The cultural mission of the media in the beginning of the Romanian press

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Abstract

The cultural and educational aspect of the media has always been a concern for theorists, journalists, people involved in the mass communication system and even for the common individual daily exposed to the media messages. The relationship between media and society can be looked upon in terms of global consequences (the functions), precise influences (the effects) and general missions of the media (the roles) [1]. In this article the authors will refer to the general roles assumed by the media according to the political system they function within. In terms of the global mission of the press, three American professors, Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm, in 1956 published a book called *Four theories of the press*, where they have elaborated the most famous models regarding the role of the media [2]. The four theories discussed are: authoritarian, where the state exercises control over content to assure that content is in the public or state interest; libertarian, where nearly everything is permitted and the public is trusted to sort what they need and consider useful from the multitude of messages coming from mass media; social responsibility, which is essentially libertarian but with an obligation of the media to meet certain minimum standards of responsibility to its audience; and soviet communist, which is a special type of authoritarian in which content is totally controlled for the specific aim of supporting communist ideology [3].

In correspondence with the European history of the press but much later, the Romanian press was born under the circumstances of the authoritarian model. 1829 is the year of the first real periodical publications in the Principalities and 1838 in Transylvania. By a text analysis of the articles introducing the gazettes, the authors of this article will demonstrate that the cultural and historical personalities involved in the development of the first gazettes had assumed their mission in terms of the libertarian theory based on the rights of the individual, the enlightenment of the people provided by knowledge, the development of the Romanian language and the creation of the citizen individual with a defined role in the political decision.

Keywords: mass media; press; beginning; theories of the press; the authoritarian model; the libertarian model; culte; education; first Romanian gazettes; mission of the media
1. Introduction

A study on the cultural and educational role of the media in the beginning of the Romanian press brings a new and different approach on the mission that the first journalists in the history of the Romanian gazettes assumed. The concrete conditions of the apparition of the first periodical publications were previously analyzed by researchers like Pierre Albert [4], Nicolae Iorga, Marian Petcu, Sergiu I. Nicolaescu and others. The authors of this study will apply the mass communication sociological approach of analysis on the period starting with the year 1829, when the first edition of Curierul românesc (București) and Albina românească (Iași) were published until the Revolution in 1848 in the Principalities. The study of the Transylvanian press will start with the year 1838 when Gazeta de Transilvania (Brașov) was published. The authors will start by presenting the theoretical basis of this article, the four theories concerning the role of the media, emphasizing the authoritarian model, representative for the historical period analyzed, and the libertarian model which contains the principles of action that the men responsible with the first newspapers had assumed. The article contains also a monographic approach on the three gazettes and of their authors in order to see how they applied in practice the main principles contained in the programme-articles that preceded the first editions of the newspapers. The historical conditions, the obstacles the first journalists encountered the authoritarian system’s pressures that led to an obedient behavior of the press, the fail of the programme and the efforts to stick to the programme will be taken into account.

2. Theoretical approaches

Johannes Gutenberg’s invention of mechanical movable type printing (around 1438-1454) [5] started the Printing Revolution and is widely regarded as the most important event of the modern period. The new machine allows a fast multiplying of the same text and offers the writing a chance to reach a large number of readers, a chance that the manuscripts did not have. Although many and different informative texts were published, the printed periodical press did not appear until the XVII century in Western Europe [6]. The social and political circumstances made this type of events to occur much later in the Romanian history, in the XIX century. Starting with the year 1829 we can talk about real Romanian press, as an accomplishment of the efforts of intellectuals like Ion Heliade Radulescu, Gheorghe Asachi and George Baritiu.

The first modern newspapers in the Principalities are connected to an important historical event, with international implications. Despite the fact that the Principalities’ territory was subject to the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, the founders of the first gazettes have exploited the opportunities to obtain licenses to print in Wallachia and Moldavia. Until September 1829 the Principalities were under Russian occupation, led by a military governor. The Treaty of Adrianople stipulates that Turkey was defeated and Russia was allowed to occupy Moldavia and Walachia (guaranteeing their prosperity, and full “liberty of trade” for them) until Turkey had paid a large indemnity. Moldavia and Wallachia remained under Russian protectorate until the end of the Crimean War, in 1856. Ironically, the first weekly publication on the Principalities territory was Courier de Moldavie (February 18 – April 1, 1790), edited in French by the Russian Army Commandment stationed in Iasi during the Russian-Turkish War in 1787-1791 and printed at General Potemkin’s war campaign typography [7]. We can easily understand the need of information under the given circumstances and the way Russians, who already had a press from 1703 [8], understood to deal with this need. So, again the Principalities were under Russian occupation, but this time the merits of the first publications were now Romanian. The license, of course, was given by the Russians.

In every modern state confronted with the apparition of the media, a new problem occurred: liberty or control over was in the process to destabilize the state system, by opposing to the political decision and emphasizing the rights of the individuals. The state was seen as the highest expression of institutionalized structure that supersedes the individual and makes it possible for the individual to acquire and develop a stable and harmonious life. Mass
communication, then, must support the state and the government in power so that total society may advance and the state may be viable and attain its objectives. Therefore, it is easy to see why the press was seen as a threat to the system. The State (the elite that runs the state) directs the citizenry, which is not considered competent and interested enough to make critical political decisions. One man or an elite group is placed in a leadership role. As the group or person controls society generally it (or he or she) also controls the mass media since they are recognized as vital instruments of social control [9]. These are the premises of the authoritarian theory concerning the role of the media versus the state, as they appear in the work of the three American theorists, Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson and Wilbur Schramm. The mass media, under authoritarianism, are educators and propagandists by which the power elite exercise social control. Generally the media are privately owned, and this is considered a major obstacle in the act of control from the state’s point of view. So, the state can only intervene by privileges and restrictions [10]. Privileges were accorded to those press institutions subordinated or obedient to the political power and consist in: the license or right to publish, the financial support, the diminishing of the taxes and personal favors [11]. The restrictions refer to the preferential access to license, to resources, to the distribution system, to the severe law system containing too many articles about treason and instigation to fight the system and the abuse of applying these laws [12]. This press concept has formed and now forms, the basis for many media systems of the world. The mass media, under authoritarianism, have only as much freedom as the national leadership at any particular time is willing to permit.

The libertarian theory of the press is generally attained by observing the England and the American colonies of the seventeenth century. Giving rise to the libertarian press theory was the philosophy that looked upon man as a rational animal with inherent natural rights. One of these rights was the right to pursue truth, and potential interferes (kings, governors et al) would (or should) be restrained. Exponents of this press movement during the XVII century, and the 200 years which followed, included Milton, Locke, Erskine, Jefferson, and John Stuart Mill [13]. Individual liberties were stressed by these philosophers, along with a basic trust in the people to take intelligent decisions (generally) if a climate of free expression existed. In theory, a libertarian press functions to present the truth, however splintered it may be in a pluralism of voices. It is impossible to do this if it is controlled by some authority outside itself. Through the years many new ideas were grafted on to early press libertarianism. There flows a basic faith, shown by libertarian advocates that a free press – working in a laissez faire, unfettered situation – will naturally result in a pluralism of information and viewpoints necessary in a democratic society.

The principles of the authoritarian theory represent the context in which the first Romania gazettes were published and the rules applicable to the journalists. But the way the used to see themselves and the role they had to play in the society was different and the ideas were similar to those contained by the libertarian theory of the press. It is actually what happened in the whole Europe, where the journalist had to fight the political system in order to attain their goals: free access to information, the education of the individual to fight for his rights and to participate in the political decision, the enlargement of the knowledge horizon. Only the time when these phenomena appeared differ.

3. Methodology

To demonstrate the premises of this article, the authors have applied the monographic research on the first Romanian periodical publication: Curierul românesc (București), Albina românească (Iași) and Gazeta de Transilvania (Brașov). The monographic approach was previously used by the historian Nicolae Iorga [14] and his conclusions are reliable and valuable to the present day researcher.

The main method is the text analysis of the programme-articles that preceded the apparition of those three gazettes. The texts are contained in Istoria presei române. O antologie de Marian Petcu [15]. Important contributions to journalistic activity of the XIX century are noted by people involved like Mihail Kogălniceanu, Dimitrie Bolintineanu and Cezar Boliac, whose articles can be found in the this antological volume.
We have identified the main coordinates of the press vision upon itself in the XIX century and the particularities regarding each of the two Principalities and Transylvania.

3.1. “Curierul românesc”

From its beginning, the Romanian press had a crucial role not only in the development of the language, but also in its ability to record the political, social and cultural events concerning the three Principalities and to determine the people to participate in the historical and cultural events more or less important to the development of the citizens. This mission assumed by the journalists, at that time personalitieS of the cultural and political life, militants for the enlightenment of the people, for the rights of the Romanian, involved in the events that lead to the unification of all Romanians, involved in the fight to gain sovereignty and independence of the country.

A few of these principles appear in Știriințarea (The notice) announcing the publishing of Curierul românesc. The author, Ion Heliade Rădulescu, wrote: “Folosul gazetei este deosebit și deoptrivă pentru toată treapta de oameni: într-însa politicul își pironese ascuțitele și prevâzătoare sale căutături și se adâncează în gândurile și combinări sale; aici înșiitul literat și filozof adună și pune în cumpăna faptele și întâmplările lumii, îndrăznețul și neastâmpăratul războinic se desăvârșește într-însa, povățindu-se din norocirele sau greșelele altor războinici; băgătorul de seamă neguțător dintr-însa își îndrepteză mai cu îndrâzneală speculațiile sale; până când, în sfârșit, și asădatul plagar și el poate afla aceea ce înlesnește ostenelile sale și face să umple câmpurile de îmbelșugatele sale roduri. Nu este nici o treaptă, nu este nici o vârstă care să nu afle placere și folos într-această aflare vrednică și cuviințiosă cuvântării omului, adică în gazetă” [16].

The tone of the article is very warm and patriotic, with an idealistic view of the mission of the press, the emphasis of the press role in other societies and the deep necessity the Romanian society was in. Therefore, the factor of enlightenment represented by the press would have to perform a decisive role in the development of the individual of any age and social class, by contributing to the growth of the Romanian language, by enlarging the spiritual horizon, by bringing history in the peoples preoccupations so they could be able to act like responsible citizens. There are the things the notice promises to the future readers of the newspaper: a gathering of the most useful things from the European gazettes, texts to support the growth of Romanian literature, internal news, commercial information, decisions and laws given by the rulers of the state, useful information (named nowadays “instrumental” [17]), hygienic precepts and announces regarding what people want to buy and sell, that means an incipient form of advertising [18]. From the list of subscriptions, we can draw the conclusion that Heliade Rădulescu, a pupil of Gheorghe Lazăr, who had often travelled to Sibiu, did not limit the circulation of his gazette to the Principality of Wallachia and found subscribers also in Iasi and in Transilvania, Bucovina and Basarabia [19]. The ideas about the meaning of the gazette are found also in the programme-article from the first edition of the newspaper.

The first edition was published on April 8, 1829. Nicolae Iorga evocates the moment writing that the gazettes was delayed by the typographical conditions and the appearance of the first editions was not very qualitative regarding the aspect of the letters and the paper they were typed on [20]. From April 1829 until April 1848 Curierul românesc had two to four editions a week. On 19 April 1848, due to a motto disliked by the political power (“Urâsc tirania, mi-e frică de anarhie”/ “I hate tyranny, I’m afraid of anarchy”), the publication was suspended. In 1859 was refounded, but it only lasted for two weeks [21]. In Curierul made their debut important personalities of the Romanian cultural life: Vasile Cărlova, Iancu Văcărescu, Grigore Alexandrescu, Ion Catina and Heliade himself [22].

3.2. “Albina românească”

In Albina, we find the same idealistic image of the press in the ideas of Gheorghe Asachi, who insisted on the informative role and the event agenda role the media has: “Luătorii-aminte, cetitorii gazetei, ca într-o oglindă
in ea vede înfățișate toate interesantele întâmplări de carile el însu în atârnă, martor să face cruntele bătălții, vede faptele, aud vorbile strălucitoarelui, să minunează de fenomenele firi și ca un călător de pe rotunzimea pământului culege folositoarele pilde de învățătură” [23].

The same patriotic and pathetic tone can be observed by reading the programme-article from the first edition of the gazette, where Asachi emphasizes the development of the human mind of the readers by reading the newspapers and the great event represented by this printed work. The newspaper contained political and economical news, international facts, historical, moral and philosophical articles, advice articles regarding the crops and the field. C. Negruzzi, M. Kogâlniceanu, Alecu Donici, V. Alecsandri, N. Bălcescu, D. Gusti, Alecu Russo, N. Nicoleanu signed their names on the newspaper pages. Albina românească had also two editions a week. Although the historians considered that Asachi did not have the same large cultural vision as Heliade Rădulescu, his ideas deserve all the respect from journalists of all times: the respect to religion, to the laws and to the state, the truth of the written news, the usefulness of advice, principles to which he was always faithfull [24]. Albina ceases to exist under this name in 1850, when it changes into Gazeta de Moldavia, and permanently in 1858.

3.3. “Gazeta de Transilvania”

In March, 12, 1838, in Brasov, Gazeta de Transilvania was published as the first political and cultural newspaper of the Romanian from beyond the Carpathians. In the beginning it was a weekly publication, then the frequency constantly grew to daily in 1884-1917, then again weekly until 1945. George Barţiu was the founder and the first editor of this gazette. In the programme-article, Barţiu emphasizes the meaning of the newspaper in the life of the Romanian people in Transylvania: “Lătirea științelor și a cunoștințelor, împărtășirea ideilor la toate clasele de oameni, atrage astăzi toate națiile, toate stăpânirile cele înțelepte și pământești; mijloace la acestea sunt cărțile, literatura, scrierile periodice știitice și propovăduite la toți” [25]

A political newspaper in the native language contributes to the re-birth of a nation [26]. Among other things, Gazeta fights for the recognition of the equality of rights of the Romanians in Transylvania with the other nations in this territory, emphasizes the role of Avram Iancu in the Revolution in 1848, militates for the introduction of the Latin alphabet instead of the Kirilic one, for knowledge and for keeping the orthodox schooling, considered a binding aspect in the problems of the existence of the Romanian nation [27].

As we can see, the militant aspect is more striking in Transylvania, due to the political situation of the Romanian from this province and the press is seen as a factor of unity and national identity.

Among the names who signed the articles of this gazette, we find Ion Maiorescu, Andrei Mureșanu, Timotei Cipariu, Damaschin Bojânca, Al. Papiu Ilarian, A. T. Laurian, I. Heliade Rădulescu, Ioan Slavici, C. Negruzzi, Ion Pop Reteganul and G. Bogdan-Duică [28].

Conclusions

The conditions of the existence of the three gazettes that mark the beginning of the modern Romanian press, Curierul românesc (București), Albina românească (Iași) and Gazeta de Transilvania (Brasov), the principles contained in the notices announcing the publishing and in the programme-articles demonstrate that the first pages of the Romanian history of the media can be put under the sign of a very responsible view on the press role in the society. Although the political situation places the gazettes under the rules of an authoritarian regime, the ideal of the journalists can be successfully included among the libertarian point of view on the press.

According to Mihail Kogâlniceanu, the first newspapers contributed to the growth of the Romanian literature and language, were responsible for the creation of public opinion, were a factor of enlarging the knowledge horizon of individuals and of creating a global solidarity [29], ideas that we encounter in the works of modern theorists of the press.
References

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[2] Ibidem, p. 88-89
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[4] Pierre Albert, *Istoria presei*, Institutul European, Iași, 2002
[5] Ibidem, p. 12
[6] Ibidem, p. 12
[7] Georgeta Răduică, Nicolae Răduică, *Dicționarul presei românești (1731-1918)*, Ed. Științifică, București, 1995, p. 138
[8] Pierre Albert, *op. cit.*, p. 108
[9] Marian Petcu, *Istoria jurnalismului și a publicității în România*, Polirom, Iași, 2007, p. 116
[10] Nicolae Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 48
[11] Ibidem, p. 48
[12] Ibidem, p. 149-150
[13] Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Incursiuni în istoria presei românești*, Pitești, Ed. Cultura, 2001, p. 17
[14] Nicolae Iorga, *Istoria presei românești*, Ed. Muzeul Literaturii Române, București, 1999
[15] Marian Petcu, *Istoria presei românești. Antologie*, Tritonic, București, 2002
[16] „The utility of the newspaper is for everyone and for every category of people: in it politics finds its sharp and fore viewing regards and it goes deeper into its searchings and combination; in it the peaceful philosopher gathers and weighs the facts and occurrences of this world, the brave and restless warrior becomes better by the advice he takes from the performances and bad lucks of another warriors; the curious seller finds rules for his activity and speculations; the sweating farmer can ease his hard work and learn how to make the fields full of crops. There isn’t any category of people who can’t find pleasure and use in this fine and useful work that is the gazette.” (the translation of the authors of this article)
[17] Mihai Coman, *op. cit.*, p. 75
[18] Marian Petcu, *Istoria jurnalismului și a publicității în România*, Polirom, Iași, 2007, p. 116
[19] Nicolae Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 48
[20] Ibidem, p. 48
[21] Georgeta Răduică, Nicolae Răduică, *op. cit.*, p. 149-150
[22] Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Incursiuni în istoria presei românești*, Pitești, Ed. Cultura, 2001, p. 17
[23] “The one who seeks knowledge, the reader of the gazette, finds in it, like in a mirror, all the interesting happenings he depends on, he finds himself a witness to the rough battles, sees the facts, listens to the words of great men, is astonished by the natural phenomena, and like a traveler through the world, gathers the wisdom of different peoples” (the translation of the authors of this article).
[24] Nicolae Iorga, *op. cit.*, p. 52-53
[25] “The enlargement of sciences and knowledge, the dissemination of ideas to all social categories attracts today all nations, all wise and earthly governments; the means to disseminate information are books, literature, periodical writings distributed to everyone” (the translation of the authors of this article).
[26] Sergiu Nicolaescu, *op. cit.*, p. 18
[27] Ibidem, p. 18-19
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