

Structure and agency in the newsroom: incorporating structuration theory into the sociology of news

Dani Madrid-Morales, City University of Hong Kong

dani.madrid@my.cityu.edu.hk

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Outline

1. Sociology of news
 1. Problematizing levels of analysis
 2. The preeminence of structure
2. Theory of structuration
 1. Duality of agency and structure
 2. Social change
3. Agency and structure in news production
 1. A case study

Media sociology | Definition

- Media sociology...

“situates communication and media research within the dynamics of social forces and links them to questions about order, conflict, identity, institutions, stratification, authority, community, and power” (Waisbord, 2012)

Sociology of news | Definition

- Media sociologists try to answer questions such

“what factors inside and outside media organizations affect media content?”

(Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 1)

why “the mass media institution produces the kind of content it does”

(Whitney, Sumpter, & McQuail, 2004, p. 394)

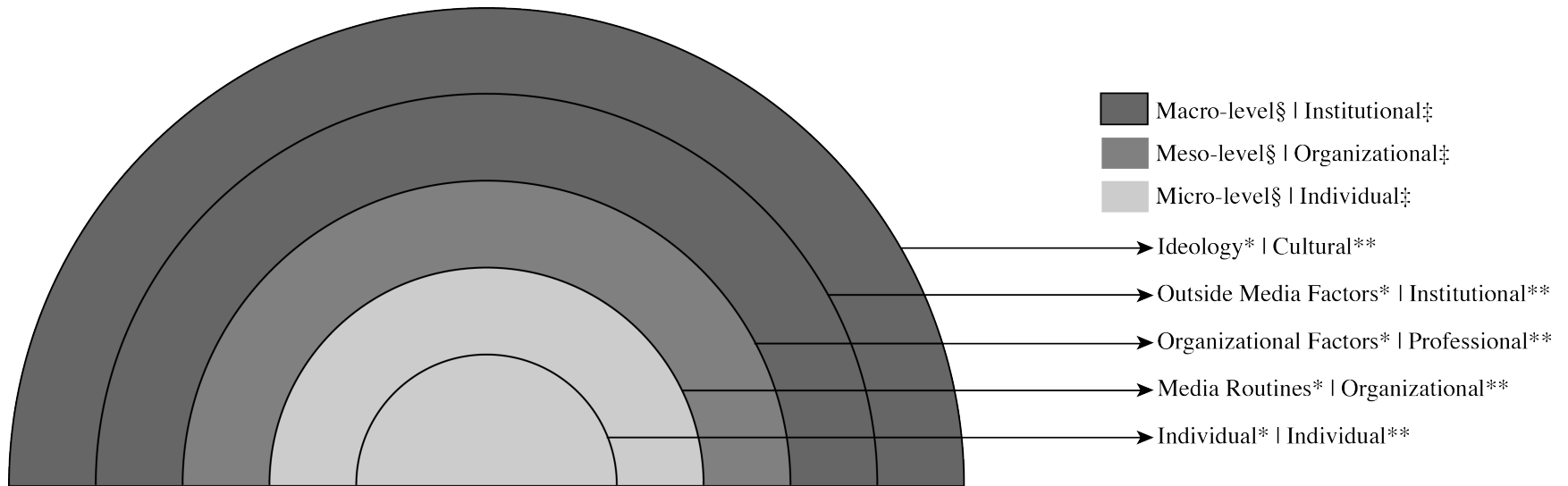
“why do news turn out like it does?”

(Berkowitz, 1997, p. xii)

Sociology of news | Levels

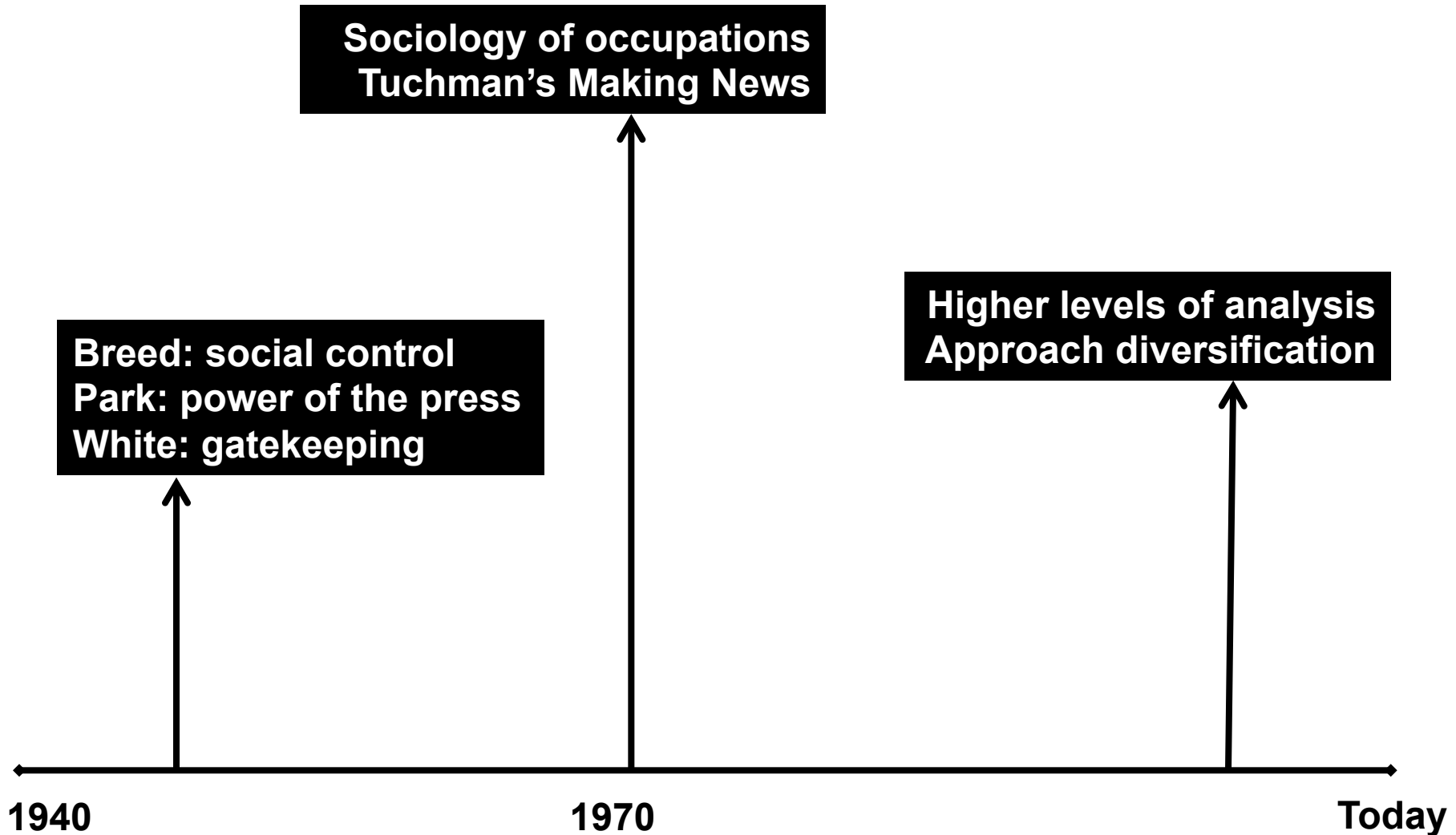
- The interest of SoN has been to find answers to the question: what are the factors affecting (some might say determining) the way news turn out to be the way they do.
- The multiplicities of factors studied in academia have been explained in the form of 'levels of analysis'.

Levels of analysis | Overview



* Shoemaker & Reese (1996); **Berkowitz (2011); §Cottle (2003); ‡Ettema, Whitney & Wackman (1977)

Sociology of news | Evolution



Levels of analysis | Problems

- The hierarchical relation between levels is problematic since it minimizes the autonomy of lower levels and overemphasizes the higher levels
- Newsrooms are changing fast:
 - Technological progress (knowledge gap)
 - New labor dynamics (freelancing)
 - Diversification (human capital)
 - Globalization (disperse audiences)
 - Hybridization (media convergence)
 - Innovation (format patterns)
 - Atomization (plurality of messages)

An example

Cultural

Authoritarian re

Institutional

Media-governm

Professional

Self-censorship, editorial control

Organizational

Symbolism of NFMG

Individual



Theory of structuration | Overview

- Structuration theory

“proposes that the social sciences investigate neither human agency nor social structures but the **social practices** by which both agency and structure are created and sustained; the emphasis is on their relational, co-constituting complicity in action” (Pozzebon, 2008, p. 216)

Theory of structuration | Overview

- Four central arguments of ToS:
 - Agency and structure are mutually **constitutive**
 - **Duality of structure**: structure is both medium and outcome in social processes
 - Transformative **power of agency**
 - Relevant questions need to query **processes, interactions** and relations

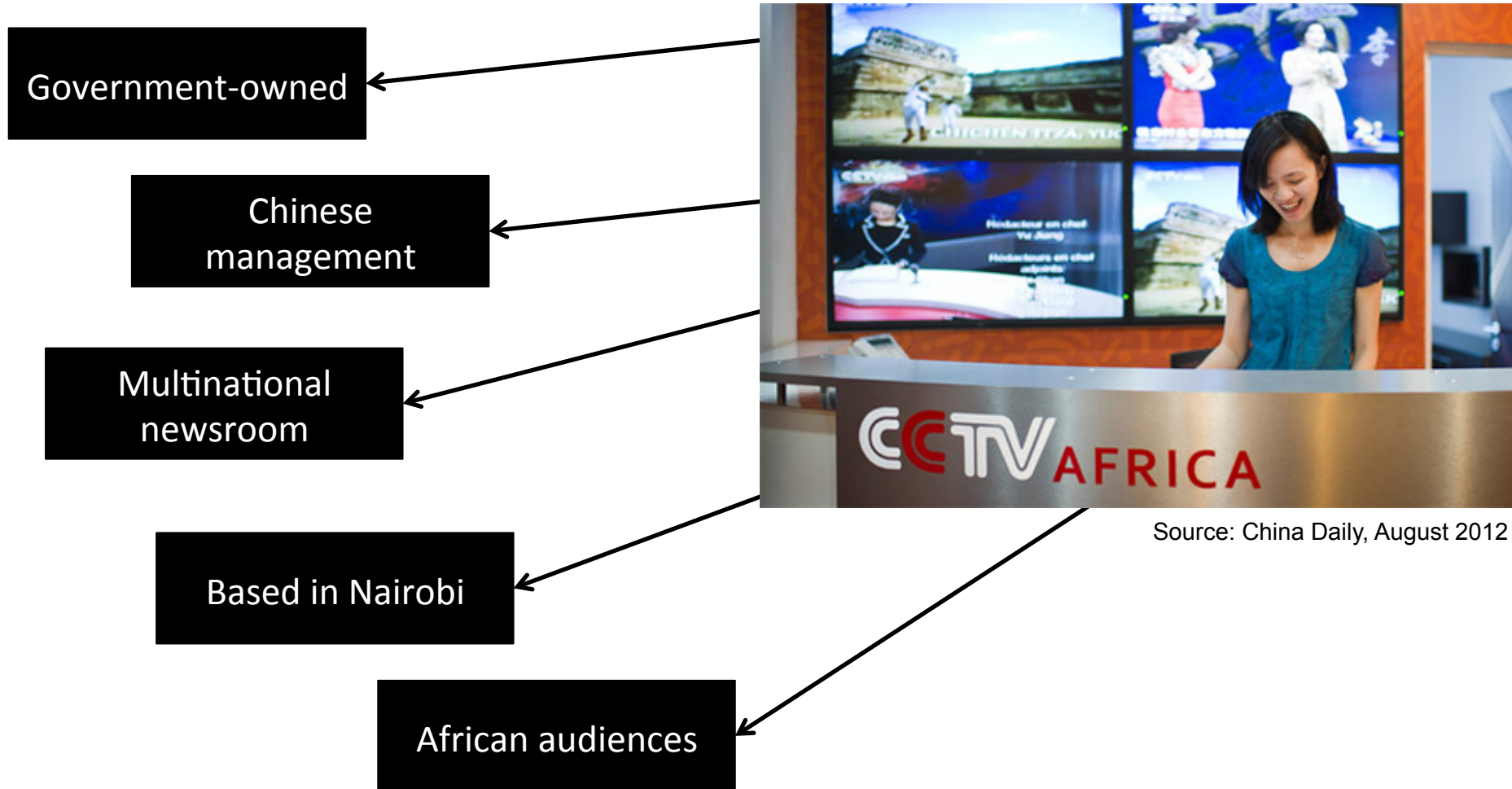
Theory of structuration | Structure

- Structure is “rules and resources, recursively implicated in the reproduction of social systems” (Giddens, p. 377)
 - Rule are standardized procedures (such as news values) that are recurrently employed in social life.
 - Resources are “anything that can serve as a source of power in social interactions”, be it physical or .

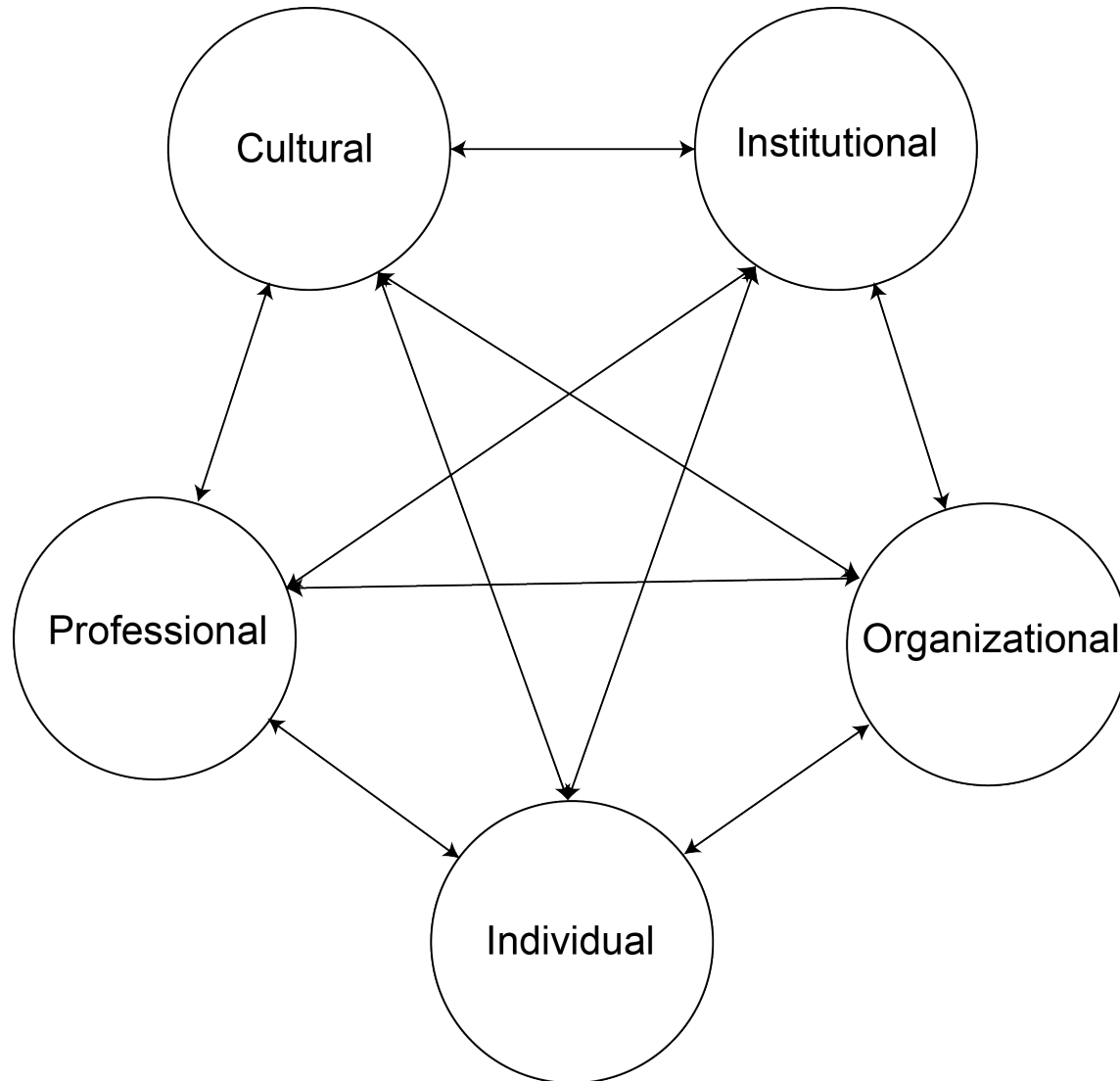
Theory of structuration | Agency

- “Social actors draw upon structures of meaning, power, and norms to perform their practices and subsequently materialise, localise, and transform those structures” (Lindlof and Taylor 2011, p. 50)

Theory of structuration | Example



A multimodal approach



Final ideas

- The study of news production has been dominated by the tacit acceptance that journalists' work is **determined by multiple structural constraints**.
- This paper argues that that when adopting elements of structuration theory we are constantly reminded to **consider agency alongside structure** and how agency is empowered to bring along (social) change.

Final ideas

- The degree of agency at play may vary in different contexts and situations, but it should not be dismissed under an all-powerful structure.
- For a more comprehensive understanding of news production today, there is a need for reconnecting **studies of news production** with **sociology** and **sociology** with the **study of the media**.

Thank you

dani.madrid@my.cityu.edu.hk