalism.

However, Merritt (1995b, 127) clarifies: "Public journalism seeks to define and learn a different set of reflexes, one that has a purpose beyond telling the news. It seeks to break away from the concept of One Journalism, with its idea that the rules and conventions of the profession are pervasive and inflexible." He goes on to say that public journalism involves "learning to report and write about public life beyond traditional politics" and, among other things, reporting " the very important news of civic life — including civic successes" (Merritt 1995b, 130).

Moreover, he says that public journalism, which is the antithesis of One Journalism, "seeks to define another set of five Ws and H." He adds: "Public life, according to the values of public journalism, requires shared information and shared deliberation; people participate in answering democracy's fundamental question of 'What shall we do?'" One can compare these characteristics of public journalism with those of developmental journalism, which also wants to de-emphasise the conventional news values of One Journalism and report the civic successes of the community.

Black (1996, A8) says: "Public journalism is hard to define succinctly. It has arisen in response to various signals warning that democracy and public life are in trouble and that journalism is in disrepute, and in response to the belief that certain bad habits of conventional journalism have contributed to these problems." The emergence of developmental journalism was also a result of the realisation that the news values associated with conventional journalism contributed to the problems of nation building and public participation. Galtung and Vincent (1992, 50-51) have shown how the traditional news values — which emphasise elite nations, elite persons, personalisation and negativity — have resulted in very little coverage of "how structures are operating to produce (...) unhappy circumstances for poor people." Both public journalism and developmental journalism aspire to solve this aspect of One Journalism.

Merritt (1995a, 114) says: "Public journalism is additive. It builds on telling the news by recognising (a) the fundamental connection between democracy and journalism, (b) the need for public life to go well, for democracy to fulfil its historic promise, and

(c) journalism's rational self-interest, both economic and intellectual, in public life's going well." A similar rationale was behind the emergence of developmental journalism. Its proponents indeed saw a connection between nation building, a pre-requisite for fostering democracy, and journalism. They envisioned journalism's role in encouraging public participation in nation building. They also envisioned journalism's rational self-interest of doing well in political environments that ranged from authoritarianism to varying degrees of democracy.

Anderson, Dardenne and Killenberg (1994: xix-xx), who coined the term conversational journalism, start with the view that "the prime role of journalism (...), and the only way by which it can survive as a viable institution in the pubic arena, is to take the responsibility to stimulate public dialogue on issues of concern to a democratic public." Their radical platform calls for a de-emphasis on the reliance of current news values and the attempt to project objectivity, a shift from the heavy reliance on the inverted pyramid format of presenting news to the much more natural narrative (storytelling) format, a change from the linear transmission of news as a commodity to a communication mode that entails interactive feedback, as well as a re-conceptualisation of ethics to encompass multicultural and feminine perceptions (Gunaratne 1996).

A comparison of public journalism with developmental journalism becomes easier when one looks at what they are supposed to achieve. Black (1996) points out that public journalism is designed to:

1. "Invite ordinary citizens back into public life by making their concerns the starting point of the debate." Developmental journalism tries to achieve a similar objective by making known the concerns of the large majority of underprivileged people in the backwoods of developing nations to their national leaders and the world.
2. "Overcome journalistic cynicism and acknowledge the possibility that citizens working together might be able to solve some of society's problems." This happens to be the crux of developmental journalism as well. The mass media can and should play an active role in encouraging citizens to work together to solve their rural or urban problems.
3. "Modify the rules of detachment by accepting that journalists have an interest in and responsibility for raising the level of public discourse and helping society find solutions to its problems." Again, this looks like the model development journalist. Detachment cannot achieve the objectives of developmental journalism. The journalists have to play a catalytic role to stir up people into being active participants in nation building.

Merritt (1995a, 113-114) says that public journalism involves at least five mental shifts on the part of the conventional journalist:

1. Moving "beyond the limited mission of telling the news to a broader mission of helping public life to go well, and acts out that imperative." This is exactly true of the developmental journalist.
2. Moving "from detachment to being a fair-minded participant in public life." As already mentioned, the development journalist cannot be detached..
3. Moving "from worrying about proper separations to concerns with proper connections." The development journalist cannot afford the luxury of worrying about the separation of the "Fourth Estate" from the three arms of the government in his or her attempt to connect with the public and project their concerns into national, or even international, attention.

4. Moving "beyond only describing what is 'going wrong' to also imagining what 'going right' would be like." Similarly, the development journalist has the commitment to report civic successes.
5. Moving "from people as consumers (...) to seeing them as a public, as potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems." The development journalist also goes well beyond looking at news as a commodity that enables the generation of maximum profit. Rather, he or she is more concerned with engaging the public in finding solutions to a variety of social problems.

Lambeth (1994, 51) summarises that the new forms of civic journalism constitute some combination of the following:

1. Careful, timely and sensitive listening to public needs.
2. Systematic consultation of the public by means of polls and focus groups.
3. Journalist-organised dialogue with panels of resource specialists chosen for their differing expertise and perspectives.
4. Media-sponsored public fora designed to deliberate on key issues.
5. Continuity of in-depth reporting on issues chosen independently by journalists for their fidelity to citizen concerns.
6. Occasional co-operative projects by newspapers, radio and/or television newsrooms.

While some of these techniques pertain to the practices in an advanced society, the development journalist may as well use them depending on the degree of sophistication a particular society has reached.

Discussion and Conclusion

The foregoing discussion clearly shows the close relationship between developmental journalism and public journalism. If one were to substitute "civic-oriented media" for "development-oriented media" in the 10 proposals of Galtung and Vincent (1992), one would hardly see a difference between the two concepts. Their similarities become crystal clear, particularly in the following statements:

- "The task of a development-oriented news media is to define problems and solutions as clearly as possible, including pursuing the development drama into the deeper aspects of nature, as ecological drama" (152);
- "A development-oriented journalism would never forget the dimension of democracy" (160);
- "There is always the possibility of reporting about development, not critically in terms of problems, but constructively in terms of positive programs" (162);
- The media ought to "let the people talk" (163) so people may "run more of society" (164).

The framework that supports both developmental journalism and public journalism is the social responsibility theory, which accepts the six functions that the libertarian theory ascribes to the press but, according to Theodore Peterson, expresses "dissatisfaction with the interpretation of those functions by some media owners and operators and with the way the press has carried them out" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 74). The theory has this major premise: Freedom carries concomitant obligations; and the press, which enjoys a privileged position ..., is obliged to be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society. The six functions are:

1. Servicing the political system by providing information, discussion and debate on public affairs.
2. Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government.
3. Safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government.
4. Servicing the economic system primarily by bringing together the buyers and sellers of goods and services through the medium of advertising.
5. Providing entertainment.
6. Maintaining its own financial self sufficiency so as to be free from the pressures of special interests.

The social responsibility theory asserts that the press has been deficient in performing the first three tasks. It also says that the fourth task should not take "precedence over such other functions as promoting the democratic processes or enlightening the public" — something that both developmental journalism and public journalism would agree on. It asserts that the fifth function should relate to "good" entertainment. With regard to the sixth function, it "would exempt certain individual media from having to earn their way in the market place" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 74).

The Commission on Freedom of the Press, which formulated the social responsibility theory, called on the media to:

1. Provide "a truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning."
2. Serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism."
3. Project "a representative picture of the constituent groups in society."
4. Be responsible for "the presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society."
5. Provide "full access to the day's intelligence."

The second, third and fourth of these demands are also central to the philosophy driving both developmental journalism and public journalism.

Moreover, the social responsibility theory rests on a concept of positive liberty unlike the libertarian theory that was born of a concept of negative liberty (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 93). Both developmental journalism and public journalism clearly condone positive liberty.

The libertarian theory, which was born at a time when the state was regarded as the chief foe of liberty, and the social responsibility theory differ on the view they take of the nature and functions of government: The latter holds that the government should help society to obtain the services it requires from the mass media if a self-regulated press and self-righting features of community life are insufficient to provide them (p. 95). On this matter, developmental journalism seems to be more in agreement with the social responsibility theory than public journalism.

The social responsibility theory differs from the libertarian theory on the nature of freedom of expression as well: the latter considers this a natural right while the other considers it a moral right rather than an absolute right. Both developmental journalism and public journalism would tend to agree on freedom of expression as a moral right.

The social responsibility theory and the libertarian theory differ fundamentally in their view of the nature of man. The latter regards man as primarily a moral and ratio-

nal being who will hunt for and be guided by the truth. The social responsibility theory views man not so much as irrational as lethargic. Therefore, the more alert elements of the community must goad him into the exercise of his reason. Both developmental journalism and public journalism assigns to the journalists the role of those "alert elements."

Finally, the social responsibility theory puts far less faith than the libertarian theory in the efficacy of the self-righting process. Both developmental journalism and public journalism would agree with that view.

Several recommendations of the MacBride Report (1980) also pertain extremely well to both public journalism and development journalism. Because the MacBride Commission issued those recommendations for the benefit of the international community, while undoubtedly being influenced by what the Commission on Freedom of the Press required of the U.S. mass media, this discussion would be incomplete without reference to its most pertinent recommendations:

- Recommendation 22 seeks the "promotion of dialogue for development as a central component of both communication and development policies."
- Recommendation 23 calls on the media to adapt prevailing news values and practices "to be more receptive to development needs and problems."

These two denote the importance the MacBride Commission attached to integrating communication in development. It considered communication to be a "a major development resource, a vehicle to ensure real political participation in decision making, a central information base for defining policy options, and an instrument for creating awareness of national policies." They are compatible with the underlying assumptions of the social responsibility theory, as well as with the emphasis on "conversation" in public journalism to promote community problem solving. Just as Chalkley (1968) urged the development journalist to use simple language, the MacBride Commission also points out the need for "the use of non-technical language and comprehensible symbols, images and forms to ensure popular understanding."

- Recommendation 31 calls for non-commercial forms of mass communication that is in conformity with "the traditions, culture, development objectives and sociopolitical system of each country."

This too is in conformity with the social responsibility theory, which too recognised the need to "exempt certain individual media from having to earn their way in the market place." Developmental journalism accommodates this view while the concept of public journalism, insofar as its present proponents are concerned, seems content with accomplishing its goals within the prevailing market-place set-up in the United States.

- Recommendation 45 says that "conventional standards of news selection and reporting, and many accepted news values, need to be re-assessed if readers and listeners around the world are to receive a more faithful and comprehensive account of events, movements and trends in both developing and developed countries."

Both developmental journalism and public journalism point out the need to go well beyond the traditional occidental news values — i.e., impact, proximity, prominence, timeliness, currency, conflict and the unusual — to make the mass media more relevant to readers, viewers and listeners in a democracy that promotes participation. The Commission on Freedom of the Press implicitly attacks these news values when it

says that "the press has often paid more attention to the superficial and sensational than to the significant in its coverage of current happenings" (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1956, 78).

- Recommendation 54 says: "Communication needs in a democratic society should be met by the extension of specific rights such as the right to be informed, the right to inform, the right to privacy, the right to participate in public communication — all elements of a new concept, the right to communicate."

The right to communicate is implicit in both developmental journalism and public journalism both of which place emphasis on "conversation" with people. In fact, this stands out as the major difference between these two concepts and traditional journalism that heavily relies on elite sources. Participatory democracy is meaningless without the right to communicate. The social responsibility theory implicitly condones it when it calls on the mass media to project "a representative picture of the constituent groups in society."

- Recommendation 63 says that "those in charge of media should encourage their audiences to play a more active role in communication by allocating more newspaper space, or broadcasting time, for the views of individual members of the public or organised social groups."

The MacBride Commission has criticised the mass media for treating their audience as "passive receivers of information." Both developmental journalism and public journalism have a major aim: to make the "people" play an active role in communication. This is compatible with the social responsibility theory, which recognises freedom of expression as a moral right of individuals.

The foregoing analysis brings us back to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this essay. Has the Western (libertarian) concept failed despite the attempts of Stevenson (1994) and others to paint a supremely optimistic picture in its defence? Clearly, the emergence of the public journalism movement indicates dissatisfaction with its performance as much as, or even more than, in the mid-20th century. Has social responsibility theory returned to respectability? Yes, in the form of public journalism. During the NWICO debate, the protagonists of Western (libertarian) journalism found many holes in the views of the Commission on Freedom of the Press. Is public journalism a sort of developmental journalism in disguise? Public journalism is clearly a younger cousin of developmental journalism. The term developmental journalism doesn't fit the cultural terminology applicable to advanced countries. However, the two concepts aim to accomplish similar goals in dissimilar cultural environments.

Stevenson (1994, 231) has taken the view that "like the communist theory, the development concept lost legitimacy in the 1980s" resulting in the victory of Western (Anglo-American?) journalism. His opposition to developmental journalism or development news is based on the grounds that "it became more blatantly identified with the regime" thereby excluding "criticism and negative information." The examples of "development journalism" he gives are from China Daily and Pyongyang Times. Thus he implies developmental journalism and communist journalism to be identical.

Stevenson is able to engage in this condemnation because there is no concrete definition of developmental journalism, which is much more grounded in the social responsibility theory of the press that he no longer seems to accept. If Western journalism has won, why has the public journalism movement arisen in the 1990s? Both developmental journalism and public journalism aim at achieving similar goals of social responsibility.

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