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Developmental and political news coverage in the Liberian press

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San Jose State University, 1989

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**DEVELOPMENTAL AND POLITICAL NEWS
COVERAGE IN THE LIBERIAN PRESS**

A Thesis

Presented to

**The Faculty of the Department of Journalism
and Mass Communications
San Jose State University**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science**

by

Joseph S. Kappia

December, 1989

APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF JOURNALISM
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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPMENTAL AND POLITICAL NEWS COVERAGE IN THE LIBERIAN PRESS

by Joseph S. Kappia

This thesis examines how the media, particularly the newspapers in Third World countries, conceptualize news with reference to covering political activities, crime, and disaster or economic and social development issues. Taking Liberia as an example, the study investigates the coverage of developmental and political news in government and independent newspapers in Third World countries. It also examines the category of news emphasized in each of the newspapers.

It is suggested in this study that Third World journalists perceive news in Third World context as a social good and a cultural product essential for national development. It also reveals that newspapers in Third World countries reflect a positive image of the environments in which they operate, which indicates that the developing countries have redefined news as a conduit for national development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
LIST OF TABLES	v
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
A General Overview of the Liberian Press	7
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	14
Developmental Journalism: Theoretical Foundations	14
Communication for National Development	18
Developmental Journalism: Some Critical Views	23
Hypotheses	27
III. METHODOLOGY	29
Operational Definitions	29
Intercoder Reliability	31
Coding the Content	31
IV. RESULTS	34
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	42
Directions for Further Research	44
REFERENCES	45
APPENDICES	52
APPENDIX A: CONTENT CATEGORIES	53
APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET	56
APPENDIX C: LIBERIAN NEWSPAPERS	58

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	<u>Page</u>
1. Frequency Distribution of Items According to Newspapers	34
2. Frequency Distribution of Items Ranked According to Topics	38
3. A Comparison of Development and Political News in Government and Private Newspapers	40
4. Headline Size According to Development and Political News	41

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The Third World, or developing countries, have accused the Western trans-national news agencies of presenting a distorted view of their regions, and exercising monopoly over the flow of news and news agencies (Ogan, 1987, pp. 80-87). This monopoly has created cultural imperialism, and the lack of development news in Western press coverage, which ignores the concerns of the developing countries (Weaver, Porter, & Evans, 1984, p. 356). The Third World scholars, such as Masmoudi (1979), have cited perpetual imbalances in the content of the flow of news reportage about their countries. These imbalances, according to Masmoudi, constitute crisis-oriented reportage such as strikes, demonstrations, and civil strife, while relegating to the background pertinent issues such as social development and progress (pp. 172-73).

To off-set these imbalances, the developing countries have called for a change in the manner in which the Western media portray the image of their countries, according to Masmoudi, (1979, p. 179). Hence, the New World Information Order. This new order, sought by the Third World countries, is aimed at funneling information resources toward national development (Sidel, 1984, p. 494).

At a 1976 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) general conference in Kenya, (Nordenstreg, 1984, p.4), the McBride Commission was constituted to study and identify international communication problems. This sparked off a spirited debate between Third World countries and Western nations. At a 1978 UNESCO conference in Paris, the debate was brought to a center stage, and its rationale was articulated by the then Tunisian Minister of Information, Masmoudi (1979), who pointed out several types of imbalances reflected in the news about the Third World, as reported in the West. He asked for a change in international communication and information systems (p. 178).

This view became a recurrent theme in the McBride Commission report released in 1980 "which recognized the need for improving the balance of international communication" (Stevenson & Shaw, 1986, p. 6).

The New World Information Order debate has left diplomats, politicians, journalists, and academics divided into three schools of thought: the conservatives, the reformists, and the structuralists.

According to Meyer (1988), the conservatives, backed by the United States government, believe that the imbalances in international information flows are not caused by Western governments and news agencies, but as a result of faulty news gathering and dissemination processes (p. 7). They deny charges that a free press can adversely affect developing countries (p. 7). The conservatives also argue against

governmental control of the media in Third World countries, and condemn press censorship by state officials (p. 8). However, they believe in a free flow of information, an independent press, and an increase in media access to all shades of public opinion (p. 8).

The reformists, led by Masmoudi, believe that the imbalances in the flow of information are anomalies of Western monopoly over newswires and technology (Meyer, p. 8). They view the unregulated activities of these trans-national news agencies as threats to social and political developments in Third World countries, and therefore, seek some adjustments in the old information order (p. 9). Meyer (1988) states that the reformists advocate "more coverage of ongoing projects for social, political, and economic development . . . to replace 'spot news' which concentrates on episodic events such as riots, coups, and disasters" (p. 9). The reformists uphold the concept of governmental control and private press institutions.

The structuralists, on the other hand, maintain that imbalances exist today in the flow of global information pattern primarily due to the desire of Western nations to "retain hegemony over formerly colonized areas" (p. 10). Meyer (1988) maintains that Western news agencies only tend "to promote their economic interests at the expense of the developing nations" (p. 10).

Meyer states that a leading proponent of this theory, John Galtung, believes that there is a connection between communication and cultural

imperialism. In his cultural theory of imperialism, Meyer explains, Galtung believes that the Western powers or nations at the center of the world own and operate major news agencies which dominate the periphery or underdeveloped nations of the Third World (p. 10). Through this formation, "the center provides the definition of what is newsworthy for the periphery. Journalists and media users in the periphery, therefore, come to see events with center eyes. These factors in turn erode the cultural identity, national sovereignty, and political independence of developing countries" (p. 10).

The structuralists, according to Meyer, believe in the destruction of this system, to be replaced by a new one. They believe in a free and balanced flow of information, decolonized and democratized media. They prefer local technology for communication hardwares (p. 10).

Several studies by Western scholars such as Larson (1979), Charles, Shore, and Todd (1979), Schramm (1980), Yu (1982), and Hachten and Beil (1985) show that Western media stress coups and earthquakes in their reportage about the Third World, without much focus on development news. They maintain that political or crisis journalism in the Third World countries is given prominence while down-playing development news and social progress (Ogan, 1987, p. 87).

While advocates of the New World Information Order want a balanced presentation of the Third World view that would incorporate the dissemination of information about development activities, Cherry (1986)

has said that Third World journalists still perceive news from Western perspective by emphasizing extreme and unusual events (p. 16). In her study of selected African newspapers, evidence suggests that journalists have not heeded the call for channeling information toward national development (Cherry, 1986, p. 16). Instead, news relating to political, and military matters is given prominence in local newspapers at the disadvantage of development and economic issues, the professed concerns of the Third World advocates.

This argument has led to the definition of news in two contexts. Meyer (1988) defines news in Western context as a saleable commodity "collected in bits and distributed in markets according to utility and consumer tastes" (p. 18). Therefore, Western news agencies collect and distribute informational news as a priced commodity. To satisfy the needs of the consumer, Meyer explains, news reports must be characterized by commercial and sensational events such as crimes, scandals, riots, accidents, and corruption rather than accuracy and truth (p. 19).

On the other hand, Meyer defines news as a social good or service in the Third World context where it is viewed as a resource for economic and social development. News as a service commodity disseminates information about national development projects and current events (p. 28). Reporters in developmental journalism go at length in digging

"historical background, and possible long-range implications of an isolated data-event" (p. 28).

In his indictment of the old information order, Masmoudi, a leading advocate of developmental journalism, included a new definition of news for the Third World. "Information must be understood as a social good, and a cultural product, and not as a material commodity or merchandize" (Stevenson, 1988, p. 143).

But Stevenson (1988), like Cherry (1986), holds that proponents of the New World Information Order who set up alternative news agencies on national and regional levels mostly carry stories about politics, and military activities rather than developmental news (p. 150).

Notwithstanding, Meyer (1988) points out that Masmoudi's definition of news in this context "attempts to bring communities with low literacy rates into the public discussion regarding development, while at the same time, providing them with useful information, and promoting self-education" (p. 28).

Liberia, as a Third World advocate of the New World Information Order, is on the path to national development. How do the media in Liberia conceptualize "news" with reference to crisis journalism or developmental journalism? Does Cherry's (1986) finding apply in the Liberian case? Do Liberian journalists concentrate on reporting development news or political activities in the country? What category of news is emphasized in the independent or private media? Do

government newspapers publish more development-related stories than the independent or the private media? These are the basic questions that would be investigated in this study.

A General Overview of the Liberian Press

Liberia, located on the west coast of Africa, was founded in 1822 by the American Colonization Society (ACS) in an effort to find a home for black slaves who had gained their freedom in America following the American War of Independence. The settlement was founded, with the assistance of the American government, to also abolish slavery and to spread Christianity in Africa (Dunn & Tarr, 1988, pp. 6-15).

This colony grew up with the characteristics of the American bureaucracy. In 1847, Liberia gained her independence from the ACS and adopted a republican form of government. The 1847 Constitution was modeled after that of the United States Constitution. The settlers, also called Americo-Liberians, who were later joined by recaptured slaves or the Congos, were educated and well versed in the art of politics and religion (Cassell, 1970; Liebenow, 1987). They dominated the aborigines they met on the Grain Coast in every sphere of influence: politics, religion, education, business, and other social institutions until that oligarchy was toppled in a military coup in 1980.

Liberia is 37,000 square miles with a population of about three million (1984 census). There are 13 counties stretched along a sandy

coastline of 350 miles along the Atlantic Ocean. There are 16 ethnic groups in the country who speak more than 16 different languages. English is the official language. The capital is Monrovia; the form of government is republican, headed by a military-backed National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), of which Samuel K. Doe is the president. The U.S. dollar is a legal tender in the country, on par with the Liberian dollar.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press as enshrined in the 1847 Constitution formed the foundation of the First Republic (1847-1980), but its implementation remained an illusion. The fragile press at the inception of the First Republic, according to Liebenow (1987), took on the characteristics of an authoritarian press theory, with little or no avenue for freedom of expression and public dissent. These were some of the reasons advanced by Wonkeryor (1985, p. 20) that led to the overthrow of a century-old regime by non-commissioned military officers in April, 1980.

The soldiers quickly set up a military government, the People's Redemption Council (PRC), as the legislative body, the People's Supreme Court, as a military tribunal, and a coalition cabinet composed of soldiers, opposition forces, and a few hang-ons from the deposed regime.

The cause of the revolution, according to the coup makers and their civilian messengers, was to restore to the Liberian people their basic human rights and to promote economic and social development in the

country (Wonkeryor, 1985, pp. 19-20). It was in this light that the PRC government launched a free education program and a back-to-the-soil movement. These were envisioned as national priorities that would pave the way to economic and social development. Development scholars such as Schramm (1964) hold that communication plays a vital role in promoting national development and, therefore, the military government began the expansion of its own communication facilities. The press was viewed in this light as an ally in the development process (Best, 1987a; Liebenow, 1987).

But during the military regime from 1980-1985, the promise to promote freedom of expression, and of the press was quickly abandoned by the revolutionary government (Nelson, 1985, p. 234) when some of the military leaders with political ambition began designing strategies to convert themselves into civilian administrators come 1986, the target date for a return to a constitutional rule.

Decrees were promulgated that inhibited freedom of the press (Nelson, 1985, p. 234) as mushrooming newspapers and radio stations became targets of closures, illegal fines, the intimidation of journalists and their incarceration without trial. This situation remained the same until the Constitution, which gave birth to the Second Republic, came into effect on January 6, 1986. Restrictions on the press and government censorship of media institutions are still prevalent today, as is evidenced by the continuous closure of *Footprints Today* and the *Sun*

Times newspapers, and a Catholic radio station, ELCM, despite a guarantee of the freedom of the press, and of expression provided for in the new constitution (*Daily Observer*, October 13, 1989, p. 1).

The Liberian press has its philosophical foundations in the Liberian Constitution. In theory, the press plays the watchdog role of checks and balances among the three branches of government.

In August, 1989, the Government of Liberia enacted a national communication policy that would regulate and safeguard Liberia's sovereignty in changing communication technologies (*The News*, September 1, 1989, p. 1). The act also created a National Communications Commission (NCC) with a secretariat at the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications, to be headed by an executive director.

According to *The News* (September 1, 1989), the NCC was created:

1. To regulate and devise policies to govern the creation and operation of all electronic and print media in Liberia;
2. To coordinate and enforce all communications policies and regulations within the country;
3. To appraise and review the programs and activities of all media institutions within the country;
4. To impose fines and revoke licenses of media institutions, decisions of which shall be subject to appeal to the circuit court (p. 1).

The commission is composed of the Press Union of Liberia, the National Bar Association, two members of the Legislature, heads of security institutions, among others, to be chaired by two cabinet

ministers from posts and telecommunications, and information. All members are appointed for a two-year period except the two heads.

A newly established weekly newspaper published by the Catholic church in Monrovia, *The Herald*, published a critical analysis of the new act in an editorial in its August 3-9, 1989, edition (p.5). This editorial sparked off angry reactions from all political schools of thought in the country, as was reflected in that week's daily newspapers. The act, according to *The Herald* (September 7-13, 1989), calls for the revocation of the license of a news organ and the imposition of a fine "for what is perceived by the authorities to be wrong-doing before an appeal can be made to a court" (p.4). But the Constitution of Liberia calls for a legal process in the arbitration of all matters pertaining to the press.

Following that editorial, the Press Union of Liberia announced that it will not associate itself with the commission or become a member because it "is clearly aimed at subjecting the local media to unnecessary regulations and censorship" (*Daily Observer*, September 4, 1989, p. 10). Backing the union's position are relevant portions of the Constitution, Article 15 A-E, which states in part that "freedom of expression shall not be curtailed, restricted or enjoined by government save during an emergency. . ." (*Daily Observer*, September 4, 1989, p. 6). The union's understanding of a communication policy in a developing country such as Liberia, the *Daily Observer* continues, is the harnessing of all communication resources for national development rather than an

exercise aimed at inhibiting press freedom.

The Unity Party, one of the vocal opposition parties in the country, also reacted by citing various sections of the Constitution that were violated by the new communication act (*The Herald*, September 15-20, 1989). Specifically, the inclusion of members of the Legislature on the commission and those from the executive branch of the government, is a violation of Article 3 of the Constitution, which deals with the doctrine of separation of powers, the party pointed out. Under the Liberian law, "no person holding office in one of the said branches shall serve any autonomous public agency" (*The Herald*, September 15-20, 1989, p. 1).

Despite these developments, the Liberian press constitutes a potent force in national development through its traditional role of informing, educating, entertaining, and uniting the various elements of the society (Best, 1987a, pp. 13-18). The press plays these roles from two main domains: the public and the private.

In the public domain, the government finances and operates newspapers, magazines, radio and television stations. The private domain is largely composed of individual businessmen, private corporations, and Christian missions which operate the media for the spread of the Gospel (Best, 1987a, p. 4).

Out of several newspapers established in Liberia since the 1980 revolution, those that survived the wrath of the military government until constitutional rule and are presently on the newsstand at home are the

Daily Observer, *Sunday Observer*, and the *Mirror*. Those that were established during the military regime but are no longer in circulation are *The Redeemer* (1980), *Weekend News* (1980), *Saturday Express/Sunday Express* (1981), *Footprints Today* (1984), *The Sun* (1985), *Sun Times* (1985), and *Daily Star* (1985). Those that were established since 1986 include *The Standard*, *The Liberian Post*, *The News*, *The Herald*, *Business Digest*, *Business Times*, among others. *The New Liberian* (1978), the official news organ of the government, appears four days a week, unlike other dailies. It is an eight-page tabloid. In addition to this government publication, the Ministry of Information runs *The Bong Crier* (1983), a regional weekly mimeograph, as part of the rural communication network project. Each of these publications has a daily circulation of less than 6,000 copies (Nelson, 1985, p. 234).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Developmental Journalism: Theoretical Foundations

During the past three decades, developmental journalism has emerged as the fifth typology of the four theories of the press (Harun, 1985, p. 1), in an attempt to address the concerns of developing nations on the path to modernization. This development (Haque, 1986) coincided with the independence of countries once colonized by Western empires, and the United Nations declaration of the development decades for 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (p. 83).

The pioneering role played by Schramm, father of development communication, who conducted studies in the 1960s, led to the conceptualization of developmental journalism as a field of study. Factors that led to the establishment of development media as a separate theory from others, according to McQuail (1987) rest on the following grounds:

1. Lack of infrastructural facilities for the improvement of communication systems such as professional skills, audience;
2. Dependency on Western technology;
3. The primacy of social and economic development as national priority;
4. Similar characteristics of Third World nations (p. 120).

The dominant role of the mass media, therefore, is to play a contributory role so as to foster (Haque, 1986, p. 83) a nation-building

process for which "certain freedoms of the media, and of journalists are subordinated to their responsibility in helping in this purpose" (McQuail, 1987, p. 121). According to McQuail, the theoretical foundations of developmental journalism constitute the following:

- Media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.
- Freedom of the media should be open to restriction according to economic priorities and development needs of society.
- Media should give priority in their content to the national culture and language.
- Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries which are close geographically, culturally or politically.
- Journalists and other media workers have responsibilities as well as freedoms in their information gathering and dissemination tasks.
- In the interest of development ends, the state has a right to intervene in, or restrict media corporations, and devices of censorship, subsidy, and direct control can be justified (p. 121).

Sharing similar views, Allen (1989) affirms Liberian support for the theory of developmental journalism and provides its parameters to include:

1. Belief in the press as a unifying rather than a divisive force;
2. Belief in the press as an instrument of social justice and a device for beneficial social change;
3. And the presumption that the press is properly an instrument of two-way communication, with equal importance assigned to the writer and the reader, to the broadcaster, and the listener (p. 3).

Several names have been associated with this concept by different scholars: "developmental communication," "development media," "development communication," "development journalism," "developmental journalism," and so forth. In this study, they all mean the same and will be used interchangeably.

In defining developmental journalism, its components, which includes development, social change, and communication must first be analyzed. Social change, the major concern of the Third World nations, is the transformation of a society through evolutionary or revolutionary process, according to Hedebero (1982), and the "alterations in the organization of a society in its structure, or in the functions performed by different groups and units in it" (p. 5). This is a process through which the lifestyles of people are changed for improved living conditions so as to set them free from all forms of dependence and oppression.

Development, on the other hand, "is a shift from a static, agricultural, primitive, rigid, ascriptive society to a dynamic, industrialized, urbanized, rational, and socially mobile nation" (Hedebero, 1982, p. 19). Rogers (1976) defines development as "simply a purposeful change toward a kind of social and economic system that a country decides it wants" (p. 8). Communication, another component of developmental journalism, is perceived by Hedebero (1982) as a process whereby "messages flow between institutions, people, and media, with or without feedback" (p. 4).

Development communication or journalism, therefore, according to Chalkley (1975), is "the formation of a new class of newspaper and broadcasting and magazine reporters who were fully trained and informed in the general economic field as specialists who can take the economic overview, with all its social and political quirks, and can explain how things work, how capital gets formed, what effects of monetary and trading policies are, how jobs are created and where goods and services flow" (p. 28).

For Aggarwala (1979), developmental journalism

Is not identical with "positive" news. In its treatment, developmental news is not different from regular news or investigative reporting. It can deal with development issues at macro and micro levels and can take different forms at national and international levels. In covering the development news beat, a journalist should critically examine, evaluate, and report the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between its impact on the people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is (p. 181).

McAnany (1980) defines development communication as "the study of how to apply various kinds of communication technology and techniques to the solution of different social problems of developing countries" (p. xii).

But Stevenson and Shaw (1986) look at the concept from a different perspective as one that denotes "information that describes the progress being made in the Third World in national development. It is the 'good news' from the Third World that tells the rest of the world not about

disease and poverty, about successes in piecing together nationhood from the patchwork quilt of diverse and often hostile cultural groups left to the Third World as the legacy of colonialism" (p. 9).

A recent definition provided by Haque (1986) interprets developmental journalism as "news relating to physical projects, and progress or problems regarding subjects in the development category . . . news dealing with reforms and improvement of quality of life" (p. 89).

In each of these definitions, the role of communication in development is underscored. The exchange of communication changes people's behavior, attitudes and ways of life either directly or indirectly through opinion leaders (Hedebro, 1982, p. 9). Hedebro further perceives the role of the media in national development as an agent "to mobilize human resources by substituting new norms, attitudes, and behaviors for earlier ones in order to stimulate increased productivity" (p. 15). He cites Lerner's communication model for development in which "the mass media spread attitudes favorable to social change, and through other mechanisms, these ideas will promote development" (p. 15).

Communication for National Development

Developmental journalism, Harun (1985) recounts, started in Asia in the 1960s when efforts were made to bring communication in the modernization process as an agent of change (p. 1). This was based on

studies conducted by Lerner and Schramm in developing countries, grouped today as Third World nations.

The differentiation between developed nations (Western) and developing nations (Third World) was made by the Organization for Economic Cooperation for Development (OECD) when the United Nations declared development decades for poor nations (Hedebro, p. 10). Such nations, according to Hedebro, are characterized by poverty, malnutrition, chronic diseases, unemployment, low income per capita, and low rate of literacy (p. 10). The underdevelopment of Third World nations is a causality of a historical process -- colonialism. Countries in Africa, Latin America, parts of Asia, the Middle East, and the Caribbean have once been colonized by a European power. This has produced a legacy of dependent relationship, often characterized by the exploitation of the material and human resources of the once colonized.

The concept of modern development started in Western Europe when conditions such as "Renaissance, widespread political freedom, swift advancement in literacy and education, development of commerce and capital, fairly high percentages of entrepreneurs and innovations in the population . . ." (Schramm, 1964, p. 13) laid the groundwork for an Industrial Revolution. This was later exported to North America, other European, and Asian countries. Today's underdeveloped nations were once under the colonial administration of these European powers, according to Schramm, who controlled their politics, economics, and

social institutions, thus causing them to lag behind in the development process (p. 14). Schramm added that the social changes necessary for an economic growth did not take place in the Third World until the dawn of independence.

As soon as they graduated from that exploitative class of colonialism, Third World nations embarked upon development activities. Schramm's model of development, perceived as the best prescription for Third World nations, featured the development of agriculture, infrastructural facilities, and human resources for industrial development as a gateway to better conditions of life (p. 25).

Schramm believed that development starts first with the people, the mind, before any other development (p. 27). Human resources must first be developed through education/information so as to enlighten the people and free them from ignorance and one-sided manipulation (Schramm, p. 27). Therefore, Schramm posited, "an adequate flow of information is required for knowledge to be shared between those who have more of it and those who have less on any given subject. Adequate flow of information is needed if the ordinary people of a country . . . are to be brought into the decision making process" (p. 36). Such a flow must take on the characteristics of both vertical and horizontal lines of communication, moving in either direction. Through these means, Schramm suggested that communication serves as a temperature-regulating agent of social tension by either raising hopes

and aspirations, or providing explanations about economic and social development (p. 37). In sum, communication for development must serve as a watchman for society by reporting and reflecting the social realities of the environment; by helping in the policy making process so as to construct new goals, attitudes, customs, responsibilities, and by serving as a teacher to increase technical knowledge, and public affairs (p. 37).

Contrary to Schramm's views, information is not available where it is most needed in the rural societies, unlike the urban centers in the Third World. "Within a developing country," Schramm explained, "the flow and supply of information drop off sharply as one goes from the cities toward the villages" (p. 79). About 80% of the people live in villages but get less information due to the concentration of broadcasting stations and newspapers in those cities. This is a typical case in Liberia, a situation that complicates social development.

Attempts by Third World countries to transfer and adopt Western technology in farming practices created the need for innovations. It was believed from the onset that if farmers abandoned the traditional farming methods and adopted scientific technology, harvest would multiply. This created the need, Melkote (1987) holds, for the re-orientation of farmers so as to achieve rural development through the dissemination of new ideas, skills, and practices (p. 40). The use of extension communication services became a dominant paradigm and more associated with

development concepts. For example, when Liberia established agricultural development projects in Bong, Lofa, and Nimba counties between 1978 and 1980, agricultural extension workers were employed to travel from village to village to educate traditional farmers about modern technology in agricultural practices for increased productivity.

Best (1987a) has underscored the role of communication in national development when the press, in concerted efforts with the people, ensure that the fundamental rights and civil liberties are preserved by "informing, educating, and instructing them as to how to exercise them within the pale of law" (p. 11). A developed society, therefore, in his argument, is depicted by well informed, healthy, and well-fed people who live happily in a peaceful environment (p. 12).

To achieve this goal, Best's model of communication for national development entails a three-pronged function:

1. To let the people know what their government is doing and how they, the people, can participate in the government's efforts for the good of the country;
2. To let the government know what the people are thinking about the government and its policies, programs, and actions;
3. To provide a medium through which people communicate with one another -- people to people (p. 13).

McQuail (1987) terms this a participative communication model which favors democratic grassroots involvement (p. 120). For positive results, these functions can adequately be performed by the independent media outside state control.

Vandi (1979) notes that Liberia's high illiteracy rate is an out-growth of deficiency in educational resources, which has produced a culture of poverty and underdevelopment (p. 3). Educational facilities are heavily concentrated in the urban areas, leaving very few opportunities for rural dwellers. This has produced a regional imbalance in resources, according to Conteh (1989), that has precipitated rapid migration to Liberia's core region. One resultant consequence is that the "men are poor because they are ignorant; and they are ignorant because they are poor" (Vandi, 1979, p. 3). This vicious cycle is the greatest dilemma plaguing developing countries today. To penetrate such societies with speed and efficiency, according to Vandi's paradigm, the resources of mass communication must be utilized in community education programs such as health, agriculture, and nutrition, so as to institute social and economic progress (p. 4). Sherman (1989), as a member of this same school of thought, holds that Liberia's 79% illiterate population, with declining primary school enrollment, can be rehabilitated through the use of the mass media for literacy campaign, based on the lessons from Tanzania and Somalia in order to mobilize the resources of the people toward national development (p. 17).

Developmental Journalism: Some Critical Views

Despite the professed miracle expected to be performed by the mass media in national development, several critics have pointed out the

dangers in developmental journalism. One such danger is the intolerance of Third World leaders to accept criticisms.

At the time Third World leaders were advocating the use of information for development purposes, Hlophe (1979) states that criticism of government in the Liberian media was virtually impossible. Suppression of public opinion was prevalent as no outlets were provided for the discussion of national issues from all shades of ideology (p. 228).

Critics associate developmental journalism with Leninist journalism, which is characterized by state control but Smith (1980) parts company with such critics by stating that developmental journalism can be equated with libertarian journalism since it employs critical examination and objective analysis of developmental news.

Smith further holds that for developmental journalism to fulfill its mission, it must be based on "analytic interpretation, subtle investigation, constructive criticism, and sincere association with the grassroots rather than with the elite" (p. 154). This function is similar to the social responsibility theory, which many Third World leaders cannot accept, given the undemocratic and fragile nature of their banana republics.

The original advocates of developmental journalism in Asia, Smith states, "have subsequently repudiated it after seeing the travesties of objective and professional journalism which have emerged in its name" (p. 149). Based on the case of Guyana (Sidel, 1984), developmental

journalism can be applied in national development in the context of government policy (p. 494).

The groundwork for this is laid in the philosophies of media ownership in Third World countries, especially in Africa, where the media are predominately owned by governments whose employees are paid from public payroll. Stevenson and Cole (1981) indicate that news agencies established by the Third World governments exercise direct control over the distribution of news services provided by Western agencies. This arrangement, they argue, empowers "the national news agency to control the picture of the world that is painted for the nation's readers, viewers, and listeners" (p. 865). This is a form of institutional constraint.

Revisiting this argument, Stevenson (1988) notes that communication as a tool for development has failed to produce modernity the Third World had cherished. But he believes that "the idea of journalism as a watchdog, not cheerleader, of the powerful is still alive in the Third World" (p. 14). Relating this to the Liberian situation, the 1980 coup created cultural fissures between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous ethnic groups, and the need for national integration became a revolutionary slogan. The mass media were looked upon to heal the wounds of the revolution and the soldiers monopolized the use of the information services in this regard. Activities of the soldiers dominated the headlines in the main news diet dished out by the radio and television, while their photos flooded the newspapers, regardless of

the impact of the story. In this connection, Stevenson (1988) strikes a difference "between the skeptical treatment of public officials in the Western press tradition and the adulation heaped on leaders who have seized the press under the banner of national integration" (p. 67).

In 1983, the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC), according to Stevenson (1988), approved a project for the rehabilitation of the Liberian News Agency (LINA) through a West German technical assistance. The objective of this program, according to Stevenson, was to "transfer Western technology and ideas to the Third World to speed the process of industrialization and political maturation" (p. 76). This has been classified by Savio, founder of the International Press Service (IPS), as a mere creation of a "cathedral of high technology in an information desert, with the result in practice that nothing has changed in Liberia, except for a new technology and professional dependence on Germany" (Stevenson, p. 76).

One of the early opponents of the New World Information Order, Sussman (1981), maintains that developmental journalism is a "code word for control" (p. 37). He holds that the news media

Should be free of governmental regulations; that broad diversity of reporting and access by journalists to varied official and unofficial sources is essential to an independent press; and that free flow of information, ideas, and people is necessary for the social and economic development of the Third World (p. 39).

For Hedebrø (1982), news should be critically examined. He warns that a one-way information flow does not encourage community participation

in development activities. Information that contains rules, orders, commands, announcements does not stimulate discussion or suggestions in community affairs (p. 52). The "government-say-so-journalism" is a direct result of the subordination of developmental journalism to the political system in Third World countries, Haque (1982) holds, except the case of India. Best (1983) refers to this as "Yessirism."

As a failure of a theoretical concept, Honik (1989) argues that communication for development rarely succeeds because the theoretical role of communication in development is inadequate; development projects are inadequately planned and implemented; and there is a lack of political commitment on the part of the politicians (pp. 14-26). In sharing the same view, Beltrans (1976) says communication is impotent to cause national development because the "trickle-down" or the opinion leader theory does not enable the majority of the population to have access to mass media messages (p. 17), given the reality of the Third World countries.

Hypotheses

Cherry's (1986) study of selected African newspapers shows that African journalists still perceive news from Western perspective by emphasizing political events and disasters rather than publishing stories that would contribute toward national development in their coverage. This finding is not complimentary to the position of Third World

countries who want a positive image at home and in the Western media abroad. Cherry (1986) maintains that African journalists have not accepted in practice, developmental journalism that sprang out of the debate on the New World Information Order. This study, therefore, investigates whether Cherry's findings apply in the Liberian case: whether Liberian journalists emphasize the hard political news or developmental news based on the following hypotheses:

H1: Newspapers in Liberia publish more political news than developmental news.

H2: Government newspapers in Liberia publish more political news than private or independent newspapers.

H3: Political news is assigned larger headlines than developmental news in Liberian newspapers.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Operational Definitions

This study focuses on content analysis of selected government and independent or private daily newspapers in Liberia as a study population. Krippendorff (1980) defines content analysis as "a research technique to making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p. 21). The term "daily" in this study refers to independent newspapers published in Liberia from Monday to Friday and does not include the Saturday and Sunday papers. It also includes government newspapers published in Liberia four times a week between Monday and Friday.

The sampling frame is the daily editions of selected newspapers in Liberia. In this case, the *Daily Observer* is used as a representative of the independent press and the *New Liberian* as the government press. The *Daily Observer* was selected as a representative of the independent or private media because of its endurance to survive the multiple adversities it had faced during the military regime (Sawyer, 1986, p. 8; *West Africa*, April, 1985, p. 732). It is the only independent daily that has been running for nine years unlike other papers which fold up before their second birthday. The *New Liberian* was selected because it is the only government newspaper that has survived since the disappearance of *The Redeemer* a few months after the coup in 1980.

Secondly, the paper is published on a daily basis to reflect government policies. *Footprints Today* was used in place of the *Daily Observer* for the corresponding dates due to government's closure of the paper or the management's inability to meet publication requirements. Examples of these papers are provided in Appendix C.

As units of analysis, news stories, features, and caption photos were coded. Editorials and letters to the editor were not coded in this study because the *New Liberian* does not publish them on a regular basis but occasionally while they constitute regular columns in the *Daily Observer*.

This study covers a four-year period from 1982-85 during the military regime in Liberia. The year 1982 was selected as the starting period because both the *New Liberian* and the *Daily Observer* were published concurrently since the former started in 1978 and the latter in 1981. Secondly, these were the only two daily publications in the country that lasted throughout the military regime. The year 1985 was the cut-off point because it was the last year for the military rule in Liberia. The country was returned to a civilian rule in January, 1986.

Through a simple ballot for random selection, three months were selected for each of the four years, producing a total of 12 months or a composite year. Using the same simple ballot method, one week was selected for each of the months ranked first, second, third, and fourth week (Babbie, 1989, p. 188).

Intercoder Reliability

The researcher was assisted by a former editor of a local newspaper in Liberia. The coding session was preceded by periodic briefings about methods used and decisions made about the variables. The assistant was instructed how to code each of the variables. A sample of six issues of the *Daily Observer* and six issues of the *New Liberian* were randomly selected and pretested to check for intercoder reliability using the formula:

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{2m}{n_1 + n_2}$$

where m = the total number of coding decisions on which two coders agree; n_1 = total number of decisions made by Coder A and n_2 = total number of coding decisions made by Coder B. The intercoder reliability for coding the items was 90% (Budd, Thorpe, and Donohew, 1967). A total of 176 items were analyzed. Of this number, 89 items or 50.6% were about economic and social development, and 85 or 48.3% on political matters. This does not show a significant difference but there is a striking difference between the independent press (67.4%) and the government press (32.6%) in the coverage of development news.

Coding the Content

The day-to-day coverage of local, national, and international issues affecting Liberian politics and national development were coded. Using

the definition offered by Budd, Thorpe, and Donohew (1967, p. 50), the overall tone of the content of an item was categorized as positive, neutral, or negative. A positive item, according to Stevenson and Shaw (1986, p. 29), is one that supports the thematic concern of the item; a neutral item is a presentation of balanced facts without judgment; and a negative item is one that looks at the critical, or less positive angle of an item.

Liberian newspapers assign 60 points or more to a story in order to be qualified as a lead story, usually placed on the front page. Items with 40-59 points are usually placed on the back page. Items with 24-39 points are usually placed anywhere in the paper. Fillers and other less important items are usually assigned 12-23 points.

In coding the items, the categories provided by Schramm (1980), Harun (1985, p. 34), and Stevenson and Shaw (1986, pp. 26-27) have been modified for the purpose of this study. Items pertaining to agricultural development, economic affairs, social services, entertainment and culture, were collapsed under development news category while items on government activities, political activities, military/security matters, crime and disaster, and human interest constitute non-development stories, and therefore, classified as political news.

Sample dates selected were as follows:

1982: October, 2nd week; January, 1st week; May, 4th week.

1983: February, 3rd week; August, 1st week; September, 3rd week.

1984: July, 2nd week; November, 4th week; December, 4th week.

1985: March, 2nd week; April, 1st week; June, 2nd week.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

For the study period 1982-85, a total of 105 issues of Liberian newspapers were coded by this researcher and an assistant. The sample produced a total of 1,236 items. Out of this, the *Daily Observer* registered 40.8%; the *New Libertian*, 42.7%; and *Footprints Today* 16.5%. Table 1, below, shows a frequency distribution of items according to papers.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Items According to Newspapers

Paper	Item	Percentage
<i>Daily Observer</i>	504	40.8%
<i>New Libertian</i>	528	42.7%
<i>Footprints Today</i>	204	16.5%
Total	1236	100.0%

The *Daily Observer* and *Footprints Today* are grouped under the independent newspapers (57.3%) while the *New Libertian* (42.7%) represents the government newspaper.

The sample shows no significant difference in the distribution of items by years because the chi-square test of .38 is greater than the .05 significance level.

The highest number of items (382) was reported by the papers in 1984, closely followed by 344 in 1983. Surprisingly, the papers reported the least (221) items in 1985, the year of general elections in Liberia, which was slightly lower than 289 as reported in 1982. What accounts for this disparity may best be explained in terms of major events, as described below, that occurred during this period, and the degree of the military government's commitment to freedom of expression.

In 1983, a constitutional process was set in motion that would return the country to a civilian rule (Sawyer, 1987, p. 22). A draft constitution, written by a commission composed of a cross section of the country, was released to the public in 1983 (Sawyer, 1987, p. 21), followed by the election of a constituent assembly that revised the draft. This process was covered by the press as citizens and the media mounted a lively debate in the newspapers, the radio, and television stations. This event was dampened by a raid on a mining center in Nimba County, the northern part of the country, by alleged coup plotters on November 21, 1983 (Wonkeryor, 1985, pp. 107-108). The aftermath of this incident, especially the treason trials, generated more stories in the papers.

The year 1984 produced the highest number of stories in the study as a result of three factors: the lifting of a four-year ban on political activities and the formation of political parties; the arrest and detention of Amos Sawyer, a dean at the University of Liberia, for his involvement in an alleged coup plot; and the invasion of the University of Liberia by government troops to disperse protesting students following the arrest of Sawyer and others (Liebenow, 1987; Sawyer, 1987; and Wonkeryor, 1985). All these incidents were given coverage by the newspapers.

But 1985, the year of general and presidential elections in Liberia, produced the least number of items. This may be attributed to some developments in the country. By the end of 1984, the country was governed by Decree 88A, issued by the military government, which prohibited analytical reporting or criticism of government officials (*Liberia Alert*, March, 1985; Sawyer, 1987). Several political activists, including Sawyer who chaired the constitution drafting commission, were accused and detained or banned from making public speeches or press statements that allegedly violated Decree 88A (Sawyer, 1987, p. 27). This was also occasioned in January, 1985 by the fifth closure of the *Daily Observer* and the three-month old *Sun Times* newspaper by mid-1985. The newspapers that survived adopted guided journalism based on the lessons from the closures of the *Daily Observer* and *Sun Times*.

Results also show that news items (83.6%) commanded priority over features (9.9%), and caption photos (6.6%) in the papers over the four-year period. Out of 1,236 items, 1,033 were news stories, 122 features, and 81 caption photos. More than half or 54% of the items were rated positive, 27.6% neutral, and 18.4% negative. This indicates a significant difference where $p = 0.00 < .05$ level of the positive stories. It can be inferred that the newspapers were less analytical or critical and more promotional in the presentation of news stories in light of press restrictions and self-censorship that prevailed during this period. Therefore, Liberian newspapers project a positive image of the country in conformity with existing press laws.

Three hypotheses were examined in this study against the background that Third World journalists define news in Western context (Cherry, 1986).

The first hypothesis, which states that Liberian newspapers publish more political news than developmental news, was rejected. Both papers published 49.2% of stories in the economic and social development category while 50.8% of the items were on politics. The hypothesis was not supported using the chi-square test ($0.335 > .05$).

Stories on social services within the development category, according to Table 2, account for 19.3%. This has a slight edge over government activities which account for 18.8%. For stories on economic activities and crime, each account for 13.3%. Next in line is culture and

Table 2

Frequency Distribution of Items Ranked According to Topics

Topic	Item	Percentage
Social services	239	19.3%
Government activities	232	18.8%
Crime	165	13.3%
Economic activities	164	13.3%
Culture/entertainment	148	12.0%
Politics	90	7.3%
Human interest	87	7.0%
Agriculture	48	3.9%
Military	45	3.6%
Other	17	1.4%
Total	N = 1,236	100.0%

$$\chi^2(9df, N = 1,236) = 41.50793, p < .05$$

entertainment which is 12%. Both military and political activities each represent 7%, while agriculture, a national priority in Liberia, like any other Third World nation, was given an insignificant coverage of 3.9%.

This shows four levels of priority given to the topics or categories in news reporting in the Liberian press. About 40% of the stories are on social services and government activities. This is as equally important as economic activities, culture, and entertainment which also constitute about 40% of the news menu. The ratio drops significantly to 14% for stories on politics and human interests. Agricultural development and military matters receive less coverage with 6%. This indicates that to a larger extent, Third World journalism is geared toward promoting social and economic development as priority category of news. This also suggests that Third World journalists define news as a social service for national development. Against this background, Cherry's (1986) finding that Third World journalists define news in Western context is not supported in the Liberian case, and therefore, remains unsupported.

Hypothesis two predicted that government newspapers in Liberia publish more political news than the private media. Statistically, this was not supported due to the fact that the two papers almost evenly split. The *New Liberian* published more of political news (52.2%) than the independent newspapers (49.1%). As illustrated in Table 3, private newspapers concentrated slightly more on reporting development stories

Table 3

A Comparison of Development and Political News in Government and Private Newspapers

Topic/category	Government newspaper	Independent newspaper
Development news	48.8%	50.9%
Political news	52.2%	49.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

$$\chi^2 = 0.92645 \quad \underline{df} = 1 \quad \underline{p} = 0.33579 > .05$$

rather than politics or the activities of government officials.

As predicted, hypothesis three, which states that political news is assigned larger headlines than development news in Liberian newspapers, was supported. There is a significant difference in headline size between political and economic development stories. Table 4 illustrates that out of 126 stories with 60 points or more in headline size, 6.4% were on development news while 14.4% of the stories were on politics, crime, and disaster.

Table 4

Headline Size According to Development and Political News

Headline size	Development News %	Political News %
60 points or more	6.4%	14.4%
40 to 59 points	6.3%	12.2%
24 to 39 points	72.6%	59.5%
12 to 23 points	14.7%	13.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

$\chi^2 = 37.83053$, df = 4, p < .05

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to investigate Cherry's (1986) finding that "news is still defined in Western terms, and from a Western perspective" (p. 16) by Third World journalists. Her study came in the wake of a debate between Third World and Western governments about the bad image of Third World countries in the Western press. The Third World countries (Masmoudi, 1979) have complained about their bad image projected in the Western media, a charge supported by Giffard (1984, 1985), Ogan (1987), Perry (1987), among others. Studies by these scholars and others indicate that the Western media give prominence to crisis journalism which thrives on reporting about political and military matters, internal conflicts, coups, and earthquakes.

Giffard's second look at the problem (1985) shows that despite the establishment of the Inter Press Service as a Third World news agency, news coverage within the region shows that political news is still the leading category of news, followed by a substantial coverage of economic issues. Cherry's (1986) study finds no difference in the style of reporting between the Third World media and Western media agencies. This implies that Third World journalists project negative images about their countries at home as is done by the Western media abroad. But Ogan's (1987) investigation, which compares media reports about the 1984 international conference on population held in Mexico, shows that the

media in the developing countries report more development news than the Western media which emphasize crisis journalism. This also questions previous conceptions that there is no difference between Third World media and the media in the West "in their preoccupation with political news" (p. 87).

Cherry's findings were not confirmed in this study. The definition of news as a social service in the Third World rather than as a priced commodity (Meyer, 1988) was reaffirmed, given the fact that Liberian newspapers publish more of social development news than political news. News in this context places premium on its use as a vehicle for development.

This is a similar situation that exists in many Third World countries today, especially where state ownership of media institutions is common. National radio and television stations and newspapers are used by Third World countries as agents of development through social change. This research has also indicated that newspapers, private or government-owned project a positive image of the countries in which they operate. Since the New World Information Order debate, the Third World journalists have been left to reconcile between the acceptance of developmental journalism or the Western watchdog press theory. Roser and Brown (1986) believe that the media in the Third World give prominence to development news rather than violence and conflict (p. 115). Despite the several violent political upheavals Liberia went

through between 1980 and 1985, the newspapers did not concentrate only on reporting political issues but economic development as well. This is true of many developing nations today. Furthermore, despite the corruption scandals that rocked the nation during the revolution, they constitute only 13% of all the stories reported in four years.

This shows that news is being redefined in Third World countries in light of national development policies where information is considered as a resource for economic and social development. That is why some nations have embarked upon the enactment of national communication policies that would channel all information resources and technology towards national development.

Directions for Further Research

The question raised by Cherry's study needs to be investigated in other Third World countries. Scholars should find out how journalists in developing countries perceive news in light of development communication as a catalyst for national development.

A new study should also be designed to investigate newspaper readership in Third World countries. Such a study should find out what the readers want to read about in their national newspapers and what should be emphasized in the coverage of news categories. This survey would find out how journalists perceive news and how the readers respond to such a perception.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CONTENT CATEGORIES

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1. Agricultural development - cash crop/food crop production, farming, weather conditions, extension services, agricultural projects, forestry, land tenure, cooperative societies, research, harvest, machinery, animal husbandry.
2. Economic affairs -- labor, wages, fiscal policies, development planning, prices, banking, foreign exchange, bilateral and multilateral cooperation, population census, relief aid, national debt, manpower development, fund raising programs and rallies, trade and industry, investment, balance of payments, factories, marketing, science and technology, infrastructural development, self help projects, and business institutions.
3. Social services -- health, medicine, sanitation, family planning, housing, water, energy, environment, mortality, education, illiteracy, parks, insurance, communication, welfare programs, charity organizations.
4. Entertainment and culture -- traditional beliefs and practices, religion, recreation, music and dance, arts and crafts, anniversaries, celebrities, festivals, films, contests, sports news.
5. Political activities -- pressure groups, resolutions, political parties, student politics, elections, campaigns, demonstrations, strikes, unions, political publications/statements, political corruption,

mal-administration, political confessions, public hearings, treason trials, and executions.

6. Government activities -- appointments, dismissals, changes in positions, protocols, communique, diplomacy, foreign cooperation, national policies, legislation/decrees, reconstruction, reconciliation, settlements, restitution, detention/release, deportation/extradition, annual reports/messages, constitutional issues, human rights, foreign visits.
7. Military/security -- coups, counter coups, border clashes, uprisings, curfew, military tribunal, para-military and joint security forces, weapons, camps/bases, prisons, prisoners, training and barracks, terrorism, defections, recruitment, and discharges.
8. Human interest stories -- wedding, lost and found, rescue, gambling, appeals, hunger strike, pets, and humanitarian organizations.
9. Crime and disaster -- rape, murder, kidnapping, drowning, suicide, white collar crime, property theft, debt case, accidents, police reports, victims, floods, drought, landslide, court trials, judiciary.
10. Other.

APPENDIX B: CODING SHEET

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APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF LIBERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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These consist of pages:

59-61

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