News Media Bias and Hegemony

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies
School of Professional Studies
Gonzaga University

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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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December 2008
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Abstract

This study examines the nature of media bias within the news media (for this study, newspapers and television news), the trajectories and methods through which these biases are spread and how a hegemony is formed, and looks at the qualities of this hegemony. The thesis begins with a review of some of the literature covering bias in the news media, approaching the issue from a number of angles and considering various actors. Three case studies follow, with details of specific practices and situations in Italy, India, and France. Many commonalities are found among the news media in these countries in terms of messages spread and the methodologies through which these messages are spread. Specifically, the study looks at the importance of money and the status quo for the news media, and the subordination of societal duty or public interest to money and the status quo. The study also considers the intersection between the public and private in the news media, especially the privatization of public news media and the ensuing results. The thesis asks if any of the most visible and followed news media are actually fulfilling a real public need, or whether these media outlets are pandering to the public while at the same time pushing a hegemony in line with private interests rather than those of society. If the latter is true, how is this achieved, and what are the dangers to democracy?
### Table of Contents

**Chapter One: Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 5  
Importance of the Study......................................................................................................................... 5  
Statement of the Problem...................................................................................................................... 6  
Definition of Terms................................................................................................................................. 7  
Organization of Remaining Chapters..................................................................................................... 7

**Chapter Two: Review of the Literature** .............................................................................................. 8  
Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Bias................................................................................... 8  
Introduction........................................................................................................................................... 10  
The Development of a Media Bias within the News Media ..................................................................... 11  
Partisanship vs Objectivity ....................................................................................................................... 14  
Operation of Media Bias........................................................................................................................ 17  
Processes................................................................................................................................................ 17  
The Importance of Money in Media Bias................................................................................................. 19  
The Role of the Journalist in Media Bias................................................................................................. 21  
Some Present Trends in Media Bias........................................................................................................ 23  
Populism................................................................................................................................................. 23  
Symbiosis and Consolidation .................................................................................................................... 25  
Results of Media Bias............................................................................................................................. 28  
Import to Democracy............................................................................................................................... 28  
Research Question and Hypothesis........................................................................................................ 30

**Chapter Three: Scope and Methodology** ............................................................................................ 32  
Scope of the Study................................................................................................................................ 32  
Methodology of the Study....................................................................................................................... 33

**Chapter Four: The Study** .................................................................................................................. 36  
I. Italy....................................................................................................................................................... 36  
II. India..................................................................................................................................................... 47  
III. France.............................................................................................................................................. 58

**Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusion** .......................................................................................... 69  
Limitations of the Study and Ideas for Future Research........................................................................ 72

References.............................................................................................................................................. 74
Chapter One: Introduction

Importance of the Study

The news media play an exceedingly important role in modern society. Since the news media are the primary means by which information is spread through this society, it is important to understand who controls the messages contained in news media and how these messages are constructed and deployed. In many places, the news media-a vital part of society where people can come together and exchange ideas, information, and debate-has been given over, at least in part, to private corporations whose driving motive appears to be profit rather than providing an arena for constructive debate or the filling of a societal duty. Where the news media is government-run or regulated, there still remains a high chance that although such a system is run or regulated in the public name, it is not necessarily for the public good.

If we as a global society expect to further our experiments with democracy, such a furthering will surely necessitate a free and open news media, where participation and representation is accessible and open to all. A society in which the most visible and most influential news media (either corporate or ostensibly ‘public’) have little accountability and where the citizenry has pitifully little power over content would not appear to be a society in which democracy is highly valued or even sincerely practiced.

Given the vast audience that the news media reach, and the overall immutability of these media due to their closed and inaccessible natures, it becomes obvious that their content and influence would want to be examined in order to ensure that such was in the best interest of a democratic society. If the messages propagated by the news media are counter to those of a free and open democratic society, or are subject to censorship, distortion, or other falsity which does not accurately reflect democratic ideals, then we might say that the news media in question are at
best not fulfilling their roles, or, at worst, are actively working against democracy.

By examining via a series of case studies the situation of the news media in various countries, a pattern may be seen which shows that, indeed, the news media tend to propagate a vision of the world that is limited to the narrow interests and biases of their owners, linked heavily to capital and the status quo, and furthermore, these news media are characterized by a minimum of accountability and are inaccessible to the public at large. If the news media operate under, employ, and broadcast these biases to the population at large, democracy may be said to be compromised.

Statement of the Problem

This study attempts to gauge the situation of the news media by examining its place and operation in three countries. Beginning with the notion that the news media are an extension of the public sphere and are thus important outlets through which democracy flows, the study hopes to make clear that this is quite often not the case. Both public and private news media are covered by the study, which will explore if one or the other can be said to be doing a better job in furthering democracy, or if the news media as a whole is implicit in any certain behavior. The study will look at the drive towards privatization, issues of objectivity and partisanship, the role of money in the news media, the role of the journalist in the news media system, the dangers for democracy of a media that tends towards populism, and finally, the effect of the news media on democracy as a whole. Following these case studies a conclusion will be drawn as to the effect of a media bias on democratic society.
Definition of Terms

**News Media:** Used here to refer to televised and print news media, i.e. television news and mainstream newspapers or newsmagazines. Although there are certainly other forms of news media, these are the most established or most visible in most cases, and are thus used for the purpose of this study.

**Symbiosis:** Used here to refer to the phenomenon of two or more obstinately distinct entities (i.e., government and corporate) working together towards a desired end; or, likewise, different branches of a parent entity (i.e., subsidiaries or diversified holdings) working together towards a similar end.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

This thesis is made of five chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter Two provides a review of some of the literature concerning media bias in regards to the salient points mentioned above; this is followed by the research question. Chapter Three provides an explanation of the scope and methodology by which the study was conducted, as well as introducing the philosophical stances and theoretical framework through which the study was approached. Chapter Four is made up of three case studies where the media and their biases are examined in three separate countries, again, according to the points mentioned above. Finally, Chapter Five summarizes the findings and comes to a conclusion, with mention of limitations of this study and ideas for future research.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Bias

This paper takes as a philosophical assumption that the function of the news media should be to help create aware and informed citizens who have an understanding of the world and can further democratic functions to better society. In many senses, this is a typically Western, post-Enlightenment viewpoint, but it is one which large portions of the globe have coalesced around, at least in the abstract. The theoretical basis for this conception of the news media is that this media should have a responsibility to those it reaches, and, given that democracy and societal betterment would be the goal of any culture, it stands to reason that the news media should help along the way through information and debate. The news media should have a “primary responsibility to provide good public service” (Bertrand, 2000, p. 4) for the furtherance of democracy.

‘Social responsibility theory’, as this concept is known (McQuail, 2003; Gross, 1974; Goodwin & Smith, 1994; d’Haenens & Bardoel, 2004b), treats the news media as an “essential intermediary” on which everything in society depends (McQuail, p. 6). The news media has obligations, normative expectations, and accountability; the freedom of publication brings with it a responsibility and an accountability to society (McQuail). Since the members of the news media, despite these responsibilities, are not elected or even necessarily appointed based on competency, behavior codes have come into being, authored by various groups (Bertrand, 2000). An early, important, and highly influential code which fixed this idea of journalism in the public service was the American Hutchens Commission report of 1947 (d’Haenens & Bardoel, 2004b; Bertrand; McQuail; Knowlton & Parsons, 1995). This report established that a news media may
be private and apart from— that is, not owned or controlled by— the state, but that the news media was not an ordinary commercial enterprise like any other (Bertrand, p. 13). Press freedom, the document read, was a right, but a “conditional right” (McQuail, p. 53) based on the behavior of the news media. The media must be both responsible and responsive to the public (Bertrand, p. 13; d’Haenens & Bardoel, 2004b, p. 6). Although “a single uniform theory of the media’s social responsibility does not exist” (d’Haenens & Bardoel, 2004a, p. 1), this formulation of the social responsibility theory has proven to be an “essential point of reference” (McQuail, p. 55).

Of course, this theoretical basis for the behavior of the news media breaks down when we look at things on a global scale; there are many countries where democracy is not the goal, or is paid only lip service; this conception of media social responsibility can only happen in a democracy, according to Bertrand (2000, p. 5). There are those countries where societal betterment or advancement is seen as a concept limited to certain members of society, be it by sex, class, caste, or creed. In these countries the news media may not be philosophically charged with the task of bettering humanity or creating informed citizens; it may rather be an instrument of control or simply a form of entertainment. Even in self-identified democratic countries, the above assumption in favor of a responsible media may not be universally accepted; as mentioned above, there is no ‘uniform theory’.

However, for the purposes of this thesis, we will operate within this framework, one which identifies a free and responsible media as a key towards advancing democratic ways of life and benefiting humanity as a whole: a version of Habermas’s (1991) ‘public sphere’ where the news media and the public might be linked together in open debate, celebrating the “emancipatory heritage of the Enlightenment” (Johnson, 2006, p. 174). This thesis will furthermore operate under the idea that the most visible and influential news media, as intermediaries between
societal groups, owe it to the population to encourage debate and understanding as well as serve as founts of culture and enlightenment: that journalism be “a profession based on ethical principles” (Kieran, 1999, p. 8) and where duty is done to society (Gross, 1974, p. 49). Despite the utopian overtones present here, it would seem that a case can be made for the news media to have a clear social responsibility.

Introduction

News journalism occupies a vital role within society; for McChesney (1997), "no institution is more important to the public sphere" (p. 16). The public and their views are strongly influenced by the news media; indeed, much of life is viewed and understood via this lens (Radford, 2003). The importance of bias within the news media, stemming primarily from media owners and providers, is thus of primary importance since it affects the functioning of society and is deeply intertwined therein.

Following I will examine some of the literature touching on these ideas. The review of literature is divided into four main sections: I will look firstly at where the current idea of media bias comes from and how it has developed, examining especially the development of objectivity as a central concept and what that has brought with it. From its development, we will move on to its actual operation and effectuation, addressing along the way two important components of this operation: the role of money, and the role of journalists. The third section looks at two important developments in media bias at the turn of the century: the rise of populism as an acceptable media viewpoint, and the push towards heavy consolidation within the news media and symbiosis between different corporations and the government sector. Finally, I will look briefly at the visible and expected results of the current situation in news media, with a particular focus
on its import to democracy and the functioning of a free and open society.

The Development of a Media Bias within the News Media

Media bias is a touchy subject within the literature, and studies thereof tend to come under two forms: those authors who believe that a “bias” in favor of one government party over another is what all the fuss is about, and that mathematical models can definitively resolve the issue (Vatz, 2003; see, for example, Niven, 2002), and those who take bias as inherent but seek not to confine it to any certain political party preference (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; McChesney, 1997; Artz & Kamilipour, 2003). These latter authors therefore see bias as an institutional phenomenon inherent in the general global news media, and look thusly to define it and to investigate it as a structural phenomenon which has more to do with ideology and hegemony than party politics. Those authors who present the case of media bias as a mathematical model will not be dealt with in this paper, as it appears to lead to a narrowing down of factors and a reduction of media bias into favoritism for political party A or B, rather than the structural, institutional aspects of bias that I wish to study.

Common among some scholars is a sense that the current incarnation of news media bias is in part a symptom of governmental deregulation. While this deregulation is most visible in broadcast media, it can be argued that deregulation also brought with it a loosening of restrictions in the news media as a whole. For Artz (2003), "[w]hen national governments adopt market-driven policies of deregulation, privatization, and commercialization, they... [are] regulating away viable public media and cultural independence" (p. 6). The result, a privately-owned and operated media, is much less sensitive to the public interest or public influence - surely not a good sign for the democratic process. The inherent bias of private control thus
enters, and the public welfare is forgotten- "public media have been dismissed as tantamount to government propaganda, as if private broadcasters better represent the public good" (Artz, p. 10). Moyers (2005) proposes an outright collusion between government and the news media, with both seeing "eye to eye in putting the public's need for news second to free-market economics" (p. ix). Media bias is thus a natural part of privatization, according to McChesney (1997), since there exists no way that a privately-controlled media can be "neutral" (p. 7) in any real sense. It would seem, however, that one could make this statement about any form of media, regardless of its control, as in the case of quasi-socialist or socialist-influenced countries: surely such a media is not any more 'neutral' than its corporate counterparts.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) see the development of the current news media as a natural "outcome of the workings of market forces" (p. xii). Furthermore, as the news media has developed and modernized, the financial barriers to entry have raised (Baldasty 1992, p. 5; Herman & Chomsky, p. 4). At present, a large investment and plenty of monetary backing to keep a media outlet going are required to enter into the field (Starkey, 2006, p. 47). The result is that societal elites dominate ownership within this private and expensive news media (Herman & Chomsky, p. 2). It thus follows that the dominant bias present would be that of these elite owners- in essence, a "propaganda system for elite interests" (Edwards, 2005, p.2); other views are "brushed to the margins" (p. 10). Of course, the continued growth of advertising has also contributed greatly to the current situation, with the result that much of what we see in the news media is reflects the wants and needs of advertisers rather than the wants and needs of the community (McChesney, 1997, pp. 12-13). But would a bias really disappear in news media where the public had more of a say (i.e., public ownership or community ventures), or where the barriers of entry were lower (i.e., the internet or such forms of new media)? In the absence of
market forces would we lose bias, or would it simply develop or manifest itself differently?

Finally, coupled with the notion of a by-and-large for-profit news media is the continued absence of any real form of regulation which could aid in balancing out the information and viewpoints of privately-held media. The reality has been that the news media has been allowed to self-regulate in various forms throughout the world (Starkey, pp. 65-66); the result of this has been, according to Starkey, "ineffectual" (p. 65). However, even where regulation exists, it appears easy enough for canny media owners to bypass it, or for profit-hungry governments to fail to implement such regulations or make exemptions- in America, for example, Dunbar (2005) finds that the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), though tasked with regulating the industry, is staffed with former industry executives and functions off bribes and by and large without public participation. It is, for Dunbar, an “agency so thoroughly beholden to the industry it regulates that the goals of governance and the goals of business [are] at times nearly inseparable” (pp. 127-128). Though regulations may help address disparities, the mere existence of such legislation would likely not have much effect, given the apparent ease with which such laws are circumvented.

While it is certainly true that public forms of news media exist, they are increasingly marginalized (Artz, 2003). Furthermore, although many believe that this public news media is a “healthy alternative” to the for-profit media, the reality is that the public news media tend to “mimic” the corporate media, “repeating the offerings of… advertiser-supported media” (Hart, 2005, p. 55). In some countries, there is little difference between the two, even in ownership. In Italy, for example, the public media and the majority of the corporate media are controlled by the same man: Berlusconi (Moyers, 2005). While in theory public media should offer a much larger range of viewpoints, it seems this is not always the case.
**Partisanship vs Objectivity**

The development or identification of a news media bias is, for some, tied up in questions of partisanship versus objectivity. While objectivity has tended to be the rallying cry of large portions of the news media in the twentieth century, it remains largely an American concept-a “supreme deity” according to Mindich (1998, p.1); the “highest original moral concept ever developed in America and given to the world” (quoted by Blankenburg & Walden, 1977, p. 591). Mindich sees objectivity as arising in the United States in the early 1800s, becoming an established criterion for news media by the end of the nineteenth century (p. 11), largely as a response to the sensationalism of the partisan press (p. 39; see also Bagdikian, 1983, p. 179), but also as a result of modern forces: urbanization or industrialization (Baldasty, 1992, p. 4) and an increasing tendency towards a “scientific mindset” (Mindich, 1998, p. 95) of which objectivity was claimed as a major guiding element. The subsequent twentieth century tendency towards “postwar realism” and innovations such as wire services and journalism schools (Mindich, 1998, pp. 105-117; McChesney 1997, p. 13) set the place of objectivity and a “just the facts” attitude as the theoretical backbone of the news media- from whence it spread, given, as Pierre Bourdieu (1998) puts it, “the symbolic dominance” of the American model (p. 41) and the foreign importation of that model (see, for example, Peer, 2007).

This is not to say, however, that overtly partisan news media have gone anywhere: even in the United States, where objectivity holds great sway, a partisan renaissance of some sorts has appeared of late (viz Fox News and its liberal challengers). Around the world, the partisan media has remained strong, particularly in print media; after all, it is an older and more traditional form of journalism, and in many places the outlook has been one in which “[n]o one worried that
newspapers were partisan so long as the public were free to choose from a wide range of opinions” (Edwards & Cromwell, 2006, p. 9). Baldasty in a way praises the partisan press, seeing an expansive forum for “essays, argument, and counterargument”; despite the obvious partisan bias, Baldasty (1992) claims the existence of a “fervent and wide-ranging debate” (p. 143). While this may be true in some examples, the partisan press in many countries certainly entertains very little real debate – fervency, yes, but how inclusive is its nature? If we accept that the partisan media has, in many places, ‘given way’ to the commercial (and usually self-identified ‘objective’ media), as McChesney (1997) states, we should keep in mind, then, that a partisan media is by no means a more self-evidently free, true, or authentic form of journalism. Indeed, its near-disappearance in some countries seems to have led to hand-wringing; in those countries where it is alive and well there seems to be no equivalent cheering in its favor.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that partisanship has its strengths- most notably a lack of commercialization and the accompanying control. Yet objectivity, or some semblance thereof, still has in its favor the idea that with its lack of explicit tilt and “scientific” approach, bias is somehow mitigated or made obvious. However, Lewis (2001) notes that objectivity “tends to promote a specific ideology... a specific philosophical assumption about where the truth lies” (quoted in Radford, p. 88). A dichotomy is thus formed (Mindich, 1998, p. 7); “the model tends to assume that both sides will always be speaking partial truths... [so] it is easy to infer that the whole truth must lie somewhere in the middle”- an “implausible” situation, according to Lewis (quoted in Radford, 2003, p. 88). For Bagdikian (1983), journalism is “essentially subjective” (p. 34), making objectivity a very difficult fit indeed. Radford sums up this “agnostic objectivity” of presenting conflicting views minus any “subjective” commentary as giving simply “both sides and a shrug” (p. 90).
McChesney (1997) comes to the conclusion that journalism can never really be wholly neutral: instead of heading off on a wild goose chase in search of this neutrality, McChesney suggests we might instead simply “de-emphasize” neutrality, though he admits that such a thing would be difficult given the current climate. Indeed, doing so would involve dealing with a substantial population who often sincerely believe in objectivity and are frequently quick to its defense. Community involvement, which McChesney continually promotes, is unlikely to change such an all-encompassing cultural philosophy.

Objectivity also brings with it an increased reliance on “authoritative” sources of information (Mindich, 1998, p. 75), ranging from government statements to corporate press releases, the idea being that only the facts are presented that way: “interpretation”, write Blankenburg and Walden (1977), is seen as “creeping advocacy” (p. 592). Radford (2003) points out, though, that in leaving claims and interpretation to the “experts” in the name of objectivity is ultimately flawed, as it reduces the role of the journalist “from claim analyzer to claim deliverer” (p. 89). Objectivity quickly becomes official and “establishmentarian” (Bagdikian, 1983, p. 179). Again, this would not seem to be a hallmark of objectivity in and of itself—nearly any philosophy has the potential to be adopted and propagated by the elite. Although it seems clear that such an adoption has taken place in the case of objectivity, little is said by these authors as to the procedures whereby partisanship could become similarly entrenched or at least a perennial feature of the news media landscape.

It appears, then, that the form of media bias I am looking at stems at least in part from an exaggerated respect by the news media for objectivity, though the partisan press, far from being blameless, has its share of biases as well. The assumption that there might be one best form of journalism which might reduce biases also lingers, though there seems little to suggest it.
Operation of Media Bias

We see then that the ground for this conception of media bias seems set through the transformation to a for-profit system of journalism where regulation is by and large absent and the public are not generally active participants in the media. Day-to-day operations by the news media propagate bias through various institutional processes (with a heavy emphasis on profit) as well as through the individual journalists, who may or may not be aware of their place in the system. Following I will examine some of the literature on these processes, as well as some of the literature dealing with the place of the journalist in the media.

Processes

Herman and Chomsky (1988) propose that the news media practice bias by applying a series of “filters”, which they see as, in essence, a propaganda model (p. 2). This model helps to keep debate within bounds (p. 298), as would be required by the elite who dominate the media (p. 2). The way the “news” is selected and framed will, of course, affect people (Druckman & Parkin, 2005). People can be “given what they want”, but only within a certain narrow range, as defined by the news media (McChesney 2005, p. 17). This framing, construction, and selectivity allow the media to spread certain messages and influences to the public (Mazzoleni, 2003, pp. 10-11; Druckman & Parkin, p. 1030). The messages are very much in favor of the status quo, and what is “news” is subject to the caprices of the news media: if it fits their value system and the messages they wish to convey, only then is it considered “news” (Mazzoleni, pp. 11-12). Meaning becomes decontextualized and distorted (Radford, 2003, p. 67). For McCombs, Shaw,
and Weaver (1997), these messages can be considered ‘agendas’ which are set by the news media through the use of selection and presentation; this “framing” allows the controllers of the media to retain power over the message. Hall finds that this Gramscian hegemony is certainly real and the process through which ideology is spread, but argues that these messages, no matter the cunning with which they are framed, may be read in different ways by different people (1980); nevertheless, he appears to concede that despite this possibility of interpretation, it is indisputable that the media attempt to set the agenda (Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Robert, 1978). These elites are, then, through this agenda-setting and framing, leading or moving society towards some sort of hegemony (Artz, 2003, p. 16)- an “establishment-supported ‘consensus’ position” (Hart, 2005, p. 53) is seen as the only way to think. The problem here, of course, is that elites tend to attempt to move society in whatever realm they belong to- surely Chomsky is an elite (cultural or intellectual rather than commercial) who engages in similar behavior. There seems to be little support to the notion that a publicly-controlled media would be any less filtered or propagandist (in whatever sense) or that elites would not form within that milieu; the problem then, seems to have less to do with the media sui generis and more to do with societal structure.

Pierre Bourdieu (1998) sees that anything serious or in-depth in such an environment is pushed aside in favor of whatever has been approved; there is an avoidance of any intellectual complexity (p. 3). There is a “compromise to narrowness” (p. 10) and a tendency to conformity (p. 15). The public is left out; journalists control access to public space in Bourdieu’s view (p. 46). And yet, what if, despite this general haranguing of the public and their taste, a publicly-controlled or more “democratic” media controlled public space? Would we really end up with a by-and-large “intellectually complex” and wide-open media landscape, as Bourdieu pines for, or are popular tastes just that, and complexity relegated to a niche in any situation? And who
defines intellectualism if not the cultural elite, of whom Bourdieu is one? It would seem we
would still end up with an elite domination; “intellectualism” by itself is not the antithesis of
conformity or compromise. And would the premises of intellectualism or seriousness in and of
themselves be sufficient to draw people away from the more populist material the news media
tempts its public with? The existing global situation appears to make that proposition anything
but a given. Nevertheless, it seems clear that a tightly-controlled media with a bias towards
narrowness and simplification would not be beneficial for democracy.

*The Importance of Money in Media Bias*

If much of the debate about media bias is aimed at for-profit news outlets, it makes sense
to study the place of money in the news media equation. For Newman and Scott (2005), it comes
down to the fact that “newsgathering [has become] just another way to generate profits” (p. 3).
Baldasty (1992) concurs, writing of “news values that [have] exalted profit-making at the
expense of older notions of news as political information or persuasion” (p. 4). The end goal is
money; “[h]ard news gets diluted and manipulated by private interests with financial motives”
(Radford, 2003, p. 14)- be they corporate owners or commercial sponsors. News is “dumbed
down” in order to reach the widest possible audience so that the owners might reap in ever-
higher profits (Radford, p. 70), and news is “re-defined” within a business context (Baldasty, p.
4). Demers (2003) agrees that chasing money at the expense of solid journalism has resulted in
“less emphasis on... quality and a diversity of ideas” (p. 179). Yet there seems to be an element
of nostalgia in the writings of these authors, as though the media had a “golden age” and at some
time and in some country the press existed as a noble, almost mythological concept until the
advent of nineteenth- or twentieth-century large-scale capitalism. There is a danger here in this
looking backwards, and furthermore, there is little looking forwards. Given that capitalism (or the basic concepts thereof) does not appear to be going away with any alacrity, what does this mean for the most visible, for-profit news media? Is it forever stuck in its situation? And yet even without the notion of capital, it seems likely that any media owners would lust after something- power, prestige, or any such notion; unmitigated beneficence has not heretofore been in evidence among media moguls. In short, the absence of a capitalist bias does not mean the absence of any bias.

Edwards and Cromwell (2006) note that any idea of press neutrality must inherently be compromised when money enters the picture (p. 6). Commercial media has the additional constraint of intervention by both the owners and sponsors. Topics that the owners may not agree with or want presented will be avoided (Radford, 2003, p. 14), as will those that might offend sponsors- there are “advertisers to placate” (Hart, 2005, p. 56). The connection between the news media and these corporate sponsors is so strong in some countries (the United States), that Hart argues that debating media bias “misses the point. Media with the most resources and power in the United States are alternately timid or in the service of Corporate America [sic]” (p. 75). The dominant capitalist classes set the agenda and ideology, as in Gramsci’s conception (Nemeth, 1980). Edwards and Cromwell (2006) sum up the idea that anyone who would propose placing money ahead of legitimate journalism, as is the case in a for-profit media system, is espousing a “psychopathic set of values” (p. 4). Indeed, much of the problem is with the market itself for McChesney (1997), and these capitalist notions have always been inherent parts of modern-day “professional” journalism, “albeit discreetly” (p. 49). He allows that some commercial news media may be inevitable, but asks that it not be the dominant power. But who will decide this? Corporations have as much power acting as lobbyists to government as they do acting as
advertisers to the media, and, furthermore, when there is a system of corporate and government consolidation and symbiosis (discussed below) the chances of such a happy situation arising seem very slim. Money, then, would appear to play a strong role in the forming and continuation of news media bias; at the same time, the assumption that without money, bias would lessen would not appear to be the case either.

*The Role of the Journalist in Media Bias*

If so much of media bias revolves around media ownership and money, where does the individual journalist enter the picture? What is their place within the greater news media? Bourdieu (1998) sees journalists as political actors (if not “full-fledged”) simply through the power they wield (p. 4); for him, the “very structure of the journalism field” imposes a specific set of visions on the journalist and the public (p. 2). In this fashion, journalists submit to the higher powers as need be. Bourdieu sees them as a “subproletariat” who are “forced into self-censorship” (p. 6) and who manipulate the more they themselves are manipulated (p. 17). “[T]hose who submit,” Bourdieu writes, “...are rewarded accordingly” (p. 37). At the same time, he recognizes that those journalists who are most visible to the public are simply speakers, and in no way have control over the “instruments of production” (p. 13); those are owned by the elites. In any case, the whole situation is one of “structural corruption” (p. 17); the malaise extends into every aspect, leaving journalists few options.

McChesney (2005) agrees, indicating that journalists have taken refuge in their “professional practices” as a panacea of sorts (pp. 14-15): although the media owners may be biased, by joining the cult of objectivity, journalists can practice their craft unscathed. The reality, though, for McChesney (2005), is that this “professionalism” has become
institutionalized and journalists have simply internalized the “commercial needs and political interests of media owners” (p. 15). We thus end up with journalists who are “oblivious or resigned to the compromises with authority” (p. 16). Even at a lower level than that of ownership, there may be pressures: although the news department is theoretically separated from the editorial department, the latter may well exert soft pressure or influence on the former (Druckman & Parkin, 2005, p. 1030).

Herman and Chomsky (1988) continue in this vein, agreeing that pressure on journalists is not always overt, and that submissive behavior is internalized: journalists are “adapted to the constraints” (p. xii). These journalists may practice self-censorship and other such concessions to power; they have, according to Herman and Chomsky, “adjust[ed] to the realities of source and media organizational requirements” (p. xii) (i.e., constraints) and behave accordingly.

Herman and Chomsky go out of their way to note that this behavior is more or less internalized and not part of any grand conspiracy, and Radford agrees, believing that there is no “insidious plot” on behalf of journalists; they are “victims” (p. 68). Even if journalists might wish to adopt a less conciliatory and more aggressive tone, they have little autonomy in McChesney’s (1997) view; “they are fighting an uphill battle” (p. 58). Yet, Starkey (2006) concedes that there remains much debate on the exact place and consciousness of individual journalists within Bourdieu’s “structural corruption”: he sums up the situation by proposing that at best journalists are “underpinned” by constraints; at worst they are “deliberately biased, often in order to pursue political agendas that aim to distort democratic processes” (p. 157). Journalists appear to find themselves in a very uncertain situation.

Is there any place, then, for an independently-minded journalist? Is not the hierarchical nature of news media imparting the same constraints on journalists as greater hierarchical society
would on the public? Little is said as to the essential make-up of these organizations, with the blame being placed variously on journalists, editors, owners, and everyone else. Bourdieu’s (1998) blanket “structural corruption” comes closest to a condemnation of the entire situation, but he provides little identification of how change might come about. Machesney (1997) proposes “progressive social unionism” (p. 72) as a way for journalists to retain autonomy, but this does not seem likely to erase internalized biases: as Alterman (2005) writes, journalists may be socially liberal already, but this is “offset by their commitment to objectivity and professionalism, coupled with a similar —though largely un-remarked-upon—class bias toward a relatively conservative, business-friendly outlook on economic issues” (p. 14). In other words, unionism or moderately “left” social views are unlikely to make much of a dent on the deeper “class” beliefs of many journalists. It seems that attempts to reform the journalist are not enough; the entire structure may need to be reformed or demolished: a drastic measure, certainly, but perhaps necessary given the institutional nature of the problem. As regards media bias, however, it appears that while journalists may share some of the blame, they may be far from its overreaching source; in a structuralist view of the situation, they are but one small aspect.

Some Present Trends in Media Bias

Populism

Since an important aspect of media bias evidently involves the “dumbing-down” of news to suit a larger audience, the concept of populism (or neo-populism, as the case may be) is an important one to consider, and one that has been a growing issue in recent years (Mazzolini,
2003). As a news media outlet searches for wider appeal, populism lays directly ahead of it. It is, in fact, “almost inevitable”, though of course forms may vary by country (Blumler, 2003, p. xv). Blumler goes on to define this populism as an “emotive, sensational” form of journalism, catering to popular tastes and centering on scandals and a “personalization of politics” (p. xvii).

Overall, there has been little attention paid to this sort of media populism in the scholarly literature (Mazzolini, 2003, p. 2), although it should be of some interest: media populism, Mazzolini writes, is “endemic” in many countries in order to “appeal to audiences” (p. 8). Journalism in many situations has come to be “characterized by a corporate and professional outlook and practice, geared to respond primarily to the increasing ‘popular’ demand for entertainment, spectacle, gossip, and the like” (Mazzolini, p. 16). Media populism, Mazzolini notes, is also important for its links to political neo-populism, in the form of extreme right-wing movements which reject pluralism and debate (p. 4); political populism in many countries is tied to this far right neo-populist outlook and the news media can, knowingly or not, very easily make itself at home therein in order to make more money (p. 7). This issue is especially relevant in light of the fact that this neo-populism is either on the rise, or well established in many democratic countries, (Mazzolini, 2003) and the tabloidization of “serious” news outlets is a perfect fit for the sensationalist and reactionary behaviors of such neo-populist movements.

For Bourdieu (1998), “dumbing down” in the news media is a given, tabloid or “serious” news media alike, and anti-intellectualism is thus a natural corollary, a “structural constraint” (p. 58). Anything that remains is “too cerebral” and is “doomed” in Radford’s (2003) words; what we are presented with in an insult to our intelligence (p. 70). Complex issues are simplified and framed with leading questions (Radford, pp. 86-87). Mazzolini (2003) notes that although this dumbing-down is taken to extremes in the tabloid media (pp. 15-16), wherever it appears,
harmful societal elements may be given “media legitimatization” under the guise of a populist outlook from the news media (p. 7). Again, this would be an apt description of the media attention paid to varied extreme right-wing neopopulist groups in a number of countries. The relatively recent emergence of this situation in places such as India, France, or Italy means that, as Mazzolini mentioned in the citation above, little attention has been given on the whole to the idea of a news media lending legitimization to neopopulist social movements. Of further interest is that the increasing “dumbing down” of serious news sources means that the lines between the prestige media and the tabloid media may be blurred, turning the prestige media into, in essence, a “serious tabloid” media. There does appear to be a lack of research into this phenomenon and its specifics in various countries where the threat is real or the process already underway. Populism (and the dangers for democracy that neo-populism encompasses) is, in short, a very possible consequence of a biased and unaccountable media.

Symbiosis and Consolidation

An additional aspect of media bias is the growing corporatization of the news media and the resulting hegemony, which may occur in partnership with other corporations or with a national government, but which extends its influence on society as a whole. According to Artz (2003), since elites own the corporations and control the government, it should come as no surprise that for-profit media is so widely accepted and promoted: “elites everywhere have adopted the mantra of deregulation, privatization, and commercialization” (p. 10). This hegemony is fostered between various corporate branches for the simple reason that “capitalist hegemony needs parallel media hegemony” in order to indoctrinate the masses to whatever the desired behavior may be- to convince the “subordinate classes” to indulge in “particular cultural
practices within the context of capitalist norms” (pp. 16-17). In the case of government, there is a sense of indebtedness on both sides: each is grateful to the other for the freedoms and allowances made for them (Herman & Chomsky, pp. 19-25; Murphy, 2003). Herman and Chomsky propose that the media present a world wherein the “interests and concerns of the sellers, the buyers, and the government and private institutions” (p. 303) are those presented; their desired hegemony is thus promoted.

Furthermore, this symbiosis between corporations, the media, and the government has gone global, and with the news media owned and controlled in many cases by transnational or multinational corporations, the threat of this hegemony becoming all-dominant is increased (Artz & Kamalipour, 2003). This hegemony is controlled, according to Herman and Chomsky (1988) by the usual culprits: “the government, the leaders of the corporate community, the top media owners and executives” and some scattered other elites (p. xii), as in Althusser’s view where ideology is extended by such means (Resch, 1992). There is, in other words, a consolidation between the most powerful members of society which is reflected in the news media. If we add to that the continued incestuous relations between these parties, especially in the form of consolidation, mergers, acquisitions and the like (McChesney, 1997), it becomes clear that this elite family is chummy indeed.

While in most countries, there have traditionally been a fair amount of governmental controls on the news media (in terms of ownership, limits, restrictions, etc.), these controls have faded away somewhat with the advent of deregulation and free-market economics (discussed above). These rules were meant to protect or promote diversity through limiting the amount of media under one owner, or the diversification into other branches of media ownership by the same individual or corporation (Horwitz, 2005). What we have seen of late, however, is just
what these rules protected against: the news media now has its hands in other forms of media, or in other outlets within the same media (multiple newspapers, for example; or a combination of newspapers and television stations). The diversification goes further as news media owners expand outside news media altogether (Horwitz, p. 186) into entertainment, property, or even government. While some may consider a greater number of news outlets to equal a greater diversity of sources or range of opinion, this is not always the case (Caputo, 2008): as Horwitz writes, “[s]ynergies of common ownership, especially when they are news outlets, become the vehicle for the outlets to promote, not compete with, the other outlets” (p. 186). No matter what, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony (Boggs, 1976) and Althusser’s idea of a structuralism of semi-autonomous parts forming a whole (Resch, 1992) seem easy to spot in this environment.

McChesney (1997) argues that the rot sets in very early, with the concept of objectivity itself as it is taught to journalists carrying with it an unquestioned capitalist hegemony; objective journalism has “effectively internalized corporate capitalism as the natural order for a democracy” (p. 14). If, in the eyes of everyone from the owners to the journalists, capitalism and corporatism go hand in hand with democracy, it seems only natural that a convergence of these affected parties would be the outcome. As a society moving in such a direction became the norm, partisan or obviously biased news sources might be freely admitted, as long as the underlying hegemony mentioned above remains the same.

What is the result, then, in countries where media ownership rules have been relaxed, and where there is a heavy symbiosis between the media, industry, and/or government? Is the public pleased by a diverse press, even if the owners are part of the same group of moneyed elites or political cronies? Can an independent news media survive amidst this consolidation and symbiosis?
Consolidation and symbiosis would appear to be important trends to consider when discussing media bias, and are especially relevant in exploring the situation from a structural viewpoint.

Results of Media Bias

If the news media is controlled by wealthy elites in collusion with other powerful forces, and if they have drifted increasingly further from their stated mission in a quest for money and power, what are the effects on society?

We can imagine that journalists will continue to internalize their submission; they will, according to Herman and Chomsky (1988), “with complete integrity and goodwill... convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news ‘objectively’” (p. 2). Instead of serving a societal purpose, these journalists (and the media as a whole) serve the dominant elite (Herman & Chomsky, p. 298). So, as Radford (2003) writes, if we accept that the goal of the media should be similar to that described above—“the public’s watchdog,” empowering and educating society—the media have “fail[ed] at their job” (p. 316). Big business will be permitted to remain in control, and the population will find their minds enfeebled by a media that “encourages a weak political culture that makes depoliticization, apathy and selfishness rational choices for the citizenry” (McChesney, 1997, p. 7). None of this would appear to be healthy for democracy.

Import to Democracy

The current situation of the news media may be a grave threat for democracy, according to some. If we understand that large portions of the world’s media are for-profit enterprises, with,
as Moyers (2005) writes, the tendency of the media to work on “big-business principles, to exalt commercial values at the expense of democratic value” [sic] (p. viii), we should understand as well that “capitalism will not willingly advance either democratic international institutions or democratic cultural exchanges” (Artz, 2003, p. 23). Or, as Herman and Chomsky (1988) write, “the free market does not yield a neutral system” (p. 14). The news media may continue to assert that they are furthering democracy and empowerment via populism and framed debates, claiming that they are serving a “popular demand” for such sensationalism and simplification (Radford, 2003, p. 70). In fact, Radford asserts, all this “manipulation” is “in a real way, a threat to democracy”: the exchange of ideas is limited and communication controlled, the very antithesis of democracy (pp. 315-316). Bourdieu (1998) agrees, seeing a “threat to political life and to democracy itself” (p. 10), since, as Baldasty (1992) notes, “the press will serve democracy only when such service is financially profitable” (p. 9)- a scenario that might rarely if ever happen.

Vital elements of democratic participation- news regarding public affairs and issues of societal importance- are made “obtuse, confusing and boring” by the news media; even the range of debate is narrowed in this process of depoliticization (McChesney,1997, p. 16). Again, the free-market system is called into question; Horwitz (2005) writes that a “market-driven media system” will naturally fail in providing exposure to certain concepts, “especially content essential to democratic deliberation and self-government” (p. 196). Habermas’s (1991) notion of the public sphere, so essential for democracy, would seem to be in grave danger.

In places, then, where for-profit, heavily biased news media rules, has democracy actually been weakened? Can we see any specific examples where the concept of democracy itself is threatened in some way as a result of the current dominant news media system? Even where news media is publicly owned, might not democracy be weakened by governmental
actions or a dominant bias?

Research Question and Hypothesis

Although much has been written on news media bias in general, we are still left with some questions that may be examined by looking to specific instances or situations. Is there anywhere where the news media is any less subject to bias constraints? Does media bias have an observable effect on the general level of discourse and practice of democracy anywhere? Although a number of researchers come down heavily on the private media, does a government-controlled media actually lessen media bias in any way? Can an independent news media survive or prosper in an era or society of capitalism and media consolidation? Is media populism a scam foisted on a population secretly thirsting for intellectualism, as several researchers claim, or is it something more? What are the effects on democracy given the media-government symbiosis visible in a number of countries?

I propose that capital (or, relatedly, the status quo as defined by elite members of society) is the key to understanding this bias in any situation, regardless of culture; for the purposes of this paper, I will examine the situation in France, Italy, and India. Although these countries have fairly diverse news media, and different governmental approaches to news media regulation and funding, I propose that it is invariably the populist and status quo sources of information that remain most visible and set the trends for society via a structuralist concept of “deeply-rooted hegemony” (Resch, 1992, p. 28). This trend can be seen in all three countries, despite their diverse populations and histories; neither does democratic governance appear to have any major effect on controlling media bias. I propose furthermore that an independent news media is in absolute danger in this environment, and must in any situation rely on outside capital to survive,
thus undermining any form of independence and encouraging compromise. Finally, I propose that the free-market system of journalism has done nothing to enhance real democracy in any of these three countries, and, if anything has weakened it under the guise of doing the opposite.
Chapter Three: Scope and Methodology

Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is to examine the presence of bias in the news media through the examination of three case studies: the news media in Italy, France, and India, respectively. The scope is limited to traditional forms of news media, namely print journalism (newspapers and magazines) and television. While new media forms such as the internet are exciting and may develop into powerful forms of news media in these countries, this new media will not be included in the scope of this study.

These three countries have been selected due to personal familiarity, but also due to their diversity and simultaneous similarities. All three have had different experiences with media, and different developments of news media within these. France (and to some extent Italy) was a colonial power; India was the colonized. India has a substantially larger population than either France or Italy, along with the accompanying linguistic and ethnic diversity. France and Italy are both modernized countries, whereas India is in the midst of a long and slow transformation in that direction. Nevertheless, these three countries share similarities: they are all, despite various hiccups along the way, confirmed democracies, all three of which have been heavily influenced by socialist theory in some way. All three have a more-or-less open and private (i.e., non-state-controlled) news media sector acting in parallel to the state-funded media, and, finally, all three have a reasonably long tradition of journalism and news media which allow us to trace some of their varied histories.

The study is thus divided into three case studies. In each, a historical background of the news media in the respective country is given, followed by an examination of that news media.
according to some of the most important aspects raised in the review of the literature: i.e., the role of privatization, partisanship vs. objectivity, the importance of money, the place of the journalist, the role of populism, areas of consolidation and symbiosis, and overall import to democracy. In this way I hope to shed light on some of the questions posed above.

Methodology of the Study

The research method used in this study is that of textual research, specifically a critical/cultural approach (Rubin, Rubin & Piele, 2005). Thus, the ideological biases (messages) and societal biases (structures) of the news media and their resulting effects on each population will be studied from a perspective of Marxist criticism.

Rather than examining these situations from a traditional, orthodox Marxist viewpoint, I have chosen to operate from a standpoint closer to that of structural Marxism, looking especially to Althusser and Gramsci. Again, a dogmatic approach of strictly structuralist Marxism will not be abided by; it will serve rather to inform the overall Marxist criticism. Finally, Habermas’s concept of the public sphere (1989) will provide a background as to the grounding, basis, and overarching rationale of the study.

Louis Althusser, beginning with the ideas of Marx, takes Marx’s theories in a structuralist direction, suggesting that all the elements of an institution (in the case of this study, the news media) are separate structures, but all work together to a certain end. That is to say, an institution may be comprised of varied branches (i.e., economic, political, ideological), each of which may have some autonomy, but which are ultimately connected. Althusser refers to these branches as ISAs, or ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’, the ‘ideological’ portion key here in that it denotes a
moving away from Marx’s specifically economically-based essentialism towards a concept where ideology gains in importance. The economic aspect is certainly still important, but social subjects are elevated amidst an ideology-shaping structural background of ISAs (Resch, 1992): the base/superstructure relationship. There are certainly valid criticisms of Althusser and the structural approach itself; this study will not be concerned with these but will rather use Althusser’s ideas more generally. In this study, the news media for each country will be examined using Althusser’s structural concepts so that the intertwining of each element in favor of ideology will be visible.

Antonio Gramsci also provides a useful approach to examining media bias, also in the Marxist tradition. Like Althusser, Gramsci casts off the strictly economic aspects of orthodox Marxism in favor of elevating the role of ideology. Importantly, Gramsci stresses the significance of recognizing hegemony, specifically the hegemony maintained and promoted by the ruling classes through “speculative world views” (Nemeth, 1980). For Gramsci, this consensus may be achieved through threats, but in advanced societies this is done more often through ‘popular consensus’: media bias, for the purposes of this study. Gramsci also provides us with a certain notion of praxis, a unification of theory and commitment: praxis, according to Gramsci, urges us to expose the ruling hegemony and, indeed, create total change, a ‘counter-hegemony’ through an organic transformation of consciousness (Nemeth; Boggs, 1976). Using Gramsci’s theories, then, this study examines media bias as an aspect or manifestation of hegemony and as a tool for the achieving of popular consensus. Additionally, it places the researcher in the spot of exposing this hegemony and also making steps to change it: the researcher cannot afford to be disinterested.

Finally, the ideas of Jürgen Habermas provide the study with a basis as to the preferred
role of news media. Habermas proposes the idea of the Öffentlichkeit, or public sphere, where
dialogue and views are freely exchanged for the betterment of democracy. This public sphere,
however, could now be in a marked decline, particularly due to rise of the commercial mass
media; Habermas sees an entire structural transformation of the public sphere towards a
‘bourgeois public sphere’ led by the ruling classes; individuals become progressively
disenfranchised (Johnson, 2006). Nevertheless, for Habermas, this public sphere is of “ongoing
importance and relevance” (Johnson, 2006, p. 12); it is essential for the workings of democracy.
Using Habermas as a basis, this study works from the idea that a news media where the public
have a real say is indispensable for democracies such as France, Italy, and India, and that the
difficulty is in recognizing and counteracting the hegemony wrought by this transformation of
the public sphere into something entirely apart from the population of each country.
Chapter Four: The Study

I. Italy

Historical Overview

Italy has a population of nearly sixty million (ISTAT, 2008) and has been a parliamentary, democratic republic in the modern form since 1946. Newspapers have traditionally been the medium of choice for news, but the advent of television and subsequent deregulation of broadcast media, paired with the intensely regional nature of the Italian press, has placed television at the forefront. Indeed, although Italy has been said to have had a highly developed print media in the past, the situation today is one which is "underdeveloped", with a news reading public among the lowest in Europe (Mancini, 2000, p. 319). Newspapers still provide a certain status or quality not attributed to television news, but any study of the Italian news media must concede the dramatically greater importance of television news in Italian society, and, importantly, its connection to the government by way of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Television in Italy was traditionally under tight governmental control through the single state-controlled broadcasts of Radio Audizioni Italiane (RAI, now Radiotelevisione Italia but retaining the former initials). In 1963, the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) gained control of the government on a ticket of wide-ranging social reform aimed at transforming Italy into a more modern social-democratic state, a component of which was the loosening of the government's say over RAI's framing of news. In 1975, RAI was dissolved into two channels; these two channels were staffed and run along party lines (corresponding more or less to a Catholic/lay
divide). Further splits and branching into other television and radio channels saw this party line division, called *lottazione*, continue, with the effect that each channel contained and propagated an identifiable and distinct party line (Hibberd, 2007).

Just following this development, the broadcast media was deregulated altogether after a Constitutional Court ruling in 1976. Lack of any political framework for this post-deregulation environment, however, led to a situation where the Italian broadcast media was essentially without any real regulation at all throughout the 1970s and 80s (Hibberd, 2007). It was in this environment that then-businessman Silvio Berlusconi began by launching television stations at a local level, adding channels and networks to his portfolio before eventually moving up to become owner of the largest national private network, Mediaset. Berlusconi eventually turned towards politics, and in 1994 his right-wing Forza Italia took control of the government, putting Berlusconi in control of Italy, and thus of RAI. Italy's highly unstable coalition politics mean that Berlusconi has been in and out of office in the intervening years, but as current prime minister, his command of RAI coupled with his media holdings make him very important in a discussion of the country's news media landscape.

Examination

*Development and Privatization*

Privatization was part of a continuing Europe-wide push towards economic liberalism and a free-market approach towards broadcast media. The result within Italy is a print media that is by-and-large for-profit and under the control of large corporations, and a television duopoly, split more or less evenly between the public (i.e., government-run, though commercial) RAI
network and the private commercial network Mediaset. This duopoly reaches perhaps 90% of the Italian television audience (Hibberd, 2007). There is, in effect, no obvious source for non-commercialized audiovisual news, as RAI, despite its public status, continues to devote more and more time to advertisements (Mazzoleni, 2000). As for newspapers, the somewhat limited print journalism market in Italy means that all the major newspapers in the country are owned by large industrial groups. *Corriere della Sera*, a contender for the most widely-read national daily, is owned by multinational corporation RCS Media Group; *La Stampa*, another high-circulation daily, is owned by multinational car manufacturer Fiat (Caputo, 2007). Overall, newspapers are in the hands of big business (“Daussault’s Assault,” 2004). The few papers not owned by large, diversified corporations are political party papers, essentially party organs subsidized by the party (in effect, the government) itself. The result of this heavy private and industrial ownership is that the elite—those who have the financial resources—are those who control the private media. The fact that the largest private media holder, Berlusconi, also controls the public media (RAI) means that privatization does not appear to have led to any form of media plurality, but rather a media consensus in favor of the biases of the elite.

Regulation seems to have had little effect. As mentioned above, regulation was essentially non-existent for many years; certainly no laws have stopped Berlusconi from "exercising excessive control" of the media (“Turning it Off,” 2003, p. 56). In the last decade, there have been periodic half-hearted attempts by left-wing coalition governments during their brief tenures to introduce laws limiting media holdings or checking the power of advertising; nothing concrete has materialized, however. It can be argued whether this lack of regulation is due to sheer difficulty or to unwillingness on the part of politicians wedded to the status quo (Hibberd, 2007), but the fact is that Italy, despite its modern parliamentary democracy, is unable
to regulate its media in a satisfactory fashion, one that would place Habermas's public sphere first and foremost and act to check the effects of Gramsci’s hegemony. At this point, it appears that any regulatory change will come from without (i.e., the European Union) before it arises from within, and, given the EU propensity towards privatization, will likely fail to satisfy at a democratic level as well.

As it stands in its current incarnation, Italian news media is primarily a televised phenomenon, deregulated (even unregulated), nearly entirely commercial, and to a large degree in the hands of one man. Outside of television lie the newspapers, mostly owned by large corporations, with the remaining newspapers being party organs. Lawmakers appear powerless to push through legislation. In such a situation, the media bias is acutely in favor of its elite owners.

**Partisanship and Objectivity**

Italy has traditionally had a thriving partisan press, mostly in the form of party newspapers. This is probably a reflection of a tendency in Italy towards party membership; historically, party members would be expected to read their party’s newspapers. This phenomenon has changed recently, with a number of party newspapers disappearing or substantially lowering their circulations, perhaps due to the growing preference for television. However, despite the lower profile of party newspapers and their obvious partisan natures, partisanship itself has gone nowhere in Italy: while there is some pretence at objectivity, newspapers (and, to a large degree, television) are permeated with a partisan outlook. In fact, it is an "accepted fact of life in Italy", and partiality is "rarely, if ever, contested" (Starkey, 2006, p. 53). Thus, *Corriere della Sera* is mildly leftist, and economically liberal; *la Repubblica* similarly
so, with a small bent towards progressive ideas; *il Giornale* free-market conservative, *il Manifesto* communist, and so on. It goes without saying that the party newspapers, such as Gramsci’s *l’Unità* would be partisan papers, but the remaining papers usually adopt the partisan qualities of their editors- *il Giornale*, for example, is owned by Berlusconi via his brother and while not a party organ, follows Berlusconi’s political outlook.

Italian television revolves around Berlusconi as well. His Mediaset network of three privately-owned channels feature a "hugely disproportionate amount" of positive Berlusconi-related news (Hibberd, 2001, p.157), and lean heavily towards his views. The public network, RAI, finds its place complicated by the Italian system of *lottazione*, whereby different channels are staffed and run by different political parties: nevertheless, Berlusconi retains overall control (though this can occasionally be frustrated). Berlusconi has on numerous occasions thundered against content on RAI that he disagrees with, and several journalists have been fired and television programs censored at Berlusconi’s decree. It would appear that although, thanks to *lottazione* (though no longer as prevalent as it once was), the fractured RAI system is already rather partisan, Berlusconi is attempting to refashion it along partisan lines loyal only to himself.

It must be said that there does lay a veneer of objectivity over the proceedings of television news: Berlusconi and the status quo are rarely hailed outright; rather, partisanship is present in the form of an all-encompassing hegemony with lip service paid to objectivity. Pure propaganda is kept in the background; there is the reassuring façade of a modern, objectivist stance. Newspapers too have adopted a more blanketed approach to partisanship, with all but the most rabidly partisan (the Catholic, communist, or neoliberal press) presenting partisan arguments and views in a 'just-the-facts' tone borrowed from objectivity.

It seems that while Italy has retained many of the aspects of a partisan news media, it has
at the same time made use of objective approaches in presenting this media. The result is a partisan press with objectivist delusions, neither authentically partisan in the sense of principled and non-commercial, nor fully objective in the sense of not arguing a point from an acknowledged bias. In the case of television, the fact that Berlusconi controls up to 90% of its output makes it clear that partisanship in favor of Berlusconi’s right-wing Forza Italia is a very real situation, and at the same time complicates things with the inclusion of an obstinately public network like RAI coming under Berlusconi’s aegis. The result appears to be a hodgepodge of journalistic traditions with no clear benefit for the public, and no public voice powerful enough to change things.

The Importance of Money

The Italian news media is nearly uniform in being of a commercial nature; as mentioned above, even the majority of the public RAI channels on television are funded in part through advertising (the remainder of RAI's operating fees come from yearly license fees). This means that advertising plays a very primary role in broadcast media. Newspapers are similarly indebted to advertisers, with the notable exception of some of the more ideologically-minded papers such as *il Manifesto* (which, in turn, carries a higher cover price). Thus, commercial news media is by far and away the dominant power in Italy; the few non-commercial news outlets, while often of a high quality, reach small fractions of the public.

An interesting situation arises as well when a businessman and media magnate is in charge of the country and its airwaves: here, two of Althusser's ISAs are clearly visible, the government and the media, each somewhat autonomous, but linked in promoting the same ideological hegemony Berlusconi embraces- in his case, a neoliberal conservatism that serves to
reinforce consumerism (Mazzoleni, 2000).

The end situation is one in which for-profit media dominates, control of commercial media and commercialized public media is in the hands of a media billionaire, and wherein the public holds no real control over or influence on the system. Extracting money from these equations would be very difficult, given the entrenchment commercial media has gained in Italy since deregulation.

The Place of the Journalist

Journalists in Italy have a number of structural constraints, but the most important may be the controls exercised over them by media owners, most often Berlusconi. As mentioned above, some journalists have lost their jobs for failing to present news suitably deferential to Berlusconi. United-States-based Freedom House, an outfit dedicated to analyzing press freedom worldwide, notes that "[a]lthough freedom of speech and press are constitutionally guaranteed, media freedom [in Italy] remain[s] constrained... by the continued concentration of media power in the hands of Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi" (Freedom House, 2006).

This close contact between the government and the media means that journalists are inevitably caught up in government policy and worrying about potential censorship or sacking to the detriment of newsgathering. Journalism, a profession already rather unpopular among the Italian public, continues to lose its luster as people see journalists as complicit with the government rather than acting apart from but in close quarters to it. Journalists therefore become unwitting ISAs in a structural approach, neither part of the government nor fully independent, and thus constrained structurally to submit and be ideological messengers or tread lightly at the risk of losing their jobs. There is a subservience to the political system (Mazzoleni, 2003);
journalists are seen as a way to serve political and monetary power.

Given this very small degree of autonomy for Italian journalists, it appears that they have become simply another means to perpetuate the ruling hegemony rather than promote truth and democracy.

**Populism**

The news media in Italy has seen an increasing slide towards populism, perhaps due in part to the tendencies of the government: Berlusconi promotes a heavily populist message, and his coalitions have generally included neopopulist and post-fascist elements, which some researchers have seen as gaining legitimization though the media (Mazzoleni, 2003). Berlusconi himself enjoys a flashy, flamboyant lifestyle which he takes great pleasure in seeing promoted in the media; his sexist and otherwise gauche pronouncements earn places in the press at the expense of actual policy, with the result that the media cover the spectacle rather than items of importance.

Newspapers have gone increasingly sensationalist, obstinately by popular demand, and celebrity coverage and gossip content have increased. Interestingly, this tabloidization of the mainstream, 'serious' news has not diminished in any way its coverage of politics; rather, the approach towards politics has changed (Mancini, 2000): the focus is now on personalizing the politicians, presenting emotive, simplistic takes on events and policymaking rather than focusing on the practicalities and specifics.

Television remains resolutely populist, with nothing that could be considered anything but entertainment on offer on most of the channels; Rai Tre is the only broadcast channel with a clear remit in favor of public service and 'intellectual' programming. While such programming
can occasionally bleed through to other channels, they are far from the bread-and-butter of Rai Uno or any of the Mediaset network, which generally offer programs of a distinctly populist bent: game shows, reality shows, and scantily-clad dancing girls selling domestic appliances.

It hardly seems as if Italians are crying out for intellectualism amid this tide of populism: one can tune in to a serious debate on Rai Tre just as easy as a soap opera on Rai Uno, yet Rai Uno comes ahead in the ratings. It would appear, then, that the simple availability of an intellectually stimulating news media is insufficient to attract a public, and furthermore, given that Italian audiences do not seem to be abandoning television-watching, that the populist tone on offer is accepted, albeit possibly with resignation.

Consolidation

Italian media exhibits a high degree of symbiosis and consolidation both with itself and with related ISAs such as the government or the church. As mentioned above, Berlusconi controls both the majority of the private televised media and the entirety of the public televised media, giving him effective control over most of Italy's news media. Berlusconi’s family and friends own portions of the print media; the remaining print media is owned by either large industrial groups or political parties. In this way the state and private apparatuses are heavily linked to the media apparatus.

Outside of the heavy linking of industry to government, the various private owners of the news media extend their hold on the media by often owning multiple titles or channels (Mediaset, for example, mentioned above, or RCS MediaGroup, owner of Corriere della Sera, which owns a number of newspapers, magazines, book imprints, and radio stations). The situation gets more complex and more incestuous: Mondadori, the publisher of left-wing daily la
Repubblica, is owned by Finivest, which in turn is owned by Silvio Berlusconi's daughter, whereas la Repubblica's right-wing 'competitor' il Giornale is owned by Berlusconi's brother. It would be folly to see any competition here at all, since the leading sources of news media- in fact, the dominant forms of news media- are all owned by members of the elite, often with political connections and connected in some way to Berlusconi more often than might be considered healthy to a functional democracy.

In short, there is heavy consolidation in the news media sector in Italy, with a diversity of titles and surface diversity in outlook which deflect attention from the fact that most of the sources of information are owned by large corporations or the government, all with a vested interest in promoting large-scale free-market capitalism and the status quo.

Democracy

It would seem there is a real conflict of interest in a country where the political leader controls so much of the news media. This concentration of power does not promote diversity or an exchange of ideas necessary for democracy as in Habermas's public sphere. Although there is an extensive network of television stations in Italy that are obstinately publically-owned, RAI has drifted heavily away from its commitment to public service, and, indeed, seems to actively resist this mission (Mazzoleni, 2000). While RAI could act as a buffer against or alternative to the private for-profit media, Italian lawmakers seem unwilling or unable to bring this to fruition, preferring the status quo. The result is that service to the public is undermined (Hibberd, 2001).

If the Italian public is denied access to the public news media because their input runs contrary to the wishes of Berlusconi, or to the private media because their input fails to promote the aims of the owner or political party, the public sphere is compromised and has indeed shifted
to a bourgeois public sphere where only the concerns of the elite are those on offer.

Furthermore, democracy is already weakened when a country that proclaims itself a
democratic republic finds itself unable or unwilling to confront the problems and conflicts of
interest created by the investiture of Berlusconi. Failure to remedy this situation allows the
media-government hegemony and media-big business hegemony to work together in the
takeover of the public sphere, so important to democracy. Those media outlets that do provide a
service to democracy are, sadly, those which are least supported by the public.
II. India

Historical Overview

India is the second most populous country in the world, with a population of well over a billion (CIA, 2008). The country has been a parliamentary democracy since just after achieving independence, with the Republic of India claimed in 1950 with a constitution dedicated to secularism and socialism. Newspapers have traditionally been strong in India, and heavily diverse due to the myriad languages spoken in the country. The English-language press was developed largely as a result of British control, but command of English was widespread among the educated Indian elite, and English has subsequently served as a national language. Nevertheless, knowledge of English is still in large part restricted to the educated class of India, and the vernacular press continues to be read, a tribute to the notion that "no other country has a newspaper industry as complex and as highly developed as India" (Gupta & Sharma, 1996, quoted in McGuire & Reeves, 2003, p. 112). Newspapers have traditionally been subject to state control and censorship of various sorts, most notably during the 'Emergency' of 1975 to 1977; they have nevertheless been greatly influential.

Television was launched in India in 1959 with the creation of the government-controlled Doordarshan channel. Color television was introduced in 1982 and transmission grew apace; television became accessible to the majority of the country by the end of that decade. Although India had been a 'non-aligned' and quasi-socialist country up until this time, with a heavily regulated economy, the 1990s brought a wave of deregulation in India under then-finance minister and current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Although the government retained control of Doordarshan, the airwaves were opened to private broadcasters from that point forward (McGuire & Reeves, 2003, Crabtree & Malhotra, 2003; Thussu, 1997).
Television has grown continually ever since, while the government has "stood aside" (Landler, 2001). The result has been a heavy commercialization of the medium. Doordarshan remains the public network, having branched out into a total of nineteen channels in various Indian languages and dedicated to various topics such as sport or parliamentary debate; Doordarshan National is the flagship station. Though a public network, Doordarshan has shifted heavily away from the educative and informative programs of its early years, now concentrating much more on entertainment as it "scrambl[es] to compete" in a commercialized media landscape (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2003, p. 214).

Despite some continuing illiteracy problems, actual literacy in India has grown greatly and with it newspaper readership, in contrast to other countries where newspaper-reading has taken a downturn. English-language dailies, though quite visible, pale beside the vernacular dailies: the top two Hindi-language newspapers claim a combined daily readership of forty million (Chu, 2007) in a language spoken by well under half of the population. Newspaper prices remain low, generally a rupee or two (five cents); the effect is a society where newspapers are common and widely-read. Coupled with the pervasiveness of television, the average Indian (especially urban) has a heavy exposure to the news media.

**Examination**

*Development and Privatization*

Like Italy, privatization of the Indian airwaves took place as part of a package of reforms aimed at moving India away from its image of bureaucracy of the 'license-fee raj' and towards free-market capitalism (albeit with a number of socialist holdovers as safeguards); to that effect a number of national industries were privatized or opened to competition. The explosion of
broadcasters which followed, however, and the entry of wealthy, foreign broadcasters, have meant that in Doordarshan's case, competing would be difficult indeed: how can a cash-strapped government operation in a developing country be expected to compete with slick imports and lavishly-funded private media broadcasts?

Foreign companies such as Rupert Murdoch's Star TV, or Sony and their commercial networks, have done quite well in India against Doordarshan and the local competition without such financial backing: "Well- financed companies like Star and Sony, with multiple channels, are likely to survive, while stand-alone channels fall by the wayside" (Landler, 2001)- for without diversified capital to fall back on, how can home-grown media compete? In fact, the Indian branch of Star TV has become the second-largest media outlet in this billion-strong country, just after Bennett, Coleman & Co., owners of the *Times of India*, the country's (and the world’s) largest English-language daily. The remaining high-profile newspapers and television networks are also run by large companies, often diversified into other forms of news media or with multiple titles in publication.

Regulation of the news media, though it exists in some form, is considered to be "inadequate" in the areas of "foreign ownership, competition and content regulation" (Singh, 2007)- just about everything, it appears. Plans for regulation by the government are opposed by the news media, especially over a 'content regulation' clause (Singh)- understandable after the censorship of the Emergency- and 'restrictions on accumulation of interest'- that is, ownership limitations (Joseph, 2007). The private media balks that regulation should be left up to the industry in the case of content, and given the heavy-handedness of the government in the past, there is some reason to believe the government may clamp down: "When it comes to choosing between regulation by the government or by the media, people will be on the side of the media,"
according to Akhila Sivadas of Delhi's Center for Advocacy and Research, a social justice group (quoted in Singh). Curbing media holdings, according to the media, simply stifles a growing sector in a developing economy. However, India's current lax system of regulation does not appear capable of responding to growing concerns that accompany this growing sector.

India is left with a news media system that, in its televised form, pits a poorly-funded state broadcaster against flashy foreign-funded commercial products; newspapers are run by diversified 'media groups'. Regulation is insufficient, meaning that a strong consolidation, as in Italy, is quite possible; in the area of content, regulation is little and rare, meaning that bias and hegemony is allowed to creep unchecked.

Partisanship and Objectivity

The news media in India has traditionally been linked to politics in some form; specifically, newspapers were highly identified with nationalism due to their importance in spreading information and debate on the topic during the colonial and early post-colonial periods: print journalism was a "crucial vehicle" (McGuire & Reeves, 2003, p. 106) by which consciousness was raised and theories debated. Newspapers remained quite close to politicians and other political actors, and this trend was amplified by the routine censorship and regulation visited upon newspapers.

The easing of restrictions on newspapers and the emergence of a fully commercial (as opposed to government-regulated, sanctioned, or patronized, as was often the case up until the 1980s) press has led to less of a dependence on political actors for survival (Rao, 2007), and with it much of the overt partisan nature of the press has dissipated. The existence of a press that is highly varied by region and language means too that this vernacular press will be somewhat
partisan by its very nature. Nevertheless, the decline of overt partisanship in the news media does not seem to have brought a strict objectivism with it, but rather a move towards a more crass, commercial outlook: "admiration for the economic potency and power of the new economic elite, and disgust for politics as politicking" (Rao, 2007, p. 17). As India's wealth and world standing have grown, the news media seem to have adopted a tone neither partisan nor objective: politics can be dispensed with altogether as mere mouth-flapping, of limited importance; more that partisanship there is partiality, here to wealth and status above all things. Wild.

**The Importance of Money**

If wealth and status are of primary importance in the 'new' India, that concept is surely reflected in the news media. Commercialism has become all important and corporations control much of the news media. Broadcast media is the "province of big capital" (McGuire & Reeves, 2003, p. 107). The market is such that it is possible for new players to enter the industry, but without established capital and access to continued funding, grand successes are not likely. In essence, many media outlets simply serve as repositories for advertisements.

The news media tends to promote a vision of capitalism and consumerism, in line with the interest in money and power. Audiences are prompted to spend money and consume; a hegemony in favor of "capitalist values, lifestyles, and dreams" is pushed (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2003, p. 220). News comes in the form of headline articles on "The Ten Richest Men in India" or "Highest-Paid Celebrities"; attention paid to the large amount of lower-class and poor Indians is relegated to blurbs on crime or pity. A media which exists for reasons of profit will surely reflect that in its output; if advertisers wish to reach audiences with the money to buy products, the
middle class will be targeted, along with their values and mores to the exclusion of others. Crabtree & Malhotra (2003) suggest that this situation, a fixation on wealth and power, is leading to a growing chasm between social classes as poorer groups become marginalized by the media and no longer see themselves represented or catered to due to their incomes. Of course, one imagines that the poor have more important things to worry about than lobbying the news media for change, but a widening chasm between rich and poor could have society-wide implications.

It is too soon to tell if such a dire outcome as the above will take place as predicted, but it seems safe to say that the news media in India is safely within the hands of the moneyed elite, and that increased commercialization has led to a situation where those with money present the news and present it in their image to audiences made up of people from similar backgrounds. Again, the public sphere has shifted or narrowed to a more exclusive shape.

*The Place of the Journalist*

Despite the vastness of India's news media landscape, the majority of the news is of sub-par quality by global standards, in terms of reporting, writing, and editing. Where is the blame to be placed? "Editors... lament the shrinking pool of qualified, experienced journalists" (Chu, 2007); at the same time, journalists bemoan the fact that they are constrained from practicing their craft. The thousands of news sources make no difference: "quantity is not quality" (Chu); an "expanding media market is no guarantee that it is filled with the best journalism" (Peer, 2007, p. 24).

Journalists complain that there are too many constraints placed upon them by the news media system- there precious little space for anything serious or detailed; editors demand short, lights stories, and there is pressure to write on approved topics- "400-word news articles about
millionaires" being the sort of thing editors are interested in (Peer, 2007, p. 25). Furthermore, India does not have a worldwide system in place for newsgathering; they are dependent on foreign sources for much of their news (Thussu, 1997).

The preferred solution for journalists is, then, to work for the American or British news media: those who are serious must "look to foreign venues" (Peer, 2007, p. 25). This 'brain drain', however, means that the Indian news media is filled with the lower ranks of the profession, the most pliant and submissive who are willing to become an apparatus through which the ideology of the status quo and or elite hegemony is spread. Of course, the situation may be similar in another country; one would simply be serving a different master. In India, however, it appears that an average journalist would find their options for employment limited without adapting to the dominant hegemony of the news media and its related apparatuses.

**Populism**

The news media in India has seen an increase in its coverage of fluff and topics of limited newsworthiness, as noted above; its continued focus on celebrities and gossip have helped push them towards a less intellectual and more populist approach. On a political level too, plenty of news time and space is taken up by reporting the minutiae of the day-to-day lives of members of the ruling dynasties and their cohorts; as in other countries, there is an elevation of politicians to celebrities and media figures in their own right, at the expense of serious policy discussion- the “spectacular and the populist overrid[e] the serious and critical” (McGuire & Reeves, 2003, p. 115).

Particularly interesting in India’s case is the appearance of a very dangerous strain of neopopulism in the form of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BNP), a xenophobic right-wing Hindu
fundamentalist party of some power, responsible for violent behavior and racially-motivated hatemongering. The BJP has a long-standing relationship with the news media; this link is “instrumental and, at times, criminal” (McGuire & Reeves, 2003, p. 115) and manifests itself in a news media bias in favor of the BJP’s actions, however violent and criminal. This is seen most clearly in the vernacular Hindi or Marathi media, in regions where BJP members have won seats in local government and have great power: in these instances, the vernacular news media “has been incorporated either directly or indirectly into the... ideological predisposition of the BJP” (McGuire & Reeves, p. 115). The already communal nature of the vernacular press makes this easier; in addition, party members or coalition colleagues, often wealthy, are those who many times own the means of production or are the big businessmen on whose advertisements the news media survives. For those news outlet which fall outside these criteria, there are always threats; McGuire & Reeves find the BJP have used fear and intimidation to “ensure newspapers printed what it wanted” (p. 116).

Promotion of neopopulist attitudes by the news media, with the accompanying elements of fundamentalism and violence, have very real effects in India where communalism is unfortunately still present among some segments of the population. Furthermore, as when neopopulist politicians and parties own leading newspapers, one is unlikely to be presented to a nuanced, critical view in such an arena. Populism in the form of gossip and fluff is already an impediment to serious reason, but its politicization has had very real effects in India.

**Consolidation**

As seen above, there is a good deal of collusion between the government and the media, and politicians or prominent party members own portions of the news media. Additionally, large
parts of the news media are owned by large corporations with their fingers in various pieces of the pie: Bennett, Coleman & Co., owner of the *Times of India*- the world’s largest English-language daily- also own various other vernacular dailies, dozens of magazines and radio stations, and a number of television stations, as well as controlling various real estate companies and even running fashion shows. Its competitors, such as the *Hindustan Times*, though smaller, are similar. The vernacular press too often comes under the ownership of large conglomerates: *Eenadu*, a widely-read Telugu-medium daily, is owned by the Ramoji Group, who also run television channels, movie studios, banking institutions, shopping malls, hotels, and food processing plants.

With so much of the Indian news media being controlled by corporations- indigenous, as in the case of the above-mentioned outfits, or foreign-based, as with Rupert Murdoch’s Star TV or Ted Turner’s CNN- it should come as no surprise that the messages presented “reveal little diversity” (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2000, p. 376). We can expect that the messages presented by the news media in India would be those espoused by their controllers- wealthy politicians, wealthy advertisers, or corporate owners, either foreign or local. While the government has proposed some regulation in order to prevent such a situation- either by regulating content or regulating ownership (Joseph, 2007)- little has come of this, possibly due to the power of these corporations or, as in Italy, the unwillingness of lawmakers. However, without such safeguards, consolidation and symbiosis will continue, with grave results for democracy.

*Democracy*

India’s experience of government is markedly different than that of other post-colonial states: firstly, for the fact that while many newly-free countries went from colonies to
dictatorships or heavy-handed military control, India took the path of democracy; secondly, for the fact that India’s massive population has made it by far the largest democracy in the world. However, in common with many post-colonial states, India has had to deal with many of the problems which typically beleaguer developing countries, such as a lack of education among the populace: in India’s case, this problem is worsened by the large population and generally poor infrastructure. Television has been quite successful in bridging in some way this gap—whereas newspapers can be read only by the literate, and are subject to problems of distribution, the broadcast media have been able to penetrate into all areas of the subcontinent and have an impact on the local populations (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2000). There are pros and cons here: the pros are that television news has allowed uneducated and rural Indians to have a basic understanding and concept of democracy and the functioning of the country. On the other hand, as we have seen earlier, while the outward trappings of democracy may well be visible, the media also sends other messages which may be harmful.

There is even room to ask whether or not the news media in India may be an aspect of cultural imperialism, as the conceptual models borrowed to frame the news are typically from Anglo-American sources; along with these concepts come the accompanying ideologies (Crabtree & Malhotra, 2003). As in any situation, these ideologies and messages are not always in promotion of or compatible with democracy, and when the news is a profit-driven industry owned and operated by the elite or foreign nationals, we cannot expect these players to have the same concerns and regard for democracy as an ordinary committed citizen.

A particularly telling example of the news media’s regard for democracy can be seen if we look to Indira Gandhi’s ‘Emergency’ in the 1970s, where democracy was dissolved, draconian laws were introduced on a variety of issues, and within the press, censorship and
jailing rampant. Few news media outfits seemed to care. The news media “not only feared the stick but were happy to bite at the carrot” (Guhu, 2007, p. 499) as they willingly submitted to censorship and printed government-approved ‘news’. It was a “spectacular capitulation” as the news media dropped down “on all fours” (Varma, 2007, p. 108) in front of a democracy-turned-dictatorship. The news media was only too happy to please the whims of the powerful and to fly whichever way the wind blew. If now the prevailing winds that the media follow blow towards promoting consumption, lionizing the wealthy, and other aspects of their desired hegemony, one certainly cannot say that democracy is being well served.
III. France

Historical Overview

France has a population of just over 60 million (INSEE, 2008); its tradition of democracy extends back to the French Revolution and the proclamation of the republic in 1789. The current government, that of the Fifth Republic, was established in 1958; its constitution defines the country as a “secular, democratic, and social republic”. Like Italy and India, there has been a strong trend towards socialism on the part of the state which has seen some heavy changes in recent years with the pressure of free market economics. However, France still remains heavily committed to the ‘social’ aspect of its republic, and there is a tradition of the government being involved in the media by way of enacting beneficial laws or direct subsidizing of the news media.

The French newspaper industry has followed much the same course as the industry in other countries: a period of sensationalist tabloid newspapers, followed by the development of a more ‘scientific’ approach where opinion was presented following analysis rather than based on emotion (Bourdieu, 1998). By 1918 France had the largest press in the world; newspapers began their decline following the Second World War and their circulations have been dropping ever since (Mermet, 2006). French newspapers today continue to enjoy a great deal of influence and status; they are, however, subject to very limited, even “tiny” readership: circulation remains down, with “nearly all papers in dire straits” (“A License to Lose Money,” 2004, p. 65). The center-left Le Monde is generally considered the most prestigious French newspaper, and is perhaps the most widely-read national daily; a multitude of regional titles such as Le Parisien or Ouest-France have much higher circulations, however, as do sports newspaper such as l’Equipe (Mermet).
As in many places, the blame for this shift away from newspapers is placed on television. Television in France began as a public service, “essentially educational” and dedicated to the “provision of public information” (Feigenbaum, 1998, p. 283). Right-wing president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing cut up the government branch overseeing television into three parts in 1974, each assigned a television network; by the late eighties (also under a conservative government) the most popular of these public networks, TF1, was sold off in a wave of deregulation that moved in fits throughout that decade. TF1 remains the most widely-viewed channel; the remaining channels comprise those which remain public (France 2, the most widely-viewed public station, and its sister stations France 3 and France 5), the little-viewed private Franco-German cultural channel, Arte, and youth-based private channel M6. The largest competition is then, in essence, between TF1 and the stable of public channels, primarily France 2. The situation of news media in France can thus be seen as primarily television-based, although newspapers are well-viewed if little read.

Examination

Development and Privatization

As in Italy and India, French deregulation of the airwaves took place throughout the 1980s as essentially right-wing governments attempted to put free-market ideas into action. However, the strength of France’s various leftist parties, most visibly the Socialists, meant that free-market reforms were not always able to pass as easily as elsewhere, and various concessions have been made, notably in the case of subsidies.

As mentioned above, the French government has traditionally held a protectionist
attitude towards newspapers (and ‘cultural’ products as a whole), allowing them generous subsidies (Feigenbaum), 278 million euros’ worth in 2007 alone (“A License to Lose Money,” 2004, p. 65): “[i]t is not unheard of for total governmental support to reach 20 percent of income for a newspaper” (Ferguson, 1998, p. 83). This “elaborate system of subsidies” (Feigenbaum, 1998, p. 283), has as its intended effect the creation of room for small and diverse parts of the news media to thrive away from the competition of the market. Although these are private outfits, their perceived cultural and societal worth is considered such that they must be shelters from the ravages of the market. The reality, however, is that these newspapers are simply being propped up; their readership is down. They are able to survive, but not to compete within the market, or even be visible against their more commercial cousins.

Certainly such small titles are invisible against television: one broadcast of the nightly news is viewed by more people than read all the papers that day put together (Bourdieu, 1998). Again, subsidies, even those that reach twenty percent of costs, cannot compete with a heavily-funded and widely-diffused broadcast media; the situation is heavily lopsided.

Competition is also seen between stations, here between the public stations of France Télévisions and the private stations, TF1 first and foremost. Ratings thus become of great importance: although France Télévisions has a remit ostensibly in the public interest, competition with private channels in the name of chasing ratings mean that this remit will be compromised; privatization thus affects the quality of the public service.

Regulation in France falls to the Comité Superieure d’Audiovisuel (CSA), a socialist introduction which combines content regulation with a certain French protectionism or promotion, most notably institution of a quota on private and public channels alike in favor of French-produced content. This quota can be seen as linked to the matter of subsidies: there is
also an element of nationalism about its protectionist goals; regulation here sidesteps matters of ownership or ideology and insists instead on provenance of content as the determining factor (Kuhn & Perry, 1999). However, it would seem that a network can broadcast material ‘made in France’ perfectly well and still fail to be in the public interest; therefore, while the CSA may appear on the surface to be a more effective regulatory body than that of Italy or India, there is little in it which might compel a news media outlet to act in any way but their own interest and still be within the law.

It can be said then that privatization has led to competition between public and private news media, as elsewhere, though France is somewhat exceptional in the role that governmental subsidies play for the private news media. France’s regulatory body, the CSA, appears more concerned with promoting ‘Frenchness’ (defined by country of origin rather than cultural value) than acting in the interest of the French people, as we might expect organizations to do in exchange for use of the public airwaves.

**Partisanship and Objectivity**

Like elsewhere, partisanship remains primarily a press phenomenon. Television stations retain the general orientations assigned them by their status: private stations being linked somewhat with the right, due to their free-market operations, and public stations identified somewhat with the left for their government connections. While the ORTF, an early incarnation of France Télévisions, was heavily divided along partisan lines, calling to mind Italy’s *lottazione* system, such is no longer the case. Newspapers too, though retaining ideological lines, have seen their “political tendencies… becoming less and less evident” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 23).

*Le Monde*, center-left but linked by status to the establishment, thus finds right-wing *le*
Figaro as its major competitor; further left is found the somewhat socialist Libération; the line continues to the communist l’Humanité. The local papers tread a generally populist ground, given their regional or small-town natures; these are, again, more partisan in the sense of regionalism as opposed to a national daily which might consider its base Paris. Newspapers have seen continued diminution in sales across the boards (Mermet, 2006), and some speculate that specifically partisan newspapers will disappear before long; certainly, Libération is in the midst of a struggle, but the more centrist le Monde is seeing its share of trouble as well.

It appears that the model of a partisan press in France will see either a further softening of political stances, a “dispens[ing] with sharp edges” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 44) in the name of wider market appeal, or will die out altogether (or struggle along thanks to subsidies) as French youth increasingly choose television or another source for news. The result, far from the benefits of noncommercial partisanship or sober objectivity will likely be the simple homogenous status quo, leaving the public sphere void yet again of meaningful exchange.

The Importance of Money

Money is as important in France as elsewhere for the news media, and although the government attempts to shelter some news outlets from the market, the most visible forms of news media are often those of large corporations. In the realm of newspapers, most of the sector is controlled by wealthy corporations—indeed, three-fourths of the French newspaper market is controlled by two large defense groups, Dassault and Lagardère, who manufacture military aircraft in addition to their press activities (“The Rag Trade,” 2007). Money is, of course, all important to these companies; Serge Dassault has raged against newspaper content that was not suitably in favor of ‘commercial interests’ (“Paper Dreams,” 2004). It has been suggested that
there is a danger of the French press going the way of Italy in becoming the playground of big business (“Dassault’s Assault,” 2004). It may also be true that these large diversified corporations view their press holdings as mere investments rather than crucial pieces of the public sphere.

TF1, by far the most-watched television station, is owned by Bouygues, a major multinational industrial group involved in construction, real estate, and cell phones. There is little to suggest that access to the television airwaves is in any way accessible to those who are not wealthy; most newspapers too being in the hands of the élite does not bode well for construction of a counter-hegemony, as Gramsci calls for.

The Place of the Journalist

Journalism occupies a special place in France, if in law more than in the public image; nevertheless, journalists in France are subject to special allowances in society—things such as discounted train fares and “hugely generous tax breaks” (“A License to Lose Money,” 2004, p.65). Though they are allowed such cultural capital, these perks do not appear to give French journalists any more real power—again, journalists appear to be subject to a certain self-censorship. Bourdieu (1998) suggests this is in part due to journalists worried about job security; I would suggest that it extends beyond that into a more generalized fear of the political climate (which Bourdieu mentions) and of the whims of the ‘press barons’: Dassault, for example, has a “relative view of the independence of the press”, bragging that control of the press allows him to spread the neoliberal views he considers “healthy” and we may assume that such views are shared by his peers; in 2003, journalists at business daily la Tribune quit after their corporate owner attempted to promote biased information; le Monde too has been accused by its journalists
of such behavior ("Dassault’s Assault,” 2004).

Journalists are placed in a spot where there is no choice but to follow the status quo: those employed by government-run television channels may steer clear of criticizing the government; journalists in the private media may self-censor or be instructed to avoid topics disfavor able to corporate owners, sponsors, or the government to whom the corporate may be contracted or bidding for contracts (Dassault for military vehicles, for example); even in small journals journalists may be fearful of losing government subsidies by reporting on unpopular topics.

In all these situations, journalists must either quit their jobs and find themselves marginalized and living precariously, or submit to the requirements of the dominant ideology and those controlling it and become another means by which this ideology is spread.

**Populism**

The French news media trends heavily populist, and has been doing so for some time. Although this is most visible and egregious on TF1 and to a lesser extent M6, the state channels display a fair amount of populism as well; the press is just as guilty. Cultural affairs and heavy news analysis are marginalized in these media (Kuhn & Perry, 1999); while French TV in the 1950s could be considered “openly cultural”, what passes for broadcast news these days may be little more than sports scores (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 48).

Interestingly, while newspaper circulations decline in general, circulation is up for one newspaper: *l’Equipe*, a sports daily full of scores and gossip about players, owners, and coaches ("Dassault’s Assault,” 2004). Indeed, it appears that pure populism in the form of gossip and scandal are what sell. While the daily newspapers tend stick to some sense of decorum and,
while not shying from scandal and gossip, tend to couch it in at least cursory analysis, newsmagazines (‘news’ defined loosely) are under no such illusions and are enjoying higher circulations. These newsmagazines are free to “treat political life as a soap opera” (“Pipol Power,” 2008): as in Italy, politics are still covered, but from a viewpoint which treat the political actors as stars and polity as of trivial importance. There is even a term for this situation in French, pipolization, from the English people, which carries connotations of celebrity in French. Of course, not all dailies are as sober, and many of them tend towards populism as well: among the best-selling papers in France is le Parisien, a gaudily-designed daily full of “health scares and consumer scandals” (“Paper Dreams,” 2004, p. 47).

TF1 reinforces this populist tone with its programming, full of reality shows, imported sitcoms, game shows and news programming low on serious news; M6, aiming for the youth demographic, follows the same track. Even sources one might expect to find free of this sort of populist programming, such as the avowedly cultural Arte, find it necessary to ‘tone down’ their serious offerings in favor of “facile, popular programming” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 52) more likely to reach a mass audience.

Again, while there are safeguards in place in the form of subsidies to low-profit news media, this does not address the fact that the most populist forms of news media (TF1, le Parisien) are by far and away the most visible. While a serious level of discourse remains possible, it does not do so under the brightest lights; resultantly, the populist status quo remains in the limelight and its ideology becomes to most pervasive.

Consolidation

As mentioned above, the French government is heavily intertwined with the news media,
both by way of ownership and regulation, but also by way of subsidies and incentives. In the private sector, there are a number of buyouts and mergers which mean that the news media is under highly centralized control. While there are independent forms of news media that remain, they are the outliers and their audience is limited.

A state of tacit agreement appear to exist between the government and the news media in many cases: Martin Bouygues, for example, is a close friend of the French prime minister Nicolas Sarkozy (“The Rag Trade,” 2007); as an industrial group involved in construction, it has won contracts from the government to build many very large and very expensive state structures. In the case of press baron Dassault, government contracts also loom large in the form of military vehicles: “it is obvious”, according to Bourdieu (1998, p. 16) that the government is deferential to these organizations as a result of these relationships and understandings. The relationship between these varied state and private apparatuses illustrate the complex, linked nature through which hegemony is propagated; we see additionally that though each arm is allowed some autonomy, the arms are controlled by the same general group and pushing in a similar direction.

The situation in France is not nearly as extreme as that of Italy, but the potential is there (“Dassault’s Assault,” 2004); between a convergence of government and big business the news media might find itself completely stifled. As it stands now, this takeover appears to still be in progress.

Democracy

A situation like that in France, where the news media cater for mass tastes and treat people as consumers and not citizens (Kohn & Perry, 1999) is not one in which democracy is likely to be fostered. French politics, already sometimes difficult to follow, are not served when
the media approach political figures through the prism of celebrity and status, rejoicing in gossip and glitz rather than focusing on background, context, and ramifications of the politics and politicians in question. While democratic gestures such as subsidies may help to democratize the news media in the abstract, little is done to limit the power of large media conglomerates who do not necessarily share an enthusiasm for democracy.

Although there remains in France a public media which is perhaps closest to the public interest of the three countries studied here, constraints remain, not least because of the need for higher ratings, which are seen as a justification for spending. Bourdieu (1998) calls for a contestation of the whole idea of ratings, writing that he is doing so “in the name of democracy”, since ratings (and by extension advertisings and the various trappings of private, for-profit media) “have nothing to do with the democratic expression of enlightened public opinion or public rationality” (pp. 66-67). The fact is that the public stations are just as guilty as the private stations, and, as the high-ups of France Télévisions get together to discuss declining ratings they are surely more likely to more towards populist nonsense à la TF1 or M6 to gain higher ratings rather than look towards Arte’s culturally-rich programming but bottom-of-the-barrel ratings. Likewise, newspapers searching for higher circulation are more likely to adopt the lurid headlines of a heavy seller like *le Parisian* rather than the text-heavy seriousness of intellectual papers like *le Monde diplomatique*.

Democracy cannot be served when access to the public sphere is limited, and when control is shared between press barons, large corporations, and an ever-shuffling government, all three with mutual and tightly linked interests. French peculiarities such as subsidies can be seen as helpful but ultimately are only token acts since they aid the existence of a more inclusive media but provide no means by which that news media might make itself more visible or
accessible. Democracy calls for all voices and opinions to be heard, rather than only those that are loudest.
It seems clear that the modern news media in many places, far from being a vital element of democracy and acting as a public sphere for society’s exchange of ideas and information, has become quite often a closed system which propagates messages beneficial to itself and its ideological partners rather than messages beneficial to democracy and society. Where there is governmental regulation, this regulation fails to address the important issues or is left unimplemented; additionally, when a government and private media are closely associated, we can expect impotent regulation. Instead, the news media are generally left to their own devices, and, whether run by the government or private corporations, seem to spend much of their time courting advertisers and wealthy audiences rather than fulfilling their democratic function. As news media outlets search to expand their reach, they tend to tone down the seriousness of their reporting and adopt unreasoned populist stances. This populism, combined with a modus operandi which places money and power at a premium, is reflected in the framing of news stories and the way in which society sees itself represented by the news media. Rather than acting as a forum for debate and mutual enlightenment, as in Habermas’s public sphere, the news media has become closed and inaccessible to the public, manufacturing and broadcasting its own self-beneficial messages and biases. While the public certainly share some of the blame for this situation, the extensiveness of the controlling hegemony appears to neutralize any of the patchwork and small-scale attempts at change.

The first case study, covering the news media in Italy, showed the situation where a media baron was allowed to become the nation’s political leader, resulting in a serious conflict of interest whereby Berlusconi is able to exercise great power over Italy’s media. Regulation is
weak, and the media is divided between partisan newspapers, corporate television stations and newspapers, and government television stations, many of which are controlled by Berlusconi or his associates and lay the populism on heavily; those that are not tend towards the status quo and suffer from lack of exposure. The entire news media is heavily corporatized, consolidated, and controlled.

The second case study covered the situation in India. In India too deregulation has led to an environment with very little regulation at all, paving the way for foreign and national conglomerates to become the means through with vital information is spread. Again, as with Italy, the news media has tended towards populism, forcing serious journalists to look elsewhere; the current staple of the news media is stories extolling wealth and power, far from the day-to-day realities of the majority of Indians. With an inaccessible news media which does not properly represent the country and shies away from critical debate, democracy is not being served.

The final case study covered France, where a culturally-minded tradition has meant that many news media outlets are government-subsidized in order to shield them from the ordeals of the market. However, while this subsidizing has ensured the survival of less economically-viable news media outlets, it has done nothing to increase their visibility. As in Italy and India, the most visible news media outlets are not those that are most societally valuable. While public television is well-funded in France, it is rarely accountable and has allowed itself to become a competitor to commercial media rather than an alternative.

In each case, the story seems much the same: deregulation brought with it private media concerns who had little use for the news media as a public service and every use for it as a money-spinner. In each case, deregulation was pushed through by a government who appeared to
have no post-regulation policy on the law books, meaning that for a good amount of time the private news media was free to proliferate and hold itself accountable under its own profit-driven terms. Each country, although having constitutional roots in a mid-century conception of socialism, has slid further towards the free market, allowing institutions like the news media to become simple money-making commodities rather than important aspects of democracy. In all three cases, the news media have tended towards ideologies that suit themselves and their owners the best; held in the sway of advertisers, they have looked to increase audiences by ‘dumbing down’ content and taking a populist tack. Journalists suffer an overall lack of autonomy in all three countries. Want of regulation has meant that the news media sector is experiencing heavy consolidation in all three countries as well, and as in many cases the governments and the media conglomerates are happy with the status quo, little seems likely to change on its own. We are left with a situation where the government and big business control the news media, use it to their own (often mutual) benefit, and are unlikely and apparently unwilling to share this power or open it up to the people. Citizens are thus left without a voice and placed at the mercy of whatever hegemony the elite wish to spread; the all-encompassing nature of this hegemony and the means through which it is spread makes change very difficult. This means that there is, in essence, an element of public complicity in the whole situation in that the apparatuses in question have effectively won public consent for their behavior. Nevertheless, the blame cannot be laid solely at the citizenry, since the governments charged with regulating in the public interest have failed to do so; furthermore, the lack of accountability and openness in the various media, government, and corporate apparatuses would appear to make any attempts for change within the existing framework rather futile.

At least in the case studies presented here- and likely in a great many other countries as
well-the news media have become another trajectory through which the elite promote their own messages and conceptions of reality. This bias has a hegemonic effect as it is heavily backed by capital and reinforced by other societal apparatuses. While alternatives to this for-profit news media exist, they are far less visible and suffer in a media arena governed by the rules of capitalism rather than a landscape governed in the public interest. The public sphere has been infiltrated and laid waste to by private interests; democracy is in turn endangered when this vital public space is compromised. If there is to be any reclamation of the public sphere, it will not be within the confines set by the current dominant news media with their built-in biases and allegiances.

Limitations of the Study and Ideas for Future Research

This study was purposely limited in the extent to which the news media was defined; the internet has thus far appeared to play an important role for news media, often at the community level, and though the medium is still in its infancy compared to television or newspapers, study of internet news media may shed some light on ways in which hegemony is being challenged-or, alternatively, if internet news media is simply reinforcing this hegemony.

Further study might examine the failure of regulatory policy and prospects for the future enacting of regulation (especially at a supranational level, as with the European Union for France and Italy). Examining the reality of public news media and the actual impact and say that the public have on this media might allow us to (re)construct the model of the public media, making it more inclusive, representative, and open. Also welcome would be a case study on a country where the news media has possibly been able to go against these above-mentioned trends and do so successfully; such a study could provide insight into why this might be so and why such has
not been the case elsewhere.
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