



“Gendered space”: A study of newspaper opinion journalism as emergent and oppositional to the dominant culture in journalism

Ma. Theresa Angelina Q. Tabada

Abstract

This paper reviews the literature in academic journals and books and asserts the importance of studying opinion journalism as a genre of emergent and oppositional journalism and a form of public engagement. Using Raymond Williams's Marxist cultural theory of base and superstructure, this writer takes the perspective that newspaper columns are a genre that contributes to residual and emergent forms of alternative and oppositional culture which counters the texts and values in the dominant culture of journalism. Exercising traditional public scholarship, op-ed writers utilize columns, essays, and other forms of creative nonfiction to address issues that concern women, the working class, and other vulnerable groups that are kept at the periphery of public discourse.

Keywords: Opinion journalism, creative nonfiction, public sphere, mediation, mediatization, gender, feminism

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In understanding how newspaper opinion journalism includes residual, emergent, and oppositional voices in the dominant culture of journalism, I contribute the use of gender lens to the field of “media-centered” studies such as mediatization, which “involves a holistic understanding of the various intersecting social forces at work (in societal change) at the same time as we allow ourselves to have a particular perspective and emphasis on the role of the media in these processes” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 3). A media-centric approach in understanding social change has been criticized as focusing on the role of the media as “agents of change,” ignoring “non-media factors” and oversimplifying what should be “a complex and nuanced understanding of the role of media in social and cultural change” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 3). As part of communication and social dynamics, the media reflects the complex interaction of economic, political, technological, and cultural factors, particularly in surfacing the engendering dominant discourses and counter-discourses that reflect polysemous, alternative, and even oppositional women’s subjectivities.

Such changes in the social fabric involve processes that take a long time; thus, these are regarded as social transformations (Hepp et al., 2015). Factors that do not promote but resist changes are also significant for these long-term studies of the media (Hepp et al., 2015). Serving as a litmus test, the opinion-editorial (op-ed) section published essays in the form of columns and letters that reflected how in-house columnists and contributing writers viewed and reacted to the changes and transitions in society.

In studying related literature on how the opinion-editorial pages of legacy newspapers reflect the dominant culture of journalism but also include residual, emergent, and oppositional voices—particularly of women, a sector prominently relegated to the peripheries or the margins of communication—I contribute to understanding one of the three theoretical concerns cited by Andreas Hepp, Stig Hjarvard, and Knut Lundby (2015) in their research on the study of mediatization: “the role of media as causal agents, the understanding of historical change and the design of concepts” (p. 3).

Opinion journalism underwent historical changes from the early advocacy papers to the opinion-editorial pages that dichotomized opinion or the interpretation of news from the front and main pages’ presentation of straight news. I surveyed academic papers and books to chart the evolution of the “public sphere,” as first theorized by Jürgen Habermas (1989/2006), up to the legacy newspapers of the 21st century.

Although both concepts involve social transformation, scholars do not agree whether “mediation” and “mediatization” are interchangeable. For this paper, I adopt the theorizing that the processes of mediation

(“mediated communication”) (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 4) and mediatization (“their transforming potential”) (p. 6) are separate but complementary. In this paper, I present the findings that newspaper opinion journalism reflects the more general process of mediation, the incipient stage of mediatization, which, in its study of the “interrelation between the change of media and communication on the one hand and the change of (fields of) culture and society on the other hand,” manifests the “alter[ation]” of “the large-scale relationship between media, culture, and society” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 6).

Veering away from an institutional approach to studying mediation and mediatization, I adopted the social-constructivist or cultural approach to studying how newspapers’ opinion-editorial pages reflect how columnists, editorialists, and contributors construct the “social and cultural world” of women during the historical phases “to investigate the interrelation between the change of media communication and sociocultural change as part of everyday communication practices, and how the change of these practices is related to a changing communicative construction of reality” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 4).

As a Cebuana who still regularly reads op-ed articles published by legacy newspapers and contributes a weekly editorial on social issues to an English-language daily in Cebu, returning to the world of print—and in particular, to the newspaper sections publishing opinions of in-house columnists and contributors, and shaping or countering the views and stances of their readers—is essential for me. As I finalize this paper, the Philippines is moving towards the 2022 general elections, one that is already assured of continuing the trend of not just an increasingly contentious but also “weaponized” arena of discourses and counter-discourses on not just news and opinion—what was traditionally bifurcated by legacy journalism—but also on facts and “alternative fact,” history and revisionism, journalism and citizen-journalism.

In the post-truth world, there is widespread dissent over the nature of truth or truths. Before she was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize 2021 with Russian journalist Dmitry Muratov for “their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression” (“The Nobel Peace Prize 2021,” n. d., para. 1). Maria Ressa (2016) wrote a three-part series, published in 2016 on Rappler.com, on how the strategy of disinformation is misused by states to create “fear, uncertainty, and doubt (FUD)” (para. 30) among netizens through social media; the dissemblance of truth is achieved through the circulation of half-truths presented as “alternative reality,” boosted by the power of bots or software capable of generating multiple posts per minute and trolls or fake social media accounts that create an impression of social media virality. Ressa calls the “weaponization of the Internet” (para. 23) a strategy to carry

out “death by a thousand cuts” (para. 9) because this disinformation strategy is targeted at whittling down the reputations of people or groups, who are often critics and dissenters of the state.

Yet it is essential to be conscious that in a world dominated by the legacy media, dissemblance accomplished the effacement and marginalization of groups, such as women, through the manipulation of the perception of social realities. This is achieved through the dominance and naturalization of the hegemonic masculinist worldview. Women are represented through the gendered lens of male journalists and writers, which simplify the polysemous realities undergone by women and construct the monolithic ideal of Women in many guises: Women’s Pages, Women’s Beat, Women’s Magazines, Third World Women, etc. This review of the literature shows how the opinion journalism carried out by newspapers is in actuality an arena for this hegemonic gendered discourse and its contestation by counter publics that seek to express and expose, not efface or disguise, the clash of economic, racial, gendered, and other divisions transforming society.

“Most important arena”

A reason why mediatization is regarded as marking a “paradigmatic shift within media and communication research” (Hepp et al., 2015, p. 1) is the evolution of political communication over the past decades, in particular, with regard to the centrality of the media in the process of opinion-making. “Media have become the most important arena for politics” (Ampuja et al., 2014, p. 112).

My paper presents related literature showing the historical phases of opinion journalism in American and Filipino newspapers before and after World War II, describing the nascent and evolving forms of postcolonial feminist expression as one of the “different levels of mediatization” (Ampuja et al., 2014, p. 113) that was carried out by journalism’s mediation of women’s writing, which surfaces the emergent and oppositional streams that mix with or even dilute the dominant culture of male-dominated discourse in opinion-editorial pages.

How do media embed and interweave with the social and political fabric? According to a 2004 theory by Winfried Schulz (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008), the media change human communication and interaction in four ways: first, by “extend[ing] human communication abilities in both time and space” (p. 109); second, “substitut[ing for] social activities” (p. 109) that were formerly “face-to-face” creating an “amalgam” of activities, such as mixing face-to-face communication with mediated interaction, which permeates daily life; and lastly, influencing actors to adjust to the media’s “valuations, formats, and routines” (p. 109).

Schulz's (2004, as cited in Hjarvard, 2008) conceptions of the four important mediatization processes of "extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation" (p. 109) are manifested in Jürgen Habermas's (1991) theory of how eighteenth-century newspapers, referred to as "political journals," (p. 20) functioned as a medium of the "public sphere" (p. 20) and "developed a unique explosive power" (p. 20) as a rising entity in the economic and political order during the "mercantilist phase of capitalism" (p. 20).

The newspapers published in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century were improvements on the earlier news sheets, which were primarily "news letters," defined as the private correspondences commercially organized by news dealers (Habermas, 1991, p. 16). By the eighteenth century, the press, along with social clubs formed in coffee houses, salons, and the *Tischgesellschaften* [table societies] (Habermas, 1991, p. 30), represented the public sphere in the world of letters, distinct from the public sphere in the political realm. In Great Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century, independent political journalists took an adversarial stance against the government, considering it as "normal" (Habermas, 1991, p. 60) standards for journalism to be a conduit for critical commentary and mobilizer of public opposition against the state.

Applying Schulz's (as cited in Hjarvard, 2008) theory of the four ways media transforms social interactions, I view the mediatization process of extension and substitution in the changes of the newspaper trade from the "small handicraft business" (p. 17) of selling information to complement the traffic of commodities marking the early stages of capitalism, which coincided with the establishment of the modern state and the growth of local economies, to the eighteenth-century enterprise that included "ideologies and viewpoints" (p. 17) through the incorporation of the editorial function in literary journalism practiced in the "scholarly journals' on the continent and the moral weeklies and political journals in Great Britain" (Habermas, 1991, pp. 181-182). Through the opinion-editorial pages, newspapers disseminated the editors and writers' "valuations, formats, and routines" among readers, mediating the public's discussion of issues through an "amalgam" of activities combining reading news and interpretation with face-to-face communication about the media-set agenda on what the newspapers regarded as public affairs (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 109).

Hjarvard (2008) agrees with Habermas that even in the "early modern era," when nation-states were being created, "newspapers helped to create a democratic, political public sphere" (p. 117). He notes that it was only in the 1920s that newspapers, along with radio and television, emerged as "cultural institutions," independent and no longer serving as "instruments"

of other “social institutions” and espousing the consequent advocacy of “special interests” (p. 117). He also marks this phase as the start of the media’s advocacy for a “generalized public” (p. 117).

Adopting the “omnibus” concept of journalism, Hjarvard (2008) enumerated the key features of newspapers that carried a “news platform” that was less partisan and catered to an “entire spectrum of readers”: distinctions were made between “news” and “views;” “news” was guided by the principles of “objectivity” and “accuracy,” among others; “views” were accommodated in “opinion-based genres,” such as editorials and debate pages; and other pages included an extension of other coverages of the community, such as home, family, “culture” or “society,” and leisure (p. 118).

These are some of the “media logic” shaping newspaper journalism during the 1920s-1980s, when as a cultural institution, the media’s dominant logic was “public steering” through its “representation of various social institutions (but not one particular one) in a public arena” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 120). As conceived by David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979, as cited in Ampuja et al., 2014), media logic refers to the forms and formats with which the media “present and transmit information” (p. 114) such as “how the material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication” (p. 114). In these forms of mediated communication, media logic does not just influence the presentation but also the interpretation of social phenomena (Ampuja et al., 2014; Strömbäck, 2008).

After 1980, Hjarvard (2008) makes the same observation as Habermas that from being a cultural institution guided by the dominant logic of public steering, the media, embracing both legacy and digital portals, transformed into an “independent institution” (p. 120), now guided by “media professionalism” (p. 120), market competition, and commercial and profit orientations. While still serving audiences, the media’s purposes and objectives are directed toward closing “sales to target groups in a differentiated media system” (p. 120).

This paper aims to focus on studies showing how, as a political public sphere, newspapers’ opinion journalism intervenes with and shapes social actors, particularly women. At the macro level, the media shapes society in three ways, according to Hjarvard (2008): as an “interface in the relations within and between institutions” (p. 126) as a “realm of shared experience” (p. 126) for the “presentation and interpretation of ‘the way things are’” (p.126); contributing to the creation of a “sense of identity and of community” (p. 126); and as a “political public sphere” (p. 126) where persons and institutions can “pursue and defend their own interests and establish their legitimacy” (p.126).

Through this media logic, newspapers have the power of becoming the most important arena for both the powerful and the powerless, especially the latter.

“Community connectedness”

The media’s commercial and corporate interests have a detrimental effect on its functioning as an “arena in which members of a society can discuss and decide matters of common interest” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 126).

Scholars have conducted research and evolved theories on how newspapers can transform their corporate and profit-driven nature by engaging with the public to expand, deepen, and diversify public discourse. Studies have shown that “community connectedness” (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994; Hynds & Archibald, 1996; Moseley, 2010) can strengthen opinion journalism by highlighting civic issues and views that are less emphasized in traditional reporting; giving citizens access to participate as op-ed page contributors; and featuring women, youths, and other marginalized groups among editorialists and writers for newspapers.

If newspaper op-ed pages are currently not meeting this function of community connectedness or public engagement, innovations should be undertaken to reinvigorate its content and form, which includes exploration of the genre of creative nonfiction as well as its subgenres such as the personal essay. A public-conscious newspaper exemplifies “public journalism,” which, according to communication scholar and public journalism advocate Jay Rosen (1994, as cited in Hynds & Archibald, 1996), shows a paper’s “willingness to intervene, its concern for the resolution and not just the existence of the dispute, its determination to create discussion where none existed, its aggressive style of pro-active neutrality” (p. 16). Aside from opinion journalism, investigative and explanatory journalism exemplify public journalism, with the former genre exposing corruption and abuse of authority affecting public welfare and the latter, providing context to enable citizens to understand and thus participate in seemingly complex aspects of governance.

Other journalists and scholars are uncomfortable with public journalism’s involvement with civil society and its consequences on the traditional objectivity and detachment of the press. “Others say it was just *good* journalism” (Hynds & Archibald, 1996, p. 16). For Habermas (1989/2006), it was precisely the emphasis on advocacy over objectivity that was the strength of “literary journalism,” which he claimed changed the role of the eighteenth-century press from being mere news bearers into the “mediator and intensifier of public discussion” (p. 76) during the second half of the century. Before newspapers practiced the “journalism of

commerce,” these were stakeholders of a nascent democracy by practicing the “journalism of conviction” (Habermas, 1989/2006). When Habermas (1989/2006) refers to “literary journalism,” he stresses the opinion-making function that marked the major transition from the “earlier news sheets” that disseminated announcements and updates to the “daily political newspapers,” which came later, and was also influential in setting the public agenda. The distinctive features of this stage were the creation of the editorial staff for news and opinion-making and the change of the newspaper publisher from a “vendor of recent news to a dealer in public opinion” (Bücher, n.d., as cited in Habermas, 1989/2006, p. 76). At this stage of its development, the press was considered by Habermas (1989/2006) as “an institution of the public itself, effective in the manner of a mediator and intensifier of public discussion, no longer a mere organ for the spreading of news but not yet the medium of a consumer culture” (p. 76).

The Habermasian concept of “literary journalism” as “journalism of conviction” translates into the contemporary opinion journalism practiced through a newspaper’s opinion-editorial pages publishing editorials and columns written as essays (Habermas, 1989/2006). Expressing the writer’s voice and taking a definite standpoint or point of view on a recent event or issue concerning the public, the essay played a central role in the Filipino people’s struggle for independence as a “formidable tool(s) for forming public opinion” (Lucero, 2017, p. 220), most prominently during the Propaganda Movement. Rosario C. Lucero (2017) considers that, except for Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, whose distinction was in the writing of scientific essays, the “more significant essayists” (p. 220) writing in Spanish from 1900 to about a decade after the Second World War are all men, according to the second edition of the Cultural Center of the Philippines’s *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*. In Cebu, notable essayists cited for writing for the newspapers from the 1920s to 1940 were all men but one. Maria Kabigon was the only woman cited as a notable essayist during this period in Cebu, according to the Cultural Center of the Philippines’s *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art* (Lucero, 2017, p. 222).

In its interpretation of facts sieved through personal analysis and reflection, essays typify “personal journalism,” “literary journalism,” “new journalism,” “parajournalism,” and, to use a more contemporary term, “creative nonfiction” (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005, p. 7). She writes that, as practiced in the Philippines, the last genre covers several forms aside from essays, such as “social commentary, reverie, reflection, recollection, meditation, humorous sketch, journal entry, letter, travel sketch, and profile” (p. 3). According to Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, most of the contemporary creative nonfiction takes the form of essays published as newspaper

columns and magazine articles, with the columns ranging from “serious political commentary to historical trivia, from music reviews to cooking tips, from practical lessons on how to succeed in the corporate world to highly personal reflections on a midlife crisis, losing a parent, or flunking an exam” (p. 5).

In its fusion of “nonfiction prose” and the “techniques and strategies of fiction,” essays, like other forms of creative nonfiction, include a kit of tools flexible for self-expression and personal advocacy, as indicated by the increasing involvement of women since essays in English were first published in the Philippines during the Commonwealth Period to the “golden age” of essays before World War II (as exemplified by Estrella Alfon and Pura Santillan Castrence) and during the postwar era (Alfon, Castrence, Kerima Polotan, and Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil); the ‘60s and the early ‘70s that marked a “high point in Philippine journalism” (Polotan, Gilda Cordero-Fernando, Ninotchka Rosa, Sylvia Mayuga, and Rosario Garcellano); the post-martial law resurgence in the exponents of “interpretative news writing” or “new journalism” during the ‘80s (Jo-ann Q. Maglipon, Sheila Coronel, Maritess Danguilan-Vitug, Ma. Ceres P. Doyo); and the peaking of these women journalists/essayists, along with Letty Jimenez Magsanoc, Arlene Babst, and Sylvia Mayuga in the ‘90s (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005). Some of the “better columnists,” like Jullie Daza, Barbara Gonzalez, Nakpil, and Mayuga, selected “the best of their essays” and published these as books: Daza’s *An Etiquette for Mistresses* (1993), Gonzalez’s *How Do You Know Your Pearls Are Real?* (1991), Nakpil’s third collection of essays, *Whatever* (2002), and Mayuga’s *Between the Centuries* (2004) (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005, p. 5).

Applying Raymond Williams’s (1980/2006) Marxist cultural theory of base and superstructure, opinion journalism carries out public service by serving as a portal for “residual and emergent forms, both of alternative and of oppositional culture” (pp. 136-137) to counter the texts and values in the “dominant culture” of journalism. Williams regarded as “residual” those “experiences, meanings, and values” that are at a remove from dominant culture but may, through incorporation, still be “lived and practiced” (p. 137) in the cultural and social dimensions. “Emergent” culture emanates from what Williams regards as the “new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences” that are “continually being created” (p. 137). Stemming from the Habermasian literary journalism, opinion journalism in contemporary newspapers carries on the residual interpretation of news but opens new access to marginalized groups, such as women, formerly shut out from the public discourse dominated by educated and propertied men.

The surfacing of the previously inarticulate or the silenced means not just the ventilation of “new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences” (Williams, 1980/2006, p. 137) but subjectivities that may oppose or diverge from those purveyed by the dominant culture. Williams points out that there may be a “simple theoretical distinction” between the alternative and the alternative as “between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light” (p. 138). From the perspective of the dominant culture, Williams considers that only a “very narrow line” distinguishes the alternative and the oppositional since both subcultures stand for “meanings and practices” that are not just “disregard[ed] or despise[d] but “challeng[ed]” as well (p. 138).

Sustaining democracy requires intellectuals to engage with the public through alternative and oppositional discourse challenging the dominant culture. An avenue for such public engagement is provided by “public scholarship” (Moseley, 2010, p. 109). Drawing on the works of sociologist Michael Burawoy and geographer Kevin Ward, geographer William G. Moseley (2010) writes that in the “organic” (p. 109) form of public scholarship, academics work with specific groups formed according to interests or areas, for instance, through participatory-action research. In the second type, “traditional” (p. 117) public scholarship, Moseley discusses how the scholar initiates public discussion and debate by disseminating research or writing articles or columns in newspapers, magazines, or other popular portals like the blogosphere. Referring to Katharyne Mitchell’s (2006, as cited in Moseley, 2010) paraphrasing of Karl Marx that the “point of scholarship... is not just to interpret the world but to change it” (p. 110), Moseley points out that traditional public scholarship has the potential to inform and influence the public and policy-makers, the audiences reading op-ed pages of newspapers and other popular media. Since journalists in other media also read op-ed pages for leads, there are possibilities that the scholars’ writing will cascade or be echoed through republication in other media, follow-up interviews with the writer, etc. Many newspapers and other legacy media also have websites, which expand their reach to mass and niche audiences. Through this penetration of “contrarian views” in the mainstream press can public intellectuals fulfill one of their major roles, which is to “question the mainstream view,” writes Moseley (2010, p. 117).

The significance of a “public-minded press” is stressed by Andrew Ciofalo and Kim Traverso in their 1994 survey of op-ed page editors of 1,650 U.S. daily newspapers. Their major findings show that “fewer than half of the responding papers have op-ed pages, that professional journalists, public figures and propagandists dominate the pages, and that editors firmly control

the agenda” (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994, p. 51). The researchers conclude that these trends show “little likelihood of a deep-rooted public forum” (p. 51) existing in op-ed pages that are independent of the main editorial page (the “sacrosanct domain” reflecting the stance of the newspaper publisher or the editorial board) and provide accessibility to citizens writing as freelance contributors of op-ed pieces, ensuring democratic participation, diversity, and inclusivity. Despite the constraints that prevent many U.S. newspapers’ op-ed pages from encouraging a free and balanced dialogue “among readers, experts and freelancers,” there is greater attention being paid to “press-sponsored dialogue” due to the “advocacy of *community connectedness* as an antidote for the fading influence and readership of newspapers” (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994, p. 52). The researchers quote Jay Rosen (1994, as cited in Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994, p. 52) in identifying the rationale for journalism’s “community connectedness,” which lies in the press “supporting civic involvement, improving discourse and debate, and creating a climate in which the affairs of the community earn their claim on the citizen’s time and attention” (p. 52).

The libertarian press’s ideal of pluralism must be asserted, given that the dominant culture in media masks the monopoly of the elites through the seeming plurality of views, as purveyed by “professional journalists, public relations practitioners, and institutional advertisers” (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994, p. 54). For instance, the gender issue is skewed, given the dominance of men over women in writing for the op-ed pages. Ciofalo and Traverso (1994) cite a 1990 six-month monitoring by the *New York Times*, which shows that 87 percent of freelance contributors were men. In 1992, monitoring within one month shows the trend to be the same: 84 percent of the *New York Times* op-ed pages’ articles were contributed by men; 87 percent in the *Washington Post* (Ciofalo & Traverso, 1994, p. 54). In the 1970s, U.S. newspapers’ involvement of women and minority groups in editorial assignments was still a cause for concern (Hynds, 1976, p. 532). In the same study, a sample of randomly selected dailies representing 20 percent of the newspapers listed in the *Editor & Publisher Yearbook* featured political analysis (93 percent), followed by political reporting (75 percent) in their column pages (Hynds, 1976, p. 534).

A 1996 study conducted by Ernest Hynds and Erika Archibald shows that approximately 375 dailies, representing 25 percent of the more than 1,500 daily newspapers listed in the *Editor & Publisher Yearbook*, undertook improvements in the content and form of their editorial pages. Such initiatives in enhancing the effectiveness of editorial pages, especially when these involve collaboration between citizens and journalists, benefit public discourse and democracy. The efforts to improve editorial pages also reflect

the increasing importance paid to them by the press and the audience (Hynds, 1976; Hynds, 1984).

Hynds and Archibald (1996) quote John Hulteng in describing the “gyroscope function” of editorial pages: “bringing meaning out of the jumble of news and events and...keeping in view the central values of our age despite the tides of passion and propaganda that swirl about and obscure them” (pp. 14-15). According to Hynds and Archibald, effective editorial pages provide “leadership” (p. 15) to the public through forums, which facilitate the exchange of information and ideas, and benchmarks, which present “strongly argued viewpoints” (p. 15) that can influence readers in various ways: by reinforcing existing views, crystallizing unclear ones, and exposing readers to contrasting views. The researchers point out that opinion journalism performs a vital public function as merely presenting information without making meaning can overwhelm and confuse audiences. Newspapers and legacy media also compensate for a constraint in online media where netizens limit their exposure only to “echo chambers,” which are websites, forums, social media sites, and other portals where they share the same viewpoints “echoed” or repeated by digital journalists and bloggers. Among the trends the researchers observed as initiatives to improve editorial pages are areas that are the foci of this paper: “greater use of argumentation, explanation and description” (Hynds & Archibald, 1996, p.19), “a more personal writing style” (p. 20), and the inclusion of more women editorialists and other minorities underrepresented in editorial pages.

Women’s stake

Habermas notes the structural limitations of the newspaper as a liberal public sphere, as it first took form during the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions to the contemporary form operating in the era of welfare state capitalism and mass democracy (Durham & Kellner, 2006).

For Habermas (1989), the bourgeois public sphere embodies the ideals of liberalism and populism, such as “diversity, tolerance, debate, and consensus” (Durham & Kellner, 2006, p. 6). In actuality, the public sphere is “dominated by white, property-owning males” (p. 6) particularly “polls or media experts” (p. 6) who distribute “manufactured opinion” through editorialists and columnists that do not reflect the “voices and interests” of excluded “working-class, plebeian, and women’s public spheres” (Durham & Kellner, 2006, p. 6).

In Julia A. Golia’s 2016 study of the evolution of the woman’s page in a sample of 31 mass-circulation daily newspapers published in the U.S.

from 1895 to 1935, she notes that the publishers and editors' feminization of the editorial and commercial content was "both limiting and liberating" (p. 607) in its consequences for the gendered public sphere. The shift from "partisan politics" to a "capitalist marketplace" for funding newspapers during the 1840s to the 1850s meant that women were moved closer to the center of editorial attention since nineteenth-century partisan newspapers "reinforced the popular notion that the public sphere was a masculine arena" (Golia, 2016, p. 609).

Sexism still prevailed from 1895 to the 1920s, although more women were hired by newspapers so they could write articles that women readers could relate to (Golia, 2016). She notes that by 1925, innovations included women writing columns about "social and political events of interest to female audiences" (p. 607). Although she notes that race and class were not mentioned "explicitly," she sums up the "ideal American woman" addressed by editors and writers then as "white, married, financially comfortable, and rooted in her home" (p. 607).

Yet the transformations of American society during the early part of the twentieth century meant that women writers and readers would also be influenced by the increasing number of women of varied backgrounds joining the workforce, heightened involvement of women in social and political reforms, and the changing mass culture that led to complex gender norms and "hybrid" interactions with the public sphere (Golia, 2016, p. 627).

Newspapers promoted a conservative perspective of women's engagement with the public sphere, using formats such as advice columns and housekeeping exchanges. Taking advantage of these innovations, "readers remade the woman's page into an influential site of public debate" (Golia, 2016, p. 627), creating a "space of striking experimentation and community building during a period of great economic and cultural transition" (p. 627).

Golia (2016) concludes that "long after its demise," the woman's page continued to exert its influence in "reshaping how Americans understood and interacted with their daily paper" (p. 628).

Philippine newspapers, particularly opinion journalism, also reflect the "baggage of colonialism" (Santiago, 2002, p. 182), such as poverty, race, and gender). In her study of 100 years of Philippine feminist poetry and other forms of expression, such as journalism, Lilia Quindoza Santiago (2002) considers the period bracketed by 1889-1939 as feminist Filipinas' "Period of Awakening" (p.86). During this epoch, several watersheds occurred to advance the recognition of women's rights.

Among these milestones are the 1889 demand of the women of Malolos for the opening of a night school to allow them to study Spanish and value

education for improving their lives. This act inspired *La Solidaridad* editor Marcelo H. del Pilar (whose pen name is Plaridel) and Jose Rizal, who wrote a letter praising the women for their courage (Santiago, 2002). Santiago highlights other feminist watersheds: a masonic branch for women, Walana: Logica de Adopcion, was founded in 1893, as well as the women's branch of the Katipunan (p. 86); the first women's association using the term "feminist" was founded in 1905, the *Asosacion Feminista Filipina* (p. 87); and the first magazine about women for women, *Filipina*, was edited by Constancia Poblete and carried a paraphrase from the title of the book written by noted American feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, "revindication of the rights of women," in its masthead (p. 88). According to Santiago, the culmination of their struggles came when Filipina voters, mobilized by "*panuelo* (shawled) activists" (p. 88), approved the law granting equal voting rights to women and men in the country; the Philippines became the first country in Asia to grant the vote to women and paved the path for women's more meaningful participation in the public sphere and democracy (p. 89).

Despite these milestones in an emerging postcolonial feminist consciousness and activism among Filipinas, history led to the "silencing of the writer" among women (Santiago, 2002, p. 182). Colonialism grafted misogyny and sexism onto language, with the Spaniards denying Indios, men and women, the opportunity to learn and use Spanish and the Americans shaping Filipino consciousness through a free educational system that promoted a gender-"bifurcated" language, English, at the expense of pre-colonial, "homegrown" languages that made no distinction between genders (Filipino's neutral "*siya*" for the "he/she" of English; "*kapwa*" for all, regardless of gender) (Santiago, 2002, p. 19).

Language alone cannot explain "the unlim'd" Filipinas during the Spanish and American colonization, which represented a "lost cosmology of women," or the "unrecorded, unmonumented, unsung, uninscribed, unilluminated, trounced, stifled, abrogated, graffitied women, silenced by the selectivity of history" (Martin, 1984, p. 41). In a survey of the late 19th-century propagation of the "discursive, argumentative, and didactic literature" (Lucero, 1994, p. 141) penned, in "both Spanish and the vernacular" (p. 141), to advance the Propaganda and Reform Movement, women writers are silent or unacknowledged. The trend was repeated in the Filipino-American War until the decade after World War II, when the essay was a "formidable tool for forming public opinion" (Lucero, 1994, p. 143). The Cultural Center of the Philippines' *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art's* entry on essays first cites a Filipina writer, Rosalia L. Aguinaldo, in its enumeration of fictionists, poets, literary critics, and essayists forming the first literary organization in 1910, Aklatang Bayan (Lucero, 1994). The popular Cebuana

columnist, Maria Kabigon, is the only woman essayist cited among essayists in Cebu who wrote from the 1920s to the 1940s newspaper commentaries on “local politics, history, culture, places, and personalities” (Lucero, 1994, p. 146).

Research on women writing, especially in the Philippines, can surface what history, innocently or not, ignored or buried. One of the important texts published during the campaign for women’s suffrage in the Philippines is an open letter the writer Concepcion Felix addressed to a certain Marta Garcia (Santiago, 2002). Felix, the first president of *Asosacion Feminista Filipina*, wrote: “There is no recourse but to prepare women, whether single or married through full education. However high that education must be, women should be equally entitled and it should not be the exclusive right of the men alone” (Santiago, 2002, p. 90). There is no known collection of Felix’s writings; yet this single letter/essay, published in the newspaper, attests to the significance of women articulating women’s perspectives on a concern published for general circulation by a newspaper.

Women only figured prominently as columnists covering both the domestic and public spheres in the 20th century. Cited in the Cultural Center of the Philippines’ *Encyclopedia of Philippine Art*’s entry on essays are the following Filipina writers: Pura Santillan Castrence whose column, “Woman Sense,” tackled “domestic affairs and current trends; Carmen Guerrero-Nakpil whose essays addressed “Philippine history, culture and politics;” Kerima Polotan Tuvera, who exposed the hypocrisy of politicians and journalists and wrote about women’s roles; Sylvia Mayuga, who wrote about life during martial law; Barbara C. Gonzalez, whose essays considered relationships from a “self-sufficient woman’s point of view;” Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo’s travel essays and creative nonfiction works; Dolores Feria, for travel writing, book reviews, and feminist studies; Ceres Doyo for investigative reporting; Jo-Ann Maglipon for “political analysis with human interest;” food and culture critic Doreen G. Fernandez; and other women using a variety of formats to address themes not limited only to women’s interests (Lucero, 1994, pp. 148-150).

Noticeable for their absence in the CCP documentation of essayists are regional women writers. Aside from the importance of studying mediatization’s focus on societal factors that resist transformations, the study of women’s writing, though marginalized in newspapers, is crucial for filling the knowledge gap that shows how early opinion journalism, particularly in the Philippines, made the “initial sowings of seeds of the nationalist essays in Philippine literature” (Guieb, 2013, p. 13).

In his 2013 study of 28 essays written by 11 writers and published in *Renacimiento Filipino* (1910-1913), Eulalio R. Guieb III argues that these

journalistic outputs were used as “early examples of the nationalist essay in Tagalog” (p. 126) to critically parse current events from the interpretations imposed by Spanish and American colonizers. I argue that studying essays written by women during feminist watersheds, such as the 1889-1939 period considered as feminist Filipinas’ Period of Awakening, is also significant for surfacing the “standpoint of those deemed to be on the fringes of power” (Guieb, 2013, p. 124). By replacing postcolonial feminism with nationalism, I contend that a study of Philippine newspapers’ opinion journalism can liberate these “marginalized views” from historical silencing, a fate “Constantino terms as the ‘history of the inarticulate’” (Guieb, 2013, p. 124).

Dominant, alternative, and oppositional cultures

The potentials of op-ed columns in a newspaper for public engagement, particularly in communicating the needs and aspirations of women, youth, minorities and other marginalized groups, point to the possibilities of opposing hegemony in culture, including but not limited to journalism.

Raymond Williams (1980/2006) theorizes that “hegemony” is beyond the “level of mere opinion or mere manipulation” (p. 135). At particular periods, every society has a “central system of practices, meanings and values...(that is) dominant and effective...the central, effective and dominant system of meanings and values, which are not merely abstract but which are organized and lived,” he writes (p. 135). When this dominant “set of meanings and values” is put into practice, ideology and custom are “reciprocally confirming” (p. 135).

In this dominant culture, Williams (1980/2006) writes that a particular set of meanings and practices is selected while the rest are ignored, rejected, “diluted,” or reinterpreted so as not to contradict that which is preferred to be “*the* tradition” or “*the* significant past” (p. 136). This process of selection at the level of philosophy or theory is lived and reinforced at the level of “history of various practices,” states Williams (p. 136). This is the process by which the forces at the intellectual and practical level “are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture” (p. 136).

Challenges are presented in the selection of meanings, values, and practices that can serve as “alternative” and “oppositional” to the dominant culture. Williams distinguishes the former from the latter by stipulating that these are ideologies and practices that can be “accommodated and tolerated” within the dominant culture (1980/2006, p. 136). He points out that values and experiences that remain after a “previous social formation” are termed “residual” (p. 137). Although a residual culture “cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture” (p. 137), Williams notes that this can be assimilated into the hegemonic culture. In contrast, “new

meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences,” which are “continually being created,” are classified as “emergent” culture by Williams (p. 137).

While a “very narrow line” separates alternative and oppositional cultures, Williams (1980/2006) makes a comparison “between someone who simply finds a different way to live and wishes to be left alone with it, and someone who finds a different way to live and wants to change the society in its light” (p. 138). While the alternative culture may be interpreted as “disregarding or despising” (p. 138) the dominant culture, he observes that the oppositional one can be seen as “challenging it” (p. 138). In the residual culture may be retrieved “areas of human experience, aspiration and achievement, which the dominant culture under-values or opposes, or even cannot recognize” (p. 138).

Williams (1980/2006) writes that these various cultures may not “necessarily” be “contradictory” (p. 139) in practice; in theory, though, the distinctions are perceptible.

As with the other forms of art, literature may fall under the residual and emergent. Yet, Williams (1980/2006) considers that “most writing in any period, including our own, is a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture” (p. 140), citing innate literary features that contribute to the tradition “with great power”: its “capacity to embody and enact and perform certain meanings and values, or to create in single particular ways what would be otherwise merely general truths” (p. 140). While some forms of writing may “embody residual meanings and values” or “express also and significantly some emergent practices and meanings” (p. 141), Williams writes that the dominant culture will attempt to transform and incorporate these into the tradition since it must remain flexible in adapting its “articulated features,” without altering its “central formation” to retain its dominance in theory and practice.

Liberating the voice

The dominant and most resistant tradition in journalism surrounds the culture of objectivity, which puts up boundaries between fact and meaning, between news and interpretation. The dominant news culture is embodied in the practices of journalists and the education of aspiring journalists, all anchored on such “basics” as the news elements of the 5Ws (who, what, when, where, and why) and the H (how), the news values, journalism standards such as the use of the third-person point of view in news reporting, and news ethics extolling the journalist’s non-involvement, “discipline,” and “professionalism”.

In the journalism tradition of objectivity, creative nonfiction develops a culture that challenges and sometimes opposes the dominant journalistic meanings, values, and practices. Termed “personal journalism,” “literary journalism,” “new journalism” or “parajournalism,” creative nonfiction involves “the skill of the storyteller and the research ability of the reporter,” Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo (2005a, p. 7) quotes Theodore A. Rees Cheney to define the genre.

Creative nonfiction is viewed as using only the techniques for “imaginative” (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005a, p. 7) storytelling that are the hallmarks of literary writing while retaining a “fidelity to truthfulness” (p.10). She cites certain practices—such as disregarding balance and encouraging subjectivity—may lead to creative nonfiction writing deviating from a straightforward, unbiased narrative of verifiable facts (p. 10). Creative fiction covers a range of forms, from literary journalism (which she considers as “still close to traditional reportage” although it is “writing in a personal way about the facts in a news event”) (p. 11) to literary memoir.

A major proponent of creative nonfiction, Lee Gutkind (1997, as cited in Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005a) points out that teaching is “the mission of the genre” (p. 13), using techniques to convince the most resistant reader and whet his or her interest to learn more. Such techniques are the same ones used to write a human interest story: “personal voice, a clearly defined point of view, which will reveal itself in the tone, and be presented through scene, summary, and description, as it is in fiction” (p. 13).

Compared to poetry and fiction, creative nonfiction is “extremely dynamic and flexible” (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005a, p. 126), covering a range of topics, styles, and tones. Another form frequently used in op-ed columns is the informal, familiar, or personal essay, which creates in the reader “the sense of immediate contact with a thinking mind” (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005, p. 128). Pantoja-Hidalgo (2005a) quotes *Philippine Daily Inquirer* op-ed columnist Conrado de Quiros, who penned essays for his regular column “There’s the Rub,” in describing the standards he sets in penning his essays:

I mean that writing which brings you to face the truth of your own world and of your own self. I mean that it brings you to face the unimaginable horrors of your own land and the even more unimaginable horrors of your own life. I mean that it brings you to look at the bloodstained face of humanity—and know that to turn away *is* to be turned into a pillar of salt. (p. 130)

“One of the most adaptable and useful varieties of modern narrative” (Hart, 2011, p. 209), the personal essay is a “five-minute read” of one thousand

words, which is a standard that is also diminishing along with the size of the news hole, or the space left for editorial material after the newspaper pages are allocated to advertisements and newspaper design features. Hart writes that by permitting the writer to “take an idea for a walk” (p. 216), the essay expresses personal experiences and insights, which editors publish as they view these as newsworthy enough to be shared with the public. Newspaper columns written as essays are accessible to citizens, who can continue the engagement with the writer and the public by contributing letters to the editor or readers’ reactions, newspaper sections that have been traditionally treated as public forums.

Both personal essays and creative nonfiction liberate the voice of the writer, which may not necessarily be a journalist or editor. In countering the dominant discourse that journalism must be objective and impartial, the forms are defended as “advocacy journalism” (Gutkind, 1997, p. 12) which is “arguably more accurate than traditional reportage since it probes its subjects more thoroughly” (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005a, p. 138). While both forms involve a subjective viewpoint, Pantoja-Hidalgo (2005a) points out that the rigor in writing the personal essay and creative nonfiction demands that the writer be “able to illustrate—with accuracy—the particular viewpoint that they are advocating” (p. 138).

The concept of “freedom of the press” is also subject to contestation since news policies and newsroom practices are determined by newspaper owners, publishers, editors, reporters, and photographers, as well as by non-news newspaper insiders such as the marketing and circulation departments and outsiders like advertisers and politicians. In the light of these contested realities of press freedom, “advocacy or committed journalists” believe taking sides is more important “to bring about desirable changes in society without however forgetting the demands of fairness, accuracy and reliability” (Pineda-Ofreneo, 1984, p. 214).

The dominance of journalists’ voices—the gatekeeping function of a newspaper’s editorial staff, the political background and ideologies of the newsroom staff—leads to a deeper examination of whether “white, male, middle-class (newspaper) executives and journalists (can) make decisions that allow the ideas of women, blacks and other minorities to be presented fairly?” (Pineda-Ofreneo, 1984, pp. 214-215).

So, as a free zone for the citizens to share the news hole with in-house columnists, selected by the newspaper owner, publisher or editors, opinion-editorial pages are a democratic mechanism for running social, political, or cultural commentaries. A legacy newspaper has an established audience, who perceive it as having more credibility than some websites and blogs in the current controversy involving “fake” news. Writing for a newspaper, a

contributor reaches out to an audience that may include policymakers and journalists of competing papers and media.

Structural changes have also made writing and engagement with the public more possible. For non-journalists, lack of specialized training in journalism and communication are no longer barriers to participation.

The public sphere, not just the job market, has “morphed” into “something unrecognizable,” writes Pantoja-Hidalgo (2011, p. 180). These are specialized “professions” and “occupations” (2011, p. 180) that did not exist decades ago, observes Cristina Pantoja-Hidalgo, who has written creative nonfiction since the 1980s. She points out that a writer in contemporary times is someone working at home, needing only a “computer, an Internet connection, and a cell phone” (p. 180).

Access, especially for the “silenced” and the “inarticulate” (Guieb, 2013; Santiago, 2002) has been aided by both changes in the media and communication and changes in society and culture. “Perhaps an even more important change for women writers is what might be described as the diminishing of gender bias in the field” of writing (Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2011, p. 179).

Pantoja-Hidalgo (2011) quotes poet and scholar J. Neil Garcia who is “more interested” in seeking the answers to “the question, ‘*where* are we?’ than the ‘much-abused *what* are we?’” (p. xxii). According to Garcia, the former question:

Requires us to take stock of everything that has happened to us—of what we do and have been done to; of the oral that endures in and governs our lives (in the Philippines, *tsismis* or gossip is possibly the primary mode of knowledge); of the textual that we the writers in this non-reading culture are valiantly trying to secure and promote; of our relations with the different parts that make up ‘what we are’; of our relations with the various ‘others’ alongside and against which we exist as part of the same human community. (p.xxii)

Pantoja-Hidalgo (2011) also has another question that must be posed to women who persist in writing despite the difficulties:

What keeps them going? If one were to take them at their word, it would seem that they simply can’t help themselves: writing is what they do. But underlying their narratives, visible in the gaps, in the asides, in the thoughts left suspended, is this other motive. None of the writers

dwelled on it at length, out of modesty, I suspect. It shines through nonetheless—the belief that writing is important, that literature, like all art, has a role to play in society. And that this role—whether society acknowledges it, and rewards those who dedicate their lives to it, or ignores them and lurches on, blindly, fitfully—is one that society cannot do without. They would remember to remember, as Marcel Proust put it more than a century ago. They would remember both the large stories and the small ones. And they would reflect. And they would record. Because a race without memories is doomed. (p. 179)

Implications and Recommendations

This study of related literature on how the opinion-editorial pages of legacy newspapers reflect the dominant culture of journalism but also include residual, emergent, and oppositional voices, particularly of women (a sector prominently relegated to the peripheries or the margins of communication), shows the research possibilities for exploring the significance, especially from the perspective of gender, of newspaper opinion journalism as a channel for mediatization and other processes showing the intersection of various forces for social transformation.

Research regarding newspapers' opinion-editorial pages reflects how columnists, editorialists, and contributors construct the social and cultural world of women during key historical periods. In the post-truth world, where there is widespread dissent over the nature of truth, there is a need to be conscious of the changing nature of communication in increasingly contentious and “weaponized” arenas of discourses and counter-discourses.

There is an illusion of the separation of objectivity and subjectivity created by the traditional bifurcation of news and opinion in the omnibus concept of journalism practiced by legacy newspapers. This illusion is shattered by studies showing how dissemblance is accomplished in the effacement and marginalization of groups, such as women, through the manipulation of the perception of social realities. This is carried out through strategies that rely on the dominance and naturalization of the hegemonic masculinist worldview; the representation of women through the gendered lens of male journalists and writers; and the oversimplification of the polysemous realities undergone by women through the construction of a monolithic ideal of Women using the media logic that defines women in terms of the coverage of home, family, community, culture, society, and other interpretations of the so-called women's beat. This review of the

literature shows how the opinion pages of newspapers serve as an arena for hegemonic, gendered discourse and its contestation by “counterpublics” that seek to express and expose, not efface or disguise, the clash of economic, racial, gendered, and other divisions in the transformation of society.

Future studies should analyze how opinion journalism creates a realm of shared experiences and a sense of identity within groups and institutions; achieves the interface of relations between groups and institutions, particularly the dominant and the vulnerable; and serves as a channel of a public sphere where groups and institutions participate, interact, and negotiate to establish identities, pursue interests, and resolve conflicts. Future research should focus on the mediatization processes involving legacy and digital newspapers and groups, such as women, the poor, indigenous peoples, and other sectors that are traditionally elided in the media.

Research about creative nonfiction published in newspaper opinion pages or sections as news columns or contributed essays is also promising, as a means for surfacing the ways that opinion journalism intersects the dominant, oppositional, and alternative streams of information and meaning, capturing hegemonic and divergent streams of consciousness.

Applying the gender lens in the study of opinion journalism should surface the polysemous subjectivities of women of various classes, ethnicities, and persuasions, obscured or effaced by the monolithic Women constructed by the media logic of traditional journalism. Even as access, especially for the silenced and the inarticulate ones, diminish with the transformation of media and society, there should be a greater impetus to surface the writings on women, particularly by women in legacy newspapers, liberating voices and realms of experiences interred by culture and society.

Conclusion

In studying how the opinion-editorial pages of legacy newspapers reflect the dominant culture of journalism but also include residual, emergent, and oppositional voices, particularly of women, a sector prominently relegated to the peripheries or the margins of communication, I seek to describe the nascent and evolving forms of postcolonial feminist expression through opinion journalism and creative nonfiction as among the “different levels of mediatization” that were carried out by journalism’s mediation of women’s writing, which surfaces the emergent and oppositional streams that mix with or even dilute the dominant culture of male-dominated discourse in opinion-editorial pages.

This paper aims to focus on the ways by which, as a political public sphere, newspapers’ opinion journalism intervenes with and shapes social

actors, particularly women. As a “political public sphere” where persons and institutions can “pursue and defend their own interests and establish their legitimacy” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 126), newspapers are the “most important arena” for both the powerful and the powerless, including women. Journalism, particularly opinion journalism, means opportunities for articulation and expression unlocked by good reportage, which, to quote Nick Joaquin (as cited in Pantoja-Hidalgo, 2005b), is “telling it as it is but at the same time telling it new, telling it surprising, telling it significant (p. 228).

The studies of mediation and mediatization also pay attention to factors resisting changes. The “gendered space” in newspapers’ practice of opinion journalism yields interesting and significant insights into the socio-cultural forces that, aside from media, result in the silencing of many women as writers. And yet, the emergent, alternative, and oppositional voices of women that succeed in contesting the dominant culture of journalism illuminate how, through mediation and mediatization, the newspaper opinion-editorial pages serve as the most important “political public sphere” where persons and institutions can “pursue and defend their own interests and establish their legitimacy” (Hjarvard, 2008, p. 126).

Precisely because it is an arena of conflicts and contestation involving varied, clashing interests that are, however, still bound by media protocols to civil discourse, opinion journalism practiced by legacy newspapers retains the possibilities and opportunities of the Habermasian journalism of conviction and public service. In an age that has stood on its head the meaning of terms such as “alternative,” “different,” “marginalized,” “manufactured,” and “fake,” journalists and citizens should continue to share the stake in communicating and engaging with other stakeholders, particularly the marginalized and silenced, in public discourse.

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About the Author

MA. THERESA ANGELINA Q. TABADA is a doctoral candidate in the Media Studies program of the College of Mass Communication at the University of the Philippines (U.P.) Diliman. She is on study leave as a faculty member of the College of Communication, Art, and Design of the U.P. Cebu. She writes editorials on social issues for *SunStar Cebu*. (To correspond, please email to mqtabada1@up.edu.ph and mayette.tabada@gmail.com.)

