

IDEOLOGY AND PRESS FUNCTIONS
IN CAMEROON
Towards an Authoritarian-Responsible Private Press

ABSTRACT

The role of the press in any Society has been used to indicate its political culture and system. In the 1960's, systems were classified into the authoritarian, libertarian, communist and social responsibility systems with definite media ideologies. However this typology has been inadequate in analysing many African regimes because of the internal competition of the different ideologies within the various states.

This article tries to highlight this phenomenon in Cameroon. It focuses on the different ideological trends in the Cameroonian media system, situates them in their historical context and shows the strains and symboisis between the leadership ideology and the private media ideology. It concluded that with such features, the Country could not fit in the existing typology and instead proposes the use of an authoritarian responsible press system.

RESUME

Le rôle de la presse a toujours été d'indiquer le système et la culture politique de toute société. Pendant les années 60, on distinguait le système autoritaire, le système libéral, le système communiste et le système de responsabilité sociale, chacun correspondant à une idéologie spécifique de la presse. Cependant, cette typologie s'est avérée inadéquate dans l'analyse des régimes africains à cause de la confrontation de différentes idéologies à l'intérieur des Etats.

Cet article cherche à démontrer ce phénomène au Cameroun. Il analyse les différentes tendances idéologiques des médias camerounais, les restitue dans leur contexte historique et relève les divergences ainsi que la symbiose entre l'idéologie gouvernementale et l'idéologie des médias privés. Il conclut qu'avec ces caractéristiques, le Cameroun ne pouvait s'insérer dans la classification existante mais plutôt présentait un système de presse d'autoritarisme responsable.

IDEOLOGY AND PRESS FUNCTIONS IN CAMEROON: TOWARDS AN AUTHORITARIAN-RESPONSIBLE PRIVATE PRESS

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THE PROBLEM

The problem of analysing the functions of the media in any society has been mostly to classify them in the political development continuum. Early researchers such as Laswell (1948), Merton (1957), and Wright (1959) had established four main functions of the media in the society : watching over the environment, helping the society to respond to its environment, transmitting the social heritage to new members of the society and entertainment. Blake and Haroldsen (1975) have elaborated on these functions by outlining news, propaganda, social norm, status conferral, supplementation, narcotic dysfunction and canalisation as important media functions.

The emphasis which the media place on anyone of these functions it has been argued helps in determining its political regime. For this reason Siebert F, Peterson T, and Schraam W (1963) had conceived the four theories of the press in which they identified four main media systems : the authoritarian, libertain, communist and social responsibility press systems.

With the authoritarian press regime, the mass media controlled mostly by the state is expected to support state policies. The libertain press functions to uncover and present the truth. It operates as a private enterprise with little government intervention and is regulated by members of the society. Its main objective is to inform, entertain, sell and check the government. The communist press is expected to play the propaganda function : perpetuating and expanding the socialist system. It is an instrument of go-

vernment although it allows criticism of the regime's bureaucracy. Finally the social responsibility press has an ideology based on moral and ethical restrictions. It's main stress being on the responsibility not freedom. It is people-oriented and does not believe that truth will rise from a class of ideas but through constructive discussions. Most researchers have simplified their classification of media systems by styling the western press either responsible or free, the eastern European Press Communist and most of the third world press authoritarian. This paper tries to examine whether there is a link between the media ideology of African press lords and the leadership ideology. By ideology, we refer to

«System of ideas concerning phenomena, especially those of social life and the manner of thinking characteristic of a class or an individual». (1)

For our study, there are two social classes with distinct media ideologies. First is the ruling political class whose media policy is tied to the leadership ideology. In Cameroon, this class has defined the role the press as «to inform and educate at home and persuade abroad». In this case, the media is expected to have a supportive function in the political system similar to that of the authoritarian press regime. It is supposed to be an instrument for the expression of the system which will include political mobilisation, conscientisation, national consolidation and unification.(2)

Second is the class of press lords who own the private press and are interested in the newspaper as an enterprise. Since their intention is to sell, their policy is to unravel sensational news and in most cases the «truth». The constant censorship indicates that the private press is not totally supportive and does not reflect the ideology of its owners. Because there is no viable press union to articulate the ideology of the private press in Cameroon, we have resorted to a survey and content analysis of mottoes and editorial policies of the papers.

METHOD

In all 30 newspapers were surveyed, 28 of which were English and two bilingual. The survey which was done in the Buea archives, included newspapers which existed between 1960 and 1980. Two of the newspapers were published in Yaounde, five in Bamenda, one in Tiko, two in Buea, three in Kumba and 17 in Limbe. Papers which changed their mottoes and editorial policies were counted as different from the previous ones. From a word content analysis we identified 16 common words and 59 items. These include service independent, Frank, Truth, entertainment, vigilance, unity, people inform, educate, guide, objective, nationalist, power, humanist. and justice.

After the word content analysis, we grouped them according to the following themes :

- (i) Responsibility press ideology : service, vigilance, educate, humanist and justice.
- (ii) Libertain press ideology : independent, frank, truth entertainment, inform.
- (iii) Authoritarian press ideology : unity, guide, nationalist, power.
- (iv) Communist press ideology : people.

RESULTS

The results of this word and thematic content analysis are presented in the following tables.

Table I. Word content analysis of editorial policies

WORD	FREQUENCY	%	RANK
service	8	13.5	1
independent	3	5	5
frank	1	1.69	7
truth	5	8.47	4
entertainment	2	3.3	6
vigilance	2	3.3	6
unity	2	3.3	6
people	2	3.3	6
inform	2	3.3	6
educate	8	13.5	1
guide	5	8.47	4
objective	2	3.3	6
nationalist	6	10.1	3
humanist	3	5	5
power	7	11.8	2
justice	1	1.69	7
number of items	59	100 %	

Table 2 : Thematic analysis of media ideology in Cameroon

CATEGORY	ITEMS	%	RANK
social responsibility	24	40.6	1
libertarian	13	22	3
authoritarian	20	33.8	2
communist	2	3.3	4
number of items	59		

ANALYSIS

The survey shows that most Cameroonian newspapers ascribe to the social responsibility and authoritarian press systems. The two systems made up 74.4 % of the desires of the country's attentive press public expressed in their mottoes. It also shows that the social responsibility system is the most favoured with 40 % followed by the Authoritarian press (33.8 %). If the country depicted as lacking press freedom, it is due to the comparatively lower libertarian values in most editorial policies, 22 % of the survey. Although most of the papers in the survey are private, their support for state institutions expressed as authoritarian attributes is high (33.8 %). This is in contradistinction to the low advocacy function of the press in a pro-western regime shown in the low value of the communist attributes (3.3 %).

The survey shows that social responsibility and authoritarianism are the main ideologies prescribed by the press in Cameroon. The ideology of social responsibility was mostly expressed by *Cameroon Time*, *Cameroon Champions*, *Cameroon Out look*, (1968-1984), *Cameroon Telegraph*, *Cameroon Express*, *Cameroon Mirror*, *New Standard*, *Cameroon Post*, (1980), *New Era*, *Cameroon Observer*, *The Voice*, *Cameroon Tribune* and *Graphic Sport*.

On the other hand, the authoritarian ideology was expressed by *Cameroon Times*, *Cameroon Out look* (1987), *New Cameroon*, *Cameroon Bilingue*, *Cameroon Mirror*, *Cameroon Chronicle*, *Cameroon Post*, *Unité*, *The Voice*, *Sunday Voice*.

The pure libertarian ideology was expressed by *Cameroon Star*, *Cameroon Out look*, *Cameroon Bilingual*, *Western Mail*, *Cameroon Chronicle*, *The Citizen*, *Cameroon Spokesman*, *Graphic Sports*, *Sunday News*, and *Cameroon Scope*.

Finally the communist, People-oriented ideology was the main preoccupation of *The Iroko* and *Cameroon Post*.

The reason for the predominance of the social responsibility and authoritarian ideologies are mainly political. Papers like *Cameroon Champions*, *Cameroon Times*, *Cameroon Mirror* and *Unité* were sponsored by political parties : The CPNC for the first, the KNDP for the second and third and the CNU for the last. This made them both instruments of political support (authoritarian ideology) and fora of social discussions (1). Others such as *Cameroon Observer*, *The Voice*, *New Era*, *Cameroon Post*, *Cameroon Chronicle*, and *Western Mail* were owned by members of liberal professions : Lawyers and journalists These made them more idealistic and closer to the libertarian school. One of such professionals was Dan Lawany Motomby-Woleta who created *The Voice* chain of newspapers in Bamenda. In his editorial of February 11, 1969 launching the paper, DL Motomby-Woleta summarised this authoritarian-responsible mission of the Cameroon press thus :

«Throughout the existence of this newspaper, we Pledge that we shall edit and publish without favour malice or rancour. We shall inform, educate, and inform, we shall lavish praise where it is due, but we shall not hesitate to damn and condemn where there is injustice, bias or an apparent mess that annoys public sense.

We shall probe, investigate and ask questions for which we shall expect honest answers.

We shall implore the help of experts or anyone who has a profitable suggestion to speak through the medium of this paper to help the economic advancement of our dear fatherland.

Of course, we shall gossip a bit (not destructively though). The Voice is the people's Voice».

The advocates of the pure libertarian press are mostly dissent political activists, idealistic journalists and members of liberal professions like lawyers and pharmacists. For instance, *Cameroon Star's* libertarian vocation was highly influenced by the political and professional outlook of its owner : Gorji Dinka, a lawyer and legal adviser of the dissent CUC party. Stressing on an independent policy, *The Star* was noted for its criticism of abuse on civil liberties and freedom by the government. In its editorial of August 5, 1966, «The Wrong Foot Forward», the paper argued that :

«When there is a legal opposition party, dissent opinion in newspapers will not be termed subversion».

It is this medium which Dinka used to criticise the government and the Prime Minister Ngom Jua. As pro-cuc newspaper, *The Citizen* and *Cameroon Spokesman* were also in the forefront in the fight for the truth and general freedom.

Finally the communist press ideology was basically embraced Mukong's *The Iroko*. A staunch pro-Ok party stewart (the com-

munist-oriented UPC wing in West Cameroon) Mukong's paper with its motto «The people» was a forum for the promotion of the ideology of African socialism especially by Dr. Fonlon.

Apart from frequent editorials which frequently reminded the public of their roles, these papers had many columns which tied with their ideologies. For instance authoritarian-oriented paper had columns such as «The political chronicle» (*Unité*), and «Top of the Week» (*Cameroon Tribune*). The social responsibility papers had columns such as «men and matters», «Auntie Clara», «Our guest writer» (*Cameroon Champions*); «letters to the Editor», «Liza», «Dear Sylvester», «Sammy Twainkle», «Emile Nola», «Kontiki» and «Dear Christyn». (*Cameroon Times*), «Random leaves», «Focus», «Our Guest of the week», «Tribune Debates», «matters of the «Top of the Week» (*Cameroon Tribune*) and «The citizen lawyer» (*The Citizen*). The main characteristic of these columns is that they were educative and showed concern at public issues. On the other hand, the libertarian-oriented columns included, «The Rambler», «Big Mof Market», «Gossip in Buea», «A free mind speaks», «KNDP Gossips» (*Cameroon Spokesman*). «Ako-Aya», «Sidonlook», (*Cameroon Out look*); «Free thinking», «Tony Free Thinker». (*Cameroon Mirror*); «Ink in my Blood», «Political Run-down», «Glimpses», «Jakatu» (*Cameroon Times*); «Talkshop», «Thinks here and there», «Thinking Aloud». (*Cameroon Tribune*) and «Troki» (*Iroko*). Most of these columns were either gossip columns or very highly critical columns which tried to write freely on taboo subjects. (1)

CONSEQUENCES

The ideology and policies of the papers under review had a great impact on the practice of journalism in Cameroon. It explains the survival of newspapers in the country. In most cases, whenever there is a discrepancy between the leadership ideology and the media ideology, the latter suffers. For this reason, most papers which adopted the libertarian ideology fizzled out quickly because of constant conflict with the government. This explains the demise of *The Citizen*, *Cameroon Spokesman*, *Cameroon Star* and *Cameroon Scope* between 1966 and 1968. If paper like *Cameroon Out look* created since 1968 has been surviving, it is partly because of its «real journalismus». In effect, the paper started on a libertarian platform in 1968, posing its motto as «Independent», frank and objective «but it finally ended up in the authoritarian camp in 1987 with its policy being «To Lead and Direct Opinion». The same with *Cameroon Post* which started on a social responsibility posture with a policy of «True service to our people» but ended up in the authoritarian camp, changing its policy to «United We Stand».

Like the libertarian papers, those of social responsibility too have been in conflict with the government. In 1963 *Cameroon Champions* wound up following a wrangle with the KNDP authorities. In 1966, the *Cameroon Star's* editor was jailed. In 1969 *Cameroon Times*, *New Standard*, *Cameroon Outlook* and *Cameroon Telegraph* editors were constantly arrested for criticising the government.

On the other hand, the authoritarian ideology papers such as *Cameroon Tribune*, *Cameroon Times*, *Cameroon Post* and *Unité* have been surviving thanks to government support. Because of their open policies to support the government politically, they receive government assistance regularly.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has tried to shed more lights on the classical four theories of the press. It has shown that it is very difficult to categorise a society in anyone of the four press regimes prescribed by Siebert et al. By using Cameroon, it has shown that either through committed expediency or profit-seeking, newspapermen adopt policies characteristic of anyone of the following four regimes. It has also shown that no one paper could totally belong to any of these categories. It has however shown that the government is more prone to clash with papers depicting a high tendency towards the libertarian and social responsibility ideology than with those promoting authoritarian press values. The outcome is that for the private press to thrive well and live harmoniously with the government in a developing country like Cameroon, the newspapermen must adopt both authoritarian and social responsibility values. In this way a hybrid authoritarian-responsible press is needed in most of African countries which want to use the media for development and social integration.

E.M.C

APPENDIX

WORD CONTENT ANALYSIS

Cameroon Times	:	Service to the Nation	1960
Cameroon Outlook	:	Independent, franck, objective	1968
Cameroon Outlook	:	To lead and direct opinion	1987
*Cameroon Star	:	The Independent Newspaper	1968
*Cameroon Champions	:	External vigilance	1960
Cameroon Telegraph	:	Truth, service, vigilance	1968
New Cameroon	:	Unity, is strength	1963
Cameroon Spokesman	:	Malice towards none	1964
Cameroon Express	:	Service	1968
Cameroon Bilingue	:	Nation	1984
*Western Mail	:	Truth	1982
Cameroon Mirror	:	Service to the nation	1965
The Citizen	:	Malice towards none	1982
Cameroon Bilingual	:	Our Weekly	1963
The New Standard	:	Service	
The Cameroon Chronicle	:	To inform, educate, guide guard and defend Cameroon First.	1980
Cameroon Scope	:	Tomorrow is here today	
Cameroon Post	:	Time Service to Our Nation	1980
New Era	:	Service to the Nation	
Cameroon Post	:	The Voice of the People	1980
Cameroon Post	:	United We Stand	
Voice Inc (3)	:	Knowledge is power	1973
Cameroon Observer	:	Truth and service	1963
The Iroko	:	The people	9163
Sunday News	:	All that is good in Man	1966
Sports Graphic	:	Truth, Service, objectivity	1984
Cameroon Tribune	:	Responsible, objective, service	1974
Unité	:	Guide and Educate.	

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SUMMARY

An understanding of communication emanating from the works of international communication experts does not permit the improvement of the process of decision-making by economic and political agents in the Third World. The dominant approaches