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Contextual media orientation. Non-normative concept of media structures analysis in the developing countries, the example of Arab media

Introduction

An analysis of the media system in the Arab world is a complicated process as it includes a multitude of different countries and societies. There are countries which are completely unlike, such as for example Saudi Arabia and Lebanon, in terms of tradition, social/political conditions, or decolonization routes. Also, the media constantly undergo change and develop as a result of socio-economic changes. These are reasons why, so far, there have been little research on media in this region by media and oriental culture experts.

According to Willian Rugh, researchers first became interested in the Arab world media culture when television Al Jazeera started broadcasting, revolutionizing media reality in that part of the world. Before 1996, when the Qatar broadcaster began transmitting, not counting a few articles, doctoral theses and some Middle East publications (mostly from Cairo and Beirut), there have been only several books on the topic which gained acclaim. They were written by Rugh (on Arab press systems), Boyd (on national radio/TV systems) and Ayalon (on history of Arab journalism)¹. In 1998, created was the “Transnational Broadcasting Studies Journal” (“TBS Journal”, presently “Arab Media and Society”) published by the Electronic Journalism Centre at the American University in Cairo and the Middle East Studies Centre at the Oxford St. Anthony’s College. It is the one and only academic journal solely devoted to Arab world media which has created interest for research on media in that part of the world. In the introduction to the first issue, its publisher and editor, Lawrence Pintak, writes, “after two years of Al Jazeera broadcasting, when TBS Journal was first published, satellite TV was a novelty, press was in stagnation, Internet access was practically inexistent and media deregulation seemed like an abstract idea. Now the influence of this pan-Arab satellite revolution is visible on all levels of Arab society and in every sphere of media activity”². Research on Arab media systems is still, however, inadequate. This is something that should change if we take into consideration that this part of the world is becoming all the more important on the world stage. The world needs to know more about how Arab media function and what kind of socio-political reality they present.

Rugh, in an introduction to his 2004 analysis entitled *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*³ states that mass media in every country reflect that country’s specific social, cultural and political environment. If anyone wishes to understand the Arab world, he needs to get to know its media. Rugh does not say that the structure of Arab mass media is consolidated. In his work, he offers a presentation of various media systems in different countries and he outlines their several common characteristics. His main goal was to present a comprehensive picture of media reality in the Middle East and Northern Africa.

Leaving aside Rugh’s findings, we can put forward a thesis that some of these media characteristics do show that there is a gradual consolidation of national media realities in the

¹ W.A. Rugh, *The Arab Press: News, Media and Political Process in the Arab World*, London 1979; D.A. Boyd, *Broadcasting in the Arab World: A Survey of Radio and Television in the Middle East*, Philadelphia 1982; A. Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East*, Oxford 1995.

² L. Pintak, *From the Editor*, “Transnational Broadcasting Studies” 1998, nr 1, www.tbsjournal.com.

³ W.A. Rugh, *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics*, London 2004.

Arab world. This article aims to discuss three main research goals. The first is to systemize the elements and processes of mass media structures. These structures may significantly differ from the developed existing “media and politics” models proposed by, for example, Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini⁴, who take into consideration the existence of regional “types of media systems” as presented by R. Blum⁵. In contrast to Rugh, who bases his deliberations on “four press theories” by Fredrick Siebert, Theodor Peterson and Wilbur Schramm⁶, this analysis will be based on the *transitional media approach* created by Chengju Huang. This attempt to systemize media systems transformations in the developing countries has resulted in the drawing up of *contextual media orientation* of Arab media.

The second goal of the analysis is to examine the Arab media from the perspective of the changes they are undergoing, their dynamics, direction, forms and influences of transformations.

The third goal is in connection with a course, “Foreign media systems” at UW’s Journalism Institute, which I attended in 2007. It seems that every media system requires its own typology in order to be analysed and described as a media structure. I would like to create a theoretical framework which will allow us to clearly, precisely and comprehensively analyse the Arab media via media studies.

“Four Press theories” limitations in an analysis of Arab media systems

One popular theory in analysis of Arab media states that media reflect political and social structures within which they operate⁷. This theory, proposed by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in their influential work “four press theories”⁸ states that media institutions cannot operate independently of their surrounding environment and are limited by the political, government or party systems and the socio-economic environment. If we take a closer look at Arab media, however, we can see that this theory has its shortcomings.

Firstly, let’s examine the political system influence. In contrast to Siebert et al, Hallin and Mancini do not come to a conclusion that mass media are a “dependent variable” to the “system of political control” in which they exist. “In many cases it would be correct to say that media systems reflect various social structure aspects including the government system. However, there is evidence that media systems also influence other social structures”⁹.

The influence of pan-Arab satellite television on the social and media structures of the Arab world sheds new light on relations between social systems and mass media means undergoing transformation. The question is, what role do the media play in the promotion of change? This issue relates to fundamental axes of theoretical division which separate

⁴ Cf. D.C Hallin, P. Mancini, *Comparing Media System. Three Models of Media and Politics*, Cambridge 2004 (Polish edition: *Systemy medialne. Trzy modele mediów i polityki w ujęciu porównawczym*, Kraków 2007). Basing on criteria developed as a result of empirical studies in “developed capitalist democracies” of Western Europe and North America, the authors created a paradigm, comprised of three main model, describing the political and cultural environments based on which they performed a classification of media systems in the analysed countries.

⁵ Expanding on Hallin and Mancini’s model, Blum added similarities in terms of culture and mentality from the six different regions of the world. Basing on the theory that territorial communities generate similar media systems, he distinguished different models of media systems – liberal (characteristic to the Atlantic and Pacific regions), clientele (South Europe), media in public service (Northern Europe), shocking (Middle Eastern Europe), patriotic (Arab/Asian regions, Muslim) and authoritative (Asian/Caribbean) Cf. R. Blum, *Bausteine zu einer Theorie der Mediensysteme*, “Medienwissenschaft Schweiz” 2005, nr 2, p. 5–11.

⁶ F.P. Siebert, T. Peterson, W. Schramm, *Four theories of the press. The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, Urbana 1956.

⁷ Zob. W.A. Rugh, *Arab Mass...*; D.A. Boyd, *Broadcasting...*

⁸ F.P. Siebert, T. Peterson, W. Schramm, *Four theories...*, p. 1.

⁹ D.C. Hallin, P. Mancini, *Systemy...*, p. 9.

culturalism from materialism, “mediocentric” orientation from “sociocentric”. Based on these, Dennis McQuail has constructed four perspectives of “media and society view” – media-culturalistic, media-materialistic (focusing on media activity, their autonomy and influence), socio-culturalistic and socio-materialistic (which views media reflecting political, social and economic powers)¹⁰.

Karol Jakubowicz also supports the lack of consensus in academic literature on the relations between mass communication and social change. The most appropriate, in this case of mutual influence, seems the model of “co-dependence” according to which the social system influences media but also creates conditions for their influence and determines the strength of their influence¹¹. His proposed model of *non-equivalent interdependence* provides an imperative theoretical framework for an analysis of relations between Arab society and its mass media in the creation of a “new Arab auditorium”, according to Marc Lynch’s terminology¹². In this understanding, the media can and have a significant influence on social development if existent are favourable social conditions without which the media could not use their functions. Jakubowicz also stresses the vital importance of political conditions on which the development process also depends. Even though social conditions may be favourable to change, it is the political conditions which play a decisive role in media development¹³. The earlier mentioned influence of satellite TV on the changes in Arab society, through mechanisms of frustration and resistance to oppressive governments, is visible in the media environment in that region. However, this influence, in view of little possible political opposition or action, is difficult to rate and may be hard to determine how it could possibly affect the political situation in a given country.

Another shortcoming of the authoritative model, used by Rugh, as dominant in Arab reality, is its theoretical weakness. According to McQuail, the authoritative concept lacks theory and the authoritative press theory really is a historical description of periods of press control by European repressive regimes¹⁴. McQuail states that the typology proposed by Siebert et al cannot be applied to media other than the press. The example of media development in the Arab world requires us to look into the relations between authoritative governments and the mass media in an entirely new way. However, even McQuail is skeptical of such analysis results stating that despite various attempts to improve the “four press theories”¹⁵ a formulation of a coherent and comprehensive theory would not be successful. This is for two reasons. One, the theories are diverse and they relate more to society than

¹⁰D. McQuail, *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction*, London 1983 (Polish edition: *Teoria komunikowania masowego*, Warszawa 2007, p. 31–32).

¹¹ K. Jakubowicz, *Rude Awakening: Social and Media Change in Central and Eastern Europe*, Cresskill, NJ 2007, p. 5.

¹² Cf. M. Lynch, *Voices of the New Arab Public. Iraq, Al-Jazeera, and Middle East Politics Today*, New York 2006.

¹³ K. Jakubowicz, *Rude Awakening...*, p. 5–7.

¹⁴ D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania...*, p. 190.

¹⁵ Cf. R. Williams, *Communication*, Harmondsworth 1968; J.C. Merrill, R.L. Lowenstein, *Media, Messages and Men: New Perspectives in Communication*, Longman, New York–London 1979; W.A. Hachten, *The World News Prism. Changing Media, Clashing Ideologies*, 5th edition, Ames 1981; D. McQuail, *Mass Communication...*; J.L. Martin, A. Chaudhary, *Comparative Mass Media Systems*, Longman, New York 1983; O. Wiio, *The Mass Media Role in the Western World*, [w:] J.L. Martin, A. Chaudhary, *Comparative Mass...*, p. 85–94; H.J. Altschull, *Agents of Power: The Role of the Media in Human Affairs*, New York 1984; C. Sparks, P. Splichal, *Journalistic education and professional socialization*, “Gazette” 1989, nr 43, p. 31–52. Also see the combined work of Clifford Christians, Theodor Glasser, Denis McQuail, Kaarle Nordenstreng and Robert White, *Journalism in Democratic Societies: Normative Theories of the Media*, Urbana 2009 (in print), in which the authors conduct a revision of “four press theories” basing on the basic levels of analysis. For more see: K. Nordenstreng, ‘Four Theories of the Press’ reconsidered, [in:] *Researching Media, Democracy and Participation. The intellectual work of the 2006 European media and communication doctoral summer school*, red. N. Carpentier et al., Tartu 2006, p. 35–46.

media. When we are dealing with social change, it is media which adapt to the new situation. On the other hand, not just theoretical deliberations but media systems themselves are complex and inconsistent due to their diversity, ongoing change and the implementation of new technologies. “In most countries - states McQuail - the media do not make up one uniform system. If there is anything the media have in common (if anything at all) it is the fact that they apply ‘media logic’ but this regards rather communication than content, goals or effects”¹⁶.

According to the above, it is impossible to apply any specific media theories to society in the phase of transformation or growth and, hence, the adapting media, since in such conditions there is too much dynamics. As Barbra Thomass pointed out, “the difficulty in placing a given country within a model is that media systems in those countries are so dynamic and there is a great deal of mutual interaction”¹⁷. As will be shown in the latter part of the text, an analysis of modern media reality should go beyond individual countries and their political systems, taking into consideration the countries’ mutual interdependencies as well as intensive media expansion outside national borders. A Gallup¹⁸, survey from 2007 in Saudi Arabia, considered one of the most conservative countries in the Arab world, shows that people’s basic source of information about the outside world is international television (93%, in comparison to press – 66% and national TV – 59%). The most popular channels are three pan-Arab TV stations – Al Jazeera, Middle East Broadcasting Center (MBC) and Al Arabiya (30, 24 and 23% correspondingly), while the Saudi public channel was rated at 5%¹⁹. It should also be noted that the present MBC (launched before Al Jazeera) style has changed significantly as a result of Al Jazeera’s presence while Al Arabiya was supposed to be a Saudi counterpart to Al Jazeera’s monopoly in the news sector in the region. In other words, although control mechanisms can be applied to press and public media in a traditional sense, the influence of ‘new Arab media’ (satellite TV and ‘offshore’ press, according to Lynch²⁰) – the changes within regional media structures indicate shortcomings of traditional media theories and do not apply to the Arab world.

It is true that political systems, as Rugh pointed out, still have a significant influence on the shape and form of media structures in different Arab countries²¹. However, it is problematic whether it is a decisive influence in the ever changing media environment. Since there are present limitations of existent normative theories in relation to political, social and media situation in the Arab world, there is a need to take a new look at the dynamics of change in that region.

Kaarle Nordenstreng presents this issue in the categories of ideal or real approach to the media situation in a given region. He points out the dualism in the theoretical approach to mass media in many countries. On the one hand, we are dealing with normative and subjective media goals which are to have a mission to society (idealistic approach). On the other hand, considered needs to be the real role of media and their influence on society, as institutions shaped by various political, social, economic or cultural factors (realistic approach)²².

¹⁶ D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania...*, p. 190.

¹⁷ B. Thomass, *Comparing media systems. The development of analytical tools and theoretical concepts over the last 50 years*, presented at the IAMCR conference in Paris, July 23, 2007.

¹⁸ Gallup World Poll 2007, www.gallup.com.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Cf. M. Lynch, *Voices...*

²¹ W. Rugh, *Do National Political Systems Still Influence Arab Media*, “Arab, Media and Society” 2007, May, www.arabmediasociety.com.

²² K. Nordenstreng, *Beyond the four theories of the press*, [in:] *Journalism at the Crossroads. Perspectives on Research*, ed. By J. Koivisto, E. Lauk, Tartu 1997, p. 47–64.

It is without doubt that comparative studies of media systems have made great headway since the 1950s. According to Thomass, in a classification of media systems, media studies have noted a turn away from the normative and descriptive approach to empirical studies, at the same time increasing the number of categories thanks to which a more in depth description of media realities is possible²³. We can obtain considerable knowledge on the subject of media functions in developing countries and mechanisms within media systems. They do not, however, provide us enough insight on media structures in transformation processes and constant media development, as they do not take into consideration such imperative to media environment processes as transnationalism or globalization.

Transitional media approach – non-normative approach

According to Huang, normative media theories are helpful in a comparative analysis of media systems. This can take place under specific historical conditions but it is not possible to adapt to changing political, socio-economic and media conditions. Huang points out the paradox of the normative approach. Although normative theories do not take into consideration empirical analysis of media systems and they focus on a general abstract analysis, many researchers fall into the trap and risk placing dynamic and complex media realities within narrow boundaries²⁴. Taking into account these threats, Huang proposes an alternative approach to media systems in developing societies, focusing on dynamics of change and ‘elasticity’. His *transitional media approach* is based on three characteristic features.

Firstly, Huang focuses on non-normativity. “An elastic approach to media is a non-normative one. It sees communication as a historical process shaped by concepts of change and adaptation”²⁵. Change, as Huang noted, needs to be viewed as a universal media phenomenon and media systems need to be analysed in terms of their dynamic and complexity. “Taking into consideration the relative independence of different stages of mass media development within history of a given society, an elastic perspective focuses on the dynamic and transitory nature of communication and notices the complexity and diversity in the development process”²⁶.

Secondly, media systems transformations are seen as a multi-dimensional process in evolution and revolution. In contrast to normative theories, in which analytical boundaries of the system are determined by radical changes in media environments, in the elastic approach both of these phenomena take into consideration the complexity and long term nature of change. Huang states, “revolutionary changes are not the beginning nor the end of the transformation process, they are a kind of result and part of the ‘daily’ evolution of communication processes”²⁷.

Thirdly, the last feature of this approach is its cultural sensitivity and openness. Communication processes should be viewed from a wide theoretical perspective as socio-historic phenomena set within a specific cultural context. The media system of a given society is tied to its changing political and socio-economic conditions and is also determined by them²⁸. Media transformation in various societies can take different forms, depending on the political, cultural and socio-economic context and can result in the formation of diverse media

²³ B. Thomass, *Comparing media...*, p. 9.

²⁴ C. Huang, *Transitional media vs. normative theories: Schramm, Altschull, and China*, “Journal of Communication” 2004, nr 53, p. 454.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 455.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

systems. Attempts to classify them into old, existing models, based on uniform philosophic thought can be risky and erroneous.

Contextual Arab media approach – context shapes the model?

Based on the above, there is need to apply a completely new look at media structures in the Arab world. The analysis of media systems should go beyond the normative approach and take into consideration the character of not only their structures but also the quality of evolution, the dynamics and interpenetration of factors shaping Arab media.

Proposed here is *contextual media orientation* considering the culturally deeply rooted media systems under the conditions of global transformations of information systems so far considered peripheral. This is because there is a need to define ‘non-Western’ or alternative to Western philosophy media. This approach must apply to different than previously used theories and practices, since, according to McQuail, “the mass media experience in non-Western (less individualistic, more community character, more religious) societies is much different”²⁹.

Media systems classification considers factors such as geographic location, linguistic and cultural factors, legal and political systems, economic situation and influence of technology as natural factors which influence media systems³⁰. These factors can no longer be limited to national boundaries and need to be understood in their transnational or global reality. An analysis of different sectors of Arab media should take place within the following contexts:

- *political* – in analysing the media-authorities relations, the dependent variables in this context are: type of government, political culture, degree of society and media freedom, media functions, media culture, journalist position within the system, level of journalist education, journalist responsibility, formal and non-formal aspect of government control over media, level of censorship and self-censorship, media as a tool of domestic and foreign policy, media policy and its analysis on the national and regional levels;
- *legal*³¹ – regarding regulatory aspects of media in society on national and regional levels, press, radio and TV legislation, professional regulation, journalist activity, national regulation of media institutions’ activity, media supervisory bodies, regional regulation on media and technology, journalistic ethics code;
- *economic* – taking into account political and media economics, the creation and shaping process of a values system in view of economic choice, variables are: media ownership structure, forms of ownership (national, regional, global), ways of media financing, the advertising market, audience ratings changes, audience preferences, technologies used;
- *technological* – in analyzing the level of technological advancement in a given area the variables are: society’s access to the new technologies (Internet, satellite TV) as well as media technologies and digitalization;
- *socio-cultural* – focusing on media and society relations (national level) and the community (transnational/regional levels), variables are: media orientation (public service, education, entertainment), literacy level, press readership level, the level of

²⁹ D. McQuail, *Teoria komunikowania...*, p. 31.

³⁰ B. Thomass, *Comparing media...*, p. 8.

³¹ In the normative/legal analysis of Arab media taken into consideration should be the practical aspects of the law. As Yahia Shukeir, Jordan Higher Media Council adviser and journalist for “Alarab Alyawm” (interview; Amman, May 8, 2008), points out, freedom in interpretation of press law by Jordan authorities results in press regulation being the main obstacle to free media. For more see: P. Krzysiek, *Testing legal boundaries within Arab media hubs: reporting, law and politics in three media cities*, “Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture” 2009, February (in print), www.wmin.ac.uk/mad/page-880.

society's education, role of language, religion and values system in media, the influence of religion on journalist practices³²; journalist cultural sensitivity and proposed by Nawawy and Iskandar concept of "contextual journalist objectivity"³³; media and pan-Arab identity, influence of media on the Arab public sphere and the influence of this sphere on Arab "media culture" and media structure;

- *regional-global* – regarding the transnational technology and content flow, variables are: transnationalisation of Arab media, "regionalization" of foreign media, historical analysis of foreign influence on the Arab media market, transnational capital, services and people flow in the media sector.

Isolating the different contexts will allow for a more elastic characterization of the environment in which these media function within various Arab countries and, thus, provide a more comprehensive picture of the whole.

The contextual approach to Arab media structures has to take into consideration an analysis of *two parallel dimensions*. The first regards elements which make up the systems – media institutions, legal/formal regulation, the level of professionalism, journalist position within the system, as well as the structural changes which have shaped the above elements. The second dimension regards the processes and conditions which situate the systems within the contexts presented above. In modern global information reality, media systems operate on at least two level plains – the local plain (national or transnational, but culturally similar) and the global³⁴. Therefore, an analysis of Arab media systems needs to take place on two levels – the national/regional – delineated by socio-cultural borderlines (such as language, ethnic background, religion or values systems) and on the global, being the product of global factors' influences.

The contextual approach assumes a different operational character of the above mentioned variables. Due to the transnational scope of active contexts and the legitimacy of their analysis on the regional level, the analysis, even though it takes place on the individual country level, will isolate the trends and dependencies on the transnational level. As Nick Couldry points out, due to the intense internationalization of media societies, it would be an oversimplification to say that media systems "secretly hide separate 'national' media cultures"³⁵. On the contrary, these systems are becoming, all the more so, part of a greater entity and, through the confrontation of various contexts, the transnational dimension shows that the systems not only operate on the territories of different Arab countries but worldwide.

³²One example of religion's influence on journalism is the common use of the word 'martyr' (*shahid* singular, and *shuhada* plural) regarding Palestinian suicide bombers and the victims of Israeli military operation in Palestine. The use of the word stems from Koran and shows Arab journalists attachment to Arab socio-cultural reality. *Shahed* means an individual who sacrifices his life in a just cause. However, it is a term which is not earthly but given by God. Only Muslim can ask God to be a *shahed* posthumously. In Arab media, in the context of the Palestine conflict, *shahed* is someone who dies fighting for Palestine. For more on culture and media in the Arab world see: P. Krzysiek, R. Miszczuk, *Zrozumieć lepiej świat Islamu. Etyka a kultura i media w krajach muzułmańskich* – report from the „Retoryka i Etyka” Conference, Uniwersytet im. A. Mickiewicza, Poznań, April 2007 (publication in preparation).

³³ Cf. M. El Nawawy, A. Iskandar, *The minotaur of the 'contextual objectivity': war coverage and the pursuit of accuracy with appeal*, "Transnational Broadcasting Studies" 2002, nr 9. In Polish literature the phenomenon was written about by P. Krzysiek, R. Miszczuk, *Zrozumieć lepiej...*

³⁴ For more see: A. Sreberny, *The Global and the Local in International Communication*, [in:] *Mass Media and Society*, ed. by J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, 3rd edition, London 2000, p. 177–203. In Polish literature, on widening global and local space and the example of forming of European identity see: P. Krzysiek, *Idea tożsamości europejskiej w kontekście komunikowania masowego*, [in:] *Modele integracji międzynarodowej: uniwersalny, kontynentalny, sektorowy a idee, państwo, prawo*, ed. by T. Smoliński, Szczecin 2007.

³⁵ N. Couldry, *Researching media internationalization. Comparative media research as if we really meant it*, "Global Media and Communication" 2007, nr 3, p. 249.

The analysis should also take place in accordance with theoretical axes of division delineated by McQuail, on the one hand- the materialistic and culturalistic and, on the other, the mediocentric and sociocentric dimensions of media activity. The focus is on the context which shapes the media system and the conditions which make the system affect the context. Further on, analysed should by the different media segments over the centuries in specific cultural, political and socio-economic conditions and the changing role of media structures in the process of forming political and social systems as a result of the above conditioning.

An analysis of factors influencing the media sector on different levels of its development also gives us information about the social, political, economic and cultural changes going on. And vice versa, a study of these developments allows us to determine the direction of change and characteristic trends for the given media system (for example, 'hegemonic' internationalization or 'cultural imperialism' intensifying the need for media identification in the Arab world, manifested in the transnational media cultural identity). This perspective will allow us to delineate the analytical frames for these types of media structures, according to the elastic approach to media sensitive to the complexity of structures and the dynamics of transformation.

Via an analysis of media systems changes in the region, it is possible to individualise the various, specific routes of development, characteristic to a given socio-political environment. This is imperative as, according to Couldry, deliberations on the growing internationalization of media do not have to stem from historical modernization processes of the media environment, imposed by the West, but from an analysis of present changes taking place, the trends and perspectives for further growth³⁶.

Within this contextual media approach, I also propose the non-normative orientation, according to Huang. This is so for the following reasons, firstly, it allows us to avoid excessive idealism and the creation of dissonance in confrontation with reality. Secondly, it emphasizes the key contexts influencing Arab media structure. Thirdly, it stresses the need to research both the Arab media as an institution and the Arab environment outside social and political reality of specific countries, in categories of mutual interaction of dependent variables. Taking into account the influence, for example, of American CNN broadcasting during Persian Gulf War in 1991, on the Arab media environment, we need to conduct the analysis in as broad context as possible, regarding the entire media environment in the region.

Focusing on Huang's concept of change and adaptation as two main media phenomena shaping the web of media environment influence factors, a theoretical analysis of Arab media structures in the contextual approach should be based on three main premises:

Change causality and determinism. The Arab media structure must be seen as a system constantly undergoing change, determined by political and socio-economic conditions as well as cultural context. Contextual approach firstly defines the causes of change and does not view Arab media structures in a normative way, as a coherent, complex type of media systems being a product of the political system and different types of authoritative regimes (or, according to William A. Hachten, neo-authoritative³⁷). As discussed above, this way of media viewing is, on the one hand, mostly shaped by socio-cultural factors characteristic to the Arab world (such as language, religion, oral communication) and, on the other, by infiltrating global factors, forming an alternative space (similar to Castell's *space of flows*)³⁸

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 247.

³⁷ W.A. Hachten, *The World News Prism. Changing Media, Clashing Ideologies*, 5th edition, Ames 1999.

³⁸ Castells sees the need for a change of time and space in the modern world where communication process require less and less time, for example capital, information, technology and symbols flow via electronic connections which results in limiting space to 'real virtuality' or being addicted to a perception of the world dictated by media and electronic broadcasts; M. Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society, Culture*, vol. 1, *The Rise of the Network Society*, Cambridge, Mass.-Oxford 1997, p. 376-428.

or Arjun Appadurai's *scapes*³⁹. Taking into consideration the dynamics of forces influencing the media environment, we can see a confrontation of contexts which results in the Arab media world framework. Its elements are part of a coherent, constantly changing media structure.

Sensitivity to change elasticity. In analysis of Arab media structures, a flexible approach to processes of transformation is necessary. It has to take into account revolutionary change within structure, as a result of, for example, political coups and changes of governing authorities or evolutionary change, as a result of gradual socio-political changes, bringing about a re-orientation in media policy or expansion (new players on the market). The researcher's attention should be drawn to both, revolutionary events (ie. political system changes in Iraq after 2003, military activity in Lebanon) and evolutionary (growing economic and, therefore, political influence of the Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC) changes which shape the socio-political arena and can influence the media market. Other issues which this take allows us to distinguish are: the influence of political (and media) change in Iraq on media in the region, or growing radicalism in countries such as Lebanon and its effect on the media market (activity of TV Al Manar controlled by the Hezbollah and its influence on the regional media market), potential scope of quality change in the media environment of the GCC countries, not just regarding media quality but growing professionalism and education of journalists in those countries.

Taking into consideration both, revolutionary and evolutionary, changes in Arab media structure enables us to have a flexible approach in the study of development processes, in view of dramatic changes taking place in almost all Arab countries. A flexible analysis of these changes will allow for a better observation of characteristic elements influencing the Arab media market and will enable us to distinguish common for this market characteristics and elements within individual countries. Moreover, it will allow us to define problems which need to be faced and other challenges to meet, in this, according to Huang, post-Cold War global media transformation.

Conceptualisation and individualisation of change. In a flexible analysis of media systems it is necessary to take into consideration specific cultural contexts with the use of broader range of theoretical concepts⁴⁰. For Arab media systems I proposed the use of Hallin and Mancini's⁴¹ comparative study of media systems, combined with a critical media studies theory⁴². Additionally, useful could be Couldry's approach, focusing on broadening the scope of the research and including comparative analysis of media cultures which take into account the role of religious institutions and social infrastructure in the process of media environment transformations. The research should focus, instead of on particular countries' media systems, on transnational structures and *media flows*⁴³. A contextual approach to Arab media goes beyond an analysis of media structures evolution but concentrates on the fundamental

³⁹For more see A. Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis 1996, p. 27–47.

⁴⁰ C. Huang, *Transitional...*, p. 455.

⁴¹ Cf. D.C. Hallin, P. Mancini, *Comparing...*

⁴² Cf. V. Mosco, A. Herman, *Critical theory and electronic media*, "Theory and Society" 1981, nr 10, p. 869–896; *Culture, Media, Language*, ed. by P. Hall et al., London 1982; J. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, Boston 1988; T. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *Dialektyka oświecenia*, Warszawa 1994; *International Media Research: A Critical Survey*, red. P. Schlesinger, R. Silverstone, J. Corner, London 1997; M.G. Durham, D. Kellner, *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Cambridge, Mass.–Oxford 2001.

⁴³ Cf. A. Hepp, N. Couldry, *What should comparative media research be comparing? Towards a transcultural approach to 'media cultures'*, presented at the "Internationalising Media Studies" Conference, University of Westminster, September 2006. See also: Working Group 2 "Democratic theory and the democratic performance of the media", *Beyond Hallin and Mancini: Reconsidering Media Systems in a Democratic Perspective*, part of COST A30 Action "East of West: Setting a New Central and Eastern Media Research Agenda", www.costa30.eu.

questions of if and how the media fit into the contexts and how these contexts influence media structures. Through analysis of changes, this approach individualizes other factors affecting Arab media (internal, external, local, global) and stresses the role of cultural sensitivity, the complex relations between media and government, sources of financing, the position of media institutions in society, religious factors role, Arab solidarity and identity as well as processes of internationalization of such structures.

Need for further research

The application of normative approach to such dynamic and complex media realities as in developing countries would not reflect the specificity of the environment the media function in. It is without doubt that Huang's theoretical approach requires further research. Firstly, taken into account should be an analysis of different systems in the transformation phase.

Hence, a more individualistic approach to Arab media was proposed with a focus on theoretical assumptions. Fundamental to the contextual approach to Arab media is the use of a non-normative and transnational orientation allowing a broader (not focused on individual countries) perspective.

On the other hand, I do agree with Rugh's ideas in two aspects. Firstly, a comprehensive analysis of Arab media structures requires an in-depth look into media systems in different countries in order to isolate characteristic elements making up the transnational structure. Secondly, it seems correct to say that most of the elements are marked by authoritative systems (or neo-authoritative, regarding regimes functioning in specific conditions and dynamically developing in spheres such as education or economy). Nevertheless, in order to understand the specificity of Arab media reality, it is necessary to abandon normative analytical frames and apply a more flexible approach which takes into account the key role of contexts within these structures.

A comprehensive analysis of Arab media has got to consider the national dimension of Arab media reality but it should not be limited to it. Moreover, although the neo-authoritative notion is an imprint on media structures in the region, it must not be treated as a complete representation of existing reality, in order to avoid what Nordenstreng pointed out - the confrontation of the 'ideal with the existing 'reality'. The approach to Arab media structures needs to be, on the one hand, elastic and non-normative, open culturally and, on the other, culturalistic and ethnocentric, which will take into account the specificity of the region.

The key element in such research is an internationalization of media studies, based not only on a thorough analysis of different media realities within the region but also on a confrontation of the results of the analysis on a global level. Firstly, it requires a more flexible description of existing political, social and media realities. Secondly, there is a need to broaden the existing classification and create a progressive 'individualisation' in order to distinguish characteristic to a given region trends and properties within a specific media model. From this point of view, it seems crucial to carry out more advanced empirical research in the area of *cultural media studies* in order to, according to Thomass, "maintain a balance between a level of abstraction which authorizes a given model and the level of use for a larger number of cases"⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ B. Thomass, *Comparing media...*, p. 7.