

15

Post-authoritarian Politics in a Neoliberal Era: Revising Media and Journalism Transition in Mexico

Mireya Márquez-Ramírez

Introduction

For the past two centuries various influences have decidedly shaped the changing relations between Mexico's private news media and the equally mutable state. Local forces and actors; the inevitable impact of global stimuli such as commercialism; and the absence, obsolescence, or non-enforcement of media regulation have profoundly shaped Mexico's news media and journalism. Throughout this chapter, it is evident that a hybrid media system and a resulting post-authoritarian journalistic culture are in place. Both are better grasped through the understanding of cultural patterns, habits, changing interests, and under-the-table arrangements that have prevailed regardless of political democratization – and sometimes as result of it. Hence, the mere study of global forces, formal legal frameworks, ownership structures, discursive adoption of journalistic norms, or institutional structures can not fully account for the 'captured liberal' nature of Mexico's news media.

A country with a long-standing history of political instability, conflict, and authoritarianism has left an indelible footprint in the structural, organizational, cultural, and individual configuration of both the media system and the culture of journalism. However, with the turn of the century and the decades prior to it, a number of studies have documented the emergence of what they deem to be patterns of journalistic professionalization, media modernization, and the 'opening' of Mexico. In comparison to earlier decades of authoritarian political rule, by the

1990s a number of authors, in fact, observed a much varied range of sources, more plural, fact-based and less sycophantic reporting, investigation of corruption and exposés, a legal framework to ensure access to information, and a more robust exercise in critical reporting and press freedom (Lawson, 2002; Wallis, 2004; Hughes, 2006). For example, Lawson (2002) claims that when compared to how things had been for decades in terms of censorship, repression, or media collusion with political elites, the press began to open with a variety of themes and critical reporting due to political democratization and commercialism. For her part, Sallie Hughes (2006) argues that while different segments of the media followed three oppositional paths – either civic, inertial, or commercial – a widespread wave of ‘civic journalism’ has become ‘the dominant form of newspaper journalism in the country’ (2006: 6).

The aforementioned authors also strongly connect the patterns of what they consider to be professionalization, modernization, and opening in journalism to the adoption of US news values, formats, and press business models that slowly distanced it from the state apparatus and gradually grew closer to either civic voices or to market logics (Lawson, 2002; Hughes, 2006). Similarly, regardless of the complicated and ambiguous ways in which Mexican journalists assimilate and adapt global frameworks of professional values – such as objectivity and autonomy – or the way in which they enact passive reporting through the adaptation of ‘professional’ values (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012a, 2012b), this line of research argues that by the end of the 20th century, the press had become ‘more assertive, investigative, politically engaged, and generally balanced’ (Wallis, 2004: 118). The electoral victory of the center-right Party of National Action (PAN by its Spanish acronym) in 2000 – the oppositional party that ended the 70-year consecutive ruling of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI by its Spanish acronym) – prompted an author to predict that president-to-be Vicente Fox was going to bring ‘a cataclysmic break with the past that inexorably pushes the modernization of Mexico’s media forward’ (Rockwell, 2002: 109).

As predominant lines of thought, these narratives of media change – henceforth referred to as ‘liberal’ – often highlight the positive effects of commercialism in eroding authoritarian journalistic cultures and promoting democratic deliberation through investigative and watchdog journalism. In other words, the assumption is that global trends help alleviate local ailments. By global trends these studies *de facto* assume the standardization of features normally attributed to liberal economies: democracy, commercialism, deregulation, private property, and commercial funding for the media; likewise, a mass-oriented press; little

intervention on the part of the state or political actors; and the watchdog role of journalism (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1956; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White, 2009). It is hence assumed that the more liberalized the media system is, the more open and plural their news media are, and thus the more professional their journalistic standards become (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). Not surprisingly, the predominance of this narrative is found in most comprehensive studies on Mexican journalism throughout the 1990s and in fact in several other studies across the region (Tironi and Sunkel, 2000; Alves, 2005; Pinto, 2009). The underlying assumption in much of this scholarship is that in emerging democracies both a hospitable commercial environment and the solidification of a multi-party political system eventually erode the traditional complicity between the state and the media, de-legitimize the use of censorship as a mechanism of control, and foster competition that in turn broadens the spectrum of choices and voices in the media.

However, there has been a contrasting approach to media transition that focuses on the growth of unaccountable media power; the perils of rampant commercialism, deregulation, and press-state complicity; and the effects of media concentration in democratic processes. These have been long-standing topics of preoccupation in Mexican media research and in fact, in Latin America as a whole. Departing from the standpoint that the political, economic, and journalistic fields continue to be fully integrated, critical political economists view journalism as the most distinguishable instrument for media proprietors and political actors to advance and accommodate their news agendas to their economic and political interests. Far from the docile or complicit role they used to play during the authoritarian era, they claim, a Mexican 'mediacracy' has fully consolidated, re-shifting the subordination role to a more protagonist one (Trejo-Delarbre, 2001, 2005). Not only have the media filled the void left by weakly supported political parties and judicial system, but also the public space is now filled by a news agenda often defined – particularly during times of crisis and political conflict – by an established elite at the service of private interests (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012b). The fear about the rising power of broadcast media in shaping media policy and avoiding regulation has prompted definitional labels in book and article titles, such as 'governing television' (Villamil, 2005), the 'Fourth Media Republic' (Esteinou, 2008), and the 'Televisa Law' (Esteinou and Alva de la Selva, 2009).

With these contrasting readings about the Mexican media landscape, have they indeed democratized and fully opened after two decades of

political reforms, transitions, and commercialism? Is journalism more professional, critical, and above all, autonomous? The clear gaps that emerge from comparing the liberal and the radical approaches to media transition revive the need to comprehensively account for the structural, organizational, cultural, and individual forces impacting news media in general and journalistic practices in particular. I argue in this chapter that the hybrid nature of Mexican journalistic culture means that clashing forces: authoritarianism (tradition) and commercialism (modernity) have blended, not unlike other forms of cultural production. As cultural scholar Néstor García-Canclini claims, tradition and modernity are highly interdependent in Latin America: 'We find in the study of cultural heterogeneity one of the means to explain the oblique powers that intermingle liberal institutions and authoritarian habits, social democratic movements with paternalistic regimes, and their mutual transactions' (García-Canclini, 2005: 3).

Private media in authoritarian hands: the captured liberal model in Mexico

Depending on the global or local forces at stake in the struggle for power, various exogenous and endogenous influences have shaped the journalistic culture, the media system, and therefore the press-state relations in Mexico. This must be analyzed in the light of the impact of continuing political instability, war and conflict, extended periods of authoritarian political rule, and a 'flexibilized' approach to commercialism and democracy. These forces all have blended to produce a hybrid press model that Guerrero (See Chapter 2 in this book) calls 'captured liberal.' Such a model retains the features attributed to two contrasting models in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) three-fold categorization of media systems: the 'liberal' vis-à-vis the 'polarized-pluralist.' The strong presence, domination, and high levels of 'political parallelism' and 'political instrumentalization' in Mexico's news media are akin to the 'polarized-pluralist' model existing in Mediterranean countries. However, these characteristics have developed not in the context of formal state intervention in public broadcasting, or in the overtly partisan press as seen in Italy, Greece, and Spain. In fact, Mexico's media have been 'overwhelmingly commercial and privately owned' (Hallin, 2000: 101) since their inception and technically qualify as 'liberal' by their property type and stated mission.

Traditionally, media property has been inherited in Mexico – Televisa being the most notable case – and thus the media business tend to stay

in the family for decades (Sinclair, 2002). This was the case throughout the 20th century. Under the wing and patronage of the PRI-governments and presidents, organizations like Televisa slowly grew into multimedia conglomerates of gigantic proportions (Sinclair, 1999, 2002). The trend, however, did only intensify with the arrival of democratic and neoliberal governments. More recently, pro-business newspapers like *Excelsior* have vastly benefited from the past three administrations of allegedly democratic credentials: Vicente Fox (2000–2006, PAN party), Felipe Calderón (2006–2012, PAN party), and Enrique Peña Nieto (2012–2018, PRI party back in power) and have now become just a link to a much wider business portfolio (Lara-Khlar, 2007).

The captured liberal model of Mexican media has meant that at the upper levels of hierarchy, private media still exchange loyalties to the president in office for benefits, as they did in pre-democracy days or the party in power as they do in post-democracy days. These may include advertisement contracts, tax exemptions, permits, and license renewals to grow business. Unlike the highly instrumentalized media systems in Mediterranean countries wherein politicians own media organizations or media proprietors run for office, in the captured liberal model in Mexico, political neutrality is not an ideological position or a tenet of professionalism but a commodity to exchange. My previous research (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012c) shows how economic interests are more conveniently served by minimizing confrontation or maintaining political allegiances with certain political actors. Therefore, I argue that political instrumentalization or state intervention in Mexico's media system does not necessarily stem from explicit partisanship, draconian laws, or legal frameworks implemented to ensure governmental control, restrict media movements, or limit freedoms, but primarily from unwritten arrangements crafted by contexts and pragmatics.

To understand how collusion and complicity between media elites and political actors came into place, it is first necessary to trace back the development of media industries in Mexico that occurred at contrasting paces. For example, akin to many European and Latin American countries (Mancini, 2000; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; Hallin and Mancini, 2004), the Mexican print press stayed oriented toward elite readerships, developed very slowly as a commercial business, and thus had consistently small circulations throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. A sustained history of social conflict, wars, and political instability in the 19th century became the fertile terrain for the development of a very active militant and partisan press as well as for the strong influence of literary narratives and intellectual debates in the newspapers. The

19th century press in Mexico also underwent periods of freedom and censorship, partisanship and detachment – depending on the fragility or strength of whoever held power at the time (Pérez-Rayón, 2005).

Conversely, the broadcast industry successfully developed its commercial position throughout the 20th century, modeling itself after the United States. A century later, Mexico has become one of the most concentrated countries in the world in the sectors of media and telecommunications. Daniel Hallin has observed that by the turn of the millennium: ‘there [was] no country comparable in size to Mexico in which a single private company [Televisa] so dominate[d] the airwaves’ (Hallin, 2000: 96). Up to 1993, Televisa was the sole commercial TV network in the country. It had grown from being a single TV channel in the 1950s to becoming the biggest media conglomerate of the Hispanic world by the 1980s¹: it began its horizontal and vertical integration long before other worldwide media conglomerates did so. Only in 1993, after pressures from the competition clauses contained in the National Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed by Mexico, the United States and Canada, TV Azteca came into the pitch as the second competitor in television, fuelling hopes that some plurality and content diversity would ensue. However, this much smaller corporation was one of the very few beneficiaries of the privatization of state-administered TV channels carried out by a self-proclaimed neoliberal reformer, Carlos Salinas, in 1993, a process that back in the day attracted widespread criticism and controversy.²

Following a short period of alternative content in the mid 1990s, soon TV Azteca became part of a growing and powerful media ‘duo-poly’. Like Televisa, the new network held very clear political orientations and came into being thanks to political connections and a president’s goodwill. In fact, regardless of who wielded power during PRI 70-year consecutive rule – whether nationalistic oriented presidents of the 1970s or ‘modern’ reformers between the 1980s and the 1990s – not only technically private media corporations but also smaller publications have enjoyed limitless benefits and financial survival in exchange for loyalty, good coverage, and publicity (Caletti-Kaplan, 1988; Cleary, 2003; Rodríguez-Munguía, 2007). Such was the media’s intertwining with the country’s one-party system that the country’s most important media baron – Televisa’s Chairman Emilio Azcárraga Milmo – famously proclaimed his utter loyalty to the system by claiming to be ‘the PRI’s soldier’ (Fromson, 1996). The overtly clear political subordination waned with the strengthening of media markets. Nowadays, in a politically diverse context where various parties and actors hold key seats, his heir and current Chairman, Emilio Azcárraga Jean, appears to be

more pragmatic and open with his political allegiances. His 'business-first whoever is in office' approach adopted during the late 1990s as part of a strategy shift, means that his main TV channel and news service has either supported or confronted through various means those political actors who represent a direct benefit or threat to his business expansion, particularly during election time (Villamil, 2005, 2012; García-Calderón, 2007).

Throughout the 20th century though, there were few incentives for media executives to shift loyalties away from the PRI system: part of the party's success to retain office despite a rotation of leadership and a façade of democratic elections was that it managed to devise mechanisms to exert control of the media without the need of harsh regulation. These mechanisms, as I have argued elsewhere (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012d, 2014), deeply impacted reporting culture, professional and ethical values, media content, and ownership structures of print and broadcast media. Such mechanisms of press-state collusion were the following:

1. *Bribery and payoffs*. A crucial aspect of the relation between the state and journalists entails the government's co-opting of salaried reporters. As Fromson (1996) notes, this operated in a myriad of ways: free meals, transportation, hotel accommodation, junkets to resorts, luxury gifts sent to newsrooms and personal addressees, and – potentially the most embarrassing but also the most common method – by direct payment, known as *chayotes* or *embutes*. Reporters received them in an envelope in return for 'planting a story, twisting a story's angle or point of view, or spiking an embarrassing piece' (Fromson, 1996: 113; Cleary, 2003).
2. *Control and handling of criticism, spin, and information flow*. Ensuring the right spin on political coverage was fundamental to the maintenance of the PRI's power as a controller of public information and was an equally crucial element in keeping control over the public agenda. In the avalanche of information that such an overarching system generated, 'newspapers reflected an overwhelming dependence on officialdom' (Lawson, 2002: 49). Apart from the sycophantic coverage of the president and his activities, monopolization of information meant that voices other than official ones were rarely met, often overlooked, and negatively portrayed in the print press.
3. *Ostensible freedom of the press*. The system claimed to be open and respectful of press autonomy, even by institutionalizing an annual reception to commemorate Press Freedom Day – an event not meant to be an opportunity for the president to acknowledge the press, but

the other way around: an opportunity for the press to show support and pay respect to the president, to express its gratitude for permitting an 'unrestrictive freedom of speech.' On its own terms, this ceremony became symbolic of the cynical display of press servitude to the system (Rodríguez-Castañeda, 1993).

4. *Control and subsidy of newsprint.* One of the most effective instruments of the state in controlling and co-opting the media was the subsidy and monopolization of newsprint production and distribution by the supplier PIPSA. This state-run company subsidized newsprint prices, so that publications could cope financially because historically low circulations in Mexico as well as insufficient private advertising made journalism outlets barely profitable. In exchange for the low-priced material, publishers were not legally obliged but certainly expected to offer support to the president and the dominant segment of the party. Each time the government wanted to review subsidies, publishers saw it as a threat to their economic interests, or as an explicit expression of reprimand (Fuentes-Beráin, 2002).
5. *Economic dependence on political advertising.* This consisted in the selective allocation and distribution of political and institutional advertising. Back in the day, state-owned or public-administered industries dominated and private advertisers were not only scarce but complicit with the government or susceptible to political manipulation. Within the vast supply of political and official advertising, the most striking form was the *gacetilla*, a paid insert typically prepared by the government to resemble a genuine newspaper article (Benavides, 2000). Moreover, the government purchased advertising space to publicize official achievements for all the state agencies. As a result, ample advertising budgets were frequently denied to independent publications as a form of reprimand and were awarded to sympathetic and loyal ones.
6. *Lax regulatory and legal framework in print and broadcast industries.* Media legislation in Mexico has been notorious for being outdated and often nonexistent in practice and for serving the economic interests of media proprietors. For example, newspapers are not licensed or regulated by any central government-related agency that oversees their functioning, content, or the public's complaints; and the only legislation concerning print media dates back to the 1917 Constitution. In practice, the press has been left to regulate itself. Likewise, there is no national association to which print media widely subscribe that might allow industry-wide adherence to voluntary codes of conduct in journalism; neither are there any institutions, public or industry-run that

- verify and certify the circulation of publications or reports on media performance. There is in practice no one to channel and deal with media complaints; or a collegial, independent body or union that licenses, examines, protects, trains, or speaks on the behalf of organized journalists at a national level (Hernández-López, 1999).
7. *Discretionary awarding and renewal of broadcast licenses.* The state facilitated and promoted, rather than opposed or constrained, the consolidation of media industries by granting broadcasting licenses to key allies. The old boys' network of relationships between PRI political leaders – such as the president and his ministers – and powerful businessmen meant that in exchange for media deregulation, discretionary concessions, and extension of broadcast licenses, propagandistic plans through news and entertainment content were unbridled. The governmental protection and perpetuation of faulty (de) regulatory frameworks held the media unaccountable to the public and enabled the consolidation of radio and TV monopolies in the hands of very few individuals and families that continues to this day.
 8. *Censorship, and the silencing of oppositional voices.* The aforementioned mechanisms of complicity and co-option of media elites made overt censorship and repression unnecessary. However, a few cases did stand out in recent press history when the system resorted to censorship, repression, or advertisement boycotts. The Tlatelolco student massacre in 1968 crowned a period of the worst authoritarian rule in which the press was subjugated to the state's discipline. Later, a well-documented episode known as the Excelsior-coup³ – in which the government masterminded the deposition of a critical newspaper director – became emblematic of the conflictive relations and gradual visibility of the critical media.

As we can observe from these mechanisms implemented during the authoritarian rule, the culture of submission was not gratuitous. 'A web of subsidies, concessions, bribes, and prerequisites created a captive media establishment that faithfully reflected ruling party priorities' (Lawson, 2002: 173). From the very beginning the private media emerged as a technically 'independent' institution but in reality so deeply entrenched with the official ruling party that the system neither devised the creation of a strong state-ruled media to pursue its own propagandist aims nor an autonomous public broadcasting service as occurred with most European countries (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). The media barons and elite politicians were so in tune, that the system saw little need

to encourage any public, meaningful debate – let alone advocate – for any reform proposal concerning the press and the media's public responsibility and freedom of speech. As for the working conditions of Mexican journalists, in the late 1970s and 1980s, reporters lacked skills and competence, were poorly paid, enjoyed little job security, had little training or educational background, learned on the job, and were prone to accepting and using governmental bribes and payoffs to supplement their living (Baldivia, Planet, Solís and Guerra, 1981). The aforementioned circumstances and the convulse period of key political and social events throughout three decades⁴ thus prompted more debate on media reform and the need journalistic professionalization. For many, neoliberalism was the pathway for such endeavors.

Privatization and commercialism in the wave of transition

The early years of neoliberal governments evolved around the signing of NAFTA in 1992. This long negotiated treaty entailed the Mexican government's commitment to increase media competition in the broadcasting sector. As mentioned earlier, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) carried out the privatization of two state-run channels called Imevision that gave rise to TV Azteca. Many analysts from that time were confident that the liberal reforms fostered by NAFTA would buttress the consolidation of the freedom and autonomy of the press that civil society and media observers had longed for. In fact, Lawson (2002) and Hughes (2006) greatly attribute the cultural conversion of authoritarian media into modern, free, civic, and democratic to the aforementioned reforms. In theory, this modernization process of the media under the new wave of neoliberal privatizations entailed a renovation of a financially autonomous media business no longer dependent on governmental assistance and therefore more prone to critical coverage; balanced reporting of oppositional political actors, particularly during election time; the end of the bribery culture and newsprint subsidies; and the overall professionalization of university educated journalists (Trejo-Delarbre, 1996; Carreño-Carlón, 2000).

The neoliberal reforms certainly affected the traditional press-state relations in a number of ways. Financially, one of the most immediate consequences of economic reforms in the media was the privatization of more than a thousand state-run enterprises that for the first time became fresh nongovernmental sources of advertising for the media (Hernández-Ramírez, 2010b). In theory, the Carlos Salinas' and Ernesto Zedillo's PRI

governments (1988–1994 and 1994–2000) did establish a number of measures to modernize relations with the press: government branches refrained from financing journalists' expenses during trips; guidelines for the allocation of advertising budgets were supposedly reviewed; and the newsprint supplier PIPSA was privatized, thus ending state subvention and one of the most enduring forms of control (Carreño-Carlón, 2000). Additionally, perhaps the most iconic change occurred in 1994 when the president no longer attended or hosted Press Freedom Day, and so put an end to the customary display of flattery.

Moreover, it is also true that the newspaper industry dramatically changed with the arrival of a financially independent, commercially viable, and journalistically professional newspaper named *Reforma* in 1993 that rose editorial standards for the whole industry and addressed a captive market of middle-class, educated readers that held oppositional and alternative political views. The 1990s were thus a period of consolidation of synergies and franchises of newspapers as profitable business models that became oriented toward the market (Hernández-Ramírez, 2010b). In terms of coverage, a context of constant upheaval reflected in the media through the publication of exposes, the multiplication of political scandals, and the diversification of news sources. Not surprisingly, this period is often considered by the accounts of Lawson (2002) and Hughes (2006) as the renaissance of investigative and critical journalism in Mexico. Similarly, radio news programs whose news anchors held various political sympathies gave credence to the discourse of plurality and political diversity. As in many other countries, radio news hosts had resorted to 'discourses of integrity to consolidate the public inquisitor as a discursive figure' (Higgins, 2010) and discovered its commercial and profit-making value.

Overall, by the mid-1990s, it is fair to acknowledge that the political establishment carried out various political and economic reforms to guarantee fair and competitive elections and to foster competition and commercialization in the media landscape. As a result, they were both considerably more open, critical, and competitive than they had ever been. Many claim, however, that 'opening' in the media resulted from commercial incentives rather than from media elites' commitment to democratic values: 'Raising the game in terms of journalistic standards and political sophistication became a matter of survival in the 1990s; [since] obeisance to the regime would no longer suffice' (Wallis, 2004: 118; see also Guerrero, 2004).

So far the changes on the surface were apparent, but disguised a lot more. Despite the widespread optimism, Mexican historian Lorenzo

Meyer argues that the reforms carried out in the 1990s were as modern as they were authoritarian. He argues that President Salinas used the most traditional instruments of Mexican authoritarian politics to modernize Mexican economics (Meyer, quoted in personal interview by Thelen, 1999). The façade of neoliberal discourses of modernization at times disguised the prevalence of censorship, blackmailing, mutating allegiances and several other authoritarian inertias. For instance, in retaliation for their coverage and extensive documentation of the alleged electoral fraud that took president Salinas de Gortari to power in 1988, critical publications such as *Proceso*, *El Financiero*, and *La Jornada* struggled to obtain governmental advertising contracts or gain access to information, and many were excluded from the coverage of high profile official events (Lawson, 2002: 39).

Censorship and surveillance continued at the middle layers of the government and party, and in many news outlets the reporting of events still followed the official discourse and agenda, even if the presidential figure was more tolerant to criticism and questioning. By the late 1990s, however, a single-party beginning to lose its overarching power and the growing stake of oppositional parties seeking to advertise their candidates and platforms meant more business opportunities and less need of subordination of editorial decisions to the single-party. A devastating electoral defeat approached as both the president and the party appeared more distanced, isolated, and ideologically opposed than ever.

Change and continuity within post-authoritarianism

Despite the prevalence of the core structural conditions that have shaped the Mexican media system and its resulting journalistic culture, there are considerable differences in how journalism functions after political democratization, in regard to the authoritarian days. Without a doubt, the press is free, diverse, and competitive in a way that few could have imagined thirty years ago. A variety of changes are currently shaping journalism in Mexico: a wider and diverse range of news sources enabled by political democracy now give more balanced perspectives that were unimaginable four decades ago, when oppositional parties were illegal. News media promptly informed us, nearly without any restriction, about the multiple accusations and cases of wrongdoing committed by all political parties from 2000 to 2004. Elite journalists such as radio presenters or political columnists now interrogate presidential decisions and public policies in a way that was not possible fifty years ago. The secrecy characteristic of the authoritarian era has now given

place to legislation on Transparency and Access to Information passed during Vicente Fox's term (2000–2006), which certainly propelled the opportunities to source stories and conduct investigative journalism (López-Ayllón, 2004).

However, a growing body of literature poses a contrasting view that helps to debunk the argument of media democratization and straightforward journalistic professionalization. This work points out that while journalists did gain considerably more freedom to report on critical issues, it doesn't mean investigative journalism is profitable or actively incentivated within the newsrooms, quite the opposite in fact (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012a, 2012b). Actually, observers perceive the quality of reporting as unsatisfactory, if not low (Levario-Turcott, 2002; Riva Palacio, 2005; Hernández-Ramírez, 2010a). Instead of the liberal – and certainly global template of professionalism – argument about a Fourth Estate characterized by political neutrality, protection of the public interest, and assertive reporting, media observers like Marco Levario-Turcott (2002) find a 'media democratic drunkenness' manifested in several print reportages and news coverage. A superficial and sensationalist angle prevails, the information is based on unverified rumors or leaks, and the suppression of investigative journalism is filled with speculation and the focus is on political harangues. He claims that Mexican journalists of the post-authoritarian era display their sympathies and aversions without honesty and explicitly admitting them.

From the sum of contemporary journalists' testimonies (Márquez-Ramírez, 2005, 2012c, 2014), it is possible to observe the continuity of age-old ailments. Mexican journalistic work – much as their worldwide counterparts – is constrained by heavy workloads, low salaries, tight deadlines and pragmatic ethical values. They rely on passive reporting methods and on the (biased) agendas of a small number of elite sources and methods, or what Jay Rosen (2009) calls 'he said-she said' type of journalism and a shortage of contextualization, minimal cross-checking, and corroboration (Hernández-Ramírez, 2010a). In fact, the prevalence of on-the-spot type of news stories is also said to be the consequence of hierarchical social structures within the newsroom implemented to face increasing pressures and commercial competition (McPherson, 2012). Akin to what Silvio Waisbord (2000) found in South America, Mexican journalists "do not hold a dreamy-eyed belief in journalistic independence, but instead, show a pragmatic attitude and admission that constraints are inevitable and vary across media" (2000: 148).

The accentuation of what we find to be 'selective' and 'targeted' press freedom, censorship, and poor reporting is worse in the growing context

of statelessness (Waisbord, 2007) and widespread drug-related violence across the country (Relly and González de Bustamante, 2014). Most importantly, old forms of press-state relations and reporting inertias remain. With the political and economic transformations brought about by the change of government in 2000, the media were no longer obliged to act as the organic mouthpieces of a ruling party, but instead multiplied their contacts with a diversity of available actors. Whether regional or federal, religious or corporate, the media transplanted their long-standing authoritarian business model – steady supply of advertising in exchange for coverage, and good coverage in the case of presidential elections – to new political and corporate patrons. This has impacted journalistic culture in various ways in the past decade. Many of these actors – rising-stars politicians from all parties always courting favorable publicity – also began to manifest their inexperience and vulnerability through countless gaffes, errors, and corruption cases, positioning themselves as the target of a newly gained freedom of speech manifested through scandals and overt criticism on the part of high profile radio hosts and print columnists.

For the media, political scandals and the resulting iconoclastic journalism aimed at all political parties has become both a business opportunity and a channel to appeal to audiences in an attempt to regain credibility and lay claims to critical journalism, objectivity, and impartiality (Márquez-Ramírez, 2005, 2012c). Nevertheless, frequently the target subjects of such iconoclastic journalism are chosen after consideration of the economic and political interests of the media – or market-driven partisanship (González Macías, 2013) – rather than from a genuine commitment to the public interest. As Waisbord found in his seminal study on South American newsrooms, while ‘attention-grabbing exposés give temporary boosts to sales [...] the political and business costs outweigh potential market revenues’ (2000: 70–71). Thus, the civic journalism approach that presupposes the exercise of a watchdog role of the press overlooks the fact that in the captured liberal model of the media and the post-authoritarian journalistic culture in Mexico, scandals may bow down to the logic of political and economic interests or to partisan diatribes, and not necessarily to democratic convictions.

Even more crucially, as state agencies continue to function like the main source of advertisement for most media, they still constitute a very important source of revenue, especially among smaller organizations across regions. Political parties, governments, and state agencies all continue to publicize their achievements through the press, often

through well-known means inherited from the *Priista* era: from advertising credited and clearly identified as such, gacetillas and publicity disguised as news, or most recently, as the cynical intention of news coverage, front pages, or interviews in exchange for cash or benefits (Marquez-Ramírez, 2005, 2012c). Due to the frequent periodicity and duration of election periods in Mexico (federal, regional, municipal, and mid-term), election time has historically been the source of economic boosts for the media, particularly broadcasters, due to their high ratings among the working and middle classes. Not only political parties (up to 2007), but the government and state agencies crucially spend most of their election-time media budgets on TV and radio. Between 2000 and 2006, the state's expenditure on media increased every year (Bravo, 2009; Trejo-Delabre, 2010).

Likewise, the passing of electoral reform in 2007 that bans political parties and third parties from buying airtime on radio and TV to avoid misuse of resources and inequitable competition, fueled a media campaign to discredit congress and particularly the senators and officials who pushed through the reforms. After media expenditure became an issue of debate around fair competition after the 2006 presidential elections and post-electoral conflict (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012b), political parties are now supposedly banned from purchasing airtime in the media after the 2007 electoral reform. However, it is possible to observe such policy subverted through other nonregulated forms of publicity: the old-day gacetilla spirit has resurfaced. In fact, the most recent election in Mexico, on July 1, 2012, has certainly lent plenty of credit to this practice. Analysts and commentators believe that the media had carefully helped to enable the triumphal return of the PRI and its telegenic candidate Enrique Peña Nieto to presidency: the amount of positive coverage on his political activities way before he became the official candidate arose widespread suspicions back then (Kuschick, 2009; Rúas Araujo, 2011; Villamil, 2012). Besides Televisa and TV Azteca, smaller media conglomerates like Milenio or Grupo Imagen now add to the elite of businessmen whose commercial interests across the nation are best kept when knitting alliances with strategic political actors and parties during elections.

Even in the early 2000s, when the outlook for press freedom appeared more promising, President Fox continued to control broadcast licensing. In parallel with the financial dependence on the government, a subtler, but still influential form of censorship manifest itself. The successive 'democratic' governments of center-right Presidents Vicente Fox (2000–2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006–2012) were said to have exerted

constant and eventually successful pressure on certain media outlets to remove unwanted reporters due to their critical reporting. In fact, two high profile radio anchors whom at different stages hosted the morning news programs with the greatest ratings both suffered either advertising boycotts or personal pressure to quit their jobs (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012c).

The gradual polarization and over-*politization* of the media – particularly visible after the post-electoral and social conflict resulting from the 2006 presidential elections – is less connected with genuine ideological pluralism and partisan contentions and more connected with the adoption of market-driven partisanship that conveniently takes advantage of well-placed political actors, or patrons (Márquez-Ramírez, 2012c; González Macías, 2013). Instead of an assertive journalism, I observe a more distanced, cautious, passive, and detached type of reporting culture that continues to cater – with varying degrees of subtlety – to the political forces that represent better opportunities for profit, those that align with their interests, or that do not threaten media proprietors' private interests. More than ever before, radio concessionaries aim to protect the indefinite renewal of their licenses by avoiding overt confrontation with the president and other key political figures or advertisers, and so self-censorship or the 'softening' of compromising stories is still a common occurrence. The argument that connects commercialism to more editorial autonomy, assertive, and critical reporting thus loses credence in post-authoritarian politics.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued the existence of a captured liberal model of news media and the resulting post-authoritarian journalistic culture in Mexico. It is true that commercialism, competition, and political reforms have arguably paved the way for a more diverse coverage of political actors, critical voices, and disclosure of wrongdoing. But the press is now confronted by new political arrangements in a challenging social context such as emerging party-politics; social polarization; limp economic growth; poverty; economic divides; immigration; and rising concern over organized crime, violence, and the perceived 'statelessness'. At the same time, the power of democracy has failed to fundamentally change the conditions that sustained authoritarian practices of journalism, such as business models based on governmental advertising. In fact, many cornerstones of the authoritarian media-state relations still remain, although through subtler, yet still effective means that adapt to

and accommodate various commercial and political interests, given the diversification of agents of power. Not surprisingly, local media scholars' accounts of the media's lack of accountability and unchallenged powers in many ways appear to clash with the positive perceptions of media change in the liberal tradition. Hughes and Lawson (2005) in fact do acknowledge the various barriers to media opening in the region, citing, among several others, weakness on the rule of law, media concentration and reliance on political advertisement. The existence of Latin American commercial media systems with authoritarian traits shows that this binary opposition is insufficient to account for hybrid media systems and journalistic cultures. There is little empirical evidence that the adoption of global journalistic norms and trends, as well as commercialism and deregulation, amounts to media modernization, democratization, and pluralism in Mexico.

Notes

1. In 1973, when Televisa acquired its current name, it was comprised of four terrestrial channels and hundreds of syndicated TV and radio stations. Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, Televisa began its vertical and horizontal expansion. By 2013, the network consisted of 22 channels, four terrestrial and the rest on pay TV. The corporation owned 14 media-related ventures in music, film, satellite and cable services, publishing, telecommunications, internet provision, casino, football teams, and sport managements. Besides, it is a partner in 14 other ventures that include US TV channel Univision and a leader in the production of 'telenovelas,' its flagship genre.
2. State-owned TV network Imevisión was created during the early 1970s under Luis Echeverría's administration to promote national models of communications. In 1993, businessman Ricardo Salinas Pliego –a man not known in the broadcasting industry – won the bid over other more suitable bidders (see Villamil, 2005 for a summary of the process).
3. *Excélsior* and its director, Julio Scherer, developed a reputation for his critical stance toward the system (Rodríguez-Castañeda, 1993). The growing antipathy toward Scherer from his paper's pro-system cooperative of workers and also from advertisers and the establishment was such that the paper's headquarters was bombed, suffered of internal division and skulduggery staged by the government, and ultimately faced an 'advertisement boycott' in 1974. Nevertheless, the definitive blow came in 1976, when president Luis Echeverría masterminded the so-called '*Excélsior* coup' that involved cooperative leaders rebelling against the editorial board and taking over the paper's headquarters, ejecting Scherer and his close collaborators out the paper.
4. Among these events we can cite the student massacres of 1968 and 1971 in Mexico City, the widespread corruption and economic crisis in the early 1980s, the Mexico City earthquake in 1985, the electoral fraud in 1988, the questionable processes of privatization in 1992, the growth of drug cartels throughout

the 1980s and 1990s, the assassination of Cardinal Posadas in 1993 and of presidential Candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in 1994, the Zapatista movement uprising in 1994, or the massacre of peasants in Aguas Blancas, Guerrero in 1995 and Acteal, Chiapas in 1997.

References

- Alves, R. C. (2005) 'From lapdog to watchdog: the role of the press in Latin America's democratization,' pp.181–201 in H. de Burgh (ed.) *Making Journalists: Diverse Models, Global Issues* (London: Routledge).
- Baldivia, J., Planet, M., Solís, J. and Guerra, T. (1981) *La formación de los periodistas en América Latina: México, Costa Rica y Chile* (México: Nueva Imagen).
- Benavides, J. L. (2000) 'Gacetilla: a keyword for a revisionist approach to the political economy of Mexico's print news media,' *Media, Culture and Society*, 22(1): 85–104.
- Bravo, J. (2009) 'La comunicación gubernamental de Vicente Fox,' *El Cotidiano*, 24(155): 43–58.
- Caletti-Kaplan, R. S. (1988) 'Communication policies in Mexico: a historical paradox of words and actions,' pp. 67–81 in E. Fox (ed.) *Media and politics in Latin America: the struggle for democracy* (London: Sage).
- Carreño-Carlón, J. (2000) 'Cien años de subordinación: un modelo histórico de la relación entre prensa y poder en México en el siglo XX,' *Sala de Prensa*, 2(16). Available at <http://bit.ly/PaYpBB> (accessed March 3, 2008).
- Christians, C. G., Glasser, T. L., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K. and White, R. A. (2009) *Normative Theories of the Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).
- Cleary, J. (2003) 'Shaping Mexican journalists: the role of university and on-the-job training,' *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator*, 58(2): 163–174.
- Esteinou-Madrid, J. (2008) 'La ley Televisa y la formación de la IV república mediática,' *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales*, L(202): 53–70.
- Esteinou-Madrid, J. and Alva de la Selva, A. R. (eds) (2009) *La ley Televisa y la Lucha por el poder en México* (México: UAM/AMIC/AMEDI).
- Fromson, M. (1996) 'Mexico's struggle for a free press,' pp. 115–137 in R. E. Cole (ed.) *Communication in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media and Society* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources).
- Fuentes-Beráin, R. (2002) 'Prensa y poder político en México,' *Revista Iberoamericana de Comunicación*, 2: 61–79.
- García-Calderón, C. (ed.) (2007) *El Comportamiento de los Medios de Comunicación. Elección 2006* (México: Plaza y Valdés/Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México).
- García-Canclini, N. (2005) *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).
- González Macías, Rubén (2013) 'Economically-Driven Partisanship – Official Advertising and Political Coverage in Mexico: The Case of Morelia,' *Journalism and Mass Communication*, 3(1): 14–33.
- Guerrero, M. A. (2004) 'La apertura de la televisión privada en México,' *Política y Sociedad*, 41(1): 89–93.

- Hallin, D. (2000) 'Media, political power and democratization in Mexico,' pp. 97–110 in J. Curran and M.-J. Park (eds) *De-westernizing media studies* (London: Routledge).
- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press).
- Hallin, D. and Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002) 'Political clientelism and the media: southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective,' *Media, Culture and Society*, 24(2): 175–195.
- Hernández-López, R. (1999) *Sólo para periodistas: manual de supervivencia en los medios mexicanos* (México: Grijalbo).
- Hernández-Ramírez, M. E. (2010a) 'El periodismo mexicano en estado de emergencia: hacia el debate necesario,' *Revista Mexicana de Comunicación*, 124: 17–21.
- Hernández-Ramírez, M. E. (2010b) 'Franquicias periodísticas y sinergias productivas en la prensa mexicana: en busca de nuevos modelos de financiamiento,' pp. 55–122 in M. E. Hernández Ramírez (ed.) *Estudios sobre periodismo: marcos de interpretación para el contexto mexicano* (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara).
- Higgins, M. (2010) 'The "Public Inquisitor" as media celebrity,' *Cultural Politics: An International Journal*, 6(1 March 2010): 93–109.
- Hughes, S. (2006) *Newsrooms in Conflict: Journalism and the Democratization of Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburg Press).
- Hughes, S. and C. Lawson (2005) 'The barriers to media opening in Latin America,' *Political Communication*, 22(1): 9–25.
- Kuschick, M. (2009) 'Marketing y comunicación política,' *El Cotidiano*, 24(155): 31–41.
- Lara-Klahr, M. (2007) 'Olegario Vázquez Raña, el amigo de todos los presidentes,' pp. 142–175 in J. Zepeda Patterson (ed.) *Los amos de México: los juegos de poder a los que sólo unos pocos son invitados* (México: Planeta).
- Lara-Klahr, M. (2011) *No más 'pagadores'. Guía de periodismo sobre presunción de inocencia* (México: OSJI/Artículo 19/La Embajada Británica en México).
- Lawson, C. (2002) *Building the Fourth State: Democratization and the Rise of a Free Press in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Levario-Turcott, M. (2002) *Primera plana. La borrachera democrática de los diarios* (México: Cal y Arena).
- López-Ayllón, S. (2004) 'La creación de la ley de acceso a la información en México: una perspectiva desde el Ejecutivo Federal,' pp. 1–37 in H. A. Concha, S. López and L. Tacher (eds) *Transparentar al estado: la experiencia mexicana de acceso a la información* (México: UNAM).
- Mancini, P. (2000) 'Political complexity and alternative models of journalism: the Italian case,' pp. 265–278 in J. Curran and M.-J. Park (eds) *De-westernizing Media Studies* (London: Routledge).
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2005) *The Radio Journalist in Mexico: Practices, Notions and Attitudes to Professionalism*. MA Dissertation. Cardiff, Wales: Cardiff University.
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2012a) 'Valores normativos y prácticas de reporteo en tensión: percepciones profesionales de periodistas en México,' *Cuadernos de Información*, (30): 97–111.
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2012b) 'Valores, roles y prácticas en conflicto: el papel de los periodistas mexicanos en las elecciones presidenciales del 2006,'

- p. 181–207 en C. Rico y A. Roveda (eds) *Comunicación y ciudadanía en las América; entre la gobernanza y la gobernabilidad* (Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana-Orbicom).
- Márquez-Ramírez, M. (2012c) *Change or Continuity? The Culture and Practices of Journalism in Mexico*. PhD Thesis. Department of Media and Communications. Goldsmiths, University of London.
- Márquez-Ramírez, Mireya (2012d) 'Valores noticiosos, identidades profesionales y prácticas periodísticas en el México post-autoritario', in E. Campos y S. Berrocal (eds) *La investigación en Periodismo Político en el entorno de los nuevos medios de comunicación* (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Periodística).
- Márquez-Ramírez, Mireya (2014) 'Professionalism and journalism ethics in post-authoritarian Mexico: perceptions of news for cash, gifts and perks,' in W. Wyatt (ed.) *Individual, Institutional and Cultural Bases of Journalism Ethics* (New York: I.B. Tauris, Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford).
- McPherson, E. (2012) 'Spot news versus reportage: newspaper models, the distribution of newsroom credibility, and implications for democratic journalism in Mexico,' *International Journal of Communication*, (6): 2301–2317.
- Pérez-Rayón, N. (2005) 'La prensa liberal en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX,' pp. 145–158 in B. Clark de Lara and E. Guerra (eds) *La República de las letras: asomos a la cultura escrita del México decimonónico* [Vol. 2. Publicaciones Periódicas y Otros Impresos] (México: UNAM).
- Pinto, J. (2009) 'Diffusing and translating watchdog journalism,' *Media History*, 15(1): 1–16.
- Relly, J. E. and C. González de Bustamante (2014) 'Silencing Mexico: a study of influences on journalists in the Northern States,' *The International Journal of Press Politics*, 19(1): 108–131.
- Riva Palacio, R. (2005) *Manual para un nuevo periodismo: vicios y virtudes de la prensa escrita en México* (México: Plaza y Janés).
- Rockwell, R. (2002) 'Mexico: the Fox factor,' pp. 107–122 in E. Fox and S. Waisbord (eds) *Latin Politics, Global Media* (Austin: University of Texas Press).
- Rodríguez-Castañeda, R. (1993) *Prensa vendida. Los periodistas y presidentes: 40 años de relaciones* (México: Grijalbo).
- Rodríguez-Munguía, J. (2007) *La otra guerra secreta: los archivos prohibidos de la prensa y el poder* (México: Debate).
- Rosen, J. (2009) 'He said, she said journalism: Lame formula in the land of the active user,' *PressThink*. Available at <http://bit.ly/Pb0i1c> (accessed March 27 2013).
- Rúas-Araújo, J. (2011) 'Escena política y mediática en México: Las elecciones presidenciales,' *Revista de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociológicas*, 10(2): 43–58.
- Siebert, F., Peterson, T. and Schramm, W. (1956) *Four Theories of the Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press).
- Sinclair, J. (1999) 'The Autumn of the patriarch: Mexico and Televisa,' pp. 33–62 in J. Sinclair (ed.) *Latin American Television: A Global View* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Sinclair, J. (2002) 'Mexico and Brazil: the aging dynasties,' pp. 123–136 in E. Fox and S. Waisbord (eds) *Latin Politics, Global Media* (Austin: University of Texas Press).
- Thelen, D. (1999) 'A conversation with Lorenzo Meyer about Mexico's political transition: from authoritarianism to what?,' *The Journal of American History*, 86(2): 601–612.