CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of how three media agencies have reported and played a role in the ongoing violence in Southern Thailand between the Thai government and Muslim communities, is grounded in the theoretical framework of how social reality is constructed. If reality may be defined as what 'actually' happens in the world, one may surmise that reality as we know it is relative rather than absolute. Arguably, reality as it actually is can never be known; an absolute reality may, in fact, be a myth. Perhaps it is the interaction between the several versions of reality that exist that forms the basis of social reality. This literature review outlines various sources that lend credibility to the theory that the media is largely responsible for creating biased views of reality.

There can be no denying that the media plays a vital role in the construction of social realities. A recent example of the prominence of the media in shaping political reality was the way the attacks on the U.S.A. on September 11, 2001, were portrayed on television and in newspapers. Juxtaposed with repeated playbacks of an aircraft crashing into the World Trade Center could be seen images of people in the Middle East allegedly celebrating the attacks. Even if these celebrations were indeed triggered by the events in America, the way they were portrayed by the media left no doubt as to who was responsible for the attacks. Long before the hunt for Osama Bin Laden was officially announced, the media had picked up on the phrase "war on terror" and unleashed it onto television screens and front pages across the globe. Whether or not the governments of the Western world were planning to join forces to send their armies into the Middle East or West Asia, they would certainly have been left with little choice in the matter after the media propagated the American public's apparent demands for their government to avenge the deaths of thousands of Americans on September 11, 2001.

Could the situation in Thailand also have similarly been influenced by the media's response to it? There have certainly been numerous instances in the past of the media influencing decisions taken by governments. Different theories discuss why some countries allow freedom of the press while others do not. Over the years various news stories have led to the government taking action about different problems. One example was the decision of the United States to intervene with the problems in Somalia due to news reports (Gilboa 2005, 22). News coverage about Katrina in September, 2005 attracted financial help from a number of different sources located throughout the United States as well as some countries sending support.

Newspapers play an important role in the world today. Different theories have been created to explain the role of the media. Different theories about the role of the media exist. It is valuable to examine these theories even though they may have changed over the years. Now, many newspapers can be located on the Internet as well as in paper form. When studying newspapers and their role in shaping foreign policy the four theories of the press Frederick S. Siebert can be helpful. These four theories are the authoritarian, the libertarian, the Soviet, and the social responsibility. This study will not focus on the Soviet because it no longer exists. However, the other three theories are still applicable when studying newspapers and their connections to government.
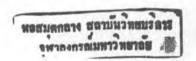
The first theory to be discussed is the social responsibility theory. The Commission of Freedom of the Press believed that other theories had failed. They wanted a model that would have certain responsibilities and obligations to society (Skjerdal 1993, 31). In response, social responsibility was constructed. In this model the media is expected to "report the truth with attribution," and the public has the right to example what has been published and decide if it is true (Applegate 1996, 141). Social responsibility theory, then, expects the media to do with purpose what libertarianism simply allows to happen as a by-product of a free market. That is the media is expected to "keep tabs on the government" as well as "the system, its leaders, and even others within the system" (Applegate 1996,141). The theory holds that in democratic societies

the press has a responsibility to expose the public to divergent ideas, enrich the public discourse, and ultimately contribute to communal consensus on policies that, when enacted, accrue to the advantage of the citizenry. Implicit in this notion is the existence of an objective, unbiased press (Baran & Davis 2003). Woodward and Bernstein can be thought of as classic examples of journalists operating squarely within the boundaries of the model of social responsibility, with their involvement in covering and investigating the Watergate scandal in the Nixon administration.

. "Leaders have always used the press, particularly the 'elite newspapers' to obtain information and insights on other countries and world affairs" (Gilboa 2005, 61). Both the mass media and the government operate on the same level. Each one is free to criticize one another. Newspapers are free to report on different conflicts as well as inform and entertain the public as mentioned earlier. "Press control is mostly in the form of community opinion, consumer action and professional ethics (Yin 2003, 44)". This theory has the goal of being normative or "they do not attempt to stipulate how social systems do operate, but rather with specification of how they should or could according to preexisting set of criteria" (Skjerdal 1993, 36). No government is an ideal . On the other hand, the press doesn't always operate on an ideal basis and some stories do show a level of bias. "It is legitimate to expect that theories concerning mass media and society to a large degree correspond to actual political systems" (Skjerdal 1993, 36).

2.1 Theory on the Social Construction of Reality

One of the most influential texts on the subject of the social construction of reality is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (1966). Sociology is an intrinsic part of epistemology, and its theories augment our theories concerning the world. Sociological theory plays an integral role in any study focused on the role of the media in culture. The theories of Berger and Luckmann will be developed into a theoretical framework that examines ways in which social reality is constructed.

Berger and Luckmann write: "*Homo sapiens* are always, and in the same measure, *homo socius*":

> Man's self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise. Men *together* produce a human environment, with the totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations. None of these formations may be understood as products of man's biological constitution, which, as indicated, provides only the outer limits for human productive activity. Just as it is impossible for man to develop as man in isolation, so it is impossible for man in isolation to produce a human environment (Berger and Luckmann, 51).

The concept of *homo socius* indicates that whatever one set of individuals does impacts the realities of others too. Human society is seen to be an integrated network of organic social realities, each of which has a bearing on all of the others. As the above passage points out, the biological aspect of a person's reality is only the outer shell of one's concept of reality; the socio-cultural and the psychological aspects of one's being form the core of one's experience, and shape one's idea of reality.

As Berger and Luckmann imply, the collective or the organizational views of reality may be more influential than the individual. Considering the imperative that history and culture are governed by those in power, influence of such kind has always been seen as having a dubious source, i.e., power or authoritarian appropriations of reality. However, sociological theory indicates another possibility: that organizations may be more influential than individuals not so much because they have power, as much as because the collective is greater than the individual.

Sociological theory indicates that societal development precedes individual development, and that perhaps the former is even responsible for the latter: "Empirically,

human existence takes place in a context of order, direction, and stability. The question then arises: From what does the empirically existing stability of human order derive?" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 51) According to theorists Berger and Luckmann, order must have a point of origin. This indicates a belief in structuralist discourse, which presupposes that all human knowledge may be understood in terms of structures, and that structures are held together by central or nodal points. In the case of the social construction of reality, organizations such as the media may be seen to be such nodal sources of meaning.

If societal development precedes that of the individual, then syllogistically one may assume that social reality also precedes the existence of individuals' reality. Berger and Luckmann note that there are two ways of examining the idea that social construction of reality determines the way in which individuals perceive reality. According to the authors, the first way is the following:

> One may first point to the obvious fact that a given social order precedes any individual organismic development. That is, world-openness, while intrinsic to man's biological make-up, is always preempted by social order. One may say that the biologically intrinsic world-openness of human existence is always, and indeed must be, transformed by social order into a relative world-closeness. While this enclosure can never approximate the closeness of animal existence, if only because of its humanly produced and thus "artificial" character, it is nevertheless capable, most of the time, of providing direction and stability for the greater part of human conduct (Berger and Luckmann, 51).

The authors, then, see social order as transformative in nature. There is also the implication that social order is somehow artificial; not in a negative sense, but in the sense that there is no structure of comprehension in reality. To clarify this point, one may select the example of human versus animal reality that the authors have commented on.

For animals, comprehension of reality is limited to an awareness of biological imperatives; more importantly, they do not have a shared system of knowledge or of reality. Whatever their awareness of reality is, they do not seem to share it with other members of their species except in cases between their individual offspring's. Whether it is because of the development of various forms of communication in human societies or of the cognitive development of the human brain, or both, human beings have created an intricate system of shared beliefs which determines the nature of reality for them. Consequently, one may "know" something that one has never actually experienced: a South American knows of the existence of Big Ben and the Eiffel Tower, and the western world knows of the ravages the Tsunami wreaked on the Asian coasts, even if those who possess this knowledge don't have tangible evidence of these realities.

The second question, for Berger and Luckmann, is to do with the origins of order itself. If we have created certain systems to shape our realities for us, why have we done so at all? Why do certain systems take precedence over others, depending on time and place? For example, certain cultures believe in polygamy, while others consider it a moral crime. What makes us prefer certain systems over others? Why do these systems arise at all? From where does the impulse towards organizing reality arise? Berger and Luckmann write:

> Social order is not part of the "nature of things," and it cannot be derived from the "laws of nature." Social order exists *only* as a product of human activity. No other ontological status may be ascribed to it without hopelessly obfuscating its empirical manifestations. Both in its genesis (social order is the result of past human activity) and its existence in any instant of time (social order exists only and insofar as human activity continues to produce it) it is a human product (Berger and Luckmann, 52).

If, as the authors say, social order exists only as a result of human activity, then it must also be true that any breakdown or disruption in the social order is also because of human activity alone. It is part of the agenda of this thesis to describe and interpret the reality by the media as part of a failure of structure in the social order. Clearly, human beings have devised structures as a means of organizing social reality. The failure of these structures to perform the tasks they are entrusted with, consequently, is also a failure of society itself to maintain its agendas.

This thesis also relates Berger and Luckmann's idea of the institutionalization of social reality to the manner in which social reality comes to be controlled by media agencies. The example that the authors give us is of how parents structure reality for children, but the idea may be applied similarly to the relationship between the media and the public as well:

> A thing *is* what it is called, and it could not be called anything else. All institutions appear in the same way, as given, unalterable and self-evident [...] Empirically, of course, the institutional world transmitted by most parents already has the character of historical and objective reality. The process of transmission simply strengthens the parents' sense of reality, if only because, to put it crudely, if one says, "This is how these things are done," often enough one believes it oneself (Berger and Luckmann, 59-60).

This idea of an "institutional world" may be applied to the politics of the media as well. The media is put by society into a governing, authoritative position; ironically, this is often done under the illusion that one is using the fourth estate to counter the authoritarianism and subjective agendas of governments, but the media in turn becomes an entity that seeks to impose its own subjective agenda onto social reality. If the media portrays something as real, it becomes real.

The idea of an institution is such that it is given the status of a monolithic entity with unlimited power and influence; also, it seems natural to assume that the larger a social entity is, the more likely it is to be a determinant of social reality:

> An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection. It was there before he was born, and it will be there after his death. This history itself, as the tradition of the existing institutions, has the character of objectivity. The individual's biography is apprehended as an episode located within the objective history of the society. The institutions, as historical and objective facticities, confront the individual as undeniable facts. The institutions are *there*, external to him, persistent in their reality, whether he likes it or not. He cannot wish them away. They resist his attempts to change or evade them. They have coercive power over him, both in themselves, by the sheer force of their facticity, and through the control mechanisms that are usually attached to the most important of them (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, 60).

As the above passage indicates, the older and more powerful an institution is, the more is the power it has to structure reality for the individual. The authors also direct us to a simple fact: the more an organization gains prominence, the more control mechanisms are available for it to use as it chooses to. If power corrupts, then the assumption is that the greater the power, the greater is the scale of the corruption it may generate. In the context of the social construction of reality, corruption is the deliberate falsification of reality, the imposition of a subjective mask over the objective truth (or truths).

Objectivity may be the key to accurate social constructions and representations; however, Berger and Luckmann caution us against granting objectivity the status of an absolute, since, after all, it is also a man-made concept—even a structure:

It is important to keep in mind that the objectivity of the institutional world, however massive it may appear to the individual, is a humanly produced, constructed objectivity. The process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity is objectivation. The institutional world is objectivated human activity, and so is every single institution. In other words despite the objectivity that marks the social world in human experience, it does not thereby acquire an ontological status apart from the human activity that produced it (Berger and Luckmann, 61).

We are accustomed to thinking of objectivity as pure detachment, but Bergman and Luckmann warn us that there is no such thing as absolute objectivity. Objectivity does not have an autonomous ontological status; it does not have a 'being' of it's on that may be separated from social reality.

The authors also suggest, through the passage cited above, that institutionalization is an act of "objectivation." Different from objectification, the process of objectivation seems to be an act of providing society with structures that assist it to construct structures of meaning. Consequently, what we are working towards seems to be a system of epistemology that stems from the human ability to construct cognitive modules of meaning.

Another theorist whose ideas have proved influential, especially as a response to Berger and Luckmann, is John Searle. Searle (1995) in his *The Construction of Social Reality* also underscores the importance of objectivism in social determination, albeit through a different lens than the vision of Berger and Luckmann. Searle seems to be more interested in the idea of "social reality," whereas Berger and Luckmann evinced interest in the manner in which reality is socially constructed. While the latter suggested that there are different ways of constructing reality and that the social way is one among

them, Searle selects the idea of social reality to examine the way in which meaning is constructed.

Searle's model of reality seems to follow the Marxist one. Marx theorized that economics was the base on which other aspects of reality were structured or superimposed. For Searle facts are of two kinds: those that are unchanged by their transposition into human knowledge, and those that are changed because of human beings. For example, the fact that there is saline water in oceans is not changed because human beings come to know of it, and is an example of the first kind of fact.

The second kind of facts, for Searle, is the social ones, which are structured "on top of brute physical facts" (Searle, 35). Searle's use of the word "brute" seems to indicate that (a) physical facts (e.g. climatic or geographical information) are akin to what Berger and Luckmann referred to as biological identities, which remain changeless and do not really form the core of human experience, and that physical facts are somehow animalistic, and almost an embarrassment to the idea of cognitive perception; also, he suggests that (b) it is through social facts that physical facts are granted meaning; e.g., it would not matter if sea water was saline or not if human beings had not considered it important to define and objectify salinity for the purpose of their construction of social reality.

In many ways, media approaches to foreign countries are a corruption of this idea. For example, Afghanistan is not given its due as Afghanistan, but rather as a country which is of interest because it has impacted the social reality of the U.S. Monica Lewinsky is a non-entity one day and a celebrity the next because her involvement with the president of the United States has greatly enhanced her 'value' in the scheme of what is significant to social reality and what is not. While the generation of knowledge with the help of the media does presuppose the attribution of a certain amount of license to the media to enhance people's right to information, it certainly does not give the media to blow certain facts out of proportion and shrink the importance of, or ignore the existence

of, other facts. Colombia's 1928 Union Fruit Strike massacre is an example of how the media ignored public killings by the government to protect the latter's agenda. Hundreds of employees of the Union Fruit banana company had gathered in a peaceful protest to demand better wages and health care facilities. Most of them were killed when they were surrounded by troops armed with machine guns, which were ordered to open fire on them. The bodies were disposed of overnight by being transported via railroad to the ocean. The incident was never recorded in the official history of Colombia, and even today, it remains written about only in fiction and poetry, but not in media versions of the country's history.

In this context, it may prove useful to return to the theory of social responsibility. Given the idea that social reality is structured by various agencies, the implication is also that there needs to be a sense of responsibility among these agencies towards the greater objective end of the construction of reality, rather than the subjective one of prioritizing their own role in the process. Social responsibility theory, one of many derivative normative perspectives, posits a relationship between those norms, media content, and organization of choices in a free marketplace of ideas. In this model the dominant role of elites in establishing social norms and rules is not always recognized. Libertarianism, in its pure form, is predicated upon the belief that in a free marketplace of ideas people can determine for themselves the truth of particular events and situations. In this rather idealistic vision, the press plays an absolutely neutral role because there are so many versions of the truth being presented together. They must attempt to present a complete picture. A libertarian press ferrets out anything a government or corporate entity wishes to keep hidden. In general reporters serve, or are expected to serve, as a check on the various powers that exist in society. According to libertarian thought, "man is seen as a creature who can think things out and rationalize," (Applegate 1996, 77) and does not need the state, nor the press, to interpret the news for him. People are perfectly able to sort through the mass of news and reach their own conclusions. Or are they? If the press is one of the creators of social reality, does that also imply that people allow their conclusions to be determined by the media?

One must also bear in mind that "the press" is not a monolithic entity. The problem with libertarianism is that it rests upon a faulty assumption, that all factions of the press have equal capital with which to publish their stories. The fact is that only the largest companies/newspapers can survive the intense competition in this marketplace of ideas. This also implies that the largest media agencies also have the strongest ability to impact the social construction of reality. Libertarianism in practice eventually is hardly distinguishable from the totalitarian and/or authoritarian theories of the press (Applegate 1996, 77). They gradually come to represent not the interests of the people but their own interests. That is, they become one of the powers whom they themselves are supposed to be monitoring. The process of constructing reality becomes a competition among institutions, a game played to control versions of reality, and the original agenda of organizing social reality objectively is forgotten.

Alternatively, the process of constructing social reality may also degenerate into a joint effort by two or more institutions—e.g., the government and the media—to collaborate their efforts in an attempt to gain control of the construction of reality. Most governments would prefer that newspapers not publish negative stories about themselves especially if it can cause mistrust and skepticism towards the government among the general public. In the authoritarian theory the government maintains direct control over the media (Skjerdal 1993, 41). This theory maintains that the government knows what is best and should be allowed to tell newspapers what they should print. Newspapers lack independence and are controlled by the government. "The goal of the media under such a system is to support and advance the politics of the government so it achieves its objectives. The major problem in such a system is establishing and exercising effective control over the media" (Yin 2003, 78). Some of the ways the government controls newspapers are licensing, government censorship, special taxes, and other laws setting the limits on what can be published.

What, then, happens to the question of the freedom of the press? How much freedom may be given to the press if it seeks to undermine the objectivity of the process of social construction? After World War II that the Commission on Freedom of the Press was convened to issue a warning that "if the owners of the media continued to engage in practices that society questioned, the media would eventually be controlled or regulated by an arm of government or a committee founded for that purpose" (Applegate 1996, 78). This, however, also begs the question: having determined that governments are as likely to manipulate the construction of reality as the media, are they the best controllers or regulators for the media?

All these theories have flaws. Libertarianism rests upon the assumption that anyone with something to say will have the means with which to say it. Social responsibility theory assumes that publishers and journalists alike have an almost infinite perception of 'exposure' as a means to truly 'enrich' the public. They believe that what will enrich the public is the presentation of practically everything there is to know, especially obscure or hard-to-find information. Furthermore, journalists reporting with a sense of social responsibility must feel beholden to no one, either internally (supervisors, board of directors) or externally (advertisers, audience).

However, both libertarian and social responsibility theory encounter problems in their practical application. It is rather naïve to assume that journalists and publishers have no interest in their financial bottom line. For example, at this point almost every major city in the US is dominated by just one newspaper. Even more striking is the fact that most of these newspapers are owned by national chains. Experts today consider the U.S. news media (including newspapers, television, radio and Internet sources) to be either monopolistic or headed towards a monopolistic structure (Applegate 1996, 78).

In 2002, the 22 largest newspaper chains owned 39 percent of all represent 70 percent of daily circulation and 73 percent of Sunday. (State of the Media, 2004).

[F]ive companies -- Murdoch's News Corp., Disney, Viacom, GE and AOL Time
Warner -- control 75 percent of the total U.S. television audience and 90 percent
of the television news audience for broadcast and cable. (Glasner, 2003)

Many scholars have come to regard the U.S. press as authoritarian more than
anything else (Applegate, 1996, 80). Whether or not such an extreme statement is
accurate, it is the case that true social responsibility has yet to completely emerge in U.S.
media outlets, isolated examples like Woodward and Bernstein notwithstanding.
Nevertheless, news media in the U.S. continues to operate under (and/or deliberately
perpetuate) the assumption that they are not beholden to anyone other than the public in
its quest for the truth.

One must also raise the question: is the public objective and blameless in its quest
for the truth? All too often, one's need to know reality is overcome by the relief of having
someone else do one's thinking. It is all too easy to hand one's conscience and discerning
abilities to someone else, especially if that someone else is a social organization.

2.2 Media's Relationship to the State

Bennett (1990) proposes an indexing hypothesis to describe the current
relationship between the state and the press. This hypothesis was cultivated in an attempt
to describe how closely (or not) the media "achieve a reasonable balance of 'voices' in
the news" (Bennett, 1990, 106) [which] Bennett argues would be the granting of
government voices a "privileged voice" in the news unless majority opinions are thereby
silenced or marginalized, or unless the actions of the government are improper; in those
cases, which Bennett deems "exceptional" in their rarity. "[...] it is reasonable for the
press to foreground other social voices...in news stories and editorials as checks against
unrepresentative or otherwise irresponsible governments" (1990, 104).

The indexing hypothesis rests on the observation that mainstream media personnel "index" the perspectives expressed in their news coverage about a particular topic based upon the range of governmental debate being expressed about that topic. In other words, they fulfill the first aspect of the reasonable balance described above but abandon the second. They respond favorably to government sources of information but do not include the voices of dissent unless those voices have already appeared in official government circles. Bennett (1990, 106) argues that this indexing behavior results in a mixed relationship between state and press. Some issues receive a reasonably balanced treatment in the press, notably those for which popular sentiment is especially strong. There is support for such issues in government circles if only on the part of representatives responding to their constituents' diverse opinions. Such issues include abortion, gay rights, and so forth.

However, other issues -- largely those of "national security and foreign policy" (Bennett, 1990, 106) -- tend to either be ignored or else propagandized by the media as official government sources wish. Issues that fall into this latter category tend to revolve in a self-perpetuating cycle. The general public does not always receive the controversial news concerning foreign policy. Therefore they might not be informed about those issues. The government does not feel compelled to respond to public outcry because one does not exist and so the cycle continues. On those occasions when the public hears about events that have been publicized by official government sources, the dearth of contextual information tends to give rise to a general acceptance of the government's stance on those events. Dissenting voices do not make their way into those governmental circles primarily because such circles are often closed to the general public.

2.3 Media's Influence on Foreign Policy

In 1963, Bernard Cohen devised a model of a symbiotic relationship between the press and the government with regard to foreign policy (O'Heffernan 1993, 186). He argued that the press was "usually [a] helpful partner in the policy process, advising

policymakers through quiet conversations and reasoned editorials in elite newspapers" (O'Heffernan, 1993, 187). Cohen believes this relationship has persisted because the general public has little interest, by and large, in foreign affairs. Arguably, social reality should consist of an awareness of global realities, and not just the realities of a parochial area.

In seeking to update this model, O'Heffernan (1993) examined media coverage of several seminal events that were relevant to foreign policy making and their consequences. He found that a mutually exploitative, rather than symbiotic, relationship is more truly descriptive of the relationship between the media and government. O'Heffernan (1993, 187) asserts that while policymakers cannot conduct their business without the help of the media, the media cannot cover matters of foreign policy without assistance from the government[1]. This is not to imply that the U.S. media are complete accomplices in drumming up support for U.S. foreign policy (O'Heffernan, 1993, 188).

There have been many instances in which the media has actively opposed government policy decisions. One example is when it decried U.S. support of Fernando Marcos. Furthermore, there are other influences upon the mass media besides the government (e.g. journalism schools, corporations, etc.), so its behavior regarding foreign policy cannot be completely explained via this one relationship. Examples of non-governmental influences often come in interesting forms. As O'Heffernan (1993) notes, "[it] is the tape that can be shot and smuggled out [of a location such as Beirut or North Korea] that makes it to the screen, whether or not it is representative of the nation in question or even of the situation that is being reported" (O'Heffernan, 191). Nevertheless, a clear relationship can be perceived between the state and the (U.S.) press.

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[1] An interesting aside can be seen in an example supported by Bennett (1990). When Tom Brokaw was asked why the U.S. media abandoned the previously ubiquitous (and often daringly-covered) El Salvador story from its reporting after the 1984 election of the U.S.-favored Duarte and a majority of Christian Democrats, he responded by asking how the media were expected to continue the story once the U.S. Congress had fallen silent on the matter.

It is possible to list three specific effects of the mass media on the global political scene:

> The media have opened the policy agenda to non-state players, added global issues to national agendas, and accelerated and reinforced the political impact of interdependence. (O'Heffernan, 1993, 191)

This second effect in particular can be noted by examining the U.S. press. Through its choice of coverage, the U.S. media have increased U.S. awareness of global issues such as global climate change, the international spread of AIDS, human rights issues in other nations and other important issues (O'Heffernan, 1993, 192). By raising awareness of these and other issues the media have helped in the formation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-state players who have a critical role in the policy-making climate, both on a national and global scale. As awareness of boundary-transcending issues grows, an awareness that nations must participate to some extent in interdependent policy-setting also grows -- in the United States as well as among other nations.

Advertising can also play a critical role in the transformation of international attitudes over particular issues (Kendrick & Fullerton, 2004). While journalists are ostensibly removed from the concerns of advertisers, the fact is that news media are beholden to advertising revenue. Furthermore, when the advertiser is the government -- as it has become in selective circumstances in what is being called a "new chapter in the history of U.S. public diplomacy" (Kendrick & Fullerton, 2004, 299) -- the line between news and propaganda becomes quite fine. Kendrick and Fullerton (2004) examined the "Shared Values Initiative" designed to promote feelings of positive regard toward the U.S. government and people in Muslim nations after the events of September 11, 2001 and the subsequent War in Afghanistan. They found that such information (some might

say, propaganda) delivered via news media channels can be an effective tool for changing attitudes toward the United States -- in this case -- in Muslim countries. This finding is particularly relevant given the increasingly global nature of media and O'Heffernan's (1993) ideas concerning the mutually exploitative relationship between the state and the press.

2.4 Monopolistic Structure of the U.S. Media

The gradual consolidation of news media into a few powerful conglomerates has led U.S. media to the point where it is far easier for the U.S. government to influence their reportage (Halimi, 2003). In part, this is because these few powerful conglomerates donate heavily to U.S. politicians and political parties. It is also because their owners tend to have interests in other large corporate ventures that are often in harmony with those of the U.S. government (such as weapons manufacturing and energy corporations). In addition, enormous conflicts of interest are inescapable when multiple media outlets are owned by one entity. The danger in this is that "news organizations embedded in conglomerates will promote their own products or fail to investigate their vested interests critically" (Halimi, 2003). An interesting example of this was the 1997 Olympics, when CBS employees were all wearing Nike shoes because of a deal CBS had worked out with Nike. Concurrently, a CBS journalist was repeatedly being delayed in her efforts to produce a story about Nike's labor practices.

Such consolidation has had a strong impact on the reporting on foreign policy. Before the events of September 11, 2001, stories about foreign events accounted for only two percent of all news stories in mainstream newspapers (Halimi, 2003). News magazines were also similarly sparse in their coverage about foreign policy. *Time, Newsweek, US News* and *World Report* each devoted approximately twelve percent of their content to foreign policy at that time. With such a small percentage of content invested in foreign news and policy stories, news media tend to reduce budgets for journalists covering such stories. Because of this journalists tended to rely upon just a

few sources of information in other countries. They essentially rely on them to represent their entire nation or even entire regions (Halimi, 2003, 123).

After September 11, however the news coverage has not significantly increased contrary to what one might expect. What coverage does exist is "increasingly mediocre" in its content (Halimi, 2003, 123). But most telling is the fact that although coverage is scarce, major U.S. newspapers have also begun seriously participating in diplomatic efforts. One example was when the *Wall Street Journal* solicited statements from the Italian and Spanish governments regarding the viability of the Iraq War. The publication did so because they intended to include these statements in an op-ed piece about the opposition of Germany and France to the war (Halimi, 2003). Such goings-on not only represent an intense blurring of the lines between media and state but they also are a clear indication of the general bias of many major news media. As Halimi (2003, 125) notes, "if you want to understand the plight of the U.S. press today, imagine what the reaction might have been if a U.S. leftwing, pro-union paper had directly lobbied foreign heads of state to make a statement opposing US foreign policy."

Theorist Johan Galtung "On the Coming Decline and Fall of the US Empire." *The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research* (2004), argues that the U.S. political system is based on the old archetype of the Empire, suggesting that it is a system which has outlived its purpose and may be on the verge of collapse, or, at the very least, atrophy. It may be possible to hypothesize that the U.S. media is partly based on this system as well, and is a tool for the government to act out its various agendas. In Derridean fashion, Galtung argues that the post-structuralist model of the center and the periphery may be applied to U.S. politics:

The Center is continental USA and the Periphery much of the world. Like any system it has a life-cycle reminiscent of an organism, with conception, gestation, birth, infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senescence and death. Seeded by the British Empire, the maturing colonies honed their imperial skills on

indigenous populations, [and are] now in the aging phase with overwhelming control tasks quickly overtaking the expansion tasks (Galtung 2004, 121).

An Empire is, by definition, monopolistic. One may argue that like a media giant, an empire is also in the position of being able to monopolize social construction of reality. Galtung identifies two such 'empires' existing in the world today: the U.S. and the E.U. As neocolonialism grows, the emerging empires are faced with the same challenges that the historical ones were, the primary challenge being that control of the less-powerful group's reality becomes all-important. With the media controlling the public's right to information, it is not unreasonable to locate the media's role as middle-man between the government and the public in the context of monopolistic neocolonialism. The fourth estate is increasingly being used as an agent of control by ensuring that it presents the public with a premeditated and predetermined construct in lieu of reality.

Galtung (2004) opines that there are two approaches that political agencies may take to achieve their objectives: the subjective, and the objective.

> Ideally for the objective contradiction, [...] an unresolved issue at the center [...] has to become the cause of the movement. And that gives rise to basic problem of adequacy in the coupling between subjective and objective contradictions, between the causes and the issues. Both are parts of social reality. (Galtung 2004, 122)

As Galtung (2004) suggests, social reality cannot be determined by either a subjective or an objective imperative alone; rather, it must be coordinated by a relationship between the two perspectives that ensures that they work in tandem rather than in contradiction.

The media is clearly in danger of losing its freedom to the domination of news conglomerates: if the U.S. and the E.U. are the two emergent political empires, their media counterparts are the CNN and the BBC. Media giants directly control news flow by standardizing information, and streamlining knowledge so that it appears to the public to be smooth and uniformly structured. This very smoothness of new reports—where the how, when, what, where, who and why of events are cleanly and neatly packaged and presented to a 'structured' audience—needs to be viewed by a discerning public with some suspicion.

As Galtung's (2006) thesis explicates, neither complete subjectivity nor objectivity can better social reality; the solutions have to be provided by striking the correct balance between the two. The question of equilibrium is very delicate, since there are not only polarities that exist—in terms of 'structure' and agency, for example—but also several planes on which they clash: government-public, government-media, media-public, and so on. One of the questions to be asked here is: does the public get what the public wants? Is it all too easy to theorize that monopolistic determination is only practiced by media agencies? The agency of the public imperative towards knowledge and the right to information also needs to be examined in this regard, with the remembrance that the market for news is created by the consumer, the public.

In the light of the theories discussed in this chapter, perhaps it would be prudent to use neither the phrase "social construction of reality" nor "construction of social reality" for the description of the process that is the subject of study. The problem with both of these concepts is that they are too singular and mono-dimensional in their perception of both the idea of 'reality' as well as the process of construction. There is not a singular *reality*, but there are *realities*. It is not the *process* of constructing reality that we should be concerned about, but the *processes*. The ideas regarding social constructs that we have need to be pluralized; it needs to be understood that there are many ways to construct reality. Since social realities are a collective enterprise, there is no reason why it should be believed that individual organizations can be responsible for the process. The

single organization is, after all, only a large-scale representation of the individual mind. No individual can form a society, since by its very definition, a society is a collective effort. Thereby it is clear that a more pluralistic approach to social realities and their constructions will naturally impede the processes by which false impressions of reality are imposed onto the fabric of society.

2.5 The current situation between Thailand and the United States

Chanlett-Avery (2005) in her report to the Congress states that Thailand not only has a favorable geographic location but it also offers a broad-based economy (Chanlett-Avery 2005). The United States and Thailand are currently negotiating to implement a Free Trade Agreement. If these negotiations are successful it could mean a bilateral trade total worth over twenty billion dollars. The possible trade opportunities will expand through this trade agreement. If Thailand is able to develop a more prominent role in the global market it bodes well for the country to play a leadership role with various countries in Asia and with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Currently, Thailand has a close relationship with China. In fact, Thailand has a closer relationship with China than any other Asian country. An important reason for this is that Thailand does not have boundary issues with China. While Malaysia, Vietnam and the Philippines have boundary issues caused by the South China Sea (Chanlett-Avery 2005). Thailand has a large population and thus China is able to open up new markets in Thailand since there is little friction between the two countries. This demonstrates that Thailand is important both to China and the United States.

It is important to reflect on the importance of this country, its future and present relationship with the U.S. "Thailand's growing stature in the region may affect U.S. foreign policy objectives and prospects for further multilateral economics and security cooperation in Southeast Asia" (Chanlett-Avery 2005).

Many people believed even before the end of the Cold War that Thailand's importance to the U.S. would change. Even at the end of the Vietnam War the country continued to be important to the U.S. albeit with somewhat less interest. The Asian financial crisis in 1997 degraded the relationship even further. Thailand's change of policy and its subsequent role in the war on terrorism brought the countries back into a more positive relationship The United States continues to say that Southeast Asia is like a 'second front' in its war against terrorism (Vaughn, Chanlet-Avery, Cronin, Manyin, and Niksch 2005).

Several reasons exist as to why the United States is concerned about how Asia reacts to the war on terrorism and its continuing interest in receiving support from Thailand. Although Thailand and other countries have helped the United States in past wars U.S. President George Bush has made strong statements concerning U.S. policy and the war on terrorism. He has been extremely vocal in declaring that 'you're either with us, or against us'. The U.S. has also been vocal about its concerns over various countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore (Vaughn et al 2005). One reason for American concern over these countries is the fact that Al Qaeda has used Asia as a building ground for terrorist training camps. One example is the fact that Jemaah Islamiyah has ties with Al Qaeda. As stated earlier, the U.S. is emphatic that it has declared war on terrorism and they want Asia and any other country willing to assist to be on its side.

Nevertheless, the U.S. government continues to assert that Thailand has a special role in the U.S. interests (Brandon & Chen 2002). However, at present there are "many new faces assuming leadership roles in Washington and Bangkok," which requires that the relationship between the two nations be carefully nurtured to ensure that ties are not broken. According to official U.S. policy, "it is important that official contacts ... are maintained and developed to ensure that officials and opinion leaders in both nations fully understand each other's respective views and policies, even when they sometime disagree" (Brandon & Chen 2002). However, the primary question for this thesis is

whether or not American newspapers keep the public informed on this particular issue. This researcher is basing part of this work on the hypothesis that it is important that newspapers fully inform the American public about the current situation in Thailand with the hope that a positive image of Thailand will strengthen the relationship between these countries.

Given O'Heffernan's (1993) model of the interaction between the state and the press as a mutually exploitive relationship in which both sides influence each other; it is reasonable to assume that U.S. newspapers would have some interest in portraying Thailand's struggle toward democracy in a relatively positive light. In turn, if positive stories are published then it might be reasonable to conclude (given sufficient supportive evidence) that these same newspapers do indeed play a role in the shaping of U.S. foreign policy. This would be especially true if it can be demonstrated that these representations helped to shift the political climate in America towards Thailand in a particular fashion.

This brief summary addresses the U.S. government's current interest in Thailand-as a burgeoning democracy in a region dominated by authoritarianism. It can also be seen as part of the current's administration's general global campaign to install and/or encourage democracy. And, it stands to reason that the government might have an accompanying interest in encouraging positive media representation of Thailand. Given O'Heffernan's (1993) model described above it is reasonable to assume that not only the press but the American government would also have an interest in portraying Thailand's struggle toward democracy in a relatively positive light. If this shift in foreign policy takes place it may be possible to demonstrate that these positive journalistic representations of Thailand helped to shift the political climate toward Thailand in a particular fashion.

2.6 The current situation in Thailand

Since January 2004, sectarian violence between insurgents and security forces in Thailand's majority-Muslim provinces has left over 800 people dead. The civilian victims include both Buddhist Thais, particularly monks and teachers, and local Muslims. Over 34,500 residents fled the region in the first half of 2005 as a result of the violence and over 20% of the local teachers have requested a transfer out of the area (*Christian Science Monitor* 2005).

The conflict intensified after two major developments in 2004. On April 28, Thai soldiers killed 108 insurgents mostly teenagers armed with machetes at a historic mosque in the Deep South. This incident occurred after an attempted raid on several military and police outposts in well-coordinated attacks. On October 25, 84 people died in another violent incident. Six demonstrators were shot outside a police station demanding the release of prisoners at the Tak Bai police station. Eventually 78 people were asphyxiated when they were piled into trucks after their arrest. They died while being transferred to a military base 350 kilometers away.

Initially, Thailand was neutral in the war on terrorism. The government reconsidered their position and eventually offered support to the U.S. However, there have been serious problems with Thaksin. The primary problems in Thailand can be summarized as; human rights issues, conflict between the Thai government and Muslims and the way Thaksin handles different political problems.

The issue of human rights abuses is a serious problem in Thailand. The specifics of the October 25th incident mentioned above are a good example. On that day, 78 men were arrested, subsequently placed into a truck and ordered lie face down. Layers of men were stacked on top of each other and they were asphyxiated to death. After this incident, Thaksin said it was only a 'mistake' and no one was punished or faced charges as a result of the deaths of these men. "Thaksin acknowledged that the government had made

mistakes in the south, promised to correct abuse of authority and to pursue justice for the victim of the security forces' heavy-handed tactics" (Mydans 2005).

In Malaysia in particular, there is widespread sympathy among the majority of Malays for the Muslim population in Southern Thailand. Frequent statements are issued from Malaysian organizations during anti-Bangkok demonstrations. These statements often refer to the fact that Thaksin's support for the US invasion in Iraq and other government actions has created conditions leading to the growth of Islamic extremism.

Malaysians are extremely concerned about the charges that extremists are coming from their country to spread violence in Thailand. The prospect of Thai forces crossing the border in pursuit of either extremists or criminals and drug dealers that Thaksin believes are responsible could trigger a military clash between the two countries. Authorities on both sides of the border fear a mass movement of refugees and its possible humanitarian consequences.

ASEAN members expressed alarm over the military approach of the Thai government and doubt whether Thaksin fully understands the threats coming from the south. According to the Institute of Strategic and International Studies, based in Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok's neglect of the South had made Malaysia "highly concerned by a possible overflow" of violence. The antagonism between the two countries will only be heightened by Thai allegations that Malaysia was a possible source of support for the separatists in the Southern Thailand. These allegations subsequently caused Thailand to tighten its border controls.

Although Thaksin promised to provide Malaysia and Indonesia with a complete accounting for the deaths on October 25th, separately; Bangkok seems intent on relying on the agreement among South-East Asian leaders that guarantees non-interference in domestic problems of neighboring countries and its policies towards the Muslim minority.