THE PRESS IN TRANSITION
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NICARAGUA,
SOUTH AFRICA, JORDAN, AND RUSSIA

BY
ADAM JONES
M.A., MCGILL UNIVERSITY, 1992

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE)

WE ACCEPT THIS THESIS AS CONFORMING
TO THE REQUIRED STANDARD

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
APRIL 1999

© ADAM JONES, 1999
In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of **Political Science**

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date **26 APRIL 1999**
The Press in Transition adopts a comparative approach to transitional print institutions worldwide. It is based on some 150 interviews and archival research on four continents, over a decade of unprecedented global transformation and upheaval. The dissertation seeks to fill a serious gap in the existing literature on democratization and political transition. Theoretical chapters advance a comparative model of press functioning (Chapter 1) and a more tentative model of transitional media, with a strong focus on the mainstream press (Chapter 6). The bulk of the work consists of four case-studies, each drawn from a different geographical region (indeed, continent) and a markedly different “type” of liberalization or transition process. The case of Nicaragua (Chapter 2) stands out somewhat. It concentrates almost exclusively on a single newspaper, Barricada, the former official organ of the Sandinista Front. The newspaper's transformations in the 1990s are, however, set against the backdrop of Barricada's history since 1979, intra-Sandinista politics during and after the revolutionary era, and the more general interplay of media and politics in Nicaragua. The remaining three case-studies (South Africa, Jordan, and Russia: Chaps. 3-5) combine system-level analysis with micro-level portraits of transitional institutions and individuals.

The core of the theoretical analysis lies in a delineation of “mobilizing” and “professional” imperatives. The former I attach mainly to sponsors and managers of media institutions; the latter mainly — not exclusively or universally — to the editorial side of the operation. The interplay of these variables I see as integral to an understanding of events at the case-study newspapers. The opening theoretical chapter situates mobilizing and professional imperatives as both dependent and independent variables. I argue that they reflect and respond to variables like underdevelopment, authoritarianism, and pre-existing media culture. But they also serve as founts of important and interesting initiatives, whether professional, political, or commercial. Significantly, too, they regularly conflict. The dissertation struggles to avoid heroicizing, but it also tries to show that tensions and upheavals — both small-scale and radically transformative — tend to derive from the clash of mobilizing and professional priorities.
## THE PRESS IN TRANSITION

### Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables &amp; Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Note About Interviews and Web-Based Supplementary Materials</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction and Acknowledgments</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter One

**Towards A Comparative Model of the Press in Transition**

- The Mobilizing Imperative  1
- The Professional Imperative  7
- The "Moral Economy of Journalism"  19
- Components of the "Moral Economy"
  - Taking advantage of splits in sponsors’ ranks  22
  - Exploiting a “Soft” Authoritarianism  27
  - “Piggy-Backing”  32
  - Exploiting the Foreign Dimension  33
  - Presenting the Professional Imperative
    as a Path to System Stability  35
  - Choosing Exit  38
  - Sabotage, Silence, Surrender  42
- Conclusion  46

### Chapter Two

**Barricada and the Struggle for the Sandinista Press**

- Introduction  60
  - The Vanguard's Vanguard  65
  - The FSLN and Barricada: “Norming” the Material Relationship  74
  - Norming the Political Relationship  77
- Beyond the Barricades: A New Journalism for Nicaragua, 1987-1994  83
  - 1990: The Earthquake  86
  - A Revolutionary Liberalism?  90
  - In the National Interest: 1991-94  92
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Crisis, Institutional Response</th>
<th>99</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Barricada, I: The Challenge of Opposition</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Barricada, II: Sandinismo and Self-Censorship</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993-94: Anatomy of a Defenestração</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coup and Interregnum</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The &quot;Negotiated Exit&quot;</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;A Relative Objectivity Such As Decency Demands&quot;</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barricada’s New Comandante: An Interview with Tomás Borge</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Who Stayed: Alfonso Malespin</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline and Fall</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Death of Barricada</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Chapter 3**

**Not So Black and White:**

**South Africa’s English Press Enters the Democratic Era**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction: The English Press and Apartheid</th>
<th>161</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Social and Economic Legacy</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monopoly Ownership</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Press As Opposition</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The English Model&quot;: Mobilizing and Professional Imperatives</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regime Policy and the Parameters of Transition</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Media and the &quot;Grand Bargain&quot;</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation from Without: Shifting Patterns of Press Ownership</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformations from Within, I: Political and Professional Reorientation</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformations from Within, II: Market Reorientation</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformations from Within, III: Black Empowerment and Affirmative Action</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Libidinization” and the Repealing of Censorship</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Rightist to “Brightest”? A Case-Study of The Citizen</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Info Scandal and After</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer Abraham Johnson</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citizen Redux?</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sowetan and The Star: Argus Unbundles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sowetan and The Legacy of the Black Press</th>
<th>245</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political Identity</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation-Building and Institution-Building</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star: An Overview</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mafiosi</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Para-Statal Corporations and Media Magnates</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constituencies, Old and New</td>
<td>388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Models of Professionalism</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izvestia: A Case Study</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izvestia under the Soviets</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Battle with Parliament</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Orientation and Independence</td>
<td>413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The New/Old Constituency: Plus Ça Change ...</td>
<td>418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Search for Sponsorship</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coup and Aftermath</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion: The Press in Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview of the Press in Transition</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobilizers in Transition: Regimes and Non-Regimes Actors</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Regime Actors</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition and the Crisis of Resources</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformations in Staffing and Infrastructure</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Quest for a Constituency</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Partnerships and Technologies</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Professional Imperative in Transition</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Perils – and Promise – of “Yellow Journalism”</td>
<td>468</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Model of the Press in Transition</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staying Alive</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desiderata</td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Web-Based Supplementary Materials (abstracts and links)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1 Circulation: Winners and Losers in the Post-Apartheid Press 212-13
Table 3.2 The Citizen: Reader Profile 224
Table 4.1 Jordan Press Foundation – Total Profits of Newspapers, 1993 and 1994 332
Table 5.1 Circulation of Russian Newspapers, 1997 365

LIST OF FIGURES

System A: Authoritarian (Hard) 52
System B: Authoritarian (Soft) 53
System C: Liberal-Democratic, Market-Oriented 56
Figure 2.1 Detail of child newspaper-vendor, by Cordelia Dilg 73
Figure 2.2 The limitations of partisan journalism (Cartoon) 61
Figure 2.3 Typical Barricada masthead of the post-defenestración era 136
Figure 2.4 The first edition of Barricada, 25 July 1979 160
Figure 2.5 The final Barricada, never published, 31 January 1998 160
Figure 3.1 A typical Citizen front page of the late Johnson era 238
Figure 3.2 Brochure for The Star’s daycare project 261
Figure 4.1 The cartoon that nearly closed the Jordan Times? 338
Figure 5.1 Onecimbank and LUKoil poised to carve up Izvestia (cartoon) 425
Figure 5.2 The logo of Novye Izvestia 430
System D: Transitional Press System 472
DEDICATION

For Jo and David, my mother and father,
with much love.
A Note About Interviews

To reduce footnoting, I have chosen for the most part not to reference quoted comments from the body of interview material. Any quoted statement lacking a footnote derives from this material. A complete list of interview subjects, dates, and locations is given at the end of the bibliography. An exception to the rule is the Nicaragua case-study (Chapter 2). Because three separate stints of fieldwork were conducted in Managua (in 1991, 1996, and 1998); because many subjects were interviewed more than once; and because some were interviewed on more than one research trip, I have given the date of each interview in the notes. The date is also noted where subjects in the other case-study countries were interviewed on more than one occasion.

Extensive supplementary materials for The Press in Transition have been posted to my site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj>. Though the approach varies somewhat from case to case, in general these materials sample editorial commentary from the case-study newspapers in order to establish a clearer picture of the institution's editorial orientation and style, political priorities, perceived constituency, etc. It is my hope that these materials will be of use to scholars studying various aspects of these transitions — not just the mass media's role in them. A synopsis of the Web-based appendices, with the relevant URL addresses, appears immediately before the bibliography.

A.J.
INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book presents a theoretical framework for understanding the functioning of the press in general and the transitional press in particular. Between theoretical bookends (Chapters 1 and 6), it details the paths taken by four media systems and six press institutions through transformations that range from the incremental to the fundamental. The approach adopted in the case studies varies from chapter to chapter. The Nicaraguan study (Chapter 2) focuses on one newspaper, Barricada, which lay at the heart of the Master’s research with which this project began. By contrast, the three remaining case-studies (Chapters 3, 4, and 5) move from extended consideration of the media system in transition, to a study of one (in the South African case, three) newspaper institutions.

There is method in this, but also a certain whim. Barricada in Nicaragua had been profiled up-close from the start, and simply staying on top of its transformations and permutations was a full-time (and fascinating) job. No insurmountable language barrier obtained, for archival research at least. Barricada was also something of a political cause célèbre, and illustrative enough of wider trends in Nicaraguan media to justify the extended focus. Thus, the former “vanguard” publication of the Sandinistas served something of a vanguard role in this book: generating many of the theoretical propositions and perspectives that guided subsequent research. The South African case-study began with a planned focus on The Citizen, and this newspaper still receives the most extended treatment in the case-study section. But I expanded the research to include The Star and Sowetan shortly after I hit the ground in Johannesburg; my curiosity about other cases quickly grew, and so did my concern about presenting the delightfully idiosyncratic Citizen as some kind of representative case. The paradigmatic Star and the Black flagship Sowetan seemed more promising in this regard, and intriguing in their own right.

In Jordan, only the staff and product of the English-language Jordan Times was easily accessible to me (and featured a professional environment that was somewhat less stifled and more
interesting than the mainstream Arabic dailies). But again its marginal position in the media system made it hard to rope into service to describe broader trends and continuities in Jordan’s limited liberalization. The focus, therefore, is on system-level trends. This is true as well in Chapter 5’s analysis of the Russian case. The “classic” character of the Russia case-study encouraged attention to the system-level transformations. As well, time and resource constraints limited the possibility of conducting Russian-language interviews. English-language interview subjects naturally tended to be drawn from a broad spectrum (something that was true also in Jordan), and to take a correspondingly broad view of Soviet and post-Soviet media. The chapter, for the most part, follows them in doing so. For the close-up analysis of a press institution in transition, though, I did select a Russian- rather than English-language publication. As is described further in Chapter 5, I believed the post-Soviet media system (unlike Jordan’s far less developed one) could not be represented, even inadequately, by a focus on The Moscow Times or The Moscow Tribune. Neither of these English-language dailies has the readership and influence among domestic elites that The Jordan Times enjoys. One publication that could make such a claim, Moscow News, was already well-studied. The choice of Izvestia as a case-study was thoroughly vindicated by the extraordinary upheavals that followed there within weeks of fieldwork’s completion in 1997, and the paper’s renewed crisis (part of the more general economic collapse) in mid-1998.

Rounding out this work in Spring 1999, I am gratified that each of the case-studies has assumed its own “personality.” Basic challenges, themes, and issues are evident enough in most cases. To draw some of the disparate empirical strands together is the task of the theoretical chapters. But beyond bald propositions and attempted generalizations, I hope the book retains a healthy appreciation of the vagaries – including those of individuals – that give each press system and institution, as well as each case-study, its distinctive cast. One should be open about one’s biases, influences, and preferences. The research presented in The Press in Transition is the latest outgrowth of a near-lifelong interest in the press. As a nine-year-old at elementary school, running off mimeographed copies of a newsletter for sale to friends at five cents, I had my first intimations of journalism’s power to disseminate information and forge bonds of community.¹ Later, as an instructor and scholar, I found myself guided by the same basic ambitions. Accordingly, while The

¹Among early employers and collaborators, I acknowledge especially Wayne Emde and John Hunter.
Press in Transition is about the comparative politics of journalism in transition, it is journalism of a sort as well. I see no reason to establish artificial boundaries between the two disciplines: journalism and comparative politics need not be strangers. The relationship of politics to journalism over the centuries has been intimate, even – or especially – for those seeking to undermine or overthrow established political orders. Think of the careers of Thomas Paine, Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, George Orwell, Václav Havel, and Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Think of The Conditions of the Working Class in England and Democracy in America. In which pantheon should Homage to Catalonia and Fanshen find a home, or The Soccer War, or Lenin’s Tomb? Are they seminal political texts, history, or “just” great reporting? Take your pick – or skip the pointless exercise altogether.

At the level of elite institutions and patterns of rule, the lines between politics and the press are similarly blurred. The interpenetration of media and politics in the developed West, notably the U.S., has long been grist for radical critics. Their influence on my thinking and research has been far-reaching. In addition, much of my journalistic work has been with the alternative press. I served as founding co-editor of Latin America Connexions, a Vancouver solidarity publication, for many years. While alternative media figure only peripherally in this study, I do consider them essential to realizing the broader potential of the press in society – I did, after all, devote years of my life to helping launch and sustain one such project. My convictions about the necessity of media diversity, and my fear of corporate homogenization (with or without monopolization), derive naturally from my experience with the alternative press.

The epistemological foundations of The Press in Transition are rationalist in essence, as talk of essences suggests. Like Cecile Jackson, I am “still stirred by the promise of modernity” – by a stance that does not indulge in shallow empiricism, but bases itself in “an extra-discursive reality which one struggles to grasp, by triangulating the pluralities of perceptions and discourses in an increasingly less provisional way.” This rationalist perspective obviously shapes what I find interesting (and desirable) about mass media. I do not entirely ignore post-modern contributions, however. We live in a post-modern age in which media technologies stand at the very cutting edge of social and cultural transformation. As a child of this culture, I have not been immune to the

---

2Cecile Jackson, "Still Stirred by the Promise of Modernity," New Left Review [date to be confirmed].
fragmentation and micro-specialization of media outlets and their audiences; the increasing predominance of visual technologies and sound-bite snippets versus discursive prose; the plethora of new societal identities (translating as "demographics" that advertisers seek to shore up or seduce); and so on. I do feel, though, that post-modern realities are easily enough conveyed in straightforward language. The desiccated, needlessly convoluted style of academic post-modernism attracts me not at all. To put it bluntly, this is a Derrida-free zone. In my view, any work that is funded in large part by taxpayers' money (see the Acknowledgments) betrays its civic responsibilities if it needlessly erects barriers to understanding by intelligent laypersons.

A final caveat. To engage with the press transitions of the last decade, in a project that has taken almost as long to research and write, has been to ride a wild tiger. The newspaper analyzed up close in the Russia case study, Izvestia, is a good example. It witnessed the sacking of its chief editor and the exodus of many senior staff barely a month after fieldwork closed. A little over a year later, it was plunged into a new crisis that was, in a sense, terminal. As part of the savage cost-cutting measures demanded of Russia's business class as the economy collapsed around it, Izvestia's owners merged it with a newly-founded daily, Russkiy Telegraf. A fresh wave of staff cuts saw the payroll of both newspapers reduced by fifty percent. The example of Barricada (Chapter 2) demonstrates that such a rollercoaster trajectory, though perhaps not typical, was far from unique.

The challenge in these pages has been to capture some of the drama, scale, and import of these transitions — each in its way unique and utterly unpredictable. At the same time, I have tried to construct a framework that allows some unifying themes and patterns, or at least coherent lines of theoretical inquiry, to emerge. Whatever my success, I am aware that some of what follows is being outpaced by events even as I write these words. The inscrutability of historical process will always foul up attempts to interpret the present and read the future. A cartoon depicts the proprietor of the Israelite Boat Rental service, bemoaning his luck as Moses appears to part the waters of the Red Sea and let potential customers stroll across.3 The scholar of political transition could only feel a rueful twinge of recognition.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The first of the case studies to draw my attention, and the first presented here, was *Barricada* in Nicaragua. Long before I thought to study transformations in the FSLN's official organ (by chance, just as especially dramatic transformations were unfolding), my passionate interest in Nicaragua and its revolution was sparked by the political writings of Noam Chomsky. A decade-long private correspondence, similar to those Dr. Chomsky maintains with hundreds of ordinary people worldwide, nourished that interest further. My direct involvement with Nicaragua began with a stint as a volunteer with Tools for Peace, a Canadian solidarity organization that dispatched millions of dollars in material aid to Nicaragua throughout the years of the Sandinista revolution. Through "T4P" I met a lifelong comrade (now a colleague at Langara College), Peter Prontzos. I also visited Nicaragua for the first time on a Tools for Peace delegation in 1986, and read *Barricada* to the extent my limited Spanish permitted. But the seed of the present project had yet to germinate.

Prof. Rex Brynen at McGill University supervised first a reading course on the press, and then a Master's thesis on the Sandinista newspaper *Barricada* that took me back to Nicaragua in early 1991. The success of that fieldwork owed an enormous amount to two central figures in the *Barricada* drama, Carlos Fernando Chamorro and Sofía Montenegro. "Let me ask you frankly," Carlos Fernando mused in our first conversation. "Who do you think will be interested in reading about *Barricada"? Whatever doubts he may have had on that score, he and Sofia took time from absurdly busy schedules to sit for many hours of interviews over the three months of my stay. Carlos Fernando also granted me the run of the *Barricada* offices and library. The latter proved an essential resource, since virtually every back-issue of every Nicaraguan publication was conveniently bound or boxed on its shelves, extending as far back as 1940s editions of the *Somocista* rag, *Novedades*.

Daniel Alegria at *Barricada Internacional* welcomed me in his inimitably gregarious way to *BI*’s offices, and allowed me to use the computers there to transcribe interviews. *BI*’s Jane Curschmann translated Spanish-language interviews patiently and superbly. Her co-workers, Toby Mailman and Diane Chomsky, were fine sources of company and insight. Thanks also to Mercedes Moncada, who reminded me there was more to fieldwork than work.
I returned to Nicaragua again in 1996, to study the new version of *Barricada* introduced by the architects of the *defenestración* (the firing of Chamorro *et al.* in October 1994). One could hardly imagine a more transformed institution. Of all my contacts from the 1991 fieldwork, only Diane Chomsky and a couple of others at *Barricada Internacional* remained. To my great good fortune, Diane cheerfully helped me find my feet, introducing me personally to *Barricada*'s new editors and senior writers. In so doing, she allowed the considerable credibility she had amassed through years of dedicated work at *BI* to rub off on me. I am quite sure this secured me interviews and archival access I would not otherwise have had, and without which the latest — apparently concluding — instalment of the *Barricada* story could not have been told.

Among the staff of the post-1994 *Barricada*, William Grigsby, Alfonso Malespin, and Julio López were unreservedly accommodating of my fleeting presence. All took time from their own busy schedules to sit for interviews. My own bias towards the previous, Chamorro-directed incarnation of *Barricada* will probably be evident; but I hope that the post-1994 contingent will find itself treated fairly in these pages. A major task of the 1996 fieldwork was to reconstruct the story of the *defenestración* and its immediate aftermath. Many of my earlier contacts thus remained crucial to the project. Again, Carlos Fernando Chamorro and Sofia Montenegro welcomed my protracted interrogations; again, Carlos Fernando was a crucial source of internal documents. I also greatly enjoyed a long lunchtime interview with Daniel Alegria. Liz Light brought her intelligence and deadpan wit to life away from *Barricada*'s environs. The staff at Guest House Santos put a tin roof over my head for four weeks; sold me numerous cold bottles of Victoria, one of the world's great pilseners; and tolerated my odd *gringo* ways, including an interest in ice-hockey broadcasts on their satellite TV that must have struck them as pathological.

This project could never have been completed without the generous support of diverse granting agencies. The 1991 fieldwork was funded by a McConnell Fellowship from McGill University; the 1996 travels by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council doctoral fellowship. In Summer 1998, after a two-month stay in Guadalajara, Mexico, editing the draft, I was able to return to Nicaragua for a brief visit and final updating, thanks to a research stipend from Langara College. I wish to express my gratitude again to all those who sat for interviews; to Claudia Castillo López of Nicaragua's Biblioteca Nacional, for archival assistance (it now housed most of those old bound volumes from *Barricada*'s library); and to Liz Light for accommodation and
inspiration. As the chapter on Nicaragua and a related book manuscript reached completion, Carlos Fernando Chamorro again provided more assistance than I had a right to expect. He gave a close reading not only to the Barricada manuscript but to the theoretical chapters of this book, and provided extensive and extremely helpful corrections and constructive criticisms. His dedication was indicative of the passionate interest in the transitional press he has been nurturing at Stanford and Berkeley universities since 1994.

In South Africa, I am indebted first and foremost to Ismail Lagardien, then Sowetan's parliamentary correspondent. I owe "Izzy" for accommodation at his flat in Yeoville — one of Johannesburg's funkiest neighbourhood, and one of its first multi-racial ones; for several key contacts; and for a base in Cape Town towards the end of my South Africa sojourn. Without his assistance, offered early and without reservation, the research would have struggled to get off the ground. Izzy's friend, Elspeth Graham of EMG Associates in Johannesburg, helped me find my bearings in a strange city. Her daughter, Helen, took me as I was after 48 hours on planes and in airports, gave me my first handshake and assistance in Jo'burg, and introduced me to Belinda Rimer (see below).

All those in the South African English press who granted me access to their institutions and homes, and who took time from busy schedules to sit for interviews, earned my deepest gratitude. Among the many journalists I interviewed and socialized with, I must thank especially Lloyd Coutts of The Sunday Independent (Gauteng's answer to Van Morrison) and Robyn Chalmers of Business Day, for taking me under their wing. Thanks also to Helen Grange of The Star and Ginger Payne of Business Day.

Many hours were spent hunched over old files and newspapers in reading rooms. No doubt it takes a perverse mindset to enjoy this sort of thing in the first place; but many people in South Africa made the experience far more pleasant and productive than I could have hoped. Sue Lane at the TML Media Library gave me the run, free of charge, of the library's clipping collection — probably my most valuable single source of secondary materials. The following also provided me with important archival access and other research assistance: Anton Harber at the Mail & Guardian, Jeanette Minnie at the Freedom of Expression Institute; Allison Gillwald at the Independent

---

Broadcasting Authority; Lara Kantor at the Media Monitoring Project; Hugh Lewin at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism; and the staff of the Johannesburg Public Library. For arranging e-mail in Johannesburg, I thank the friendly folk at Sangonet, especially Simone and Fatima.

Belinda Rimer, whom I met within a couple of hours of stepping off the plane, almost singlehandedly made my off-hours as enjoyable and fulfilling as the research itself. Belinda ensured that I saw more of Johannesburg than the central business district and Rockey Street. She also joined me on excursions to Pretoria, Pilanesberg, and Swaziland. Last and least, but still indispensably, she lent me her grandad’s old manual typewriter – on which several hundred pages of single-spaced interview transcripts were hammered out.

In Amman, my thanks to all those in the Jordanian press who sat with me for interviews and otherwise offered assistance. The staff at The Jordan Times, in particular George Hawatmeh and Abdullah Hasanat, were extraordinarily generous in allowing me the run of their newspaper (and use of their computers) during my stay. Bassel Salloukh at the Inter-University Consortium of Arab Studies (Montréal) kindly volunteered to translate the interview with Nidal Mansour.

My too-brief fieldwork in Moscow in 1997 presented special logistical challenges, and was even more dependent on the goodwill and assistance of others. I owe the deepest gratitude to my companion on the trip, Miriam Tratt. Miriam shared the joys, challenges and travails of field research, did more than her share of domestic duties while I was typing up notes and transcripts, and accompanied me to many of the interviews, occasionally contributing probing questions of her own. Our stay in Moscow was made pleasurable in large part by the Abdalian family – Ira and Igor, and their children Sveta and Alex – who put us up at their flat for the better part of the month, helped us feel out the neighbourhood, and granted me crucial use of their Pentium computer for the duration. Bolina Dobinina traipsed downtown for many interviews at Izvestia, not all of which went according to plan or schedule, and translated them creditably throughout. The contribution of the scholars and others who helped me with the logistics of the Moscow fieldwork – focusing in on English-language contacts, and nearly always offering themselves as references for the approaches – is described in some detail in Chapter 5. Let me thank here Laura Belin, Frances Foster, Catherine Fitzpatrick, and John Murray.
My dissertation supervisors, Phil Resnick and Diane Mauzy at U.B.C. and Rex Brynen at McGill, have been consistent sources of guidance and support. Professor Brynen, as noted, has been involved in the research from the very start. His influence on the concepts developed and applied here has been formative. Paul Marantz gave the Russia chapter a very helpful specialist's reading.

Beloved family and friends have been the bedrock for all the projects I have undertaken in life. Of those not cited earlier or in the dedication, let me thank especially Terry and Meghan Evenson, Jay Forster, Craig Jones, John Margesson, and Hamish Telford.

Adam Jones
Vancouver, B.C.
April 1999
CHAPTER ONE

TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE MODEL
OF PRESS FUNCTIONING

For centuries, the press and politics have been intimately intertwined. Indeed, the freedom of print media, and later of their broadcast and new-media counterparts, has been seen as definitional to the wider freedoms of expression and association that define liberal democracy. From Milton’s Areopagitica and the First Amendment, through to Mill and Orwell,¹ the notion that truth is knowable, but that it can only emerge if individuals are free to disseminate it, has guided the assumptions of many of the world’s greatest liberal thinkers. The most recent contribution to the study of mass media and political transition makes the point at some length, but with admirable concision:

There is a common understanding [in liberal-democratic societies] that a strong connection exists between mass communication and democracy. Simply put, the assumption is that for democracies to function, civil society requires access to information as a means to make informed political choices. Similarly, politicians require the media as a way in which they can take stock of the public mood, present their views, and interact with society. The media are thus viewed as a vital conduit of relations between state and society. But the media are not simply instruments of political actors, lacking their own independent power. Democracies are political systems that allow for the dispersal of power and public access to it, but liberal-democratic theory also notes that such systems can be easily corrupted, thereby undermining participation and voice. Institutional checks and balances within the state structure are highlighted as necessary firewalls against such abuse, and the media are equally valued in this area. As the fourth estate or watchdog of government, the media are expected to critically assess state action and provide such information to the public. Ideally, then, the media not

¹In Areopagitica (1644), Milton wrote: “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.” The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1791) reads: “Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press ...” Mill in On Liberty wrote: “The time, it is hoped, is gone by when any defense would be necessary of the ‘liberty of the press’ as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government. No argument, we may suppose, can now be needed against permitting a legislature or an executive ... to prescribe opinions to [the people] and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear.” (John Stuart Mill, On Liberty [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1978 (1850)], p. 16.)
only provide a link between rulers and the ruled, but also impart information that can constrain the centralization of power and the obfuscation of illicit or unethical state action.²

Those who reject liberal prescriptions have, nonetheless, acknowledged the centrality of the press and other media to political strategy. A noted journalist named Karl Marx moved, over the course of his political life, from a classical-liberal view of the press as "the omnipresent open eye of the spirit of the people" to a more radical, social-revolutionary conception: the press's role was "to undermine all the foundations of the existing political system." But the inseparability of journalism from his political project was plain at each stage.

Vladimir Lenin developed Marx's mobilizing model further, seizing upon "an all-Russian newspaper" as the only "means of nurturing strong political organizations ... [of] generaliz[ing] all and sundry sparks of ferment and active struggle."³ In the post-World War II era, a mobilizing model of the media was a key ingredient of the "developmentalist" prescriptions advanced by scholars like Lucien Pye, Gabriel Almond, and James Coleman.⁴ Underdevelopmentalist critiques rejected this communications model along with the western conceptions of "modernization" that underpinned it. They called instead for a "New World Information Order" (NWIO) to redress imbalances in the international political economy of news production and dissemination.⁵


⁴Almond and Coleman saw "the political communication function," in which media were obviously instrumental, as integral to all the other functions of the political system: "political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, rule-making, rule application, and rule adjudication." An "autonomous, neutral, and thoroughly penetrative system of communication" would assist in the development of "an active and effective electorate and citizenship." The developmentalist notion of a "mobilizing" function for mass media long precedes my own usage of the term, and influenced it. See Gabriel Almond and James S. Coleman, eds., The Politics of the Developing Areas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 45-52; see also Lucien S. Pye, ed., Communications and Political Development (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

⁵For an example of an underdevelopmentalist media critique, see D.R. Mankekar, Media and the Third World (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Mass Communication, 1979).
Given its importance to these various "democratic" and "authoritarian" political models, it is striking that the press receives such little attention in the burgeoning literature on democratization and political transition. "The role of mass communication" in democracies and democratizing societies "is not open to question," according to Patrick O'Neil; but "despite the fact that the recent spread of democracy has led to a commensurate amount of scholarly work on authoritarian collapse and democratization, little attention has been given to the media in this regard." The press has indeed been "absent from relevant discussions"; it is "the forgotten actor in transition analysis." The first landmark study of transition, O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead's four-volume *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*, completely ignored the media, except as a peripheral subset of the "revival of civil society." Larry Diamond and Juan Linz at least acknowledged the deficit in their edited work, the most ambitiously synoptic project of its kind to date. They noted that "we lack, in the social sciences, a good understanding of how a democratic press develops over time and articulates with other social and political institutions." But they offered themselves nothing to fill the void.

---

6"I use the terms ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘democracy’ to refer to political orders that are, on the one hand, characterised by commandist, usually violently repressive, strategies of governance – with attendant censorship, limitations on freedom of association, and often direct state control of the judiciary, parliamentary structures and the news media; and, on the other hand, political orders that allow relatively free political expression and association, comparative immunity from naked state violence, and institutionalised political participation by the mass of the population. ... These definitions ignore the contentious issue of economic democracy ... I do, however, consider massive disparities in resource distribution to be inimical to a democratic order." Adam Jones, "Wired World: Communications Technology, Governance, and the Democratic Uprising," in Edward A. Comor, ed., *The Global Political Economy of Communication* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), pp. 146 and 162 (n. 2).


8Lise Garon, "The Press and Democratic Transition in Arab Societies: The Algerian Case," in Rex Brynen et al., eds., *Political Liberalization & Democratization in the Arab World, Vol. I: Theoretical Perspectives* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1995), p. 150. Garon provides an important defense for the study of print media as opposed to their broadcast counterparts, worth stressing in light of the widespread perception that print is in decline and electronic media on the rise. "In the Arab world [and elsewhere], the press contrasts with radio and television, which are usually state property and act as mouthpiece for the official discourse. Quite to the contrary, the press explicitly expresses opinions and, in permissible political contexts, is a vehicle of opposition and contestation to state authority. More likely to influence the transition process, the press therefore becomes the exclusive focus of this essay," and (with glancing exceptions) of this book. Garon, p. 163 (n. 6). The ease of access to archival sources for print versus broadcast media is an important additional spur to a focus on the press, in my view.


In the years after Diamond and Linz’s compendium appeared, a number of important case-studies were published. They include Lise Garon’s chapter on the Algerian press, Elena Androunas’s and John Murray’s overviews of post-Soviet media transformations, Peter Gross’s detailed treatment of post-Ceauşescu Romanian media, and the monographs on East Asian cases by Chan and Lee (Hong Kong) and Daniel Berman (Taiwan). But a void still yawned, at least in the eyes of the first theorist to adopt a comparative approach to media and political transition. In his book *Internationalizing Media Theory* (1996), John Downing wrote scathingly of a kind of “structuring absence” in political-science analyses of key political phenomena, including “questions of regime transition.” These, he argued, had “generally been researched without benefit of attention to communication processes, rather as though politics consisted of mute pieces on a chessboard.” In his more specific treatment of the transition literature, Downing was scarcely less critical. “Know-nothingism” prevailed “among political scientists about the very communication processes by which authoritarian rule, regime transition and contestatory political movements develop or decline.” Journalistic treatments had been at least a match for more traditional “scholarly” investigations of transitional media. Downing instead advances a proposition that the present work shares, asserting

that mainstream media are a pivotal dimension of the struggle for power that is muted but present in dictatorial regimes, [and] that then develops between political movements and the state in the process of transition from dictatorship (though perhaps only into some form of

---


12Downing argues that “especially in the analysis of changes in Eastern Europe, serious journalism has to date made at least as informative a contribution as the academy, if not more so.” Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory: Transition, Power, Culture* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 103 (n. 2).
“delegative” democracy). This equally applies in the consolidation period after the transition."

Downing in fact moves well beyond mainstream media in his analysis, drawing in “such forms of expression as graffiti, theatre, music, [and] religious observances” into the discussion. His original and provocative description of “marginal” communications processes, and their sometimes dramatic influence on transition processes, represents both a summing-up of sociological and journalistic work on the subject over the last twenty years, and a paving of the road for future comparative investigation. The ambit of my own comparative project is narrower thematically – I do not move much beyond mainstream print media – but it does follow Downing’s “marginal” pursuits in arguing for greater attention to tabloid-style “yellow” media, like Nicaragua’s *El Nuevo Diario* and Jordan’s *Shihan*, as political and professional actors in their own right.14 I think it is also fair to say it investigates their agendas and impact in a more detailed and multinational manner than Downing manages in his analysis, which is bounded by the relatively well-studied Russian, Polish, and Hungarian cases.

Without entering into a detailed consideration of Downing’s ruminations on “critical” media theory, which for the most part ground themselves in a literature radically different from the present work, let me briefly engage the author’s contribution. In my view, Downing can be accused of carrying his project to the gates of real theory-building, but not very far beyond. His reading is exhaustive (the bibliography alone is an indispensable resource for any student of media and transition). He makes a persuasive case for a significant “mediatic” dimension to all transition processes (indeed, all political processes). The inclusive approach to communications media never fails to stimulate. To a certain extent, though, Downing makes a strong case for exploration of the subject, without pushing the boundaries much further himself. A number of his chapters, perhaps the majority, could be classed as critical commentaries, wandering over an eclectic literature, with a pronounced emphasis on post-structuralist thinking. Other chapters are tautly-written and well-framed overviews of “mediatic” developments in Eastern Bloc countries. They do not strike me as especially revelatory, however. Rather, they seem more valuable as syntheses of available secondary materials. And the case-study analysis is pitched throughout at the level of national media systems,

---

14Downing refers to this as the “boulevard” press (p. 145).
at least as far as mainstream media are concerned. There is only sporadic, never sustained, attention to individual media institutions and the professionals who constitute them. Leading off his conclusion, 229 pages into a 246-page text, Downing announces: "Thus far, the argument has conducted a rather major ground-clearing and map-making exercise of the terrain of media communication theory." This arguably arrives a little late in the game. The conclusion also demands of us that we wade through passages such as: "Power relations are the primary energy source, organized along a variety of axes, but mediatically through processes of iteration and refraction, and through synaptic connections, all of them in conjunction and/or dissonance with other societal forces." Downing's conclusion does feature a brilliant and distilled summary of some core concerns which I believe all students of transitional media should note. It is reproduced at the beginning of Chapter 6.

The first truly global survey of media and transition is Patrick O'Neil's edited volume, *Communicating Democracy*. This work, which reached mebare weeks before completion of the manuscript, adopts a cross-regional case-study approach, as does my own. Ten chapters in two hundred pages, however, does not leave much room to move beyond system-level analyses, usually written by those (Elizabeth Fox on Latin America, Owen Johnson on Central Europe) whose more substantial contributions have been available for years. Despite many thought-provoking moments, O'Neil's introduction does not depart from, or significantly supplement, a classic liberal analysis. As for the individual contributions, their quality varies, as with most edited volume of this type. Johnson's survey of "The Media and Democracy in Eastern Europe" is actually a small masterpiece of concision and useful insights, well-sprinkled with case-study examples despite its brevity. Silvio Waisbord on "The Unfinished Project of Media Democratization in Argentina" adds a well-conceived case-study to the (English-language) scholarship on transitional media. At the other end of the scale, Louise Bourgault's analysis of "The Politics of Confusion" in Nigeria seems to have strolled into the wrong volume: the media finally make an appearance thirteen pages into a nineteen-page chapter.

---

Despite its last-minute arrival, I could not resist integrating some of *Communicating Democracy*’s empirical and analytical nuggets for this work. The book deserves a fuller engagement, though, which I hope I will be able to provide in another forum.

• • •

Despite this promising recent work, further attempts at comparison and synthesis seem long overdue. That is the purpose of this book, which draws freely on research carried out on Nicaragua, South Africa, Jordan, and Russia to sketch (in the concluding chapter) an analytical framework of the press in transition, and to draw out similarities and differences in the way the press has negotiated tumultuous political change worldwide. A worthwhile prelude, in my view, is to arrive at some understanding of how the press functions the world over.\(^{16}\) What are the basic imperatives that unite both capitalist and state-socialist press systems? What do the sponsors of press organs expect from “their” media; how do journalists and editors charged with the task of generating editorial content seek to do so? What tensions and clashes may result from the interaction of sponsors and professional journalists?

**THE MOBILIZING IMPERATIVE**

Usually, the situation is that a newspaper follows the point of view of its owner, more or less – in the west and everywhere else.

— Alexander Sychev, foreign editor, *Izvestia*

The mobilizing imperative that dominates a given press system or newspaper institution, and the identity of the sponsor and primary mobilizer, is easily enough isolated by asking a few basic questions. Who owns the institution? Who pays the staff, and covers the cost of inputs? If it is not the state or regime directly, what is the relationship between the sponsor and the state or regime? If we expand the analysis beyond simple survival, the broader mobilizing imperative can likewise readily be ascertained. What constituency does the newspaper target? What is the stated agenda of the institution, as this is expressed in editorial page “leaders”? (Where, in other words, do “leaders” lead, and whom do they seek to lead?) Which taboo areas are respected – that is to

\(^{16}\) I stress here, and will repeat in the concluding chapter, that the emphasis in this work is on the written press. I believe that many of the basic frameworks and interpretations are valid for broadcast media (and occasionally new and alternative media); but their applications should be viewed throughout as more tentative in these spheres.
say, what social, economic, and political options tend to be \textit{foreclosed}, rendered "unthinkable," in the paper's reportage and editorial commentary? What, at its heart, qualifies as "news"? Which social sectors and class interests tend to be selected out for special attention, treated more favourably and attentively, as measured (for example) by the kind of supplements the paper publishes? Given the limitations of the social sciences, it is best to consider all these questions in tandem. Any of them alone, however, may serve as a fairly reliable lead to the source and character of the wider mobilizing imperative, in both its material and editorial manifestations.

The guardians of the mobilizing imperative seem best located, across media systems, in the nexus of owners, managers, and senior editors. These together control the "strategic heights" of any newspaper's operations. They are largely responsible for day-to-day strategizing at both material and editorial levels. They act to balance the varied, sometimes conflicting, mobilizing considerations — beyond the simple imperative of institutional survival — against an analytically-separable set of \textit{professional imperatives}, discussed in greater detail below. As a result of the "gatekeeping" procedures that obtain in newspapers as in all institutions and organizations, the sponsors of the mobilizing imperative tend to display — and demand — a high degree of common purpose and ideological cohesion.\textsuperscript{17} Any institution, though, has its fissures. It appears that the bond between owners and managers is stronger than that between managers and editors, with correspondingly higher levels of conflict evident in the latter relationship. The relationship between owners and editors is more variable and contingent still. The South African case studied for this book exemplifies well the complexities of these relationships. In the modern history of the English-language press, an "English model" of editorial autonomy and intra-institutional communication prevailed. Its essential feature was the establishing of direct lines of communication between editors and owners, to give editors a degree of breathing space from management's day-to-day mobilizing priorities. At the same time, though, ownership was highly dispersed through shareholders (in stark contrast with centralized state or party ownership in classically authoritarian societies). The role of the owner was thus more "hands-off" than in the state-socialist societies or, for that matter, the more personalist operations of the early Hearst or modern Black eras.

\textsuperscript{17}Eric Johnson, \textit{Internews, Moscow}: "The \textit{Washington Post} has an editorial line that everybody knows about, not because the owner tells it to, but because that's the way it's been created over the course of many years, and those are the people who have been hired."
Environmental variables act to condition the mobilizing imperative prevailing in a given media system or institution. The most important are 1) the degree of underdevelopment and 2) the degree of regime authoritarianism—with a strong correlation evident between the variables as well. Material concerns are so primary in press functioning, and underdevelopment exacerbates them to such an extent, that we need to consider the ways in which this “meta-environmental” variable makes itself felt.

**Underdevelopment correlates with poverty and illiteracy,** which in turn act to constrain the reach of the written press. Hall writes of the Malawian press that it “is operating in a market in which a majority of people cannot read, cannot afford to spend money on newspapers, radio receivers or batteries, and are difficult to reach because they live in rural areas.” In rural areas of northern Nicaragua, according to a foreign aid worker with whom I spoke in 1991, newspapers were usually purchased in bulk (at a steep discount) days or weeks after they were published. They were bought not mainly for informational purposes, but for use as toilet paper—though the aid worker assured me that literate peasants read them first.

**Underdevelopment also privileges broadcast over printed media.** When illiteracy and poor transportation infrastructures are combined with questions of cost-efficiency, the advantage of broadcast over print media is heightened, at least as far as mass constituencies are concerned. Print media—at least “serious,” mainstream media—are targeted disproportionately at intellectuals and professional elites. In countries where these classes speak a foreign tongue, moreover, media may be limited to audiences with linguistic capacities that the overwhelming majority of the population does not share. In all of Africa, according to Karikari, “Only Tanzania had a[n African-language] daily and weekly, and Kenya a monthly, all in KiSwahili, each of which had [a] 100,000 circulation figure. Very few others surpassed 50,000 copies per edition ...”

**Distribution difficulties.** The written press, unlike its broadcast counterparts, relies upon a distribution infrastructure that is especially sensitive to the constraints of underdevelopment. Carlos Fernando Chamorro vividly described the constraints that underdevelopment imposed on

---


his former paper, *Barricada* — even in a capital city that was home to a third of the country’s population:

It’s a problem of circulation. Let’s say there are in Managua 150 or 200 agents. Each agent has under him a group of kids — most of them are kids. They study. Now, a good seller could sell 80 newspapers, maybe up to a hundred. But what happens is that you have the same agent taking both *El Nuevo Diario* and *Barricada*. So that kid who could sell 80 or 100 papers would only sell 40 of *Barricada*. If, on the same day, he has also to sell [the pro-Sandinista weeklies] *El Semanario* or *La Semana Cómica*, that adds to the amount of paper he has to carry. The result of all this is that if you get the papers to the drop-off point a bit late, the kids will take *El Nuevo Diario* and not come back [for *Barricada*]. The amount of time they can devote to selling the papers is relatively brief, because they have to go on to study [later in the day].

**Dependence on imported material inputs.** Karikari writes that African societies provide only a “weak industrial base for a dynamic mass media”: “Not even paper stapling pins are manufactured in Africa: paper, ink — indeed, all the material inputs for publishing — have to be imported. Thus, in countries where currencies are constantly being devalued, the unit price of newspapers, magazines and books gets ever higher and, finally, unaffordable.”

**Paucity of advertising revenue.** Hall writes of Malawi, surely a paradigmatic Third World example, that

The nature of [the country’s] limits the opportunities for media to earn revenue from advertising. The rural/agricultural sector, which is dominant, does not generate much advertising. There is a small internal market for manufactured goods and the structure of business in many sectors is monopolistic, which means manufacturers don’t have to advertise as much as in a more competitive environment because they have already developed large market shares. ... All this forms a vicious circle. Because the advertising base is low, publishers need to earn more from copy sales[,] which means they need to place a high cover price on their newspapers. Because incomes are low, fewer people can afford to buy them[,] which means lower circulation[,] which means less appeal to advertisers. It also means, obviously, that the cost of publishing is met by the newspaper buyer, rather than the advertiser.

**Underdevelopment and authoritarianism.** In underdeveloped societies that also exhibit authoritarian patterns of governance — the large majority — mass media tend to depend overwhelmingly on the state or ruling regime. “What is important for the authoritarian conception is its instrumental approach,” said Yassan Zassoursky, dean of the journalism faculty at Moscow

---


22 Hall, p. 75.
State University. "Media are seen as a tool. The tool might be an axe, it might be a whip, it might be a carrot; but it's an instrument. And an instrument in the hands of the mighty - the rulers, mostly." Even opposition media voices, if permitted to exist, will regularly depend on the goodwill or at least benign indifference of rulers. In these resource-scarce societies, the state/ regime often exercises a monopoly on materials and services that are vital to media functioning. In a positive sense, it will be able to channel a wide range of inducements and subsidies to favoured media institutions - those it does not own outright (or control indirectly, as in Jordan). The catalogue of state "carrots" on offer to the Mexican press, for example, could be extended with few alterations to numerous societies in the developing world: "subsidized newsprint, state control of newsstand distribution, circulations inflated by government purchasing and advertising revenues dependent on government advertising, and a revolving-door relationship between newspaper editors and government press offices." Through judicious manipulation of these assets, a more sophisticated authoritarian state can maintain its sway at discreet arm's length, even over "independent" and oppositionist newspapers. "When a subsidy makes up a certain part of your income, and a rather important part, you don't even have to be pressured into acting," said Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program in Moscow. "You just know that if you want to keep it, you have to stick within certain boundaries which basically exist in your head."

Nor does this exhaust the list of positive inducements that the authoritarian state can brandish. It can "encourage" private business to establish or otherwise help sponsor media projects. It can provide direct payoffs to editors and journalists, right down to "supplementary" pay envelopes slipped into the pocket of the reporter on the beat. In underdeveloped societies,

---

23 William A. Orme, Jr., "Overview: From Collusion to Confrontation," in Orme, Jr., ed., A Culture of Collusion: An Inside Look at the Mexican Press (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers/North-South Center Press, 1997), p. 6. In Mexico, the advertising component is supplemented by the institution of the gacetilla, essentially paid political advertisements published as straight news. As for the "revolving-door" relationship between the regime and favoured media institutions, this is, of course, standard even in developed western societies: editors and journalists move easily into important propaganda("public relations") positions, or are drafted to orchestrate election campaigns, or settle into well-remunerated ministerial and sub-ministerial positions (the Information Ministry, perhaps). The authoritarian regime may offer additional important rewards in terms of social prestige and upward mobility - awards, honours, scholarships to study overseas.

24 In Malawi, writes Hall, the "biggest print media institution [the Malawi News] was developed with massive injections of capital from financial institutions acting under political pressure," and benefited from the "guaranteed market" its printing operations (owned by then-President Banda) enjoyed "from organisations and other businesses who were forced to trade with it." Hall, "Economics of Press Freedom," p. 68. The original founding of the South African Citizen by right-wing millionaire Louis Luyt, as a façade for regime sponsorship, can also be cited (Chapter 3).
these are often mainstays of a journalist's or editor's income; plum patrimonial relationships may be highly prized and hotly competed for. The stuff and substance of the reporter's daily life—sources and access to information—can be granted disproportionately to the sycophant: the regime is, after all, the story that often must be reported on, even by more "objective" news standards. It is in any case usually the custodian of the archives, and the security guard at the press conferences.

In the most highly-centralized and repressive political systems, the state's reach is all-pervasive, touching on many more facets of a journalist's life than the ability to earn a living wage:

Like other workers in a centralized system that allocates most jobs regardless of individual preference, [Chinese] journalists know they must work where they are assigned in order to eat. If they give up their jobs, they must also surrender their work unit's housing, food coupons, and other subsidies. Refusing to work on the basis of principle is more than a luxury; in China's work unit system, it can be suicidal.25

Even in the comparatively liberal media climate of Jordan, according to Jordan Times political editor P.V. Vivekanand,

very few [people] have been willing to openly challenge the system. And those that did got in trouble. They were made miserable; their passports were withdrawn; they couldn't travel; they could be questioned for hours and hours, with nothing coming from the questioning—sheer harassment. After a time, you say, "What the hell am I working for? If I have to go and report to someone [in the security apparatus] at nine o'clock every morning, and be there until two o'clock, then be asked to come back the next morning..." You start to think, "Is this the price I'm paying for trying to do an objective, truthful job and live up to the principles of my profession?" Not many people can withstand that test.

For those who conform, though, there are important rewards. The material pressures media institutions often face in politically and economically freer environments may be rendered redundant. As we will see in Chapter 4, Vivekanand's Jordan Times made no profit for nineteen years, surviving thanks to indirect regime sponsorship. The Citizen in South Africa performed at below-survival levels for years, thanks to the (sufficiently) generous expenditures of its Perskor parent (Chapter 3).

The negative inducements the authorities can deploy range from the aggravating to the appalling. Media can be hemmed in by an apparatus of direct censorship, or (more commonly) by indirect censorship exercised through the selective application of media or libel legislation and

intricate licensing restrictions. The material functioning of the media is also exposed at many points to the disciplinary actions of a powerful state or regime. Louise Bourgault’s depiction of Nigerian media provides a veritable catalogue of regime “sticks”:

Nigeria’s press has suffered such indignities as the temporary seizure, banning, and closure of newspapers; harassment of vendors, distributors, and even readers; the hijacking, impounding, and arson of newspaper delivery vans; a shortage of newsprint; and even the firebombing of presses. Bogus editions of the feistier publications – the News and the Sunday Magazine – have even been circulated. Meanwhile, the country’s journalists and publishers have suffered harassment, intimidation (of themselves, their spouses, and their children), detention, arrest without trial, death sentences, and even death by parcel bomb.

In Cuba, similarly, “a nascent independent press” must grapple with the difficulties of procuring “basic supplies, such as pens, notebooks, [and] typewriters” outside state distribution channels. It must also reckon with the regime’s restrictions on ownership of fax machines and computers. The state can pressure businesses, whether state-owned or private, to withhold advertising from oppositionist media. In Dakar, the newspaper Sud Hebdo received just such a cold shoulder, according to its chief editor, Mamadou Oumar Ndiaye:

No business, no corporation, no state-owned company would buy ads in the paper. Why? Most of the people who run state institutions, or even private businesses, are afraid to appear to be supporters of ill-thinking people. The nature of the state in Africa is such that, whatever situation you are in, you still have some sort of links, and you are to some extent dependent on the state. So that you constantly fear retaliation. Even foreign business organisations have the same attitude. Because, in Africa, the state is the largest single contractor.

Under regimes better termed tyrannical than authoritarian, total conformity is enforced in cruder fashion. The trussed and tortured bodies of journalists and editors along Salvadorean and Guatemalan roadsides in the 1980s attested to the willingness of state agents to punish deviation with death. In other, superficially less authoritarian societies – Mexico, Colombia, Algeria – bloodshed is a greater or lesser feature of the journalistic landscape. “Non-regime” actors including gangsters and religious fundamentalists are as likely to be the ones delivering the death-threats or planting the car-bombs. Often, of course, the regime will turn a blind eye to such activities, or collude with them outright, in addition to launching its own crackdowns.

The standard effect of these positive and negative inducements under authoritarianism is for the media – especially broadcast media – to be owned and administered outright, and used to mobilize public support for regime leaders and policies; or, in “softer” authoritarian societies, for media to maintain a superficially autonomous but generally sympathetic orientation towards those leaders and policies. (“This is a government television station,” said one emblematic TV executive, “and we believe that the news should be consistent with the government’s point of view and its national policy.”28) What is truly remarkable is that the trend is not universal. There are numerous examples of media workers seeking to operate outside authoritarian constraints. Often this requires courage on a scale that can only leave the analyst slack-jawed, and that tends, lamentably, to correlate with a shorter lifespan. Under hard authoritarianism, a newspaper29 may manage to establish other sources of sponsorship that help it confront the basic challenge of material survival. The most common are wealthy patrons (as the Chamorro clan in Nicaragua supported La Prensa through the Somoza dictatorship); opposition parties, trade unions, or other political groupings; and “civil society” – an elite or mass readership that can support the enterprise through newsstand sales and associated advertising revenue.

But the harder and/or more underdeveloped the authoritarianism, the rarer are such instances of semi-autonomy and independence. At the extreme, the trend is for media subservience to the regime’s mobilizing agenda to be virtually total. Indeed, it makes little sense to differentiate between press and regime under such circumstances. In Iraq, “the press is the state,” according to one dissident journalist; as another in neighbouring Syria put it, “the press is a branch of government and journalists are government employees.”30 Senior editors are likely to be handpicked party appointees and cronies;31 they may serve in separate capacities as political leaders...

29It is usually a newspaper, given the state’s stranglehold on broadcast media.
31Writes John Murray of the Soviet press: “The entire editorial board of the main government newspaper, Izvestia, was included in the list of political and administrative positions which the party central committee had responsibility for filling. The appointees figured in the list of approved and reliable people suitable for such positions. All newspaper editors as well as the directors of the two national news agencies, TASS and Novosty, were selected in the same way. ... The editors of Pravda and Izvestia were also traditionally members of the party central committee. ... This power to make appointments to senior positions in the press at all levels was the most effective way of controlling what was written in the newspapers. It was more important for the day-to-day running of a newspaper than the more...
and decision-makers. As for journalists, there is little practical difference between their daily task and that of the professional mourners hired to emote at Chinese funerals. What Alec Nove has called “the language of catechism” dominates editorial content. The Stalinist media model described by Nove (and satirized by Orwell) is the classic example. Though for the most part it has been consigned to the ash-heap of history, it still survives in isolated outposts, and retains its capacity to amuse, if not inform or edify. Consider this news roundup offered by the (North) Korean Central News Agency, on a day in February 1997 when the defection of North Korean professor Hwang Jang Yop was dominating headlines worldwide:

Conveyed in papers is news that Kim Jong-Il's Selected Works (vols. 9, 10 and 11) were brought out by the Workers' Party of Korea Publishing House and commemorative stamps and postcards were issued by the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications. ... It is reported in the press that senior party and government officials appreciated the sixth part of Kapf Writers, part 30 of the multi-part feature film The Nation and Destiny. Conspicuous in the press is the February Appeal issued by the Central Committee of the National Democratic Front of South Korea calling upon the South Korean people from all walks of life to brilliantly adorn the 55th birthday of the great General Kim Jong-Il as the anniversary of victory which will long shine in the annals of the nation. Rodong Sinmun [newspaper] reports that the South Korean puppets ceaselessly staged war exercises and committed provocations near the military demarcation line...

And so on, with news of the defection conspicuously absent. Even in a softer autocracy like Jordan, press adoration of senior regime figures may know few bounds:

Your Royal message delighted our hearts which are brimming with love and allegiance to Your Majesty as it reflected Your Majesty's support for the Jordanian journalists who have been relentlessly working under your Hashemite standards and contained pure wisdom and Royal directives for pursuing efforts to follow the sound course in helping the country to achieve its objectives. ... We solemnly pledge to remain true to the cause under your directives working relentlessly and unyieldingly so that Al-Ra'i can remain a platform for free and responsible expression.

So declared the chairman of the board of Al-Ra'i, the Hashemite kingdom's leading establishment daily, in response to King Hussein's fraternal message of congratulation upon the general control exercised by the ideology or other party bodies, or by the largely redundant censors. ... An editor appointed with the blessing of the party made for a compliant 'politically correct' though usually unadventurous newspaper.” Murray, The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, pp. 40-41.


The item was taken from the North Korean World Wide Web page's posting for 14 February 1997. My thanks to Prof. Richard J. Samuels at M.I.T. for unearthing it, and to Pablo Policzer for forwarding Prof. Samuels' post to me.

Mahmoud Al-Kayed, Chairman of the Board, Jordan Press Foundation; "'Al-Ra'i will remain true to Royal directives,'" Jordan Times, 7 June 1993.
paper’s 25th anniversary. It is easy to poke fun at such examples from a western, liberal-democratic perspective. One advantage of an overarching mobilizing framework, however, is that it can be readily extended to western media themselves. What we have described is the mobilizing imperative as it tends to operate under authoritarian, especially underdeveloped, societies: forcing or luring most media into the more or less formal embrace of the state, in return for which media institutions receive the requisites of survival and a range of other useful “carrots.” The “free” media institutions of the western world may be less prone to direct regime intervention and the shackles of underdevelopment alike. In a free-market environment, though, in which they operate for the most part as mainstream corporate enterprises, they are free to fail commercially. Their overriding mobilizing imperative, externally generated by sponsors and shareholders, is profit. Under market conditions, corporations called newspapers have as their primary source of income (hence profit) other corporations — those that advertise in the newspaper’s pages. Large press institutions in these circumstances are seamlessly woven into the fabric of a capitalist society and economy. As important shapers of public opinion, one of their overriding functions, deriving from the profit imperative, is an ideological one: to advocate on behalf of the system that makes profit possible.

In the case of the world’s dominant capitalist power, the United States, this means that newspapers and their staff can no more easily position themselves outside the ideological framework of the market economy than King Hussein’s acolyte at Al-Ra’i could envisage limits to the monarch’s munificence. It is no more conceivable that The New York Times, or any other mainstream U.S. paper, would one day declare itself in favour of socialism than that the Korean Central News Agency would suddenly start singing odes to market capitalism. In fact, it is somewhat less conceivable, since we have one example of an avowedly communist society and media system (China) that has shown considerable flexibility in adapting to market ideologies. The situation in Canada, Western Europe, and Australia is somewhat different than in the U.S., reflecting a more diverse political culture, more varied patterns of economic organization, and a wider range of sources of press sponsorship. Political parties and trade unions, for example, still play a leading role as sponsors of Western European and Scandinavian media; many of these systems also feature direct government intervention in the media, through a vigorous public-broadcasting sector and strict anti-monopoly legislation. In Scandinavia things are carried further still, with the regime providing subsidies “in the public interest” that offset the profit imperative to
some degree for the written press. Analysis of the mobilizing imperative that prevails at a given mainstream press institution needs to be correspondingly more nuanced, though commercial considerations will almost certainly still be primary.

Do these comments unfairly demonize the profit motive? The positive aspect of a commercial mobilizing imperative should be acknowledged. Market mechanisms were crucial in establishing an important measure of political autonomy for the press, and bolstering it in the face of regime pressures – no small accomplishment in world-historical terms. So long as the basic ideological underpinnings – respect for private property and the corporate organization of the economy – are incorporated, press workers may have substantial freedom to debate secondary political and economic issues (such as the actions of a given regime and its policies), and to investigate corruption and other malfeasance, even in the corporate sphere. As far as transitional media are concerned, the most impressive achievements of the press in undermining authoritarianism, or in supporting democratic forces during liberalization and political transition, are rarely ascribed to regime-affiliated media, for obvious reasons. Indeed, they tend to correlate with corporate sponsorship, since this is the most common alternative to direct or indirect regime affiliation. Daniel Berman cites Huang-mao Tien, a Taiwanese political scientist, to the effect that “before the lifting of martial law [in Taiwan], commercial pressures and network competition for popular programming rendered many government restrictions extremely difficult to implement. It was due to the fact that business goals sometimes run counter to political interests, according to Tien, that Taiwan’s newspapers were able to maintain a degree of independence not found in other authoritarian systems.” Berman adds: “the economic interests in a capitalist system may sometimes be the only force powerful enough to override authoritarian political directives.”

We should not, though, exaggerate the degree of autonomy from state or regime that the press enjoys in the market democracies. Regimes remain powerful mobilizing forces unto themselves, deploying a battery of functionaries and representatives to try to bend mainstream media – particularly élite “agenda-setters” and opinion leaders – to their own views and priorities. By varied means, essentially clientelist in nature, they encourage these institutions to respect rules of “acceptable” political discourse that protect powerful interests from public inspection and intervention. And regimes are important players, if arguably secondary ones, when it comes to

35Berman, *Words Like Colored Glass*, pp. 84, 93.
establishing the “rules of the game” within which public discourse occurs. Its regulatory apparatus is normally held in reserve, but in times of war or national emergency, censorship and news management on a massive scale are the norm – even in the most liberal media systems and the most recent crisis settings (for example, the conflicts in the Falkland Islands and the Persian Gulf). The running battles between successive apartheid regimes and the liberal English press in South Africa provide one of the few examples of real disharmony between regime and mainstream media in an emergency situation, and even there, the press was usually careful to operate within the law.

Regimes, corporations, political parties, and trade unions or other public associations are thus the key actors determining the mobilizing imperative of press institutions the world over. But newspapers are also influenced by a range of petty mobilizers whose input may, on a given day and in a particular setting, prove significant or even decisive. In a classic authoritarian system, the petty mobilizer will likely be a functionary dispatched by the state or regime, usually to ensure a smooth translation of the regime’s mobilizing agenda into daily editorial content. Occasionally, usually as a reflection of a softer authoritarian system, such functionaries may clash with editors or journalists, for reasons to be considered shortly. Regime functionaries also play a role in the market democracies, as noted. Here, though, the petty mobilizers are more likely to be corporate functionaries of one kind or another: the “advertisers, public relations officers, and commercial managers,” as Ken Owen put it in the South African context, who “want to slip propaganda into the newspaper in the guise of ‘news’.” They compete with each other for the newspaper’s attention and favour (more favourable advertising terms, greater publicity for corporate products or services, and so on). Newspapers also court them, assiduously – most obviously for the advertising revenues whose disposition they control. These varied architects and representatives of the mobilizing imperative, then, combine to exercise the greatest influence over press functioning. Indeed, the influence of the mobilizing imperative is so obvious that many media systems – particularly those in highly authoritarian and/or underdeveloped societies – are seen as responding

---


37 Ken Owen, “Decline and fall of the editors,” Sunday Times, 29 January 1995. Owen considers “editing a newspaper ... [to be] often a matter of fighting off” these petty mobilizers – a task that is rendered more difficult in his view “when editors must function under the supervision of boastful and aggressive commercial managers.”
to little else. In my view, though, the mobilizing imperative rarely tells the whole story — even in classic authoritarian systems where all media of note are owned and administered by the state or regime. Other influences, priorities, and practices must be factored in — elements that do not result directly from the newspaper's struggle for survival, nor respond to the mobilizing agenda implemented by powerful sponsors, managers, and (usually) senior editors. I group these factors and considerations under the rubric of the professional imperative, which I locate for the most part within press institutions themselves, notably at the level of journalists and editors. These are the actors who have the task of producing the day-to-day "output" of the institution, at least what can be squeezed in among the advertisements. Senior editors, as already mentioned, occupy something of an ambiguous position straddling the two imperatives. On the one hand, they are the proximate architects of the paper's editorial output, and the key "gatekeepers" when it comes to maintaining the integrity and cohesion of the institution. But they are themselves neither owners nor bean-counters, and may very well find themselves on the hot seat if and when mobilizing and professional imperatives clash.

THE PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVE

There are two forces. On the one hand, there is outside interference in terms of money, influence, direct control, and so on. On the other hand, there is a corporatist spirit within the community of journalists, and professional training, which is very strong. So every competent journalist has a kind of internal contradiction.

— Boris Kagarlitsky, Russian intellectual

We had to reconcile what we construed as sensitive reporting, as far as the government was concerned, with a minimum level of integrity.

— Walid Sa‘di, former chief editor, The Jordan Times

Conceptions of "professionalism" are inherently slippery. But there is little doubt that the art of "reporting" has established itself as a profession, and often as a distinguishable "estate," in

---

38 The advertising side of the newspaper's operations responds much more completely to the demands of ownership and senior management than do the agents of the professional imperative — journalists and editors. For this reason, I would class advertising departments with the other administrative and bureaucratic offshoots of the mobilizing imperative — though its role and significance to the operation will vary, depending on the priorities of the institution's sponsors and the relative importance of ad income to the paper's material functioning.

39 More contingent still is the role of "director," a position that in some media systems combines elements of chief editor, publisher, and general manager, thereby blurring blurring editorial and managerial divisions.
diverse political systems around the world. With this process of professionalization, and the diffusion or imposition of western models of modernization throughout the world, has come a greater routinization of journalistic behaviour, guided by a distinctive set of professional norms, standards, and strategies. Thus, any evaluation of a “professional imperative” must see it as “part of a general trend ... toward conceptions of administrative rationality and neutral expertise,” beginning in the 19th-century Western Europe and the United States.\textsuperscript{40}

The expression of such a “professional imperative” seems contingent on a diversity of other political, social, and economic forces as well. The version of “professionalism” propounded by U.S. media was likewise an offshoot of distinctive patterns of sponsorship and mobilization during the nineteenth century. Michael Schudson has argued, for example, that the professional values of North American journalists were conditioned by the mobilizing imperative of commercial success.\textsuperscript{41} Advertisers replaced parties and regimes as the leading source of sustenance; advertisers wanted readers; and to broaden their constituency newspapers (and also wire services) increasingly adopted a less partisan, more “objective” tone in their coverage. The appeal to a mass audience encouraged an emphasis on human-interest issues rather than the narrow concerns of political and economic elites. Over time, these trends coalesced into a “cultural form, with distinct technical codes and practical rules,” according to Hackett and Zhao. These included “the attribution of opinion to sources, the construction of information in an appropriate sequence and format (the news story), the presentation of both or all major sides or viewpoints on public issues, and adherence to prevailing standards of decency and good taste.”\textsuperscript{42}

There is little doubt that professional self-conceptions are strongly shaped and constrained by the level of development that prevails in a given society and media system. The sense of professional self-worth that journalists and editors feel tends to arise and increase in tandem with the broader development of a media system and a society itself. Certainly, underdevelopment


\textsuperscript{42}Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, \textit{Sustaining Democracy? Journalism and the Politics of Objectivity} (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1998), p. 41. The authors remind us that the imposition of one professional “norm” may displace other viable ones. In the U.S. case, for instance, “Dependence on advertising revenue helped to marginalize the radical press and bolster a more conservative version of objectivity, pushing content away from the radical implications of the Enlightenment democratic discourse and towards a blander, less politicized non-partisanship” (p. 69).
induces a hangdog cast, professionally speaking. When the material infrastructure or finished
product is ramshackle, journalism is much less likely to be perceived as an honourable career to
pursue – often with good reason, and in good measure because of the professional compromises
(corruption, “moonlighting”) that may be necessary to win a basic subsistence. Underdevelopment
also affects the institutionalization of journalism, an important factor in instilling and bolstering
professional self-esteem. The evolution of press organs into at least semi-autonomous institutions;
the growth of unions and professional associations for journalists, editors, and publishers; the
evolution of internal “watchdogs” on press conduct – all these may serve to demarcate the
profession of journalism from occupations that otherwise might be closely related: publicist,
stenographer, tout.\footnote{The usual objects of journalists’ associations are: To improve the working conditions, status, training and qualifications of journalists; to defend the principles of Press Freedom and to protect journalists from harassment or any outside interference which adversely affects their working lives; [and] to deal with questions affecting the professional conduct of members and the maintenance of journalistic standards ...” Jeanette Minnie, “The Role of Professional Media Associations,” in \textit{Media for Democracy in Malawi}, p. 110.}

We cannot, however, posit a simple causal link between development and professionalism.
First of all, professional tradeoffs and compromises may be felt every bit as powerfully in an
underdeveloped media environment like Nicaragua as in a more developed one, as we will see
shortly. Second, as Jae-Kyoung Lee has argued in his analysis of the “rather disappointing or even
dire record” of East Asian media, “the fundamental assumption ... that economic growth will
translate into a concomitant increase of press freedom must be either abandoned or radically
modified.” He proposes the addition of an historical variable to consider the strength of “civil
society” or “the public sphere” in bolstering the professional imperative. Because newspapers “are
literally grounded in the history and culture of a society, an adequate analysis of them will yield rich
insights about how institutions of public communication have evolved in a country and why the
country has come to have a certain type of national media system rather than other types.”\footnote{“The countervailing trend, of course, is for journalists to become more “institutionalized” in every sense: too co-opted by the material carrots on offer, especially from regime sources, to play the critical or independent role which they avow and claim to aspire to.} A particularly important factor appears to be the presence or absence of an “independent” press
tradition in a country’s past. Another meta-environmental variable, media culture, is therefore worth

\footnote{Jae-Kyoung Lee, “Press freedom and national development: Toward a re-conceptualization,” \textit{Gazette} 48 (1991), pp. 155, 162.}
factoring in; it would be difficult to examine the evolution of Barricada, Izvestia, or the Johannesburg Star without understanding something of the impact of La Prensa on the culture of Nicaraguan reporting; the role of the “fat journals” (толстые журналы) in 19th-century Russian journalism; and the formative influence of the “English model” of liberal journalism on the English-language press of South Africa.46

“THE MORAL ECONOMY OF JOURNALISM”

Journalists start to realize after a couple of years of experience that there is a thing called responsibility. When you write something, you should think about the people who will read it, because you can change people’s lives. You should remember that some people read newspapers as though they were the only true opinions about something. You should always bear that in mind.

— Irina Petrovskaya, Media Columnist, Izvestia

Beyond the political, social, and economic influences discussed above, are we justified in isolating an ethical and epistemological foundation to the professional imperative? In recent years, commentators have begun to speak of the creation of a “global civil society” or body of “world public opinion,” built around core values like respect for life, human rights, and opposition to war.47 In the same way, global conceptions of professional journalism seem increasingly to have moved towards consensus on what might be called a “moral economy of journalism.” The reference here, of course, is to James Scott’s classic study of peasant rebellion in Southeast Asia.48 The incorporation of Scott’s work into the following discussion is offered more as an extended analogy than a serious attempt at theory-building. But to the extent that issues of material — and existential — “subsistence” lie at the heart of peasant rebellion and professional journalism alike, perhaps these thoughts will at least take up residence in the outer suburbs of theory.

46“Media culture” is, of course, a dependent as well as independent variable, reflecting, for example, degrees of authoritarianism versus the vitality of civil society or the “public sphere.”

47According to Howard Frederick, “world public opinion: desires peace through international law; holds governments responsible for averting the horrors of nuclear war; opposes torture and inhuman treatment; opposes the persecution of minority beliefs; opposes discrimination based on race or gender; supports the preservation of a sustainable environment; supports resolution of conflict through nonviolent means; supports action to eliminate hunger and poverty. . . This is not to say that all people or leaders support these goals, but they are increasingly conscious of them.” Frederick, Global Communication & International Relations (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993), p. 272.

Scott speaks of a “right to subsistence” as foundational to peasant society. Its “operating assumption ... is that all members of a community have a presumptive right to a living so far as local resources will allow. This subsistence claim is morally based on the common notion of a hierarchy of human needs.” While it is true that “the means for physical survival” will take priority (our own underdevelopment variable?), the individual does make a “minimal claim” on the wider society and the governing political authority. If professional journalists, too, have something of a “minimal claim” to make on mobilizers, it appears to centre on a degree of institutional autonomy and individual autonomy within the institution. Both are normative and prescriptive concerns, rather than fundamentally practical or bureaucratic ones.

Any ideal “autonomy” is, of course, a chimera. The term appears to reflect certain core human values (survival, freedom from oppression), but its modern expression derives from broadly western conceptions of the individual in society, and the divisibility of that society into discrete “estates,” “institutions,” “corporations.” To the extent, then, that such concepts underpin a growing global consensus, they express and advance First World hegemony in the economic and cultural spheres. The micro-institutional analysis in the case-study sections, moreover, provides dozens if not hundreds of examples of the professional imperative tamed and subverted by powerful – more powerful – mobilizing forces. I contend nonetheless that a major force shaping the professional imperative is a set of normative and ethical principles which are not simply reducible to material self-interest:

* an adherence to the values and procedures of liberal democracy and the rule of law (except where law is administered by tyranny);
* a relatively high degree of autonomy from state and regime – a “watchdog” role vis-à-vis ruling authorities and other loci of power;
* service to readers and the public good more generally (the “social responsibility” model of press functioning, with developmentalist overtones in many parts of the Third World);

---

50 In a global-historical sense, perhaps; or in the context of the evolution of press-regime relations in a given national media system.
51 Also, perhaps, with a “feedback loop” or “boomerang effect.” One senses that western media since the 1960s have become more attuned to the developmentalist concerns of Third World states, and to minority and social-justice concerns at home.
• consultation of a diversity of sources and accurate representation of their views; and finally,

• "objectivity": the separation of fact and opinion, story and reporter, news and editorial content, with a ritualized language of "distancing" from one's subject material.

This last concept is probably the most contentious, and I would hardly deny that it varies widely across existing media systems, even western ones. It is doubtlessly more muted in European than in U.S. media, for example, and may also be less prominent in media systems where developmentalist influences are strongest. Recognizing this especially highly-contested character, I place "objectivity" in quotation marks throughout this work.

The expression of these core values is limited by authoritarianism and other mobilizing constraints. The surface of relations between media institutions and authoritarian regimes, for example, may be very placid for a very long time. In The Moral Economy of the Peasant, Scott likewise stresses how rare and difficult is fullscale peasant rebellion, calling it "one of the least likely consequences of exploitation ... To speak of rebellion is ... to forget both how rare these moments are and how historically exceptional it is for them to lead to a successful revolution." The very "reliance on state-supported forms of patronage and assistance" that often pins peasants into a subservient relationship with the authorities is also enough to mute most expressions of a professional imperative in journalism. As a result, in both sets of circumstances, lesser means tend to be found of evading or exiting constraints, be they oriented to material subsistence or professional self-expression. The peasant strategies cited by Scott—exit through migration,

---

52Janos Horvát summarizes the differences between European and American models as follows: "In the United States, most professional journalists see themselves as passive or neutral, confining themselves to the function of a neutral broker between politics and the audience. But common in Europe is the concept of the active or participant journalist, the journalist who sees himself as someone who wants to influence politics and audiences according to his own political beliefs. This sense is even stronger in Eastern Europe, where journalists are closer to artists and writers, and many poets and writers contribute regularly to daily publications. Together with the journalists, they feel a sort of a messianic vocation: They want to become a mouthpiece for the people." Horvát, "The East European Journalist," Journal of International Affairs, 45:1 (Summer 1991), p. 196. If we wish to give diversity its due, however, we should avoid overstressing it. If some combination of "objectivity," independence from the state, and public service is seen as foundational to the moral economy, it is evident in both systems. Jane Leftwich Curry, for example, argues that the model of professional functioning underpinning the "European press tradition" emphasized the role of the press as "a partisan force that accept[ed] responsibility for the 'good of the society,"' a self-conception that was powerful enough to spill over even to the strictly-regulated media of European state-socialist societies like Poland. Curry, Poland's Journalists, p. 4.

53Scott, Moral Economy, pp. 193, 203.
“raiding the cash economy,” “growing symbolic withdrawal” – strongly resemble professional strategies used to circumvent mobilizing restrictions under authoritarian regimes or corporate management.  

Is it appropriate to compare the strategies of peasants pushed to the very boundaries of subsistence, with the conundrums that confront the professional journalist in the face of sponsors’ mobilizing constraints? The suburban character of this analysis, theoretically speaking, again looms large. But I nevertheless suggest the “moral economy” analogy may be pushed further still. For one thing, Scott is careful to point out that the peasant’s priorities are not purely material, even though they must always be primarily material. “The right to subsistence,” in other words, is more than a matter of rice in the belly. This is implicit in the “growing symbolic withdrawal” that Scott cites as a major means of resisting change to traditional subsistence strategies. Symbolic, cultural, and ideational factors are also vitally significant. Even if repression renders them all but invisible to the outside observer, they may be essential to generating alternative norms, modes of analysis, and counter-cultural practices that can blossom with extraordinary suddenness into popular upheavals and politico-economic transformations, including those of the modern era of political transition. The final paragraph of Scott’s work could hardly be more emphatic on this point:

_It is especially at the level of culture that a defeated or intimidated peasantry may nurture its stubborn moral dissent from an elite-created social order. This symbolic refuge is not simply a source of solace in a precarious life, not simply an escape. It represents an alternative moral universe in embryo – a dissident subculture, an existentially true and just one, which helps unite its members as a human community and as a community of values._

In this sense, it is as much a beginning as an end.  

If such an “alternative universe” exists, one might expect it to appear on the stage precisely or particularly at times of wider stress and transition, according to Scott. When “a worsening balance of exchange” in the peasant’s relations with elite forces “menaces crucial elements of

---

54The symbolic dimension aside (it is addressed more or less immediately), I am referring in the case of mass media to journalists’ strategies of subsistence and subsistence-supplementing: freelance work, “moonlighting,” stringing for foreign news-agencies, etc. It is worth quoting in context Scott’s claim of a “growing symbolic withdrawal,” employed as a strategy of daily resistance: “I believe it is possible to find clear evidence of growing symbolic withdrawal in the culture of those who are exploited but have little prospect of revolt. The values of an oppressed group, in this sense, are one of the clearest tests of their symbolic alignment or of their symbolic opposition to elite values and homilies.” Scott, *Moral Economy*, p. 231. The foot-soldier culture that develops among journalists on the ground, defining itself in opposition to editorial and managerial elites within the media institution, might provide a useful comparison.

subsistence routines," stretching "existing subsistence patterns ... to the breaking point," Scott argues that "we may expect explosions of rage and anger." For professional journalists, of course, the "explosions" — if they come — are more likely to be explosions of verbiage than of violence.

And because the dimension of material subsistence is somewhat reduced, the explosions perhaps are less likely to be "angry" ones, and more likely to be opportunistic explorations of newly-opened cultural and professional spaces. In general, though, there can be little doubt that a context of broader societal crisis prompts journalists, along with other self-aware sectors or "estates," to re-examine core principles and their traditional institutional relationships with both elite and popular forces. The result may be a surprisingly gradual evolution (as with *The Citizen* — see Chapter 3). But it may also involve the radical reorientation of editorial policies and re-evaluation of target constituencies. And the process of institutional transformation may entail a severing of longstanding relationships with mobilizers, or the defenestración of the professional corps as mobilizers lash back. Very often the trajectory is dramatically congruent — analogous, at least — to the kind of peasant unrest Scott analyzes. It also bears comparison with the often-crushing attempts of elites to "mobilize" peasants behind new, usually more intensive modes of exploitation.

The importance of crisis moments and transitional junctures, in Scott's view, means that "we can assess the intimidating effect of coercion by seeing what happens when this constraint is lifted." We might extend this further: only when constraints are lifted does the warp-and-woof of mobilizing and professional imperatives become clearer. Political transition does not always have a liberalizing or democratizing thrust — far from it. But my argument in Chapter 6 will be that it usually does. It tends to open new "spaces" in which media professionals feel more comfortable.

---


57 The simple profusion of media in times of transition, described in Chapter 6, should also be predictable according to this general framework. All such generation of cultural alternatives depends on communication first and foremost. While Scott points out that peasant channels of communications tend to be informal (e.g., folk-ballads, gossip, graffiti, religious mysticism and millenarian movements), mass media would seem to be among the most powerful formal means of presenting and debating such alternatives.

58 The fact that new economic and social "regimes" of this type are often more onerous than their predecessors — as with the agonizing transformations from subsistence to commercial agriculture in the 19th century — represents the point at which the analogy breaks down, at least if the generally liberalizing thrust of recent political transitions is acknowledged.

relating the constraints under which they used to operate: these are now safely in the past. It may, too, prompt greater openness about the constraints under which media professionals still operate — in the era of transition itself. To the extent that such an evaluation relies on subjective testimony, it must be alive to the self-serving and self-justifying rhetorical tropes that all human beings engage in. Cross-checking and buttressing with secondary sources can go a considerable distance towards offsetting these difficulties, however. And careful attention to such testimony offers some real advantages, providing a wealth of anecdotal information about the diverse ways in which the professional imperative and its “moral economy” component may be manifested and entrenched.

**Components of the “Moral Economy”**

To see the basic tenets of the “moral economy of journalism” writ large, consider the New Editorial Profile promulgated by *Barricada’s* Editorial Council and approved by the Sandinista National Directorate in December 1990. The drafters of the profile pledged, among other things, to move towards

- a balanced journalism which breaks with the unilateral nature of information predominant in Nicaragua. That is to say, the consultation of various sources in covering news, the presentation of alternative opinions, etc., in order to gain credibility and professional quality.
- ... To establish a solid relationship with the public which is linked to the daily. Their minor and major concerns and demands — whether individual or social — should always receive privileged attention. ... To formally separate opinion from information, and to adopt a necessary distance in treatment of informational subjects. This does not imply that information should be stripped of all its political significance [*intencionalidad política*] ...

In a very different media environment – South Africa – that paradigmatic English daily, *The Star*, proclaimed in its Code of Ethics a vision that with one (italicized) exception was in every respect typical of the consensus that has evolved among media in the developed market democracies:

1. In its reporting and comment, *The Star* should be accurate, fair, honest and frank.
2. *The Star* should aim to give all sides of an issue, by means of balanced presentation without bias, distortion, undue emphasis or omission.
3. *The Star* should be independent of government, commerce or any other vested interest.
4. *The Star* should expose wrongdoing, the misuse of power and unnecessary secrecy.

*New Editorial Profile of Barricada*, unpublished internal document, 1990, privately supplied. The full list of ten guidelines for the *Barricada* autonomy project, of which three are excerpted here, is presented in Chapter 2.
5. *The Star* should encourage racial co-operation, and pursue a policy aimed at enhancing the welfare and progress of all sections of the nation.⁶¹

Fine words — but also more than that, in my view. The moral economy, with its “objective” epistemological essence, responds in part to the desire of media workers to reconcile the inevitable (and primary) mobilizing imperative with their professional and ethical desire to *tell the truth*. We have already seen examples of the kind of dissonance that can result when journalists are asked to bend reality too far to suit sponsors’ wishes. For another, consider the plight of *Barricada* journalist Gabriela Selser, dispatched in the early 1980s to report on the fate of the indigenous population of Nicaragua’s Atlantic Coast. Thousands of Miskito villagers were being forcibly relocated away from the war zone along the Honduran border, where it was feared they would fall (or had already fallen) under the influence of *contra* rebel forces. *Barricada’s* editors, said Selser,

> sent me to [the resettlement camp] the day or the day after the people had been moved, supposedly to write about how nice [the camp] was. The problem was the people didn’t want to live there. The women were crying, accusing the Army of having forcibly removed them from their houses. They asked us [journalists] to tell the truth: that they weren’t doing well there. ... They missed the river, their trees, their houses. I remember I came back really traumatized. We had very strong discussions at the newspaper about how to focus the story on this. We managed to write a story in which everything was outlined, but sort of between the lines, in a disguised way. For example, we said it was natural [those resettled] would feel badly, but they’d get used to it. I never agreed with that [approach] ...

The dissonance here was between reality as the journalist understood it, and the editorial “output” that best suited the mobilizing requirement of the sponsor — in this case the Sandinista Front. A rationalist or positivist epistemology (call it what one will) appears necessary in order for such a “moral-economic” crisis to arise. *There must be the assumption, and the professional conviction, that reality is not infinitely malleable.* Only if this is the case can that reality be seen to vary from the sponsor’s requirements or preferences; only then can the gulf between mobilizing and professional imperatives give rise to anxiety, unease, or “trauma.” One can see from the example, and numerous

---

⁶¹*The Star’s Code of Ethics,* *The Star,* 7 March 1995. See also the accompanying “Code of Conduct for surveys, advertising features.” Across town at *Sowetan,* the in-house credo reads: “Our purpose as journalists is to inform, not to indoctrinate. We hold sacred our people’s democratic right to know the truth. Therefore we must always be objective and unbiased. Our own opinions, beliefs and emotions must not influence how we report news. When we express opinions we must clearly identify them as such. We must expose injustice, corruption and wrongdoing whenever we find them. The welfare of all our people, whether or not their beliefs are the same as ours, is our deepest concern. We must be compassionate. Above all, we must be fair.” The statement is copied from a posted notice in the *Sowetan* newsroom.

others that will be cited throughout this work, how delicate is the task of juggling mobilizing and professional considerations in the task of daily journalism: how fraught the strategy is with pitfalls; how readily it can give rise to tension and discord, and sometimes open conflict, between the custodians of the respective imperatives.

We must ask, lastly, how applicable this framework is to the media of the developed west. They are not a focus of this work, but one of their offshoots – South Africa’s English press – very much is. Moreover, all the case studies offer examples of press institutions moving towards western models, usually as a reflection of declining or defunct regime sponsorship and the move to a market economy. We do not need to expend much energy demonstrating that the professional imperative as described is relevant to western settings, since the classical version of it originated there. But can one meaningfully speak of conflicts between the prevailing mobilizing imperative – usually profit – and the tenets of the professional imperative and the moral economy?

My conviction is that such a framing is valid, perhaps no less in the market democracies than in authoritarian (at least soft-authoritarian) systems. The fact that newspapers must both report on and derive the bulk of their income from large corporations (via advertising) is a situation tailor-made for quandaries and conflicts. Consider, for example, the regular clash between advertising departments, which belong to the category of “petty mobilizers,” and editorial departments. Most journalists and editors know that the advertising department is indispensable to the newspaper’s continued existence, and hence to the reliability of their paycheques. But journalists and editors in market systems also tend to feel that advertising – the visible expression of the newspaper’s profit imperative – is not the primary reason the paper is read. Whatever “brand loyalty” the institution commands among readers is seen to derive mainly from the efforts of editors and reporters. Those on the editorial side regularly see themselves as resisting the encroachments of “bean-counters.” Kaizer Nyatsumba, political editor of the Johannesburg Star, captures well this sometimes-fractious interplay of mobilizing and professional imperatives:

I do believe very strongly that those who run newspapers are not running charities, but business ventures. Newspapers anywhere in the world [sic] have got to be profitable and self-sufficient. But journalists anywhere in the world – those who are regarded as serious journalists – will be very unhappy about a situation where those who own newspapers only want them to rake in money and make lots of profits, while editorial space shrinks. It’s something about which I feel quite passionately. The thinking here now is that the newspaper must make money. I have no quarrel with that, provided part of the profits made are plowed back into the paper – to pay people well, to create more editorial space.
The moment we lose space, then I think most of us will be unhappy. Because then [management] people [at The Star] would be more concerned about profits than about serving the public, and that's an important responsibility that should not be shirked at all.

The perceived encroachment of commerce into editorial deliberations was in fact central to the high-profile resignation of The Star's editor, Richard Steyn, in 1994. A number of other instances of such dissonance are cited in the South African case-study (Chapter 3); the relationship between the press and the corporate sphere in that country has perhaps been even more cozy than the western norm. More generally, radical critics of western, especially U.S., press performance have tended to focus on the intimacy of ties between mainstream newspapers and corporate and/or political elites. These critics argue, with considerable validity in my opinion, that the pressures and constraints of the profit imperative are not profoundly different, in nature or impact, from those brought to bear in more formally authoritarian societies.

The critics' views are worth exploring a little further here, since it is in their writings that we might expect to find the harshest denunciation of the idea of a "professional imperative" or a "moral economy." What objections might the radical be expected to pose to this framing, whether it is applied to the developed market democracies or underdeveloped authoritarian systems? Perhaps that the professional imperative is merely a self-delusion – posturing of the type that any publicist or propagandist is bound to engage in, the better to harmonize reality with the warped version that is their stock-in-trade. Radical critiques do, indeed, usefully stress the range of mobilizing imperatives that help us to extend our analysis beyond authoritarian and/or underdeveloped societies. But it is notable that, to take a well-known example, the "propaganda model" of Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky does not rule out the existence or validity of a professional imperative and a "moral economy of journalism." One might be surprised to find Chomsky writing elsewhere that

The general obedience of the [U.S.] media does not approach full subservience, much to the distress of "conservatives," and there is a tradition of professionalism of reporting that is also lacking in much of the world. An American journalist is as likely to give an accurate account of what he or she sees as any in the world, far more than most; though what they look for, and how they perceive it given a background of indoctrination, and what the editors will tolerate or select, are different matters.64

64Noam Chomsky, Turning the Tide: The U.S. and Latin America (Montréal: Black Rose, 1986), p. 239. Emphasis
"The mass media," Chomsky told an audience in British Columbia, "are complicated institutions with internal contradictions. So on the one hand there's the commitment to indoctrination and control, but on the other hand there's the sense of professional integrity." It is not difficult to find similar comments scattered throughout the work of other radical critics. Michael Parenti, for example, writes:

Journalists who believe they are autonomous professionals expect to be able to report things as they see them. If the appearance of journalistic independence is violated too often and too blatantly by superiors, this can have a demystifying effect, reminding the staff that they are not working in a democratic institution but one controlled from the top with no regard for professional standards as they understand them. To avoid being criticized as censors and intrusive autocrats, publishers and network bosses sometimes grant their news organizations some modicum of independence, relying on hiring, firing, and promotional policies and more indirect controls. They might show themselves willing to make an occasional concession so as to minimize the amount of overt intrusion. The idea of a free press is more a myth than a reality, but myths can have an effect on things and can serve as a resource of power. ... At times superiors can be prevailed upon to make concessions.

From a less radical perspective, Ben Bagdikian contends that today's "journalists are not only better educated, but ... are more concerned with individual professional ethics than would have seemed possible fifty years ago. The conventions against lying, fictionalizing, and factual inaccuracy are strong and widespread. ... The devotion to accurate facts and the rarity of suppression of dramatic public events are strengths of American reporting."

---


Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of News Media*, Second Edition (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), pp. 215-16. Elsewhere Parenti argues that "The news must be packaged so as to be (1) pleasing to press moguls and other politico-economic elites; and (2) informative and believable to the public. But these two functions are not always automatically reconcilable" (p. 218). One does not want to downplay the implications of Parenti's reference to "the appearance of journalistic independence"; but his picture of the relative power relationships, the location of an overriding (mobilizing) imperative in "superiors," "publishers and network bosses," and the corresponding location of a professional imperative among "journalists" and "staff," seems fairly close to my own framing. His recognition that "resource[s] of power" also exist for the custodians of the latter imperative serves as a useful corrective to overly-schematic analyses of the propaganda function of North American media.

In sum, it appears as though a professional imperative not only figures in much radical or quasi-radical commentary; but that it actually constitutes the very ideal of press functioning which they espouse. It is the chasm between the professional imperative and professional performance that radical critics generally assail – not the existence or validity of the imperative itself.

In the following sections, I attempt a taxonomy of the most common strategies by which journalists and editors seek to express the professional imperative under authoritarianism, and the structural conditions most likely to encourage that expression. It would be deeply misleading to extend the analysis to developed, liberal-democratic, market-oriented mass media without caveats and qualifications. But it would also be a mistake to view authoritarian and/or underdeveloped media systems as somehow sui generis, immune to the kind of conflicts between the imperatives that are more plainly visible in democratic systems. We will return to this point later in the chapter, and explore it further in the South Africa case-study in Chapter 3. For now, the question is: how do press workers, confronted with the panoply of constraints discussed, seek to counter them with a "professional" agenda of their own?

**Taking advantage of splits in sponsors’ ranks**

With the Sandinista Front divided and dislocated after its election defeat in 1990, *Barricada* found the ideal moment to forge a more autonomous agenda that allowed greater breathing-space for the professional concerns staff had long harboured. *Izvestia* in Russia likewise seized the opportunity (and responded to the challenge) presented by the collapse of the USSR to establish itself as one of the most "professional" dailies of the post-Soviet era. Newspapers the world over seek to exploit such rifts within sponsors’ ranks in order to widen the professional sphere of their operations. What are the sources of these splits in sponsors’ ranks? Often personalistic power struggles seem the most prominent consideration. They can also result, though, from differing visions of the relationship between regime and civil society, especially as this pertains to the desirable scope of civil freedoms (note the clash between duros and blandos – hard-liners and soft-liners - isolated by O’Donnell and Schmitter).

Whatever its roots, disunity or factionalism among sponsors’ ranks is a key way in which constraints of the kind we have discussed can be handled or circumvented. But, by the same token, it is also a key way in which the professional agenda can be advanced or expanded. We have seen that journalists and editors alike can exploit splits in sponsors’ ranks to present a more independent face to the world. What are the structural conditions most likely to encourage this kind of activity? How does the public sphere – understood here to include all outlets for communicative action, from street demonstrations to radio broadcasts – itself stand to gain from such activity? How do the structural conditions of the media systems that have been discussed in this chapter encourage or discourage such activity? These are issues that we will address in later chapters, as we explore the different ways in which constraints can be handled or circumvented in authoritarian and underdeveloped media systems.
sponsors is a leading contributor to periods of liberalization and “thaw,” almost always exemplified in the media above all other fora. At such times, the taboos that buttress authoritarian rule are suddenly opened to transgression, and journalists move to the forefront of the societal ferment. Thaws, of course, can unleash avalanches — the point at which the analyst might, with the benefit of hindsight, locate the onset of a fully-fledged political transition. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the behaviour of the media, especially the press, at such points may be crucial to the liberalization or transition as a whole. It is undeniably central to any understanding of transformations those press institutions themselves experience.

The South African case-study offers a somewhat novel variant on this theme. The split in sponsors’ ranks occurred at the level of societal elites broadly viewed, rather than among the owners and directors of English press institutions per se. A substantial component of that elite, indeed the economically dominant group – English Whites – spent more than four decades deeply estranged from their politically-dominant Afrikaner counterparts. The result was the positioning of the English press as an opposition voice, one that took pride in its “professional” sensibilities as against the overtly propagandistic role of Afrikaner media. There is much more to the story of press-as-opposition, which will be considered at length in Chapter 3; but it was clearly the lack of elite unity that permitted the English press to play whatever critical and progressive role it did in undermining the apartheid system.

It is also possible to speak of a split among sponsors as reflecting divided priorities among groups that otherwise appear coherent or unified. Barricada in Nicaragua offers a notable example. Its autonomy experiment relied above all on uncertainty and dislocation within its Sandinista sponsor: even those figures (such as former president Daniel Ortega) who would later prove decisive in the dismantling of that project initially felt bound to support it. Likewise, when the ortodoxo contingent established hegemony and an artificial “unity” within Sandinista ranks, the professional space opened to Barricada was doomed, and finally — in October 1994 — closed.

**Exploiting a “Soft” Authoritarianism**

“Soft” authoritarianism generates a host of challenges and constraints — but also a number of opportunities — that strongly influence the expression of the professional imperative. The Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, for instance, was an unusually tolerant and open one, providing a
space for opposition media unusual not just for left-revolutionary regimes in this century, but even compared with liberal-democratic societies in conditions of war or national emergency. The effect on the FSLN’s official organ was multifaceted. The paper was able to develop its own sense of professional identity— and then to lobby the leadership of the Front, successfully, for greater institutional room to express that identity. These negotiations presaged the more dramatic transformations of January 1991; they would hardly have been countenanced in, for example, Castro’s Cuba, the left-revolutionary society that was closest to Nicaragua in both the geographic and the political sense. Unknown elsewhere, too, was the existence of a broad range of opposition media throughout the Sandinista years in power. The most prominent opposition voice during the revolutionary decade was Violeta Chamorro’s La Prensa, an institution with deep roots in the country, and a leading player in the struggle against the Somoza dictatorship. After July 1979, La Prensa sundered internally, giving rise to the pro-revolutionary El Nuevo Diario and a more conservative version of La Prensa that came out in strong, often bilious opposition to the Sandinista authorities. At the height of the contra war, it went so far as to send senior editorial staff to Washington to lobby for aid to the rebels, a near-treasonous action that led to the paper’s closure for 15 months. For most of the revolutionary decade, however, La Prensa served as Barricada’s principal opponent and competitor. This “reflex relationship” between the two papers, as Barricada’s director Carlos Fernando Chamorro referred to it, was a powerful spur to Barricada’s professional imperative; staffers spoke of a sense of disorientation in both mobilizing and professional senses when the paper was banned.

South Africa under apartheid should similarly be classed as a “soft” authoritarianism, at least as far as the White opposition and English-language press were concerned. Certainly its repression was serious and systematic enough to cripple the development of an independent Black press. But the degree of latitude the regime permitted intra-elite opposition was again unusual for an authoritarian polity. It was certainly decisive in enabling the press to play the role that it did in confronting apartheid and developing an “English model” of liberal-democratic journalism. The third case-study country examined in this book, Jordan, likewise merits the “soft” designation. Even before 1989, the country had a reputation as one of the most liberal in the Arab world, perhaps matched only by Kuwait and antebellum Lebanon. Regime control over print media was diffuse rather than direct, and the system of prior censorship and state agents in the newsroom was
a sporadic rather than pervasive feature. All these factors were vital in allowing the regime-affiliated press to take halting steps towards greater independence, as describe in Chapter 4; and in permitting the rise of tabloid and political-party media after the liberalization process began in mid-1989.

"PIGGY-BACKING"

When reformist impulses arise in authoritarian systems — if the blandos gain the upper hand over the duros, usually as a reflection of wider popular opposition and unrest — then newspapers and their staff will often be quick to seize the opportunities presented to downplay mobilizing considerations and expand the reach of the professional imperative. They will often seek to “piggy-back” on the forces of reform, through a variety of overt and coded strategies. For example, journalists may selectively cite examples from the mythologized past in order to align themselves, in readers’ eyes, with reformist or liberalizing elements. (They may also, of course, align themselves with the most reactionary elements — but not, I would argue, on grounds of professional principle.) In the best-known cases, the Soviet Union and China, the linguistic intricacy of these strategies spawned an entire cottage industry devoted to reading the tea-leaves of the “totalitarian” press, looking for cracks in the elite edifice.

Another “piggy-backing” tactic that deserves consideration is the exploitation of a privileged relationship with a powerful or dominant regime actor — usually manifested in the relationship between the actor and the press organ’s director or chief editor. The degree of professional space granted to newspapers under authoritarianism often correlates directly with the trust established between senior figures at both the regime and the institutional level. Favoured editors and directors may use their greater leeway to bolster the professional imperative and institutional autonomy of their paper — even when this irritates or alienates other important regime players. Much of the success of Barricade’s autonomy project in the early 1990s can be ascribed to the proximity of its

---

69 In the Soviet Union in the early 1960s, Novy Mir, under Nikita Khrushchev’s protection and sponsorship, blazed a liberalizing trail, opposed in this endeavour by Oktyabr, the vehicle of Khrushchev’s powerful opponents. John Downing cites as well the example of Chemistry Today, the small publication that took the risk of publishing a limited-circulation report denouncing Stalin’s pet geneticist, Anatoly Lysenko. The report’s “unauthorized publication by Chemistry Today was a major breach of the political rules. Indeed, the magazine was only able to survive such risky actions because it had one very powerful protector within the Soviet hierarchy. Without that shield, or godfather, its staff would likely have been dismissed and possibly some of them jailed.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, pp. 73, 81.
director, Carlos Fernando Chamorro, to the the inner circles of Sandinista power. (Chamorro even headed the FSLN’s Department of Agitation and Propaganda for a time in the mid-1980s.) Partly as a result, Barricada was never exposed to the kind of prior censorship visited upon the other Nicaraguan dailies in the 1980s (even the pro-Sandinista El Nuevo Diario); the chief censor during this period, Nelba Blandón, referred in an interview to “a relationship of trust” existing between the Front and its official organ under Chamorro’s direction. As well, it is unlikely that Barricada’s FSLN sponsor would have been willing to grant the far-reaching independence that it did in December 1990 to a paper headed by a more mercurial, less sympathetic figure than Chamorro.

In South Africa, the degree of independence from sponsors’ interference that M.A. “Johnny” Johnson, editor of The Citizen, enjoyed was unparalleled not only among pro-regime media, but anywhere in the English-language press as well. The personal relationship between Johnson and Perskor chair Koos Beytendag appears to have been crucial to the arrangement. According to Senior Assistant Editor Martin Williams, Johnson “has no power without the chairman. It’s the relationship between them — that’s where the power exists. If the chairman says go, he walks. But as long as he has that relationship with the chairman, he doesn’t go.”

A number of other examples of “piggy-backing” can be cited from media systems other than the case-studies profiled in this book. In his analysis of The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, John Murray offers an interesting anecdote about how personal clout can allow editors, at least, to override mobilizing requirements — and pave the way for others to do the same. The example is drawn from the newspaper Komsomolskaya Pravda during the early Khrushchev era (1957). Murray writes that

One journalist, [Alexander] Krivopalov, was working as duty-editor in the news-room when a TASS [state wire service] communiqué that would have filled an entire newspaper page arrived on his desk. Customary practice had been to print TASS communiqués in full, often, moreover, on the page and position on the page indicated on the TASS notice. About to proceed, Krivopalov was interrupted by the editor, Khrushchev’s son-in-law, [Alexei] Adzhubei, who looked at the official notice and expressed his indignation at having to devote so much space to it. He then told Krivopalov to reduce the length of the notice by five times before printing it. Krivopalov, with grave misgivings, did so. The edited résumé appeared and neither Adzhubei nor Krivopalov were fired, a probable outcome prevented only because of Adzhubei’s favoured status at the time, according to Krivopalov. Subsequently, other papers followed suit and soon TASS began to shorten their communiqués.70

---

70 Murray, The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, p. 63.
Adzhubei went on to edit Izvestia, where the “close family connections between Khrushchev, the top leader at that time, and our editor-in-chief” likewise gave the paper added clout and breathing room, in the recollection of Stanislav Kondrashov (see Chapter 5). The role played by People’s Daily editors during the Tiananmen events of 1989, when “the state’s most important propaganda tool emerged as a virtual flagship of rebellion,” was made possible by the unique trust extended to the party’s time-honoured mouthpiece. This had manifested itself, over time, in a degree of structural separation between sponsor and institution – a partial but unusual autonomy that the People’s Daily then used to press for a more professional journalism and the political reformism that would entrench it. Frank Tan’s carefully study zeroes in on the right aspects of institutional functioning, in my view, and draws conclusions that seem congruent with the arguments advanced here:

In order to understand how disagreement with the party line could manifest itself in the People’s Daily, it is necessary to know something about the paper’s internal operations prior to the suppression of the student movement and the corresponding repression of the press in general. An important underlying principle at the People’s Daily has always been that leading editorial staff, from the chief editor and his deputies to the heads of departments and the editors in charge of putting together specific pages, have had more authority and discretionary powers than one might expect. True, they attend regular meetings and consultations with propaganda authorities, receive direction and orientation from written materials, and sometimes get specific instructions to publish certain things, but the editors make most day-to-day decisions on whether, where and how their reports are used.

According to Tan, “The latitude for editorial judgments built into the organization of work at the People’s Daily did leave room for editors to stray from the official line. They seldom did so, however, because their training, socialization and positions made them staunch loyalists and devoted propagandists. But a radically different situation had arisen by the spring of 1989,” drawing journalists and editors towards a much more activist orientation, and incidentally raising the question of how “staunch” and “devoted” the loyalty to their sponsors truly was.71

---

EXPLOITING THE FOREIGN DIMENSION

The mobilizing agenda that an authoritarian sponsor devises for its media may undergo significant revisions (and a significant diminution in intensity) when the press or broadcast organ is meant to mobilize foreign populations or domestic expatriates, rather than the mass of the home population. An unusual degree of professional latitude and institutional semi-autonomy may be tolerated in such cases. This, in turn, may attract journalists and editors who seek to practice a less constrained journalism. A paradigmatic example is the English-language Moscow News, established in 1930 as "an 'American-type' newspaper aimed at the thousands of Americans and other foreign specialists drawn to the Soviet Union during the period of rapid industrialization mandated by the first Five Year Plan." The paper degenerated under Soviet censorship into a "relentlessly partisan, platitudinous, internationally oriented, decidedly upbeat, and, by most standards, ponderously dull" publication. But under the direction of Mikhail Gorbachev's appointee as chief editor, Yegor Yakovlev, Moscow News engineered a "truly monumental transformation," becoming the unquestioned vanguard publication of the glasnost era — the face the new regime chose to present to the wider world and (via its Russian-language edition) to the domestic intelligentsia as well.72

Foreign-oriented publications, after all, though they must maintain a broad congruence between their editorial content and the mobilizing requirements of their sponsor, must also be credible to the more discriminating international audience that they seek to mobilize. That audience is likely to have access to a much wider range of information sources, adding a competitive dimension to the foreign-language medium that may not exist within the authoritarian society itself. It is generally better able to recognize, and more likely to reject, the simplistic mobilizing devices deployed for domestic consumption. The greater leeway granted to foreign-directed media also tends to reflect well on the sponsor in the important international arena, suggesting a more liberal media policy (and thus a freer political system overall) than likely prevails in reality.73


73Of course, such media are not inherently less vulnerable to direct or indirect regime pressure. An interesting example — since it hails from one of the freest media systems in the world — was the decision by Israel's then-Foreign Minister Shimon Peres in 1994 to cancel 1,100 ministry subscriptions to The Jerusalem Post, a liberal bellwether before its recent right-wing makeover. The Independent reported that "Mr. Peres is not concerned about The Jerusalem Post's influence on domestic public opinion, but rather the effect it may have on opinion abroad. As the only Israeli English-language daily, it is an international opinion-former. The paper has been distributed free at Israeli embassies." “Peres
The domestic role of these media should not be underestimated. To the extent that print media of this type are accessible at home, it will tend to be the educated (foreign-language-speaking) elite that reads them. Usually this elite is the most trusted sector of the population: one can be fairly sure it did not secure its privileged status through vigorous dissent. Foreign-directed publications may be an important way of meeting the more discerning informational needs of domestic elites, while limiting the access of the less trustworthy popular sectors — though the boundary may not be quite so easy to draw in practice.

Foreign-oriented publications also tend to have greater freedom to reprint material from foreign press sources, especially if (as in most authoritarian societies) material resources are limited and the number of journalists fluent in a foreign language is insufficient. Foreign models of professional journalism therefore have a point of entry to the authoritarian society that might otherwise be lacking. A more professional, credible, and independent journalism than is generally available domestically (albeit one with its own constraints and biases) can thus be a constant presence for working journalists in authoritarian and/or underdeveloped societies. The fact that only one model of the mobilizing/professional relationship is domestically sanctioned may not rule out other influences, or journalists' professional attraction to those influences. This may be a significant factor when we try to explain the otherwise surprising emergence of alternative (usually western) models of professional journalism under authoritarianism.

Another typical media actor under authoritarianism deserves examination in the present context. I refer to the medium, usually a broadcast organ, that is accessible to foreign populations — often when foreign broadcast media can also be accessed domestically. Such media may be able to...

---

74 Downing cites the interesting example of "Radio Danubius in Budapest, set up in early 1988 to provide a German-language service to summer tourists from Austria and the German Federal Republic. From the beginning, Danubius had considerably more free play than other radio channels, made possible by the fact it was not broadcasting in Hungarian, and that it was commercially structured. It was a type of wedge into the system." Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory*, pp. 80-81. Another example is the Qatar-based satellite TV channel al-Jezirah (The Peninsula), which saw its Amman office closed after it aired a "controversial talk show" in which "a Syrian historian ... vehemently criticized Jordan and its leadership, at times describing them as 'agents of the Zionists'." Sana Abdallah, "Jordan shuts down satellite channel," United Press International dispatch, 4 November 1998. *The Economist* notes that al-Jezira "interviews dissidents and exiles from all over the Middle East, screens lively debates between government and opposition, and tries to report the news impartially. None of this may be shocking stuff by international standards but it is revolutionary for the region. Millions of ordinary Arabs are tuning to the channel for theirs — while their infuriated rulers turn to the Qatari government for an explanation. ... Diplomats reckon it is the most popular channel not only in the Gulf but as far away as North Africa." "Telling the news as it is," *The Economist*, 19 September 1998.
argue that they require greater institutional autonomy, and freedom from certain mobilizing strictures, in order to mount a competitive challenge on the regime’s behalf.75 Media in China’s Guangdong province and Shenzhen special economic zone, for example, have long claimed such a privilege, basing it on their proximity to Hong Kong and the ability of populations on both sides of the border to access the less-inhibited broadcast media of the former British colony. In Cuba, Susan Eckstein writes that when the CIA-sponsored Radio Martí began beaming its radio broadcasts to the island in 1985, “the foreign competition resulted in less state control over radio than other media programming,” leading “Cuban stations to air more diverse and informative programs than in years past,” including “call-in shows ... where people could voice complaints.”76 (A crackdown on the “subversive” foreign medium is also an option – Radio Martí has frequently been jammed, as Soviet authorities interfered with predecessors like Radio Liberty and Radio Free Europe.)

Sometimes the foreign “virus” enters by the back door. Cuban authorities were shocked by the radical rethinking of Soviet history and policy that was played out in the publications of glasnost – the same publications that had been washing up, generously-subsidized, on Cuban shores since the alliance was forged in the early Sixties. The most liberal glasnost-era publications, like Moscow News and Sputnik, were banned outright in 1988.77 Likewise, “Soviet publications and films were denied circulation in East Germany” in 1988-89, as the GDR regime spun towards its final crisis. Where the authorities allow such media to be disseminated, by contrast, they may play an incendiary role even greater than that of “enemy” media. During glasnost, “the signals coming from Moscow were an immense boost” to Hungarian journalists’ spirits: “If it was happening in the imperial

---

75Rami Khouri wrote in the case of post-liberalization Jordan that “For the first time in recent memory many people have alternatives to the state-owned television and radio, in the form of international satellite television channels. The proliferation of home satellite dishes allows Jordanians to learn about the world from perspectives other than the government’s. This is an important challenge that we have to face up to with a combination of professionalism and honesty that has not been forced upon us before.” Khouri, “The media, the past and the challenge,” The Jordan Times, 19 April 1994 (emphasis added).


77“These publications were outlawed for political, not economic reasons: for promoting ‘bourgeois democracy and capitalism.’ Identified with glasnost and perestroika, the journals contained articles not only critical of the Soviet Union but also of Cuba. They had been selling out in recent years, after having collected dust in kiosks before then. The outlawing of the Soviet publications was unambiguously a form of cultural repression.” Eckstein, Back from the Future, p. 98.
center, it must be permissible.” The irony, of course, is that in these cases the empire communicated the messages that in turn fatally undermined the empire. The reverse route is perhaps more likely, and might contribute to an understanding of the influence of Hungarian economic publications on reformist elites in the USSR, to take one example.

In the age of satellite broadcasting and the Internet, the boundaries between “domestic” and “foreign” media are eroding all the time. This may place intrinsic brakes on authoritarian polities. China passed laws in 1990 and 1994 forbidding the use of satellite dishes to pick up foreign broadcasts, and demanding that all dishes be licensed. But “by the middle of 1994 no one already hooked up to a dish had yet been challenged by authorities,” and the Internet policy (as it emerged in early 1998) surprised many observers with its apparent recognition that effective control was beyond the regime’s reach. The saturation of Chinese households with TVs and VCRs, meanwhile, “meant there was no limit to what people could watch – from hard-core pornography and American cop shows to MTV rock-music videos and Hong Kong kung fu movies – in their own homes.” In the “thoroughly Islamic society” of Saudi Arabia, “dishes now freely pluck American B-television programs ... from the airwaves for viewing behind private walls. ‘Satellite television is here,’ a senior Saudi official said, ‘and the government is looking the other way.’”

Two further variants of the foreign dimension deserve mention. In some cases, reporters who have the necessary language skills and wish to practice a more professional journalism – while also amassing more money and prestige – can seek posts as wire-service correspondents or “stringers” for foreign media outlets. In many cases this work will be part-time only, providing an important secondary source of income, and room to breathe professionally that may not be available in the domestic media environment. Several of the most prominent wire-service correspondents in Amman, for example, began their journalistic careers with The Jordan Times, and were then “headhunted” by the foreign services. The Times' editor, George Hawatmeh, has long contributed reportage and opinion-pieces to Middle East International, a London-based biweekly; his

---

78 Hungarian journalists, for example, used to cite Moscow News and Ogonyok at that juncture to allay the censors' fears they were going too far too fast.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, pp. 78-79, citing a 1989 work by István Varró.


commentary in that forum is noticeably more hard-hitting and critical of the regime than is permitted in the pages of his own newspaper. In China, Orville Schell notes that after Tiananmen, foreign publications served as tacitly regime-sanctioned outlets for writers who had been blacklisted and marginalized domestically — even those radically estranged from the ruling authorities. "The Party seemed to view writing for publications outside of China something like the export of toxic industrial waste – better to dump it abroad than keep it stored in China."\(^8^1\)

**Presenting the Professional Imperative as a Path to System Stability**

One of the common ways in which press workers can help to reconcile the mobilizing and professional imperatives under authoritarianism is by stressing the importance of the latter to the former. Particularly in the field of economic coverage, which regimes may see as more "objective" and less politically sensitive, journalists and editors can work to widen the sphere available to professional journalism by emphasizing the importance of accurate reporting to system stability. Correspondingly, inaccurate, excessively mobilized reporting can be depicted as inimical to the "national interest" — that is, the regime’s interests. Even the post-crackdown Chinese press of the 1990s, for instance, proved flexible on "the need for credible news reporting," given the volatility of the booming Shenzhen and Shanghai stock markets. Business papers and magazines flourished within these wider parameters, staking out territory that was far less politically-mobilized than run-of-the-mill Chinese media.\(^8^2\) Attention to the values and standards essential to solid business reporting — like timeliness and accuracy — may have a spillover effect, entrenching these values more securely in the journalistic culture. In the former Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev overtly linked the need for *glasnost* to the parlous state of the Soviet economy, tying the need for more accurate and dependable information and channels of communication to the stability of the system as a whole. The "managed liberalization" of *glasnost* spun out of the regime’s control, however, when the early revelations of deep-rooted economic mismanagement and corruption spilled over into

\(^8^1\)Schell, *Mandate of Heaven*, p. 301.

\(^8^2\)Liu Jernow, "Don't Force Us to Lie," p. 85. Dmitry Murzin, editor-in-chief of *Financial Izvestia* and a former reporter with the Soviet economic press, made a similar argument in the context of *glasnost*. Independent publications had sprung up that consisted initially only of advertisements; “but once they had got the means, they started publishing other information also, not only ads.”
discussions of alternative economic models, and then to the even more sensitive subjects of Soviet
history and state-socialist mythology.

**Choosing Exit**

It's good to be forgotten sometimes.

– Dmitry Babich, TV6, Moscow

The above analysis provides some sense of the creativity and versatility of media workers confronted by authoritarianism’s strictures. But it would be naïve to pretend that this is the whole story of the professional imperative under authoritarianism. Often the mobilizing pressures that journalists and editors confront are simply overwhelming, and rule out recourse to the strategies outlined in previous sections. What then?

When the dissonance between a sponsor’s mobilizing expectations and the journalist’s professional desires becomes impossible to sustain, the option of self-exile beckons. Outside the country, journalists may set about establishing media that aim to undermine the mobilizing imperative that drove them from their homeland. London, for instance, is home to a “mushrooming world of Arab journalism in exile,” which has made the city “its center of operation.”

But exile is only the most dramatic means of evading mobilizing constraints. Some options have already been noted: reporting for foreign-language or foreign-based media, for example. A journalist with an agenda – not necessarily a lofty professional one – different from that of the regime, may seek out a marginal media outlet less likely to attract the regime’s attention.

Another option is samizdat: works distributed through underground channels, often on pain of imprisonment or death. **Samizdat** or “second circle” works are usually anonymously or pseudonymously produced and distributed. They allow journalists, along with other intellectuals,

---


84 In Jordan, Rana Sabbagh noted, “The way things stand now, many journalists feel that the role of the press has in many cases been reduced to a sort of public relations job, where a reporter should be, or is forced to be, cautious not to reveal what might offend government officials or certain heads of departments. As a direct result, many good reporters find themselves compelled to leave the local press and join either Arab or international media organisations, where they feel appreciated and respected, instead of staying with the local press and waiting for the situation to improve.” Sabbagh, “A reporter’s side of the story,” *The Jordan Times*, 26 October 1985 (tenth-anniversary edition).

85 “Second circle” was the Polish term for the “underground press [which] circulated millions of copies each week throughout the 1980s” in the unusually open martial-law environment. See Johnson, “The Media and
to produce material that is more harmonious with their own professional standards and/or personal political priorities. The structural conditions that give rise to the *samizdat* vary considerably, and determine the particular means chosen. In the Soviet Union under Brezhnev, small circulations, regular arrests, and moderately high levels of state vigilance were the norm. But sanctions were not so brutal as to suppress the *samizdat* entirely, and it is even possible that the state preferred to allow the *samizdat* channel to exist, albeit in marginalized form, as a kind of social safety-valve. Likewise, in China during the post-Mao, pre-Tiananmen era, a “nebulous galaxy of underground publishers and distributors called the ‘second channel’” proliferated along with other profit-making opportunities under Deng Xiaoping. On the distribution side, the second channel resembled “a giant underground ‘irrigation system’ veining the country with a complex web of interconnected entrepreneurial enterprises that were able to deliver product into the hands of thousands of outdoor *shutan* (private street stalls) with amazing speed.” Though most of the material disseminated in this manner was tabloid-style sensationalism, romantic pablum, or outright pornography, journalists and other intellectuals were also able to exploit the “second channel” as a means of evading one of the regime’s major means of control over societal communication: its monopoly on publishing. According to Orville Schell, a book formally banned by the Chinese authorities can nonetheless sell a million or two million copies.\(^\text{86}\)

An exit strategy is more common in “soft” authoritarian regimes, where staffers who feel constrained by a highly-mobilized media institution can abscond to a less-inhibited competitor, sometimes one of their own creation. Generally this means making do without the cooperation or

---

Democracy,” p. 110. There are, of course, numerous cases in which the one “choosing” the exit is the sponsor rather than the journalist. Sponsors will often “bump” journalists from more sensitive to less sensitive media or in-house responsibilities. Says Stanislav Kondrashov of *Izvestia*: “The editor-in-chief of [the liberal] *Moscow News* — a close friend of mine — was Yegor Yakovlev, who before that worked at *Izvestia*. He was somehow — well, removed from *Izvestia*. It was a kind of exile for him to go to *Moscow News*, and he made this newspaper the most liberal and one of the most popular in the Soviet Union.” The same result can be obtained by mutual agreement, as with Alfonso Malespin at the post-1994 *Barricada* (see Chapter 2).

\(^{86}\)This account of the “second channel” is drawn from ch. 27 of Schell, *Mandate of Heaven*, pp. 293-310. Of *The Tide of History*, a compilation of writings by intellectuals “many of whom had previously run afoul of Party hardliners,” Schell writes: “Almost as soon as the [book] appeared, the SGPPA [State General Press and Publication Administration] criticized it for having ‘serious political problems,’ banned it, and ordered the remaining 20,000 warehoused copies seized and destroyed. In the old days this might have been the end of the book. But as far as the market was concerned, there was no better testimony to a work’s perspicacity than Party censure. Like a rave review on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*, Party censure made almost any book an instant best-seller. In no time at all second-channel entrepreneurs ... were reproducing editions of *The Tide of History*, and bookstall vendors were selling them for five to ten times the price of the original volume” (pp. 304-305).
largesse of the regime; often active regime hostility will be the result. Nonetheless, it may be possible. Late in Nicaragua’s revolutionary decade, Róger Sánchez, the brilliant (now-deceased) Nicaraguan cartoonist, supplemented his work at Barricada and evaded the mobilizing constraints of the official party organ by founding the anarchic, often deliberately obscene La Semana Cómica. The venture was a huge success, enabling Sánchez to follow his own broadly pro-revolutionary but anti-authoritarian project — one that despite its pro-Sandinista orientation stung the revolutionary authorities on regular occasions, prompting them to close La Semana Cómica twice on obscenity charges. In Jordan in 1995, three veterans of regime-affiliated mainstream media announced plans to establish independent weekly newspapers, intended to counter the bland reportage of the pro-government press and sensationalist tabloid media alike by espousing “a distinguished professional attitude to the journalism profession.”

The South Africa case-study offers another intriguing example of the “exit” strategy. The Afrikaans-language alternative paper Vrye Weekblad was founded by a consortium of progressive Afrikaner journalists and editors, who renounced the indirect regime subsidies that most Afrikaner media enjoyed in order to espouse an anti-apartheid political project and a journalism less compromised by regime affiliations. Max du Preez, Vrye Weekblad’s editor, said his “conversion on the road to Damascus” came when he was assigned to cover the proceedings of the Nationalist-dominated parliament in 1977. “I sat there listening to one Nationalist after another. Over a period of about six months, I realized that my people have become morally bankrupt and sick and there was nothing to be proud of anymore.” Many Afrikaner journalists and editors had been unhappy about the political and professional compromises involved in working for pro-Nationalist institutions, said du Preez; but until the founding of Vrye Weekblad, “our only alternative [was] to go to English-language newspapers.” Unfortunately, the project ultimately proved commercially unviable (see the discussion of the collapse of the alternative press in Chapter 3).

Most impressive of all, in human terms, are cases where journalists and editors resign, or engage in actions that are almost certain to lead to their dismissal, without any clear avenue of “exit”
to provide a viable alternative livelihood. Such was the situation in Poland after the crackdown on Solidarity in 1980-81. Jane Leftwich Curry writes that journalists' “actions during the Solidarity period appeared so threatening and powerful to the rulers that journalists, as a group, were directly attacked in the initial martial law declarations. More than one-third of Poland’s journalists in those first days were either fired from their jobs or refused to work in their old positions in the face of the retreat from media freedom.”

SABOTAGE, SILENCE, SURRENDER

Sabotage of the material operations or editorial content of a newspaper often serves as a “creative” outlet for mischief-minded staff. But it can also be aimed at undermining the mobilizing imperative of sponsors, and carving out political and professional space for the journalists. A common strategy under authoritarianism is to slip a coded message into the newspaper itself, as when a Chinese journalist in the post-Tiananmen era submitted a poem to the People’s Daily (overseas edition) that contained the acrostic, “Li Peng, step down to placate people’s outrage.”

Chapter 3 details several instances of wilful mischief at South Africa’s Citizen newspaper, during the strange period at that even stranger institution when a newspaper that had been founded by the apartheid regime came to be staffed largely by left-leaning young Whites, fresh out of the political ferment of the English university system.

A variant of this strategy is the adoption of a complex, often allegorical journalistic style. Depending on the breathing-space offered by the authoritarian regime, which even in certain “hard” authoritarian conditions is not inconsiderable, this can allow the journalist to explore and express a more critical and autonomous perspective. In fact, the intricately-coded or “esoteric” language which this strategy requires, and the intimacy of the unspoken understandings it creates

---

89 Curry, Polish Journalists, p. 2. Although it again was not prompted by regime actions, the decision of most staff at Barricada to resign following the October 1994 defenestración of Carlos Fernando Chamorro can also be cited in this context. Many of the journalists who left Barricada were thrust into one of the most impoverished labour markets in the world, offering precious few alternative sources of employment. This was surely a factor that the paper’s sponsor, the FSLN, expected to be more powerful than it in fact turned out to be: they believed it would induce many more journalists to stay on under the more highly-mobilized nuevo regime.


with regular readers, can itself become a powerful “glue” binding the institution to civil society, a bond which can endure into the era of liberalization and transition (as Izvestia’s core readership stuck by it in sufficient numbers to help the paper briefly establish its semi-autonomy from regime and corporate sponsors). Perhaps counter-intuitively, these strategies can hone professional skills that also can be drawn on when the wider political environment undergoes a transformation. The Russian socialist intellectual, Boris Kagarlitsky, touched on these themes in an interview, mentioning “some elements of Soviet intellectual sophistication” that were actually encouraged by the intensity of the mobilizing imperative under communism:

The Soviet press, whatever you could say about censorship – probably because of censorship – was much, much more sophisticated than in the West. If you wanted to say something that didn’t exactly fit into the line, you had to find some very sophisticated ways of saying it. [So that] the readers would understand, and the censors would never be able to catch you. Allegories, for example, but very nice in terms of their literary style. You could be very concrete, very open, but never primitive or simple. The literary training of the journalists was excellent.

Curry’s study of the Polish press under state socialism similarly found that journalists favoured feuilletons,92 “vehicles for veiled discussion of theoretical or political issues in which the author does not have to explicitly state the problem, his position, or recommendations.” One of her interview subjects argued that in employing such strategies, the journalist becomes more skillful, tries to trick the censor, winks at the reader, uses dodges, allusions, plays on words. Some readers, aware of the situation, look for and appreciate such allusions. I flatter myself that, over the long years of journalistic struggle, I have educated a group of readers who can understand me. This is shown by the many letters I receive.93

Consider, too, the curiously-positioned liberal English press in South Africa – too deeply entrenched in the economic and social elite to be effectively suppressed, but vocally opposed to the Afrikaner variant of White rule. As the only quasi-oppositionist media permitted to exist under apartheid, the English newspapers likewise adopted an intricate language of subversion — though this was aimed at subverting the state’s intricate censorship legislation, rather than overturning the established social order. All media that adopt such strategies return, in a key sense, to the earliest blossomings of modern journalism, and its running battles with the police and censorship agents of

---

92 Apparently a corruption of the French feuilletons.
93 Curry, Poland’s Journalists, p. 192.
repressive political orders. One of the leading editors of the apartheid era, Ken Owen, acknowledged as much, recalling in 1997 that “If one were clever enough and called in the help of Sir Thomas More, Thomas Jefferson and Mahatma Gandhi, the language offered the means to say, by innuendo, irony, hyperbole or analogy, whatever one wanted to say. I wrote, or tried to write, between the lines.”

The counterpoint to this surfeit of verbiage is simply — silence. This in itself can be eloquent, as Ryszard Kapuściński noted of the pre-perestroika USSR: “People made their views known through silence, not speech. The way in which they were silent was significant and said volumes.” The journalist withdraws from the story or the daily beat, most commonly, perhaps, because the task of bending reality to fit mobilizing requirements becomes too dispiriting. Often a “click” moment can be isolated which moves the writer from staunch support for the regime to a more guarded posture or outright disillusion. For the dean of political journalists at Izvestia, Stanislav Kondrashov, it came in 1968, with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia — “one of the greatest disappointments of my life.” Then his editor-in-chief, Lev Tolkunov, asked him to write a laudatory article about the invasion! “I could not decline his offer openly,” Kondrashov remembered, “but I told him: ‘Lev Nikolayevich, I am not an expert on Soviet-Czechoslovakian relations. I am an expert on the United States.’ He did not insist, and I did not write anything, positive or negative. From 1968 to 1971, I wrote very few pieces... My understanding of the nature of my profession was becoming more and more serious, and for me to write something which I didn’t believe in became more and more difficult, even impossible.”

Kondrashov’s standing at Izvestia (he received the USSR’s highest honour, the Order of Lenin, in 1967) allowed him to stay on the political beat, and professionally to “stand by all I’ve written from, let’s say, the end of the 1960s, the beginning of the 70s.” Other journalists may not be so lucky, or so influential. They may feel bound to move to different niches in the institution, a step or two removed from those that entail the greatest cognitive dissonance: to the post of sub-editor or editor, for example. Business writing, as noted, is a regular refuge, as is the sports section, youth pages, or the “culture” and entertainment beat.

---


Finally, a press worker under authoritarianism may simply surrender to the dissonance of the job — rationalizing it to some degree, while harbouring varying degrees of private cynicism. "People have lived with the contradiction between what they know and think on the one hand, and what they write and publish on the other," a Chinese editor explained. "... Sometimes we anaesthetize ourselves. We don't allow ourselves to think about these subjects." As another staffer put it: "Inside, journalists may feel very conflicted. Propaganda is not what they want to write. But the strength of one individual is very small."

CONCLUSION

I have already suggested that the analysis of press functioning in terms of constituent and sometimes opposed "imperatives" downplays the extent to which those imperatives are interwoven in daily practice — with institutional stability the most common goal, and result. For the most part, daily newspapers the world over are institutions like any other; and by definition, institutions exhibit a high degree of ideological cohesion and common mobilizing purpose. Nor should the attempt to define particular locii for the mobilizing and professional imperatives cause us to ignore the areas of structural and conceptual overlap. The journalist may feel a sense of "professional" pride and self-worth in the relative market positioning of his or her institution. Sponsors, equally, may look with pleasure on the degree of editorial independence within the enterprise — feeling gratification, for instance, in an investigative "scoop," and defending journalists against outside pressure and protest, even if this results in a corporation withdrawing its advertising or in a slew of cancelled subscriptions.

Still, the distinctions and divisions proposed here do move us towards a portrait of press functioning that can be used as a kind of "snapshot" for the case studies that follow, and to the concluding theoretical section on the press in transition. To understand the mobilizing imperatives of these diverse institutions; to consider the variables that shape and constrain their operations; to examine the ways in which professional journalists work to secure a "breathing-space" within the wider mobilizing framework — all these are vital to understanding the roles press institutions play in

96Both quoted in Liu Jemow, "Don't Force Us to Lie," p. 77.
transition, and how sponsors and staff perceive those roles. For all their fuzzy edges, the analysis of mobilizing versus professional imperatives, when the “meta-environmental” variable of level of developmental is factored in, allows us to draw tentative comparisons between institutions that otherwise may seem highly disparate in their nature and functioning. Accordingly, I close this chapter by trying to model the imperatives and variables raised so far, with some acknowledgment of the difficulties and ambiguities that remain.

I begin by dividing the world’s media systems into three broad types, placed along the axis of regime authoritarianism. As already noted, most transitions have taken place in authoritarian societies. I class authoritarianism as an environmental variable, and divide its offshoots into “hard” (System A) and “soft” (System B) types. A “meta-environmental” variable, level of development (more precisely, of underdevelopment), is also introduced. It clearly has vital implications for the resources, material and professional, available to the newspaper institution, and also the resources — the carrots and sticks — available to the state or regime. Accordingly, a subsidiary distinction is made between “rich” and “poor” authoritarianism. A third basic media model is proposed as System C: the liberal-democratic, market-oriented press of the developed west.

This schema is not entirely adequate even as a general framing. Cuba, for example, is classed as a hard-authoritarian media system, since all media are under the direct control and

---

*I have chosen, after some pondering, to exclude from the models that conclude this chapter a variable that many might expect to see factored in: degree of media concentration/monopolization. The variable was urged on me by Barricada’s former editor Carlos Fernando Chamorro, who argued that “the distinction between monopolistic or economic-concentration situations and more competitive environments is very important to explain the emergence of an independent press” (personal communicato, 25 September 1998). I think it is fair to say that this squares, intuitively, with the standard presuppositions of liberal-democratic media systems, or at least those who study them. But is there not a tautological dimension to the reasoning? Non-monopolization of media encourages the emergence of “independent” media — one might have difficulty distinguishing the chicken from the egg. If we look beyond media “independence” as an end in itself, to the civic function it is supposed to serve, I doubt an easy linkage can be drawn between pluralistic ownership and the more effective expression of a “professional imperative,” or a “truthful” journalism, or a “watchdog” role, or however one chooses to cast the classic liberal-democratic concept. Thus I would join with Karol Jakubowicz, whose work stresses “the non-equivalence of media de-monopolization with media autonomy, let alone with media democratization” (in Downing’s summary — see Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 170). The media environment that shaped Chamorro can be offered as a case in point. During the 1980s, as noted in Chapter 2, the Nicaraguan press achieved the unique status of a family oligopoly. All three daily newspapers in the country were owned and/or edited by Chamorros. Yet there were vast political chasms between (on the one hand) the leftist dailies Barricada (under Carlos Fernando's direction) and El Nuevo Diario, and the right-wing, virulently anti-Sandinista incarnation of La Prensa published during the revolutionary decade. In a similar vein, even if the only television outlet left in the United Kingdom was the BBC (or still more so Channel 4), would it not be possible to find a broader spectrum of political opinion and debate there than in a superficially more “diverse” media system, such as the United States at present?
administration of the regime, and opposition media circulate only as samizdat. This reflects a similar degree of regime vigilance over political activity in the country more generally. Yet the sanctions meted out to regime opponents are comparatively mild, and the openness of informal communication outside regime channels is striking — certainly in no way comparable to Iraq or Stalinist Russia. Along the same lines, where should Sandinista Nicaragua be classed — a country whose experience between 1979 and 1990 was unprecedentedly democratic, but which also exhibited some of the classic features of authoritarian systems? What of the schizoid media environment that resulted — the existence of an opposition press allowed unusual freedom in wartime, but also a system of regime-supervised prior censorship? What of South Africa, where the regime seemed to adopt a “soft” authoritarian stance towards the media of the English elite, but a much more classically “hard” one towards the independent Black press? Or Colombia and Mexico, where a superficially civilian-democratic regime turns a blind eye to the abuses committed by its security forces, and where non-regime actors (guerrillas, drug-traffickers, paramilitaries) impose constraints on media reminiscent of much more classically authoritarian systems? Further caveats will arise as we move along; but let us proceed, with due care, to a model of the first and most restrictive of our media systems (System A, overleaf).

In this model, bold typeface and solid lines are used to indicate the directness and force of the mobilizer’s influence on the newspaper’s (N’s) institutional functioning and editorial output. Here, the main sponsor and mobilizer is the state, regime, or ruling party. At the present time, the “levels of development” possible within this model (reflecting the overarching environmental variable) seem limited to either underdeveloped or semi-developed — though several petroleum-producing monarchies in the Middle East are anomalies, and history (in the form of Nazi Germany) reminds us that the model can also entrench itself in the most highly-“developed” countries on earth. “Hard” authoritarian states that exhibit substantial degrees of industrialization, and/or a solid record according to other indices of development (life expectancy, education, health) are rather more common: Stalin’s USSR, China, and Iraq could be cited in this context. Rather more common, perhaps, is underdevelopment, which often seems causally linked to the authoritarianism of the regime in question. The systematic use of violence and repression often aims to maintain a regime in power through an era when very little may be moving except the death-squads and armoured personnel carriers.
The plain typeface used for the professional imperative in the model, and the discontinuous line connecting it to the newspaper institution, suggest the likely fate of press institutions under hard authoritarianism. The space accorded the professional imperative tends to be minimal, sometimes (under Stalin or Saddam Hussein) all but nonexistent. There are exceptions — hard authoritarian states where an independent press may persevere in the face of savage regime and regime-supported violence, as in Guatemala and El Salvador during the civil wars of the 1980s. But that survival is highly contingent and commonly short-lived. Anomalies aside, overwhelmingly the most common editorial "output" of such hard-authoritarian systems is uncritical political advocacy on behalf of the state or regime. In return for its propaganda labours, the institution and its staff receive the requisites of survival, and often the attractive perks reserved for dutiful servants of the system. Usually in tandem with low levels of development, the model ensures the total or near-total integration of media with the mobilizing requirements and administrative bureaucracy of the regime (hence the "N?" blended with the state/regime/party bloc). Other possible "outputs" — attention to the wishes of readers, or to market positioning, or simply to the truth — are largely irrelevant.
One should not overlook the possibility, though, that alternative models of professional journalism may pre-exist the hard-authoritarian regime, or seep in by diverse means from the outside. Though conditions prevent their further exploration or implementation, they may serve as “latent” models to be drawn upon when conditions change. The reverse may also be true: the pre-existing culture may bolster the authoritarian model of media functioning introduced by the hard-authoritarian regime, as was certainly the case in Stalin’s Russia, for example. Hence, I include “media culture” as an environmental variable in the model, and accompany it with a vestigial professional imperative.

System B
Authoritarian (Soft)
Examples: Mexico, Jordan, Sandinista Nicaragua, Algeria, post-Soviet Russia, Singapore, South Africa (apartheid era)

System B is perhaps the most amorphous of the three models presented. Beyond the “meta-environmental” variable of level of development, how the model operates in a given case-study setting appears contingent on two main factors: 1) the degree of institutional and editorial “breathing space” that the regime grants to the press (both those it directly controls and oppositionist publications); and 2) the influence or predominance of market considerations. From
these two variables, much else seems to flow. If the regime's hold over print media is comparatively loose, profit-seeking might gain in significance as a mobilizing imperative—a means of compensating for the reduction or absence of regime subsidies. This will hold true especially for independent and oppositionist press outlets who seek to exploit the freedoms available under soft authoritarianism, but are also "free to fail" in a market environment that adds its own pressures to those the regime may bring to bear. In such cases, profit-seeking deserves to be classed as an input in its own right. On the other hand, an orientation towards profit-seeking does not by itself indicate distance or autonomy from the regime. A press institution such as Jordan's Al-Ra'i that is closely affiliated to the regime may exploit those ties to generate profits—making direct regime subsidies unnecessary, or even contributing to regime resources through the profits it remits. The example of the Afrikaans-language press under apartheid could also be cited in this context. In such cases, profit-seeking as an output is also included in the model—reflecting its possible presence as a subordinate feature of a wider mobilizing agenda.

By definition, the power and influence of the regime in soft-authoritarian settings remains strong (boldface type), though not to the tyrannical extremes common in System A. Even if the regime permits "independent" or oppositionist media to publish or even flourish, this will tend to be highly contingent and liable to be withdrawn at any moment. The range of "carrots and sticks" already discussed are the major means of reminding wayward institutions and individuals of this contingency.

If a semi-independent or oppositionist press does exist in System B, its options for material survival are limited. It will likely be forced to seek its support from "civil society," in the form of newsstand sales, advertising revenue, or overt sectoral sponsorship (e.g., an opposition political party, trade union, or popular movement). If it chooses the sectoral route, its institutional autonomy and professional independence will not necessarily be more extensive than that enjoyed by regime-sponsored publications.

Still, no question-mark attaches to the input of the "professional imperative" in this model—a decision that perhaps requires explanation. Regardless of how radically their functioning may be constrained by the regime and/or other sponsors, the press under soft-authoritarian conditions does tend to display a greater awareness of professional norms and standards. This generally results in a higher degree of "professionalism," at least as classically understood (critical coverage, attempts at
"objectivity," service to readers). Perhaps print media have an intrinsic bias towards their audience in these conditions: newspapers are inherently an elitist medium in most underdeveloped or semi-developed societies, which accounts for the majority of soft-authoritarian systems as well; and such elites, as hinted earlier in the chapter, tend to be better-educated and more media-savy, which may translate into a reduced tolerance for simplistic propaganda and a desire for higher professional standards. Thus, "catering to readers" makes its appearance as a possible output, with a two-way communication flow: in this environment, a newspaper is more likely to engage in reader surveys or polls, to accept and publish letters, to investigate readers' complaints and "tips," etc.

Note also that a "soft" authoritarian society is more open than the System A standard; outside influences, including western models of professionalism, can more easily penetrate. Training for journalists is less likely to be seen as a process of political indoctrination and nothing else. Hence, even if the professional imperative is only latent or underexploited, it is more likely to be "in the air" in these systems – even as an object of derision – than in hard-authoritarian environments. For all these reasons, an arguably naïve formulation, "The Truth," makes an appearance in the output category, again with an interactive element emphasized. The truth, I argue, makes its own demands; and the threshold of tolerable dissonance between mobilizing and professional imperatives tends to be set lower than in hard-authoritarian systems.

Nonetheless, political advocacy remains paramount among System B outputs. Most media (including nearly all broadcast media) will tend to be strongly, often slavishly, supportive of the ruling regime. Those that align themselves with other sectors may simply exchange one form of uncritical advocacy for another, as noted. Those profit-seeking enterprises beholden to no particular sponsoring regime or institution are likely to enjoy the greatest freedom of all, and correspondingly tend to play a leading role in the "onset" phase of any liberalization or transition process.

The final media system considered here (System C, overleaf) makes only a passing appearance in the case studies, although it can be seen to underpin the "English model" of press functioning in South Africa's English-language press. Otherwise, given that the basic theme of this book is transitions from authoritarian rule, System C stands more as a model to which newspapers in the media systems studied for this work may aspire, or which may be imposed from without, rather than a model that usefully describes those systems. The fact that System C is a model of a
developed media system, while all the media environments studied here save South Africa’s are at best semi-developed, further limits its direct applicability.

**System C**

**Liberal-Democratic, Market-Oriented**

*Examples: United States, Canada, U.K., South Africa (post-apartheid)*

System C nonetheless represents the globally dominant model of press functioning, the more so since the end of the Cold War and the erosion or collapse of state-socialist and developmentalist alternatives. It might be argued, accurately, that variants of authoritarianism still characterize a majority of the world’s media systems, as underdevelopment is still more widespread than its counterpart. But these are local models only. With the exception of the handful of
remaining state-socialist media societies, and possibly religious media, no existing model can claim applicability or influence beyond the boundaries of its own system. And the residual state-socialist or Islamist models are peripheral contenders at best compared with the liberal-democratic, market-oriented ideal espoused – and disseminated internationally – by North American and Western European countries.

In addition to a level of development far beyond Systems A and B, System C exponents claim for the media the status of a "fourth estate": the press as its own mobilizing force on behalf of the "public interest," independent of the mobilizing agenda of the regime or other powerful interest-groups within society. There is, however, no reason to take this comfortable self-image at face value. I have argued in this chapter that the "public interest" in System C is a secondary consideration, and that in escaping from the controls of the authoritarian state, the mass media in western societies exchanged one mobilizing imperative for another: success in the marketplace.

There is the further question of exactly how far the press of the market democracies has removed itself from the influence of other powerful interests in society. It is quite true that this model grants the press far greater latitude in disputing policy with the government of the day than exists under either hard or soft authoritarianism. Nonetheless, the ideological underpinnings of the "regime" broadly construed – private property, the corporate organization of the economy – are universally shared by the mainstream press as well. It is quite easy for interest-groups within the system, notably the corporations that both own and constitute the mainstream press, to allow their media a comparatively long leash, knowing it will never be used to call the underpinnings of the system into question. With this in mind, it seems reasonable to retain the "state/regime" as a dominant mobilizing force – so long as "regimes" are understood to extend beyond the government of the day. Paradoxically, the analysis may be least valid in systems – those of the Scandinavian countries, for example – where the regime plays the greatest direct role in press functioning, via the distribution of subsidies. The safeguards in place here militate against any attempt to mobilize those media in the interests of the government of the day, and arguably enable newspapers to play more of a "fourth estate" role than is the case in systems where the press is in the mobilizing grip of a) an authoritarian regime or b) private corporations.

---

98The secular bias of this analysis is acknowledged, and addressed to a slightly greater extent, in Chapter 6.
The role of the owners and managers remains determinant in System C—unless a newspaper has found a source of sponsorship elsewhere, be it in political parties, trade unions, or "public" (albeit regime-distributed) subsidy. The owners and managers of corporate enterprises must have profit as their overriding mobilizing imperative, or they will be stripped of their posts in short order at the next shareholder’s meeting. They must also act to bolster the underpinnings of the system that enables their enterprises to flourish. Hence both “system advocacy” and “profits/market niche” tend to predominate, and will always figure strongly, among possible outputs.

It is nonetheless the case that only in the System C model do the professional imperative, service to readers, and “The Truth” all appear in boldface, indicating that they are more prominent features of this model than of either of the others studied. There are several reasons for this. First, the high level of development and equally far-reaching constraints on state violence and repression, together with the longstanding press traditions they have spawned, have permitted the professional imperative to evolve and even flourish in a way that is only sporadically true in more authoritarian, less developed systems. Second, the role of readers—of “civil society,” if one prefers—is greater in liberal-democratic societies generally, but more specifically in environments where readers’ tastes (expressed through their consumer decisions) are decisive to the successful realization of the profit imperative. All of these factors influence the decision to place “Catering to Readers” and “The Truth” in boldface as a system output, with strong lines of interaction between them and the press institution. A developed democratic polity and a privately-run economy depend for their smooth functioning on the dissemination of accurate information in mass form far more than do authoritarian, dirigeiste, and underdeveloped societies. The sophistication and “media savviness” of the ordinary consumer is likely to be much greater in democratic societies with highly-developed systems of liberal education and tight constraints on state violence. And the guardians of the professional imperative themselves—journalists and editors—will have been exposed to the same influences and range of opportunities as ordinary citizens. Ben Bagdikian’s comment, quoted earlier, that American journalists are “better educated” and “more concerned with individual professional ethics than ... fifty years ago” seems intuitively true, though difficult to prove; the analysis could also be extended to Canada and the Western European democracies. There is no
space here to enter into the reasons why this might be so; the analyst might even have to call upon the notion of civilizational advance, which would be highly unfashionable.99

System C therefore presents a model of press functioning that, while hardly free of mobilizing constraints, offers unprecedented and unparalleled opportunities for the expression of countervailing professional imperatives. At the very least, it provides an example of freedom from the savage state repression common elsewhere. It is hardly surprising that the model has held a strong appeal, not only in more authoritarian societies worldwide, but on the transitional press institutions that often seek to break free of those authoritarian constraints. We will consider that complex and contingent process in detail in the concluding chapter of the book. Now, however, it is time to present intimate portraits of four transitional media systems, and six press institutions within them. In doing so, we will seek to gauge whether the framework presented in this opening chapter is of some use in understanding the broad range of press functioning under authoritarianism, and the even more varied challenges and opportunities that confront the press in transition.

99Among the historical events that contributed to a greater skepticism and devotion to the truth on the part of journalists, I would cite post-World War II decolonization on the one hand, and the Vietnam War and Watergate on the other, as the most important for the Western European and United States media systems, respectively. Similar professional advances in more authoritarian systems might also be linked to momentous historical events: e.g., the Twentieth Party Congress in the USSR, the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, the 1980 Kwangju Uprising in South Korea, and Tiananmen Square.
INTRODUCTION

It’s not that we lost autonomy. We were stronger than ever in 1993 or in 1994. But they were stronger than ever too.

— Carlos Fernando Chamorro, former director, Barricada

The atmosphere at the Managua offices of the Nicaraguan newspaper Barricada on the afternoon of 25 October 1994 has been described as “tense, but in a way festive.” It was in any case expectant. With Barricada journalists assembled on the front doorstep, Sandinista commanders Tomás Borge and Lumberto Campbell arrived at the paper’s plant in jeeps with tinted windows. A retinue of bodyguards and local party personnel trailed in their wake.

Borge, the only surviving founding member of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), had served as Minister of the Interior and chief censor during the revolution’s tumultuous years in power (1979-1990). He and Campbell were fresh from a meeting of the Sandinista Assembly that had placed a decisive seal on the campaign, probably dating back to 1990, to unseat Carlos Fernando Chamorro as Barricada’s director. Chamorro had directed the paper from June 1980, less than a year after it was founded. He was the son of martyred La Prensa editor Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, killed at the behest of the Somoza dictatorship in 1978, and his wife Violeta, who would serve as Nicaragua’s president from 1990 to 1996. In his own right, Chamorro had

1Carlos Fernando Chamorro interview, Managua, 16 May 1996.
2Daniel Alegria interview, Managua, 10 May 1996.
3Numerous commentators have cited the murder of Chamorro père as a turning point in the revolutionary struggle. According to George Black, it sparked “an unprecedented wave of riots and mass mobilisations which the Sandinistas’ October [1977] offensive alone could never have unleashed, and a flurry of international condemnation.” George Black, Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua (London: Zed Press, 1981), p. 108. Pedro Joaquin’s image today adorns the Nicaraguan 50-córdoba banknote – certainly one of the rare instances worldwide in which a professional journalist has been memorialized in this manner.
become a leading figure in the broad “renovationist” current that sought a far-reaching transformation and democratization of the FSLN’s structures and internal processes. Deposing Chamorro, and (as it transpired) replacing him with Borge, would reharmonize a “wayward” Sandinista institution with the dominant _ortodoxo_ (orthodox) current of the FSLN, which had gradually gained the upper hand in the intra-party struggle.

As Borge and Campbell made their appearance at the _Barricada_ plant, similar purges were underway across town at the FSLN-owned Radio Sandino and Radio Stereo Ya. Three programs were being abruptly pulled from the airwaves – including one that had been on the air for 21 years. Their directors were also fired. But none of these events had the air of ceremony and significance of the scene unfolding at _Barricada_. There, the _defenestración_ (literally, “throwing out the window”) of Carlos Fernando Chamorro proceeded with the dignity and sense of familiarity befitting longtime revolutionary comrades in a movement that had always foresworn violent internal vendettas.

Chamorro – looking “tired, but serene,” according to one observer – received the two Directorate representatives, and led them into his office. After a while, he emerged to speak to assembled staff, announcing that he accepted the decision as a _fait accompli_, but protesting that the Directorate in fact did not possess the authority to depose him. Then he retired again to his office to pack his belongings and embrace a succession of _Barricada_ employees, clinging “much of the while to a small wooden statue of Augusto C. Sandino, the peasant insurrection leader who lent his name to the [Sandinista] Front.”

By the time Chamorro re-emerged, more than a hundred representatives from national and international media had flooded to the _Barricada_ offices. The place “was just full, chock-a-block,”

---

4The programs were the 21-year-old _Sucesos_ on Radio Sandino, directed by José Esteban Quezada; _Perfiles_ on Radio Stereo Ya, directed by the Mexican-Nicaraguan Karen Santamaria; and _Noticias_, also on Radio Ya. See Alvaro Cruz Rojas, “Periodistas marcharán hoy para protestar censura sandinista,” _La Tribuna_, 28 October 1994. All translations from printed sources in this chapter are my own, unless otherwise stated.


6Chamorro recalled arguing before staff that “the FSLN was perpetrating a political intervention in the paper with no authority. Because my appointment came from the Board of Directors of _Barricada_ ... and therefore it was [the Board], and nobody else, that could call for my resignation. ... We fought to the last detail to make evident that _Barricada_ was an autonomous institution and not a party extension.” Two days later, Chamorro received a formal notice of dismissal from the Vice-President of the Board. Chamorro, personal communication, 25 September 1998.

recalled senior editor Daniel Alegria. One staffer, Economics editor Roberto Larios, covered his mouth with masking tape as a sign of protest for the assembled photographers. Chamorro strolled through the throng to his Jeep Cherokee and drove off for his suburban home. Many Barricada staffers would join him there later, for a bittersweet commemoration of the day's events, and of Chamorro's 15-year tenure at the newspaper.

The day before his dismissal, Chamorro had written a "final reflection" as director of Barricada. In it, he summarized the impasse that had brought about his defenestración:

Over these last four years, since it was agreed that Barricada would cease to be the official organ of the FSLN, I have waged, with the support of the Editorial Council, an incessant battle to secure the autonomy conferred on this newspaper and its professional profile. I had to overcome pressure from powerful interests to ensure that Barricada became a daily dedicated to truthfully informing the reader, independently of our own political interests... Only by moving beyond the narrow framework of party interests was it possible to set the precedent of transforming a party institution into a credible and influential national newspaper. ... However, now the will of those who were never in agreement with the change in editorial profile, and who continue to see the paper as the extension of the party apparatus, has been imposed. Underlying the practical urgency of bringing the paper into line and converting it into their political instrument is the insistence on a totalizing vision of power [una visión totalizante del poder], which recognizes as legitimate only those expressions under their strict control.10

The National Directorate did not necessarily foresee the dismissal of Carlos Fernando Chamorro as involving sweeping changes to every aspect of Barricada's staffing and functioning. The leadership likely felt that economic pressures – together, perhaps, with an institutional esprit de corps – would keep the majority of Barricada's journalists and editors in place after the coup. On the first Barricada anniversary to be celebrated since the defenestración (25 July 1995), Tomás Borge acknowledged as much. "The journalists identified with the former director of Barricada are good at their profession," he said, "and, in general, [they are] good persons. This is the reason why we intended – in vain – to keep them on."11

---


9Guillermo Cortés Dominguez, "El Funeral" (Siglo XXI column), El Semanario, 10-16 November 1994.


In vain indeed. Over the three weeks following the defenestración, approximately 80 percent of Barricada’s editorial staff resigned, or were forced out by a new directorate that finally realized the scale of internal opposition to its project. Only four lower-level veterans remained (though much greater continuity was maintained among blue-collar staff). It is easy, in retrospect, to overlook the three-week interregnum between old and new orders at Barricada, since the final housecleaning was so extensive. Nonetheless, this brief period must be numbered among the noteworthy sagas in modern Latin American journalism. Day after day, the policies and editorial preferences of Barricada’s new directorate — and their allies within the FSLN as a whole — were exposed to withering criticism from Barricada’s journalists and remaining editors, within the pages of the newspaper itself. The tale delineates with great clarity the clash between mobilizing and professional imperatives that had, by October 1994, been shaping Barricada for a decade-and-a-half. It also provides a fascinating and intimate glimpse into an important revolutionary movement and one of its key component institutions, as both underwent wrenching and far-reaching transformations. Finally, the 1994 coup and its aftermath constitute a powerful human drama, as old allies and compañeros within the FSLN grew estranged from one another, and as a project in which most participants had invested years of their lives was abruptly terminated by its longtime sponsor.


The Nicaraguan revolution gave birth to Barricada in a blaze of truck headlights. Six days after the ragtag Sandinista armies vanquished the last pockets of Somocista resistance and flooded into the capital city, to the cheers of hundreds of thousands of Managuans, the first four-page broadsheet edition of Barricada began to circulate through whatever channels were available in the chaotic transitional environment. The banner headline of the 25 July 1979 edition proclaimed: “We’ve Triumphed — Now, Forward!”

That day, and for three years afterwards, Barricada was produced in the offices of the old Somocista newspaper, Novedades. Leonel Espinoza, who would go on to serve as chief of the Sandinistas’ Department of Agitation and Propaganda (DAP), managed to protect offices and valuable equipment from the hordes of demonstrators who sought to vent their fury on the dictatorship’s mouthpiece. Still, many production basics had to be improvised. “Sometimes,” said
Sofía Montenegro, “we had to work with the delivery trucks providing illumination for the journalists to write.” Those present at Barricadas’s creation numbered perhaps fifteen people, in Montenegro’s recollection. The majority of them were nearly complete amateurs. We had no idea that things like accounting and administration even existed, until some people from La Prensa came over to help us out while their offices were being repaired. We didn’t sell the paper initially, we just gave it out. We had no distribution network, nothing. And frankly, we didn’t give a shit, you know. To show you how naïve we were, I remember one of the members of the FSLN National Directorate, Luis Carrión, arriving at the office. “You need some money, eh? Well, here’s some capital to start with.” He gave us four hundred dollars. That was the extent of the Front’s subsidy at the beginning. ... We all worked as volunteers; wages weren’t introduced until 1980.

Inexperience characterized the very summit of authority as well. The earliest responsables políticos – Barricadas’s commissars, dispatched by the National Directorate of the Frente – had some experience in underground propaganda efforts, but none in professional journalism. The implications of this will be explored in detail later in the chapter; they certainly attracted the attention of 23-year-old Carlos Fernando Chamorro when he took up the post of Barricada director in June 1980.

Chamorro would occupy the director’s office for a decade-and-a-half, with a brief interregnum at the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, where he orchestrated the FSLN’s successful 1984 election campaign. The FSLN leadership, it seems, was seeking to capitalize on the legacy of Chamorro’s father when it appointed Carlos Fernando to direct the new official organ of the Frente. By doing so, it helped to pave the way for a remarkable anomaly. When, in April 1980, La Prensa’s increasingly anti-Sandinista line prompted 80 percent of the staff to leave and found El Nuevo Diario, Nicaragua gained the status – probably unique in this century – of having all of its daily newspapers owned and/or directed by members of a single family.

---

12 La Prensa had been destroyed by aerial bombing in one of the final vengeful spasms of the Somoza dictatorship.


The institution Chamorro oversaw had barely emerged from chaos. “Everything was very spontaneous,” he remembered. “We didn’t have time to organize anything. Someone would be named general manager, but he didn’t have any experience on a newspaper. We had very young people; we were very rhetorical.” By early 1980, “we ran out of paper, and we had to reduce the circulation. The distribution system broke down. ... We made a lot of mistakes of that kind.” It was an inauspicious start, but Barricada was on its way to becoming one of the most valuable — and in the end one of the most hotly-contested — of the revolution’s institutions.

THE VANGUARD’S VANGUARD

Rather than mere journalists, we are Sandinistas.
— Barricada, 7 September 1979

If the material environment was unstable and unpredictable, Barricada could at least count on a role and an identity that were all but predetermined. From the moment it first hit the streets, the paper’s raison d’être was the Sandinista National Liberation Front and its revolutionary struggle to transform Nicaragua. Barricada would be a party-political project, along the classic lines sketched by those two journalists and revolutionists, Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin — although a more Gramscian “organic-intellectual” tinge was occasionally evident. The classic Marxist-Leninist conception of the newspaper as a disseminator of revolutionary propaganda had guided the Sandinista press from the first mimeographed pamphlets issued by the FSLN in the early 1960s. Now, with the revolution victorious, Lenin’s “idea of the newspaper as an organizer of production” would guide Barricada’s journalism, according to Carlos Fernando Chamorro. The “common understanding” of this model among Barricada staffers, said Sofia Montenegro, was that...
the press should not only be a medium of information, but also should help to organize a
totally disorganized society. The whole Somocista state had fallen to pieces, absolutely
destroyed. You had to reconstruct institutions, help people to organize and defend their
interests, and all the time keep moving, advancing the revolutionary project. That was another
characteristic of this view, that the press should serve to make propaganda for revolutionary
ideas. Finally, it should be an organ of information, to bring people the news they needed to
organize their daily lives.

Some sense of the stylistic essence of the project can be gleaned by surveying the headlines
of these early editions of Barricada. “Victory of the people with their vanguard,” “Now: consolidate
the revolution,” “Organization in the revolution” – the message, and the rhetoric, was typical.
Anyone who missed the thrust of the polemic needed only to consult the paper’s published
statements of editorial purpose. On 13 August 1979, barely three weeks after the triumph, Barricada
declared that “Our work [as journalists] should be oriented through discipline, through the full
identification with the process being mapped out by our leaders.”19 The edition of 25 August,
commemorating the first month of Barricada’s publication, made the Marxist-Leninist influence
even more plain:

We are, in this moment, the only newspaper written by the revolutionary vanguard. We
know that this implies a complex and diverse agenda: to inform, in the sense of making
known that which occurs in our country and around the world; to orient the people and
contribute to the task of National Reconstruction; to disseminate the political line of the
FSLN; to help bring about the organization and normalization which our liberated country
so badly needs as it emerges from the rubble of war; to support the measures taken by the
Government of National Reconstruction [dominated by the FSLN]; and to provide
information that is both truthful and dedicated to the demands of our people.20

This conception of the “revolutionary vanguard” will be familiar to students of Leninism.21
Though in crucial respects the Sandinistas departed from the standard state-socialist model Lenin
had propounded, on this point – the need for a driving force to propel Nicaragua into the
revolutionary future – they demurred not a bit. In his unsurpassed study of the FSLN, Sandinistas:

19Quoted in Ryan, Fall and Rise, p. 120.
21Lenin’s strategic revision of Marx – the idea that historical stages like capitalism could be “skipped” on the
path to communism – centred on the role of a relatively small, highly motivated revolutionary strike force to seize
control of the state and the instruments of production. The vanguard could then turn this apparatus to its own
purposes, gradually disseminating a revolutionary message of such force that the public would be drawn en masse to the
revolutionary project. Revolutionary media were meant, and in fact proved, to be essential propaganda tools in this
long process. Their main role, though, came to be that of instruments in a sophisticated apparatus of coercion. The
majority population of the various republics, it transpired, had to be dragged rather than drawn into the embrace of the
Soviet state.
The Party and the Revolution (1988), Dennis Gilbert calls the notion of “a self-recruited, ideologically motivated, disciplined, self-abnegating, hierarchical, revolutionary elite ... without doubt Lenin’s most important contribution to the ideology of the FSLN.” “Vanguard” became in turn “the most common term in the Sandinista lexicon.” Indeed, noted Gilbert, “It is difficult to find a party text where it does not occur.”

The vanguardist tendencies within the Front would only increase throughout the 1980s, as the revolution confronted the implacable hostility of the Reagan Administration and the terrorist force, the so-called contras, that the U.S. armed and sustained along Nicaragua’s borders and in the thinly-populated zones of the north and south. No Sandinista institution would remain untouched by the trend — least of all, perhaps, the party’s official organ. When Barricada’s perfil editorial (editorial profile) was finally formalized in 1985, at the height of the contra war and with the economy spiralling ever downwards, Carlos Fernando Chamorro was frank in his acknowledgement that “as an official organ, Barricada must comply with the following functions”:

a) To be a vehicle of mass information of the FSLN for the divulging of its political line, an instrument of support for the mobilization of the masses around the tasks of the revolution, and to convert itself into an effective medium of communication between the masses and the FSLN.

b) To contribute to the formation of the base committees, members, and activists of the FSLN to wage the ideological struggle, arming them with arguments and revolutionary conceptions, and to be a vehicle of support for the organization of ideological work at the base.

In this vanguardist and para-statal conception, there was naturally little room for “bourgeois” virtues of journalistic “professionalism” and “objectivity.” In fact, there was barely room for the kind of stylistic agility that would allow a journalist to move beyond ponderous official pronouncements and engage the reader on a more personal, conversational level. It was not that classical notions of critical distance or of the press’s “watchdog” role were dispensed with altogether. Chamorro, for instance, rejected a strategy built around the provision of “isolated information that might otherwise be called objective truth.” But he also argued that “without

---


23 Perfil editorial de Barricada, cited in Guillermo Cortés Dominguez and Juan Ramón Huerta, “Critical Journalism in the Daily Barricada,” monograph prepared for the Degree in Journalism at the University of Central America (UCA), Managua (1988), pp. 4-5. A nearly-identical version of the profile can be found in “Profiles of the Communications Media,” an internal document of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda prepared under Carlos Fernando Chamorro’s aegis in the first trimester of 1985 (unpublished, privately supplied).
criticism there can be neither journalism nor revolution.” The crux, it appeared, lay in the
definition of criticism: “We do not refer here to destructive, counter-revolutionary criticism, but
rather to criticism which offers a searching analysis of problems and proposes alternative
revolutionary solutions for them.” Clearly, the vanguardist conception offered Barricada relatively
little opportunity to develop its own agenda of news-coverage and editorial concerns. How, then,
was such a project able to do an about-face after 1990 – to “de-officialize” and establish itself as a
more balanced and professional publication “in the national interest”?

The answer may lie, in large part, in an analytically-distinguishable “professional imperative”
of the kind discussed in Chapter 1. If the mostly young and ill-trained journalists and editors who
launched Barricada in 1979 were imbued with a desire to serve as the “vanguard of the vanguard,”
they were also participants in the building of an institution that, over time, achieved greater internal
coherence, amassed important new resources, and established a firmer sense of professional
capacities. Often this process went hand-in-hand with the mobilizing dimension of the paper’s
operations. It was, after all, the Front that was the most important provider of the material inputs
and training that were indispensable to a deepening of professional sensibilities. Moreover, the
revolutionary commitment that Barricada journalists brought to – for example – the war
 correspondence of the 1980s had important professional implications. The journalist who risked
his or her life on the battlefront, to help speed the defeat of the contras and the triumph of the
revolution, was also the journalist who found himself or herself exploring a type of journalism
without precedent in Nicaraguan history.

At least as regularly as the mobilizing and professional imperatives were able to establish a
harmonious balance, however, they brought the paper into conflict with those whose main concern
was that Barricada be a dependable mouthpiece for the vanguard. As Barricada entrenched itself as a
revolutionary institution – and even before – staff chafed at party-imposed restrictions, and
experienced regular difficulties in juggling the political and professional obligations implicit in the
idea of “revolutionary journalism.” In earlier research I argued that the professional imperative had


25 A turning-point appears to have been reached in 1982, with the building of a stable journalistic and
administrative staff; a move from the cramped quarters of Notedades to larger and better-equipped facilities; the
implementation of stable salary arrangements; and the establishment of a distribution network and stable supplies of
ink and newsprint, enabling an increase in circulation.
left an anecdotal and occasionally documentary spoor that allowed the analyst to trace its growth and development through the revolutionary decade of the 1980s.26

The roots of the professional imperative in the context of revolutionary Nicaragua, and their presence even in a propaganda organ such as Barricada unashamedly was in the 1980s, require some explanation. Perhaps the most important mitigating factor was the overarching character of the Sandinista revolution — by contrast, say, with Cuba or the Soviet Union. Almost uniquely in the annals of leftist revolution, the Sandinistas never sought or exercised a monopoly over Nicaraguan media. As with their decision to leave 60 percent of the economy in private hands, the relatively wide latitude given to opposition-owned newspapers and radio stations reflected the FSLN’s desire to avoid scaring away “patriotic producers” domestically, as well as international sympathizers, by imposing a more draconian system of control. The FSLN’s fractious relationship with the anti-Sandinista La Prensa is usually cited against this thesis. But the fact that there was a relationship — that the paper was not simply annihilated and its editors jailed, exiled, or killed — attests to the comparatively tolerant media policy adopted by the Sandinistas.27 Even at the level of daily material supplies, essential goods like Russian newsprint and printer’s ink were distributed equally by Sandinista state authorities to all three daily newspapers throughout the revolutionary era.28

26Jones, Beyond the Barricades (thesis), pp. 46-47.

27More generally, Nicaragua was one of the rare places in Latin America in the 1980s where one could voice contrary opinions in the street without worrying about a visit from a death-squad, or pass a uniformed soldier without flinching inwardly. In fact, as Noam Chomsky wryly argued in the context of the 1990 Nicaraguan elections, the degree of pluralism was unusual even by the standards of developed western countries in wartime: “Under the totalitarian Sandinistas, foreigners were permitted to forge a political coalition [UNO] based upon the terrorist force [the contras] they created to attack the country; and they were allowed to pour millions of dollars into supporting it in the elections. Foreigners engaged in what the World Court condemned as ‘the unlawful use of force’ against Nicaragua were allowed to fund a major newspaper [La Prensa] that called for the overthrow of the government and openly identified with the terrorist forces pursuing these ends, proxies of the foreign power funding the journal. Under these totalitarians, such foreigners as Jeane Kirkpatrick and US Congressmen were permitted to enter the country to present public speeches and news conferences calling for the overthrow of the government by violence and supporting the foreign-run terrorist forces. ‘Human Rights’ investigators accompanied by contra lobbyists posing as ‘experts’ were permitted free access, as were journalists who were scarcely more than agents of the foreign power attacking the country. Nothing remotely resembling this record can be found in Western democracies; in the United States, Israel, England, and other democracies, such freedoms would be inconceivable, even under far less threat, as the historical record demonstrates with utter clarity.” Noam Chomsky, “The Decline of the Democratic Ideal,” in Deterring Democracy (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 325-26.

28In the mid-1980s, an American reporter, Michael Massing, witnessed the anomalous sight of “a truck backed into La Prensás loading dock, disgorging 300-kilogram rolls of newsprint marked ‘Made in the USSR.’ The trucks arrived throughout the day, delivering 700 tons in all — enough to keep the paper going for three or four months. Thus,” Massing noted tongue-in-cheek, “did Soviet generosity help keep the flame of press freedom alive in Nicaragua.” Massing, “Nicaragua’s free-fire journalism,” p. 33. Professional (not to mention family) bonds also linked
An outside – U.S. – influence was also prominent in Nicaragua’s pre-revolutionary journalism. The only school of journalism in the country before the revolution was a wholly-owned subsidiary of the U.S. Embassy. (Bayardo Arce, later the National Directorate representative to Barricada, taught there before slipping underground as a guerrilla commander.) Though enrolment in the school was never large, the school’s diet of “objective,” western-style journalism exerted a powerful influence on generations of Nicaraguan journalists. This meant that however vigorously Barricada journalists denounced “bourgeois media” practices during the 1980s, they could hardly help but define themselves against – and to some extent in terms of – that same tradition. This resulted in a certain schizophrenia when it came, for instance, to the “watchdog” function so central to liberal-democratic conceptions of the press. Even when Barricada was most shrill in denouncing the hypocrisy of the model – as when its staff argued that capitalism turned journalists into “eunuchs” capable of writing glowingly about “tyrant assassins” – even then, the critique seemed founded not so much on a conviction that objectivity and the critical function were ignoble per se, but that western journalism fell short of the standards it proclaimed. Thus Barricada could be counted on to deliver denunciations of a journalistic model “that always tells us we have to be objective and impartial, while it itself is neither.”

But Barricada’s writers also paid regular, if ambivalent, lip-service to the critical function, as we have seen. The cultural heritage of the Nicaraguan revolutionaries, and the macro-pluralistic character of the policies they implemented during the 1980s, had two basic implications for the development of the professional imperative at Barricada. First, they determined the essential character of relations between the FSLN (for most purposes, the National Directorate) as the sponsor of the revolution’s “official organ,” and Barricada staffers as the day-to-day custodians of that institution and its journalistic project. It is no exaggeration to say that Barricada had greater room for manoeuvre, and more say in establishing the terms of the relationship with its sponsor, than any comparable organ in the history of leftist revolution.

---

the staff and directorates of the three politically-opposed Managua dailies. Business managers, for example, would meet to discuss matters of common interest and hammer out practical agreements – to conduct joint tours of Costa Rican newsrooms, or to deny space to advertisers who refused to settle debts owed to another paper. See Jones, “Beyond the Barricades” (article), p. 87, n. 26.

It is worth pausing briefly to contrast *Barricada* in the 1980s with the newspaper that might have been expected to serve as its most obvious role model: *Granma*, the official organ of the Cuban Communist Party. It so happened that *Granma* served as a negative example for many of those who wrote and edited *Barricada* during the 1980s. Sofia Montenegro, along with many other *Barricada* staffers, visited *Granma’s* offices in Havana in the early 1980s. She emerged feeling not inspired, but “horrified” — and amused:

I couldn’t stop laughing. You know, *Granma is here*, and the Central Committee headquarters is over here. You write an editorial, you have to take it over to the Central Committee. There’s some big shot from the party who checks what you write and gives the O.K. Only then can it be printed. This sort of thing never happened at *Barricada* ...

Are Montenegro’s comments merely self-serving, retrospective attempts to differentiate *Barricada’s* essential propaganda function from *Granma’s* less apologetic version of the same? Closer analysis suggests that *Granma* did, in fact, serve *Barricada* as an “anti-concept” in key areas of the paper’s coverage. In the first place, *Barricada’s* directorate took steps to avoid *Granma’s* “extreme subordination of news coverage to official requirements” — what Chamorro referred to as a “pre-elaborated” model of press functioning. The micro-control exercised by party commissars and censorship authorities would be bluntly rejected as a *modus operandi* for the revolutionary journalists at *Barricada*. Not only would the FSLN’s presence in the newsroom be strictly regulated (eventually limited to a single, rather easygoing representative); but *Barricada* would also enjoy freedom from the kind of prior censorship imposed on all the other Nicaraguan dailies in the 1980s, including the pro-revolutionary *El Nuevo Diario*. *Barricada* sought to devote greater attention to the human-interest component usually so lacking in *Granma’s* coverage, a feature of its reporting that would later emerge as a core component of the autonomy project of the early 1990s. Finally, the range of opinion-editorial material in *Barricada’s* pages would lean towards individual (though sometimes painfully rhetorical) commentary, rather than prefabricated “official statements” from on high.

It could be argued that *Barricada* during the 1980s was more successful in expanding the professional imperative in institutional, rather than editorial, terms. It undoubtedly established a considerable, likely unprecedented, degree of day-to-day autonomy from its FSLN sponsor. But as

---

anyone who pores through the archives from the 1980s can attest, the paper rarely moved beyond a generally clichéd, propagandistic tone – a deficiency that was widely recognized in internal documents of the period. It was, nonetheless, a vision of a more independent, human, “agile” journalism – founded above all on a further loosening of the sponsor’s reins – that determined the character of the “norm” worked out between Barricada and the FSLN leadership. We will see in the next section that the structural changes aimed at enhancing Barricada’s autonomy from party dictates always (not surprisingly) arose within the newspaper as an institution. From the mid-1980s onwards, internal documents began to speak regularly of the professional dilemmas of revolutionary journalism: to express an open desire for a less stilted and “officialized” style than was possible under the mobilizing constraints that prevailed amidst the nearly constant political and economic crises of the 1980s.

The other key respect in which macro-pluralism shaped Barricada’s professional agenda in the 1980s was in the paper’s conflictive but curiously interdependent relationship with the reactionary version of La Prensa. The paper was indeed a powerful opponent. Despite the frequent harassment visited upon it by the Sandinista authorities, including one period of extended closure, La Prensa could count on a solid foundation of material and moral support in Nicaraguan society. Obviously, of the three Nicaraguan dailies, it was the preferred publication of the elite. La Prensa could count on receiving the bulk of private-sector advertising revenue – supplemented by open and covert contributions from abroad, notably the CIA and affiliated front organizations, and by the resources that its wealthy owners and directors possessed. More nebulous, but perhaps even more significant, was the place La Prensa held in the hearts of Nicaraguans – primarily the result of
Pedro Joaquín Chamorro’s distinguished record of opposition to the Somoza regime. *La Prensa* was thus a powerful competitor for the project of *periodismo revolucionario* being developed across town at the *Barricada* complex.

The importance of the “reflex relationship” between *Barricada* and *La Prensa* to the professional self-conception of *Barricada* staffers became plain in June 1986, when *La Prensa* was closed indefinitely on the orders of the Minister of the Interior (and future *Barricada* director), Tomás Borge. (The ban was lifted as part of the Esquipulas peace process in October 1987.) Perhaps surprisingly, *Barricada* staffers strongly opposed the closure. According to Xavier Reyes, the opposition derived from a sense that, while “politically we were rivals ... professionally we were colleagues. ... We imagined ourselves in the same position, being closed down, and imagined how we’d feel about it.”

Sofía Montenegro’s comments are also revealing: “I always said our greatest pride as

---

31 This and preceding quotes from Chamorro interviews, 28 February and 28 April 1991.
32 Reyes interview, 13 April 1991.
revolutionary journalists should be for La Prensa to exist [unmolested by the regime], and for nobody to read it."

The disappearance of the daily competition for fifteen months left a void at the heart of Barricada’s political and professional project. “Our reason to fight every day was La Prensa,” said Montenegro. “And it was very dull, you know, when it wasn’t there. Something was missing.”33 The best the paper could do was to seize the opportunity to expand its professional purview in an attempt to reach devoted readers of La Prensa. “We had to fill the information vacuum,” said Chamorro. According to Xavier Reyes, “We tried to include other points of view, convert people and institutions into news who were not [traditional] sources for Barricada. We were trying to be more objective, more balanced.”34

In a sense, though, the role of other influences in shaping Barricada’s professional identity was always secondary to the core issue of relations between the paper’s staffers and their primary sponsor, the National Directorate of the FSLN. It is time to consider more closely the unusual character of this relationship, and the specific means by which Barricada sought to establish a degree of independence in dealings with Sandinista leaders. It was, after all, this move towards a limited independence from an externally-generated mobilizing imperative that provided the foundation for the remarkable, if eventually abortive, autonomy experiment of 1990-94.

THE FSLN AND BARRICADA:
“NORMING” THE MATERIAL RELATIONSHIP

For Barricada, the status of official organ brought with it significant material privileges. Of course, these were not as pronounced as with similar publications in more developed revolutionary societies. Nicaragua’s crippling underdevelopment, the massive damage caused by fifty years of dictatorship and a ruinous civil war, the rapid onset of a new conflict as the Reagan Administration aimed its minions against the soft underbelly of the revolution – all these factors meant that the regime’s generosity towards its affiliated institutions was heavily constrained throughout the revolutionary decade. After helping Barricada find its feet in 1979-80, the Sandinista Front was

33Montenegro interview, 15 March 1991. Carlos Fernando Chamorro concurred: “In general it was dull, yes. ... I guess we were all stimulated when La Prensa reappeared in October 1987.” Chamorro interview, 3 April 1991.

never again able, or never chose, to provide Barricada with direct financial subsidies. Indeed, by the end of the decade, it was Barricada that was contributing resources to the Front.

But if Barricada was left without subsidies “in the classical sense” (according to Chamorro),

the paper could nevertheless access a wide range of inputs and advantages as a result of its privileged relationship with the party and state (a distinction not always easy to draw in a revolutionary society, whether of the left or right). The first significant endowment was the old offices of Novedades that housed Barricada for the first two years of its existence. “The physical assets of the Somoza-owned newspaper, Novedades, ended up directly in FSLN hands, rather than being transferred to the state,” Phil Ryan notes. “These assets formed the basis of Barricada, the official party newspaper.”

This was only the beginning of a pattern of support that allowed Barricada, over time, to establish itself as the largest Nicaraguan daily in circulation terms. Indeed, at one point in the mid-1980s, Barricada claimed the highest circulation of any newspaper in the history of Nicaragua – 120,000 copies, in a country of a little over three million people.

This unrealistically wide distribution (in a strictly market sense, at least) was the direct result of FSLN policy measures that boosted the circulation of all three Nicaraguan dailies. Beyond this, though, Barricada received an added boost. Its high circulation reflected bulk purchases of the paper for distribution through state channels – to Nicaraguan embassies abroad, for example, but especially to

35Chamorro interview, 28 February 1991.

36Ryan, Fall and Rise, pp. 119-20.

37Like most statistics in Nicaragua, Barricada’s circulation is difficult to verify independently. A peak circulation of 130,000 in 1985 was claimed by Carlos Fernando Chamorro in a 1991 interview (28 February). The fifth-anniversary edition of Barricada cited a figure of 120,000 for special print-runs, and a regular circulation of 110,000 — “a quantity … unheard of in the history of Nicaraguan journalism.” Chamorro was quoted as saying the circulation figures pointed to the “beginning of the overthrow of bourgeois press hegemony in Nicaragua” (“Five years of revolutionary truth,” 25 July 1984). Joan Coxedge lists Barricada’s circulation as 110,000 in 1984 (Coxedge, Thank God for the Revolution: A Journey through Central America [Sydney and London: Pluto Press, 1986], p. 121). The usually-reliable Nicaraguan magazine, envio, gave a circulation figure of 105,000 for early 1986 (up from 90,000 in late 1985 and 75,000 in 1983). This is close to the figure claimed by Chamorro. See “La Prensa. Post-Mortem on a Suicide,” envio, August 1986, p. 32.

38Notable among these was the distribution of donated Russian newsprint free of charge; and the subsidies on basic goods that for a time boosted the discretionary income of Nicaraguan consumers, particularly the poorer sectors forming the base of Barricada’s (and El Nuevo Diario’s) readership. Correspondingly, according to Carlos Fernando Chamorro, when the Sandinistas introduced “stabilization” measures in 1987 that included a lifting of subsidies, “circulation declined steeply. Because when the subsidies were suspended, the people had to pay for food and other things, and they no longer bought newspapers as they had in the past.” Chamorro interview, 28 February 1991.
the battlefront, where *Barricada* was considered vital to troop morale in the struggle against the *contras*.

State-sector advertising was another important source of support. It accounted for around 85 percent of *Barricada’s* advertising prior to the electoral debacle of January 1990. The paper thus enjoyed the rare luxury of being selective in its courting of private-sector ad accounts. “We were not advertiser-oriented,” Chamorro conceded in 1991:

> We had a small advertising department; we didn’t have aggressive people out looking for ads, and also we weren’t very good clients. Our philosophy was to favour the reader, not commercial interests. So we decided on a policy of advertising which was completely new: we’d put all the advertisements on non-facing pages. You can go into the archives and see that *Barricada* would give page six, page four, page eight to advertising. That’s not the best [thing] for the advertisers themselves – they want to be on the facing page.”

Of still greater importance were the state-sector printing contracts that flowed *Barricada’s* way throughout the revolutionary decade. The trend began with the mass literacy campaigns of the early 1980s, and took a quantum leap with the 1984 arrival of a Plamag Rondoset printing press, donated by the East German government. The donation itself, said Carlos Fernando Chamorro, was “the result of a political initiative taken by the FSLN at the highest level,” with a commensurate response from “the highest level” of the East German Socialist Unity Party. As such, it stands as perhaps the supreme example of the type of *de facto* aid, short of direct subsidies, that the Front could provide for its official organ. The new press nearly quadrupled *Barricada’s* printing capacity, and gave Editorial El Amanecer (*Barricada’s* FSLN-owned publisher) the only colour-capable press in Nicaragua. In 1987, the East Germans contributed a bookbinding machine that further boosted the publishing operation.

With these strategic infusions of aid, *Barricada* was able to become far and away Nicaragua’s largest publisher: As of 1987, *Barricada* was the largest supplier of books for Nicaraguan primary and secondary schools – some 2,310,000 volumes between 1980 and 1987 – and also produced 10,000 copies of higher educational texts. It prepared millions of pamphlets, magazines, cards and various educational materials for FSLN activists, mass organizations, and armed forces. It handled the major releases of Editorial Vanguardia, the magazines of the Ministries of Defence and the

---

35Chamorro interview, 28 February 1991.
40Chamorro interview, 19 March 1991.
Interior, and the official periodicals of the major urban and rural trade unions, together with the monthly publications of the National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers (ANDEN) and the Health Workers’ Federation (FETSALUD). It printed the publications of Special [Military] Zones I and II and Region V, along with large quantities of “educational” materials for the Department of Agitation and Propaganda (DAP).  

Carlos Fernando Chamorro acknowledged straightforwardly that these contracts were “one of the most important reasons we were able to grow, to capitalize, to earn money and reinvest it in Barricada to make it a strong industry.” The publishing operation brought in more than twice the revenue of the sales and advertising generated by Barricada itself.  

As hinted earlier, though, there was a reciprocal dimension to the material relationship between Barricada and its sponsor. When the publishing operation is factored in, Barricada by the end of the revolutionary decade was probably the most lucrative enterprise in the Front’s stable (certain obscure holdings in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama notwithstanding). Beginning in 1988, and for five years thereafter, Barricada became an important contributor to the FSLN’s coffers – donating between .5 and 2 percent of its monthly income, until the strain imposed on the paper’s dwindling resources became insupportable. This subsidy-in-reverse had become by 1992 “an important source of financing for the Front,” in the estimation of the National Directorate’s representative to Barricada, Comandante Bayardo Arce. It was also a defining moment for Barricada as an institution, symbolizing a new, if temporary, equality in relations between party and paper.

**Norming the Political Relationship**

I have argued that both a staunch mobilizing imperative and a drive for professional autonomy are visible almost from Barricada’s birth. Let us now consider some of the evidence for the latter proposition.

---

42Chamorro interview, 28 February 1991.
In the earliest days of *Barricada*'s operations, the task of ensuring a basic harmony between the Front's mobilizing requirements and the editorial content of the official organ was achieved through two major institutions. The first was a network of political cadres that directly oversaw and approved every word that made it into the paper's pages. This was the standard state-socialist model, followed at *Granma, Pravda*, and other paradigmatic institutions. The successor arrangement saw individual members of the National Directorate delegated to serve as dominant, and direct, mobilizing influences. The transformations that took place in both institutions, and from one to the other, were the direct result of the efforts of *Barricada*'s staff, especially its director, Carlos Fernando Chamorro. Likewise, what tensions arose in the party-paper relationship through the 1980s tended to result from *Barricada*'s bridling, primarily on professional grounds, at the mobilizing demands placed upon it by its FSLN sponsor.

The first attempt to assert direct party control over *Barricada*'s operations, the network of political cadres, took the form of a political commissariat that included just one trained journalist — Xavier Reyes. *Barricada* journalists, according to Reyes, felt their professional sensibilities piqued by "the fact that people who weren't journalists would touch their material.... This was like establishing a certain distance between the journalist and revolutionary work: it was like setting up a barrier, like doubting that the journalist was capable of interpreting correctly the new phenomena in society." In 1981, under Reyes's supervision, the commissariat was overhauled, and a "normal writing structure" instituted in the newsroom — "that is, without any political intervention by the party." *Barricada* won greater professional "breathing-space," Reyes said — more freedom to interpret and apply the ideological tenets of the Front in its own manner.44

These first intimations of professional autonomy, though, were quickly undermined by another, more personal kind of mobilizing intervention — one that proved no less exasperating on professional grounds. The culprits this time were the individual members of the FSLN National Directorate. The Directorate combined three pre-revolutionary "tendencies," each of which contributed three representatives. In addition to their position on the Directorate, and reflecting the intertwining of party and state that is standard in revolutionary societies, most Directorate members also received ministerial appointments or other privileged state positions. It is notable

44Reyes interview, 13 April 1991.
that this did not lead to major ideological schisms during the years of revolution and national emergency. An impressive revolutionary cohesion instead prevailed – at Barricada as well. But if newspaper staff did not have to walk an especially delicate doctrinal line when mediating among Directorate members, they did have to reckon with the personal quirks and preferences of the nine most powerful individuals in Nicaragua.

The purviews and personal temperaments of Directorate members varied widely. But all FSLN leaders, it seems, had something in common – a conviction that their own activities were most central to the revolution, and thus should command the greatest attention in Barricada's pages. “All the members of the National Directorate demanded a strong presence on the newspaper,” recalled Xavier Reyes:

[Minister of Agriculture] Jaime Wheelock felt that what he was doing ... was so important it should take up all eight columns of the front page. Carlos Núñez felt the National Assembly [which he oversaw] was the most important thing. Daniel Ortega felt the activities of the central government were most important. Tomás Borge felt what he was doing was most important. So you had nine telephone calls every day! ... Some days were more unbearable than others.

Nor was Carlos Fernando Chamorro, as director, the only victim of this self-interested lobbying. “When they failed” with Chamorro, Reyes said, the Directorate members “would go down to the level of the writers.” Finally, Chamorro took it upon himself to press Barricada's case in an audience with the Directorate – citing “our criterion as journalists,” according to Chamorro. His argument on behalf of Barricada staff “was that you had to take into consideration the political aspect [i.e., the wishes of individual Directorate members], but you couldn’t subordinate the journalistic importance or the public interest to the political aspect all the time.” Chamorro described the foundation of the new norm this way:

If you had five members of the National Directorate participating in different activities, there might be one thing of the five that was really a priority, decided politically by the FSLN. So I would say, “Okay, you tell me what’s your priority, and from then on I decide what is more important, according to my perception of the public interest.” ... We had to negotiate and accept certain things. [But] we fought in order to introduce new concepts. Basically the new concept was: Journalistic criteria have to be respected, and you can’t predetermine everything. We had a lot of complaints about how we administered the norm, but I think over time, everybody [in the Directorate] started forgetting about it ...

45Reyes interview, 13 April 1991.
46Chamorro interview, 19 March 1991, emphasis added. Onofre Guevara recalled that the “political aspect” of dealings with individual Directorate members necessitated an equal apportioning of space and attention, down to the
CHAPTER 2 - NICARAGUA

The result was the most significant institutional innovation in *Barricada*'s operations during the revolutionary decade: the designation of a single National Directorate member as liaison between the paper and its FSLN sponsors. Under the new arrangement, any Directorate member who had a request for coverage could present it to the representative, who in turn “would speak with Carlos and discuss with him, of all the necessities, which one got space,” according to Sofia Montenegro.\(^47\) In turn, the representative would serve as a channel to the Directorate for *Barricada*’s concerns and requests – for example, the initiative that led to the donation of the East German printing press. As it happened, both representatives – Carlos Núñez until 1984, and Bayardo Arce thereafter – established strong and empathetic bonds with *Barricada* as an institution with its own interests and identity, and lobbied other Directorate members on the paper’s behalf. Núñez, in particular, appears to have been genuinely loved by *Barricada* staff; his untimely death from cancer, in 1990, was keenly felt.

Despite the important steps towards “norming” the relationship between party and paper, though, it was standard for most Nicaraguan and foreign readers to assume that every word in the paper was rubber-stamped by the FSLN leadership. As a result, political coverage was a perennial minefield, in which outright disaster always seemed a step away. The result was an inordinate amount of self-censorship that effectively cancelled out much of *Barricada*’s hard-won autonomy. Coverage of foreign relations, for example, could impose crushing pressures, as Sofia Montenegro described:

> You were absolutely conscious of your responsibilities toward the Front. You didn’t have the possibility of writing anything wrong in *Barricada*. Anything you wrote was [perceived as] official. You had no margin of discretion at all. ... Out of this there developed a paralyzed journalism. You were so intimidated by the possible effects of what you could write about the revolution that you always exercised immense self-restraint. ... That’s how self-censorship came along. ... Everybody was cornering you. You lived constantly in a state of siege. ... You had to think very carefully, weigh every word that made it into print. There wasn’t much possibility to fool around.\(^48\)

It was a signal feature of *Barricada*’s operations, though, that the deficiencies were noted and decried at the time – indeed, they commanded greater attention and concern than perhaps any minor details: “Carlos Fernando was careful to balance the activities and representation of every member of the Directorate, even down to the size of the photos and the space the article took up.” Guevara interview, 2 April 1991.

\(^{47}\)Montenegro interview, 15 March 1991.

\(^{48}\)Montenegro interview, 15 March 1991.
other subject, if internal documents and related evaluations are given credence. The 1985 Editorial Profile of Barricada, the first major attempt to formalize an identity for the paper, placed considerable emphasis on the newspaper's critical function. Barricada pledged itself to unearthing all the "deficiencies which affect the execution of the policies of the revolution." But this was little more than the standard Leninist formulation, more honoured in the breach than in the observance. The failure was widely acknowledged. The New Editorial Profile of 1990, looking back on Barricada's performance during the revolutionary decade, would criticize the original incarnation of the paper as "extremely predictable," with only the narrowest critical distance, "in many cases none at all," in its relations with government and other official sources. Barricada was "fundamentally a daily [that served to] diffuse the FSLN line, with few variations," inhibiting the ability of Barricada writers to "formulat[e] alternatives which would nourish revolutionary thought." Only "limited and unsystematic" measures had been taken to counteract the trend. The 1990 verdict echoed conclusions reached two years earlier, in an impressive study written by Barricada staffers Guillermo Cortés and Juan Ramón Huerta as part of a degree course at the School of

Figure 2.2 The limitations of partisan journalism. A revolutionary state functionary spoonfeeds press conference material to an eager pro-revolutionary journalist: "Open your mouth and close your eyes..." Roger Sánchez's cartoon appeared in Barricada on 1 March 1983.

Journalism, and supervised by Carlos Fernando Chamorro himself. Examining the front pages of 42 *Barricada* editions from 1985 to 1987 — some 256 articles in all — Cortés and Huerta cited an "almost absolute preponderance, in *Barricada*'s coverage, of official discourse and official sources."

The paper had failed to "exercise systematically a critical function," as its 1985 charter pledged it to do. Concluded the authors:

... In *Barricada* there is not an integral exercising of the journalist’s critical function. ... Superficiality, lack of rigour, absence of investigation and failure to follow cases through to their conclusion ... characterize the majority of the articles published by the paper in the period under investigation ... The daily appears to be highly concentrated on the divulging of official government activity; it acts, moreover, as a mere reproducer of the interests of the various official institutions, without a line of its own which would allow it to satisfy other, more broad and varied, information necessities of the population.50

The conflict between mobilizing and professional requirements thus produced a powerful quandary. How was *Barricada* to engage, enlighten, and entertain, when dissemination of a polemical revolutionary "line" was the paper’s *raison d'etre*? How could the steady diet of political pronouncements, diplomatic news, visiting foreign delegations, and broadsides against U.S. foreign policy be made palatable to readers who, though presumably revolutionary, were also hungry for diversion from the ultra-politicized atmosphere of war and economic crisis?

The answer is that as long as the Sandinistas were in power, the challenge was rarely met. Jonathan Evan Maslow wrote of *Barricada* in 1981 that it was "as boring as any in-house corporate magazine."51 Despite important transformations at the structural level, and considerable improvements in production and design, there seemed little reason to alter that assessment as *Barricada* headed into the election campaign of 1990 and another round of uncritical boosterism for its FSLN sponsor.

---


If the printed press of the 1980s was fundamentally political, or, more exactly, partisan, that of the 1990s has already been marked by the irreversible stamp of professionalization and the strengthened autonomy of journalistic institutions. Barricada seeks to continue to play a pioneering role in the process of press modernization.

– Carlos Fernando Chamorro, in Barricada's 15th anniversary issue, 1994

Sandinista- CONTRA CEASE-FIRE TERMED MAJOR BREAKTHROUGH BY NICARAGUA'S RIVAL FACTIONS. On 25 March 1988, readers of The New York Times awoke to a four-column headline announcing the decisive step towards resolving Nicaragua's grinding conflict. For years, the Sandinistas had proclaimed that negotiations with the contras would never be entertained – the Sandinistas would only deal directly with the rebels' paymasters in Washington. Now the world watched as members of the FSLN National Directorate, including President Daniel Ortega and his brother, Army Chief Humberto Ortega, signed a ceasefire and exchanged mutual recognition with contra leaders – all under the approving eye of the conservative strand of the Catholic Church, represented by Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo.

The result was a notable “thaw” in a country that had been a political pressure-cooker for many years. The new buzzword was concordación – a somewhat hazy concept that combined national reconciliation with peaceful political competition. The attention of the regime shifted towards the parlous condition of the hyperinflation-ridden Nicaraguan economy. In this sphere, too, significant policy transformations had become evident by the time the ceasefire with the contras was inked. A "hesitant turn towards the market" had occurred as early as 1985, Phil Ryan writes, and 1988-89 saw the "triumph of the market," as “economic reforms scuttled most key elements of the state-dominant economy project.”

The leadership imposed a range of austerity measures strikingly similar to those being implemented throughout Latin America, as debtor nations sought to curry favour with the International Monetary Fund and other First World-dominated institutions. There

53 Ryan, Fall and Rise, p. 219.
were new attempts to court “patriotic producers” — members of Nicaragua’s capitalist class who had established a modus vivendi with the Sandinista authorities, and whose economic contribution was more desperately needed than ever. In the crucial area of land reform, the Sandinistas continued to shift away from the original emphasis on cooperatives and state farms. That policy was already in abeyance by 1987, as the leadership realized how badly it had alienated Nicaragua’s fiercely individualistic peasants — driving them, in some cases, into the arms of the contras.

The economic measures, though popular with the private sector and conservative business classes, caused profound distress to many FSLN militants. Ryan cites their “fear ... that government policy had been hijacked by technocrats.” Once again, the ripples were felt within Barricada, occasioning what Ryan calls “perhaps [the] most critical editorial ever” published in the newspaper while the Sandinistas held power. Headlined, “A counterpart to the economic logic is missing,” the editorial pointed to the regime’s alleged failure to take into account the “social and ideological repercussions” of the austerity measures. Concepts that had long been “slogans and guides for mass action,” Barricada wrote, had now “lost validity.” The reforms might well be necessary, the paper conceded; but it nonetheless bemoaned the FSLN’s failure to successfully convey their “socialist orientation” — putting quotation marks around the phrase, Ryan notes, “perhaps for the first time.”

Neither at this point nor in the remaining couple of years of the revolution was Barricada free to declare itself opposed to a basic tenet of FSLN policy. There were, nonetheless, signs of a more autonomous and exploratory agenda emerging at the paper, and their ramifications extended beyond the interesting editorial cited by Ryan. As with the more dramatic transformations to come in 1990-91, the changes at Barricada from late 1987 onward reflected important transformations in FSLN policy, responding, in turn, to perceived changes in Nicaragua’s domestic political sphere. But they also — and increasingly — reflected the desire of Barricada staff for greater professional self-expression.

The FSLN’s policy reversals of 1987-88 decisively shifted the arena of conflict from the military to the political-ideological arena. The measure with the greatest implications for Barricada was the decision to allow La Prensa to resume publishing after a 15-month hiatus. This meant a

---

^Quoted in Ryan, Fall and Rise, pp. 219-20.
renewal of Barricada’s political and professional confrontation with its main competitor, the absence of which (as noted) had led to a certain professional lethargy at the paper. It also presented the paper with an ideal opportunity – and a practical reason – to push for greater professional autonomy, since it could be argued that this was necessary to meet La Prensa’s challenge. According to longtime editor Onofre Guevara, there was “a feeling that you had to make a paper that was more socially acceptable to everyone, less partisan.”

This line of argument actually found a receptive audience among the Sandinista leadership. “The National Directorate was conscious that we needed a change,” said Sofia Montenegro. “They felt themselves that [Barricada’s] officializing everything had become a straitjacket.” That perception, Montenegro added, happily coincided with the interests and desires of “the ones who really thought in terms of the newspaper itself” – Barricada’s staff.

The “thaw” of 1987-88 also witnessed the climax of the process to draft a new Nicaraguan constitution, one that would lay a foundation for concertación and national consensus. The constitution was intended to “institutionalize” the Sandinista revolution. Barricada, too, felt itself sufficiently strong and coherent as an institution to play a leading role in the process. In charting the future course of the paper, Carlos Fernando Chamorro said he drew on the example of another “institutionalized” revolution – Mexico’s – and the press that it had spawned. He cited specifically Excelsior, the leading pro-establishment Mexican daily, as the inspiration for a project that would not necessarily be official, would not be too tied to the FSLN, but would seek to be more the paper of consensus on the basic foundations of [Nicaraguan] society. A newspaper that would be much more preoccupied with defending the constitution than with the party aspects of the FSLN. Excelsior is the institution of the political class in Mexico. In a very subtle way, it’s oriented to support, not the [ruling] PRI itself, but the system the PRI is supporting. It’s seen by the society as an institution which speaks for itself; it has a commitment to the basic foundations of the system – the type of economic and political model you’re promoting – and at the same time it’s not too tied to the party. It’s a very sophisticated arrangement.

---

55 Onofre Guevara interview, 2 April 1991.
It is quite likely that this "establishment" project would have prevailed, in some form, had the Sandinistas won the 1990 elections. As it transpired, though, a much more drastic reconfiguring of the political landscape loomed, one that would require a more far-reaching response from the leading Sandinista media organ. Few Sandinistas would have proclaimed the outcome of the 1990 vote a desirable one. It did, though, allow — and require — Barricada to undergo a political, material, and professional restructuring that was altogether more far-reaching, wrenching, and perhaps interesting than the strategy that first began to be mooted in 1987-88.

1990: THE EARTHQUAKE

Right now [1991], the Front is going through a very hard time. It has lost authority, credibility, legitimacy. It's difficult for them to lead even their own organizations. Even if they wanted to have greater control over Barricada, the situation itself prevents it. Well, we're taking advantage of that.

— Guillermo Cortés, Barricada staffer.58

Carlos Fernando Chamorro spent election night, 25 February 1990, moving between the Barricada offices and FSLN campaign headquarters at La Piñata fairground.59 Like nearly all Sandinistas, Chamorro was anticipating a Sandinista victory "by a wide margin," possibly a landslide. At about 9:30 in the evening, the first results came in from rural polling stations. They showed the FSLN trailing Violeta Chamorro's UNO coalition badly. For Chamorro's son, the staunch Sandinista supporter, this early tally meant the dream was over: "It was quite clear for me, at that moment, that we had lost." Other Sandinistas held out hope a little longer, waiting to see whether the results from Managua — the FSLN's power-base — would turn the tide. But the FSLN lost Managua too. By one o'clock in the morning, Chamorro was back at Barricada, anxiously wondering how to report the staggering developments to the newspaper's readers:

In that moment, in which everybody felt personally depressed, I was thinking about what to do. I couldn't close the edition until I had official results. Then the official results started arriving, but they weren't definite — only 10 percent or so of the vote counted. So I couldn't run a story in which the defeat was decisively announced.60

58 Cortés interview, 9 April 1991. Cortés added at the time, presciently: "I don't know if, when the Sandinista Front recovers from the electoral defeat and repairs itself organizationally, when it feels stronger and more solid with its new statutes and program, it will want to exercise greater control [over Barricada]."

59 An ironic choice of sites, given the "piñata" scandal that would descend upon the FSLN after the elections.

60 Chamorro interview, 17 April 1991.
A decision was taken. For the time being, *Barricada* would limit itself to announcing that UNO was in the lead. That was the tone of the front-page reporting on 26 February. By the time *Barricada* made it to the streets, though, Daniel Ortega had formally conceded defeat. In its 27 February edition, *Barricada* too accepted the verdict. This pat summary of events can hardly begin to capture the shock and tension of these pivotal hours. Observers noted an unnerving stillness in the streets of the capital. Nicaraguans were holding their breath, waiting to see whether the FSLN really would surrender state power, and wondering – perhaps for the first time – what a new, counter-revolutionary regime would mean for them personally.

Once before, a transformation in FSLN policy – responding to changes in the wider political arena – had provided *Barricada* with an opportunity to contemplate expanding its professional imperative and its appeal to the wider Nicaraguan society. But in 1987-88, staffers had envisaged only a gradual reorientation, undertaken at the newspaper’s own pace. The catastrophe of 1990 stripped the paper of this luxury of incremental change. It forced *Barricada* to confront a harsh new environment: one in which it could no longer depend on the sympathy and support of the ruling regime; in which the movement that had given it life and provided it with a ready-made constituency was in disarray; in which new rounds of austerity measures and market-oriented reforms would threaten the very material survival of the newspaper. The result was a maturing of the earlier plans for quasi-autonomy, and their substantial reformulation in the face of radically-transformed circumstances. The essential ramifications, for *Barricada*, of the FSLN’s fall from power can be summarized as follows:

- The defeat lifted from *Barricada* the burden of supporting the regime in power, eventually decreasing the salience of the mobilizing imperative and radically reducing the dissonance between it and its professional counterpart.
- The normative agenda of political democratization and *concertación* decisively influenced the National Directorate’s own agenda, and provided an important political “space” that enabled *Barricada’s* professional imperative to assume greater prominence.
- The outlines of the FSLN mobilizing agenda were rendered more flexible (and therefore more open to interpretation by *Barricada* staffers) by the Directorate’s loss of strength and legitimacy, and by the atmosphere of questioning and self-examination that prevailed among Sandinista ranks.
- In the construction of the FSLN’s (and therefore its own) mobilizing agenda, *Barricada* came to play a semi-autonomous role, encouraging debate about the FSLN’s future and seeking to establish itself as a “public-opinion leader.” Its
performance in this respect encountered strong opposition from some Sandinista sectors, including one National Directorate member and later others.

- The importance of Barricada to the FSLN's financial well-being grew, at the same time as material pressures and constraints on Barricada dramatically increased.

The wider, indeed global, context also should not be overlooked. The FSLN's fall from power occurred only a few months after the cataclysmic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, which obliterated or sharply transformed most of the Sandinistas' staunchest supporters during the 1980s. Clearly, the winds of change were blowing; and they blew through Barricada's pages even before the National Directorate met in December 1990 to approve the paper's New Editorial Profile. In mid-1990, an important structural transformation took place at Barricada that paved the way for the paper's formal relaunching in January 1991. It took the form of an Editorial Council, something Chamorro had been working to get off the ground since at least 1987. The council is best seen as the culmination of a struggle for greater autonomy from the FSLN leadership that had begun with Barricada staffers' early bridling at the introduction of political commissars in the newsroom. We saw earlier that the introduction of a single Directorate representative as go-between was designed to streamline relations between the newspaper and its sponsor, and to reduce the day-to-day involvement of the latter in Barricada's professional functioning. Now, with the creation of the council, the role of the leadership would be further muted, and Barricada's professional autonomy correspondingly increased. Bayardo Arce, who remained the Directorate's representative, was named president of the council. There, however, he would be only one among seven: in addition to Arce, the council comprised three representatives from Barricada (Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Sergio De Castro, and Xavier Reyes), and three representatives of what could be called "institutional Sandinismo": Alejandro Martínez, the Minister of Foreign Trade in the Sandinista government; William Ramírez, an FSLN representative in the National Assembly; and Rodrigo Reyes, a member and ex-president of the Nicaraguan Supreme Court.61 Sofia Montenegro also participated in most council meetings, enjoying "a strange status of observer and invited" in Chamorro's words, and slightly mitigating the council's gender bias.62

61 It is tempting to see here the influence of the periódico del sistema model first advanced in 1987-88.
62 Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
In the New Editorial Profile that Chamorro now drafted on the basis of council deliberations, the newly-constituted body was portrayed as the very anchor of Barricada’s continuing role as “an organic medium of the FSLN.” In a sense it was. But the initiative for the council, as with all such initiatives in the life of the paper, had come from within Barricada. And the primary motivations were professional. In a 1991 interview, Chamorro was frank about the council’s role as a firewall between the FSLN leadership and Barricada’s editorial functioning:

It’s much better to know that we’re going to have a meeting [of the council] every two weeks; every two weeks we’re going to have a brief evaluation, and at the same time share important information dealing with the law, the economy, politics and foreign policy. I think there is still vigilance [by the FSLN leadership], but this is totally a posteriori. I mean, we don’t get any phone calls from anyone saying, “What are you going to publish tomorrow? What’s your headline for tomorrow?”

After its “deep de-officialization,” Chamorro wrote in the New Editorial Profile, Barricada would cease to be an organ of the vanguard. If the paper would remain “an organic medium of the FSLN,” it would do so by transforming itself into a more amorphous entity – a “newspaper of the revolution, or a newspaper of Sandinismo.” This would allow Barricada to emerge “as a journalistic institution with its own identity, that is to say, with some degree of autonomy in relation to the FSLN as a political subject, to strengthen to the maximum its potential credibility and influence.” Barricada would best be able to serve the Front’s longterm interests, Chamorro argued cannily, if it did not have to be preoccupied on a daily basis with serving those same interests. By “not having to submit [itself] in a rigid way to the tactical requirements of FSLN policy,” Barricada would have “a greater margin of freedom of action” to cater to its traditional constituency and increase the newspaper’s – and hence the Front’s – appeal to previously hostile or indifferent sectors. After all, Chamorro wrote, “in the final analysis, it is the people [as a whole] that the revolution seeks to attract.”

The Editorial Council was critical to this balancing act. The “Rules of the Editorial Council of Barricada,” an unpublished internal document drafted by Chamorro during this same period, offers subtle indications of the tradeoffs necessary to secure greater autonomy while preserving a

63Chamorro interview, 3 April 1991. Guillermo Cortés, then a Barricada staffer, concurred: “It’s more difficult for a comandante to come here or call on the phone and say he wants to see something published, or doesn’t want something else published. The situation has radically changed. There’s greater independence for the newspaper.” Cortés interview, 9 April 1991.

64New Editorial Profile of Barricada (in Spanish), unpublished internal document, December 1990.
broadly Sandinista orientation – or, as the document put it, “to harmonize the newspaper’s actions with the global [i.e., overarching] strategy and the specific interests of the FSLN as an opposition force.” Taking no chances, Chamorro sought to ensure that *Barricada*'s writers and editors would not have to deal with untoward meddling – even by the council itself. “The Editorial Council,” according to Chamorro’s “Rules,” “is not an executive organ that intervenes in the ordinary decisions of the paper on questions of news and editorial policies, which are the purview of the directorate of the newspaper in accordance with generally approved policies.” Rather, the council would “aid in the elaboration of the editorial strategy of the newspaper,” including the “definition of its political objectives.” This editorial strategy would be “forwarded at the end to the director of the newspaper and his team, who are responsible for its application and execution.”

The council’s role would remain fairly constant over the course of the autonomy experiment, though its membership did evolve, with William Ramírez departing and Emilio Baltodano and *Barricada* editor Roberto Fonseca being drafted to serve. There are indications of a degree of dissension on certain aspects of the internal Sandinista debate; a *Barricada* editorial of February 1994 referred to “a variety of personal opinions” existing among “members of the editorial council,” as well as among *Barricada* staff. In a 1996 interview, however, Chamorro properly pointed to the decision by all council members – including Bayardo Arce – to resign en masse as the defenestración loomed in 1994 as evidence that a unified vision of the autonomy project had prevailed among council members. The vestigial role of the council after October 1994, Chamorro likewise suggested, was an indication that a powerful linchpin of *Barricada*'s institutional autonomy and professional identity had been discarded.

**A Revolutionary Liberalism?**

The professional project that took shape at *Barricada* in 1990 derived above all from liberal-democratic conceptions of the press and its role *vis-à-vis* civil society. To see this more clearly, consider the essence of the “journalistic strategy” outlined in the New Editorial Profile, which recommended that *Barricada* reposition itself “as a daily of general information with a national reach,” rather than a sectarian publication of minimal interest to the unconverted. At the heart of

the professional project outlined in the profile were ten components that Carlos Fernando Chamorro and the Editorial Council considered essential to the paper's new identity. They are reproduced here at some length, with emphasis added throughout, since there is no clearer articulation of the professional vision that was meant to guide Barricada in the post-revolutionary era. The drafters of the profile pledged:

i) [To move toward] a balanced journalism which breaks with the unilateral nature of information predominant in Nicaragua. That is to say, *the consultation of various sources in covering news, the presentation of alternative opinions, etc., in order to gain credibility and professional quality.*

ii) To construct an individual agenda. Barricada must reflect daily reality, but above all it must come up with an investigative agenda of news. *To give facts priority over words [discurso].*

iii) To combine agility with profundity ... Abundant information in short note-form, combined with more in-depth material, should [contribute to] a modern and attractive design for easier reading.

iv) There should be no informational “blank-spaces” [*No hay que dejar vacíos informativos*], even taking into account the fact that there will always exist questions of political convenience which must be considered in deciding whether to publish [an item] or not.

v) To establish a solid relationship with the public which is linked to the daily. Their minor and major concerns and demands — whether individual or social — should always receive privileged attention.

vi) To undertake self-promotion of Barricada's role, its achievements and those of its journalists, as an institution. Each small victory of Barricada should be claimed as a conquest which serves to increase [Barricada's] own space.

vii) To combine journalistic genres which will permit [the paper] to offer a diversity of reading material and [present] a distinctive journalistic style. ... To cultivate news [*la crónica*, reporting, interviews.

viii) To grant a special importance to human-interest [material] and entertainment. [These serve as] “hooks” for readers. [There should be] a surprise every day. A touch of craftiness, pain, joy, without succumbing to unnecessary stridency.

ix) To cultivate a plain language [of reportage] ... to purify the language of rhetoric and hyper-adjectivization [sobreadjetización].

x) To formally separate opinion from information, and to adopt a necessary distance in treatment of informational subjects. This does not imply that information should be stripped of all its political content [intencionalidad política] ...

It is clear that there is more going on here than a wholesale adoption of liberal-democratic journalistic principles. The reference to “the unilateral nature of information predominant in Nicaragua” acknowledges the partisan character of Nicaraguan journalism in the 19th and 20th centuries — a tradition of which Barricada was itself a part. The special nature of Barricada's institutional ties with its FSLN sponsor, and of the revolutionary process that brought it to national
prominence, is also evident: hence the acknowledgment that “there will always exist questions of political convenience which must be considered in deciding whether to publish” certain items. Hardly an admission many western editors would freely make, this accurately reflects the professional compromises that were held to be necessary in order for the autonomy project to find its footing without disrupting the symbiotic relationship with the Frente.

“IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST”: 1991-94

On 30 January 1991, less than a year after the historic elections that lent a decisive impetus to its drive for autonomy, Barricada formally unveiled a new and in some ways radically revamped version of itself. Gone was the insurrectionary logo alongside the masthead: a guerrilla crouched behind a barricade of paving stones, taking aim with a rifle. Gone, too, were the broad swaths of red-and-black — the banner of Sandino (though a more subtle version of the colour scheme remained). Most striking of all was the change in the paper’s slogan, altered to read: “In the National Interest” [por los intereses nacionales]. As if to emphasize the move away from Barricada’s official-organ status, a new logo also appeared: Sandino’s trademark cowboy hat, emblazoned over a Nicaraguan flag. Even this, though, was soon deemed too partisan. A few days after the first edition of the new Barricada hit the stands, the hat and the flag were separated. There was perhaps no better symbol of the balance — and distance — between mobilizing and professional imperatives that the paper’s staff now sought to entrench.66

The specifics of Barricada’s post-revolutionary editorial agenda received close attention in the New Editorial Profile. As political and programmatic bulwarks for the new orientation, the paper proposed:

i) The defense of the State of Law, the Constitution, and democratic rights, among which the most important is freedom of expression;

ii) The widening of space for popular participation, and the democratization of the popular organizations and social movements;

iii) The unity, democratization, and programmatic relaunching of the FSLN, and its projection in society as forger of an authentically democratic, participatory, and representative political culture;

iv) The struggle for the political depolarization of society, and the channelling of conflicts into democratic forms of expression;

66This paragraph is reproduced from my article, “Beyond the Barricades.”
v) The defense of socio-economic alternatives which, in a framework of equity and social justice, will benefit the development of the popular sectors;
vi) The defense of national independence and sovereignty and the values of national culture.\(^7\)

Thus, essential values of tolerance and reconciliation – within the overarching framework of democratic pluralism – would act to soften the ultra-mobilized militancy of years past. Envisioned as well was a much broader canvas for reporting and opinion-editorial contributions. An attempt would be made to reflect and promote not only the vigorous discussions taking place within the FSLN, but also the “debate ... between Sandinismo and other social sectors,” as the New Editorial Profile phrased it. In a practical sense, this meant that sources and contributors who were once anathema to Barricada now would be the paper’s very stock-in-trade. This new pluralism, perhaps more than any other aspect of Barricada’s new “line,” rankled opponents of the autonomy experiment, with consequences that will be explored later.

A *sine qua non* of the new editorial orientation was acceptance of the UNO regime’s right to rule. “It would be wrong, totally wrong, for us to deny the legitimacy of this government,” said Carlos Fernando Chamorro in 1991. “If we decide they don’t exist, that they’re a fraud, simply the sons of Yanqui imperialism – well, what we’d have to do is organize a coup d’état or a military insurrection. But they exist, and we have to dispute their ideas against our ideas.”\(^8\) Acknowledging that legitimacy while maintaining a spirited tone of opposition to most government policies was “a difficult balance to strike,” according to staffer Guillermo Cortés. As he outlined the dilemma, Barricada’s “opposition cannot be so strong that it causes the fall of the government, nor can it stop being an opposition [paper].” Cortés perceived the quandary to be “weighing on the newspaper” as of 1991. But for him – and for a clear majority of Barricada staff – the difficulties were more than offset by the professional opportunities opened to Barricada in its new role as an opposition daily. “It’s easier to do journalism from the opposition,” Cortés said.\(^9\) His comment touches, simply but elegantly, on the “watchdog” role that is almost definitional to liberal-democratic conceptions of the press, and which – under new conditions that were both traumatic and encouraging – had become a core feature of Barricada’s project.

---

\(^7\)All quotes are from the *New Editorial Profile*. Emphasis added.
\(^8\)Chamorro interview, 28 April 1991.
\(^9\)Cortés interview, 15 April 1991.
Integral to the acceptance of both peaceful political competition and the "watchdog" role was the idea of *Barricada* as a leader of public opinion. This concept made regular appearances in the New Editorial Profile. Politically, the status of opinion leader would allow *Barricada* to promote the interests of the Sandinista Front in the wider society. If traces of the old "vanguardism" remained, though, the professional aspect was also germane. The new orientation would serve as an antidote to the depersonalized, predetermined character of *Barricada's* reporting in the 1980s.

"In general," Chamorro argued in the profile, *Barricada* "has lacked opinion leaders on various themes. The reality of [relations with] the FSLN and the lack of a tradition has impeded the projection of a broad spectrum of opinions, even within Sandinismo." Accordingly, *Barricada* must aspire to convert itself into a leader of public opinion. This supposes its aggressive involvement and the taking of positions in the national debate, not only in relation to political questions, but with regard to all the themes of interest to the population.70

With new forms of cooperation went new forms of competition. One of the most striking developments of the post-revolutionary era was *Barricada's* reorientation – in the marketplace of commerce rather than ideas – from the perennial struggle with *La Prensa* to a new jockeying for position with the paper's longtime political ally, *El Nuevo Diario*. Since it arrived on the Nicaraguan media scene in 1980, *END* had sought to preserve something of the populist sensibility of the old *La Prensa*, where most of the paper’s staff had once worked. Though *END* was also a good source of intellectual commentary and criticism, it cultivated a generally "lighter" tone, and indulged in lashings of *periodismo amarillismo* (yellow journalism) to bolster its mass readership. In a 1996 interview, Carlos Fernando Chamorro expressed admiration for the balance *END* had managed to strike, and described it as influential on *Barricada's* own autonomy experiment:

> We learned from *El Nuevo Diario* a lot about trying to make the newspaper more attractive. It was very difficult to compete with *El Nuevo Diario*, because they move on a totally different logic, and their readers don’t judge the newspaper by the same standards that they judge *Barricada* or *La Prensa*. You read *El Nuevo Diario* today as a kind of humour magazine, and tomorrow you read it as a newspaper, and then three days later it’s a humour magazine.

As a public-opinion leader, moreover, *Barricada* would be able to mitigate some of the inevitable constraints on a print medium in an underdeveloped country – at least when direct and indirect assistance from the government in power could no longer be counted on. *Barricada*, it was hoped, could play an agenda-setting role for Nicaragua’s network of private radio stations. This would permit it to extend its political influence and professional identity by "piggybacking" on broadcast media. These were vastly cheaper for the poor majority to access (compare the cost of a transistor-radio battery with a newspaper subscription); did not require basic literacy skills; and needed no infrastructure to disseminate their message beyond a transmitter and scattered (usually shared) relay stations.
It's muy versatil [very versatile]. And you don't care if they make mistakes, because they're supposed to make mistakes! They're supposed to be scandalous, they're supposed to be imprecise.\textsuperscript{71}

Accordingly, the Qualitative Evaluation spoke of the need to "lead the agenda of public opinion in the sphere of daily life, in order to have a greater impact and penetration in the popular sectors." It was now acknowledged that these sectors read \textit{Barricada} not only for political and economic information, and for a depiction of the "social crisis of the country, but also for recreation" – for coverage of the events of daily life that lay outside "the national political agenda."

In practice, this meant tentative steps towards \textit{periodismo amarillo} of the type END had long favoured. \textit{Barricada} began to pay greater attention to "crime, beauty contests, women's asses on the beach," as Max Kreimann unabashedly conceded in 1991. "The reality the majority of people here were born into — you can't change that in 20 years," Kreimann contended. "People like to read this stuff." \textit{Barricada}, he said, sought to temper these \textit{amarillista} elements with greater attention to professional values and craft:

We're a little yellower, and people like it. These were policies that didn't exist before. But I would say the little yellow journalism that's there is ... educated. Educated in the sense that it's unlike \textit{El Nuevo Diario}, which will say: "So-and-so raped so-and-so," give lots of details, names and surnames, and then three days later the people who are mentioned write letters saying it didn't happen. That shows a lack of respect for those people. We try not to print sordid things in a way that a child who reads them will think of them as somehow normal; we try to be more balanced and courteous.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{71}Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that \textit{El Nuevo Diario} went through its own process of "modernization" and "professionalization" in the 1990s. Its political sympathies in the intra-party debate were solidly with Sergio Ramírez's \textit{Movimiento de Renovacion Sandinista} (MRS). In 1996, though, the paper distanced itself from Ramírez as it had earlier distanced itself from the ortodoxos, and became "a more politically independent paper," in the estimation of Carlos Fernando Chamorro (personal communication, 25 September 1998). There were several other interesting experiments in Nicaraguan journalism during the late 1980s and into the 1990s. One was \textit{La Crónica}, a politically-independent weekly begun with Dutch funding in 1988, which succumbed to infighting and closed in 1991. \textit{La Crónica}'s founders decried the "low intellectual and political level" of the nation's press, and presented the project as a "different, a democratic voice in favour of social progress," according to one of its editors, Edwin Yilescas. (See Stephen Kinzer, "In Nicaragua's Press, a Softer Voice," \textit{The New York Times}, 25 November 1988, and "Chronicle of Missing Funds," \textit{Barricada Internacional}, 2 June 1990). \textit{La Tribuna}, sponsored by the wealthy Nicaraguan businessman and presidential hopeful Haroldo Montealegre, survives at the time of writing despite being the lowest-circulation Managua daily. Despite its politicized origins, it also defined itself against the project of the traditional party-affiliated press, prompting \textit{Barricada} to develop a marketing strategy designed to meet the new competitor's challenge. For a good overview of the political and professional orientation of a number of small-circulation publications that sprang up in the wake of the Sandinista election defeat, see Guillermo Fernández, "A modest publications boom," \textit{Barricada Internacional}, 22 September 1990.

\textsuperscript{72}Max Kreimann interview, 4 April 1991.
Editorial Council member Sergio De Castro put the matter more directly, in an interview conducted around the same time:

Look. People – revolutionary people – like to fuck, like to drink, to go to the beach. Why not? Who can imagine that if you’re a revolutionary or a progressive, you’re going to behave like a monk in a monastery? It’s crazy. People are tired of war. They have been saturated with politics. We have to reflect the other aspects of normal life.73

The lighter-hearted page *De todo un poco* was one beneficiary of the new emphasis. A survey of 3,300 *Barricada* readers in 1990 had found it to be the most popular page among readers.74 (The notion of a readers’ survey itself aptly symbolized *Barricada’s* reorientation.) *De todo un poco*, accordingly, was expanded from one to two pages. Mocked by more traditional readers of the paper was the prominence *Barricada* gave to “The Horoscope of Madame Tousso”; it would now run weekly instead of monthly (“in response to numerous appeals from our readers ... [expressed in] letters and phone calls,” the announcement proclaimed).75 For Carlos Fernando Chamorro, the horoscope, though patently silly, was nothing to get exercised about. “I don’t personally like to read the horoscope. For me, it’s totally idiotic. But a lot of people like it! What can I do? When I go and talk to the people who sell *Barricada*, they tell me I should have a horoscope every *day!*” It was, he said, “a concession” to popular demand.76 Interestingly, even the *ortodoxo* heirs of *Barricada* found it advisable, after the *defenestraición* of 1994, to retain the horoscope as a regular feature.

The sensational turn in *Barricada’s* coverage can itself be sensationalized. *Barricada* remained a serious, sometimes dour paper. The Qualitative Evaluation acknowledged “the strong competition” that *El Nuevo Diario* was able to give *Barricada* “based on its ‘yellow’ strategy, which lends its news a high degree of sensationalism.” (At the time, *END* was outselling *Barricada* by about ten thousand copies a day, 40,000 to 30,000.) But the Editorial Council pledged itself to avoid “descend[ing] to the extremes of *El Nuevo Diario.*” *Barricada* would not abandon its essential sobriety of outlook – the only appropriate tone, it was felt, given Nicaragua’s impoverishment and perpetual political crisis. But “‘serious’ has a double connotation,” Chamorro said in 1996. “One is a good one: it implies credibility. The other meaning is: *boring.* I felt we shouldn’t be afraid of being

---

73 Sergio De Castro interview, 22 April 1991 (in English).
75 *Barricada*, 1 April 1991.
76 Chamorro interview, 28 April 1991.
perceived as a serious newspaper, but what we needed was more colour, more balance, more of an equilibrium between what we call 'traditional news' – politics, the economy, foreign policy – and [human-interest] news stories.]

Some sense of how the new emphasis on human interest translated to daily coverage can be gained from a non-systematic glance through several months of Barricada coverage not long before the defenestration of 1994. In addition to stories on corruption, addressed separately below, the paper published an exposé on the mafiosi operating in Managua's markets; features on incest, AIDS, drug addiction, unemployment, and the energy crisis in Nicaragua; a long meditation on the legacy of the Sandinista Revolution, entitled "The Children of the Change"; a four-part story on the return of Nicaraguan boxer Alexis Argüello to his home country; another four-part feature examining Nicaragua's claim to the Colombian islands of San Andrés and Providencia, as well as portions of Honduran territory and the Gulf of Fonseca; a profile of a forensic scientist at work; and a two-part, non-sensationalistic story on transvestism. During this period Barricada also introduced a new weekly computer section in De todo un poco, edited by the paper's resident techno-buff, Daniel Alegría. There was little doubt that the paper's informational canvas and stylistic range had expanded greatly since the bland and predictable days of the 1980s.

The wider outlook was reflected, too, in the increased professional ties which the paper cultivated with regional and other international media. Beginning with the "thaw" of 1987-88, Managua's dailies had cooperated in arranging joint visits to Costa Rican newspapers. Now Barricada took things a step further, co-sponsoring an innovative investigation into Nicaraguans working illegally in Costa Rica with the conservative San José daily, La Nación.

---

77 Chamorro interview, 3 April 1991.
a political reporter with *Barricada*, recalled that between 1991 and 1994, he had “had a chance to go to Germany, Florida, Honduras, Costa Rica, and Colombia” for tours of dailies in those countries, while other *Barricada* staff “went to Japan, Venezuela, Brazil, and Chile.”

The introduction of a Sunday edition in July 1993 was another first for *Barricada* and for Nicaragua as a whole. Carlos Fernando Chamorro cited it as evidence of the paper’s desire to “offer to the reader polemical general-interest reporting, debate and diversity of opinions, and reading-matter appropriate for [one’s] free time,” to meet the needs of an audience that was “ever more demanding and heterogeneous.” The same thinking apparently lay behind *Municipios* (Municipalities), a section introduced in August 1993 “to open space for the daily activities of local government, along with [local] residents, trade union representatives, producers and all types of popular and trade-union organizations.” Another new section, *Noticiero Costeño*, debuted in February 1994, targeting Nicaragua’s historically marginalized Atlantic Coast communities – sectors which the FSLN and *Barricada* had alienated in the 1980s, but which were now seen as potential growth markets for paper and party alike.

One of the most important side-projects of *Barricada*’s autonomy era – for which it actually served as a harbinger – was *Gente* (People), a weekly supplement first introduced in 1989 under the direction of Sofia Montenegro. A longstanding thorn in the side of many Sandinista leaders (who considered her, she said, “a loose cannon”), Montenegro was appointed to direct *Gente* only after “a little internal battle” within the FSLN – this according to Carlos Fernando Chamorro, who waged the battle on behalf of Montenegro and the professional imperative of the paper. *Gente* was conceived as one of the projects which would allow *Barricada* to exploit the internal opening offered by *concertación* and the “thaw” of 1987-88. It would be “a publication not too tied to political demands, to the agenda of the FSLN,” in Chamorro’s words; rather, it would “deal with problems of everyday life, of culture in the broad sense of the word.” It would also, inevitably, bear the

---

84 Alfonso Malespin interview, 17 May 1996.
87 Chamorro interview, 28 April 1991.
88 Chamorro interview, 28 April 1991.
The stamp of Montenegro’s flamboyant personality, lending some much-needed unpredictability and flair to Barricada’s pages.

The results proved popular with readers. Gente began publishing in 1989. Barricada’s 1990 readers’ survey found that it was preferred by an absolute majority (54 percent) of readers; only one other weekly supplement (Revista de Campo) reached double figures. Much of the appeal derived from Gente’s ground-breaking analysis of controversial social issues, especially those linked to gender and sexuality. The supplement dealt frankly – sometimes brazenly – with sexism, homosexuality, impotence, pornography. Its tonal range was impressive, ranging from “infotainment”-style gossip to long scientific treatises by noted professionals. The basic political “line” hardly varied from that of Barricada as a whole, but the style was dramatically different. “Our intention was to promote the self-affirmation of the individual and of individual experience,” said Montenegro in 1991. “The Sandinista Revolution had always spoken of nosotros, ‘we.’ ‘We the people,’ and so on. ... The collectivist and communal mentality was very powerful. We wanted to fortify the ‘I,’ and at the same time stress the validity and necessity of not divorcing individuality from the collective.”

**MATERIAL CRISIS, INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE**

Barricada entered the 1990s with its glory days behind it, at least as far as circulation was concerned. The inflated print-runs of the mid-1980s had ebbed even before the FSLN fell from power, beginning with the Sandinistas’ “hesitant turn towards the market.” The subsidies on which Barricada (along with the other Nicaraguan dailies) depended were sharply cut back. Hyperinflation, meanwhile, attained levels not seen since Weimar Germany in the 1920s; all three Managua dailies were forced to boost their prices “almost every week” (in the words of former La Prensa director Pablo Antonio Cuadra). All saw their circulations plummet: from over 100,000 for Barricada at its peak in the mid-1980s, to around 35,000 for the newspaper in 1991.

Beginning even before the Sandinista election defeat, Barricada was forced to introduce deep staffing cuts. The payroll plummeted 17 percent in 1988-89, to 400 employees. Further cuts after the 1990 elections reduced total staff to 350. Research in 1996 confirmed that yet another cut of 35

---

89“Enquesta ‘Gran Promoción Madre’ Barricada–Radio Ya.”
90Pablo Antonio Cuadra interview, 26 April 1991.
or 40 workers had taken place around Easter 1994 – a “downsizing” that proved particularly difficult to negotiate, since those released included senior managers who demanded (and received) generous severance packages. The damage to morale that accompanied these cuts can readily be imagined – but also, perhaps, overstated. Most of the “redundant” workers were on the production side of the operation. Senior editorial personnel remained comparatively immune from dismissal, through to the defenestración of 1994. But this added measure of security carried its own dangers for the longterm viability of the autonomy project. It drove a deep wedge between remaining blue-collar staff, who were left to wonder whether each working week would be their last – while journalists and editors seemingly lived high on the hog. This institutional tension would have important implications at the time of Chamorro’s dismissal, and during the brief interregnum between old order and new. Even during the era of semi-autonomy, staff reductions exacted “a political cost,” according to Carlos Fernando Chamorro; this acted as a brake on further “changes that we wanted to introduce,” presumably a reference to even deeper staffing cuts.91

The onset of true material crisis at Barricada dated from the inauguration of the UNO government in April 1990, and intensified with the regime’s “maxi-devaluation” of March 1991. This virtually halved Barricada’s bank balance, which plummeted from US $430,000 to $220,000, according to then-Business Manager Max Kreimann.92 In 1991, as well, existing stockpiles of cheap Soviet newsprint finally ran out, and all the Nicaraguan newspapers were forced to pay market prices for their most essential material resource. “I don’t think the management team at Barricada was able to understand well the change in that variable,” Carlos Fernando Chamorro recalled in 1996. “The paper was not organized or prepared to assimilate ... [the fact] that you were buying paper at $350 per ton, and then from one day to another you were paying $550.”93

Most features of the material crisis, as noted, were shared by the other Nicaraguan dailies. But the new era also brought challenges specific to Barricada. The most obvious was the collapse of the privileged relationship with the largest client for Barricada’s sophisticated publishing operation – the state. Shortly after it took power, the UNO government, “for explicitly political reasons” according to Max Kreimann, declined to renew Barricada’s contract to publish textbooks for the

91 Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
92 “We lost $210,000 from one day to the next, overnight.” Kreimann interview, 4 April 1991.
93 Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
Ministry of Education. Kreimann estimated the loss to *Barricada* at between US $500,000 and $2.5 million annually. According to several sources at *Barricada*, the government turned to a publishing operation in Honduras, since *Barricada’s* was the only press in Nicaragua capable of handling the contract.

Life under UNO also meant a precipitous decline in state-sector advertising. This had constituted anywhere up to four-fifths of the paper’s ad revenue in the 1980s, leading the paper to take a rather blasé and “idealistic” attitude (Chamorro) towards private-sector advertising. That was changing even before the revolution lost power: Chamorro emphasized that in the latter half of the 1980s, *Barricada* “went to the street in competition for private advertising.” In the first half of the 1990s, though, the quest for such advertising became a matter of life and death. Granted, at the time of fieldwork in 1991, state-sector advertising still constituted a significant proportion of ad revenue — around 30 percent. The figure could even rise for brief periods, when the Chamorro government introduced important policy initiatives with publicity campaigns designed to appeal to all social sectors, including *Barricada’s* (gradually diversifying) constituency. Still, this was 30 percent of a much smaller pie. From about five pages of ads per edition before the FSLN’s fall from power, *Barricada* in early 1991 was publishing around two — a “below-survival level,” in Max Kreimann’s estimation at the time.

A dramatic turnaround seems to have begun shortly afterward, however. As the autonomy project gathered steam, private advertisers began to show signs of accommodating to the former official publication of their political enemy. *Barricada* “did well in selling advertising” in the two years before the defenestración, contended Carlos Fernando Chamorro:

> We were the number two paper in ads in the country, after *La Prensa*. ... And we had potential. That was the most important thing. You talk to the advertising companies, and they always told us that sometimes it was difficult for them to convince their clients to put their ads in *Barricada*, because we were a Sandinista newspaper, and in the last analysis they thought they were giving money to the Frente. But they started to accept that we were a respectable newspaper, of even higher quality than the others.

The most systematic internal appraisal of the autonomy experiment, the “Qualitative Evaluation” carried out by the Editorial Council in April 1992, also put *Barricada* in second place

---

94 Kreimann interview, 4 April 1991.
95 Kreimann interview, 4 April 1991.
96 Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
nationally in terms of advertising, with an average of 6.5 pages daily. (The house organ of the business establishment, La Prensa, predictably soared ahead with 10.4 pages, while the downmarket, brashly populist El Nuevo Diario was the least favoured by private-sector advertisers.) The rebound at Barricada permitted a remarkable expansion in the size of the paper – from a daily average of 10 pages in the 1988-91 period, to between 16 and 24 from 1991 to 1994. This gave Barricada’s professional project considerably greater scope as well – funding new editorial sections and the expansion of existing ones, and generally “making it possible to improve the attractiveness and quality of the publication.”

One explanation for the advertising turnaround was Barricada’s unique ability to print in colour – something it emphasized to potential clients in April 1991 by publishing each day’s edition in colour, albeit at a considerable financial loss. The strategy was designed to lure readers, but also, in Max Kreimann’s words, “to attract more advertisers – offering them colour, giving it to them free as a promotion, and implementing a variety of features related to the fact that in Nicaragua there has never existed a newspaper which came out in full colour every day.” The paper also turfed the staff of its monthly overseas edition, Barricada Internacional, from their commodious offices adjacent to the main Barricada building. A beefed-up advertising department was installed in their place – another revealing indication of the new prominence of material, as opposed to strictly political, considerations in the paper’s functioning.

Barricada’s printing resources proved indispensable in two further respects during the lean years of the early 1990s. They allowed Barricada to bolster its design and presentation: in the estimation of the Qualitative Evaluation, Barricada could claim “the most modern system of graphic design of [all] the dailies and other periodical publications in the country.” This made an important “contribution to the redefinition of the newspaper’s personality.” Similar advantage was taken by the publishing operation, Editorial El Amanecer, which now courted customers regardless of their political leanings. For anyone who recalled the ultra-polarized political scene of the mid-1980s, some of the new publishing arrangements could only raise eyebrows. El Nicaragüense, for example, was the weekly newspaper of COSEP, a business organization that had been one of the most persistent thorns in the side of the regime during the revolutionary decade. But COSEP decided the political differences that had surfaced with the UNO regime and its supporter, La Prensa – where El Nicaragüense had been printed – were more intractable than those with Barricada, which at
least was also critical of the new regime from its own, rather different perspective. An agreement was reached. Max Kreimann's summary of the changed mentalities offers particularly concise testimony about the new salience of market factors in Barricada's material operations, and the corresponding de-emphasizing of political considerations:

[In addition to El Nicaragüense,] we print thoroughly anti-Sandinista religious newspapers. And they all send in their advertising, too. This didn't happen before, because the political factor predominated in business decisions. Now you see more the business aspect of the newspaper, because it's more necessary; if we don't [adopt this approach], we won't survive.97

The overall effect of these diverse strategies was to preserve a semblance of material stability at Barricada, and as broad and diverse a constituency as was perhaps viable at a time when press readership was in free-fall across the board. If institution-specific responses to the material challenges are to be considered, though, one should not gloss over actions and decisions that may have undermined or eroded the paper's competitiveness during the years of the autonomy experiment. The most damaging of these centred on a corruption scandal that ensnared, among others, Max Kreimann, the paper's General Manager at the time of fieldwork in 1991. Kreimann's resignation in April 1994 "to devote himself to private activities"98 climaxed the worst internal upheaval at Barricada since the mid-1980s. His departure, and that of several dozen other employees in the paper's administrative division, resulted from an internal investigation into the management of Barricada and its associated publishing operation.

Chamorro and his editorial staff, it should be noted, were never personally accused of involvement in corrupt practices. Was Chamorro, though, asleep at the wheel as events unfolded? He acknowledged in 1996 that "somehow the management side went out of our control" during the years of the autonomy project, leaving Barricada "in a very vulnerable situation in economic and financial terms ... I knew very well by 1993 that we had an economic crisis, and that it would take quite a few years to put everything in order."99 By the time of the defenestración, the paper was heavily in debt, though it is impossible to ascertain the precise extent of the burden. Barricada's

98"Nuevo gerente en Barricada," Barricada, 22 April 1994. Kreimann's last day on the masthead was 21 April 1994. His space was filled the next day by Ronaldo Gómez who, in Alfonso Malespin's estimation, "couldn't do anything" to reform the paper's administration in the few months that remained before the defenestración. "There was so little left." Malespin interview, 17 May 1996.
99Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
editor in 1996, William Grigsby, gave a figure of US $2 million. Alfonso Malespin guessed even higher, “around $3.5 or $4.5 million.” Though less precise in her estimation, Sofia Montenegro’s account also suggests considerable stress: “We were breaking our fucking backs, believe me, in order to keep the newspaper afloat.” Montenegro added, though, that increased private-sector advertising helped to mitigate the administrative and “structural” problems of the enterprise. It is apparently the case that economic difficulties, whether externally or internally generated, did not translate to a sense of day-to-day material crisis at Barricada. “The finances of the paper were shaky,” said Daniel Alegria. “But the paper was running. I never felt it was going to close from one day to the next. I think we could have managed to survive. ... And it would have been done in a professional way.”

THE POLITICS OF BARRICADA, I: THE CHALLENGE OF OPPOSITION

The 1992 Qualitative Evaluation of Barricada spoke of “two fundamental reference points” that would “orient the new role of the newspaper: on one hand, the process initiated by the FSLN aimed at the organic and political recuperation of its forces – [the product of] the First Congress [in 1991] – and, on the other hand, the Sandinista opposition strategy towards the government”:

In its policies for news and opinion-pieces, Barricada has privileged the actions and struggles of the popular Sandinista movement ... The overarching themes of the Sandinista agenda – property, disarmament, privatization, defense of the Constitution, social conflict/political struggle and concertación, the consequences of “stabilization” and structural adjustment, the isolation of extremist sectors, hunger and unemployment, initiatives of the popular movements, etc. – have been permanent features of Barricada’s agenda. ... In covering the FSLN, understood as [the sum of] its organic structures: the DN [National Directorate], the Sandinista [parliamentary] bench, the departmental committees, the structures at the base – the dominant tendency has been to stress the discourse of the National Directorate, in coverage of its political activities, or by means of interviews ... The privileged treatment of FSLN policies, and the activities of the Sandinista leadership, contrasted markedly with the stance adopted towards the UNO government. Or did it? For those who decried the de-officialized incarnation of Barricada, the politics of the paper between 1990 and

---

100 Grigsby interview, 15 May 1996.
101 Malespin interview, 17 May 1996.
102 Montenegro interview, 22 May 1996.
103 Alegria interview, 10 May 1996.
1994 represented a 180-degree about-face from the mobilizing imperative that had guided it from its birth. *Barricada* had abandoned its revolutionary principles and commitments, affiliating itself with a dissident “social-democratic” wing of the Front that sought to undermine the revolutionary energies of the movement by diverting them into bourgeois pseudo-opposition. *Barricada*, the critics hinted or alleged, had indeed become *un periódico del sistema*, as Chamorro had envisaged back in the late 1980s ... but a voice of the *new*, counter-revolutionary “system” that was struggling to entrench itself in the face of continued opposition from the FSLN leadership and the revolutionary base. By these lights, *Barricada*’s “watchdog” pretensions towards the Chamorro regime were farcical.\(^{104}\)

Clearly, many thousands of dedicated Sandinistas felt betrayed by *Barricada*’s new political “line.” How, amidst all its talk of “impartiality” and “pluralism,” could the newspaper mobilize the revolution’s remaining constituency to confront an uncertain and perplexing future? How could serious criticism of the FSLN be countenanced in the Front’s own newspaper? Most painful, it seemed, was the respect the paper now displayed for public figures it had once reviled — counter-revolutionary figures whose actions and policies could only further immiserate the poor.

Carlos Fernando Chamorro vigorously rejected the allegation of complicity with the UNO regime. He maintained that the semi-autonomous *Barricada* “was always critical of the government.” Even during the period of *co-gobierno* (1990-93), when the FSLN entered into a tacit alliance with more centrist elements of the UNO coalition, Chamorro argued that *Barricada* “didn’t have a *co-gobierno* mentality, ever.” The reason for the complaints from *ortodoxo* elements within the FSLN, Chamorro said, pertained rather to the new *tone* of *Barricada*’s coverage. “Probably we were, let’s say, more like a loyal opposition, in terms of being less rhetorical. We were not going to behave in

---

\(^{104}\)Juan Ramón Huerta, one of the few staffers on the editorial side of the paper for whom the 1994 defenestration came as a relief and a vindication, described the newspaper’s strategy under Carlos Fernando Chamorro as one of “loyal[ty] to the managers [dueño] and the bosses [patrono]” — that is, to the most reactionary and oligarchical forces in Nicaraguan society. Huerta interview, 22 May 1996. William Grigsby likewise accused the custodians of the pre-1994 *Barricada* of maintaining “a very intimate involvement with the [UNO] government.” Grigsby interview, 15 May 1996. Daniel Ortega told a Cuban news agency after Chamorro’s dismissal that *Barricada* “had been turned into a mouthpiece for neoliberal, imperialist, and rightwing politics”; pro-Ortega militants denounced the semi-autonomous *Barricada* as “rightist, in the service of the government, and the exclusive redoubt of the renovationists.” See Juan Carlos Sarmiento, “Continuar el profesionalismo perdido,” *Barricada*, 2 November 1994.
an insulting way." Nonetheless, "The official editorials of Barricada were 80 percent of the time against the government."

A non-systematic perusal of Barricada from June to September 1994 — the period immediately prior to the defenestración — found no shortage of examples to justify Chamorro's assertions. The paper tackled corruption in the customs service in June. In July, it published a three-part story on the flow of contraband through Honduras, and in August, an in-depth investigation of Minister of Agriculture and Livestock Roberto Rondónin. The minister, it transpired, was indebted to the tune of nearly 20 million córdobas to the National Development Bank; he was later forced to remit C$ 3 million of the debt. Perhaps most memorably, Barricada tracked down the former Vice-Minister of the Presidency, Antonio Ibarra, a fugitive from Nicaraguan justice who had fled to the United States. The paper's reporting led to a formal government request for Ibarra's extradition.

A further sense of Barricada's posture vis-à-vis the UNO regime can be gleaned from a study of the paper's coverage during one of the tensest periods of post-revolutionary Nicaraguan politics: the massive transport strikes of September 1993. Taken as a whole, the coverage again appears to bolster contentions that Barricada adopted a strongly critical stance towards the government. But it also points to the paper's willingness to advance its own political and normative "line," independent to some extent of the desires and pronouncements of FSLN leaders — notably Daniel Ortega, whose rhetoric was notably more inflammatory, and who at the time was only a few months away from establishing his formal alliance with the ortodoxo current of the Front.

The September strikes were a direct response to a new range of government-imposed taxes that hit the transport sector especially hard. In its early coverage of the strikes, Barricada laid the blame for the crisis squarely on the government’s shoulders. "The protest of the transport workers and managers ... was a mobilization without any party-political tint," read the first editorial on the

subject. "No one is more guilty than the government of having provoked the unity of the transport workers." Another editorial zeroed in on Minister of Finance Emilio Pereira:

As we have indicated on other occasions, the origin of the problem is that the government is faced with a dramatic decline in the collection of public finances ... Minister Pereira has refused to acknowledge this situation publicly, which is directly responsible for his failed negotiations with international bodies. As his only solution, he has opted to impose new taxes which aggravate the situation of ungovernability in the country.

Popular frustration soon boiled over into random violence and, eventually, deaths. Barricada lamented “unfortunate acts of violence” that nonetheless “should not obscure the civic character of the protests.” But on 22 September, the paper published dramatic front-page photographs of the death of police commander Saúl Alvarez in a clash with an armed group of unspecified political affiliation. Barricada still stuck to its line of blaming the Chamorro government for “irresponsibly prolonging” the strike by refusing to negotiate with the protesters. But while Daniel Ortega was raging against “a murderous government” and directly accusing Violeta Chamorro and her key officials, Antonio Lacayo and Alfredo César, of responsibility for the officer’s death, Barricada was drawing back from the brink. It acknowledged that the character of the protests had changed with the assassination; its support for the strikers softened accordingly. Reporter David Gutiérrez-López wrote on the 22nd that “The transport strike, which began ... in an organized and relatively peaceful manner, yesterday degenerated into violence, anarchy and vandalism carried out by groups of demonstrators.” The following day an opinion piece appeared on the editorial page entitled, “In defense of the police,” wondering “why no-one demanded that these ‘workers’ stop attacking the police.” The paper’s unwillingness, at this critical juncture, to climb onboard with the more militant strand of FSLN opinion incurred the wrath of many within the Front, as will be explored later.

A more general question remains to be asked. How did Barricada’s mobilizing origins, and the continuing close relationship with its FSLN sponsor, condition and constrain the paper’s daily coverage and professional imperative? What trade-offs, both political and professional, were

---

necessary in order to fulfill the enduring mobilizing imperative – to serve as a “privileged space” for the Sandinista Front and its leadership?\textsuperscript{112}

**The Politics of Barricada, II: Sandinismo and Self-Censorship**

The defenestración of 1994 vividly demonstrated how fragile was Barricada's position within the FSLN. To maximize its autonomy vis-à-vis its sponsor, the newspaper was forced – or willingly chose – to subordinate the strict requirements of a professional imperative to the mobilizing role that remained central to its self-definition. Given the fractious internal politics of the Front, this was a fine line to walk from the outset. It became increasingly delicate as the ortodoxo current of the Front established unquestioned hegemony over the party apparatus in 1993-94. It is worth exploring these trade-offs: the issues and policy areas in which Barricada plainly accepted mobilizing constraints; others in which its editorial policy was ambiguous, and which regularly attracted criticisms from the ortodoxo tendency; and one – the issue of violent struggle – in which the paper adamantly held to its own “line,” while FSLN leaders and militants seemingly vacillated according to the political requirements of the moment.

*The internal politics of the FSLN.* Upon its relaunching in January 1991, Barricada responded to criticisms of the paper's new orientation with a pledge “that we would not interfere in the internal affairs of the Frente,” according to Carlos Fernando Chamorro. The basic editorial strategy adopted to balance mobilizing and professional imperatives revolved around a distinction between formal editorializing, on the one hand, and opinions of individual writers and outside commentators, on the other. In an attempt to abide by mobilizing constraints while still cultivating “leaders of public opinion,” within the Frente as well as within the wider society, Chamorro and his editorial staff reserved the right to publish personal opinion-pieces that took strong stands in both the intra-party and the national debate. Several of these articles – like Chamorro's 1993 call for Humberto Ortega to resign as Chief of the Army – were as controversial as anything Barricada published during this period. In editorials, however, “It was clear that Barricada ... would not make

\textsuperscript{112}All of Chamorro's comments in this section are drawn from the interview conducted on 23 May 1996. I have not referenced the quoted excerpts separately.
any comment” on the Front’s internal politics, according to Chamorro.113 The Qualitative Evaluation likewise stated that in the first year or so of the autonomy experiment, Barricada, “as a norm of editorial policy” (como norma de política editorial), had “endeavoured not to pronounce itself on the question of the public debate of the FSLN.”

The “piñata.” Of all the dubious actions that dogged the Sandinista Front through the early 1990s, none was pricklier than the “piñata,”114 the term popularly attached to the outgoing Sandinista regime’s stripping of state assets prior to the April 1990 handover of power. With the Front’s leadership constantly on the defensive over the piñata, Barricada was the very last quarter from which criticism would be tolerated. Carlos Fernando Chamorro, and others at the paper, got the message. Throughout the four years of the autonomy experiment, the piñata was an unmentionable subject — perhaps the most unmentionable of all. “We never had an editorial on the internal abuses of Sandinismo, nothing at all,” said Chamorro. He called it “the most powerful concession I made to the Frente,” but also an inevitable one. Coverage of the piñata was “unmanageable.” Bayardo Arce, the National Directorate’s representative to the recently-formed Editorial Council, “would never have accepted it. It was a matter of him or myself. If I wanted Barricada to get involved in that issue, he would [have said] to me, ‘Well, I quit, or you quit.’ ... It’s not that we got to that point, but it was very clear that this was a kind of taboo.”115

Human rights. The revolutionary past and oppositionist present of both Barricada and its FSLN sponsor drew the paper naturally towards an editorial stance aimed at promoting and defending the human rights of all Nicaraguans. The political and professional imperatives that guided the new Barricada were founded on a defense of constitutional freedoms — those enshrined in the constitution the FSLN itself had drafted in the latter half of the 1980s. Nonetheless, Barricada’s zeal in pursuing the subject during the years of semi-autonomy seemed a little pallid,

113Chamorro interview, 23 May 1996.

114The reference is to the children’s game in which a papier-mâché is bashed with sticks to release the sweets or gifts inside.

115Once again, though, the line drawn between editorials and opinion-pieces permitted an oblique reconnaissance or two of the mine-laden terrain. “We accepted some opiniones from others [outside the newspaper],” said Chamorro, “but they were always very, very costly. The Frente would get very angry if we accepted opinion-pieces from critical Sandinistas saying, ‘We have to discuss this openly, we have to clean up the problems.’ I think that is the most important topic, and the most important limitation that we had, seeing ourselves as an institution that included, as one of its goals, helping in the transformation of Sandinismo.”
compared with its vigorous investigations into corruption and economic mismanagement under the UNO regime. The reason, according to Chamorro, was that "human rights are very politicized here, and there's one side of the story which is Sandinistas violating human rights." The taboo against delving into the FSLN's own behaviour placed Barricada in an awkward position when it came to the actions of the UNO government. The paper, said Chamorro, was "more or less consistent in trying to find a balance" on the human-rights issue. But Barricada never succeeded in becoming a "point of reference" – a public-opinion leader – in this area.

In one area, however, Barricada stuck adamantly to its own editorial "line," regardless of feelings within the Frente. The issue was the legitimacy of violent struggle. "I developed a very strong conviction," Chamorro said, "that one could not make any concessions on that issue." The paper, here, was exploiting – but also implicitly denouncing – the leadership's uncertain stance on the issue, which Chamorro characterized as riddled with "ambiguity [and] double standards ... saying one thing but doing another." Such equivocation "probably made me much more suspicious of the leadership ... I was very careful in the newspaper that we should not follow the Frente on that."116

Violence was so fundamental an issue because it so palpably threatened to tear Nicaragua apart during the early 1990s. Its ravages, moreover, remained vivid in the collective consciousness of the population. In the space of a decade-and-a-half, Nicaragua had known the thuggery of the Somoza dictatorship, the civil war of the 1970s, and the protracted siege and contra-war of the 1980s. Since the fall of the Sandinista regime, numerous small-scale clashes had occurred between reconstituted elements of the former combatants (the so-called recontras and recompas117), and between both groups and the security forces of the UNO government. Against this backdrop, a powerful lobby within Sandinismo called on the FSLN to renounce any use of violence to contest or regain power. Early on, in fact, with concertación and co-gobierno all the rage, this came close to being a consensus position – at least for public consumption. With hindsight, though, it seems clear that from the outset of the post-Sandinista era, a minority of Sandinistas never reconciled themselves to the surrender of power. They shared the view of most Sandinistas (and this author) that the 1990 elections had been skewed against the FSLN by a U.S. government in intimate alliance with

116 All quotes from Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
117 "Recompas" from "compa" (i.e., compañero), the familiar form of address for Nicaraguan revolutionaries.
domestic forces of reaction. The perils of co-gobierno allowed plenty of opportunities for this minority viewpoint to surface – sometimes violently, but more often clandestinely.

The more bellicose strand of Sandinista thinking gained strength as concertación and co-gobierno eroded between 1991 and 1993. But Barricada remained staunch in its condemnation of violence, whether perpetrated by forces of the left or right. Any number of examples can be cited to bolster the assertion of a basic consistency in the paper’s political line; the language varies little. Typical was the editorial-page condemnation of tit-for-tat kidnappings and armed assaults by leftists and rightists carried out in August 1994. Barricada denounced all such actions “with the same energy,” arguing that “violence only engenders more violence, and this spate of armed kidnappings carries with it the risk of bringing the country to the brink of anarchy.”

After a car-bomb attack rocked Esteli in August 1994, Barricada published “Our condemnation of the violence,” pledging: “Barricada will never cease to reiterate that the method of irrational violence is not conducive to solving the grave social problems of the country, but rather aggravates them and delays any solution. ... The police authorities must investigate and detain those responsible for all acts of irrational violence ... because this is healthy for society and for all political sectors.”

On no occasion were the delicate tradeoffs of Barricada’s autonomy-era balancing act cast in such stark relief as when Barricada broke the story of the Buzón de Santa Rosa – perhaps the greatest “scoop” the paper could claim in its two decades of publication. “That was a big story,” Chamorro said proudly in 1996. At issue was a large cache of weapons and forged documents uncovered in a suburban Managua neighbourhood in May 1993. The cache’s existence was not the story – it had been already revealed by police. What was not known, until Barricada published the details, was the complicity of El Salvador’s Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (Popular Forces of Liberation, FPL) in stashing the arms – in collusion with the terrorist forces of the Basque ETA. When Barricada’s star investigative journalist, the late Noel Irías, traced the web of complicity to its

119 Editorial, “Nuestra condena a la violencia,” Barricada, 10 August 1994. See also the editorial of 26 April 1993, similarly titled “Nuestra condena,” and reiterating that “For reasons of principle, Barricada has always rejected all terrorist acts, whether they come from extremists of the right or left.”
120 Canadians will recall this as the raid that uncovered the false documents used by David Spencer and Christine Lamont, then jailed in Brazil on kidnapping charges. Until the discovery of the documents, Spencer and Lamont had denied any connection to El Salvador’s left-wing guerrillas.
source, Barricada became “the first medium, [whether a] newspaper or radio station, to talk about the existence of the network and all these false documents.” The next day, Chamorro remembered, “we had dozens of telephone calls – from Mexico, the U.S., everywhere. Everybody wanted to know about our story. We did it very well.”

But whatever professional pride Barricada staffers felt when the news broke on the paper’s front page, it was hardly shared by the FPL – which still maintained close ties with the FSLN leadership. Salvadorean representatives paid a visit to the newspaper at the behest of leading ortodoxo intellectual (and Barricada’s future sub-director) Julio López. In Carlos Fernando Chamorro’s recollection:

I had a private meeting with representatives of the FPL, who asked me not to create problems for them. I said, “Listen, this is a public investigation. Everybody else is looking for it. We’re not going to do extra damage to you; but it’s better if we do it than if others do it.” They were upset, obviously. They thought that because we were political friends, we were supposed to hide their problems. And we said, “We cannot hide this.”

The FPL were not the only ones to take umbrage at Barricada’s coverage. For many Sandinista ortodoxos, the former official organ was rubbing salt in the wounds of revolutionary movements throughout Central America. The reporting was further proof that Barricada had betrayed the mobilizing imperative that had given it birth.

In the case of the buzón saga, Barricada chose to emphasize professional considerations over mobilizing ones. When the chips were down, though, this was rarely the case. The forbidden areas established by the FSLN leadership were largely respected. The quid pro quo that Carlos Fernando Chamorro demanded for abiding by these constraints was the Front’s respect for Barricada’s own institutional identity and professional agenda – a recognition that the paper required commensurate concessions from the leadership. Said Chamorro in 1996: “I was very conscious that it was one thing to be a political party dealing with the government, and another thing to be a newspaper that was being judged every day by public opinion. We had to take stands at different moments of the conflictual relationship between the party and the government, and we did not always follow the Frente line, the official line.”

---

121Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.
On 11 July 1993, 29 Sandinista militants – including deputies to the National Assembly, mayors, political secretaries, and union leaders – issued a call for the FSLN to “distanc[e] itself clearly from the government” of Violeta Chamorro, and “to lead the popular struggle” anew, beginning with the fourteenth anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution on 19 July. Among the key figures of the Group of 29 (as it was quickly dubbed) were René Vivas, the former police chief of Managua; Mónica Baltodano, a former guerrilla leader who had served as Minister of Municipal Affairs during the revolutionary decade; her husband, Julio López Campos, the future “brains” behind a revamped and reofficialized Barricada, Victor Hugo Tinoco, the FSLN’s political secretary in Managua; and Mirna Cunningham and Lumberto Campbell, two prominent Sandinistas from the Atlantic Coast. All but López were members of the FSLN National Directorate at the time, or would be appointed to the expanded twelve-member Directorate at the May 1994 Special Congress. The signatories included three more Sandinistas (Doris Tijerino, Orlando Núñez, and Carlos Fonseca Terán) who would be drafted to the Directorate when its three remaining renovationist members resigned in February 1995.

“The greatness of our party,” proclaimed the Group of 29, “has been, and must continue to be, its stand alongside the people, and not on the side of the structures of power that oppress them.” The signatories avowed the legitimacy of the FSLN’s decision in 1990 to pursue concertación and co-gobierno with the UNO regime. They argued, though, that the time for such cooperation was past, given Nicaragua’s enduring social horrors and the regime’s apparent determination to aggravate rather than alleviate them:

After three years of [the government’s] neo-liberal policies, the economic and social results could not be more eloquently clear: poverty and social decomposition, unemployment and lack of access to education and health care, delinquency, prostitution, the total abandonment of Nicaraguan children and of the Atlantic Coast. Administrative corruption, the surrendering of national sovereignty, non-compliance with political agreements, and the hoax of promises made to the people have become the institutionalized policy of the government. The socio-economic achievements of the revolution, in particular all those that benefitted thousands of Nicaraguan peasant and worker families, are on their way to extinction.\(^{122}\)

\(^{122}\)The document was published as “Relanzar la lucha el 19 de julio,” Barricada, 13 July 1993.
As Barricada noted the next day in a po-faced front-page headline, the Group of 29 declaration “reopen[ed] debate in [the] FSLN.” That was putting it mildly. The manifesto was the first coordinated salvo fired by the ortodoxo current of the Front, which now felt itself sufficiently strong to challenge the renovationist sentiment which had briefly gained the upper hand after the catastrophe of 1990. In February 1994, a second seminal ortodoxo proclamation, the Propuesta desde la izquierda democrática Sandinista (Proposal of the Sandinista Democratic Left), formalized the alliance between the Group of 29 and its new leader – Daniel Ortega. The so-called Pikín Guerrero manifesto emphasized the FSLN’s self-definition “as a revolutionary party, whose fundamental objective is to struggle and work, in the short and medium term, for the establishment of a state of law and social justice, and for a humanistic and democratic socialism.”

The renovationist wing of the Frente was always more chimerical than its ortodoxo counterpart. It mustered no formal response to the Group of 29 proclamation. But the consolidation of the alliance with Daniel Ortega at Pikín Guerrero could not pass without comment. A formal renovationist response finally came on 10 February 1994, less than a week after the Democratic Left announced its existence. It was titled the Propuesta por un Sandinismo de las Mayórias, and – crucially – it was co-drafted and signed by the director of Barricada, Carlos Fernando Chamorro. Three other prominent figures at the newspaper also appended their signatures: Onofre Guevara, Darwin Juárez, and Sofia Montenegro. The call “for a Sandinismo that returns to the majorities” appealed for “a new vision of change and renovation” within the Front, and the development of party structures that were more “open, participatory, and creative.” While the renovationists echoed the ortodoxos’ rejection of neo-liberalism, they urged the Front to “proclaim without double-speak [dualidades] our respect for private property and all other legitimate kinds of property,” and to “declare our rejection, now and in the future, of any kind of confiscation.” Most emphatically of all, the Mayórias document rejected violence as a means of struggle: “Sandinistas cannot sponsor, defend, justify or excuse any type or method of armed or violent struggle in Nicaragua.”123

The battle-lines were now drawn. But it was necessary to expend at least as much energy reading between them to determine the ideological and personal core of the dispute. One of the

most insightful analysts of the FSLN’s internal divisions in the 1990s was Guillermo Fernández Ampié, feature writer for Barricada Internacional. Writing in the aftermath of the May congress, Fernández succinctly depicted the ortodoxo and renovationist currents as “revolv[ing] around the way each group has analyzed the 1990 electoral defeat, their different proposals for regaining power, and even different opinions about the party’s fundamental nature”:

Those belonging to the current “For the majorities” [i.e., the renovationists] fought for modifications to a number of statutory and programmatic concepts which had previously been fundamental to the FSLN, in order to “adapt to changing times.” These included discarding the concept of a “vanguard,” anti-imperialist party as well as the practice of classifying members in two categories, as activists or affiliates. Furthermore, they rejected and openly condemned all forms of armed struggle and violence in the popular fight for political and economic objectives. ... The Democratic Left [ortodoxos], although proposing some changes of their own, argued that following the other group’s recommendations would “destroy the revolutionary essence” of Sandinismo. ... The dispute between the tendencies was also influenced by the personal struggle between [Sergio] Ramirez and Daniel Ortega for political control of the party, apparently motivated by the [leadup to the] 1996 general elections, for which there [then was] still no designated Sandinista presidential candidate.124

In the immediate wake of the 1990 election débacle, renovationist sentiment enjoyed what seems in retrospect to have been its high-water mark. As late as July 1991, at the FSLN’s historic First Party Congress, virtually no-one dared – or bothered – to speak against the need for renewal and internal restructuring. Nonetheless, with so much of the Front in disarray, there seemed little point in making precipitous changes that might only weaken the FSLN further. In a decision that now appears fateful, congress delegates swallowed whatever misgivings they may have felt, and gave their backing to a “sunset clause” aimed at preserving continuity at the leadership level while the expected deeper renovation was carried out. All sitting members of the National Directorate were allowed to retain their positions as a single slate; only Humberto Ortega declined, in order to remain as Chief of the Army under the UNO regime.

Correlating with the relative strength of renovationist sentiment, but related also to the separate and intense internal lobbying of the previous year, Barricada’s editorial staff won important official confirmation of the paper’s new “line” at the 1991 congress. Surveying the course of post-revolutionary Nicaraguan politics in 1998, Carlos Fernando Chamorro cited the congress seven

years earlier as a vital foundation for Barricada's controversial explorations and editorial policies between 1992 and 1994:

We lobbied to introduce in party documents our own thesis on the autonomy of the press. Not many people were interested in discussing this matter, but we had a particular interest. Onofre [Guevara], Sofia [Montenegro] and myself were party delegates. Finally, the congress adopted our proposal, and therefore the autonomy concept became legalized as the official party line by the maximum authority.

There was little significant debate in the congress. One of the few important issues that provoked controversy had to do with "freedom of opinion." There was an article [published] on the rights of militants, saying you had the right to defend your own opinions until the party made one decision. We fought hard to establish the principle of freedom of opinion, which meant that even though the party had taken a decision, you had the right to maintain your own opinion as an individual, even though you had to apply the party decision. What this meant for those who understood the significance was [providing] the platform for the idea of permanent debate, promoting opinion leaders, and eventually [creating] corrientes of opinion in the party. People like William Ramirez, Julio López, and Bayardo [Arce] himself were in the opposite camp. And the result was tremendously important for us.

Another thing was that the results of the congress elections in the Sandinista Assembly were very favourable for us. I got elected with a relatively high percentage of votes — in the first 22 out of 90, while people like Rosario Murillo, our main detractor, was not elected at all. Julio López also was not elected.

So it was like winning the first battle with ... Ortega's opposition. It was like the political legitimizing of the decision to cease being the official organ, and making Barricada [instead] a paper open to Sandinista debate. This explains why, when Ortega came to Barricada to meet with staff, we not only had institutional or journalistic strength, but also political [strength].

A short three years later, though, the ortodoxo current and Daniel Ortega had succeeded in stalling what enthusiasm there was for the autonomy of Sandinista institutions, let alone more sweeping transformations in that direction. At the next party congress, in May 1994, Ortega and his Democratic Left counterparts — including Murillo and López — played their hand and won, inflicting a decisive defeat on the diffuse renovationist wing of the Frente. The period between the two congresses, during which the ortodoxos and Ortega established and consolidated a firm hold over the party apparatus, is murky. There was no doubt about the results, however. As Daniel Alegria noted in 1996, the May 1994 showdown left the ortodoxos with "the keys, the seals to the party. They have the apparatus, and it works. It still works like a well-oiled bulldozer, although it's missing a few parts now." Certainly it worked well enough to bulldoze the renovationist tendency out of the Sandinista bench in the National Assembly, out of the National Directorate, and out of Barricada.
As this account suggests, a major factor throughout the drama of 1993-94 was the role played by Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega. At first, in the recollection of Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Ortega had seemed fairly amenable to granting Barricada greater independence from the FSLN leadership. Whatever Ortega’s original enthusiasm for the project, however, it rapidly dissipated. In September 1990 came the first public denunciation of Barricada from what might be called the “Ortega camp”: Rosario Murillo’s broadside against a “sect” that had allegedly seized control of the FSLN’s media. Murillo, of course, was Ortega’s longtime companion; it was tempting to read, in her references to “Sandinista leaders” being relegated to the inside pages of Barricada and “the ruling [Chamorro] family” being given preference, an expression of Ortega’s own frustrations with the direction taken by Barricada and other Sandinista media.

By the time of the critical National Directorate meeting to approve Barricada’s autonomy experiment (December 1990), Ortega’s ambivalence had apparently intensified: he was conspicuous by his absence. In an interview conducted several months after the February 1991 relaunching of the paper, Chamorro confirmed that opposition to the autonomy project had been voiced at the Directorate level. He declined to name names, but in retrospect Ortega was almost certainly the leading critical voice.

At last, in February 1992, Ortega openly joined the fray, delivering what The New York Times called a “frontal attack” on the new incarnation of Barricada. He expressed opposition to the Directorate’s approval of the autonomy project: had he been in the country at the time of the vote, he said, he would have opposed it. Ominously, he now said he wished to see the decision overturned. Ortega also accused Barricada of placing excessive emphasis on “commercial” considerations at the expense of political ones.125 This charge seemed to derive, proximately at least, from the paper’s decision to publish a full-page political advertisement for a proto-renovationist group dubbing itself Sandinistas por un Proyecto Nacional (Sandinistas for a National Project). Ortega’s deeper concern, though, was apparently Barricada’s willingness to solicit comments and op-ed pieces from a broad cross-section of Nicaraguan politics and society, and to court the advertising revenue of the mostly-conservative business community.

The implication that Barricada journalists were in the pockets of the powerful – and thus had descended to the corrupt level of pre-revolutionary journalism in Nicaragua – immediately drew Barricada’s staff into the controversy. The “Declaration of Barricada Journalists,” published on the editorial page on 6 March 1992, protested Ortega’s attack on the grounds that it “contain[ed] insinuations that could injure the personal and professional dignity of our collective.” Chamorro, for his part, published a rare front-page riposte under his own signature, entitled “The Barricada That We Need.” In the measured tones from which he rarely departed in print, Chamorro reminded Ortega of the decision of the July 1991 FSLN Congress to “support and respect the autonomy of the revolution’s communications media.”

Eventually, as noted, Ortega’s personal opposition to Barricada and other “renovationist” forces crystallized into the alliance at Pikín Guerrero, the formation of the Democratic Left, and the fateful decision by a loose renovationist coalition – including Barricada staffers – to confront the militants. As the FSLN’s Special Congress of May 1994 convened, Barricada’s reporter announced what was plain to all observers – that it would be “an open struggle.” (For an extensive sampling of Barricada’s coverage of the congress, see Appendix 1.) The ortodoxo-Ortega alliance, though, all but ensured it would be a lopsided one. In the final balloting for the new Sandinista Assembly, the ortodoxos secured an impressive 75 percent of delegate support. Ortega was re-elected General Secretary by an equally convincing 287-147 margin over Henry Ruiz, who presented himself as leader of an “anti-current” current. “From that day on,” said Carlos Fernando Chamorro, “I knew perfectly well that [the defenestración] was just a matter of time. The whole question was if they were willing to pay the political cost to do what they did. And they were willing to pay the cost, and they did it.”

Barricada decided to seize the initiative. Staffers prepared a submission of their own to the Directorate. On 19 September, a number of staffers gathered for a 10 a.m. press conference at the

---

126 Quoted in Christian, “Ortega’s Leadership.”
128 Chamorro interviews, 16 May and 23 May 1996. The ortodoxo victory was not total. It had been widely expected that Tomás Borge, the only surviving FSLN founder, would be drafted to fill a newly-created post of Sandinista president. Instead, delegates voted against creating the post – an implicit snub to Borge. Likewise, Julio López, who many had expected to join the National Directorate, was not among those chosen to fill the expanded twelve-person body. Both of these figures ended up playing leading roles at the post-defenestración version of Barricada, roles that may be linked to these setbacks at the congress.
office of the Union of Nicaraguan Journalists (UPN), seeking to explain their position on the
Barricada project and “the implicit will to silence and censor us.” A document signed by thirty-seven
staffers, entitled Un periodismo para una sociedad democrática (Journalism for a Democratic Society), was
presented, and was published on the Opiniones page on 20 September. Behind the scenes, a more
formal submission to the Directorate was being prepared by the members of Barricada’s Editorial
Council. The document that resulted, Ajustes en la estrategia editorial de Barricada (Adjustments to the
Editorial Strategy of Barricada), was hardly designed to assuage those FSLN leaders and militants –
now apparently a majority – who supported the reassertion of Directorate control over the former
official organ. As staffer had done in their open letter, the council members called quixotically not
for a diminution of the paper’s autonomy, but for that autonomy to be increased.129 Remarkably, at
no point did the text actually refer to Barricada as a “Sandinista” or “revolutionary” institution. The
emphasis throughout was on the paper’s “Sandinista and non-Sandinista” constituencies and
potential constituencies. (Indeed, non-Sandinistas were seen as the most promising avenue for
future expansion.) If Barricada was to extricate itself from its economic dire straits, the authors
claimed, it would have to further strengthen its autonomy from the partisan interests of the FSLN.
This led to the most barbed passage in a generally moderate document:

These aspirations run contrary to the demand of sectors of the base and leadership inside
the party structure of the FSLN, who demand a greater degree of support [protagonismo] for
their political activities in the newspaper’s pages, together with a “militant” editorial policy
favouring the official positions of the FSLN.

The Editorial Council instead urged “consolidat[ion of] ... the daily’s professional
discretion”:

The newspaper decides the relevance of the news. News value is the fundamental criterion
in considering whether news coverage is fair or not. News judgment cannot be placed at the
service of subjects, sources or groups, but [only at the service of] the broader public, and of
what the audience considers vital. The newspaper must administer this criterion with total autonomy
[emphasis added].

In retrospect, the document reads partly as a deposition to the Directorate, partly as an
elegy for the autonomy experiment that was shortly to be foreclosed. “I think we were trying to
sell the project without being much convinced of our ability to do so,” Chamorro stated:

129 Unpublished internal document, privately supplied.
We thought it was our responsibility to put it in words, put it on paper, and say, “Okay, this is our editorial strategy. Don’t ask us to change it, because we don’t think it has to be changed. What we can do is to make some adjustments which are not necessarily political adjustments — like what kind of supplements we have, whether we are going to be more popular or less popular, if we are going to be more integrated in our approach to advertising and news ...”

Inevitably, the arguments counted for little. The document was submitted to the Directorate on 21 October 1994, but “was never discussed at all,” said Chamorro. “They had already made their decision.”

Four days later came the defenestration.

**Coup and Interregnum**

The first that Carlos Fernando Chamorro heard about the precise timing of his “throwing out the window” came as *Barricada* headed into its final weekend as a semi-autonomous publication. Senior editor Daniel Alegria had received a call from Tomás Borge, whom Alegria served as both bodyguard and speechwriter in the Ministry of the Interior during the 1980s. Apparently perceiving Alegria to be one of the few sympathetic figures within the newspaper, Borge sought to persuade him to serve as *Barricada’s* editor for a period of transition following Chamorro’s departure. Eventually, grudgingly, Alegria agreed. Then he phoned Carlos Fernando Chamorro to tell him the sword was about to descend.

In its front-page headline of Monday, 24 October, *Barricada* brashly reported the “Agreement to dismiss the director” of the publication. The next day – Tuesday, 25 October 1994 – *Barricada* printed Carlos Fernando Chamorro’s lengthy “final reflection,” quoted earlier, together with an article aptly titled “The hour of truth” by second-in-command Sergio De Castro. The current impasse had arisen, De Castro angrily alleged, because *Barricada*

has been ever less inclined to use our pages for political manoeuvres which respond to the power interests of individuals or groups, at the expense of the institutions created by the Revolution, of which we consider ourselves a part, and which we have sought to strengthen.

... The National Directorate and Sandinista Assembly ... have offered nothing new to *Sandinismo* or to Nicaraguan society, [only] reiterating at every stage methods and political styles which stress control by the apparatus of power.

---

130 All quotes from Chamorro interview, 16 May 1996.

131 Chamorro interview, 23 May 1996. Alegria declined comment when asked whether he was Chamorro’s source for the information.
The morning’s edition divulged news that three members of Barricada’s Editorial Council – Alejandro Martínez, Rodrigo Reyes, and Emilio Baltodano – had tendered their resignations. As Barricada readers were digesting this reportage and commentary, the Sandinista Assembly was meeting at the offices of CIPRES, a research institute near Managua’s Universidad Centroamericana headed by Orlando Núñez, a leading ortodoxo intellectual. At the request of the National Directorate, delegates voted – narrowly – to dismiss Chamorro as director of Barricada, and to re-establish party control over the newspaper. Finally, just before three o’clock, Tomás Borge and Lumberto Campbell made their trek across town to the Barricada plant, Assembly resolution in hand. There, they formally divested Chamorro of his post, and began the arduous process of restructuring Barricada as a journalistic and revolutionary institution.

As the defenestración unfolded, no-one, perhaps, felt in a more awkward position than Daniel Alegria. As Chamorro drove away from the throngs on the Barricada steps, Alegria was already beginning to map out the next edition. The top story was never in doubt: “Obviously, we were news that day. That wasn’t the problem.” The difficulties began to arise when Alegria carried proofs of the paper’s front page to the spacious office that several hours previously had been occupied by Carlos Fernando Chamorro. There he found Tomás Borge, Lumberto Campbell, and a retinue of ortodoxo supporters. “There were people there that didn’t have anything to do with the paper; they had a lot to do with the party,” said Alegria. “It reminded me of a gathering of pirates that had taken over somebody else’s ship, with their feet on another guy’s desk, living it up!” Alegria showed Borge the proofs, with the banner headline: “DN se toma Barricada” (National Directorate Takes Over Barricada). “He takes a look at the headline, and just crosses it out,” Alegria recalled. There was, of course, a deep familiarity underlying Borge’s apparent brusqueness:

You have to remember that I used to be a speechwriter for him. So he’s very used to this style with me – I’d give him a speech proposal and then he’d cross that out and put his own stuff in. That’s totally acceptable. But this was different, although he didn’t realize it.

He wanted to change the title. He disagreed with “DN takes over Barricada.” He wanted something like “Barricada is back with the FSLN.” I told him that wasn’t the truth ... a whole discussion began, and then everyone else in the room started, you know, attacking my position. So I said to Tomás: “Look, can we meet elsewhere? ... I want to talk to you


\[133\] “Borge: Barricada será un periódico sólo para sandinistas,” La Tribuna, 26 October 1994. The article states the initiative was approved by 64 votes out of 120, with three abstentions.
and Lumberto [alone], otherwise we'll never get anywhere. And if you don't like it, I've got no problem with leaving."

The trio moved to the Barricada library, where they were soon joined by the flu-ridden Sergio De Castro and Sofia Montenegro. More haggling ensued over the headline. "He [Borge] was disagreeing. Finally, he said, 'Okay, I'll give in, but change the title to "AS"' – to suggest that the paper was being taken over by the Sandinista Assembly, rather than the National Directorate.

The 26 October edition arrived on the streets with its banner headline duly amended to emphasize the role of the Sandinista Assembly. Also on the front page was a statement by Lumberto Campbell, defending the Directorate's decision against mounting criticism within the institution, in other Nicaraguan media, and around the world. Barricada "belongs to the FSLN," Campbell declared, and would "defend the interests of the FSLN, within the framework of [defending] popular interests and national interests." Criticism of the Front would be countenanced; but "we must not confuse the self-criticism necessary within the FSLN with the shame and guilt [vergüenza y culpabilidad] of falling into a vulgar anti-Sandinismo." Coolly, he thanked Chamorro for "his efforts" at Barricada.

But Campbell's was the only defense of the defenestración published in Barricada that day, or for three days afterward. With a couple of ambiguous exceptions, no alterations were made to articles and commentary that were at the very least plainspoken in their depiction of the preceding day's events, and often bitterly critical of the Directorate's actions. The most prominent note of dissent in the 26 October edition was a statement titled "Autonomía vs. partidismo," signed by 74 journalists and administrative staff at the paper. "The dismissal of our director is more than just the dismissal of an individual," the staffers wrote. "It is the liquidation of an entire journalistic project." In particular, it represented a rejection of Barricada's efforts to forge an "investigative, quality journalism" that would subject all those in "positions of public responsibility" to scrutiny, "independently of the party to which they belong." "These principles and criteria," the signatories asserted, "... respond to the necessity of providing greater objectivity and impartiality in our media." They were indispensable if Barricada was "to gain credibility and esteem in the eyes of the public."

---

Still serving as caretaker was Daniel Alegría, who found himself, the morning after his protracted negotiations with Tomás Borge, coordinating the 27 October issue together with Lumberto Campbell. Borge was absent — receiving a dressing-down, Alegría claimed, from Directorate members unhappy with the extensive and negative publicity the defenestración had generated. “At two o’clock [on the 26th] I meet with Lumberto, and we talked about what stories should go where. He was in agreement on some things; on others, not.” Alegría said he began to perceive the first signs of a new political agenda shaping Barricada’s content:

I started seeing some political clientelismo. That day, somebody calls Lumberto and says, “Well, now that you’re the editor, you can carry this on the front page.” And he said, “Sure, no problem.” It was some news that I’d already put on the international page, about Lumberto having visited somebody in Spain a few days previously. ... I said, “Look, to me that’s not news. That goes on page four. You register the fact, but this and this and this are much more important. If you start doing favours like that, then you might just as well turn this into a rag and let people pay you for what they want you to publish. That isn’t a newspaper.”

“Every day” rapidly became “a struggle,” in Alegría’s recollection. “I could see how the paper was changing.” In the end, he decided he wanted no part of it. On 3 November, Alegría resigned.134 His departure coincided with a rapid haemorrhaging of the staff that the new leadership had counted on to run the re-officialized Barricada.

**The “Negotiated Exit”**

At some point about a week into the interregnum, the FSLN leadership seems to have decided the following:

- that Barricada staff were too united in their opposition to the new project to serve as a foundation for it;
- that the political costs of the defenestración and subsequent outcry had largely been borne, and there was now little to lose by wiping clean the slate;
- that even if Barricada’s circulation and influence were decreased by an exodus of readers, this could be overcome in time to mobilize the paper effectively for the 1996 elections;

---

134Alegría, “Una renuncia amarga.” Alegría told La Tribuna at the time that he resigned “for very personal reasons; I served as editor because I believed in the project that they are [now] destroying. I have open eyes and sufficient knowledge of the facts to know that this daily is going to be converted into a partisan object and [an object] of political clientelism.” Alvaro Cruz Rojas, “Espionaje y censura en Barricada,” La Tribuna, 3 November 1994.
• that the circulation of the paper might even increase in the wake of the defenestación — there were, after all, 350,000 registered FSLN militants in Nicaragua who mostly supported the ortodoxo line, and might be prevailed upon to support the new version of Barricada; and

• that even if none of these strategies worked, and Barricada declined in both circulation and influence, the material deficit would be offset by a new harmony of interests between the paper's dirección and the now-dominant ortodoxo current of the Front. More efficient coordination, for example, would be possible among the FSLN's various print and broadcast media — and the Sandinistas' prospects in the 1996 elections correspondingly enhanced.¹³⁷

The circumstances of the top-to-bottom transformation of Barricada's staff that ensued remain the subject of bitter controversy. All that can be said with confidence is that the situation prevailing after Chamorro's dismissal — the clash of mobilizing and professional imperatives that seemed to occur at every editorial gathering — was ultimately untenable for either side. Who among Barricada's staff jumped ship, and who was pushed? Tomás Borge offered a paradoxical assessment that may also be the most accurate one: the staff "chose to leave," he said, but "we formally fired them because they asked us to do so."¹³⁸ Whatever the mechanism, the human underpinnings of the semi-autonomous Barricada rapidly disappeared. As early as 1 November, Barricada reported on its front page that sixteen journalists, among them Sofia Montenegro and Onofre Guevara, were seeking a "negotiated exit" from the paper.¹³⁹

One sector of Barricada staff, though, was isolated entirely from the wrenching upheavals taking place in the editorial division. Despite the earlier references to the solidarity that largely prevailed among the paper's journalists and editors, a clear distinction must be drawn between this sector and the blue-collar staff who ran the presses in Plant B of Editorial El Amanecer. The blue-collar workers displayed a much more sanguine — and often a supportive — attitude towards the defenestación. It was the blue-collar side of the operation that had been gutted in the layoffs and

¹³⁷See "Ortodoxos confirman control de medios," a Reuters dispatch published in El Nuevo Diario on 9 November 1994. The article quotes Tomás Borge as pledging that Barricada would seek a "fraternal" relationship with other Sandinista media "now, tomorrow and forever." "Borge [also] predicted that Barricada's circulation would increase and that, together with the party's radio stations and TV channel, [Barricada] would lead the Sandinista Front to victory in the 1996 elections by bolstering its base of support among the poor."

¹³⁸Borge quoted in Fernández Ampié, "Political and labor conflicts."

“downsizing” of the early 1990s, while the editorial staff remained largely unscathed. “How many compactaciones [downsizings] have there been here?” demanded Frank Avilés, a Barricada photomechanic, shortly after the defenestration. “Nobody ever said anything when workers were fired. Nobody kicked up a fuss. They fired people without so much as a thank you for all the years they worked here. Well, now it’s their turn.” Another protested to Barricada Internacional that “They [the journalists] never did anything for other workers when they were laid off; they used to justify it, saying the paper was falling apart.”

The schism between plant and editorial staff ruled out the formation of a truly common front at Barricada in the days and weeks following the defenestration. Had the plant workers struck — as they would in late 1997, with decisive results — a serious opposition to the new order might well have been mounted. So long as the presses and the delivery trucks kept rolling, however, resistance was largely symbolic. Whatever obstacles confronted Barricada’s new directorate, it would at least be able to rely on continuity at the level of production. The schism among staff also gave Barricada’s new guardians one of their few advantages in the court of public opinion. They were quick to exploit it: at one point Tomás Borge even claimed the defenestration had taken place “only for this reason” — that is, to demonstrate a proper “admiration and respect [for] the work of those in the area of production.”

Barricada’s directorate now moved to replenish Barricada’s depleted editorial corps. Within days of the defenestration, the two leading ortodoxos at the paper’s Managua office – Juan Ramón Huerta, editor of the Departmentales section, and photographer Pablo Emilio Barreto – had been promoted to leading roles at the paper. Now they were designated “journalistic recruiters” (reclutadores de periodistas). Their early efforts bore little fruit. Mario Fulvio Espinosa, a veteran editor at El Nuevo Diario, agreed to move to Barricada. But at least three other journalists who were offered positions refused — including Silvio Mora, an assistant to Tomás Borge. Alfonso Malespín, a journalist unaffiliated with the Sandinista Front who had been brought in to work on the

---

140Quoted in Guillermo Fernández Ampié, “Political and labor conflicts in full color,” Barricada Internacional, December 1994. According to Fernández Ampié, “Many of the other workers at the newspaper – particularly the press operators and those at the bottom of the pay scale – were unsympathetic or indifferent to the journalists’ situation. Some even expressed a certain righteous satisfaction, saying that they got no more than they deserved. ... In the last four years, more than 100 workers have been laid off, causing general discontent among the paper’s staff. The journalists, however, were rarely affected.”

141Borge quoted in Huerta, “Los retos.”
entertainment sections and to buttress the “objective” tone of Barricada's political reporting in the early 1990s, agreed to stay on. Many regional correspondents – the one generally pro-ortodoxo sector of Barricada's editorial staff – offered to move to Managua to help fill the yawning editorial gaps. The focus of outside recruitment then shifted to target a disproportionate number of Tomás Borge's assistants at the Ministry of the Interior during the 1980s: Fernando Solís, Mayra Reyes, José Reyes Monterrey, and Judith Ruiz among them. Many of these figures had little if any prior journalistic experience. As Alfonso Malespín told El Semanario at the time: “The problem [the new directors] have is that they want to change the newspaper, but they don't know how to do it, because they haven’t brought in anyone technically capable of introducing the changes they want.” This lack of professional experience would prove one of the most debilitating factors in the early months of the new Barricada.

A smoother transition was effected at the leadership level. On 4 November, Sofía Montenegro and sub-director Sergio De Castro disappeared from Barricada's masthead. Julio López, a presence at the paper from the day of the defenestración, formally appeared as De Castro’s replacement. López was a former Baptist preacher and sociology professor with a law degree from the University of Lausanne. He had substituted for Carlos Fernando Chamorro at Barricada for a brief period in 1980, before moving on to work at the FSLN’s Department of International Relations. Along with his wife, Sandinista comandante Mónica Baltodano, López had established himself as a leading ortodoxo voice in the intra-party debate of the early 1990s. He and Baltodano were among the few ortodoxos who chose to contribute opinion-pieces to Barricada during the years of the autonomy experiment.

On the same day as López was confirmed in his position, an altogether more enigmatic figure was installed as Barricada's new chief editor. William Grigsby’s appointment ended days of speculation which had seen a number of prominent Sandinistas mentioned as candidates, including Jaime Wheelock (the former Minister of Agriculture) and Miguel D’Escoto, Foreign Minister in the

142 Alvaro Cruz Rojas, “¿Vienen más despidos en Barricada?,” La Tribuna, 30 October 1994.
revolutionary government. At first glance, Grigsby seemed an unlikely choice for chief editor. He had had a fractious relationship with the FSLN during his journalistic career in the 1980s, being expelled from the party in 1987 for publishing material deemed heretical in El Nuevo Diario. That newspaper, meanwhile – likely bowing to pressure from the FSLN leadership – fired him. Grigsby moved over to the radio station La Primerisima, and quickly climbed the ladder to become director and host of the paper’s most popular program.

This author interviewed Grigsby at La Primerisima in February 1991. He appeared agitated throughout the conversation, answering questions in curt bursts. A .45 pistol was parked prominently on his desk, with a full clip of bullets adjacent. Death threats had apparently become common as, after the election defeat, Grigsby renewed his populist attack on selected FSLN leaders, especially the Ortega brothers. A few months before the interview, in September 1990, La Primerisima’s transmitters had been bombed. The station was knocked off the air, and forced to seek international aid to get back on its feet.

Grigsby’s considerable popularity among listeners derived from his persona as voice of the impoverished Sandinista majority. While the poor fought the Chamorro regime’s attempts to roll back the revolution’s gains, Grigsby proclaimed, the FSLN leadership was betraying the people by engaging in concertación with the Chamorro government. He denounced the pinata, which some within the Front had used to bolster their own resources – notably Daniel Ortega with his mansion in the wealthy neighbourhood of Los Colimas. Grigsby’s most vituperative criticism, though, was reserved for army chief Humberto Ortega. In conversation in 1991, he accused the ex-comandante of “an overbearing nature, arrogance, and ambition which prevent him from being a genuine revolutionary.” As the military, still under Ortega’s command, was slashed from 70,000 to 28,000 troops, Grigsby opened La Primerisima’s phone lines to disenchanted, disoriented career soldiers, who suddenly found themselves turfed out with few severance benefits and even sparser job prospects. When Humberto Ortega threw his support behind the Chamorro regime’s suppression


146 On the bombing of La Primerisima, see Anne Baldwin, “Solidarity among the ashes,” Barricada Internacional, 20 October 1990.
of strikes during the near-insurrection of July 1990, sending in soldiers to dismantle the street barricades, Grigsby was apoplectic. How could a “Sandinista” institution adopt a posture of neutrality or even active opposition in the face of massive popular discontent? Soon afterwards, La Primerisima was bombed; Grigsby openly accused Ortega of complicity in the attack.147

Given this background, one might sooner have expected Violeta Chamorro to be named Barricada’s new editor than William Grigsby. Perhaps, though, the above account offers a few clues as to why Grigsby was chosen. In a sense, few had taken a more “militant” or “orthodox” line than Grigsby in the years following the Sandinista defeat. His criticism of the policies of concertación and co-gobierno, which the increasingly ortodoxo leadership would themselves abandon in mid-1993, seemed ahead of its time. Likewise, the accusations the ortodoxos would direct against Barricada and other perceived renovationist forces in 1993-94 – of compromise with conservative forces, of a fickle revolutionary commitment, of personalism and clientelism – were precisely the charges Grigsby had been levelling at various Sandinistas (including more than a few ortodoxos) since 1990. Furthermore, if the Front’s leadership saw Grigsby as somewhat irascible and unpredictable, his combination of solid journalistic experience and pugnacious populism could help to invigorate the new Barricada. Perhaps Grigsby’s presence would garner the paper credibility among longtime readers who feared Barricada would become merely the house organ of Tomás Borge and Daniel Ortega.

In a 1996 interview, Grigsby denied any dissonance between his past stands and his responsibilities as chief editor. To the contrary, he said: he had actively pursued the editor’s position, “como trabajo militante” – as his revolutionary duty. “The Front knew that my thinking on many issues” varied from many in the leadership, he added; “but I don’t bring my own opinions to bear on the newspaper. ... Barricada might take a different position than mine, but here I respond to the needs of the paper.” Did the arrangement allow him less freedom than he enjoyed at La Primerisima, the radio station he continued to direct? “Of course,” Grigsby answered – then backtracked slightly. “Not less freedom, but ... what I say here at Barricada has political

147 For a typically outraged response from an FSLN militant – precisely the sector Grigsby would ally himself with a couple of years later – see William Calero, “Siete preguntas para William Grigsby,” Barricada, 28 February 1991: “Do you not believe that the Popular Sandinista Army is the only bastion that can sustain the Revolution? What are your pretensions in seeking to discredit it? Does this position differ from that of the bourgeois and imperialism?” etc.
consequences for the Sandinista Front. I have to think about how something I publish will affect the Front. It’s a totally different level of operation.”

Grigsby’s presence, though, did lend a volatile ingredient to the post-defenestration mix – one that eventually proved impossible to reconcile with the new vision of the paper that Tomás Borge et al. were working to entrench. At the time of fieldwork in 1996, there were hints that Grigsby’s attempts to preserve a degree of professional autonomy for the paper were drawing him into conflict with Borge and his other immediate superior, Julio López. By the time Barricada breathed its last in January 1998, Grigsby was long gone.

While Barricada struggled to find its feet under the new dirección, the displaced veterans shifted their strategy to the legal battlefront. There, a campaign was waged against Borge’s Barricada for back-pay and benefits allegedly owed. The court case would drag on for three years, until all staffers but Sofia Montenegro finally settled in 1997.

Life went on. Mid-1996 found Montenegro working at the Centre for Communications Research (CINCO), a social-scientific institute established by Carlos Fernando Chamorro not long after the defenestration. Chamorro himself, though outspoken in comments to the media shortly after his dismissal, soon reverted to his more typical equanimity. He founded CINCO, which sought to systematize the study of the media, politics, and public opinion in Nicaragua. He published (together with Guillermo Rothschuh) the first post-revolutionary study of national media, Los Medios y la Política en Nicaragua. He founded a new weekly newspaper of political opinion, Confidencial. And he became co-host of Esta Semana (This Week), a current-affairs-oriented TV program, politely grilling guests from across the political spectrum – including the man who had orchestrated his dismissal from Barricada, Daniel Ortega. In an interview at his suburban home in

---

149 For example, Chamorro wrote in El Nuevo Diario at the end of November 1994 that Barricada had “suffered a total reversal” since the defenestración, “in order to dedicate itself to promoting personal vanities and partisan sectarianism.” He minced few words in describing “the extreme manicheanism” of Daniel Ortega, criticizing “his vision of the world in black and white [which] has reached the point of bankruptcy within and outside Nicaragua. ... He doesn’t want to admit that the main intention of this long-planned action was to pave the way for the aligning of the newspaper with his own person, and with the group of ‘ideologues’ that join him in controlling the FSLN, as also occurred with other Sandinista communications media.” Carlos Fernando Chamorro B., “La religión de una secta,” El Nuevo Diario, 30 November 1994.
1996, Chamorro characterized his post-\textit{Barricada} experience as a transitional one. He was engaged, he said, in "a process of reviewing my view of the world and of politics," and was in "no hurry" to complete the self-evaluation. In fact, he was contemplating extending it, by returning to higher education. Asked to reflect on fifteen years as \textit{Barricada}'s director, Chamorro described the period in terms of personal, political, and professional evolution:

"Probably the most important part of my adult life I spent at \textit{Barricada}. I grew up at \textit{Barricada}. I have to say I'm happy I was able to survive \textit{Barricada} and become much more the owner of myself in the last five or eight years. ... \textit{Barricada} also gave me a lot of friends, a lot of satisfaction, a lot of learning. Probably the most important thing is that I found my own place as a professional. I know I'm a journalist. Again, that's thanks to surviving \textit{Barricada}. I was able to move beyond my own understanding of ten years as a political cadre who was doing journalism; I became more a journalist than a political cadre. I think one of my skins has been left behind.\textsuperscript{151}

But at the newspaper Chamorro once directed, the cadres had returned.


When the dust settled at the new \textit{Barricada} in November 1994, the paper's directorate – notably the core trio of Tomás Borge, Julio López, and William Grigsby – faced a challenge that was by nearly any measure unenviable. In an immediate sense, the task of producing publishable copy would have to be accomplished despite a severe deficit in professional skills and capabilities. The \textit{defenestración} and its aftermath had prompted the departure of most veteran staff and the arrival of dozens of new workers whose political loyalty was unquestioned, but whose journalistic

\textsuperscript{151}Chamorro interview, 23 May 1996.
experience was often minimal or nonexistent. Even at the level of the paper’s directorate, only William Grigsby could claim much in the way of hands-on media experience. Administrative and managerial expertise was also hard to come by.

Just producing the paper was a daunting enough task. There was also the question of who would buy it. The well-publicized struggle at the paper had greatly compromised Barricada’s standing in the eyes of established readers — those who had shored up the declining, but perhaps sustainable, circulation levels of the early 1990s. Almost immediately after the defenestración, Barricada’s circulation went into free fall. Roberto Fonseca reported in December 1996 that the number of Barricada subscribers declined from 4,000 in October 1994 to 2,500 in May 1996, while overall circulation fell from 15,000 to 7,000 in the same period. By January 1998, when for the first time in its history Barricada failed to appear on newsstands, some estimates put the circulation as low as 5,000. Advertising revenue was also hard to find even before the government of Arnoldo Aleman took power in 1996 and launched an advertising boycott of Barricada and other independent media.

Tomás Borge, the paper’s new director, oscillated between buoyant predictions that Barricada’s circulation would stage a recovery, and claims that even if it didn’t, the paper could still fulfill its designated role in the Sandinista movement. A Reuters dispatch published in El Nuevo Diario shortly after the defenestración quoted Borge as “predict[ing] that Barricada’s circulation would increase and that, together with the party’s radio stations and TV channel, [the paper] would lead the Sandinista Front to victory in the 1996 elections.” On another occasion, though, Borge allowed that Barricada was “not exactly a commercial undertaking” (un proyecto comercial); “its primary objectives,” he said, were “oriented towards service.”

Could Barricada find sufficient popular support to offset the decline in circulation and advertising? For all his professed optimism about the professional side of the operation, Grigsby

---

152Roberto Fonseca, “El periodismo partidista agoniza,” Confidential, 8-14 December 1996. In an interview on 27 July 1998, Carlos Fernando Chamorro stated that the average daily circulation of Barricada in 1994 (when promotional print-runs were factored in) was actually about 23,000 copies daily.

153One of the “closest collaborators” of Tomás Borge told Confidential in September 1997 that “the circulated continues to stagnate between 5,000 and 5,500 copies.” “Conato de huelga en Barricada,” Confidential, 21-27 September 1997.


doubted it. A more pressing concern, he indicated, was to preserve *Barricada's* appeal to “the middle sectors,” which didn’t confront the same economic dilemma as the very poor. “Our market positioning directs us towards the lower middle class,” Grigsby said. That meant the paper had to move beyond its pro-FSLN mobilizing imperative and cater to “many requirements with regard to show business, culture, [and] ‘light’ information.”156 But how would such apolitical (some would say reactionary) content be viewed by those who saw the *defenestración* as an opportunity for *Barricada* to return to the ultra-mobilized “glory days” of the revolutionary decade? All these questions lingered as the new dirección reached out to Sandinista militants and the wider Nicaraguan society. Nearly all would be answered to the decisive detriment of the new project.

“A RELATIVE OBJECTIVITY SUCH AS DECENTY DEMANDS”157

The editorial team that took over at *Barricada* after the *defenestración* saw and presented its mission as one of liberation. “Under the pretext” of an autonomy project, Tomás Borge said, *Barricada* had become “aligned with a fraction of the FSLN.” It had “abandon[ed] national interests in order to place itself at the service of a minority group, in which the old director of *Barricada* was registered.” Did that mean *Barricada* would now return to being the official organ of the FSLN? Borge sidestepped the question. But he rejected the idea that reharmonizing *Barricada* with the dominant current of the Frente would lead to the paper’s becoming merely “a party bulletin or pamphlet.” Instead, *Barricada* would be “a professional newspaper, very broad, flexible, giving space to all [sectors of] national thinking.” Symbolic of this ambition was the decision to preserve the masthead of the autonomy era: *Barricada* would continue to work *Por los intereses nacionales*, “in the national interest”; Sandino’s hat and the Nicaraguan flag would continue to be separated.158

Nonetheless, said Borge, *Barricada* would “express – fundamentally – the Sandinista way of seeing the political and social contradictions of this country.” He added:

---

156William Grigsby interview, 15 May 1996.

157The quote is from Borge, “Saldremos victoriosos”: “The new management took on the difficult mission of converting the newspaper, not into a party bulletin – as the prognosticators had it – nor into ‘yellow’ trash [*mamarracho amarillo*] that appeals to deviant desires – but into a broad accessible medium ... [with] a relative objectivity such as decency demands.”

158In another apparent pledge of continuity, the slogan was incorporated into the headline of the first interview with Borge published after the *defenestración*. See “Barricada fiel a los intereses nacionales,” *Barricada*, 2 November 1994.
We are going to make a newspaper which carries the banner of the most worthy popular causes; we are going to demonstrate that you can have a revolutionary newspaper that is, at the same time, professional. It's not a contradiction [to say] that the newspaper should be revolutionary and at the same time attractive. ... Revolutionary indifference is detestable; revolutionary ardour and passion is the most noble face a journalist can present.

The new environment, though it posed its share of constraints, was also open to a more innovative and creative blending of mobilizing and professional considerations, in Borge's view. "The idea is not only to provide continuity," Borge confirmed, "but to widen the options that Barricada offers to readers."\textsuperscript{159}

Was a genuine balance of the imperatives still possible after the institutional restructuring of October-November 1994? Earlier in this chapter, I argued that the bedrock of Barricada's evolving autonomy and professionalism was the "firewalls" – some in place for many years by the time the autonomy project was officially launched – that had insulated the newspaper from personal and political interference by the party leadership.\textsuperscript{160} Important transformations were quickly apparent in this area. Perhaps the most striking was the recomposition of the editorial council and its almost-immediate ossifying as a meaningful decision-making body at the paper. Neither William Grigsby nor Tomás Borge even bothered to mention the council in conversation, let alone to assign it a formative role in constructing a mobilizing or professional strategy for the paper. The council (consisting of Borge, Gloria Cardenal, Alba Palacios, and the Reverend Miguel Angel Casco) continued to appear on the masthead – but on 23 December 1996 it vanished, without comment or explanation, and did not reappear.

What power had once resided in the hands of Carlos Fernando Chamorro and the Editorial Council now devolved in certain (apparently decisive) part to Tomás Borge.\textsuperscript{161} But the comandante's

\textsuperscript{159}Barricada: fiel a los intereses nacionales.

\textsuperscript{160}To recap briefly, these included: the banishing of political cadres from the newsroom early in the life of the paper (the first professionally "uprising" against mobilizing dictates); the appointment of a single National Directorate member to mediate between the leadership and Barricada, which substantially reduced the Directorate's micro-involvement in editorial policy; the construction of a New Editorial Profile in 1990 that downplayed mobilizing considerations and emphasized professional ones, including the cultivation of a much wider range of sources and outside commentary in the paper's coverage and a strict separation of editorials, news coverage, and personal opinion; the creation of an Editorial Council in 1990 dominated by "establishment" FSLN figures, a step removed from the fray of daily politics; and finally, the successful lobbying of the National Directorate to permit Barricada's relaunching as a de-officialized publication working "in the national interest."

\textsuperscript{161}Decisive, certainly, in the sense that it was Borge who took the decision to close the enterprise in January 1998.
day-to-day involvement in the paper, at least through to the terminal crisis of late 1997, was surprisingly limited. Borge may have viewed *Barricada* as his personal “toy,” as his critics alleged.\(^{162}\) As we will see, though, Borge apparently sought little of the practical involvement that Carlos Fernando Chamorro had maintained. He was often absent from the paper for extended stretches, pursuing his business involvements and political contacts throughout Central America and in Mexico.

It was Julio López whom many regarded as the “brains” behind the new *Barricada*. López had a direct line to the National Directorate not only through his relationship with Borge, but through his wife, Mónica Baltodano, drafted to the Directorate level at the May 1994 party congress. Many observers had expected López himself to become a Directorate member, given his prominence in the internal debate of the early 1990s. He was passed over, however; the nod may have gone to his wife instead, in part to help redress the gender imbalance among the FSLN leadership. The two were peas in a pod, ideologically speaking; but now López, like Borge in the wake of the 1994 congress, lacked a pod of his own. In October 1994, *Barricada* beckoned to both.

According to Juan Ramón Huerta, López’s role at the paper was “very important, because it is the guarantee that there will be cohesion between the interests of the party *vis-a-vis* the population, and the interests of *Barricada* *vis-a-vis* the population. He is the main engine, the main catalyst of this cohesion. Before, there was no such cohesion. The forces of the party were on one side, the forces of the paper on the other.”\(^{163}\)

An evaluation of the degree of democratic decision-making prevailing at the new *Barricada*, outside the governing triumvirate of Borge, López and Grigsby, leads the analyst into rather subjective terrain. But the person who was perhaps the closest to being a detached observer of the new experiment – Alfonso Malespín – found the new atmosphere at the paper both more highly mobilized and more rigidly hierarchical:

> I believe there was a more democratic daily life before [the defenestración]. We had daily [editorial] meetings before, and we discussed the things we were doing and how we were publishing them. We also criticized not only the director, but the editorial council – how they were running the newspaper. Now that doesn’t happen, because there’s a direct link between the party and the director, and he [Borge] randomly meets with Julio and William,

\(^{162}\)Daniel Alegria used the term: “From the very beginning, [Borge] saw the newspaper very much as his toy.” Alegria interview, 10 May 1996.

\(^{163}\)Juan Ramón Huerta interview, 22 May 1996.
so they have the “line.” William works mainly with the staff that are not involved in the political side of the newspaper; Julio meets the three members of the political staff, and they kind of have the picture first thing in the morning, which is basically the same as [the pro-Sandinista] Radio Ya’s and Radio Primera’s.

The “firewalls” constructed between editorials, news coverage, and personally-signed opinion pieces also seemed in danger of disappearing at the new *Barricada*. Nowhere was this more evident than in the ongoing dispute with the renovationist wing of Sandinismo. The *defenestración at Barricada* marked the climax, but not the end, of the battle; the new *Barricada’s* “dispatches from the front” were decidedly one-sided in tone and content. A mocking column by Berenice Maranhao on 23 November referred to MRS leader Sergio Ramírez as “a case for Freud.” When Ramírez finally resigned from the FSLN in January 1995, *Barricada* led off its coverage with Tomás Borge’s reaction to the news, with a photo of Borge alongside. On *Barricada’s* opinion-editorial page the resignation was denounced as a “political travesty.” The resignation did not stop *Barricada* from taking regular potshots at renovationist statements and activities thereafter. In August 1995, for example, the paper reported Ramírez’s claim that Daniel Ortega, Mónica Baltodano, and Bayardo Arce were part-owners of a Nicaraguan bank. The headline read: “Sergio Ramírez: Gossip and Liar.”

This last, shrill contribution was not an editorial, nor did it appear on the opinion-editorial page. It did not even carry a reporter’s byline. As such, it was typical of *Barricada’s* new blurring of mobilizing and professional imperatives. The erosion of professional firewalls was also evident in the paper’s coverage of Violeta Chamorro’s UNO government. Juan Ramón Huerta claimed in conversation that “we are very respectful in our treatment of the different parties”; but the analyst could hardly fail to be struck by the increasingly aggressive and personalized tone of the paper’s reporting of regime policies and actions. When police fired on protesters in downtown Managua in May 1995, *Barricada* ran banner headlines reading: “Chamorro represses” (17 May) and “Violeta guilty” (18 May). When police and student demonstrators clashed in December of the

---

164 Alfonso Malespin interview, 17 May 1996. Malespin’s positioning is discussed further below. The three “political staff” referred to are Pablo Emilio Barreto, whose beat was the various Sandinista organizations; Juan Ramón Huerta, covering political parties and Sandinista policies; and Carlos García in the National Assembly. According to Malespin, these journalists received closer attention than most.


167 Huerta interview, 22 May 1996.
same year, leaving one person killed and 35 students (as well as several police) injured, Barricada again ran the news on its front page, with the headline: “Chamorro repeats [Somoza’s] massacre of 1959” — a reference to one of the earliest outbreaks of student protest against the dictatorship. This rhetoric would have seemed out of place even as an op-ed contribution to the semi-autonomous Barricada. “FSLN denounces manoeuvres of the new traitors” was another representative headline of this period. The examples could be multiplied; see also the excerpts from Barricada’s 1996 election coverage in Appendix 1.

By contrast, coverage of FSLN leaders was worshipful. In November 1995, as Daniel Ortega celebrated his birthday, Barricada wrote that “the people” celebrated along with him: “Hundreds of Sandinistas showed up yesterday morning at the offices of Radio Ya to celebrate the birthday of Cdte. Daniel Ortega and to back the decision of the FSLN National Directorate to put him forward as the [party’s] presidential pre-candidate for next year’s elections.” Half of the “Astrology” page of the same edition was turned over to Ortega’s horoscope, with entries like, “To understand him, it is necessary to know and love him.”

If the new Barricada risked alienating readers with its return to the more partisan tone of old and its often-slapdash professional skills, could the deficit be offset by appealing to the lowest common denominator of human interest? Did periodismo amarillo — yellow journalism — figure prominently in the new project, as it had in the attempts during the autonomy era to cultivate a “lighter,” less politicized tone?

Anyone who expected Barricada’s new directorate to repudiate periodismo amarillo in favour of a more ideologically pure (and puritan) product was in for a surprise. “Yellow” themes and strategies seem to have played an even more substantial role in the thinking of the new dirección than

---

they had between 1990 and 1994. In an attempt to compare the prominence of *periodismo amarillo* in pre- and *post-defenestración* versions of *Barricada*, a survey was conducted of front-page images of sex and violence – the *amarillista* staples. Six months (March to August) of *Barricada* front pages were sampled from both 1994 and 1995. Sexually suggestive and violent imagery was tallied, with the former defined as photographs or other representations of fashion models, women in bathing suits or other skimpy attire, women in suggestive poses, and beauty-pageant contestants. (No such images of men alone were detected in either sample period.) Simple representations of conventionally-attractive women were not counted. Violent imagery, meanwhile, was defined as including photographs or other representations of corpses or visibly-wounded victims of violence. Certain images of more abstract violence, such as photographs of police clashing with demonstrators, were not tabulated unless they met the separate requirement of visible injury. Where “grey areas” arose, the survey erred on the side of inclusion – but consistently, I hope. Ambiguous cases – especially where sensationalism crosses over into “hard” news, and vice-versa – are mentioned in the footnotes.

As with most mainstream media environments, the degree of explicitness of the violent imagery far exceeded that of the sexual imagery, which was comparatively tame in both pre- and *post-defenestración* versions of *Barricada*. Analysis indicated that the front-page prominence given to sexually-suggestive imagery was roughly equal for both incarnations of *Barricada*. Seventeen examples were detected in the 1994 *Barricada*, compared with eighteen for its successor. In the area of violent imagery, however, the tallies differed dramatically. The survey counted just ten front-page images of violence for *Barricada* in six months under Carlos Fernando Chamorro, but forty-two for *Barricada* in 1995. The count suggests a significantly greater resort to at least one of the *amarillista* staples in the period following the *defenestración*. A separate tally – of the paper’s constantly-

---

137 The totals break down as follows:

*Barricada, March-August 1994: Sexually-suggestive imagery:* March – 15, 19, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30 (heavy concentration around the Semana Santa holiday); April – 4; May – 2, 30 (Miss Nicaragua, not suggestively dressed or posed) (An 8 May story on breast cancer was illustrated with a photo of a naked breast and a hypodermic syringe; it was not counted as a sexually-suggestive image); June – 3; July – 12 (Miss Latin America, not suggestively dressed), 23, 29; August – 2, 15, 25.


Total: 17 sexually suggestive images, 10 violent images.

*Barricada, March-August 1995: Sexually-suggestive imagery:* March – 9, 14, 18, 20, 22, 24 March; April – 2, 7, 10, 12 (two instances), 17, 30; May – none; June – 9 (drawing of satanist sex) (A possible example from 24 June
declining circulation — suggests that this was not enough to bridge the gap between readers’ informational (and sensational) desires, and the new *Barricada’s* ability to satisfy them.

**BARRICADA’s NEW COMANDANTE: AN INTERVIEW WITH Tomás Borge**

In this country [Nicaragua], there are two characteristics. Everybody wants to be president, and everybody wants to have a newspaper.

— Francisco “Paco” Gómez

One noticed the transformation in the director’s surroundings first. Tomás Borge did not occupy the same office in the editorial department that Carlos Fernando Chamorro had during his tenure at *Barricada*. He was tucked away instead down a hall, in an inner sanctum guarded by a personal assistant whose main task seemed to be explaining why the *comandante* was not in the office or (almost as often) in the country. Finally entering Borge’s office was like entering a shrine. The walls were literally blanketed with framed photographs of Borge with the internationally famous, including Fidel Castro, Pope John Paul II, and Gabriel García Márquez. Against this backdrop was Borge’s desk, and behind it, Borge himself. Small in stature, still vigorous despite the years and Somoza’s tortures, the *comandante* rose to greet me. He answered questions rapid-fire. Half an hour later, he was breezing out to his next appointment.

Borge depicted his role as on the one hand strategic, and on the other symbolic. “I am the strategic leader of the enterprise [Editorial El Amanecer] and of the newspaper,” he told me, and “it is me who takes the decisions.” But practical direction of the operation devolved to his two immediate subordinates: Julio López and William Grigsby. López, according to Borge, served as the “day-to-day director, the immediate authority on the newspaper.” As chief editor, meanwhile, Grigsby was guardian of the “professional” side of the operation. The symbolic dimension of Borge’s presence lay, obviously, in his status as founding member of the FSLN and senior member

— a dramatized photo of rape victim, topless — was tallied instead under “violent imagery,” below); July – 6; August – 5, 6 (suggestive photo of a street prostitute).

*Barricada*, March-August 1995: Violent imagery: March – 1, 5, 6 (two instances), 11 (three instances), 13, 21 (two instances), 30; April – 11, 17, 20 (Oklahoma bombing), 22 (Oklahoma bombing), 26, 28 (two instances, Rwanda); May – 6, 11, 16 (two instances), 17 (two instances), 18, 19, 31; June – 5, 19, 24; July – 2, 5, 8 (dramatized — story on dying), 12; August – 11, 12 (three instances, all from an air crash), 28, 31 (three instances).

Total: 18 sexually-suggestive images, 42 violent images.

of the Sandinista National Directorate. In the wake of the defenestración, there was "a much closer relationship" between Barricada and the Frente, said Borge, "since I am one of the most important leaders of the Sandinista Front. ... Therefore, the relationship between the newspaper and the party is much more close. In spite of that," Borge contended, "the newspaper has autonomy. ... This isn't a bulletin of the Sandinista Front."

At several other points in Borge's testimony, though, the paper's close integration into the overarching FSLN propaganda strategy seemed plain. Barricada's function in the 1996 election campaign would be to serve as "a newspaper of propaganda for our candidates," although "at the same time, the newspaper has to serve as an instrument of national unity and reconciliation." Barricada would work closely with other Sandinista broadcast media: "Within the framework of the electoral campaign as a whole, we will make a common front, with a common plan of action." The concept of impartiality that had underpinned Barricada's autonomy project was likewise significantly reworked in Borge's formulation. "I've opposed practices like, for example, writing headlines that reflect the personal opinions of the writer. But objectivity is relative. We are partisans in political activity. We are professionals, but in the service of a particular cause. One way or another, that will be reflected in our pages."

In a sense, Borge argued, Barricada's objectivity had actually increased since 1994. The reason, he said – echoing the longstanding ortodoxo allegations – was that the newspaper was no longer an intimate ally of the government in power. Now, said Borge, "we are very critical of the government." As a result, and despite Barricada's attempts "to be objective" in its political coverage, "the government has taken reprisals against us." (The alleged campaigns of regime discrimination Borge would cite again and again in the year-and-a-half that followed, as Barricada drifted towards the precipice.) The formerly cozy relationship with the UNO government had guaranteed the Chamorro-era version of the paper a steady flow of regime largesse. "Remember that the [former] director of the newspaper was the son of the president of the Republic," Borge said, not bothering to limit his personal critique of Chamorro to an insinuation, as was the more common ortodoxo practice. "This facilitated [getting] ads, and in return the paper would serve as the spokesperson for the government. Now the situation has changed in both respects. We are no longer the spokesperson for the government, nor do we receive material benefits from them. On the contrary, we've been repressed in many ways by the government's policy of denying us advertising.
They’ve threatened to take the enterprise away from us because of the debts we still have to the state.” Other Nicaraguan media, Borge asserted, were spared these “political reprisals.”

Government disfavour, though, was only one source of the economic crisis Barricada now confronted. Prices of key inputs had continued to rise steeply. It was hard to deny, too, the fact that readers had abandoned Barricada en masse, at least initially. “Many people stopped buying the paper, and the circulation declined” along with advertising revenue, Borge noted. The combined pressures had led him and other senior personnel to “make very serious personal sacrifices” in an attempt to keep the paper afloat. Borge claimed to have renounced his salary “as a contribution to redressing the financial situation.”

Still, Borge declared himself satisfied that the new Barricada, after a rough start, had begun to stabilize. “We took over an enterprise that was extremely precarious in financial terms – indebted up to its eyeballs, with serious administrative problems and grave symptoms of internal corruption. So we’ve had to undertake the task not only of correcting the political compass of the newspaper, but also of cleaning up the enterprise in the economic sense.” Overall, said the comandante – with a hint of the machismo for which he was renowned – Barricada was “much better liked” than it had been a year or a year-and-a-half earlier. “It’s a newspaper which combines seriousness with a certain zest. Barricada is like a girl who walks down the street in a mini-skirt and attracts the glances of passersby. It’s like a lady with a nice body and expressive eyes.”

**ONE WHO STAYED: ALFONSO MALESPÍN**

Barricada reporter Alfonso Malespín had the distinction of being the only staffer at the paper to emerge from the defenestración without having alienated any of the bitterly-opposed factions in the dispute. In a 1996 interview, Malespín described how he was brought on board in 1990 when Barricada began to look for “journalists who could write articles without the influence of the political part of the Sandinista Front.” Malespín, who was working with Managua’s Institute of Culture at the time, had never been an FSLN militant. He was thus well-positioned to write both lighter, frothier features for De todo un poco, and the more detached and “objective” political reportage Barricada now sought. As ortodoxo opposition to Barricada’s political reporting deepened, Malespín
was drafted to supplement the corps of political reporters.\footnote{172} It was he who would provide the most extensive coverage of the 1994 upheaval at \textit{Barricada}, in the newspaper's own pages.

Malespín spoke glowingly about most aspects of the autonomy experiment. From 1991 to 1994, he said, “I believe \textit{Barricada} ... was the most successful institution the Sandinistas had. It had become one of the most reliable newspapers in the country; it was a newspaper that was read mostly by the leaders of the country – the politicians, the diplomats, the government, middle-class professionals and technicians, college students.” The only problem, in his view, was that it lacked the kind of news that Sandinista leaders and militants wished to read; it refused “to make news happen around the Sandinista agenda.” Daniel Ortega and other ortodoxos wanted instead “a newspaper that was clearly identified with the political line of the party.”\footnote{173} Malespín rejected the notion that the paper had become a tool of Sergio Ramírez's \textit{Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista}.

It wasn't that they [\textit{Barricada}'s directorate] were involved with the MRS. The thing was, they had made the decision here to make a professional newspaper. The decision was, OK, we are a Sandinista newspaper, but we have two sides. We're not going to write news that would privilege this side or the other. The official leaders of the party thought that decision was a big mistake. They thought \textit{Barricada} should be writing the political news from their [ortodoxo] standpoint.

When the axe fell, Malespín nonetheless chose to remain at \textit{Barricada}. “I thought that it was better to stay, for several reasons. One was that if we stayed, we would have a better chance to ... [ensure] that the newspaper would not become so inclined towards a Sandinista political position.” A year-and-a-half after the defenestración, Malespín was still ensconced at \textit{Barricada}, but his role was limited to the “lighter” side of editorial content: \textit{De todo un poco} and the post-Sofía Montenegro incarnation of \textit{Gente}. The move reflected “a combination of both” Malespín’s own wishes and the preferences of \textit{Barricada}'s directorate to refashion the paper’s political coverage from the ground up.\footnote{174}

\footnote{172}{What happened is that when the \textit{Frente} started questioning political reporters like Jorge Katin, we tried to diminish the pressure by sharing some assignments with Malespín.” Carlos Fernando Chamorro, personal communication, 25 September 1998.}

\footnote{173}{This and all subsequent quotes from Malespín interview, 17 May 1996.}

\footnote{174}{Malespín expressly cited the pages he edited as an antidote to \textit{Barricada}'s political coverage, which was generally perceived to be excessive: “They are clear that they have difficulties among the public when they present political news. But they believe that through \textit{De todo un poco}, \textit{Gente}, and Sports, they can gain this audience.”}
Malespín remained hopeful that what many perceived to be the greatest weakness of the new *Barricada* – its excessively partisan tenor – could be overcome. But he thought it was unlikely to happen before the 1996 elections. For that vote, he said, *Barricada’s* directors “wanted a newspaper like in 1989.” Thereafter, he speculated that the overriding fact of the “financial crisis” at *Barricada*, together with the “rejection the newspaper has suffered” in the form of declining readership and national influence, might “move the directors to publish a more balanced newspaper. They haven’t gotten to that point yet. But they are trying.”

## Decline and Fall

It wasn’t working. *Barricada* between October 1994 and January 1998 lurched from crisis to crisis. The paper was never able to establish a clear or consistent institutional identity, at least in the opinion of Juan Ramón Huerta. Interviewed in 1998, *Barricada’s* last editor recalled the post-defenestração period as a time of confusion and interpersonal conflict at the newspaper:

The truth is that when Carlos Fernando left, they [his successors] had no clear idea what kind of newspaper they wanted. Even by the time *Barricada* was finished, there had never been a clear idea what kind of newspaper they wanted. They had a basic conceptual problem. In the era of Grigsby and Julio López, one day *Barricada* would appear “yellow” [*amarillista*], the next overly-politicized, the next more professional, all depending on the editor who closed that day’s edition. There was no coherence in their policy. If William Grigsby said it was necessary to attack someone and not provide that person with any opportunity to respond, that was that [*pues así iba*], and we had to mount a charge [*enderezar la batería*] against that person or institution or sector of society. ... It was a determined utilization of the newspaper for propaganda and in the service of special interests [*intereses muy particulares*].

Tomás Borge, meanwhile, Huerta described as a vestigial presence:

Borge was to a certain extent decorative. He was constantly out of the country – in the Dominican Republic, in Panama, in Mexico. He only came to the newspaper to change its editorial profile. He’d suddenly say it had to be a ‘pink newspaper’ [*un periódico rosa*, i.e., more sensationalist]. Fine, we’d make it pink. Then he’d head off to Mexico and come back after a couple of months and tell us we had to publish an opinion article on the front page [*every day*]. ... He wasn’t a director who would sit down and discuss it with you if he had an idea for a change. He’d come and ask for the editor on duty, not seeking him out in the editorial [offices] but calling him to his own office – a policy completely at odds with the horizontal character that the directorate of a newspaper should have. He’d call [the editor] to his office and say, “*Hombre*, what are you running today?” He’d tell him: “Fine. I’ve brought this and that bit of news [to publish].” He’d say, “I don’t want you to run with

---

A pervasive, morale-sapping backdrop to the “identity crisis” was the catastrophic decline in readership and subscriptions that had begun with the defenestration. If this had stabilized briefly around the time of the 1996 fieldwork (something that is by no means certain), it resumed its downward slide shortly afterward. Advertisers, too, deserted Barricada in droves, many of them “because the policy of Grigsby and López was to mount a charge against the bourgeoisie, and it was they who gave us the ads,” in Juan Ramón Huerta’s view. As readers abandoned the paper, so too did staffers, alienated by the poor and sometimes-tardy salaries, and by the lack of direction at the FSLN’s flagship. “Many journalists left,” said Huerta. “Today, they’re excellent professionals in other communications media. Barricada was forming new and excellent journalists as student trainees, paid 2,000 córdobas (about US $200) a month; but when students felt the need to improve their situation and demanded a salary increase, they’d be told ‘no.’ And that journalist whom we had formed, whom we had developed to a high standard, left. And we’d set about forming new ones.”

The full dimensions of the crisis, though, did not become apparent until after the national elections of October 1996. Barricada—or rather Editorial El Amanecer, the publishing operation which subsidized it—had counted heavily on winning a contract with the Supreme Electoral Council to print the ballots for the voting. The contract was worth about U.S. $1.5 million. To maximize its competitive advantage, El Amanecer invested heavily in new machinery and equipment, and put forward the lowest bid. According to Alfonso Malespín, Rosa Marina Zelaya, the president of the electoral council, “had assured Tomás Borge that Barricada would get the contract.” In the end, though, it went to La Prensa, leaving Barricada bereft.

There was one further hope: that the FSLN would rebound from the electoral disaster of 1990 to recapture national power in 1996. Had it done so, it is likely that the resources available to

---

177 Huerta’s phrase.
179 Fonseca, “El periodismo parndista agoniza.”
181 According to Juan Ramón Huerta, the dispute arose over a “very strong caricature” directed against Rosa María Zelaya, and published at the behest of editor William Grigsby. Huerta interview, 28 July 1998.
Barricada — in the form of state-sector advertising and publishing contracts — would have increased. The paper undoubtedly did what it could to promote the FSLN's candidates, above all Daniel Ortega. “Nothing restrains the Sandinista fervour of the people,” read a typical headline during the campaign. A week before the elections, Barricada confidently, if prematurely, proclaimed: “Daniel ... ¡Presidente!” Ortega, the paper reported, was “virtually” certain to be “the future president of Nicaragua, and will possibly win in the first round.” Barricada also heaped derision on Arnoldo Alemán's Liberal Alliance, referring to its candidates standardly as “somocistas” and “arnoldistas.” According to Juan Ramón Huerta, the paper was used outright as a “propaganda instrument,” and “also for a dirty-tricks campaign [para campaña sucia]” against the FSLN's opponents.

The rhetoric did not subside with the vote of 20 October 1996. After a brief interregnum in which the results were proclaimed to be “uncertain” (21 October), the paper declared a “Colossal fraud!” (23 October), linking alleged abuses in the process to the tradition of electoral manipulation under the Somoza dictatorship. When the Supreme Electoral Council issued its official results, which gave Alemán a victory over the FSLN by 51 percent to 41, Barricada's front page fumed: “May God forgive them! Results illegitimate — The struggle continues.” Likewise, as the new National Assembly was sworn in and Alemán officially declared the victor, Barricada proclaimed: “Fraud Consummated — Poor Nicaragua!”

The defeat of 1996 immediately spawned a far-reaching internal crisis at Barricada. A further wave of staff cuts had long been impending, but according to Alfonso Malespin it had been deemed politically undesirable in the run-up to the presidential elections. Now it was unavoidable; and Malespin, along with 91 other staffers, found himself cast out of the paper in early December. A few days later, an article at the bottom of the back page announced the surprising resignations of

---

182 “Nada detiene fervor sandinista del pueblo,” Barricada, 10 October 1998.
183 Barricada, 14 October 1996.
184 See, e.g., the reference to Alemán as “el candidato somocista” (“Borge y Asociados admite derrumbe de Alemán,” Barricada, 13 September 1996), and the 8 September 1996 headline, “Candidato arnoldista invade cooperativo en Masatepe.”
187 “¿Que Dios los perdone! Resultados ilegítimos — Seguiremos luchando,” Barricada, 9 November 1996.
chief editor William Grigsby and sub-director Julio López. López’s letter of resignation referred to “the reasons I expressed” to Tomás Borge, but these were not cited. According to former Barricada staffer Roberto Fonseca, writing in Confidential, the departures were linked to a debate over Barricada’s future direction. The essence of the debate remains unclear, but according to Alfonso Malespin, Grigsby and López both “thought it was time to take a step back, and try to retake the road the newspaper was travelling until 1994.” Borge, meanwhile, felt that “What we need is a Barricada that looks like the one we have right now, with some changes in content.” A clash of personalities also figured in the drama, according to Malespin. Grigsby and López felt “that in order for Barricada survive, it was necessary that Borge step aside. They considered him a big part of the problem. ... He has a very poor image with the government and [the private-enterprise group] COSEP, and they thought that as long as Tomás remained in Barricada, the paper would have more and more problems getting advertisements.”

Whether as a result of Borge’s leadership or not, Barricada indeed encountered even more severe difficulties in securing advertising as 1997 dawned. Part of the problem was the decision by the new Alemán administration to centralize state-sector advertising in the hands of five agencies, including one (Comunicaciones) run by one of President Alemán’s relatives. The February 1997 decision was denounced by most Nicaraguan media, who feared a return to the “Black Code” of the Somoza dictatorship, when state-sector ads – constituting twenty to thirty percent of total advertising revenue in Nicaragua – were used for politically-partisan purposes. Persistent rumours circulated at the same time that a presidential advisor had issued orders both to governmental ministries and to sympathetic private businesses, “indicating to them which media should not receive advertising.” Throughout 1997, Barricada and its director would cite the government’s campaign as the principal source of the “profound financial crisis” in which the paper found

---

189Barricada, 7 December 1996.

190Fonseca, “El periodismo partidista agoniza.” El Nuevo Diario claimed that Grigsby had also been opposed to the decision to fire the 92 staffers the previous month. See “Cisma en Barricada,” 7 December 1996. Grigsby, for his part, refused comment at the time, except to state that he and López had resigned and not been fired. He did not return phone calls in July 1998.

191The estimate was made by Carlos Fernando Chamorro, “¿Un Cartel publicitario?” Confidential, 9-15 February 1997. Chamorro cited the total amount of state-sector advertising as “some 60 to 80 million córdobas of the 270 million [in advertising revenue] billed annually.”

192Chamorro, “¿Un Cartel publicitario?”
itself.\footnote{193} Tomás Borge accused President Alemán of having “decided on his own to liquidate this enterprise, not only denying us state advertising, but also by pressuring private enterprise to deny us advertisements.” Advertisers, he claimed, were now “fear[ful] of being seen as sympathizers of the Sandinista Front.”\footnote{194}

There was clearly more at work, though, than the “sadistic reprisals” of the government.\footnote{195} Nicaragua’s economic and political elite had found reasons to support Barricada between 1990 and 1994 — whether because they wished to back the paper’s attempts to bring about concertación and reconciliation; or because they appreciated Barricada’s new professionalism; or even because they considered Carlos Fernando Chamorro a fellow aristocrat. But there was precious little reason for them to do so after October 1994. If the FSLN had decreed the end of Barricada’s autonomy experiment and the outward-looking stance towards other social sectors that defined it, why would those sectors be enthusiastic about supporting a more militant and partisan project with their subscriptions or advertising córdobas?

It was hard to avoid the conclusion that the crisis afflicting Barricada was at heart one of legitimacy. This was evidenced by the fact that it was not only “the most obsequious sectors of private enterprise” who shied away from advertising in Barricada.\footnote{196} A plaintive, at times almost hysterical editorial commentary of 23 December 1997 also faulted “progressive sectors, or even worse [those] identified with the Sandinista Front” for their “execrable, illegitimate and immoral attitude” towards Barricada, which the editorial’s author (Borge?) found “absolutely incomprehensible.” “Public opinion identifies as ‘Sandinista’ hundreds of enterprises and public personalities,” the editorial raged. “Where are the advertisements of these hundreds of firms and

\footnote{194}'Si, hay salida para superar la situación.” In an opinion piece published in October 1997, Borge wrote: “Barricada, in order to obtain advertisements, would be obliged to keep silent about the abuses, vices, and errors of those who govern ... [their] corruption, stupidity, betrayal, and demagoguery. This is impossible. But it means nothing more or less than the absence of advertisements. ... As a result of the government reprisals — to which a section of private industry has [also] submitted, with notable exceptions — Barricada is in an extremely difficult situation.” The paper, however, would not “sell out or surrender. We will die with our boots on.” Borge, “En Nicaragua no hay libertad de expresión,” Barricada, 22 October 1997.
\footnote{195}Borge quoted in “Barricada lanza dramático SOS,” Confidencial, 6-12 July 1997.
\footnote{196}'1998: el año de Barricada.”
public personalities that control them, directly or indirectly?" The answer, apparently, was: "In the other communications media." \(^{197}\)

Meanwhile, the ordinary Sandinista militants whom Borge had confidently expected to purchase *Barricada* after the *defenestración* instead stayed away in droves. The fact that "the militants militantly don't buy it," in Sofia Montenegro's mid-1996 assessment, was borne out by the further erosion in subscriptions and overall circulation by late 1997. *Barricada* seems to have survived that long only because of extensive personal subsidies from Tomás Borge himself. The *comandante* is estimated to have poured between half a million and one million dollars (U.S.) into the publication between 1994 and 1997. \(^{198}\) In early December 1997, Borge took the additional step of seeking a mortgage from a private bank for his property in the Managua neighbourhood of Bello Horizonte. He was turned down; \(^{199}\) instead, he surrendered a mansion on the lakeshore of Xiloá, outside Managua, valued at US $540,489, and two vehicles with a value of about US $80,000, to help offset *Barricada*'s debt to the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS). \(^{200}\) This still left the paper owing US $400,000 to the INSS, however, and no closer to solvency. An internal financial statement of November 1997 showed a loss of more than $30,000 for the month of September alone, with nearly as much owed to employees in the form of unpaid wages.

There was thus an air of desperation surrounding Borge's attempts to restructure *Barricada*'s operations and secure new sources of funding and investment. The December 1996 *defenestración* of 92 staffmembers was followed, in July 1997, by a "dramatic circular letter" directed to "militants and sympathizers of the FSLN, urging them to contribute economic resources" and claiming (Borge's phrase) that *Barricada* was "on the verge of disappearing." Various schemes were floated to seek

---

197"¡Al ladrión, al ladrión! contra Barricada," *Barricada*, 23 December 1997. These "other communications media" included *La Prensa*, which in December 1996 had switched from afternoon to morning publication; Roberto Fonseca linked this to the material "crisis" at both *La Tribuna* and *Barricada* ("El periodismo partidista agoniza").

198The lower figure was given by Roberto Fonseca in "El periodismo partidista agoniza," an article which dates from December 1996. Francisco Gómez claimed Borge had told him, upon Gómez's arrival at *Barricada* in Autumn 1997, that he had invested a million dollars of his own money in the daily (Gómez interview, 24 July 1998). In the interview with Roberto Fonseca cited earlier, Borge claimed to have paid off "an important part" of the debt to Social Security (INSS), "in part with my own personal resources."


200This according to the financial statement prepared by *Barricada* General Manager Soraya Montoya on 13 November 1997, privately supplied. The document cited the total debt to the INSS alone as 11,088,792 córdobas – a little over one million U.S. dollars.
outside investors in the Dominican Republic; prominent Sandinistas, including Humberto Ortega, were also courted. In September 1997, a former Barricada insider – Xavier Reyes, who had left the paper a year before the defenestration – was persuaded to return as an advisor. He was subsequently joined by Francisco “Paco” Gómez, a Spanish journalist who had been hired away from El País to work at the Managua daily La Tribuna. The two were charged with preparing a diagnosis of Barricada’s problems and a “new profile” to guide the newspaper – or its successor project. This initiative was torpedoed by the labour strife of mid-December (see below), at which point both Gómez and Reyes departed the paper. But the draft document they prepared, entitled “A Brief Description of the Situation,” offered a vivid depiction of the state of affairs at Barricada during its bleak final months. “The current situation at Barricada,” wrote Gómez and Reyes, “can be characterized in one word: disarray.” At the heart of the problem the authors perceived

the lack of a clear structure in the journalistic hierarchy, the absence of a true journalistic director, excessive political influence over the daily information [published], the lack of motivation of the workers, the lack of quality in some of the members of the editorial team, and the economic problems of the enterprise ...

The authors described “a lack of authority and the absence of a rational system of work,” with a chief editor – now the faithful Juan Ramón Huerta – who had “serious problems in directing the editorial department.” Borge, though unable to “lead and orient the day-to-day work” of the newspaper, was unwilling to “renounce his role,” preferring instead to “intervene sporadically in the decisions of the editorial department, in the selection of the contents and their position on the page.” This “is-but-isn’t” (si pero no) arrangement served only to vitiate the editorial structure “and create tensions,” while Borge’s “direct involvement with the FSLN provoked a tendency towards self-censorship among editorial staff. They are always wondering what Tomás Borge will think, before they consider what is in the best interest of readers.” In a replay of the early days of Barricada’s life, Gómez and Reyes reported that “members of the FSLN address themselves directly to our editorial staff in order to give them directions or to suggest [subjects for] coverage”; while the fact that chief editor Huerta and various of his subordinates were also “active party members” meant that “on many occasions, political influence was not external but internal.”

---

201 In the 1998 interview, Gómez elaborated that “Tomás wasn’t really a director, he was away in his office talking about his histories of the revolution.” Huerta could not fill the gap, partly “because Tomás didn’t want him to,” and partly because the very notion “panicked” him.
Was there a way out? In a followup draft document, “Notes Towards A Profile,” Gómez and Reyes suggested incorporating “the positive experiences of the past,” by creating “an independent ... and pluralistic newspaper.” Their prescriptions bore a striking resemblance to the vision advanced in the New Editorial Profile of 1990:

While reaffirming its leftist vocation, [Barricada] must not be seen as the official organ of any political party. The paper [should] declare itself a defender of the lawful state [del Estado de Derecho] ... help to strengthen democratic institutions, and denounce whatever abuses they commit. ... The newspaper [should] reject all types of pressure from political parties, economic groups, religious or ideological [interests], and people who seek to influence the editorial line to benefit themselves. At the same time, its pages should be open to all ideological, political, religious, and social tendencies, with the exception of those who break the law, promote the use of force to obtain their ends, or seek systematically to discredit [others] as a tactic of communication [como táctica de comunicación] ...

The events of December 1997 and January 1998 did not quash discussion of such a revamped project entirely, as we will see. They did, however, lead to the departure of Gómez and Reyes from Barricada, and – rapidly – to the end of Barricada itself.

THE DEATH OF BARRICADA

Whatever threats had confronted Barricada in October 1994, the institution at least did not have to fear rebellion within its own ranks. Even the decimated and disgruntled blue-collar staff of El Amanecer's Plant B did not actively demonstrate support for the defenestración of Carlos Fernando Chamorro by striking or otherwise demonstrating en bloc. The threat came instead from outside the immediate parameters of the institution; the defenestración was perceived by the vast majority of Barricada staff, by the public at large, and by this analyst as an intervention by a distinct and opposed political force.

In the last weeks of 1997 and into 1998, the prospect of outside intervention – at least by Sandinistas – was minimal. The relationship between Barricada and the FSLN leadership was formally a mutually-supportive one. That support, though, was confined mostly to the level of rhetoric. The FSLN was in no position to subsidize Barricada – except by rather desperate and ad-

---

202: This and subsequent quotes from “Notas para un Perfil,” internal document, privately supplied (not dated: November or December 1997).
hoc means, as with Borge's personal dispensing of largesse and the decision by him and other
senior staff to renounce their salaries so that reporters and blue-collar personnel could be paid.
The other channels of possible sustenance — street sales, subscriptions, and advertising revenue —
were non-starters for the reasons already outlined. And now, fatally, rebellion arose among staffers
themselves.

The first inklings of revolt came on 12 September 1997, when Barricada editorial staff
declared their refusal to write another word for the paper until wages owing for August and the first
half of September were paid. “To avoid a scandal,” the administration issued a one-time payment
of 300 córdobas to each staffmember; Borge pleaded with workers for two months’ breathing space,
the time to be spent seeking foreign investors for the enterprise.203 The truce in fact lasted three
months, though staffers spent the interregnum making repeated appeals to Daniel Ortega to
intervene in the dispute. The last of these, in late October, had something of the character of an
ultimatum: “We, the workers of the Barricada daily, urgently request a meeting for next Monday, 27
October, at 10 o’clock, in the Andrés Valle room of the newspaper, or in any other place you
indicate. The objective of our [proposed] meeting with you is to explain in-person [de viva voz] the
economic crisis that has rendered us incapable of sustaining the enterprise, and to analyze, in a
definitive manner, the alternative solutions ... We respectfully request your most prompt and
positive response.”204 “I don’t respond to threats,” Ortega allegedly answered. “Speak to
Tomás.”205

Finally, on 20 December 1997, two Barricada staffers, Xavier Rayo Valle and Pedro Vindell,
launched a hunger strike demanding U.S. $80,500 in back wages and other benefits. By this point,
Barricada was a month late in paying its Managua-based staff; for correspondents in the regions,
wages were arriving as much as three months late. Health benefits — the contractual right of
Barricada workers to receive treatment at Managua’s Cruz Azul clinic — had been suspended, along

204 The letter was signed by 15 Barricada staff, including most senior editors, on 23 October 1997.
Unpublished, privately supplied.
205 “Daniel Ortega se niega a intervenir en favor de periodistas de Barricada,” Confidencial, 16-22 November
1997. Ortega reportedly met with Borge at the Barricada offices in mid-December, but refused to provide support for
the paper. He also seemed openly derisive about Borge’s own attempts to keep the paper going: “If Tomás believes he
can solve the problem of the newspaper by mortgaging his house, he’s wrong.” Quoted in “Banco no aceptó
hipoteca.”
with transportation subsidies for night-shift workers. Food subsidies for the children of *Barricada* staff were also cut.

Vilma Núñez, a longtime Sandinista who was now president of the Nicaraguan Centre for Human Rights (CENIDH),\(^{206}\) was brought in to mediate the dispute. On 22 December an agreement was reached, ending the hunger strike after 60 hours. Borge promised to pay all wages owing – now reckoned at one million córdobas (about $100,000 U.S.) – by 31 January 1998. *Barricada*, on its front page, proclaimed the agreement “a triumph of maturity.”\(^{207}\) One last burst of guarded optimism was mustered. An opinion-piece of 30 December proclaimed that 1998 would be “the year of *Barricada*,” despite the “profound financial crisis” afflicting the paper.\(^{208}\) But the first weeks of the new year passed without a saviour appearing on the horizon. On 26 January, two *Barricada* staffers – Carlos García and Freddy García – made a final direct appeal to Daniel Ortega. They called the situation at the newspaper “a time bomb”:

> In business terms [*empresarialmente*] the situation is grave. *Barricada*, since December, has been distributed only in the capital. The distributors, for lack of wages, have refused to maintain the full reach of distribution. The delivery people have also failed to [get the newspaper to] subscribers. The lack of paper is evident, and prevents us from publishing more than twelve pages. We likewise have no possibility of printing the paper in full colour. ... To further aggravate the situation, the final benefit inherited from the revolution, the [staff] cafeteria, closed.\(^{209}\) The same goes for the medical dispensary and other benefits such as the payment of bonuses [e.g., the “13th-month” bonus common in Nicaraguan enterprises], the INSS [social-security], and innumerable other social benefits.\(^{210}\)

There was no last-minute intervention from Ortega. The end, when it came, was hardly unexpected; but it arrived with a suddenness perhaps more shocking than the *defenestración* of 1994. At 7 p.m. on Friday, 30 January 1998 – a day before the deadline for payment of back-wages – Tomás Borge called staff representatives to his office for a 45-minute meeting in which he

---

\(^{206}\) Núñez, a lawyer, stood against Daniel Ortega in the February 1996 presidential primary, losing by 84 percent to 16. She was the wife of the late Carlos Núñez, the National Directorate’s representative to *Barricada* in the early and mid-1980s.

\(^{207}\)*Barricada*, 23 December 1997. See also Manual Torres Cerda and Vivian Torres, “Crecen crisis en Barricada,” *El Nuevo Diario*, 23 December 1997: “Workers at the daily insisted that the strike and protests they were undertaking were strictly labour-related,” dismissing suggestions that the conflict was a replay of the *defenestración* of 1994.


\(^{209}\)The cafeteria provided subsidized (i.e., free) meals to *Barricada* personnel, as well as itinerant Canadian scholars.

announced the “temporary closure” of *Barricada*, effective immediately. By the time the meeting broke up, representatives from other Nicaraguan media were already arriving at the *Barricada* complex; Borge addressed them irritably, and left.\textsuperscript{211}

Staffers predictably responded with “first panic, then fury” to Borge’s announcement. They nonetheless set about preparing a four-page edition of *Barricada* for publication the following day, with a front-page headline to read: “Aquí estamos: *Barricada* se debe al pueblo” (Here we are: *Barricada* must be with the people). According to *El Nuevo Diario*, the text for the edition was prepared and laid out, and an agreement was reached with General Manager Soraya Montoya to supply paper for printing. But “when we tried to print that night,” chief editor Juan Ramón Huerta told END, “Montoya had already left, leaving the paper wrapped up with instructions that [El Amanecer] shouldn’t pay any attention to us.” Huerta called it “the final betrayal.”\textsuperscript{212}

It was not, however, the final act in the *Barricada* drama. Editorial staff\textsuperscript{213} arrived at the *Barricada* offices as usual on Friday, 31 January. Said Huerta: “We’re coming to work because the MITRAB [Ministry of Labour] still hasn’t notified us of any suspension, and we don’t want to be accused of abandoning our jobs.”\textsuperscript{214} The workers found support from an unlikely source: the Minister of Labour in the Alemán government, Wilfredo Navarro. On 2 February, Navarro declared the closure of *Barricada* illegal under Article 13 of the Labour Code, which required the ministry’s authorization for any such action.\textsuperscript{215} According to Juan Ramón Huerta, the response from the Sandinista rank-and-file was strong: “Our people were with us. They brought us bread, coffee, money.” Media workers across the Nicaraguan spectrum also expressed their solidarity. “But the owners, by contrast, remained completely indifferent – as though they had never struggled for the interests of the workers. This was one of the greatest contradictions. It created in me, and


\textsuperscript{213}In an ironic echo of the defenestración, the revolt was confined to the editorial side of the operation – though this time the actions of editorial staff were aimed squarely at the directorate of *Barricada* and Editorial El Amanecer, rather than being mobilized in the directorate’s defense. Staffer María Antonia López claimed that employees in printing and production had been paid when editorial workers had not, in order to “ensure they didn’t join the protest.” A majority of staffers – 150 out of a total of 230 or 250, depending which report one believes – still had administrative or blue-collar jobs with El Amanecer. López quoted in Mayela Rodríguez, “Trabajadores embargarán el lunes el diario *Barricada*,” *La Tribuna*, 1 February 1998; staff figures cited in Torres Cerda, “Hoy embargan a *Barricada*.”

\textsuperscript{214}Torres Cerda, “Hoy embargan a *Barricada*.”

\textsuperscript{215}“Trabajadores embargarán el lunes el diario *Barricada*,” *La Tribuna*, 1 February 1998.
in many other compañeros, a real feeling of dejection, and a critical attitude – not towards Sandinismo, but towards the party leadership. When a labour problem arose in a private enterprise [Barricada], the Sandinista leadership were the first to abandon the struggle of the workers.” Tomás Borge and Daniel Ortega were behaving like “patrones,” bosses – “the most noxious figure to the working classes.”

The same day, a workers’ delegation petitioned Managua’s First Civil Court to grant an injunction against Editorial El Amanecer and Barricada’s director for violating the terms of the 22 December agreement mediated by Vilma Núñez. As it transpired, the strategy was unnecessary. On 3 February, the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) acted, placing a three-month embargo on the operations of El Amanecer. The enterprise allegedly owed some 11 million córdobas – more than a million US dollars – to the INSS, debts that extended as far back as 1993.

While the hunger strike dragged on, an extraordinary initiative was launched by the self-constituted directorate of the “new Barricada.” It targeted many of the leading lights of the era of semi-autonomy, from 1990 to 1994. Among them were Roberto Fonseca, Sergio de Castro, Daniel Alegria – and the iconoclastic Sofia Montenegro, who described receiving a telephone call from leading ortodoxo intellectual (and Group of 29 member) Orlando Núñez in April:

> I was quite surprised. I said, “Orlando, what are you calling me for?” He said, “Well, you know the crisis that is going on with Barricada?” I said, “Well, yes.” Then he came out with this incredible – from my point of view – proposal. He told me that they had had a meeting the night before, until very early in the morning, with the people of the past redacción [editorial team] and entrepreneurs of the Front, who were willing to put up $500,000 to start a new newspaper. ... They thought that most of the people who had left the first [semi-autonomous] Barricada should come back and be hired again. Orlando was calling me to tell me that they had thought of me, and the proposition was, one, that I should reopen Gente [the former supplement directed by Montenegro]. They told me I could do whatever I wanted with it. And I could be a member of the new editorial board. ... He told me that they had spoken about this with Daniel Ortega, and he had accepted. They had spoken to the journalists, and they had agreed not to put up a fight if we came back again as their bosses and editors.

Montenegro said she was stunned by the proposal: “I couldn’t believe my fucking ears! ... I said, ‘In the first place, how dare you approach me? The Frente haven’t even paid me what they owe

---

me from the last time [I worked at Barricada]. Now that you don’t have any credibility, you want people like myself to put our names and faces [to the project] ... in the name of what?” The offer, Montenegro said, “provoked a turmoil within me. You know, I’d been distancing myself [from the events of 1994], but this shit was reviving all my old anger. I told [Núñez], ‘Yes, there’s the possibility for a new paper. But not with you.’”

What was going on behind the scenes in February 1998 was a concerted attempt to revive Barricada, or a quasi-Barricada, as a means of reasserting Sandinismo as a print-media force. In mid-February, a window of opportunity appeared, with an agreement between Barricada staff and the FSLN leadership to sell the newspaper’s plant and property, and use the money to pay the $80,000 claimed by staff. All rights to the name Barricada, meanwhile, were turned over to an anonymous society, Renacer (Rebirth), headed by Orlando Núñez. From a material and marketing viewpoint, the plan for a Nueva Barricada involved two share issues aimed at raising US $40,000 in start-up capital, half of it from those directly involved in the project (from back-wages owed), the other half from a broad cross-section of pro-Sandinista business and opinion. International support was solicited; a Dutch activist pledged a computer, and a friend of Juan Ramón Huerta’s in Estelí offered $3,000. Four thousand copies would be published, at 16 pages, initially in Managua only. Among the names mooted for the new project were Nueva Barricada (the name used generically here to refer to the project), Siglo 21, El Guardian, and El Jardín [The Garden], the last of which, pointed out Confidencial, seemed “more appropriate for a beer hall.”

Editorially, the project proposed by Paco Gómez and Xavier Reyes the previous December was to serve as the foundation for a newspaper that would be “a totally independent enterprise,” one that “exclude[d] all members of the Sandinista directorate” from the running of the newspaper. The paper would also be institutionally separated from Editorial El Amanecer, which would become the personal property of Tomás Borge – compensation for the money he had

---

219 Sofia Montenegro interview, 20 July 1998. Daniel Alegria also described receiving a similar offer from Núñez, which he rejected out of hand (Alegria interview, 21 July 1998).

220 All figures from Huerta interview, 28 July 1998.

221 “Representantes del Comité Provisional de Barricada,” undated (February 1998); and “Nueva Barricada, una publicación para el siglo XXI.” Unpublished internal documents, privately supplied.


invested in Barricada over the previous years. In return, Borge would assume all the debts that El Amanecer still owed to the government (e.g., in social-security payments) and to suppliers of raw materials.\textsuperscript{224}

A draft editorial profile emphasized the new project's "professional" dimension, envisaging Nueva Barricada as "a newspaper for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century," "independent," "pluralist," with a "left" editorial definition but emphasizing "service to the interests of all Nicaraguans." An initial circulation, in Managua only, of 4,000 copies and 16 pages was anticipated. Juan Ramón Huerta described the project as an attempt to recapture the sense of "professional pride" that had animated Barricada journalists in the 1980s and during the autonomy project. "We wanted to take the best of Carlos Fernando's project, because it was a very good project professionally," even though contaminated by "a political bias." The new Barricada, by contrast, would adhere to standards of "strict professionalism."\textsuperscript{225}

But if the prospects at first seemed promising, at least for a successful launch, optimism dissipated when the worst scandal in FSLN history descended upon the Frente's leader and perennial presidential candidate, Daniel Ortega. On 2 March 1998, Juan Ramón Huerta, Barricada's final editor and a key member of the "provisional committee of [the new] Barricada," received a summons from Zoilamérica, stepdaughter of Ortega and his longtime partner, Rosario Murillo. "I'd had friendly relations with her for a long time. She invited me to a meeting where [she said she] would be taking a family decision. I arrived, and imagine my surprise! The family decision was to divest herself of the name 'Ortega,' and to denounce Daniel Ortega for raping her from the age of eleven."

Huerta was the final interview subject of a research project that had occupied the better part of the decade. He had been out of town for most of the Summer 1998 fieldwork in Managua, but I tracked him down the day it ended. Trudging along the road to Huerta's small but tidy home in the "journalists' colony" that is a feature of many Latin American cities, I was confronted by an apparition. Looming up through the windshield of an oncoming Pathfinder were the broad pugilist features of Adolfo Calero, leading point-person for the contra rebels in their dealings with the Reagan administration during the 1980s. Calero regarded me coolly from the passenger seat of the

\textsuperscript{224}See the series of reports in Confidential, 15-21 February 1998, pp. 2-3.

\textsuperscript{225}Huerta interview, 28 July 1998.
vehicle as it sped past. Clearly, much had changed since my first visit to Nicaragua – in 1986, at the height of the *contra* war, when Calero was public enemy number one and *persona maxima non grata*.

Much had changed in Juan Ramón Huerta’s life as well. He described the transformations over coffee at his kitchen table, detailing *Barricada*’s final months, the efforts to found the new project, and his final rupture with the Sandinista leadership. Huerta said he had been impressed by the support Daniel Ortega had rendered *Barricada* throughout its death throes, despite his unwillingness to respond to last-minute appeals from staff. Now he was stunned to find Ortega behaving in a “diametrically opposite” fashion when it came to his stepdaughter’s allegations. “In the *Barricada* case, Daniel Ortega showed his face, and came out in our defense,” said Huerta. “It was as a result of his efforts that they ended up paying us [back-wages] – he personally involved himself in the case. We could speak frankly with him about everything.” After the death of *Barricada*, as well, Ortega was receptive to “the necessity of making a new newspaper” and to the proposed editorial profile. But Ortega was keeping mum on the subject of Zoilamérica’s accusations, and refusing to surrender his parliamentary immunity from prosecution.

The accusations, which Huerta fully believed, left him in an “impossible” ethical and personal position. After two decades of dedicated militancy, he suddenly felt “a moral, historical, and human obligation to be critical” of the FSLN and its leaders. But by taking Zoilamérica’s side, Huerta immediately and irrevocably alienated himself from his co-planners on the *Nueva Barricada* project. On the very day – 2 March – that Zoilamérica issued her denunciations, the “Renacer” enterprise had been founded to oversee the launch of the *Nueva Barricada*. But when Huerta backed Zoilamérica, his co-workers “called me up and told me I was being very hard on the leadership of the *Frente*, that I was entering into an opposition to *Sandinismo*, and [that I was] therefore a contaminating element – dangerous, a threat to the new project. I told them that if that was the way they felt, I didn’t want to be accused of causing problems in the new *Barricada*. Owing

---

226 This was true of all my major interlocutors in Summer 1998, although I do not believe in trial by consensus, and the charges against Ortega are unproven at the time of writing.

227 Huerta edited a short compilation of statements and articles on Zoilamérica’s allegations: see *El Silencio del Patriarca* (Managua: El Renacimiento, 1998). Note that the name chosen for the “publisher” (the project was “financed by the friends of Zoilamérica”) is close to “Renacer,” the company name planned for the new *Barricada* enterprise.
to their lack of confidence, and to avoid contradictions with my compañeros, I wrote a letter of resignation."

Whether or not Huerta's departure and the post-Zoilamérica disarray within the Frente were the decisive factors, the "provisional committee" of the new Barricada would never meet again. "They said [the paper] would be on the streets in May," said Huerta. "In May, there was no sign of it. Then came the [FSLN] Congress. I remember a friend who told me something [at that time] that worried me greatly. He said: 'Let's wait and see. It all depends on what happens at the congress whether Barricada is published [again] or not.'" For Huerta, the comment indicated that the new Barricada would be not a truly "journalistic project" — a more autonomous publication along the lines of the 1991-94 version — but rather "an instrument of the thoughts and interests of whoever was elected in the Congress ... a partisan project." Now it was July, and still there was no new Sandinista daily. "Unfortunately, although it pains me to say it, the people have forgotten about Barricada," Huerta lamented.

He was in any case largely a spectator, still struggling to absorb the personal and political implications of his break with the Frente. The lifelong militant could no longer hope for employment in the Sandinista media or related institutions. That had its advantages, perhaps: Huerta pronounced himself glad to be "a free agent," liberated from the constraints of political partisanship. To keep bread on the table, he had worked with the Nicaraguan Union of Journalists (UPN), and travelled around the country to sound out the possibilities of municipal-level publishing in the regions. He was contemplating writing a more reflective account of the Zoilamérica scandal. "I don’t feel disillusioned," Huerta emphasized. "On the contrary, now I feel free to say things that previously I considered it my responsibility not to say. I’m always thinking of the future. If Sandinismo is ever to return to power here, it will have to become more transparent and self-critical, to recognize its errors. I will never leave Sandinismo, but I will struggle within its bosom to denounce things that need to be denounced."

Huerta seemed, nonetheless, a little shell-shocked as he surveyed the eventful last couple of years. They had seen him rise to the editor's chair at Barricada, only to find the paper careening towards its final crisis. He had played a leading role in the abortive attempts to found a new

---

Sandinista daily. Now, suddenly, he was at odds with the entire organized Frente, a leading advocate of Zoilamérica, and a trenchant critic of the most powerful Sandinista in the country. His transformation resulted from a twin betrayal, in Huerta's view. The first violation of trust came with the cancellation of the old Barricada project, which he saw FSLN founding-father Tomás Borge as having engineered. Now there were the explosive allegations of sexual abuse levelled against Daniel Ortega. Huerta could hardly credit that “the leadership in which I had believed so much, in which I had such confidence, had left me feeling so uncomfortable from a personal point of view – to say nothing of [my reaction] as a militant of a revolutionary party. I couldn’t control my distress. I realized at that moment that either the Sandinista leadership would change, or the party would disappear.” He was not optimistic. “The Sandinista Front has become the type of party it always criticized – a traditional party, election-oriented, wheeling-and-dealing [de componenda], making pacts. Las luces de un partido revolucionario aquí se han apagado,” Huerta said pensively. “The lights of a revolutionary party have gone out here.”

**Conclusion**

The inglorious conclusion to the Barricada saga was a potent reminder of the dangers of excessive partisanship in transitional journalism. Close adherence to a mobilizer’s ideological “line” may bring rewards in the form of stable sponsorship (though in the end even this was denied Barricada), a predictable editorial style and agenda (though Barricada journalists after 1994 had to cope with the caprice of Tomás Borge), and perhaps the political satisfactions that accrue to militant journalists from service to a cause. But the fact that even Sandinista militants “militantly didn’t buy” Barricada suggested that the partisan journalism of the post-defenestración era was unappealing even to the partisans. The model was hard to abandon for those, like the ortodoxo FSLN, with a “permanent conception of the press as an extension of the party apparatus,” as Carlos Fernando Chamorro put it in 1998. But the 1991 comments of Nicaraguan communications theorist Guillermo Rothschuh seem prescient in retrospect. “It’s been proven in Nicaragua that this kind of journalism provokes a certain if not total rejection by the readership, a

---

certain distance and cautiousness," Rothschuh told me. "Because people understand that what comes first isn't defence of the interests of society as a whole, but of a particular party or governing regime." Seven years later, and possibly wiser, Juan Ramón Huerta considered "the Nicaraguan reader today" to be "more demanding. You have to provide him or her with a coherent product — not at the behest of the owner [por la voluntad del dueño], or because you personally believe it to be true."

Other themes of this chapter will resurface throughout this work. Barricada stands, in my view, as a particularly distilled example of mobilizing and professional imperatives in transition. The comparative liberality of Sandinista rule meant that conflicts between mobilizer and mobilized were permitted, and therefore stand out for the scholar to unearth. The shocking suddenness with which the FSLN fell from power — unmatched elsewhere in these case-studies — prompted an especially searching exploration of the professional imperative and a new journalism "in the national interest." The 1994 defenestración was likewise an almost archetypal demonstration of the type of conflict that could arise when the self-perceived guardians of each imperative sought to maximize their influence over the newspaper's content and operations. In this sense, the Barricada study prepares the reader well for some of the more subtle workings of the professional and mobilizing imperatives in countries like South Africa (considered next) and Jordan. The role of Carlos Fernando Chamorro in Barricada's transformation, meanwhile — though it should not be overstressed — attests to the significance of leading editorial figures in determining the "identity" and "direction" of nearly all media institutions, and certainly most transitional ones.

It is perhaps fitting that Barricada's longtime director should have the final word. Over dinner in mid-1998 at Los Antojitos, a well-known Managua restaurant, I asked Chamorro — now himself a scholar of transitional media — how he would generalize from Barricada's experiences. "One angle would be to say that transitions do not always produce the results you're looking for," Chamorro responded, after pondering the question a while. "You can have different outcomes from transitions, advance or regression. There's no way to predict that transitions in the press will always lead to modernization, or pluralism, or whatever it is you're looking for." Still, he thought Barricada had helped to pave the way for the emergence of a truly national and independent

---

231 Guillermo Rothschuh interview, 16 April 1991.
journalism in Nicaragua – one that would renounce partisanship while “not giving up on promoting the transformation of society, and people’s participation in decision-making. Is that a political role?” Chamorro asked rhetorically. “Yes, I think the role of the press is political in that sense. I see a very close connection between the press and democracy, and a very political role for the press. Not a partisan role – but not neutral either.”
INTRODUCTION:
THE ENGLISH PRESS AND APARTHEID

The outside world is black and white / With only one colour dead.
— Peter Gabriel, “Biko"

The editor's indecision is final.
— Anonymous journalist, commenting on The Star's fence-sitting editorial position on the 1983 Whites-only referendum

The apartheid system, installed and expanded by successive Nationalist regimes after 1948, was the apogee of a system of White dominance that began to be entrenched the day Jan van Riebeeck stepped ashore at the Cape of Good Hope in 1659. That same White dominance is the single most powerful independent variable shaping the English press of South Africa. In this respect, the press is little different from any other economic or social institution in the country. All bore the imprint of White rule, and were born out of it. An overview of the origins and evolution of apartheid is beyond the bounds of this study, and is readily available elsewhere.


2Hereafter, any reference to “the English press” should be understood as referring to the English-language press of South Africa.

departure in this section will be the way White dominance, with its distinctive schismatic character institutionalized in apartheid, worked to shape the English press in South Africa through to the extraordinary upheavals of 1985-1990.

We will not be surprised to find no aspect of press functioning untouched by White power (and by the internal struggle between English and Afrikaner). Targeted constituencies, distribution networks, hiring decisions, political orientation, professional self-conception – in every area, the influence is obvious. South Africans speak of decades before the legacy of apartheid is decisively undermined. That is to assume that the fragile social peace (at least between Blacks and Whites) will endure. If it does not, all bets are off; but the fate of the press will then be far down the list of South Africa's worries. Even a worst-case scenario, though, would be the bastard offspring of apartheid and its racist predecessors.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC LEGACY

"With just 5 percent of the population owning 88 percent of the wealth," Martin J. Murray writes, "South Africa exhibits perhaps the most unequal wealth distribution in the world."4 Eighty-seven percent of land and 95 percent of industrial concerns were held by Whites as of the early 1990s.5 Average disposable income is eight times higher for Whites than Blacks; stunting of children from malnutrition, six times higher for Blacks than Whites. There is one doctor for every 700 people in urban areas, where Whites are concentrated; one per 10,000-30,000 people in the former Black "homelands." An educational chasm yawns between the races: 97 percent literacy for Whites, 43 percent for Blacks.6 Under 30 percent of Black households have running water in their

---


6I have capitalized "Black" and "White" throughout (though I have not interfered with others' written usage). I think this reflects the centrality of race in South African politics and society, and serves as a useful reminder of underlying continuities during extended discussion of change. It also helps to avoid confusion when reference is made
homes, compared with 98.4 percent of White homes. Unemployment, 6.4 percent for Whites, is 41.1 percent for Blacks.\textsuperscript{7} With the one stated exception, these are recent, post-1994 figures. They attest to the huge and burdensome legacy of apartheid that, even under the most optimistic scenarios, will dominate South African politics and society for generations.\textsuperscript{8}

How have apartheid and White domination more generally shaped the South African press? It is hard to know where to begin – the word “overdetermined” springs to mind – but we do not need to delve far back in history to make the case. A snapshot of current conditions, with relevant background, will do.

The large majority of South African newspapers are White-owned and -managed. Until quite recently, this was true of all of them – even if, like the anomalous \textit{Sowetan}, they had mostly Black journalists and editors. Black investment capital was as radically inhibited by the legal and informal constraints on Black economic activity as it was by the institutionalized impoverishment – and hence negligible saving power – of the masses. Five years into the transitional era (i.e., in 1995), Blacks still accounted for only a tiny fraction of available investment capital; Whites still controlled 97 percent of the capitalized value of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, South Africa’s economic bellwether. In retrospect, apartheid represented only a superficial reshaping of the basic racialist distribution of resources: it aimed to bring the material standing of one group of Whites (Afrikaners) closer to that of their English counterparts. Under the British or the Boers, Blacks subsisted where they were permitted to, under tight restrictions, through low-paid wage labour and whatever they could wring from marginal lands.

But there was more to the suffocation of the Black press than these pervasive material constraints. A more direct explanation lay in the concerted strategy by White newspaper owners to preclude or eliminate Black competition. The Bantu Press organization taken over by the Argus to the “Black market” (not a black-market sector) that newspapers increasingly seek to cater to.

\textsuperscript{7}Claire Gebhardt, “50% of unemployed under 30,” \textit{Star Business}, 31 March 1995.

\textsuperscript{8}The figures are cited in “SA will not go cap in hand - Naidoo,” \textit{The Star (Business Report)}, 10 March 1995, p. 11; Justin Pearce, “Still a land of inequality,” \textit{Weekly Mail & Guardian}, 17-23 March 1995; Amma Ogan, “Legacy of ethnic education,” \textit{Weekly Mail & Guardian}, 21-27 April 1995. Not surprisingly, among apartheid’s legacies was a lack of detailed statistical investigation of apartheid’s effects on the Black masses. Cathy Stadler, of the Human Rights Institute of South Africa, notes: “Apartheid has had a catastrophic impact on the quality, collection, organisation and dissemination of information by the state – in some cases more catastrophic than the mechanisms of censorship have been. Little information has been collected on marginalised, rural communities, about women or about the impact of violence on children, to name but a few areas.” “Freedom of information is vital,” \textit{The Star}, 21 March 1995.
group in 1963 (which included in its stable The World, forerunner of Sowetan) was founded by Whites.\(^9\) “It was impossible for any independent African newspaper to survive the competitive power of the white-controlled Bantu Press, and indeed this was the intention,” argues Elaine Potter in her seminal study.\(^10\) An anonymous Johannesburg journalist protested in the pages of Sowetan in 1993 that “there has been no serious and free black Press in this country for many decades if not a full century. ... Even in this new South Africa the so-called black Press is wholly in the hands of whites, with the exception of one magazine and two newspapers in which blacks have some shares.” What Black journalism did exist was so overwhelmed by a White-generated mobilizing imperative – commercial profit – that it was largely deaf to Black readers’ informational needs: “The major influence shaping the black Press today seems to be a desire to keep the uninformed white board of directors happy with high circulation figures while the burning issues of the day play a peripheral role.”\(^11\)

White dominance dictated that discretionary income would be concentrated overwhelmingly in White hands. This, too, shaped the English press, which existed in a market environment in which advertising, and to a lesser extent subscriptions and newsstand sales, were the main sources of profit and hence survival. Newspapers bore the additional constraints of a particularly expensive and dependent medium – dependent, that is, on literacy levels that in South Africa reflected the staggering educational deficit inflicted on Blacks. The near-total preoccupation of advertisers and advertising agencies with White consumers bolstered this orientation still further. In something of a sea-change that reflected deeper social and political transformations, the three largest newspapers in the country all developed majority Black readerships in the 1970s and 1980s. But as late as 1985, The Rand Daily Mail’s Black readers (70 percent of the total) were cited as one of the paper’s principal liabilities, leading to the famous irony of the paper being starved for funds, then closed,

---


precisely when its circulation was booming. The educational deficit, combined with rural underdevelopment, limited the penetration of newspapers to an abysmally low three percent of the Black population, compared with 20 percent for television and 80 percent for the poor's normal medium of choice, radio.\textsuperscript{12}

Black needs and tastes were thus secondary, if not outright peripheral, to the English (let alone the Afrikaner) press. Nonetheless, the majority's sheer weight of numbers dictated that Black purchasing power would, cumulatively, be of some significance, and in the 1970s it began to be taken seriously by the owners of the English press. The strategy they devised to exploit it symbolized perfectly the chasm between the races in South African society and mass media. It was the so-called “extra” or “Africa” edition — a separate run of the newspaper aimed at Black readers, with somewhat different editorial and advertising content. Even The Rand Daily Mail, the most committed opponent of apartheid among the English press, produced such a racially-split edition. According to Hachten and Giffard, the editions “were almost unanimously resented” by Black journalists,\textsuperscript{13} but those who oversaw them were quick to offer more practical justifications, even in the post-apartheid era. “The market said to us that they wanted” an Africa edition, claimed the former editor of the liberal Johannesburg Star, Richard Steyn, in 1995. “Black people wanted to read about soccer and things in their areas; White people didn’t. All of the politicians and the politically-aware said it was a bad thing, it was perpetuating apartheid. It wasn’t.”\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{12}“Poor marks for press!,” City Press, 22 May 1994. A Rhodes University study in 1991 found an even more striking predominance of radio in one of the least-developed parts of the country (rural areas of the Eastern Cape). Although 83 percent of residents interviewed were functionally illiterate, “90 percent regularly listened to the radio,” versus 9.6 percent for television; no figures for the press were given. Charlene Smith, “ANC calls for a monitored code of conduct for media,” Sunday Times, 12 January 1992.

\textsuperscript{13}William A. Hachten & C. Anthony Giffard, Total Onslaught (University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 143.

\textsuperscript{14}Steyn, in fact, regretted the disappearance of the split edition in 1993. “Eventually we decided we simply had to bite the bullet, chuck it out, have only one edition. I don’t think that did circulation any good.” Former Star editor Harvey Tyson concurred with Sullivan on the death of the Africa edition, blaming the “ignorance and prejudice” of academics and others who criticized the practice of the split run. “What the critics – especially the politicians – could never understand was that people are inclined to read what they want to read – not what they ought to read, or are told to read. Thus, when The Star tried once to eliminate a geographically defined Africa Edition, readers of these special editions simply refused to buy the ‘other’ paper. ... When people’s lives are kept apart by legal and artificial barriers their communal interests invariably differ, and often clash. When apartheid is finally dead, perhaps editionising can return to normal, efficient practices.” Harvey Tyson, Editors Under Fire (Johannesburg: Random House, 1993), p. 347. The commercial framework found – or refuge taken – by proponents of the Africa edition seems to have carried over to the transition era. It is frankly doubtful whether the new political climate was decisive in the disappearance of the separate edition in the runup to the first free elections. The Financial Mail’s Tony Koenderman has argued that the major factor was the decline of a key demographic cohort for advertisers – Blacks between 16 and...
Monopoly Ownership

If the defining feature of the English press under apartheid was its whiteness, a close runner-up was a “concentration of newspaper ownership ... [that was] extraordinarily high compared with that of other [sic?] Western countries.”15 The intersection of monopoly ownership and racial domination remains the most urgent and potentially incendiary issue the South African English press confronts in the post-apartheid era, as the current debate over “unbundling” and affirmative-action policies testifies.

By any measure, the major actor in the English press was Anglo-American Corporation, with its associated holding company Johannesburg Consolidated Investments (JCI).16 The press was merely part of Anglo’s impressive media cachet, which also included infrastructural operations vital to press functioning, such as printers and distributors. These, in turn, constituted only a small part of Anglo-JCI’s holdings, which extended to “virtually every major sphere of mining, financial and industrial activity in the country,” including the De Beers diamond company. These involvements made Anglo “easily the largest single company in the country,” and earned it the tag of “The Octopus.” “Translated into social terms,” Douglas Innes writes, “... the Group wield[ed] an awesome degree of power.”17

Anglo-JCI’s omnipotence in the South African English press was established through its ownership of Argus, the largest press group in South Africa, with flagships like The Star (Johannesburg), The Argus (Cape Town), and The Natal Mercury (Durban). Moreover, through JCI, Anglo held a controlling stake in Argus’s principal “competitor,” Times Media Ltd. TML (which at the time of writing publishes Business Day, the Cape Times, and the mighty Sunday Times) was the successor to South African Associated Newspapers, SAAN – also JCI-controlled. On the Afrikaans
side, two groups predominated: Nasionale Pers (Beeld, Die Burger, City Press), and the much smaller Perskor (with its English flagship, The Citizen). Though not overseen by a single large corporation as was the English press, the Afrikaans press had its own powerfully centralizing features: most notably the shadowy but decisive influence of the Broederbond — the Afrikaner secret society whose media involvements will be touched on briefly in The Citizen case-study. ¹⁸

Taken together, this handful of cross-owned and/or jointly-coordinated press groups, English and Afrikaner alike, accounted for 95 percent of newspaper circulation in South Africa. This arrangement appears to have held as late as 1994-95, at which point the unbundling process described below began to gather steam.

For the English press, Anglo-American control ensured — indeed, required — that the two major English press groups would have “a cozy, cooperative arrangement, functioning in effect as a cartel.” The result, in the view of most critics, was a professional malaise — an absence of professional zeal and innovation. Ken Owen lamented the professional deficit in 1984, linking it explicitly to monopolistic ownership patterns:

The symptoms of a cartel are those of monopoly: complacency, exploitation, inability to innovate or adapt, a gradual decline in standards, and in the end a vulnerability to more vigorous challengers. All of these were discernible, to a greater or lesser degree, in the comfortable milieu in which English [South African] journalism languished from the early Fifties until, perhaps, the late Seventies. At the end of this period, the industry was comfortable but the profession of journalism was close to ruin. ¹⁹

According to numerous accounts, the deficit was particularly keenly felt when The Rand Daily Mail collapsed in 1985. The English press was weakened precisely at the time it might have come into its own, with the liberation forces marshalling for the final assault on apartheid.

Nonetheless, even in the waning days of White rule, the degree of monopoly control attracted little

¹⁸Broadcasting, of course, was a regime monopoly, and thus mirrored regime strategies in every aspect of its operations. In Danny Schechter’s vivid summary: “From its inception, the SABC [South African Broadcasting Corporation] was an arm of the apartheid system, and reflected its values not only in what it broadcast but in how it was structured. There were black stations and white stations, and even newsrooms which had walls separating people along racial lines. I was told that the black radio station was built so that it could be sealed off. Security guards with dogs patrolled the grounds. ... In the ‘old days,’ the prime minister had a direct line to the news chief, and virtually dictated what could and could not be covered. Censorship was the order of the day. ... Sugar-coating reality was the priority. Unrest and human rights abuses, police brutality and death squad activity in South Africa were not news on South African TV. The TV system [introduced only in 1976] was used systematically to mobilize a consensus behind the government line, providing disproportionate access to the ruling party and its apologists for apartheid while shutting the ANC out.” Danny Schechter, “Visiting South Africa,” Z Magazine, July/August 1996, pp. 57-58.

attention. After all, it existed against the backdrop of a national economy that exhibited many of
the same monopolistic features, particularly when the Afrikaner-dominated state sector was
factored in. Even had greater pluralism been desired, “unbundling” could hardly have occurred
(beyond simple redistribution among White capitalists, domestically or abroad) — given the effective
lack of a Black capitalist class, the legal harassment and de facto marginalization of Black journalism,
and the mounting international campaign for sanctions and disinvestment.

The peripheral role of the press in these vast industrial empires did, however, make
newspapers attractive candidates for “unbundling” once majority rule was established. The potent
symbolic appeal of the press allowed newspapers to serve as something of a fob to those forces
calling, after 1990, for a de-racializing of the wider economy. And newspapers are comparatively
minor players in the modern media age, despite their moderate profitability in the South African
context. Notable changes in ownership had thus occurred at the time of fieldwork in Johannesburg
in 1995, and they will be examined in greater detail below. But transformations in institutional
structures and mindsets were another matter. A year into the era of majority rule, White
dominance remained evident at every level of South African newspapers’ staffing and operations.
Black staff predominated only on the blue-collar end: printing, trucking, distribution, street sales,
and so on. The strategic heights of the institutions themselves, the upper editorial and managerial
levels, remained strongly (The Star), even completely (The Citizen), White. The prevalence and
durability of the racial divisions was evident even at Sowetan, which otherwise seemed an exception
to the trend.

Unions and professional associations may be important buttresses of media autonomy and
professionalism around the world (see Chapter 6). Sometimes they may become significant political
actors in their own right. Halfway through the term of the first democratically-elected government
in South African history, however, racial divisions were blatant here as well, inhibiting the
development of professional links among South African reporters and editors.\textsuperscript{20} In 1993, the

\textsuperscript{20}Since 1980, there have been two unions for South African journalists, with limited and only slowly
increasing racial crossover: the original South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ), dominated by English Whites, and
its Black counterpart, the Media Workers Association of South Africa (MWASA), which included support staff. The
Association of Democratic Journalists (ADJ), created in the late 1980s as an attempt to link the two, “faded out,”
according to Sowetan journalist Mzimkulu Malunga, who was active in MWASA for many years. “You’re left with
MWASA and SAUJ. I think as long as we have black and white issues in the country, you won’t necessarily have those
organizations merging.” The SAUJ was known until the 1990s as the South African Society of Journalists (SASJ).
Conference of Editors elected its first Black chairman, Khulu Sibiya. In October 1995, Sibiya resigned, claiming the racial chasm among editors was unbridgeable: “Black and white editors will forever be in conflict with each other.”

Only in late 1996 did some 80 senior representatives from the Black Editors’ Forum (BEF) and the White-dominated Conference of Editors (CoE) meet over two days to create the South African National Editors Forum (SANEF), an organization with the stated goal of addressing “inappropriate racial and gender imbalances prevalent in journalism and news organisation,” and of “encouraging a transformation of culture within the industry.” But core issues like Black advancement remained highly contentious, and the prospects for the new organization were uncertain. The common desire to protect media freedoms had to be set against the legacy of division, on the one hand, and the possibility that the new organization would become simply “a non-racial tea party,” on the other (the caution of Deputy PM Thabo Mbeki, addressing the conference). At the level of ordinary social interaction, things have surely changed from the days when “not one black reporter [at The Star] had ever had a white co-worker ... to his house.”

But casual observation of the most racially-integrated of the three newsrooms studied for this chapter, The Star’s, and conversations with journalists at the paper, suggested that here, too, racial divisions were marked (see the Argus/Star case-study for extended testimony along these lines).

The legacy of division sketched briefly here should be borne in mind as we turn to apartheid’s political legacy and the manner in which it, too, decisively shaped the English press. The restricted sphere of political activity entrenched under White rule merely reflected the White claim to a monopoly over the resources — including the human resources — of South Africa. Thus, the political context in which the English press operated could hardly have been anything but racist at its roots. “Official” politics was a Whites-only game for the entire history of the country through to the 1990s, with the peripheral exception of the Coloured vote on the Cape, eliminated early in the twentieth century.

---

There was no comparable association for Afrikaner journalists. See Jackson, Breaking Story, p. 44.

21Sibiya’s unenviable position was suggestive of the difficulties prominent Blacks will face for years if not decades: viewed as something of a curiosity by Whites, and by Blacks as “a token” among “white, middle-class males,” as Ken Owen put it at the time of Sibiya’s departure. Ken Owen, “Rainbow nation’s straw in ill wind,” Sunday Times, 1 October 1995.

As Elaine Potter was the first to systematically articulate, the framing of South African politics after 1948 to exclude the vast majority (and also to subordinate, politically, the English elite) meant the English press would play a certain political role by default. In what sense, and to what extent, could institutions that were organic outgrowths of racial dominance perform a meaningful “oppositionist” function under apartheid? The question is a complex one, pointing, among other things, to system-level commitments on which the most significant continuities of the transitional era are founded.

**THE PRESS AS OPPOSITION**

The economic and social system established to secure White dominance in South Africa set the broad parameters for the media system that emerged in the modern era. But the unique character of White dominance after 1948 — the ascent of Afrikanerdom to national power — determined the more narrow political role to be played by the English press. “It is perhaps strange that in a country where four-fifths of the population are by the consent of the competing White groups excluded from participation in the political system, attitudes to constitutional principles and democratic processes can be a source of conflict within the ruling group,” Potter wrote in her groundbreaking study of South African newspapers (I have appropriated her title for the section heading). “It becomes less strange when ... it is realized that the South African state ‘preserves its dual character of a democracy for the Herrenvolk and a racialist colonial regime for the non-Whites.’”

The political role of the papers was similarly schizoid: oppositionist, but opposition that accepted a “rule of law” that was inherently unjust, and that recognized the racially-exclusive parliament as the locus of “legitimate” political activity.

The victory of the National Party in the 1948 elections marked a sea-change in South African politics. Afrikaners, ironically, saw it as a homegrown version of the great wave of national liberation movements then beginning to sweep the globe. For the next four decades, the traditionally hegemonic White elite — the English-speaking population — would be permitted to preserve and even to expand its property holdings and economic clout. In return, it was to accept

---


24There are foreshadowings, here, of the similarly-regulated Jordanian press, which likewise has used the parliamentary “whipping boy” as a means of evading more systemic critiques. See Chapter 4.
political marginalization and quiescence — unless its members could be persuaded to join the Nationalist fold. (That such an epic shift in political affiliation did not, in the end, take place was only one of the gripes the National Party held against the “negative” reporting of the English press.) The political and economic focus of National Party rule, of course, was affirmative action for Afrikaners. The part to be played by the Black masses was constant; inducements in this sphere were limited to pious urgings to Blacks to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and make the most of “separate development.”

Within this Afrikaner-dominated framework, the overriding political imperative for English Whites — and the press they owned and supported — was security of person and property. The estrangement of English Whites from formal political power allowed English-language newspapers to sling arrows from a quasi-independent position — one that happened to fit well with the imported “English model” on which these newspapers were founded. Often this allowed concerns and criticisms to be raised on grounds of utility or even social justice. But the press blew hot and cold, usually reacting to outbreaks of social unrest that threatened the “stability” of property relations. The attitude towards the Black liberation movements reminds one of John F. Kennedy’s comments, sizing up the political situation in the Dominican Republic in the wake of the Cuban Revolution:

There are three possibilities, in descending order of preference: a decent democratic regime, a continuation of the [dictatorial] Trujillo regime, or a Castro [social-revolutionary] regime. We ought to aim at the first, but we can’t really renounce the second until we are sure we can avoid the third.

This structuring of priorities drew U.S. administrations into alliances with state terrorists, including South African ones. In a similar way, the overriding priority of South Africa’s English Whites — reflected in their press — prompted them to prioritize White security (even under Afrikaner hegemony) so long as socialist revolution and/or race war seemed the likely alternatives. This drew most English Whites into a tacit alliance with the Nationalists on key issues like international sanctions and, often, outbreaks of civil disorder. The boycott campaign, for example,

---

25Martin J. Murray found it “ironic ... that this Afrikaner elite, who trumpeted the virtues of business freedom and personal liberties as a bulwark against state-managed programmes of socio-economic upliftment, owed its very class existence to massive state intervention and to the denial of political rights for the majority.” Murray, The Revolution Deferred, p. 15.

posed the risk for both elite groups of destabilizing a country that each contended would evolve
towards a more just order without outside interference. Consider, in this context, the statements of
G.W.H. Relly, chairman of Anglo-American, in an annual statement published in 1988 — less than
two years before the South African transition began with F.W. De Klerk's historic speech to
parliament (2 February 1990):

Many politicians overseas attempt to force the pace of change through sanctions and
disinvestment. They choose to ignore the reality that the result of their activities to date has
been to set back reform and impoverish the people they are intended to help. The
credibility of their judgement thus becomes questionable and the morality of their motives
dubious. They fail or do not want to understand that South African socio-political
dynamics are already working powerfully on the side of black people. None of this creates
an environment helpful to a low, but in many ways remarkable, process of modernisation in
South Africa that is nevertheless taking place. Everyone abhors emergency powers which so
severely circumscribe the rule of law, but one is entitled to abhor just as much the mindless
mayhem and murder which was prevailing in South Africa.27

And here is Anglo's flagship, the Johannesburg Star, writing on violence, sanctions, and the
need for market-oriented growth:

Emotionally, the idea of an economic squeeze is attractive to many in both countries, but
the reality is more likely to be that successful sanctions will bring only hardship and
polarisation. The idea that black workers are willing to sacrifice jobs, an idea put forward by
spokesmen of the NUM [National Union Movement] and other unions, is an elitist political
cliché. (Editorial, 2 October 1986)

Only a society based on individual liberty, the rule of law, a thriving market economy,
limited government and redistribution through growth can succeed in the modern world.
(Editorial, 23-24 April 1994)

With such overarching priorities driving it in the direction of system stability, the English
press was limited to supporting incremental change. No white media outlet except The Rand Daily
Mail ever came out openly in favour of one-person, one-vote in South Africa.28 The content
analysis carried out by media analyst Les Switzer in 1994 found that "even within the English-
language press, only a few newspapers actively opposed the Government's policies throughout [the


28The Mail wrote even in the early 1960s: "The fact of the matter is that the choice is not so much between the
Government's Bantustan policy and the United Party's race federation [i.e., "reformist" half-measures of the type that
were constantly proposed], but between policies of race domination and the policies of complete non-discrimination in
race and colour. This is the only choice that matters, and it is the one demanded of us by the rest of mankind." Mail
editor Laurence Gandar argued in print that full racial integration, including mixed marriage, was in the end
inevitable. This was extremist stuff in the South Africa of 1964." Martin Walker, Powers of the Press: The World's Great
1960s to 1980s]. The targets of dissent, moreover, were carefully selected and these news stories represented a relatively small proportion of the total news content. ”

"If our [English] newspapers are liberal," wrote editor Ken Owen pithily, "they are, by and large, the wettest liberals on earth."

This record of alleged complicity with the apartheid system has brought the English press in for its share of criticism in the immediate post-apartheid era. This was especially true in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Process designed, in part, to unmask those who had been complicit with the old order. The commission heard from Tony Weaver, a journalist with the Cape Times who resigned in 1987 after numerous alleged attempts by senior editors to rein in his coverage of state terrorism in South Africa. "Elements of the media," Weaver told the commission, "are guilty of collusion with the apartheid regime, either by remaining silent or actively suppressing the truth."

He directed the brunt of his attack at the English-language press, claiming that figures like Stephen Mulholland, manager of Times Media in the late 1980s, had "perceived [Weaver] as being too radical" and sought to have him dismissed. The former editor of the Times, Tony Heard, echoed the "spirit" of Weaver's testimony, telling the Mail & Guardian that Mulholland and his stable of editors, the so-called liberal English press, bent over backwards to accommodate versions of the truth put out by the police and the National Party. ...

During that period journalists were operating not only in the milieu of a hostile police and government, but also in the employ of a hostile management. ... It was widely rumoured that an editor of a major English opposition newspaper was an agent of the National Intelligence Service. This was not considered a gross violation of human rights, but we certainly made it possible for those violations to happen — more than the medical or legal professions did. When people say today they did not know what happened, we are the reason for their ignorance.

Other representations to the TRC included fiercely outspoken comments by Thami Mazwai, chair of the Black Editors' Forum, who contended that "even when the state was implementing its various restrictive laws, there was very little opposition from the English media."

The Argus group and SAAN "hardly raised a sweat in opposition to the then-government's
stranglehold on the media.” Interview subjects in 1995 voiced similar criticisms. “I would say about 80 percent of the people in journalism didn’t give a shit about the tyranny,” said Scope’s Andrew Beattie, who worked with many of the major English dailies at one time or another. “They actually supported it. It was only a small minority of people who actually challenged the status quo, and those people felt the pinch. The others were quite happy to buff their nails and talk about what was on television.” Ismail Lagardien, then Sowetan’s parliamentary correspondent, was more emphatic still, analyzing English press support for the tiny Progressive Federal Party in the apartheid-era parliament:

It was okay for the majority of the White establishment that chose to “oppose apartheid,” quote-unquote, to stay within the system and make sure that the system survived. They earned salaries from the system, and apartheid actually entrenched and protected their positions in society. If you look at the PFP, the Democratic Party, [the press] validated, as it were, the National Party in parliament. My thinking here is that one of the elements that legitimizes a legislature is opposition. I don’t think liberalism in South Africa aspires to anything like the left-liberalism of Tom Paine, say. Liberals have, by their own admission, an institutional relationship with the British Conservative Party. They basically represent the New Right, and they will tell you that they never fought for Black liberation. The newspapers accepted the legal framework, adhered to the letter and the spirit of it. If a Black kid threw a stone and broke a window, that kid was breaking the law. That formed the bedrock of what was particularly pernicious in this country.

If the press evaded an opposition role more often than it embraced it, though, it would be a mistake to end the discussion at that point. The role itself is of intrinsic interest. It tells us a great deal about the political and professional self-conception that animated most English journalists and editors. These serve as touchstones, and vital cognitive frameworks, for the era of unexampled change that began in 1990. The press-as-opposition motif is also important to an appreciation of ANC media policy, which displays the kind of ambivalence that leaders of a liberation movement could be expected to feel towards English press institutions that were perceived both as accomplices in a cruel system and as potential allies in the struggle for freedom. That ambivalence was founded in reality: a handful of English press institutions, and a minority of journalists and editors, did manage to transcend the constraints of opposition-as-cooption, and play a meaningful (though usually inconsistent) role in kick-starting the South African transition. In its coverage of the Soweto uprising, the death of Steven Biko, the “Info Scandal,” the South African war in

Angola, and government-run hit squads, the English press showed itself capable of unveiling and denouncing specific regime abuses – even if this coverage rarely rose to the level of a general or systemic critique. The value of the moral capital the press gained thereby is open to debate. But English journalists and editors have not hesitated to draw upon it in establishing a *modus vivendi* with the new ANC-dominated regime; and that regime, in turn – for all its sometimes derisive criticisms – has not laughed the claims out of court.

A disproportionate part of the moral and political legitimacy that the English press accrued under apartheid resulted from the efforts of a single press institution during a specific period in its history: *The Rand Daily Mail*, from the 1960s through to its death in the mid-1980s. From its founding in 1902, the Mail, like the other English papers, had played a largely conservative, system-supporting role. It was “very much a businessman’s paper, devoted to the mining interests and to the white mineworkers”; its coverage was permeated by an “innate racism.” (So wrote Martin Walker, who chose the Mail for his study of “the world’s great newspapers,” *Powers of the Press*.)

But after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 and the subsequent banning of the liberation movements, the paper moved to the forefront of the above-ground struggle against apartheid’s abuses. “We have a clear and unambiguous political policy which is liberal in content and contemporary in spirit,” proclaimed the Mail’s editor, Laurence Gandar, in 1962. “In the twilight of South African traditionalism, we are a paper of vigorous dissent and social protest... In a continent in the throes of change, we endeavour to serve as an instrument of change.” No other English paper came close to this kind of public proclamation, certainly not in the 1960s. Nor was any White publication the target of comparable harassment by the apartheid regime. The Mail’s legal wars in the 1960s are legendary; the Info Scandal of 1978 made it clear that the Nationalist government did not draw the line even at flagrant subversion of the paper’s operations.

---


35 Gandar quoted in Potter, *The Press As Opposition*, p. 175, who calls this “by far the most radical statement to be made by any editor of an Establishment newspaper,” through to 1975 at least. Martin Williams says the Mail’s stance “was extremist stuff in the South Africa of 1964” (*Powers of the Press*, p. 322). I am aware of nothing comparable elsewhere in the daily press after the Mail’s collapse in 1985, though one of the Mail’s successors, *The Weekly Mail* (now *The Mail & Guardian*) struck a similar tone.

36 The Info Scandal revealed state funding behind *The Citizen*, the English-language daily founded by the regime in an attempt to undercut the Mail’s circulation and counter its political influence. See the *Citizen* case-study for further details.
That the Mail played a key role in uncovering the Info Scandal seemed sweet revenge at the time. The paper's death less than a decade later — and The Citizen's plodding endurance through to the present — was the sting in history's tail. But in retrospect, very few critics of White dominance in South Africa, or of the role of the English press in supporting it, question the Mail's contribution to the liberation struggle. Black South Africans considered it "the most concerned and sympathetic white newspaper that black South Africans have ever had." According to the late Percy Qoboza, dean of Black South African editors and journalists, "The Mail was not just another paper; it was an institution, a courageous crusader for justice and peace. Far ahead of white public opinion, it gave us the courage to go on."

How far do the other English papers deserve to bask in the Mail's glow? To a great extent — at least if one accepts the self-exculpation offered by former Star editor Harvey Tyson, one of the leading lights of South Africa's older generation of journalists. In his rambling but engaging book, Editors Under Fire, Tyson sought to demonstrate that the press — at least the newspaper he edited — did the very best it could under the circumstances. For Tyson, The Star was indeed "part of the System" — but in the sense that it belonged to civil society, and did not lack for protectors there. "[The government] had to be fairly circumspect in how they went about frightening us. We were able to protect our own, to a small degree." He acknowledges that "Rule of law was 'the bottom line' for many of us in the mainstream press," and so life was a constant travail of trying to "challenge legislation, or 'get round' it. Only in the last few years of apartheid did we admit to blatantly breaking bad law." In return, says Tyson, the government granted the press de facto breathing space, reflecting its desire to avoid "the obvious, ruthlessly efficient totalitarian route." This in turn pointed to "a strong tradition of free speech" in South Africa, and the regime's enduring but "forlorn hope that it could persuade all of the mainstream press to 'come on side'." Nonetheless,

The attack on the press was constant and ferocious. Whole government departments were dedicated to the task, and Cabinet Ministers devoted up to a quarter of almost every political speech to the issue. Eventually, the government succeeded in damaging the press in two ways: it turned most of the white electorate against the opposition newspapers, although

they continued to read them, and it finally killed press freedom. But the apartheid rulers failed ever to subjugate, let alone control, the newspapers.\(^{38}\)

Support for Tyson’s press-as-opposition framing hails from diverse, sometimes surprising quarters. His book includes a contribution from Nelson Mandela, broadly supportive despite some evasive turns of phrase.\(^{39}\) Another interesting perspective was offered by Fergus Sampson, a Star employee, but one who was harshly critical of the institution in other respects (e.g., its approach to affirmative action in the post-apartheid era). In the townships where he grew up, said Sampson in a 1995 interview, “at some point in time all newspapers were seen to be advocates of apartheid. That’s because all Whites were seen to be advocates of apartheid, and newspapers were run by Whites; to a large extent they still are.” But his evaluation of The Star was a good deal more positive:

As a newspaper – thinking soberly, not as an employee but as an objective observer – The Star employed some smart people. I think they pushed the limits of the law back then. I think they’ve done what they could to expose the wrongs of apartheid. And I think they’ve gone further than any other newspaper in advancing the cause of justice in this country. They will always carry that flag with them in my mind, and in the minds of many people ... In that respect, The Star, I think, has been a beacon of justice.

One thing that rings true in Tyson’s and Sampson’s comments is the references to the hostility of the Nationalist regime. Whether or not the Rand Daily Mail’s courageous opposition was exceptional, the apartheid government certainly saw it as part of a wider trend — or of one that always threatened to spread. More than anything, it was this campaign of regime harassment — certainly including many papers other than just the Mail — that created a perception internationally that the English press was an underdog of the apartheid system, rather than one of its bulwarks. The Nationalists, with their paranoid, pathologically anti-communist world-view, saw the English

\(^{38}\)Tyson, Editors Under Fire, pp. 10, 269-70.

\(^{39}\)Mandela wrote that “the media, and especially ... the newspapers, have played their role in assisting the birth of this emergent democratic order.” Mandela, “South Africa: The Future,” in Tyson, Editors Under Fire, p. 411-12. He added wryly that “I feel well qualified to talk about the press since, during my latter years in prison, I was probably the country’s most avid reader of newspapers!” The ANC’s Cyril Ramaphosa, often mentioned as a possible successor for Mandela, was more effusive in his appraisal of the press’s role under apartheid: “The ANC is not alone in suffering a history of oppression and repression. It is no exaggeration to say that the media, particularly certain sections of the press in South Africa, have been part of the struggle for democracy in our country and have suffered the consequences thereof like most of us. The bannings, the constant harassment, the repression, and so forth. In this regard, one has to pay tribute to great newspapers like The World and The Rand Daily Mail. They are no longer with us. But together with others, they have gone down in history as champions of the voice of democracy in our country.” “The African National Congress Position,” in Nieman Reports XLVI: 4, Special Edition on “South Africa/Southern Africa: The Future of the Media,” 1992, p. 57.
press as the repository of all the naïve liberal tendencies that would one day lead to Whites being submerged by a Black – and Red – tide. National liberation and socialism were linked in the minds of most English Whites during the apartheid era, but for Nationalists the “connection” became a fixation. The trend was apparent from 1948, but reached a fever-pitch after the post-colonial “winds of change” blew South Africa out of the British Commonwealth in 1961. As the Nationalists’ siege mentality deepened, the international environment was reconceptualized as one of a communist-led “total onslaught” against South Africa and other isolated redoubts of the “free” world. The onslaught demanded countermeasures on every front, with the media heading the list of targets. “The English press,” writes Elaine Potter, “became not a fourth estate but a fifth column.”

And so the regime used its legal armoury to hem in and suppress perceived opposition sentiment at every turn. Hardest hit, predictably, were the few English-language publications with a predominantly Black staff. “Many small, independent papers have been banned or hounded out of existence,” William Finnegan wrote in *Dateline Soweto*, his 1988 study of Black reporting in South Africa. “Those black community papers that survive are constantly seeing their editions banned, their offices burned down, their reporters and editors attacked and jailed.”

The climax of the regime’s campaign came on “Black Wednesday” (19 October 1987), when *The World* and *Weekend World* were banned along with eighteen Black Consciousness organizations. *World* editor Percy Qoboza and his assistant, Aggrey Klaaste (later editor of *Sowetan*), were detained without trial and jailed for nearly five months.

---


41 Again, details are readily available elsewhere. The snarl of punitive legislation is well explored in Jackson, *Breaking Story*, especially chapters 5-6; see the sample legislation in the Appendix. Potter, *The Press As Opposition*, pp. 112-29, is an earlier treatment. William Lane et al., *Kelsey Stuart’s The Newspaperman’s Guide to the Law*, 4th ed. (Durban: Butterworth Publishers, 1986), captures the state of the legislation just as National Party hegemony was beginning to waver. Some press reaction to the legislation is excerpted in Appendix 2.

42 Finnegan, *Dateline Soweto*, p. 33.

43 Helen Grange, “October 19: dark day for freedom,” *The Star*, 19 October 1993. “Between June 1976 and June 1981,” write Hachten and Giffard, “about fifty black journalists were detained without trial for periods of up to five hundred days. At least ten were detained more than once. Ten black journalists were banned in that time, and one was tried and was sentenced to a seven-year term on Robben Island. (During the same period, the figures for white journalists were: one detained, one banned, and one tried and jailed for six years. A 1977 manpower survey counted 3,761 white journalists compared with about 200 black journalists.)” Hachten and Giffard, *Total Onslaught*, p. 134. The frequency with which one encounters tales of detention, jailing, banning and other acts of state violence in interviews with *Sowetan*’s senior journalists and editors is evidence of the part played by state repression in forming Black
The notorious government-sponsored Steyn Commission Report on the Media (1982) remains one of the clearest exemplars of the regime's total-onslaught thinking, as it applied both to the English press of South Africa and the foreign media with whom they were presumed to be in cahoots. The report's authors wrote that:

44. The Western politico-cultural inability or unwillingness to grasp the agonizing reality of Soviet Communism is probably the main reason for the failure of the Western news media to alert their reading and viewing public to the real gravity of the Soviet threat. ... Our evaluation satisfied us that the media contribute to the extending of the ambit and the intensity of the conflict situation and they often encourage revolutionary forces. The media apparently do not appreciate (or if they do, they act with preconceived intent) that normal, first world journalistic approaches and practices designed for a homogeneous democratic country are not applicable in their undiluted form in a heterogeneous country with a first and third world population mix, with a massive difference in levels of sophistication, where first world "advocacy journalism" has a much greater impact upon the unsophisticated half-literate mind than in a homogeneous and sophisticated first-world community.

With this mentality prevailing, the day-to-day interaction between the Nationalist regime and the English press could only be riven with mutual suspicion and contempt. "You hate me and I hate you," Prime Minister John Vorster told English reporters to their faces. Vorster’s successor, P.W. Botha, was even less charitable at the opening of the Nationalists’ Transvaal congress in November 1988. He referred to members of the opposition press as "little jackals," “muck-rakers,” and “lunrieme,” which The Star helpfully translated as “slimy ropes used in the control of trek oxen.”

The regime was far from the only source of danger that the English press, and especially its Black journalists and editors, had to face. The Soweto riots of 1976 marked the resurgence of the liberation movement after a decade-and-a-half of effective suppression. The riots were also a coming of age for the English press. Papers like The Rand Daily Mail and The Star had been journalism at nearly every level. Apartheid was no respecter of youth, and even very junior journalists today will have had clashes with the police or IFP supporters in the late 1980s or early 1990s.

44. The efforts at media subversion also extended beyond South Africa's borders, to the “frontline states” and even to the United States. The decision to found The Citizen was made only after attempts to purchase a major U.S. publication, The Washington Times, fell through.

The Steyn Commission Report, quoted in Hachten & Giffard, Total Onslaught, p. 88. What a relief, incidentally, that the South African transition has virtually erased such offhand derision of the majority population from mainstream discourse.

gradually developing a corps of Black writers and photographers, who could get the stories for the Africa editions that White reporters could not. This stood those papers, in particular, in excellent stead when the townships exploded. The words and images that Black staff returned with brought the English press to new heights of domestic credibility and international visibility. But the uprising also turned the townships, and sometimes the city centres, into combat zones; nearly every journalist in the field, Black of White, became a war correspondent, "risking their lives daily to get the story."47

In such an environment, a threat at least equal to that of the regime arose from less predictable quarters, one that grew in intensity with the chaotic popular uprising of 1984-85.48 With most of the leaders of the liberation movement in prison or in exile, the uprising spawned gangs of *tsotsis*, "thugs." These young men, even less well-educated than the Black South African norm (thanks to post-Soweto boycotts of the state education system), roamed the townships in a manner that increasingly blurred political activism with vigilante justice and common criminality.

Black journalists, used to being seen as "the heroes and heroines of the struggle" after their remarkable photojournalism in 1976, now had to face "the murderous anger of the [Black] communities" themselves, *Sowetan* editor Aggrey Klaaste remembered in 1992. With their cameras and their probing questions, they could easily be mistaken for state agents. "Those were dark days for reporters and executives. Many is the time when our men and women had narrow escapes from angry youth baying for their scalps."49 *The Star*’s reporter Jon Qwelane visited Uitenhage on the Eastern Cape in 1985, shortly after 21 demonstrators had been killed by police. While reporting

47Finnegan, *Dateline Soweto*, p. 74. He adds: "All the black reporters on the Star cited 1976 as a turning point in their lives. ... With the world’s attention turning to Soweto and the other townships, local black reporters were often the only source of news."

48Martin J. Murray’s summary of the rebellion conveys the atmosphere of chaos with which journalists were confronted: "What distinguished it from earlier episodes in South Africa history was not only the duration and intensity of open confrontations, pitting mostly unarmed township residents against well-armed and highly mobile police and regular army units, but also the unprecedented degree to which broad layers and sectors of the subordinate classes actively participated — or at least approvingly acquiesced — in pushing the townships, ghettos and squatter settlements beyond the frontiers of governability and rendering 'the system' unworkable. ... The battle lines were constantly in flux, without recognizable fronts or fixed positions. ... The cumulative effect of these countless clashes was to undermine thoroughly the semblance of law and order and normalcy that the white minority regime required to maintain administrative control.” Murray, *The Revolution Deferred*, p. 79, emphasis added.

incognito from the Langa township where the massacre had occurred, he was mistaken for a businessman that a mob had resolved to burn to death as a collaborator:

There were about two hundred men out there, with knives, spades, axes and a jerrycan full of petrol. Some of them were shouting, “Your time is up!” and “You bastard!” and “You’ve sold us out long enough!” ... What saved me was the people I was staying with. One is an ex-detainee, the other is a former Robben Island prisoner. The crowd decided that such people would not have a sellout in their house. But a mob is almost impossible to reason with, you know. It only takes one irresponsible accusation these days to seal your doom.50

The analysis of the new pressures from political factions, and the demand that journalists “take a side,” carried through to the transitional era. Surviving the Story, a pamphlet prepared by the South African Union of Journalists (SAUJ) in 1993, makes clear how multifaceted were — and are — the physical dangers South African journalists face, even with apartheid receding into history. Subtitled “A Safety Manual for Journalists in South Africa,” the publication reads more like advice for those taken hostage by terrorists, or women walking city streets late at night:

Walk confidently as if you know where you are going — even if you don’t. If there are other journalists around, stick close to them. If you walk away from your vehicle, make sure your exit back to the car is free. Don’t make any sudden movements. If you are told to leave, walk away. Don’t run or move too quickly. Be careful of young people. The youth movement tends to be undisciplined. ... Do not allow yourself to be surrounded. ... Don’t argue — agree with anything everybody says and never challenge anyone. ... Do not get stuck in the middle between two opposing groups. There is almost no place that is more dangerous.51

Some sense of the diversity of threats journalists faced in the transitional era was clear from the SAUJ’s estimation of the toll between January and July 1993, when “about 80 journalists became victims of the South African story.” They included SABC reporter Calvin Thusado, “attacked by a panga-wielding mob” in Sharpeville; six journalists shot when police fired on protesters and looters in the wake of Communist Party leader Chris Hani’s assassination; and another journalist who “had five bullets pumped into his chest by gunmen waiting outside his home.” Others were “seriously

50Quoted in Finnegan, Dateline Sowteo, p. 98. Thami Mazwai, one of the most prominent Black journalists, captured the conundrum well: “We have a situation in which journalists are far less exposed to arrest, attention and incarceration by the government than they used to be, but are being threatened and manhandled by political activists in the townships ... and are being told to toe the line ‘or else’ ... We have now reached a point where the journalist is told, ‘You are either for us or against us.’ It is sheer political blackmail.” Thami Mazwai, “The Present and Future Role of the Press,” in Mazwai et al., Mau-Mauing the Media: New Censorship for the New South Africa (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1991), pp. 11, 13.

injured in vicious assaults” or “mugged for the high tech equipment they carried” – a reminder that journalists had become prime targets for the crime wave that is a near-ubiquitous feature of political transitions worldwide. In February 1994, just before the founding democratic elections, Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) militants attending the funeral of APLA commander Sabelo Phama “urge[d] Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA) cadres to shoot white journalists.” And in April of the same year, Ken Oosterbroek, a White photographer for The Star, was killed in a confrontation on the East Rand – allegedly by a bullet from a member of the National Peacekeeping Force guarding the polls.

“THE ENGLISH MODEL”:
MOBILIZING AND PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVES

It cannot be refuted that mining interests dominated the English-language Press, quite as much as political interests dominated the Afrikaans-language Press. But the more important question to answer is how power was distributed within the newspapers themselves: what was the relationship between owners and editors, between the commercial or political ethic of proprietors and the journalistic ethic of newspapermen. And to what extent a distinction between the two functions was made and at what points they confronted each other.

The owners, managers, and editors of South Africa’s English press considered that press, and the country that gave rise to it, as offshoots of the liberal-democratic tradition. Politically, that drew them naturally towards a posture of opposition to the blatantly illiberal Nationalist (and, moreover, non-English) regime established in 1948. In terms of professional self-conception, the most influential model was, again naturally enough, the original English press. The distinctive feature of this model was a particular configuration of relations among owners, senior managers, and senior editors (nothing especially distinctive was claimed with regard to the relationship between editors and journalists). What was special about the configuration, at least according to exponents of the English model, was the extraordinary degree of professional autonomy and independence that it granted to editors. Under the model, an editor reported directly to a newspaper’s owner, bypassing senior management – the day-to-day guardian of the mobilizing imperative in most newspaper

54 FXI Update, April/May/June 1994. Photographers from Newsweek and Reuters were injured in the fusillade.
55 Potter, The Press As Opposition, pp. 54-55.
institutions. For some, like former Star editor Harvey Tyson, the result was “so much independence nobody would believe it. I couldn’t believe it myself.”56 He cast the results in typically heroic terms:

Editors were allowed to beat Big Business on the head, and say what they liked about politicians — but they had nowhere to run to. In practice an editor in this system could happily tell a major advertiser spending vast sums of money in his newspaper, to “go and jump in the lake.” The manager would be left with the difficult task of persuading the advertiser that he was privileged to witness genuine editorial independence in action. In fact advertisers who approached an editor with a threat that they might withdraw their advertising if they could not get favourable editorial publicity (or desired silence), invariably received the response: “Are you threatening a boycott? Do it! I would like to publish the story of how you tried to manipulate the media.” It was even easier with other pressure groups.57

Even more critical commentators like Ken Owen stressed the advantage of the English model, arguing that it was carried even further in South Africa than in the country that spawned it. “As newspaper owners the mining houses [most notably Anglo-JCI] have had one great virtue: they have left their editors alone, giving them a degree of independence far beyond anything known in Britain or Australia. ... This independence was of crucial importance during the years when the Nationalists tried to bring the major opposition newspapers to heel.”58 Raymond Louw, former editor of The Rand Daily Mail, went a step further in a 1995 interview, contending that the model entrenched itself in South Africa’s English press partly because it allowed sponsors a degree of ‘deniability’ in their dealings with the Nationalist regime:

We’ve always built our newspapering traditions on the British system. And in Britain the best papers always gave editors independence. That tradition came out here. And the managements were quite happy to conform to that, particularly after the Nationalists came to power. It gave them the ‘out’: every time there was [government] criticism of what their papers were doing, they could say, “Well, we don’t interfere with our editors. They’re independent.”

Does this apparent degree of professional independence warrant a revision to the basic framework of mobilizing and professional imperatives sketched in Chapter 1? Perhaps not. In two areas — political and, particularly, commercial — mobilizing imperatives can be seen to underlie the workings of the model to an extent that does not differ dramatically from other media systems.

56Tyson, Editors Under Fire, p. 369.
57Tyson, Editors Under Fire, p. 369.
around the world. The English model indeed stressed professional and editorial autonomy — but from interference by managers and "petty" mobilizers, not from mobilizing considerations themselves.

To see the political side of the mobilizing equation more clearly, consider the recollections of Richard Steyn, describing the point in his career when he was poised to take over the editorial helm of the Argus flagship *The Star*. Steyn was frank about the basic political orientation that Argus board members expected of him. "They knew what my political proclivities and interests were. If I was a Nationalist, I wouldn't have been appointed to the job ... and they weren't going to appoint an outspoken socialist." Once in the editor's chair, Steyn stressed, "there was no attempt to exercise any influence at all." Politics "was never discussed; it was left to me. The board of Argus, the chairman of Argus, had no idea who we were going to support in the [1994] election, or in the [1993] White referendum, for that matter." But this may not be quite true. Argus's chair could, by that point, have been certain that *The Star* would not support the National Party in the elections, or any other Afrikaner-dominated force. Nor would it back an "outspoken socialist" option like, say, the South African Communist Party. As Steyn himself acknowledged, he would not have been hired in the first place had he demonstrated a leaning towards any of these political groupings, or the fundamentals of the economic system that sustained them. The 1994 summary of *Finance Week*’s Allan Greenblo seems apt:

> At the nitty-gritty of this noble 'editorial independence' concept is the reality that the board which owns a newspaper appoints its editor. No board will appoint or retain an editor who bucks its persuasions. ... Thus the controlling shareholder, who appoints the board, is not incidental but pivotal. From there a convergence of thought process between controlling shareholder, board and editor is as osmotic in TML and Argus as in Perskor and Nasionale [Pers].

59 Alan Greenblo, "He who pays the piper," *Finance Week*, 20 January 1994. In *The Press As Opposition*, Potter painted the gatekeeping measures adopted by Argus and SAAN in broad strokes. "All editors of Argus newspapers in recent times were appointed from within the group itself: they were tried and tested Argus Group men, conscious of management and of circulation and of the advertising problems of newspapers. Thus from the outset there was a measure of uniformity about the men selected to edit Argus Group newspapers ... Yet every Argus editor expressed his firm adherence to the principle of editorial independence and the expectation that the newspaper ought to reflect the personality of the editor." At SAAN, meanwhile, the autonomy of editors from managers and owners was superficially greater, but still did not run deep, according to Potter. "Undoubtedly the SAAN Group newspapers were much less management-ownership controlled than the newspapers of the Argus Group, and editorial independence from proprietorial interference was extensive. But it is also true that editors were selected from within a reasonably limited political spectrum." The editors of the 1960s and 1970s apparently pushed these boundaries, resulting in protracted conflicts between owners/managers and editors, or — to use our terminology — between mobilizing and professional imperatives. Potter, *The Press As Opposition*, pp. 60, 63.
What is at work here is nothing more than the standard "gatekeeping" by which newspapers, and indeed all institutions, work to ensure that like-minded individuals and only like-minded individuals ascend to positions of influence. Clive Emdon, who worked for two papers in the Argus chain, recalled his own interrogation by the gatekeepers: "As a 24-year-old, I applied to the Cape Argus for a job. I went through five interviews! And long interviews, complex interviews. I finally said to the last guy: Why am I being asked so many questions? Are you trying to find out my politics?" And he said, 'Yes!' Now, if they did that with a very junior person, you can imagine what you have to go through to become an editor."

Or to remain one, perhaps. Despite the generally long leash that sponsors extended to editors, post-facto interference and disciplining — up to and including dismissals of editors and other high-profile staff — was routine throughout the apartheid era. The Rand Daily Mail, for example, saw the defenestration of no fewer than three chief editors — beginning in 1966 with Lawrence Gandar, sacked "in a tactical move to placate government hostility"; continuing with Raymond Louw; and concluding with Allister Sparks' dismissal in June 1981. These were precisely the editors who pushed the boundaries of the English model furthest, moving the Mail to the very forefront of world journalism, but also threatening the unspoken ideological underpinnings of the model that guided the English press. Junior reporters felt the hand of discipline in their own fashion: the guardians of the mobilizing imperative were the editors who handled, and sometimes manhandled, their raw copy. Andrew Beattie recalled in 1995:

When I did the cadet course at The Star, I'd already been a student at Wits [the University of Witwatersrand], which at that time was quite an active university in the struggle against apartheid. So I came into journalism with the mindset that I wanted to be an activist against apartheid. On the cadet course, they told me, "You can't change the world." They told us we had to be objective. You weren't allowed to bring your own point of view into the story. But basically, what they were saying was: "You work for the Argus company now." And you will write in their kind of style, and from their point of view. Yeah, self-censorship definitely was there. ... It was something that you struggled against, because there were a lot of stories that were published, and could be published, which did rock the boat. You could actually continue to work for the Argus Company and break all the rules. But your career wouldn't go very well.

Whatever gatekeeping took place at the lowest levels of the institution, it rarely came to public light. In high-profile cases like the dismissal of successive Rand Daily Mail editors, the
justification given by sponsors was that the firings were a response to the Mail's ongoing financial losses. This serves as a reminder that in the mobilizing scheme imposed on the English press, party-political considerations were subordinate to the overriding imperative of profit in the marketplace. And whatever changes may have occurred in the surface political orientation of the English press since 1990, the profit imperative remains unabashedly dominant. In 1995, for example, Independent Newspapers Group Manager John Featherstone charged the new editor of The Star, Peter Sullivan, with the obligation to “produce newspapers of the highest standards possible, editorially, technically and commercially.” But the sine qua non for the exercising of the professional imperative was profit: The Star should “operate on a profitable basis so that those standards can be maintained, thus ensuring the group’s leadership in providing information and entertainment, and, at the same time, giving shareholders a reasonable return on their investments.” 61 At Argus’s Black flagship, Sowetan, there was the same emphasis on managing the paper “as an independent, profitable, commercial enterprise, recognising that editorial independence and commercial independence are closely linked.” 62

Wherever profit and professionalism are blurred in this manner, there exists a danger that the boundaries between journalism and commerce will be also. The result can be dilemmas for reporters delegated to cover business activities. In a 1995 interview, Ross Herbert, a Star business reporter, offered a valuable spin on some of the typical quandaries that could arise: he had reversed the usual pattern of press migration, moving from the U.S. to South Africa. He was startled by the erosion of professional values that was apparent in the latter environment, perhaps as a reflection of the longstanding monopolistic features of the South African press:

I think the more common and insidious kind [of corporate influences] are the ones that are not by grand corporate design, but represent a sort of corrupt neglect on the business side [of the newspaper]. You have people coming to you, and they’re a buddy of someone they used to work for, and you’re repeatedly having the same story put on your plate: “Can you

61 Quoted in Peter Sullivan, “Tell me how I measure up,” The Star, 17 March 1995. Featherstone’s comments vary little from the apartheid-era mission statement cited by former Star editor Harvey Tyson, which also linked profitability to professional functioning – though Tyson depicted profit as subordinate in the equation: “Some put power first. Some have better motives. I edited a newspaper under a company mission statement of which I was extremely proud: We shall make profits in order to produce good newspapers” … which means that profit was not the major aim. Our major goal was to produce newspapers of quality that would serve the community – the whole community; the whole country, and not any group or any single sectional interest. Yet to be independent a newspaper must make a profit.” Tyson, Editors Under Fire, p. 358. Emphasis added.
do something with this? There’s got to be a story in this.” You’re saying, “This is crap, it’s not a story.” It hasn’t got to the point where [someone has said], “You have to do this story.” But there are certainly instances where you know damn well that so-and-so is a buddy of this guy, or did consulting work for them, or whatever. And there’s quite a thing here of doing journalism and P.R. at the same time, often for the same people. Stories get into the paper, they write the press release and put it into their own column, that kind of thing. ... It’s all predicated on the fact that if you bite the hand that feeds you, you get no more stories.

The Star recognized, at least pro forma, the professional dangers represented by “vested interest[s],” including “commerce” — if its published Code of Ethics is any indication. But other accounts also suggested significant shortfalls in daily practice. “About 1990,” a Star reporter stated (not for attribution), “I wrote a story on [company name removed]. It was quite a big story, published on page two. It appeared on Saturday. On Monday I went to work, and they had the Managing Director of [company name removed] on the phone, screaming and shouting at me. I insisted that everything I had written was true, slammed the phone down. Next thing I knew, one of the former deputy editors comes trotting through and insists that from now on, any stories I write on the issue should be sent to him for approval. I never wrote another story on that again, out of principle.”

According to several sources, one of the main mechanisms by which the profit imperative supervenes professional ones is the “editor’s request.” “The first thing the news editor says is, ‘We’ve got this story, it’s an editor’s request,’” one reporter stated, again not for attribution. “And that means, ‘This story will get in the paper, and you’d better fucking get the story.’” Often the story itself seems to have little merit apart from the narrow business interests that it serves. Ironically, in the opinion of one Star staffer, “the big champion of editorial independence” — former editor Richard Steyn — was “a very bad editor for actually putting his own friends from the Rand Club in stories in the paper.” Another remembered “regularly” being assigned to cover gatherings of an association that Steyn chaired: “I was sent out to cover these stupid bloody meetings where about ten people would turn up, and it would be on page two or page three the next day because it had ‘editor’s request’ on it.”

Among the commercial interests capable of shaping the editorial agenda of The Star in this fashion, those that actually owned the paper could be expected to carry the greatest clout. One Star staffer described, not for attribution, an event s/he felt was typical of the way editorial content was
regularly affected by petty commercial considerations under John Featherstone's new managerial order:

Caxton Publications tried to prevent us from publishing our local pullout sections [in The Star]. As a result of this, there was a court case, and the court found in Argus's favour yesterday, nine o'clock in the morning. Nobody informed us it was going to be held at nine; the courts usually open at ten. As a result, The Star missed it. ... [Editor] Peter Sullivan was up speaking to John Featherstone, and Featherstone was outraged that we had not carried the judge's criticism of one of the directors of Caxton, saying that he had contradicted himself and basically made a fool of himself. As a result, Peter Sullivan was in the newsroom yesterday, going, "We've got to carry this story! We've got to carry the story in as many editions as possible!" People were running around, they were sent off to the courts — this is after hours, around five in the afternoon — to try to get a taped transcript of the proceedings so we could write what a big fool Terry Moolman [Managing Director of Caxton Publications] was — because Featherstone wanted it done. Why are we going to all this trouble? Is it because Peter Sullivan wants it? Is it because the news editors feel it's a newsworthy thing? Or is it because John Featherstone has got a personal vendetta against Mr. Moolman, and feels that Mr. Moolman slipped up somewhere and he would like to see this in the paper please! As a result, everyone's running around like chickens without a head trying to get it into the paper. So where's your editorial independence there? And if it's a small, petty thing like this making it into the paper, what's going to happen when it becomes a big, important thing?

The essence of the "negotiated transition" that brought about the end of minority rule in South Africa explicitly left in place the market underpinnings of the national economy. For this reason, perhaps, the workings of the profit imperative, and its potential pitfalls in the professional sphere, have received rather less attention than the apartheid-era political imperatives which have come in for their share of criticism and concern. It is thus easy to overlook the extent to which the profit imperative has evolved in recent years, undermining even the limited editorial independence from mobilizing concerns that is central to the English model. The media of the new South Africa are as responsive as any to global trends of "downsizing," "efficiency," and "modernization" — that is, greater profits. Many now view the English model as an anachronism, and a greater emphasis on purely market considerations as desirable. John Featherstone offered these comments from the vantage point of Independent Newspapers' chief executive officer:

It [editorial independence] is a hangover from the church-and-state mentality that was appropriate at the time of the Nationalist government, where we did everything possible and went to extreme lengths to separate editorial [operations] from management so that we could protect the papers from potential government attack. It's a totally inappropriate way to run modern newspapers, where you have to serve a market, you have to provide readers with a package which is acceptable to them. And you have to decide where that package is going.
The Star's editor, Peter Sullivan, similarly referred to the underpinnings of the English model as a "misnomer." Though he was strongly critical of the way the dismissal of his predecessor, Richard Steyn, was handled, Sullivan carried Featherstone's analysis further still, arguing that when it comes to editorial independence, "no such thing exists":

What is an editor independent of? Of the owner? Of advertising? Of the world around him? Of commercial pressures? Well, the reality is that Richard [Steyn] was not independent of commercial pressures. He understood them very well. And he did his best to counter them. That "independence" was really, I believe, a misnomer. It should be called editorial integrity. The integrity is that when the pressure does arrive, you are able to say that advertisers, individual advertisers, are unable to affect the editorial content of the newspaper.\(^{68}\)

But this moves our analysis into fresh territory – namely, the forces and factors that have shaped and constrained South Africa's English press since the onset of transition in 1990. To what extent are continuities evident – in press-regime relations, institutional structures, and the task of daily journalism? Likewise, to what extent have the extraordinary transformations in the political sphere been duplicated by those in the English press?

**Regime Policy and the Parameters of Transition**

"Hostility towards the media from democratically-elected governments [in Southern Africa] is on the increase," wrote the Windhoek-based Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) in a May 1996 report. "The honeymoon which media in many countries enjoyed during periods of democratic transition is definitely over, while a lack of unity, resources, skills and professionalism within the media has left the profession in poor shape to defend itself."

\(^{68}\)Featherstone's and Sullivan's outlook may represent a reassertion of a specifically Argus-inspired model of editor-manager relations on the South African press scene. According to Elaine Potter, "The powerful central organization of the [Argus] group, and its emphasis on management qualities tended to produce editors with marked management capabilities and stressed the editor in his role as administrator rather than 'personality'... The administrative-editor is a common enough feature of large modern newspapers but the editors of the Argus newspapers were very clearly of this mould, distinguishing them from editors of other newspaper groups in South Africa." This may account for the less swashbuckling approach to political opposition taken by The Star and other Argus ships of the line during the 1960s and 1970s, by comparison with SAAN's The Rand Daily Mail. It may also help to explain the greater financial success, as evidenced by the continuing survival, of the Argus (Independent Newspapers) chain versus SAAN, which had to die and be resurrected as a more streamlined TML in order to ride out the media upheavals of the mid-1980s. To the extent that Potter's assertion is credited, it prompts a further reassessment of the meaningful "space" open to exponents of the professional imperative, even under the English press model. Potter, *The Press As Opposition*, p. 60.
It was hard to argue with this appraisal of the regional trend. But to what extent did South Africa follow it? There was plenty of evidence, after South Africa's first free elections, that the new ANC-dominated regime had a bone to pick with the press – particularly (perhaps surprisingly) with the English press, both Black and White. Things came to a head in an escalating series of confrontations and rhetorical clashes in the latter half of 1996. In August of that year, Nelson Mandela accused the media – not just the White-dominated media – of waging a racist campaign against scandal-plagued Minister of Health Nkosazana Zuma. He summoned City Press editor Kulu Sibiya and gave him a “stern-faced” dressing down for an editorial that had charged Mandela with “unnecessary interference” in a judicial appointment. Five days later, Mandela took his first public swipe against unnamed “senior” Black journalists, accusing them of “think[ing] freedom of speech is theirs alone.”

The campaign reached a crescendo in November, when, in media appearances and dinner speeches, Mandela lashed out in turn at White newspaper interests and senior Black journalists, depicting them as forming a subversive nexus. In an appearance on SABC state television on 12 November, Mandela echoed the allegations against a “type of senior journalists – and there are a few – who regret we have destroyed white supremacy in this country, and who are taking out their venom on the one organisation that has brought about radical change in this country.” At a business meeting hosted by the ANC two days later, Mandela argued: “The media is still controlled by conservative elements of a tiny minority of the population. They have co-opted certain senior black journalists to do their dirty work and destroy this ... government ... They think they can turn whites against transformation.”

The newly-formed South African National Editors’ Forum (SANEF) accused Mandela of endangering Black journalists by singling them out for his wrath. Apart from Sibiya of City Press, the implicit targets included The Star and its political columnist, Kaizer Nyatsumba, who had written columns referring to Mandela’s “autocratic behaviour” and possible “growing senility.” Other Star stories claimed Mandela had threatened to resign, and that he was at loggerheads with Deputy President Thabo Mbeki. Carl Niehaus, a senior ANC figure, assailed the paper for “gutter journalism ... based on misinformed opinion, distorted facts and in some instances outright lies.”

---

The Star denounced "President Mandela's personal smear campaign," calling it "as unsubstantiated, unbalanced and ridiculous as that waged by the [apartheid regime] during the worst days of total onslaught." For Business Day, Mandela's "rantings" would leave "foreigners wondering just how long our vibrant new democracy will last." Black journalists, for their part, requested and received a meeting with Mandela on 18 November, during which "he undertook not to repeat allegations that they were being used by their white bosses to undermine the government." Thami Mazwai, chair of the newly-created National Editor's Forum and leader of the delegation to Mandela's residence, told journalists that the president had made the assurance provisional on the press not "overstretching the limit" in its coverage.66

Such incidents, and wider authoritarian strands in ANC political thinking and practice, raised concerns that South Africa might be moving closer towards the standard postcolonial press model in Africa, where subservience to regimes and their mobilizing imperatives was the most common practice. The example of neighbouring Zimbabwe loomed: a country that had engineered the same transition as South Africa from racialist to majority rule, but where the new regime proved "unashamedly hostile to pluralism and an independent press," perpetuating the traditional state broadcasting monopoly and gradually acquiring ownership of 90 percent of Zimbabwean newspapers.67 There was still plenty of punitive legislation on the books in South Africa, the result, it seemed, of simple inertia; and the state's — or at least the bureaucracy's — censorious tendencies seemed still present, if more covertly expressed.

It was perhaps surprising that the Zimbabwean example, and the authoritarian trend more generally, seemed very remote prospects to South African editors and journalists in mid-1995, when

24 November 1996; FXI Update, November 1996. The regime appeared to reserve particular venom for what it saw as rumour-mongering concerning Nelson Mandela's successor — something of a sore point, given Mandela's iconic centrality to the transition process, and the absence of a leader of corresponding stature elsewhere in ANC ranks. Reacting to rumours in late 1994 that ANC Secretary-General would step down in favour of Thabo Mbeki, the ANC released a statement "once again calling upon members of the press to refrain from malicious reporting on ANC matters, but [sic] to be objective and observe the ethics of professional journalism" (MISA Free Press, e-mail edition, December 1994/January 1995). The controversies of late 1996 were likewise sparked in part by a Star story suggesting that Mandela had disowned Mbeki as Deputy President and heir apparent. Emphasizing the significance of economic and international constraints, the effect of the rumours on domestic stock exchanges and foreign investment were prominent in the critiques: ANC spokesperson Carl Niehaus said the Mbeki story and others had "seriously impacted on international perceptions about the political stability of South Africa." Hamilton, "Mandela lashes out."66

66FXI Update, October/November 1996.
most of the trends just noted were amply evident. Media workers were just as likely to aim their criticisms at the deficiencies of the transitional press, and to acknowledge the merits of much of the ANC criticism. They, together with this analyst, were more inclined to see press-regime tensions as the predictable growing pains of transition — a transition in which both main players were grappling with uncertainty and internal reorientation. The “honeymoon,” it appeared, was not yet over.

Regime actions were still viewed in the context of the broader, truly staggering transformations in civil freedoms and regime media policy. Mail & Guardian editor Anton Harber was only speaking the obvious when he stressed that

If you look at the statute books, there is all sorts of residual legislation that remains in place. It’s all ignored. The fact is we have an extraordinary freedom. That’s the perspective you need to keep. Although we’ve had criticism and attacks from government spokesmen, not one of them has even hinted that they’re looking at changing our constitutional protections. We have an extraordinary constitution on this issue, which I think is not often realized. It’s true that our Bill of Rights gives us a lesser protection than the First Amendment does. But written into our constitution is that what they’re attempting to create is not just democracy, but open democracy. That’s the phrase used again and again in the [draft] constitution. I don’t know another constitution where that’s the case.

Allister Sparks likewise saw “a remarkable degree of tolerance” on the ANC’s part. “You don’t get many parties coming into power after a revolution who then promptly pass an equivalent of the American First Amendment, which you don’t even have in Britain or most of the western democracies. I think it’s a very unusual and rare commitment to press freedom.” Sparks, in fact, went so far as to criticize the press criticism of the government’s criticism! He argued:

If the press is free to criticize government, government must be free to criticize the press. And I think there’s plenty of room for criticizing. You know, the level of error is very high. And poor reporting, lack of backgrounding, misjudgment. ... If you’re going to turn out that kind of newspaper, you mustn’t then whinge if the government complains about misreporting. Press freedom doesn’t mean a license to misreport. But here, you just chuck anything straight in [to the papers], because of the neglect of journalism over such a long period. For a government to be tolerant of that is quite tough.68

The new freedoms were so extensive and unprecedented for South African journalists that they appeared to pose professional obstacles of their own. The efforts at “transparency” in government deliberations translated into an inundation of raw data, committee meetings, and

68See also the editorial, “Stop whingeing!,” in the Weekly Mail & Guardian, 13-20 April 1995: “Why is it that journalists expect everyone else to take their jibes and live with their probing, and are so reluctant to take it themselves? ... Free speech in this country depends on our convincing politicians to live with robust public debate, even when it’s hurtful. If we want them to accept this, surely we must do so ourselves?”
debates; many journalists and editors found the flood of information literally overwhelming. “There’s too few journalists and too much information,” said Jeanette Minnie of the Freedom of Expression Institute:

Parliament has 36 committees sitting all at the same time, dealing with very important things, reviewing legislation ... Apart from all the committees, there’s so many press conferences going on, and then they still have to cover the ordinary parliamentary debate. Maybe there’s one or two people per newspaper. They can’t cover it completely, it’s absolutely impossible. [Some journalists are] almost saying there’s a limitation on press freedom now because there’s too few journalists to sift through the information! They’re not saying they should write all of it, of course, but they can’t get to it to decide what’s important and what isn’t; what the public should know, and what we can do without.

We will see later in the chapter that the new openness has led, in certain cases, to a bewildering loss of professional identity – both for media that sympathized with the apartheid regime, and those that criticized it or crusaded against it. The new freedoms reflect transition’s usual stew of inputs — global and domestic political economies; ANC theory and praxis; the partially independent dynamics of the mass-based liberation movement; the structure of the new constitutional committees and courts; the collective weight of media reporting and editorializing; and transformations, sometimes amorphous, at the level of popular culture and the prevailing moral and political “climate.” Many of these features can be analyzed under the rubric of regime policy, since they appear to be the formative influences on that policy; and it is to this policy that we now turn.

THE MEDIA AND THE “GRAND BARGAIN”

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War – events that gave a crucial spur to the South African transition in the 1990s – the ne plus ultra of insurgent market forces was the globalized economy. With the last entrenched ideological and economic challenger

69 This was, in fact, typical of the concerns of intellectuals and creative artists in the post-apartheid era. As Transvaal farmers grappled with the cognitive dissonance of a Black majority government that actually allowed them to keep their land and increase their prosperity, so too did those who had constituted the mainstream or “underground” cultural opposition to apartheid struggle to find their bearings, now that the bête noire was beating a retreat. Political satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys noted in 1995: “In the old days, there were so many rules to break, so many laws to defy, that it was a very noble battle. Now it’s so easy to get up and say what you like that no one is interested.” Artists, meanwhile – according to Sophie Perryer, Arts Editor of the Mail & Guardian – “are struggling because there aren’t any limits to push against. People have been left absolutely stranded without statements to make.” Uys and Perryer quoted in Bob Drogin, “South Africa gets own Archie Bunker,” The Vancouver Sun (from the Los Angeles Times), 6 January 1996.
to capitalism in terminal disarray, the "end of history" was pronounced. Hereafter, nation-states would gradually integrate into a global-trade regime, built around open (therefore "efficient") economies subject to the disciplinary actions of market-driven actors, from international economic institutions to bond traders and corporate investors. As the peoples of the world were drawn further into the "liberal" economic model first pioneered (and globalized) by the West in the 19th century, political liberalism — in the form of modern, pluralist democracies — would surely follow. These tenets represented a new, in some ways unprecedentedly powerful, dogma. In January 1997, Ignacio Ramonet, editor of Le monde diplomatique, provided a term for this new and somewhat suffocating orthodoxy: globalitarianism. "Globalitarian regimes," he wrote, "admit no other policy [than a market-driven one], subordinate the social rights of citizens to the competitive ethos, and hand over to financial markets complete control of the activities of dominated societies."

In the last two or three years, forces of opposition to this global model have begun to assemble. Few commentators, however, would dare suggest that the opposition is anything other than scattered and unfocused. For now, "globalitarian" ideologies, and their domestic "liberal" (or neo-liberal) prescriptions, command the field. They certainly predominated at the time that the "Grand Bargain" was struck to liberate South Africa from minority rule. The essence of that bargain was a) one-person, one-vote political democracy; and b) preservation of the underpinnings of the apartheid-era economy: private property and the free market.70 "Blacks get the vote, whites keep the economy," was Adam Hochschild's skeptical summary. The arrangement, he noted, was "spelled out very explicitly in the country's transition-period constitution," with its entrenching of pensions and property rights, and its injunctions against largescale "redistribution of commercial and industrial wealth." As a result, changes in wealth distribution will be "agonizingly, glacially slow."71

The "globalitarian" foundation of the transition received a further buttressing in mid-1996, when the regime introduced a macroeconomic policy that (in Reuters' summary) "seeks to harness fiscal discipline, wage and price moderation, industrial incentives and trade liberalization to encourage local and foreign investment and boost exports, jobs creation and economic growth." In

70 I use the term "orientation" because an evaluation of the apartheid economy must attend to the powerful state presence in the economy, as both owner of property and manipulator of the market to benefit Whites, notably Afrikaners.

a discussion document leaked to the press in November 1996, ANC leaders argued that these measures were unavoidable:

The democratic movement must resist the illusion that a democratic South Africa can be insulated from the processes which characterize world development. It must resist the thinking that ... South Africa [can] elaborate solutions which are in discord with the rest of the world, but which can be sustained by virtue of a voluntarist South African experiment of a special type, a world of anti-apartheid campaigners, who, out of loyalty to us, would support and sustain such voluntarism.72

In the domestic context, the perceived global reality translates to a respect for the structure and basic functioning of the institutions and corporations that constitute the White-dominated economy — newspapers and most other media among them. But there is a crucial tradeoff. In return for being allowed to retain their traditional market orientation, these corporations and institutions must change — both in terms of their ownership and shareholding structures, and in their staffing. The concepts of “affirmative action” and “Black advancement” may not be constitutionally entrenched (beyond provisions guaranteeing non-discrimination in hiring); but they are an unspoken convention of the grand bargain that is well understood by the key players. The convention, moreover, assumed practical form very early in the transition. We will consider its impact at the level of individual institutions later in the chapter, and throughout the case-studies that follow.

This, then, is the delicate balancing-act that the regime and corporate/institutional interests confront in the new South Africa: “trying to meet the pent-up aspirations of millions while proving [the regime’s] free-market credentials and [maintaining] political stability.”73 Mass concerns are central to the ANC’s project, as long as it survives as a cohesive political force and depends on the popular vote for re-election. But change cannot occur at such a pace that the pillars of the old regime are violently shattered. Government intervention, notably in the form of punitive legislation, must be sparing — to avoid an exodus of White capital and skills, as well as accusations of heavy-handedness or authoritarianism from the international community, with the loss of “investor confidence” that would certainly follow.

---

72Document quoted in “S. Africa’s ANC urges left to ease ideology,” Reuters dispatch, 10 November 1996 (clari.world.africa.south_africa).

73Source?
The protections for mass media, and civil freedoms more generally, enshrined in the 1996 South African Constitution are indeed impressive – the more so since the post-apartheid regime has largely abided by them:

16(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes –
   (a) freedom of the press and other media;
   (b) freedom to receive and impart information and ideas;
   (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
   (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

The only substantial modification to the freedom-of-expression provisions entertained during the constitutional negotiations of 1993-96 centred on the issue of access to information. The 1993 Interim Constitution originally stated that “Every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the state or any of its organs at any level of government,” but added a controversial qualification: “in so far as such information is required for the exercise or protection of any of his or her rights.” This need-to-know provision sparked much debate, and was reworked for the final draft along notably more libertarian lines:

32(1) Everyone has the right of access to –
   (a) any information held by the state; and
   (b) any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.

The protections for mass media, and civil freedoms more generally, enshrined in the 1996 South African Constitution are indeed impressive – the more so since the post-apartheid regime has largely abided by them:

16(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes –
   (a) freedom of the press and other media;
   (b) freedom to receive and impart information and ideas;
   (c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
   (d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

The only substantial modification to the freedom-of-expression provisions entertained during the constitutional negotiations of 1993-96 centred on the issue of access to information. The 1993 Interim Constitution originally stated that “Every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the state or any of its organs at any level of government,” but added a controversial qualification: “in so far as such information is required for the exercise or protection of any of his or her rights.” This need-to-know provision sparked much debate, and was reworked for the final draft along notably more libertarian lines:

32(1) Everyone has the right of access to –
   (a) any information held by the state; and
   (b) any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.

These provisions were obviously important to the White minority seeking to preserve its economic privilege, and to an international community that championed liberal-democratic political values along with the market economy. But it is important to recognize that they also – perhaps

74The constitutional right to freedom of expression is limited only to guard against “propaganda for war; incitement of imminent violence; or advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm” (16(2)). These qualifications evoked little controversy. In 1994 South Africa signed two treaties (the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) that oblige signatories to impose criminal penalties for disseminating racist propaganda or (as the latter agreement phrases it) “any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence.” These quotes from the constitution and international agreements are drawn from Lene Johannessen and Tracy Cohen, Media Law and Practice in Southern Africa, No. 1: South Africa (Johannesburg: Article 19, November 1996). According to the authors, who are given to understatement “These constitutional provisions for the most part appear to provide a reasonably satisfactory protection of the right to freedom of expression. Indeed, in some respects they offer a more explicit guarantee than international standards and many other countries’ constitutional provisions, for instance by specifically including freedom of the press.”

primarily — reflect a century-old struggle to end racialist rule. That struggle was guided by a variety of philosophical and religious influences; but at its heart was a democratic vision founded on individual integrity, regardless of race. Certainly this was true of the parties and organizations that made up the African National Congress, the vanguard of the liberation movement from its founding in 1912. These founding principles supervene the predictable tensions in relations among regime, press, and civil society, according to The Star's political columnist, Kaizer Nyatsumba (a target, as noted, of some of the harshest regime criticisms in the post-apartheid era):

One has to distinguish between official ANC policy and what is happening on the ground. The ANC as a party is committed to press freedom. They have fought for these things; they really do mean it when they say they're committed. There come times when the ANC leadership and some people within the party, as in most political parties around the world, wish they were able to dictate to the press what to write and how to present it. ... But they cannot possibly do this, because there's a fundamental bill of rights, and Chapter 3 of the constitution; there's a constitutional court which will strike down any legislation that seems to infringe the rights contained in the fundamental bill of rights.

He added: "I do think people like Mandela and [Deputy President] Thabo Mbeki, who are also very sensitive to criticism, are nonetheless very committed to press freedom." In his postscript to Harvey Tyson's book Editors Under Fire, Mandela himself argued that the role of a free press would be vital in the new era:

I cannot overemphasise the value we place on a free, independent and outspoken press in the democratic South Africa we hope to build. It will temper the appetite of any government to amass power at the expense of the citizen. A free press will be the vigilant watchdog of the South African public against the temptation to abuse power. ... Even newspapers which were broadly sympathetic [to the liberation movements under apartheid] should criticise when they feel it is necessary. ... I have no doubt that the press is playing, and will continue to play, a vital role in the national debate.76

At the same November 1996 dinner for foreign correspondents where he vowed to "hammer" journalists who "impugn the integrity of my organization," Mandela also paid homage to the classical liberal-democratic model of press functioning, stating that "the media should not be a lapdog ... [but] a watchdog to make sure that our famous revolutionaries remain on course":

Media freedom is not, has not been, and will never be under threat in our country. It is in the selfish interest of the ANC that we should have a probing, robust and critical media ... a questioning media that seeks to expose the weakness of our inherited bureaucracy, security...

76Mandela in Tyson, Editors Under Fire, pp. 411-12.
forces, judiciary and indeed the new politicians themselves who can easily be corrupted by power.77

In a typically forceful analysis from the “moral conscience of the nation,” Archbishop Emeritus Desmond told the 1996 Editors’ Forum that “We need a sycophantic, kow-towing, lickspittle media as much as we need a hole in the head”:

It is quite crucial that we become used to asking the awkward question, “But why?”; to refuse to be browbeaten by those who confuse authoritative with authoritarian; to cultivate the culture in which we refuse to become kow-towing and uncritical, scared of rocking the boat, afraid of not toeing the line.78

Alongside this classical conception of the press’s role, however, there exists a strand of ANC thinking and policymaking that owes more to so-called “developmentalist” conceptions of the mass media. As noted in Chapter 1, these enjoyed a vogue throughout the Third World in the 1970s, culminating in calls for a “New World Information Order” to overturn the structural imbalances in global communication flows. At the level of day-to-day professional functioning, developmentalists stress the responsibility of the journalist to assist in national development projects, rather than adopting a stance of classical “objectivity” and critical distance. As social institutions, newspapers should work to disseminate news of social transformations and successful government-initiated projects; they should concentrate on “the reporting of development processes rather than [discrete] events ... to convey to the reader the continuing and the long-term nature of the process of economic and social change.”

Developmentalist influences were prominent in the ANC’s major policy statement on the media, “Towards a Media Charter,” issued in 1992. The draft charter began by recognizing “the right of all citizens to take part in society’s decision-making process,” which “requires that individuals are armed with the necessary information and have access to contesting options to make informed choices.” To this end, a far-reaching “democratization” of the South African media was proposed, guaranteeing the practical ability of South Africans to utilize national media for developmental ends:

Transition entails movement from a closed society into one based on the free flow of information and the culture of open debate. ... Democracy cannot emerge and flourish without a democratic media. However, declaration of media freedoms on its own is not enough. It has to be underpinned by an equitable distribution of media resources,

77Mandela quoted in Hamilton, “Mandela takes white S. African bosses to task.”
78Tutu quoted in “Watchdog, or pussycat?,” Mail & Guardian, 18-24 October 1996.
development programmes and a deliberate effort to engender the culture of open debate. In our society, this also implies a measure of affirmative action to redress the injustices of apartheid.

Accordingly, given South Africa’s widespread underdevelopment, “Measures shall be taken to ensure that all communities have access to the technical means for the receipt and dissemination of information, including electricity, telecommunications and other facilities. All communities shall have access to the skills required to receive and disseminate information, including the skills of reading and writing.”

The cornerstone of the regime’s developmentalist prescriptions for the wider society was, at the time of fieldwork in 1995, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). ANC leaders repeatedly made plain both that they expected the press to play a leading role in bolstering the RDP, and that they considered it structurally constrained in its ability to do so. In his September 1994 speech to the White-dominated Conference of Editors in Cape Town, President Mandela suggested that the traditional “oppositionist” stance of the English press was anachronistic in the post-apartheid era, and called (in the standard developmentalist fashion) for the press to play its part in the social transformation of the country:

It is absolutely crucial that you [editors] should be searching, critical and even sceptical. At the same time, you also have to exercise the responsibility of accurately reflecting the hopes and fears, aspirations and apprehensions, optimism and pessimism as they exist within society. ... In the new situation of relative normalcy, the challenge is to undergo what some would characterise as a transition from the sensation of conflict to that of reconstruction and development.

Such a transition to a more far-reaching “freedom of expression” for the mass of the population, Mandela made clear, was inhibited by the enduring structure of the White-dominated media:

Firstly, the ownership structure of South Africa’s media, which is not only concentrated in a few hands but reflects the patterns of racial exclusion characteristic of the old era. Secondly, the demographic composition of management, editorial executives and senior journalists which mirrors the same pattern. Thirdly, broader socio-economic issues such as illiteracy, poverty, lack of media skills, language constraints and so on, all of which limit the ability of the majority to exercise their freedom of expression. You will agree with me that it is crucial for media establishments to act and be seen to be taking the initiative in dealing with these

---

matters, be it in the form of unbundling, training, deployment of personnel or any other relevant actions.80

“Diversity of ownership of media production and distribution facilities shall be ensured,” pledged an internal ANC document, “Towards A Media Charter.”81 What could be done to promote such diversity? Part of the regime’s response was the “unbundling” of the state broadcasters, a complex process that is outside the purview of this analysis. Another option was direct state intervention and investment in the sphere of alternative media. In September 1994, Deputy President Mbeki himself raised the idea of state subsidies for alternative newspapers and “community media”:

The capacity of the citizenry to intervene, to help to formulate policy, to criticise Government, even to vote governments out of power, depends in good measure on access to information. What are we doing in terms of ensuring that we empower this general public to take part in these processes and to defend democracy against tyrants by making sure that information is available? We must do something to make sure that these people are able to impact on Government.82

He reiterated his concerns at the Arniston conference on government communication in 1995, stressing the need to “search for a solution with regard to community media as well as other media initiatives independent of the large corporations. Many of them are either collapsing or have collapsed under the strain of lack of resources.”83 The state of the alternative press was indeed parlous. Gwen Ansell wrote in 1994 that “After a brief honeymoon during the late 1980s, when donor-funded independents provided a genuine diversity of voices, monopoly is once again the dominant characteristic of the South African print media.”84 The “honeymoon” to which she

80“Media should be optimistic too, says Mandela,” The Star, 7 September 1994. A few months earlier, Mandela had issued a similar critique at the opening session of the general assembly of the International Press Institute (IPI), also in Cape Town: “South African media are still largely dominated by persons drawn almost exclusively from one racial group. With the exception of the Sowetan, the senior editorial staffs of all South Africa’s daily newspapers are cast from the same racial mould. They are white, they are male, they are from a middle class background, they tend to share a very similar life experience. The same holds true for the upper echelons of the electronic media, again with a very few recent exceptions. While no one can object in principle to editors with such a profile, what is disturbing is the threat of one-dimensionality this poses for our media. It is clearly inequitable that, in a country whose population is overwhelmingly black, the principal players in the media have no knowledge of the life experience of that majority.” Quoted in Michael Morris, “In search of media to serve the truth,” The Star, 15 February 1994. For a riposte, see Richard Steyn, “Newspapers maligned,” Saturday Star, 26 February 1994.

81Privately supplied by ANC headquarters, Plein St, Johannesburg.


83Mbeki quoted in “Changing the Face of Government Communication.”

referred saw the advent of publications like Work in Progress, South, New Nation, Learn and Teach, and SPEAK; they were joined by the first-ever liberal Afrikaans weekly paper, Vrye Weekblad, and its English-language counterpart, the Weekly Mail (successor to the defunct Rand Daily Mail). By mid-1994, however, all of these publications save for the Weekly Mail and New Nation, along with numerous others, had ceased publication. New Nation, after several years on life support, was in the process of being folded into Sowetan by the paper’s new Black owners. The Mail itself nearly succumbed in 1990, when a disastrous attempt to publish daily folded after less than a month-and-a-half. The Achilles’ heel of the alternative papers lay in their dependence on foreign funding: Canada, for example, provided Vrye Weekblad’s computer system; South looked mainly to Scandinavian donors; and the Catholic Church backed New Nation. Outside funding ebbed with the transition to majority rule; donors, in Clive Emdon’s words, decided that “there’s now a democratic government in power, and the publications they supported that traditionally helped in the struggle against apartheid now have to make it or not make it in a real market.”

Was more direct intervention in the press conceivable, not to discipline or constrain existing media, but to supplement them? The possibility has been mooted for a number of years of an official or semi-official ANC daily newspaper, which would devote itself wholeheartedly to supporting the regime. In 1993, Pallo Jordan, a principal architect of ANC media policy (and Minister of Posts, Telecommunication & Broadcasting until his abrupt dismissal in 1996), was quoted as predicting an ANC paper would be on the streets before the end of 1993. Launch costs were estimated at R60m, with Lonrho’s Tiny Rowland – a close friend of ANC leader emeritus Oliver Tambo – cited as the most likely main stakeholder. It was rumoured that both Sowetan and –

---

85 In 1992, the paper was bailed out through a deal with the Manchester Guardian, under which it became the Weekly Mail & Guardian, with the British paper becoming the major shareholder and provider of outside editorial content. In early 1997, now named the Mail & Guardian, it was one of only a handful of South African newspapers reporting growth, with an upmarket, multiracial readership (Slightly Left Upwardly Mobile Professionals, or “Slumpies”) that made it highly attractive to advertisers.

86 Jackson, Breaking Story, p. 59.

87 Ansell, “A still small voice.” A mechanism which might have helped the alternative press survive the collapse of international funding was the Independent Media Diversity Trust, a consortium established by the different press groups (both English and Afrikaans) to encourage press diversity and mute ANC criticisms of monopolistic ownership patterns. But the Trust was starved of funds from the start, and by 1996 it was on the verge of collapse. Its patron, Dr. Frederick van Zyl Slabbert, berated the mainstream press for abandoning its commitments. Only “seed money” had reached the project, he protested.
more bizarrely — *The Citizen* were likely candidates for an ANC takeover. Joseph Lelyveld, former South Africa correspondent for *The Washington Post*, revived the idea at a Sowetan Press Freedom Day Seminar in early October 1995. Perhaps surprisingly, the Johannesburg *Star* backed the idea, arguing in an editorial that such a paper would help to defuse the inevitable tensions between press and regime.

In many countries, there are newspapers which actively and vehemently support a political party, especially when that party is in government. The media diversity which is really needed in this country is that kind: a strong, active daily newspaper supporting the ANC almost unconditionally would be a welcome addition to the diversity of newspapers in this country.

At the time of writing, however, nothing had come of the idea, leaving the developmentalist ambitions of the new regime adrift. The folding in 1996 of the Reconstruction and Development Program, supposedly a pillar of ANC policy, meant that South African newspapers — and businesses more generally — would probably have considerable leeway in shaping their own “contribution” to the new nation. Only one policy prescription still seemed essential, though the means and extent of implementation remained ambiguous. This was Black advancement. Few could deny the crying need for overhaul in the media sphere as in all other areas of South Africa’s economy. In late 1995, Deputy President Thabo Mbeki appointed a ten-person task force charged with examining “ownership and control of the media” outside the state broadcasting sector. The commission was authorized to recommend “large scale affirmative action at newspapers — up to the level of editor”; newspaper groups were quick to express concerns that the proceedings would lead to “press bashing” and “pressure from the task team to hand over control of newspapers via the selling-off of large chunks of shares.” But the regime stopped short of imposing quotas for Black

---

88Aggrey Klaaste of *Sowetan* said that prior to the paper’s purchase by Prosper Africa, “there had been rumours that the ANC wanted this paper, because it’s a Black paper with a good circulation and so on.” In 1993 rumours also circulated that the ANC was interested in purchasing *The Citizen* (already popular with Blacks) from its Afrikaner owner, Perskor. “There is no truth in that,” Pallo Jordan stated in 1993, and Perskor attorneys dismissed the rumours as “malicious.” See “Deadline time again,” *Financial Mail*, 29 October 1993.

89*The Star* quoted in FXI Update, October/November 1995.

90A mid-1990s survey of 70 companies by the University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business turned up data indicating that a full 93 percent of managers were White, amidst a 76 percent Black preponderance in the overall population. “Games people play,” Gemini news dispatch in *Sowetan*, 8 February 1995.

91Jacquie Golding-Duffy, “Media task team rattles press groups,” *Mail & Guardian* (World Wide Web site), undated (early 1996). Addressing the Conference of Editors in 1994, Archbishop Desmond Tutu linked the desired transformations to longterm media self-interest: “Most newspapers will, I’m afraid, continue to struggle unless they take advantage of the enormous potential market in the black community. And they won’t do that unless they are
representation in the press and other White-dominated institutions. In keeping with the terms of the “grand bargain,” South African companies and corporations were granted a breathing-space to boost Black representation by their own means. Exactly how much leeway they would receive remained uncertain at the time of writing (early 1999), and will likely stay that way well into the ANC’s second mandate. The government has placed primary emphasis on the state sector of the economy, announcing in January 1995 the ANC announced the reservation of 11,000 affirmative-action appointments to bring greater racial balance to the civil service. But it intended only to “monitor and implement affirmative action measures” in the private sector.

A tougher line emerged with the draft Equal Opportunities Bill submitted to cabinet in November 1994. It gave notice to corporate employers that they were expected to “employ, develop and promote qualified members of disadvantaged groups into positions previously not open to them,” and to “create a work environment and culture that will be open to persons of diverse backgrounds.” It remained in the regime’s interest to keep corporations guessing about how far it was prepared to go. The uncertainty would prompt internal discussion and probably a degree of restructuring, without providing domestic and international critics with opportunities to seize upon “authoritarian” statements or policy measures.

Were these regime measures, and the broad range of constraints and opportunities the transition engendered, sufficient to bring about substantial transformations in South Africa’s English press? What was the character of those changes – both at the level of sponsorship and mobilizing forces, and at the more intimate level of day-to-day professional functioning?


93Quoted in Brian Stuart, “Govt will set up race monitors,” The Citizen, 11 June 1994.

94Erica Jankowitz, “Affirmative action law is drafted,” Business Day, 15 November 1994. Under the terms of the bill, employers would be required to “submit an initial public report to the [equal opportunity] agency giving statistical information concerning affirmative action appointments and an outline of their processes, with penalties of up to R100,000 in fines and/or two years in prison for the recalcitrant.”
CHAPTER 3 – SOUTH AFRICA

Transformation from Without: Shifting Patterns of Press Ownership

The impact of transition on the press is often most immediately and dramatically felt in transformed patterns of media ownership, usually including a greater diversity of sponsorship. The latter tends to result from the partial retreat of the state/regime – generally the most powerful actor in authoritarian systems – from the media sphere. Common intervening variables include the extent of legal restrictions on foreign ownership; the health or, alternatively, poverty of economic sectors distinct from the state or regime; the overall profitability of media (as an incentive or disincentive to private investment, and sometimes to regime investment); the strength or weakness of a party-affiliated press in a pluralistic environment; and the pre-existence of a semi-autonomous “fourth estate” in a given media system. In the South African case, transformations in the area of press ownership and sponsorship were strongly conditioned by a “grand bargain” – the negotiated pact that laid the foundations for the post-apartheid order – and by the ANC’s own policy priorities, as discussed. But wider domestic and international forces were also powerfully evident in the post-1990 transformations. The liberalization of trade regulations and civil freedoms alike decisively shaped the way the press went about its tasks, and who directed it in those endeavours. Other factors included the comparative stability and profitability of mainstream print media, despite much buffeting; the growth of diversified media owners exploiting new and highly-profitable sectors like cable and satellite broadcasting; and the emergence of a Black investor class, mostly in the form of large consortia, in alliance with White managerial and technical elites.

All these elements contributed to the “unbundling” of the English press after 1994. Perhaps one could add a more intangible factor: embarrassment. After 1990, the White hammerlock over South African communications media – with the added symbolic dimension beyond simple commercial monopoly – was widely seen as anachronistic, even odious. The most obvious sign of the “new thinking” was the formal end of Anglo’s longstanding domination of the English press. (Similar measures were taken by the Afrikaner press groups, and will receive passing mention in the Citizen case study.) But this hardly represented an abdication of the media sphere by White capital. In many cases, corporations simply shifted over to broadcast media, where profits could be made in a rapidly-expanding, positive-sum environment. Furthermore, it was not just Black domestic capital that moved in to fill the void. The decline of the traditional press barons was also offset by a new
breed of foreign investors like the Irish “ketchup king,” Tony O’Reilly. Spurred by the end of the sanctions campaign and the highly favourable investment terms offered by the new regime, it was O’Reilly’s Independent Newspapers, rather than any domestic consortium, that became the principal inheritor of Anglo’s empire.

The transformation of Anglo-JCI’s near-monopoly control over South Africa’s English press began with the January 1994 sale of *Sowetan*. As is discussed in greater detail in the *Argus/Sowetan* case-study, the paper was sold to Prosper Africa, one of South Africa’s few Black-owned corporations of any size, and a key component of the Black consortium New Africa Investments Ltd. (NAIL). NAIL subsequently consolidated its role as the largest Black player in the English press environment – both by snapping up several of the publications that the White press groups now appeared eager to unload, and by entering into joint-ownership and co-management arrangements that would allow White sponsors to reduce the racialist tint of their media holdings while maintaining much of the institutional character, and profitability, of their enterprises.

The next piece of evidence of Anglo’s “unbundling” intentions – in its way, equally dramatic and symbolic – came only a month after the partial selling-off of *Sowetan*. In February 1994, Tony O’Reilly purchased a 31 percent controlling stake in Argus Newspapers – announcing, at the same time, a name-change to Independent Newspapers. For the Argus/INP flagship, *The Star*, and for South African journalism more generally, the O’Reilly deal introduced something of an alien and unpredictable element into the mix, since the South African press scene had witnessed very little to that point in the way of outside investment or control. The shift in sponsorship inevitably had repercussions at the professional level, sparking the most important controversy at *The Star* since the transition’s onset – the resignation of editor-in-chief Richard Steyn later in 1994. As is discussed in the *Star* case-study, Steyn was protesting the new alignment of mobilizing and professional imperatives that now had him reporting not to *The Star’s* board of directors, as under

---


96 Although the deal had been completed at the time of fieldwork in Johannesburg in 1995, the formal name-change to INP had not yet taken effect. Hence, the present-tense references to Argus in interview quotes actually refer to INP, for all intents and purposes.
the time-honoured "English model," but to the general manager of a new regional entity, Gauteng Newspapers. The transformation Steyn perceived was from an institutional arrangement that had allowed the paper substantial autonomy, to one that exposed the editor and the newspaper to corporate and petty-commercial constraints.

In March 1994, Argus's joint holdings with TML — the means by which it had exercised control over its major "competitor" — were eliminated. Under the terms of the deal, Tony O'Reilly was granted control over two TML flagships, the Pretoria News and Cape Times, along with a few less-significant publications. Anglo-JCI retained the rest. When the dust had settled, then, Anglo-JCI's near-monopoly over the English press had been replaced by a duumvirate of O'Reilly's INP, accounting for a majority of Anglo's former press holdings; and Anglo-JCI itself, through its continuing control over TML (including the largest-circulation paper in South Africa, the Sunday Times). The only large-circulation English daily not included in the arrangement, The Citizen, underwent a similar transformation, as its Afrikaner owner Perskor merged with Kagiso Trust Investments.

It was highly debatable, though, whether the transformations in sponsorship had done much to change the basic fact of highly-concentrated media ownership, particularly given the failure of alternative media to take root. The Mail & Guardian's Bruce Cohen remained skeptical:

The result [of the unbundling] is that, at the operating level, monopolisation of the English newspaper market is now even more concentrated than before. ... The main difference is that local mining capital has been replaced by foreign ketchup capital [O'Reilly's INP]. ... The degree of concentration in the English press remains unacceptably high with power over the press a privilege of the select few.

It seemed likely that, whatever transformations could be expected in the near-term, powerful continuities would remain at the level of ownership and sponsorship. Would these be

---

97As is explored in detail in the Citizen case study, the Perskor/KTI arrangement likewise did not involve any expectation that the Black partner would quickly assume control over the day-to-day running of the paper. The transformation to a more racially-diverse staff, meanwhile, would be carried out in a manner consistent with the overarching mobilizing imperative: profit.

98Bruce Cohen, "Press monopoly remains," Weekly Mail & Guardian, 18-24 March 1994. Cohen noted that in the wake of the unbundling, "O'Reilly now controls: more than 50 percent of English language daily newspaper sales across the country ... If one adds in O'Reilly's de facto control of the Sowetan [under the management agreement previously referred to], the percentage is much higher): almost 40 percent of English weekend newspaper circulation; a total monopoly — of advertising and sales — of the English daily newspaper market in Cape Town; a similar monopoly in Durban; [and] a prime position in the PWV [the Gauteng region]."
offset by far-reaching changes in the political orientation and professional self-conception of the English press?

**Transformations from Within, I: Political and Professional Reorientation**

Earlier in this chapter, we saw that whatever the insertion of the English press in the economic structure and social fabric of apartheid, and whatever the tacit constraints it respected on criticism and anti-regime activism, the press did present itself to its constituency as an opposition force, at least as far as Afrikaner political hegemony was concerned. This opposition stance, moreover, was not entirely fanciful. The “English model” of liberal journalism may be seen to have bolstered journalists’ view of themselves as a bastion against corrupt and illegitimate rule. This framing of their project gave English journalists room to breathe, politically and professionally, that their Afrikaner colleagues developed only much more slowly. Recall the comment of the Nicaraguan journalist Guillermo Cortés, quoted in Chapter 2: “It’s easier to do journalism from the opposition.” His point, as I interpreted it, was that journalism’s “moral economy” squared more easily with a critical, investigative posture than a passive and pliant one. In the South African case, the English press was additionally confronted by a regime that was contemptuous of basic human rights as nowhere else in the “western” world – a regime that was increasingly anathematized by the rest of the world. English journalists and editors could thus depict themselves – especially retrospectively? – as leaders of the global struggle against apartheid. Political, professional and ethical considerations blended on a quasi-heroic scale.\(^9\)

To the extent that this self-image had a foundation in reality, the legacy of press-as-opposition could be predicted to position the English press well in the post-apartheid era. In fact, though, the South African transition has involved something of an identity crisis for the English press – including Black journalists and editors. Prominent figures of the present and recent past described the challenge in strikingly similar terms and language: to discover a political and professional orientation for the post-apartheid age that would be both personally palatable and

\(^9\)Anyone who doubts that this self-image was both pervasive and somewhat inflated during the apartheid years can consult the histories and memoirs of English press figures of the 1950s to the 1990s. Tyson’s *Editors Under Fire*, the most recent such contribution, is emblematic.
commercially viable. As we have already hinted with our brief analysis of the alternative press, the challenge – again counterintuitively – may have been most acute for those whose opposition was strongest (or where the press-as-opposition motif was most central to the identity of the institution and its individual staff). Typical were the comments of Anton Harber, chief editor of the *Mail and Guardian* at the time of the 1995 fieldwork:

The fact that what we had so firmly stood for and fought for came about, obviously created a very serious crisis of identity for us. It's clear that in 1995, an anti-apartheid newspaper is about as relevant as a newspaper in Britain today fighting for woman's franchise. ... If you look at the way the *Mail and Guardian* was in 1990 and the way it is today [1995], clearly in 1990 we were very much a uni-thematic paper. We had one concern, one issue — “the big one.” We were an overwhelmingly political newspaper. ... We didn't have to say, “How do we get a clear identity?” It was given to us.

*Sowetan*’s Aggrey Klaaste concurred:

In the past, writing was a fight against evil. So there was a kind of passion in the writing. Now people are trying to deal with a new reality, and you can't be too passionate about good things like the Reconstruction and Development Programme. It's a bit difficult to get all fired up over what is happening now. And all fired up about this freedom, which carries with it a great deal of responsibility. We need to be responsible more than I think we were before.

*The Star*’s editor, Peter Sullivan, echoed Klaaste's notion of a connection between critical reporting and professional self-conceptions:

[The transition has brought] major challenges, and major problems. Probably the most difficult challenges have been in the mindsets of the journalists. I became a journalist because I wanted to fight apartheid, and that seemed the best way to do it. ... The epitome of good journalism in this country was when you were hated by the government and loved by the people. That has come to define what journalists do. So those of us that are very good at criticism do very well. Those of us who occasionally praise tend not to do so well. ... Now we have a government that does actually do some things right. And we have to recondition journalists to understand that you have to praise as well as criticise, where that praise is due. That's a very hard thing, because you're re-educating 30 or 40 years of journalism in this country.

*The Weekly Mail*, and to a lesser extent *The Star* and *Sowetan*, responded by trying to strike a balance between the political (and overriding national) imperative of supporting the new order, and the offsetting imperative of a vigilant “watchdog” role. The particular quandaries in which this landed both *Sowetan* and *The Star* will be examined in the joint case-study of these papers that concludes the chapter. On the other hand, *The Citizen* — the very creation of the apartheid regime, and hence the English-language paper one might have expected to suffer the greatest hardship in
the new era – managed to plod on in a largely predictable, moderately successful manner. This apparent anomaly also invites case-study treatment.

Transformations from Within, II: Market reorientation

In 1996, a company called Taxinet established tours to Soweto, the sprawling former “township” (actually the largest city in southern Africa) on the outskirts of Greater Johannesburg. The tours were targeted at “white media planners, marketeers and retailers [who] are grappling with the realities of the black consumer market.” The four-hour visits included informal chats in a shebeen, or neighbourhood drinking spot. They were designed to allow these paragons of the white managerial class to “experience Soweto.” For many, Jacquie Golding-Duffy reported, it was the first glimpse of the living conditions of South Africa’s urban masses they had ever had. “It’s strange but true that they have as much to learn as the overseas tourists,” says Tribius Tshabalala, the independent tour-guide contracted by Taxinet. A Black advertising and marketing executive welcomed the fact that “endeavours are at least being made,” but suggested that “one trip to Soweto will certainly not make media planners experts, and is a mere dipstick into the lifestyles of the main market consumer.” He stressed that it would “also not redeem white media planners” for their past sins.100

The executives’ interest, though tardy and still tentative, was understandable. “From a base of virtually zero in the early 1970s, black purchasing power grew to 40% of the total by the late 1980s,” Robin Morris wrote in 1992, in a book similarly designed to assist White businesses in Marketing to Black Townships.

By 1995 it is expected to reach 50%, and it must be remembered that the cake is growing larger and larger all the time. ... The spending power explosion is not going to stop there. Predictions are that it will continue rising and rising. It is estimated that by the year 2040, when 85-90% of the black population will be urbanised, black spending power will be around 90% of the total.101

This may be an optimistic projection, but for White capital the choice in South Africa is between optimism and self-exile. The transition from apartheid will find enduring expression in the

100Jacquie Golding-Duffy, “Media catch a taxi to Soweto,” Mail & Guardian, 2-6 September 1996.
uplifting of the masses, or it will be stillborn, with chaos and civil strife the likely result. So much depends on eventual mass prosperity, or at least a visible momentum in that direction, that South Africa’s English press has little choice but to plan for the same. As Fergus Sampson of The Star put it in a 1995 interview:

I have no doubt that this government is serious about uplifting the people who voted for them. I have no doubt that the people who voted for this government will not rest until the government actually does something substantial to improve their lot. What that means is that people are going to have more money to spend in the future, if everything goes right. As a business, we have no alternative but to think positively. If you’re going to neglect this market now, you’re going to lose out in the future.

And so the newspapers plan for expanded circulation, greater national reach, increased cross-linkages with other media, and diversified media portfolios. Of these, expanded circulation and territorial outreach are the pillars. They are virtually coequal with expansion into the Black market, since White readership is in longterm decline, in relative though not necessarily absolute terms. The reorientation towards a Black readership also harmonizes well with the (diffuse) mobilizing imperative of the ANC regime. The ANC regime, after all, is making some effort to expand basic services and infrastructure to the dispossessed majority. To the extent that it does so, it will open up fertile new markets for private capital, and new constituencies for newspapers written in the lingua britannica of the new South Africa. To the extent that the English press is seen to be assisting in the process as well as benefitting from it, its credibility with the regime will likely increase, and the limited regime pressures will perhaps diminish — or at least not intensify.

This “reorientation towards Black readers” need not be cast in purely “racial” terms. One of the common features of transition processes is the development of new forms of collective identification within society. New social classes emerge and take hold; new international influences make themselves felt; and new local and regional identities arise. The English press may seek to encourage and exploit the incipient non-racial identifications of South Africans — as generic

---

102 I do not explore these trends in detail in this chapter, but I am referring especially to press-radio linkages (similar to those undertaken by Barricada in the Nicaragua of the early 1990s, and for similar reasons). As an example of media diversification, one could cite the Mail and Guardian’s and Sowetan’s forays into radio and (in the case of the Mail) Internet and other new-media linkages.

103 White audiences will, of course, continue to hold a disproportionate appeal for most English newspapers, since the spending power they command will make them a favoured market for advertisers for a long time to come.

104 Richard Steyn hinted at this when he argued in an interview that “the Black market is seen as where the future is. Certainly it’s where political power is.”
“consumers,” say, or residents of a newly-created province like Gauteng, which consolidates previously fragmented regional identities. Fergus Sampson, a key point-person in The Star’s new outreach campaigns, offered an intriguing if speculative glimpse of such a future:

The market that we operate in, Johannesburg, is largely cosmopolitan. And indications are that it’ll become more so. There’ll be fewer distinctive groups, sectors, and sections. I think we’ll have a kind of melting pot sooner than we think. The cultural hangups people have impede, rather than advance, interaction between people. I think government and business, the whole organizational praxis of the [Gauteng] region, will work towards a melting-pot mentality. That would greatly change the demographics, the whole outlook of our market. As a business, we’ll have to be aware of that. What I think will happen is that a city or regional identity will emerge. We’ll be “Gautis” or something. So the racial thing will matter less when it comes to things that are common to us, like a newspaper. It’ll be, like, “Jo’burg’s newspaper,” or “Gauteng’s newspaper.” And that will be reflected in our product and our staff, if we continue on the path we’re going. That should make our newspaper more representative, more appealing to the wider public.

Editor Peter Sullivan’s comments were similar:

We now look at people as being colourless a lot more. That’s very important. We’re starting to look at people the way newspapers do around the world, in terms of psychographics and demographics. So you look at people that earn over 2000 rand a month, or have a luxury car in the home, or several appliances, or their lifestyles. That’s the way we see people now. Only peripherally do we look at whether they’re Black or White. Not as a deliberate tactic, but because it’s the best way to look at the market. That is how you are going to be more successful. Because there are a lot of Black people who are in certain socioeconomic groups, or certain psychographic groups, who identify more with the people in that group, who may be green or white, than they do with Black people generally.

“The days of White newspaper ‘empires,’ or whatever you want to call them, are definitely over,” said Star general manager Graeme King. His statement, as we have seen, requires qualification. But there is little doubt that the kind of dirigiste imperial thinking of the past now shares history’s dustbin with many other mindsets of the apartheid era.
### Table 3.1

**Circulation: Winners and Losers in the Post-Apartheid Press**

*(case-study newspapers appear in bold print)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1986 Circulation</th>
<th>1996 Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Argus</td>
<td>97,603</td>
<td>82,370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Times</td>
<td>60,916</td>
<td>50,894</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily News</td>
<td>89,757</td>
<td>75,205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening Post</td>
<td>21,109</td>
<td>16,978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal Mercury</td>
<td>61,463</td>
<td>48,369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natal Witness</td>
<td>25,688</td>
<td>20,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretoria News</td>
<td>25,982</td>
<td>24,552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Star</td>
<td>201,426</td>
<td>169,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend Star</td>
<td>156,365</td>
<td>138,486</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>489,352</td>
<td>477,204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Tribune</td>
<td>120,850</td>
<td>115,241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend Argus</td>
<td>119,146</td>
<td>115,531</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend Post</td>
<td>43,396</td>
<td>37,287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"WINNERS"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>1986 Circulation</th>
<th>1996 Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business Day</td>
<td>27,998</td>
<td>38,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Citizen</td>
<td>110,746</td>
<td>138,071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Dispatch</td>
<td>32,707</td>
<td>39,147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.F. Advertiser</td>
<td>7,194</td>
<td>7,368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.P. Herald</td>
<td>28,051</td>
<td>31,629</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sowetan</td>
<td>113,675</td>
<td>211,688</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beeld</td>
<td>92,503</td>
<td>118,220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burger</td>
<td>71,584</td>
<td>97,630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volksblad</td>
<td>24,048</td>
<td>28,210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail &amp; Guardian</td>
<td>16,013</td>
<td>30,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport</td>
<td>393,922</td>
<td>398,852</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Press</td>
<td>162,084</td>
<td>271,228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilanga</td>
<td>112,480</td>
<td>119,557</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


TRANSFORMATIONS FROM WITHIN, III:
BLACK EMPOWERMENT AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

Corporate actors in South Africa, including the press, have hardly been sitting idly by waiting for the government to intervene in the critical area of Black advancement. A December 1994 Sapa dispatch claimed that 84 percent of private and public companies had instituted some form of affirmative-action policy, compared with 74 percent in 1993 and just 58 percent in 1992.105 "It's like management has awakened now because they can't evade the issue any longer," said Jeanette Minnie of the Freedom of Expression Institute:

There's been a transition in the country; politically, it's a Black-dominated country now. The government is very firm about the issue of affirmative action. So it's become the buzz thing in every business and organization: if you want to be politically correct and get your public relations to work for you internationally, you have to do it.

Again, it would be reductionist merely to view this as a reflection of regime preferences: the press well understands that the professional imperative of “getting the story” in the new South Africa will be a non-starter if newspapers must rely solely on White journalists to do the job. Affirmative action is thus overdetermined in the South African environment. The readiest parallels are with the post-colonial transitions that have taken place in Southern Africa since 1975: Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia. This provides further support, perhaps, for the contention that South Africa’s transition needs to be viewed in the context of the postwar drive for decolonization as well as the more recent trend of transitions from authoritarian rule.

There are two respects in which the issue of Black advancement/affirmative action dilemma is especially acute for the press. First, well-trained senior journalists (or editors, or managers) are famously mobile creatures. The phenomenon of corporate “headhunting” is rife throughout the South African economy, but it has hit the press particularly hard, perhaps because journalistic training prepares one well for a variety of corporate roles. Affirmative-action programs have been in place for two decades at newspapers like *The Star*: its longstanding cadet-training program has by now produced legions of skilled Black journalists and editors. In the new South Africa, these are “black gold” (in the words of *Star* editor Peter Sullivan). They move with ease into lucrative careers in broadcast journalism, government, the diplomatic corps, and public relations. Sullivan pointed to the trend to help explain and perhaps offset some of the perceived deficiencies in *The Star*’s record on Black advancement. He looked at figures on Black hiring at the paper a little differently from my colleagues. Most of my colleagues look at *The Star* and say, “How Black is this organization?” And we’re not doing terribly well in those terms. *I* look at South African journalism and say, “Gee, look at all our successes. Those are all the stars we’ve put out there. Had they stayed at *The Star*, we would now have a reasonable figure [of Black representation]. But at least we have fed them into the system.” And, I mean, I’m delighted. Where South African journalism is excellent and has Black people, I would venture to say 80 percent of them have come from *The Star*—right at the top of the SABC [Zwelakhe Sisulu], on all the television stations, on all the radio stations, at other newspapers, at Anglo-American, at the Chamber of Mines, at various embassies—all the places that count. I think that’s quite a successful affirmative-action program, seen from a national perspective. Seen from this newspaper’s perspective, it doesn’t look so successful. But I would think that at least 60 percent of the people recruited by *The Star* have been Black. Of those recruits, probably 80 percent of them left *The Star*, but they left with wonderful feelings. Feeling very loyal to *The Star* as they climbed into their BMWs.

106 The Eritrean transition of 1991-93 might also be added to the list.
In addition, to the extent that liberal conceptions predominate in the English press, that press confronts the unique task of showing civil society *its own face*. This is not just a philosophical or professional obligation, but an urgent commercial imperative in a competitive market. For many years, in the absence of any real alternative, the English press was able to meet enough of the informational requirements of Black readers – at least the literate, skilled, upwardly-mobile Blacks who predominated – to keep readers of the "Africa editions" purchasing the product. As the demographics of their readership began to change, many White-dominated papers, notably the *Rand Daily Mail* and *The Star*, began to transform internally, granting a new prominence to Black journalists and photographers. But in the democratic era, this is clearly insufficient. If the English papers wish to secure or preserve credibility among the constituencies that will be their commercial bedrock in the future, it is clear that they must pursue a more dynamic reformulation and reorientation. Of the three newspapers studied here, only one – *The Star* – had faced the dilemma head-on at the time of the 1995 fieldwork. Its early, tentative efforts in this field will be considered in detail in the Argus/Star case study.

**“Libidinization” and the Repealing of Censorship**

The above account has emphasized continuities in the ownership, management, and daily functioning of the South African press in the post-apartheid era. What is missing, perhaps, is some sense of the change that has occurred in the social and cultural spheres. In many respects, these have been nothing short of revolutionary, and they too find their reflection (and sometimes their inspiration) in the mass media. Imagine, for instance, the following enterprise being established in apartheid-era South Africa – or being reported in a breezily libidinous fashion:

---

107 *Sowetan*, of course, had no urgent need to do so, although there are still some interesting things to say about race relations at the newspaper. Another case-study institution, *The Citizen*, found itself more in the situation of the Afrikaans papers: largely lily-White, uninterested in radical change, and editorially prickly about government intervention to redress the situation. See, e.g., “New racism” (editorial), *The Citizen*, 13 June 1994: “Strange, isn’t it? The previous Nationalist government got rid of race classification three years ago. The new ANC-dominated government intends to bring it back. ... We hope the ANC will realise that any form of race monitoring or classification is a throwback to a system that could not be tolerated when it was enforced previously – and cannot be tolerated if it is imposed now.”
Pretoria is SA’s new porn capital

Once considered to be South Africa’s heart of conservatism, if not darkness, Pretoria is finding itself in a grip of jungle fever as copies of “Whoomp,” a video portraying all kinds of acts across the colour divide, topped the best-selling lists last week.

“I’m all sold out, the white guys go crazy for it,” said Eugene Marais, part-owner of the Hustler sex shop in Sunnyside.

Ninety percent of Marais’ customers are white and it’s interesting to note that they seem to prefer the magazines that are directed at the black market, like Black Electric Blue, Home Girls or Black Sexsations.

“I even had one guy who wanted a strap-on black penis but all we had was the flesh colour. He was insistent on it being black though.”

The subject-matter and presentation of the article attest to the South African variant of a phenomenon that is nearly universal in political transitions, but largely ignored by scholarship – despite its manifest relevance to the study of censorship legislation and administration, constitution-building, and the transitional press. I use the term *libidinization* to describe the transformations in sexual culture that standardly accompany liberalization – a theme that is discussed in a comparative context in Chapter 6. For present purposes, there is little doubt that South Africa’s transition should be placed in the first rank as far as both the intensity and the impact of libidinization are concerned:

... South Africa’s political transformation from police state has started a stark social revolution as well, turning one of the world’s most intolerant, oppressive societies into one of its most open and permissive. From gambling to gay rights, from talk shows to literature, startling changes are everywhere in a country once ruled by dour Afrikaners who frowned on public dancing, banned television until 1976 and enforced more than 100 censorship laws in an Orwellian attempt to protect strict Calvinist morality and white supremacy. ... Even more surprising is how little protest, or even debate, the changes have brought. South Africa’s interim constitution, for example, offers such sweeping safeguards to individual rights that it outlaws discrimination against “sexual orientation,” making it the world’s only constitution to specifically protect the rights of homosexuals. ... *Hustler* magazine had a huge advertising billboard of a woman’s bare buttocks towed down major roads until drivers complained that it was causing traffic jams and nearly a few accidents.

---

109 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines libido as “Psychic drive or energy, esp[ecially] that associated with [the] sex instinct.” There is no etymological connection between “liberal” and “libido.” But the varied connotations of the word “liberal” – not to mention the proximity of “liberty” and “libertine” – suggest linkages.
110 Bob Drogin, “South Africa gets own Archie Bunker,” *The Vancouver Sun* (from the *Los Angeles Times*), 6 January 1996. For another good analysis of the South African libidinization, see Bill Keller, “Apartheid’s Gone, and Anything Goes,” *The New York Times*, 28 December 1994: “Shielded by a new Constitution that protects free expression and forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, South Africans have seen the unbanning of sexually explicit films and magazines, uninhibited celebrations of homosexual pride and culture, and a proliferation of sex clubs and erotic cabarets. ... There is even serious speculation that South Africa, one of the last countries on earth
Chapter 3 – South Africa

Libidinization has been so prominent in the South African case because, under apartheid, Afrikaner political conservatism and racial exclusivism was always intimately associated with enforced sexual puritanism. (Hence the link between “strict Calvinist morality and white supremacy” in the passage just quoted.) The agent of enforcement was the legal apparatus of the apartheid state, with its barrage of laws to punish sexual expression and relations across the colour barrier. Thus, the political rejection of apartheid was inextricably caught up with a rejection of apartheid sexual culture.

Apartheid’s linkage between political and sexual repression gave rise to a vast censorship apparatus – one that by the early 1990s was practically self-sustaining, and posed a real obstacle to transformations in the media sphere and political culture more generally. Nearly all of the materials to receive the “XX” classification were cited for their sexually-explicit content. It comes as little surprise, then, that many of the most important legal campaigns to widen the scope of civil freedoms in the new South Africa were fought by publishers and distributors of sexually-explicit materials – notably the South African edition of Hustler. Denounced as “nothing but unbridled licentious pornography of a coarse and obscene nature” by one Supreme Court justice; banned more than any other publication in South Africa under the residual censorship legislation. Hustler nevertheless followed in its American parent’s footsteps by funding, fighting, and winning some of the most important court challenges to the apartheid-era censorship laws.

Meanwhile, and hardly to legalize Playboy magazine, could be among the first to legalize gay marriage.” For an interesting treatment of the specifically female dimension of the libidinization, see Lara Kantor, “Do ‘Girls’ Just Want to Have Fun?,” MediaMask 1: 3 (November/December 1994), pp. 21-25.

The promulgation of a new abortion law can also be cited. The overwhelming (and obligatory) support among ANC ranks for one of the world’s most liberal pieces of legislation on this contentious issue was a reaction, in part, to decades of Afrikaner puritanism. (National Party and Freedom Front representatives accordingly “sat stony-faced” as the abortion bill was approved, 209 to 87, in October 1996.) “The bill clears the way for state-funded abortion on demand during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy and subject to some conditions for a further eight weeks. The draft law gives women and even minor children the sole right to decide whether to have an abortion and specifically states that they need not consult partners or parents.” “S. African assembly adopts abortion law,” Reuters dispatch (clari.world.africa.south_africa), 30 October 1996.


The vanguard role of Hustler’s American parent was perceptively examined by Laura Kipnis in “(Male) Desire and (Female) Disgust: Reading Hustler.” See Kipnis, Ecstasy Unlimited: On Sex, Capital, Gender, and Aesthetics.
coincidentally, publisher Joe Theron oversaw *Hustler's* meteoric rise in circulation: in the year following the inauguration of majority rule, *Hustler* was the fastest-growing publication in South Africa, registering a circulation increase of 67 percent over the previous year.\(^{114}\)

But libidinization and the diverse impulses that spawn it tend to crest. A period of reaction may set in, evident in both commercial and constitutional spheres. By 1996, all of South Africa's sex magazines were experiencing a major slump. *Hustler* had fallen from a high of 195,000 copies in 1995 to just 101,947 in for July-December 1995. *Scope* fell from a circulation of 169,052 in 1994 to 56,637 only a year later. By the end of 1996, both *Scope* and *Playboy* had folded (or perhaps centre-folded).\(^{115}\) A similar retrenchment was visible in regime legislation. The Film and Publications Bill, gazetted in March 1995 and finally passed by parliament in August 1996, was in its original incarnation a powerfully libertarian initiative, adopting a classificatory rather than punitive approach. It proposed to ban (via the enduring "XX" classification) only materials depicting acts involving children under 16, explicit physical or extreme depicted violence, and the promotion of religious hatred. In August 1996, however, via procedures that civil-liberties groups denounced for their backroom character, substantial revisions were made. Among the most significant was the addition of "degrading" materials, ambiguously defined, to the "XX" category — apparently a concession to the ANC Women's Caucus.\(^{116}\)

Johannesburg's Freedom of Expression Institute (FXI) used the occasion to pass a broader verdict on the ANC's commitment to civil liberties, which it perceived to be on the wane:

> Essentially, we find it unacceptable that the further we progress into the transition of this country to democracy, the more censorious our government becomes. These are deeply disturbing tendencies, and we have a duty to ensure that this period of relative freedom of expression does not become an isolated phase in our history.\(^{117}\)


\(^{115}\)See Jacquie Golding-Duffy, "Bottom falls out of SA sex industry," *Mail & Guardian*, 24 December 1996—9 January 1997. According to one commentator quoted: "With the advent of a new government there was a revived sense of freedom in both magazines and films, resulting in a general surge in consumers' interests. However, after a high of about a year, consumers were no longer keen on their newfound freedom."


\(^{117}\)I have conflated commentary here from an FXI press statement issued on 30 August 1996, the day after the bill was passed by parliament, and a "background document" on the Film and Publications Bill, both at the FXI's Website (http://wn.apc.org./fxi/). See also *FXI Update*, July/August 1996. Other amendments in the bill included a
Still, if libidinization's tide tends to recede as transitions progress, it leaves the floodgates open. Viewed in toto, the repudiation of Afrikaner sexual culture has been as general, if not complete, as the destruction of White political dominance. It seems that when it is finally safe to proclaim that the emperor has no clothes – or too many – the dethroning can take place with astonishing speed, with irreversible ripple-effects throughout society, culture, and media.\textsuperscript{118}

With this brief analysis of some of the underlying cultural transformations in 1990s South Africa, we close the general section of this chapter, and turn to a more detailed consideration of the country's three largest newspapers in transition.

---

**FROM RIGHTIST TO “BRIGHTEST”?**

**A CASE-STUDY OF The Citizen**

**INTRODUCTION**

We are not very transparent [as an institution]. Because of the success of The Citizen, we have a lot of enemies.

– Koutie Van Heerden, General Manager, The Citizen

The Citizen is the greatest anomaly in South African journalism. The circumstances of its birth in 1977 have made it the target of near-apocalyptic denunciations. “The shameless spawn of the Info Scandal,” Desmond Tutu called it.\textsuperscript{119} Even those less prone to biblical rhetoric descend to melodrama when The Citizen is the subject of discussion. For Joel Mervis the paper was “born in a morass of lies and deceit” and still stands as “a monument to state corruption.” It was “born in

---

\textsuperscript{118}I do not use the word “irreversible” lightly. It is possible to imagine South Africa returning to political dictatorship, or moving towards a Black-dominated ethnic/racialist regime that would be a grim mirror-image of apartheid. It is possible to imagine civil war, or even socialist revolution, in the country. But it is nearly unimaginable that Afrikaner racialism and sexual puritanism, as a combined politico-cultural force invading the most intimate corners of citizens’ lives, could ever be re-established. With so much that is ambiguous and contingent in political transitions, we should not overlook – or in this case fail to celebrate – such truly revolutionary change.

\textsuperscript{119}Tutu quoted in Finnegan, *Dateline Soweto*, p. 36.
political sin,” Rex Gibson declaimed, “bereft of the legitimacy of the marketplace, secretly funded with our taxpayers’ money ... a joy to the far Right, an enigma to accountants.”

But here this “most notorious of the apartheid-era newspapers” is still — and not merely scraping by, either. It has the most idiosyncratic institutional functioning and physical presentation of any daily newspaper in South Africa; but it has won a devoted readership, making it the third largest daily in the country at the time of writing. Counted out more than once, The Citizen has successfully secured a market niche that is more than apartheid-era smoke and mirrors — as The Star discovered when it launched a court case against its rival in October 1994. Those proceedings saw The Star challenge The Citizen’s Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) figures for the period January-June 1994, charging that they ran too far counter to industry trends to be genuine. The charges were reminiscent of a “dumping” scandal that The Citizen was embroiled in shortly before its propaganda origins became known. Nearly two decades after the ignominy of those earlier revelations, though, the original ABC audit was investigated and confirmed; The Star was forced to pay the costs of the new audit.

In the wake of the case, Ken Owen concluded that The Citizen “has the fading Star in its sights,” and was approaching the highest-ever circulation of The Rand Daily Mail — the paper that had helped to unmask The Citizen in 1978. Citizen editor M.A. “Johnny” Johnson crowed on the leader page that “If our sales went against the trends, it is because more people are buying the paper, confirming The Citizen’s popularity as South Africa’s brightest, newsiest morning newspaper.” Two years later, the paper was still riding high. The survey by Lyndall Campher of the Hunt Lascaris group (see Table 3.1) numbered The Citizen among circulation “winners” in the new South Africa, citing a rise from 110,746 to 138,071 between 1986 and 1996. “The Citizen,” Campher confirmed, “… has found a formula which works.”

---

122140,596 copies daily, up from 136,957 and 134,863 from the previous six-month periods.
This stable market niche is not the only curious aspect of the *Citizen* story. Another is the professional credibility the paper garnered over the years, despite its compromised origins and pro-Nationalist sympathies. In its dowdy and often reactionary way, *The Citizen* — to cite Owen again — has served as "the closest thing to a newspaper of record in South Africa." "For the news of the day, professionally judged and correctly weighted," Owen wrote, "one must go in Johannesburg to *The Citizen*." The visitor to the *Citizen* finds several such comments posted around the newsroom — talismans, perhaps, against the lingering public derision that staff face when they venture outside the Perskor complex in Braamfontein.

This professional credibility reflects the substantial semi-autonomy that characterized the paper's dealings with the Perskor ownership. Any attempt to explain this autonomy leads rapidly to a further striking curiosity of *The Citizen's* functioning, one that dates from the paper's very early days. While "Great Man" theories of history may be out of fashion, the fact is that *The Citizen's* institutional identity was primarily the product of a single powerful personality: Meyer Abraham Johnson, Chief Editor for all but a couple of months of the paper's life. Johnson finally retired in 1998, at the age of 77. But whatever course the paper took after his departure, his formative influence seemed likely to cast a long shadow.

In *The Citizen's* political "line" during the apartheid era, and the tense negotiation process that brought it to an end, there are further surprises. Johnson was "generally faithful" to the Nationalist cause, as Gavin Evans and many others have pointed out. But he was also a "maverick" capable of unexpected nuance — even quasi-liberal posturing. Reading his editorials from the 1980s and early 1990s, it becomes gradually more possible to conceive of Johnson editing *The Rand Daily Mail* in the 1960s — a position he was apparently tipped for.

---

126 Ken Owen, "The habits of free men have atrophied in SA," *Sunday Times*, 23 May 93; Owen, "Decline and fall of the editors," *Sunday Times*, 29 January 1995. In an October 1995 column, "Is the new SA killing the press?" Owen wrote: "Why does *The Citizen* succeed where *The Star* fails? Well, for one thing, despite its shabby appearance, its shaky grammar and its disdain for theories of design and news organisation, it is the better newspaper. It publishes the news."


128 The story has it that Johnson was solidly in the running to head the flagship opposition paper after Laurence Gandar (who, it will be recalled, had proclaimed the *Mail's* "clear and unambiguous political policy" to be "liberal in content and contemporary in spirit"). Instead, Raymond Louw took over. In 1974, Johnson was again rumoured to be in line for "the plum job" of editor of the *Sunday Times*. Once again he was bypassed, according to Gavin Evans because "his rightwing United Party political views were not in line with those of his SAAN bosses," and he left SAAN "in a huff" only to sign on with *The Citizen* two years later. Martin Williams, *Powers of the Press: The World's
The Citizen stood at the time of writing on the cusp of a change that would transform it more thoroughly than at any time in its two decades of life. The details of the project remained unclear at the time of writing, but their overall character was surely established by the dramatic July 1996 announcement that Perskor, the paper’s Afrikaner owner, would merge with Kagiso Trust Investments (KTI), among the most prominent of the new Black investment consortia. The Perskor-KTI merger was “arguably the most significant black empowerment deal in the new South Africa.”

It represented the culmination of growing ties between the two companies, as one of apartheid’s favoured clients scrambled to reposition itself in the era of majority rule.

For the media, of course, the fate of The Citizen quickly became the focus of the deal. It was expected that KTI would “not only play a role in the commercial aspects of the newspaper, but [would] also be involved in the editorial composition of The Citizen.” Changes in the area of affirmative-action policy seemed imminent, reflecting the fact that The Citizen had by far the worst record on Black advancement of any English daily. At the time of fieldwork in mid-1995, not a single Black journalist, photographer, sub-editor, junior editor, or senior editor was to be seen in The Citizen’s halls and offices, though there were rumours of a Black darkroom assistant. In fact, Perskor had signalled its affirmative-action intentions even before the merger, with the February 1995 appointment of Eric Mafuna, “a well-known marketing expert and promoter of Black business,” to The Citizen’s board of directors.

---


130 Golding-Duffy, “Can print remain lily-white?”

131 Andrew Beattie, Scope, formerly The Citizen. “No Blacks were ever hired by The Citizen.” Helen Grange, The Star, formerly The Citizen. “I think the highest job title that a Black had at the time I was there was ‘photographic assistant,’ ‘darkroom assistant.’ That was it.” Robyn Chalmers, Business Day, formerly The Citizen. Q. Did you have any indication, when you were working there [1993], that there was an attempt to bring a couple of token Black faces on board? “Absolutely not.”

The joint venture with KTI represented a logical development both for *The Citizen* as a press institution and for Perskor as the paper's sponsor. This may seem counter-intuitive, in light of *The Citizen*'s racist origins and suffocatingly White staffing structure. But it is tenable when one considers the most exquisite irony of all: since not long after *The Citizen* was founded, apartheid's creation has been read mostly by Blacks! In 1994, they accounted for 60 percent of *Citizen* readers (with Coloureds and Indians tallied separately; see Table 3.3). These are sales and subscription figures, moreover, and do not reflect the greater number of readers per copy among Black South African readerships. It is true that Blacks were drawn to *The Citizen* largely by default (the paper enjoyed a lock on the Johannesburg morning market between 1985 and 1990), by its relatively cheaper price (around two-thirds of other Johannesburg dailies), by its tabloid format (useful on long minibus commutes), and by the nonpareil racing-sheet, “The Punter's Friend.” But that such a devoted Black readership could be drawn to *The Citizen* under apartheid, despite the paper's origins and editorial sympathies, suggests that possibilities for further expansion into the Black market were as impressive for *The Citizen* as for any of the avowedly liberal South African dailies.133

This relatively optimistic picture seemed unlikely twenty years ago, when *The Citizen*'s intimate links to the apartheid state were exposed, and the paper found itself at the centre heart of the greatest political scandal in South African history – and the biggest story South African journalism had ever broken.134

133A further prized demographic offered additional room for expansion: women. *The Citizen* had a readership that was 73 percent male in 1994, far beyond the South African norm.

134Some background comments on the place of *The Citizen* in this research project may be worthwhile. The paper was the original case settled on for the South Africa research. Language considerations dictated (at least in the context of such a large comparative study) that the paper examined be an English one. *The Citizen*, with its regime origins, was an obvious subject of study. As with *Barricada* in Nicaragua or *Izvestia* in Russia, the paper with the closest link to the pre-transition regime often undergoes the most interesting and far-reaching transformations, casting into sharper relief the different forces, actors, and priorities at work. Early in my research in Johannesburg, though, I was warned away from *The Citizen* by Hugh Lewin at the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism. "Why would you come all this way," Lewin asked, "just to study a shitty newspaper?" He made a persuasive case for expanding the research at least to *The Star*, which he saw as emblematic of "White quasi-oppositional politics under apartheid." Once a decision had been made to study two papers, *Sowetan* was a necessary third. It would have been preposterous, given South Africa's new political reality – and arguably at any point – to study two classic "White" papers without considering the largest Black-staffed daily. Also, *Sowetan* was – and at the time of writing still is – the largest-circulation daily in the country.

In the end, I feel I had it both ways. My original curiosity about *The Citizen* only deepened when I began to investigate its history and conduct interviews with staff. The result is, I think, the most intimate institutional portrait of the three presented here. But I never regretted the decision to expand the research, however limited it remains. (The absence of an Afrikaans case-study is a clear drawback.) *The Star* and *Sowetan* proved rewarding objects of study, and
TABLE 3.2

The Citizen: Reader Profile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial group</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>182 000</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloureds</td>
<td>30 000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td>20 000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W/C/I</td>
<td>232 000</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>352 000</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>584 000</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Readers per copy</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The Citizen Marketing Services Department, September 1994; based on All-Media Product Survey (AMPS) 1994 figures.

THE INFO SCANDAL AND AFTER

On 29 October 1978, the Sunday Express published details of what would become known as the “Info Scandal.” The stories detailed a massive propaganda operation by the apartheid regime, targeting foreign as well as domestic media and populations. But they focused on the provenance of a daily paper that had first hit Johannesburg streets on 7 September 1976, allegedly under the sponsorship of Louis Luyt, a right-wing Afrikaner millionaire. There was, of course, more to The Citizen than first met the eye, though a fuller account of the paper’s genesis only emerged in the years following the Info Scandal. In his 1980 memoirs, The Story of an Afrikaner, Nattie Ferreira – an early partner to the high-level machinations that gave birth to The Citizen – recalled a conversation with then-Minister of the Interior Dr. Connie Mulder. Ferreira says he proposed

...
the establishment of an English-language newspaper which would support the Government within the framework I had explained. Communication was the key. ... Such a newspaper ... would create a positive atmosphere and make it possible for anti-Government [i.e., English-speaking] voters to change their allegiance because they would be shown the positive aims of an evolutionary policy.

Ferreira claims he gave Mulder an estimate of R25 million in start-up costs, suggesting the money be raised through government “contacts and ... influence in financial circles” — without, that is, the direct state involvement that would have destroyed its credibility among English readers.

The recommendations followed the classic Afrikaner press model: most of South Africa’s Afrikaans-language dailies were similarly founded by loose consortia of ideologically-motivated Boer nationalists. Shortly after Ferreira’s meeting with Mulder, Louis Luyt made his bid for ownership of South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN) — the first serious attempt by Afrikaner capital to gain a foothold in the English press. Ferreira, a key source for Express and Mail investigators who casts himself as a strongly verligte (“enlightened”) Afrikaner, was purportedly horrified by Luyt’s bid — and by his subsequent decision to start a new English paper called The Citizen. Nonetheless, Ferreira allowed himself to be appointed political editor of the new venture. He resigned some weeks later, after clashes with “the right-wing ex-editor of the Sunday Express” Johnny Johnson, who had replaced original editor Martin Spring only ten days into the paper’s life. The Citizen, Ferreira lamented, had turned out to be “more right-wing than the Nationalist [Afrikaans] press.”

Speculation about The Citizen’s real sponsor began the moment the paper hit the streets. In the absence of hard proof, however, the allegations were fairly easy to deflect. “We dismiss with contempt this rotten smear by the Left-Wing Rand Daily Mail about the finances of the Citizen,” Johnny Johnson editorialized after one such round of speculation, condemning “a whispering campaign of the most vicious kind.” The pace of revelation stepped up, however, when the Sunday Express and The Rand Daily Mail began looking critically into the performance of the Mail’s new morning competition. They discovered first that The Citizen was pulping 30,000 copies a day on Louis Luyt’s farm, in order to claim an inflated circulation and amass more credibility and advertising revenue. Then, on 29 October 1978, the Sunday Express published its explosive article, THE CITIZEN SECRET REVEALED. The Citizen, according to the account, “had been heavily financed by public money channelled through massive and secret State funds.” This and

135 Quoted in Mervis, The Fourth Estate, p. 443.
subsequent reportage in the *Express* and *Mail* established beyond serious doubt that, as Ferreira
summarizes it, *The Citizen*

1. ... was started with money from the Department of Information's illegal "secret
fund."
2. R12m was "loaned" to [Louis] Luyt for this purpose. The former Prime
Minister, John Vorster ... personally chose Luyt as the front-man.
3. John Vorster, Connie Mulder and General Hendrix van den Bergh, former head
of the Bureau for State Security, were key figures in the secret project.
4. Luyt's attempt (before *The Citizen* was started) to buy SAAN, an Opposition press
group[,] was also an Info plan with tax-payer's money behind it.
5. The former Secretary of Information, Dr. Eschel Rhoodie[,] was *The Citizen's*
behind-the-scenes political boss. Luyt had to sign a contract that he would accept and carry
out Rhoodie's "guidelines."
6. When the Info affair was first disclosed ... John Vorster appointed General van
den Bergh () to "investigate" it. He would try to save Vorster and Mulder from political
destruction by saying that the investigation was covered by the Official Secrets Act. This
would make any further press revelations illegal.136

*The Citizen's* first response was to deny the allegations, reiterating that the paper was "an
independent business venture" and claiming that "legal advice has been taken."137 But the die was
cast. Less than a week after the *Express* story appeared, Justice Anton Mostert, head of a
commission appointed to investigate simmering allegations of secret slush-funds and other financial
irregularities, issued his confirmation of "the improper application of taxpayers' money running into
millions of rands" and "corruption (in the widest sense of that word) relating to public funds." *The
Citizen's* origins, it was now plain, lay in a R64-million "propaganda package ... put together to sell
apartheid to their own voters and to the Western world as a whole."138 The first and in many ways
most substantial of the "gates" that followed Richard Nixon's travails, "Muldergate," as it was also
widely called, led to "the resignation of Vorster from the State presidency, the breaking of General

---

176.

1980), p. 87. Rees and Day's is the standard work on the scandal, and can usefully be supplemented by Ferreira's
engaging though self-justifying account.

138This was emblematic of the state's overall devotion of resources to the propaganda effort. For an overview,
which replaced the Department of Information in the wake of the Info Scandal, employed 697 people as of 1988, with
a budget of R33 million. It released 35.5 million publications (including newspapers and newsletters aimed at Blacks,
"glossy magazines" like *Panorama* and *SA Digest*), produced 53 shows and 80 exhibitions, along with films.
van den Bergh ... [and] the breaking of the power of the Transvaal Afrikaners in the Nationalist Party.”

The news hit *The Citizen* like a bombshell as well. Despite Joel Mervis’s belief that the paper’s denials of foreknowledge constitute “an astonishing admission of ignorance from a paper which in so many other respects showed it was neither naive nor stupid,” it appears possible – even likely – that no-one at the paper knew of the scale and intimacy of Luyt’s collusion with the regime, Johnny Johnson included. Alex Hattingh, then a *Citizen* staffer, spoke of “confusion” reigning in the wake of Mostert’s announcement. Sports editor Chris Swanepoel, one of the few staff remaining from the early days, presented a vivid picture of the in-house shock:

> It was devastating. I’ve never seen Johnny Johnson so devastated. I remember, that morning Louis Luyt was in Johnson’s office the day that Justice Mostert blew the top off [the scandal]. He assured Johnson there was no state funding behind the paper. Then, two hours later, the press conference was held [at which Mostert announced his findings]. Mr. Johnson was walking the hallways like a ghost.

The joke exhortation — “Pay your taxes, buy *The Citizen*” — had been found to be literally true, almost beyond the wildest speculation. *The Citizen* had acquired a stigma, a mongrel status, that it only today seems poised to slough off. The stigma clung most palpably to the paper’s journalists, who were constantly confronted with public hostility. Helen Grange, now a reporter with *The Star*, remembered: “There was a lot of strong reaction from people who would be considered liberal or progressive during those days. Some people would just refuse to talk to you. Quite often you would be thrown out of meetings because you represented the government mouthpiece.”

The Info Scandal was a blow from which few thought the paper would recover. But *The Citizen* struggled on under its new owners, Die Afrikaanse Pers (Perskor), who purchased it for a song – “the price of the printing press,” according to Allister Sparks — and operated it on a

---

139The lionizing of the *Mail’s* role bore a remarkable similarity to the importance assigned to *The Washington Post* in the American Watergate affair, as Walker also points out (*Powers of the Press*, p. 330).


shoestring. Again according to Sparks, the sweetener in the deal for Perskor was that it would receive a government-funded printing press that could be used for other, more profitable ventures.\textsuperscript{142} Notable among these were lucrative state-sector publishing contracts (such as educational texts and the Telkom phone-book account). These Perskor could access along with the much larger Nasionale Pers, another favoured regime client.\textsuperscript{143} Perskor’s ties to the Nationalist regime were undoubtedly intimate: State President De Klerk and his wife headed the invitation list at the paper’s 21st anniversary celebrations in 1992.\textsuperscript{144}

While distancing itself from the paper, therefore, the regime sought to ensure that The Citizen would maintain an organic relationship with the Afrikaner political class, and not stray far from its founding institutional imperative: to advance the interests of Afrikanerdom in general and the National Party, especially its more conservative Transvaal wing, in particular. The Citizen thus departed from the norm of South Africa’s English press, in that direct profits were a secondary consideration in its functioning. Perskor brass surely hoped The Citizen would become self-supporting, and perhaps turn one day into a modest money-spinner. But until it did, the means would be found to keep it going – as a pro-apartheid counterweight to the solidly anti-Nationalist English daily press, and as a source of corporate prestige for Perskor.

Structural and institutional continuity between Perskor and the upper ranks of the Afrikaner regime was preserved through the Broederbond. Ostensibly a “cultural organization,” the Broederbond served as a secret society encompassing a near-majority of Afrikaner professionals (especially educators), senior civil servants, and politicians.\textsuperscript{145} It sought to guarantee nothing less

\textsuperscript{142}Says Sparks: “The Citizen survived because [the government] never really ceased funding it. ... When [the Info Scandal] was exposed, the government sold it for one rand to Perskor, and with that went this new printing press. I believe the way it continued to operate after that is by using the press for commercial printing as well as for The Citizen, with that offset against the losses of the paper. The paper must still run at a loss: if you have a look at its advertising content, the ratios are not at an economic level. So it’s a loss-maker, but the loss is offset by commercial printing from the gift of the press, which enables it to be in fact a money-spinner. The quid pro quo for getting the press free was that they would continue running a pro-government newspaper.”


\textsuperscript{144}Perskor celebrates 21st anniversary in style,” The Citizen, 27 November 1992.

\textsuperscript{145}As journalist Gus Silber put it: “It is untrue to say that the Afrikaner Broederbond is a secret, racially exclusive power bloc masquerading as a cultural organisation, since everyone knows that the Afrikaner Broederbond is a racially exclusive power bloc masquerading as a cultural organisation.” Quoted in Jennifer Crwys-Williams, The Penguin Dictionary of South African Quotations (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 1994), pp. 60-61. Emphasis added.
than "ultimate Afrikaner domination" at every level of South African politics and society, and to
give Afrikaners a hefty piece of the economic pie as well. The media were a consistent focus of
Broederbond recruitment efforts.\textsuperscript{146, 147}

Thus Perskor and the wider Afrikaner establishment, rather than the state as such, became
the primary sponsors of \textit{The Citizen} in the wake of the Info Scandal. This held true through the
ownership transformations of 1996. For Perskor, the advantage seems largely to have been
symbolic – and uncertain, in the opinion of Senior Assistant Editor Martin Williams:

I said to Koos [Beytendag, Chairman of Perskor], "What do you want from the newspaper?"
And he said [imitating Beytendag's Afrikaner accent]: "I want prestige and I want clout." This
is a bit of an enigma to me, because it's since dawned on me that he actually thinks the
paper's very good as it is. Now, to me, it might have readers, but I don't think it's got prestige.
I honestly don't. It's not viewed anywhere as a prestige product, as far as I can work out.\textsuperscript{148}

Nonetheless, Perskor kept \textit{The Citizen} afloat through years when the paper truly was "an
enigma to accountants." To judge strictly by its advertising-to-copy ratio, the paper should not

\textsuperscript{146}There is an overview of the founding and rise of the Broederbond in David Harrison, \textit{The White Tribe of
Africa} (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1985), Chapter 7. On the media, see Wilkins and Strydom, \textit{The
Super-Afrikaners}, p. 23, citing a 1978 Broederbond circular: "It is important that Afrikaners working in the newspaper
industry are considered for membership. These people, because of their working conditions, cannot always take part in
public affairs or serve on public bodies. Their work gives them exceptional opportunities to exercise leadership and
influence so they merit consideration, especially as they perform, or can perform, a service to the Afrikaner cause." As
early as 1963, Dr. Piet Koomhof, Broederbond Chief Secretary, had issued a report recommending "that an English-
language newspaper be established which is equipped to reach the top level of English-speakers and by that means
exercise influence" (quoted Wilkins and Strydom, p. 271). The authors note: "Whether or not the Broederbond played
any part, their wishes as expressed by Dr. Koomhof were realised in 1976 with the establishment of a pro-Nationalist
daily paper, \textit{The Citizen}. It may or may not be pure coincidence, but the founder of that newspaper, South Africa's
genial fertiliser king, Mr. Louis Luyt, is a close associate of Dr. Koomhof" (pp. 271-72).

In their work on the Broederbond, Wilkins and Strydom provide a list, purportedly about 60 percent
complete, of then-members of this "most exclusive and influential underground movement in the Western world." At
the time, the authors wrote of Perskor's Board of Directors that it "include[d] at least nine Broeders out of a total of
12," including Marais Viljoen, then-President of the Senate. A comparison of the names on Wilkins and Strydom's
incomplete, 17-year-old Broederbond list with the 1995 Perskor Board of Directors still turns up five matches and two
possible matches out of 15 present and recently-retired (or deceased) board members. Extrapolating from the 1978
list, and assuming nearly two decades of further influx to Broederbond ranks since Wilkins and Strydom's book
appeared, it seems fair to wonder whether Broederbond preponderance was even greater than this tentative
comparison suggests. (Today the brotherhood has been renamed the Afrikanerbond, and has adopted "a new non-
racial, non-sexist constitution." It appears set to play a reduced role more in keeping with the "cultural" character that
thinly disguised its political machinations under apartheid. Its function in civil society may soon be be somewhat
similar to that of a Masonic or even Rotarian organization.)

\textsuperscript{147}See Wilkins & Strydom, \textit{The Super-Afrikaners, Group Annual Reports}, Perskor, 1994, p. 16, privately supplied.
Wilkins and Strydom's list occupies the entire last section of the book.

\textsuperscript{148}Staffer Martin McGhee's appraisal was similar: "\textit{The Citizen} is certainly a flagship publication [for Perskor],
let's put it that way. I think that's the main consideration. ... Prestigious? I'm not too sure. I don't think it's got to that
stage yet."
have survived the 1980s. South Africa’s powerful advertising consortia were reluctant to patronize The Citizen, owing both to its illiberal image and (paradoxically) to its Black majority readership. In a 1990 chairman’s statement, Koos Beytendag “bemoaned The Citizen’s failure to attract ‘its rightful share of advertising.”

According to Advertising Manager Pat Wills,

> We’ve had a problem getting advertising, basically because of the paper’s political background. The Citizen started off as a political, right-wing, government newspaper. ...

Largely, the companies that decline to advertise with us are the major corporate people, the Anglo-Americans [for example]. We have overcome a lot of the right-wing perception. But give a dog a bad name and it stays.

The ability of ad revenues to sustain the newspaper, circa 1995, was a subject of some controversy. Roger Wellstead, general manager of Sowetan, claimed that “For [The Citizen] to survive like that, unless it’s got some formula that we haven’t thought of, it just cannot make a profit. If we ran on that advertising ratio, we’d be bankrupt.” But Citizen General Manager Koutie Van Heerden countered that “the paper is profitable,” although “we don’t make big profits.” Andrew Beattie commented that when he worked at the paper in the late 1980s, “it definitely wasn’t running at a loss,” but “had stabilized and was making a profit.” Nobody, however, contended that the advertising levels were anything other than anaemic.

Perskor seems to have been willing to accept these marginal or even negative returns, and to provide strategic infusions of subsistence funds, in return for the entree to the English market and the wider political culture that its flagship provided it.

Perskor’s purse aside, several factors and wider developments allowed The Citizen to recover from the ignominy of its founding and the apparent alienation of its target audience, and to find a secure if stagnant market niche. The first was the financial crisis and eventual closure of The Rand Daily Mail. Any number of commentators and interview subjects have noted the irony of The Citizen’s outlasting the Mail, “public enemy number one in the eyes of the ruling party” under

---


150Tony Koenderman of Finance Week passed perhaps the most measured verdict on the role of advertising in The Citizen’s material operations. “The Citizen, started in the mid-1970s, took 12 years to reach the point (about three years ago [i.e., in 1987]) where it could claim to be breaking even. Circulation (particularly among blacks) and advertising revenue have both risen strongly since 1986 ... [But] even with its notoriously low salary structure, it’s difficult to see how The Citizen can be getting the kind of returns which some of the more profitable papers are achieving. A count of a recent 44-page issue found six pages of display ads and 10 pages of (lower-yield) classified — a long way short of the 60% advertising ratio which most publishers consider the minimum acceptable.” Koenderman, “Two’s company, seven’s a crowd,” Finance Week, 5 July 1990.
apartheid, and a major player in The Citizen's humiliating unmasking. But the closure of the Mail gave The Citizen a monopoly in the Johannesburg morning market for the latter half of the 1980s, until The Star introduced its morning edition in 1990.

With the closure of the Mail (and the Sunday Express in the same year), 1985 was "the year of the big chop" in the South African newspaper industry. That proved a further boon to The Citizen. A large pool of mostly young journalists was expelled onto the South African job market (more skilled senior journalists were quickly snapped up by newspapers abroad, notably in Australia). The Citizen, despite its low pay levels, offered steady employment. And it could not afford to be choosy about its journalists and sub-editors: as late as 1995, General Manager Koutie van Heerden acknowledged that "We have difficulty attracting skilled and qualified people." Typical of the new recruits was The Star's Helen Grange, who graduated from the Rhodes University school of journalism to find "there were a lot of professionals out on the streets. It was very difficult to get a job in newspapers when the industry was flooded with out-of-work journalists. So I took what I could get, I'm afraid, and The Citizen was it."

The presence of these liberal and radical journalists and sub-editors seems to have provided a counterweight to The Citizen's pro-Nationalist political orientation. For Helen Grange, the arrangement was anarchic, basically. Because there weren't any journalists there who outwardly supported the National Party! Somehow it came together in a very fiery and amusing mix. The middle-ranking people, the news editors - they were untrustworthy as far as we were concerned, and apparently as far as Johnny was concerned, because he used to treat them like shit. I mean, he wouldn't even address them by their names! Most journalists, apart from the two or three civil-servant types in the newsroom, had quite clear political views. Johnny was under no illusion about the mutiny in the ranks, and the fact that [journalists] were there just to learn the skills and move on.

---

151 Andrew Beattie's recollection of skulduggery at The Citizen around the same time is also worth citing: "Izzy [former sub-editor Ismail Lagardien] and I actually indulged in a bit of guerrilla journalism. It was The Citizen's style to always refer to the ANC, the PLO, the IRA — anyone who was a leftist — as 'terrorists.' And we would often jigger that around, and refer to 'the Zionist terrorists,' and that would get through [to print]. We'd write book reviews under the name Lev Davidovich Bronstein [Trotsky's real name]. These things were actually noticed by a couple of people. I'd be totally deluded if I thought we actually did anything to change the public's perception of the newspaper, because we didn't. We were just working there under sufferance, because no-one else would employ us. But I remember once Johnny Johnson came walking out of his office and said, 'God, the Russian Ambassador in Maputo [Mozambique] has just taken out a subscription to The Citizen'. He couldn't understand it. I'd like to think it was linked to the subversive role Izmail and I played. Who knows?"
Journalists were not the only assets snapped up by The Citizen after the demise of the Mail and Express. “The Punter’s Friend,” a racing tip-sheet that had run in the Mail for years and was hugely popular with its predominantly Black readership, was taken over by The Citizen and instantly became one of the paper’s most popular features. It was instrumental in allowing apartheid’s creation to build a new core constituency among less-politicized but racing-mad Black readers.152

Another explanation for The Citizen’s ability to withstand the fallout of the Info Scandal was the paper’s bare-bones material functioning. The Info Scandal forced a radical downsizing of operations: approximately half of Citizen staff were let go. “It’s a shoestring operation,” acknowledged General Manager Koutie van Heerden in 1995. “Our staffing levels have always been very small compared to other newspapers. We have about 70 staffmembers; other [papers] will have two or three hundred.” It was not always thus: News Editor Poen de Villiers remembered that “this newsroom was full when I started working here,” before the downsizing. Business Manager Ian Smith also contended that “ten, fifteen years ago, The Citizen was a very aggressive newspaper with a strong editorial staff.”

The staffing deficit was mirrored by a declining material infrastructure. To wander the near-empty newsroom of The Citizen in mid-1995 was to step back in time twenty years, to antiquated technology and drab, musty offices. “It’s such a dismal place, it really is,” said Business Day’s Robyn Chalmers, who worked at The Citizen for a brief spell in the early 1990s. “The newsroom has almost none of the energy and bustle of its counterparts at The Star and Sowetan. In fact it is mostly empty for most of the day, picking up steam only in the later afternoon and early evening.” The decrepitude of the physical surroundings was reflected in the paper’s visual appeal, or lack thereof. Despite Johnson’s regular references in leaders to the paper’s supposed “brightness,” under his tutelage The Citizen’s was almost anti-design: blocky and print-heavy. The antiquated approach struck Martin Williams particularly strongly when, in the latter half of 1994, he arrived to take up the position of Senior Assistant Editor and Johnny Johnson’s heir apparent. Williams came to the paper from the Natal Mercury, one of the more prosperous and professional South African dailies:

152 As one of William Finnegan’s informants told him in 1987, The Citizen’s “totally wrong editorial profile for the black market” was overcome by “big black readership … two days a week: Wednesdays and Saturdays. The two pre-racing days! You see, The Citizen took over a racing-tips section called Gilbe’s Punter’s Friend from the Rand Daily Mail when it closed. Blacks are great punters, and Gilbe’s Punter’s Friend has lots of credibility with blacks.” Quoted in Finnegan, Dateline Soweto, p. 127.
I was shocked when I arrived here. We were subbing in a way I’d last subbed in the 1980s, using a pen and paper. You see this cable in the wall? It’s for an Aztec [computer] terminal. It’s been here for years. They had the equipment and they kicked it downstairs. They’ve got the equipment for Pagemaker, very advanced equipment, but they’ve kicked it all downstairs to the Works Department. They’ve had people sent out and trained how to use the Apple Macs and so forth. Poen [de Villiers] has told me that people phone in, because we’re always advertising for subs; they say, “Okay, what system are you on?” “No, we hand-do it” – they say, “I’m not interested.” It’s a dying skill – the half-dozen people who can still sub like that are here!

Among other things, downsizing dictated that much of The Citizen’s editorial content would be drawn from outside sources – the SAPA news agency and foreign wire services – rather than generated internally. The Citizen’s dependence on the services turned its pages into “a comprehensive though characterless compendium of SAPA messages.” But it also drew the paper’s content in a more centrist direction: wire services standardly adopt a moderate, mainstream tenor in their reporting, to maximize their appeal to a cross-section of clients. Professional morale, though, plummeted along with the declining in-house resources. “I think quality’s gone down, just because we have far fewer people,” Ian Smith lamented in 1995. “You’ll never get an exclusive off a wire service.” Several staffers testified to Johnny Johnson’s preference for SAPA copy even over that of Citizen reporters. “We’ve got a handful of reporters here,” said Martin Williams, “but if they write something, and SAPA wrote something [on the same topic], Johnny will take SAPA’s version. That’s very demoralizing for the staff.” “It’s pretty much a slap in the face every time that happens,” another staffer agreed.

As the above account illustrates, it is difficult to discuss The Citizen without attention to Johnny Johnson himself, with his “peculiar combination of conservative chutzpah, fierce individuality, and out-and-out weirdness.” Johnson’s energy and vision was sufficient to establish The Citizen as a surprisingly credible news source; it was also a millstone around the paper’s neck, inhibiting the path of professional modernization that seemed likely to dominate in the post-Johnson era.

---

153Raymond Louw, “Remember the days when a newspaper told us the news?,” Weekly Mail, 20-26 December 1985.

MEYER ABRAHAM JOHNSON

There are two types of people: those that hate Johnny Johnson, and those that don't hate him that much. But you cannot but respect the man — not the personality, the man. Johnny just does it his way. He doesn't come out trying to explain himself; he's not apologetic for what he does either. He's never pulled punches. He's just a hard-arsed journalist. Johnny's taken the newspaper to where it is. Look at the circulation today. Look at the stable audience, the predominantly Black readership. ... Maybe there's a moral there; maybe Johnny Johnson is the moral, and maybe people should take another look at Johnny Johnson.

— Alex Hattingh, former Citizen staffer

A detailed and remarkably consistent image of Johnny Johnson's influence on The Citizen emerges from interviews. Unfortunately, these third-party appraisals must be offered in lieu of firsthand observations, or indeed any substantial testimony from Johnson's own lips or typewriter. To this researcher's knowledge, Johnson has never given a published interview; nor has he published any autobiographical reminiscences. His secretary for many years at the paper, his wife, has successfully fended off attempts by interlopers to break the silence. In 1995, she greeted an initial request for an interview with the patience born of wisdom that a parent might display, when a child asks why there is so much suffering in the world. “Mr. Johnson doesn't do interviews, actually,” she explained. And though her sympathetic mien never faltered, neither did her resolve in denying access to the man himself. Thus I can record only a single medium-distance glimpse of Johnson through a tangle of sub-editors, as the production process heated up one night late in the fieldwork.

Under the circumstances, and given the decisiveness of his hold over The Citizen's operations, perhaps the best thing Mr. Johnson could do was stay out of the way. In this respect, research at The Citizen was greatly blessed. The indefatigable Johnson was on holiday for the first time in anywhere up to a decade. Staff took it as a faint sign he might truly be mortal. With his autocratic presence banished to the beaches of Australia, Citizen editors and journalists regularly (if often anonymously) confessed that they felt far more comfortable speaking to an outsider about the operations of the paper.

---

155 For instance, former Citizen employee Andrew Beattie comments: “It's mainly due to the character of Johnny Johnson that The Citizen is what it is. Because he runs that newspaper with an iron hand. Every single decision that is made at The Citizen is made by Johnny Johnson.” A Citizen staffer likewise stated (not for attribution) that Johnson’s editorial control over the paper was “total. He doesn’t delegate. There’s no backup management staff. He’s got total control.”
In what main respects can we locate Johnson as central to the course *The Citizen* has taken over the last two decades? First, consider his cultural positioning. Not only is Johnson an English-speaking South African; he is also Jewish. Thus, he is doubly an outsider to the Afrikaner political culture that founded *The Citizen* and sustained it throughout its life. We enter into speculative terrain here, but it is possible that Johnson's positioning helped him, and his paper, to establish an identity separate from Perskor and the Afrikaner political class. Johnson, moreover, seems to have courted a symbolic distance from the Nationalist regime — to the extent that there are those, themselves liberally-inclined, who see him as a political liberal. Certainly, the outright zealotry of the conservative Right was rarely imputed to Johnson; nor does significant pressure seem too have been placed on him to move beyond the quasi-liberal wing of *verligte* Nationalist supporters. In his leaders, the foundation of *The Citizen*'s editorial identity, Johnson often struck a reformist note, occasionally registering ringing dissent from government policies. He wrote in 1985 that

> Despite its controversial origins, *The Citizen* has never been a tool of government. It supports the Government's reform initiatives, but is not a National Party mouthpiece, meting out praise or criticism where it is justified. It respects the sincerity of the Progressive Federal Party and gives that party, as it does all other parties, fair and objective coverage in its news columns. ... *The Citizen* has always been an honest, highly professional, politically independent, middle-of-the-road newspaper, observing the best traditions of journalism, serving all sections of the community, and being noted particularly for its very South African outlook. That it has survived in the face of bitter competition, that it is growing in circulation and importance, is a tribute to its integrity and to the position it has achieved in the marketplace.

In particular, Johnson regularly differed with the government over implementation of its press policies, offering ringing defences of media freedom scarcely distinguishable from *The Citizen*'s more liberal English-language cousins. (The trend began even before the Info Scandal was uncovered. “The lamps of Press freedom have gone out in South Africa and will not be

---

156 Helen Grange stressed the significance of Johnson’s Jewishness in an interview: “He was also Jewish, and the Jews in this country were very much alienated and victimized by the Afrikaners.”

157 Andrew Beattie, for one, considers Johnson “actually quite a liberal guy. He’s not inherently a slavishly subservient government butt-smoother.”


159 In October 1977, *The Citizen* decried the closure of Percy Qoboza’s *World* and *Weekend World* (predecessors of *Sowetan*) in language that could have been drawn straight from *The Rand Daily Mail.* “This is a sad day for the Press of South Africa. ... [W]hatever the World and its sister newspaper did or did not do, destroying them by a stroke of a pen and a proclamation in the Government Gazette was not the answer. ... Freedom of the Press is indivisible. If some
switched on again while the emergency lasts,” he trumpeted in December 1986, as the regime cracked down on the media.\textsuperscript{160}

Johnson’s personal attitude towards the liberation forces also seems to have evolved, in part because of his admiration for Nelson Mandela as an individual. “He’s obviously infatuated with Mandela,” said Senior Assistant Editor Martin Williams. “He goes out of his way to say nice things about him, not to offend him.” According to Richard Steyn, former editor of The Star, Johnson originally “described Mandela as a terrorist and the devil incarnate,” but now, although he “doesn’t like the ANC, he likes Mandela. So Johnny has mellowed to some extent.” The admiration apparently predates the onset of the transition process, which one could see as encouraging a more generous attitude towards the man who would become South Africa’s first democratically-elected president. Andrew Beattie recalled that in the 1980s, “when it wasn’t the done thing at all,” Johnson would “talk about what a great man Nelson Mandela was.” Helen Grange described Johnson’s politics during the transition as “somewhat schizophrenic, you know, moving between an ANC line back to a National Party line, and sometimes even back to the Conservative Party line.”

By the time of the first democratic elections in South African history, though, Johnson’s “mellowing” had progressed to the point that The Citizen could proclaim “the liberation of the Black masses is at hand”; remarkably, the paper backed no party in the election, urging its readers only “to vote ... and help determine the future of the country and all its people.”

Throughout, Johnson’s strategy seems to have been to take cover behind classical conceptions of professionalism and objectivity in editorial content.\textsuperscript{161} This was evident not so much in newsgathering (as we have seen, The Citizen did relatively little of it), but in news selection. News was an obsession for Johnson: Ken Owen calls him “perhaps the country’s shrewdest judge of news, with an unerring instinct for the lowest common denominator of public interest and taste.”\textsuperscript{162} Nearly all interview subjects testified to Johnson’s herculean energies in this respect, and the generally positive impact on The Citizen:

\[\text{newspapers are not free, all are not free} \text{ (editorial, “A sad day,” 20 October 1977).}\]

\textsuperscript{160}\textquotedblleft Lights go out,” The Citizen, 11 December 1986.

\textsuperscript{161}\textquotedblleft I don’t think Johnny is a political animal at all. I think he’s a cynic. Always has been. And he’s over and above all else a newspaperman. He loves the craft. Frankly, I don’t think politics particularly interests him, or ever has.” (Helen Grange)

\textsuperscript{162}Owen, “Is the new SA killing the press?”
Johnny Johnson is highly regarded as an editor in this town. He's very good, and he's my kind of editor. He's the kind of guy who rolls up his sleeves and doesn't think about the golf course all fucking day. (Lloyd Coutts, Sunday Independent)

I would agree that Johnny Johnson is a singular newsman. I don't have great admiration for his political views, which are poles apart from mine; but he's absolutely dedicated to his job, and he has a very good news sense. (Richard Steyn, former editor, The Star)

In a professional sense he's brilliant. He's probably one of the best editors I've ever worked for. Simply because he's one of those hands-on editors. Gets in there at ten o'clock in the morning, rolls up his shirt sleeves, and gets down to it. I used to leave at seven or eight, and he was still there. He was phenomenal. (Robyn Chalmers, now with Business Day)

For news, The Citizen has still got the best reputation. News dominates everything! Forget the features and the fancy writing and the typographical gymnastics; it's just squeezing the news in! I think we might lose some of that edge when Johnny goes, because there's not many people left like that — everyone wants smart, lovely little pages, [and] balanced design ...

You open that paper and it's just stories. Any time I have to check up information coming from court reports, I would always go through our files looking for The Citizen's stories. Because The Citizen's stories allow the court reports to run as long as they want to make them. As a result, you have three times as much information [as in other newspapers].

(Brendan Templeton, staff reporter, The Star)

Perhaps uniquely in mainstream South African newspapers, Johnson even privileged news over advertising copy — an option open to him thanks to Perskor's laissez-faire approach to management. Ads, for example, were pushed to the back of the newspaper rather than placed in prime positions near the front. According to Business Editor Ian Smith:

Just looking at the level of advertising, we could obviously do a lot more. That's because Johnny doesn't like advertising. Advertising people came to me once and said that a big bank had taken over another bank, they wanted four or five pages [of advertising], which was something like 67,000 rand [in revenue]. I went to Johnny and said, "Look, we've got this huge ad, and if it needs extra space I've got copy I can wrap around it." Johnny said, "I'm sorry, I can't have advertising dictating to me ..." So there it was! The advertising people here hate going to Johnny. There's whole pages without a single ad in them.

By these varied means, then, Johnson repositioned The Citizen in the wake of the Info Scandal, establishing it as a credible news source and shifting it successfully towards the reader-rich political centre. Under apartheid, said Andrew Beattie, "The Citizen was the kind of newspaper you could read without being insulted by anti-ANC propaganda, even if you were an ANC supporter. There was plenty of stuff to read apart from the propaganda. And Johnny Johnson made it clear which pages would have the propaganda on them, and which would be plain, ordinary news."
It is important to appreciate how this curious arrangement suited Perskor. First, *The Citizen* never wavered from its general pro-regime stance under apartheid. “It embraced all the values and policies of the National Party,” said Helen Grange. “It upheld apartheid, it upheld capitalistic structures and the policies thereof. It was pretty simplistic in that respect.” As far as Johnson’s outsider status was concerned, *The Citizen*’s sponsor may have seen it as lending added credibility to a newspaper that sorely needed it after 1978. Finally, for Perskor and the Afrikaner political class more generally, Johnson’s occasional notes of dissent might have cast the limited pluralism permitted under apartheid in a more positive light. As Johnson himself noted in his 1986 leader on the state-of-emergency provisions, “A relatively free Press has been the best vindication South Africa has had for its claim that it is not an authoritarian state.”

There is the further question of exactly how interested Perskor was in *The Citizen*’s day-to-day operations. For the most part, its attitude seems to have been one of benign neglect. As one *Citizen* staffer pointed out, “the owners of this company are our printers ... [and] they know nothing about newspapers.” Perskor’s role, said Alex Hattingh, was simply to “allow him [Johnson] to carry on in his autocratic, bombastic way.” All interview subjects questioned on the matter agreed that the personal relationship between Johnson and Perskor Chair Koos Beytendag was crucial in blending the requirements of institution and sponsor. “He has no power without the chairman,” said Senior Assistant Editor Martin Williams. “It’s the relationship between them – that’s where

---

163*“Lights go out.”*
the power exists. If the chairman says go, he walks. But as long as he has that relationship with the chairman, he doesn’t go.” The arrangement, as noted, gave Johnson near-total control over The Citizen’s internal operations, including hegemony over the advertising department and an absolute say in editorial matters. Johnson was thus able to shrug off many of the institutional constraints that owners and managers place on the editorial operations of newspapers in South Africa and around the world. His degree of supremacy was unmatched in the English press.

**Citizen redux?**

There was, however, a dark side to the professional environment that Johnson invigilated over at *The Citizen*. Johnson’s personality was variously described as “obnoxious,” “difficult,” and “workaholic.” “He’s a grumpy old man and we all feel he’s past it now,” one staffer said. “We really think he should have retired.” Said another: “The editor is very tired, and he’s got no interest outside of newspapers. He’s fighting to hang in there. ... A bit of a dead hand.”

In the past, predictions that “the reign of ... Johnny Johnson is now drawing to its close” have proved about as accurate as four decades of U.S. claims that Fidel Castro’s downfall was imminent. Only at the end of 1997, at *The Citizen* Christmas party, did Johnson finally announce his retirement.

A number of pressing tasks seemed likely to guide *The Citizen* in the post-Johnson era. While emphasizing that he might never have a chance to implement his plans, Senior Assistant Editor Martin Williams did sketch an especially thoughtful and detailed outline of where he saw *The Citizen* to be headed. The most urgent requirement was the modernization of *Citizen* operations: expanding the paper’s resources, reaching out to old and new constituencies, and fine-tuning the paper’s editorial content. In Williams’ view, this would likely be implemented under the auspices of

---

164 Commentary in the wider society has tended to follow these lines. In March 1990, *The Citizen* lost a defamation case against *Frontline* editor Dennis Beckett; the Rand Supreme Court found Beckett’s reference to Johnson’s becoming “increasingly depraved” was fair comment. *Frontline*, April-May 1988; “Citizen editor loses defamation suit,” *Business Day*, 2 March 1990. Aubrey Sussens, once an assistant editor to Johnson, told *Style* Magazine in November 1988 that he was “pretty nearly impossible” to work for, “sarcastic, critical, and unpredictable,” though she had mellowed somewhat in her views: “I used to regard him as a bastard, now I find him amusing.”

165 For example, according to Eddie Botha in the *Financial Mail*, Martin Williams’ 1994 appointment meant “Johnny Johnson ... has finally decided to call it a day” (“Senior citizen,” 23 September 1994). According to *Business Day* (22 September 1994), the appointment “fuel[s] speculation that the rumoured departure of [The Citizen’s] editor Johnny Johnson might have been forced.”
a formal relaunching. The intention would be to bolster the professional functioning and market positioning of the paper through investment in new technology ("It’s quite clear [Perskor] is not afraid of spending money"), along with a brighter, more streamlined design. With greater resources, said Williams, The Citizen would be able to generate more of its editorial copy internally – something he would encourage by delegating greater responsibility to the paper’s staff. “For the first time in years, while Johnny was away, I used a locally-written piece about [the 1994 massacre at] Shell House. That made [the journalists] all very excited, [to see] that now they can get their local stuff in.” Another staffer confirmed, not for attribution, that Johnson’s absence was vital in allowing Citizen staff an unprecedented chance to flex their professional muscles: “I know that much of the management of Perskor consider that Mr. Johnson is The Citizen. Without him there’d be no paper. And I think we proved that to be a fallacy over the month that he was away. ... Certainly in the month that a certain gentleman was on leave, morale was way up.”

A more engage approach to the journalistic scene, domestically and internationally, also seemed in the cards. “I would be outward-looking, and I mean that in every respect,” said Martin Williams. “Joining the Conference of Editors, sending journalists on training courses and outings, so they mix more with other journalists to know what’s going on in that world. So we become more part of the community in every sense.” Other outreach projects would aim at boosting the paper’s circulation (about 135,000 in 1996). “I think they’ve got to be realistic about it, because 55,000 to 65,000 more copies of The Star sell each day [than of The Citizen], and that’s not good enough,” said Martin Williams. “Why should people be buying that paper and not ours? I wouldn’t be happy until we actually pass The Star. I think it’s nonsense.”

The most obvious expansion strategy would be to build on The Citizen’s already-strong base among Black readers. “I think the biggest potential is obviously in the Black market,” Williams acknowledged. “The time is long gone when the Black market was regarded as one that advertisers didn’t want because they reckoned Blacks couldn’t spend money.”166 As part of such outreach, the most glaringly backward feature of The Citizen’s standard operating procedure would have to be addressed: the uniformly White hue of the staff. Under his direction, “there would definitely be

166 Alex Hattingh, a former Citizen employee, points out the obvious irony in the paper’s advantageous position: “Our opposition in the old days was The Rand Daily Mail. It was sunk because it was seen to be neither fish nor fowl: it served two markets, black and white. And today that is the strength of the Citizen newspaper!”
affirmative action,” Williams claimed. “I know and have worked with quite a few Black journalists. I wouldn’t approach any of them to come and work here now. Because the environment is very unhealthy and unhappy. But if I do get the job I applied for ...

A number of other staffers echoed Williams’ appraisal, stressing the professional payoff that a Black-advancement initiative could bring. In the opinion of staff reporter Martin McGhee:

I think we’re all agreed that we should have some Black reporters and photographers. We in the trenches feel that we miss a lot of stories that The Star or the Sunday Times would get, in the townships or in the regions, that White reporters wouldn’t have access to. I feel that sort of change is necessary, not only because of the South African environment, but purely because I feel it’s essential if the newspaper is not only to expand but to become more community-orientated.

Nonetheless, truly radical affirmative-action policies did not appear to be in the offing, even in the wake of the KTI merger (see below). And The Citizen’s outreach efforts would seek to attract new readers “without losing our broader appeal,” in Williams’ view. In part, as Ken Owen has noted, The Citizen today “succeeds because its right-wing orientation gives dispossessed whites a voice.”167 This core readership may prove even more important if The Citizen can position itself to benefit from the largescale White flight from post-apartheid broadcast media, many of which have been transformed almost beyond recognition since the end of the Nationalist era. In this context and in general, more liberal White readers also seemed a promising growth sector, according to Williams:

I think it’s important for us to cater to the right wing, but my impression of the approach I would adopt is that it would be broader. It wouldn’t be unsympathetic to the left at all, or to any reasonable political approach. I think the only ground for restriction would be if people were inciting racial hatred or violence. Otherwise, they can have their say, as far as I’m concerned. This goes with Payton described as one of the tenets of liberalism, one which is often left out, and that’s a generosity of spirit. I think we have to be more generous than we are now.168

There are indications that shift towards a more liberal constituency was in the minds of Perskor planners well before the 1996 merger with KTI. Williams says that when applying for the job of Johnson’s heir apparent, he was open with Perskor Chair Beytendag about his liberal political views. During one of several lengthy interviews, in Williams’ recounting, Beytendag glanced at a

167 Owen, “Is the new SA killing the press?”

168 As far as The Citizen keeping its right-wing readership, Ken Owen says this may be essential to the paper’s success: “It is hard to escape the suspicion that The Citizen, like the Afrikaans papers, succeeds because its right-wing orientation gives dispossessed whites a voice.”
reference letter calling Williams “a true liberal.” Beytendag “opened his eyes very wide and said, ‘What does this “liberal” mean?’”

I explained about basic freedoms: freedom of association, freedom of the press. That seemed to appeal to him. When you come down to it, a lot of these people whom one might regard as right wing, they actually believe in those things too. More and more, now that they’re on the receiving end!

Such a shift, of course, would be less radical than many of The Citizen’s detractors would allege, given Johnny Johnson’s overriding emphasis on “neutral” hard news and his sometimes-ambivalent editorial stance. Together with Black-advancement initiatives, though, it would allow The Citizen’s sponsor, Perskor, to present a reformist face to the public – and to the nouveau régime. As Business Editor Ian Smith put it, “I know that they [Perskor] were very anxious to get on the right side of the ANC government, as any commercial organization with big government contracts would be.” The corporation’s greatest concern was the lucrative state textbook and telephone-book market, which it had long divvied up with the giant Afrikaner publishing house, Nasionale Pers. But Perskor/KTI faced plenty of competition in the new era, mostly from publishers whose political-correctness quotient far exceeded Perskor’s. Moreover, around the time that Eric Mafuna was appointed to the Citizen Board of Directors, the government announced that it would write and print school-text supplements for the next three years, rather than undertaking a general replacement of texts in schools. One Education Department employee said the Ministry’s decision was “driven by political imperatives,” and by an unwillingness to be viewed as “conniving with publishers”; losses to publishers and printers, including Perskor, were estimated in the millions of rands.169

The KTI merger was surely motivated in part by a desire to explore new opportunities to compensate for an expected shortfall in revenue from traditional sources. The merger, though, should not be seen as indicating a far-reaching transformation of The Citizen’s functioning, either in terms of the relationship between the paper and Perskor or with regard to editorial content and

169 Amanda Vermeulen, “Govt to print new school materials,” Business Day, 2 February 1995. Meanwhile, tendering was fierce for the phone book contract (6 million Telkom directories nationwide), with over a dozen companies vying for the tender shared since 1989 by Nasionale Pers and Perskor. “Rivals allege that Afrikaans publishers profited in the past through their close association with the former National Party government,” notes Ciaran Ryan, though Perskor’s Koos Beytendag was quoted as rejecting the notion. “All ... printing contracts were awarded to Perskor after we successfully won formal tenders that were issued through the formal Tender Board,” Beytendag said. “Some tenders were won, but many were lost.” He made similar comments in a (brief) personal interview: “Some contracts you win, some you lose. That’s business.”
orientation. The role of KTI in the paper’s day-to-day operations remains peripheral: the syndicate is limited to three directors on a Perskor board of nine. Moreover, Chairman Eric Molobi indicated that KTI would not involve itself “in the day-to-day management” of *The Citizen*, slack as it already was. He described such intervention as

> a recipe for chaos. We must leave the management to do what they do best. We can’t just tell them what to do; we must learn to understand the business, and from there develop a strategy for change. ... You cannot change a newspaper overnight. Repositioning *The Citizen* will have to be done cautiously and thoughtfully. It still has the image of being a bastion of right-wing thinking, but if you change a brand too drastically, you could end up killing it. The paper has a strong black readership – maybe not for the news content – but we have to consider that when debating potential changes. We will be canvassing other editors, marketing and advertising experts to come up with a feasible, workable solution – and it will take time.¹⁷⁰

Molobi’s comments suggest that financial considerations will increasingly come to predominate – that *The Citizen*, in other words, will move closer to the free-market model that South Africa’s English press has standardly followed. The new emphasis on profits will serve as a major point of consensus in blending Afrikaner “old money” with the emerging Black capitalism typified by KTI. Fani Titi, a director of KTI, stressed that “we are first and foremost business people and we have a response to make money for Kagiso Trust.” Simply doing so, he suggested, was Black “empowerment” of a sort.¹⁷¹ Eric Molobi and Koos Beytendag also emphasized the role of money as a lubricant: in a joint statement issued in the immediate wake of the merger, they noted that “politically, [the merger] unites two entities from opposite ends of the spectrum. Economically, it brings together a superb mix of business synergies.”¹⁷²

The implications of the cautious, profit-oriented approach for Black advancement at *The Citizen* seemed considerable. Affirmative-action measures certainly will be implemented, but within limits, as Molobi stressed in post-merger comments to the *Mail & Guardian*:

> Affirmative action for the sake of it is not productive. ... Training is a long-term undertaking and we need to emphasise skills and competency before colour when making appointments. But at the same time there is no room for complacency.¹⁷³


¹⁷² “Boost for black business,” *Independent Online*.

¹⁷³ Molobi quoted in Wackemagel, “Kagiso treads softly.”
Politically, other continuities will probably be evident. We have seen that *The Citizen* has long taken a mildly reformist line while buttressing the status quo. Under the new ownership arrangements, *a similar stance* vis-à-vis the ANC-dominated regime is quite possible – especially if this brings benefits in the form of state publishing contracts, new advertising accounts, and an expanding Black readership. Even before the KTI merger, in 1995, Helen Grange stated that “*The Citizen* seems to have settled down grudgingly into a sort of Government of National Unity-supporting newspaper.” A more “developmentalist” tinge may emerge if *The Citizen* a) grows more liberal in its editorial outlook and b) seeks to become a newspaper of record for government policies. Strange though it may seem, one can even imagine *The Citizen* coming to supplant *Sowetan* in this latter role – to an extent at least. Skeptics should note that in 1995, Perskor’s flagship was already outselling the nationally-distributed *Sowetan* in the Greater Johannesburg area.

If the quest for profits and modernization can be expected to stir up *Citizen* operations over the coming years, one can also expect *The Citizen’s* longstanding emphasis on hard news to serve as bedrock for the transition to a post-apartheid, post-Johnny Johnson era. Asked to predict where and how *The Citizen* would stand five years hence, staff reporter Martin McGhee responded: “As far as content goes, I’ll take a wild guess and say I don’t think it would be much different. We would have progressed as far as technicalities go ... But content-wise, I think the news mix that we have right now is dead right.”

**Conclusion**

*The Citizen* likes the status quo. It will move with the status quo if it moves slowly.

– Nick Lane, former SAPA reporter

The changes were gradual and we rolled with them.

– Martin McGhee, *Citizen* staffer

South Africa’s transition from apartheid, like most political transitions worldwide, has thrown domestic media into a ferment. The effects of the political emancipation of the Black masses will echo across the media spectrum into the 21st century.

In this complex and still rapidly-transforming environment, *The Citizen* stands out – as it always has. The English paper that one would expect to experience one of the more profound identity crises instead trod a stolidly traditional path right through to 1996. Only then, with the KTI merger, did *The Citizen* appear to be jumping on the bandwagon of change. And the change
mooted was not what one would predict for a former government-propaganda organ that is still the most right-wing of the English-language daily papers. A far-reaching modernization project is in the offing, perhaps under the stewardship of a Black editor. But changes in the basic conception and selection of “news,” in the paper’s orientation towards the political and economic status quo, in reader demographics – all seemed likely to be incremental rather than dramatic.

**Sowetan and The Star:**
Argus Unbundles

**Sowetan and the Legacy of the Black Press**

The thing about transition is, it does create uncertainty; but if you think about it very carefully, you can use it to your advantage.

– Aggrey Klaaste, editor, Sowetan

*Sowetan* entered the post-apartheid era with laurels and advantages that no other South African daily could match. As the flagship of Black journalism since its founding in 1981, replacing Percy Qoboza’s revered *World*, *Sowetan* was perfectly poised to ride the wave of national self-expression that the Black liberation movement represented. Since its inception, it had demonstrated the most spectacular growth of any South African daily, possibly in the country’s history. Its initial circulation of about 56,000 copies had grown explosively by March 1995, to 217,894 copies. Senior *World/Sowetan* figures had also paid a price under apartheid far higher than nearly any White journalist. Editor Aggrey Klaaste and political editor Mathatha Tsedu, along with numerous more junior staff, spent time in jail or under banning orders during the 1970s and 1980s. This bond of shared suffering established a “one-to-one relationship, a mutual loyalty” with readers that, it seemed, perfectly positioned the paper for the post-apartheid

---

It was no surprise to find *Sowetan* cited as the biggest “winner” in a generally anaemic post-apartheid press market: circulation nearly doubled between 1986 and 1996. The paper, according to its new masthead, was now “building the nation.” The new nation, too, was building *Sowetan* — even if *New Nation*, the weekly publication, would prove one of *Sowetan’s* biggest transitional headaches.

There were other surprising dilemmas for *Sowetan* in the end of apartheid. As noted, the oppositionist stance it had adopted under Nationalist rule was clearly outmoded with the apartheid dragon slain. In Aggrey Klaaste’s words, quoted earlier: “It’s a bit difficult to get all fired up ... about this new freedom,” since it brought with it an added burden of “responsibility.” Moreover, the sense of betrayal that regime sources, including President Mandela, expressed whenever Black journalists criticized government policies, weighed especially heavily on *Sowetan*. As the most prominent Black daily, it was often a rumoured target of regime takeover attempts, indirectly or even directly (the long-mooted ANC daily newspaper, mentioned earlier in the chapter). This tension was not eased by the unbundling of Argus. The sale seemed to represent the fulfilment of Argus Chairman Doug Band’s pledge in 1992: to support “the principle of an independent and diverse Press in South Africa.” But there was more to the deal than a simple handing-over of the keys. At the time of the unbundling, Argus (shortly to be renamed INP) signed a contract with Prosper Africa under which *Sowetan’s* longtime sponsor would continue to manage the paper on a daily basis, as well as overseeing printing, advertising, and distribution. Aggrey Klaaste justified the decision with a directness that a White, perhaps, could not have: “To successfully hand over a

---

175 Joe Mdhlela interview. Evidence for the bond is not purely anecdotal. A 1994 survey of Argus stablemates by Marketing & Media Research concluded that “Sowetan ... appears to have a strong emotional bond with its readers [emphasis in original], and unlike many of the other Argus newspaper readers, who feel their newspaper does not write or care enough for people like themselves, the *Sowetan* scores well in these attributes (cares about people of my race, people in my neighbourhood, who are the same as me politically, etc.).” Unpublished internal document, privately supplied.

176 Under the terms of *Sowetan’s* sale, Prosper Africa's directors came to hold 70 percent of New Africa Communications (NAC), Prosper Africa’s media arm. Argus retained the other 30 percent. NAC in turn held about three-quarters of the stock in New Africa Publishers, “sole owner and publisher of the *Sowetan*."


178 *Sowetan* General Manager Roger Wellstead said in 1995: “Remember that I'm employed by Argus. All the other staff are on the New Africa Publications payroll. Argus still has a 42 percent interest in the company, does all the printing, all the distribution, selling of the advertising. And management is on a three-year-contract basis. The *Sowetan* was sold to a company that openly admits it’s got no experience in newspaper management. If you're going to sell a company with the object of redistributing control of some media, it would be rather pointless to sell it to a company that doesn't have the expertise, with the possibility that it could fail. So Argus are making sure that *Sowetan remains successful.*"
publication like the *Sowetan* to blacks, it must be done in phases to allow time for the training of blacks in all the skills required to manage a paper well."\(^{179}\) *Sowetan*’s former owners arguably emerged with the best of both worlds. Allan Greenblo wrote in the wake of the deal that Argus/INP were “seen as participants in a high-profile economic empowerment exercise,” which might ingratiate them with South Africa’s new regime. At the same time, they retained a 42.5 percent stake in the country’s largest daily. They also continued to hold “the management and print contracts where (incidentally) the real profits in the newspaper industry are often made.”\(^{180}\)

The unbundling, moreover, brought *Sowetan* under the direct control of one of the most prominent ANC supporters in the country — Ntatho Modana was President Mandela’s personal physician. The transition was not eased by the new ownership’s attempts, beginning in January 1995, to merge *Sowetan* with an ANC mouthpiece, nor by the heavy-handed interventions in editorial policy when material was published that ran counter to the new mobilizer’s preferences. Even this early in the case-studies, we may not be surprised to see the efforts to impose a rigid mobilizing “line” met with anger and resistance from staff. In large part, this seems to have been a response to a perceived invasion of editorial “territory” by political considerations. And those political considerations in themselves were problematic for a good many *Sowetan* staffers. The paper had always been avowedly anti-apartheid. But its preferred political option for the post-apartheid era was far less clear. This reflected the longstanding conviction of many staffers, and several senior ones, that the ANC’s accommodationist option should be jettisoned in favour of a more militant, pro-Pan-Africanist Congress “line.” In the clash between Ntatho Motlana and *Sowetan* staff, there were shades of the showdown at *Barricada* in October 1994: staff bridled both at the professional imposition, and the hegemony of a political line that they deemed suspect. Let us explore this aspect of *Sowetan*’s institutional “identity” further.

**Political Identity**

For many years, *Sowetan* was saddled with a reputation as a supporter of the hard-line Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), with its military wing (the Azanian People’s Organization, AZAPO) and

---


its notorious slogan, “One settler, one bullet.” Several of the main players at the paper – including Aggrey Klaaste, Joe Thloloe, and Thami Mazwai (now with the SABC) – were closely affiliated with the PAC in the 1970s and '80s. The Black Consciousness movement that took a firm hold over Black youth after the Soweto uprising also found converts among the paper’s staff. Sowetan’s political editor at the time of the 1995 research, Mathatha Tsedu, was a Black Consciousness supporter. These identifications were hardly dropped when the ANC took power in 1994, and according to Aggrey Klaaste, they influenced the reporting and commentary of some Sowetan staff.

“We have these divisions, politically, amongst ourselves,” Klaaste admitted in a 1995 interview:

ANC, PAC, AZAPO, and so forth Many of the chaps here were rather sharply against the ANC, many of our reporters. Even up to now, they are always looking for a way in which they can sort of knock the ANC, make the government stumble. That is a very unpatriotic thing to do, but it happens. ... I always tell [Mathatha Tsedu], “I know what you’re up to! You’re trying to get at the ANC!” Sometimes that’s okay for the newspaper, because it gives it a sense of independence. We’re not sucking up to the government, in a way. He’ll say, “No, I’m not,” and I probably have to give him a warning now and again. But he’s smart. I think he’s very well respected, even by the ANC guys, although they know his political affiliations.

The irony – and perhaps the evidence of Sowetan’s ability to suppress partisanship in favour of “nation-building” and journalistic professionalism – is that somewhere around 96 percent of Sowetan’s readers support the ANC. Yet an unusually high proportion of those readers, by South African standards, consider the paper’s political coverage to be sufficiently fair and objective. The paper, it seemed, was doing a reasonable job of upholding its transition-era credo: “Our purpose as journalists is to inform, not to indoctrinate.... Our own opinions, beliefs and emotions must not influence how we report news. When we express opinions we must clearly identify them as such.”

This suggests, to some Sowetan staff at least, that the paper’s pro-PAC or anti-ANC reputation is outdated, or was always undeserved. Mathatha Tsedu asserted that the paper had

---


182“Panel Norms.”


184Mathatha Tsedu argued that the supposed pro-PAC “slant” of Sowetan coverage was a professional response to existing gaps in South African news coverage. “We try to be as unbiased as we can, but we service a Black
developed “very good working relations with the ANC as an organization, and with government,” even if Sowetan had disappointed those who thought that with the end of apartheid, “we would now just willy-nilly become a mouthpiece of the ANC.” There was also the undeniable fact that the “nation-building” project Sowetan espoused virtually mirrored the ANC’s ill-fated Reconstruction and Development Program. For Klaaste, the de facto alliance in itself did not involve a professional conundrum:

I’m very willing to try and help the government do the things they’re doing, because I think they’re right. It’s absolutely correct to try to repair the damage caused by apartheid. It’s also correct in a business sense, because the more people you get who are [economically] viable and informed, the more people will buy newspapers. Of course, the danger is always that you will become the sweetheart of the government. People like my political editor are very useful, because they sometimes sound a different drum. If the government makes mistakes, you should say so vigorously, as loudly as you possibly can. And they must know that you’re not just beating your drum because of who they are, but of what they’re doing.

It was one thing to cultivate a working relationship with the ANC, however, and another altogether to be taken over by it. In January 1994, just a month before the dawn of majority rule in South Africa, Argus unbundled Sowetan to Prosper Africa/NAIL, a consortium of Black business interests that had become the largest Black-controlled company on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Headed by Dr. Ntatho Molana, Prosper Africa – in tandem with the ANC government and Sowetan itself – proclaimed its devotion to the principles of Black advancement and the market economy.

185In its mission statement, Prosper Africa’s parent, NAIL, pledged “to ensure black economic advancement by promoting constructive black-led partnership with leading business entities and leaders of commerce and industry; to ensure that black entrepreneurship is universally fostered in the South African economy; to maximise existing shareholder wealth and facilitate greater direct black shareholder participation; to ensure significant interests in selected major business groupings in Southern Africa with an initial emphasis on the financial services, media and communications industries; [and] to ensure that the wealth and prosperity of the private sector will benefit all South Africans.” Quoted in Tim Cumming, “What does it mean to be a shareholder in NAIL?,” African Business, December
Their new owner's political affiliations were instantly a concern to *Sowetan* journalists and editors, as well as others worried by the ANC's overwhelming dominance over the Black liberation movement.\(^\text{186}\) As noted, Motlana was part of Nelson Mandela's inner circle. Most of the other directors of Prosper Africa were also part of the pro-government "establishment." When the unbundling was announced, recalled Aggrey Klaaste, "the staff on the newspaper got particularly upset, because they thought the ANC was buying the *Sowetan*."\(^\text{187}\) To help assuage the staffers' concerns, Argus management arranged for Motlana to visit *Sowetan*'s offices shortly after the purchase. The visit was a disaster. In Klaaste's summary, Motlana "just blew it":

He came here and had a fight with the guys. Normally, such guys — the Murdochs and all that — they just bungle their way through life, quite frankly. For them to come to a staff of very hostile people, who already think they're coming with a particular agenda ... He made a bit of an ass of himself here, because he got into quarrels with youngsters, and it shouldn't happen that way. I've since told him that if you're the head of a newspaper group, you don't come and speak to the staff like that, because when you come and speak to a whole lot of reporters — even if you're the Prime Minister, they're just going to upset you. They're going to ask you tough questions.

The journalists peppered Motlana with questions about whether the ANC would seek to exert influence over *Sowetan*. By all accounts, Motlana lost his cool, going so far as to relay directly to the assembled staff President Mandela's concerns that *Sowetan* was distorting its coverage and granting excessive attention to the PAC and other minor but militant players.\(^\text{188}\) Motlana was subsequently cautioned not to exercise any sort of direct vigilance over *Sowetan*'s operations. "I've made it clear to him — at least to his assistants — that he must never come here and talk to the staff, unless he wants to give them a watch or a prize," Klaaste said bluntly. "He mustn't come and have debates here. That should be left to the managers."

---


\(^\text{186}\)Dr. Gomolemo Mokae, publicity secretary of AZAPO, expressed a "cautious optimism" about *Sowetan*'s unbundling to a Black investment consortium. But he added, significantly: "In normal circumstances this kind of move, where black people are making inroads into a white-dominated world of newspaper publishing, would be laudable. However, all the major people said to be behind the move are directly or indirectly associated with one political stream [the ANC]. AZAPO hopes that political one-upmanship and sectarianism will not rear their heads and meddle in this potentially nation building project." Quoted in Mzimkulu Malunga, "Delight, anger greet takeover," *Sowetan*, 27 January 1994.

\(^\text{187}\)"There had been rumours that the ANC wanted this paper," said Klaaste, "because it's a Black paper with a good circulation and so on. So those fears emerged again. It was quite something to try to convince the chaps that Dr. Motlana, even if he was ANC, was also a businessman who wanted to make money on this newspaper."

\(^\text{188}\)This account is based on interviews with Paul Drosdzol, Aggrey Klaaste, and Mathatha Tsedu, all of whom were present at the meeting with Motlana. Motlana's office did not return calls.
Nonetheless, several Sowetan staffers reported overt political interference by Motlana and Prosper Africa in their subsequent reportage. Business reporter Mzimkulu Malunga claimed to have had several adverse reactions from Motlana to stories he had written. As a result, he says, he had chosen to seek the approval of higher-ups for potentially sensitive articles:

In the past, because I'm in charge of business, I would go ahead if I thought the story was worth publishing, without even going through the editor. But with stories relating to Motlana — because he is the owner, and they're sensitive — in principle I would still publish, but I would have to notify Aggrey, and he would have to go through the story and be satisfied. Then, if Motlana wants to come back on certain issues in the story, he [Klaaste] would be able to defend me.

Malunga's view, notable in the light of our explorations of the professional imperative, was that “unless the owners come to grips with the fact that they are dealing with intellectuals, and there are people here who are very principled, it's going to be difficult, and the relationship will remain very tense.” For his part, Mathatha Tsedu recalled the exception Motlana took to Sowetan's — Tsedu's — coverage of a 1994 ANC conference in Bloemfontein:

I went down with a reporter, stayed for a day, for the opening, and then came back and left this guy down there. The Star sent the political editor and two political correspondents, and they stayed there for the whole time, and their coverage was much greater than ours. But during the same weekend of the ANC conference, there was a PAC conference and an AZAPO conference. We had sent staff to cover those other conferences, which The Star had not done. And Motlana was saying our treatment of the conference was less than good. We said that in our opinion we did as much as we could with the resources we had, and it should be judged in the context of our political coverage of that weekend [as a whole].

The potential for a serious clash between Sowetan's editorial autonomy and its mobilizer's political affiliations was such that Aggrey Klaaste was almost fatalistic on the theme, although part of him seemed to relish the prospect of a good scrap:

The problems that are going to be very tough are when Mr. Mandela leans on Dr. Motlana, and Dr. Motlana leans on me, because it's going to happen one of these days. And what on earth am I going to do? If I'm not courageous, I'll just — you know, lick their boots. While I'm not very courageous, I don't think I would do that. I think I would tell them to go fly a kite, and I might get fired or something. Because if the ANC realizes eventually that the RDP doesn't fly, and the people start rioting, we're going to write about it. And then Mr. Mandela's going to tell Dr. Motlana, "No, you can't let those guys do that." And he's going to give me a phone call, and the fight is going to start at my level. Of course, those guys in the newsroom will just be itching to get into that fight, and I'll have to stop them.

Further grist for Motlana's critics came with Prosper Africa's purchase of the faltering New Nation, a strongly pro-ANC weekly founded in 1986 as part of South Africa's alternative-press "bloom." Motlana announced his intention to fold New Nation into Sowetan's operations, most
likely as a weekend version of the paper. Staff feared instead that *Sowetan* was being folded into *New Nation*, and hence into the unofficial propaganda apparatus of the ANC government.\(^{189}\) "We were convinced that this was a political decision and not necessarily a commercial decision," said political reporter Joe Mdhlela. "Because *New Nation* has always been an ANC mouthpiece; it's an open secret. That is why they're not successful commercially, because they have been pandering to the wishes and the whims of the ANC." Mdhlela also expressed staffers' concerns that *New Nation* would drain resources from the comparatively flush and profitable *Sowetan*: "We think a dying horse like *New Nation* would obviously interfere and deplete resources, because we'd need to refurbish it, revamp it, in order for the publication to attract any form of readership." Amidst all the uncertainty, Mdhlela argued that *Sowetan* risked being distracted from opportunities to expand its own circulation and influence:

I think we can go a long way [to increase circulation]. For instance, we circulate mainly in the Gauteng region. That doesn't mean we don't go to places like Durban, Cape Town and so on, but if we do go there, it's on a very small scale. We were told that plans were afoot to jack up our circulation in those areas, so we could actually go full-blast countrywide. That has the potential of increasing our circulation to 300, 400,000 copies a day. However, now the main focus is on accommodating *New Nation*, and that [expansion] in a way has to take a back seat. We were quite disappointed, obviously: it's an opportunity lost, temporarily perhaps.

Mdhlela's fears seemed borne out by mid-1996, when NAIL was "contemplating the future of *New Nation*," according to the *Mail & Guardian*. The paper noted that *New Nation* had been running "continual losses," forcing *Sowetan* to "plough ... part of its profits into the ailing newspaper in a bid to keep it afloat." The report noted, though, that some NAIL board members favoured shutting down *New Nation* — an option said also to be the preference of "staffers at the *Sowetan*."\(^{190}\) In the end, it was the closure rather than the merger that prevailed. *New Nation* folded in 1997. It is not known whether *Sowetan* staffers breathed sighs of relief.

---

\(^{189}\) According to Aggrey Klaaste, "because the *New Nation* was an ANC newspaper, straight away it revived all the past fears that the new Black owners would use it as a Trojan horse for the ANC to take over the whole [*Sowetan* operation]."

NATION-BUILDING AND INSTITUTION-BUILDING

As noted, Sowetan has conceptualized its post-apartheid project around the theme of "nation-building." It is a preoccupation shared by most South African papers, as we will see again in the Star case-study. But it obviously holds a special significance for Sowetan as a flagship of the liberation struggle.

Core to nation-building is Sowetan's educational role, which differs somewhat from that of its Independent stable-mate, The Star. The Marketing & Media Research survey found an average monthly household income of R1989 for Sowetan readers vs. an Argus norm of R4072. "Even comparing African readers of all the Argus newspapers," the survey added, "Sowetan has the lowest income levels." Uplift and advancement were thus pressing concerns for Sowetan in a way that they were not for the more upmarket Star and Citizen. With its readership disproportionately concentrated in poorer Black constituencies, Sowetan could only benefit by improvements in literacy and education, and a rise in disposable income at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Sidney Matlhaku, features editor of Sowetan, provided an example of the paper's educational role, on the sensitive issue of paternity and absent fathers. It extended beyond rhetorical exhortations in editorials:

Most Black guys don't even know where they stand when it comes to a child, whether they're married or not married. And you've got your rights. You can actually have paternity [custody?] of the child, and the mother can have visiting rights. Whereas it's always been the other way around. This is a legal change that's come into force. I've had several calls this morning, people wanting follow-ups [on the story], whom they can phone ... We actually have an advisory clinic here in the Sowetan — we don't have it in Soweto [itself], but you get it here at Sowetan newspaper. There's a woman who actually staffs the "Help Line," and we've got volunteers who work from five in the afternoon till nine at night. You can ask about any problem; they're trained counsellors.

Materially, by many measures, Sowetan in 1995 was in good shape. Its longtime White management was efficient. Circulation and advertising were increasing steadily. Readership loyalty was unmatched. And yet the paper confronted professional challenges beyond the sponsors' clumsy attempts to reorient editorial content. The problem resulted from the paper's staffing composition, from decades of racist educational policies in South Africa, and from the near-revolutionary militancy of Sowetan's formative years in the 1980s.

The paper's predominantly Black staff, unique among South African dailies, rendered Sowetan immune to the affirmative-action pressures that majority rule placed on other English press
But it also meant that, unlike other English papers, most of Sowetan's journalists were writing English as a second language. Owing to apartheid's shoddy “Bantu education” policies, their training in that language was unlikely to be superior. “Copy,” said sub-editor Paul Drosdzol, “is a very big problem”:

> We have some very dedicated subs who work very hard, but it’s frustrating. We’ve had people almost on the brink of a nervous breakdown sometimes, because they are working with impenetrable copy that’s so badly written ... There have been running battles between specific sub-editors and reporters. It’s touching a raw nerve here. ... Oh, it’s a challenge! I don’t think sub-editors on any newspaper in this country work as hard as we do. I’ve often had to intercede, to calm people down, because there have been some very — almost physical confrontations over this.

The difficulty was compounded by the rawness of many of the paper’s recruits. Mathatha Tsedu told the Sapa news agency in 1995 that 70 percent of Sowetan’s reporters had less than two years’ experience. More subtle challenges arose from the practice of committed or “advocacy” journalism in the liberation movement of the 1970s and ’80s. Aggrey Klaaste phrased the problem this way:

> In the newspaper, what happens is that a young man or woman sits behind the typewriter, and has got to articulate this very complex situation. And she can’t, because of Bantu education or whatever, and she gets angry. So the easiest thing to do is to pick up a banner. Many of them became advocates of a cause, propagandists. What you need to be able to do is make them understand that journalism is not advocacy. Journalism is trying to get at

---

191 This is not to say that racial issues have not resonated among Sowetan staff. While the paper’s reporters are overwhelmingly Black, the sub-editing section was more racially even. Asked if the different levels of representation, so common in the post-apartheid press, have caused tension at Sowetan, sub-editor Paul Drosdzol responded: “Very much so ... Recently we had to make an appointment: the assistant chief sub, a Black guy, left to continue with his studies. We actually put three people in his place on a kind of trial basis, and the person we eventually appointed was a White guy, because he was the best person for the job. That caused an absolute uproar. It’s since died down, but it took a lot of backpedalling and justifications. The people who selected the guy in question — there were three of us — were called racists. That was quite funny, because I was White, there was one Coloured and one Black guy ... But I think it’s convenient to throw things like that around.” Drosdzol added, however, that this was “the only incident I know of on this paper. I think there’s always been a kind of equity here. I’m sure, for instance, that if I wanted to go far on this paper, I would be allowed to do that. I don’t think anybody would stand in my way.”

Ismail Lagardien, Sowetan’s parliamentary correspondent in 1995, alleged discrimination against Coloureds at the paper in the era of Black political dominance — reflecting lingering perceptions that Coloureds received more favourable treatment under apartheid. Lagardien said he was told that in terms of his advancement, “There’s nothing we can do with you at the moment, or in the foreseeable future ... The country’s buying Black.” A Sowetan editor allegedly told him, “They’re already saying you [Coloureds] are taking over.” According to Lagardien, “That kind of comment just crept up every now and then — once a month, twice a month. On the floor, in the newsroom, they were saying, ‘Why can’t we send an African person there?’ Yet just a year earlier, I was seen as a Black person who was doing a fucking good job. Suddenly I’m not an African anymore.”

192 “Media can’t even handle info it has, says Sparks,” Sapa dispatch in The Star, 9 February 1995 (reporting a freedom of information conference in Grahamstown).
various truths by some very smart footwork. You can only do that if you are very well informed. And if you are well-informed, you can become a leftwing journalist or a rightwing journalist, as happens everywhere in the normal world. In our situation, we tell them to try to acquire the skills to understand their environment. If you understand the environment, you’re able to make choices. And in a free world, there’s nothing that would stop you making such choices. You could start a communist newspaper if you want to. But we are still trying to grapple with underdevelopment at all levels.

The management plan developed by INP for Sowetan stressed training and professional improvement as keys to the paper’s future. General Manager Roger Wellstead said management had “plowed quite a lot of money into upgrading the quality of the staff, putting them onto training programs.” Mentoring schemes had been implemented. Salaries, too, had been boosted – necessary at Sowetan for some of the same reasons as at The Star, since the Argus/INP stablemates shared an unusual commitment to Black training and advancement, and therefore produced ample fodder for corporate headhunters. Sowetan also invested in material and technological upgrades, lending the newsroom a streamlined look far in advance of The Citizen at the time of field research. Further improvements were proposed to a graphic design that was already clear and attractive. And the paper’s national reach, which exceeded that of any other South African daily, was slated for further expansion. In mid-1995, the paper was experimenting with satellite transmission of its finished pages to printing plants around South Africa. “Very few copies go to Durban and Cape Town [presently],” said Paul Drosdzol. “It’s a case of a couple of thousand in each city. What we want is 25,000 in each. That’s why we need new technology. You can’t do it the old way. You have to do it with fourth-wave [technology], where you’re just transmitting an entire paper down there and shoving it on the printing press. Transporting it is not practical at all.”

The various strands of Sowetan’s project for the new South Africa were well-summarized in an internal mission statement, dated February 1993 and posted in the paper’s newsroom at least through mid-1995. It was titled “Our Vision for the Year 2000.” Sowetan, according to the document, sought to be

* An editorially and commercially independent daily newspaper,
* produced by a well-trained and well-rewarded staff,
* profitably serving every viable English-speaking market,
* building our communities

---

and meeting the needs of a truly democratic society.

Note the twining of professional and mobilizing considerations here: profitability alongside editorial independence; the appeal to “every viable English-speaking market” beside the building of community and democracy. Sowetan seemed broadly in harmony with the market-oriented transformations that the ANC regime was overseeing. The impression was deepened by the announcement, on 1 April 1996, that veteran editor Aggrey Klaaste would be replaced by Mike Siluma, a 37-year-old who had served as Sowetan’s day editor for barely a year. According to Jacquie Golding-Duffy, some at the newspaper expressed a conviction that “Siluma is sometimes reactionary, not the ‘militant Africanist’ editor they would like to see head the tabloid.” There were echoes here of the militant-moderate split that had long made life more interesting at Sowetan. Siluma naturally rejected the “reactionary” tag. But he did express his belief, in Golding-Duffy’s paraphrase, that “the media needs to tone down its criticism of the government and find a balance between constructive criticism and informing people.” “We have to ask ourselves,” said Siluma, “if we are doing our job properly, and whether, in some instances, the government’s resentment of the press is not warranted.” He even suggested government could have a role to play in promoting “real black empowerment” through direct subsidies:

Why not let us consider that the government may have a crucial role to play in this ... an active role, where it could finance a consortium of black partners and ensure that blacks have their foot in the door? A kickstart in the right direction. You know, a lot of people will probably shoot me for suggesting this alliance, but all I will say is that I am not suggesting that we, as the press, compromise our editorial independence. No, not at all. [But] we should be open-minded and explore the possibility that the government could chip in with some funds.194

So long as Sowetan was able to preserve a basic editorial harmony with ANC policy and retain the fabled trust and loyalty of its readers, it did not seem likely to adopt a more oppositionist stance towards the centres of power – or for that matter a more obsequious one. With its poorer and universally Black demographic, though,195 Sowetan could be expected to feel the pressure if regime policies spawned mounting disaffection and frustration among the South African masses. It is impossible to predict whether some of the latent tensions with the ANC “line,” visible even in

---

195“Sowetan’s readership is almost entirely [Black] African,” according to the “Panel Norms” survey (see footnote 181).
this brief snapshot of Sowetan, might then emerge into plainer view. The existence of those
tensions, though, and the testimony of Sowetan staffers, suggest that over the past two decades, the
newspaper has developed a coherent and resilient institutional identity. Attempts by dominant
powers to co-opt or cow South Africa’s largest daily might well run up against determined
resistance – and prompt a more critical and exploratory journalism in Sowetan to boot.

**The Star: An Overview**

As the proposed “paradigmatic” English paper of this study, The Star has entered our
analysis at a number of points already. The Star was originally founded in Grahamstown, on the
distant eastern Cape, in 1871, “and moved to Johannesburg in 1887, only one year after the city
itself sprang into existence on the site of the great Witwatersand gold strike.”196 Its origins thus lay
in the same mining capital, based on hyperexploitation of African labour, that buttressed all the
Argus papers and indeed nearly all English South African institutions of any note. The Star adopted
the mantle of “press as
opposition” after the Nationalist
rise to power. But typically, it
cast its opposition to the
apartheid system in the broader
context of upholding a “state of
law” and the security of property rights. The
paper supported incremental changes, but also a peculiarly schizoid brand of fence-sitting, in the
eyes of many. Editor Harvey Tyson’s waffling on the 1983 Whites-only referendum (see Appendix
2) was only the most infamous example: Ken Owen called it a “seminal event ... even now he
[Tyson] can offer no compelling argument for his eccentricity.”197 Raymond Louw, former editor
of The Rand Daily Mail, accused The Star of “maintain[ing] a sterile neutrality, desperately trying to

---

196 Finnegan, Dateline Soweto, p. 29.
197 Ken Owen, “So what did we really do in the great war, daddy?” (reviewing Tyson’s Editors Under Fire),
avoid being elevated to the position of the government’s number one media enemy” after the Mail ceased to publish.198

As it entered the post-apartheid era, The Star carried with it an almost prototypical middle-class White constituency – in a country where middle-class Whites enjoyed a degree of comfort and disposable income unequalled anywhere in the world. In absolute terms, though, The Star, like the other two case-study newspapers studied for this chapter, had “succeeded” in attracting a predominantly Black readership.199 That gave it important advantages in negotiating the transition to the post-apartheid era.

There are many dimensions of Star functioning that one could choose to focus on in this brief case-study. The most interesting to this researcher are: the paper’s role in the “unbundling” of Argus, and its subsequent purchase by Irish “ketchup king” Tony O’Reilly; and the linked strategies of community outreach and affirmative action that were prominent in The Star’s editorial and institutional orientation (or at least rhetoric) during the 1995 fieldwork.

OUTREACH AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The Star’s community outreach after 1990 reflected a conviction that The Star could not stand passively by while the great process of social transformation took place. As a symbol of its determination to break down previous divisions, it abandoned its longstanding practice of running a split-run edition for Black and White markets, sometimes editing the same story in different ways, depending on the targeted constituency.200 Now, according to general manager Graeme King,

It's not good enough to stand on the sidelines commenting on the process that's going on within the country. We need to become far more actively engaged in helping to ensure that we have a stable and economically strong nation. That's very easy to say, but the meaning is that we don't just stand and comment in a "whitey" fashion. We've got to become part of

198 Raymond Louw, “Remember the days when a newspaper told us the news?,” Weekly Mail, 20-26 December 1985.
199 The “success” was ambiguous, as noted earlier, in light of these sectors’ unattractiveness to the advertising consortia on whose revenues The Star relied.
200 Finnegan offers an example in Dateline Soweto, his study of Black journalism at The Star. A story by Black writer Jon Qwelane about a speech by Zulu leader Mangosuthu Buthelezi “emphasized in the white editions the Zulu strongman’s anti-government remarks, while in the Africa edition it emphasized Buthelezi’s belligerence toward black journalists and his penchant for making silly remarks.”
this process, and demonstrate to our readers and all our stakeholders that we're interested in being part of the new South Africa.\textsuperscript{201}

Socially-conscious involvement in the Black community was not new to \textit{The Star}. As it had taken a lead in training Black journalists, it had also made inroads into the country's impoverished Black education system. A program called TEACH – Teach Each African Child – was founded in 1971 with public and private money. It built 36 schoolhouses between 1971 and 1976, but died with the chaos of the Soweto riots.\textsuperscript{202} Another project, Newspapers in Education, delivered unsold back-issues of newspapers to Black schools. In the early 1980s, when South Africa's newspaper industry began to bottom out, the program was cut; but it was revived in 1994 as an ideal goodwill-builder for the post-apartheid age. Indeed, the transitional era saw \textit{The Star} increasingly defining itself as a newspaper that would promote progress and development for South Africa and all its citizens. \"\textit{The Star} should encourage racial co-operation,\" stated the Code of Ethics published in March 1995, \"and pursue a policy aimed at enhancing the welfare and progress of all sections of the population. \textit{The Star} should endeavour to be positive and constructive ...\"\textsuperscript{203} More than one project was literally constructive. \textit{The Star} in mid-1995 was soliciting readers to donate funds for an R30 million daycare and early-learning centre in Soweto – \"investing in the future of our children,\" according to the glossy promotional literature. \textit{Star} promotions manager Hilly Camacho described the project as \"the biggest multipurpose community daycare centre [in South Africa], probably in the world.\" It was a move away from the \"very 'white' promotions\" the paper had run in the past (and still did run).\textsuperscript{204} \"Because I run all the community projects, I'm very close to the people in

\textsuperscript{201}Peter Sullivan also said in an interview that \"We've sat on the sidelines and criticized for too long. We want a stable South Africa, and we need to get out onto the field.\" For example? \"Rather than just saying we embrace affirmative-action legislation, we should get out in Johannesburg and teach people how to do this and manage this.\"

\textsuperscript{202}After 1976, said Hillie Camacho, education became a focus of the struggle against apartheid, and \"people started sending us rude notes saying, \'Why are you building schools when our schools are being burnt down [by activists]?\' In fact, Peter [Sullivan] and I took a tour of Soweto. Not one of our TEACH schools had been damaged. Not one windowpane was broken.\"

\textsuperscript{203}\textit{The Star's Code of Ethics,} \textit{The Star,} 7 March 1995. The passage after the ellipses reads: \"but not misleadingly optimistic or bland.\"

\textsuperscript{204}One such \"White\" promotion was \"Bride of the Year,\" in which \"mothers, mothers-in-law, grandmothers\" bought \"two [or] three thousand newspapers to cut out the coupons and enter their daughters, daughters-in-law, cousins, whatever, in the competition. That's a very good circulation-builder,\" but relatively few Blacks in South Africa can afford to buy thousands of copies of newspapers at a time. In general, said Camacho, \"it's very difficult to say which promotions really apply to the White market, and which to the Black. But through the years, anything we run which offers major prizes, especially with the [increasing] electrification of Black areas – we found if you give away TV sets, or stoves, or fridges, the entries are predominantly from our Black readers. If you give away motor cars, it's
Soweto,” said Camacho. The daycare project arose out of consultations in the early 1990s with a school “adopted” by The Star and supplied with books, sewing machines, and other resources. At a parents’ day she attended, Camacho learned that

90 percent [of the parents] told me they wanted a crèche-cum-daycare centre, where they could leave their little babies and kiddies up to the age of five or six. Because they leave for work at four in the morning, they have to catch trains and taxis. Between four and seven, when their domestics come in, a two-month-old baby has to stay at home in a house or a little shack without electricity, with paraffin, with the oldest kids [around] who could start a fire and destroy the whole household and die. That has happened.

Camacho’s description of her lobbying effort to get The Star to support the project also provides an intriguing glimpse of the paper’s cozy links to the political elite of the time:

Being a mother myself, I thought: This is exactly what we [at The Star] have to do. I came back and had to sell it to my editor at the time, Richard Steyn. He said, “Yeah, I don’t know if that’s right, do a little more homework. You’re never going to get the land.” So I went to Peter Sullivan and said, “Look, you’ve got contacts in government” — it was still the National [Party] government at the time. I said, “I know you play golf with the Minister of Development. Invite him to lunch in our penthouse.” He said, “Fat chance you have of bringing him to lunch.” Well, the long and the short of it [was], he came to lunch. I sat next to him and blabbered in his ear for two hours, and then I said, “I want land in that area.” I think he was a bit shocked. He went back, faxed me, and said, “It’s a wonderful idea. Speak to my Department of Education and Training.” We got the land free, gratis.

These efforts at outreach into new and old constituencies alike confronted the reality of faltering and in fact declining circulation figures for The Star throughout the 1990s. The paper shifted to a 24-hour publishing schedule in 1990, finally ending the monopoly on the Johannesburg morning market that The Citizen had held since the demise of The Rand Daily Mail. It debuted a Sunday edition, the Sunday Star, in May 1992, and lost $12.6 million in two years. The Sunday Star folded in January 1994. Lyndall Campher’s 1996 “Spotlight on Media,” cited earlier, placed The Star in the “losers” column of the post-apartheid press. Circulation had fallen from over 200,000 in 1986 to under 170,000 a decade later. The “loser” tag was only partly deserved: newspaper circulation was stagnant overall, with the standout exception (among dailies) of Sowetan. It did not take much to be labelled a “winner,” as we have seen in the Citizen case-study. The Star was still a

unbelievable. ... Because, obviously, a small proportion of our Black readership owns cars, compared with our White readership.”

205See the Sunday Star’s final editorial, “The souls go marching on,” 23 January 1994 (by editor Dave Hazelhurst). See also Mandy Jean Woods, “Goodbye to newspaper that took risks,” Saturday Star, 22 January 1994. From this point, the Saturday Star and the Sunday Star merged as the Weekend Star.
mighty player on the South African media scene – second-largest in daily circulation, and vying for the status of “most influential” newspaper with the venerable Sunday Times and the upstart Mail & Guardian. But it was not surprising to find senior figures at The Star stressing interpretations of “outreach” that emphasized more than simple circulation.

More problematic than the decline in readership was The Star’s attempts to transform itself internally through Black advancement and “affirmative action.” To summarize earlier comments, The Star was a trailblazer in the field of Black journalism, founding the first cadet-training program for Blacks in the early 1970s. Its coverage of the Soweto Uprising of 1976, fuelled principally by the extraordinary access its Black journalists and photographers could command, briefly allowed the paper to rise to the level of The Rand Daily Mail in the domestic and international impact of its political coverage. Some Black staffers considered The Star a “beacon of justice” (Fergus Sampson’s words) in the struggle against apartheid. The paper’s editors, past and present (Harvey Tyson, Richard Steyn, Peter Sullivan) all depicted The Star’s commitment to Black advancement and liberation as one of the definitional features of the project, in both the late-apartheid and post-apartheid eras.
But fieldwork at *The Star* in mid-1995 found the paper grappling with the imperative of internal transformation in the direction of greater racial “balance.” As noted, the paper was plagued, more than any other South African newspaper, by the problem of “headhunting.” Its training programs consistently turned out high-quality Black candidates. Even under apartheid, these were among the few Blacks that had some job options in South Africa. As South Africa entered its wrenching transition, they became “black gold.” Editor Peter Sullivan found himself waving goodbye to promising staff lured away by more lucrative offers, “feeling very loyal to *The Star* as they climbed into their BMWs.”

Beyond that, though, the paper’s attempts at Black advancement from the 1970s to the early 1990s had been impressive only by comparison with most other South African newspapers. At the time of fieldwork in 1995, the paper had roughly reached its target of 80 percent Black reporters in the newsroom — hardly an insignificant accomplishment. But what responsibilities those Black reporters were entrusted with, and how far their representation was duplicated higher up the chain of command, were other questions entirely. With no real inducement for far-reaching transformations, *The Star* as late as 1995 could be accused of practising an affirmative-action policy limited to “bums on seats” (Ginger Payne of *Business Day*), and concentrated on the lower ranks.

“When I joined *The Star* about eight years ago [in 1987], there were, I think, two senior Black people who had the rank of assistant editor,” said political columnist Kaizer Nyatsumba:

There were never more than two in those eight years. There has been a policy of affirmative action. But this is a White newspaper — a White liberal newspaper, granted. White-controlled, White-owned by the mining industry, [with] every key position held by White people. And if you and I started here at the same time and were equally capable, chances are that you would have advanced far quicker than I, because I’m Black. Now the culture has changed, and there is the professed intention to make sure that people progress because of their abilities and merit. But you still find that morale on the floor is not what it should be.

Nyatsumba described *The Star’s* Black-advancement policies as “a failure” and “lip-service.” A similar verdict was delivered by Fergus Sampson of *The Star’s* marketing department, who paired his ringing endorsement of the paper’s role under apartheid with a blunt dismissal of its

---

206 There was also a gender component to the affirmative-action policies, but I do not consider it here.

207 Nyatsumba stressed, however, that “as a member of “the most prized unit here,” the team of political reporters, “I have in many ways been an exception. I’ve been treated very differently. I haven’t been as frustrated as my colleagues. But I have seen people here who are terribly frustrated, leaving.”
affirmative-action policy as "a lot of talk."\textsuperscript{208} For an extended "insider" perspective on the process of internal transformation and Black advancement, I have taken the step, uniquely in this book, of excerpting Sampson's comments at length. Alongside them, I have set a discussion with Brian Dyke, self-described "Consulting Clinical Psychologist" for The Star's affirmative-action campaign. That campaign, launched in August 1991, declared as the paper's "short-term objectives" the creation of an "environment of equal opportunity [for Blacks] to compete for available and future positions." It pledged The Star "actively [to] seek black candidates for vacancies or new positions," and "balance the ratio of black/white management."\textsuperscript{209} No-one denied, however, that there was a long way to go in overhauling The Star, especially at managerial levels. The interview with Brian Dyke found an architect of the paper's affirmative-action policy grappling with semantics, and stressing the need to move away from the rhetoric of "affirmative action" towards creation of an environment conducive to the advancement of all employees, Black or White.\textsuperscript{210}

At the level of day-to-day relations between Black and White journalists, The Star's Helen Grange described the introduction of the affirmative-action policy as "quite tough":

Initially, it was very tough, because you had White journalists who'd been there for a long time, especially male journalists, who felt very threatened. And you also had a certain degree of resentment and bitterness among Black journalists who were being hired, who were clearly not being "trained up"; they were just tokens. ... It's been quite a difficult transition, and there's quite a bit of racial tension. In fact, about six months ago [late 1994?], we had a physical fight in the newsroom, between someone who was perceived to be a racist, a White man, and a Black man who perceived him to be a racist. And there was a brawl in the newsroom! That's how high the tensions were then, and they still haven't been eliminated completely. There's a lot of trust-building [necessary] before honest interaction can happen. I'd say that some of the older journalists, who are known in the Black community to have genuinely promoted the transition and democracy, find it much easier; they interact more easily with the Black journalists. But the newer, younger White journalists simply don't have that history or credibility. In the newsroom, there's quite a good spirit of interaction. But it's a very personal thing: you get real individuals in journalism, and it throws up some very offbeat personalities, because of the nature of the job. You can't talk broadly about [interracial socializing] at all.\textsuperscript{211}

\textsuperscript{208}To his credit, I think, it was Star editor Peter Sullivan who suggested I speak to Sampson, being well aware of his strong criticisms of the affirmative-action policy.


\textsuperscript{210}The "Policy Statement" of September 1991 also listed as the sole "long-term objective" of the policy the "ongoing development of all staffers" (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{211}Kaizer Nyatsumba also described "a lot of resentment ... at [staff] meetings. What happens is that for five or six months, when there's something happening on the affirmative-action front, people get very upset. Then it slowly disappears when nothing happens. I would say there are some here, perhaps the majority, who realize that affirmative
Q. How do you evaluate your time here [at The Star]? Has it been a supportive environment? No, it hasn't. The greater part of my time here has been very unproductive and very frustrating. I started out in the Marketing Department; it was eight months old at the time, and still finding its feet. I thought I had it made, you know. Management trainee – to me that meant training to be a manager, literally.

But I found that *The Star* didn't have a program to train managers. They sent you on all types of courses – I have certificates up to here – but it doesn't help if you're not trained to be a manager. You can have all kinds of lovely theories about management; but if you don't give me the support, and with that the leverage to make decisions, to initiate, to just drive my own learning, it's not going to help. If you don't prepare the environment, by which I mean the other people around, [by saying,] "This is what we're going to do, this is what we expect from you" ... I found that I couldn't walk into the Circulation Department, for example, and sit down with the circulation manager, and just have a chat and get some help. There was always this, "Who the hell are you?"

It's just frustrating. Nobody knows how to treat you 'cause you're Black. They can't be nicer to you, because we have a Black government now, you know what I'm saying? But they're not going to be too excited about you being there either, because a lot of the younger guys, the middle-management guys, feel threatened. They feel like, "They're going to hire this guy and give him my job. Why should I help him?"

Q. Do you feel there's an element of tokenism in the way you've been treated? Yes, I feel like a token sometimes. Of course, sometimes I wonder whether this guy's talking to me because he is really interested in what I have to say, or because he really has something to share with me; or whether he's just trying to be nice. That affects my interaction with people in lots of ways. It's something I have to be aware of continually. But then again, I've had this all my life, 26 years. I'm a champ at it by now. I'm just sitting, waiting and wondering, when am I going to be taken seriously?

There are some good people here: some who know exactly what's going on, and know how you feel. But their hands are tied. There's just nothing they can do. And for myself – it's a new experience for me. I've never been in a position like this. So I was finding my feet, taking advantage of the indecision, of the fact that they probably need me, for whatever reasons. I was happy, therefore, for a couple of months just to sit back and get paid. If you're not giving me anything substantial, why not just sit back and relax? But that lasted only a couple of months, because I'm just not that type of guy. I want to get something done.

I think [affirmative action] is a lot of talk. They talk a good game. But you need guts, you need foresight. You need definition. Nobody knows what it is! You can waltz through this building, and everybody will give you a different version of what they think it is. The company as such have not set down a clear definition.

*Experiences Under "Affirmative Action": The Star's Fergus Sampson* 
INTERVIEW, JOHANNESBURG, 19 APRIL 1995

action is very important, that it's necessary for the survival of this newspaper, and that it's a sensible business strategy. Then there are some who may be in a minority, but are a very vocal minority – speak a lot at meetings and so on – who are very, very opposed, and who will have you *know* that they are opposed. I don't think, to date, these people have been won over to the need for affirmative action."
I tend to favour a business definition of it. I think it’s part of the bottom line. And if you put it that way, when most of the people around here are accountants, people with a financial background, they might understand it. You tell them that this is a company that’s been in existence for over 75, a hundred years. And they probably want to keep it going for the next 100. The reality of South Africa is that there are more Blacks than Whites. The reality is that consumerism is just now rearing its head. And that’s one thing The Star should look out for. Because Black people out there will say, “Well, if you won’t employ me, or promote me, or let me run your company, why should I buy your product?’ It’s as simple as that.

Q. I’m curious about how you perceive the motivations behind the policy in the first place. To what extent do you think it was a pre-emptive policy, introduced to head off the possibility of [punitive] legislation? I think that’s where it comes from. If it were just up to regular management, I think The Star would say, “We’re fine; we employ Black people.” You know, who would ever think that a newspaper, a beacon of the liberation struggle, is racist? They wouldn’t dare accuse The Star of being racist. But some of the arguments raised by the South African Chamber of Business and the Black Management Forum have alerted them to what might lie ahead. I do think they anticipated punitive legislation, and they want to be ready for that. They don’t want to be caught with their pants down.

Q. Do you see anything in the way of a positive evolution in the way the policy has been implemented? Has it grown in sophistication since it was first introduced? Is there less tokenism than there was? As a matter of fact, I think we’ve moved a few steps back. Because you’re caught between these two extremes. What do you do? Here’s Fergus Sampson, a reasonably educated guy, high ambitions, willing to work and study. But he also knows you can’t fire him, because you need Blacks. What kind of decision do you make about that person? Do you put me in a management position? Even though you know I might not be ready – I’m 25, what do I know? On the other hand, there’s Times Media Limited across the road, and in their Sunday newspaper [the Sunday Times], they keep making jibes at us, and publishing their [own Black] appointments. What do you do? Where does common sense lie?

That’s not the point, though. The point is that decisions have to be made about these things. Make up your mind, formulate what you want to do. Even if it’s going to be adverse, have something rather than nothing. Go out there and say to people, “This is our argument. We think that Blacks are not ready to manage yet. This is why we think they’re not ready to manage, and this is why we don’t have any Blacks on our board.” That’s it. Stick to it.

It’s moved backwards in the sense that there’s indecision about it. They’ve changed the way this business runs, which is great. But they haven’t addressed one of the fundamental issues: Black advancement. I hate using these catch-words, but that’s what it comes down to. They’ve mentioned it in a draft policy document, but they keep whitewashing it.

Q. Do you think there were tensions in terms of the way established staff responded to affirmative-action policies? No. I think you have to look at the nature and dynamics of the organization. People take their cue from their leaders. A clerk, however racist, whatever reservations they have about [affirmative action], would have no effect on what I do, if I have more power in the organization than they have. If I have the support of management, they could not affect what I do directly in a way that would impede or interfere with what I do on the job. How I react to that person personally, that’s another issue.

But a top manager could [impede me], just in his mere attitude towards me, what he or she says about me to others that interact with me. We’ve had numerous incidents here where people go to a manager and mention something, indicating or implying that it’s “the Blacks” [that are at fault]. They wouldn’t say Fergus Sampson, but “One of your affirmative-action employees,” and it would bounce back to me as a person. I just don’t think that’s fair. I don’t think it’s right.
People will always have gripes, but it’s the people with the power that I see as the problem. I see that guy sitting in his office having grave reservations about [the policy]. I see another guy coming in and confirming to him these reservations. That’s it. This is not a blanket indictment. This is natural, even acceptable in some quarters. But you have to be aware of what you’re thinking and feeling, in order to be effective in your [managerial] decision-making. If you’re not aware that you might be predisposed in a certain way, then you won’t be effective in what you decide. It’ll be tainted, biased. People who make crucial decisions about other people’s lives must be aware of their own baggage.

**THE “CONSULTING CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST”:**
**BRIAN DYKE**
**INTERVIEW, JOHANNESBURG, 12 APRIL 1995**

Part of the problem is that there is a glass ceiling in journalism. I don’t know if it’s a reluctance on the part of employers to spend too much money on young journalists, because they know they’re probably going to leave the company after two or three years, ‘cause there’s really nowhere for them to go. Despite efforts to create positions for them, there really is a glass ceiling. That’s also really true in terms of affirmative action. If you think about it, where do these guys go? With all the best will in the world, how can we move these people into senior positions by the year 2000? That seems to be the cutting-off point that COSATU [the Confederation of South African Trade Unions], all the unions, and the ANC, for example, are suggesting is the time frame. After that, they are going to be a lot more demanding, perhaps even radical in their legislation. We’ve been waiting for affirmative-action legislation for a while now. We’ve set ourselves targets, but I think targets are going to be replaced by quotas. It’s going to be forced on us by the government.

At the moment the government haven’t imposed a quota system. What they’re doing instead, what they seem to be saying to us, is “Set yourself realistic targets, so that by the year 2000 you reach certain percentages.” The Black Management Forum, for example, and COSATU, have given an indication of what percentage representation there should be at various levels of the organization. I don’t think, myself, that *The Star* is going to get there, because there simply aren’t enough skilled, competent people from those underrepresented groups to move into these positions. I just hope it doesn’t lead to quota-setting.

I think we’ve also created a climate here where, collectively, people who work for *The Star* have said: don’t further disadvantage previously-disadvantaged people by appointing and promoting people who really aren’t ready for that level of work. Promoting them too quickly is setting them up to fail. I think one of the things we’ve done quite well is to make clear that if people from underrepresented groups are put into more senior jobs, they’re there because they can do the job.

Q. Would it be fair to say that the kind of affirmative action that’s been brought in by *The Star* or *Argus* more generally is, to some extent, a pre-emptive move? That it’s designed to help a future strong ANC government resist the temptation to legislate? Yeah, definitely. I think we have to make a distinction, though, between *The Star’s* activities and [those of] the Argus group, or what has been the activities of the Argus group. The Argus board indicated quite clearly in 1991 that it wanted its branches to look very seriously at an affirmative action program. In those days, *Sowetan* was also part of the Argus stable, but their situation was quite different. I mean, they employ mainly Black people. I think *The Star*, in the early years from 1991 to 1993, was probably more active, more *formulative* in its approach.
to affirmative action; perhaps more critical in terms of what its objectives should be. The other
newspapers seem to have had no official policy. But now things have changed again. The Argus
company, soon to be Independent Newspapers, is going to operate on a regional basis, so the
regions become responsible for affirmative-action programs.

I think that, if you look at affirmative action from a business perspective, it probably was
more than anything a pre-emptive move. Business is scared about the ramifications of affirmative-
action legislation. But I think there are two other issues as well. [The first is] an appreciation that
our readership is going to change — The Star, for example, has more Black readers than White
readers. We need to be employ staff that are going to be able to cater to our readers, and to
potential advertisers. But there was also, if I can put it this way, a utilitarian, altruistic motive behind
this. I think there was a genuine concern to advance our Black staffers, who’ve really over the years
made a huge commitment. During the really turbulent and violent years, we lost staff [killed], both
Black and White.

I don’t think it’s true to say that Argus Newspapers, and certainly not The Star, embarked on
affirmative action because they feared the wrath of the ANC or a future Black government. There
are a lot of people here in senior positions who are genuinely concerned to promote the interests of
our Black staffers. But that concern doesn’t easily translate into what you see happening at work.
Over the last two years, we’ve scoured the country, and we’ve looked overseas, for senior Black
journalists. They just aren’t here.

We made a decision when Richard [Steyn] was still here that 50 percent of our staff by the
year 2000 will be Black. We also decided we’d like to shoot for 40 percent or more senior staff. I’m
not quite sure how realistic it is: in part, because we don’t have a pool of Black or previously
disadvantaged people and underrepresented groups that we can draw from. That includes women
and disabled people as well. They simply aren’t out there in the workforce.

What we’ve got to do now is commit as much money as is available to training and
development. We’re looking at training and development across the spectrum. Educational levels
are a problem, because most of the people coming into the workforce who happen to be African
Black, most certainly come from disadvantaged educational backgrounds. They’ve got to somehow
try to catch up, and we’ve got to help them bridge the gap between the educations they received and
those the Whites and Indians, by and large the privileged groups in terms of education, received.

How do we bridge that gap without offending those people? How do we in South African business
say to our Black staffers who really have potential, “We need to send you on these programs, we’d
like you to do these courses,” without them thinking: “Oh, shucks, you don’t believe we’ve got the
skills and talent to be as good as you are.” So it’s a very delicate process. I think the way it’s framed
and our intentions are conveyed is very, very important. That’s why I believe we’ve got to lose the
label of “affirmative action.” It’s loaded with stigma, and the potential to misinterpret genuine effort
to advance underrepresented groups in the workforce is just wide open to abuse.

Q. There does seem to be a powerful disjunction between how effective the affirmative-action program has
been at the lower levels, versus the higher levels. If we go back to October 1994, by far the majority of our
Patterson A & B staff — those who are less involved with the senior levels of work; the messengers
and a lot of the operational staff — fifty-eight percent of those people were Black in October 1994,
and 79 percent of them were women. We’ve probably got about 10 to 15 percent up [since 1991 or
1992] on Patterson C & D. But there are so few opportunities for all Patterson D people that what
we’ve done is to create additional categories. We have a large number of assistant editors, for
example, as opposed to deputy editors who have a stronger line function. But because job grading
tends to be restrictive, we thought one way to get past the thing was to create more job categories.
Still real jobs: those people tend to be specialist writers and things like that. In terms of line
functions, though, we’re very limited. That’s where the glass ceiling becomes a problem, because you can only have so many deputy news editors, for example.

We’re going to move away from “affirmative action” and replace it with a policy of collective responsibility and accountability for how we progress as an organization. Rather than being able to say, because it sounds good, “Forty percent of our senior guys are Black,” we want to get to that point through a collective-responsibility program, rather than headhunting Black guys or green guys or disadvantaged people or women for the sake of meeting our quotas.

MANAGEMENT AND THE NEW ORDER

In closing the case-study and this chapter, it is worth considering the interplay of mobilizing and professional imperatives at The Star, particularly as it pertains to the “English model” that long guided South African press functioning. We saw that the model imposed a strict separation between managerial and editorial duties, regarding the imposition of the former on the latter as a betrayal of journalistic professionalism. Such barriers, though, were increasingly viewed as archaic in the market-driven media environment of the 1980s and 1990s – not just in South Africa, but the world over. The introduction of foreign capital and a new model of editorial-management relations came via Independent Newspapers’ Tony O’Reilly and his group (formerly Argus) CEO, John Featherstone. In an interview at his spectacular home in a northern-Johannesburg suburb, The Star’s editor at the time of the Argus “unbundling,” Richard Steyn, explained his concerns over the new managerial approach:

I was not so much worried by Tony O’Reilly’s takeover, but by Featherstone, because I sensed a potential erosion of editorial independence. Featherstone and I had disagreed for some years over the [desired] extent of editorial authority. Featherstone believes editors have too much freedom in the commercial sense; they should be much more bottom-line oriented. ... He went to America and came back enamoured of this publisher route: that one person should be responsible for the financial performance of the paper. My response to that was, first of all, it’s very rare that you get one person who is qualified both to run the editorial side of the paper and to manage the finances. The best solution is to have a good general manager and a good editor, who agree on the strategy, the positioning, and everything else. ... I thought it was very dangerous, in view of this country’s political history, to fuse the editorial and managerial roles. Because then it’s much easier to exercise control or undue influence over the editorial side of the paper. Under apartheid there were pressures brought on newspapers by the government, right up to the top, and by advertisers as well. To have a board and a chairman protecting editors was a terrific thing. The editor

[212 A quandary similar to that faced by figures like Oleg Golembiovyk, Izvestia chief editor, who also assumed a dual role after the paper was turned over to its “journalistic collective.” See Chapter 5.]
was able to insulate himself from commercial and also political pressures to some extent. Under this new system under which editors report to a managing [group] director, I don’t think that protection still exists. That is why I disagree fundamentally with the new structure. We have to think about threats from our political masters once we’re beyond the Government of National Unity [period] and we have a very strong ANC government. One’s seen in Africa the influence that governments have exerted over the media. I think it’s important to entrench a strong spirit of independence now. I don’t think it’s the time to change [internal] structures. ... I think you need strong editors to be able to resist the kind of pressures that managers put on you. 213

Featherstone, as noted, considered Steyn’s touting of the English model as “a hangover from the church-and-state mentality” of the apartheid era. 214 But the attempts to impose the new order with Steyn as chief editor ran aground. In December 1994, bare weeks after The Star joined the INP stable, Steyn abruptly resigned. It was the highest-profile editorial abdication of the 1990s, and sparked considerable debate in the press over the legitimate limits of sponsors’ mobilizing authority. Pretoria News editor Deon du Plessis described Star staff as “battered and bewildered” by Steyn’s resignation. 215 Steyn’s replacement, Peter Sullivan, expressed strong reservations about the circumstances of his predecessor’s departure. 216 But Sullivan seemed more comfortable than Steyn with the new arrangement:

The reality is that Richard came into the [editor’s] job to report to the board, under the protection of the chairman. The job that was offered to me was to report to the managing director [Featherstone]. They are two very separate jobs. I think it was humiliating to Richard to offer him that job. It was, of course, not humiliating to me, because it was moving me up. I also believe that the company is better-run now that it was before. There was too much protectionism; editors lived an almost “ivory-tower” life. I was asked directly whether I thought that editorial independence had been affected. I said yes, it was, but editors would

213 After his resignation, Steyn was quoted in his old paper as saying: “Newspapers should make money in order to produce better newspapers, not only to make owners and shareholders richer. Otherwise we might as well be making margarine or selling soap.” Quoted in Winnie Graham, “Handing on the baton of trust,” The Star, 31 January 1995.

214 See above, p. 195.


216 Sullivan wrote a letter on 13 December 1994 to Liam Healy, chairman of the Argus board of directors. It read in part: “At this critical moment, the Editor-in-Chief is forced to resign on a matter of principle. The company is restructured and a measure of editorial independence removed. In my considered view we should all have been consulted before changes were made. ... From Richard’s resignation speech to the staff, to the fait accompli of the restructuring, was a matter of minutes. Better consultation and negotiation would have saved us the embarrassment of being picketed, of having our credibility, our integrity and our independence questioned (gleefully) by our rivals. This letter is not a comment on the new system, which it was your prerogative to impose. It is to question and protest against the ruthless methods, lack of consultation with the staff body and senseless secrecy which has caused so much unnecessary unhappiness.” Unpublished internal document, privately supplied.
like to report only to God, if that was possible, and they would probably find that too onerous. ... Whether editors should be as independent as they were during the apartheid years is a question I have not been able to answer. Certainly, for the apartheid years, it was essential. But that was a weird society. We’re now part of the normal world. We will have the normal corruption and the normal attacks by government, and we probably require the normal protections.217

There had always been worrying signs of commercial influence over The Star’s editorial decision-making, as was explored at some length earlier in the chapter. And the limitations and evasions of the classic English model were numerous. At best, the editorial “independence” it permitted would allow The Star and other English papers to play a meaningful role in incremental social change. But they could rarely mount a structural critique, or depict a future for South Africa as visionary as the one-person, one-vote scenario that eventually came to pass. And it was an open question whether the paper’s new structures and strategies would enhance its ability to play such a role. The concerns many expressed about The Star’s vulnerability to powerful mobilizers, whether political or corporate, hardly seemed frivolous.

CONCLUSION

Although we have analyzed more than one newspaper close-up for the only time in this book, gaps still remain in the analysis of the South African press in transition. Most obviously, no extended attention has been devoted to the Afrikaans-language press – though the oddball Citizen, with its Afrikaner/Broederbond sponsorship, offers insights as an English-language offshoot. But it must be remembered that the “oppositionist” posture of the English-language press, examined in detail here, was atypical of South African media under apartheid. This is especially true when the Nationalist regime’s broadcast monopoly is taken into consideration.

The “oppositionist” posture and self-image led to some surprising, but theoretically intriguing, “identity crises” in newspapers that had actively criticized the apartheid regime. It turned out that system-supporting and system-supported newspapers – especially when the Afrikaans press is factored in – were at least as viable and self-confident as the English press after 1994. (The

217See also Sullivan’s comments on editorial independence as a “misnomer,” above (p. 196). General Manager Graeme King said in an interview that while he was “obviously concerned at the time Richard Steyn left ... I think I’m not as concerned now. The experience of seeing the new structure working has shown, I think, that there’s not going to be interference. I think editors are as free as they were under the previous structure, to do what they like with their products. Essentially, they’re the brand managers ...” (emphasis added).
phenomenon will receive greater attention in Chapter 6.) As press workers struggled for a new orientation under a democratic regime, their “oppositionist” character under apartheid was called fundamentally called into question by the “Truth and Reconciliation” process in post-apartheid South Africa. Critics claimed that even in a post-apartheid age, the English press continued to reflect the legacy of racism. They were lax in their support for the dramatic social transformations required in the country, it was held; and they had been slow to undertake the institutional initiatives – most notably “affirmative action” and community outreach – deemed vital in the “New South Africa.” All this made for an English press that was struggling to adjust both its internal structure and editorial product for a democratic era, but whose laggardliness in doing so made sweeping verdicts difficult to render.

The approach of the ANC-dominated regime after 1994 was characterized above all by an extraordinary level of political and commercial freedom (at least to the extent that the latter is defined in terms of private property). By allowing existing media to operate basically unhindered; by privatizing state media; and by opening the country to outside investment, the ANC buttressed and deepened the market orientation of the South African press. This case-study gives us the most intimate glimpse we will have in this book of the liberal-democratic, market-oriented model of the press (“System C” in Chapter 1). As the “richest” media system studied here, we get some sense of the professional possibilities (including at the level of training and infrastructure) that are possible in a relatively prosperous material environment. At the same time, the analysis of the apartheid and post-apartheid eras provides insights into the mobilizing pressures and professional constraints of “System C” media. The difficulty of drawing clear boundaries between business reporting and advertising, for example, is hardly unique to the western press. But it does tend to lie at the core of many instances of dissonance between the imperatives in the South African case. Economic and business coverage is also the area in which the English-language press of South Africa has tended to be most uncritically system-supporting, and probably as a result, it may be the area in which the press can be faulted most easily on professional grounds.

The imperative of political advocacy can be seen to figure strongly, both under apartheid and in the transitional era. Bullied and lured into preserving a basic respect for the “state of law” under apartheid, the press was not immune either to the blandishments or the bluster of the ANC-dominated regime. Ntatho Modana’s attempted imposition of a partisan and personalist agenda on
Sowetan, and the staff’s rebellion against it, attested to the likelihood of political pressure on selected transitional institutions (with a key Black press outlet like Sowetan one of the most prized). Likewise, Perskor’s unfamiliar courting of key ANC figures – an attempt to preserve something of its government-publishing base – demonstrated that the transitional press could actively seek political sponsorship, as well as shy from it.

Finally, like its Nicaraguan counterpart, the South African case reminds us of the powerful importance of individual personality to press functioning, including transitional press functioning. There is no explaining The Citizen at any stage of its existence without acknowledging the towering (admittedly almost unique) influence of Johnny Johnson over the paper’s operations. The role of “campaigning” editors in the apartheid era, such as The Rand Daily Mail’s 1960s cohort, was perhaps made more possible by the prevailing “English model” of the press. This stressed a close personal relationship between sponsor and the chief editor, aimed at reducing the pressure of petty mobilizers on editorial operations. The limits to the professional freedom afforded by the model can certainly be stressed. The “English model” did, in a sense, firm up the basic mobilizing relationship by reducing the petty constraints. But it also allowed a degree of “crusading” and “campaigning” journalism, and principled operation to civil injustice, that gave the heroic self-portraits a persuasive as well as a pompous ring. And in the case of Johnny Johnson’s Citizen, the model allowed apartheid’s creation to maintain considerable professional autonomy from its Afrikaner sponsors.

With South Africa, we also see our first clear example of continuity predominating over change in the transition process. The next case-study, Jordan, can be seen as a kind of “control” for the comparative analysis as a whole. The impetus of Jordanian liberalization in the 1990s has been successfully stemmed and rolled back more or less at the regime’s whim. While this renders the analysis difficult to fit into a pure “transition” framework, it supports the contention that there is no inevitable forward impetus to liberalization, and no substantially-democratized outcome is guaranteed. A canny regime, such as Jordan’s Hashemite one, can keep hold of the reins with the right combination of guile, repression, and strategic retreat. It is a trick the custodians of South Africa’s apartheid regime must wish they had mastered. Many in the former Sandinista and Soviet hierarchies would be similarly envious.
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESS, REGIME AND SOCIETY
IN JORDAN SINCE 1989

INTRODUCTION

The press has total freedom; this is an undisputed issue because commitment to the freedom of the press, and providing it with a democratic atmosphere to express the causes of the homeland and the nation, stems from our commitment to the constitutional liberties and the government’s desire to maintain this liberty so that the press may shoulder the responsibility of this stage — a stage that carries deep democratic changes in terms of the basic concepts of justice, tolerance, dialogue, acceptance of the other’s view, and consolidation of the authority of the law.

— Minister of Information Dr. Khalid al-Karaki, 1991

For a time, the killing at police hands of Mahmoud Khalifeh was one of the great non-events in modern Jordanian history. Khalifeh, “an outspoken critic of Jordan’s rulers,” was gunned down, and his brother Bashar critically wounded, in a dawn raid on 2 June 1995. The assault, in a wealthy suburb of Amman, “sent a chill through a population not used to seeing dissidents dying in a blaze of gunfire. But officials never publicly acknowledged anything happened, local media ignored it and a detachment of police stood at the building for more than a week after the shooting.” So wrote the Reuters journalist Jack Redden, in a story published on 2 July, analyzing an increasing wave of repression in Jordan after years of stop-and-start liberalization.2 As Redden accurately noted, Jordan’s “local media ignored” an event that was the talk of Amman for weeks after it happened. Redden avoided the fact that he himself did not risk publishing a story on the events for a full month after they occurred.

Finally, on 17 August, the news broke through the surface of the Jordanian press. (It never stood much chance of being carried by Jordan’s broadcast media, a regime monopoly.) Sa’eda

---

1Quoted in Al-Ra‘, 5 August 1991; cited in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (hereafter, FBIS), 5 August 1991.

Kilani, a feature writer for the *Jordan Times*, Amman’s liberal English-language daily, reported intense debate in Parliament over “the case of the Khalifeh brothers.” The Interior Minister, Salameh Hammad, finally had deigned to comment in writing on the matter, claiming the brothers had been shot by police “in self-defence.” Kilani, though, reported opposition parliamentarians’ forceful criticisms of the police action. An Islamist parliamentary deputy, Bassam Emoush, was quoted as demanding the Minister reveal “who issued the order to shoot [Khalifeh], what was he accused of, and whether the police operation could have been carried out differently.” According to Dr. Emoush, Mahmoud Khalifeh’s “problem was that he was a man of principle. He wanted to speak his mind and say what was right and what was wrong regardless of who was involved. ... Is it reasonable,” Dr. Emoush demanded, “that such barbaric action be taken against him?”

The press treatment of the Khalifeh affair speaks directly and indirectly to many of the main themes that have engaged the Jordanian press since 1989. On the one hand, it confirms some of the more pessimistic analyses of the depth and substance of the Jordanian liberalization process. The liberalization era has not seen a radical transformation of the regulatory environment in which the country’s media operate. The *Press and Publications Law* (PPL) of 1993 replaced pre-liberalization legislation, but retained many of its more sweeping constraints. This included a ban on reporting of material that might cast aspersion on Jordan’s armed and security forces. The ban extended to foreign correspondents based in Amman, as the Reuters correspondent covering the Khalifeh affair well knew.

The continuities in ownership, control, and regime restriction of the press explain the Jordanian media’s own reluctance to discuss the events of 2 June 1995 until the issue was raised for the record in parliament and thereby “legitimized.” Parliamentary discussion, in turn, may have been possible only after the Minister of Information chose to rescue the event from the memory hole by acknowledging it in writing. There is much evidence here of the continuing de facto marginalization of both parliament and the press as arenas of national debate in Jordan.

In the interregnum between the Khalifeh events and the first coverage of them in the Jordanian press, George Hawatmeh, editor-in-chief of the *Jordan Times*, was asked why the paper—which has a limited but deserved reputation in Jordan for bold commentary and investigative

---

reporting – was holding off on the story. “Nobody told us not to publish” the Khalifeh story, Hawatmeh responded. “But you needed a statement, at least, by official sources as to what happened. How could you tackle such a sensitive story from only one side, or on the basis of what you hear on the street or what’s said in the tabloids?”

What of the view that this gave the regime inordinate power? Hawatmeh was asked. Did censorship remain if a story could be killed simply by the regime’s refusal to comment? “According to the Press and Publications Law, if you say anything that might be conceived as against the security forces, you could be jailed for up to two years,” Hawatmeh replied. “I can take a chance, but I’d be liable to prosecution. And the story in its own right was so sensitive that it could have created problems much bigger than me, bigger than any newspaper.” Hawatmeh was speaking from recent experience. At the time of the interview, he was appealing the first-ever conviction of a mainstream daily under the new Press and Publications legislation. His transgression: publishing material that reflected poorly on the Jordanian security services.

As Redden’s original article on the Khalifeh killing makes plain, the events – and the media (non-)response to them – took place against a larger political backdrop. The peace treaty with Israel, signed in October 1994, precipitated a sharp downturn in regime tolerance of dissent and opposition. The situation was such that, despite numerous eloquently-expressed criticisms of the 1993 PPL, most journalists and editors canvassed on the subject in Summer 1995 were convinced that amendments to the legislation could only work to their detriment – given the stresses that had riven the Jordanian body politic since the signing of the peace agreement. Their concern proved justified. The post-peace crackdown in Jordan – of which the Khalifeh killing was only the most sanguinary evidence – testified to the partial, “mushy” nature of the Jordanian liberalization since 1989. As Glenn Robinson has argued, the process since the Ma’an riots of that year can be characterized as “defensive democratization” – “a series of pre-emptive measures designed to maintain elite privilege in Jordan in the face of demands for more significant reform.” Many more substantial political transitions have begun as limited liberalizations and then spun out of the regime’s control, a process Robinson calls “democratic snowballing.”

*Glenn E. Robinson, “Defensive Democratization in Jordan,” unpublished paper, pp. 1, 20. Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter’s definition of a “transition” suggests that Jordan has not experienced one: “It is characteristic of the transition that during it the rules of the political game are not defined. Not only are they in a constant flux, but they are usually arduously contested ...” In Jordan since 1989 the “rules of the political game” have
Jordan,” as the Times' George Hawatmeh has written, “was not a revolution.” And at the time of writing, it shows no sign of becoming one, or even of sparking a more thoroughgoing transition.

Liberalization is liberalization, however. In its way, the Khalifeh affair attested to this as well. George Hawatmeh was able to publish brief word of the events in the small-circulation, London-based Middle East International as early as 9 June, with no known repercussions. Within a couple of months of the killing, the Minister of Information felt called upon (or at least able) to give the government side of the story. This opened the matter to parliamentary debate – recall Dr. Emoush’s denunciation of the regime’s “barbaric” actions. The Jordan Times and other papers then could provide a fairly complete rendering of events, carefully including both sides of the story, but raising questions and criticisms of real substance.

Any evaluation of the Jordanian liberalization must acknowledge that it is taking place under a regime generally considered one of the “softest” in the Arab World. The monarchical/tribal system of rule has long secured for Jordan relative freedom from the vicious state abuses that are common elsewhere in the region. It has also spawned a more tolerant and pluralistic political climate, one that has shaped mass media among many other state and societal institutions. The degree of press freedom in King Hussein’s Jordan has been attained only rarely elsewhere in the region over the last three decades – in places like Kuwait, Lebanon (before the civil war), and Algeria (in the brief period between liberalization in 1988 and the descent into civil war; today the country is probably the least congenial environment for journalists anywhere in the world). More common in the Arab World is the Syrian or Iraqi model: totalitarian control of the media and savage repression of debate and dissent, so intensive that “journalists ... are an extinct species.” The middle band of the spectrum is dominated by environments like those of Egypt, where the major newspapers “are headed by strong pro-regime figures” but a limited opposition press exists,


6Hawatmeh also placed the Khalifeh killings in the context of the regime’s growing intolerance of dissent: “The shoot-out ... reinforced the belief that the strain created by the signing of the treaty was growing rather than lessening with the passage of time.” Hawatmeh, “An edgy regime,” Middle East International, 9 June 1995.

7 “A Censor’s Testimony: ‘Journalists in Syria are an extinct species,’” Middle East Report, November-December 1987, p. 42 (also Index on Censorship, June 1987).
or the Gulf, where "investigative reports are almost non-existent ... and government-appointed officials directly or indirectly supervise most newspapers," though without serious brutality. The emergent nation-state of Palestine, meanwhile, has disappointed observers who found Yasir 'Arafat's ringing promises of democracy and press freedom hard to reconcile with the punishment his regime meted out to wayward journalists and publications.

Today, even in the chilly and unstable post-peace environment, Freedom House's 1994 assessment – that "for all its shortcomings, the Jordanian press ... is the most level-headed and reliable in the Arab World" – would need very little revision. The media environment in Jordan also remains a good deal more diverse than before the liberalization process began, in the print if not the broadcasting spheres. The rise of the tabloid and political-party press in Jordan is the most visible (and interesting) evidence of this new diversity, and is considered in detail later in the chapter.

### The Jordanian Media System: Broad Outlines

#### Authoritarianism and Tribalism

It is natural that the existing press are supportive of the government; they are owned by the government.

– Fu’ad al-Khalafat, Islamist parliamentarian, 1992

The journalistic culture here is part of the dominating culture in the country.

– Lamis Andoni


Jordan displays essential features of an authoritarian media system. All broadcast media are owned by the state and controlled by the government of the day.\textsuperscript{13} Strict control over Jordan Radio and Television is exercised through the government's Ministry of Information, which also oversees print media, and can act against any perceived dissonance between press behaviour and press legislation. The Royal Court communicates its preferences directly to managers of the broadcast media, and to a lesser extent the daily press. There is a large state news service, Petra.\textsuperscript{14}

Although cited statistics vary, it is certain that at the time of writing [February 1999] the government, directly and through the "social corporations" it controls, owns a majority of shares in the Jordan Press Foundation, which publishes \textit{Al-Ra'i}, Jordan's largest daily paper (along with the English-language \textit{Jordan Times}). The government owns at least a substantial minority or a slight majority of shares, but anyway a controlling interest, in \textit{Al-Dustur}. This paper is the remaining daily competition for \textit{Al-Ra'i}, in the wake of the early-1995 demise of \textit{Sawt Al-Sha'b} — in which the government also controlled a large majority of shares.\textsuperscript{15} Nabil al-Sharif, Chief Editor of \textit{Al-Dustur}, called government ownership "the first and most important" constraint on press functioning in Jordan:

> It is not a direct hindrance or obstacle, but it definitely affects the overall atmosphere of freedom that we would like to have. ... When you say that the government owns 65 percent of the shares [in \textit{Al-Ra'i}], and the government has nine out of 12 members of the Board [of Directors], what does that mean? It means the government appoints the General Director [General Manager]; it appoints the Chief Editor; it has some sort of invisible influence over the editor. The government doesn't have to say, "Do this, do that," once you feel that your whole position is in the hands of the government. ... The mere fact that the threat is there,

\textsuperscript{13}According to George Hawatmeh, broadcast media are used to "winning sporadic freedoms in covering news and views depending on which prime minister and minister of information are in office at the time." Hawatmeh, "The changing role of the press — the Jordanian experience since '89," in Hawatmeh, ed., \textit{The Role of the Media in a Democracy}, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{14}Petra, established in 1969, employs 170 staff, including 100 journalists and seven foreign correspondents. It generates about 200 stories per day. See "King congratulates Petra on 25th anniversary," Petra dispatch in \textit{Jordan Times}, 17 July 1994.

\textsuperscript{15}As noted, estimates vary. Nabil al-Sharif, editor of \textit{Al-Dustur}, claimed in 1994 that government ownership figures were 60 percent for \textit{Al-Ra'i} and 40 percent for \textit{Al-Dustur}, and that the figure for \textit{Sawt Al-Sha'b} had been 75 percent. (Rana Husseini and Cathy King, "Role of Jordanian media in limelight at 'Scientific Week,'" \textit{Jordan Times}, 27 November 1994). In an interview (Amman, 24 July 1995) al-Sharif cited figures of 35 percent for \textit{Al-Dustur} and 65 percent for \textit{Al-Ra'i}. 1990 figures cited by the \textit{Jordan Times} (Rabab Mango, "Government to study ownership of press," 8 January 1990) gave the following estimates: 61 percent \textit{Al-Ra'i}, 53 percent \textit{Al-Dustur}, and 85 percent \textit{Sawt Al-Sha'b}. \textit{Al-Ra'i}'s editor, Suleiman Qudah, claimed 62 percent \textit{Al-Ra'i}, 45 percent \textit{Al-Dustur}, and 67 percent \textit{Sawt Al-Sha'b} before its closure (interview, Amman, 15 July 1995).
that you are somehow in the hands of the government, definitely affects the freedom of the press. It creates a psychological barrier.

A further element of majority control is the ability of the “regime” — in Jordan, a triumvirate of government, monarchy and “establishment” forces — to subsidize newspaper operations by siphoning state and government advertising revenue to the establishment dailies, especially Al-Ra'i. “All other daily and weekly newspapers are excluded from government advertising,” Article 19 reports of the Jordan case. “Most newspapers have no revenue other than the meagre income from sales” — but are banned by government legislation from seeking funding or support abroad. Thus do the favoured, mainstream few become the exclusive recipients of regime largesse. Thus, too, does the regime continue to dominate the mainstream of public discourse. The increased financial health of the favoured newspapers, moreover, rebounds to the material benefit of the regime, in the form of higher dividends on government-held shares.

In Jordan prior to the Ma'an riots of 1989, the high degree of government ownership was matched by an authoritarian tradition of punitive legislation and direct regime oversight. The punishment was particularly severe after martial law was reimposed in 1967; regime oversight extended far beyond the openly-monopolized broadcast media. A 1987 report on conditions in Jordan stated that “the Ministry of Information daily reviews the newspapers and meets with editors, providing guidelines and instructions on how to approach certain topics, and which topics should simply be omitted altogether.” The Press and Publications Law of 1973 allowed the government to “close any paper without reason, and without right to appeal.” All journalists had to be licensed by the Jordan Press Association — and therefore vetted by the Mukhabarat (Interior Ministry), which “must approve all applications, and uses the process to sift membership and also to promote collaborators and informants.”

---


17 Advertising constituted 63 percent of the JD 8.5 million (about C $17 million) earnings of the Jordan Press Foundation (publisher of Al-Ra'i and Jordan Times) in 1994. The boom in advertising contributed to the JPF’s “84 percent increase over the previous JD 1.5 million record [profit] posted at the end of 1992.” Samir Shafiq, “Jordan Press Foundation hikes pre-tax profit by 84 percent,” *Jordan Times*, 29 March 1994. To my knowledge, no reliable estimate of government versus “private” advertising revenue exists. But since government and the upper reaches of private business are so interwoven to begin with, such distinctions may not be very useful. Al-Ra'i, the regime’s flagship publication, is certainly the fattest Jordanian paper, and the one most flush with corporate and commercial advertising.

For Nabil al-Sharif, speaking in 1995, the growth of an entire generation of Jordanian journalists was stunted by the authoritarian tradition. “We have only lived and breathed the air of democracy for four years [since martial law was lifted on 7 July 1991]. Most of the journalists working in newspapers now have been under martial law for close to 20 years. If you work for so long under martial law, you are likely to begin to believe that everything the government says is right; everything the opposition says is wrong. You’re conditioned to think that way. It takes a lot of time to recondition yourself, to reprogram yourself.”

Authoritarianism also imbues a society with a particular ideology of information control. The expression of professional imperatives, as defined earlier, is rendered substantially more difficult when sources — government ministries and officials, archivists, the person on the street — are wary of speaking. “You’ve got to understand that this whole new process of openness has yet to put down roots in the country and the mentality of the people,” argued Ayman al-Safadi, editorial page editor and senior political writer at Jordan Times. “You’ll find a lot of people reluctant to talk. If they do give information to you, most of the time it’s on an off-the-record basis, which weakens the validity of your reports. Verifying information is very hard as well. You have to nourish your own sources, make sure they develop confidence in you and trust your professional abilities and ethics.”

Authoritarianism in Jordan is bolstered by a tradition that runs even deeper in the political culture than the Hashemite monarchy. Nabil al-Sharif called it “the tribal factor.” While he was careful to stress that “tribalism has many positive aspects,” his account emphasized how day-to-day professional operations and judgments were liable to be overwhelmed by “social considerations”:

The tribe acts as one entity. If a criminal commits a crime, and he comes from a certain tribe, and if you write the name of the person with the name of his tribe, the whole tribe

---

19 See “A Policeman on My Chest ...” Ayman Al-Safadi of the Jordan Times made a similar point: “To bring about a change in the perception of your role, from a government spokesman whose job is merely to report what the government does, into a watchdog of a sort, into the role the press really has to have in any democratic society — to seek information to expose public officials and how they’re conducting their business — that takes a mentality change which has not been very fast in coming, unfortunately.”

20 Jordan Times Managing Editor Abdullah Hasanat has written that “Ministers and heads of government departments, being accustomed to long membership in the bureaucracy and entrenched in the system they serve, are fearful they might, if they talk, say the wrong thing ... There is apparently a doctrine, held by most officials and civil servants, that the press has sinister aims and should not be given any information.” Hasanat, “Access denied,” Jordan Times, 29 December 1994. Hasanat told Article 19 that “There is no freedom of information act in the country and the material that you are after is not your right as a journalist. You have to use devious methods to get it or you have to use favours or you have to use connections, but it is not your right basically. This is the problem.” Article 19, Jordan: Democratization without Press Freedom, p. 14.
becomes angry. "Why did you defame the name of our tribe?" Here, the law of the tribe is supreme. What about a corrupt official, a minister for instance, who happens to be from a certain tribe? If you write about him negatively, in many cases it's his tribe that will object. "What do you have against our son?" they'll say. [So you start to think:] "Well, maybe I shouldn't publish that last name. Maybe I shouldn't publish the story at all." Or you'll write it up as: "It was rumoured that a certain person was found doing this and that ..." You end up with a story that is lacklustre, that doesn't really mean anything. It could be a front-page story that deserves great prominence, but you can't publish it. Not for political or legal reasons; not because of the government; but for social considerations.\(^{21}\)

Tribalism's patriarchal character exerts a further influence and constraint on Jordanian press functioning. Journalism is overwhelmingly a male profession in Jordan,\(^{22}\) with one notable exception – the liberal Jordan Times, where the reporting staff was around two-thirds female in 1995.

**The Jordanian Liberalization: Political Parameters**

The Jordanian liberalization can be divided into four stages. In the first, from the "austerity"-inspired riots of April 1989 to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, one of the more authoritarian governments in modern Jordanian history – led by Prime Minister Zaid Rifa'i – was transformed by a process of limited democratization that saw the lifting of martial law, a revitalized parliamentary life, and regime vows to "modernize" Jordan by broadening political participation.\(^{23}\) The powerful monarch acknowledged mistakes and the need for change. Islamic fundamentalists moved to the forefront of a newly feisty political arena, scoring "results exceeding those predicted even by optimist[ic] supporters of the movement" in the landmark parliamentary elections of November 1989.\(^{24}\)

The second stage began in Jordan, as in the rest of the region, on the morning of 2 August 1990. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait thrust Jordan into its most severe political and economic crisis since the Six-Day War. Jordan's Islamic fundamentalists, buoyed by their election success, led the opposition to western intervention in the Gulf, but that opposition resounded through all levels of


\(^{22}\)This is of course true to a certain degree in all the case-study countries, but is carried furthest in the Jordanian media, I believe.


Jordanian society. Patriotic feelings ran high; elite actors in politics and society formed a National Front to manage the crisis.

The Iraqi defeat in the ground war of February-March 1991 inaugurated a third stage in the Jordanian liberalization. It was characterized by a cresting of Islamist influence and the beginnings of a reaction against that influence, by both the regime and the wider society. The end-result of the "backlash" was a refashioning of electoral procedures for the 1993 parliamentary voting. The old electoral system may have favoured the Brotherhood: it was, after all, "the most influential and best organized of all political groups in the country." The new one-person, one-vote system was generally held to favour traditional and tribal candidates, while redrawn electoral boundaries gave added prominence to constituencies where such candidates dominated. Stage Three also saw the zenith (to this point) of liberalization in Jordan, and its growing institutionalization. The quasi-constitutional National Charter in 1991 was signed by prominent Jordanians across a broad spectrum of national life, and in September 1992 the ban on political parties was lifted. Internationally, this period was marked by Jordan's profound isolation from traditional allies and supporters, as the country struggled to re-establish its credibility with powerful actors regionally and globally.

The fourth and most recent stage began with the second post-liberalization elections to parliament, in November 1993, and ended with King Hussein's death in February 1999 after a long battle with cancer. During this stage, the new parliament set the seal on resurgent tribalist influence and renewed regime assertiveness vis-à-vis dissident opinion. The restabilizing of the status quo was accompanied by a growing string of diplomatic "successes" (at least as most western opinion


\[26\] For an excellent overview of the changes to the electoral law, see "Jordan's Parliamentary Elections, 8 November 1993," a publication of the Jordan Media Group (Amman, 1993). See also the coverage in the Jordan Times, 18 August 1993 (in FBIS, 18 August 1993). Rana Sabbagh notes that "A voter who once cast extra votes on an ideological basis, is now expected to use his [or her] single vote for a member of the tribe" ("Jordan Tribes Hold Key to Multi-Party Election," Reuters dispatch, 6 November 1993). A dissenting view, in my opinion not one borne out by subsequent events, is Maryam Shahin, "Tribes, Parties Seen Weakened by Election Law," Jordan Times, 4-5 November 1993 (FBIS, 5 November 1993).

\[27\] A good overview of the drafting of the Charter is Robinson's. He notes not only that "it is a remarkably progressive document," but that "what gives the National Charter status is its collection of signatories," ranging from "not just ... well-known government and business figures close to the king, but a number of prominent figures from leftist parties and the Muslim Brethren as well." Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," p. 7.
perceives them), climaxing with the signing of a peace treaty between Jordan and Israel in September 1994. The peace treaty’s impact at the domestic level, however, was highly ambiguous. It provoked a groundswell of popular anger and resentment, prompting in turn a wave of limited repression by the regime. The atmosphere in Amman in Summer 1995 was one of “chill” and democratic rollback, though the regime remained liberal by regional standards.

THE PRESS AND THE ONSET OF LIBERALIZATION

This breakdown of the liberalization process may assist us in exploring key patterns of change versus continuity in the Jordanian press, and in press-regime relations, during the 1990s. For this analysis, though, a benchmark is needed: the state of Jordanian media at the time of the outbreak of the Ma’an riots of April 1989. The rioting and other unrest that greeted the Rifa‘i government’s attempts to impose IMF austerity measures in Jordan helped to end “a dismal period in the history of journalism in Jordan,” in the words of one Jordan Times editorial. King Hussein himself had begun the adverse trend in 1985 with an open letter accusing “a number of our newspaper writers” of “launching attacks on our social institutions and their customs and values.”

Measures against the foreign press followed in May 1988. In August of the same year, the Rifa‘i government announced its startling decision to take over formal administrative and editorial control of the press institutions that it materially controlled. On less than an hour’s notice, entire boards of directors and key chief editors were fired and replaced, or resigned in disgust. Among those dismissed was Mahmoud al-Kayed, chief editor of Al-Ra‘i. Rami Khouri, editor of the Jordan Times, resigned shortly after: he “could not accept to edit a paper under conditions which saw government employees come in late at night and check our editorials” (see the Jordan Times case-study).

Lamis Andoni notes that in the months following this night of the long knives, “at least three journalists were fired for publicly opposing the new information policies as the margin of free expression in the local press was almost eliminated.” Early in 1989, the government-run Social

---

29 Quoted in “A Policeman on my Chest ...,” p. 33.
30 Lamis Andoni, “Jordan,” in Rex Brynen, ed., Echoes of the Intifada: Regional Repercussions of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991), p. 174. The editor notes that Andoni herself “had her press credentials and passport withdrawn, and was banned from working for the local media. She was also repeatedly questioned by Jordan security services, and publicly accused by then Information Minister Hani Khasawna of being a ‘liar and a traitor’” (p. 174n).
CHAPTER 4 - JORDAN

Insurance Institution, the most prominent of the “social corporations,” bought up the bulk of the private shares still held in Al-Ra'i and Al-Dustur, “thus completing the effective nationalization of the daily press.”

During the following, brief period of direct government control, any information emanating from the Ministry of Information was expected to be treated as, in the words of an official, ‘gospel’ and be carried with no elaboration or explanation of the issue involved. Local editors recall dozens of occasions when they were told to use “only the Petra version” of the story. ... The ministry used to hold regular meetings to instruct the local press about what was permissible for publication and what was not[,] and had watchdogs at all the three papers ...

The initial transformations in this arena under liberalization were delayed, but dramatic when they did come. The new government of Zayd Ibn Shakir lifted much of the day-to-day vigilance over the press. A formal return to the status quo ante, though, had to wait until the first post-liberalization elections produced a less authoritarian government under Mudar Badran. Shortly after Badran took power in December 1989, old boards of directors were resurrected at the newspapers, and former editors returned, for the most part, to their posts. The press spent much of the next few months exploring how far their new leash extended:

Issues related to the liberalization policy, such as the limits on free expression and the legalization of political parties, began to be discussed, often critically, in the press. The papers began to air public grievances on a wide range of issues, such as the rising cost of living, unemployment, and the level of public services. The government and the press were also more open and informative on the gravity of Jordan’s economic difficulties.

Still, Susser notes that even at this early stage, the basic character of the press’s role in the transition was being established. “The freedom granted ... did not signify a radical departure from Jordan’s authoritarian tradition. It was the regime that granted this freedom and determined its parameters. Journalists remained cautious and uneasy as they groped to define the bounds of their newly acquired freedom.” In this respect, the press resembled other key actors in the Jordanian liberalization, such as the Muslim Brotherhood (and other Islamist groups), professional associations such as doctors and engineers, and certain Palestinian cultural organizations. Like those institutions, too, the press’s newfound independence was all but surrendered when the Gulf

---

crisis descended on the region, the appeals for national unity rang out, and the second stage of Jordan's liberalization began.

THE PRESS AND THE GULF WAR

When a society falls into step, most journalists are too responsive to the stirrings of the crowd and too susceptible to martial music to do anything but grab a drum and join the parade. At these times government controls seem almost superfluous.

– Mitchell Stephens

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was greeted with an almost universal outpouring of enthusiasm in Jordan. The reaction was perhaps less vocal the further one moved up the social ladder; but even among elites, ambivalence towards the Iraqi actions was expressed only in the most mainstream press coverage, and in those closest to the ruling circle. To the outside observer, Saddam Hussein’s pledges to redistribute Arab wealth from the greedy Gulf to the impoverished periphery may have seemed cynical and improbable. But the Jordanian masses – like most poor Arabs from Yemen to Morocco – seized on Saddam’s promises like manna. Even for more privileged Jordanians, the sense of historical redress was inescapable. “There was what I would call a sense of injustice,” said Jordan Times Political Editor P.V. Vivekanand, “coupled with the frustration over seeing the affluence of the Gulf countries. It was a question of, ‘The Kuwaitis did not help us when we needed help, and now they deserve what they’re getting.’” Five years after the Iraqi invasion, Jordanian editors and journalists sometimes drifted into nostalgia, recalling the unifying effect the Iraqi invasion had on a frustrated and long-humiliated citizenry. “The morality of the Iraqi invasion was never an issue” for the press, Vivekanand argued,

because nobody said Iraq should not have invaded Kuwait. I would say the overwhelming majority of the people I talked to here – 98, 99 percent of the people, at all levels of society from the top to the bottom – they were saying that, yes, Kuwait deserved it. I seriously can’t recollect anybody who said that what Saddam Hussein did was wrong. That was the thinking on the street. And the media reflected it.

The formal expression of this crisis, and the brief unity it brought about, came by the end of August. Jordanian political forces across the spectrum – including long-banned Communists, Islamists, and Arab nationalists – formed a National Front aimed at opposing western intervention in the Gulf and supporting a negotiated solution to the conflict. The formation of the Front

solidified the democratic groundswell of the year before, when negotiations had commenced towards constructing a National Charter to reconfigure regime-society relations in Jordan. The consensus the crisis created in turn spurred the Charter process, which would conclude only a few months after the guns fell silent in southern Iraq, and which stands in retrospect as the highwater mark of the Jordanian liberalization thus far.

With regime and society tending towards cautious concern at best (e.g., King Hussein), and more often towards excitement and euphoria (the Palestinian population and many others), it is little wonder that the most critical perspective the Jordanian press could muster at the news of the Iraqi invasion was to call it a possible “complication” (Al-Ra‘i), or a source of “regret” and “pain,” nevertheless excusable (Al-Dustur).\(^3\) The Jordan Times, the most “westernized” of Jordan’s dailies, pressed for non-intervention in the days following the invasion. At times, it expressed editorial sympathy for Saddam’s plight that would have done the Baghdad Post proud. “President Saddam is not a new Hitler, nor is he a loose tiger,” the paper editorialized. “He is an Arab patriot whose higher ideal is the service of the Arab peoples and their interests. ... All Arabs would come to Iraq’s help if attacked by the U.S., Israel or any other foreign power. Those Arabs who will acquiesce in such aggression will be doomed.”\(^3\)

During this stage of the Jordanian liberalization process, the Islamist bloc in Jordan seems to have shared Saddam’s immunity to press criticism. A rigorous content analysis would be necessary to establish this claim more fully. But it is noteworthy that the Jordan Times, a paper that had demonstrated a marked lack of sympathy for the Islamist agenda and would again after Spring 1991, refrained entirely from publishing critical commentary or editorials for the duration of the crisis and war. The onset of the Gulf crisis also may have nipped in the bud a line of investigation that was new to Jordanian civil society: corruption. The scandal of Jordan’s 1988-89 economic crisis had accounted for a good deal of the public anger that eventually spilled over in Ma’an and elsewhere. The events spawned a series of parliamentary investigations of key officials, including

\(^3\) Al-Dustur editorialized: “If some are inclined to blame Iraq, we remind those of the train of events that preceded those that took place at dawn yesterday [the Iraqi invasion]. We also urge them not to ignore a long series of moves that have been taking place against the legitimate rights of Iraq, a matter that compelled Iraqi political decisionmakers to make this move and that prompted Iraq to move to defend Iraq’s interests and natural rights.” Al-Ra‘i and Al-Dustur excerpts translated in “Newspapers Support Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait,” FBIS, 3 August 1990.

\(^3\) Editorial, “Problem’s in the root,” Jordan Times, 5 August 1990.
former Prime Minister Rifa'i; in 1992, a campaign spearheaded by the maverick Islamist deputy Layth Shubaylat would come within a single vote of the super-majority necessary to impeach Rifa'i on corruption charges. But for the most part, the press had followed in the Islamist wake during the initial post-liberalization phase. Only sporadically did it surge ahead with its own investigations of the corruption issue—a "docile" stance that might, in retrospect, be seen as one of the key missed opportunities of the post-1989 liberalization process. In any case, in the climate of national crisis and unity in 1991, carping about corruption was bad form. Said Vivekanand: "Before the whole thing could really mushroom into something that would have taken a sweep at basic pillars of the society, the Iraqi invasion ... shifted [the issue] to the back burner."

**AFTERMATH**

If support for the Iraqi invasion was almost universal in Jordan, so too was the sense of disillusion after the crushing Iraqi defeat at Allied hands. "The end of the Gulf war is indeed a day of reckoning and soul-searching for all Arabs, governments and peoples alike," the *Jordan Times* proclaimed soberly on 3 March, once the extent of the rout was plain.

In the wake of the Gulf conflict, a number of commentators sought to address the deficiencies in press performance during the crisis. Few were as blunt in their criticisms as journalist Khalil Mahmoud, who accused the press of "deceiving citizens and insulting people's intelligence" in its coverage of the war. Rather, much of the self-evaluation had an apologetic but still somehow self-exculpatory tone, evident too in the reflections of interview subjects in 1995. The most common stratagem to explain press behaviour, or explain it away, was the claim that the popular groundswell had irresistibly shaped press coverage. In one of the first public post-mortems, for example, Walid Sa'di said the press had merely served as "a faithful mirror of the people's sentiments":

[Although] there were some faint voices within Jordan which whispered opposing views, ... such views were kept muted by choice of those who held them. I doubt that the Jordanian press would have refused to print an opposing views [sic] had the people who expressed them in private chose[n] to do so in public. As the current of support for Iraq was so

---

39Khalil Mahmoud, "How the press has fared since 1989" (floor discussion), in Hawatmeh, ed., *The Role of the Media in a Democracy*, p. 28.
overwhelming, it was unthinkable for the silent opposer to swim against the current and say
loudly what they were thinking and saying quietly.40

One can only wonder to what extent this argument was employed because it allowed
journalists and editors to present a professional failing as evidence of increased democratization. If
the press had proved incapable of providing the public with a reasoned appraisal of events, it at
least stood by the public and captured its sentiments. George Hawatmeh made this slightly dubious
leap when he argued that the “sizeable freedoms” enjoyed by Jordanian newspapers meant that
“their editorial policies have been moulded more by their own – and readers’ – thinking and ideas
than by the government in power. This is how their position on the Gulf conflict evolved.” Less
regularly acknowledged was the fact that, if popular pressure did not suffice, there was always the
government of the day’s own clearly-stated objective to ‘mould’ the papers’ editorial lines, and
public opinion, further. “If there were any hesitation on the part of the people and the mass
media,” wrote Sa’di, “it was resolved firmly in the direction of the signals that emanated from the
government.”41

The Rise of The Popular Press

Examining “the skirmishes over the press” in Jordan since 1989, Glenn Robinson has
argued that they “seem to be located entirely among Jordan’s elite”:

Indeed, there is no obvious grassroots movement for a free press. Within this elite there are
clear differences of opinion as to what role the press should play during the liberalization
period. However, there is consensus both inside and outside the press that the media
should not play an antagonistic role vis-à-vis the government or the dominant power relations
in Jordan. It appears that muckraking is not one of the jobs of Jordan’s press.42

This analysis tells us much about the performance of the mainstream press in Jordan over
the last few years. It overlooks, however, one of the most striking features of the Jordanian
liberalization: the flowering (some would say rash) of tabloid and political-party journalism in
Jordan, as de jure restrictions on the parties, and de facto restrictions on the tabloids, were relaxed

40 Walid M. Sa’di, “Jordan’s press during the Gulf crisis: A faithful mirror of people’s sentiments,” Jordan Times,
13 May 1991.
41 Sa’di, “Jordan’s press during the Gulf crisis.”
after 1989. I refer to this as the “rise of the popular press.” It is a common phenomenon in liberalization and transition situations, as we will see further in Chapter 6.

**The party press.** The rapid growth, from 1993, of political-party publications like *Al-Mustaqbal* (of the Future Party), *Al-Jamahir* (Jordanian Communist Party), and *Al-Watan* (Progress and Justice Party) proved a shaky, possibly transitory affair. Their blooming was quickly followed by a winnowing. The limited resources of peripheral political sponsors could not prevent material challenges from overwhelming publications like *Al-Ba’th* (paper of the Jordanian Arab Masses Party), *Nida’ Al-Watan* (Jordanian Democratic Popular Unity Party), *Al-’Asr Al-Jadid* (the Democratic Arab Islamic Movement Party-Du’a’). All were formally licensed in late 1992 or early 1993, along with their party sponsors; all had ceased publication by early 1995. The new wave of regime suppression detailed in the postscript could prove the final nail in the coffin.

The party press exists to advance the political agendas of its sponsors. Party publications are mobilizing media in the purest sense, “popular” in that they are oriented towards the masses, but espousing no professional ethic beyond a conviction that the sponsor best represents the interests of the citizenry as a whole. They are critically dependent on party resources. In other countries, party affiliation might be an advantage in strict survival terms (it is otherwise hard to explain the endurance of a downsized *Pravda* in Russia, for example). In a poor country like Jordan, though, parties are fledglings, marginalized from the real centres of power. Party resources are correspondingly shaky, and the party press is vulnerable and often short-lived. All of these challenges must be confronted before the issue of regime tolerance can even be addressed; but the regime, too, is capable of delivering a death-blow to even a flourishing party publication. On balance, while the party press can be seen as an offshoot of the liberalization process in Jordan, it has played only a marginal role in that process – except to serve as a useful scapegoat when the regime is in a reactionary mood.

**The tabloids.** The rise of independent tabloid papers like *Shihan* and *Al-Bilad* is a different and more intriguing development. As we saw in the Nicaragua case-study, tabloid journalism (or “yellow journalism”) tends to be pitched at the lowest common denominator of public taste and functional literacy. Its content emphasizes aspects of experience that are both common and

---

43 For a complete, fairly up-to-date listing, see the “List of Legalized Jordanian Political Parties” (and their newspapers) in *FBIS*, 1 February 1995.
sensational — so that neither the popular interest nor the supply of easily-obtainable stories is likely to wane. In exploring its favoured topics — sex, violence, and scandal — the tabloid tone is often sensationalistic. Not surprisingly, this approach to journalism is viewed with derision in many mainstream quarters. Mohammad Amin, the Ministry of Information’s chief overseer of press functioning and editorial content in Jordan, accused the tabloids in 1995 of “dragging the community to a low standard of language”:

Our [Jordanian] community is a very conservative community. It is an Islamic community. At the same time, it is an open community. It is a moderate community. In general, we are not fanatics. But we have our limits. The values of the West are not our own values. In some respects we have a difference of point of view, or heritage, or religion. So these tabloids are pushing more than a little too far. You know, they are publishing sex exposés, things like that.

Of the three editors-in-chief of Amman’s mainstream dailies, one — Suleiman Qudah of Al-Ra'i, who also serves as President of the Jordan Press Association and the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ) — was openly dismissive of the tabloids. In his view, they had had a “bad effect on the press itself, on journalism, and on the Association.” Another, Nabil al-Sharif of Al-Dustur, acknowledged that the tabloids published “a few stories here and there that were quite good and daring,” but strongly criticized their slapdash approach to fact-checking — “we’re not talking about a responsible press.” Only George Hawatmeh of the Jordan Times viewed the balance-sheet as a positive one for Jordanian journalism:

I personally think that the tabloids have had a positive impact, if only because they can energize situations and people. They are daring. They have courage in exposing or talking about issues that the pro-establishment, the daily newspapers, basically don’t tread on. They’re not perfect. They have investigative reporting, but it’s not well-documented, it’s not well-researched. But the fact that they’re tackling what were taboo issues for a long time is a positive thing. There is much more variety in the Jordanian press today. I think any river that flows enriches the soil around it. Weeds also grow, but you can’t stop the river.

For a view from the tabloid trenches, one can turn to Jehad Momani. In 1995, Momani was chief editor of the largest and most influential tabloid, Shihan, which first began publishing in tabloid format in 1984.45 According to Momani, though, only when he began to transform Shihan after the

---

44 Amin’s counterpart at the ministry, Secretary General Nayef Mawla, distinguished between “professional” newspapers that “increase the level of information the average person has” without “blowing things out of proportion,” and tabloids that are “based on only sensationalism” and “only looking to increase their sales.”

45 The paper distributed 100,000 copies weekly inside Jordan as of mid-1995, with occasional surges to 200,000 when major events occurred (such as the defection of Saddam Hussein’s son-in-law to Jordan in August 1995). By comparison, Al-Ra’i, the largest daily, printed 90,000 copies a day. Jehad Momani interview; “Al-Ra’i: Facts and
onset of liberalization did the paper become the popular fixture that it is in Jordan today.

Momani’s restructuring concentrated Shihan’s coverage on three main themes: politics, sex, and crime. Politically, he said, Shihan considered itself “a principled opposition organ,” bounded by respect for the King, who was “above the law.” Momani said this opposition orientation had proved “very good from a commercial point of view,” in a country where all the daily newspapers were “not trustworthy.” “The people,” he stated firmly, “like us when we oppose the government, when we tell them where is corruption, where mistakes are being made.” Momani thus cast himself straightforwardly as an exponent of the western “watchdog” model for the press, and in conversation he made clear his preference for western models of social modernization as a whole.

Consider his reflections on Shihan’s troubled relationship with the Islamist opposition, the force in Jordan most vocally concerned with western cultural influence:

> Our problem is, we [in Jordan] talk too much about the past. We are too close to the Arabs of two thousand years ago. The right thing to do is forget the past. ... We have to talk about fashion, about rock music. But there are some people in our country who don’t want us to forget the past. ... We want [the Islamists] to be as they choose to be – Muslims, praying – but don’t lead me. I want my country to be a part of Europe. I want to be a part of civilization!

Shihan’s greatest coup came with its unveiling of “Malhasgate.” The scandal centred on accusations made by the outgoing Health Minister, Abdul Rahim Malhas, in an interview with Shihan in early 1994, to the effect that much food and medicine imported to Jordan was “the garbage of the industrialized world” and unfit for human consumption. Malhas subsequently claimed Shihan “blew [his remarks] out of proportion” and “sensationalized” them, but they sparked urgent talks in the Lower House of Parliament, and a spate of coverage in the mainstream press.  

> “People call us ‘the brave one,’” Momani said proudly. “We always open things up.” Notably, he viewed Shihan as playing a vanguard role vis-à-vis Jordan’s mainstream dailies. “In the beginning, [the dailies] think [a certain story] is untouchable. Then, after we publish something on it, they think: If the government didn’t punish Shihan, then maybe we can talk about it.” It is hard to know how

---

Figures” (Jordan Press Foundation advertising brochure), privately supplied.

much of this evaluation is self-serving, but the idea of the tabloids as violators of taboos in the Jordanian press seemed to be accepted by most parties — though it was as often decried as praised.

Momani acknowledged that Shihan's investigative journalists sometimes made professional mistakes, "but not big mistakes. Mistakes in the details. We say that the Minister of such-and-such stole one million dinars. The question is not whether the Minister is innocent or not. He is a thief. But maybe he just stole one hundred thousand [dinars]." Most of the errors, he claimed, were traceable to the culture of secrecy that surrounds information in Jordan, and the added reluctance of official sources to divulge material to Shihan in particular. "Shihan journalists all the time face problems with officials and ministers, corporations or companies. They know that when Shihan talks, it means there is a big story. So they try to keep their secrets. And they try to set traps for us, so we'll make mistakes."

So much for politics; what of the sex-and-crime corners of the triad that guided Shihan's self-conception (and that of several other tabloids) under Momani? In late 1994 and early 1995, three tabloids – Shihan, Al-Bilad, and Hawadeth Al-Sa'ah – came under "heavy attack ... for publishing photographs of semi-naked women and sensational stories." In fact, the "semi-naked women" were clad; their photos had been doctored to give an illusion of translucency to their form-fitting garb. The reaction was typical, according to Momani:

When we talk about sex, people [here] can't understand it, because Jordan is an Arabic, Islamic country. We're not talking about sex like you talk in Canada! We're just talking around the subject. ... We believe that we have to talk about sex, about crime, about our social problems. ... In the future, we'll talk about sex like we talk about fruit and vegetables. Because it's something very important to our lives. We are talking about sensitive problems about ten or fifteen years before anyone else. ... You'll see, they'll start a war against us: the other newspapers, the Muslim Brotherhood. 'What are you doing? You published a nearly-naked woman in your newspaper! But we are Muslims!' But it goes in one ear and out the other with us.

Again, it must be stressed that the degree of indulgence granted Shihan in sexual matters did not approach the salaciousness of western tabloid reporting. This restraint scarcely obtained,

---


48 "There was once a mistake when a coloured photo of a woman was published in black and white. It made her look as if she were not wearing anything," Momani told the Jordan Times. However, "Mr. Momani admitted this was not the only time [the mixup had occurred]. The weekly ... also published photos of women on Eilat beach a couple of months ago." Sa'eda Kilani, "JPA warning to 3 weekly tabloids stirs controversy," 10 January 1995.
though, when crime was the subject. In March 1994, the sexually assaulted and decapitated body of an eight-year-old child, Lo'ai Araiqat, was discovered in Zarqa, Jordan's second city. *Shihan* published pictures of the victim's body; scattered over the pages of various editions were headlines, allegedly quoting the suspect in the case: "I am a monster and I don't deserve to live," "For God's sake allow me to kill myself, I wish all people would spit on me," "I have sex five times a day," and so on. Ziad Rifai, head of the Yarmouk University Communications Department, described the coverage as "cheap and revolting."49 And the tabloids' sensationalistic treatment of crime drove Jordanian authorities to distraction. "Sometimes people [in the Gulf states] tell me, 'We're not coming to visit Jordan this summer, we're going somewhere else,'" said Nayef Mawla, Deputy General of the Ministry of Information. "I say, 'Why?' They say, 'You don't read the newspapers?'"

The regime's grey hairs notwithstanding, Momani seemed firmly convinced that such coverage bolsters *Shihan*’s relationship with its readers - the primary bond for a publication that enjoyed neither the approval of the regime nor the enthusiastic support of state and corporate advertisers. "A woman called me two days ago and told me, 'Shihan has become a very dangerous habit in my life! Thursday morning, I send my daughter to bring it to me; if she can't find it in the supermarket, I get mad. It's like breakfast for me!"" The degree of popular devotion allowed *Shihan* to evade the early, often decisive pressure of advertisers' boycott of popular-oriented publications.50

There existed the possibility of a more 'professional' journalism emerging from the tabloid scene. In July 1995, one of the veterans of the tabloid press, Nidal Mansour (who wrote for *Shihan* and edited *Al-Bilad*, and was briefly jailed by the authorities for stories published in the latter), moved to found a new weekly, *Al-Hadath*. Mainstream critics like Suleiman Qudah credited *Al-

---


50 With regard to the claim of a "broad spectrum" of readership, Momani stated that the addition of political coverage "talking about political problems after the advent of democracy," together with design changes, allowed *Shihan* to reach beyond its original traditional lower- and lower-middle class audience. Poorer newspaper readers, of course, were more likely to choose a weekly paper over a daily. As for advertisers' original reluctance to come on board, Momani recalled: "We found at first a big problem [in attracting advertising]. The people who have the money and factories would think twice when they wanted to advertise with our paper, because we were opposed to the government. The government is always friends with capital, as you know." Greater success in recent times, he said, reflected "over three years of working with [advertisers] to convince them that we are a national [i.e., loyal] opposition, [that] we are working for our country and for the sake of our people."
Hadath with moving away from the standard formula of Jordanian weeklies – de-emphasizing sensationalism, and working to promote critical, independent journalism in Jordan.\footnote{According to Suleiman Qudah: "[Al-Hadath] is very good. It is very serious, and it has a lot of courage in the things it says about politics. It is completely different from the other [weeklies]."} In conversation, Mansour also rejected aspects of his tabloid heritage, saying Al-Hadath sought to avoid "exaggerating in our presentation of subject matter ... We are cautious not to arouse excitement over unimportant subjects."

**THE (SELF) CENSOR’S SCISSORS:**

**SHIFTING PATTERNS OF PRESS LEGISLATION**

Patterns of press-regime relations in post-liberalization Jordan coalesced around the redrafting of Press and Publications legislation that dated back to the era of martial law. The reconfiguring was typical of those the regime negotiated with other social actors and forces. Restrictions were loosened, and some regime powers were abandoned or put out to graze. But the essential subordination of ruled to rulers was also codified and entrenched. In the process, a truly transitional spiralling of the liberalization process was successfully avoided.

The Press and Publications Law (PPL), approved by both houses of parliament in December 1992 and March 1993, was a schizoid document. Introduced by the government, ostensibly as a contribution to the democratization process, it underwent extensive modification at the hands of parliamentarians, to the obvious detriment of press freedom and autonomy.\footnote{Muhammad Ayish, a professor of Journalism and Mass Communications at Yarmouk University, has argued that the Law must be "understood within the framework of a long record of cynicism and mistrust characterising the press relationship with [the] people's representatives [in parliament] from the outset of the country's democratisation process." According to Ayish, parliamentary modifications included clauses "relating to source revelations, criteria for publishing information and [the] definition of a professional journalist." Ayish, "Press and Parliament – the uneasy relationship," *Jordan Times*, 23 December 1992. George Hawatmeh has also claimed that "apparently, the version [of the law] that was approved was much worse than the one that was [originally] presented to the government. What happened there, we don't know. It's a big indication, though, that relations between parliamentarians and the press were so tense that the parliamentarians had to tighten the screws more than the government did."} Many representatives held the press in contempt: from Islamists who felt excluded and marginalized by the secular mainstream media,\footnote{On the Muslim Brotherhood’s concerns, see Ziad Abu Ghaniimeh, "The Islamists’ voice is not being heard," in Hawatmeh, ed., *The Role of the Media in a Democracy*, pp. 59-62. The complaint has been raised more generally by the political opposition throughout the liberalization era. Parliamentary hostility towards the press broke into the open in a} to pillars of the establishment displaying their hereditary sensitivity...
CHAPTER 4 – JORDAN

295

to criticism. (While parliament often seemed a marginal player in the course of post-1989 Jordanian politics, its contributions to the 1993 press legislation served as a reminder that it could exert an important influence on the parameters of liberalization. Unfortunately, it chose to exercise that influence in a manner that targeted the press, rather than working to shore it up as a fellow “estate.”)

The PPL as eventually passed began by declaring that “freedom of expression is guaranteed for every Jordanian.” It committed the government (and “government institutions”) to a reduction in their direct or direct ownership of press organs to a maximum of 30 percent of shares by 1997. The central advantage that the press won under the new legislation was a repealing of the government’s right to close any press institution at will. A temporary suspension of the institution’s activities could be imposed, but any further action had to take the form of government prosecution through the court system. The courts, as a result of their own post-1989 transformation, now stood at a certain remove from the regime – far enough away to overrule regime initiatives on occasion, though not in the face of the recent “chill” in press-regime relations (see the postscript).

But if these moves could be seen to boost press autonomy, a sterner orientation was also evident. The first indication came with the PPL’s definition of a journalist as “every person who meets the conditions stipulated in the valid Press Association law or who takes journalism as his [or her] profession and is registered with the Association.” The PPL thus entrenched the role of the Jordan Press Association as a pro-regime “gatekeeper,” one charged with pressuring or marginalizing unruly elements within the press (see below). It also included an extensive list of direct constraints on press functioning and coverage. Journalists were allowed “to keep secret the sources of their information” – until, that is, a court “decide[d] otherwise in the process of a criminal case to protect state security, prevent a crime, or to serve justice” (Article 5D). Publications were to “refrain from publishing what conflicts with the principles of freedom,

Lower House debate of March 1992 in which, “in an unprecedented attack on local media organisations, many deputies blamed the press and the government-run radio and television networks for being mouthpieces of the executive authority and tools of well-to-do newspaper owners” (Jordan Times, 26-27 March 1992, in FBIS, 27 March 1992). In July 1994, a group of “political leftist, pan-Arab, and Islamic parties” presented a memorandum to then-Information Minuister Dr. Jawad al-‘Anani. “The memorandum said these parties do not object to the government’s right to express its view [on peace negotiations] ... but these parties do not accept the government claim that through its position and media it represents all the people; they do not agree to the government’s turning its back on national Jordanian establishments, represented by political parties, social figures, and trade unions that have expressed their position on the Jordanian-Israeli negotiations.” Sawt Al-Sha‘b, 28 July 1994 [in Arabic]; quoted in FBIS, 29 July 1994.
national responsibility, [and] human rights; [and] shall respect the truth and the values of the Arab and Islamic nation” (Article 8). Designated editors-in-chief, now exclusively Jordanian citizens, were legally “responsible for what [was] published” in their publication; “The owner of the publication and the writer of the published article also share[d] legal responsibility” (Article 14. In fact, joint or multiple prosecutions under the PPL have been the norm rather than the exception). Article 20 gave the Minister of Information power to license all publications, and to deny licenses if sufficient financial backing could not be raised (a minimum of JD 50,000 registered capital for a daily newspaper, for instance; no small hurdle in a poor country like Jordan, particularly when foreign contributions are banned. In 1997 this regulation was made much more stringent still, as will be discussed in its place).  

By far the most controversial section of the Law was Article 40. It forbade publication of:

1. News that touches on the king and the royal family.
2. Any information on the number in the Armed Forces, their arms and ammunition, or their movements unless the publication of such news is authorized by a responsible authority in the Armed Forces; as well as any news report, sketch, or commentary that touches on the Armed Forces or the security agencies.
3. Articles and items degrading any of the religions or sects whose freedom is guaranteed by [the] Constitution.
4. Articles which may harm national unity; inspire crimes, or spread hatred and sow the seeds of rancor, disunity, or discord among the members of society.
5. The proceedings of the parliament’s closed sessions.
6. Articles or news reports aiming at shaking confidence in the national currency.
7. Articles or information which include a personal insult to heads of Arab, Islamic, or friendly states ...
8. Articles or news reports that infringe on the honor of individuals or their personal freedom, or tarnish their reputation.
9. News reports, letters, or pictures that violate ethics and public decency. ...
10. Foreign publications that contain any of the materials prohibited by this law will be denied entry.  

Predictably, when the draft Press and Publications legislation was unveiled before parliament, it generated an unprecedented wave of opposition among Jordan’s journalistic community. As early as 23 August 1992, about 40 journalists staged a public demonstration against

---

54The specific language of the Law concerning foreign ownership or contributions reads as follows (Article 44): “The owner of any press publication, or its chief editor, managing editor, or any other editor, correspondent, or regular writer ... is prohibited from receiving any financial aid or gift from any local or foreign party without the minister’s approval.”

the draft legislation and Lower House amendments to it.\textsuperscript{56} Ayman al-Safadi wrote in the \textit{Jordan Times} that the country's "incompetent, dull, imperceptive, and teethless press" was about to be further hidebound by a law that was "a giant step backwards" and "a complete disappointment":

\begin{quote}
Its restrictions are crippling, its language is elastic, its definitions are vague; it leaves the government with too much power, the press with too many concerns. ... The media will thus continue to be confined to being a mouthpiece for the government, reporting the news that it wants to pass to it. ... By any serious standard, the draft law makes a mockery of freedom of expression in Jordan.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

In an editorial, the \textit{Times} called the endorsement of the Law by the Lower House "a black day for the press," one that "will go down in Jordanian journalists' record books as the day on which their cause and that of the freedom of expression took a heavy blow. ... For the blunder that the House has committed, it deserves no thanks."\textsuperscript{58}

The international response, though more muted, was equally critical. Article 19 warned that the draft PPL "contains many provisions which ... would undoubtedly put freedom of expression and information in jeopardy." The article forcing journalists to reveal their sources if ordered to do so by a court, for example, would "virtually muzzle all officials in possession of information of public interest."\textsuperscript{59} Glenn Robinson's observation that "virtually any news worth printing would contravene” one PPL provision or another may have been overstated.\textsuperscript{60} But it emphasized the discretion the regime had in keeping the press off-guard through selective, unpredictable “strikes" under one or another proviso of the PPL. The uncertainty lent increased prominence to self-censorship in reportorial and editorial decision-making: a traditionally low-cost, non-invasive, and functional replacement for direct regime oversight. In this sense, Jordanian journalists still had grounds to empathize with the Palestinian writer who said of the pre-1989 intellectual climate in the country: "I really feel as if a policeman sits on my chest and as if there is a scissor in my brain." The Palestinian's counterpart in post-liberalization Jordan could feel that the policeman was at least

\textsuperscript{60}Robinson, "Defensive Democratization in Jordan," p. 9.
off drinking tea, rather than an all-pervasive presence. But if the scissors in the brain had grown a little dull, later events would demonstrate they could still cut.

Actual instances in which the PPL has been used to bring wayward press organs into line, and cases where its use has been overtly or indirectly threatened, are the most useful evidence of the legislation's intended role in shaping press-regime relations. It is also worth considering how the PPL is subsumed in the regime's broader conception of the role of the press, the parliamentary opposition, and ordinary Jordanian citizens.

**Legislation: Applications, and Broader Regime Strategies**

How has press legislation been applied since 1989, both under residual martial law legislation and under the new PPL of 1993? How does legislation fit into the broader pattern of press-regime relations, and what other mechanisms does the regime have at its disposal to discipline wayward press institutions? Regime strategies can be divided into three general categories, with resort to formal charges under the PPL or the penal code playing a greater or lesser role in given instances.61

*Preservation of the inviolability of the armed forces and security forces.*

In Jordan — as is examined in some detail below — the monarchy is immune, and the government is the designated lightning-rod and whipping-boy. This leaves the army and security forces atop the list of regime institutions that neither enjoy the unconditional respect of press and public, nor tolerate the type of scorn sometimes heaped on the government of the day. Article 40.2 of the PPL was designed not just to preserve security around matters such as troop deployments and dispositions. Indeed, this intention may not even have been primary. At least as significant was the desire to draw a veil over the limited abuses of human rights that the Jordan security forces inflicted, for the most part in the campaign against radical Islamist opponents and other, more peripheral dissident elements.

Sensitivity to trespass on the “rights” of the army and security forces underpinned several of the most important regime actions against the Jordanian press since 1989. The pattern of

---

61Between the May 1993 implementation of the law and April 1994, UPI estimated “more than 10 cases” in total of prosecution under the PPL, “against mainly tabloid and political party newspapers.” Richard Purdy, “Two Jordanian journalists go on trial,” UPI dispatch, 18 April 1994.
harassment and prosecution began with *Al-Ribat's* publication in September 1991 of a report by the Public Liberties Committee of the Jordanian House of Representatives. The report had been issued about two weeks before its publication in the Muslim Brotherhood weekly. It summarized investigations by an opposition-dominated parliamentary committee into “detentions, restraint of liberties, treatment of detainees, interference in appointments, clubs, and societies, reinstatement of employees dismissed on political grounds, and political prisoners.”

The Ministry of the Interior issued a pointed statement rejecting the allegations, and “regretting the publication of material in newspapers before consideration of an opposite viewpoint and verification of facts.” No direct prosecution was launched against *Al-Ribat* for publishing the text of the report – an indication, perhaps, that the regime still had not come to a consensus on the appropriate limits of press freedom and parliamentary opposition in the new circumstances. But the publishing of the report apparently precipitated regime harassment of *Al-Ribat* that was as serious and systematic as any visited upon a Jordanian press institution in the first half of the 1990s. The unwanted attention included numerous bannings and confiscations of individual editions of the paper. These are described in greater detail in the next section, since the later bannings were not security-related.

The next time the regime was confronted with a potentially incendiary security matter, it chose a pre-emptive strategy. This effectively quashed inconvenient publicity and commentary. Two Islamist deputies, Layth Shubaylat and Ya'qub Qirsh, were put on trial in September 1992 for illegal possession of weapons and links to terrorists abroad. The generally-held opinion, in Jordan and internationally, was that the prosecutions were politically motivated at best, trumped up at

---

52 Report by the Public Liberties Committee of the Jordanian House of Representatives,” 26 August 1991; published in *Al-Ribat* [in Arabic], 10 September 1991 (FBIS, 12 September 1991). The report pulled few punches, claiming that “to date, the measures being adopted to restrain citizens’ liberties violate most international laws, accords, and charters concerning civilian and political rights.” It described two unregistered detention facilities of the General Intelligence Department (GID), including “a torture place called ‘the square’,” and named the slang terms for the tortures allegedly carried out there. It demanded that “the government ... issue instructions to all its executive agencies to stop collecting information by detention and torture, which has become the principal method of collecting information by departments set up” for that purpose.


54 Like *Al-Ahali*, the organ of the Jordanian Popular Democratic Party, *Al-Ribat* operated on the margins of the Jordanian media system, being registered overseas – in Greece – and rolling off presses in the Zarqa free trade zone. The authorities therefore had some difficulty in launching formal proceedings against it, and relied instead on confiscations of the finished product.
worst. Certain Jordanian press outlets – particularly the tabloids – made “speculations” along these lines, at least in the eyes of the Minister of Information. Their editors’ attention was then drawn “to a 1959 criminal proceedings law which states that newspaper editors could be imprisoned for publishing information which could influence judges, witnesses or court staff entrusted with investigation.”

The gag order limited journalists to reporting only testimony approved for release by the Security Court judge. It largely served its purpose, allowing the regime to proceed through the show-trial conviction of Shubaylat and Qirsh and their sentencing to 20 years’ imprisonment with hard labour, all a prelude to a magnanimous pardoning by King Hussein. (Shubaylat would be rearrested in 1996: see the postscript.)

The most severe early demonstration of the regime’s security sensitivities occurred in September 1993, during the trial of ten Islamists accused of plotting a coup against the government. Ramadan al-Rawashidah, a journalist with the Jordan People’s Democratic Party’s weekly Al-Ahali, published an article on 20 September charging that the State Security Court had delayed granting doctors access to prisoners. The article reported defence claims that the prisoners had been tortured. Al-Rawashidah further alleged that he had been banned from the courtroom; he demonstrated outside the court with a sign protesting the “injustice” of his exclusion. On 26 September he was arrested outside the courthouse and held for “slandering the court.”

The regime action prompted a demonstration in front of the Ministry of Information by some two dozen Jordanian journalists “express[ing] solidarity with and protest[ing] against their colleague’s detention.” Al-Rawashidah was held for five days, then released on bail – and in through the revolving door went Jamil al-Nimri, editor of Al-Ahali. He was charged with contempt of court for publishing al-Rawashidah’s story. The Jordan Times called the prosecutions “an unprecedented measure ... since the democratisation process was launched in Jordan in 1989.” But the tale took a twist that swept up the Times itself: it became “the first independent mainstream newspaper to go on trial” for violating the PPL.

The prosecution was a delayed result of Times reports following in Al-Ahali’s footsteps and expanding on the weekly’s coverage of torture allegations. An article by Sani Atiyeh, published on

---

11 October 1993, cited graphic defence testimony, including one defendant’s claims that an “officer had stripped him and threatened to shove a stick in his rectum if he did not sign a testimony that tied him to the plot to kill the King.” Immediately after the article appeared, Atiyeh and Times Editor-in-Chief George Hawatmeh were called in for security-branch questioning. Formal proceedings were temporarily shelved, then reinstated; Atiyeh and Hawatmeh went on trial in April 1994, followed shortly thereafter by al-Rawashdeh and al-Nimri of Al-Ahali. (The charges against the Al-Ahali duo were thus considerably more serious than the charges laid against Jordan Times. The Al-Ahali staff faced up to two years in prison — an interesting act of regime discrimination, to which we will return.) On 16 May, Atiyeh and Hawatmeh were convicted and ordered to pay a fine plus costs. They immediately appealed the decision, but it was upheld by the court of appeals in June 1995, immediately after al-Rawashdeh and al-Nimri had been found guilty and fined (not, as it transpired, jailed). In conversation in 1995, Hawatmeh angrily derided the “outrageous” proceedings:

“It’s a basic test of the freedom of the press. If you’re quoting a defendant in the newspaper, and you get prosecuted for it — I mean, that’s the limit of undemocratic practice as far as, say, a country like the United States [is concerned]. ... So the fact that they’ve taken us to court over that particular thing is outrageous. And it’s outrageous that we were convicted in the first court, and in the Appeals Court. If the Supreme Court says we were right to be convicted, it’s a catastrophe!

Nonetheless, Hawatmeh argued that the court system, particularly the Supreme Court, exercised “a lot of independence” in handling the appeal:

“We’ve seen two cases where even those who were accused of plotting to kill the King were freed. So in theory, the independence is there. Especially with the big guys at the Supreme Court. It’s not one little judge at the first-instance court, who’s afraid to absolve you of such a charge, generally, because he has ambitions within the system, because he doesn’t want to take the responsibility to interpret the law on his own. ... We’re hopeful.

Detention and prosecution appeared appear to be distinct regime strategies, and were rarely employed in combination. Prosecution under the PPL, one of the less severe actions, has with only one exception targetted “popular” rather than mainstream press institutions. More severe regime actions, like criminal prosecution, detention, and confiscation are likewise the exclusive lot of déclassé tabloid and political-party media. Mainstream media have largely immunized themselves through

---

their own caution, self-censorship, and often institutional clout within the regime itself. This evaluation would appear to hold as of early 1999, with the disparity in treatment cast into even sharper relief by the regime’s mid-1997 crackdown on the press.

**Preservation of good relations with “friendly” states.** Jordan’s foreign-policy priorities explained a number of prosecutions and other regime actions against the press during the liberalization era. In these instances, the targets were less commonly the tabloids and more often the Islamic weeklies and political-party newspapers. These sometimes had a partisan political interest in sling mud at foreign figures; with Jordan urgently seeking to resurrect itself in the eyes of regional powers and potential aid-givers, the regime’s skin proved decidedly thin. The most heavily-targeted publication was *Al-Ribat*, the Muslim Brotherhood weekly. Beginning in late 1991—shortly after *Al-Ribat* had revealed the details of security abuses in Jordan, as described, and concurrent with the regime’s post-Gulf crackdown on the Islamists—four editions of the weekly were banned and confiscated by the authorities. A February 1992 banning was apparently the result of vociferous criticisms – slander, according to the Minister of Information – of ‘Yasir ‘Arafat and Saudi Arabia’s King Fahd. Kamal Rashid, editor of *Al-Ribat*, commented at the time: “In a nutshell, they [the censors] don’t want us to talk about the Arab countries with which Jordan wants to improve relations, nor to write about our rejection of the peace settlement of the Middle East crisis.”

In November 1992, another edition of *Al-Ribat* was banned and confiscated “because it contained an article about repression and torture conducted by the Tunisian authorities against Islamists,” at least according to a statement by *Al-Ribat*’s management. The harassment campaign heated up again in 1995, as the dimensions of the opposition to the 1994 peace treaty with Israel became plain, and the regime chose increasingly to suppress rather than tolerate them. An edition of the Islamic weekly *Al-Muharrir* was confiscated in January 1995, after the paper published an interview with Libya’s Mohamar Qadafi in which Qadafi expressed strong criticisms of Arab states that had signed peace treaties with Israel. Barely two months later, in March 1995, the regime breached the boundaries of the absurd, charging the weekly *Al-Majd* under the PPL for

---

publishing a riddle that is considered offensive to the president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed Ben Sultan Al Nahayn. The riddle ... asked readers to identify an imaginary animal “with one eye, one ear, lives in the wilderness, eats honey and stings like a bee. The creator [sic] is homosexual, hates women and is shortsighted.” ... [Al-Majd] said the riddle seems to be written by Sheikh Zayed but “distributed by his enemies.” The weekly readers should send answers to the royal palace in the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, to qualify for a prize of one million UAE dirhams.73

Once again, the regime demonstrated considerable selectivity in targeting the popular press as opposed to its mainstream counterparts. Al-Ribat’s editor protested the preferential treatment at the time of the weekly’s February 1992 banning. Rashid was quoted as “saying that other newspapers — published inside and outside Jordan — had been writing more critical articles about the same issues and that they were neither banned nor censored.”74 Some support for his argument could be found in the pages of the Jordan Times, a generally-favoured institution that has exploited regime benevolence in order to report on human rights abuses around the Arab World — even, tentatively, in Jordan. A scathing editorial of 17 December 1992, on the occasion of an Arab Writers’ plenum in Amman, lamented the dismal state of the intellectual establishment through the Arab World. It pointed a finger at state repression as “the main culprit”:

It is not a secret that Arab regimes are the main culprits behind the stifling of the freedoms of thought and expression that in turn resulted in a culture fearful of being invaded and defeated from the outside. Perhaps other writers, not so distinguished or guilty by association with repressive regimes, would identify the real problem and point their fingers to it.75

If this seems too abstract in its condemnation, consider the editorial of 29 May 1993, which charges several Arab countries by name with gross abuses:

The quest for freedom, democracy and full human rights in the Arab World has begun and people are on the march to realise what is their birth right. No matter how brutal, backward or entrenched the regimes are, people will triumph. ... Authorities in countries like Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria must realise that they cannot rule by intimidation, torture and abuse of human rights.76

To my knowledge, no pressure, direct or indirect, was ever brought to bear on the Times for such comments. The contrast with the measures against Al-Ribat and Al-Muharrir, for commentary varying more in style than in substance, was especially striking when one considered that the main subject of the final Times editorial was Tunisia. This was, of course, the very country Al-Ribat had criticized less than six months earlier, suffering confiscation of an entire edition as a consequence.

There was a further factor underlying the limited attention paid to regime abuses by parliament as well as the press. The Jordanian regime stood on rather safe ground. Jordan is, after all, the only Arab country to host an Amnesty International office. Its human-rights record is one of the best in the Arab World, and the occasional glancing blow in the press may actually bolster its generally tolerant image. George Hawatmeh put this well in an interview: “If I were a Jordanian official, I would want newspapers to talk about or reprint articles from Amnesty International, because this is a benevolent autocracy. Jordan would emerge, relatively, in a very positive light – compared to Iraq, to Syria, to Egypt.”

Preservation of the reputation of prominent members of the establishment. The establishment component of the Jordanian regime, including its dominant parliamentary wing, has been a key source of institutional continuity throughout the pre- and post-liberalization eras. This bloc – comprising at a glance tribalists, pro-regime parliamentarians, the upper civil service, and the upper urban professional class – sees investigative reporting of establishment figures, or attacks on their integrity, as acts bordering on treason. Not surprisingly, the establishment reserves special vitriol for the tabloids and political-party papers in Jordan, and may have been the major architect of the 1997 crackdown on the press. It is tempting to point to a kind of class queasiness at work here, given the tabloids’ “popular” status, and their comparatively unsophisticated and uneducated...

---

77 It would be another matter entirely for the Times to commission an independent report of torture allegations per se (i.e., not the second-hand dissemination of court proceedings). The prosecutions of 1994 brought the paper to heel long before such a point was reached, in the unlikely event that it was ever contemplated.

78 Elsewhere in parliament, such probing is of course welcomed by the Islamists and other opposition forces, for whom it provides useful ammunition. But owing to the fact that they have largely been frozen out of high government positions, with the brief exception of Mudar Budran’s Gulf War cabinet, the Islamists should not be counted as part of this establishment bloc; possibly the more supine Islamic Brotherhood hierarchy of years past would qualify. In any case, the Islamists have their own grudge against the press.
constituency. This is precisely the sector the establishment sees as most volatile and least trustworthy – with good reason, as the 1989 and 1996 rioting showed.

In November 1994, the editor of the tabloid Al-Rasif was charged with libel under PPL regulations holding editors legally responsible for everything that appeared in their publications. Al-Rasif's transgression was to have published "false information" about a local doctor: the claim that his surgical procedures had left a patient paralyzed. The accused, it transpired, was head of the Jordanian Medical Association – an establishment pillar. Jehad Momani of Shihan told in an interview of being seized by police and jailed for two weeks without charge, for publishing a story claiming that the son of the Minister of the Interior had killed a woman and a baby in a traffic accident. It was not possible to confirm his account independently. "When the case is very sensitive, when it deals with the Interior Minister, with the Prime Minister, with some sensitive places in the government, they will follow us, and they will try to punish us however they can," said Momani.

A similarly-themed prosecution under the PPL targetted Al-Hayat, the London-based daily cited in Chapter 1 as a regular irritant to authoritarian Arab states. On 20 September 1995, Al-Hayat was accused of publishing an article "that harms national unity, incites criminal action, and sows seeds of hatred and division with society" without "consideration to objectivity, fairness and accuracy." The story in question was written by the paper's Jordanian correspondent, Salameh Ne'matt. It alleged that 42 unnamed "businessmen, journalists and a cabinet minister" were on the payroll of the Iraqi government. The action was a cause célèbre, unseen in Jordan since the corruption allegations and probes of the security forces in 1989-91. The idea that prominent Jordanians were in the pocket of the Iraqis was not beyond belief, especially given the track record of the journalist making the claims (then the BBC's Amman correspondent). Once again, the source of regime nervousness seemed to be revelations of establishment corruption – a consistent sore point since the ruling class confronted the upheavals of 1989.

---

81The corruption theme is explored further in the *Jordan Times* case-study, below.
A basic theme of this chapter is that continuity has predominated over change in the Jordanian press since 1989. That trend has only increased since fieldwork was carried out in Amman in 1995. It may therefore be worth examining three institutions that have anchored the overriding continuity in press-regime relations.

**The Press and the Monarchy**

Everybody tells you there is a red line in this democratization process: not to touch the King.

— George Hawatmeh

That the monarchy is above criticism in Jordan is both an article of legislation and something of an article of faith. The press had an additional reason to respect the figure of the monarch: King Hussein himself was the main architect and guarantor of whatever liberalization process could be said to have taken place in Jordan since 1989. The King was viewed by most owners, editors and journalists as a bulwark of the limited but genuine freedoms, and the rather relaxed arm’s-length relationship that the regime maintained with the mainstream publications it controlled. Hussein’s role in regime crackdowns on the press was usually more shadowy. As a result, an implicit and sometimes explicit self-conception guided Jordanian newspapers. It was the idea that the press must limit itself to the political fray, and the monarchy and Royal Court must stand above that fray.

The monarch’s impunity did not extend to all his initiatives. Once those entered the governmental arena, they became fair game, within certain limits. After all, as Jehad Momini noted above, that is partly what the government was there for. “We do indicate problems where they

---

82 Literally, given the time-honoured relationship between the Hashemite monarchy and the Muslim Brotherhood.

83 Even the most combative editor in the country acknowledged this. “We’re the first newspaper to tell the Prime Minister of Jordan, ‘You are wrong,’” said Jehad Momani of *Shihan*. “We couldn’t, of course, tell the King that he is wrong, under the law. He’s above all that.” It hardly needs to be added that the King is also above the merest hint of prurient tabloid reporting of his private life — the lot of royalty and celebrity elsewhere in the world.

84 It has ever been thus in Jordan: Kathryn Rath notes that during the 1989 unrest, “The king was not directly attacked ... A distinction was made between the king and the government, and it was towards the latter that the anger
exist with certain policies adopted by the monarch," said George Hawatmeh. "[But] if you want to blame the regime for something, you tend to blame the government."

A surprising feature of press-regime relations in Jordan is that the monarch sometimes has a thicker skin than his acolytes in the Royal Court and the establishment display on his behalf. Propriety tends to limit royal interventions in these areas, though they are hardly unknown. The establishment has no such concerns, and takes what opportunities it can to loudly proclaim its loyalty. The motives are not hard to discern: any whisper against the King is a whisper against the system upon which their privilege rests.

This was particularly evident in the "Khouri Affair" of 1992. Rami Khouri's "View from the Fourth Circle" column for the *Jordan Times*, published on 8 September 1992, is perhaps the single most controversial article published in the Kingdom since the liberalization process began.85 Innocuously titled, "Jordan's Opportunity: Where History and Elegance Coincide," Khouri's article appeared against a backdrop of widespread domestic uncertainty over the King's health. Hussein had flown to the U.S. for surgery to treat a cancer of the urinary tract and had both a ureter and a kidney removed. "Precisely because of the monarchy's centrality in the Jordanian system," notes Asher Susser, "King Hussein's serious health problems gave rise to questions about the continued stability of the state, if and when he were to pass from the scene."86 In this climate of instability, Khouri's first oversight was to believe that the whispers on the street, or behind closed doors, could be transferred to a column of a mainstream Jordanian daily – one with a substantial foreign readership – without causing undue distress. "The reality of His Majesty's health should be seen as an opportunity rather than as a crisis," Khouri wrote. "The medical reality of the last several years ... cannot and should not be ignored even by those who profess to show their affection for King Husayn and Jordan with a shower of superlative praise."

The reality [Khouri added] imposes several questions that should be considered seriously: For how many more years will King Husayn choose to continue shouldering the responsibilities that have defined his entire life? ... Will this latest health episode rekindle the

---


thoughts he considered about one year ago, when – as he told the country in a speech outlining why we should participate in the Arab-Israeli peace talks – he said he had contemplated abdicating and turning over the constitutional responsibilities of the monarchy to someone else? In other words, is this the moment when King Husayn and Jordan should start contemplating the manner and nature of a transition to a post-Husayn era? ... It is all the more reason for His Majesty and all Jordanians to ponder the nature of the succession now, when it can be planned carefully and wisely, rather than to risk the pressures of crisis management in some unknown future scenario.

Such a transition, Khouri contended, would “necessarily mean a substantive shift in the manner of governance and decision-making” in Jordan. His clear preference was for a devolution of monarchical powers and the creation of a more “pluralistic democracy.” Hussein's new status would be that of “an Arab elder statesman who is respected ... [as] a striking example of political nobility – of leaders who do not cling to power eternally, but who pass it on smoothly, even elegantly, when the moment is opportune to do so.”

Khouri's second “error” was to overlook the fact that Hussein did have a designated successor: Crown Prince Hassan, though he would be upstaged in January 1999 when his ailing brother returned to Jordan to settle his affairs. These two oversights are the source of much of the outrage that followed. The storm of criticism included at least one direct communiqué from the Royal Court: the King's eldest daughter, ‘Alia Al-Hussein, wrote the Times to lament “a peculiar phenomenon in the modern world,” namely “that people with academic degrees often take those very degrees as a license to dispense with thought.”

From establishment ranks, Hani al-Khasawna, a former Information Minister, took to the pages of Sawt Al-Sha'b to question Khouri’s loyalty to Jordan and its monarch. For four consecutive days, the Times' letters column was full of unanimously vituperative commentary. Much of it stressed the Times' role as a newspaper of record for the English-speaking foreign community, with a 'responsibility' to avoid arousing international speculation or uncertainty. This is a point worth noting for our later case-study of the Times.

In a 1995 interview, Khouri offered a jaundiced appraisal of the backlash. His column had “created a fuss,” he said,

---

89Thus ‘Alia Al-Hussein's claim that Khouri's comments are “completely irresponsible ... especially in that the Jordan Times is the Jordanian paper that is most read outside the country in important circles.” See also the letter from Flavia Tesio Romero (“Not so elegant or humble,” Jordan Times, 13 September 1992): “Why was it [the article] written in English, in the Jordan Times? What audience was it meant to reach?”
because the establishment saw it as blasphemous. I talked of the king as a human being while most officials preferred to see him as a god. The system here is not used to having the king assessed as a mortal, which I insisted was the proper thing to do if our concern was the fate of the country. The controversy reveals the depth of tribal and patriarchal sentiment in Jordan and the desire of the majority to keep the old system in which the king takes care of everyone and handles all major decisions himself. I think this system has worked for many decades but is unsustainable in today's conditions.  

For all the controversy generated by the column, however, no formal proceedings were launched against Khouri or the *Jordan Times* (though the paper did face prosecution on different grounds two years later). Personally, Khouri was not so lucky, despite some artful backtracking in a subsequent column in which he pronounced himself "astounded and saddened" by the furore.  

Shortly after the article appeared, he was dismissed from his popular talk-show on Jordan Television. But Khouri retained his column in the *Times*, as well as his intellectual prominence in Jordan and internationally. He did not become a pariah. Reflecting in 1995, *Times* editor George Hawatmeh was blithe about the whole affair, calling it "a very democratic exercise," and stressing that "nothing happened to the newspaper." It surely helped that the paper in question was the *Jordan Times*, and not *Al-Ribat* or *Shihan* or *Al-Bilad*.

**The Department of Press and Publications (DPP) of the Ministry of Information**  
The phenomenon of ministries of information in the Arab World dates back to the Nasser era in Egypt, and the associated rise of radio as a mobilizing tool for regimes in the region. Ministries, accordingly, have always devoted the bulk of their energies to broadcast media, which are normally state monopolies. The days of Nasserite mass mobilization are long past. But the ministries of information retain their prominence, in Jordan as elsewhere. And Jordan's Ministry of Information, with its Department of Press and Publications for dealings with the print media, has exercised a powerful influence throughout the liberalization process. This was despite the fact that the ministry was viewed by most in Jordan's press as a reactionary anachronism, with a particularly robust attack launched by Rami Khouri in 1994:  

---

^90^Note in Khouri's analysis that the monarch's own sensitivities are secondary, causally, to the ire of "the establishment," craven "officials," "tribal and patriarchal" elements, "the system."

Frankly, I am embarrassed by the fact that we still have such a relic from the early days of Arab intellectual totalitarianism that was born in the crucible of Nasser’s Egypt. ... The very concept of a ministry of information is politically and intellectually outdated. It smacks of a combination of arrogance and mind control on the part of the government that are [sic] totally incompatible with the concepts of democratisation, freedom and pluralism that we utter every other minute these days. ... The ministry of information concept was designed to control the flow of news to the public, to offer only a singular, governmental perspective on the news of the day and to engage in rhetorical battles with other states, whether Israel, Arab states, or western powers. This is the ugly intellectual and political legacy that we copied blindly half a century ago, and that lingers anachronistically in our midst today.92

The Director General of the Ministry of Information’s Department of Press and Publications in 1995 was Mohammad Amin, a 30-year veteran of Jordanian and international media, former head of the Board for movie classifications, and former director of Jordan Television. Criticism like Khouri’s left him unfazed. “I’m dealing with it! I think we are dealing in a broad-minded [way], and at the same time we are trying to implement the spirit of the law, not its wording. We’re trying to deal in a tolerant spirit. ... In every beginning, things were a little bit difficult, but now I think everything is going smoothly.”

The DPP is the Ministry of Information’s appointed “guardian” of press legislation. In consultation with the Minister, it decides whether to take a newspaper to court. (Detentions, as noted, are an analytically and functionally separate regime strategy, routed through the security services.) The DPP also oversees the entire domestic publishing industry. Under the PPL, printers are required to supply the DPP with two copies of any work published in Jordan. Publications can be banned prior to publication, and anyone printing a banned publication is liable to a moderate fine of JD 500-2000 (C$1,000-$4,000). The DPP has gone out of its way to ensure that printers are reminded of the strictures.93

The DPP employs a staff of about twelve to keep a close eye on imported materials. This is the stage at which the censor’s scissors snip the Page Three “girl” from incoming British tabloids. It is also the point at which issues of the Guardian newspaper, the UK Independent, the Beirut-based Palestine Studies, and (at one fell swoop) “14 imported Arabic and other newspapers” have been

93 “In order to discourage underground printing and distribution of banned or unlicensed books, the DPP launched a campaign directed at printers warning them against printing unauthorized material. In January 1994, the DPP placed newspaper advertisements warning owners and managers of printing houses, photocopying offices and advertising agencies against printing any book or other publication without the authorization of the Department.” Article 19, Jordan: Democratization without Press Freedom, p. 17.
blocked and remanded by the authorities. The infractions alleged have included speculating on a possible postponement of the 1993 parliamentary elections, and criticizing the Israeli-PLO peace agreement. Foreign books banned in Jordan include all of Patrick Seale’s books on Syria, and bestselling novels by Naguib Mahfouz and Mohammad Choukri.\footnote{Article 19, \textit{Jordan}, pp. 18-19.}

Even agents of continuity, though, undergo change. The Ministry of Information’s role was both an independent and dependent variable in press-regime relations during the 1990s. On behalf of the regime, the Ministry worked to demarcate the boundaries of acceptable discourse in the press (no such considerations obtained, of course, for the closely-controlled broadcast media). But it has also had its own boundaries set by higher forces, including the ordinary parliamentarians who modified and approved the PPL.

The PPL both entrenched and transformed the function of the ministry and the DPP in the post-liberalization environment. The two most substantial changes since 1989 were, first, the DPP’s retreat from prior censorship over the domestic daily and weekly press (which had been sporadic, not systematic, before 1989); and second, the repealing of the DPP’s power to close a newspaper by executive fiat. The invasive vigilance of the previous era was also abandoned. No longer could “some information ministers” go “beyond determining the topic of editorial comment [in mainstream dailies] and come to newspapers themselves to write articles, in addition to sending other material for publication signed with false names.”\footnote{Nabil Al-Sharif, “Opposition in the print media,” in Hawatmeh, ed., \textit{The Role of the Media in A Democracy}, p. 11.} As Ibrahim Izz-al-Din, Information Minister in the early stages of liberalization, delicately phrased it: “The Information Ministry is no longer a party to the chief editors in their responsibilities.”\footnote{“Information Minister Speaks on Media Role in Gulf,” \textit{FBIS}, 14 December 1990.}

The Deputy General of the Ministry of Information, Nawef Mawla, pointed to one further aspect of the ministry’s evolution: he claimed it had served as something of a lightning rod for foreign complaints about the Jordanian press. “I receive on the average probably two or three Arab ambassadors a month complaining about an article that appeared in a newspaper, with the ambassador claiming that this is going to affect relations between Jordan and [the country in question],” Mawla stated in an interview:
Most of the time I'm defending the newspapers, and I'm telling the ambassadors that if an article in a Jordanian newspaper is [enough] to affect relations between you and me, that means the relations are not good... But some of these countries, some of these ambassadors, do not believe that we don't have the right and the power to close a newspaper. I don't want to close newspapers. We are not in the mood to close newspapers because this country or that country is going to be angry at what they are publishing.

What of the day-to-day contact and interaction that allowed the DPP to play watchdog over the watchdog? Mohammad Amin presented his dialogue with the editors of the Jordanian press as comfortable and mutually respectful, though he acknowledged a "very tough period" at the onset of Middle East peace negotiations in Madrid in 1993. "In the first six months [after the peace process began], it was a very sharp turn... We [the DPP and the newspapers] were feeling that we were opposing parties." Amin said he sometimes found himself confronted by deliberate "challenging of the law." "We tried to deal with the situation by making contact and holding a dialogue with these people, and showing them that we respected every point of view that is within the law." He seemed to be referring principally to contacts with the tabloid and political-party press. Interviews did not penetrate deeply enough into these issues and sectors to gain a clear picture of the daily norms that operated in the DPP's relationship with the popular press. But it was intriguing that even Jehad Momani, editor of the boisterous tabloid Shihan, seemed to view his dealings with the ministry and DPP as a kind of cheeky cat-and-mouse game. He described with relish the moments when the Minister or Director General approached him hat-in-hand, petitioning him to withhold publication for the good of the country or the monarch.

Within the broader context of relaxed regime control over the press, then (at least compared to 1988, if not to 1991 or 1992), the Ministry of Information and DPP have waxed and waned as activist elements in press functioning. On balance, as watchdogs they have not been rottweilers. They typify the Jordanian regime's willingness to permit debate, even public sensation, that laps at the edges of the PPL and other regime strategies of suppression. Nonetheless, during periods of "chill" in press-regime relations, the DPP (and by extension the ministry and the regime) have been quick to clamp down. The acts of harassment or suppression attest to the regime's

---

97 In Momani's words: "Sometimes, when there is a very sensitive thing... for example, after the signing of the Jordan-Israeli peace treaty was signed, Yediot Ahranot or Ha'aretz, one of the Israeli papers, published a photo of King Hussein and Yitzhak Rabin. In the photo, King Hussein was lighting Rabin's cigarette. I had the photo. And it was not very complimentary towards the King, not very flattering. He is the King, and he's lighting someone's cigarette! So I received a call from Mohammad Amin. He told me, 'Please, please, don't publish this photo.' I told him, 'I never planned to publish it, because it's not my policy to embarrass the Royal Family.'"
determination to establish the parameters of acceptable criticism and debate, and to preserve the continuities of which the DPP was an important anchor.

**THE JORDAN PRESS ASSOCIATION (JPA)**

"The JPA," according to Article 19, "is considered by most Jordanian journalists, both members and non-members, as a state body whose aim is to control journalists." Since its establishment under Martial Law in 1983, the "vast majority" of its members, according to Reporters Sans Frontières, have been "employed by State-owned organizations," mostly broadcast media. Throughout its life, the JPA has retained a monopoly on the licensing of professional journalists in Jordan. The monopoly does not constitute the kind of stranglehold common in more authoritarian media systems. It remains possible to practise journalism in Jordan without joining the JPA. But non-membership remains an irritant and a constraint for many working journalists.

The role of the JPA during the liberalization was the result of hard lobbying by the Association's executive. It petitioned parliament to enshrine the Association's monopoly on licensing, which was cancelled in the PPL as originally tabled. (The draft legislation as presented to parliament defined a journalist as "any person who meets the conditions for membership in the Jordanian Press Association or chooses journalism as a profession"; the version eventually passed by both houses of Parliament excised the italicized words.) Thus, the promise of greater distance between the regime and the professional association of Jordanian journalists was perceived as a threat by the Association itself! Indeed, entrenching the JPA monopoly solidified the symbiotic relationship between the Association and the regime. The relationship continues to serve as a means of disciplining two main groups of journalists: those who entered "prematurely" into contact with Israelis during Middle East peace negotiations, and tabloid newspapers deemed guilty of alleged professional misconduct.

The most recent evidence of this campaign at the time of fieldwork in Amman saw the JPA stay largely on the sidelines – while allowing itself to be used as the excuse for a regime strike against two tabloids, *Hawadeth Al-Sa'ah* and the old regime nemesis *Al-Bilad*. Both were suspended in

---

February 1995 on the grounds that the chief editors had failed to meet "legal requirements":
namely, membership in the JPA. As it transpired, the editors had been accepted into the JPA, but
had not been formally sworn in. The regime initiative proved so flimsy that the DPP was overruled
by the Higher Court in May 1995. In a precedent-setting move, the Court claimed the department
"did not have the authority or the legal power to take such a decision." The publisher of Al-Bilad,
Nayef Tourah, immediately announced his intention to sue the government for damages.101

The JPA was passive to the point of prostration throughout these tendentious proceedings.
A few months later, after the Higher Court ruling, JPA President Suleiman Qudah was still
nonchalant:

The government asked us very clearly: this fellow, is or is he not a member [of the JPA] ... According to the law, he is not a member [because he had failed to be sworn in formally]. It's very clear. ... Of course, the government used that for their own purposes, but it was not our planning. They asked us, and we answered them. ... If the Association [itself] broke the law, how could I ask the members not to go against the law?

One might respond – journalists in Jordan have responded – that the JPA would do better
to leave the sidelines and join the fray when press workers are under fire, particularly when the
JPA's own membership code is being exploited for attempted regime gain. But there has been little
sign of such independence, offered or sought, since 1989.102

It is important, however, to remind the reader that non-membership in the JPA does not
bar Jordanians de facto from practicing journalism – although it gives the regime a useful additional
weapon to brandish against those working outside strict official parameters. All staffers of political-
party weeklies are ineligible for membership. Even quite senior mainstream journalists abstain from
Association activities. JPA President Suleiman Qudah estimated in 1995 that there were “about 50”


102 Of particular note is the JPA's contemptuous attitude towards the popular press. This was evident in the
campaign the JPA launched against the tabloids (notably Shihan, Al-Bilad and Hawadeth Al-Sa'ab) in January 1995,
invoking the PPL and accusing the weeklies of exaggerating facts and printing material that "infringe[s] upon the
general ethics and moral standards" of Jordanians. The campaign resulted, in March, in the resignation of JPA board
member Musa Hawamdeh, a columnist for Al-Dustur. Hawamdeh went public with harsh accusations against the
Association, claiming the JPA had been "transformed into another department of the Ministry of Information" and
"used as the means to muzzle all voices that oppose the government." Nidal Mansour of Al-Bilad similarly accused the
JPA of complicity in regime designs "to muzzle freedom of speech under the slogan of protecting public freedoms."
Sa'eda Kilani, “JPA board member resigns in protest over ‘cooperation in curtailing press’,” Jordan Times, 2-3 March
1995. Hawamdeh claimed, accurately, that "It [the JPA and regime actions against the tabloids] is not a story of
publishing obscene photos or fabricated crimes. They are targeting opposition papers because they publish true and
real information that has never been published before and that influences decision makers."
journalists still holding out, of roughly 400 eligible to join. One was \textit{Jordan Times} Managing Editor Abdullah Hasanat. He criticized the JPA board for being dominated by “domesticated” media workers. “It’s very awkward. I don’t like it, and I’m not a member, and don’t want to be a member, because basically they \textit{force} you to join. It’s a violation of human rights,” Hasanat said – even if the violation did not extend to firing Hasanat (an editor at a favoured mainstream daily) for his obstinacy.

\begin{center}
\textbf{1994-98: The Cold Peace and After}
\end{center}

Interview subjects in Amman in Summer 1995 displayed a striking degree of unanimity in appraising developments in Jordan since the onset of peace negotiations with Israel two years previously. Almost without exception, they cited the stepped-up peace process, culminating in the signing of the Oslo II peace accords in September 1994, as marking the onset of a decline in autonomy for the press and civil society, and an increase in regime intolerance:

I think that freedoms, as experienced in democracies, have received a major setback in Jordan after the peace process [began]. There are Israeli and American conditions imposed on Jordan which in turn require a tighter control on freedoms. (Nidal Mansour, Editor-in-Chief, \textit{Al-Hadath})

The King, and the regime more generally, may be accused of premature normalization. They may be accused of cracking down on the opposition in order to fulfil their agenda, i.e., the promise of a warm peace with the Israelis. (George Hawatmeh, Editor-in-Chief, \textit{Jordan Times})

The government is a little nervous, and the opposition, also, is a little nervous. My opinion is that [this] is a very dangerous thing, because it has cancelled the dialogue between the two sides. ... It is not easy for the entire country to move from a state of war, of hatred [of Israel], to peace, just like that: to switch on and off. (Suleiman Qudah, Editor-in-Chief, \textit{Al-Ra'i})

The priority for the government has become to forge ahead with the peace process, sign the peace treaty, and the vision of the government and the leadership has been that the peace treaty is an essential thing for the future of the country ... and we’re not going to allow anybody to stand in the way. Democracy, the democratization process, has taken a back seat to the peace process with Israel. ... If you observe, you’ll see that freedoms have been cut off, curtailed. (Ayman Al-Safadi, Editorial Page Editor and Senior Political Writer, \textit{Jordan Times})

Events in Jordan since mid-1995 have lent generally greater weight to concerns that the country was entering “a period of clear retro-liberalization,” in which a campaign against
independent media was accompanied by "clampdowns on freedoms in other sectors: the state was, simultaneously, reconsidering the elections law, the political parties law, and the law of non-governmental organizations and charitable societies." The regime's intentions in the media sphere were made plain in May 1997, when, with parliament in recess, the government's council of ministers pushed through sweeping amendments to the Press and Publications Law of 1993. The amendments included:

- an "exorbitant" increase in monetary fines for violations of the PPL — up to JD 25,000 ($35,225); 
- a toughening of the censorship provisions of Article 40(a), expanding the "no-go" areas for journalistic coverage;
- an increase in the power of the courts to impose suspensions on wayward newspapers (that is, without formal government intervention);
- stringent new capital requirements for newspapers, representing a twentyfold increase over earlier previous sums demanded (up from JD 15,000 to JD 300,000);
- restrictions on acceptable candidates for chief editor, limiting the pool to Jordanian citizens with a minimum of a decade's journalistic experience; and
- a renunciation of the government's pledge to reduce its ownership in daily newspapers to no more than 30 percent.

The effect of the amendments was to place "staggering restrictions on all forms of published information," Human Rights Watch concluded in June 1997. Their report criticized "the broadly formulated language of the content restrictions [which] can be interpreted by authorities to rule out the publication of virtually any critical news, information and analysis related to the conduct of public affairs by King Hussein, government ministers and ministries, and the internal security forces."

Acknowledging the breadth of the regime's offensive, key institutions of civil society united to reject the measures. The press, of course, was as vocal as it dared to be. Opposition deputies

---


105 "Jordan: A Death Knell for Free Expression?," pp. 4-5.
convened to try to force a recall of parliament to discuss the legislation. The head of Jordan's influential professional associations, Basim Dajani, protested the law's hasty passage and the lack of "consultation with us or with any of the concerned people." His remarks drew a rebuke from King Hussein himself: "Let us hope that the time will come when everybody will confine their activities to their work," he hinted darkly. Human Rights Watch cited Hussein's "clear annoyance" as "implying that such groups have no role to play in defending freedom of expression."106

The government defended the new measures with old canards, including references to the protests the regime was allegedly receiving from friendly Arab countries. Regime statements also testified to the sensitivities of the public figures and officials who were regularly targeted by the weeklies on grounds of corruption or other misbehaviour. The end result, according to the Minister of State for Information Affairs, Dr. Samir Mutawi, was "severe damage" to the Jordanian nation:

Violations by the press have damaged our relations with some Arab states and created a dark cloud. We were constantly receiving complaints from these states and we were also receiving complaints from Jordanian expatriates. Some of these papers have invaded the private lives of citizens and damaged their reputation and honour. Some papers also tried to incite sedition and fragment the homeland's social fabric. ... Recently, matters have got out of hand and so we had to reconsider this law to protect the unity of the homeland.107

If the justifications offered were old hat, so too were the underlying motivations: the regime's insecurity in the face of opposition to the Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement and ongoing economic instability. The proximate political context was the parliamentary elections scheduled for November 1997. But if the amendment process had a direct trigger, it was probably the events of August 1996, when unrest and rioting broke out in southern Jordan following a doubling of the price of bread. Certainly, at that time, the regime displayed its sensitivity towards the press with notable sharpness. Five journalists from the weekly Al-Bilad were arrested and charged with "inciting sedition" for their reports on the disturbances; a small-scale roundup of other dissident journalists followed in Amman and elsewhere.108 And the monarch announced bluntly that the

107Quoted in "Jordan: A Death Knell for Free Expression?,” p. 7.
press would shortly be reined in, castigating the “media disarray which is eating at the foundations of the national edifice and the accomplishments of the homeland.”

The implementation of the law, and other instances of harassment of the press, bolstered perceptions that the regime’s main targets were the tabloid and political-party weeklies. Such publications, especially the political weeklies, were on a much more fragile material foundation than the establishment dailies, and had far greater difficulty meeting the capital requirements of the new legislation. They also accounted for the “overwhelming majority” of 62 prosecutions under the PPL between 1993 and 1997. In addition to the crackdown on Al-Bilad and other publications after the August 1996 riots, the CPJ cited a variety of other attacks on the weeklies:

- Abdullah Bani’Issa, editor of Al-Hiwar weekly, imprisoned for six months (“reportedly the first prison sentence for a publications offense in Jordan’s history”);
- Freelance journalist Nahed Hattar, tried and fined for articles criticizing the peace agreements and “other government policies”;
- Another freelancer, Abdullah Abou Rouman, accused of insulting King Hussein by questioning the decision to lift bread subsidies, tried in the state security courts and fined;
- Two editors of Abed Rebbo, a satirical weekly publication, detained for an article which accused an MP of hypocrisy and a government functionary of corruption. The publication was subsequently closed.

On 23 September 1997, the regime delivered the coup de grâce. It suspended ten weekly publications for failing to meet the new capital requirements. Al-Majed and Al-Mithaq were among those targeted, along with venerable institutions of the liberalization era like Hawadeth al-Sa’ab. “The government,” noted a reporter for Agence France-Presse, “said it was necessary to sort out the many weekly publications in order to improve the standard of the Jordanian press.”

---

109 Quoted in “Jordan: A Death Knell for Free Expression,” p. 4.
110 “Jordan: A Death Knell for Free Expression?,” p. 3.
111 Specifically, the publication accused Abdul Hadi al-Majali, the Minister of Municipal and Rural Affairs, of stealing cars during his stint as head of the Public Security Department in the 1980s. See Sana Abdallah, “Jordanian editor’s release sought,” UPI dispatch, 29 January 1997 (clari.world.mideast.misc).
project neared its conclusion, the signs were of a further constricting of the political space open to mass media. In August 1998, a revised press law appeared that *The Economist* described as “savage”; “a whole range of offences – from shaking confidence in the national currency to instigating strikes, sit-ins or public gatherings – can now lead to fines of up to 10,000 dinars (US $14,000) and immediate suspension of the publication.” This time the “muck-raking tabloid press” was judged to be the prime target of the measures.114

Amidst the general gloom that pervaded the press and most sectors of civil society, the regime pointed to a single bright spot. The new amendments lifted provisions for the imprisonment of journalists. Imprisonment, though, was previously permissible under the PPL only when journalists or editors were convicted of receiving local or foreign funding without Ministry of Information approval. (*Al-Hiwar* editor Abdullah Bani‘Issa, like opposition leader Leith Shubaylat in March 1996, was jailed under separate *lèse-majesté* provisions of the Jordanian legal code.) But the symbolic removal of the imprisonment clause was a crumb at best. The overall climate was still an improvement over the stifled pre-1989 era. A few independent publications, like *Shihan*, were able to meet the capital requirements and continue to publish. But Jordanian journalists and editors could do little but wait for their destinies to be decided by a nervous and increasingly censorious regime. And they could only watch, or ineffectually protest, as their most precious and interesting gains were gradually eroded.

Despite this worrisome trend, however, there was an undeniable melancholy in the events of January and February 1999, when King Hussein – the architect of the crackdown, but also of whatever limited liberalization had taken place in Jordan – succumbed to cancer. There was no doubt that the monarch’s death marked the end of a stage of Jordanian history, and that a certain reconfiguration of press-regime relations could be expected under the new order. Other factors aside, though, it was unlikely that the reign of Prince Abdullah would be marked by decisive transformations in Jordanian media, or would overturn the basic triad of press, regime, and "establishment” forces. With frustrations brewing on the West Bank, and the basic artificiality of the Jordanian state, it was far from inconceivable that regional events could upset the apple-cart. We do not anticipate much, at this stage of the discussion, if we note that three of the four case-

study countries in this work are by no means assured of surviving as unitary states, even in the medium-term.\(^{115}\) The threat to Hashemite rule might not seem as palpable as in South Africa, which has recently been on the precipice of civil war, nor in Russia, where a functioning administration lies in ruins across the Eurasian landmass. But with a Palestinian majority population, and the prospect meaningful nationhood rapidly receding for their West Bank brethren, the carving-up of Jordan into two or three sections was not inconceivable.\(^{116}\) In the absence of such apocalyptic scenarios, though, it was possible to imagine the status quo enduring in Jordan for decades.

**LIBERALISM, JORDANIAN-STYLE:**  
**A CASE STUDY OF THE JORDAN TIMES**

**INTRODUCTION**

In Hungary during the communist era, the joke was told about an American who arrives in Budapest and hires an English-speaking guide to show him around the capital. Over coffee, the guide browses one of the local newspapers.

"What's that story about?" the American asks.

"The headline says: 'Communism in Ruins, Capitalism Clearly Superior,'" the guide tells him.

"What?" Disbelieving, the American presses on. "And that one?"

"It says, 'Corruption Rampant Among Top Party Officials.'"

"I don't understand it!" protests the American. "I've heard so much about censorship over here. How can stuff like this get published in a local paper?"

The guide gives a dismissive shrug. "Who reads Hungarian?"

\(^{115}\)Ironically, it is the least developed of the four, Nicaragua, that stands the best chance of holding together.

\(^{116}\)A possible outcome would be a southern Hashemite core, with a West Bank-affiliated central section and a small northern zone annexed to Syria. The worst-case scenario was widely bandied about at the time of King Hussein's death, and I claim no originality for it.
In the case of the *Jordan Times*, the question might be asked, less rhetorically: Who reads English? The answer tells us much about the position the *Times* occupies in the Jordanian press system—a position that is both peripheral and unique.

The paper’s English-language status has been central to its mobilizing orientation from the very start. It also buttressed the liberal self-conception, politically and professionally, of its staff. The *Times*’ “founding fathers” at *Al-Ra’i* “all ... foresaw” that the *Times* “would by virtue of its language difference commit itself to more liberal, open policies.”117 As an English-language daily originally targeted at Amman’s expatriate and diplomatic corps, strict limits were placed on the paper’s constituency and circulation. But the paper’s original mobilizing imperative—to present an attractive image of Jordan to outsiders—proved the “foot in the door” the paper needed to expand its material resources, professional range, and role in Jordanian society. The last two decades have seen the *Times* transformed from a government publicity sheet to a press institution with an authoritative style all its own.

The functioning of the *Jordan Times* since its founding in 1975 displays several of the key features of the foreign-oriented publication discussed in Chapter 1. I noted there that the special position such institutions occupy may enable them to evade authoritarian constraints more easily than mass media that publish or broadcast in the national language(s). They may use this greater freedom to extend the boundaries of liberalization, sometimes—as with *Moscow News* in the USSR—coming to play a key role in pushing a managed liberalization towards a true political transition.

The experience and role of the *Jordan Times* has been far less dramatic, befitting an institution operating amidst one of those rare managed liberalizations that has managed to hold fast: the limited decompression engineered by King Hussein in 1989. The *Times*, moreover, has been constrained professionally, as well as sustained materially, by its intimate affiliation with the regime. The *Times* began life as an offshoot of Jordan’s largest establishment daily, *Al-Ra’i*, which has served throughout its life as a bastion of regime support. As noted, this was hardly surprising, given that the regime owned around two-thirds of the shares in the enterprise through its “social corporations.” To close the paper, the regime would not even have to resort to legal (or extra-legal) means. It could simply manipulate its indirect majority on *Al-Ra’i*’s board of directors to shut

the project down. But if the *Times* existed at the sufferance of its older, regime-bred sibling, it was also freed from many of the constraints that *Al-Ra*’s own journalists confronted. In order successfully to reach its target audience – deemed more sophisticated and media-savvy than non-English-speaking Jordanians – the *Times* was permitted, and indeed required, to push boundaries that no Arabic daily could.\(^{118}\)

The result was that the *Jordan Times* gradually became transformed from a newspaper targeting an overwhelmingly expatriate audience, to one whose readers were increasingly (if not primarily) Jordanian professionals. These Jordanian readers were “99 percent liberal,” according to *Times*’ managing editor Abdullah Hasanat. They were attracted by the *Times*’ manifestly liberal politics; by its cosmopolitan sensibility; and by its locally (and regionally?) unparalleled digest of international reportage.\(^ {119}\) That special emphasis on international coverage, and the freedom the *Times* enjoyed in presenting it, was made possible by the paper’s niche constituency and its outward-looking mobilizing imperative.

In its domestic coverage, meanwhile, the *Times* could claim with some validity to be the best newspaper in Jordan. It might rarely stray more than "slightly ... from the government’s viewpoint," in the words of former editor Rami Khouri.\(^ {120}\) But it was largely able to avoid the fawning excesses of the Arabic-language dailies, as well as the partisanship and slapdash sensationalism of the tabloids and party-political papers. By regional standards, it also held up

\(^{118}\) We thought the *Jordan Times* had to be different from the Arabic-language press, because of its predominantly foreign-language press, because of its predominantly foreign audience. We would have limited credibility if we limited ourselves to mirroring government viewpoints.” Rami Khouri, “From the ’70s to the ’90s: Changing with the *Times*,” *JT*, 26 October 1995.

\(^{119}\) In an article for the *Times* 20th-anniversary edition, I wrote that the paper’s international coverage was “better than any newspaper in Canada, in my opinion.” (See Adam Jones, “Liberal journalism, Jordanian style,” *Jordan Times*, 26 October 1995.) The appraisal of the Larnaca-based Michael Jansen, in the same edition of the *Times*, is worth citing: “Reading the *Times*, posted to me in Cyprus where it arrives erratically and often very belatedly, helps me to function as a Middle East correspondent for the *Irish Times* of Dublin, a paper I also greatly admire for its serious and extensive coverage of foreign news, and particularly of developments in this region. ... The fact that I still read issues of the *Jordan Times* when they arrive weeks, or even months, late, shows that its reporting serves as excellent background to current happenings.”

\(^{120}\) Rami Khouri, “From the ’70s to the ’90s: Changing with the *Times*,” *JT*, 26 October 1995 (20th-anniversary edition). George Hawatmeh said in an interview: “This is realpolitik. You have to do it, even in the press. ... You can contribute more by being aware of your own role, by playing ball with the rest, but also getting your spin on it. That’s infinitely more useful. We’re not confrontational. If anyone tells you that this newspaper, the *Jordan Times*, is confrontational, don’t believe them.”
exceptionally well. In the opinion of Irish Times correspondent Michael Jansen, the Jordan Times is “the best of the English-language papers produced in the Arab World.”

But the Times’ English-language orientation also constrained the paper in important ways. First, its project was only sustainable as an adjunct to Al-Ra‘i. This “added-on” character has led to a perennial underfunding of the Times—the kind of material malnourishment that might remind the reader of The Citizen in South Africa, or Barricada after the defenestración. Only very recently have technological improvements brought a measure of relief from ramshackle infrastructure. The language constraints also made it hard to find good typesetters, copy editors, and proofreaders, with the result that the paper’s “columns are still a minefield of typographical errors. (My own favourite was the story claiming that tennis star Monica Seles had been “stagged in Hambourg” by a knife-wielding spectator.) As well, the language restrictions have restricted the range of domestic commentary the Times was able to sample. Although it bent over backwards to “encourage every potential writer to write,” the paper was perpetually reliant upon intelligent but

---

121 Jansen, “Keeping track ...” According to Musa Keilani, publisher and chief editor of the weekly Al-Urdun, “The nearly dozen English-language newspapers in the Gulf states focus mostly on external issues. ... Burning political issues at home are very conveniently left to the foreign media, including the international news agencies that operate out of the Gulf. That is what distinguishes the Jordan Times, which has never hesitated in tackling any local political issue regardless of the sensitivities involved, even if that had to be done somehow belatedly a number of times.” Keilani, “The Jordan Times and domestic issues,” JT, 26 October 1995 (20th-anniversary edition).

122 Another contender is cited later in the chapter: the claim that “the libel laws of Jordan are as fizzy if not fizzier than those of Western democracies.”

123 Ayman Al-Safadi interview. “We give them a lot of chances. We even overlook weaknesses in writing skills — we try to fix the language here, providing the person writing has something to say and can say it openly and clearly and at an acceptable level of sophistication.”
foreign-generated copy to fill its op-ed page.\textsuperscript{124} (As noted earlier in the chapter, though, this did provide the \textit{Times} with a roundabout means of criticizing human-rights abuses in Arab countries, and even in Jordan itself. The “detached” retransmission of outside reportage was less politically sensitive than domestically-generated investigations.)

Lastly, at the same time as the foreign orientation gave the \textit{Times} a prestige status and considerable protection, it also rendered it vulnerable to charges of “exposing [Jordan’s] dirty laundry to foreigners,” according to editorial-page editor Ayman Al-Safadi. “We come under a lot of fire for publishing things. People, government officials, know that the \textit{Jordan Times} is read by foreigners, by embassies, and by researchers who come and work on Jordan. They get very sensitive when you report news that they think – based on the old mentality – that we’ve got to keep hidden.” The paper’s distinctive position in the Jordanian media landscape, Al-Safadi said, was thus “both a source of comfort and a source of problems.” This sort of sensitivity is especially significant in a weak and dependent country like Jordan, where foreigners in many spheres hold enormous power over the domestic polity and economy.

\textbf{The \textit{Times} under the Old Regime}

A former minister of information, Dr. Hani Khasawneh, walked into \textit{Jordan Times’} offices one day in 1988 and told its editors that they either began to see their newspaper as the \textit{Izvestia} of Jordan ... or else they would all face measures they did not like.

\textsuperscript{124}The \textit{Times} foreign wire-copy was prone to undergo subtle and not-so-subtle editing changes in sensitive areas. Beatrix Immenkamp, a German journalist and scholar who was working as a staffwriter at the \textit{Times} in the summer of 1995, brought to my attention a remarkable, probably all-too-typical example. She provided the text of a Reuters wire-service feed about German chancellor Helmut Kohl’s attendance at a memorial service to the dead of Auschwitz. The original feed referred to “1.5 million people, mainly Jews, [being] murdered” by the Nazis, and to “one million Jews” being “gassed.” “Before he leaves Poland,” the dispatch noted, “Kohl is due to meet young Poles and Germans in Krakow later and visit a synagogue in the city’s former Jewish quarter.” The \textit{Times} version, published on 9 July, altered “1.5 million people, mainly Jews” to “1.5 million people.” The “one million Jews” gassed likewise became “one million people.” Kohl’s meetings and visits with Jews were (the only passages) excised. See “Germany’s Kohl Pays Tribute to Auschwitz Dead,” Reuters dispatch, 8 July 1995; and “Kohl pays tribute to Auschwitz dead,” \textit{Jordan Times}, 9 July 1995. Immenkamp’s summary is sharply phrased: “The original Reuters article was obviously talking about the Jewish people who were killed in Auschwitz. The same article, appearing in the \textit{Jordan Times}, omitted all references to Jews. In the entire article, not once were Jews mentioned. ... And actually, [that meant] the numbers were incorrect [in the \textit{Jordan Times} version], because in the Reuters article it said 1.5 million Jews were killed, and there were a lot of Poles and other people killed [at Auschwitz/Birkenau] as well. They changed ‘1.5 million Jews’ to ‘1.5 million people,’ which is simply wrong. Kohl’s visit to synagogues in Russia and other places in Poland, to Jewish quarters and ghettos ... it didn’t appear. It had been altered to omit references to Jews as people. I think there’s a policy in the paper to dehumanize Jews or Israelis, in a way that’s instinctive.”
Moving away from being a government public-relations arm to the status of an independent newspaper ... it's a continuing process. We haven't reached it yet. I wouldn't call [the Jordan Times] a very independent newspaper, because in every story you write, every sentence, you have to be careful not to offend people. I've come to realize that's the way things work in a Third World country. You have to be careful, because after all, what it boils down to is your job security.

— P.V. Vivekanand

The Jordan Times has its roots in two strands of the Palestinian diaspora and Jordan's leading Arabic-language daily. The first Palestinian connection arrived courtesy of the Lebanese Civil War. As the conflict tore Lebanese society apart, it also destroyed the Middle East's most independent and professional press. The Beirut-based, English-language Daily Star, for which future Times editor Rami Khouri worked, was closed. Distributed region-wide, the Star, rather than any domestic news source, had been "the main source of information for foreign readers in Jordan." When it closed and chaos descended in Lebanon, many Palestinian reporters — disproportionately represented in journalism as in other professions, and especially in English-language journalism — moved to Amman.

The other Palestinian branch of the Times' family tree lies in Jordanian East Jerusalem, and came to life mere months before that entity ceased to exist. In 1966, the Jerusalem Star — the only English-language West Bank daily — closed due to lack of advertising revenue. Even before the Israeli seizure of the West Bank the following year, the Jordanian regime was apparently considering sponsoring a new English-language daily to replace the Star. As a conduit to the foreign community, the paper was seen to exert an influence well beyond its circulation of a couple of thousand copies.

Accordingly, two leading figures at the regime's flagship publication, Al-Ra'i — Mahmoud Al-Kayed and Mohammad Al-Amad — contacted Raja Elissa of the Jordan Distribution Agency. Together, they agreed to co-found a new English daily, the Palestine News, which was launched early

---

126 This and other salient details of the early years of the Times are drawn from P.V. Vivekanand, "The story of the evolution of Jordan Times," Jordan Times (hereafter, JT), 26 October 1985 (tenth-anniversary edition). Occasionally, given that many of its writers speak English as a second language, passages quoted from the Times may have certain linguistic oddities. I have corrected only some spelling errors and occasional punctuation, adding "sic" where I deem it necessary. I have also standardized nomenclature, as throughout the book.
in 1967. In its technological capacity and staffing resources, the News "was the most up-to-date English language daily" in Jordanian and Palestinian history, according to Elissa. "It had a full complement of staff compared with the previous English-language newspapers ... for the first time, an English daily had twelve people working for it." But the Six-Day War and Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem cut short the life of the News, which immediately folded. It would be nearly a decade before Al-Ra'i, acting on the regime's behalf, would take the initiative to found the Jordan Times.

The Times published its first edition on 26 October 1975. We have seen that it was at first strongly oriented towards the expatriate community in Jordan, and to a limited extent regionally. (The planners, of course, were hardly blind to the small but devoted Jordanian readership that could be expected to seek out the paper, and the additional mobilizing opportunities this presented.) In interviews, most staffers depicted the history of the Times as an evolution towards a more truly Jordanian professional identity. Together with this, a switch was supposed to have occurred in the paper's constituency: some went so far as to claim that a majority of the paper's readers were now Jordanian. This can best be seen as wishful thinking. Most sources concerned with the business side of the Jordan Press Foundation (JPF), Al-Ra'i's regime-controlled publisher and the Times' parent company, confirmed that Times readership remained predominantly foreign as

---

127 One other English-language paper, the weekly Jerusalem Star, was started in 1983 with capital from the Al-Dustour daily, and clearly sought to play on memories of its 1960s namesake. Al-Dustour's strategists apparently decided that "one English daily was enough for Jordan," and that the new weekly would "focus on in-depth features and news analysis." The Jerusalem Star folded in 1988, amidst a climate of chill and repression. Two years later, in a newly-liberalized media environment, it was relaunched as The Star. It has since established itself as a comfortable companion — not really a competitor — to the Jordan Times.

128 See, e.g., Rami Khouri's account: "The most persistent theme of our early years was a running debate with the government about the role and purpose of Jordan Times. The state tended to see us only as a service for foreigners and tourists, providing information in English about the great achievements of the government, the television listings, and other important issues. The state thought that we should be primarily an English-language version of the Arabic-language press. We saw ourselves in a slightly different manner. ... We thought that Jordan Times could offer a service to foreigners and Jordanians alike. It could attempt gradually to develop new journalistic techniques and concepts that were not being applied locally. ... We also consciously sought to expand the limits of the politically permissible. We published commentaries, interviews and editorials that the Arabic-language press would find too controversial, mainly because we occasionally dared to express a viewpoint that was slightly different from the government's viewpoint. Today, of course, this is routine. In the late 1970s, it was almost foolhardy. We dared to do this because we felt that we had to do it in order to be credible and useful." Khouri, "From the '70s to the '90s."
of 1995. It also did not grow much in absolute terms, beyond an initial circulation of six or seven thousand copies (circulation stood at around 9,000 at the time of fieldwork in 1995).

But if the constituency was partly imaginary, the self-perception was significant on its own. There is no doubt that Times writers sought a voice in the domestic debate, and sought to influence that debate in a broadly liberal direction. In the tenth-anniversary edition of the Jordan Times, George Hawatmeh provided what seems for the time (1985) a remarkably nuanced, if elliptical, analysis:

Jordan has been said by many to be the Switzerland of the Arab World. Some even believe the Kingdom should no longer be described as a Third World or developing country. Much as we value these opinions, we in the Jordan Times tread a fine line; not that everybody can see it, but it exists.

This country has indeed taken great strides towards achieving true and genuine development in many fields. ... But it is undeniable that the press here cannot operate as it does in Switzerland or the other developed countries. How then, at least from our angle as journalists, can we boast of full development when our press is nowhere near being the fourth estate of the realm as it should be?

... The Jordanian press is an arm of the state, and the Jordan Times is an integral part of the local press. We see ourselves exactly as the Arabic dailies see themselves, and although this point may be misunderstood by some, it is nevertheless clear in our minds here at the paper.

According to the survey we conducted with a random segment of our readers, many believe that the Jordan Times has an edge on the Arabic dailies in that it enjoys a greater degree of freedom in publishing news reports and analysis. While this is largely true, our general impression is that whatever leeway we may have is not unjustifiable and we cannot push the limits unnoticed by the authorities.

Some of our Jordanian readers view the Jordan Times as a paper directed only at the foreign community in Jordan, with the main purpose of putting foreigners in touch with local and regional problems. That may well have been true when the paper first saw the light ten years ago, but there have certainly been some changes in the last decade.

Whatever leeway the Jordan Times may have over the Arabic press has encouraged more writers to use it as a vehicle for expressing their views. As a result, and in order to get more candid and critical views of events in the Kingdom, increasing numbers of Jordanians read the Jordan Times today. Additionally, many Jordanians, who have been educated abroad, turn to the Jordan Times for first-hand, unedited news from the original source. The question here is not one of sophistication, but rather of relaying news in its original format and language, without the inevitable changes incurred by editing and translation...

127Q. The majority of readers are still foreigners? “Foreigners, yes.” (Interview with Nader Hourani, deputy director general, JPF, 22 July 1995.) “The readers of the Jordan Times, most of them, are foreigners, not Jordanian ... it is for the foreigners who live in Jordan.” (Al-Ra’i chief editor Suleiman Qudah.) Advertising Manager Oudah Hussein, who had been with the Times for 12 years at the time of writing, stated that the majority of advertising was aimed at foreigners resident in Jordan. (Interview, 20 July 1995). On the other hand, editorial staffers were quick to contend that “we think 60 percent of our readership is Jordanian, 40 foreign” (Abdullah Hasanat). Ayman Al-Safadi claimed, albeit tentatively, “Most of our readers, I think, are Jordanians.”
It can no longer be said that the Jordan Times is a newspaper for a minority group of foreigners. Rather, it is an English-language newspaper published in Jordan, with Jordanian concerns at heart.\textsuperscript{130}

Hawatmeh's contention that "We see ourselves exactly as the Arabic dailies see themselves" is surprising in light of the distinctiveness claimed for the paper elsewhere in the essay. Note, too, the subtle shift from "the Jordanian press is an arm of the state" to "The Jordan Times is an integral part of the local press." If the press is the state's propaganda tool, and the Times is no different from its Arabic kin, then how can the paper avoid serving as a mobilizing instrument for rulers? Indeed, there is no shortage of overt and more coded indications that just such a relationship exists: "we in Jordan Times tread a fine line; not that everybody can see it, but it exists"; "our press is nowhere near being the fourth estate of the realm as it should be"; "we cannot push the limits unnoticed by the authorities." In this sense, perhaps, the newspaper was primarily oriented towards the domestic scene. Like other Jordanian newspapers, it had always to gauge which way the wind was blowing.

**THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SPONSOR**

The relationship between the Times and its parent, the regime-controlled Jordan Press Foundation, was pivotal to the paper's course for nearly a quarter of a century. It was, after all, nineteen years before the Times turned even a modest profit. Such a track record requires indulgent sponsorship of a sort not usually found even in the notoriously slow-growing newspaper industry.\textsuperscript{131} It was the JPF, with its profitable Arabic flagship and flush with state-sector and "establishment" printing contracts, that kept the Times afloat. As one Times writer noted in the paper's 20\textsuperscript{th}-anniversary edition: "The extraordinary (in the literal sense of the word) fact about the Jordan Times is that it never needed to make [a] profit to survive. ... The Times was from the start fully supported by the Jordan Press Foundation."\textsuperscript{132}

\textsuperscript{130}George Hawatmeh, "A newspaper with a message," JT, 26 October 1985.

\textsuperscript{131}Ten years of subsidies is normally considered the very maximum, and that standard is increasingly outmoded as newspapers are managed according to more classically corporate standards.

\textsuperscript{132}"Founders recall birth of a unique experiment," JT, 26 October 1995 (20\textsuperscript{th}-anniversary edition). The article quotes Mohammad Al-Amad, assistant director general of Al-Ra'i when the Times was founded, confirming that "The Jordan Times made no financial profits during the first 18 years of its life."
But the *Times*’ small size and niche constituency rendered it peripheral in JPF management considerations. Though *Al-Ra’i* management “consider[ed] it a highly prestigious newspaper” with “a limited but good-quality readership,”133 the jewel in the JPF crown was clearly *Al-Ra’i*. There seemed every interest in keeping the *Times* afloat, but little in ploughing new resources into the paper and investing in professional upkeep. With the easy life that JPF management enjoyed—waiting for advertising and printing contracts to fall from the trees, or rather the minis-trees—there was a palpable lack of innovative thinking or efforts at outreach. Managing Editor Abdullah Hasanat claimed the *Times* “whole operation” was rendered “archaic” by the JPF’s lackadaisical approach. “They’re out of date. They don’t know about modern management techniques. The circulation manager is a very nice chap, but he knows nothing about newspapers. The advertising people are sitting on their backsides in their offices, waiting for an ad to fall on them—which it does, you know. They won’t make any effort, nor are they encouraged to make any effort, to actually go out and seek ads.”

Bare-subsistence infusions from the JPF meant that at the time of fieldwork in 1995, the *Times* lacked not only a photographer of its own, but “a single staff reporter”134 in the sense of a fulltime salaried journalist. Salaries across the board were depressingly low.135 “We cannot afford to employ somebody with the salaries we offer,” said Hasanat. “Basically, all the contributors are freelancers. Even the sub-editor is freelancing—his job is sub-editing, and we pay him for whatever extra [writing] he does.”136 Editors—even proofreaders and typesetters—contributed freelance

133Mohammad Al-Amad, quoted in “The *Jordan Times* made no financial profits . . .”

134As opposed to a staffer or “staffwriter,” the designation regularly used in this case-study. To be entirely clear, *Jordan Times* staffwriters receive a small salary plus freelance monies paid per article. Often this income is supplemented by outside work (“moonlighting”), especially stringing for foreign news agencies. The professional ramifications are discussed later in the chapter.

135Ayman Al-Safadi put it this way: “The *Jordan Times* is a small operation whose main asset is its people. Seriously. We’ve been working in a very, very frustrating environment. Lesser people would have been frustrated and quit their jobs. . . . We are understaffed. Each of us is wearing so many hats; all of us do a lot of moonlighting. You find your efforts split between two, three, four places. Which means you don’t give as much time and effort to the *Jordan Times*.” Said Cathy King: “I take home about 300 dinars a month from the *Jordan Times*. My basic salary is 150, and on top of that it’s [dependent on] whatever I write. But my rent is 125 dinars a month; that’s before I’ve travelled from work to home and bought food. You’re not left with a lot of money to play around with. You’ll find that a lot of people are struggling to keep their job, and not earning very much, and they’ve got families, and it’s like: ‘Well, let’s just get through the day, make sure my paycheque’s there, and sod the rest of you.’ There’s a lot of frustration within the *Jordan Times*, compounded by the fact that people have [often] lived and worked in other places. They’ve had more opportunities before, socially and financially.”

136Wrote the *Times* Cathy King in the 20th-anniversary issue: “The theory behind retaining reporters on a
pieces, generally credited to the nonexistent "Jordan Times Staff Reporter." The scarcity of full-time journalists forced the paper to depend on the Petra state news service for domestic coverage. Jennifer Hamarneh wrote that "Petra stories, which ... must be translated into English, are often lacking in content, focusing more on the person than the event, and more often the actual story is buried somewhere towards the end of the text."\textsuperscript{137} The paucity of resources meant also that the paper could rarely commission investigative reporting that took "time and effort," according to editorial-page editor Ayman Al-Safadi. And it was difficult to persuade local English-speakers to write for the paper. "Quite often," said Al-Safadi, "I find myself having to reprint stuff that was printed in other publications. Why? Because I simply don't have the writers to do otherwise. ... You have to go out and really solicit people to write for you. Many of them say, 'Listen, we're not willing to write for the 25 JD you're going to pay us.'"\textsuperscript{138}

The Times' chief editor, George Hawatmeh, was outspoken on the question of relations with the JPF:

I think they [the JPF/Al-Rai] are schizophrenic about us. When the newspaper [the Jordan Times] was established, it was at the behest of the government, because Al-Rai was a thriving newspaper and was getting rich. The government Al-Rai could provide an English-language daily for the country. They complied. It was a drain on their resources, and it was trouble also finding editors, finding the editor-in-chief, meeting the demands of a freelance basis [is that] without a basic salary, they are financially compelled to cover as many stories per month as is physically possible." King, "Dedication beats the pay for foreign journalists," JT, 26 October 1995.

\textsuperscript{137}Jennifer Hamarneh, "The woes and blues of Home News," JT, 26 October 1995 (20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary edition). Haya Husseini contributed an amusing parody of the drab Petra style to the same edition of the Times. "AMMAN-(Petra) The Ministry of Planning Agreements yesterday signed an agreement with the delegation to extend cooperation and coordination in all fields that matter to the issues and stated that it was greatly indebted to and grateful for and much appreciative of the efforts extended by the said delegation in its much needed aid and assistance to this part of the region which has seen developments in peace efforts as a result of its long endeavours to build a prosperous and economically enhanced region." Haya Husseini, "The good Arab-English guide to the Jordan Times," JT, 26 October 1995 (20\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Edition).

\textsuperscript{138}The paper's own material infrastructure was another constant source of complaint. P.V. Vivekanand described early-eighties Times staffers being confronted with "Five worn-out iron desks and six rickety chairs, only a couple of telephone extensions with direct dialling facilities, a couple of cupboards, two typewriters and an assortment of rulers and staplers in a five-by-three-metre room. These were the offices of Jordan Times when I walked in [in] early 1980 to work as a proofreader." The staff "cafeteria," said Vivekanand, consisted of "two men dispensing tea and coffee from somewhere within a two-by-two-metre space crammed with a 50-year-old refrigerator, a worn-out gas stove and stacks of soft drink bottles." P.V. Vivekanand, "An old-timer's view," JT, 26 October 1995 (20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary edition). As for the Times' "unique production system," according to Rami Khouri it ran as follows: "a young American fellow came in during the morning, chose the stories he liked from the Reuters wire, edited them quickly and sent them down to the basement for typesetting, where a middle-aged Egyptian wizard named Abi Siraj set the stories in lead type on a venerable old Linotype machine that he had repaired himself when necessary – sometimes manufacturing his own spare parts." Khouri, "From the '70s to the '90s ..."
newspaper that they, themselves, could not read. And we didn’t make any money. ... When we take the liberty to publish something Al-Ra’i has not published, then there’s an element of jealousy or trepidation. It’s [like], we got away with it, and they couldn’t do it, they’d be blamed for it.

Gradually, though, said Hawatmeh, “things started to change. We acquired all this prestige, and they [the JPF] took credit for it. We made a profit for the first time ... so we’re not a drain on their resources anymore. Before,” he added, “we were a bunch of probably eccentric guys [to them], trying to produce this English-language newspaper in a sea of Arab culture and language. We were small. Now we’ve become an integral part of [the operation].” That had been reflected in unprecedented infrastructural investment: to conduct fieldwork at the Times in mid-1995 was to be assaulted by a roar of buzzsaws and clattering of hammers. Cathy King spoke in the Times’ 20th-anniversary issue of “a revolution” in the paper’s operations: “The office space was expanded; two direct telephone lines were recently installed; and the process, albeit slow, of computerisation began.”

Nonetheless, the Times’ junior status in the JPF stable remained definitional to the resources it could command and the terms on which it could access them. As George Hawatmeh summarized it:

There’s much more to be done. Because Al-Ra’i is the money-making machine, they have everything. They have the photographer; we don’t. We have to ask to use him. They have the satellite photograph machine; we have to wait for them to finish with it. They have the cars; we have to ask them when we want to use them. They have extra news agencies and more reporters; we have to rely on them when we need them. Everything we spend, we have to get an authorization from them. ... Support staff? It’s theirs. The printing machines are theirs. Everything is Al-Ra’i’s, basically. We just use their facilities. And that complicates life for us quite often. We have to manoeuvre, push and shove, to get things done.

“Everything is attuned to Al-Ra’i’s needs, administratively and financially,” Hawatmeh summarized. “What we get, we have to fight for. We’re the little brother. ... Al-Ra’i is the one everybody has their eyes on. If Al-Ra’i stops for a week, the Foundation will probably go bankrupt. Not so with the Jordan Times.”

---

139 King, “Dedication beats the pay ...”

140 Hawatmeh interview, 15 July 1995. “The question the management (possibly) asks,” wrote Cathy King, is “Why invest in a newspaper whose readership will never exceed half the circulation of Al-Ra’i?” King, “Dedication beats the pay ...”
TABLE 4.1
JORDAN PRESS FOUNDATION - TOTAL PROFITS
OF NEWSPAPERS, 1993 AND 1994
(IN DINARS; JD 1 = $C 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Al-Ra'i</th>
<th>Jordan Times</th>
<th>1994</th>
<th>1993</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper sales</td>
<td>2,117,913</td>
<td>158,509</td>
<td>2,276,422</td>
<td>2,135,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>5,449,852</td>
<td>251,892</td>
<td>5,701,744</td>
<td>5,373,442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total credits</td>
<td>7,567,765</td>
<td>410,401</td>
<td>7,978,166</td>
<td>7,508,943</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Minus publication costs:

| Raw materials used in publishing | 3,199,068 | 48,328 | 3,247,396 | 2,979,602 |
| Salaries and other expenses      | 1,112,879 | 234,420 | 1,347,279 | 1,220,997 |
| Consumption                      | 178,018   | 7,732  | 185,750   | 122,459   |
| Travel and accommodation         | 36,484    | 9,946  | 46,430    | 43,895    |
| Memberships                      | 26,244    | 13,817 | 40,061    | 25,225    |
| Mail, telex, telephone           | 10,426    | 5,374  | 15,800    | 12,861    |
| Electricity and water            | 20,736    | 3,723  | 24,459    | 21,717    |
| Miscellaneous                    | 34,980    | 2,710  | 37,690    | 55,470    |
| Total debits                     | 4,618,835 | 326,050 | 4,944,885 | 4,482,225 |

Net profit                      | 2,949,930 | 84,351  | 3,033,281 | 3,026,718 |


THE LIBERAL TIMES

We are, by inclination, a liberal newspaper. We believe in change, in democracy, in political pluralism, in human rights, in a largely free market economy, in social justice, in equality and in the rule of law. Some people, mainly in the establishment, think we are ultra-liberal, but that does not faze us a bit. Jordanian society can do with a few outspoken liberals who employ words and thoughts in countering unnecessary conservatism, traditionalism and backwardness in many aspects of our lives.

— George Hawatmeh

The Jordan Times' self-definition as a liberal flagship is a matter of record. Indeed, with the possible exception of the Johannesburg Star, the Times is the most classically liberal paper studied for this book. It may be worth looking more closely, then, at the elements of Times editorial policy.
and institutional functioning that mark the paper as a "liberal" institution in a politically moderate, but socially conservative, Arab country.

A particularly good example of the paper's institutional liberalism in action is its reportage about — and by — women. The Times was consistently the most outspoken media defender of women's rights, not only in Jordan but perhaps in the entire Arab Middle East. "There seems to be no end to the misfortunes of women," an editorial protested in 1994. "Abortion, female circumcision, rape, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexism, social and moral restrictions: the list goes on endlessly, and threatens women's psyche and their well-being from birth."142 "No-one ... can claim that women make up half of society when we still have all these backward and patriarchal laws of overblown male egos," read another editorial.143 The Times was a staunch supporter of women's move into the public sphere,144 and a vocal critic of some of the more brutal manifestations of patriarchal tribalism. In 1994 it railed against so-called "crimes of honour" committed against women who transgressed against tribal norms.145

As long as crimes are committed in our midst in the name of honour and tribal vengeance, Jordan will continue to belong to the backward world instead of the modern community of nations that we are striving to catch up with in earnest. As tribal leaders should redress this tribal justice problem, the Jordanian women's societies should likewise address the commission of crimes in the name of honour and spearhead effective efforts to weed it out as well. These two features of our society are blemishes of the worst order that have got to be rectified as a matter of the highest priority.146

145 For an example of one such crime, see Rana Husseini, “18-year-old killed for ‘family honour’,” JT, 19 September 1994 (front page). The article describes the murder of a handicapped teenaged girl by her 17-year-old brother, after she had served six months in jail for becoming pregnant out of wedlock. A neighbour was quoted as saying the family “seemed relaxed, happy and satisfied after announcing the news that she was killed ...” See also Rana Husseini, “Murder in the name of honour,” JT, 6-7 October 1994 (front page), noting that between 28 and 60 women (official police figures versus estimates) are killed in “crimes of honour” each year in Jordan.
The rhetoric was matched by internal policies, according to those best-placed to offer an evaluation: the Jordan Times' women reporters. As already noted, the Times was unique among Jordanian media in having an actual majority of women journalists.

The broadside against "crimes of honour" just quoted was part of the Times' wider critique of conservative elements in Jordanian society. After the adoption of the National Charter in June 1991, for example, the Times departed from its celebratory tone only to note that "If there were some basic elements missing in the Charter, it [sic] is the absence of any effort to address some of the country's archaic traditions, especially tribal justice and honour crimes." Similar skepticism was reserved for Islamist militants – at least those who bridled at their traditional subordination to the regime. On the most basic level of cultural orientation, Islamist militancy clashed with Times' staffers western-influenced world view. The Times gulped hard when Islamist candidates won seat after seat in the 1989 parliamentary elections, but in standard house-organ fashion, it sought to put the best possible face on the routing of more liberal and secular candidates. The paper was also careful to avoid confronting the Islamists during the period of their ascendancy, through to the bitter end of the Gulf War. Its position and editorial practice during the Gulf crisis and war seemed

---

147 Q. As far as the working environment at the Jordan Times [is concerned], any problems to speak of? (Amy Henderson:) “No problems. ... Here, I feel like – I'm like this, I don't have my shoes on, and no one cares! ... Most of the people here [at the paper] find the status of women in this society appalling. And because there have been women here, Jordanians, who have been far better journalists than me and far tougher cookies, they're used to this. They see what women can accomplish here [at the Times], and they appreciate it. They know women play a vital role in this society. I think that's very well appreciated here.” (Cathy King:) “It's not just the women. Abdullah [Hasanat], for example, is very keen to push women's issues. Often you find that the people within the Jordan Times are more liberal-minded people – whether it’s because they’ve been educated abroad, or whatever... They’re all very supportive.”


149 According to P.V. Vivekanand, “When the Islamists talk about banning alcohol – I mean, personally, I don't accept it. But if the chief editor were to say, “Let's adopt a policy which is supportive of the Islamists’ drive to eliminate alcohol,” I don't think people [at the Times] would go along with it. There'd be hell to pay – we'd be fighting with George Hawatmeh! It's not [a question of] the institution setting the policy. It's a question of people's personal approach to issues.

150 After the monarch's post-election speech to the nation, the Times editorialized: “In a remarkably relaxed manner, His Majesty King Hussein laid to rest ... the fears and anxieties of those shortsighted commentators from within and outside the Kingdom that the results of the 1989 parliamentary elections spell gloom for Jordan. ... On the contrary, King Hussein assured Jordanians and others Friday that the results were very good and beneficial as they portray Jordanians' new state of mind. As for the magnificent show of strength by the 'Islamic movement' in these elections, His Majesty went on to recall that the Kingdom has always been a haven for the Muslim Brotherhood movement at times when it suffered from persecution in other countries. Accordingly, it would be totally untrue to allege that the Muslim Brotherhood presence in the Lower House of the Parliament can ever be construed as a sign of growing opposition.” Editorial, “Another milestone in Jordanian history,” JT, 12 November 1989.
strongly in solidarity with the Islamist-led opposition to the Allied intervention (the dominant mood countrywide, as noted). But when it came to the Islamists' underlying social and cultural agenda, the Times appears simply to have been seeking the right moment to go on the attack.

It came after the war, when the Islamists' political bubble burst. Then, the Times joined the fray with a vengeance. Abdul Rahim Malhas warned in the Times' pages in May 1991 of a danger of "totalitarian rule ... flourish[ing] under the banner of 'democracy'," and of (Islamist-dominated) government ministries becoming "forums for the application of ideology, for propagating campaigns instead of managing the affairs of citizens or dealing with their problems." When Royal Jordanian Airlines bowed to Islamist pressure and stopped serving alcohol on its flights to destinations in the Arab and Islamic worlds, the Times cautioned against wider prohibition measures: "History is replete with attempts to outlaw alcohol for one reason or another, but all such efforts, albeit well-intentioned, precipitated more harm than good in the end. ... The Kingdom is much safer with existing guidelines than it would be if Parliament reverses [the] time-honoured tradition of leaving such concerns to the free choice of the individual in our society.”

An editorial on the imposition of sex-segregation at public swimming pools drew a vociferous response from the Times, which proclaimed that the ban on mixed bathing

\[151\] George Hawatmeh's comment that "We were neutral, but yes, our feelings were with Saddam, with the Iraqi people, and with the Iraqi army" testifies to the slightly schizoid tone of the Times during this period. Overall, however, "we did take in the Jordan Times a strong position against the Americans," Hawatmeh said. "We probably weren't too happy with Kuwait itself. And we did have nationalistic feelings: Saddam was trying to stand up to the imperialists, and he had a solid program that any Arab, any Jordanian Palestinian, would support [re-distribution of wealth, the liberation of Palestine. ... People were charged with anti-American feelings, with anti-Israeli feelings. They were downtrodden. ... You couldn't have had the Jordan Times speak a different language from everybody else in Jordan. That would have been too much to take." Hawatmeh interview, 23 August 1995.

\[152\] Abdul Rahim Malhas, "Where is the devil?" Jordan Times, 22 May 1991. See also the article by Nemmeen Murad in the edition of 23-24 May 1991, "Thousands of parents mobilise effort to stem what they see as drive to 'politicise' process." "In an unprecedented bid to prevent what they call the 'politicalisation' of education 'and protect freedom of choice for parents and students,' thousands of individual parents and concerned citizens as well as many organisations and groups have come together to start a campaign. The aim is to put pressure on the government to rescind a number of controversial decisions taken recently by Minister of Education Abdullah Akaileh regarding, among other things, ministry policies and appointments, the running of private schools and mixing between the sexes at school age." The article was carried on the front page with an accompanying piece that continued inside and occupied nearly all of page 5. Although the story undeniably reflected a deeper rejection of Islamist militancy within Jordanian civil society, the "campaigning" tone of the coverage was also plain.

reinforces our belief that many of our deputies do not know what democracy is all about. ... All this House seems to be doing is [to] curtail basic human rights ... [and thereby] to institutionalise new forms of dictatorship based on the misuse of old democratic values. ... Those who do not like half of the society to live, work and think with the other half can do so in the privacy of their own homes and backyards, but cannot impose their will on the whole society of [a] modern state, which prides itself on respecting basic human rights. This is a very serious issue. Liberal and reasonable minded people in this country should not sit idle while they see the 'people's representatives' infringe on their rights and freedoms as citizens. The issue here is not desegregation or segregation at swimming pools and other public facilities. It is about the core of the debate of the sort of democracy that we seek: tribal or civic, forward-looking or ultimately backward. If we choose the former, in either case we will continue to oppress the individual with our tribal ethics, some of which are totally unsuitable to the modern age. If we opt for the latter, which we strongly believe we should do, then we ought to free the individual from the shackles of dark-age restrictions that led to our present-day backwardness. ... The ultimate responsibility rests on the shoulders of all open-minded and democracy-conscious groups and citizens themselves. Unless they create the civic structures that could shield and protect their freedoms and values, they are bound to be the losers.154

This distrust of Islamist extremism was of course shared by King Hussein's regime, which had successfully tamed the Muslim Brotherhood through to the 1990s. The Times was thus in something of a quandary when the regime chose to crack down on the "common enemy." Suppression of the Islamists could be viewed as a "rollback" of the very liberalization process that had benefitted the Times and other liberal forces in Jordan. Yet the Islamists seemed an even greater threat to Jordan's comparatively liberal polity and society. In some ways, the conundrum can be compared with that faced by Russian journalists in the 1996 elections - confronted with the imperative of backing the "lesser evil," Boris Yeltsin, in his struggle with the Communist-dominated opposition (see Chapter 5). As in Russia, too, the "tug-of-war ... reflected on us here at the newspaper," according to Hawatmeh. After a 1995 regime crackdown on politicized preaching from mosques, the Times' chief editor said the paper had

restrained from writing editorials against such measures, saying outright that the government is totally wrong to ban this [or that] organization. We always couch it in terms like, "The government cannot use force or intimidation against the opposition," but at the same time we have said the opposition cannot use intimidation tactics against the government either. ... We felt that the Muslim Brotherhood could not possibly continue to make the mosques their stronghold, and preach against the Jews and the Christians and Zionism and imperialism every Friday. That wasn't the job of the mosques. At the same time, we hated

---

to see the government ... send a contingent of security officers to beat up a sheikh. How can
you condone this? ... If you want to be really honest, in a free and democratic atmosphere,
[you should] be able to write everything, not just part of the truth. You have to say, "Look,
it's the regime's fault that it has pursued these policies, forged this alliance with the Islamists
throughout the years, and now you can't take this kind of action against them." But at the
same time, it stands to reason that the regime should not allow its opponents, the Muslim
Brotherhood who are against peace with Israel, to attack Jews because they're Jews, to just
continue to do whatever they want on pulpits and in mosques. So there is a dilemma here.
We've tried to handle it the best way we could, but it's reflected negatively on us.155

"The laws of the land ... forbid the use of places of worship as pulpits for political
campaigning," the Times wrote in an August 1994 editorial. Those same "laws of the land" were
sometimes less convenient to the Times' own preferences, or to its professional functioning. The
same editorial made it clear that the Times' freedom of movement stopped well short of confronting
these systemic features:156

The laws ... state that certain institutions, especially the Monarchy and the Armed Forces,
should not be discussed in any negative way. ... The Monarchy and the Armed Forces are
guarantors of the Constitution and the security of the country. The two should always be
kept out of the rhetoric of politicians or the press and that is clearly expressed in the Press
and Publication Law passed only last year.157

The PPL legislation attracted Times criticism on other grounds, but acceptance of the
regime's "no-go" areas was almost total. In a similar vein, coverage of the royals remained largely
slavish - though at a level not much different from, say, the British popular press.158 As noted, if
King Hussein at times seemed blase about the coverage accorded him, it was never obsequious
enough to satisfy his courtiers. With its window on the outside world, and the resultant regime
sensitivities, the Times was never far from trouble where coverage of the monarchy was concerned.
Rami Khouri's 1994 column, daring to note that King Hussein was mortal, was a sufficiently
dramatic example to warrant citing in the main section of the chapter.159 Another brief but

155 Hawatmeh interview, 2 August 1995.
156 I italicize "these" because I think the paper's critique of conservative elements is a systemic one. This is
especially true given the diffuse character of the Jordanian regime, and the fact that it includes these conservative (e.g.,
tribal) elements in both informal consultations and the formal structure of power.
158 See, for instance, this "Weekender" notice by Jennifer Hamameh, JT, 6 July 1995: "Family milestones:
Celebrating a very special birthday last week was His Royal Highness Prince Hussein, son of Their Royal Highnesses
Prince Abdullah and Princess Rania, and grandson of His Majesty King Hussein. A true Hashemite, the one-year-old
Prince Hussein already shows signs of following in the family footsteps[,] as evidenced by how gallantly he sports his
military garb. A fond birthday salute to a mighty tyke, and congratulations to his proud parents."
159 See above, p. 312.
memorable fracas occurred at the time of field research in 1995. Editorial-page editor Ayman Al-Safadi described events this way:

One day ... in May, both the chief editor and myself were away. A colleague, who had just come back from a two-month leave, was entrusted with drawing up the page on an hour's notice. Pressed for time, she grabbed the first cartoon she could lay her hands on. The cartoon was timely, she thought, because it dealt with the same land grab in Jerusalem. She knew the story was one that had received a lot of media coverage. My colleague was, naturally, unaware of what had happened earlier and even less so of who was caricatured.

“Who was caricatured” in the M. Kahil cartoon was apparently King Hussein himself. Together with Yasir Arafat, the Hashemite monarch was burying his head in the sand and proffering an olive branch to Yitzhak Rabin, while the Israeli Prime Minister expropriated more land in the vicinity of East Jerusalem. At least, so it might seem to a close observer:160 Arafat was identified by his distinctive keffiyeh, and the Jordanian King by the crown insignia on his shoulder.

160 How the matter might have been prosecuted, had it come to court under the PPL legislation, is also difficult to predict – despite the apparent magnitude of the offense. As George Hawatmeh pointed out, “The name ‘Hussein’ was not written in the cartoon. Could you prove it was him? Could you prove it was done intentionally?” Hawatmeh interview, 2 August 1995.
Even apart from the perhaps-unprecedented offense against Hussein – the suggestion that he was servile to the Israelis, and blind to ongoing injustices against the Palestinians – the cartoon was inopportunistly timed. Al-Safadi’s reference to “what had happened earlier” is explained by the fact that King Hussein had, before the cartoon appeared, successfully negotiated a temporary repeal of the land-grab. “The cartoon did His Majesty the King a great deal of injustice,” Al-Safadi acknowledged ruefully. For some hours, an atmosphere of crisis descended at the newspaper. But the Times was too favoured a regime instrument, and the explanation for the misstep so innocuous, that the Ministry of Information never received instructions to launch a prosecution under the PPL. “Being the magnanimous man he truly is,” said Al-Safadi, the King “accepted our apology and understood that it was an inadvertent error on our part.”

The symbiotic relationship between the regime which Hussein headed, and mainstream papers like the Times, was evident in virtually every area of Times content and institutional functioning. It certainly constrained Times reporting to more superficial treatments of systemic issues. In this context, the issue of corruption is worth focusing on briefly. As we saw in the first part of this chapter, corruption was one of the most contentious issues in the early post-liberalization era, and was seized upon by Jordan’s self-perceived “democratizing” forces – including the Islamists, firebrand parliamentarians, and a new or newly-energized tabloid press eager to exploit the issue for its sensational value. In the case of the last of these, we saw earlier that tabloids like Shihan managed to inaugurate something of a “watchdog” model in the Jordanian press. They often made mainstream papers like the Times seem toothless, if professionally more scrupulous. Interestingly, the Times, perhaps more than any other mainstream daily, felt obliged to rise to the tabloid challenge. After all, it presented itself to readers as a reliable and professional source of information important to a liberalizing society. And corruption was one of the most society-driven of the new social issues and controversies. People at nearly all levels of Jordanian society were outraged by the notion of a poverty-stricken country being further sapped by self-interested public officials. At the same time, though, the issue inherently brought any investigator – including the investigative journalist – up against the traditional closed ranks of the elite, tight-lipped

161 Al-Safadi also noted that the problem arose from the Times’ underdevelopment and scarce resources: “We do not have, nor can [we] afford, our own cartoonist. Needless to say, this arrangement can just cause us more headaches.” Al-Safadi, “The troubled life of the Op-Ed page,” JT, 26 October 1995 (20th anniversary edition).
officials, and rigorous controls over access to “sensitive” information. How did the Times respond? In short: carefully, with no real attempt at the kind of investigation or specific denunciation that the tabloids sometimes undertook.

The Times did provide extended, incisive coverage of one of the largest corruption scandals of the immediate post-liberalization era. This involved Petra Bank, an institution taken over by the government in August 1989 after years of mismanagement and surreptitious capital flight. It was, noted a Times headline of July 1990, a “story ... of shady dealings, puzzling questions and chaos in account books.” But Times coverage followed in the train of the regime’s belated investigations of itself, merely reporting the facts as announced to parliament. On other occasions, the Times appeared to downplay the extent and reach of corruption – even to argue that the issue had become too “politicized” and should be dropped altogether. As a new corruption law was debated in early 1993, the Times editorialized:

The fight against corruption in government is a worthy cause that obviously enjoys wide public support and is definitely prompted by so many stories and yet few proven cases of abuse of public office. But the crusade for clean government is also engulfed by political intrigue and sensationalism that might push some of us, like our honourable legislators, to cross the fine line of drafting effective anti-corruption laws into the domain of electioneering. ... To fight alleged corruption in the country [emphasis added], we do not need new laws at all. So why the two houses are bothered with debating the legislation in the first place is unknown to us.

Another editorial, appropriately titled “Where to draw the line,” saw the Times seeking to balance journalistic freedoms with the regime’s putative right to secrecy:

Clearly, there are valid arguments for and against secrecy in debating sensitive issues that have affected each and every Jordanian in one way or another. ... The corruption issue is indeed delicate, and our parliamentarians are still novice[s] in parliamentary debates and lack enough experience in handling subjects of this magnitude. ... This does not mean that there will not come a point when even the secret parliamentary deliberations and findings will have to be made public. No useful purpose can be achieved by debating the issue of corruption totally in the dark [emphasis added], since this could give rise to fears and suspicions that a cover-up is being contemplated or that a ‘deal’ is in the making. ... If the

---


House appears to have opted to brush under the carpet all the past wrongdoings, the deputies will have their constituencies to answer to when they are due for reelection.\textsuperscript{164}

Once again, the chain of command extended no further than the parliamentary whipping-boy. But the \textit{Times} did show itself able to alight on systemic issues, however briefly, when the biggest corruption scandal of the early 1990s erupted into the headlines. This swept up former Prime Minister Zeid Rifa'i and two former cabinet ministers, who were charged with “alleged misuse of authority [leading] to mismanagement of public funds in a multi-million dollar highway construction.”\textsuperscript{165} Wrote the \textit{Times}:

In countries like Jordan, where the division of powers was not clear and only recently started to take shape, corruption was made possible by successive governments’ overwhelming control on [sic] people’s lives. It is politically accepted of course that where there is repression, corruption thrives. ... We find that corruption [in Jordan] is highly rampant. ... It has, over the years, become a norm, and perhaps a God-given right, for officials to use their positions to their own benefits. ... The amazing thing about all of this is that it is rarely possible to try anyone and convict him on these grounds. The system itself is not built to do so. ... The case currently being debated at the Lower House of Parliament, which concerns a former prime minister and two ex-ministers, should be used as a model for investigating the loopholes in our system. Despite our belief that political and electoral gains are behind some of the motives to open the case, and the case itself may be weak, we are not [advocating] and would never advocate dropping it. But we dread the prospect that our Parliament should be wasting its and our time on a futile issue. ... No matter which way the case goes, it is the political and judicial system that needs to be tried, judged and ultimately corrected.\textsuperscript{166}

But there was still palpable ambivalence about this “futile issue.” The \textit{Times} acknowledged the limitations on coverage, with a searching, implicitly self-critical commentary credited only to “a \textit{Jordan Times} Staff Reporter.” It was a sort of oblique systemic critique, seeking to suggest why no real systemic critique was possible:

The Jordanian media faced a crucial test in the past two weeks as the country’s eyes and ears focused on the debate in Parliament over alleged corruption cases. And, for all practices

\footnote{\textsuperscript{164}Editorial, “Where to draw the line,” \textit{JT}, 20 March 1990.}


\footnote{Editorial, “Disease that hits home,” \textit{JT}, 30 July 1992.}
purposes, the journalists failed to rise to the challenge in tackling an important issue in the democratic process, according to local and foreign media experts and observers. ... Varying reasons are put forward by media experts on why the journalists have fallen far short of playing their rightful role in the affair through running investigative reports and meaningful commentaries and analyses on the significance of the affair [emphasis added] ... The very fact that [such] a powerful Jordanian politician as former Prime Minister Zeid Rifa'i was implicated in the affair, coupled with the restrictions that were a way of life for the Jordanian media until 1989, seemed to have been a key factor in shaping the journalists' approach, according to some commentators. ... "Having displayed themselves as cowering against personal fears of consequences of crossing someone's path, the Jordanian press has played into the hands of those who would like to muzzle it," [said one] journalist. Indeed, it was the first time that the Kingdom's media was exposed to an affair of such magnitude and political gravity, and therefore the journalists were at a loss to know how to handle the issue, some others say.

Another major element also appeared to be considerations of the legal implications of carrying reports which could be deemed as defamatory, particularly [given] that the libel laws of Jordan are as fizzy [sic] if not fizzier [sic] than those of Western democracies. ... The fact that Mr. Rifa'i issued a statement signalling a comeback is enough reason for chief editors, writers and commentators to justify their refraining from delving into the issue, according to one managing editor of a local daily. ... Another reason the managing editor cited was an apathy altogether towards the democratisation process and scepticism that the whole process might be turned back.167

It was precisely this fear that the limited but real freedoms in King Hussein's Jordan "might be turned back" that appears to have reined in the Times' corruption coverage - still more so that of the Arabic-language dailies. Whether the paper, along with other media in Jordan, might have pushed the boundaries further is moot. "Before the whole thing could really mushroom into something that would have touched the basic pillars of society," said P.V. Vivekanand, "the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait came along. So the focus shifted, and corruption was put on the back burner."

In August 1992, 16 of those tried in the Petra Bank scandal were indicted on "various counts of embezzlement, fraud, and breach of trust." In November 1992, King Hussein laid the issue to rest, offering a royal amnesty to all those convicted. The Times, loyally and predictably, expressed its approval, calling Hussein's announcement "a testimony of the King's compassion towards his subjects and an example of his political acumen and foresight."168

167"Press approach to 'corruption' debate - new game in an unfamiliar ground."

CONCLUSION

It is important to acknowledge the difficulty of generalizing from the Times' experience to that of the Jordanian press as a whole over the past decade. (Hence my pains to present a general view of this media system in the first part of the chapter.) The stop-and-start, highly-manipulated nature of the Jordanian liberalization also means that transformations at the Times are not nearly as dramatically evident as in most of the other case-studies in this work. Despite these obstacles, though, the case of Jordan Times seems worthwhile to a comparative study of the press in transition. Like the Jordanian liberalization as a whole, the paper can be seen as a kind of “control” for the other case-studies. On its own terms, the Times, like Barricada, serves as a fine example of a newspaper working to expand its limited institutional resources and widen its professional purview under conditions of limited liberalization. Like other Jordanian media and social forces, the Times has been subject to bouts of renewed regime constraint and attempted “rollbacks” of democratic gains. But however one might evaluate events in Jordan as a whole over the last decade or two, the balance sheet for the Times is surely a positive one. The paper is considerably larger (it has tripled in size since 1975); better-funded; more professionally adept; and somewhat more widely-read than at the “onset” point of the liberalization process. And it has striven reasonably energetically to inculcate political and social values more liberal and humane than those that currently prevail in Jordan. This is a subjective judgment, to be sure. But it is hardly irrelevant to a discussion of “liberalization” — a standard precondition, if neither a necessary nor a sufficient one, for political transition.
Chapter Five

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back¹
Russian Journalism in the Post-Soviet Era

Russia is in many ways the "classic" study of the press in transition. As such, one might expect to find it nearer the beginning of a comparative work on the topic. The decision was made, instead, to open with an obscure newspaper in Nicaragua. There were several reasons for this. As the classic case, Russia may have found itself disproportionately represented in the opening theoretical chapter. As well, the Nicaraguan study came first, chronologically, in my research. Thus, it helped to generate most of the preliminary frameworks that were carried into the field in South Africa, Jordan, and—lastly—Russia. Moreover, the Barricada story includes many of the "classic" ingredients one also finds in the Russian case-study. The vanguardist model of the official press under the Sandinistas was not fundamentally different in conception, though it varied strikingly in practice, from the state-socialist model pioneered by Lenin.

This "Leninist" conception of the press, of course, underwent substantial change in successive periods of Soviet history. Most notoriously, it was entrenched as a tool of the terror-state and the "cult of personality" by Joseph Stalin. The paradigmatic "thaw" took place after Stalin's death, beginning with Nikita Khrushchev's limited exposure of Stalinist atrocities at the Twentieth Party Congress (1956). Less dramatic "chills" and "thaws" were evident at different points during the Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras, with the media often serving as a bellwether. For many foreign observers, however, these fluctuations were minor. The landscape of Soviet politics and media was better represented by the literature of the era: most enduringly, Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, with its "unpersons" and "memory holes"—potent symbols of the propaganda

¹The title is a play on V.I. Lenin's pamphlet, One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (1904).
constraints that were seen to overwhelm ethical and professional considerations in Soviet press functioning.

This classical image of the Soviet press, and the Soviet system more generally, has faded somewhat since the capacity of the system for transformation became evident under Mikhail Gorbachev. The fact that a post-Soviet journalistic corps sprang fully-formed from the dying state-socialist parent, to assist decisively in advancing glasnost and perestroika and later in consigning the USSR to history’s slag-heap, suggested that professional values and skills were latent within the system — ready to seek expression when the winds of change blew. We know now, from a wealth of sociological and other studies, that the communist behemoth was in fact a more fissiparous entity — socially, ethnically, politically — than most outside observers acknowledged or assumed. This was true also of its propaganda apparatus and communications policies more generally.

During the period of revolution and civil war (1917-21), and then under Joseph Stalin (1928-1953), the Soviet system sought and achieved a degree of surveillance and control over ordinary citizens’ lives matched in its time only by Nazism, and duplicated since only by the modern capitalist corporation. Both Lenin (with the faintly credible excuse of war and national emergency) and Stalin (with psychotic zeal) sought to stamp out independent, “horizontal” channels of communication among the citizenry. Workmates were badgered into spying on workmates, wives on husbands, children on parents, and soldiers on comrades — which is how Solzhenitsyn ended up in his labour camp, after all. But even under the most extreme repression and surveillance ever imposed, those channels of communication among citizens were never entirely eliminated.2

The era of Nikita Khrushchev (1955-64) is generally remembered as a precursor of the “golden age” of Russian journalism under Gorbachev. In fact, though, it may have been the era of

---

2Anthony Beevor cites a macabre example of Stalinism’s porousness, drawn (appropriately) from the battle of Stalingrad. In November 1942, Soviet forces encircled the German Sixth Army and various Axis forces in a great pincer movement, cutting them off from the rest of Army Group Don. “The most surprising aspect of this time of [Soviet] triumph,” writes Beevor, “is the number of deserters from the Red Army who continued to cross the lines to the surrounded German Army, thus entering a trap.” According to one Soviet secret-police officer, “These Russians were most astonished to hear from the Germans the same story that had been put out by their own propaganda. They had not believed that the Germans were encircled.” Beevor, Stalingrad (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 286. Beevor attributes the error to “a mixture of ignorance and mistrust.” Enforced ignorance is certainly an accepted feature of the Stalinist system. And if Stalinism was “totalitarian” anywhere, it was on the Soviet battlefronts in World War II. But the reference to “mistrust” points to the cracks in the Stalinist propaganda system. Alternative channels of communication sustained skepticism about regime policies and messages; alternative (in this case erroneous) depictions of reality circulated; and low-level collective action — in the form of desertion — apparently resulted.
collective rule under Leonid Brezhnev (1964-1982) that was more significant for the press. As elite rule was bureaucratized in the Brezhnev Politburo, so the society as a whole was “professionalized,” in a manner that bore some comparison with the postwar West. This had obvious implications for professional journalists, whose prestige and perks (higher education, foreign travel, state laurels) increased commensurately.

It was thus not too surprising that when censorship was finally lifted in the later Gorbachev era, the press immediately flexed its professional muscles in a way that many western journalists found familiar — but which also varied strikingly from the western norm. Investigative journalism was zealously pursued, sometimes with spectacular results. The western-style “watchdog model” of the press put down roots — at least, there was no shortage of journalists willing to point out flaws in the system when glasnost gave them the breathing-space to do so. At the same time, though, a pre-Soviet model of journalism reasserted itself. It reflected the more belletristic tradition of journalism in czarist times; allegedly innate features of Russian language and rhetoric; and a long-established link between journalism and politics that was typical of Central and Eastern European journalistic cultures. Dmitry Babich, a former reporter with Komsomolskaya Pravda now working in broadcast journalism, actually assigned this tradition supremacy in influencing late-Soviet and post-Soviet media:

The difference between Slavic and Anglo-Saxon journalisms is tremendous. Even globalization couldn't alter that fact. The western press is mostly reporting, telling you what happened. The Slavic press is a very special mixture of sermon and confession. “Here is what happened to me, here is how I view the situation, and here is how I want you to view it.” A lot of stuff written in the first person, a lot of columns ... Now less than before, but still a lot. A lot of headlines with double meanings, a lot of puns; always a great attention to literature and to context. Most Russian journalists don't really like the western press. They have the feeling: “Oh, it was [all] written by one person.” I don't agree with them. ... But I would say that many, many Russian journalists would never agree to work in the way that their western colleagues do.3

3There was near-unanimity among interview subjects about the characteristics of this classical model, though greater division over its prominence today in the face of mounting western influence. Iosif Dzhaloshinsky, Russian-American Press and Information Centre: “The main difference is that for Western Europe or the West at large, journalism is a profession. In Russia, this is a mission. A Russian journalist in a small village could make as little as $30 a month, but he'll write daily, and continue writing, thinking he can change the world somehow. ... This missionary feeling which you often find among Russian journalists you won't find in the West.” Victor Daniloff, Globus Press Syndicate: “Until now, Russian journalists have seen themselves as a missionary, as a teacher who ought to teach readers what is good and what is bad: to give his opinion. They don't see themselves as information-providers.” Andrei Richter, Media Law and Policy Centre, Moscow University: “They [journalists] believe they have the right and the knowledge to formulate public opinion and to shape the public's mind.” Yassan Zassoursky, Dean, Moscow School of Journalism: “Most of our journalists think that they should point to what you should do, how you should view [something]. They wouldn't say, 'Mr. Yeltsin today concluded an important treaty.' They would always and obligatorily
With the sermon went the pulpit. The pre-Soviet tradition, heavily suppressed but not utterly vanquished under communism, entrenched journalism both as an intellectual calling and an opportunity to attain social prominence, even privilege. (One of the journalists interviewed for this chapter, Stanislav Kondrashov of Izvestia, was awarded the Order of Lenin, the highest state honour of the USSR, in 1967.) Even Leninist/Stalinist formulations emphasized the crucial role propaganda — and hence propagandists — played in entrenching Soviet power. When all censorship was lifted during the “golden age” of 1987-1992, the temptation to present oneself as the voice of the masses was irresistible. And the Russian masses, desperate for someone to navigate them through the dizzyingly unpredictable events of the period, turned first of all to journalists — certainly well before they turned to politicians. “Eight years ago,” recalled Vitaly Korotich (former editor of Ogonyok) in 1997, “I was elected, solely on the merit of my reputation as a journalist and an author to serve as a member of parliament for Constituency 58 in Kharkov, a city I had never before visited.” More than a dozen of his fellow journalists joined him in the Congress of People’s Deputies.

Korotich emphasized, however, that such an extraordinary blending of journalism with politics “could not happen now. Today the relationship between the press, the bankers and the government is such that journalists are most often seen as representatives of the establishment and not as defenders of the public interest.” Whether one sees this as a melancholy, welcome, or simply inevitable development, it points to a sharp change in public perceptions of journalism.

“There are fewer unfounded expectations of the press now on the public’s part,” said Dmitry Babich in 1997. The journalists elected to congress in 1990 were political failures! They were excellent journalists, but pretty bad politicians. Now, people understand that you can’t expect the press to solve all your problems. There are fewer letters from people saying, “Oh, I live in a small apartment, I want to get a bigger one, so please tell the government I am suffering.” That is stupid. ... Now the press is working to establish its reputation in the new conditions.

The abandoning both of unnatural conditions and unnatural expectations is the subject of this final case-study. It begins with an evaluation of the instrumentalist “Soviet model” of the media inculcated between 1917 and, say, 1987. The chapter then considers the onset of glasnost and say, “Mr. Yeltsin did it well or did it badly.” ... I think an American journalist would say, ‘Just say it, say it!’”

the "golden age of Russian journalism" — 1988 to 1992 — when newspapers and their staff found themselves at the very forefront of the changes sweeping Soviet society. The onset of material crisis in 1991-92, and the painful readjustments required to the vision of an independent and self-sustaining "fourth estate," are then explored. The shifting role of the Yeltsin regime and the rise of non-regime actors (especially large corporations and regional or municipal authorities) is addressed in detail, together with a summary of the diverse strategies implemented by Russian newspapers to adapt to the constraints posed by the new market economy. The analysis of changing models of professionalism, and the summary of the situation of the post-Soviet press as of mid-1998, may assist in restating (after the "fuzzy" liberalization described in the Jordan chapter) some important features of the press in more fully-fledged transition conditions. The chapter concludes with a case-study of one of the leading newspapers of the Soviet era, Izvestia (News). Its rocky path in the transitional era links it in important ways to newspapers, like Barricada, in distant corners of the world. As such, the Izvestia profile brings the case-study portion of the book full-circle — though here, as well as in the concluding theoretical chapter, I will take pains to avoid premature or overly-expansive generalizations.

Some brief background comments about the fieldwork may be of interest. The most obvious logistical disadvantage confronting the research was the author's complete lack of Russian-language skills, despite many years of dedicated immersion in John Le Carre's spy novels. The obvious route around this obstacle would have been, as in Jordan, to focus on an English-language paper with an English-speaking staff. As noted in the Introduction, however, I rejected this approach. One anomalous publication seemed insufficient for a project with comparative pretensions. To focus on The Moscow Times or its counterpart, The Moscow Tribune — even on the well-studied travails of the glasnost vanguard, Moscow News — seemed too limiting in a media landscape as broad, diverse, and rapidly evolving as Russia's. This meant I would have to rely on translated sources (especially Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press), on English-language journalism and scholarship, and on journalists and scholars themselves. This last group deserves special mention, not just for the influence of their scholarship on this case-study, but because a significant number of them took an interest in my work from the planning stages. They helped me to focus on intelligent, well-informed, and experienced interview subjects who happened to speak English.
well enough to field questions. The language barrier remained an obstacle, as in Jordan. But I think it can be contended that any interview regimen that includes Victor Davidoff, Iosif Dzhialoshinsky, Boris Kagarlitsky, Stanislav Kondrashov, Alexei Pankin, Andrei Richter and Yassan Zassoursky, as well as leading voices of the new generation of Russian journalists such as Dmitry Babich, Ivan Zassoursky, and Andrei Zolotov, cannot be entirely without merit.

As for secondary source-material in English, there is a great deal of it about. The Russian transition is by far the best-studied of the cases considered in this book, thanks to 1) the extensive scholarly apparatus that already existed in Soviet studies when glasnost shifted into high gear; 2) the enduring significance of Russia and Central Europe in western foreign-policy calculations; and 3)

---

5This focus on English-language interview subjects bears comparison with Jordan, and the scope and structure of the two case-studies is comparable: both devote more attention to wider transformations than institutional case-studies. Note, however, that for the Izvestia case-study, I was reluctant to limit my sources to English speakers, for the same reasons I avoided a study of Moscow News or The Moscow Times. Thanks to the services of my translator, Bolina Dobinina, I was also able to interview leading figures at the paper like then-editor Oleg Golembiovsky and foreign editor Alexander Sychev.

I must thank four scholars especially for their written contributions as well as the help they rendered to me directly. The work of Laura Belin of Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe will long be central to English-speaking scholarship on this turbulent era in post-Soviet media. Belin has worked patiently to compile up-to-date charts of ever-shifting media ownership patterns ("Russian Media Empires," <http://www.rfed.org/nca/special/rumedia/index.html>, last updated 26 September 1997). She has also assembled a chronology of the fast-moving events at Izvestia between early 1996 and late 1997 <http://www.rfed.org/nca/special/rumediapaper/appendix2.html>. The work of Dr. Frances Foster of the Washington University School of Law was indispensable to the study of the 1989-93 era at Izvestia, and the post-Soviet press more generally. See Foster, "Izvestia as a Mirror of Russian Legal Reform: Press, Law, and Crisis in the Post-Soviet Era," Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law, 26: 4 (November 1993), pp. 675-748; and "Information and the Problem of Democracy: The Russian Experience," The American Journal of Comparative Law, XLIV, No. 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 243-91. Lastly, Dr. John Murray of Trinity College, Dublin, in addition to writing a very helpful book (The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain [Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1994]), carried out an important content analysis of Izvestia's 1996 elections coverage, which he supplied to me in draft form.

the rather well-funded attempt to encourage Russian media (and other post-Soviet institutions) to adopt western standards and practices, in both commercial and professional spheres. The secondary literature is an indispensable buttress to the framework, insights, and conclusions I advance here. With rare exceptions, though (such as the narrative of events at Izvestia in 1991-92), I fold this material into the footnotes, the better to focus the main text on the interview materials gathered in Moscow in May-June 1997. Together with the comparative framing of the overall work, this seems the main "original" contribution to scholarship on the Russian transition that this chapter can hope to make.7

THE SOVIET MODEL:
MOBILIZING AND PROFESSIONAL IMPERATIVES

Everybody was a party man at that time.
– Igor Kovalev, correspondent, Financial Izvestia

It is impossible to speak about the total control of every line.
– Dmitry Murzin, editor, Financial Izvestia

In what specific ways did the Russian and Soviet press models influence the post-Soviet press? A range of factors, from management and administration to literary style, merits attention.

Dmitry Soshin, a producer with Reuters Television who began studying journalism in 1985 and joined the MSU journalism faculty in 1987, recalled that at this most prestigious of Soviet journalistic institutions, "the training [they] provided us with, and our tutors and working papers, were quite good. ... Their first task was how to teach young people to write properly. They would think about skills: how to make you think quickly, put things in the appropriate way." The instruction was "more concentrated on the stylistic side ... rather than on the guts of the stories," and it was accompanied by what Soshin called "the ideological crap": "Four out of the five years of my university was still under the Soviet Union. So obviously we had all these propaganda subjects:

7There are various ways of transliterating from Cyrillic to Roman alphabets. I have tried to harmonize usage, including materials quoted from scholars' work and other published sources. The departure from strict adherence to the text seems to me offset by the convenience of uniform spelling. The plethora of names being spelled, moreover, may be daunting to readers unfamiliar with the dramatis personae of Russian media and politics. I thus recite institutional affiliations at regular points throughout.
the theory of propaganda, the theory of the Soviet and Marxist press, the theory of Soviet journalism, the theory of writing on political matters,” and so on. Nevertheless, especially as the momentum of glasnost built, Soshin claimed a meaningful space existed for journalists to construct their own professional self-conception:

The tutors and professors were very intelligent people. They gave you the drill, the theory, very ideologically polished stuff. Then you had to match it with your own conception of journalism. ... I think most of them, especially close to the end of my education [1992], were hinting that apart from what they were giving to you [ideologically], there was the other conception. ... The subjects were often built around a very good theoretical base. They were talking about things like the theory of interviewing, the theory of feature-writing. ... They were giving you very clear ideas of western precision journalism, investigative journalism, feature journalism, Fleet Street journalism - this kind of stuff. And when I [later] saw these things in reality, I realized that they gave us a very clear and true picture of what was going on. ... Sometimes they said, “Look, this genre is quite good.” They were really hot on the western practice of investigative journalism; they wanted us to pay more attention to [it]. ... They gave us a very good breakdown on the various genres of journalism. I now feel thankful for that, because I can see that western journalists lack this idea. When you [the Russian journalist] are given an order to write a certain story, you’ve got a clear idea what you’re going to do.

Even as late as 1997, after epochal changes to the media system and wider society, Andrei Richter of MSU could claim that “the majority of the curriculum” at the School of Journalism “has remained the same as it was ten years ago, and most of the faculty are the same as they were ten years ago” – though an increasing emphasis on practise over theory was perhaps evident.

The delicate combination of professional nuts-and-bolts with propaganda requirements was mirrored in the literary style of print media, which derived, as noted, from the high-minded belletristic tradition of the 19th century. That tradition saw state censorship combined (then as later) with journalists' guile and sense of self-importance to create a journalism that was “much more sophisticated” than the West's, according to Boris Kagarlitsky. Other aspects of available professional training, at least at pre-eminent institutions like Moscow State University (hereafter,
MSU), appear also to have laid a foundation for the post-Soviet era. The calibre of the training likely increased during the Brezhnev era, in line both with the policy of détente towards the west during the 1970s, and the more general professionalization of the Soviet system.

Skills and capacities useful for the post-Soviet era may also have been developing at the managerial and administrative levels. Had this been limited to lower-level functionaries abjectly taking orders from above, the ability of Soviet press institutions to survive into the post-Soviet era might well have been crippled. It was quite clearly hindered by the managerial deficit common to authoritarian societies (and many democratic ones): a reliance on obedience rather than initiative, and on command rather than consensus. Nonetheless, the administrative legacy of state socialism appears to have provided a wellspring of managerial skills that media could exploit after the sponsor – the Soviet state – officially collapsed. Eric Johnson, an American who founded the Internews agency in Moscow, described the new generation of journalists in the independent television stations he visited as an outgrowth of the old system – but in certain respects a positive outgrowth. “Often in 1989 or 1990, they [the managers] were Komsomol people [from the Communist Youth organization]: the kind of person that has the initiative to get things done. If you were a Komsomol person in 1989, you’d already demonstrated your managerial skills.” Dmitry Soshin suggested that the legacy of communist administration also assisted the written press in navigating the transition to a post-communist order:

I don’t think these [Soviet-era] editors knew a lot about journalism, that they were brilliant professionals who knew the newspaper business. Ninety-nine percent of them had nothing to do with the newspapers. They were people who were highly placed in the Central Committee of the Party and Komsomol; they were simply going by the Central Committee’s decrees. ... But some of them managed to get knowledge. Some of them turned out to be very dynamic and smart people, in a way. Some had very good aides who directed them and could teach them the basics. And they were actually quite good – not from the editorial point of view, but very good as media managers. I think they were reading a lot about the media moguls and trying to act as media moguls.

But if such little-appreciated aspects of Russian and Soviet media can be held to have influenced the press of glasnost and the 1990s, these traditions can also be seen as powerful impediments. Most obviously, “hard” authoritarian constraints featured throughout the czarist and (especially) Soviet eras. Alexei Pankin went so far as to argue that in “the communist heritage ... even the notion of journalism is non-existent.” For Pankin, across vast swaths of the former Soviet Union no effective model of professional journalism was ever inculcated. When the Soviet
mobilizing agenda disappeared, a vacuum was created into which more tawdry and mercenary habits rushed.\(^\text{10}\)

The rigidly-enforced mobilizing agenda also inhibited journalists' abilities to assimilate new models and ideas. "The old communist religion," as Ivan Zassoursky referred to it, meant there was no shortage of pliant publicists to be found among the post-Soviet press corps:

Their [journalists'] mind is used to having a basic idea of how things are developing, and judging the world through it. It's not a pluralistic mind. It's an ideology-based mind. Now the situation has changed, and they have put "reform" where communism used to be. So now the world is pretty much clear to them [again].

Yassan Zassoursky similarly cited an "inability to believe in your reader's intellectual capacity, their ability to understand and interpret the facts" as "one of the greatest failures of our journalists. … Objectivity is the last virtue of our journalists. They were taught not to be objective, but partisan, in the Communist era, and they remain not objective."\(^\text{11}\)

One legacy of the Soviet era, already mentioned, may at first seem a positive one: the tendency to nurture journalists and editors as public-opinion leaders. "Journalists," said Andrei Richter, "have always been in the limelight of public attention, especially the prominent journalists – [in] both print and broadcast [media]. They were trusted in the old times, trusted by the party to be prominent journalists, and that meant they could express their opinion without being afraid that it would contradict the party line, because they were already indoctrinated." The Soviet journalist, Richter said, was prized "as a propagandist, an agitator, and an organizer," with the result that journalists still "believe they have the right and the knowledge to formulate public opinion and to shape the public's mind."\(^\text{12}\)

Almost as a matter of course, this time-honoured self-conception of public "voice," bolstered by the propaganda apparatus of the state, thrust journalists to the forefront of the social and political changes that swept the USSR during glasnost. Equally predictably, though, it spawned

---

\(^\text{10}\)Andrei Richter claimed that "responsibility became the last word in the lexicon of journalists" at precisely the time the power of the authorities was most diminished: "Before that, it was 'responsibility' owing to party repression, and since that time journalists have had almost no fear. So responsibility was dropped, and unfortunately not many journalists have believed in it since. … Journalism has become more formal since 1992, and more predictable; but I wouldn't say it has become more responsible."

\(^\text{11}\)"And now the new owners too don't like objectivity much," Zassoursky added.

\(^\text{12}\)"The joke that was doing the rounds last summer was a definition of pluralism. Pluralism, they say, is two ideas in one head." Rowland Lorimer, "What's the News in Russia?", Canadian Forum, June 1994.
disillusionment and bitterness among journalists when their coveted status as "public-opinion leaders," no longer buttressed by the propaganda system, declined in tandem with the public's interest in politics and its reduced willingness to acknowledge journalists as instruments of positive change. Iosif Dzialoshinsky of the Russian-American Press and Information Centre argued in 1997 that

In general, the Russian journalist feels it as a very acute pain, because instead of speaking for the state, they are now downgraded to expressing some petty private interests. ... As far as prestige is concerned, the journalist has always held fifth or sixth place on a scale of one to ten. [But] now they've moved down to the tenth or — or eleventh — place!

Together with this somewhat inflated self-perception went a "welfare mentality" — a conviction, also strongly conditioned by the Soviet legacy, that newspapers were public institutions deserving public subsidies. Many commentators saw the mentality as playing a decisive role in conflicts between newspaper staff and corporate sponsorship. Discussing the Summer 1997 fracas at Izvestia, for example, Iosif Dzialoshinsky commented: "Americans would never understand this conflict. From the American point of view, the person or persons who invest in a paper can and should take decisions on everything that concerns the paper. But from the Russian point of view, sponsors are obliged to finance the paper! And the sponsor should be glad that he was allowed to finance the paper!" Alexei Pankin was another interview subject who derided such pretensions:

Most journalists, and editors more than journalists, simply can't reconcile themselves to the idea that the proper role for a journalist and an editor is to be hired labour. No matter what they say [in favour of] the market, they simply refuse to abide by its consequences. So they want to be owners, they want to be executives, and they want to be journalists all at the same time. This is understandable; but when they're taken over rather legitimately, they start crying wolf and appealing to the president. When somebody uses the instruments of the market against them, they can't accept it, although it's natural.

In a number of other ways, the mentality may be seen to influence the functioning of the post-Soviet press. Eric Johnson, for example, linked it to the operations of the "journalistic collective," the odd institutional structure that emerged to control and direct many newspapers after power was transferred from the defunct Soviet state in the latter half of 1991. The role of the journalistic collective will be considered in slightly greater detail below, and in the Izvestia case-study.

13Dmitry Babich: "In communist times, you really could write a letter to a newspaper and then some big boss, or even Brezhnev, would come to the city. They'd show him the newspaper where a woman had written, 'I'm handicapped and I can't get to my fifth-floor apartment,' and Brezhnev would say, 'Get busy with that. Do something.' The next day she moves into a new apartment. That was an unnatural situation, an absurd situation. It couldn't continue, and it doesn't continue."
Johnson, though, joined Pankin in perceiving a “leftover mentality” from Soviet times that encouraged the feeling “that [journalists] have a right to determine how their particular medium is run”:

It’s a very Soviet thing, that these people theoretically have the right to a say in how the enterprise is run – whether it’s a factory or a newspaper. In this particular case, you’ve got journalists who believe they have a right to manage this enterprise, even if that means the enterprise is not going to be financially viable. And if somebody with a more capitalist bent comes along and says, “You’re just going to go bankrupt,” they say, “We are an institution. And as such we should receive government subsidies and be allowed to continue to exist in exactly the way we’ve always existed, in the same way that the Pushkin Museum or the cathedral downtown should exist.” I don’t buy it. It’s naïve. I don’t see any particular reason why a newspaper should continue to exist just because it has always existed. And I’m not sure that appealing to the government to preserve the independence of the media is setting a very good precedent.

A wider feature of the Soviet system was vital in inculcating the model of journalist-as-opinion-leader. Its disappearance, likewise, powerfully reshaped journalists’ professional self-image in the post-Soviet era. Under Soviet rule, the different classes or “sectors” of society had been bound together (in large part by communications media), each to play its designated role in the system. This meant that something approaching a unified intelligentsia was created. Boris Kagarlitsky, author of the classic study of Soviet intellectuals, argued in an interview that the unity was founded on limited disparities in wealth and the centrally-directed nature of the materials provided for intellectual nourishment:

The old intelligentsia was very homogeneous, both culturally and even economically. Take a professor, as my father used to be. You could go to certain places where you could meet friends who were engineers and teachers and so on. The lifestyles were always the same. You read the same books. You had the same education. You had the same styles and tastes. If there was an important book which came out, like Rybakov [Anatoly Rybakov’s *Children of the Arbat*, 1987], which was probably the last book of its kind, everybody with any kind of educational level above, say, the tenth grade read it. ... The difference of income was real, but it was not great. It was probably 1 to 2. In Soviet times, yes, that was important; but now, we have income differentials of 1 to 20, 1 to 40. These are completely different worlds: you will never be able to communicate.

---


15 This intellectual homogeneity in some respects perpetuated patterns that were evident in 19th-century Russian intellectual life. A constant, for example, was the role of the *tolstyi zhurnal* (“fat journals”). “This kind of publication came into vogue with the easing of censorship after 1855,” writes Richard Pipes. “Typically, it consisted of two parts, one belletristic, the other devoted to public concerns in the broadest sense of that word (politics, to the extent allowed by censorship, economics, sociology, science, technology and so on). Each journal espoused a philosophical-political line and appealed to a particular clientele. The polemics between them, waged in coded or ‘aesopian’ language to get by the censors, became for Russians a surrogate for open political debate. ... The ‘fat journal’
Media, broadly viewed, were the “glue” for this arrangements. Correspondingly, the fissioning of the intellectual class in the post-Soviet era, and the impoverishing of many of its members, would be key factors underlying the catastrophic declines in circulation that afflicted nearly all Russian publications in the 1990s.

**PORTRAIT OF A VETERAN:**
**STANISLAV KONDRAŞHOV**

Having painted the evolution of post-Stalinist Soviet media in broad strokes, it is worth looking at how it played itself out in the life of an individual journalist, one of Russia’s most venerable: Stanislav Kondrashov of *Izvestia*. Kondrashov joined the paper in 1951, and was still ensconced with his office and emeritus status as of mid-1997. He served as *Izvestia*’s foreign correspondent in Cairo and New York for most of the 1960s, receiving his Order of Lenin near the end of the decade. From 1971 to 1977, he was *Izvestia*’s Washington correspondent; from then until the time of the interview in May 1997, his designation had been political commentator, “or, to be more precise, ‘political analyst.’” As an éminence grise of the Soviet press and a direct link to *Izvestia*’s storied past, Kondrashov had an almost “untouchable” status at the newspaper. This protected him from the massive staff-cuts at the post-Soviet *Izvestia*, discussed later in the chapter.

Kondrashov’s rise to prominence and an honoured status within Soviet journalism attested not only to his personal and professional skills, but to the service he had rendered the Soviet state for nearly four decades. The demands of that system, and the professional costs exacted, changed over time. But the basic character of a highly-mobilized, centrally-directed media system did not. “All of us were appointed by the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party,” Kondrashov said — referring to “political analysts” like himself who occupied “top position[s] in the newspaper” and wrote on politically-sensitive subjects like international affairs. “In this sense, we

performed a unique service in the development in Russia of public opinion. It broadcast throughout the vast empire information and ideas which otherwise would have remained confined to the two capital cities, and by so doing created multiple networks linking widely scattered individuals inhabiting provincial cities and rural estates. ... Within a year after he came to power Lenin shut down all the non-Bolshevik ‘fat journals,’ no doubt because his keen political sense told him what danger they presented to absolute authority.” Pipes, *Russia under the Old Regime* (London: Penguin, 1995), pp. 264-65. The institution did, however, carry over to the Soviet era, where *Novy Mir* (which published Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in 1962, among other coups) was perhaps the most widely-read and respected intellectual publication.
were part of what was called the *nomenklatura,* the list of party faithful who received perquisites and status unavailable to ordinary citizens. Kondrashov “worked within the general framework of that time”:

> What do I mean? Many people were devoted party members. Communists – although you can interpret the term in different ways. [In the beginning,] I was a young man, a man brought up under the Soviet regime. I was very loyal to my country, and still am. I was very patriotic; now I have many doubts, but I’m still a patriot. So it was kind of a mutual development – the country developed, the system developed, because there were gradual and sometimes drastic changes after Stalin’s death. Under Khrushchev and even under Brezhnev, that development did not stop.

For Kondrashov personally, the development was from a strongly partisan allegiance to the propaganda system he served, to a more nuanced understanding of the world outside the prefabricated frameworks. “When I was young, I was rather uncritical about what was going on. My reporting, my coverage of, say, Soviet-Egyptian relations or of the United States was rather immature. But when I came back [to *Izvestia*] after my first assignment to the United States, in 1968, we had the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of that year.” His subsequent soul-searching and interaction with editor-in-chief Lev Tolkunov was described in Chapter 1.\(^{16}\) When he returned to writing with full vigour in the early 1970s, Kondrashov said he used his established status at *Izvestia* to cultivate a more flexible, less overtly propagandistic style:

> If you take what I wrote for my newspaper, *Izvestia,* and what I wrote in my books on the United States, I am ready to stand by all I’ve written from, let’s say, the end of the 1960s, the beginning of the ’70s. Sometimes it was difficult. Sometimes, because of my professional standing, they had to publish what I wrote. Sometimes they made excuses and did not print it. Or they tried to make corrections somehow. But it’s all a part of our profession.

As these comments suggest, Kondrashov’s freedom of movement continued to be tightly constrained by the bureaucracy of censorship. The limits of acceptable criticism, he said, were conveyed to journalists both through “direct indications, direct instructions” and more subtle strategies:

> At the end of the 1970s, what was called the Department of International Information of the Central Committee [of the Communist Party] was created. And the chief of this department used to invite us political observers and analysts – not only from *Izvestia,* from the other newspapers as well – once every week or two weeks for briefings. But usually [the party line] was not [conveyed by] an order. It was a kind of “recommendation,” so to speak. Then it was up to you to write about it or not to write about it. As for me, I tried to write about those items which interested me. But of course, at that time, you could not air any

---

\(^{16}\)See Chapter 1, p. 39.
criticism of the Soviet foreign policy scene. All criticism of the foreign policy actions of Brezhnev or his subordinates was also excluded. There was censorship. Representatives of Glavlit [the censorship authority] were here in Izvestia. Not all of us knew them personally — they were somehow invisible people — but they had very strict instructions. And they had, of course, a rather long list of what could not be written. ... Only after they put their stamp on each page could Izvestia be sent to the printers.

“All criticism of ... foreign policy actions ... was excluded.” How, a western journalist might ask, could one then pose as a professional commentator on foreign policy? The prostration before the party’s mobilizing imperative appears total. And yet it seems to have left room for some personal choice of subject-matter, some individual exploration and expression. How Kondrashov used the breathing-space apparently enabled him to establish a bond with readers, making him “a rather popular, well-known journalist in the Soviet Union” — in his own, and many others’, estimation.

**Glasnost and the “Golden Age”**

People were expecting a lot from the media. They wanted the truth.  
— Dmitry Soshin

For a few years in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the field seemed open for a decisive break with the Soviet past — engineered by the last exponent of the old order and the harbinger of the new, Mikhail Gorbachev. The policies of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) that Gorbachev announced after his ascension to power in 1985 began as an attempt at “managed liberalization” of the type also seen in Sandinista Nicaragua after 1987, Jordan after 1989, and South Africa after 1990. Gorbachev’s goal was to modernize and fortify the Soviet system, not undermine it. The Communist Party’s monopoly on political power would remain, along with the command economy. Like many such liberalizations, however, the momentum of transformation escaped the regime’s control, and ended up overwhelming it. In this process, the Soviet press played a role as significant as media have played in any political upheaval in the twentieth-century world.

That role, however, is more ambiguous than might appear at first glance. It was not simply a matter of restrictions being loosened and an independent press emerging into full flower. For Gorbachev, the policies of glasnost and perestroika were intimately linked. Greater openness was necessary if an efficient restructuring of the economy and administrative apparatus was to occur.
The press would be vital in isolating the blockages in the sclerotic Soviet system. A freer flow of information would contribute to more effective planning of production and distribution of resources. Yassan Zassoursky’s comment that “functionally, the media remained instrumental” in the first years of glasnost is apt. For Gorbachev, the press was both an instrument of change and a valuable weapon in the struggle against reactionary forces left over from the era of “stagnation” under Leonid Brezhnev. The alliance the Soviet leader struck with Yegor Yakovlev of Moscow News symbolized this instrumental and clientelist conception, providing at the same time one of the best-known examples of a press organ “piggy-backing” under authoritarianism (see Chapter 1).

To encourage greater openness about the flaws of the Soviet system, however, was to open a Pandora’s box that Gorbachev could not close. The desire for fresh thinking on the economic front led the press to reconsider the era of Lenin’s New Economic Policy (1918-21), when the new Soviet regime briefly liberalized on both economic and cultural fronts. Stalin’s foreclosing of the experiment, and the subsequent atrocities associated with the “cult of personality,” could then be criticized in terms far more sweeping than Khrushchev permitted during the thaw of the late 1950s. And was it accurate to depict Stalin merely as a grotesque anomaly? Could not links be drawn between his tyranny and the one-party model that Lenin, not Stalin, had imposed? Was the Communist Party’s monopoly on power not therefore the heart of the problem? This final issue was broached in 1987-88, and stands in retrospect as the point at which Gorbachev’s managed liberalization spiralled out of the regime’s control. This was, of course, much more than an ideological undermining: Gorbachev’s failure to refashion the system of production and distribution without creating catastrophic shortages and bottlenecks was probably the decisive nail in the coffin of his regime. But it marked the moment at which the press, in particular, moved beyond the

17"They remained instruments," said Zassoursky, "but they were used by Gorbachev and the Communist Party to re-structure Russian society and political life, to democratize it. So they were instruments, but instruments of democratization!" Frances Foster likewise notes that "Even at the height of Gorbachev’s glasnost reforms, the approved functions of the press were to communicate and facilitate central communist party and state directive[s] and ideology. Soviet leaders derived significant authority from control of information and greeted calls for the most minimal relaxation of restrictions with suspicion and hostility." Foster, "Isvestia as a Mirror ...," p. 678.

18Dmitry Babich: "I wouldn’t say that the press destroyed [Gorbachev’s] regime. His regime just ran out of everything. When, at the end of the twentieth century, you can’t provide a city like Moscow with potatoes, that means your government must fall. Even if you have excellent relations with Margaret Thatcher, even if Reagan loves you and you are a Nobel Prize winner and a multimillion-bestselling writer — if you don’t provide the potatoes at the end of the twentieth century, you go!"
preset limits of glasnost and began to explore the taboos that underpinned single-party rule. While (crucially) still enjoying the generous state subsidies that allowed them to maintain the highest circulations ever achieved, newspapers increasingly replaced the formal party apparatus as the main generators of instruction, advice, and guidance for the new era.

The result, between approximately 1988 and 1992, was the “golden age” of Russian journalism. Interview subjects in Moscow described the resulting freedom with varying degrees of nostalgia, but in strikingly similar terms overall. “I don’t think this media liberty was surpassed in any other country at the end of the twentieth century,” said Dmitry Babich. Irina Petrovskaya of Izvestia called it “a kind of special period that will probably never be repeated ... Everybody thinks about [it] with a sense of gratitude and amazement.” Ivan Zassoursky described the environment as one of “total freedom and total interest. A total freedom to write whatever you liked, and the total interest of the people to read whatever you wrote.” Readers’ “total interest” bolstered the journalist’s self-conception as an opinion-leader. “The media became a kind of public guardian,” said Yassan Zassoursky. For Dmitry Babich, the press was essential in sanctioning a new diversity of permissible opinion:

People still viewed the media as part of the political establishment. And when, suddenly, the media — by some twist of fortune — were dominated by dissidents, or by people with views close to dissident views, when the journalists were against the communist authorities, people could refer to the media and say, “Look, I didn’t do anything wrong. Look at the newspaper, listen to the radio. They say exactly what I do.” ... I think that was the main role of the press: it legitimized the opposition to the communist regime in the last years of glasnost.

The collapse of Soviet power, perhaps surprisingly, made it “much easier to work as a journalist” on a day-to-day professional level, according to Babich. He offered an intimate portrait of news-gathering with most of the former (and subsequent) impediments absent:

What do you do if you write a police story now [1997]? It’s like in the West. You have to go to the press or public-relations department of the Moscow city police. Then, if you have good connections and so on, they will probably release you some news. At that time, if someone was killed near this or that apartment block, you could go to the local police precinct, talk to the officers, and they’d tell you everything about it. No-one could punish them for telling you! There were all these heads of political departments who had information that came with their posts, and who were not responsible to anyone. ... So it was very easy to work. Under Gorbachev, it was a real press freedom, in the sense that people were just not afraid! Now, can you try to approach Yeltsin? You first have to talk to his press secretary. And then, if he really loves you, and if you talk to Yeltsin’s personal guards, and if they have a good relationship with you, they may allow you, if you write down the questions in advance, to come into his august presence and ask him a question that he
already knows how to answer. Under Gorbachev, it was easy. You just caught him by the wrist: "Mikhail Sergeyevich! A few more questions!" He didn't say anything new while answering the questions, but at least it was human. ... I don't think [that time] will ever come back.

As noted earlier, more than a dozen journalists — nearly half of them from the mass-circulation *Argumenty i Fakty*, were elected to parliament in the 1989 elections. But in the rapidly-changing environment of the last years of the USSR, it was not long before journalists were knocked off their lofty pedestals.

---

**THE DEATH OF THE USSR AND THE ONSET OF MATERIAL CRISIS**

My first concern is to not end up being *Izvestia*’s last editor-in-chief.

— Oleg Golembiovsky, March 1992

In August 1991, Communist Party stalwarts, terrified by the economic crisis into which the regime was sinking and by the increasing calls for an end to one-party rule, staged the final revolt of the Soviet old guard. Their blundering coup attempt marked one of the shining moments in Russian journalism — for some newspapers at least. (The showdown between supporters and opponents of the coup at *Izvestia*, described in the case-study, was only the most dramatic example.) For a time, the failed coup and the subsequent quick collapse of the USSR into its constituent republics seemed to portend a new era of press independence and prosperity. This proved illusory. Materially-stable independence, it transpired, was easier to attain than to preserve.

The question in the wake of the collapse of the USSR was: who owned the country and its component institutions, the press included? The Communist Party had claimed nearly all property in the Soviet Union, and monopolized political power as well. The latter vacuum Boris Yeltsin and his cohorts were quick to fill. At the most general level of property ownership, the new regime engaged in a round of “privatization” that bore comparisons with the *piñata* of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, but with much richer spoils. The *nomenklatura* did its about-face and emerged as the new “private” owning class, though their relationship with the state remained intimate.

---

The solution found for the Russian press seemed promising at the outset. Ownership of the newspaper's "intellectual structures" was transferred to the staff of the institutions themselves. Each journalist, editor, or other staffer received shares (aksty) in the enterprise. "The amount of stock you got depended on your experience," said Dmitry Babich, then a young journalist at Komsomolskaya Pravda. "So if you had worked in the newspaper for twenty years, you got five or six times more stock than someone like me, who had worked there for two or three years. I got just four aksty ..." The effect of this arrangement, however, was perhaps — or perhaps not — the opposite of what the Yeltsin regime had intended. The disproportionate weighting of shares towards more veteran staff bolstered the power of the conservative old guard within these institutions — just as the power of the nomenklatura had been buttressed, indeed extended, by the wider process of privatization. "This is the irony," said Babich. "Privatization, which was supposed to empower people and give them some kind of control over the enterprise, in reality led to this situation where the people who were appointed to their posts in the last years of communism ... got a tremendous amount of property." The result was that they "stayed on longer than they should have." The transition process within the press was thus more difficult and protracted than it might otherwise have been. At Komsomolskaya Pravda, a conservative bloc formed which, when the search for outside investment became an economic necessity, turned to one of the most conservative and old-style of the "new" corporations, Gazprom. The dominant bloc at KP, according to Babich, was composed of

old, ineffectual people who didn't want to do anything dramatic, just wanted to live a decent life until the end of their term, and then — après leur le déluge. ... They were not very professional. They wanted to sit it out. They were old, they were from Komsomol, and they wanted a nice life.

Still, the most interesting and significant aspect of this first post-Soviet model of press ownership and operation was the new prominence it gave to the "journalistic collective" at individual newspapers, and the blurring of divisions between editorial and managerial functions. The collectives had always existed. But as with any other Soviet institution, they served primarily as a means of transmission for party directives and the broader ideology of communism. Now, with their members turned individual shareholders in the enterprise, their role assumed pre-eminence. Collective members elected their own editors-in-chief, which was how Oleg Golembiofsky seized power at Izvestia from Nikolai Yefimov in 1991. But in part because of the disproportionate power
still held by Soviet-era veterans, the collectives rarely acted collectively. Ivan Zassoursky, formerly of Nezavisimiy Gazeta, referred to the body as "a shapeless mass of people who can't govern the newspaper, but who can, in moments of crisis, be approached. It's like a democracy," Zassoursky said. "You can lobby them to make the right decision, or the wrong decision, or whatever. But if you have enough power, will, or money, you can always buy things back."

There was, in fact, a growing vacuum evident at the managerial level. "In 1991," said chief editor Oleg Golembiovsky of Izvestia, "newspapers weren't ready to handle their independent status. They had never had to deal with finance and management issues, because everything was taken care of by the government and the Communist Party." As such, figures like Golembiovsky acquired a standing that resembles the Latin American institution of the newspaper "director" who involves himself or herself in both managerial and editorial sides of the operation. The result, in the appraisal of MSU's Andrei Richter, was "a very unique case where journalists handled both the editorial and business side of the newspaper."

It is possible that this first post-Soviet model of the press would have been able to find its feet, had it not been followed soon after by the onset of a material crisis unprecedented in the history of the Russian press. "Even before" the reforms were introduced, according to Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program, "editing a magazine meant looking for money all the time, lobbying the government for subsidies, sub-letting office space at commercial rates when you were getting it before for free, various types of hidden advertising. It was really rather boring, always looking for money and struggling against inflation." But difficulty and inconvenience gave way to full-blown crisis with the so-called "Gaidar reforms": the market-oriented economic

---

20 Androunas puts it pithily: "Collective newspapers' cannot be more efficient than the collective farms ..." Androunas, Soviet Media in Transition, p. 48.

21 Richter, like many other commentators, found the arrangement deeply unsatisfactory. "It's like a military regime, you know, when the generals want to run both the army and the country. And military regimes typically fail at economics. So probably there'll be the same consequence with the journalists: they will fail in the economics of the newspaper, and have to cede the economic powers to the civilians, so to speak. To the economists." In this case, the "civilians" proved to be corporations whose ambitions for the press often offered little room for professional manoeuvre.

22 I do not mean by this that Russian newspapers were never produced under more arduous conditions (e.g., during the civil war or the world wars); but that the "establishment" press was always assured access to what state resources were available. The crisis of the post-Soviet era, and newspapers' quest for private sponsorship, are without precedent.
measures introduced by Boris Yeltsin’s Prime Minister, Yegor Gaidar, in January 1992. The policy “had a staggering impact on Russian newspapers,” writes Frances Foster:

With the lifting of price controls, the cost of newsprint alone rose from 300 rubles per ton to 13,000 rubles per ton. *Izvestia* reported an increase in overall production expenses of as much as 200 times previous charges. ... *Izvestia* in the first quarter alone suffered a 400 million ruble loss from subscriptions. By July the situation had deteriorated to the point that *Izvestia* was actually subsidising its subscribers in the amount of more than two rubles per issue.²³

The impact of the economic reforms on press functioning extended beyond the spiralling prices of basic inputs and services. The reforms annihilated the savings of millions of Russians overnight, and bit deeply into the discretionary spending of tens of millions of others. “The newspapers themselves became very costly,” said Andrei Richter, “and not many people could afford to buy them; so circulations dropped for that reason.” “Dropped” is putting it mildly. Twenty Russian newspapers folded in a single month (January 1992). Looking back in late 1997, Vitaly Korotich, former editor of *Ogonyok*, cited a decline in “the total circulation of Russian newspapers and journals” from 220 million copies before the economic crunch, to “20.8 million copies in the centre and 22 million in the regions.”²⁴ *Trud*, the trade union daily “that had the highest circulation of any newspaper in the former USSR at 22 million,” had fallen to 1.2 million by mid-1994.²⁵ *Izvestia* fell from approximately 12.5 million copies in 1990 to 600,000 in late 1996, “a decline of 95 percent.”²⁶

The sudden rise in the price of newspapers drove many consumers back (or exclusively) into the arms of broadcast media – always more cost-efficient in underdeveloped and poverty-stricken environments. It also prompted a “turning inwards” on the part of the population. We will see further in Chapter 6 that material scarcity tends to spawn political disengagement and a preoccupation with daily survival. This was certainly the case in post-1992 Russia. “The political apathy of the population in general, and disillusionment with politics and politicians” began to erode not only press circulation but the heroic model of journalism that prevailed between 1988

²³Foster, “*Izvestia* as a Mirror ...,” p. 685.
²⁴Korotich, “The High Cost of a ‘Free’ Press.”
Table 5.1
CIRCULATION OF RUSSIAN NEWSPAPERS, 1997

[Note: Figures supplied by newspapers themselves (no independent audits)]
Source: The Economist, 20 September 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argumenty i Fakty*</td>
<td>3,100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komsomokskaya Pravda</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trud</td>
<td>1,250,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moskovsky Komsomolets</td>
<td>800,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Izvestia</td>
<td>531,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rossiiskaya Gazeta</td>
<td>530,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moskovsky Novosti*</td>
<td>139,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selskaya Zhizn</td>
<td>102,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kommersant Daily</td>
<td>100,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pravda</td>
<td>60,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nezavisimiy Gazeta</td>
<td>55,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svoednya</td>
<td>51,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Weekly publication

and 1992. So claimed Andrei Richter, adding: “These trends resulted in the decreased popularity of journalism as a profession, a reduced trust of journalists, and less audience interest.”

Part of this growing distrust derived from an interim institution, which still survives, called the dejinta, or “ordered article.” It is similar to the gacetilla in Mexico (Chapter 1): reporters accept commissions from political or corporate clients in order to supplement their low wages. The practice established deep roots within the press, and bolstered public perceptions that

27 Dejinta derives from dejinty, Russian slang for “jeans”: a reference to the de facto currency of many black-market deals conducted in Soviet times.
journalists were limited by their role as paid publicists for shadowy new sponsors. But while the dzhintsa could be significant as a supplementary income source for individual journalists and editors, it was a fragile foundation for medium- or longer-term institutional functioning. If sponsorship was no longer to be provided by the state on the exceedingly generous terms of 1988-1992, and if “civil society” was no longer the buttress of press independence (not to mention professional self-image) that it had once been, where could newspapers turn as material crisis threatened to destroy them? The choices were limited. Newspapers would have to seek sponsorship from the Yeltsin regime; or they would have to approach the new “private” corporations that at times seemed inseparable from the regime (and vice-versa). Neither prospect offered much potential for the kind of far-reaching independence that had seemed possible during the “golden age.” But neither would newspapers adopt quite the lickspittle posture towards their new sponsors that they had towards the all-powerful Communist Party. It is to the intricate interplay of mobilizing and professional concerns in the era of semi-democracy and market economy that we turn next.

**PRESS AND REGIME IN THE POST-SOVET ERA**

The Russian state consists of a few shallowly rooted institutions — a presidency, a parliament, a central bank and so on — which have yet to earn public trust, and which are dwarfed by an impenetrable and antique hinterland of cynicism, incompetence, racketeering and bureaucratic dead-weight. Weak and corrupt government means that Russia has no rule of law. There is no local investment, only capital flight. Manufacturing industry and agriculture are dying, though commerce survives. Public services are minimal, often criminal. There are pockets of brilliance and generosity to be found, but only amid a wasteland of misery and poverty, ugliness and pollution, created partly by the builders of communism, partly by its collapse.

— *The Economist* 29

28 The pace of events in post-Soviet Russia sometimes militates against stability in the patron-client relations underpinning the system. Not only is the mobility of journalists greater than under the Soviets, but the sponsor of a given publication may change overnight. In such cases, further entrepreneurial effort may be called for. A journalist can act as a broker for old patrons seeking new clients, according to Boris Kagarlitsky: “What the journalists do is, they continue to work with the same clients [i.e., patrons], but this time as intermediaries. So somebody who works for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* calls the guy who works for *Pravda Pyat*, the new private communist paper, which is next door. They say, ‘Guys, you know, I have a client who wants something to be printed, for such-and-such money. But my paper can’t do it. Can you do it, and give me my ten percent of the payment?’ So they switch it to *Pravda*; it’s published there; and everybody gets his little share. That’s how the whole thing works.”

Could we imagine that we would live to see the day when there wouldn't be enough paper for Pravda ...?
— G.N. Vachnadze

If President Boris Yeltsin is the most mercurial leader of those discussed in this book, the regime he headed after 1991 is likewise one of the hardest to pin down. Some comparisons, though, can be drawn with the other case-study countries. As with the unexpected collapse of the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, the scale and suddenness of the post-Soviet transformations caught most participants by surprise. This precipitated similar processes of devolution and— as noted— parallel if not comparable abuses. Both transitions left the former ruling party as the main opposition and most coherent political force: the Communist Party scored 40.3 percent of the vote in the Russian presidential elections of 1996; the Sandinista Front, 38 percent in the presidential elections held in Nicaragua that same year. In both countries, moreover, the transitional regimes were exceedingly permeable. The Chamorro government in Nicaragua was never more than a cobbled-together anti-Sandinista coalition, and it quickly collapsed into its squabbling parts. The Sandinistas continued to exercise a de facto veto over certain areas of government policy; so did international capital in the form of the International Monetary Fund, and U.S. foreign policy more generally. The family politics that had long been the Nicaraguan norm reasserted themselves to provide a lubricant for the squeaky wheels of the transition process. In post-Soviet Russia, the constitutional and actual powers accruing to the executive went some distance towards countering centrifugal forces and muting the power of the communist opposition. But a return to previous ruling practices and institutions was also evident. Boris Kagarlitsky spoke only partly metaphorically when he described post-Soviet power as characterized by a revival of feudal, even clan-type institutions:

We get a government which is not a coalition of political forces, but is very much a coalition in the sense that it's a kind of council of main lords and notables in the country. ... The point is that you have to be in the system, because there they make economic decisions based on the political position of yourself of your client. And just as when you get a council

30Vachnadze, Secrets of Journalism in Russia, p. 89.

In both countries as well, the forces of the state-turned-opposition were important determinants of at least some transitional press functioning: the Sandinista Front, obviously, in the case of Barricada; the Communist Party, as the dominant bloc in the Russian parliament, making its play for Izvestia from March to October 1992.
of feudal lords, it's not just one-person, one-vote. In a feudal council, the vote of, say, the lord of this place will be much more important than the lord of some tiny little shire.\textsuperscript{32}

One thing most of these actors have in common is a past existence as members of the nomenklatura (Boris Yeltsin himself sat on the Soviet politburo). Their experience of the press is as a mobilizing tool. Andrei Richter described the mindset this way:

Yeltsin is the head of the executive branch. To some extent, he and his close advisors are basically those who grew up during the years of the old regime. And during the old regime, those who had power viewed the mass media as their instrument to form public opinion.

That means that while, okay, they have dropped their communist dress and crossed the bridge to the new world, they still view the press as an instrument they can use — for good purposes, of course. And therefore, they are very irritated when they see something which they don't like in the press or on television, and they try to correct the mistakes of the press.

In doing so, they sometimes display a rude and arrogant and unlawful [attitude].

Let us examine, first, the diverse means by which the executive branch, and a range of non-regime forces, has sought to discipline and direct the post-Soviet press in this time-honoured fashion.

Direct subsidies, and the preferential granting of same, are a standard means of co-opting the press worldwide; and they have been a feature of the post-Soviet system as of its predecessor.\textsuperscript{33}

In official guise, the post-Soviet round of subsidies began on 20 February 1992, when Boris Yeltsin introduced the Decree On Additional Measures of Legal and Economic Protection for the Periodical Press and State Publishing. As Frances Foster summarizes it, this decree specifically targeted the dual threat identified by the mass media: continued government monopolization of all major publication services and new price liberalization policies. Most notably, it established a mandatory price-controlled quota for newsprint production, guaranteed state compensation of state communications enterprises to reduce delivery and distribution costs, called for rapid demonopolization of distribution networks, and authorized subsidies to Russian publications.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} There are similarities here to the institutionalized role of tribal notables (and, less officially, system-friendly Islamist leaders) in the Jordanian regime (see Chapter 4). As in Jordan, too, domestic and international capital exert a powerful influence over government policy; domestic business interests enjoyed institutionalized representation through mechanisms like the professional associations in Jordan and Yeltsin's "security council" in Russia. The key differences in Russia are the constant flux of the arrangements — reflecting a fully-fledged and turbulent transition, as compared to Jordan's limited liberalization — and the much greater size and wealth of the country. In Russia there are many more spoils to fight over, and geographical as well as political impediments to centralized control.

\textsuperscript{33} Said Andrei Richter: "The policy of subsidies and tax relief is to a very large extent left to the discretion of the state authorities. By supporting certain newspapers, or ceasing to support other newspapers; by freezing bank accounts or redirecting the money or postponing the payments, they can punish the chief editor and make him understand that he's printing the wrong stories and should change his policies."

\textsuperscript{34} Foster, "Izvestia as a Mirror ...", p. 720.
The decree itself “was legally and practically unenforceable ... [and] failed to recognize the severe budget constraints of the Russian government,” as Foster also notes. But it was not the first, or the only subsequent, route by which the regime could funnel funds to help newspapers cope with the crisis engendered by the reforms. Direct subsidies had flowed from Yeltsin’s Press Ministry from December 1991.35

Because they are such an obvious instrument to manipulate press functioning, the Russian subsidies (and the market reforms that necessitated them) have tended to be presented as a Machiavellian attempt by the Yeltsin regime to reassert central control over the press. There is more to the policy, however. One must recognize that the newspapers themselves petitioned the regime, beginning in early 1992, for subsidies that could only reduce their hard-won independence. Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program took a particularly jaundiced view of the newspapers’ role, calling the press “the first in the chain of moguls that asked for special subsidies, special treatment, privileges for themselves. They paved the way for state collective farms, the defence lobby, et cetera.” But such subsidies were crucial in allowing a number of major papers to survive long enough to seek more stable sponsorship – mostly from para-statal corporations and the urban business class, including individual media moguls. With this “handoff” accomplished, regime subsidies faded as a significant feature of the Moscow and St. Petersburg media, although they remained a preferred instrument of authorities at the regional level. Only once, up to the time of writing, did they stage a resurgence – at the time of the 1996 presidential elections, when the Yeltsin regime lavished tens of millions of dollars in advertising revenue and direct-to-pocket cash payments to Russia’s press. Again, many newspapers competed eagerly for the munificence. Here, indisputably, the result was virtually-unqualified support for the donor, regardless of the longer-term damage done to the professional reputation of the press.

The 1996 elections deserve special attention, for they reveal much about the material and ideological harmony of interests that made most Russian papers close ranks around Yeltsin’s regime in a time of crisis. As John Murray’s examination of election coverage in Izvestia suggests (see the case study), the critical tenor that the mainstream press had adopted during the Chechen war of 1994-95 went out the window when the fundamentals of the new system seemed at stake.36 At the

36 Murray wrote scathingly that “The pretensions to objectivity, the declared aspirations to achieve high
most general level, the Yeltsin regime — certainly as against its communist competitor — was seen as the guarantor of a system that had enabled a daily newspapers to secure a precarious financial stability and varying degrees of professional independence. Accordingly, they had “no problem serving the vested interest that maintain[ed] the situation in which they keep their jobs,” said Alexei Pankin. “That’s the reason why they supported Yeltsin. Because he’s the guy who pronounces all the right words, but in reality helps the system work: the give-and-take between the authorities, business interests, and the press; the negotiating and lobbying.” Other respondents also pointed to a mixture of material and normative considerations, though with the former predominating:

Of course [journalists] were afraid for the freedom of the press; they were scared they wouldn’t earn as much money as they can now. Because if the press is not free it’s not an industry anymore, and there wouldn’t be as many places to work. (Ivan Zassoursky)

It was self-interested on two counts. One was: “How can I make the most money out of it?” ... For the independent [broadcast] stations outside Moscow and St. Petersburg, it was just a windfall. They made more in that month than they made in the rest of the year. ... The second thing was self-interest in the sense that a lot of media, if we [Internews] said to them, “How about trying to make sure that everybody has equal air time, that the communists and capitalists and socialists all get equal coverage in the news?” they would say: “You’ve got to understand. Our existence is at stake here. If the wrong guys get elected, we get closed down.” They would be perfectly open about it. (Eric Johnson)

One of the reasons this craven media stance dismayed so many observers was the brave Chechen coverage that had so recently preceded it. This earlier high point receives slightly greater attention later in the chapter, in the context of press professionalization; the more effective “watchdog” role it symbolized is equally part of the story of post-Soviet media. Independent NTV, for example, “became famous because of its independent stand on the Chechen war,” said Yassan Zassoursky. “They uncovered the crimes, they criticized Mr. Yeltsin, Mr. Chernomyrdin, everybody. And suddenly, in 1996, during the elections, everything changes.”

Press-regime relations in post-Soviet Russia were prone to these erratic twists and turns, the more so once para-statal corporations entered the scene in force in 1993-94. But the boom-and-standards, and the sanctimonious protestations at outside interference characteristic of the ‘democratic’ media are hard to take seriously in the light of their voluntary betrayal during the election campaign of the most basic of journalistic ethics.” John Murray, “No Truth in the News? Coverage by Izvestia of the 1996 Presidential Elections” (draft journal article, privately supplied).

Laura Belin also notes that “NTV earned a reputation for bold coverage during the Chechen war and was valued for its credibility with viewers. Before the [1996 election] campaign, NTV wore its opposition to the authorities as a badge of honor.” Belin, “Owners Attracted by Power of Media,” in “Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media” <http://www.rferl.org/nca/special/rumediapaper/owners.html>.
bust cycle disguised deeper continuities in press dependence upon the regime, and manipulation of that dependence by the regime (even more so at the regional and municipal levels). The “privatization” process that saw entire industries and vast swathes of real estate sold for a song did not affect the state’s monopoly in several areas critical for press functioning: printing; newsprint manufacturing and distribution; tax collection; publication-related distribution and transportation (both departments of the Ministry of Communication); and the state postal services (especially vital in a country where mail-order subscriptions typically outnumber newsstand sales by four to one). The federal government also shares with its local counterparts responsibility for licensing media enterprises and accrediting the journalists who work in them.

Of these potential instruments, Alexei Pankin cited the “state monopoly on printing facilities” as “the main problem,” at least throughout the Russian regions. “The cost of printing is just exorbitant. What is even worse is that, as with every monopoly, the state printing plants are basically not interested in reforming themselves. They pass the costs of their inefficiency onto the papers.” Of at least equal concern is the possibilities for political manipulation that the monopoly creates, according to Eric Johnson:

When I say that printing presses are very expensive, I have in mind not so much that it costs a lot to set up your own, but that the only one around is the government printing press: unlike TV transmitters, setting up your own is practically impossible. Therefore, you have to use the government one, and the problem is not so much that it’s expensive, although it is expensive; the problem is that it’s politically-controlled.

It is no coincidence that the structure of press-regime relations at the level of material functioning, subsidies and slush-funds included, bears a strong resemblance to the state’s armoury in underdeveloped media systems (Chapter 1). The closeness of the similarity attests to the near-catastrophic dislocation that accompanied the death of the USSR. Living conditions and infrastructure outside the largest cities (and often there as well) have fallen to Third World levels. The unprecedented demographic collapse is the most disturbing evidence of the trend; but there is no shortage of examples, either, from post-Soviet press functioning. Rowland Lorimer offers this instructive vignette about postal delivery in the new Russia:

Getting a paper to a reader is also a problem. The postal system, while not totally collapsed, barely grinds along. Morning papers that, prior to perestroika, were available before setting off for work now arrive sometime during the day. They are placed in apartment mailboxes. But many mailboxes have been vandalized and no one is in charge of fixing them any more.
So if your paper is still in your box when you come home from work, you are either lucky or you know that no one else wants it.\footnote{Lorimer, “What’s the News in Russia?,” p. 6. See also the discussion of the “voodoo economics” involved in postal subscriptions in Chapter 6.}

Another typical element of media underdevelopment is the scarcity of advertising revenue. The western experience suggests that sponsorship by diffuse corporate capital, in the form of advertising, served as an important means by which the press extricated itself from dependence on regimes or other political authorities. Russia has seen a transformation in the direction of corporate sponsorship, but in the form of straightforward ownership and direct subsidy, often accompanied by traumatic internal upheavals at the institutions in question. (The ramifications for press independence and professionalism are explored at length below.) The material dislocation of the post-Soviet economy, and the nascent character of many of the enterprises that have sprung up in the last half-decade, means that even the richer environments of Moscow and St. Petersburg cannot support the huge array of publications struggling for revenue. Apart from economic or political paroxysms, like the brief flurry of “pyramid schemes” in 1993-94\footnote{Andrei Richter: “There was an advertising boom around 1994 with all of these mainly pyramid schemes advertising themselves. They started collapsing, and with them this type of market collapsed.”} or the Yeltsin campaign’s election-related expenditures in 1996, there is nowhere near enough “adspend” to go around. “The market here in Moscow, where there’s lots of money and advertising, is overcrowded,” said Alexei Pankin. “There are twelve quality dailies here, and that just destroys any possibility of their living by advertising, because they’re robbing each other.” The difficulty of accessing ad revenue is compounded by the unfamiliarity many companies have with the practice:

Russian companies do not normally budget some part of their income for advertising. It doesn’t work that way. Normally, it’s like this: a Russian company has a certain budget, which it doesn’t know how to spend. First you build a building, then you get a nice secretary with long legs, then you probably place an ad somewhere. (Tigran Vardanian of Maxima Advertising)
The press also suffers from the shoddy quality of the state’s antiquated printing facilities, and from competition by increasingly-dominant broadcast media and “knock-and-drop” publications. (These latter, as in South Africa, are published weekly, monthly, or irregularly, and delivered free to people’s doors.) The result is that “Most Russian newspapers have less than 40 percent advertising,” according to Victor Davidoff — barely two-thirds of the minimum considered sustainable in western press systems. In fact, one of the more recent pieces of Russian tax legislation “provides for very heavy tax on advertising revenues if a newspaper contains more than 40 percent advertisements.”

The financially precarious situation in which the struggle for ad revenue leaves most newspapers encourages them to avoid, as far as possible, taxes on their operations. This is in fact necessary for all enterprises of note in the newly-underdeveloped Russia: the plethora of old and new tax regulations would drive companies into bankruptcy if all were abided by. The regime’s administrative weakness means that these regulations are lackadaisically and inconsistently enforced, and usually easy to evade — but only so long as the regime chooses not to turn its limited capacities of vigilance on a particular institution or enterprise. By simply holding this tool in reserve, the regime can use it to rein in would-be recalcitrants among the press. The regime “won’t have to do

---

40 Consider the perspective of advertising account manager Tigran Vardanian: “Black-and-white copy is the nightmare of advertising agencies. There’s no good printing whatsoever. You will never be able to show me a newspaper of a quality where I can see the picture. I can’t see a dark blot there. The advertiser comes to me and says, ‘Hey, is this supposed to be my ad?’ ‘Yeah.’ ‘Where’s the car?’ I say, ‘You don’t see it?’ He says, ‘No, I don’t see it, I see a black blot.’ ‘Well, maybe you have to see the psychiatrist, then.’ … Another good example: part of a publication, of a print-run, can come out in a good way, another part in a bad way. The problem is that normally the client, buying from a kiosk, gets a copy from the bad part of the run. And the publication delivers to us [a copy from] the good part. So a client calls me, for instance — this is a real story — and says, ‘Have you seen my ad in Kommersant Daily?’ I say, ‘Not yet what’s up?’ He says, ‘I can’t see my cat!’ I go, ‘Wait a second, I’ll grab the newspaper.’ I do, and I see what is, for black-and-white copy, a pretty nice-looking ad. I say, ‘No, mine is fine.’ He says, ‘Mine is bad!’ … I bring him mine, and he says, ‘Well, yeah, that probably means I had a bad copy.’ Then I find out about 95 percent of the circulation is like his, and five percent is like mine. … The worst problem is that the publication’s representative … claims that it’s not his fault … He says, ‘You should speak to the printing house I use.’ I say, ‘Maybe you should speak to them.’ ‘Yeah, I can turn to them on a regular basis, but they still deliver bad quality.’ ‘Maybe you should change the printing house.’ He says, ‘No, that’s not possible, because there’s only a few in Russia that can provide me with anything at all for a daily press.’”

41 On the “knock-and-drops” (the term is drawn from the South Africa case study, where such publications have similarly drawn “ads spend” away from the daily press), see the comments of Victor Davidoff: “The Russian press is suffering a lot from newspapers given away for free and put in people’s mailboxes. These newspapers get a lot of advertising money, and those that are smart include some information and basic news. This basic news satisfies, let’s say, the news demands of 50 percent of the population.”

anything illegal," Dmitry Babich stresses; "what [it] can do is simply not notice some of the taxes you owe. And if it remembers ... you will lose everything in two days.”

In these diverse ways, the “meta-environmental variable” of underdevelopment and material scarcity can be seen to drive the press into the arms of the regime, and at the same time to vitiate the capacity of the regime to deploy its authority and tools of control effectively. A nearly-ubiquitous feature of underdeveloped systems is the limited range and power of central authorities vis-à-vis other power contenders, whether regional, municipal, corporate, or criminal. The difficulty of central control is exacerbated by the sheer scale on which such a grip has to be exercised in what is (and in recent centuries always has been) the largest country in the world. We turn now to consider the role of the most important of these actors.

Non-Regime Actors

Regional Governments

Though the focus of this chapter is on Moscow-based newspapers with a national reach, it should be remembered that a diverse regional press still exists in Russia. Its posture towards regional authorities has been more reliably subservient in the post-Soviet era than its counterparts in Moscow and St. Petersburg. This is not surprising, in light of the much greater material crisis in the regions than in the urban heartland; the reduced number of possible sponsors to court and play off against one another; the paucity of advertising revenue and developed corporate enterprise; and the lack of even remote alternatives in the fields of production and distribution. In addition, there is often a parochial character to the publications themselves. Under the USSR, their designated role

---

43For example, some of the glossier and better-funded Russian monthlies, based in Moscow and St. Petersburg, have chosen to print outside the country, usually in Finland. The quality of paper stock, printing, and transportation provided by the foreign firm tends to be beyond anything available nationally. This option is not open to any regional publication, to my knowledge.
was to supplement the national press with local news and propaganda. According to Dmitry Soshin of Reuters:

I think the papers in the small towns are really cut off from life outside. All the best local journalists are trying to escape to Moscow or St. Petersburg. I think they're more suppressed by local authorities, and are just more "provincial." This is a very international term: you've got provincial thinking and cosmopolitan thinking. In the cities with long intellectual traditions, you've got very independent papers. Where there's a flow and exchange of information, the papers will be very good. If it's a small town, cut off and ruled by a bunch of ex-mafia people, then you wouldn't expect a nice local paper to exist.

This evaluation may underestimate the diversity of the regional press. But the basic depiction of dependence seems accurate. "In the provinces, ... the majority of newspapers rely on subsidies from the federal and local budgets," said Andrei Richter, adding frankly: "Most of the newspapers depend on those subsidies, and therefore they follow the policies of local governments and local administrations." Laura Belin provides a vivid recent example of how this "servility" may be manifested in practice:

... In the October 1997 gubernatorial election in Orel Oblast ... supporters of the incumbent governor, Yegor Stroev, who is also speaker of the Russian Federation Council, in effect staged a sham election. Stroev's only competitor, the obscure head of a collective farm, was barely visible on the campaign trail and told journalists that she hoped Stroev would win the election. Two potential candidates were excluded from the race by the regional electoral commission. Local media neither publicized their cause nor reported on foot-dragging by the Orel Oblast Court, which deprived the would-be candidates of enough time to appeal to the Russian Supreme Court. Instead, local media printed and broadcast innumerable appeals to vote for Stroev, while there was little media discussion of economic problems facing the oblast. In the end, Stroev was re-elected with more than 95 percent of the vote. ... By offering almost exclusively favourable coverage of a campaign that offered voters no real alternative, the Orel media demonstrated that they place the interests of the authorities above those of their consumers.

"Said Victor Davidoff, who has travelled extensively in the regions through his work with Globus Press Syndicate: “I think that very often, newspapers get this strange idea that they don't have to cover anything but local events. I think it derives from the old model of communist times, when a family was subscribing to two newspapers, a local newspaper and a central, Moscow newspaper. Right now, they subscribe to only one newspaper, usually a local one.”

Laura Belin's assessment is similar: "The media in the Russian regions are as a rule more restricted than Moscow-based media outlets. ... Political elites keep journalists largely subservient through 'carrots' (offering loyal journalists subsidies and access to high officials) or 'sticks' (such as libel lawsuits or sending tax inspectors to investigate the owners of 'inconvenient' media outlets). ... Journalists have faced physical intimidation from the authorities in some regions, including the Republic of Tatarstan and Primorsky Krai. The media environment in some areas, such as Kabardino-Balkaria in the North Caucasus, has been compared to that found in the extremely restrictive Central Asian regimes." Belin, "Regional Media Even Less Free," in "Politicalization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media" <http://www.rferl.org/ nca/special/rumediapaper/regional.html>.

"Belin, "Regional Media Even Less Free."
The idea of securing greater independence — from political authorities, at least — through greater advertising revenue and expanding constituencies is limited, not only by the scarcity of such revenue (especially in the regions), but by the mindset still prevailing at institutions long used to a symbiotic relationship with authority. Victor Davidoff of the Globus Press Syndicate recalled speaking

to the editor and publisher of a small town in Smolenski oblast. And he was saying that his readership is mostly pensioners: they like this newspaper and subscribe to it. However, because they’re pensioners, of course there’s not so much advertising. I looked at this newspaper, and really all they had there was [news] of interest to pensioners. Not a single person who is younger than fifty would read a newspaper of this kind. I think this is an example of how editorial policy affects the financial status of the newspaper. If they would include more information of interest to young readers, more entertainment; if they would produce some business information; then they might change their readership and attract more advertising.

Not that there is much to attract. The “collapse” of the still-nascent Russian advertising market in 1994, was “especially felt in the regions,” according to Andrei Richter. The struggle for ad revenue in Moscow and St. Petersburg is simply not worth engaging in for thousands of regionally- and locally-targeted publications. This is how Victor Davidoff explains the otherwise curious phenomenon of some regional newspapers having “advertising rates that are either incredibly low or incredibly high. The reason is very simple: they don’t care about [ad revenue], because most of the income they get is in the form of subsidies from local governments.”

If subsidies are the main “carrot” that regional authorities can command, there is also no shortage of sticks. These may be comparatively subtle, such as the denial of access to sources described by Victor Davidoff: “In the regions, everything that’s published, the authorities scan it and react to it. Very often it’s enough for a newspaper just to put one line of negative remarks, and after that their correspondent won’t be invited to a governor’s press conference. That happens very often.” More concerted strategies may involve stripping press institutions of local licenses or office space, and impounding material plant.

**Municipal Authorities**

For the most part, the activities of municipal authorities can be viewed in tandem with those of the regions. There is one exception, though, related to the pre-eminence that Moscow holds in

---

47Some regional and local governments (among them Ulyanovsk and Samara) are now refusing registration to
Russian economic and political life. "In terms of a Wallerstein-type analysis of the centre and periphery, Moscow represents the centre and exploits the periphery," said Boris Kagarlitsky, citing statistics showing that 80 percent of Russian capital was concentrated in - the Russian capital.

"And if you take the internal structure of the Moscow economy," Kagarlitsky added, "the main entrepreneur in the city is the municipal government. It owns almost everything, or a share of almost everything." Atop this structure, at the time of writing, sits Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. He is widely believed to hold presidential ambitions for the year 2000, and thus to be bent on using the mayor's office as a springboard to national power. Luzhkov gave every indication that he had a vested interest in controlling mass media within his domain. His rising power turned once-skeptical Moscow dailies into sycophantic publicists, as Dmitry Babich described it:

In 1990, when no-one owned the newspapers and they actually wrote everything they wanted, ... every 17-year-old journalist would consider it his duty to call Luzhkov a thief. Everyone wrote that Luzhkov is corrupt, about all these affairs with Moscow real estate ...

And the editors encouraged the young people to do that, and sometimes did it themselves. Now these same editors are the first to kiss Luzhkov's ass! Now that he holds the power, now that he controls the money, now that they are entirely dependent on him, they're the first ones to write sickening articles about his administrative talents. ... The same people put Luzhkov on the front page, interviews with questions like, "What do you think about when you wake up in the morning?" "Oh, I think about the city." "Isn't it too difficult for you to think about such a big city?" "Well, it's true, I don't know how I survive, but still I think about it." You know ...

media organizations unless the local government is included as a co-founder or the media is registered as a municipal or regional enterprise. ... In 1995 ... some local governments began threatening to evict media organizations registered in Moscow from offices they had provided them for free or at reduced rates and to bar publications from using the local printing plant, claiming that they are not a local newspaper and ostensibly to preserve press capacity for local media. In Ulyanovsk, the Simbirsky Kurier, which refused to re-register and include the local government as a co-founder, was denied the services of the Ulyanovsk printing house, and the head of the local administration ordered state enterprises not to place advertisements in the newspaper. The Simbirsky Kurier was able to print in another city, but the result was a drop in circulation from 100,000 to 15,000 copies. ... [Moreover,] registration as a municipal enterprise gives the local state property committee (GKI) the right to examine its books and declare the newspaper bankrupt. The editor can then be fired and a new one appointed by the local property committee, which is part of the local administration. "Registration of Media," in "Media Regulation in the Russian Federation" <http://www.internews.ras.ru/report/media/part3.html>.

"Perhaps convenience plays a role here: only a short move would be required from the mayor's offices overlooking the Moscow River, to the Kremlin nearby.

Andrei Richter: "Luzhkov and the mayor's office occupy a unique position in Russian economics and politics, because of the wealth of Moscow and the opportunities of the Mayor's office to gain enormous wealth. Luzhkov obviously has presidential ambitions, and therefore he tries to control the Moscow press in order to promote his candidacy, when need be, for the Kremlin job."
Moskovsky Komsomolets, cited by many commentators as one of the most independent of the national dailies if not the most independent, still acquired the nickname Luzhkovsky Komsomolets for its determined championing of the mayor. And Luzhkov was not content to adopt an arm's-length distance from the media for appearance's sake. Rather, in the name of the Moscow city government, he amassed one of the largest media empires in Russia. The survey compiled by Laura Beilin in September 1997 depicted the municipality's recent or former involvements—through shareholdings and subsidy schemes—with Moskovsky Komsomolets, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Vechernayaga Moskva (through the Bank of Moscow), and the weekly Kuranti. Like most media players, Luzhkov was devoting himself even more energetically to the broadcast sphere. The city authority held a 67-percent share in Center TV, "which aims to become a network with nationwide broadcasting capabilities," and which also includes "a pool of Moscow cable networks." Moscow had shares in the independent TV-6, and provided unspecified "support" to the private REN-TV.

MAFIOSI

The carnage wreaked within Russian press circles by mafia violence has been most evident in the regions, where criminal elements enjoy the closest ties with the political authorities—indeed, may have become the political authorities through old-style clientelism and rigged elections. Nationwide, however, it became "a very hot issue" in Russian press circles as of 1997, in Dmitry Soshin's estimation:

Many journalists have been killed in the provinces for reporting on mafia deals. There have been dozens of journalists killed recently: investigative journalists, journalists in Moscow. Yes, the mafia is trying to control the media. They realize it's a very profitable thing. And we're now in the process of turning from the Chicago kind of capitalism into something smarter. These guys are now switching from drugs and oil to something more legitimate. Clearly, there were cases in the provinces where the mafia tried to curb the media; also on the individual level, they tried to punish and suppress journalists who were writing about the mafia.

50Belin, "Politicization and Self-Censorship," endnote 31 <http://www.rferl.org/nca/special/ rumediapaper/endnotes.html>. She notes that the chief editor of Moskovsky Komsomolets, Pavel Gusev, "was the city's minister of information from January 1992 to October 1997."

Soshin described the stark results: “There are journalists who are writing who are frightened by the mafia, being blackmailed; and there are an exceptional few who still do it, and risk being killed.” Organized and unorganized crime, likely including off-duty or out-of-work members of the security forces, also does “freelance” services for other actors seeking to pressure the media, such as regional authorities and corporations. Often no clear pattern of authorship is visible in the resulting crimes, but the machinations of “the Chicago kind of capitalism,” as Soshin called it, are at least a pervasive backdrop. Vitaly Korotich wrote in Ogonyok in 1997 that the battle for control of the press has become just as merciless as the battle for political power. Almost all the chief editors of major Russian papers with whom I met this summer drive only in the company of their bodyguards and some have bullet-proof automobiles. Their apprehension denotes how dangerous the profession has become; during the last several months, three directors of prominent publishing houses have been killed. ... I asked the chief editor of a major Russian paper why that paper avoids certain sensitive topics. “Ten years ago, even five years ago that kind of reporting would have been possible, but now I would be fired immediately or even killed,” he told me. Over the last four years I have consistently asked that question of many different editors and have always received the same response.

In no other case-study country studied, and in precious few others worldwide, is criminal intimidation of mass media (including assassinations of journalists and editors) so pervasive. One would have to look to the Russian “near abroad” (Central Asia, the Caucasus) and to the Latin American “narcode democracies” (Mexico and Colombia) for parallel cases. High-profile mafia-style “hits” have included Moskovsky Komsomolets reporter Dmitry Kholodov, blown up by a bomb in his office in 17 October 1994; well-known TV journalist Vladimir Listyev, shot to death in March 1995; and Vadim Biryukov, editor of a Moscow-based business publication, killed in 1996. A total of 24 journalists were killed in Russia and the CIS countries in 1996 – 130 since the breakup of the USSR. Thousands of others very likely heard warning bells whenever they sat down to address potentially sensitive subjects and personalities.

---

52Nicaragua under Somoza and South Africa during the last years of apartheid may provide a faint historical comparison.
55Reuters dispatch in Moscow Times, 19 December 1996.
To put it bluntly, there is a “Gazprom” line and a “non-Gazprom” line, which can never intersect. ... No considerations of common sense (market saturation) or calculation (moneyless propositions) can halt the continued splintering of the market for national publications. Indeed, in our country only a *putsch* can create a community newspaper.

— Yelena Rykovtseva

They [Gazprom] are interested in the publication of general information. We write very little about them. They’re always interested in political stability. And we’re a paper that already supports social peace, democracy, and social development. So we have a common understanding of things, and they [as investors] won’t need to get involved in our editorial policy.

— Vladimir Sungorkin, chair of Komsomolskaya Pravda, October 1996

The range of press-related subsidies introduced by the Yeltsin regime in the first weeks of 1992 only partially mitigated the material crisis of the market reforms, as noted. The subsidies on newsprint and printing costs were quickly eroded by new regime directives. Decree no. 1233 of January 1994, for example, sent printing costs spiralling to 500-600 percent of their levels only a month earlier. The price of a ton of paper rose from US $150 throughout most of 1992-93 to $540 in 1995. Even some of Russia’s most venerable press institutions seemed on the verge of bankruptcy. In late 1996, three of them — Pravda, Komsomolskaya Pravda, and the regime’s own mouthpiece (!), Rossiskaya Gazeta, were suspended for failing to pay their printing debts.

Advertising revenue were able to make up only part of the shortfall, and only temporarily. In March 1997, the total national market was worth between U.S. $1.5 and $1.7 billion, about a hundredth of that of the United States. Under the circumstances, with neither the regime nor diffuse capital able to provide stable sponsorship, the press turned *en masse* to the only remaining

---


option – the para-statal corporations and financial-industrial groups who were the foundations of Russia’s new quasi-capitalist economy. Not coincidentally, these actors were also eyeing the press and broadcast media with a new interest – which only increased when the press was seen to play a critical role in the 1996 presidential elections. The result of the collusion, and often the collision, between newspapers and their corporate owners was a trio of controversies, revolving around Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Komsomolskaya Pravda, and – lastly and most dramatically – Izvestia. In the process, the hegemony of the large corporations over national media was, to most observers’ eyes, confirmed.61

In many respects, the organization of the post-Soviet polity and economy around para-statal corporations was the most logical successor to state socialism. The matrix of material survival for a majority of the population revolved around industrial concerns, mostly extraction-based, that had constituted “the basic element of the state structure” in the Soviet Union, and still kept tens of millions of Russians fed, clothed, and housed – however inadequately.62 Boris Kagarlitsky compared the role of these giants to both the South Korean chaebols and American “company towns” of a century ago, citing the huge monopoly Gazprom (which supplied Europe with 88% of its natural-gas imports in 1997)63 as “a perfect example”:

Internally, it’s a standard Soviet enterprise. It’s the old Soviet gas ministry. It didn’t change its ways of operating. It has all the corporatist arrangements with the workers, with the trade unions; it’s a complete corporatist state. It doesn’t have labour mobility: if you’re in Gazprom, very much like in the large Japanese corporations, you will stay there for the rest...

---


62 This was part of a broader pattern: in the Soviet Union (as in China and other state-socialist countries), “the workplace was a service-distribution node, not only for meals, but also for housing and medical care, in a way totally unfamiliar in the West.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 115.

63 "Still most awkward partners," The Economist, 9 May 1998.
of your life. ... Gazprom provides everything from the job to the pensions. Cradle-to-grave provisions. Not necessarily good – it’s poor quality, but you do have the provisions. It’s a privatized sector of the state.

It is hardly surprising, under the circumstances, that Viktor Chernomyrdin – former head of the Soviet gas monopoly – came to be chosen prime minister under Yeltsin (and nominated again, unsuccessfully, in 1998); nor that Chernomyrdin was widely considered the “representative” of the oil and gas concerns like Gazprom and LUKoil; nor that, when those corporations began to make their power-play in the media sphere in 1994, they were concerned to see those interests – including Chernomyrdin’s political interests – defended in “their” press outlets. By late 1997, Gazprom owned 30 percent of the shares in NTV, and a controlling in the daily paper Rabochaya Tribuna. It also provided subsidies to Trud. In part owing to its own conservatism and complacency, it had been narrowly edged out by banking consortium Oneximbank in the battle for influence and control over Komsomolskaya Pravda. LUKoil, for its part, was engaged in a joint venture with Gazprom “to develop a network of 29 small, regional television stations based on the oil and gas sector network formerly existing in oil and gas-producing regions.” It had also acquired a controlling share in Izvestia through its backdoor bargain with Oneximbank in July 1997 (see the Izvestia case-study).

Banks such as Oneximbank, Obedinyionny Bank, and Menatep and Alfa Banks were also prominent players in the economy in general and the media in particular. Their para-statal character was established through intricate networks of cross-ownership and cross-pollination of directorial boards. As for the more arriviste financial-industrial groups, especially (for our purposes) Boris Berezovsky’s LogoVAZ consortium and Vladimir Gusinsky’s MOST Media, these groups likewise sought to translate their “private” capital into “public” capital through establishing close ties with the formal political system. Such involvements could be direct, as in the case of Berezovsky, who served as a member of Yeltsin’s inner cabinet or “security council” until November 1997. Or they could be indirect. In either case, press and other media acquisitions quickly came to be viewed as a vital ingredient in lubricating relations with the executive branch, as


65 As of late 1997, Berezovsky’s LogoVAZ held a controlling share in Nezavisimaya Gveta, and a stake in Ogonyk, as well as 37 percent of the shares in the independent TV-6 and a smaller stake in Russian Public Television (ORT).
well as other key power-players like Moscow Mayor Luzhkov. Dmitry Babich cited the trend as yet another “legacy of our socialist past”:

If you want to get rich, you must have good relations with the government. You can’t be entirely independent from the government. You can’t retreat to a country mansion or company headquarters and get your billions without getting government connections. You have to constantly mingle, you have to always be with Chernomyrdin or Yeltsin or some government ministers. If you relax for a moment, if you lose their trust for a moment — if, heaven forbid, you conflict with them for a moment — they will find a way to ruin you ... So you have to have a good relationship with the government. How do you do that? For better or worse, there are elections in Russia, and you have to influence public opinion. The best way to do it is through the press.66

A broad consensus, in fact, obtained among interview subjects when it came to the motives underlying the wave of corporate takeovers of media institutions between 1994 and 1997. Often implicit in respondents’ framing was the self-serving manipulation of editorial “lines” and content by the new corporate sponsors:

What most people in the papers say, and what most people would say off the record, is that really these companies are buying papers because they’ve realized they are powerful political tools. Just the fact that you own a paper, when you’re dealing with government officials, gives you power. You don’t have to use it. You don’t have to publish a whole bunch of compromising material about some politician to get them to sign the documents you need to create the right environment for your business. They just need to know that you could do that if you wanted to. ... They all realized how valuable that was, how powerful, during the 1996 presidential elections. It was after then that the real buying spree began. (Mark Whitehouse, business reporter, The Moscow Times)67

Of course they don’t expect profits. They’re looking towards the elections, especially the presidential elections. That’s why they’re really interested in Izvestia — among Russian newspapers, it probably holds first place; it’s very influential, and has a lot of power influence in the regions, not only in Moscow. ... It can express its opinion, and that’s very important for LUKoil. (Yuri Feofanov, senior law correspondent, Izvestia, and member of the Judicial Chamber on the Mass Media.)

All the major clans are trying to set up their media. And it’s really related to politics. It’s not just because they think it’s profitable. (Eric Johnson, Internews.)

66The comments of Alexander Sychev, Izvestia foreign editor, were similar: “In the West, the person who does business in newspapers and the media is more or less independent from the government. Russia doesn’t have this kind of businessman. Usually, the owners of a newspaper are bankers or oil magnates. And those businessmen are really dependent on the government. They subsist on government contracts and credits; they depend on preferential treatment from Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin, and the others.”

67In his excellent feature for The Moscow Times on “The Money Behind the News,” Whitehouse wrote: “The new shareholders usually see newspapers either as a vehicle for self-promotion or, more subtly, as a powerful tool of influence which can be called into play should the need arise.”
The reason why the banks and the people who control money invest in unprofitable newspapers is that they can influence politicians thereby. It’s kind of a paradox: from one point of view, they depend on the politicians; from the other point of view, they want to influence the politicians. (Alexander Sychev, Foreign Editor, Izvestia)

Q. How would you compate the ownership patterns in Russia with what’s been entrenched in the West?
Well, in the West, I guess it’s primarily still a business, and here it’s mainly a political instrument. (Ivan Zassoursky, Obshchaya Gazeta.)

Several subsidiary motives were also ascribed to the corporations and media magnates. Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program pointed to the role of the press and other media as a tool of intra-elite communication: “There’s kind of a special system of establishment groups sending signals to each other. They publish stuff, say, an exposé, which is taken by another group not at face value, but as a hint that they’re either declaring a war on you, or holding back – ‘We have much more information that we could release,’ et cetera.” Financial gain, though sometimes a peripheral concern, was also cited – especially for Gusinsky’s MOST Media group, which Andrei Richter cited as “one major exception” to the emphasis on “political gain”: “They want to make profits by investing in the mass media. I don’t think that Gazprom or LUKoil are particularly interested in the mass-media business.” Lastly, there was the simple fashion factor. “It’s getting quite prestigious,” Alexei Pankin said. “Every self-respecting company should be able to claim it has a newspaper or a radio station.” “This guy bought a paper, so I have to buy one,” added Dmitry Soshin.

This account of corporate motivations should not pass, however, without an important point being reiterated: that most newspapers played a key role in courting corporate investment, viewing it as the most reliable replacement for the state sponsorship they had once enjoyed. According to Mark Whitehouse: “The question for editors has not been so much one of complete independence, but of: Who’s the best person to get into bed with?” Ivan Zassoursky made a forceful case for viewing the newspapers as active agents in the relationship – sometimes, as with Izvestia in Summer 1997, as participants in their own undoing:

68In a feature article on “The First 5 Years of the New Russian Press,” Zassoursky wrote: “For the people who controlled the process of concentration in the Russian press, the possibility of influencing public opinion was often sufficient cause to invest in one enterprise or another. ... Political influence gave them access to the distribution of resources (privatization) on such a scale that by comparison, the modest profits to be made from the Russian mass media seemed unimportant.” Zassoursky, “The First 5 Years ...”

69“In Russia there is a saying: ‘If you want to live with the wolves, you should howl like the wolves’” (Yassan Zassoursky).
You shouldn’t mess around with abstract words like censorship, government, politics, press, mass media. You should look into the situation, and the situation is this. Izvestia is incapable of supporting itself through advertisements and making profits. So that’s why, although it’s a respectable and stable publication, it’s still very weak in a commercial sense. That’s why they look for political investment. It’s not these vicious political investors, who like hungry wolves are crowding around Izvestia and trying to eat it. It’s Izvestia who are looking for investment, for an inflow of politicized capital...

Many of the problems that had arisen between corporations and newspapers Zassoursky blamed on the naiveté of the newspapers themselves – again attesting to the enduring power of the Soviet model of media functioning. “The editors-in-chief are still not used to having an investor. They’re not used to negotiating and making compromises. They used to have one investor, the Communist Party, the communist state. From the flow of events, they found out it was a bad investor. ... But you can’t live without an investor, if you’re promoting a creative project, you want to do something, [and] you don’t have money.”

The heavy-handed manipulation of the media through to 1997 certainly engendered considerable cynicism among the population. “Investigative reporting in particular is likely to be viewed as ‘commissioned’ by financial backers,” wrote Laura Belin. “Newspaper circulation rates have, not surprisingly, continued to decline, as there is little interest in reading [the] thinly-veiled propaganda of a large bank or corporation.” Irina Petrovskaya of Izvestia agreed: “Now it’s a really common situation for people to say, for example, not that Nezavisimaya Gazeta wrote about something, but that Berezovsky, the owner of the newspaper, told the newspaper to write about it.”

But in part recognizing the danger to their own agenda of excessive press partisanship, corporations and media magnates may have made adjustments to the professional imperatives driving their media institutions. “They are increasingly intelligent businesspeople,” said Eric Johnson:

Their approach to the media is increasingly sophisticated. It’s not, “I want to buy you and tell you what to say”; it’s, “I want to invest in you, I want to make money. I don’t plan to have any editorial control, but it should be perfectly understandable that if you start espousing the views of some far-out religious sect or some really contrary political line, yes, I’m going to step in.”

This suggests that rather than day-to-day control over editorial content, corporations were content to exercise a “veto power” over certain areas of coverage, and to mobilize their media at

---

key moments, such as the 2000 presidential elections. (As Laura Belin points out, too, corporate influence is also likely to be “apparent in coverage of issues that pit financial groups against one another, especially privatization sales.”71) Apart from this, though, corporate owners may recognize the advantages — in terms of credibility, relations with employees, and potential profits — in keeping an arm’s-length distance from their media. “When you invest for money,” said Yassan Zassoursky of MSU, “at least you take care to control your account. If you’re losing money, you change your information policies, you provide different news. If you disregard your finances, if you’re rich enough to waste a lot of money, then you don’t care much about the public. And you lose your credibility.”72

Boris Berezovsky was cited by a number of interview subjects as a leading exponent of this more sophisticated, arm’s-length relationship. His purchase of a controlling share of Nezavisimya Gazeta in 1996 was perhaps the most closely-watched of the corporate takeovers. NG had long been considered one of the most professional and credible of the Russian dailies, and its editor, Vitaly Tretyakov, had jealously guarded its independence — “refusing to take any state subsidies or money from sponsors.”73 But that had meant a slow haemorrhage in the paper’s material fortunes. By May 1995, it had shrunk to four pages from eight. When Berezovsky and LogoVAZ came to the rescue, many assumed the paper would simply become his mouthpiece — including Ivan

71Laura Belin, “How Financial Dependence Slants News Coverage,” in “Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media” <http://www.rferl.org/nca/special/rumediapaper/financial.html>. Belin offers a dizzying example: “The auction of a 25 percent stake in the telecommunications giant Svyazinvest sparked a ‘bank war’ that has been fought in competing Russian media outlets since July [1997]. Russian Public Television and Nezavisimya Gazeta, under the influence of Boris Berezovsky, unleashed furious attacks against First Deputy Prime Ministers Anatoly Chubais and Boris Nemtsov. They also attacked Oneximbank, which led the winning consortium for Svyazinvest. The network NTV and the newspaper Segodnya, both owned by Vladimir Gusinsky, did the same. Berezovsky and Gusinsky were reportedly involved in the losing bid for the Svyazinvest stake. Meanwhile, newspapers partly owned by Oneximbank vigorously defended Chubais and Nemtsov and retaliated with attacks against Berezovsky and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin, who was considered close to Berezovsky ... When Yeltsin sacked Berezovsky from the Security Council in November 1997, the media reaction was entirely predictable. Commentators on Vremya and Itogi [news broadcasts] depicted Berezovsky as a departing hero and hinted that the dismissal could lead to grave consequences for Chubais and Nemtsov. In contrast, state-controlled Russian Television and newspapers funded by Oneximbank (Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda) welcomed Berezovsky’s ouster as a long-overdue step.”

72Dmitry Babich advanced a similar argument: “In some newspapers [control] is crude, but in many newspapers it’s subtle. And many companies are getting clever enough not to be too aggressive about it. Because if you are too crude with the journalist, if you force him to write the articles that he doesn’t want to, you will sooner or later ruin the newspaper’s image in the eyes of the public. And you will waste the money that you’ve spent on the newspaper.”

Zassoursky, who resigned from NG in part for that reason. In mid-1997, however, Zassoursky said his fears had been misplaced: "Nezavisimaya Gazeta, although Berezovsky owns it, remains very independent in terms of editorial policy. Actually, it's really developing... To that extent I was mistaken about the prospects of Nezavisimaya Gazeta. It was kept absolutely independent."

"They say Berezovsky controls Nezavisimaya Gazeta. But it's very hard to notice," concurred Dmitry Babich. He added wryly: "It's sometimes difficult for people without any ideological convictions, like many Russians, to understand that money does not decide everything in the press." (And, one might add, for some western commentators as well.) Yassan Zassoursky also considered Berezovsky "more sophisticated. He keeps [Nezavisimaya Gazeta] on a long leash. He does not dictate every opinion in the paper. He is satisfied simply not to be exposed as a rascal in the newspaper."^74

The more media-oriented of the large corporations have, at least, invested heavily in their holdings rather than simply displaying them like trophies or running them into the ground. To the extent that the western-style media magnate — so far limited to Berezovsky and MOST Media's Gusinsky — comes to predominate over more staid and detached corporate giants like Gazprom and LUKoil, commentators concerned with the professional functioning of the press might consider it a positive development.\(^75\) Yassan Zassoursky recalled writing an article for Pravda at the height of glasnost entitled, "Shouldn't We Learn from Mr. Murdoch?" — i.e., Australian press baron Rupert Murdoch. "My view," said Zassoursky,

was that in order to develop our media, we should have the kind of corporations or media investors who could develop it. Without this, the media remain very poor; printing is very expensive; the distribution system is in the hands of the monopolies.... Therefore, I think that with all its limitations, Mr. Gusinsky's MOST Media holding is a healthy development,\(^75\)

---

\(^74\)Boris Kagarlitsky: "It's true! Berezovsky doesn't control Nezavisimaya Gazeta. He can veto certain materials, that's all. He cannot simply say, 'Publish this or that.' Because Tretyakov is a very strong editor. And he knows that whatever happens, he has to maintain the image of his newspaper.... The very fact that Nezavisimaya Gazeta is basically independent, but somehow you can still apply your influence — that makes it very important also. He [Berezovsky] can manipulate that."

\(^75\)Dmitry Soshin offered a TV journalist's perspective: "If we talk about NTV, there are very good things about companies run by a very strong and powerful media mogul like Mostbank. The good thing is that they have provided more new equipment, which made the television [station] look nicer and more western. They're able to buy more shows, more sports, more entertainment, more news. They just look more comprehensive. They are also able to buy more talented journalists. I think staff-wise, NTV is the best now. They've got the best people, because of the money." He added, though, that the "independent channels controlled by the market-oriented moguls are very bad at keeping to an objective line"; "it [NTV] often sounds very pro-Yeltsin and anti-communist."
because it is developing information capital which may invest in new media technologies and produce better newspapers.

"On the one hand, we need the corporations," summarized Zassoursky. "On the other hand, there should be a certain legal framework to enable journalists to defend their independence and their ability to be watchdogs of the state. At least to bark, if not to bite." Such a legal framework was one of the notable gaps of the press legislation of the early 1990s, which guaranteed journalists the right to choose their own editors-in-chief and formally protected them from political intervention, but which had nothing to say about the rights and responsibilities of newspapers versus their sponsors. The resulting confusion would feature in the most dramatic post-Soviet showdown between a press institution and its sponsor — a story related in detail in the Izvestia case study.

**Constituencies, Old and New**

The search for subsidies and outside investment represents one of the most common strategies Russian newspapers have implemented in order to survive. In a handful of cases, however, newspapers have managed to preserve some independence from both regime control and corporate ownership by targeting either a mass audience or a specific (usually elite) constituency. A search for stable and profitable constituencies has also, of course, been evident at newspapers with separate sources of sponsorships — especially those whose sponsors are, like Berezovsky and Gusinsky, concerned to make their press holdings as profitable and politically influential as possible.

What have been the dominant trends in this search for a post-Soviet constituency? What major obstacles have been encountered? Which publications have been successful in the struggle, and why?

---

76 Yassan Zassoursky: "Ownership of the newspapers was not a special item in our [1992] press law. It promoted the fourth-estate concept and journalistic freedom. It has a special article which allows the journalist to disagree with the editor in chief. He can refuse to sign an article changed by the editor. He may refuse to carry out an assignment which contradicts his conscience, his beliefs, his ideals. His personal freedom of expression is defended. But there is no special provision for the defence of your freedom as to your owners. And there is no concept of an owner, a proprietor, or a publisher in the sense of the owner's representative, in the law. So there is no legal regulation of the relationship between the publisher and the journalists. This is a very important gap in the legal system regulating the press."
Any newspaper seeking to establish or re-establish itself in the wake of the Soviet collapse had to reckon with a number of specific constraints:

1) **Economic and political crisis**, beginning in 1991 and reaching catastrophic proportions in July-August 1998. This dislocated the system of state-socialist production and distribution, crippled consumer spending, and turned the population inward to private, subsistence-oriented concerns.

2) **The Soviet legacy** of a segmented and task-divided national media, combined with the fragmentation of the intelligentsia. The mass readerships which the Soviet model generated were quickly dissolved by political collapse and mounting inequalities of wealth. But the basic configuration endured of regional and local press set against nationally-distributed “flagship” newspapers. The parochial focus of many regional publications inhibited the building of stable national constituencies, at least for print media.

3) **The explosive growth of broadcast media**, which established materially self-sustaining national constituencies. Together with the “knock and drop” publications, broadcast media crowded the printed press out of many poverty-stricken popular constituencies, soaking up much of the limited “adspend” in the process.

4) **Public disillusionment** with the press after the “golden age” of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Variants of these constraints will be familiar to anyone who has read the book to this point. The basic strategies open to Russian newspapers, as in most of our other case-studies, were twofold: to preserve as much as possible of the traditional constituency; and to expand the appeal to new ones. (The Izvestia case study explores the route taken by one of the longest-established of the Soviet and post-Soviet papers.) In general, not surprisingly, the more conservative and tradition-oriented papers placed the greatest emphasis on preservation of core constituencies. In the case of certain nationally-distributed papers (*Pravda, Sovetskaia Rossiya*), regime hostility and business boycotts may have left them with little choice. The (communist) political option with which they were usually affiliated was entrenched in an older cohort of readers who sought out the papers, despite their general impoverishment, for the links they represented to the Soviet past. The problem for *Pravda* staffers, in Boris Kagarlitsky’s words, was “not that they don’t know how to make the newspaper nicer; but they care about the readers, and the readers don’t want the

---

77If it existed; that is, if the newspaper in question was not part of the blooming of new publications under conditions of liberalization (Chapter 6).
newspaper to be that different from the newspaper they had in Soviet times.” As it transpired, 
*Pravda* could “branch out” into new constituencies only by fissioning into three separate papers (see 
Chapter 6).

The lure, but also the constraints, of traditional constituencies were also realities for 
“establishment” papers seeking a more “modern” and progressive orientation. Again the options 
here seemed twofold. Either these papers moved into “niche” markets, in which they enjoyed 
more or less unchallenged hegemony; or they sought a “lowest-common-denominator” route to a 
mass audience, often but not always built around a core component of sensationalism and “yellow 
journalism.” The niche option included both small- and large-circulation publications. Smaller, 
weekly papers sometimes targeted sectors of the now-fragmented intelligentsia.78 A more common 
approach for such small-circulation ventures, however, was the new corporate and political elite. 
The Kommersant Publishing House, which publishes *Kommersant Daily* (founded in 1990), 
*Kommersant Weekly*, and *Dengi*, among other titles, has accepted investment from Alexander 
Smolensky’s Stolichny Savings Bank, among other corporate actors. But on its own initiative, it has 
also carved out a profitable, more or less unchallenged position atop the hierarchy of post-Soviet 
business publications.

However, the largest-circulation newspapers in post-Soviet Russia are those that have 
trodden the “lowest-common-denominator” path. Mass-circulation “success stories” include the 
weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*, once the holder of the Guinness Book of Records title for the world’s 
largest distribution (34 million copies), and still boasting a decent bedrock constituency of three 
million readers. Yassan Zassoursky defined both *Argumenty i Fakty* and the daily *Moskovsky 
Komsomolets* as “qualoids,” “a strange combination of a tabloid and quality newspaper.” *Argumenty*, 
for example, countered the prevailing partisan tradition of Russian journalism by offering “just a lot 
of *fakty* – news and interviews, very simple,” according to Victor Davidoff. *The Economist* described 
it as “doggedly unpolemical.”79 Of *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, meanwhile, Celestine Bohlen wrote in *The

---

78Of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, for example, Boris Kagarlitsky said: “It doesn’t have that many readers, it has a 
limited circulation, but it has a huge number of writers. And the readers, who are mostly intellectuals, are very 
enthusiastic readers.” Kagarlitsky, like other interview subjects, spoke highly of *Nezavisimaya* even under Boris 
Berezovsky’s sponsorship. He mentioned specifically its responsiveness to its constituency: “The opinion of these 
readers shifted in recent years from being very, almost ultra-liberal [i.e., ‘neo-liberal’?], to more left-of-centre. And the 
newspaper shifted with the audience, which for me is almost an ideal case.”

New York Times that the paper was "the only major Moscow-based daily to have discovered how to survive in a rough-and-tumble marketplace without government subsidies or outside investors, and with new ideas like advertising, profit, and the need to define a paper’s relationship to power."\(^8^0\) Its recipe for success was varied, as we will see when we examine such "hybrid" publications further in Chapter 6.

More ubiquitous than the "qualoids," though, have been "trashy," tabloid-style publications like Speed-Info. "In the pages of Russia's most successful newspaper, there is not a word about the latest Kremlin intrigues or economic reforms," writes Bohlen. "My libido frightens my husband!" screams a headline over a typically sensational article in Speed Info." Such newspapers tended to target depoliticized sectors seeking entertainment and sensation, rather than endless reminders of political squabbling and confusion:

In the Russian newspaper industry, the secret of success is simple: Avoid politics completely. Back in the 1980s, in the dying days of the Soviet Union, everyone was obsessed with politics. But today's Russians are disillusioned by years of broken promises and painful reforms. They don't trust politicians and they don't trust the intellectual journalists who produced the weighty newspapers of the glasnost era. ... "People are tired of politics," says Pyotr Selinov, the deputy editor of Speed Info. "Politics doesn't create anything except irritation and apathy. We try to bring in new plots, new subjects. Our photos are always beautiful. For our readers, it's like a flight to a different world. When they read our newspaper, they're drawn away from their economic hardships. Our newspaper is a friend to them."\(^8^1\)

In response, many mainstream Russian dailies have taken a sensationalist turn, as staff at Izvestia frankly acknowledged, and as seemed even clearer in the case of Komsomolskaya Pravda. Dmitry Babich left KP in 1996 "because it was just getting too yellow," publishing "absolutely ... unchecked information." The adoption, whether partial or whole-hearted, of such strategies was based on a perceived appeal to mass tastes. The press worldwide, and perhaps the transitional press in particular, provides ample support for these expectations. But a number of interview subjects also spoke of a looming saturation, as Russians grew tired of reading about phenomena that were anyway part of their everyday life. As Evgeni Zaitsev of MSU put it:

---


Tigran Vardanian buttressed Bohlen's assessment: "Those guys [at KP] are so confident in themselves that they do not give any serious discounts, even to advertising agencies. Which means they are so good, or have so much advertising, that they don't need advertising agencies to work for them."

\(^8^1\)All quotes from Geoffrey York, "Goodbye Pravda, hello Speed Info," The Globe and Mail, 16 November 1996.
The situation in our country is sensational itself! You can find all these problems with your own eyes on the street. When you're reading newspapers, you want to find out something new. Many people, when they read newspapers, they want quiet, cultural news. Life in your country [Canada] is very stable, very quiet. ... So you want to add to your quiet life some sensation while reading the newspapers. And when we are living this sensational life, we try to add some quiet.

With the increasing conviction that such coverage conceals behind-the-scenes manipulations by corporate forces or political factions, it is indeed possible that the hunger for the "forbidden fruit" of sensationalism may be on the wane in Russia (another common feature of transition environments – see Chapter 6). But the lowest-common-denominator tastes the tabloids cater to are not likely to disappear from Russian, or human, society anytime soon.

MODELS OF PROFESSIONALISM

In evaluating the professional progress and regress of the post-Soviet press, it was unclear what would best serve as a benchmark. Hegemonic western conceptions of professionalism ran up against post-Soviet journalistic models tracing their lineage back to the 19th century. Wider traditions of literature and rhetoric were powerfully felt in Russia as in most of the Central and Eastern European countries. The ideal of impartiality and dispassionate "objectivity" avowed by most western journalists may be "fundamentally" different from the Russian approach (Eric Johnson). Dmitry Soshin, a journalist more familiar than most with western journalistic practice, saw its influence beginning to pervade some areas of news-gathering and editorial writing. Like other interview subjects, though, he was doubtful that this could be easily reconciled with long-established practices:

"The Russian agencies and the Russian services of the foreign agencies are now writing in a very English Russian – in a Russian without adjectives, giving a very straight position. But if we're talking about the wider range of publications, people are now trying to learn a new style, to discard the old Soviet clichés, to get some drive, some dynamic style from the western media; some skills. But language-wise, you really cannot reshuffle Russian, because it's a very specific language.

Despite such shifts in style and tone, "overall the attempt to introduce a news-driven journalism that would be fair by North American standards failed," according to Andrei Zolotov. "It's now clear that the Russian press is going to be different. It will be partisan." Where there is
partisanship one would expect to see the spectre of self-censorship. Dmitry Babich brought a useful cross-cultural perspective to the phenomenon, suggesting that a partisan style could counter self-censorship, in one respect at least:

It depends what you consider self-censorship. In matters of style, western journalists are a lot more self-censored than Russians. Because a Russian journalist can call a politician whom he doesn’t like an “idiot,” without any problem. This is serious television, serious programs. In America, you can’t imagine anyone in the serious press calling a politician an idiot, even if he hates him. In Russia, you can make statements that would be outrageous by western standards, and stay afloat. ... But a freedom to engage in selective name-calling (a practice Babich decried) is a far cry from the freedom to write evenhandedly about corporate power in the new Russia, or diverse political factions, or the role of local functionaries in bribery scandals and corporate kickbacks. As we have seen, the broad range of mobilizing imperatives and “meta-environmental” constraints that Russian newspapers encountered often limited their ability to behave in a “professional” manner—and not only in the estimation of western observers. The declining public interest in the press, too, seemed to reflect a perception that the press had ceased to play the vital “watchdog” role it once seemed destined to.

There were failures, too, in journalists’ ability or willingness to defend their collective interests. “I would say that unfortunately we have very little solidarity,” said Dmitry Babich:

I see a lot of young people from my generation who ... think that individualism is a solution for all problems, like many people in post-communist society. I’m for private initiative, I’m for being responsible for yourself, but that doesn’t exclude the fact that you have to help your friends and colleagues sometimes.

The divisions among journalists obstructed internal attempts at self-regulation, and thus may have made outside intervention more likely. “The journalistic community is so different, so splintered” that self-regulation would be unlikely to have much effect, according to Eric Johnson. “No matter what kind of platform you put forward, you’d have a small group of journalists who would be very vocally for it, and a small group very vocally against it, and the vast majority would say, ‘Oh, that’s nice.’”

“I just don’t see how it can be done,” agreed Dmitry Babich. “Because everyone has his own standards. Who’s going to be the judge? ... I don’t want to give the people who control the media another tool to control it. Let it be the way it is now, rather than adding some organization to the list of organizations which already try to control the media. ... I just can’t imagine what it would be like if there was an association which tried to set standards. A lot of people would immediately say that this is the enemy; some others—a minority—will say it’s a friend; it will just be a big mess.”
But there were offsetting developments — including commercial competition — that had pushed Soviet journalism forward in important professional respects, according to Dmitry Babich:

I see a lot of good reporters now. And I see there is more respect for the journalists on the part of their employers. ... There are newspapers which are buying the journalists from one another. You couldn’t imagine anything like that in communist times. On the one hand, it’s not very nice, because people hop from one job to another; there is less of a sense of community. It’s more like a business. But on the other hand, if journalists can get respect in this way, fine! ... A good journalist should get a lot of money. He’s doing hard work.

Dmitry Soshin, another young journalist, touched on all these themes in offering perhaps the most optimistic assessment of transformations in post-Soviet journalism:

In the 1980s, during perestroika, the media were playing the role of a tutor, a sort of guide. Teaching people how to act, what to do, what position to take. But I think the information departments in all the papers have improved. They’ve become more objective, more up-to-date, with more in-depth information. They got more assimilated to society’s needs. They’ve realized the market economy is coming, and they’ve opened up economics departments giving business data and banking information. ... The role of the media now is not to teach the people, the society, but to orient people — to give them the objective day-to-day information they need. ... Overall I see this as a very radical turn to the real needs of the people.

Did outsiders have a useful role to play in the transformations? The models they provided, both of ownership patterns and journalistic craft, were certainly influential. Ownership patterns, according to Alexei Pankin, were “moving into the world pattern.” He expected to see “various types of companies, not necessarily media-related — like Gulf + Western, or General Electric” featuring, along with “strictly media companies, like MOST Media — the standard international pattern.”83 In the spheres of marketing and design, too, Boris Kagarlitsky saw western media technologies as influential:

The Russian tradition was very much about content. There was little interest in style, outside of the literary style — but [not in] the visual style, design, making things sound nice. This kind of marketing. So this technology came in from the West and was immediately incorporated. These media owners and managers? were talented and educated people, so they picked it up. Even if you go to Pravda, which is not the best-marketed newspaper, you

---

83 Eric Johnson saw television, meanwhile, “heading straight down the American road. If there are two major TV structures in the world, the European and American models, it’s all going the American way. It’s lots and lots of independent TV stations, independent in the sense that they’re privately owned; it’s increasingly uniting them, programming-wise, into national networks, and ownership-wise as well — as has always been the case in American, and as is accelerating in the last year and a half, since ownership regulations were lifted. The major domestic corporations are buying TV stations; western organizations are trying to do that as well. So the broadcast world is heading towards centralization of programming and increasing centralization of ownership.”
can see that they have very sophisticated computers, the latest Mac software. ... Technically, they have all the skills there.

Western agencies by 1997 had played a significant role in establishing aid and professionalization programs with a reach extending across the Russian landmass. Internews, headed by Eric Johnson, was involving itself in “projects which help independent TV: co-productions, news exchanges, development of networking associations, a Web site ... We get subscriptions for them for Western TV journals, help them organize their own journalism schools and defend their rights, put them in contact with western stations, help them find investors ...” Alexei Pankin’s USAID-funded Media Development Program promoted, according to Pankin, “institution building and business development.” It sought “to establish various institutions, professional associations, or research centres which can support the whole [media] industry.” Among them was a National Association of Telebroadcasters, which “practically copied its charter from the National Association of Broadcasters” in the U.S., according to Eric Johnson.

Still, a number of respondents questioned the extent and efficacy of this western influence. Aid agencies, said former dissident Victor Davidoff, could assist greatly with the nuts and bolts of management: “financial analysis, forecasting, helping the media companies in Russia to prepare business plans and establish sound accounting. In Russia the accounting that’s done doesn’t even deserve the name. But,” Davidoff added, “I doubt they’re going to do it. Like all government institutions, they tend to spend money on projects which are straightforward, like giving away computers or doing training. It’s helpful, but it doesn’t really help the media to become independent.” As for the training programs and seminars offered in the west, said Dmitry Babich, “real journalists ... rarely go. They have no time.” Russian journalists, said Andrei Richter, “are not likely to accept retraining; and if they do accept it, probably they just pay lip-service to their tutors, and use the opportunity to travel to the States or Germany.” Even more uncertain was the infiltration of western models of professional journalism, as already discussed. Their influence was already evident on any number of levels. But offsetting factors cautioned against any easy assumption that the press, in post-Soviet Russia or any other transitional environment, would model itself bolus bolus after western models of media functioning.
Conclusion

Overall, what is happening in the Russian media is that the concept of the “free press” is being reconsidered at a new level, which is a practical level. In the first stage, it was very idealistic. People fought for freedom from government control or party control; journalists thought they could publish newspapers on their own, and be a very strong element of the society by themselves. That basically the politicians would be seeking their support, rather than them seeking somebody else’s support. And all of these illusions collapsed because of the economy, because of the nature of publishing here, where there is still practically no serious publication that makes money.

— Andrei Zolotov, reporter, *The Moscow Times*

If the post-Soviet press is a classic case, it is also *sui generis*. The world, let alone this volume, offers no example of the type of media environment prevailing in the dying days of the USSR and the first year in the life of post-Soviet Russia. While the formal outlines of the regime’s mobilizing imperative remained in place between 1988 and 1991, they were no longer enforceable, and were ignored. Journalists stood at the vanguard of the extraordinary debates and revelations that pushed glasnost beyond the control of the Gorbachev regime. Nearly every word journalists wrote was pored over by millions — sometimes tens of millions — of Russians. But crucially, the material infrastructure of state sponsorship — the newsprint, printing facilities, office buildings, national distribution networks, and salaries — remained largely in place. One is reminded of the Wile E. Coyote character in the “Loony Tunes” cartoons who, unaware that he has just left the edge of the cliff, enjoys a brief but illusory “golden age” in mid-air. In the cartoon, realization quickly dawns, and gravity takes over. So too with the Russian press. Newspapers enjoyed a final few months of seeming freedom after the August 1991 attempted coup. But they were already feeling the pinch of economic upheaval, and the market-oriented reforms and largescale privatization introduced in early 1992 sent them crashing to the ground with a suddenness rarely, if ever, duplicated in recent transition processes.

If the crisis was both more sudden and more severe in scale, though, it was also typical in many ways of other transitions considered for this study. As elsewhere, too, a rapid “winnowing” of press outlets occurred when the impetus of liberalization dissipated. In post-Soviet Russia the winnowing, though severe, was perhaps not as extensive as might have been expected — through to the economic catastrophe of July-August 1998, at least. The survival of a dozen daily papers with national pretensions in Moscow alone was unusual if not downright unrealistic. It could endure
only because the press itself engaged in a rollercoaster ride of shifting sponsorship. But that was a game in which the press was anyway bound to be swept up — given the machinations of powerful new figures on the landscape, such as the Yeltsin regime and the regional or corporate actors who interacted with and interpenetrated it.

There were success stories: publications that secured mass readerships despite the shattering blow dealt to discretionary income, and thereby avoided undue dependence on corporate and other forces (Moskovsky Komsomolets, Speed-Info). There were “niche” publications, especially aimed at economic elites, that earned plaudits for incisive business coverage (Kommersant Daily). And some publications found the right alchemy between sponsor and staff to produce a product that many interview subjects and other observers found positive and palatable (Nezavisimiy Gazeta, Obshchaya Gazeta). In the broadcast sphere, independent television stations were “certainly becoming self-sufficient,” according to Eric Johnson. “The vast majority of stations we [Internews] work with are covering their costs with revenue.” Professionally, new models were being considered and often adopted, with results that many, including this author, found promising.

But there was reason to share Laura Belin’s assessment in late 1997 that “Russian media appear markedly less free than they did two years ago, and the mood among journalists is gloomy.” Nowhere was this so evident as in the written press, which was still catching its breath after the corporate power-plays that radically altered the ownership and sometimes the professional activities of the publications in question: Izvestia, Komsomolskaya Pravda, and Segodnya (less so, apparently, Nezavisimiy Gazeta). The result was hardly a return to the Soviet era of micro-managed editorial content. But it left gaps, sometimes gulfs, in the coverage that any one newspaper chose to provide. Alexei Pankin called the result “a pluralism without limits. Because the interests that either own the media officially or subsidize it in a hidden way are so diverse that if you read twenty papers, you will get a rather comprehensive picture of just about everything that’s going on.” But how many people in Russia had the money to read even two newspapers? The question was not purely rhetorical — the answer is probably “more than you might think.” But mass media reflect mass trends. There was no doubt at the time of fieldwork in mid-1997 that the trend was

84Laura Belin also writes: “Since no one political or financial group has a media monopoly, there is, in the view of one Russian journalist, ‘a peculiar freedom of information.’ If one reads half a dozen newspapers a day and watches a variety of television networks, one gets a fairly accurate picture of the news.” Belin, “Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media” (“Prospects for Development”).
increasingly away from print media and towards their broadcast counterparts. Most daily papers had come to serve, and be seen, as outlets for corporate bickering and associated political factionalism. Under the circumstances, a number of interview subjects pointed to an incipient “shakeout” in the Russian press. According to Iosif Dzialoshinsky, this (further) winnowing would lead also to a more sharply-polarized product:

You have four kinds of newspapers [presently]. One is for elites; then it's quality publications, mass publications, and the yellow press. Only two kinds will survive: the ones aimed at the elite, and the mass newspapers. There will be tabloid papers of the kind that Komsomolskaya Pravda wants to be. And ultimately we'll have just a few publications for intellectuals, and many, many tabloid papers.

To this market-oriented perspective had to be added the implications for press functioning of the “new underdevelopment” afflicting post-Soviet Russia. Newspapers found it difficult to deliver to subscribers at profitable rates – and, given delays and breakdowns in distribution, even then. Social dislocation, furthermore, had spawned trends that press workers found worrisome: declining literacy, for example. “I really think the younger generation reads less than the older generation,” said Irina Petrovskaya. “And not just less, but worse. I have a daughter in the fifth grade, and I’ve seen that kids the same age can hardly read. They really have problems, and they're ten years old!”

If the number and diversity of Russian newspapers seemed set to decline, it hardly seemed questionable that one of the survivors would be Izvestia. The second-oldest Russian press institution had perhaps the rockiest ride of all the mainstream dailies in the early 1990s – exceeded only by its more fissiparous brother, Pravda. The corporate takeover and defenestration of its chief editor in 1997, followed by the economic crisis of 1998 that forced it to shed half its staff and merge with Russkij Telegraf, were only the most recent rounds in the Izvestia saga. But they brought the paper, and many others in Russia, to the brink of disappearance as a recognizable institution. A closer analysis of Izvestia’s post-Soviet experience clarifies many of the more general issues and controversies that have occupied us in the first part of this chapter.

---

85 Andrei Richter: "Russia has too many newspapers: in Moscow there are probably more than in any other capital city in the world... Many newspapers will die, and I don't think that would be a bad thing. The market will get a stronger hold in the Russian economy; then there would probably be more advertising. So the fewer newspapers that remain would be more supported by advertisers, and could survive without subsidies." Alexei Pankin: "It's very difficult to predict, but logically speaking, if in Moscow we now have roughly twelve dailies, [in ten years] you'll find three."
IZVESTIA: A CASE STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Oleg Golembiovsky, chief editor and director of the Izvestia publishing house, welcomed me into his spacious office, and lit the first of a number of cigarettes. As I arranged my tape recorder, I noticed a souvenir ice-hockey stick on the window-ledge. It was a memento of the Izvestia Cup, long the most prestigious of Soviet sporting events. The stick linked Golembiovsky to Izvestia's venerable tradition as a leading organ of Soviet propaganda. After the fall of the USSR in 1990-91, while its "big brother" Pravda teetered on the edge of bankruptcy, Izvestia came dramatically into its own. It established a reputation as one of the most critical and professional newspapers of the post-Soviet era. During the August 1991 coup attempt, Izvestia journalists rebelled against conservative chief editor Nikolai Yefimov, defiantly publishing Boris Yeltsin's anti-coup decrees over Yefimov's objections. After the coup, Izvestia successfully re-registered as an independent publication owned by its own "journalists' collective." Yefimov was dismissed as chief editor, and replaced by the man — Oleg Golembiovsky — whom I was now interviewing. Under Golembiovsky, wrote Frances Foster, Izvestia's editors and journalists repeatedly emphasized the newspaper's independent status and line. ... They served notice that Izvestia would no longer mechanically reproduce legislation on instruction from above but, rather, would print only those documents "of interest to readers." ... There was a marked change as well in the content and tone of Izvestia articles. Reporters paraded their liberation from party and state sponsorship in pieces that openly criticized even the highest Soviet and republic leaders and bodies. There was an immediate response from readers and authorities — a noticeable increase in retail sales and bans on circulation by several republic governments.86

But if the transformations generally proved popular with readers and foreign observers, they also brought Izvestia directly into the sights of Supreme Soviet speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov. The parliament, as the successor to the State Presidium, claimed it was the rightful heir to Izvestia's plant and personnel. The result was an extraordinary tug-of-war, which reached a climax in October 1992. Khasbulatov, furious at Izvestia's independent posturings, dispatched armed guards to the publishing complex in downtown Moscow. In response, President Yeltsin sent his own presidential

86See Frances H. Foster, "Izvestia as a Mirror ...," pp. 681-82.
guard to engage the interlopers in a “brief skirmish.” By good fortune, “a potentially bloody confrontation” was narrowly avoided. In the end, the parliamentary forces retreated. The battle shifted to Russia’s newly-created Constitutional Court, which in a landmark May 1993 decision found in Izvestia’s favour, declaring the journalistic collective the rightful inheritors of Izvestia’s name and publishing enterprise.

Meanwhile, though, the paper was staggered by new developments: the 1992 market reforms. The paper supported these staunchly in editorials, earning it the opprobrium of some readers. But the reforms sent prices of paper and printing, among other inputs, skyrocketing. Izvestia joined three other leading papers in petitioning the Yeltsin regime for subsidies and other handouts. Its critical spirit appeared to many to grow less bold as its dependence on the regime increased — although its in-depth, harshly critical coverage of the war in Chechnya was among the best available in the Russian media. In 1995 it “repeatedly drew attention” to machinations by both Yeltsin and the Parliament to manipulate media in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of that year (and the looming 1996 presidential vote). It criticized “parliament’s move to close down the Judicial Chamber on Information Disputes which provided relatively impartial judgments on fair election coverage, and the Yeltsin administration’s move to harness three state committees (Press, Film and Broadcasting) to the Central Electoral Commission’s pre-election educational campaign.” Downing called Izvestia “after October 1993 a highly independent newspaper.” As late as mid-1997, Yassan Zassoursky, dean of the Moscow State University journalism faculty, said

---

87 Foster, “Izvestia as a Mirror ...,” p. 701.


89 Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 142.
he still considered Izvestia “the best, the most serious newspaper” in the country; The Economist lauded it as “arguably, Russia’s best all-round daily newspaper.”

But the economic crisis sent Izvestia in search of new sponsors and investors. Things seemed promising in November 1996, when the giant oil corporation LUKoil agreed to purchase 22 percent of shares in the paper – money that could be used to expand Izvestia’s coverage and reach in the far-flung Russian regions. As Golembiovsky and I spoke in the summer of 1997, though, the supposed outside saviour was looking more threatening by the day. In April 1997, Izvestia had reprinted an article from the French daily Le Monde accusing Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of amassing US $5 billion in unaccounted-for wealth. (Le Monde later retracted the allegation.) A few days later, LUKoil’s president, Vagit Alekperov, protested Izvestia’s decision to publish the article. Readers, he said, might get the impression that LUKoil sought to smear Chernomyrdin. The oil company and Izvestia exchanged numerous public broadsides in the weeks that followed. Rumours abounded that LUKoil was seeking to buy up shares from Izvestia journalists and editors, seize control of the board of directors, and depose Oleg Golembiovsky and other senior figures at the paper. By March 1997, indeed, LUKoil appeared to have gained control of a full 49 percent of Izvestia shares.

To head off LUKoil’s designs, Izvestia turned to another corporation: Oneximbank, described by its chair (and former First Deputy Prime Minister) Vladimir Potanin as a “private bank with a state mentality.” Despite the widespread concerns about editorial changes made to Komsomolskaya Pravda after Oneximbank acquired control the previous year, the company was invited to purchase 25.8 percent of Izvestia’s shares. Izvestia would hold 25.8 percent more; together the two would be able to counter LUKoil’s 49 percent. There was only one problem, and Golembiovsky himself mentioned it in passing during our interview: “There are no intimate relationships in business.” What would happen, I asked, if Oneximbank and LUKoil cut a deal?

---


behind *Izvestia's* back, combined their shares, and took the paper over? Golembiovsky acknowledged the hypothetical danger, but dismissed its likelihood. "We have reached an agreement [with Oneximbank]," he proclaimed confidently, "in which the editorial and financial aspects of *Izvestia* will be strictly separated."

The interview was conducted on 2 June 1997. On 4 June, news broke of a charter signed by LUKoil, Oneximbank, and the *Izvestia* collective that seemed to bolster Golembiovsky’s claim. The corporations agreed not to use their shares to "take actions restricting the independence of views [stated] in the publication" or "aimed at promoting anyone’s interests through the publications."

Exactly one month later, a flustered Golembiovsky was calling a press conference in Moscow, seeking to explain the sudden decision of *Izvestia’s* board of directors to fire him as chief editor. Oneximbank had indeed switched sides, combining its shares with LUKoil and seizing control of the board. It was announced that the procedure to choose a new editor would be altered, reducing the role of the journalists’ collective. In the end, longtime deputy editor Vasily Zakharko was selected. *RFE/RL Newsline* reported that "most *Izvestia* journalists were discouraged by the selection process, and have little hope that the new editor will be independent of the paper’s major shareholders."

Oleg Golembiovsky, meanwhile, defiantly announced plans for a *Novye [New] Izvestia* – to be located just down the road from the old one. Thirty *Izvestia* journalists resigned to join him in the venture. Even Golembiovsky, though, seemed to recognize that such a project was unviable in the new Russia without substantial corporate sponsorship. He announced that the principal investor in *Novye Izvestia* would be none other than media magnate Boris Berezovsky. "If Berezovsky really is behind the new project," media analyst Laura Belin wrote gloomily, "it doesn’t augur well for the future editorial independence of *Novye Izvestia."

Indeed, in the paper’s first month of publication, (October 1997), journalist Leonid Krutakov announced that he had been fired for publishing an article (in another publication) that criticized Berezovsky. The case of *Izvestia*, alongside that of *Barricada*, offers a particularly dramatic example of an institution caught up in transition’s turbulence. Evident at every point, though – even to a limited extent under the Soviets – is *Izvestia* as an actor in the drama, not merely a passive reflection of

mobilizers' designs. In the late 1980s, Izvestia was one of the vanguard publications of glasnost. In the early 1990s, it frequently and publicly defended its autonomy against perceived outside “threat”; subsequently, it did not merely react to material constraints, but actively sought and lobbied for outside sponsorship and investment. Ironically, that lobbying effort would prove the undoing of the first post-Soviet Izvestia. It was not easy, though, to see how it could have been avoided.

IZVESTIA UNDER THE SOVIETS

Much of the constituency and credibility Izvestia was able to carry into the post-Soviet era derived from its reputation as the more liberal “little brother” of the Communist Party house organ, Pravda. As the official organ of the Soviet State Presidium (parliament), Izvestia was the mouthpiece for a body without much of a voice. This appears to have granted it a certain freedom of movement not open to Pravda – though such “freedom” was strictly relative, given the oppressive constraints of the USSR’s propaganda system. Foreign editor Alexander Sychev put the case for post-Soviet continuity in Izvestia’s functioning this way:

Izvestia throughout its history was more liberal during the Soviet period. It was on the left of the political spectrum: it more resembled the capitalist newspapers. It always tried to defend the popular interest in areas like human rights. Izvestia now has the same role; it inherited it from the Izvestia of the Soviet period. But under the Soviets, it criticized only the lower levels of government – never the higher. It was liberal enough, but it was never punished, because its criticisms were not so harsh. But it was always pushing the boundaries of what was allowed.94

As with all other case-studies examined in this work, Izvestia specialized in “demipoliticization”: limiting acceptable political discussion to a range of issues and perspectives consonant with the shifting priorities of the regime and corporate sponsors.95 The other case studies also lead one to seek out powerful personalities, usually directors or chief editors, in explaining the institution’s evolution and functioning. In Izvestia’s case, several staffers and other commentators pointed to both high points and low points in Central Committee selections for the top editorial post. The combination of forward-thinking leadership and maximum political

---

94"Izvestia was lucky ... to have ... personalities recognized in the Soviet public opinion for their attempts to observe some rules of decency and make, with some success, the newspaper interesting enough during all seasons (as compared with the tongue-tied Pravda).” Vachnadze, Secrets of Journalism, pp. 82-83.

95This notion of “demipoliticization” is examined further in Chapter 6.
freedom clearly came during the tenure of Alexei Adzhubei (1959-64). Adzhubei, son-in-law of Premier Nikita Khrushchev, was shifted from Komsomolskaya Pravda to take up the Izvestia post (see Chapter 1). He sought to apply to Izvestia some of the innovation and exploration that his father-in-law was now permitting in the wider culture. As a result, said veteran "Izvestian" Stanislav Kondrashov, "All Izvestia people, if you talk to them, will remember [Adzhubei]." 96

Under the previous editor-in-chief, Konstantin Gubin [1948-59], Izvestia was a strictly bureaucratic newspaper, the official organ of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Of course, under Adzhubei it preserved its position as an official organ, second only to Pravda, because Adzhubei was Khrushchev's son-in-law. So we became equal with Pravda, and sometimes it even looked as if we were a little bit ahead of Pravda, because of these close family connections between Khrushchev and our editor-in-chief. ... Adzhubei changed Izvestia in many ways. The newspaper became a little more vivid, more interesting; its circulation increased. Izvestia's writers had more freedom, though the conception of freedom at that time was a rather narrow one. 97

A more detached perspective was offered by the young Reuters journalist Dmitry Soshin:

I think the best time for Soviet journalism was in the '60s, the Khrushchev years, when Khrushchev moved his sometimes-very-talented relatives into journalism. Khrushchev's son-in-law, Adzhubei, was editor-in-chief of Izvestia, and I think that was the best time for

96 According to George Vachnadze, Adzhubei was "the most famous and truly the best central newspaper editor"; as "Khrushchev's son-in-law, he had the right to his own opinion and besides, he was very talented." Vachnadze, Secrets of Journalism, p. 87. Angus Roxburgh writes: "It was Adzhubei who, by revamping Izvestia, made the most significant contribution to Soviet journalism at the time. His bolder, eye-catching layout and use of varied typefaces and photographs contrasted starkly with Pravda's still staid and boring appearance, and it clearly appealed to the public: between 1959 and 1964, when Adzhubei was sacked, Izvestia's circulation jumped from about 2 million to 6 million ..." Roxburgh, Pravda, p. 40. Finnish researcher Reino Paasilinna confirms the judgment: "A singular role in the restoration of openness and the more vivid character of information [under Khrushchev] was played by the revamped press. Here the lead was taken by some of the central newspapers - first Komsomolskaya Pravda and later, to a great degree, by Izvestia. It is worth noting that in both newspapers the initiative belonged to their chief editor Aleksei Adzhubei ... In a short space of time he managed to alter dramatically the content of the material published, raising the information level by means of a substantially new mechanism of getting information, in particular official information. The structure and make-up of the papers were also changed radically: the erstwhile 100% official, Kremlin-inspired front page that consisted of an anonymous editorial and one or two articles of an instructive and propagandist nature (plus an official photograph) acquired a more dynamic and vivid outlook. But most importantly, the front page provided really significant information, particularly that coming in from all over the world. Thus the paper was beginning to work somewhat more along the lines of so-called quality newspapers in the rest of the world." Paasilinna, Glasnost and Soviet Television, p. 28.

97 Kondrashov nonetheless pointed to "shortcomings" in Adzhubei's tenure: "What do I mean? Khrushchev began with the denunciation of Stalin's 'cult of personality' [at the Twentieth Party Congress, 1956]. Adzhubei, in a way, together with Pravda's editor-in-chief at that time, [Pavel] Satyukov, was intentionally or unintentionally involved in a new cult of personality: of Khrushchev. Khrushchev denounced Stalin; that was a historic act on his part. At the same time, in his way, he was rather an anarchistic man. He was not very systematic, not very clever. His knowledge of history, and of other fields, was rather limited, but his arrogance was very strong. In this sense, Izvestia, together with Pravda - Izvestia maybe even more than Pravda - contributed to this new, rather interesting, and of course more liberal cult of personality - that of Khrushchev."
Izvestia under the Soviets. Because he enticed some very good people over from other publications. He created an excellent staff, and apart from being this streamline for the party, they were very good at human-interest-stories. They covered economics nicely; they had a staff of brilliant political commentators and analysts.

The era, though, ended abruptly with Khrushchev’s downfall in 1964. Izvestia’s glory days ended with it. Something of a nadir appears to have been reached during the regime of Pyotr Alekseyev (1976-83), which staffer Igor Kovalev recalled as “the worst”: “Everybody was unhappy under him. It was really a black time at Izvestia.... He was too conservative, too inhuman.”

Alekseyev’s tenure coincided with the broader cultural and economic “stagnation” under Leonid Brezhnev. This period may actually have seen improvements in the professional calibre of Soviet journalism, reflecting (among other things) détente and greater contacts with the outside world. But such transformations were not likely to be reflected in a newspaper run by a chief editor handpicked, in turn, by a conservative and culturally philistine Central Committee.98

Izvestia’s performance during glasnost, however, showed that the energies evident under Adzhubei had not entirely dissipated. The paper leapt to the forefront of the breathless period known as the “golden age.” A new generation of journalists at the paper coalesced around the figure of Oleg Golembiovsky.99 But the more conservative group that had flocked to the conservative Alekseyev was still powerful at the paper. Moreover, it had a firm alliance with the chief editor, Nikolai Yefimov. Thus, when the political reaction against glasnost gathered steam, many at Izvestia proved ready to roll with the forces of reaction.

The confrontation came with the coup attempt of August 1991, in a scene described by David Remnick in Lenin’s Tomb.100 Under Nikolai Yefimov, whom Remnick calls “a shameless sycophant,” Izvestia had become “one of the most paradoxical institutions in the country” –

---

98. The mid-1970s. Toadying and debauchery were gathering momentum in the country. [Lev] Tolkunov [Adzhubei’s replacement] was removed. Pyotr Fyodorovich Alekseyev came in. The new editor-in-chief shouted at his subordinates and stamped his feet. All the former practices were swept away.... A ‘new Alekseyev school of Soviet journalism’ was announced and made public. The pages of Izvestia were filled with smiling heroes: weavers, metalworkers, collective farmers.... The editor-in-chief sent galley proofs of feuilletons to the Party leaders of the provinces criticized therein to get their OKs. Subscriptions to Izvestia fell off by 50% in those seven-plus years ....” E. Polyanovsky, “Confrontation: Once More About Izvestia,” Literaturnaya Gazeta, 17 July 1991 (CDSP 43: 29 [1991], p. 11).

99. Dmitry Soshin referred to Golembiovsky as “a clear example of those people who moved upwards [in the Russian press] on the wave of democratization.”

“brimming with talent,” but with many of the most talented feeling estranged from their boss. Tensions had been rising for some months before the coup-plotters struck. They arose from the Supreme Soviet’s appointment of Yefimov over the preferred candidate of the Izvestia collective, deputy editor Oleg Golembiovsy. Yefimov immediately set about trying “to remove several leading journalists,” including Golembiovsy; but the Izvestia editorial board, still smarting from the imposition of the new editor over their objections, bluntly “suggested to Yefimov that he leave instead.”

When the coup began, Izvestia, because of its regime affiliation, was spared the banning that other papers suffered. But when Izvestia reporters brought back Boris Yeltsin’s appeal to the Russian people at the height of the abortive coup attempt, in the early-afternoon hours of 19 August 1991, Yefimov’s underling, Dmitry Mamleyev, refused to print it. Yefimov, for his part, had missed the start of the battle because he was racing back to Moscow from his vacation house. As soon as he walked through the door, a small group of reporters surrounded him and demanded he publish Yeltsin’s statement. Yefimov said there was no way and yanked the metal type from the printing press. ordinarily, Yefimov would have had his way. But now the printers ... said they would sooner quit than give in. They would sooner destroy the presses than publish Izvestia without the appeal of Boris Yeltsin. Twenty hours late, Izvestia appeared on the streets of Moscow and in every city and village of the Soviet Union. The Emergency Committee’s [coup-makers’] proclamations blared out from page one. Yeltsin’s appeal to resist the coup was on page two.

Key to the resistance were the Izvestia “printshop workers, typesetters, makeup personnel, press operators and stereotypers” — a reminder that the actors in such media battles do not always come from the editorial side of the operation. For editors and journalists, though, “this was an...
important example of our genuine professional worth. ... We lived those three days in the relentlessly brilliant light of conscience." On 22 August, Izvestia renounced its chief editor, publishing a resolution to the effect that "in light of the position taken by N.I. Yefimov" during the coup, he was to be removed "immediately" from office. The Supreme Soviet Presidium, which had "failed to ensure the newspaper's free operation during the period of the unconstitutional putsch," saw "its status as founder" of Izvestia suspended – at least in the eyes of most staff. Workers also resolved "to postpone ... the question of [naming] Izvestia's editor-in-chief until I.N. [Oleg] Golembiovsky ... returns from official assignment." In the meantime, the journalistic collective would stand as the "official founder of the newspaper." It was duly accorded registration certificate number 1057 by the Ministry of the Press and Public Information of the Russian Federation for a publication to be called simply Izvestia (News), rather than the more partisan "News of the Soviets of USSR People's Deputies," its former official moniker. A charter was adopted in which Izvestia staff pledged to avoid "dependence on political parties or other public associations that pursue political ends." When Golembiovsky returned from "a brief assignment abroad," he was confirmed as the new chief editor. Izvestia staff rejoiced, proclaiming on 24 August:

"Henceforth we, and we alone, will bear responsibility for every word that appears in our pages. Our confidence that this will be so is bolstered by a key fact – from now on we will be under the supervision of an editor-in-chief whom we ourselves have elected. Nothing like this has ever happened in Izvestia's history. We are proud and happy that it has fallen to the present generation of staffers to write a new page in that history. And we are confident that our newspaper will be open to different kinds of political thinking, clashes between the most dissimilar points of view, honest debate and – most important – 100 percent truthful information."

"Dear readers!" the editorial exclaimed. "We are starting a new life. Our own life, Izvestia's life and, we hope, yours too. We congratulate ourselves and you on this new beginning. ... To our freedom and yours!"

---

106 Ovchinnikova, "In the Light of Conscience."
108 "Our New Old Izvestia."
110 "Our New Old Izvestia."
THE BATTLE WITH PARLIAMENT

We shall certainly bring this so-called conflict with Izvestia to a conclusion. The newspaper has quite consciously pursued its course of waging war on the Supreme Soviet. How can we tolerate this? How can we allow such things? What sort of Supreme Soviet chairman would I be if I permit two, three, or four people of that collective to prevail over the Supreme Soviet, the country's top legislative authority? This will never happen.

- Ruslan Khasbulatov, chair of the Supreme Soviet, 21 September 1992

Izvestia's unilateral declaration of independence in August 1991, and its re-registration as a journalistic enterprise controlled by its staff collectively, only deepened the ambiguity of the paper's status. It laid the foundations for a showdown between the paper and the Russian parliament under the leadership of Ruslan Khasbulatov. This meant, in essence, a confrontation between the executive and legislative branches of the Russian federation, since the Yeltsin regime had already shown itself willing to back Izvestia in a showdown with "reactionary" forces. We will see in Chapter 6 that media organs regularly serve as important "prizes" in transitional power-struggles. In no other case studied here, though, did a newspaper assume Izvestia's status as object of an all-out conflict between contending, national-level political forces.

The events of April 1992 to May 1993 have been expertly chronicled by Frances Foster, upon whose work the following account draws heavily. Izvestia became "the catalyst for direct confrontation between Russia's First and Fourth Estates" on 10 April 1992, when Supreme Soviet chief Khasbulatov – furious at Izvestia for "deliberately driving a wedge between the Parliament and the President" – announced his intention to "restore" Izvestia to its former status as the official organ of the legislative branch. A bill introduced and passed in July of the same year sought to negate Izvestia's declaration of independence and declare the Russian Supreme Soviet, as the supposed "successor" to the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the rightful owner of the paper. Izvestia appealed to President Yeltsin, who duly "expressed ... his unequivocal and resolute

---

111Quoted in Foster, "Izvestia as a Mirror ...," p. 699, n. 142.
112Foster, "Izvestia as a Mirror ..." Other useful sources on the 1992-93 controversy at Izvestia include Gambrell, "Moscow: The Front Page," and Remnick, Lenin's Tomb (pp. 469-71).
113Khasbulatov's words, quoted by Gambrell, "Moscow: The Front Page," p. 60.
114The draft resolution, signed by Khasbulatov, stated: "On August 23, 1992, in violation of legislation then in force, publication of the newspaper Izvestia Sovetov narodnykh deputatov SSSR (founder – the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet) was terminated. A new Izvestia newspaper began publication using the facilities of the Izvestia Publishing House. The newspaper's founder was the journalistic collective of the newspaper ... The founding and registration of the newspaper Izvestia were conducted with important violations of the USSR law 'On the Press and
support for Izvessia's collective." Yeltsin's Press Ministry refused to implement the parliamentary resolution, referring the matter instead to the newly-created Constitutional Court. Khasbulatov and the parliament responded by shifting the focus from the attempt to seize control over the existing Izvessia, to attempting to register a new version of the paper, the full name of which — "News of the Soviets of People's Deputies of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet" — made its intended function plain. Central to any such strategy, of course, would be control over the newspaper's physical plant.

Yeltsin countered by instructing Anatoly Chubais, chair of the State Committee for Management of State Property, to recognize a new entity — the Izvessia State Newspaper-Publishing Complex. Oleg Golembiovsky was appointed general director. The controversy now clearly pitted Yeltsin's executive authority against Khasbulatov's legislature, which in October 1992 formally approved a resolution transferring control of the publishing enterprise and plant to the Supreme Soviet. There followed an ominous instruction: the legislature called out the Supreme Soviet guards, "a 5000-person armed unit under ... Khasbulatov's command," to secure the facilities of Izvessia Publishing House. The climax came on 27 October, when a scene as volatile as any described in this work unfolded at the Izvessia plant:

... The Supreme Soviet leadership decided to back up its demands with force by dispatching its troops to the shared premises of Izvessia Publishing House and Izvessia Editorial Office. At this point Boris Yeltsin reentered the arena. In a presidential directive of October 27th, he declared the parliamentary guards an "illegal armed formation" and ordered their immediate disbandment. After a brief skirmish between governmental and parliamentary forces, Khasbulatov's guards withdrew from the Izvessia facilities, thus avoiding a potentially bloody confrontation between the executive and the legislature.

Other News Media. In view of the fact that the right of the founder — the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, whose legal successor on the territory of the Russian Federation is the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet — to the publication of its official press organ has been violated, the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet resolves: 1) To instruct the Presidium of the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet ... to ensure the publication of a newspaper of the Russian Federation's representative bodies of power and to consider and confirm a program of activity and an editorial charter. 2) To instruct the Russian Federation Ministry of the Press and Information to provide assistance to the currently operating newspaper Izvessia in bringing its founding documents and registration into conformity with the law's requirements and in allocating the premises necessary for normal functioning." Reprinted in "An Attack on the Status of Izvessia," Izvessia, 14 July 1992 (CDSP, XLIV: 29 [1992], p. 10). Emphasis added.

115In the words of his press secretary. Quoted in "An Attack on the Status of Izvessia."

116Foster, "Izvessia as a Mirror ..." p. 701. See also "The President of Russia Eliminates An Illegal Armed Formation," Izvessia, 28 October 1992 (CDSP, XLIV: 43 [1992], p. 6).
It was a close call, but a turning point. Hereafter, the conflict between the executive and legislative branches would move to other arenas, culminating in the military showdown of October 1993, when troops loyal to the executive shelled the parliament into submission. As for Izvestia, the Constitutional Court in May 1993 “finally issued its long-promised decision and ruled in favour of Izvestia on all counts.” The paper’s independence, it seemed, was guaranteed. In fact, though, the events left the paper heavily in the debt not only of President Yeltsin, but of Yegor Gaidar and Anatoly Chubais, masterminds of the Russian privatization, behind-the-scenes, supporters of Izvestia’s new pro-market orientation, and vital lobbyists on the newspaper’s behalf. In fact, “combining all the assets of the former USSR-owned Izvestia publishing company into one ‘government newspaper-publishing complex’” briefly turned Izvestia into “a government-owned enterprise”! Eventually, though, shares in the complex would be distributed among Izvestia staff and various regime-affiliated banks. Such affiliations, when interwoven with unfriendly corporate takeovers, would eventually prove fatal to the Izvestia that emerged from the ashes of the old order in 1992-93.

Key to that post-1992 era, though, was an extensive housecleaning facilitated, in part, by the economic crisis that descended with the Gaidar reforms. As millions of subscribers and newsstand buyers were erased from Izvestia’s constituency; as the mass public abandoned newspapers to devote themselves to private concerns, so was a radical restructuring of the paper’s orientation and staffing deemed to be in order. One aspect of the response was Izvestia’s role, along with three other leading dailies, in petitioning the Yeltsin regime for relief from the new economic measures that they all supported editorially. Despite Golembiovsky’s March 1992 pledge that “We simply will not accept any government subsidies,” his paper by that point had been accepting them for several months, and would continue to do so as long as regime generosity lasted.119

Internally, it was clear that a newspaper that had fallen in circulation from 12.5 million to 600,000 copies could not support anything like the payroll it had during the “golden age” of glasnost.

117 Foster, “Izvestia as a Mirror ...,” p. 701.
But *Izvestia*‘s new guard could take the opportunity to rid the paper of recalcitrants. Andrei Zolotov’s summary is concise, and bolstered by other testimony:

I know that Golembiovsky has been making a lot of staff changes over his whole term of office. I think their direction was to create a more politically- and stylistically-solid staff, which would be like a party, in a sense. The task they were facing was very difficult. They wanted to maintain the name and the reputation of *Izvestia*, but in fact create a new newspaper. The way they were going to do that was to keep a couple of “sacred cows” and at the same time get rid of a group of journalists who were very honest and professional, but in an old-*Izvestia* way.

Golembiovsky himself acknowledged that in cutting *Izvestia*‘s staff from 1600 people in 1991 to 483 in mid-1997 — that is, by 75 percent — “we cut the staff that were connected with the old Soviet governmental system,” and “tried to retain the younger age [group] of ‘Izvestians,’ to release older people.” By “older people,” one suspects Golembiovsky meant “older mindsets.”

The end-result of the “restructuring” was also to concentrate power in a group around a single figure (Golembiovsky), perhaps more than was true during Nikolai Yefimov’s tenure. By the time of our interview in June 1997, Golembiovsky, 61 years old, had worked at *Izvestia* for 31 years, “starting from the most basic position of reporter and ending as chief editor.” Over the years he had also served as the paper’s Mexico correspondent and a reporter on the economics beat. The 1991-93 events did for him at *Izvestia* something of what they did for Boris Yeltsin on the national stage: brought him to power on a wave of democratization. His personality and ambitions also seemed important in explaining *Izvestia*‘s functioning through to LUKoil/Oneximbank crisis of mid-1997 — and well-informed commentators cited Golembiovsky’s role as no less significant in the crisis itself.¹²°

Some staffers voiced concerns and criticisms of this centralization of power under Golembiovsky. Yuri Feofanov, despite his generally favourable estimation, conceded that *Izvestia* was “very much under the control and direction” of the chief editor. The journalistic collective, so key to the conflict with the Yefimov regime within the paper, now seemed vestigial. Its role was

---

¹²°Ivan Zassoursky: “I think it was the personal ambition of Mr. Golembiovsky that rushed *Izvestia* into that battle [with LUKoil], which ended up with him losing all control over the capital of the newspaper ... He’s an American-style manager who takes control over the whole company, and who governs the company, although he’s just an editor-in-chief. So his personal ambition is to govern the company.” Andrei Richter: “I know Golembiovsky well enough to believe that he’s a pretty ambitious person. He doesn’t like being told what to do by somebody else. So that [the LUKoil controversy] was a fight of ambitions, and he could rally around him a number of journalists who were as ambitious as he. It’s both a fight of journalists against moguls, and a fight of ambitions.”
“almost nothing,” in Feofanov’s view. There was “no representation for staff — a body that would help people to express their opinions.” Stanislav Kondrashov, one of the unassailable “sacred cows” of the old guard who remained at Izvestia after 1992, switched (interestingly) to the first-person-plural in declaring that “We are on friendly terms with Mr. Golembiovsky.” Kondrashov added: “I have some reservations about his line, but it would not be quite appropriate for me to discuss them.” He then proceeded to do so:

What I want to say is that Golembiovsky is a clever man, he’s effective. He once said, “My major dream is that Izvestia will not perish, will not disappear under my leadership.” At the same time, of course, he concentrated more and more power in his hands — at the expense of a kind of collective judgment, which we were accustomed to at Izvestia during the glasnost years. We had a very strong tradition, even from the very beginning, of weekly staff meetings to discuss issues ... to engage in friendly discussions, and sometimes rather harsh criticisms, trying together to chart the course of the newspaper. Now, sometimes — too often — [decisions] are made on an authoritarian basis, by Golembiovsky and two or three people around him. They are good, they are honest journalists, but it seems to me a rather serious shortcoming.

Of particular concern was Golembiovsky’s dual function as chief editor and director of the Izvestia publishing enterprise. As at a number of other post-Soviet dailies, Golembiovsky came to combine functions that in western models at least are normally separated, at least formally. More skeptical observers saw this as an ideal means for Golembiovsky to fortify his personal position within the paper. Able to reappoint himself whenever he chose, Golembiovsky was secure from any internal revolt by staff. Only Izvestia’s board of directors could — and eventually would — remove him.

In the meantime, Golembiovsky’s daily round became a whirlwind of interwoven managerial and editorial functions. “It’s very difficult,” he said in the interview. “I spend more time on management concerns, because there are good people on the editorial side to take care of those issues, and I trust them completely.” Whatever the perceived advantages of the arrangement in

---

121 The growing conflict between editorial and managerial priorities was a key factor in Richard Steyn’s decision to resign from the Johannesburg Star, as discussed in Chapter 3.

122 Alexei Pankin translated aloud a passage from an article he had recently published, citing comments by Golembiovsky on his daily schedule. Pankin’s translation: “At nine o’clock I’m in the office. At nine-thirty we plan the contents of the forthcoming issue. Until lunch, I work on the issue. At two o’clock I have business meetings and lunches. At 3:30 I sign the number [the next day’s edition] into print. The sample copy comes at a quarter past five. In the intervals, I deal with money, finance, managing, budget, various projects, et cetera.” Pankin added sarcastically: “That’s how he copes with both [jobs] in one day. He deals with business administration in the interval between reading the paper.”
stabilizing Izvestia after the turbulence of the early 1990s, it seemed to have outlived its welcome by mid-1997. Stanislav Kondrashov was frank in stating that Golembiovsky's
two positions, as the manager or president of the company, Izvestia, and editor-in-chief ...
have to be separated. ... We want to return to the previous stage [of Izvestia's functioning],
where the editor-in-chief is elected by the staff of the newspaper. That is Golembiovsky's
idea too. And it would be a good counter to the commercial structures which are so
influential in the newspaper right now. It would be a good counter to LUKoil or
Oneximbank, if they wanted to suppress our editorial independence.¹²³

Golembiovsky indeed voiced his own criticisms of the dual-function arrangement,¹²⁴ telling
me he expected the duties to be formally separated at the board meeting scheduled for 22 June
1997.¹²⁵ In the end, of course — on 4 July 1997 — the board unceremoniously sacked him from both posts.

**Political Orientation and Independence**

Izvestia is kind of a special paper, with a specific political direction. So people working here
usually have the same political views. Q. How would you define that political direction? It's a deep
understanding that Russia can do nothing without drastic changes in all spheres: political,
social, and economic.
— Oleg Golembiovsky

The reputation for professionalism and political independence that Izvestia garnered in the
first half of the 1990s was considerable. Attesting to this is the high praise meted out by the dean
of MSU's journalism faculty and the London Economist, quoted earlier.¹²⁶ On a couple of prominent
occasions — the 1991 attempted coup; the 1994-95 war in Chechnya — a core of Izvestia's staff
showed themselves willing to withstand outside pressure and advance a more crucial and

¹²³See also the comments of media Izvestia columnist Irina Petrovskaya and foreign editor Alexander Sychev:
"You should separate the functions. Because you can't do both things well" (Petrovskaya). Q. Do you think it's a good,
constructive arrangement? "No. It's a bad arrangement, because it's almost impossible to perform these completely
different functions at the same time. ... [Golembiovsky] is very good as chief editor, but perhaps not sufficiently
experienced as a manager and a businessman" (Sychev).

¹²⁴Asked if felt the combination of duties had worked well over the last years, Golembiovsky said: "No, I
don't think so. The reason we did it was because it was a new situation in Russia — a joint-stock company built around
a newspaper — and there was no-one else around who could manage this new company."

¹²⁵Those positions will be separated. We decided to do that even before the LUKoil events, but we just
didn't have time." Golembiovsky said he would seek to stay on as chief editor. Q. Which of the positions is more interesting
for you to continue in? "It depends on the situation, but I think for the first few years, it's better to be chief editor than
director, because I should work to defend the newspaper's interests against those of LUKoil and Oneximbank."

¹²⁶John Murray notes that "Izvestia continues to enjoy a reputation in the West as one of Russia's most
balanced newspapers," which he considers "remarkable." Murray, "No Truth in the News?"
autonomous journalistic project. The paper proclaimed the validity and necessity of such a project throughout the post-1991 era. Izvestia tended to frame crucial controversies in its post-Soviet life—the battle with the parliament in 1992-93; the decisive crisis with LUKoil and Oneximbank in 1997—as a “just war” waged by the journalistic collective against the forces of darkness.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that the assessment of many interview subjects and outside observers varies sharply from such a depiction (and self-depiction) of Izvestia's role. Typical is Eric Johnson's critique:

I'm not that big a fan of Izvestia. I don't think it's the kind of journalism that the country needs. It's too much commentary-based, and by definition that means it's going to be pushing a particular point of view.

The “particular point of view” that Izvestia consistently advanced was quite neatly encapsulated by Golembiovsky's reference to “drastic ... political, social, and economic” change in Russia. In 1990-91, Izvestia pushed a solidly pro-market, pro-democracy line that increasingly associated it with the “reformist” wing of the Yeltsin regime, notably Anatoly Chubais and Yegor Gaidar. The paper's support for harsh reform measures announced in January 1992 (while it sought to evade them through back channels) may have cost Izvestia a sizable chunk of its traditional readership, as we will show. But its “modernizing” orientation won it important supporters within the regime—supporters able to mobilize successfully on Izvestia's behalf through the struggle with Khasbulatov's parliament. The Izvestia collective under Oleg Golembiovsky emerged with legal control over the material and “intellectual” structure of the enterprise. But as noted, this also left the paper even more indebted to the reformist camp. When Ivan Zassoursky, for example, chose to argue that Izvestia “was always very close to the government,” he cited the 1992 events as constituting the essence of the bond.127 For Zassoursky, the alliance had led the paper into a Manichean view of the forces contending for power in Russia. As with all quasi-religious discourses, Zassoursky argued, specifics tended to be sacrificed to abstractions:

Izvestia is a bad newspaper, extremely bad. It is very old-fashioned; it is very engaged in politics. Lots of journalists from Izvestia still think that a good journalist is an agitating journalist. ... They are very old-fashioned in terms of selecting one political line, and then fighting for it, like communists. ... They're thinking about politics all the time. It's not good for journalists to think about politics all the time, I think. It's not professional. Because

127“'The building that the newspaper has was given to them as a present by Gaidar. That is why they like Chubais more than Chermomyrdin, because he's very close to Gaidar.'
they think of politics not from the point of view of a person who voted in the election and demands that power deliver on the things it promised. They look at it in terms of processes. Reform, or no reform. Democracy, or totalitarianism. People’s capitalism or monopoly capitalism. You can’t do anything with these abstractions! They’re not good for judging the situation anymore.

*Moscow Times* reporter Andrei Zolotov also pointed to both the political affiliations of the paper as helping to spawn an unprofessionally partisan rhetoric:

*Izvestia*, though it claims to be objective and a flagship of the free press, has always been a very partisan newspaper. Since the beginning of the 1990s, *Izvestia* was ... associated with the liberal wing of the government, with the “westernizers”: Gaidar, Chubais and company. ... The style pretended to be more information-driven, but it was still very propagandistic.128

For such critics,129 the nadir of *Izvestia’s* political coverage came when it joined nearly all the other Russian media in slavishly supporting Boris Yeltsin in the 1996 presidential elections. As with the defection of NTV’s Igor Malashenko from the opposition camp to the Yeltsin campaign, *Izvestia’s* “comprehensive display of craven servility”130 towards Yeltsin contrasted poorly with the hard-hitting, agenda-setting coverage it had provided during the wretched military campaign in

---

128John Murray cited as a broader feature of the “liberal media” in Russia, including *Izvestia*, the fact that “the capitalist ideology being promoted by the Yeltsin government ... is presented simply as ‘common sense.’ Increasingly in the liberal media no explicit arguments are made to promote the ‘reforms,’ which are accepted without discussion as good and desirable in themselves. To read the liberal media, or watch national television, for example, one would not get the impression that Russia of late has experienced, and continues to experience, an economic collapse of immense proportions [n.b.: the article was written before the collapse of July-August 1998]. The liberal media are working to create a society where the fundamental arguments are generally and uncritically accepted as no longer being in dispute. As Fairclough writes: ‘[W]hen ideology becomes common sense, it apparently ceases to be ideology; this in itself is an ideological effect, for ideology is truly effective only when it is disguised.’” Murray, “No Truth in the News?” The result is the “demopoliticization” described in Chapter 6.

129See also the comments of *Nezavisimyya Gazeta* editor Vitaly Tretyakov, moderating his support for *Izvestia* after signing a letter to Boris Yeltsin protesting LUKoil’s designs on the paper: “An objective assessment of *Izvestia* shows that it is not the leader of free speech or of the independent press in Russia. It is a distinctly partisan newspaper of the Gaidar-Chubais camp – and without a doubt the most authoritative and influential publication of that wing. In other words, the ‘dislodging’ of *Izvestia* from the media sector would, by definition, weaken not freedom of the press as a whole, but only the representation of one ideology in that sector ... ” Tretyakov, “Letter Not to B.N. Yeltsin,” *Nezavisimyya Gazeta*, 23 April 1997 (CDSP, XLIX: 16 [1997], p. 7).

Chechnya.\textsuperscript{131} Like many other Moscow editors, Oleg Golembiovsky defended the decision to
dispense with a critical stance during the elections as a simple necessity, taken
only because we didn’t want Zyuganov to come to power. Western countries and societies
don’t understand that Russia hasn’t yet arrived at [the point of having a truly democratic
system. The danger of communism returning to power is still very high. I would rather see
Bill Clinton elected president of Russia, if a Communist was running against him.\textsuperscript{132}

The most detailed exploration of Izvestia’s performance during the elections, however, was
disinclined to let Golembiovsky and his fellow staffers off the hook. John Murray described Izvestia
as “pull[ing] out all the stops” after the first round of the elections, in which Communist Party
candidate Gennady Zyuganov overcame an “information blockade” to run a close second to
Yeltsin. The paper began to publish interviews in which “the journalist warned the subjects that
they would lose out if Zyuganov won,” and articles that “attempted to blacken Zyuganov by
associating him with the Soviet past.” A “negative stereotyping of all communists” was evident.\textsuperscript{133}

“The principle during the election became: print the rumour as long as it damages Zyuganov.”

Typical was the paper’s treatment of contending candidates’ pronouncements on economic policy.
The headline announcing release of the communist economic programme placed the word
“programme” in quotation marks – “a clear signal,” Murray wrote, “that the ensuing commentary

\textsuperscript{131}Murray, “No Truth in the News?” Writes Murray: “Izvestia, which had its own reporter, Valery Yakov, on
the spot [in Chechnya], consistently countered the government’s deceitful accounts of what was happening. It ...
characterised the official coverage as ‘a smokescreen of feckless lies.’ This was a high water mark in Izvestia’s short
history as an independent newspaper.” In January 1996, after Chechen rebels seized hostages in the neighbouring
province of Daghestan, a Russian attack was launched that killed many hostages, but allowed the rebels to escape.
Izvestia political commentator Otto Latsis, appointed to Yeltsin’s Presidential Council (a toothless advisory body) in
1993, resigned in protest over the conduct of the Chechen war. Izvestia published his open letter to Yeltsin on 19
January, and on 24 January another open letter – this time from Sergei Kovalev, a human-rights campaigner who was
also submitting his resignation from the Council. “At times of crisis,” Kovalev wrote to Yeltsin, “you and the leaders
of state departments appointed by you deign to offer us lies so obvious and hopeless that it is simply staggering ... You
began your democratic career as a feisty and vigorous fighter against official lies and party despotism and are ending it
as the docile performer of the will of cynical power-lovers from your entourage ... I am not going to vote for you. And
I will not advise other decent people to do so.” Cited in Laura Belin, “Appendix 2: Changes in Editorial Policy and
Ownership at Izvestia,” in “Politicization and Self-Censorship in the Russian Media”

\textsuperscript{132}See also the comments of media columnist Irina Petrovskaya: “Q. Was that a controversial decision among staff of
the newspaper [to support Yeltsin]? Actually, there was no real controversy, because we had to choose between communists
and democrats, and we decided to choose the least worst option.” Political commentator Otto Latsis was equally
straightforward: “We tried to be upstanding in this [election] fight, but we did not promise to be impartial. To stop the
party of revanche was the most important question of our lives.” Latsis quoted in Patrick Henry, “Press Gets Back to

\textsuperscript{133}One front-page headline in Izvestia in June 1996 read: “Communists Always Get Angry When the Truth Is
was going to be hostile.” He set this against “Izvestia’s entirely uncritical, in places eulogistic, coverage of the main election manifesto of the Yeltsin camp, the Programme of Action for 1996-2000.” Meanwhile, information unfavourable to the Yeltsin campaign — such as the candidate’s failing health — was systematically ignored, though space could be found for a photograph of “a young woman ... kissing an election poster showing a very healthy-looking Yeltsin.”

Izvestia also allowed its logo to be used in a Yeltsin campaign TV ad, “above the mock headline, ‘Boris Nikolayevich Yeltsin: President of All Russians.’”

In the wake of the successful push to elect Yeltsin, Izvestia, like other Moscow dailies, returned to “criticisms of Yeltsin’s policies” and a focus on the president’s health. Murray was cynical about the turnaround:

This is the quid pro quo of the new relationship between the country’s emerging elites and their “free” media: the media is free to say what it likes as long as it does not interfere with the fundamentals. When the poor state of Yeltsin’s health really mattered, when it might have made a tangible impact on the result of the election and thus disturbed the fundamentals, then the whole topic was taboo. When the main battle was won and the health issue, though still important, was no longer vitally important to the future political shape of Russia, the taboo was lifted and virtually no restrictions applied.

Murray also noted the irony of defending the uncritical stance during the elections as a bulwark against the return of communism. Izvestia and other Russian media, he argued, “in fact became the very thing they said they would become if the communists ever won, namely a creature of government.”

---

The following anecdote offered by Murray is also instructive. “On 23 May the Financial Times reported that the communist head of the Duma’s security commission, Viktor Ilyukhin, had said that he thought the presidential election results would be falsified in Yeltsin’s favour. The paper also reported that communist officials had circulated copies of a letter purportedly sent by a regional governor in which he had ordered all local newspapers regularly to publish reports written by Mr. Yeltsin’s campaign staff. Izvestia’s immediate response to both stories, each damaging to the Yeltsin camp, was to ignore them. The story of the letter commanding local newspapers to print pro-Yeltsin stories was never covered, probably because it could not be countered. Persistent communist allegations of potential electoral fraud eventually met with a considered response on 8 June, by which time the paper had prepared a strong counter-story. In this delayed reaction, Izvestia was reverting to the Soviet practice of, first, responding to, rather than simply reporting a story; second, reacting to a story as might an injured party; and third, only publishing an important story such as this when its potential impact had been weighed by the competent organs. The response fell in line with the general trend in Izvestia, as the day of reckoning grew closer, of becoming less and less a newspaper chronicling the campaign and more and more a propagandist for the Yeltsin campaign.”

Belin, “Changes in Editorial Policy ...”

Belin, “Changes in Editorial Policy ...”

Murray, “No Truth in the News?”

Murray, “No Truth in the News?”
THE NEW/OLD CONSTITUENCY: PLUS ÇA CHANGE ...

The relationship between Izvestia and the Yeltsin regime – or factions within it – is only part of the story of the post-Soviet Izvestia. We consider now the paper's attempts to preserve and, if possible, expand its constituency in the wake of the collapse of the USSR. This leads us to the fateful decision to seek outside investment from LUKoil, one of the large corporations taking an increasing interest in Russian media functioning.

With the internal configuration of authority and the broad political “line” of the newspaper solidified after 1992-93, Izvestia faced the challenge of retaining a sustainable core of readers and advertisers. This could not by itself preserve Izvestia from political and corporate machinations – not forgetting its own energetic and deliberate involvement in those machinations. But it could provide Izvestia with some bargaining power in dealings with the regime and non-regime actors. In this respect, Izvestia’s traditional constituency was both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it gave the paper a still-impressive national reach, which remained a cornerstone of its professional identity.\(^{139}\) The economics of post-Soviet production meant that sales and subscriptions generated relatively little direct revenue. But the reader demographics provided a reasonably attractive market for advertisers, a constituency Izvestia had courted from early on.\(^{140}\) Their spending constituted 82 percent of Izvestia’s revenue in 1997, according to Oleg Golembiovsky. Ivan Zassoursky, who otherwise voiced strong criticisms of the paper, agreed that Izvestia is still very, very attractive in terms of its potential prospects. It has a stable share of the market, and lots of readers who are very used to it. If you’ve read a newspaper for 25 years over your cup of coffee, and you know how it looks, you can’t just switch to another newspaper in a couple of days. Perhaps you can never leave it. That’s why they have a lot of readers, in the provinces especially. This makes it rather profitable in the end. They also

---

\(^{139}\) Oleg Golembiovsky argued in 1992: “The empire has crumbled, but the common human space remains, and so does the Russian language – the only means of communication for everyone in the CIS, as English is for the business world. ... We simply want to remain a newspaper that is a means of communication among different sorts of people. The political overlay [of Soviet power] will disappear, but the common interests of people in the former republics – both economic and political interests – will remain in the future.” Quoted in Moskovsky Novosti, 8 March 1992 (CDSP XLIV: 11 [1992], p. 12). As of mid-1997, Izvestia was distributed in a total of ninety-five cities in Russia and three republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States: Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine. Only a fifth of its circulation was in Moscow, reflecting its dependence (like most post-Soviet newspapers) on subscriptions versus newsstand sales. Seventy percent of Izvestia’s circulation was subscriptions, according to Oleg Golembiovsky. Stanislav Kondrashov, from a somewhat more distant vantage-point, cited a figure of 80 percent subscriptions.

\(^{140}\) "Izvestia’s relative success is due, in part, to a brave decision to carry advertising in 1988. Almost immediately, it was a roaring success.” See “Life after Lenin” (The Economist).
receive — or used to receive — a lot of advertising, because it was considered the only respectable national newspaper.

Interview subjects characterized this core constituency as upper-middle and upper-class intellectuals and professionals, including decision-makers. Perhaps the most nuanced description was provided by media columnist Irina Petrovskaya:

I get a lot of letters from readers [gesturing at a pile on her desk]. I learn from those letters that [the average Izvestia reader] is usually an intellectual, in his forties probably, with some liberal political views on the situation; who has a habit of reading newspapers that he probably got from his parents, because this newspaper is eighty years old. They’re willing to learn about events not from the yellow press, but from a serious newspaper, with solid expertise and respectable opinions. I think the reader is usually interested in particular authors, because Izvestia traditionally had a very strong journalistic staff here. People would be interested, for example, in what Stanislav Kondrashov thinks about political issues, or what I think about the mass media. I think [Izvestia's readers] are “Old Russians,” not like the “New Russians” who are tempted to read Kommersant Daily for more business-oriented news. Younger readers tend to read paper like Moskovsky Komsomolets where they can learn about scandals, who's sleeping with whom, criminal stuff. Izvestia tries to avoid these topics, but it's hard to do, because it's really easy to attract readers with this kind of coverage.

Petrovskaya touches on a number of the themes that preoccupied Izvestia in its attempt to bolster what remained of its old constituency, while appealing to new ones. Business readerships and the younger audience were targeted early on as potential growth markets. The paper expanded its business coverage, most notably with Financial Izvestia, the high-profile supplement first published on 29 October 1992. This joint venture with the Financial Times was negotiated by Oleg Golembiovsky on a visit to the UK; by the time of fieldwork in mid-1997 had nearly doubled, from 18 to 34, though frequency of publication had been erratic. By mid-1997 it was distributing 200,000 copies — that is, it was included in about one-third of Izvestia's print-run. The focus, predictably, was on the 20 percent of copies that circulated in Moscow, home to the vast majority of business capital (and hence advertising revenue) in Russia.

---

141 Oleg Golembiovsky: “Seventy percent of our readers are people have at least some higher education. The readers are mostly intellectuals, and also government administrators and businessmen.” Alexander Sychev: “The typical reader of Izvestia is someone with at least a high-school education, but the main reader is someone with higher education, like a college education. And the interest of this reader extends further than just earning money or doing business. [In English] Intellectuals.” This was also a predominantly male demographic. In Tigran Vardanian's evaluation, “I would say Izvestia's demographic would be men 30 to 60, middle- and high-income; people who tend to work in the government and private sectors. A certain segment of women, not very high-profile though.”

142 The supplement would be one of the casualties of the economic crunch of 1998.

143 According to The Economist, Financial Izvestia's circulation was "limited ... by the difficulty of finding pink newsprint outside Moscow." See “Life after Lenin.”
The courting of younger as well as more prosperous constituencies was assisted by the staff restructuring after the 1992 economic reforms. As noted, this concentrated disproportionately on older, ostensibly more "conservative" staff. Over the following couple of years, the paper's appearance was somewhat streamlined and modernized. Oleg Golembiovsky pointed with pride in 1997 to his recent appointment of "a 25-year-old editor of the culture section of the newspaper," and claimed "the most active group of Izvestia reporters" was "mostly from 20 to 30" years of age.

There was also a risk, however, of alienating traditional constituencies by flirting with new ones — including political constituencies along the lines referred to in the previous section. In particular, Izvestia's constant trumpeting of the merits of economic reform, at a time when these were causing great popular hardship, may have discouraged readers who sought from their newspaper a more balanced and empathetic treatment of their plight. "Many traditional readers of Izvestia could not accept the very and sometimes too liberal orientation of the newspaper," said Stanislav Kondrashov. "Let's say, our coverage of economic reforms under Gaidar. We were too enthusiastic about this reform, especially in its first stage, which caused the most suffering."

Likewise, said Kondrashov, traditional constituencies had difficulty accepting "the total denunciation of our recent history" in Izvestia's pages:

They lived with their history; it was a part of their lives. So they could not accept that overly simplistic approach to the past. Now, we are more sober and moderate in our judgments; but at that time, in 1991, '92, '93, that is where we lost [readers]. Now, many of them find it difficult or almost impossible to return to Izvestia, but one of the difficulties is that we haven't been able to find a new and more or less stable audience [to replace them].

The result was a living-standard at Izvestia that was sufficient to cover subsistence needs, but permitted only limited expansion into new markets, technologies, and constituencies. The strategy had succeeded as of 1997 in giving the paper "a zero balance" economically — "no profit, no loss," according to foreign editor Alexander Sychev. But Izvestia was left with "only enough money for the necessities." If it was to expand, or even limit its contraction, it would have to seek outside investment. Hence, Sychev said, the paper went "looking for a partner who could provide money

---

144 Igor Kovalev, Financial Izvestia. "Look in the library at Izvestia from four years ago, and compare it [to today]. You'll see, it's the difference between heaven and earth." This is an exaggeration, since the paper also sought to preserve enough of the former design (along with the name of the publication) to keep it recognizable for traditional constituencies.
for projects that would make the newspaper more profitable.” It turned, first, to LUKoil, which promised an investment “without any conditions attached.”

**The Search for Sponsorship**

This is very good news for *Izvestia*. It will in no way affect the editorial policy of the newspaper, but it could mean financial opportunities and investments that can only improve its quality.


That story with LUKoil began on a rather optimistic note...

— Stanislav Kondrashov

With *Izvestia’s* life’s-blood still flowing, albeit anaemically, the decision-makers around Golembiovsky decided it was time to make a concerted push into the Russian regions. *Izvestia’s* reputation, in considerable part, depended on its national reach. Golembiovsky and his senior staff sought to bolster the paper’s presence in (and reporting on) the regions, thereby transcending some of the limitations of the old mobilizing model, which had strictly separated national from regional media.

Nothing is known (to this author, at least) about the early negotiations between *Izvestia* and LUKoil, the para-statal oil giant headed by Vagit Alekperov. But the talks culminated, in November 1996, with a joint agreement that LUKoil would, through its pension fund, purchase 19.9% of the shares in *Izvestia* at a price of US $16-$18 million. (The state was the largest shareholder in LUKoil, and it was thus possible to view the investment as a continuation of regime subsidies to *Izvestia* by indirect means.) Relations between the paper and the corporation were “quite good” for the first several months, according to Golembiovsky. But in his account, it was not long before *Izvestia* learned it “had not a partner, but a firm that wanted to be master of the newspaper.”

---

146Yuri Feofanov asserted, and Oleg Golembievsky confirmed, the regional focus of the projects that outside investment was supposed to fund. “Q. It is my understanding that LUKoil also had an agreement with the newspaper to expand its circulation in the other areas of Russia. Is that correct? Yes, *Izvestia* had been developing that project for two years, and finally LUKoil agreed [to invest in it]” (Oleg Golembievsky). The bridging of the national-regional gulf is my own interpretation, however.
147Oleg Golembievsky interview.
The precipitating event – the spark for this most significant of post-Soviet press transitions – was a brief story published in Izvestia on 1 April 1997, reprinted from Le Monde's edition of 29 March. The snippet accused Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin of amassing a fortune of some US $5 billion through his association with the state natural-gas monopoly, Gazprom. The Chernomyrdin camp responded with outrage. Senior government spokesman Igor Shabdurasulov claimed to be “deeply saddened and hurt by the utter oblivion of [sic] professional ethics illustrated by such a sound and respectable newspaper as Izvestia.”

There is no question that the item resulted from sloppy reporting on Le Monde’s part – it quickly issued a retraction – and that the damage was compounded by Izvestia's dubious decision to reprint the article unchecked. Igor Golembiovsky in June 1997 defended the decision to publish. A number of other staffers voiced disapproval. Even one of the critics, though – Stanislav Kondrashov – allowed that the article at least “clarified the situation” with LUKoil.

It did that. On 7 April, Vagit Alekperov, LUKoil’s president, denounced Izvestia's decision to reprint the article. Coming not long after LUKoil's purchase of shares, he said, it could be seen as an attempt by LUKoil itself to defame Chernomyrdin. There could be few people within the government whom LUKoil was less anxious to defame. Chernomyrdin, the former head of the Soviet gas monopoly, was key to the awarding of lucrative drilling contracts – including one that had apparently been the subject of delicate behind-the-scenes bargaining when the snippet about

149The paper had reported the substance of a question raised by a U.S. congressman as fact.
150“I would do it again,” said Golembiovsky. “If we have information that a foreign reader could access, a Russian reader should have it also. Chernomyrdin should have directed his questions to the French newspaper, Le Monde, rather than to Izvestia. Because we only reprinted the information.” Foreign editor Alexander Sychev agreed: “There are people at Izvestia who think it was a mistake. But if information appears, there should be no limits on its publication, to make sure the Russian people can also know about it. Especially because the information was drawn from another newspaper, not prepared by Izvestia itself.”
151Stanislav Kondrashov called it “a rather brief and sensational article ... not quite a serious step on Izvestia's part.” “It's funny, they didn't even intend to discredit Chernomyrdin,” said longtime Izvestian Yuri Feofanov. “They just wanted some 'hot news.' It's just a stupid thing.” See also Irina Petrovskaya's comments: “As a member of the staff of the newspaper, I wouldn't like to speak a lot about sordid stuff inside the newspaper. But I would like to say that if I had been chief editor, I wouldn't have allowed the conflict to develop the way it did. It was careless. All newspapers want to publish some sensation and scandal at any price. For a large and famous newspaper like Izvestia, it's better to avoid this situation.”
152“LUKoil's business success really depends on its relationship with government, and with Chernomyrdin personally,” said Oleg Golembiovsky. “There are no intimate relationships in business, but many aspects of LUKoil's survival depend on the decisions of Chernomyrdin.”
Chernomyrdin was published in Izvestia. Thus, "implicitly there was a condition" underlying Valekperov's protest, said Alexander Sychev: "Don't say anything bad about the government or the oil industry." It was, to Sychev's mind, outright "censorship."

Izvestia dug in its heels. It offered no apology for, or retraction of, the offending article. In an editorial of 15 April, it directly accused LUKoil of serving as Chernomyrdin's "censor." Three days later, it published an open letter signed by prominent intellectuals and media figures protesting LUKoil's attempt "to bring Izvestia to its knees." The company's "general objective," alleged the signatories, was "to change the newspaper's political line and turn it into the obedient mouthpiece of its new owners." For Russian media, it augured "a new totalitarianism."

Izvestia's approach struck many as confrontational. LUKoil's surely was. The company now sought to consolidate its shares, apparently bidding to acquire a majority on the Izvestia board of directors and strategic control over the institution. When Izvestia delayed its annual shareholders' meeting from 22 April to 4 June, LUKoil held one regardless. By then it felt confident enough of its position to announce - erroneously, it seems - that it had purchased more than 50 percent of shares, and thus had the right to appoint a new board of directors. In this spirit, it announced the appointment of four LUKoil representatives and three Izvestia staff to a new board. The decree was symbolic and had no effect on Izvestia's functioning. But LUKoil's intentions were now unmistakably clear. Izvestia now turned to another major corporation — Oneximbank, the para-

---

153 Andrei Zolotov, The Moscow Times. "Chernomyrdin got mad, apparently, and he suspended some - LUKoil claimed to have lost $250 million of government contracts. It just coincided that Chernomyrdin was supposed to give permission for a contract on the very day that Izvestia published the article."

154 "An Attack on Freedom of the Press Is An Attack on Democracy," Izvestia, 18 April 1997 (CDSP, XLIX: 16 [1997], p. 6). On 22 April, 15 journalists and editors wrote to President Yeltsin, "appealing to you in connection with attempts to bring about the forced 'reorientation' of two major national newspapers - Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda... A determined attack is under way against something that was achieved with enormous difficulty and at the cost of tremendous effort - an attack against the very possibility for each and every one of us to conscientiously perform his professional duty, including the duty to be an effective instrument of public influence on the authorities, whether the authorities themselves like it or not." "Letter to Russian President B.N. Yeltsin," Izvestia, 22 April 1997 (CDSP, XLIX: 16 [1997], p. 6).

155 Izvestia media columnist Irina Petrovskaya, among others, expressed sympathy for LUKoil's position in the controversy, and criticized her paper's decision to publish the Chernomyrdin article. "You have to respect the rules of the game. You can't be a little bit pregnant or a little bit independent. And if you decide to sell some shares to big business, you have to respect the interests of big business. Of course, there could be some agreement where the newspaper would respect those rules, and big business wouldn't intervene in the writing and political views of the newspaper. But in any case, the newspaper shouldn't go against its partners, against its commercial interests — as with, for example, that article."
statal banking group — to head off LUKoil’s thrust. Leaving aside the issue of whether regime actors were pulling the corporate strings, this meant all three players in the Summer 1997 battle over Izvestia were now on centre-stage.

The resultant struggle for control of the newspaper can be pieced together only in fragmentary form. Even seasoned observers of the Moscow media scene were perplexed by the murky, rapidly-unfolding events. In the light of the economic collapse of mid-1988, moreover, these machinations seem of declining historical interest in themselves. I therefore concentrate on the broader question: whether Izvestia’s strategy of approaching Oneximbank was a viable one.

In hindsight, but also reflecting sentiments that I and others voiced at the time, there were grounds for caution. Izvestia was not the first national daily to attract Oneximbank’s interest. Throughout early 1997, it had sided with a faction of staff at Komsomolskaya Pravda led by the commercial director, Vladimir Sungorkin, against then-chief editor, Valeri Simonov. Simonov had already courted the gas monopoly, Gazprom, tied (as we have seen) to the Chernomyrdin faction of the regime. By late 1996, Gazprom had already invested some US $12 million in the paper. According to Dmitry Babich, who then worked at Komsomolskaya Pravda, “in return for this ... investment, [Gazprom] was planning to buy 20 percent of the newspaper’s stock” at the April 1996 shareholders’ meeting. But Sungorkin, who in Babich’s view had ambitions to be not just commercial director but editor-in-chief, engaged in backroom wheeling-and-dealing that led, shortly before the meeting, to Oneximbank’s announcement that it planned to buy 20 percent of KP shares. These were duly purchased from the paper’s employees, at vastly inflated prices.

Oneximbank and Sungorkin emerged victorious; Simonov was deposed from the chief editor’s post at the shareholders’ meeting on 7 May 1997.

The possible implications for the editorial independence of Komsomolskaya Pravda seemed clear enough to Izvestia when it published its appeal to Boris Yeltsin on 22 April, requesting Yeltsin to take measures to ensure that shareholders did not interfere in KP’s — and Izvestia’s — editorial

---

156Said Igor Kovalev, who had spent a quarter-century at Izvestia by the time LUKoil and then Oneximbank made their play for the paper: “I’ve read five or six articles on the subject in Izvestia, in Kommersant, Segodnya, and absolutely honestly, it’s beyond my ability to understand.” See also the interview with Andrei Zolotov of The Moscow Times: Q. I think I’ve almost figured out this share-transfer scheme that resulted in Oneximbank’s — “Tell me, tell me! I haven’t.”

157“He was appointed director of the joint-stock company, but he wanted to be the editor-in-chief. He had economic power, but he wanted also political power. He wanted to control the whole thing.”
independence. Nonetheless, Oneximbank’s offsetting alliance with the Chubais faction, and its readiness to come aboard on short notice, apparently redeemed it in the eyes of Izvestia’s leadership. An alliance with Oneximbank was duly announced on 14 May 1997. The next day, Izvestia trumpeted its supposed victory over LUKoil by publishing an exposé of the company’s operations, accusing it of criminal links and profiting from Viktor Chernomyrdin’s patronage to the tune of more than US $200 million in overlooked debts.

At this point, admittedly, things looked rosier for Izvestia than they had for some weeks. It was also at this point that the majority of interviews for this chapter were conducted. “There is no question of [LUKoil] dictating to us,” proclaimed foreign editor Alexander Sychev confidently. But even before the corporate endgame that brought a close to the Golembiovsky era at Izvestia, there was a question to be posed about the longterm practicality

---

158 Alexander Tutushkin of Kommersant also expressed concerns about Izvestia’s strategy in the light of Oneximbank’s track record: “What is strange is Izvestia’s sudden fondness for Oneximbank … It is worth recalling that only recently, in late April [1997], when a battle was launched in the press against the danger of big capital dominating the news media, many authors, including Izvestia writers, coupled efforts to defend Izvestia against LUKoil with efforts to defend Komsomolskaya Pravda against Oneximbank, which had ‘ridden roughshod’ over it. Now it suddenly turns out that what’s bad for one newspaper is just fine for another. It seems that press freedom means something a bit different for Izvestia than it does for Komsomolka [the nickname of Komsomolskaya Pravda].” Tutushkin, “Izvestia Threatened by Dual Power,” Kommersant-Daily, 17 May 1997 (CDPSP, XLIX: 20 [1997], p. 18).


of using one corporation to head off the ambitions of another. Golembiovsky, as noted at the beginning of this case-study, dismissed the danger. But Ivan Zassoursky offered a much more far-seeing outside appraisal. “Soon,” Zassoursky predicted, *Izvestia* would “find out that it’s a lot easier for investors to negotiate with each other than with journalists. Investors have lots of spheres where they can cooperate, and they’ll make journalists do whatever they please. ... In a couple of months I expect these investors will dismiss Golembiovsky. Everything is pretty simple.” So it proved.

**Coup and Aftermath**

On 4 June 1997, *Izvestia* published the text of a “Charter on Relations Between the Newspaper ... and the Publication’s Shareholders.” Signed by twelve representatives from *Izvestia*, three from Oneximbank, and two from LUKoil, the Charter “recogniz[ed] the social responsibility of the press, respectful of the principles of freedom of speech and of the press”:

No one is to take any actions aimed against freedom of speech or of the press. The newspaper is to bear full responsibility for the articles it publishes and for the reliability of the facts it reports. ... No one is to take actions restricting independence of opinions in the joint-stock company’s publications. Editorial decisions are to be made without external influence. ... Journalism and promotional activity are incompatible.\(^{161}\)

Anyone tempted to see the charter as a true *entente* between *Izvestia* staff and their mobilizers, though, was disabused of the notion within a month. At a meeting on 23 June, a new board of directors was elected, consisting of three representatives from LUKoil and two each from Oneximbank and *Izvestia*. The paper’s autonomy was entrenched, but perilously — “between two fires,” as it were. At the same meeting, a new president of *Izvestia* Publishing House was chosen. Oleg Golembiovsky had decided not to run, apparently owing to the longstanding concerns over his dual role as president and chief editor. The new *Izvestia* president, Dmitry Murzin, was the former editor of *Financial Izvestia* (and was interviewed in that capacity for this project).

On 1 July, a new dispute between *Izvestia* and LUKoil broke into the open, with the paper’s published accusation that LUKoil had failed to abide by the terms of the autonomy agreement. The company was allegedly pressing for revisions to the process by which chief editors were

---

selected, to reduce the role of staff in the process. On the same day, Izvestia fired another salvo, this time lashing out at Anatoly Chubais – the First Deputy Prime Minister whose program of economic “reforms” it had long acclaimed! Izvestia’s story charged Chubais with having received an interest-free loan of about US $3 million.

The motives for publishing the Chubais piece remain unclear. It may be that Oneximbank chair Vladimir Potanin had decided to turn against Chubais – though if so, Izvestia’s renewed strong support for this regime figure after 1997 is difficult to fathom. It may be that Oleg Golembiovsky, sensing the way the winds were blowing, had decided to depart with a final broadside against the pro-Chubais alliance of Oneximbank and LUKoil that would shortly defenestrate him. It is also possible that the Chubais article precipitated the final crisis at Izvestia: that Chubais, while publicly ducking the accusations, worked behind the scenes to assist in the takeover of the paper. What is known is that within three days of publication of the Chubais piece, Oleg Golembiovsky was no longer chief editor of Izvestia. In a meeting on 4 July, the Izvestia board voted to depose Golembiovsky and revise the editor-selection process along LUKoil’s proposed lines. Obviously, negotiations had taken place between LUKoil and Oneximbank, resulting in a decision to sell out the mutual partner – Izvestia’s journalistic collective – and impose a new order at the paper.

Golembiovsky was absent when the boom was lowered, having suddenly announced a two-month leave on 1 July. Vasily Zakharko, a former correspondent in Bulgaria who had served as Izvestia’s deputy editor since February 1996, replaced him – supposedly as a stopgap measure. On 10 July, Golembiovsky finally reappeared at a Moscow press conference. He acknowledged ruefully that “Izvestia had found itself defenceless before the new owners,” but defended the decision to publish the article on Viktor Chernomyrdin. Golembiovsky, officially still chief editor of Izvestia, said he would leave the paper rather than contest any new election for the post.

163Some analysts believe the new editorial line of Izvestia is related to the recent election of Oneximbank deputy chairman Mikhail Kozhokin as chairman of the newspaper’s board of directors. ... [It was] suggested that Oneximbank President Vladimir Potanin had turned against the government. Markov noted that Oneximbank lost a bid to acquire the Sibneft oil company in May and more recently failed to install the head of an Oneximbank affiliate on the Gazprom board of directors.” Laura Belin, “Oneximbank Behind Izvestia Attacks?,” RFE/RL Newsline, 3 July 1997. This account of the coup depends heavily on Belin’s reporting from the time, in articles published on 4 June, 2 July, 7 July, 10 July, and 21 July 1997.
Meanwhile, other Izvestia staff were scrambling to adjust to the new reality at the paper. Over the previous week, they had worked to form a trade union, “to combat possible diktat by the investors” and work towards regaining a controlling share of the newspaper. But Izvestia journalist Stepan Kiselyov, writing in Moskovsky Novosti, stated succinctly what was now obvious to all:

Izvestia's journalists have lost the shares war and completely lost control of their own newspaper. The new collective owner ... has already replaced the president of the company and now intends to replace the editor-in-chief [both posts held by Golembiovsky]. ... Once the new board of directors adopted its rules for electing Izvestia's editor-in-chief, even a child could tell that the days of democracy at the paper were over. ... The staff remained, to face the new order alone. ... Our last line of defence is the independent trade unions. Ten of Izvestia's leading journalists ... declared their right to organize only a week ago. Now there are almost 50 of us. We understand that our new employer would be more comfortable dealing with an amorphous collective than with organized trade unions. ... The president [new Izvestia president Dmitry Murzin] represents the interests of the owners who appointed him, and he owes his allegiance to them alone. If they tell him to fire half the Izvestia staffers and replace them with other journalists, he'll do it. Not because he's evil, but because that's his job.

Yet the potentially incendiary question of Golembiovsky's successor fizzled. The Izvestia board had the right to choose any of three candidates presented by the journalistic collective. But on 18 July, the board accepted Zakharko, the candidate who received the largest number of staff votes – thereby heading off a clash with Izvestia staff, many of them newly-unionized. Though it appeared Zakharko was not the ideal candidate for shareholders and board members, he was nonetheless “an eminently electable figure.” Accepting his candidacy allowed the chairman of the board, Oneximbank’s Mikhail Kozhokin, “to announce proudly to the Izvestia staffers that the collective’s opinion was ‘sacred to the investors.'”

Turnout for the elections were heavy, but an observer nonetheless described the mood among staffers as “dispirited.” Many may have voted for Zakharko as a compromise candidate, aware of his reputation for caution. Many may also have

---

166 Zakharko received 104 votes, versus 80 for political columnist Otto Latsis and 53 for Anatoly Druzenko, Izvestia's first deputy editor-in-chief. See Alexander Tutushkin, “Chubais Hasn't Become Editor-in-Chief of Izvestia,” Kommersant-Daily, 19 July 1997 (CDPSP, XLIX: 29 [1997], p. 9). Some wit at the meeting apparently nominated First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoly Chubais for the chief editor's post – hence the title of Tutushkin’s piece. The author adds wryly that “Chubais, who is on vacation abroad, had no reaction whatsoever to the trust shown in him. ... [and] could not be a candidate for the high post, since he did not send in his written consent to be placed on the ballot ...”
feared their jobs were at risk if they took too strident a stand. On 28 July, seven of twelve members were axed from Izvestia’s editorial board. All in turn lost their jobs with the newspaper. “There were no professional, editorial or production-related reasons for this ‘revamping’ of the editorial board,” protested Stepan Kiselyov. Along with Sergei Dardykin, he had pushed to found the Izvestia trade union; now both were out in the street.167

At the very time that the new/old Izvestia celebrated publication of its 25,000th edition, Kiselyov and Otto Latsis joined Oleg Golembiovsky and three other defenestrated editors in announcing a new enterprise to be known as Novye Izvestia. It would employ 32 former Izvestia personnel, and seek to capture Izvestia readers alienated by the departure of the paper’s “backbone” staff.168 The project claimed US $40 million in financial backing — “quite a sizable sum,” Kommersant noted, “considering that the cost of publishing the average national daily newspaper in Russia is currently on the order of $9 million a year.”169

167“It comes down to pure politics,” Kiselyov added. “Golembiovsky’s supporters were taken out and Zakhar’ko’s supporters were put in. Meanwhile, Onexim[bank] and LUKoil kept a very close eye on the process ...” Otto Latsis, the runner-up to Zakhar’ko in chief-editorial elections, likewise stated: “It’s completely obvious that what they were doing was taking out those who had actively opposed what was being done to Izvestia.” He added: “I envisage a pretty gloomy future for [the newspaper]. Even now, stringent censorship is already in effect; hard-hitting pieces are being pulled.” Quoted in “Izvestia After the Coup,” Pravda-5, 13 August 1997 (CDPSP, XLIX: 32 [1997], p. 18).

168Alexander Tutushkin, “New Izvestia Set To Start Publishing in November,” Kommersant-Daily, 20 August 1997 (CDPSP, XLIX: 33 [1997], p. 17). See also Laura Belin, “New Izvestia To Appear in November,” RFE/RL Newsline, 1: 99 (20 August 1997). Amusingly, two of the departed staffers retained a vestigial, almost ghostly presence at Izvestia for several months after the coup. Oleg Golembiovsky and Otto Latsis were not formally replaced as board members until a 4 December 1997 meeting, where the new Izvestia president, Dmitry Murzin, and chief editor Vasily Zakhar’ko were inducted to fill their shoes. The Interfax report notes drily that the meeting “was held ... because two members of the old board — ... Golembiovsky and ... Latsis founded a rival paper, the Novye Izvestia, and presumably, therefore, did not perform their duties as board members.” Interfax, 4 December 1997 (from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service[FBIS]).

169The funding allowed Novye Izvestia to maintain something of the old Izvestia’s international reach; the paper would “maintain five foreign bureaus in the US, Japan and Western Europe.” It also backed attempts to lure talented journalists (especially former Izvestians’) to the new project, with wages double those offered at the old Izvestia. In response, the old Izvestia introduced pay raises, especially for outside contributors. Novye Izvestia, declared deputy editor-in-chief Nikolai Bodnaruk, posed no threat to its forebear and competitor: it was too closely associated with a regime that had presided over steadily declining sales. Tutushkin, “New Izvestia set to start publishing in November.”
Novye Izvestia, "put together at breakneck speed," published a pilot edition late in October, and its first issue on 1 November 1997. In several ways it sought to distinguish itself from its rival. Izvestia's logo and design changed notably after the failed coup attempt of 1991, but remained monochromatic. Novye Izvestia, though, adopted a jazzier logo. In shades of Barricada's post-revolutionary marketing strategy, it also became the first Russian newspaper ever to publish colour photographs. The circulation, though - 100,000 copies - was barely a fifth of the old Izvestia's.

**Figure 5.2 The logo of Novye Izvestia.**

Soviet media, but it disappointed those who hoped for a press institution less constrained by powerful mobilizers. The main investor in Novye Izvestia was widely reported to be media magnate Boris Berezovsky. (The involvement of another magnate, Vladimir Gusinsky, was "possible," in Oleg Golembiovy's cagey estimation.) For public consumption, both media barons denied involvement. But there were indications even before the new paper hit the streets that sponsors would have a decisive effect on Novye Izvestia's "line." On 29 October, three days before the scheduled launch of Novye Izvestia, the paper's reporter Leonid Krutakov told Komsomolskaya Pravda that he had been fired because of an article criticizing Berezovsky that he had published in Moskovskiy Komsomolets. Golembiovy, contended Krutakov, had expressed his unwillingness to criticize one of Novye Izvestia's key investors.

---

CONCLUSION

The configuration of the post-Soviet media system (including Izvestia and Novye Izvestia) was thrown sharply into question by the events of August 1998. If the severity of the economic meltdown came as a shock, the ramifications for the Russian press were largely predictable. In a replay of the Gaidar reforms of 1991, the press was thrust into a subsistence crisis, “immediately laying off staff, reducing frequency and volume, cancelling subscriptions to outside news sources,” and so on. These comments are drawn from an evaluation of the regional press’s plight, but could be extended to its national counterparts without difficulty – or rather, with enormous difficulties. The chaos this time extended to the national broadcast sphere, which had had a comparatively smooth ride in the post-Soviet era. Now its main sponsors – the Yeltsin regime and big business – were nearly bereft. Costs of basic inputs had doubled, with further increases on the horizon. Among the casualties was the post-coup Izvestia. Oneximbank, itself crisis-ridden, merged the paper with a much-vaunted but ill-timed addition to its media stable, Russkiiy Telegraf. Fifty percent of the staff of each publication was laid off.

Perhaps the most significant element of the new crisis for press functioning was the body-blow – very nearly the death-blow – dealt to advertising revenue. In the regions, the effects were instantaneous. “Many advertising contracts already signed ... have been reduced by 30 to 50 percent. Payments for advertising ... have been lost or delayed due to the banking crisis. Many retailers have cancelled advertising simply because the rush to purchase goods has made advertising unnecessary” – or, one might add, because they could no longer afford it. In the broadcasting sphere, revenues collapsed by 60 to 70 percent. According to the Russian National Press


172Print, predictably, had felt the pinch even earlier: “Even the government-financed Russkaya Gazeta, a newspaper of record in so far as publishing government decrees and laws went, collapsed on financial grounds in December 1995.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 133.

173“Regional Newspapers and the Russian Crisis.” Andrei Khalip wrote that “Russia's severe economic woes have now hit all businesses and people’s buying ability. As a result, crisis-stricken firms, both Russian and foreign, can no longer afford advertising, damaging broadcasters, printers, and advertisement distributors. ... Advertisers say order volumes have fallen by up to 80 percent ... Television channels have been forced to cut advertising rates by up to 80 percent. Advertisers said most channels would soon be unable to fund shows or buy foreign films.” Broadcast media often continued to run ads nonetheless, “to convince people that everything is fine,” according to one observer. See Khalip, “Russian Media Feel Pinch in Economic Crisis,” Reuters dispatch, 16 September 1998.

Institute (NPI), "Newspaper managers were just beginning to think that a commercial orientation was possible, that advertising works. Now, with advertising revenues contracting so drastically, they will be convinced that it is better to be on good terms with the government." But was the government in a position to grant the necessary sponsorship, however impassioned the pleas?

This chapter must end somewhere, and the structural effects of the collapse of 1998 would in any case be years in playing themselves out—whether in the press or elsewhere. The events served, though, as a stark reminder that the analyst of transition always risks having his or her frameworks rendered dubious, even obsolete, by the onset of an all-consuming economic or political crisis. In the conclusion to this study, we will explore whether useful generalizations can nonetheless be advanced about these diverse transition processes, the way they affect the press, and the way press and other media seek to influence them in turn.

175 Quoted in MacKenzie, "Casualty of Russia's Economic Crisis."
... In the period of consolidation of a less authoritarian regime, what are the roles played by media? Do they destabilize it by flexing their newly gained muscles? Do they begin to generate a culture of civic engagement? Do they address ethnic and other social divisions in ways that encourage them to be negotiated rather than become the source of bloodshed? Do they simply switch allegiance from one power center to another (whatever its designation on a democratic spectrum)? Do they move to pander to the raw sensationalism and sexist exploitation that are safe commercial bets for media? All these are possibilities.

— John Downing

New institutions that are constructed in the consolidation phase of transitions are largely built from the remnants of the previous order and are affected by its manner of collapse. In other words, the wider institutional environment — existing political, cultural, and market patterns — is likely to constrain and inform political choices, influencing the kinds of changes that occur.

— Patrick O'Neil

This book has considered the experience of six newspapers enmeshed in larger, markedly different processes of liberalization and transition. Nicaragua provides an example of a twin transition — from a right-wing dictatorship to a leftist revolutionary regime in 1979; and from that same leftist regime to a post-revolutionary coalition of the centre-right in 1990 (moving further still to the right in 1996). South Africa, in its way, can be seen as the last major transition from a colonial order to a post-colonial one, or — less contentiously — from racialist minority rule to majority rule. Russia, the best-studied of the transitions considered here, has moved from an authoritarian state-socialist order to a diffuse but dirigiste post-Communist regime (in which the old nomenklatura and apparatchiki nonetheless remain prominent). Jordan, lastly, serves as something of a benchmark for the other studies. Its transformation since 1989 can be viewed as shifting it from a

---


moderately authoritarian monarchical/tribal regime to a slightly less authoritarian variant allowing a
greater role for parliamentary forces, greater independence for print media, and a liberalized
associational life for citizens. The essential character of the regime and press-regime relations,
though, remained unchanged.

But this rough sketch of the case-studies is inadequate. It imposes a linear framework on
processes that are “nonlinear and multidimensional,” as Jennifer McCoy and Shelley McConnell
remind us. If transitions are protean creatures, mass media are hardly less so. The media serve as
one of the most reliable bellwethers of the “onset” of transformation at the regime level, and a solid
guide as well to further changes in regime character and policy. But they are also vulnerable to
interventions by powerful non-regime actors; they may be crippled or crushed even when the wider
transition remains generally supportive of media pluralism and professional autonomy. The cases
of *Barricada* and *Izvestia* suggest how a sudden change in a newspaper’s sponsorship, or in the
balance of power within a sponsoring institution, can radically transform the mobilizing and
professional imperatives of the institution. Lastly, perhaps to a greater degree than most other
transitional forces, the media also respond to complex reweavings of the social, economic, and
cultural fabric – not just domestically but globally. Some “fix” may be gained on these complex
events and phenomena by exploring a number of major themes in this final chapter, including:

- the diverse roles of the press in transition;
- press-regime relations in the transitional era;
- the relationship between the press and significant non-regime and para-statal actors;
- underdevelopment, transitional economies, and the crisis of resources;
- typical “press responses” (initiatives undertaken by individual institutions); and
- the professional imperative in transition (including degrees of politicization,
  “libidinization” and sensationalism, and western influences).

---


*Throughout this final chapter, I move fairly freely between the terms “press” and “media.” The key to the
usage is straightforward. When “media” are mentioned, I am suggesting the analysis might apply to both print and
broadcast media – sometimes also to new media technologies like the Internet. These are necessarily secondary or
peripheral to the discussion, however, and I am not pretending to have explored the broadcast or new-media spheres
adequately. “Press” means “print”; the observations may have wider application to mass media, but I do not myself
dare to make the leap.*
After sketching a model of a generic press institution in transition, the chapter concludes with some brief consideration of the variables that may improve a press institution's survival chances, and necessarily subjective prescriptions aimed at bringing transitional media closer to the author's vision of things. The concluding discussion also suggests ways in which transparency in media sponsorship and functioning can be encouraged, the worst excesses of partisanship countered if not tamed, and the physical and professional security of journalists increased if not assured.

**Overview of the Press in Transition**

The press and other media have played important, sometimes pivotal roles in the epic transformations of the last two decades. But they — the written press in particular — have received relatively little scholarly attention for their pains. Outside the well-funded field of post-Soviet studies, the press is indeed "the forgotten actor in transition analysis."

The case-study approach taken in this volume provides one means of redressing this deficit. Only when we have a wealth of portraits of institutions in transition will we be able to construct a comparative analysis with confidence. At this stage, though, a few propositions can be advanced about transitional media:

1) In transitions with a broadly liberalizing character (the majority), the sheer proliferation of media institutions has been one of the most reliable indicators of transition's "onset" phase. Almost without exception, this phase is marked by an explosion of "independent" and opposition media — most notably newspapers and magazines; less regularly radio; occasionally TV. In

---


6 The greater reach of broadcast media means they are most likely to be kept under the thumb of the ruling authorities. In all four of the case-study countries, the *ancien régime* maintained a near or total stranglehold on broadcast media. Nicaragua under the Sandinistas, with its diverse network of private and religious radio stations, was something of an exception. In South Africa, Jordan, and Russia (the Soviet Union), what opposition media did function domestically tended to be print media, although in the case of the USSR this was limited to clandestine *samizdat* publications, and the occasional more "liberal" publication (like the *Moscow News*) targeted mostly at a foreign audience. Broadcast media outside state control were often powerfully significant actors — but they tended to operate outside the borders of the country in question. The role of guerrilla radio "stations" in undermining authoritarian regimes, as in El Salvador and a number of other Third World countries, is also worth considering. On the
Romania, between 900 and 1,000 were jockeying for position only five months after the overthrow of the Ceaușescu dictatorship. Miklós Vámos cites a single week in Hungary in 1990 in which three new daily papers hit the stands. In Poland that same year, Annick Cojean described "an amazing media revolution" epitomizing, for him, the revival of civil society:

A new publication appears at newsstands almost every day. Neighbourhood papers are appearing in the cities and suburbs. Villages are acquiring mimeograph machines to print their own newsletters. Parishes, community groups, companies, universities and high schools are all launching publications, as are taxi drivers' associations, movie fan clubs, jazz lovers' societies and poetry circles.

Almost identical processes marked the liberalization in Nicaragua from 1987 to 1990, immediately preceding the transition to a post-Sandinista order. Other examples include the South African transition in the half-decade or so preceding the first multiracial elections (1994); the transformations in Malawi after the overthrow of Dr. Hastings Banda (which saw "an explosion of newspapers" in one of Southern Africa's least-developed media systems); and the "dramatic" transformation in the countries of Francophone Africa, which witnessed a "stampede to set up private newspapers" in the liberalizing years of the early 1990s. Perhaps the most obscure case of recent times is also the most extraordinary: the durable press liberalization that followed the 1991 overthrow of the Siad Barre regime in impoverished Somalia. "When the government collapsed, newspapers popped up like mushrooms," according to journalist Said Bakar. Alex Bellos reported that "Mogadishu now boasts an incredible 19 newspapers, of which five are daily," even though "all the printing presses - like almost every other piece of industrial hardware in the city - were destroyed in the fighting. Mogadishu's issues are instead A4 sheets printed using Gestetner machines and stapled together."

Salvadorean case, see José Ignacio López Vigil, Rebel Radio: 1001 Tales of Radio Venceremos (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994).

7 Gross, "Restricting the Free Press in Romania," p. 366.
Before we get carried away with examples that journalists themselves like to cite, it is important to appreciate that the "blooming" of print and sometimes other media under conditions of liberalization is nearly always followed by a winnowing — usually a rapid one. Publics grow sated on the information now available to them, or disillusioned with the professional inadequacies and mobilizing excesses of the media. The material rigours that regularly accompany transition cut deeply into consumer spending. The highly-charged atmosphere of the early stages of liberalization may be replaced by mounting public apathy, mass depoliticization, and a retreat to the private sphere. Regimes may launch counterattacks that reduce the media's room for manoeuvre. Jordan under King Hussein is one example; Kenya under Arap Moi, and Nigeria under the generals, might also serve. The sympathy and tolerance that nouveaux régimes display for independent or opposition media may be little greater than their predecessors.

Still, compared with the situation prevailing before the onset, it is a rare transitional or post-transitional environment in which media diversity is actually reduced. Perhaps only where transition has a fundamentally illiberal character is this the case. Examples are not hard to find from earlier in this century — Germany, Italy, Spain, the USSR, and the People's Republic of China come to mind. But they have been harder to locate among the transitions of the last twenty years or so, which indeed seem to constitute something of a "third wave" of democratization. Even in cases where authoritarian regimes seem fully to have recovered their footing (Jordan, Kenya), or where they have been replaced by highly-autocratic new orders (Belarus, Serbia, Haiti, Democratic Republic of Congo), media diversity seems enhanced. One might wish to keep an eye on developments in Hong Kong under Chinese rule, but few scholars would feel comfortable generalizing from this historically-anomalous case.

2) Newspapers and other media have been among the most sought-after prizes in competitions and conflicts among transitional actors. Downing writes of the "vicious competition for power [that] may lead to an opening up of communication via media as the groups in contention seek to draw support for themselves, and to denounce their opponents, via media." There is, of course, a centuries-old tradition of struggle for control of the printing press — or, in the

---


modern era, of the broadcast tower and satellite dish. Presidents, parliaments, political parties, and most recently entrepreneurs and para-statals have manoeuvred in highly public fashion to gain control over Komsomolskaya Pravda, Izvestia, and other organs of the Soviet and post-Soviet media. The motive seemed primarily to marshal these media for partisan political purposes. In that respect, the takeovers bore a resemblance to the defenestración at Barricada: with the possible exception of the Sandinista bench in the Nicaraguan parliament, there was no more hotly-contested institution in the internal struggle for control of the Sandinista Front than the former official organ. In South Africa, Black penetration of the White media cartel was seen as one of the principal tests of the post-apartheid order: few institutions were as closely watched as the state broadcasters and independent press.

Where the mobilizing imperative is profit, outsiders are often eager to join in the competition. In South Africa, the Irish “Ketchup King,” Tony O’Reilly, is typical of the international magnate who sees political transition as an ideal opportunity to snap up media holdings at fire-sale prices. The material dislocation that generally accompanies transition promotes this type of penetration and attempted takeover – to a point. A similar feature was evident on the Central and Eastern European media landscape of the 1990s, as Rupert Murdoch and West German media giant Bertelsmann A.G., among other multinational players, moved rapidly to expand their holdings in Hungary, Poland, and the former East Germany. Occasionally the foreign media player was one of the more entrepreneurially-minded “Third World” conglomerates – as soap operas churned out by the Mexican giant Televisa and Brazil’s TV Globo became the most popular programs on post-Soviet TV.

15In Russia, as noted in Chapter 5, infrastructural dislocation across the vast national territory has tended to dissuade outside investment. The impoverished Nicaraguan market has likewise made the country unattractive to outside investment in general, with the exception of resource-extraction industries and low-wage maquiladora plants.

16Turner, for example, co-founded the independent Russian station TV6 in 1993, though he was replaced by domestic capital in the following year. Perhaps the “most striking” example was Axel Springer’s actions in Hungary: “Two weeks after the spring 1990 elections were over Springer simply moved in and took over from Servicing Ltd. [the firm set up by the Communist Party to inherit the regional press] seven county daily newspapers, representing a readership of about a third of a million, and just over a third of the counties of the nation.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, pp. 131, 158.

17Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 132. Elizabeth Fox notes that “Mexico and Brazil now have the two largest and most monopolistic and politically powerful broadcasting industries in the Western hemisphere.” In general, Latin American media “are competing strongly and successfully in international export markets, and Latin American broadcasters have become significant exporters of entertainment as well as news.” The broadcasters also target “the large Hispanic audiences in the United States.” Fox, “Latin American Broadcasting and the State: Friend
3) Newspapers and other media have worked to **unveil state and regime abuses**, sometimes in ways that galvanized transitional forces. In 1977, the South African *Rand Daily Mail* and *Sunday Express* revealed the existence of the huge state slush-fund to finance ostensibly "independent" media outlets like *The Citizen*. In Nicaragua under the Somoza dictatorship, Pedro Joaquín Chamorro’s *La Prensa* effectively positioned itself as the conscience of civil society. It consistently reported allegations (usually made by church sources, the Sandinista Front, or foreign human-rights organizations) that allowed a clearer picture of regime abuses to emerge. Chamorro’s death was itself seen as an unconscionable abuse of power, and bolstered middle- and upper-class opposition to the Somoza dictatorship. In the USSR, it was as much as anything the media reports of the late Soviet era that undermined the legitimacy of the state-socialist system and sent *glasnost* and *perestroika* spinning out of the regime’s control. Investigative reporting of “psychiatric” hospitals (used as dumping grounds for political dissidents), environmental disasters, Chernobyl, and other dark corners of the system founded by Lenin and Stalin – all combined to erode one-party rule, rather than strengthening it as Gorbachev had intended when he launched his reform initiatives.

A caveat, however: investigative reporting can prompt a backlash that **limits or inhibits** a process of liberalization and/or transition. The sometimes-slapdash and sensationalistic exposés that Jordanian tabloids, for example, dabbled in during the early 1990s provoked a strong reaction among entrenched social, political, and economic elites, leading to growing demands that the government rein in the “wayward” institutions. For this and other reasons, such a disciplining did take place between 1994 and 1997. The aggressive, but likewise often irresponsible, investigations

---

34Reporting by *The Rand Daily Mail*’s successor, the *Weekly Mail*, about state links to "Third Force" death-squads made global headlines and further eroded the legitimacy of the apartheid regime.

19Fox notes that when corruption charges were levelled against Brazilian President Fernando Collor de Mello, Collor sought to tough it out. But "when word got out that Roberto Marinho [head of the powerful TV Globo] had held a meeting with Vice-President Itamar Franco, next in the line of succession, Brazilians knew Collor was finished; he resigned as a result of the corruption charges on 29 September 1992." Fox, “Latin American Broadcasting.”

20It could be argued that investigative coups of this type are more common in developed media systems: investigative journalism is the most expensive variety to undertake, involving a protracted commitment to research with no certain longterm payoff. Journalists who publish such exposés often, and understandably, express gratitude to their institutions for backing them through sometimes fruitless-seeming background work. Likewise, journalists in some transforming or transitional media systems – like Jordan’s – bemoan the lack of resources available to fund such investigations.
mounted by the Kenyan, Nigerian, Zambian, and Zimbabwean press of the 1990s has spawned no end of legal actions and other punitive measures. These may originate with the regime itself, or with powerful regime-affiliated or non-regime actors that have their own axe to grind with the media — including those they sponsor. The limited discussion of Sandinista abuses permitted in *Barricada* during the era of semi-autonomy certainly earned the paper the enmity of powerful figures within the Sandinista Front. *Izvestia*’s sensational trumpeting of *Le Monde*’s allegations against Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin were instrumental in precipitating the newspaper’s crisis of Summer 1997.

4) Related to the above, but more generally, the media have stood at the forefront of popular struggles which influence and help to define the liberalization or transition. Owen Johnson writes that “The mass media were generally the most visible part of the liberalizing forces in Poland in 1956 and from 1980 to 1981, in Hungary in 1956, and in Czechoslovakia in 1968.”

O’Neil goes so far as to argue that “it is often the media’s defection from the authoritarian camp that seals the latter’s fate.” Journalists in Russia became so prominent during the *glasnost* era, and were seen as so foundational to the wider process of democratization, that the public elected more than a dozen of them to the Congress of People’s Deputies in the 1990 elections (although none, as noted, were re-elected). The role of the South African English-language press was ambiguous, as I showed in in Chapter 3. But many saw it as the vanguard of mainstream opposition to the Nationalist regime, and especially *The Rand Daily Mail*.

5) The media ordinarily have been the first to push the boundaries of the new freedoms coinciding with the onset of liberalization and transition. Some of the key forms of transgression by media professionals have already been outlined. But a further, little-recognized dimension of their role is worth considering: the institutional backing they have sometimes given to campaigns aimed at dismantling repressive legislation or, conversely, promoting more liberal legal and constitutional frameworks. The role of “quality” publications, like *The Rand Daily Mail* under apartheid, has received some attention in this context. Less often appreciated is the vanguard role

---

21Owen V. Johnson, “The Media and Democracy in Eastern Europe,” in O’Neil, ed., *Communicating Democracy*, p. 109. He adds, though: “That role does not imply that journalism was necessarily a liberalizing force [in itself]; rather, reformers used the media to convey their own liberal goals.”

of “yellow” or sensationalist publications. These tend disproportionately to run afoul of the law. But if they do battle and are successful, the implications have a “spillover effect” for the media system as a whole which may result in a loosening of legal restrictions. Consider, in this regard, the South African edition of *Hustler*. Its publisher, Joe Theron, contributed well over one million dollars (U.S.) to the campaign to erode the massive censorship apparatus of the late-apartheid regime. In other countries, tabloid media, by dint of their sensationalist tone and often-erratic fact-checking, regularly find themselves front-and-centre in court cases that reverberate throughout the political system and civil society. A similar vanguard role may be played by political-party publications. These usually have limited circulation and reach, but the explicitness of their political confrontation with the authorities, and the frankness of their political and personal criticisms, may make them special targets of state harassment and closure.

6) Media – especially the press and radio – have served as one of the few viable ways in which publics can articulate and communicate their concerns in times of transition and flux. We have seen that the proliferation of newspapers and other media in the early stages of liberalization or transition is one of the most reliable indicators that such processes are underway. Established media, too, are likely to undergo significant transformations – as the histories of *Barricada* and *Izvestia* vividly demonstrate. Ordinarily, these transformations draw media closer to traditional and non-traditional constituencies alike – for a time, at least. Under *glasnost*, for example, the letters pages of the Soviet press served more than ever their time-honoured role as an outlet for ordinary citizens to voice their hopes and air grievances. The English press of South Africa, whatever its deficiencies, offered (together with literature and theatre) an important outlet for criticism of the apartheid regime. As noted in Chapter 1, the media regularly position themselves as “watchdogs” for at least certain sectors of society. Even if their allegiances are selective, the cumulative effect (as already noted) may provide a significant counterweight to regime and elite deprivations. Often media are more effective in this role than whatever duly-constituted “watchdogs” the political system or civil society can provide. It was investigations by Brazilian media, for example, that fuelled a massive popular mobilization against the government of Fernando Collor in Brazil, pushing the starchy Brazilian Congress to take action and bring down the administration in 1993.
7) Lastly, in numerous respects, media have served an agenda-setting and educational function in transitional societies. *Barricada* appeared to have had some success in advancing the new "line" of *concertación*, non-violence, and pluralism that helped keep Nicaragua from renewed civil war in the first half of the 1990s. At the same time, it sought to implement a professional project that *typified* the more tolerant and pluralistic political agenda. Many South African papers in the post-apartheid era similarly aligned themselves with the goals of the Reconstruction and Development Program. In particular, *Sowetan*, the largest Black-written and -edited daily, devoted itself full-force to offsetting the drastic educational deficit of apartheid, teaching basic business and entrepreneurial skills, and otherwise promoting the social goals of the liberation movements. Examples can also be drawn from the Soviet and post-Soviet press. Under *glasnost*, Soviet media were sought out by tens of millions of Soviet citizens for the guidance they offered amidst the dizzying political and economic transformations of the transitional era. More recently, business publications such as *Kommersant* (which established a reputation as the most professional and politically independent of the "quality" Moscow dailies) educated "New Russian" entrepreneurs in business strategy. They assisted in streamlining the flow of information through Russia's infant market economy – as, in their way, did the new corporate mouthpieces with the signals and warnings they communicate to each other through their media. Post-Tiananmen Chinese publications likewise found it possible to push for economic (hence wider social) changes by providing readers with detailed, relatively propaganda-free information on economic issues.

---

**Mobilizers in Transition: Regimes and Non-Regime Actors**

The most significant media sponsor in the prototypical *ancien régime* is the regime itself. Can some propositions be advanced about the fate of regime or regime-affiliated media in transition? The media that bloom when the state or regime retreats or is transformed – when a society "decompresses" or "thaws" – might be expected to have an advantage in relations with a *nouveau*...

---

23The difference between "regime" and "regime-affiliated" media I would characterize as the difference between the pre-transition *Izvestia* and *Barricada* on the one hand – wholly-owned ruling-party institutions – and *The Citizen* or *Jordan Times*, operating under regimes that were themselves more diffuse, and exposed to more indirect mechanisms of influence and control.
Correspondingly, it is those media already existing at the onset of transition — those that tend, almost by definition, to have enjoyed a privileged relationship with the ancien régime — that one would expect to find transition most daunting on both a material and a professional level. It is true that transformations at the state and/or regime level almost automatically introduce an element of crisis into the functioning of such media. The severity of the crisis is likely to increase to the extent that the transformations are sudden, radical, and unexpected. The atmosphere in the Barricada editorial offices “after the earthquake” in 1990 (see Chapter 2) provides a dramatic example.

More gradual transitions, though, may be the norm — consider in this context the countries of the southern cone of Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Chile) and their Central American counterparts, where liberalizations followed in the wake of protracted pact-negotiation between (military) governments and opposition forces. Perhaps this helps to explain one of the most counter-intuitive aspects of media transitions: why those media most intimately bound up with the status quo ante do not necessarily face a direr predicament than their oppositionist or arriviste counterparts. Such media may even enjoy advantages unavailable to more “independent” media. Just as the Soviet nomenklatura made the leap from guardians of the old order to “new Russian” capitalists, media institutions have proved equally nimble. How else to explain the fact that the most popular, profitable, and politically-independent Russian daily is Moskovsky Komsomolets — Moscow Young Communist?25 The examples of Izvestia, Komsomolskaya Pravda, and the tabloid Pravda-5 can also be cited from the Russian case.26 Anna Sabbat-Swidlicka has written of the Polish case that

The once Communist-owned press has been privatized and its market is more or less stable, but the press is still dominated by the old, established publications that used to be owned by

24“The political economy of sovietized media was not a matter of overly great mystery.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, p. 28.


26One of the unsolved mysteries of the Moscow fieldwork is exactly why Pravda-5 is called Pravda-5 (Pravda Pyat). The journalist Dimitry Babich cited two reasons: by one reckoning, this was the fifth version of the often-banned, often-revived Pravda to be launched; as well, it was the successor to the Friday tabloid supplement of Pravda, i.e., the edition published on the fifth day of the week. In either case, the desire to establish continuity, as well as an independent identity, was evident.
the Communist party's publishing empire. Although dismantling that empire was one of the priorities of the Solidarity governments, the way in which it was done actually helped to enrich the Communist nomenklatura, perpetuated the existence of old titles, and gave an unfair advantage to journalists of the old Communist school.27

"The way in which it was done" indeed gave the press of the ancien régime a real advantage in confronting the varied pressures of the transition era. As the privatization processes in Central and Eastern Europe ended up turning over state resources mainly to former state functionaries, so the press was similarly divvied up among newspapers whose staff had not changed greatly from the days of the old regime. Established print media also generally carry a core constituency into the new era. This has not prevented sometimes-calamitous declines in circulation, as already noted. But it has given many papers subsistence anchors in turbulent times, and shaped their journalistic project along lines designed at least in part to avoid alienating those core readerships.28 The retention of existing names is the most obvious indicator of the continuing attempts to target core readers.29 It is far from a universal trend: a number of the leading Eastern European party dailies did change their names.30 But at least an equal number did not. This leads to oddities like Komsomolskaya Pravda and Moskovsky Komsomolets, papers whose names indicate an affiliation with organizations that no longer exist, and are not necessarily remembered fondly by the population. Hungary’s Nepszabadsag [People’s Freedom] kept not only its title, but its slogan: “Socialist Daily.” Rude Pravo, the official party organ in Czechoslovakia, retained both its name and its status as the leading daily in the Czech Republic. In a way, the example of Barricada in Nicaragua is especially striking: it kept its unusually image-specific name even when its political project became the very antithesis of barricade-building.

The South African case is worth considering here. The end of apartheid precipitated a crisis for certain established media – specifically, the state-owned broadcasters. Under a new, ANC-


28 There is, I suggest, a tension between the professional role of “watchdog” and public-opinion leader, and the mobilizing imperative of appealing to a core constituency. It results in phenomena like Izvestia’s championing of market reforms despite the material hardship they were causing most readers (and the newspaper itself). Barricada’s ambivalent relationship with the militant core of Sandinistas after 1990 can also be cited: the paper sought to be ahead of its constituency at the same time as it tried to be more responsive to them, through readers’ surveys and the like.

29 Igor Kovalev of Izvestia remarks: “As far as I know, those readers who were reading Izvestia, subscribing to Izvestia, ten years ago – they are still subscribing to it now, although it has changed greatly. The same with Pravda: those who were reading it are still buying it. It’s a habit, a loyalty.”

30 For example, “the Bulgarian Rabotnichesko Delo (Workers’ Affair) was renamed Duma (Word). The Romanian Sânteia Poporului (Spark of the People) first dropped ‘of the People,’ then changed its name to Adovarul (Truth).” Vamos, “Eastern Europe’s New Press Lords,” p. 368.
dominated regime, these were the media most liable to institutional upheaval. At the staffing level, they were turned upside down, and traditional constituencies deserted them in droves. The dimension of affirmative action, so central to the South African transition but not easily fitted into the comparative framework, added a truly revolutionary dimension to the transformations in broadcasting. But the observer seeking to extend the analysis to other regime-affiliated media in South Africa was in for a surprise. The Afrikaans press, for example, was handed an expanded constituency — perhaps uniquely in the world, it benefitted from an exodus of broadcast audiences to newspapers: i.e., Afrikaners disenchanted with the loss of their privileged status in the state-sponsored media. The Afrikaans papers claimed a modest growth in circulation and advertising revenue after the multiracial elections of 1994 — at a time when the more liberal and anti-apartheid English-language papers, which one would expect to thrive in the new conditions, were reporting stagnant or declining circulations. Most anomalous of all was the experience of the right-wing English daily, *The Citizen*, founded by the apartheid regime and funded by it until its roots were unveiled in the devastating "Info Scandal" of 1978. Remarkably, *The Citizen* managed to establish a large, predominantly Black readership during apartheid's waning years. As late as 1998, the paper seemed among the best-positioned of South Africa's English-language dailies, in both market and political terms — and with a not-insignificant professional cachet to boot.

If pro-regime media negotiate transition's hurdles with greater adroitness than expected, it is also true that distance from the *ancien régime* (whether in the form of longtime opposition or simple newsness) offers no guarantee of future success. For many independent or oppositionist media, liberalization and transition bring benefits in the form of a lifting of censorship or a reduction in regime harassment. Ironically, though, they may also undermine the institution's *raison d'être*, even more than for state-affiliated media. In Russia, the *Moscow News* — considered the most independent of Soviet-era newspapers — withered on the vine when its "liberal" reputation was rendered irrelevant by the pace of glasnost. In South Africa, newspapers that devoted themselves to the battle against racist rule confronted in the 1990s an identity crisis probably deeper than that facing the Afrikaans press. The fate of the alternative newspapers and magazines that flourished in apartheid's waning years is further powerful evidence of this transitional quandary.

One thing is certain. Liberalization and transition may or may not succeed in installing a *nouveau régime*, the relationship between given media organs and the powers-that-be may vary widely;
but *all* media will have to contend with an elite that takes an active and often decisive interest in their operations. That interest may be comparatively liberal and benign, as in South Africa and (from 1990 to 1996, at least) Nicaragua. In such cases, regimes may stress the need for media diversity, and promulgate legislation (including constitutional changes) that aims to increase media pluralism and autonomy. They may privatize state-sector media or turn them to projects more in keeping with the informational requirements of a majority rather than a small minority.

In such cases, regime media policy usually reflects the liberal and pluralistic disposition of the regime itself, often founded in a pluralistic media tradition of some vintage; and b) an unusual degree of domestic and international vigilance in the area of media freedoms. South Africa can serve. The liberal-democratic inclinations of the ANC are not, to this point at least, in doubt; the regime well understands that heavy-handed treatment of the mass media, or any other large corporations, would diminish South Africa's "favourable investment climate" and "destabilize" the transition. The relationship between the regime and the press, though not without complexities, is comparatively harmonious.

The Nicaraguan case also deserves mention. Like the ANC government in South Africa, and for similar reasons, the UNO regime led by Violeta Chamorro made sweeping media freedoms one of its basic policy underpinnings. Chamorro, it will be remembered, was both the wife of a newspaper editor murdered by a dictatorship, and the former publisher of a newspaper, *La Prensa*, that had been systematically harassed and censored by the Sandinista revolutionaries – to the point of being closed for 15 months in 1986-87. In Chapter 2, I noted that Sandinista media policy was unusually pluralistic in a country at war; and also that a liberalizing trend was evident in the final two or three years of the Sandinistas' tenure in power. Nonetheless, those liberal tendencies were notably deepened and extended under Chamorro. The worst that opposition media (notably the post-1994 *Barricada*) could claim in terms of regime hostility was an apparent bias in the distribution of state-sector advertising and publishing contracts – also evident under the Sandinistas. Thus, the pressures and challenges that Nicaraguan media confronted between 1990 and 1996 had very little to do with regime policy *per se*. They pertained more to environmental factors – poverty and material crisis – and to struggles between media and their sponsors (notably between the FSLN leadership and *Barricada*).
Such basically benign strategies, though, are far from the only ones followed by regimes in transition. A harder line is very often evident. So, too, is a gradual evolution from more protective to more punitive policies. Such an evolution commonly reflects the operation of two major variables: 1) the degree of cohesion and relative strength of the transitional regime (which tends to increase as the “new order” finds its feet and regularizes its relations with other social forces); and 2) the degree of social stress and dislocation, which nearly always accompanies transition, and for which statistical evidence can be found in areas as diverse as crime, health, traffic accidents, and domestic violence.

Transitional regimes may thus choose the route of direct manipulation or even repression of mass media. They tend to stop short of real savagery – as noted earlier, it is a rare transitional media policy that compares in brutality or censoriousness to that of its predecessor. But exceptions can be found. The policies followed by the Palestinian Authority in the Occupied Territories, for example, have not featured an appreciable reduction in jailings, harassment, or censorship of Palestinian journalists since direct Israeli control was ended; detentions and torture may even have increased.31 Post-1980 Zimbabwe could be added to the list.32

Whatever official and unofficial policy the nouveau régime adopts towards domestic media, it has the usual range of carrots and sticks at its disposal to encourage compliance. Most of these bear more than a passing resemblance to strategies of media control in authoritarian and dictatorial systems – though most stop short of outright ownership, censorship, closure, or state terrorism. Media may be hedged in with restrictive legislation, as with the Press and Publications Law of 1992 in Jordan, which in addition has been applied selectively to target the media least favoured by the regime. All media are additionally subject to the selective granting, withholding, or renewing of...
licenses, a strategy used to great effect in Jordan, and one that has aroused controversy even in liberal South Africa. As well, the legislative framework may be so confused or inadequate that the state can act more or less as it chooses. This latter condition is in fact very common in transitional societies, where legal and constitutional norms are in flux along with other traditional institutions and ideologies.  

The regime may maintain an especially powerful hold over broadcast media, through direct or barely-disguised ownership. Other journalists and media organs may be "bought" in an irregular or institutionalized way, as they clearly were in Russia during the 1996 presidential elections:

Working in conjunction with an array of private firms, including public-relations agencies and other middlemen, the [Yeltsin] campaign and its backers ... arranged for payoffs to journalists ranging from thousands of dollars a month for the most recognized reporters at major Moscow newspapers to $100 for a freelance piece by a novice ghostwriting for a provincial newspaper, according to journalists and Yeltsin campaign insiders.

Advertising revenue can be disbursed in patrimonial fashion to favoured publications and broadcast media, as Sandinista leaders accused both the Chamorro and Aleman regimes of doing in Nicaragua, and as they themselves had done (to Barricada's benefit) during the 1980s. Access to other goods and services over which the state retains at least partial control can be doled out in like fashion: printing and broadcast facilities, publishing contracts, transportation and postal services, embassy and diplomatic subscriptions, and so on. Funds may be made available for training, overseas trips, and professional infrastructure — as Jordan's King Hussein donated a plot of land for

---

33Selective taxation as an additional control strategy was discussed in Chapter 5. As Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program noted, this can operate at the individual as well as institutional level. "A journalist would make something like $700 a month [in Russia], and that's considered pretty good. But the salary that would be shown [by the newspaper] to the tax authorities is 300,000 roubles, which is fifty dollars, right? Everybody knows about this. The tax people know. Nobody takes any action, but the editors know that they know. And that makes everyone extremely vulnerable. At any moment, a tax inspection could come, and completely legally throw you in prison or fine you. Q. Is this just one newspaper? All of them! I guess you would not find a single paper which would not have some kind of tax-evasion scheme."


35The [Russian] government believes that if it doesn't privatize the presses, [the newspapers] will answer to the government." Vladimir Sungorkin of Komsamolskaya Pravda, quoted in Mark Whitehouse, "The Money Behind the News," The Moscow Times, 1 April 1997.
a new press club to the slavishly pro-regime Jordan Press Association. In every society, as well, regimes hold powerful sway over the daily requirements of newsgathering. Certain journalists, editors, and broadcasters may receive privileged access to elite sources, while others are frozen out.

In these ways and others, regimes direct and constrain the functioning of transitional media. Scholars seeking to understand why the early promises of liberalization so often fails to fully take hold — why independent and opposition media so often capsize or are tamed as the transition proceeds — can usefully consider these strategies of regime manipulation, and their undeniable effects.

A final point needs to be made before moving beyond this discussion of regime media policies, since it is also shapes the functioning of transitional media themselves. The analysis so far has indulged in a necessary analytical fiction: the idea that “regimes” are coherent entities, moving in a single and discernible direction. In times of transition above all, fissures and factionalism caution against such pat formulations. Post-Soviet Russia provides an excellent example of these complexities. Asked if the interest of para-statal corporations in acquiring media holdings resulted from a desire to maintain good relations with “the government,” the Moscow journalist Dmitry Babich replied, “Not exactly”:

Because the government itself is not united. You have a strange coalition of various political forces. There are people who represent the interests of the natural-resource monopolies, including Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. There are others, like Anatoly Chubais, who want unlimited competition, western-style market reforms, all that stuff. There are even some communists! So when [the gas corporation] LUKoil buys a newspaper, it wants that newspaper to report sympathetically about the part of the government that supports LUKoil, and unsympathetically about the part of the government that doesn’t support LUKoil. And, for example, to write unsympathetically about the Duma [parliament], which is dominated by communists who are out to ruin LUKoil. So it’s not such a simple process as “the government” trying to influence the media. ... No government is entirely unified.

---

36 Downing refers to the “highly transitional situation subject to numerous shifting and conflicting vectors” that characterized post-Soviet Russia. “At any given time, the formal attribution of power might enjoy a rather loose correlation to its reality.” Something similar could be said of media “institutions,” which in reality are, as Downing reminds us, “‘messy,’ ‘leaky,’ ongoing and interconnected societal constructs.” Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory, pp. 143, 167.

37 The splits might also be between the executive branch and the bureaucracy, or among federal, regional, and local representatives of the same putative “authority,” as Eric Johnson of Internews noted in the context of Russian licensing procedures. “In Russia it can be difficult to get a [broadcast] license. It’s not so much that the government wants to prevent independent media; it’s that the people who control the licensing procedure want that. Or the local division of the Ministry of Communications manages to go in and grab all the licenses themselves, and now they’re trying to sell them.” Often, it is only at the lowest levels of a regime that any effective action can occur, as Boris
We have seen similar phenomena in the diverse mobilizing imperatives that the FSLN National Directorate sought to impose on Barricada in the early 1980s, and which led to the construction of institutional “firewalls” to streamline relations between party and paper. The UNO “regime” that succeeded the Sandinistas was notoriously faction-ridden; the Jordanian regime, as analyzed in some detail in Chapter 4, spills over into tribal governance, Islamic authorities, and business/professional elites. Still, the fiction of unity is a necessary one analytically, with regimes as with the press “institutions” studied here. It is perhaps justified by the fact that even in the above-mentioned cases, media policies have been articulated and implemented with a fairly high degree of consistency. Any case-study analysis of transitional media should, though, consider to what extent the different factions and interest-groups within a regime may shape the media landscape. In Russia and to a lesser extent Jordan, extended consideration has been given to the subject, while intra-regime factionalism seems less relevant to the Nicaraguan and South African case-studies, and is downplayed accordingly.

NON-REGIME ACTORS

Babich’s depiction of the relationship between para-statal corporations and factions of the Russian government reminds us that transitional environments nearly always bring to the fore actors who vie with the central government and administrative apparatus for influence and resources. The roles of these actors might vary little from non-transitional environments where they also exert influence. Many were touched on, briefly, in Chapter 1. But it is worth exploring

Kagarlitsky notes (again in the Russian context): “The ministries, the first level of administration, are the façade. You go to the ministry and you understand that the minor bureaucrats decide everything. The minister can say, ‘I don’t control that.’ And if you want a real solution, you have to go to some minor person in the ministry. The problem will be resolved [there] — and not necessarily with bribes. Just because the minister doesn’t have the political competence to resolve the problem that minor bureaucrats do have, because they’re a part of the mechanism. They know how to do things — they resolve problems daily. In that sense, the government is becoming more and more nominal — though you see every group in the government is not nominal in running its own business in the country.”

One might also want to be sensitive to cases where the “regime” is a provisional and highly-constrained one which could even be viewed as a subsidiary component of a larger regime. I am thinking especially of the Palestinian Authority, which controls a minuscule portion of the Occupied Territories on the sufferance of the Israeli occupiers; in many respects — including its suppression of mass media — it seems to serve more as an Israeli satrap than a regime unto itself. See “Palestinian police arrest eight journalists,” an Agence France-Presse dispatch of 23 October 1998, reporting the detention and questioning of journalists interviewing Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. The Economist (“Spotty freedom,” 10 October 1998) quoted an earlier comment by Yassin: “We are in a situation that does not make it possible for an active or independent Palestinian entity.” The evaluation seemed difficult to contest.
their role in more detail here, since transition, by eroding central authority, may add to their power and prominence in society and media functioning alike. These non-regime actors represent the most obvious alternative sources of sponsorship for media who are denied, or wish to avoid, a close relationship with the new regime. They may also serve as the greatest threats to transitional media, whether through unfriendly takeover attempts or direct physical violence.

Corporations, whether domestic enterprises or foreign-based multinationals, have emerged as the main contenders with political regimes for control over transitional media. (Individual media magnates can also be included in this category.) Of the case-studies presented in this book, the role of these enterprises and individuals has been most obvious and decisive in Russia. There, corporations established nearly-unchallenged hegemony over the national press, and have extended their reach to St. Petersburg and selected regional centres. The imperative underlying their activities, as elsewhere, was a blend of political, economic, and personal ambition.39

The role of foreign multinationals and media magnates in Russia has been limited by the dislocation and new underdevelopment of Russian media and society. A similar situation obtains in Jordan and Nicaragua, as well as across vast swaths of transitional Africa and Latin America. In South Africa, though, the combination of a newly-"open" economy and a media system in flux has attracted significant outside investment — notably in late-developing TV, but also (for example) with the purchase by the Irish "Ketchup King," Tony O'Reilly, of most of the former Argus chain (now Independent Newspapers). In Central Europe, the influx of foreign sponsors has been explosive, with successive waves of German and other West European investment. Their presence has been most extensively felt in Hungary, where as early as 1990 "the large majority of 31 Hungarian dailies became partly owned by foreign multinationals."40 As yet, though, there has been no rush by the Murdochs or Bertelsmanns to snap up Romanian or Siberian regional dailies. There may be one on the horizon, though; and there would be no shortage of newspapers eager to be snapped up. Many

39The distinction, of course, is difficult to draw in the best of times, and these ambitions tend to spill over into simple personal prestige. "For a banker, a newspaper is like a 600-series Mercedes," according to the former economics editor of the Moscow daily Segodnya. Quoted in Mark Whitehouse, "The Money Behind the News," The Moscow Times, 1 April 1997. Like other luxury items, newspapers may see their "value" suddenly take a quantum leap through speculation. Dmitry Babich recalled that at the time of the 1997 corporate power-play for Kommersantovaya Pravda, his former workplace, "The stock which was sold before for just $150 a share ... was suddenly sold by journalists for $700 or $1000. In a week, it increased that much."

transitional press institutions have sought and welcomed such investment for the professional improvements it brings with it, along with a certain insulation from the mobilizing agendas of other actors. I will address this issue at greater length later in the chapter.

A variant of corporate influence should be noted: the advertising consortia. Their role in transitional societies tends to be limited by the paucity of advertising expenditures (see below) and the more general economic dislocation. But the case-studies offer one example of these actors exerting a notable influence: South Africa. There, advertising consortia long held a near-monopoly on “adspend,” and directed it systematically to the White, elite-oriented publications that were held to have the most “desirable” readership. The tendency has been slow to change in the post-apartheid era, and acts as something of a brake on the development of media aimed at the majority Black population. One might predict that as economies become more “modernized” and “westernized,” whether in the course of transition or independent of it, such consortia are likely to proliferate along with corporations and their adspend.

Our emphasis on underdeveloped countries in this work warrants a passing mention of the pseudo-corporate role now played by international agencies – especially the World Bank, “which has in recent years taken an active role in promoting modern communication infrastructures worldwide.”\footnote{O’Neil, “Democratization and Mass Communication,” p. 16.} The International Monetary Fund, with its slash-and-burn “austerity” programmes, may have a decisive impact on underdeveloped media systems: for example, by demanding that the price of previously-subsidized goods and services (newsprint, transportation) be lifted; by pinching consumers’ discretionary income, vital for newspaper purchases; or by weakening, limiting, and selectively dispensing the resources that prop up the state (and thus state-sponsored or -subsidized media). The more nebulous role of bond-market traders and other speculators can be seen in a similar light. Both international lending agencies and speculators’ activities were tied directly to the economic catastrophe that descended upon the Russian press in mid-1998. The collapse followed immediately upon a drying-up of new loans (drained by massive domestic graft); the collapse of the ruble on international currency exchanges; a stampede of foreign direct investment; and a drastic curtailment of new investments. The last was especially deeply felt among Russian media, which, until the crisis descended, had been seen as one of the most modern and attractive sectors for
outside investment. Investors immediately reduced their exposure, slashed their media holdings and operating budgets, and laid off staff by the hundreds.\(^42\)

Non-ruling parties and subsidiary political actors are especially significant in transitional environments. Transition offers them their fifteen minutes of fame, and sometimes an enduring role in the new order. But almost no political party or movement can be taken seriously unless it sponsors a mass-media outlet of its own. The tenacity with which ortodoxos in the Sandinista leadership fought to take control of the former official organ, Baricada, indicates how central the need for a media “voice” may be to such traditional and/or transitional actors. Another is the Russian parliament’s protracted, nearly violent struggle with the Yeltsin administration for control of Izvestia. The possible consequences for formerly party-affiliated media now seeking to strike out on their own are obvious.

Worth attention as well is the role of secondary or peripheral political actors who have amassed resources sufficient to lure, or coerce, transitional media into their fold. Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov is a paradigmatic case. Luzhkov controls the nation’s capital in a double sense: the city over which he presides is home to about 80 percent of the money circulating in all of Russia. In addition to the virtually automatic national-political ambitions that the mayor’s post brings with it, Luzhkov has an interest equal to that of the largest para-statal corporations in amassing media holdings to secure influence within the regime. Luzhkov’s acquisition of the Center TV consortium and shares in the private TV-6 was a warning-shot across the bows of his political and economic competitors – themselves scrambling to secure what media spoils they could.

Mayors of large urban centres (especially capitals and/or primate cities), along with regional “bosses,” may be most likely to intervene in the media. Apart from these non-regime actors, subsidiary actors within regimes deserve notice as secondary media players. Prime ministers, deputy presidents, ministers of information – all may also seek carve out their own spheres of media influence, though they are less likely to sponsor the institutions directly or exert decisive control. Lastly, security forces – which usually have a vested interest in keeping the seamier side of their

\(^{42}\)See “Western magazines cut Russian editions,” United Press International dispatch (clari.world.europe.russia), 14 October 1998. “The publisher of the Russian editions of several international magazines has announced plans to slash circulation by up to 35 percent and cut the number of editions to six per year, down from the current monthly schedule, because of Russia’s economic turmoil ... Distribution of the magazines would concentrate on the major cities including Moscow and St. Petersburg, rather than the entire country, in a ‘refocusing of the target market.’”
operations from public view — may have considerable practical autonomy within regimes, and use it to discipline, harass, or suppress the media.

Foreign regimes are also significant media players — usually through attempts to promote political change to their own benefit. The best-known examples are the government-funded BBC World Service and its Western European counterparts (though these generally forswear any such political agenda); as well as more openly partisan US-sponsored broadcast media (Radio Free Europe, et al) that helped to undermine the state’s monopoly on information throughout the former Soviet bloc. The CIA-funded Radio Marti, which still beams its anti-Castro message daily to the Cuban people, is an especially controversial example. Sometimes domestically-oriented foreign media can play a role in transition through signal spillover, as West German TV broadcasts did in East Germany and Czechoslovakia.

Lastly, mafiosi and death-squads are all-too-familiar actors in media systems, perhaps more so amidst the institutional breakdown and rampant criminality of many transitional environments. Journalists, for their part, may be especially vulnerable as targets. They often investigate crime and corruption, human-rights violations, and paramilitary activities, without the limited protection that regime agents receive (often off-duty regime agents are the thugs). The role of such players has been visible in three of the four transitions studied for this book. In only one case, however — Russia — has it amounted to a concerted campaign of violence and intimidation against investigative journalists and the media more generally. Some 130 reporters had been murdered in Russia and the CIS between the breakup of the USSR and December 1996. The circumstances of their deaths are sometimes obscure, but mafia figures seem involved in a majority of killings, supplemented by hit-squads mobilized by other, more traditional actors (regional “bosses,” security fores).

The dividing line between mafia/death-squads and guerrilla forces is often a fine one, as the Algerian case demonstrates. It is odd but apparently true that most countries in which guerrillas operate on a significant scale meet a loose definition of “transitional” or “liberalizing” societies. Apart from Algeria, one could cite Mexico, Peru, Turkey, Rwanda, Indonesia (East Timor), the Philippines, Spain (the Basque ETA), Russia (Chechnya), and the former Yugoslavia (Kosovo) —

43Their influence should not be overstated: as Owen Johnson notes, “The most devoted listeneers were people who had already lost faith in their Communist regimes.” Johnson, “The Media and Democracy,” p. 109.

44“24 Journalists Slain This Year,” Reuters dispatch in The Moscow Times, 19 December 1996.
though many of these movements are of older vintage than the transition. The attitude of such forces towards journalists and the media varies widely. What was said earlier of regimes, however, can also be said of guerrilla forces: they will nearly always take an interest in media, if only by trying to influence it in their favour. Some groups, such as the Zapatista National Liberation Front (EZLN) in Mexico, have made a fine art of media relations in a post-modern age. Indeed, the influence they command through media (including their own) far exceeds their military strength. The East Timorese rebels, and the Kurdish KNLA in Turkey, have likewise sought to attract sympathetic media coverage to compensate for their limited or declining military prospects.

In other instances, guerrilla strategies towards the media have been more threatening. The Basque ETA in Spain, Shining Path in Peru, and the Hutu militias of northwest Rwanda appear to perceive domestic media as hostile, and behave accordingly. In Chechnya, journalists have been prone to kidnapping and sometimes execution, though guerrillas have not always clearly been the culprits. Guerrillas may also post an indirect threat to journalists. The Algerian model can be generalized to some extent: media that report sympathetically, or even with a simple attempt at detached objectivity, about guerrilla movements risk arousing the ire and intervention of regime forces, or of regime-affiliated actors like right-wing paramilitaries.

Another set of players worth considering is ethnic and religious forces. There are again broad areas of crossover between these actors and others already discussed – especially guerrillas and

---

45 See, e.g., the Zapatista Website at <http://www.ezln.org>.

46 One of the most notable and successful recent cases in which rebels used media to magnify their influence occurred during the Chechnya conflict of 1994-95. The Russian intellectual Boris Kagarlitsky contrasted the sophistication of the rebels’ strategy with the failure of Communist Party attempts to similarly manipulate the Russian media: "People say, 'In Russia nothing happens unless it's televised and reported in the press.' That's not necessarily so in the long run; but in the short run, the strength of this propaganda is really huge. The [Communist] opposition always complains about the press being hostile. But they don't know how to win the game. There are two ways [to do so]: either you accept the rules of the game, some of them at least, and try to win; or you boycott the media and throw the TV sets out your window. ... The Chechens won the information war. They ended up with the Russian military establishing a [media] blackout on the Russian side, so then the Chechens opened up their side. [Rebel leader Shamil] Basayev had an excellent understanding of what the media were about. He knew that every day, the media needed more news. There could be no day without some kind of interaction with the media. ... When it was clear that the government was not able to cut him off militarily from the media, then he won the whole thing. It was completely through. That [the Chechen campaign] was a military action that was about the media." See also Kagarlitsky's article on the Chechen war, "David and Goliath," in New Statesman & Society, 21 July 1995.
death-squads, but including regimes as well. A particularly repugnant example of media mobilized for ethnic purposes was Radio des Mille Collines in Rwanda, a private [Hutu] radio station devoted to airing racist propaganda against all Tutsis. Local radio is of primordial importance in Rwanda, a country with an undeveloped press and a populace with little access to information from outside. Radio des Mille Collines broadcast in Kinyarwanda, the language spoken by all Rwandans, and more than succeeded in its task of “filling the graves that are still half-empty” and ensuring that “the children must also be killed.” It also accused the officially recognized opposition groups of links with the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front] in order to discourage support for them among the Hutus.

Here, the “transition” to be engineered was a genocidal one leading to an ethnically-exclusive new order. More common, thankfully, are attempts by ethnic, religious, and sometimes feminist groups (such as the religious and feminist lobbies within the ANC) to limit media coverage or representations they consider racist, pornographic, or otherwise offensive. These actors seek, and sometimes attain, influence in areas directly shaping the course of transitional media, notably press law, censorship legislation, and constitution-drafting.

The role of religious organizations in transition is perhaps larger than the secular bias of this book can convey. Christian religious organizations, for example, distribute literally billions of pamphlets, leaflets, newsletters, magazines, and books worldwide, and broadcast to hundreds of millions of listeners. Transition is often perceived as an ideal opportunity to move into new spiritual “markets.” The message often carries an explicit or implicit political dimension —

47I am thinking of the inclusion of mainstream Islamist forces within the Jordanian “regime,” as defined in Chapter 4.

48Alain Destexhe, “The Third Genocide,” Foreign Policy, October 1994 (??), p. 8. Ironically, Radio des Mille Collines arose as a direct response to a process of professionalization within Radio Rwanda, run by the Rwandan government under Juvenal Habyarimana, rather than the “radical Hutu racist” elements that eventually assassinated Habyarimana and began the genocide. These elements, grouped together in the Coalition pour la Défense de la République (CDR), chose as one of their battle-cries, “Free Radio Rwanda!” The slogan dated from the onset of liberalization after the signing of the Arusha peace accords in August 1993. “Radio Rwanda reporters, feeling that change was in the air, were beginning to show a sense of independence and to report what was actually going on, even if the news they carried was not particularly favourable to the regime. It was at this time that the CDR extremists began to think about the need to have their own radio station” — i.e., Mille Collines. Though finding it “difficult to credit that normal people could broadcast such things” as did Mille Collines before and during the genocide, Gérard Prunier points out that the station was “in its own way ... effective,” using “street slang, obscene jokes and good music to push its racist message.” It actually evoked “a kind of stupefied fascination” among listeners “incredulous at the relaxed joking way in which it defied the most deeply cherished human values. The fascination extended to the RPF [Rwandan Patriotic Front — that is, Tutsi] fighters in the battle, who preferred listening to it than to Radio Muhabura (Radio Beacon), their own ‘politically correct’ and rather preachy station.” See Prunier, The Rwanda Crisis: History of a Genocide (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), pp. 164, 189, 224.

49This is true, at least, to the extent that one accepts the conviction of the genocide’s architects — that Hutu and Tutsi were distinct ethnicities.
promoting human rights, for example; or alternatively encouraging depoliticization and withdrawal to the private sphere. The role of religious forces and media in Poland, where they represented "the only organized counterforce to a regime which insisted by force on its own all-sufficiency," has attracted scholarly attention. But a religious influence can also be seen in a number of other, less-studied cases: Iran, certainly; Jordan; Guatemala and Chile; and possibly South Africa. Such issues, however, move us beyond the chosen ambit of this work.

**TRANSITION AND THE CRISIS OF RESOURCES**

The influence that regimes and non-regime actors exert over transitional media is partly facilitated by the material crisis that nearly always accompanies transition. For the media organ, the challenge typically arises from two standard if not universal features of transitions: 1) pervasive dislocation as underlying economic regimes are transformed, together with their political and social counterparts; and 2) for those media existing at the onset-point of the transition, transformations in relations with sponsors.

The crisis of resources is predictably felt most acutely in underdeveloped media systems, and there more acutely by print media than by broadcasters. These variables were discussed at length in Chapter 1, but transition can be seen to intensify their impact in a number of ways. It disrupts the wider infrastructure of economic production and consumption, as well as established channels of distribution. Although transitions occasionally take place against a backdrop of solid economic growth, the strong tendency is towards borderline chaos, often enduring for years after the onset of transition.

Beyond the collapse of sponsors, constituencies, and circulations, newspapers depend for their distribution on diverse physical infrastructure, and on consumers’ willingness to devote

---

50See Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory*, pp. 94-96.
51Recall that the Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to national-leadership status was largely engineered from exile; in the years preceding the overthrow of the Shah, Khomeini’s supporters flooded Iran with millions of cassette-recordings of his speeches and sermons.
52The Czech Republic, Estonia, possibly Chile; in each case, though, the “growth” was rendered ambivalent by inequitarian distribution and the erosion (or stagnation) of the social safety net.
53Downing speaks of “chaotic and worsening conditions of the economy in each and every case” examined in his study of Central and Eastern Europe. Downing, *Internationalizing Media Theory*, p. 54.
discretionary resources to the press. Material upheaval standardly upsets the table, and may even introduce an element of “voodoo economics” – as in Russia in 1994, when it only profited papers not to expand their circulations:

According to Segodnya's [editor Dmitry] Ostalsky, a six-month subscription to his newspaper costs 9,000 rubles in Sverdlovsk. The post office charges 13,000 rubles per subscription just to deliver the paper to the distant Ural region. In January, [government-controlled] printing houses announced a six-fold increase in charges ...54

These comments hint at another defining feature of the political economy of transition – the near-universal adoption of market mechanisms to a greater degree than previously. When combined with the decline or collapse of traditional sponsors and sources of subsidies, the tendency is for newspapers to place a greater emphasis on sponsorship via market mechanisms – luring readers, and hence advertisers. The problem in transitional societies is that, with rare exceptions, readers are too broke and the advertising markets too pitifully underdeveloped to provide such sponsorship – at least to the broad range of publications and other media that flourishes in the early stages of transition. What advertising revenue does exist is likely to seek out more popular and cost-effective broadcast media. The strategy of gaining increased “independence” from traditional sponsors through increased adspend is thus a non-starter for most transitional press institutions.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN STAFFING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The staff was cut because – you have to understand the basic truth about the new Izvestia, that it is no longer on the state budget. And we have to earn our money on our own.
– Stanislav Kondrashov, Izvestia

Staffing transformations at transitional media are very often sweeping. They may be more common in the early than in the later stages of the transition; but this is only small comfort to a newspaper confronted with the task day-to-day survival. The common result is for transition to prompt sponsors to implement deep staffing cuts. At Barricada, staff cuts began in 1987, reflecting the FSLN's “turn to the market.” After the Sandinista election defeat of 1990, they became a matter of simple survival (though they remained concentrated almost exclusively among blue-collar staff, with ramifications that were discussed in Chapter 2). Though all the Nicaraguan papers benefitted to some extent from state subsidies in the mid-1980s (and thus were forced to scale back

54Jean MacKenzie, “For Press, Printing Less is Key to Profit,” The Moscow Times, 5 March 1994; the “voodoo economics” reference is MacKenzie's.
their operations for the transitional era), the Barricada case points to the special vulnerability of institutions that are accustomed to receiving preferential treatment from the powers-that-be (or were). These staffs are the most likely to be "padded" for political and patrimonial reasons, and thus tend to be in a particularly unsustainable position when resources dry up. This was also the case for all the major Russian newspapers, confronted with the end of the heavily-subsidized halcyon days of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Izvestia, as noted, fell from 1600 staffers in 1991 to 483 in mid-1997.

When staff cuts reach beyond blue-collar workers to strike at editorial operations, both the mobilizing and professional imperatives of transition may be transformed. Cuts at Izvestia, for example, disproportionately targetted older workers — not only because they were the most amenable to early-retirement packages, but because this removed one of the main impediments to modernizing the paper's content and "line" for the post-Soviet era. "The number of critics was reduced in this way," Stanislav Kondrashov acknowledged frankly. A similar blend of mobilizing and professional factors apparently directed the extraordinary transformations at the South African state broadcasters. Here the goal was to "downsize" overstaffed institutions by retiring personnel associated with the apartheid regime, and to restructure the institutions along lines better reflecting South African demography (i.e., affirmative action for Blacks and also women). This, it was hoped, would have positive professional spinoffs, removing "deadwood" staff who owed their sinecures to clientelism rather than their professional skills.

In other cases, staff transformations (both cuts and hirings) may occur when overall staffing levels are not the main issue — when the focus instead is on political imperatives or professional backgrounds. Barricada provides a striking example, with the 1994 defenestración, of wholesale staffing transformations undertaken for political reasons alone. The coup at Izvestia in 1997 was smaller in scale, but differed little in character. In such cases, of course, there is often an element of internally-generated exodus as well as outside intervention. The Novye Izvestias, Pravda Pyais, and El Nuevo Diarios of the world testify to the regularity of such internal transformations, usually resulting from transformations in the mobilizing imperative laid down by sponsors, or irreconcilable internal divisions among staff.

In a surprising number of cases, however, no far-reaching "purge" of existing staff has been instituted or apparently contemplated, even when mobilizing and professional imperatives are
decisively transformed. This is a tribute, perhaps, to the agility with which old guards are able to transform themselves into committed participants in the new order. The staffing decisions made at Izvestia after 1991, for example, were selective in the sense described; but the staffers of the post-Soviet Izvestia were overwhelmingly veterans (albeit usually younger ones) of the Soviet-era version of the paper. Bernard Margueritte’s study of the Polish press found that in 1995, a full two-thirds of working journalists were veterans of the former state-socialist press.55

Occasionally, liberalization and transition may prompt a welcome expansion of staffing levels, and an invigoration of the institution more generally. New owners – like the large corporations in Russia, or the foreign-owned Independent Newspapers in South Africa – may be willing to invest the sums necessary to hire new editorial and production staff, beef up advertising resources, make a concerted push to target new constituencies, or simply improve the physical appearance of the newspaper. Traditional sponsors may suddenly display a new munificence – for commercial reasons, or to bolster the allegiance of staff in politically-uncertain times. This phenomenon may be more pronounced in the more gradualist transitions. In the case of The Citizen, an enduring staffing deficit was apparently recognized as one of the main constraints on the paper’s functioning, and the newly-merged sponsor, Perskor/KTI, seemed willing to invest the resources necessary to counter it.56 In Amman in 1995, the Jordan Times was experienced the first serious upgrading of its computer and office facilities since the Jordan Press Foundation launched it in 1975. The funds came as an apparent reward for the credibility the Times had established among readers, and perhaps in recognition of the extra importance of the Times’ “window on the world” in an uncertain, sometimes turbulent era.

The Quest for a Constituency

Whatever a newspaper’s political and professional orientation, traditional and non-traditional constituencies will be front-and-centre in its considerations. Even if the newspaper is only the passive instrument of a well-heeled sponsor, that sponsor will generally expect a return on the investment: influence with political and economic elites, public visibility, or simply material


56Granted, this went against the trend: sponsors, new and old, of the South African press have tended to see “downsizing” of staff as part of the “modernization” process at their papers.
profits. In each case a constituency is pivotal to the newspaper's functioning — its editorial "line," its "style" and tone, its outreach efforts in the wider community. Accordingly, the transitional era will usually witness concerted, sometimes feverish attempts both to shore up existing constituencies and to seek out new ones.

At the same time, the wider forces of transition may trample or impoverish certain constituencies, and churn up new ones. The collapse of the former Soviet Union, for example, all but obliterated the class foundations of the Soviet intelligentsia, and rendered tens of millions too destitute to buy newspapers. But they also created a "new class" of businesspeople and entrepreneurs, highly prized by the post-Soviet press. The emphasis on *concertación* in Nicaragua after 1990 for a time allowed *Barricada* to target a constituency hitherto scarcely dreamt of: the anti-Sandinista business class, now willing to receive representations from the "enemy" publication. At the same time, the collapse of state subsidies and the market reforms of the Chamorro administration ravaged *Barricada*’s traditional (popular and lower-middle-class) constituency, making the search beyond that constituency a matter of real urgency. In South Africa, a more gradual and protracted transition, and a more developed media base, contributed to a slower evolution in newspapers’ thinking about their constituencies. But the end of apartheid obviously lent new weight — commercial, political, and perhaps ethical — to Black readers and audiences. Where once this sector was subordinated or actively avoided, it now seemed the wave both of the present and of the future. The press, accordingly, struggled to compensate for its decades of near-obliviousness to the majority’s concerns and tastes.

The basic decisions to be made by a newspaper seeking to founded, or re-founded, a constituency can be gleaned from the case examined in Chapter 5. No newspaper, unless turned upside down by external or internal crisis, seeks to throw away an existing constituency *tout court*. Normally, it does whatever it can to stanch the likely haemorrhage of readership. The most obvious attempts to cater to traditional constituencies are the retention of existing (sometimes anachronistic) names, numbering schemes that suggest continuity with the old product, and deeper continuities in editorial content and staffing. (Note the role of "sacred cows" like Stanislav Kondrashov at *Izvestia*.)

The question then is to what extent should non-traditional constituencies be targeted, and should they be elite or "popular" sectors? It could be argued that newspapers are anyway an elite
medium;\textsuperscript{57} but the strategy chosen is more likely to represent a “dumbing-down” or sensationalizing of the product than an elite-oriented refining of it. (This is a continuum, however, with some interesting hybrids in the middle of the range, considered later.) The generalization made for the Russian press may hold true elsewhere: that longer-established, more “conservative” newspapers tend to gravitate towards an elite constituency. The advantage of such a constituency is its attractiveness to advertisers and other powerful actors. A newspaper that is seen as “influential” among sectors that are themselves influential, is more likely to be courted by influential figures. Such an approach has the danger of making the paper an attractive prize in any power struggle. But it may also bolster the strength and autonomy of the institution by providing it with resources and some protection from outside intervention.

It is notable that \textit{all} the newspapers studied in this work adopted elite-oriented strategies in the transitional era – where they were not already the norm. In Russia, \textit{Izvestia} confronted the sharp decline in its circulation, and the intense competition for advertising revenue by shaping its project to the interests and informational needs of the political and business classes. \textit{The Jordan Times} was from the start a small-circulation daily aimed at expatriates, foreign tourists, and domestic English speakers (drawn overwhelmingly from the upper classes). A shift towards domestic readers, partly as a result of the liberalization process, was evident; but the basic elite orientation did not alter. In apartheid-era South Africa, of course, \textit{any} medium that targeted White audiences (whether English-speaking or Afrikaner) was serving a racial, political, and economic elite. Both \textit{The Star} and \textit{The Citizen} ended up with predominantly Black readerships. But Blacks were always seen as a secondary constituency: the real money and influence was perceived to lie with White readerships. \textit{Sowetan}, which might initially seem an exception, is at best a partial one. Given the educational and economic deficit that apartheid inflicted upon the majority population, its readership was disproportionately drawn from the narrow middle and upper sectors of Black society (albeit a more downmarket constituency than \textit{The Star’s}).\textsuperscript{58} The Nicaraguan case is perhaps more ambiguous, since \textit{Barricada} was designed as a mobilizing instrument for the masses. During the period of greatest

\textsuperscript{57}In the sense argued earlier, that they are less cost-effective than broadcast media and must necessarily target sectors of the population that have sufficient (and sufficiently confident) literacy skills to access the press and to prefer it as a source of information.

\textsuperscript{58}Keep in mind, as well, that \textit{Sowetan} was a White-owned publication throughout the apartheid era, and was still White-managed at the time of writing.
interest to the analyst of transition, though – between 1990 and 1994 – the paper focused its attention on the political elite, the business class, and professional sectors. These were seen as new political constituencies, which was one reason the autonomy project could be sold to the Sandinista leadership. But they were also central to the material survival of the newspaper in the sudden absence of other sources of sponsorship.\(^{59}\)

Whether transition increases or diminishes the elitist orientation of the press is impossible to say. The cases analyzed for this study provide examples of both trends. One example is the slow adjustment of the English press of South Africa to the new locii of politics, and spending power, in the Black "townships" and (to a lesser extent) countryside. Both *The Star* and *The Citizen* are in the process of adjusting their marketing strategies, editorial content, and longterm planning to target the Black majority. The elitist dimension of both projects seems to be diminishing accordingly. *The Jordan Times* may also have grown marginally less elitist as its foreign readership increasingly was replaced by a domestic one. On the other hand, *Izvestia*, while always targetted at the intelligentsia and professional classes in the USSR, perhaps became more elitist as its traditional mass constituency was eroded by economic crisis. The *Barricada* experience was similar, though the paper's elite-oriented stance represented a more dramatic reorientation, given the mass-mobilization strategy *Barricada* had pursued during the revolutionary decade.

What of those newspapers who go all-out to secure a "popular" constituency as a means of confronting the quandaries of sponsorship and subsistence? With the possible exception of *The Citizen*, we lack a case-study of such a newspaper in this book. Numerous examples, though, can be drawn from the larger set of examples discussed: *Shihan* in Jordan; *El Nuevo Diario* in Nicaragua; and *Moskovsky Komsomolets* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Russia.\(^{60}\) Such publications probably constitute a majority of those who have achieved a degree of market success, and several have attained short-term or lasting independence from outside sponsorship. These factors by themselves make the "popular" publications significant and underappreciated actors in many transitional environments – a subject considered at greater length below.

\(^{59}\)It is notable that even after the 1994 defenestration, the new *Barricada* directorate recognized that its market appeal, such as it was, lay in the "middle sectors" (to quote chief editor William Grigsby).

\(^{60}\)Komsomolskaya Pravda* is an interesting, rather rare example of a restructuring from a "quality" to a "popular" broadsheet.
NEW PARTNERSHIPS AND TECHNOLOGIES

Partly to compensate for their growing marginalization vis-à-vis broadcast media, many press sponsors and institutions in transitional societies have sought joint ventures or other relationships with broadcast media and/or other newspapers. Barricada's cooperation with the Costa Rican La Nación is one example; so too was the paper's increasing emphasis, in the early 1990s, on becoming an “opinion-leader” for Nicaraguan radio and television. In South Africa, the Mail & Guardian has positioned itself at the forefront of the new computer technologies; its electronic edition is expected to surpass the printed version in readers before the turn of the millennium. It also became the Mail & Guardian when it took on investment from the UK Guardian, as described in Chapter 3. Izvestia's joint venture with the British Financial Times, the supplement Financial Izvestia, is of this ilk.

Exploration of the possibilities opened up by Internet technologies is also common. Most newspapers — and most of those studied in this book — have invested in World Wide Web versions of their product. Though skeptics question the transformative impact of these technologies, newspapers the world over have made the leap into cyberspace with relative success. The Mail & Guardian has even “merged” with its 'Net version, to the point that the latter is expected rapidly to outstrip the printed version. Internet technologies may open up important new constituencies among diasporas — not an insignificant consideration for Nicaraguan, South African, Jordanian, or Russian media, since all four countries have sizable émigré populations. It is worth noting that, to the extent that emigration patterns constitute a “brain drain” (and this would be at least partly true in all the case-study countries), it is newspapers' natural constituencies — the literate, educated, professional classes — that are disproportionately represented.

In most cases, these forms of outreach, collaboration, and technological exploration are meant to bolster the professional capacities of the institution in question. This prompts consideration of transition's wider implications for the professional imperative. What challenges and opportunities present themselves?
"Professionalism" is a chimerical and subjective quantity, and the professional imperative is inherently less amenable to analysis than its mobilizing counterpart. The tentativeness of our comments on this variable in Chapter 1 will increase in this discussion of the press in transition.

Perhaps the deepest professional quandary transitional media encounter pertains to the hyper-politicization of the transitional environment. "In this country today, who knows anything but political journalism?" one Polish MP asked in 1990. "The siege mentality formed over the years on both sides lingers," Bernard J. Margueritte wrote of the press in the former Soviet bloc; "many [journalists] wouldn't want an unbiased press even now." Of Malawi, meanwhile, Hall notes that "there has been no tradition of media which are independent of partisan political interests, except perhaps for the small church press"; transitional media have accordingly displayed "a strong tendency" to remain partisan actors in the wake of the overthrow of Hastings Banda.

The challenge of material survival during times of transition adds its own element to the mix. In Central and Eastern Europe, Karol Jakubowicz contends that the struggle for subsistence since 1989 has driven "even papers determined to be impartial and independent" into the arms of "political patrons, either for financial reasons (to gain a source of financing), or because a conflict-ridden political scene leaves them vulnerable if they do not enjoy the protection of at least one side of that conflict." A contrary trend, though, has regularly been glimpsed in transitional societies: depoliticization and mass disillusionment.

Most people in Russia now are far more concerned about survival than they are about anything else. In the western industrialized democracies, we have the leisure and pleasure to concern ourselves with thinking about other things. They [Russians] are much more interested in things like, "Is my pension going to come out?" "Where can I buy something?"

---

61 Margueritte, "Post-Communist Eastern Europe," p. 4. An editor seeking journalists for a new Polish daily, Mieczyslaw Gill, complained that "The hardest thing today is to find [genuine] journalists. There are professional journalists who would be just as compliant with this government as they were with the communists before. Then there are amateurs from the underground press who have strong feelings and often approximate information. It's not easy." Quoted in Cojean, "The rebirth of Poland's free press."


Broader questions that might get more play in the western press are unlikely to become very popular here. The media, regardless of how public-service it wants to be, can't be just public-service if that's not going to attract advertisers. (Eric Johnson, Internews, Moscow)

These new [Russian] journalists can't make a name writing about politics anymore. They have to write feature stories or engage in investigative journalism. You can see a huge "Stop" sign in front of politics: "Here lots of people are buried. Don't go here." Crosses everywhere ... (Ivan Zassoursky, formerly of Nezavisimaya Gazeta)

Publications dependent upon the seemingly-insatiable curiosity of the public in the early stages of liberalization will be winnowed when it subsides, as it eventually will. The material challenges that usually prompt mass depoliticization and subsistence-oriented thinking may have the same effect on a press institution, driving it towards political disengagement and lowest-common-denominator sensationalism (see below). And depoliticization can set in rapidly. In Russia the trend was visible from about 1992, and marked more recently. Even the limited liberalization of Jordan saw a subsiding of politicization with the end of the Gulf War, the coterminous decline of the more militant Islamists, and the concerted regime attempt to "roll back" some of the political space granted after April 1989.

A sub-category of depoliticization might be called demopoliticization: a framing or reframing of the political sphere to concentrate on certain spheres to the exclusion of others, and the reverence for "taboo" personalities and overriding "national" goals. These are common strategies in all societies and media systems. But transition may add an element of delicacy or volatility to the proceedings — especially inasmuch as "pact-negotiation" has occurred between contending social forces. Especially useful in demopoliticization are political "whipping boys" like national parliaments (and cabinets) who tend to spring up reinvigorated along with a liberalized mass media. Targeting such figures and institutions allows journalists to bare their fangs in print, suggesting tenacity and therefore professionalism, while evading harder and more fundamental questions — about the policies of monarchs and chief executives, perhaps, or the class character of powerholders. In the Jordan case-study I pointed out that parliament after 1989 in many ways represented the boundary of legitimate political criticism, though it could respond with some notable punitive measures of its own. The press in Russia, too, was allowed a field day with the parliament, which was of course

---

46 As the "bloom" or "golden age" of transitional journalism subsides, constituencies may be less likely to see journalism as a political guide, and more likely to view it as entertainment. If so, they will usually be satisfied with television — further tilting the media playing field against print media.
dominated by the Communist "common enemy." It proved much more derisive in its treatment of Duma members, and accepting of its restriction or suppression, than it was towards a president (Yeltsin) whose policies were as incoherent and unpredictable as his public appearances. Barricada in Nicaragua seems to have skated more carefully around the executive levels of government, preserving Violeta Chamorro as a symbol of concertación while investigating and criticizing the actions of cabinet members and parliamentarians. One senses a similar "exalted" status for Nelson Mandela, and the ideology of "national development" more generally, in the South African transition. Particular government officials and development schemes may be relentlessly exposed, but the goal of development and the "father of the nation" are largely immune. Investigations of Latin American media have turned up a comparable reticence in the area of human-rights abuses under military rule. To point these tendencies out, however, is not to cast them in a positive or negative light, normatively-speaking. It could be argued that such restraint is important in stabilizing transition processes and building trust among estranged social forces (e.g., around common national goals and figures like Mandela or Czech president Vaclav Havel).

The above discussion suggests an opposition between politicization and professionalism. Are they indeed irreconcilable? Do media play a more "constructive" or "facilitating" role in transition processes when they distance themselves from partisan politics? Or can they best serve the society by providing a voice for a plurality of actors, helping to shore up channels of communication among elites, and perhaps encouraging informed negotiation and political compromise? The analyst can only confess his own bias and impose it on the reader. In my view, excessive partisanship, regardless of its stripe, diminishes the professional capacities and constructive contribution of the media. It tends to promote a stifled and selective journalism; privileges invective over analysis; and reduces the credibility of the profession in the eyes of the public. It may also undermine or unsettle the transition process; if social "stability" is not necessarily for the good, it is generally sought by a majority of human beings, and certainly of transitional publics.

---

65 The era of Gorbachev-era glasnost, with its intricate dance of "taboos and transgressions" eventually spinning beyond the regime's control, provides an even more apt example.

66 A reflexive interpretation — that this was simply solicitude on the part of Violeta's son, Barricada's director — is not borne out by the evidence or the context. See the discussion of Nicaraguan concertación — the local variant of the "pact-negotiation" discussed by O'Donnell and others — in Chapter 2.
The case-study institutions examined here offer ample evidence of the dangers of partisan sponsorship and content. Rarely will increasingly sophisticated – not to mention materially hard-pressed – constituencies find partisanship alone a sufficient reason to buy a daily newspaper, even if they devoutly espouse the same political "line." The Communist Party remained the most powerful organized political force in post-Soviet Russia; but its constituency, tens of millions strong, was not sufficient to preserve Pravda from material crisis and eventually dissolution into three separate institutions. Likewise, the highly-mobilized version of Barricada that followed on the heels of the 1990-94 autonomy experiment floundered and died barely three years into its life. Three hundred thousand dedicated Sandinista militants could not prevent the paper's circulation from plummeting to barely a hundredth of that number by its death. The wilting of New Nation in post-apartheid South Africa, despite the political ascendency of its ANC sponsor, also seemed cautionary.

And yet ... one would hardly wish to see transitional media dominated by political castratos. The press has traditionally played an opinion-leader role in political life – though its degree of independence from the political agenda of sponsors has varied. The challenge, it appears, is to balance political with professional considerations: to be frank about institutional or individual preferences, but to ensure they do not overwhelm journalists' professional and ethical responsibilities. These were eloquently defined by Alexei Pankin of the Media Development Program as "to write good articles. Not to think too much about the broader implications. Just write the truth, don't lie. Don't be too ideological. Trust what you see, not your implanted notions."

THE PERILS – AND PROMISE – OF "YELLOW JOURNALISM"

If any phenomenon vies with an excess of politicization to threaten the professional imperative in transition, it is sensationalism or "tabloid" journalism. A focus on sex and crime is literally as old as news itself, as Mitchell Stephens has established. It is also a ubiquitous feature of transitional media environments, often for reasons that seem to pertain to the transition itself. I have coined the term "libidinization" to describe this underside (if one chooses) of liberalization. Authoritarian societies are nearly always puritan ones. When restrictions on political debate and

organization are lifted, the liberalization is almost universally accompanied by a flourishing of "sensational" materials, explicit in their depiction of sex and/or violence. To some degree, libidinization and its press offshoot, tabloid sensationalism, have figured in all four of the case studies considered. In South Africa, one of the most puritan societies on earth overnight became one of the most liberal, with implications for the press that were considered in Chapter 3. The phenomenon was evident in Nicaragua beginning in 1987, when the Sandinista government eliminated prior censorship — indeed, the only significant run-ins any media had with Tomás Borge's Ministry of the Interior between 1987 and 1990 focused not on La Prensa, but on the pro-Sandinista La Semana Cómica, which regularly mocked puritan Nicaraguan sensibilities, and was banned on a couple of occasions as a result. Libidinization proceeded apace under the UNO regime of Violeta Chamorro, which lifted remaining censorship restrictions; the commercial success of the most sensational daily, El Nuevo Diario, prompted the adoption of amarillista ("yellow") strategies even by staid media like Barricada. In Russia, the increasing tabloid-style sensationalism of formerly stuffy publications like Izvestia and Komsomolskaya Pravda attracted considerable notice.

The tabloid model often ignores politics altogether, except to the extent it intersects usefully with the human universals of sex, crime, and gossip. As such, it is perhaps the most common and predictable — and commercially successful — antidote to the political fatigue discussed in the previous section. In South Africa, "because of the transition, people are much happier talking about sex and music rather than politics," according to Ginger Payne of Business Day (emphasis added). In Russia’s Speed Info, "the first publication to exploit society’s interest in sex" according to Andrei Richter, political issues likewise took a back seat. Speed Info’s deputy editor, Pyotr Selinov, argued in 1996 that "People are tired of politics. Politics doesn’t create anything except irritation and apathy. We try to bring in new plots, new subjects."

Tabloid-style and sensationalist media are likely to predominate in the early “flowering” of new media in a liberalizing environment. John Downing notes “the bias toward news rather than entertainment media” that often characterizes authoritarian media systems — certainly the grey
product of the East Bloc cases he analyzes. Apartheid-era South Africa, conservative Jordan, and even youthful-revolutionary Nicaragua found their own reasons to construct media systems reflecting this same bias against "frivolity" and sensationalism. The flood of tabloid-style media, and their often-impressive staying power, may attest to the enduring human appeal of this type of "news," and the artificiality of any constraints placed on its circulation and functioning.

Libidinization, and the media that thrive on it, can be significant forces in political transition— even on a professional level. At the broadest level, libidinization promotes (and typifies) the liberalizing of cultural mores. This nearly always carries immense political implications. The linkage between puritanism and authoritarianism is not accidental. Merely by confronting regime hostility, sexually-explicit and/or tabloid media help to undermine the repressive apparatus of the state— as the South African edition of Hustler was instrumental in eroding the repressive legislation of the apartheid era. Those publications adhering to the blunt and pugnacious tabloid style may be able to air facts, opinions, and rumours in a way that no other medium can— with results that can be refreshing as well as noxious.70 This is additionally the case when one considers that their "lowest common denominator" approach to journalism may secure them a commercial stability and freedom from partisan sponsors that many "quality" media in transition can only dream of.71

Analysts of transition should also pay attention to the many hybrids of quality and tabloid journalism— "qualoids," mentioned in the Russian context (Chapter 5). These may combine

---

70 The phenomenon was visible, as well, in the first of the modern wave of transitions— Spain, which moved in a matter of a few years from one of the most culturally-conservative of European countries to one of the most liberal. For a solid overview of libidinization after Franco, see John Hooper, The Spaniards: A Portrait of the New Spain (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), ch. 15. Hooper neatly ties together the press, politics, and sexual culture in his appraisal of "the magazine which best reflects the more liberated spirit of the years that followed" Franco's death: Interviú. "Founded in Barcelona soon after the end of the dictatorship, Interviú set out to provide its readers with the two things that they had been denied under Franco— uninhibited coverage of politics and pictures of naked women. It has done so in a way that has proved particularly appealing to the Spanish market. Instead of wrapping its reports in code and metaphor in the way that had been customary until then, Interviú went straight to the politicians themselves, asked them blunt, provocative questions and printed the answers word for word. Rather than rely on the professional, usually foreign, models who were beginning to make their appearance in other magazines, Interviú approached Spanish actresses and singers with the beguiling proposition that by shedding their clothes they would be putting their democratic credentials beyond question. The message projected to the readers was— and is— that sexual and political liberation are one and the same thing" (pp. 136-37).

71 For sexually-themed publications, at least, there may be a point of diminishing returns. The number and circulation of magazines like Playboy in both Russia and South Africa has largely followed the trajectory of South Africa's alternative publications— i.e., a rapid increase followed by an equally rapid decline. Many readers abandoned the publications when their curiosity was slaked; others move on to "harder," more sexually-explicit materials available in the newly-liberalized environment. This phenomenon does not seem to hold true for the sex-and-crime tabloid genre, however; nor does it characterize the related market for romance and crime fiction.
seriousness with sensationalism in a manner that is both commercially and professionally appealing. *Moskovsky Komsomolets* has established itself as the most politically-independent daily newspaper in Moscow, with editorial content ranging from sensational treatments of “anal sex ... [to] serious accounts of various problems.” The most popular Russian weekly, *Argumenti i Fakti*, has suffered a noticeable decline in circulation from its former peak of 34 million copies (a world record); “but its mix of short, terse articles, full of facts and figures, advice columns (do-it-yourself and sex), and celebrity interviews makes it, deservedly, Russians’ favourite perusal.” The enduring popularity of *El Nuevo Diario* in Nicaragua was referred to at several points in Chapter 2: the reader will find in not only lashings of crime and cleavage, but some of the more critical and iconoclastic political coverage in Nicaragua, along with a fair amount of intellectually lofty cultural commentary. *Shihan* in Jordan appears to have secured a passionately-devoted constituency which looks to it for the “watchdog” role it presumes to play vis-à-vis the regime and business classes.

Appreciation of the often-overlooked strengths of the tabloid model should not obscure its faults. Tabloids can lead a “race to bottom,” as even “quality” newspapers shift to the journalism of the lowest common denominator. As well, the sensationalism and irresponsibility of much tabloid reporting may, rather than contributing to a vibrant and pluralistic transitional press, prompt a crackdown by the authorities and the repeal of hard-won reforms. The Jordanian example serves well here: King Hussein and his government have used the excesses of the tabloid press as an excuse to tighten constraints on all press functioning. Robert Mugabe’s media policy in Zimbabwe has similarly targeted media who trumpet allegations about his private life. However one views their influence, though, no-one should presume to consider transitional media without attending to the tabloid variant, which by any strictly quantitative measure usually swamps the more “serious” publications that are the focus of this work.

---

72 Yassin Zassoursky stated that *MK* was a paper he often started his day with, and “a very good newspaper professionally.” Alexei Pankin also commented that “personally, probably my favourite paper is *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. That’s really a mixture of a tabloid and a quality paper. I learn a lot from it; on the other hand, it has a lively style, and I enjoy reading it.” A 1994 profile of the paper noted that it “does not just entertain and shock. It investigates. And when it gets its teeth into a story, it does not let go ... Despite its popularity, *Moskovsky Komsomolets* is a serious newspaper often far ahead of other publications in reporting trends in Moscow politics and life.” “Russian Paper Fights Minister,” Associated Press dispatch, 4 December 1994.

The model presented above sketches in crude form some of the actors, relationships, processes, and outcomes that have occupied us throughout this chapter, and the book as a whole. The press in transition does not cease to reflect the range of environmental variables discussed in Chapter 1 — pre-existing media culture, degree of authoritarianism, level of development. These are now filtered through a range of actors and agents resembling most closely the liberal-democratic System C described in the opening chapter. The role of the state/regime, though still prominent (as in liberal-democratic systems), now vies with non-regime actors for sponsorship of newspapers (N) and the mobilizing influence that comes with it. The two-way arrows suggest that the newspaper, too, may become an integral actor in the sponsorship sweeps, actively courting regime and non-regime sources for subsidies and other favours. Unless an exceedingly generous sponsor is found, however, profit-seeking will enter the equation with a vengeance. Often, and increasingly in times of transition, profits are sponsors’ major motivation for seeking media holdings in the first place. Staffing shakeups and occasional “pitched battles” between managers/owners and
editors/journalists may result. Tension anyway inheres in the relationship between mobilizers and professionals, as we have seen at dozens of points throughout this work.

The "output" category of the model reflects the increased prominence of these profit considerations, with "market mobilization" and "catering to readers" two common responses. But "catering to readers" obviously has professional implications beyond the bottom line. How does the newspaper seek to position itself in the fluctuating environment - to hold onto core constituencies and secure new ones, to ascertain readers' wishes while (perhaps) remaining a step or two ahead? These questions are matters of life and death during media transitions, with plenty of corpses littering the landscape to remind press institutions of the fate that could shortly be theirs. But they are also of intimate concern to journalists and editors professionally. Even managers and sponsors should not be demonized as too busy counting their lucre to take an interest in the professional content, appearance, and ethics of their media holdings. I have argued that the editorial side of a newspaper operation tends to be the main generator of the "professional imperative" and its manifestations, but it obviously seeks the supportive environment from sponsors, and often finds it.

Journalists are also not sole custodians of the values and principles I have pompously labelled "The Truth." But it is those on the front lines who have the deepest self-conception of a professional "role" for journalists and journalism in society. It is they who must daily produce, or at least select, the newspaper's raison d'être\(^4\) - its editorial, news, and entertainment content. It seems fair to predict that they are most likely to run up against the personal and ethical quandaries that can arise when mobilizing and professional imperatives clash. There are many sides to the press in transition, many not very salubrious or optimism-inducing. But a more dogged pursuit of "The Truth" - of a reporting not fundamentally at odds with empirical realities, and vigilant on behalf of a broad cross-section of society - also seems a regular and predictable feature. It is also one of the most promising, and the one with the greatest implications for the political sphere and wider society, in this author's view.

\(^4\)Raison d'être in the eyes of readers/consumers, that is.
STAYING ALIVE

The preceding judgments are subjective, and there will be when desiderada for the press and journalistic professionalism are considered in the conclusion. Before that point, though, can some general comments be made about the conditions, variables, and strategies that best allow press institutions to meet the overriding imperative of every institution — survival?

It is almost tautological to argue that stable sponsorship, or a smooth passing of the torch from one sponsor to another, greatly enhances a newspaper's chances of emerging from transition in recognizable form. If a shift in sponsorship is required, however, it is rarely a smooth one — at least for those who constitute the institution at its core. Shifting mobilizing imperatives can lead to full-scale internal restructurings that make it difficult to speak of successor publications as the "same" institutions — witness Barricada after October 1994 and Izvestia after July 1998.

The role of strong and capable leadership is similarly plagued by conceptual difficulties. On the one hand, figures like Carlos Fernando Chamorro, Johnny Johnson, and Oleg Golembiovsky were decisive in engineering their newspapers through difficult upheavals, both internally and in the society at large. On the other hand, the individualism of Chamorro and Golembiovsky (backed by the desire of most editorial staff for a degree of professional autonomy) was a precipitating factor in the defenestraciones and consequent crises at the two papers.75 Barricada did not survive the new order imposed after Chamorro's dismissal and the resignation of most key staff. Was leadership, then, an advantage or a detriment? Did the institution have to be destroyed in order to be "saved"? One's evaluation depends on one's definition of success. As will be clear in the closing discussion, I hold institutional survival to be a necessary condition for desirable and professional press functioning, though scarcely a sufficient one.

The stability of a wider publishing operation may contribute decisively to a newspaper's survival in economically unstable times. In any case, it is a regularly-overlooked feature of the mass-media landscape. Publishers may themselves be sponsors, or simply branch-plants of conglomerates.

75Johnny Johnson's leadership role at The Citizen was hardly without its drawbacks either (see Chapter 2). Emphasis was placed on the professional handicaps of his authoritarian approach, but the material and infrastructural decline at the paper under his stewardship was also examined.
Regardless, they can help keep otherwise unviable projects alive, as the examples of Barricada, The Citizen, and possibly also Izvestia demonstrate. (Even The Star, like other English papers in South Africa, rode the coattails of Argus's printing prowess, and its near-monopoly over distribution in the Greater Johannesburg area.) One of transition's most immediate threats to press functioning is often posed by the drying-up of publishing contracts. Correspondingly, transitional institutions may go to extraordinary lengths to curry favour with the nouveau régime. This was evident in Barricada's (El Amanacer's) doomed bid for the 1996 ballot-printing contract, and Perskor's/The Citizen's ingratiating approaches to the ANC after 1990.

The collective decisions of a newspaper's pre-existing constituency (such as it may be) are another important variable. Izvestia managed to hold on to a bedrock readership through the early 1990s, despite a near-catastrophic collapse in circulation engendered by the market reforms of early 1992 (and the newspaper's too-eager championing of them). This kept the paper hovering on the boundary between profit and loss, but alive, and functioning much more smoothly on a day-to-day basis than the perpetually crisis-ridden Pravda. (Even Pravda would have been lost without its faithful readers.) All three South African papers studied relied upon core constituencies throughout the transition period, most impressively Sowetan. "Outreach" to new constituencies was far more comfortably carried out against a backdrop of material stability, than with the humiliating, last-gasp desperation of Barricada's post-1994 appeals.

The success of outreach, though, makes its own contribution to the viability of transitional press institutions. Barricada was unquestionably increasing its reach and influence among traditionally hostile sectors in the years before the 1994 defenestración. In South Africa, The Citizen successfully overcame the crippling stigma of its founding by shifting to the reader-rich political centre and emphasizing hard news over state propaganda. Both The Citizen and The Star sought to build on their predominantly Black readerships, previously considered a material handicap. Sowetan's possibilities for expansion seemed almost unlimited, given its status as the flagship of the liberation movement, and its remarkable ability to garner a 96-percent pro-ANC readership with a largely pro-PAC staff. In Russia, meanwhile, Communist Party diehards like Komsomolskaya Pravda and Moskovsky Komsomolets transformed themselves into populist "qualoids," avidly supported by large and diverse readerships. Izvestia, though far more conservative in its approach, managed to dabble in sensationalism, while also carving out a share of the business and financial market (an
exceptional source of advertising income) with Financial Izvestia. Like Sowetan, it also sought to capitalize on its national reach. Pravda moved into new markets only by dividing into three, but at least one of its offshoots, Pravda-5, enjoyed considerable success with its new, brasher staff and content.

Relations with the new regime certainly condition press functioning and survival. But again, the interactions are too varied to permit easy generalizations. A good relationship with a regime that commands ample resources – at least by comparison with other available sponsors – can preserve a newspaper against considerable adversity. Barricada’s intimate alliance with the Sandinista Front in the 1980s, Izvestid’s with the Communist Party and then (more precariously) with the Yeltsin regime, The Star’s ability to play the “anti-apartheid” card with the new ANC government … all can be seen as advantageous to these papers as they confronted their transitional challenges. On the other hand, excessive closeness to a regime can hamper a paper’s survival chances – as the ANC mouthpiece New Nation learned. By contrast, an oppositionist stance, with the more vigorous journalism it tends to encourage, can be vital in entrenching a newspaper with its constituency – new or old. The Afrikaans papers in South Africa clearly benefitted from their post-1994 role (indeed, their perennial self-perceived role) as voices of a threatened minority. The autonomy-era Barricada, though accused by its ortodoxo critics of excessive closeness to the Chamorro regime, seems to have gained in professional standing and perhaps material viability through its “watchdog” role and hard-hitting investigative journalism. By contrast, the perceived closeness of the Moscow press to its new corporate mobilizers evoked reader skepticism, and perhaps undermined the viability of the city’s saturated press market even before the economic collapse of mid-1998.

It is my sense that improvements in the professional calibre of staff can boost the survival chances of transitional press institutions. The same caveat must be attached as in the case of leadership, however. Professional, highly-motivated staff, with a high sense of corporate cohesion, may bring the paper into conflict with equally organized and motivated sponsors – who are more powerful in a showdown. This professionalism is desirable in itself, though, as I argue further below.

Ironically, both sensationalism and the quest for greater national reach may have contributed to Izvestid’s undoing in 1998. The publication, unchecked, of accusations about Viktor Chemomyrdin’s dubiously-acquired $5-billion nest-egg serves as an example of the former. The courting of LUKoil to fund regional-outreach projects, meanwhile, precipitated the corporate power-play that eventually defenestrated Oleg Golembiovsky and many senior staff.
The overall sustainability of the domestic economic and political order – inseparable from global structures and processes – is probably the decisive variable in determining the survival or collapse of the transitional press as a whole. The ability of communications media to survive amidst civil breakdown and staggering material deprivations should not be underestimated: recall Somalia’s enduring publications “boom.” But the press tends to operate at a bare-subsistence, almost samizdat level under such conditions. The crippling, even exterminating effect of economic crisis on press institutions in Russia and Nicaragua cannot be denied. Renewed political and economic instability in South Africa, and even Jordan, probably constitute the greatest threats to the prosperity and comparatively free functioning of media in those countries.

**Desiderata**

I have spent this work examining the ways press institutions tend to behave – in general, and in transition specifically. How should they behave? Perhaps ten years of immersion in this question earns one a few minutes on the soapbox.

Several environmental features may encourage more pluralistic, “professional,” and autonomous media. Clearly desirable, in my view, is transparency in institutional ownership and functioning. This must be entrenched within media institutions, but also beyond them – relying on effective vigilance by governing authorities, legal systems, and citizens. To know the source of a media organ’s sponsorship is not to dismiss the contribution it can make to the debate or the society. It is not even the case that a higher degree of media monopolization, which such vigilance would usually monitor, necessarily obliterates or radically constrains the operation of the “professional imperative” – at least when such sponsorship is contrasted with actually-existing alternatives (see Chapter 1). Outright monopolies probably are deleterious, though, and to the extent that a citizenry chooses to confront them, transparency in ownership and functioning is a requisite. More generally, accurate knowledge about the sources of a media organ’s funding allows more focused attention to be directed to the paper’s day-to-day content and editorial “line.” Conflicts of interest can be more easily isolated and countered. And a more general sense of the “mobilizing imperative” to which the medium responds allows insights to be drawn into the wider media system, and the economic and political order that sustains it.
Transparency has its counterpart in daily institutional performance. Newspapers can institute measures to ensure maximum responsiveness to readers’ concerns (though I do not wish to limit media to the role of passive reflectors of their constituencies; the role of “public-opinion leader,” ahead of the constituency in important respects, is at least as valid). Peter Sullivan, editor of the Johannesburg Star, told me in 1995 that he maintained an “open-line” policy: any reader calling in with a concern would be passed through directly to the editor, rather than diverted to a subordinate. Sullivan’s first words to me when I entered his office were: “Do you understand the word ‘prurient?’” He was responding to a reader who had phoned him, irate about bare-breasted women appearing in ads for strip-clubs on the back page of The Star’s main section. Sullivan wanted to be sure of his usage of the word. My response was to point out that permissible sexual imagery in South Africa seemed to have moved from stars on the breasts, under apartheid-era censorship, to breasts in The Star. But Sullivan’s openness to ordinary readers’ communications was commendable. Reliable ombudsmen, vigorous letters-to-the-editor pages, strict regulations against mobilizers’ interference in day-to-day editorial decisions, and clearly-written codes of ethics are all essential to the endeavour. (Radio, with its populist edge and call-in shows, is still better-placed to open itself in this fashion.)

It should be borne in mind that for many journalists, “transparency” takes a back seat to vulnerability. Mobilizers, either regimes or non-regime actors, threaten their physical security on an almost daily basis. As only the most preliminary step towards advancing the human and civil rights of journalists, intensive vigilance should be maintained at the international level. Human-rights organizations like the Committee to Protect Journalists, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and a variety of religious-based monitoring organizations have done vital work by detailing and documenting the abuses that journalists experience the world over. The resilience of professional imperatives among journalists, even in the face of state terror and freelance assassination, cannot fail to leave one awestruck. But just as John Stuart Mill argued against romanticizing repression as a “crucible” of free speech, so should concerted efforts be made to ensure that journalists and media systems are insulated from violence and blatant coercion. The “grey areas” and subtleties of mobilizer-professional interaction can then – but only then – be considered and debated.
If the effects of monopolization on media professionalism are uncertain, it follows that a simple increase in the number of media outlets is not necessarily a democratic panacea. It was not self-evident that Moscow, for example, would be less well-served by half-a-dozen daily newspapers rather than the 15 that vied for shrinking readerships and "adspend" at the time of fieldwork in 1997. Nonetheless, as ultra-monopolization probably exerts a deadening effect, so too (one suspects) does a paucity of media. Such evaluations are harder to make in the age of satellite broadcasting and the World Wide Web. But it seems to me desirable to encourage a healthy diversity of media organs. This should not be limited to ensuring a laissez-faire environment, in the form of few negative restrictions on media functioning, ownership, and dissemination. Regimes and citizens alike can act in a positive sense to sponsor a diversity of non-mainstream publications. The "threshold" system adopted in Sweden, for example, allows any publication with a circulation above 5,000 to claim resources from the public purse. The result is one of the most respected and diverse media systems anywhere. In South Africa, the Independent Media Diversity Trust sought to fund alternative media through voluntary donations by mainstream newspapers. Perhaps predictably, the effort had foundered by the mid-1990s, largely because of its voluntarist character. A tax on the profits of mainstream media, to help fund a certain number of alternative and contending voices, would be a feasible and morally defensible option.

Given sufficient democratic space, citizens can support diverse and alternative media by themselves, and over the long term - not just during the "bloom" phase of liberalization, when the pent-up desire for information is unleashed. The voracious appetite of Israeli readers for their print media has made that tiny country arguably the most pluralistic media environment in the world.\(^{77}\) Alternative and "guerrilla" communication strategies, up to and including computer "hacking," have never been more viable, with the democratization of the means of production provided by the new computer technologies. The Internet and World Wide Web make any citizen a global broadcaster. This challenge to mainstream media is salutary. When citizens have diverse means of communicating outside established or permitted channels, this may spur stagnant media institutions to reinvigorate their functioning.

\(^{77}\)See again Noam Chomsky's comments on the Israeli press (Chapter 1, n. 94).
Similarly desirable is the development of collective institutions and mechanisms of solidarity, both within newspapers and across the profession as a whole. Examples within newspapers include the “journalistic collectives” that briefly dominated Russian press functioning in the early post-Soviet era, and the editorial council founded by Barricada as a “firewall” against FSLN mobilizing demands. Such institutions may assist, on a day-to-day level, in bolstering the professional imperative against outside pressures. They can be called upon in a crisis to mobilize staff en bloc, as at Barricada in 1994 (and again in 1998), Izvestia in 1997, and perhaps Sowetan when Ntatho Motlana paid his bull-in-a-china-shop visit to the paper in 1995. Such institutions can also serve a useful professionalization function, especially if used (as with Barricada’s council) to “brainstorm” about a newspaper’s strategic orientation, and bring it into contact with voices and sources in the wider society.

The advantages of industry-wide mechanisms of “solidarity” are less certain, though there are success stories. Silvio Waisbord writes of Argentina that

From the traditionally conservative associations of media owners to left-wing journalists, all have rushed to the defense of common “professional” interests. Journalists with dissimilar political trajectories and sympathies have formed a nongovernmental organization to defend freedom of the press and denounce attacks on journalists. Reporters have joined in demands for legislation to protect and facilitate access to official reports and sources. These cooperative efforts and agreements are remarkable, considering that when military governments blatantly manipulated the news and persecuted dissident journalists, media organizations did little to break out of official controls and to defend and protect publishers and reporters who were tortured or murdered.  

But in both Russia and Jordan, as well as Sandinista Nicaragua, ostensibly independent unions and professional associations have been co-opted by mobilizing forces, to the detriment of journalists and the press as a whole. Excessive institutionalization leads to inertia and the rise of vested interests. A better approach, taking advantage of the new generation of communications technologies, might be for “standing committees” to be mobilized in emergency situations: e.g., as a reaction to censorship or punitive legislation, the kidnapping or assassination of journalists, undue pressure from mobilizers, and so on. More diffuse but durable coordinating bodies are also an option. On an international level, as with the Committee to Protect Journalists, they are already indispensable.

79A promising recent example is the Southeast Asian Press Alliance (SEAPA), created in November 1998 “to overturn repressive media laws and monitor attacks on journalists.” Filipino, Indonesian, and Thai delegates from
Is there a direct role for western agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, to play in promoting press freedom and professionalism? In a range of cases, outside influence has arguably been positive. The School of Journalism in Nicaragua, founded by the U.S. embassy, was the only source of professional training for Nicaraguan journalists before the 1979 revolution. Since the Sandinista election defeat of 1990, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation has backed a number of groundbreaking studies, surveys, and publications on media, society, and politics. In isolated Jordan, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation sponsored the first-ever book-length treatment of *The Role of the Media in a Democracy*. International agencies were instrumental in developing an alternative press in South Africa that could confront and undermine apartheid’s propaganda apparatus, even if the effort did not long outlive the end of racist rule. After the onset of liberalization in South Africa in 1990, foreign capital spawned a booming (though largely entertainment-oriented) broadcast sphere. The model it sought to impose on the media it acquired was often dubious, but investments in training and infrastructure (alongside largescale layoffs) commonly featured. Journalists and media commentators in Russia tended both to downplay the significance of foreign influence, and to argue that it should be increased.

I have suggested that while a diversity of voices is probably healthy and certainly not harmful, excessive partisanship undermines the potential role of the press in transition. If newspapers are to be public-opinion leaders, they must stimulate discussion and debate, challenge and ferment. This is where simply passively reflecting readers’ wishes and perspectives falls short as an ideal. Regardless of the preferences of their sponsors, petty mobilizers, and readers, newspapers must open their pages to a diversity of sources, commentary, and outside contributions. A heavily-partisan stance almost guarantees that none of these will occur. In the age of expanding independent national press associations attended the founding session; the editor of *The Nation* in Bangkok, Kavi Chongkittavorn, called it “a landmark development in the history of the Southeast Asian press.” It would serve, argued Thai Foreign Minister Surin Pitsuwan, as an effective counterweight to pressures on media in systems where “transparency and openness run counter to vested interests.” At the time of writing, there were indications that “a similar body within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)” was also in the cards. Of course, the euphoria that tends to characterize such announcements may eventually be tempered by the reality of diverse media systems, where “press freedom ... is probably not universally accepted.” See “Journalists band together on press freedom in Southeast Asia,” *Agence France-Presse* dispatch (clan.world.asia.indochina), 8 November 1998.

80See, e.g., Guillermo Rothscluh Villanueva and Carlos Fernando Chamorro, *Los Medios y la Politica en Nicaragua* (Managua: Centro de Investigaciones de la Comunicación [CINCO], 1995).

informational options and better-educated, more media-savvy citizenries, partisanship at professionalism's expense seems a recipe for marginalization and eventual irrelevance. Frances Foster's comments are apt: "Public disinterest in the kinds of information government [or any other mobilizer?] wants them to have is a very real limitation. Information diktat is unsuccessful ... Official propaganda, at least in the blunt, artless forms ... is ineffective and potentially destructive. It is easily subverted by the alternative channels available in our modern information age."82

None of these prescriptions, nor any combination of them, can guarantee that a stable edifice of press freedom and professionalism will be built on transition's shifting sands. Simply proclaiming these desiderata, moreover, will not persuade all readers that a given "end-state" is attainable, or preferable to some other outcome – even to the status quo ante. It is my conviction, though, that such measures could reduce the pressures and dangers of journalism, including transitional journalism. In a positive sense, they could push media towards practices and standards that best suit the professional proclivities of the journalist and the informational needs of the citizenry. Media, in turn, could move beyond the role they already play in liberalization. As "opinion-leaders" and essential debating fora, media can assist transitional societies in coalescing around values like pluralism, transparency, accountability, and the peaceful settlement of disputes. These norms should be as important to working journalists as to any other citizen. By promoting them, media and their constituencies act to buttress – and exemplify – a more democratic order.

fin

Montreal – Managua – Johannesburg – Amman –
Moscow – Guadalajara – Vancouver
1990 – 1999

As noted at the beginning of this book, *The Press in Transition* is supplemented by four detailed appendices, exploring different aspects of press functioning in the case-study countries. Rather than burdening the main text with these materials, which amount to some 150 pages when printed out, a decision was made to post them to the author's Website on the UBC server at <http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj>. A brief description of each appendix follows, together with the direct URL link. These supplementary materials are currently in preparation and will be posted to the website by August 1999.

APPENDIX 1
NICARAGUA
<http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj/nicapp.htm>
*Barricada* Coverage of the 1994 and 1996 FSLN Congresses: A Comparison

This appendix does not attempt a formal content analysis of *Barricada*'s news coverage. But it is worth zeroing in on particularly sensitive and contentious moments in the post-revolutionary internal politics of the Sandinista Front. The May 1994 Special Congress marked the climactic showdown between the now-dominant ortodoxo element, led by Daniel Ortega and the “Group of 29,” and its renovationist counterpart, loosely aligned with Sergio Ramírez’s Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS). The 1996 Congress found the ortodoxo faction triumphant, and the post-defenestración version of *Barricada* largely following in its train. Two weeks of *Barricada* editions are examined from each period. A summary of the coverage for each edition is provided, including all headlines (italicized) and opening passages, followed by representative excerpts as judged, necessarily subjectively, by the author.

APPENDIX 2
SOUTH AFRICA
<http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj/southapp.htm>

This appendix samples the editorial stance of each case-study newspaper over nearly two decades, and across a broad range of pertinent events and issues, from the Soweto riots of 1976 to the first
free elections in 1994. A brief historical overview of each event is followed by excerpts from the leader pages of *The Citizen*, *The Star*, and *Sowetan*. For events prior to *Sowetan*'s founding in 1981, editorials from its predecessor *The World* are sampled. Each section concludes with my own critical thoughts on the editorial commentary itself. This is eclectic, sometimes providing historical background, sometimes pointing to language that strikes me as interesting. Some of the issues and excerpts seem to me of greater intrinsic usefulness than others, and I have not bothered to comment at length on every editorial snippet.

**APPENDIX 3**

**JORDAN**

[http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj/jordapp.htm]


Extracts from *Jordan Times* editorial coverage in the post-liberalization era are sampled, focusing (as with South Africa and Russia) on key points in recent history and politics. The extracts help to establish the parameters of the *Times*’ “liberalism” and its political, professional, and cultural positioning in Jordanian society and media. They provide some idea of the *Times*’ treatment of the monarchy, successive governments and cabinets, and other important sectors and interest groups, notably the Islamist opposition.

**APPENDIX 4**

**RUSSIA**

[http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj/russapp.htm]


[Under construction.]
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Note: This bibliography, subdivided by theme, includes only the most important books, journal articles, and feature journalism used for this study. It is not an exhaustive compilation of all sources cited in the notes.

DEMOCRACY, DEMOCRATIZATION AND POLITICAL TRANSITION – THEORETICAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDIES


---

**Mass Media: History and Theory; Links to Democracy and Democratization**


BIBLIOGRAPHY


NICARAGUA

MEDIA – LATIN AMERICA


Media in Latin America and the Caribbean: Domestic and International Perspectives. Windsor, Ont.: University of Windsor, 1985.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


**Politics and Society — Nicaragua**


MEDIA – NICARAGUA


Anteproyecto del Programa radial ‘De Cara al Pueblo’. Nicaragua: Department of Agitation and Propaganda, 1986 (?).


—. “El sistema político y el rol de la prensa en la futura situación de la región,” in Jaime Ordoñez, ed., Periodismo, derechos humanos y control del poder político en Centroamérica (San José: Ulnstituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos, 1994), pp. 119-121.


—. “Front page battlefront.” Barricada Internacional, 8 July 1989, p. 36.


Cortés Domínguez, Guillermo and Juan Ramon Huerta Chavarria. _Critical Journalism in the Daily Barricada._ Unpublished monograph prepared for the Degree in Journalism, School of Journalism, University of Central America (UCA), Managua. Submitted 30 June 1988.


Unpublished internal document.


——. “Changes at _Barricada_.” _Barricada Internacional,_ October/November 1994.


——. “¿Es revolucionario el FSLN?” _Nuevo Amanecer Cultural_ (supplement to _El Nuevo Diario_), 14 May 1994.

_A New Newspaper for Nicaragua._ Project report of the Center for Communication Research (CINCO), Managua, February 1995.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


South Africa

Media – Africa


Politics and Society – South Africa


BIBLIOGRAPHY


MEDIA – SOUTH AFRICA


Sparks, Allister. “For the Media, the Opportunities of 'Pretoriastroika.’” *Media Studies Journal,* 7: 4 (Fall 1993), pp. 103-09.

——. “Move now to ensure true press freedom.” *Daily Mail,* 7 July 1990.


---

**JORDAN**

**MEDIA — ARAB WORLD**


**POLITICS AND SOCIETY — JORDAN**


Robinson, Glenn E. “Defensive Democratization in Jordan” (ms.).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


MEDIA — JORDAN

“Censorship and self-censorship.” In The media and the peace process in the Middle East, Contributions from participants in the seminar organised by Reporters sans Frontieres, 25-28 July 1994.

MEDIA — CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

RUSSIA


Willnat, Lars. "The German Press during the Political Transformations of East Germany."

**Politics and Society — Russia/USSR**


**Media — Russia/USSR**

BIBLIOGRAPHY


<http://www.internews.ras.ru/report/media/>


**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**LIST OF INTERVIEWS**

(Positions cited are those held by the subject at the time of the interview[s].)

**NICARAGUA**

**1991**

CORTÉS, Guillermo. *Barricada* senior writer and columnist; former war correspondent; former journalist with *El Pueblo* (1979-80); co-author of dissertation on objectivity and professionalism at *Barricada*. Managua, 9 April, 15 April, 9 May 1991.
DE CASTRO, Sergio. Member of *Barricada* editorial council; former editor of *Barricada Internacional*. Managua, 22 April 1991.
MONTENEGRO, Sofia. Director and Editor-in-Chief of *Barricada* supplement, *Gente*, *Barricada International* Editor, 1980-84; *Barricada* Editorial Page Editor, 1985-88. Managua, 8 March, 10 March, 15 March, 2 April, 3 April, 11 April, 1 May, 6 May 1991.
MURILLO, Rosario. Director of former Barricada cultural supplement, Ventana (ceased publication 1991); poet; former director of Sandinista cultural union (ASTC); companion of ex-President Daniel Ortega. Managua, 24 April 1991.

REYES, Xavier. Barricada Sub-Director and member of Editorial Council; Managing Editor, 1984-87; former Barricada war correspondent. Managua, 13 April 1991.

ROTHSCHUH, Guillelmo. Communications theorist, Department of Sociology, University of Central America (Managua); advisor to Barricada Editorial Council; former advisor to Department of Agitation and Propaganda. Managua, 16 April 1991.


1996


CHAMORRO, Carlos Fernando. (See 1991.) Director of Barricada, 1992-94 (dismissed October 1994); Director, Centro de Investigaciones de la Comunicacion (CINCO). Chief of the FSLN Department of Agitation and Propaganda in the mid-1980s. Managua, 16 May, 23 May 1996.


GRIGSBY, William. (See 1991.) Editor-in-chief of Barricada, 1994-.

HUERTA, Juan Ramón. Barricada journalist, 1982-1994; Barricada editor, 1994-. Managua, 22 May 1996. (Transcribed by Carmén Miranda Barrios.)


LÓPEZ, Julio. Barricada Sub-Director, 1994-. Managua, 8 May 1996.


1998


MONTENEGRO, Sofia. Co-Director, Center for Communications Research, Managua. (Former editor of Barricada supplement, Gente.) Managua, 20 July 1998.
SOUTH AFRICA


HATTINGH, Alex. General Manager, Intermedia Periodical Services (member of the Perskor Group).  


BIBLIOGRAPHY


JORDAN

AMIN, Mohammad. Director General, Department of Press and Publications, Ministry of Information. Amman, 3 August 1995.
KHOURI, Rami G. Columnist, former Chief Editor, The Jordan Times. Interview by e-mail: questions submitted 23 August 1995; answers supplied 8 November 1995.

RUSSIA

BABICH, Dimitri O. Television reporter, TV6; former reporter for Komsomolskaya Pravda. Moscow, 20 May 1997
BIBLIOGRAPHY

DZIALOSHINSKY, Iosif. Russian-American Press and Information Centre. Moscow, 21 May 1997. (Translated by Vladimir Orlov.)

FEOFANOV, Yuri. Senior Law Correspondent, Izvestia, member, Judicial Chamber for Information Disputes; former Izvestia correspondent in the U.S. Moscow, 26 May 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina.)

GOLEMBIOVSKY, Oleg. Editor-in-Chief, Izvestia, Director, Izvestia Publishing House. Moscow, 2 June 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina.)


KAGARLITSKY, Boris. Group Leader, Institute of Comparative Political Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences; author of The Thinking Reed and other books; former deputy, Moscow City Soviet. Moscow, 29 June 1997.


MURZIN, Dmitry A. Editor-in-Chief, Financial Izvestia. Moscow, 3 June 1997. (Translated by Igor Kovalev.)


PETROVSKAYA, Irina. Media Columnist, Izvestia. Moscow, 30 May 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina.)

RICHTER, Andrei. Senior Lecturer, Moscow State University School of Journalism; editor, Law and the Practice of the Mass Media, published by the Media Law and Policy Centre. Moscow, 23 May 1997.


SYCHEV, Alexander. Foreign Editor, Izvestia. Moscow, 26 May 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina.)

VARDANIAN, Tigran. Account Manager, Maxima Advertising [with Laura Murphy]. Moscow, 2 June, 6 June 1997.


ZAITSEV, Yevgeni. Coordinator, Faculty of Journalism, Moscow State University. Moscow, 23 May 1997.


ZASSOURSKY, Yassan. Dean, Moscow State University School of Journalism. Moscow, 29 May 1997.