(Limits to) Freedom of the Press and The Man Who Fell to Earth*

Narratives and frameworks in the story of Julian Assange

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1. Introduction

Press representations of Assange shift from hacker-activist, ambassador of freedom of speech and victimised hero, to sex-offending whistleblower and enemy of the state. These representations are influenced by the ethical and political frameworks within which the press operates, as well as the political agendas of media owners. In this essay, press representations of Julian Assange from both the U.K. and U.S. are used as texts to explore deeper and more depersonalised narratives about freedom of the press, and limits to press freedoms.

After discussing key terms, case study and methodology, I conduct a literature review examining press representations of Assange related to the ethical frameworks Kantianism and Utilitarianism, and the political frameworks neoliberalism and deliberative democracy. A critical discourse analysis (CDA) is then used to compare digital media coverage of Assange in the U.K. and the U.S., noting that digital media represents an increasingly important source of news media for a globalised readership. To gain understanding of how press representations are influenced and the differences between the two countries studied, I analyse press coverage of Assange based on criteria including type of news source, readership and political leanings. I present an analysis of these findings, highlighting differences in representations found between U.S. and U.K. in relation to wider ethical and political contexts.

My CDA revealed unexpected results. The historical importance of freedom of speech in U.S. (Anon, 2010) raised expectations of more positive U.S. press representations of Assange, due to his freedom of information focus through WikiLeaks. While tabloid press in both countries presented negative representations of Assange, it was in the U.K. that broadsheet coverage was predominantly positive, with constructive analysis of his plight. U.S broadsheet coverage on the other hand remained predominantly negative, demonising Assange. The U.K. had over four times the amount of coverage on Assange than did the U.S. In hypothesising reasons for these findings, I look to the differing roles of each country in the wider Assange case, competing voices in current debates on speech freedom, government transparency and national security, and how media ownership and wider political and ethical frameworks may have influenced such narratives. Finally, I raise points for discussion about reasons for such press representations of Assange, issues raised by the research and suggestions for further study.

2. Key terms

Julian Assange is an Australian-born editor, internet-activist, hacker, publisher, journalist and "founder, spokesperson and editor-in-chief for WikiLeaks" (*The New York Times*, 2011). In

2010 sexual assault charges were raised against Assange in Sweden. In June 2012 he sought 'protective asylum' at the Ecuadorian Embassy in London from Swedish extradition, fearing subsequent extradition to the U.S. to face charges over WikiLeaks releases (*The New York Times*, 2012). He remains in the Embassy today.

WikiLeaks is the international online organisation that publishes 'leaked' documents submitted by anonymous sources, many alleging government and corporate misconduct. Recent controversial leaks have included Iraq and Afghanistan war logs, Guantanamo Bay files and U.S. diplomatic cables.

A *whistleblower* is someone who reveals covert information or informs against another, usually about alleged dishonest or illegal activities occurring in official organisations such as government (Merriam Webster, 2012).

The *press* refers to media organisations reaching large audiences via mass communication. In this essay I use *press* to refer to organisations that deliver news to the public (Potter, 2008). *Digital media* refers to forms of electronic press with data stored in digital format (Long et al., 2012), in this case online journalism is that published and distributed on the internet through news websites.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a multi-disciplinary method of analysis that relates text and language to wider socio-political contexts. CDA is the primary methodology used for analysis in this essay.

3. Case study and methodology

My case study is a comparative CDA of digital media articles on Assange from selected news websites over the past six months (1 July – 31 Dec 2012). I chose the U.S. and the U.K. due to their varying traditions of thought on press freedoms, freedom of expression and civil liberties – the U.S.'s strong tradition of protection of speech as outlined in their First Amendment (Anon, 2010), and the U.K.'s history of civil liberties and human right law (Fenwick, 2002). Both countries have close involvement with Assange's case – the U.S. government through the U.S. cables WikiLeaks release and subsequent threats to charge Assange, and the U.K. through Assange claiming asylum within London's Ecuadorian Embassy. I focus on digital news rather than print due to its accessibility and increasing globalised readership. My choice of Assange was on the basis that most WikiLeaks' coverage now focuses on its founder and that "Assange is a gift to journalists in at least one sense: he is a genuinely weird and fascinating character" (Birmingham, 2010). As Nayar states, "Assange is a messenger, he is neither messiah nor the message. But, fortunately or unfortunately, he has now become identified as the 'face' of WikiLeaks" (Nayar, 2010:2).

Media organisations selected for analysis are *The Guardian & The Daily Mail (DM)* in the U.K., and *The New York Times (NYT)* and *New York Post (NYP)* in the U.S. My rationale was to compare a left-leaning broadsheet and a conservative-leaning tabloid in both countries, reflecting both diversity of readerships and media ownership. For interpretation, I used the methodology of CDA, focusing on analysis of wording, linguistic choices, themes and bias. Through a CDA of the British and American press representations and portrayals of Assange over the past six months, this essay examines the research questions: How is Assange portrayed in the press? How do representations differ in the U.S. versus the U.K.? How do these representations reflect wider debates based on media ethics and political narratives?

4. Literature review

a. Ethical frameworks

The ethics surrounding WikiLeaks and Assange are complex. According to Somerville, if one believes the *means* in which Assange obtains leaked documents are wrong, then the subsequent use of that information is unethical. Alternatively if one believes that 'positive' *ends* such as transparency and revelation of corruption justify unacceptable means, use of the information would be considered ethical (2010).

Kantianism focuses on the will of an act rather than the consequences, so in this context, the motivations of freedom of information and exposing of government and corporate corruption justify releasing these materials (Jiahui, 2011). An alternative ethical framework to Kantianism is Utilitarianism, in which the *ends* justify the *means*, and consequences of an action are placed before the will of an action (Mathiesen, 2010). When applied to Assange, Utilitarians might view the consequences of leaked documents as outweighing Assange's intentions. In Utilitarianism "everyone counts as one and no one counts for more than one " (Jen, 2008) and thus Assange should not receive special treatment in his current political situation. Yet both Kantianism and Utilitarianism are subjective, moral judgments are contextual, and the ethical *means* and *ends* of Assange's complex geo-political case cannot be so easily defined.

Nayar believes that Assange's actions will always be open to charges of being unethical due to their disclosures affecting "powerful state and corporate interests". Some theorists even see the ethical framework raised through WikiLeaks as "deriving from the future (Jordan as quoted in Nayar, 2010:8) as the phenomenon of publicity of information in the digital age is currently generating "the greatest confrontation between the established order and the advocacy of the culture of the totally open Internet" (Backhaus & Dodig Crnkovic, 2011). How the press is responding to these ethical dilemmas will be analysed later in this essay.

b. Political frameworks

Differences between the political systems in the U.S and the U.K. impact upon their various press representations of Assange. In terms of political frameworks, the U.S. has a strong tradition of protecting speech freedom as outlined in their First Amendment (Anon, 2010), but also has a powerful Espionage Act, designed to protect U.S. national security (Peters, as quoted in Flew et al, 2011:6). The current political situation in U.S. is liberal, with strong political focus on finance and foreign policy (Hammond, 2013). The U.K. on the other hand has a long history of civil liberties and human right law (Fenwick, 2002), with the current government being centre-right, and political focus on economic growth and government transparency (BBC, 2013). The politics and ethics of the British press are also high on the current political radar due to the high-profile Leveson Inquiry (Winnett & Kirkup, 2012).

The political framework of neoliberalism places value in privatisation, interventionism and entrepreneurial opportunities that foster wealth inequality and concentrations of corporate power (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). Over the past century neoliberalism has produced immense concentrations of corporate power with disproportionate influence over the media, and a de-regulated press ownership exemplified by Murdoch's media empire (Harvey, 2005:47). Neoliberalism therefore provides a useful interpretive framework to study how and why press ethics evolved and how the press operates today.

The wider themes raised through Assange's work with WikiLeaks can also be viewed as part of a wider transition from a neoliberal era to the political framework of deliberative democracy, with digital cultures and internet freedoms of expression accentuating and propelling this trend. Dekker believes digital culture plays an important role in transition towards deliberative democracy, educating governments to stop relying on neoliberal principles and encouraging empowerment of the public in deliberative decision-making (2012: 27-28). Fitri et al believe the motivations behind organisations such as Assange's WikiLeaks are to bring attention to violations of human rights and protect the responsible flow of information on the internet. According to Assange himself, "information sets us free...by allowing us to question the actions of those who would sooner we had no means to question them... the things governments and diplomats do behind closed doors is entirely our business" (quoted by Zifcak, 2012: 136). This hospitality towards free speech is one of the reasons that democratic theorists often see the internet, exemplified by the work of organisations such as WikiLeaks, as promising movement from neoliberalism towards deliberative democracy (Fitri et al, 2011).

c. Press representations of Assange

Assange has an ambiguous relationship with the press. The blogpost 'Julian Assange - A Tale of Love and Hate' argues that the press is drawn to Assange because, in crude words,

"his stories attract so much attention and therefore promise potentially increased advertising revenue and a higher profile". Yet the press is also wary of him because his organisation WikiLeaks has exposed "more than all these vaunted organs, which exist to hold power accountable, have done in their entire histories" (Anon, 2012). Flew et al reiterate that through his work, Assange has given the public "more scoops than most journalists can imagine" (2011: 6, quoted in Deans, 2011). Of the broadsheets examined for this essay, *NYT*'s editor conservatively refers to Assange as 'a source', and *The Guardian*'s editor as a 'publisher-intermediary' (Crowley, 2012: 250). Despite this diplomacy, such broadsheets are well aware of the implications of Assange's case for wider journalism, as the *NYT* editor states, "It's very hard to conceive of a prosecution of Assange that wouldn't stretch the law in a way that would be applicable to us. ... Whatever one thinks of Assange, certainly American journalists, and other journalists, should feel a sense of alarm at any legal action that tends to punish Assange for doing essentially what journalists do" (as quoted in Jones, 2011: 139).

For a press inclined to create narratives of heroes and villains (Bormann, 2006), Assange's profile makes a compelling villain, described by Birmingham as "almost perfectly crafted for the digital realm, an avatar for the hacker activist cause" (2010). Yet Seymour observes the "highly personalised resentment" directed at Assange that goes "well beyond any valid political disagreement," (2012:4). U.S press representations have been vitriolic and extreme over the past years, with Vice President Biden referring to Assange as a "high-tech terrorist" and FoxNews proclaiming, "'A dead man can't leak stuff ... This guy's a traitor, he's treasonous, and he has broken every law of the United States ... illegally shoot the son of a bitch" (Benkler, 2011: 313). In 2010 NYT published a derogatory profile of Assange entitled 'WikiLeaks Founder on the Run, Trailed by Notoriety' (Burns), referring to his "erratic and imperious behavior, and a nearly delusional grandeur unmatched by any awareness that the digital secrets he reveals can have a price in flesh and blood" (2011).

With Sweden's extradition effort seen by many as an "unhealthy desire to pursue a high profile individual on relatively minor charges" (Klein, 2012), the media has nonetheless latched on to this narrative, with Benkler facetiously noting, "it is not difficult to understand why media outlets that need to sell copy would add sex and violence to politics and diplomacy" (2011: 336). Yet others argue Assange's actions have seriously undermined his organisation, with Berg claiming "nothing has been more damaging to WikiLeaks than Assange's personal soap opera ... if there is to be a future of whistleblowing it will be found elsewhere, far away from the Assange carnival" (2012).

5. Critical Discourse Analysis

a. Research findings

i. Findings from U.K. press study

160 articles were found on Assange dated between 1 July - 31 Dec 2012 from the chosen U.K. media organisations *The Guardian* (98 articles), and *The Daily Mail* (62 articles).

The Guardian

The Guardian is a daily broadsheet with a typically middle-class Labour Party voting readership (Leader, 1994). The newspaper is owned by Guardian Media Group and has the reputation as a platform for liberal opinions, the term 'Guardian reader' describing those holding leftwing views (BBC, 2005). Of the four news sources studied, The Guardian had both the most coverage and most positive representations of Assange. Many articles debated related issues such as freedom of speech and government transparency, for example: "entrenched views about Assange mustn't prevent a debate about source protection, accountability and banking blockades" (Ball, 2012), and "blinding media contempt for Assange must not cloud wider issues of press freedoms" (Greenwald, 2012).

From an ethical standpoint, *The Guardian* articles generally focused on the will and intentions of Assange's actions rather than their consequences, which reflects a Kantian approach (Jiahui, 2011). In terms of political frameworks, *The Guardian* was supportive of the U.S. government's transition from neoliberal, interventionist policies towards those of a deliberative democracy. Many articles criticised government response to Assange, Jónsdóttir stating that "while every trick in the book of maintaining power will be applied to silence us, these attempts gives us a chance to see the actual face of power and to understand, with real-time examples, how healthy or unhealthy our democracies have become" (2012). *The Guardian* criticised U.S. press, accusing them of leveraging Assange's case to increase neoliberal interventionism in countries such as Ecuador, rather than examining internal issues such as lack of government transparency. Greenwald questions why Assange should be 'scorned' when he "did the job that the U.S. press corps refuses to do: namely, bringing transparency to the bad acts of the U.S. government and its allies around the world" (2012).

Many *Guardian* articles expose the hostility and sensationalism in press representations of Assange. Greenwald describes the "vindictive thirst for vengeance" and "bizarrely personal contempt" for Assange in the British press, and highlights the irony that the media now shows "unlimited personal animus" toward the man who "has given the public more scoops than most journalists can imagine" (2012). *The Guardian* also criticises *NYT* coverage of Assange, referring to a front-page article diagnosing Assange with a "variety of psychological afflictions"

and concealed, malicious motives" based on *NYT*'s "own pop-psychology observations" (Greenwald, 2012).

Greenwald highlights the paradox that the press does not show interest in "the profound threats to press freedom that would come if [Assange] were extradited to and tried in the United States" (2012). His explanation is the fundamentally conservative views of many journalists and the close alliance of main news publications with governments, arguing that "[m]any journalists (and liberals) like to wear the costume of outsider-insurgent, but are, at their core, devoted institutionalists, faithful believers in the goodness of their society's power centers, and thus resent those (like Assange) who actually and deliberately place themselves outside of it" (2012). The few negative representations of Assange in *The Guardian* articles focused on negative personality traits rather than his actions.

The Daily Mail

The DM is the U.K.'s second highest selling daily newspaper, a 'middle-market' tabloid owned by The Daily Mail and General Trust (Media U.K., 2012). DM is a traditional supporter of the Conservative Party, generally taking a conservative editorial line and claiming sources such as the BBC and The Guardian are biased to the left (Torin, 2007). DM coverage contained the most negative press representations of Assange with almost all articles classified as negative, only a few neutral stories and no positive. Reporting was generally of a didactic nature, with clear conservative political leanings.

The most common representations of Assange in *DM* coverage were of an egotistical criminal "trying to escape the fair judicial process of Sweden" (*Daily Mail*, 2012) showing "contempt for the rule of law as is displayed by true tyrannies around the world" (Phillips, 2012). One representation from *DM* articles was that the sexual assault allegations against Assange undermine his credibility, showing a Utilitarianism emphasis on the consequences and those affected by Asange's actions rather than the will of his intention: "I deplore the way many Assange sympathisers feel that their political allegiance to him should result in them defending or undermining the actions he is accused of. Sexual assault ... should not be used as a weapon by anyone keen to defend 'freedom of information" (Poulton, 2012). Some coverage was provocatively sensational, Littlejohn proclaiming that Assange is "a job for the men in balaclavas. Forget the diplomatic niceties. Give Ecuador five minutes to hand him over or we send in the SAS" (2012).

Multiple articles denigrated Assange and referred to his case as a 'circus' (Slack, 2012 & Phillips, 2012), accusing Assange of "relishing his status as a political asylum seeker" (Bond, 2012) and reiterating his 'narcissistic' and 'exhibitionist' tendencies (Phillips, 2012 & Fleming, 2012). Assange's August 2012 speech from the Ecuadorian Embassy balcony was widely

ridiculed by *DM* journalists, with Poulton describing him "hanging out of windows and delivering 'gung-ho' type rhetoric to the waiting cameras ... [looking] rather more like a rock star than a potential political prisoner" (2012), Fleming referring to his "attempt to do a Mussolini at the Ecuadorian embassy" (2012), and Phillips describing him as an "archmanipulator of the media, an anti-Western agitator and an impresario of cant" (2012).

Another common theme raised in *DM* coverage was the cost of Assange's case, reiterating expenditure of "at least £50,000 a day" for British taxpayers (Doyle et al, 2012 & Slack, 2012) and "gross waste of valuable resources" (*DM*, 2012), proposing cuts of all British financial aid to Ecuador. Slack argues, "Assange claims to be a champion of free speech. Ecuador likes to brutally oppress journalists. Now there's something in it for both of them, they hop straight into bed together" (2012). Ethically, prioritising the consequences of Assange's actions - in this case his asylum-seeking - before his *will*, is intrinsically Utilitarianism and denies the Kantian philosophy of the *means* being more important than the *ends*. Politically, the focus on money and taxes above wider themes of freedom of the press, can be seen as neoliberal in nature.

Numerous *DM* articles attacked *The Guardian*, accusing it of left-leanings that impede objective representations of Assange (Phillips, 2012 & Littlejohn, 2012). Phillips argued, "The first bunch of useful idiots who played right into his hands were the anti-establishment, anti-American, anti-West Left, otherwise known as *The Guardian*… who went to hilarious lengths to build up the WikiLeaker-in-chief into a cross between Mother Teresa, Gandhi and Jesus Christ" (2012). Littlejohn attacks 'The Guardianistas' - *The Guardian's* stereotypical 'left wing' readership – for defending Assange for political reasons (2012), thereby revealing his own conservative stance on the issue.

ii. Findings from U.S. press study

34 articles on Assange were found dated between 1 July – 31 Dec 2012 from the chosen U.S. media organisations *The New York Times* (22 articles), and *New York Post* (12 articles).

New York Post (NYP)

NYP is a daily newspaper distributed in New York City and surrounds. Owned by Rupert Murdoch's media corporation News Corp, it has a reputation for sensationalist headlines and conservative editorial viewpoints (Ketupa, 2007). *NYP* had significantly the least amount of coverage on Assange with only 12 articles, as opposed to *The Guardian (98)*, *DM* (62) and *NYT (22)*. A few *NYP* articles had an objective tone, but the majority of stories took a negative, vilifying stance against Assange, with derogatory references including "white-haired rabble rouser ... limelight-loving Assange" (MacIntosh, 2012), "embattled ex-hacker" (*NYP*,

2012) and "alleged rapist ... in his dingy hideout" (MacIntosh, 2012). Missing from *NYP* coverage was wider debate on freedom of the press or government transparency.

Several articles accused Assange of hypocrisy, with double standards in valuing his own rights and freedoms more than those implicated in the leaks WikiLeaks publishes. There were jingoistic connotations that Assange "deserves what he gets" after revealing U.S. 'secrets', the best example being Mushnick's argument that "[I]ost in the reporting and the ensuing discussions and debates as to whether Assange's freedom-of-speech rights are being violated — whether he's a victim of injustice — is the old schoolyard refrain spoken to fallen, sobbing bullies: 'Well, you started it.' ... I waited for a reporter to shout something like, 'After revealing U.S. military and diplomatic secrets, what did you expect from the United States, a party? The Key to the World Trade Centre?'" (2012). Analysis of this text, including its emotive reference to the WTC, exposes the message that Assange disrespects American national pride and principles. Ethically this text exemplifies the Utilitarian principle that no man is more important than another (Jen, 2008) while comparing Assange to a 'bully' infers his actions are intrinsically unethical.

The New York Times (NYT)

NYT is the largest metropolitan news publication in the U.S, published daily in New York City and owned by *The New York Times Company* (NYT Company, 2012). Surveys show *NYT* has a traditionally liberal bias (Rasmussen Reports, 2008, Okrent, 2004 & Brennan, 2012). *NYT* coverage included some neutral stories, but representations of Assange were mainly negative.

Given Ecuador's history of persecution of journalists, limited freedom of the press and questionable human rights record, choosing Ecuador for refuge was largely seen by *NYT* as a hypocritical move by Assange (Isaacs, 2012). The US-centric view presented in some articles was that Ecuador's actions were politically motivated: "The opportunity to settle a grudge with the United States by refusing to deliver Assange to authorities in either Sweden or the United States, where he could be charged with leaking classified documents, was simply too good to miss" (Isaacs, 2012). This view was not represented in U.K. press.

Another article described Assange's 'illusions of grandeur' when "crowing that he was the true global defender of free speech and calling President Obama a false one" (Macfarquhar, 2012). Burns gave a demonising critique of Assange, highlighting his "highhanded manner", his "elusiveness" and questioning what he has done with "millions in donations" (2012), and Burns & Somaiya focus on the financial side of the Assange case (2012), a political representation based on neoliberal principles of capital and privatisation (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). From an ethical perspective these representations took the Utilitarian view of the

consequences being more important than Assange's intention, with no mention of the reasons behind his asylum-seeking, or any wider debates on the issues of freedom of press or government transparency.

Given the paper's liberal reputation, the conservative nature of much of NYT press coverage was surprising. The only article addressing wider issues at stake was written by outspoken film directors Michael Moore and Oliver Stone. Their article was scathing of the U.S. government's "failure to inform Americans about [their] uglier actions", expressing "deep gratitude" to Assange and applauding Ecuador's decision to grant him asylum. The authors dismissed Assange critics, stating, "Predictably, the response from those who would prefer that Americans remain in the dark has been ferocious". The ethical views expressed in this article reflect Kant's theory that publicity and exposing the truth constitutes the centerpiece of democratic peace (Zifcak, 2012). Politically this article is pro-deliberative democracy, with the authors strongly criticising U.S. neoliberal interventionism: "[N]one of his actions have taken place on American soil. If the United States can prosecute a journalist in these circumstances, the governments of Russia or China could, by the same logic, demand that foreign reporters anywhere on earth be extradited for violating their laws. The setting of such a precedent should deeply concern everyone" (Moore & Stone, 2012). I find it alarming that in the time period studied, no NYT journalist reported on the wider ethical and political issues at stake, or the potential consequences for press freedoms, in the ongoing Assange case.

b. Analysis of findings

The CDA revealed that U.K. press presented more positive representations of Assange, and U.S. press presented almost totally negative representations. This finding was largely due to *The Guardian* coverage, reflecting its left-wing liberal readership (Leader, 1994). CDA of *The Guardian* articles revealed strong political support for freedom of information and government transparency. From a political perspective *The Guardian* press representations are seen as rejecting neoliberalism in exchange for the values of "open democracy dedicated to the achievement of social equality coupled with economic, political, and cultural justice" (Harvey, 2005: 215).

Tabloid press in both countries presented negative representations of Assange, reflecting traditionally conservative leanings and right-wing ownerships (Torin, 2007 & Ketupa, 2007). From an ethical perspective, the tabloid coverage reflected Utilitarianism, with the *ends* of Assange's case being more important than the *means*, and consequences of his actions placed before his will (Mathiesen, 2010). Broadsheet representations of Assange differed substantially – U.K. broadsheets were predominantly positive towards Assange, whereas U.S broadsheets were negative. Broadsheets raised more ethical questions and discussed wider political implications of Assange's case.

Much coverage from U.K. tabloid press focused on themes including the cost to taxpayers and embarrassment to the British government, a viewpoint falling within neoliberal political frameworks where capital is prioritised (Harvey, 2005). Many articles presented bias towards anti-Assange quotes and depicted Assange as 'fleeing from the law', neglecting to present alternative viewpoints or examine wider debate on freedom of information. The majority of U.K. broadsheet articles contained positive representations of Assange, discussing broader issues of press freedoms, and reiterating the blinding media contempt for Assange as clouding the 'real issues'.

Representations of Assange in U.S. digital media classified as negative across both tabloid and broadsheet. U.S. tabloid presented a largely negative representation, favouring anti-Assange speakers and focusing on issues such as the threat to U.S. security and his appeal for Ecuadorian asylum being a political snipe at the U.S. While the broadsheet coverage was mostly neutral, opinions expressed they were mostly negative, focusing on cost to British taxpayers and Assange as a 'sex offender evading the law'. I was taken aback by the impassive nature of most *NYT* coverage, with not one pro-Assange piece written by a *NYT* journalist, the only supportive article being an opinion piece written by film directors. This is surprising, considering NYT has previously published many confidential government and military document leaks and could be potentially incriminated for such actions in the future if Assange was successfully extradited and trialed in the U.S. (Rosen, 2010).

The amount of *NYT* coverage was significantly lower than *The Guardian* (28 versus 98 articles) and more negative in nature. A possible reason is that WikiLeaks' leak of U.S. diplomatic cables has led to pressure in the U.S. to prosecute Assange, with government influencing broadsheets such as *NYT* to present him in a negative light (Jones, 2012). Another parochial reason is that the tradition of speech freedoms in the U.S. is now followed closely in political importance by the Espionage Act (Peters 2011 quoted in Flew et al, 2011: 6). Thus, any case threatening U.S. national security or inferring espionage is bound to warrant negative U.S. press representations.

A concerning aspect identified in U.S. press was the lack of debate on wider issues in the Assange case; that his extradition to U.S. would have consequences for the wider freedom of the press was barely discussed. A possible reason for this could be Marlin's theory that news organisations are hesitant about working closely with Assange because he does not adhere to the rules of traditional journalism (2011). From an ethical perspective, *NYT* representations of Assange took a Utilitarian approach as defined above, where reporting the entire truth could be justified if the outcome led to maintaining current status quo (aka more 'widespread happiness') rather than any type of suffering (Orr, 2011).

Another unexpected finding was the huge difference between the number of articles found in U.K. versus U.S. press, the U.K. having over four times the amount of coverage on Assange, with the majority in the U.K. broadsheets (120) compared to U.K. tabloids (74). Explanations for this include Assange currently being based in the U.K., and the resultant stalling of WikiLeaks activities and subsequent lessening of both threat to U.S. security, and public debate on the issue. Reasons for the difference between broadsheets and tabloids might be that the story of Assange is complex and not easily digested into tabloid format, or tabloids readers have lost interest in the case due to its longevity.

6. Conclusion

By analysing differing representations of Assange in U.S. and U.K. press and ways media ethics and wider political frameworks have influenced such representations, insight was gained into deeper and more depersonalised narratives about press freedoms (as well as the limits of these freedoms) in the wider Assange case.

After examining the various players that influence press representations, it was found that U.K. press presented more positive representations of Assange. Tabloid press was generally more negative, while the representations of Assange in broadsheets differed substantially – in the U.K. broadsheet coverage was predominantly positive whereas in the U.S it was predominantly negative. Through these findings one can infer that interest in Assange's case and the wider WikiLeaks debate is of lower readership concern in the U.S. Such concern in the U.K. stretched beyond the physical location of Assange's asylum at the Ecuadorian Embassy and sexual assault accusations, towards the wider issues of press freedoms and government transparency, but only for British broadsheet readers. While it must be remembered that the Assange case is currently evolving, with press coverage continuing during the writing of this essay, media interest in wider issues of freedom of the press, protection of press sources and government transparency have dissipated over the past six months in both countries, with the *The Guardian* being the only newspaper analysed that is continuing to champion these issues.

These findings are not promising for Assange's case. The U.S. press, despite a liberal government being in power, is playing a waiting game and has become disinterested in the wider fight for freedom of information and government transparency, instead prioritising U.S. national security and the fight against espionage. The U.K. press on the other hand seems busy fighting among itself: *The Guardian* continuing to campaign for press freedoms, but tabloids backing the current centre-right U.K. government and continuing sensationalised personal attacks, as in the pre-Leveson Inquiry days, at a perceived threat to the conservative British establishment and economy.

These research findings raise many questions, such as how ethical and political frameworks are continuing to influence press representations of Assange, and how much impact such representations have on wider issues such as freedom of the press, government and corporate transparency, and the continued activities of organisations such as WikiLeaks. Further research is needed on media trends in U.K. and U.S. coverage and I see value in a CDA of a wider selection of news websites, as well as location-based print media from the same time period to avoid possibilities of skewed research data. Regardless, using representations of Assange as a case study, these findings shed light on the various influences of ethical and political frameworks on the press, as well as current narratives about press freedom and limits of press freedom, on both sides of the Atlantic.

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8. Appendix

a. Articles from U.K. press study

The Daily Mail

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