AU IDEAS: Den Demokratiske Offentlighed

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A Blind Angle? News Sources, Gender and Ethnicity in Danish TV News

The Democratic Public Sphere- Current Challenges and Prospects

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The paper will present and discuss a framework for grasping some of the democratic consequences of biased TV news programs. In line with Jürgen Habermas, one can ask what consequences it has for a democratic public sphere that the national TV news landscape is biased in term of source diversity (gender and ethnicity). With Peter Dahlgren's analysis of television as a space for civic identity and agency, the paper engages in a discussion of contributions and limitations of TV news framed by some of the dimensions of civic cultures (knowledge, values, trust, practices and identities).

Introduction

The British media researcher Keane has argued that media is a mirror of society and that the democratic role of the media has been understood as a forum for a society's collective dialogue with and about itself (Keane 1991). Media both reflect *and* construct images of society and its relations of democracy, gender and power. The general theme of this paper is related to the relationship between democracy, gender and majority -minority status and media. Today, media can be considered among our most powerful agents of entertainment, information, and socialization. Media sites are of considerable ideological negotiation and contestation, that is, sites of struggle over meaning and values. Media can also be considered a vital political arena in the shaping of politics, democracy and of our perceptions of ethnicity, gender, and power.

An investigation of the diversity of news sources in terms of gender and ethnicity contributes to the debate on democracy and the public sphere. I embrace concepts of democracy and the public sphere as central categories of analysis. My argument is in line with the German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas' emphasis on the role of public dialog and deliberation as a vehicle for democracy and with the Swedish media and communication scholar Peter Dahlgren's (2009) in highlighting the important insight from theories, empirical research and debates on political communication, the public sphere tradition and cultural studies. The idea being that in the contemporary media world, popular culture and politics cannot be fully separated they "inform of each other, feed off each other" (Dahlgren 2009: 141).

This paper presents two approaches to the studies of news: those are democracy and civic engagement and news production. A central thesis in the project is that a gender and majority/minority perspective on the media sheds light 'on blind spots' in the public sphere: i.e. formally, women and ethnic minorities have access to the media as news subjects, newsmakers and news producers but in reality, there is a significant underrepresentation of different categories of women and ethnic minorities across the different news outlets.

The aim of the paper is three-fold: *first* presenting these approaches that can enlighten an analysis of news sources in a perspective of gender and minority and majority and *secondly*, discussing the question of what significance a Nordic empirical context has for this particular theoretical framework. The project is rooted in a Danish and also in a Nordic empirical context both in terms of gender norms, media regimes, the relationship between the public and the private spheres, in terms of history of multiculturalism and of democratic practices.

This empirical context is analyzed through the lens of 'travelling' concepts (Knapp 2005). A key idea behind this emphasis on a particular empirical, historical and political context is that imported theoretical concepts from Anglo- Saxion theoretical traditions and research can play

out differently when 'applied' in a different context- such as the Nordic. A wider context for a democracy and media project is turbulent (neoliberal) times in the midst of profound change. The place of the press in this wider informational orbit must be re-described (Schudson 2008: 7). Media's "present turbulent situation means that their character and their role in democracy are in transition. Thus, to understand the present circumstances, we have to situate both democracy and the media in the context of larger historical changes" (Dahlgren 2009: 3)

In what follows, I ask the following question: *what consequences can biased television news have in terms of participation, representation and voice in the democratic public sphere?* This question is discussed within a framework of democracy and media. The paper sketches a framework for this discussion by means of a range of parameters.

Empirical Data

Before I sketch the theoretical framework, it may be noted in passing that source selection as a concern of fair and accurate general reporting emerged as a consideration as early as the Hutchins Commission report in 1947 in the US (Martin 1991: 179). The empirical background for this paper is a recurring theme of unequality in terms of media, news and sources.

Research on journalism, news and gender has zoomed in on women's access to and participation in the media with a particular focus on the choice of sources, experts and news room hosts in the media and on media leadership (Andreassen 2005; Byerly & Ross 2006; Eide 2000; Fiig 2010; Gidengil & Everitt 2003; Gill 2006; Wahl-Jorgensen 2000; Norris 1997;Ross 2003; Ross & Carter 2011; Ross & Screberny 2000; Sceberny & van Zoonen 2000, van Zoonen 1998). A general conclusion is that the media is characterized by inequality in terms of gender, ethnicity and race. A similar conclusion characterises analyses of various types of media and representation of gender in texts and genres (fx Carter, Steiner & McLaughlin ed. 2014).

One systematic feature of television news programs is that they are characterized by a gender bias. "Feminist scholars who have examined journalist-source relationships have argued that journalists tend to rely on a narrow range of sources, most of whom are white, middle-class and middle-aged professional males. This is particularly true of sources whose views are solicited in order to yield expert opinions" (Ross & Carter 2011:1150).

We know from Belgian research on TV news-items (Hooghe & de Swert 2009; De Swert & Hooghe 2010) that women are used less frequently as news sources on TV-news than men.The Belgian researchers indicate that the selection of news sources, i.e. actors appearing in a news broadcast and delivering a statement, remains strongly biased (Hooghe & de Swert 2009:13). Their analysis covers a comprehensive data set covering 76,673 news items, accounting for the entire news production of the Flemish public broadcasting corporation VRT and the main commercial station 2003- 2007. Secondly, a world-wide data-sample *Who Makes the News?* based on national media monitoring of TV, radio and newspapers in 1995, 2000, 2005 and 2010 point in a similar direction of gender bias. Each of the four investigation focuses on one single day of news coverage across the world. The 2010-investigation includes findings from 108 countries participating in the day of monitoring of women's portrayal in the news as sources and subjects and as journalists (Ross & Carter 2011:1151, *WACC-Who Makes the News?*).

Two Theoretical Perspectives

This section and its sub-sections highlight its theoretical universe and fits with what research from different fields have concluded on media and democracy in terms of civic engagement, citizenship and the public sphere. However, it takes the analysis a step further by suggesting a combined framework of theories on democracy and news production. I have not tried, nor will I propose a synthesis of them as they originate in different research traditions. Adapting different 'conceptual

lenses' can allow alternative interpretations to come into focus (Allisson 1971; here from Cram 2009).

Although enjoying less fanfare than in the early 1990s, the tradition of deliberative democracy with an emphasis on a revised concept of the public sphere remains an important background framework in the analytical tool box (Habermas 1992; 1996). Having said that, it is of central importance to mine other theoretical traditions for the answers they suggest for analysing the complexity media issues in a perspective of diversity.

Initially, I situate the theoretical framework within studies of media and democracy borrowing an outline of the three traditions from Dahlgren (2009:4-6), who employs a distinction between first political communication with a focus on communicative interaction between the formal actors within the political communication system: political institutions/actors, the media, and citizens (p.5) and secondly the public sphere tradition derived from Habermas with a focus on deliberative democracy and civil society and with a critical look at institutional arrangements especially in the media (p.5). Dahlgren points out, and rightly so in my view, that the public sphere tradition often seems oddly removed from everyday sociological realities and that its strength lies in its historical, analytical, and not least normative scoop (p.5). The third tradition is the one based on cultural studies, which Dahlgren renames 'culturalist' with a focus on meaning, identity and practices.

1) Democracy and Civic Engagement

The project's democratic perspective is originally informed by a theoretical framework by the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1962; 1996) who has argued for the (positive) significance of the public sphere and citizen engagement in its democratic dialogue. Such a theoretical horizon is of course tied up with some fundamental normative conceptions and

assumptions about people and society (Dahlgreen 2009:2). With a Habermasian perspective and its normative underlining of inclusion, public dialogue and public participation, the media is emphasized as a key vehicle for the public sphere. The concept of the public sphere forms 'a central analytical construct' in our 'ongoing efforts to understand the relationship between democracy and the media' (Dahlgren 2009: 126). An echo of Habermas is also to be found in more empirically-informed understandings of democracy such as the one coined by Schudson (2008) in an exciting analysis of "Why Democracies Need An Unlovable Press?". Schudson argues that democracy is about "assuring a role for popular participation and for popular review of governmental performance within a system of competitive elections…(..).(2008:8).

T.H. Marshall's (1950) understanding of citizenship as status that entitles one to certain bundles of entitlements and benefits as well as obligations does not apply well in the following analysis. Citizenship, defined as a set of civil, political and social rights, does not provide an adequate theoretical framework for analysing political participation and identity-work in a public sphere in the 20th / 21st century characterised by central political arenas beyond the nation-state, by globalization and by issues of recognition and difference. Citizenship issues are no longer exclusively about the struggle for social equality but also a battle over cultural identity and demands for recognition of group differences (Delanty 2000). Bearing a perspective of deliberative democracy in mind, one can add that citizenship is also a question of access to and inclusion in the public sphere and the media.

The public sphere forms a central arena for a citizenship practice if by citizenship we understand four components: rights, responsibilities, participation and identity (Delanty 2000). Rather than merely focusing on citizenship as involving legal rights, there is now agreement that citizenship must also be defined as a social process through which individuals and social groups engage in claiming, expanding or losing rights.[...] 'Such developments have led to a sociologically

informed definition of citizenship in which the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings, and identities' (Isin & Turner 2002:4; here from Fiig 2011).

These general considerations serve as a way of narrowing the debate on democracy and citizenship in relation to the field of media. In what follows, I am inspired by Dahlgren's take on political engagement and participation (2009) and his line of thinking in relation to the media: "We live in highly mediated societies, and much of our civic knowledge derives from the media. In a sense, the media bear some responsibility for our political involvement" (Dahlgren 2009:81). By means of a distinction between politics and the political (inspired by Mouffe 1999) and talk, Dahlgren sets out to analyze how 'talk' in the media can generate the political and thereby potentially lead towards politics, both traditional and alternative politics (2009:101).

Dahlgren's analysis looks at television journalism and popular television culture and its (lack of) success in helping to sustain civic engagement in national politics guided by the question of how the popular quality of television resonate with notions of public spheres and civic cultures? (2009:126).

Drawing on a range of empirical studies of TV-journalism, Dahlgren points at political events that can strengthen civic engagement such as a global media event like Live Aid that can carry with it an element of 'global cosmopolitanism' (p.130) and that TV visuals are able to mobilize civic engagement and participation for example in resocializing private life towards a shared public culture (Scannell 1996; here from Dahlgren 2009:132). On the other hand, a range of studies conclude differently: I.e. that citizens don't seem to benefit much from TV journalism: they cannot easily transform journalistic information into civic knowledge and practice (Couldry, Livingstone & Markham 2007, here from Dahlgren 2009:130). Studies of news items in the US and the UK point out that the overwhelming claims made by journalists about citizens present no

evidence and that citizens have no clear place in the news (Lewis, Inthorn & Wahl-Jorgensen 2005, here from Dahlgren 2009:131).

Dahlgren's analysis of television as a space for civic identity and agency is formed by a discussion of contributions and limitations framed by some of the dimensions of civic cultures (knowledge, values, trust, practices and identities) that he has identified in regard to the links between politics and television (2009:141-148).

Regarding *knowledge*, television does not so well in conveying detailed information, whereas it does well at evoking discussion and hereby contributing to a 'talkative citizenry' (p.145). TV is therefore important in promoting political talk. Regarding the second dimension of *values*, Dahlgren argues that TV "offers a mixed bag in regard to values" (p.145). Many concerns with values connected to private life, consumption and market relations and at the same time, discourses still reiterate many basic values and virtues of democracy (p.145). When it comes to *trust*, Dahlgren argues that TV tends to show very few examples of 'thin trust' that typifies civic social bonds "or cooperation that makes a political impact" (p.146). On the other hand, Dahlgren argues, TV does an important job of rendering as familiar particular elements of society that many people would otherwise never encounter meaning that TV has been conveying a growing sense of society's plural character (p.146). Concerning *practices*, Dahlgren points out that one of the key practices of civic culture is discussion and that different kinds of programming situate the viewing subject differently – hence the different roles, the viewers are placed in and the different relation to practice. With reference to Lewis, Inthorn and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005), Dahlgren reminds us that the "immediate civic practices and sense of empowerment to be derived from television news as such is limited" (p.147). Finally, the dimension of *identities*, which Dahlgren seems critical of. He points out that a sense of civic "we-ness" in contemporary television is "quite thin" (p.147) with a typical media focus on the viewer as consumers on the market and less with the viewer as citizen and the

principles of universality "embedded in the notion of the citizen" (p.147). On the other hand, television as a major institution of popular culture offers us a framework for fantasize and speculation about our lives and identities, Dahlgren argues (p.148).

Summing up, Dahlgren concludes that TV news contributes to the public sphere in complex ways while at the same time offer very few entry points for civic identity and agency, When the study of TV-journalism is expanded to TV in broader terms including popular culture, the conclusion is that the latter holds degrees of political relevance. Dahlgren's conclusion is mixed:

> "The point is not that we should try to arrive at some ultimate, once-and-for-all evaluation, but rather, to be alert for how television- despite all its familiar limitations- may at times help move us beyond the narrow definitions of politics and the public sphere, and connect us to civic cultures in subtle, surprising and unintended ways" (Dahlgren 2009: 148)

Another way of approaching analyses of media phenomena is by looking at news and at the relationship between journalism and democracy. Scudson (2008) presents a discussion of what news can do for democracy and the democratic role of journalism based on the premise that democracy and journalism are not the same thing (2008:11). Scudson offers this discussion by means of six functions (2008:chap.2) of news in a democratic perspective.

1. Information: Informing the public of news we would not otherwise know

2. Investigation: journalists performs its institutional role as a watch dog

3. Analysis: demands a great deal of time and effort to do serious analysis. Explanatory journalism articulates a silence or foregrounds what was background making it thereby available for conversation and collective notice (p.17)

4. Social empathy: the journalistic imagination. Telling an individual story and demonstrating the link between private troubles and public issues (p.18)

5. Public forum: for a dialogue among citizens

6. Mobilization: the news media can serve as advocates for particular political programs and mobilize people

In conclusion, Schudson argues for an emphasis on the six functions of journalism and hereby for a 'greater sophistication about representative democracy' (2008:24) for journalists. The idea being that this should lead journalists to cover more carefully some (democratic /CF) institutions and relationships that today they take for granted or ignore (2008:24).

Summing up, the literature facilitates a fruitful debate about the prerequisite for and the relationship between journalism and news on the one side and democracy on the other. We are going to look at second approach to the analysis namely the actual news production.

2) News Production

Let me turn, now, to the second essential approach to news sources, the one focusing on news production. Scudson's typology of approaches to the sociology of news production (2005/1989) maps out news-making and discusses how news is produced in the institutions responsible for creating news. These approaches are all in opposition to early functionalist media studies (Willig 2011,Tuchman 2002). Despite Scudson's self-criticism (2005:172) of the approaches, they still carry some weight in explaining a framework for news production. The latter is relevant in relation to a debate on and an analysis of source-selection.

News political economy is an approach with a focus on how news is related to political and economic structures and how the outcome of the news process is linked to the structure of the economy and the ideology of the state, respectively. This approach has been characterized as "historical/materialist" analysing media and news as sub/problems of structural questions of inequality in relation to class, power and capital /see Willing and Tuchman 2002. The economic organisation of news is not clear in as much as a link between ownership of news organisations and news coverage is not easy to determine. In Europe, for example, it is not clear that the public and private broadcasters differ systematically in the ways they present political news and current affaires (Brants 1998; here from Scudson 2005:175). The political context of news-making is equally a broad topic partly depended on the political ideologies of the state. Within market societies, there are various institutional forums and constitutional regimes for the press. The distinction between ' marked' and 'state' organization of media, or between commercial and public forms of broadcasting masks important differences within each category (ibid. p.179). In Denmark, for example, private written media is subsidized by the state. The national broadcast ´TV- and radio station DR is directed by a board of, among others, Parliamentarians and have formulated policies.

The social organization of news production and journalism and the interaction of journalists and their sources forms another approach to newsmaking. This approach comes primarily out of organisational sociology, especially the study of social organisation, occupations and professions, and the social construction of ideology (Willig 2011).This approach looks at journalistic norms of work and the organisational possibilities and constrains. Finally, a 'cultural' approach to news emphasizes the constraining force of broad cultural traditions and symbolic systems. This perspective tries to understand how journalists' efforts on the job are constrained by organisational and occupational demands (Scudson 2005:174). News is the product of a set of institutionalized work practices and journalists are socialized into these practices. Louw (2005:72

ff) points at some parameters in these routinizing journalistic practices. Journalists are trained to work according to a set of formulas, which narrow the options for what can become news and 'newsworthiness'. They are also trained in the selection of sources and discourses. The term 'editorial power' (*den redigerende magt'*) is coined by Brink Lund (2002), who points at organisational demands for editing and selecting of events, approaches, agendas and themes. This covers for example the use of journalistic routines such as linguistic routines employed in describing politicians or executives in private industry elite positions and the de-emphasis of certain issues in this process (Brink Lund 2002: 27-28, 167).

Summing up

The point of departure for the project is first a lack of in depth knowledge concerning news source in Danish news programs in a perspective of gender and minority-majority population. We know from various studies that there is a bias in the news sources in Danish media in a gender perspective. What we do not know is this bias' precise scoop concerning TV-news, nor do we know about the distribution of this bias in more detail concerning gender, majority-minority population and profession. In the sections above, I have pieced together a theoretical framework for a discussion of news sources in a perspective of gender and majority-minority status (ethnicity). The parameters can be employed to specify a discussion of news in relation to the public sphere and democracy.

I have pointed out some of the limits of this reasoning without dismissing the relevance of the concept of democracy and multiple understandings of it for my analysis. The focus of the current study will also prove to make specific comments upon the discussion of the significance of a Nordic empirical context for the analytical points.

I am inspired by Sartori's idea of 'concept travelling'(1970) and his idea that thinking about concepts must include how well the concept 'travels' to a variety of cultural and national contexts (here from Mazur & Goertz 2008:5). A point of importance for the idea of a Nordic context is the history and tradition of gender roles and gender equality in the Nordic countries. When explaining the idea of a "Nordic model", the homogeneity in terms of ethnicity and religion is often underlined. So is a long tradition of political democracy and Lutheranism (Melby, Ravn & Wetterberg 2008:4). Another characteristic of a Nordic model is that the closeness and subtle boundaries between public and private, local and national, the state and civil society gave space for women's agency (ibid.p.5).

In relation to this project, a central idea is that there are gendered norms and possibilities for majority women in the Nordic countries, which are different from the ones women experience in many other regions of the world. Examples are women's role in public life, in parliamentary politics, political representation and women's participation on the labour market, which since the 1970s has reached a greater level than in most other regions of the world (Fiig 2009a; 2009b).

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