TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE MODEL OF PRESS FUNCTIONING
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TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE MODEL OF PRESS FUNCTIONING
Abstract

While the role of the press and other media has been central to a wide variety of ideological frameworks and political prescriptions, from classical liberalism to state socialism, there has been little attempt to generate a "macro-theory" of press functioning that claims to be valid for press systems worldwide. This paper attempts to construct such an analytical framework, by isolating two key variables (a "mobilizing imperative" and a "professional imperative") that act to shape the orientation and behaviour of press institutions, their sponsors, and their editorial staff. "Meta-environmental" variables, such as pre-existing press culture and level of economic development, are also considered. The paper draws on a wide variety of case-studies, mostly from the less-developed world, to depict the diverse strategies by which press workers seek to reconcile the mobilizing and professional imperatives, and to open up space for the latter. The paper concludes with a presentation of three models, each applicable to a given "type" of media system ("hard" authoritarian, "soft" authoritarian, and market-oriented liberal-democratic). It is claimed that these three models, despite certain conceptual difficulties, account for the great majority of media systems worldwide, and help to explain the institutional behaviour and professional orientations that they exhibit.

Resumen

Mientras el rol de la prensa y otros medios de comunicación ha sido central para una amplia variedad de sistemas ideológicos y prescripciones políticas, del liberalismo clásico al socialismo de estado, ha habido un reducido intento de generar un "marco teórico" del funcionamiento de la prensa que exija ser válida para los sistemas de prensa mundial. Este artículo intenta construir un esquema analítico, aislando dos variables claves (una "imperativa movilización" y un "imperativo profesional") que actúen para agudizar la orientación y la conducta de las instituciones de prensa, sus patrocinios y su equipo editorial. Las variables "meta-ambientales", como la cultura de prensa preexistente y el nivel de desarrollo económico, son también considerados. El artículo presenta en una variedad de casos de estudio, principalmente del mundo subdesarrollado, las diversas estrategias por las cuales los trabajadores de los medios de comunicación buscan reconciliar los imperativos profesionales y de movilización y abrir un espacio para lo más reciente. El artículo concluye con la presentación de tres modelos, cada uno aplicable a un "tipo" de sistema de medios de comunicación (autoritarismo "duro", autoritarismo "suave" y democracias liberales con orientación de mercado). Se exigió que estos tres modelos, a pesar de tener ciertas dificultades conceptuales, cuenten para la gran mayoría de sistemas de medios de comunicación mundial, y ayuden a explicar el comportamiento institucional y las orientaciones profesionales que ellos exhiben.
Introduction

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 definition 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, 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. A 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 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.

1 In *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).

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] generalizing] all and sundry sparks of ferment and active struggle".

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. 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.

Given its importance to these various "democratic" and "authoritarian" political models, it is striking that the press has so far not been the subject of


Almond 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).

5 For an example of an underdevelopmentalist media critique, see D.R. Mankekar, Media and the Third World (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Mass Communication, 1979).

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
attempts at a "macro-theory", one that presumes to be valid for media systems worldwide. That is the purpose of this paper, which deploys the concepts of a "mobilizing imperative" and a "professional imperative" in press functioning to isolate the underpinnings of both capitalist and state-socialist press systems; the expectations of "sponsors" for the media they control; the diverse priorities that drive journalists and editors charged with the task of generating editorial content; and the tensions and clashes that may result from the interaction of sponsors and professional journalists.7

The emphasis here is on the written press. I believe, however, that many of the basic frameworks and interpretations are valid for broadcast media (and occasionally new and alternative media). Their applications, nonetheless, should be viewed throughout as more tentative with regard to broadcast and new media.

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, Izvestia8

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 say, what social, economic, and political options tend to be foreclosed, rendered "unthinkable", in the paper's reportage and editorial commentary? What, at its heart, qualifies as "news"? Which social sectors 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).

7 Although it draws on a wide range of cases and examples, the heart of this analysis resides in an examination of four press systems: those of Russia (with a case-study of Izvestia), South Africa (with case-studies of The Star, Sowetan, and The Citizen), Nicaragua (focusing on the former Sandinista official daily, Barricada), and Jordan (with a case-study of the English-language Jordan Times). Doctoral field research was conducted in all these systems and press institutions. See Adam Jones, The Press in Transition: A Comparative Study of Nicaragua, South Africa, Jordan and Russia (Ph.D. dissertation, University of British Columbia, 1999).

8 Alexander Sychev interview, Moscow, 26 May 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina).
and class interests tend to be selected out for special attention, treated more favorably 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 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.

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

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majority of the population does not share. In all of Africa, according to Karikari, “Only Tanzania had an 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, 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

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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 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. 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”.  

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14 Yassan Zassoursky interview, Moscow, 29 May 1997.  
15 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.  
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, 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 posts 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.

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-heer 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

17 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 benefitted 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. For a detailed examination of The Citizen, see Adam Jones, “From Rightist to ‘Brightest’? The Strange Tale of South Africa’s Citizen”, Journal of Southern African Studies, 24: 2 (June 1998), pp. 325-46.

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.¹⁹

For those who conform, there are important rewards. The material pressures media institutions often face in politically and economically freer environments may be rendered redundant. And the negative inducements available to the regime are numerous. They 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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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

¹⁹ P.V. Vivekanand interview, Amman, 9 August 1995. For a detailed study of the Jordanian press system, focusing on The Jordan Times, see Adam Jones, “Press, Regime and Society in Jordan Since 1989”, working paper of the Inter-University Consortium for Arab Studies (ICAS), Montréal, 1997. This work, to my knowledge the only substantial treatment of the subject in English, can also be found on the World Wide Web at <http://www.interchange.ubc.ca/adamj/jordan.htm>.


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 Salvadoran 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”). 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 newspaper 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 the opposition daily *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.

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24 The distinction between “soft” and “hard” authoritarianisms will be considered further below.
25 It is usually a newspaper, given the state’s stranglehold on broadcast media.
26 For more on *La Prensa* under the Somoza dictatorship, and its subsequent fractious relationship with the Sandinista regime, see Patricia Taylor Edmisten, *Nicaragua Divided: La Prensa and the Chamorro Legacy* (Pensacola: University of West Florida Press, 1990).
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”. Senior editors are likely to be handpicked party appointees and cronies; they may serve in separate capacities as political leaders 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 *KapoWriters*, 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

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28 John Murray writes 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 *Novosti*, 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 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”. John Murray, *The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin: Behind the Paper Curtain* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd., 1994), pp. 40-41.

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.\(^3^0\)

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.\(^3^1\)

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 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.*

\(^3^0\) 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.

\(^3^1\) Mahmoud Al-Kayed, Chairman of the Board, Jordan Press Foundation; “*Al-Ra'i will remain true to Royal directives*”, *The Jordan Times*, 7 June 1993.
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 certainly 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.

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 elite "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 establishing the "rules of the game" within which
public discourse occurs. Their 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, and Kosovo). 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, and political parties or 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 to little else.

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33 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”.
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 in 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

Conceptions of “professionalism” are inherently slippery. But is it nonetheless possible, by now, to speak of a “universal journalist”, as David Randall does in his...

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34 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 their 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.

35 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 editorial and managerial divisions.

36 Boris Kagarlitsky interview, Moscow, 29 June 1997.
stimulating little book? There is little doubt that the art of “reporting” has established itself as a profession, and often as a distinguishable “estate”, in 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.

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. 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”.

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 induces a hangdog cast,

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40 Robert A. Hackett and Yuezhi Zhao, 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).
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.

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 underdeveloped media environments as in more developed ones, 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”. 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 factoring in. It would be difficult to examine the evolution of the Nicaraguan newspaper Barricada, Izvestia in the former USSR, 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” (tolstyi zhurnal) in 19th-century

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41 “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 Media for Democracy in Malawi, p. 110.

42 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.

Russian journalism; and the formative influence of the "English model" of liberal journalism on the English-language press of South Africa.  

"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. 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, of course, is to James Scott's classic study of subsistence and rebellion, The Moral Economy of the Peasant). I contend 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;

44 "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".
45 Irina Petrovskaya interview, Moscow, 30 May 1997. (Translated by Bolina Dobinina).
46 According 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.
48 In a global-historical sense, perhaps; or in the context of the evolution of press-regime relations in a given national media system.
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);
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 basic power imbalance, and the consequent “reliance on state-supported forms of patronage and assistance” that entrenches the dependent relationship with and subservient posture towards the authorities, are also enough to mute most expressions of a professional imperative in journalism. As a result, in both sets of

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49 Janos Horváti 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”. Horváti, “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 also 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.

circumstances, lesser means tend to be found of evading constraints, be they oriented to material subsistence or professional self-expression. The peasant strategies cited by Scott—exit through migration, “raiding the cash economy”, “growing symbolic withdrawal” —strongly resemble professional strategies used to circumvent mobilizing restrictions, whether under authoritarian regimes or modern corporate management.

To see some 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 1990.1 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, air, onest 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.


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 ...

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*. For an example of the kind of dissonance that can result when journalists are asked to bend reality too far to suit sponsors’ wishes, 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 warzone 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

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53 *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 wrong-doing 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.

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 how delicate may be 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. 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."\(^5\)

\(^5\) Kaizer Nyatsumba interview, Johannesburg, 21 April 1995.
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; the relationship between the press and the corporate sphere in South Africa 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.

“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”.

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58 Noam Chomsky, Necessary Illusions: Thought Control in Democratic Societies (Montréal: CBC Enterprises, 1988), pp. 11-12; Chomsky quoted in Mark Achbar, ed., Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1994), pp. 166, 167 (n.b.: not to be confused with Herman and Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent). Chomsky has also spoken favourably of the professional standards of the Israeli press: “One of the things that is right [about Israel] is the Hebrew-language press, or, at least, significant segments of it. I have relied extensively on the work of thoughtful and courageous Israeli journalists who have set—and met—quite unusual standards in exposing unpleasant facts about their own government and society. There is nothing comparable elsewhere, in my opinion”. Manufacturing Consent, p. 122.

59 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 sub-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 paper. 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, its official daily *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 rifts? 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 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

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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. 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.62

**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

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62 Carlos Fernando Chamorro was fired as director of the paper, and about 80 percent of the staff resigned or were released by the new directorate. This was headed by Tomás Borge, the only surviving founding member of the Sandinista Front, and one of its leading “orthodox” figures. Under Borge's tutelage, Barricada declined precipitously in circulation and advertising revenue, finally folding in early 1998. For an examination of the full sweep of Barricada's history, see Adam Jones, Chronicle of A Coup Foretold: 'Barricada' and the Struggle for the Sandinista Press, 1979-1998 (manuscript under submission).
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
policy. 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 Jordan case study likewise merits the “soft authoritarian”
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 ante-bellum Lebanon.
This was vital in allowing the regime-affiliated press to take halting steps towards
greater independence, in permitting the rise of tabloid and political-party media after
liberalization began in 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

63 Carlos Fernando Chamorro interview, 28 February 1991.
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 Barricada’s autonomy project in the early 1990s can be ascribed to the proximity of its 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

64 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”. John Downing, Internationalizing Media Theory: Transition, Power, Culture (London: Sage Publications, 1996), pp. 73, 81.
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. In his analysis of The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, John Murray offers an interesting anecdote about how personal clout can allow senior 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 newsroom 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.

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 senior political writer Stanislav Kondrashov. 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 careful study zeroes in on the right aspects of institutional functioning, in my view, and draws conclusions that seem congruent with the arguments advanced here:

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67 Murray, The Russian Press from Brezhnev to Yeltsin, p. 63.
68 Stanislav Kondrashov interview, 30 May 1997.
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.

*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

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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.\(^{70}\)

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.\(^{71}\)

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.\(^{72}\)


\(^{71}\) Of 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 more 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 said trying to keep *Jerusalem Post* in check”, *The Jordan Times* (from *The Independent*), 17 January 1994.

\(^{72}\) 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
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 *background* 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.

A significant environmental variable here is the degree of penetration by foreign, usually broadcast, media. Where such penetration is significant, domestic media in authoritarian societies may be able to 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. 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". (A crackdown on the "subversive" foreign medium is also an option revolutionary for the region. Millions of ordinary Arabs are turning 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.

Rami 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).

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. 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 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". Likewise, in the "thoroughly Islamic society" of Saudi Arabia, "dishes now freely pluck American B-television

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75 "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.

76 "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.

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’

Presenting the Professional Imperative as a Path to System Stability

One of the common ways in which press workers can help to reconcile 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. 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 discussions of alternative economic models, and then to the even more sensitive subjects of Soviet history and state-socialist mythology.


Liu Jemow, “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”. Dmitry Murzin interview, Moscow, 3 June 1997.
Choosing Exit

It's good to be forgotten sometimes.

—Dmitry Babich, TV-6, 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. 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. 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. 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.”

80 Dmitry Babich interview, Moscow, 20 May 1997.
82 Schell, Mandate of Heaven, p. 301. 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
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, 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.

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).

"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 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". (Kondrashov interview).

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 Partyhard-liners", 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*,
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 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.

The South Africa case 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.

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

and bookstall vendors were selling them for five to ten times the price of the original volume" (pp. 304-305).

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”. In my study of South Africa’s *Citizen* newspaper, I have isolated several cases of wilful mischief that seem to have been similarly directed at undermining the paper’s pro-government “line”.

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 with regular readers, can itself become a powerful “glue” binding the institution to civil society, a bond which can endure into an 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

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86 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 *nouveau régime*.

87 Liu Jemow, “*Don’t Force Us to Lie*”, p. 79.


“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.⁹⁰

Curry’s study of the Polish press under state socialism similarly found that journalists favoured feuillets,⁹¹ “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.⁹²

Consider, too, the curiously-positioned liberal English press in apartheid-era 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 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”.⁹³

⁹⁰ Kagarlitsky interview.
⁹¹ Apparently derived from the French feuillets.
⁹² Curry, Poland’s Journalists, p. 192.
⁹³ Ken Owen, “Media bosses who played the apartheid game”, Mail & Guardian (Johannesburg), 18-24 July 1997.
The counterpoint to this surfeit of verbiage is simply-silence. This in itself can be eloquent, as Ryszard Kapuscinski 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”.

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95 Kondrashov interview.
Three Systems

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 loci 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 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 development 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 paper by trying to model the imperatives and variables raised so far, with some acknowledgment of the difficulties and ambiguities that remain.97

97 I have chosen, after some pondering, to exclude from the following models 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 communication, 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
I begin by dividing the world’s media systems into three broad types, placed along the axis of regime authoritarianism. 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 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 the repression of media and discourse in Cuba does not reach the levels of Iraq or Stalinist Russia—or for that matter Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1980s, where formal state constraints were fewer while outright state terror reigned. Similarly, 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 apartheid 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

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, 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?
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).

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 monaracies 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 press 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 there. 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-
System A

Authoritarian (Hard)

Examples: Stalinist USSR; Nazi Germany; El Salvador/Guatemala (1970s–1980s); People’s Republic of China; Cuba; North Korea; Iraq.

Level of Development
(underdeveloped or semi-developed)

Media Culture

State/ regime/ party (N?)

Political Advocacy

Professional Imperative?
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 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: the example of the Afrikaans-language press under apartheid could 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 breathing space 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
System B
Authoritarian (Soft)

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

- State/ regime/ party
- Political advocacy
- Catering to readers?
- Profits/market niche?
- "The Truth"
- Other party/sector?
- Profit-seeking?
- Professional Imperative
- Level of development
- Media culture
“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, tend to be better-educated and more media-savvy, 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) 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, just 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.

98 The secular bias of this analysis should be acknowledged.
Towards A Comparative Model of Press Functioning

System C
Liberal-Democratic, Market-Oriented

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

Level of development

Media Culture

State/ regime
Owners/ managers
Profit-seeking
Political party?
Trade union?
Public subsidy?
Professional imperative

System advocacy
Catering to readers
Profits/ market niche
"The Truth"
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 paper 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—as 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.

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) subsidies. 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, dirigiste, and underdeveloped societies. The sophistication 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.  

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 exerted a strong appeal, not only in more authoritarian societies worldwide, but on the press institutions that often seek to break free of those authoritarian constraints.

Among 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.
Conclusion

The diversity of mass media worldwide has tended to militate against a "macro-theorizy" of institutional behaviour. This paper has argued that for the written press, at least, a useful schema can be constructed of "mobilizing" imperatives and constraints, on the one hand, and "professional" values and motivations, on the other. While the professional imperative may be strongly influenced by the prevailing culture of a given media system, I have attempted to show that it also expresses a "moral economy" of journalism, one that is broadly congruent with both positivist epistemology (in its preoccupation with "The Truth") and liberal-democratic ideology (in the self-image of the press as a separable "estate" within the body politic). The mobilizing imperative, meanwhile, serves as a useful heuristic device for comparing and contrasting press performance in otherwise disparate media systems—from state-socialist and capitalist authoritarianisms, to the media systems of the developed West. Meanwhile, a "meta-environmental" variable, level of development, seems to be powerfully influential in shaping both authoritarian systems and liberal-democratic ones.

I have argued that this mobilizing-versus-professional framework helps to explain the day-to-day actions and attitudes of press workers worldwide. This represents nothing more than a preliminary attempt to conceptualize press functioning on a global-comparative scale. It may, however, help to bring greater analytical coherence to the "forest" of mass media—a thicket that has often been overlooked in the detailed studies of trees and branches.
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