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Modernization, Democratization and Politicization

Mass Media in 1920s Europe

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Introduction

Post-World War I Europe witnessed some fundamental changes in its media landscape, namely the development of radio as a mass medium and the introduction of sound film. But the predominant medium of mass communication was still the press which continued its pre-war growth. The experience of a dramatic expansion in circulation numbers was something that united many countries – victors, vanquished, and neutrals – after the war: In Britain, only two newspapers had a circulation of 1 million or more at the beginning of the 1920s, while five did by 1930 (Cox and Mowatt 2014). In Germany, over 3,000 newspapers with a total daily circulation of over 20 million copies were published during the 1920s (Dussel 2004; Fulda 2009). In Sweden, 235 papers were published more than once a week in 1919, meaning 881 issues each week in total – in 1927, there already were 946. It has been calculated that the total circulation in the mid-1920s was about 2 million copies, in a country with around 6 million inhabitants (Holmberg et al. 1983; Rydén 2001). However, outside of northwestern Europe the situation was quite different: in Italy, the cumulative circulation of the five main newspapers in the 1920s remained under 2 million copies with a population of 41 million (Murialdi 2006).

This uneven growth was undergirded by a technological and structural modernization of the press and print journalism, namely a rationalization of production and an increasing visualization of design and layout. However, the growth in circulation often masked the ongoing concentration of media ownership in many European countries, a development that made the 1920s the "era of the press barons" (Gorman and McLean 2009) at least in places such as the United Kingdom and Germany. The medium that seemed to embody all of these changes was the tabloid newspaper: although already established before the war, this newspaper format thrived during the 1920s, making use of eye-catching design and photographs to entice its readers. National journalistic cultures had to grapple with these trends under often intense economic pressure during the various post-war economic crises and the increasing competition by cinema and radio.

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This included the party press, which was modernized in order to appeal to an expanded electorate, after women had gained the right to vote in many European countries after 1918. The democratization and expansion of leisure time, through the introduction of the eight-hour day and the gradual establishment of "the weekend," also boosted media use in many European countries as people increasingly filled their free time with reading the newspaper, going to the cinema, or listening to the radio.

These developments were often observed critically by political and cultural elites. The popularity of cinema in general and the increasing dominance of US film in particular led many contemporary observers to warn of the corrosive effects of "mass culture." Throughout Europe, censorship measures were implemented to save the population from the supposedly corrosive influence of popular entertainment. While press and film could only be controlled more or less indirectly with such steps, the new medium of radio was held on a tighter leash from the start. In most European countries, the state played a central role in the establishment and operation of the national broadcasting service, in contrast – and often in response – to the commercial model practiced in the United States.

However, despite the concerns of intellectuals and politicians about the pervasive influence of mass media, media consumption in 1920s Europe was still largely shaped by existing social structures. While media use generally increased and diversified, it did so within traditional social milieus particularly in countries that had not experienced a major social collapse during the war, such as the Netherlands and Sweden. Cultural traditions, such as Italy's popular music culture, also played an important role in the development of the media landscape during the 1920s. Arguably the greatest divide regarding the patterns of media consumption existed between the countryside and metropolitan areas: even if their media consumption was structured by cultural and social traditions, European city dwellers at least had the opportunity to read tabloid newspapers, listen to the radio, and experience the introduction of sound film. With the exception of highly urbanized countries like the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, the rural population in Europe often did not even have access to these new forms of entertainment and communication.

The United Kingdom

In many ways, developments in British journalism in the 1920s were an extension of those over the previous four decades, particularly with respect to entrepreneurial efforts to address emerging audiences and make use of new technologies. Well before World War I, critics had observed a sharp bifurcation between a "serious" elite press that served the educated classes, and an emerging "mass" press that entertained a much larger and newer readership, particularly women and the working classes (Hampton 2004). Although the 1920s would see continuing efforts by the largest papers to attract these readers, culminating in fierce circulation wars in the 1930s, the basic shift toward targeting these new audiences had occurred earlier, particularly with the establishing of the *Daily Mail* (1896) and the *Daily Mirror* (1903) by Alfred Harmsworth (later Lord Northcliffe). Innovations aimed at cultivating working-class audiences included a more reader-friendly type-face, an emphasis on simple language and short paragraphs rather than larger columns, and a downplaying of parliamentary politics in favor of "features" concerning everyday life. At the same time, female audiences were targeted not only by the inclusion of material thought to interest women (i.e. fashion, domestic topics) but by presenting some not specifically "female" topics from a woman's perspective (Bingham 2004).

The targeting of new readerships was occasioned by and depended upon a major restructuring of the newspaper industry. Beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century, the industrialization of newspaper production, including more expensive and sophisticated printing equipment, both enabled and, by the outbreak of the war, required mass production and mass circulation. The expense of the new technologies increased the barriers to entry, gave impetus to horizontal integration of the industry, and helped create a business model that depended (particularly at the lower end of the market) upon advertising revenue more than on newspaper sales. This in turn required newspapers to attract advertisers by boasting either enormous or prestige circulations. Although these trends were disrupted by the war, the 1920s saw their heightening (Bingham 2004; Bingham and Conboy 2015; Williams 2010). Moreover, both ownership consolidation and technological innovations affecting newsgathering led to national newspapers (mostly based in London) decisively overtaking local or provincial papers in the 1920s (Cox and Mowatt 2014; Silberstein-Loeb 2014).

The 1920s and early 1930s were the iconic age of the press baron in Britain: Lord Northcliffe, and his brother Lord Rothermere, who controlled the *Daily Mirror* and, following Northcliffe's death, the *Daily Mail* (as well as several other daily, evening, and Sunday papers); Lord Beaverbrook, a Canadian who had acquired the *Daily Express* in 1916; and the Berry brothers, Lord Camrose and Kemsley, whose titles included more upmarket papers including *The Sunday Times* (from 1915), the *Financial Times* (1919), and *The Daily Telegraph* (1927). Even before World War I, Lord Northcliffe's control over two mass circulation papers, as well as the elite *The Times* after 1907, seemed to give him unprecedented power. Although Lord Northcliffe died in 1922, interwar popular journalism was, as Adrian Bingham (2004) put it, conducted in his shadow (p. 22). Northcliffe, who had begun his career in magazines, had brought to newspapers their emphasis on "features" or "human interest" stories, along with brevity. At the same time, by merging his magazine interests with his newspapers (mainly the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, the latter sold to his brother Lord Harmsworth in 1914), by 1919, he had not only built an industry that achieved synergies across publishing forms but he had turned his holdings into Britain's "fifteenth largest publicly owned manufacturing enterprise" (Cox and Mowatt 2014, p. 54). Yet, although newspaper content had been reshaped in part by generic borrowings from magazines, throughout the 1920s newspapers remained the more prominent form, and the newspaper side of the business attracted the most attention from Northcliffe and his successors (Cox & Mowatt 2014).

Although the press barons were constrained by commercial imperatives – their influence on political elites depended upon their control over either large or elite circulations – they sometimes used their papers as a venue for pet causes. This included the *Daily Mail*'s mid-1920s crusade against lowering the age of women's suffrage to equalize it with men's (Bingham 2004). Among the mass circulation dailies, the major exception to commercialized content and ownership was the *Daily Herald*. As the official organ of the Trades Union Congress (TUC), it eschewed sensational human interest content as a tool promoting working-class false consciousness. By 1929, it had failed commercially, and Odhams Press took over a 51% ownership share on terms that left the TUC's political line intact but otherwise transformed it into just another commercial paper (Richards 1997). Although such critics as Norman Angell argued that the popular press's commercial focus inherently favored the pro-capitalist political parties, Laura Beers (2010) has shown that by the late 1920s, the Labour Party had figured out how to accommodate itself to it. At the same time, as Bingham (2014) has argued, the popular press did not so much become depoliticized as it reconfigured politics emphasizing social and economic issues more than constitutional and religious ones, and adapting it to human interest news values.

Unlike in the contemporary United States, neither professionalization nor devotion to a standard of objectivity characterized British journalism in the 1920s. By the mid-1880s, a group of newspaper proprietors and editors had attempted to turn journalism into a profession based on credentials and a code of ethics largely to elevate the social status of press work; by the turn of the century, these efforts were widely regarded as having failed, particularly in that they did nothing to address the poor remuneration and working conditions of reporters and other working journalists. The 1907 founding of the National Union of Journalists signaled the widespread abandonment of professional aspirations in favor of a trades union model (Hampton 1999). Although this resulted in increased pay for reporters, this was hardly an unqualified success as newspapers continued to employ elite columnists and highly-paid cartoonists outside either the professionalization or union models of journalism and increasingly enticed readers into providing free content through writing contests and other means (Newman 2014). At the same time, the ideal of objectivity barely penetrated British journalism in the 1920s or indeed throughout the twentieth century, particularly in regard to newspapers (see also Chapter 23). Instead, journalistic standards centered around “independence” – an ideal that itself was often seen as endangered by the ascendancy of the press barons – and truth-telling, both were considered fully compatible with overt partisanship (Hampton 2008).

Although the newspaper attained its centrality as a cultural and political medium, it was shaped in the 1920s by two emerging media of mass communication; both had originated around the turn of the century but came into their own after World War I: cinema and radio broadcasting. In the case of cinema, a field in which US imports gained ascendancy after the war (Chibnall 2007), the main effect was perhaps the heightening of expectations of popular newspaper readers that their papers to be entertaining. Wireless radio telephony, technically feasible from the 1890s, initially remained the province of hobbyists and was envisioned as an alternate means of person-to-person communication. Only in the early 1920s, partly inspired by the example of early US broadcasting, did radio broadcasting come to Britain. The British Broadcasting Company established in 1922, organized broadcasting on a tightly controlled commercial basis depending upon radio sales and a share of a statutory licensing fee. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the Company’s Director, John Reith, and rejecting the perceived “chaos” of American broadcasting, the Company was reconfigured in 1927 as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), an independent, non-commercial monopolistic institution established by royal charter. Broadcasting potentially threatened daily papers’ control over news delivery, thanks to its greater immediacy, but throughout the 1920s, newspapers were protected by a political solution whereby the BBC faced restrictions on the timing and quantity of its news broadcasts (Briggs 1985, Nicholas 2000, see also Chapter 5).

British political and cultural elites had debated the emergence of a mass press since the mid-nineteenth century. By the 1920s, the most common charge against popular newspapers was that they evaded the responsibilities of a serious, elevating, and educational press by emphasizing instead the sensational and trivial. Even worse, critics feared these qualities of the popular press threatened to corrupt the elite press as well. However, with the exception of regulations concerning sexual morality or national security – often enforced as much by informal controls as legal ones – little attempt was made to regulate press content. The well-established discourse of liberty of the press was chiefly equated with non-regulation by the state (Bingham 2004; Hampton 2004). Cinema had emerged in the United Kingdom before World War I; following the war, the UK market was increasingly dominated by US products (see also Chapter 3). In this context, many of the charges against cinema – that it contributed to juvenile delinquency, led to life lived "vicariously" or encouraged crime and irreligion – were easily elided with perceptions of "Americanization." By the late 1920s, regulations set aside a percentage of the market for UK-produced films; this led, however, to US companies arranging production of so-called "quota quickies," cheaply and often poorly made "British" films whose existence freed the parent US companies to distribute glossier Hollywood products (Chibnall 2007; Richards 2010). Protected from the immediate demands of the market in a way that neither newspapers nor films were, the BBC used its monopolistic position to attempt to set a higher moral tone than was possible for the commercialized press or cinema. In the 1920s, particularly in the company period, programming often consisted of high-level lectures and live music. The BBC articulated a middle-class perspective and emphasized correct spoken English, factors potentially alienating to working-class audiences (Briggs 1985).

The United Kingdom was overwhelmingly urban by the early twentieth century, more so than the other countries considered in this chapter. The major faultline was the one between an increasingly dominant London and the provincial cities. From the late nineteenth century onward, the London press, itself increasingly concentrated, transformed into the core of a national press. The BBC in the 1920s, particularly during the company period, frequently courted resentment on the part of provincial audiences by its use of London-centered programming and, alternately, on the part of smaller towns by offering programming from larger regional cities (Briggs 1985).

Germany

The German media landscape mirrored the developments in the United Kingdom to a certain extent: at the end of the nineteenth century, the so-called "Generalanzeiger" – a commercial type of newspaper that relied on high circulation and advertising sales – replaced the small, elitist, and politicized newspapers that had dominated the German press before the 1880s (Wilke 2000). This new mass press gave the newly unified Germany a number of famous press barons of its own, namely August Scherl, Rudolf Mosse, August Huck, and the Ullstein family. After 1918, the Ullstein company emerged as the most dynamic and successful of these press houses and grew into "the giant of German publishing" (Fulda 2009, p. 2). However, in comparison to the United Kingdom or France, the German press market was highly fragmented, which reflected the country's federal structure and traditions. Most newspapers had a distinctly local or regional focus and only a few, such as Ullstein's *Berliner Morgenpost*, or the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, were read outside their core markets (Stöber 2014). Thus, in terms of circulation, even the *Berliner Morgenpost*, the biggest German daily with a circulation of over 600,000 copies in 1929, could not match publications like the *Daily Mail*, or *Le Petit Parisien* in France.

While cinema and, from 1923, radio grew in popularity during the 1920s, everyday entertainment for most Germans was still provided by newspapers (Führer 2009). Their daily of choice – sold and delivered to their homes on a weekly or monthly subscription basis – was more than a source of news, it also offered hugely popular serialized novels, opinion pieces, reports from far-flung lands, and information about the latest progress in technology, medicine, and science. In the late 1920s, 70% of households in Hamburg held a subscription to one of six different local newspapers (Führer 2008). Considering that the papers were passed on among family members, neighbors, and friends, it is safe to say that most Germans were newspaper readers during the Weimar era.

However, the characteristic publication of the Weimar Republic was not the traditional subscription-based broadsheet but the "*Boulevardzeitung*" – the tabloid sold on the spot by street vendors. While newspaper circulation in Germany grew by 30% between 1925 and 1930, "this growth was driven almost exclusively by the explosion of tabloids, which nearly tripled" (Fulda 2009, p. 22) during this time. Ullstein had introduced the tabloid format to Germany in 1904 with the *B.Z. am Mittag*, the first German newspaper sold not by subscription but by street vendors. While the paper was a great success, the "*Boulevardzeitung*" only really established itself in Germany in the 1920s, and came to be seen as the characteristic newspaper format of the Weimar Republic. By the mid-1920s, even the party press saw the necessity of offering its audience a tabloid: in 1925, the Communist Party added the *Welt am Abend* to its media outlets to support its flagging party organ *Rote Fahne*; in 1928, the Social Democrats "attempted to jump on the tabloid-bandwagon" by publishing a tabloid-style edition of their party organ *Vorwärts* (Fulda 2009, p. 35).

The growing popularity of tabloid papers had much to do with the other important innovation in the German press during the 1920s: the increasing importance of visual content. After 1924, when the economic and material constraints of war, revolution, and hyperinflation faded, earlier innovations in printing technology and photography could now be used in newspaper production (Dussel 2012). Images of all kinds rapidly gained great importance, catering "for the ever-increasing demand for visual experience and instruction" in Weimar Germany (Kolb 2005, p. 96). Tabloids, which were predominately sold on the streets and, thus, had to grab the attention of passers-by, naturally were the at the forefront of this visualization of the German press, but even the traditional broadsheets could not escape this trend. Consequently, illustrated newspapers and magazines became very popular. The most impressive example was Ullstein's *Grüne Post*: introduced in 1927, this weekend paper for urban and rural audiences reached a circulation of nearly 1 million copies only two years later (Ullstein 1929, p. 2).

The visualization of the printed press went hand in hand with the increasing popularity of cinema in Germany. Between 1914 and 1930, the number of cinemas doubled from 2,500 to more than 5,000, and the number of cinema tickets sold rose from 332 million in 1926 to 352 million in 1929. In the large towns, this gave rise to a new type of "film palace" – cinemas with a capacity of between 1,000 and over 2,000 seats (Führer 1996). The inflation of the early 1920s made film production in Germany very cheap, which promoted artistic experimentation and exports. The stabilization of the currency opened the market again to foreign – in particular US – films and rang in the end of the dominance of domestically-produced films that had existed since the war: while there were 253 German films in the cinemas compared to 102 US productions in 1923, in 1926 there were 216 US to 185 domestically-produced films (Kaes 1993).

The new medium of radio also enjoyed a rising popularity during the 1920s. One year after the first regular broadcast went on the air on 29 October 1923, already 550,000 radio receivers were registered in Germany. By the end of 1929, this number had risen to more than 3 million. While the government played a central role in setting up the infrastructure and institutions of the new medium, they also reflected Germany's federal structure: in 1923, broadcasting corporation were set up in nine German cities, including Berlin, Munich, Frankfurt am Main, and Stuttgart. These regional corporations, of which the postal ministry held a majority of the shares, were responsible for the entertainment programs; news and political programs were produced by the Dradag company owned by the interior ministry and a press consortium, including Mosse and Scherl. Representatives of the substates were given a monitoring role in both institutions through "cultural advisory boards" (*Kulturbeiräte*) and "controlling committees" (*Überwachungsausschüsse*) (Dussel 2010). During the late 1920s, radio as a medium developed its typical form: headphones were replaced by loudspeakers integrated into the radio set whose status changed from a kind of technical apparatus to a piece of furniture easily integrated into the home. At the same time, consumption practices changed from modes of reception modeled on concerts or lectures to the medium's use for accompanying and structuring daily life (Lenk 1997).

While the German public clearly welcomed these changes in the media landscape, many members of the country's elites – politicians, intellectuals, even journalists themselves – were deeply concerned. The ever more integrated media ensemble of the 1920s seemed to give rise to an all-engulfing, uniform mass culture that threatened the German tradition of deep contemplation and aesthetic education through the high arts. In 1926, Siegfried Kracauer criticized the "cult of distraction" that had developed around the new "picture palaces" in cities like Berlin. The cheap glamor of these "optical fairylands" distracted the urban working masses from their exploitation in a capitalist system – and then charged them for it (Kracauer 1995). In 1928, the media scholar Otto Groth bemoaned an "Americanization" of the German press, a tendency toward sensationalism in style and content (Groth 1928). A year later, Rudolf Arnheim lamented the decline of the newspaper into a "picture book for adults" (Arnheim 1929). German lawmakers introduced several measures to stem the tide of foreign mass culture, including a "compensation system" that only allowed the import of films if a domestic one was produced in turn. As in Britain, the system proved ineffective and led to the mass production of cheap films to secure the introduction of US hit movies (Kaes 1993).

The fact that political parties in Germany largely failed to integrate the new media of radio and film into their subcultural networks has led some historians to claim that they instigated the emergence of a "classless" mass culture (Führer 1996, p. 739). However, media consumption in 1920s Germany was still very much structured along traditional class lines. Thus, cinemas in working-class districts often showed quite different films from the inner-city "movie palaces," and audiences remained very loyal to their local establishments that catered to their particular tastes rather than offering a "homogenized" cultural fare (Führer 1996). Radio as a whole largely remained a "middle-class appliance," not least because of the relatively high cost of the receiver; radio content itself also often reflected German bourgeois values of *Bildung* and tasteful entertainment in the forms of lectures and classical concerts (Lenk 1997).

However, the real divide in terms of media use in Germany was not a social but a geographical one: most cinemas were located in towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants, and many smaller communities did not have a picture house at all. While many cinemas in the big cities offered a daily program and the latest technology, provincial cinemas were often small establishments with old equipment and were only open on weekends. Outside the metropolitan areas, radio could only be received via much more expensive valve receivers, and the quality of reception was often very low (Führer 1996). While most rural Germans were able to at least buy a regular paper, economic, and political pressures increasingly forced many local newspapers to rely on content produced by agencies. The name most closely associated with this process is Alfred Hugenberg. An influential manager and right-wing politician, Hugenberg had built an extensive network of news agencies, advertising brokerages and media outlets during the war, and he used it to influence the press in the interests of German heavy industry (Guratzsch 1974). In 1922, Hugenberg founded the Wirtschaftsstelle für die Provinz (Economic Agency for the Provinces, Wipro) to strengthen his influence on the provincial press. This agency supplied numerous small local papers, which could not afford their own correspondents and reporters, with finished printing matrixes of national and international news, into which only the respective masthead of the paper had to be inserted before printing. By the end of the 1920s, Wipro supplied 530 papers with such matrixes. Thus, the fears of German elites about a predominant mass culture were misplaced: the differentiation of the German media landscape during the 1920s was largely confined to the cities where media consumption was still governed by social background. Instead, it could be argued that the real homogenization occurred outside of the urban centers, in communities with economically vulnerable newspapers and limited access to new media.

The Territorial Netherlands

The Dutch economy and society underwent rapid modernization in the decades around 1900. For the press, modernization meant standardization (of both production and formats), innovation (such as the use of visual material), and improvements in content (including more emphasis on human interest, following US models). This in turn meant scaling-up newspaper production to a degree that went well beyond the scope of the many family-based enterprises that were still extant in the 1920s. The period witnessed a spate of takeovers and the rise of large city-based companies, as well as an increase in the number of assertive journalists assigned to hunt for newsworthy items and scoops (Wijfjes 2005, pp. 158–163). However, as Karl Christian Führer (2008) has pointed out, the intense partisan competition of German journalism shocked contemporary Dutch observers, who were used to a more orderly national press culture. As the Netherlands had remained neutral during the World War I, this epic clash was experienced primarily as a propaganda campaign waged by foreign powers through foreign media. The tangle of competing interests in international reporting more or less forced detached observation and impartial judgment upon the Dutch press, and newspapers emerged from the war with a stronger sense for the need for independent interpretation. There were exceptions to this rule; the wartime period witnessed one noteworthy failed experiment in populist reporting when the *Telegraaf* made a *faux pas* by catering to popular opinion and openly promulgating its anti-German stance (Wijfjes 2005, pp. 117–143). This convinced the social and political leadership that the press ought not exclusively serve commercial profit.

The increase in leisure time and the (relative) growth in spending capacity in the interwar Netherlands became clearly visible in the increase of magazines and in the topics they dealt with. When the first film magazine was established in 1918, it made a point of noting the variety of weeklies and monthlies available. Periodicals came in all sorts and sizes: there were magazines for dog lovers, chicken breeders, pigeon fanciers, chess players, café performers, horse riders, aquarium keepers, cyclists, car drivers, fishermen, footballers, dressmakers, and home owners; there were periodicals for every trade, craft, hobby, and profession (Hemels and Vegt 1993). In the 1920s, magazines had to compete fiercely with newspapers, yet during and after the war, new magazine titles emerged, targeting ladies both “cultured” (1915) and Protestant (1918), as well as girls (1923), “modern youth” (1925), and especially families. The latter domestic periodicals came in many regional varieties and usually devoted particular attention to housewives. Periodicals for female readers and youth had been produced since the latter part of the nineteenth century. The 1920s, however, were characterized not so much by a diversification of audiences as an expansion in product range and, given the extensive use of images including photographs, the modernization of formats. Mass consumption grew especially in the second half of the decade, only to be brutally curtailed by the crisis of 1929. Before disaster hit, sports coverage had witnessed rapid growth, culminating in the coverage of the 1928 Amsterdam Olympic Games.

The Netherlands had its share of radio amateurs who, like their colleagues elsewhere, avidly read radio magazines and dabbled with expensive transmitting equipment. Radio broadcasting for a broader public took off only after about 1925, when insightful radio entrepreneurs and adventurous businesses (notably the electronics company Philips) organized concerts and broadcast classical music through the ether. Within half a decade, the number of listeners grew from around 2,000 to 140,000 in 1930, a figure that was to increase exponentially in later years (Wijfjes 1994). The rise of radio was not without its hitches, however. Educated music lovers looked down on the new medium while theaters, gramophone companies and even the Dutch Olympic Committee worried about unfair competition resulting from the immediacy of radio communication. There was no point in reporting about events if everyone had already been informed over the airwaves. No less importantly, the political and social elites were afraid of dance music and jazz that were bound to lead to profligacy, of political debate that would upset family life, and of transmitting the voices of their political and religious competitors without restraint, which would, no doubt, result in the wholesale disruption of the social order (Wijfjes 1994).

Throughout the 1920s, the potential of both press and radio to figure as independent forces that spoke directly to "the masses" worried elite commentators. They associated obeisance to popular sentiment with lack of principle, cheap gains, and the deleterious influence of "America." But how was the problem of an unruly press in a bourgeois society that set great store by peace, quiet and "proper" behavior to be addressed? The Dutch solved the conundrum by organizing a distinctly segregated media system based on the organization of Dutch society: The most influential media identified with specific political, cultural and/or religious orientations, and maintained direct connections to their own constituencies as well as to the political elites who governed them. The system of *verzuiling* or "pillarization" divided Dutch society into pillars or *zuilen* – socialist, Protestant, Catholic, "liberal" – each provided for the different societal groups by establishing schools (and in some cases universities), homes for the elderly, labor unions, political parties, and so on. The press played a crucial role in this system. Within each particular enclave, media acted as tools of consensus, ensuring group coherence, control by social, political, and religious leaders and, of course, restraints on commercialization. Catholic newspapers, for instance, were run on a for-profit basis by Catholic companies who appointed Catholic editors whose output was somewhat superfluously controlled by clerical censors. Editors of socialist newspapers were not only appointed by the party or union leadership but often also sat on party and union boards. Among Protestants and liberals the blending of social roles was less explicit but their profiles were clear nevertheless (Lijphart 1975).

The absence of populist, tabloid journalism in the Dutch 1920s can, thus, be ascribed to the fact that the press was integrated into a pillarized society led by elites and dominated by the middle classes. It is important to note, however, that most of the press was not specifically allied to the orientations mentioned. The "neutral" press (both regional and national) accounted for about 50% of the total number of newspapers in circulation, the Catholic press for 25%, and the remainder was divided among the other orientations. Moreover, despite built-in control mechanisms, even the pillarized press was not a mere continuation of church or party politics (Wijfjes 2005, pp. 146–151). The Dutch press was above all middle-class, relatively sedate and, in hindsight, often irritatingly self-congratulatory.

Radio, too, was duly organized according to the system of *verzuiling*. The government allotted limited broadcasting time to each of the various groups who each established their own broadcasting corporation: Nederlandse Christelijke Radio Vereniging (the Protestant Dutch Christian Radio Association, NCRV, 1924), the Katholieke Radio Omroep (Catholic Radio Corporation, KRO, 1925), the socialist Vereniging Arbeiders Radio Amateurs (Association of Laborers Radio Amateurs, VARA, 1925), the Vrijzinnig Protestantse Radio Omroep (Free-thinking Protestant Radio Corporation, VPRO, 1926), and the Algemene Vereniging Radio Omroep (General Association "Radio Corporation" AVRO, 1927, which aimed to service the nation as a whole). Protestants were not expected to listen to socialists, let alone Catholics. This system, including the specific corporations within it, remained in place for the remainder of the twentieth century, and beyond.

The complacent lack of cultural dynamism in the Dutch 1920s tied in with local developments in politics and legislation. This period was characterized, in the Netherlands as elsewhere, by democratization as a form of political modernization, but in the Netherlands, it was constrained by a pillarized social structure and a strong middle class. The 1920s saw the consolidation of a constitutional parliamentary democracy based on mass participation subtly managed by elites. Men aged 25 and older were enfranchised in 1917, followed by women in 1919. A relatively stringent legal code regulating moral conduct (the so-called *zedelijkheidswetgeving* of 1911) exemplified the middle-of-the-road morality that fed into the workings of the media (Van Vree 1994). Characteristic of the spirit of the times was an affair triggered by the communist weekly *De Tribune*. It predictably denounced Christianity as the opium of the people but added insult to injury by suggesting that Christ himself be thrown on the rubbish heap of history. The controversy led to the inclusion of the law on "scornful blasphemy" (*Wet inzake smalende godslastering*, 1932) in the Dutch criminal code where it remained until 2014.

If radio was less significant a medium of communication than the press, film was even more inconsequential in influence – not because the Dutch found moving pictures less appealing but because the Dutch elites were so successful in controlling the media environment. Protracted discussions in parliament on the pros and cons of preventive and restrictive censorship ultimately led to the "law opposing the moral and social dangers of cinema" (*Wet tot bestrijding van de zedelijke en maatschappelijke gevaren van de bioscoop*) of 1926 and the establishment of a film censorship board two years later. Thus, the elites governing the pillars not only advocated the moral codes the people were expected to comply with, but they also controlled the film commission. In response, the cinemas strictly maintained neutrality to avoid conflict and formed cartels to manage what remained of the market (Dibbets 1993; Dibbets 2006). All in all, the 1920s created a mold for media that was still recognizable almost a century later.

Sweden

The common denominator of Swedish media in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was their role in the democratization process: to a large extent, political democratization in Sweden was built on the newspapers. The main papers were liberal and had developed in close connection to groups demanding universal suffrage, freedom of religion, as well as restrictions on alcohol. But also conservative groups and, later, the Social Democratic Party established their newspapers. Almost all newspapers had a political outlook closely connected to a party. In most local towns, there were at least three newspapers, one supporting the Liberals, one the Conservatives, and one the Social Democrats. Often, there were also papers supporting the Agrarians or the Left Socialists, depending on the specific area. The political outlook of the readers usually went along with that of the paper whose political profile was part of a strategy to reach new readers in an expanding market. In consequence, the press was embedded in party politics and mainly articulated or defended party-political ideas (Weibull 2013a). In international comparison, the Swedish press system has, thus, been labeled "Democratic Corporatist" (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The politicization of the newspaper market also influenced news coverage, especially in the social democratic press (Kronvall 1971). During the first decades of the twentieth century, layout and language were modernized, mostly visible in headlines and the use of pictures. The first textbook on modern news writing "American style" was published in 1923 by the editor of *Dagens Nyheter*, the leading Stockholm paper. The book stressed the importance of catching the reader's attention: "Read the first ten words you have written: If you believe that they can attract the reader to go on, then it is right, but if you think that it sure will leave the reader indifferent, to hell with it" (quoted in Holmberg et al. 1983, p. 121).

Social changes, i.e. the expansion of the middle class and the increased amount of leisure time, and the corresponding new interests of readers were reflected in a broadened content. New ideas often originated from editors' visits to the United States or the United Kingdom, but also to Denmark. New journalistic genres and forms emerged, among them sports, causeries, and family, later also comic strips (Rydén 2001). The new categories were mainly found in the main city papers, especially in Stockholm, and were often, like family and causeries, aimed at female readers. In the countryside, papers were more traditional, but here, the expanding magazine press, i.e. family journals or picture magazines, offered an equivalent content (Rydén 2001).

Based on the "freedom of the press act" of 1766, political debate in Sweden met few restrictions, but there was an increasing criticism of the sensationalist press's focus on crime and gossip. The main newspapers regarded this focus unethical and wanted to stop it. An important reason was that they saw a potential risk of censorship legislation being introduced by the government in response. In 1916, the *Publicistklubben* (The Publicists' Club, PK), which had been founded in 1874 as an organization for publishers and journalists, initiated a press council to supervise journalistic practice, and in 1923, the PK, together with the Organization of Newspaper Publishers and the Union of Journalists, decided on a written code of conduct to prevent government legislation. The introduction of the code was a first step in the introduction of professional journalism ethics in Sweden (Weibull and Börjesson 1992, 1995).

Cinema in Sweden had expanded during the late 1910s, both in the cities and on the countryside. By 1919, there were 703 movie theaters in the country, attracting a large public. However, the recession and rise of unemployment in the early 1920s led to a decline in cinema going, which created problems for the national film industry that to a large extent depended on the Swedish market. This opened the market for US imports: of the approximately 5,000 films shown in Sweden during the 1920s, 70% had a US origin. The content of these movies that were very popular among young people, was strongly criticized by newspapers, political organizations, and churches as a threat to

Swedish culture. The national film industry, mainly the cinema owners, struggled to handle these critical voices and tried to balance the different interests by keeping close contact with the *Statens biografbyrå* (State Bureau for Cinema Censorship), which had been established already in 1911. The industry even argued that the bureau was a sort of guarantee that only politically and morally accepted movies were approved for distribution (Björkin 1998; Furhammar 1991).

Swedish reactions to early radio must be seen in the context of a general technological optimism of the early 1920s. The first radio broadcast in 1921, was organized by the *Telegrafstyrelsen* (National Telegraph Administration), the public agency responsible for radio technology. Soon, local transmissions were broadcasted a few hours a week and were mostly run by radio clubs with equipment provided by the industry (Weibull 2013b). The Telegraph Administration was the central actor in the policy process closely monitoring international trends and conducting its experimental transmissions in cooperation with the radio industry. It was also responsible for handling applications for radio concessions. In its first call in 1922, none of the applicants, among them the radio industry, was accepted. The main reason was that the agency wanted to keep control over the technology. A state monopoly for distribution, the Telegraph Administration argued, would make it easier to safeguard political neutrality (Hadenius 1998). Further, the agency demanded, the financing of radio needed to be based on the licensing of radio sets, not on advertising. These policy principles were accepted across all political parties but met with strong criticism from the radio clubs that argued that advertising was a more effective and less bureaucratic financing model. This criticism gained little support, however, and the policy principles were accepted by the government.

In the second call, a newspaper consortium called Radiotjänst (radio service) headed by the national news agency *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* (TT), which had been founded in 1921 and was owned by the Swedish press, applied for the concession. The director of TT had mobilized the press and argued that radio might turn out a dangerous news competitor if not closely controlled, and that newspapers had the necessary experience in content production (Weibull 1997). Because of the close link between newspapers and political parties, the application by the press consortium had a politically strong case (Elgemyr 1996). The Telegraph Administration, however, also wanted the radio industry to have its stake in the radio company, which led to a negotiation process that involved the government. In the end, the radio industry and business interests became minority stakeholders in Radiotjänst that finally received the government concession. The first transmissions started formally on 1 January 1925.

The organization of broadcast radio that came out of the political process was a hybrid one. It was characterized by state control with the Telegraph Administration directing the process. The agency balanced the lobbying efforts coming from the different business interests while actively involving a company owned by all Swedish newspapers, a model acceptable to parliament. Further, the agency kept control over the technology while the program concession was given to a private company but was regulated in a government charter. In the beginning, local transmissions were accepted, but after a few years, they were stopped and replaced by the national programming. Thus, the outcome was a state-controlled radio run by a private, independent broadcasting company, a model that lasted almost three decades (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2001).

According to the charter, radio programming was to be of a diverse nature and offer good entertainment. Further, programs needed to convey a high moral, cultural, and artistic level as well as reliability, objectivity, and impartiality. It was supervised by a council representing mainly cultural and educational interests. Radiotjänst developed cultural programming with classical concerts, opera and theater, as well as educational programming with lectures and language courses, and it sometimes reported live from events of national character (Nordberg 1998). Political discussions were banned, and originally, there was only one newscast per day at 9.15 p.m., delivered by TT. This timing had been set in response to the demand of newspaper publishers who had requested that radio news only be broadcast late at night – the only time when newspapers were not published. Further, the news was broadcast from the TT office and not from the radio house. In the 1930s, this structure became a focus of criticism as it was suspected that TT withheld some news in favor of the morning papers. This, however, could never be proven. Thus, a certain segregation of tasks emerged: newspapers focused on the daily news, the coverage of politics, and advertising, while radio was more of a cultural and educational institution. At the same time, radio, like cinema, was well covered in newspapers, i.e. in articles on how to build your own radio receiver (Weibull 2013b).

The audience regarded the new medium as being almost magical, and the number of listeners increased fast. Already by the end of 1925, there were more than 125,000 licenses, and in 1930, the number was close to 500,000 (Hadenius 1998). A look into early audience correspondence of Radiotjänst reveals a grateful radio public, and the few controversies that did arise, were related to music programs: letters from the countryside expressed criticism on the amount of classical music and demanded more folk and accordion music, and old-fashioned dance music (Nordmark 1999). The results from the first audience survey conducted in 1929, contrasted dramatically to the programming policy. It showed that a substantial majority of listeners was critical of classical concerts, opera, and modern dance music. The conclusion of Radiotjänst, however, was that this was not relevant for the programming profile, since it was not for the listeners to decide what music was to be played (Björnberg 1998). This decision was rooted in the view of radio's civilizing mission: while it is often maintained that the 1920s meant the modernization of Sweden, not least by media expansion with the growth of newspapers and the introduction of radio, this is only partly correct. While Stockholm's society was characterized by modern life styles, the countryside, where almost two-thirds of the Swedish populations lived, remained very traditional. Some of the negative reactions to the radio programming reflected this political and cultural divide. Thus, national radio, centralized in Stockholm, represented the new time, and its profile was seen as a way of modernizing the whole of Sweden (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull 2013).

Italy

In the 1920s, the Italian media system underwent a deep transformation. One of the main causes was the communication policy of the fascist regime, led by Benito Mussolini, which dominated the country for more than 20 years, from 1922 to 1943–1945. This policy should not be understood only as a means of channeling ideology and propaganda, but also as a thorough reorganization of the culture and media industries (Forgacs 1990, see also Chapter 7). Besides, there were other influential factors that were not directly linked to fascist media policy. To understand the development of the press in this period, it is important to also consider the growth of literacy: according to official figures, the level of illiteracy was almost cut by half during the 1920s, from more than 35% in 1921 to about 18% in 1931, and illiteracy was increasingly confined to the southern regions. Illiteracy, further, differed notably among age groups: while 10.4% of people aged 10–19 years were unable to read, so were 34.3% of people aged 50–64, and 49.4%

aged over 65 (Ottaviano and Ortoleva 1991). This created a strong generational imbalance with regard to reading but also to the Italian language more generally suggesting a more open attitude of younger generations toward national popular culture under construction by an increasingly diversified (but politically homogenized) cultural industry.

Because of the growth of literacy, many modern weekly illustrated magazines, particularly those oriented to a female readership, were founded in the 1920s, but they only fully developed later. Similarly, the popularity of radio and film – media more capable of reaching illiterate or semi-literate audiences – grew during the second half of the 1920s, but they were destined to produce their richest fruits in the following decade. Newspaper and book readership, on the other hand, remained very limited. Nonetheless, Mussolini (a journalist in his earlier life) always paid close attention to the press: this referred to political censorship but also to a constant surveillance of writers and commentators, who could either be a threat to the regime, if not sufficiently controlled, or important supporters, if induced to cooperate (see particularly Castronovo and Tranfaglia 1980).

The important role of cinema and early illustrated magazines compared to the limited access of large parts of the population to books and newspapers, seemed to support the idea of Italian popular culture of the 1920s as having been primarily visual – a culture consisting of photographs and films. However, such an interpretation ignored the role of soundscape in Italian media (Ortoleva and Pistacchi 2012). First, opera maintained a persisting popularity, also among the working class to whom one of the last great composers and heroes was Giacomo Puccini, who died in 1924. Second, Neapolitan – and increasingly also Italian language – songs played a central role. These were disseminated not so much through the gramophone as through the consumption, also by semi-literate people, of lyrics printed on spare sheets or booklets, and fostered by the circulation of "*organetti di Barberia*" (mobile pianolas) in working-class neighborhoods. The popularity of Neapolitan songs had grown since the 1870s, and with the birth of a nationwide market, they remained popular at least up until World War II. Third, dance halls, which were one of the most widespread forms of entertainment for the working class, continued to play a central role. New rhythms and dances, including the tango, gained major popularity in Italy through the adaptation of Italian lyrics to Argentinian melodies and by the creation of new songs written by Italian poets and musicians, following tango rhythms. Finally, with the introduction of sound film at the end of the 1920s, cinema, which had been an important industry already in the pre-war period, gained further popularity among the population. This was also thanks to the combination of the traditions of *variété* and songs, possibly the most universally beloved of all genres of popular culture in Italy.

Radio, which started its regular transmission in 1924 with Unione Radiofonica Italiana (URI), later transformed into Ente Italiano Audizioni Radiofoniche (EIAR), played an increasingly important role in the Italian soundscape. While its presence remained limited (by 1931, there were only 240,000 radio licenses in the whole country), radio was often consumed through collective and organized listening (Isola 1990). Through the early diffusion of *galena* devices (crystal radio receivers), the new medium also became the object of attention of city youth and enthusiasts' clubs. In the 1920s, the language of radio was relatively traditional: much of its broadcasting time, particularly in the evening, was dedicated to opera and theater. During the day, important personalities of the regime and intellectuals held so-called *conversazioni* (short talks), while the news consisted of direct reproductions of the bulletins of the official press agency Stefani (Monteleone 2001; Marzano 2016).

The fascist regime concentrated much of its attention on *controlling* radio in the early 1920s and only started a policy of actively *promoting* radio at the end of the decade.

It was in 1928–1929 that the government started a concerted effort to support radio enthusiasts' clubs (formalized in 1930 as the semi-official club "*Pionieri dell'EIAR*") particularly in rural areas. Their role was to invite non-listeners to share the experience of the new medium. In the late 1920s, the Ministry of Communication also started planning the diffusion of radio devices in rural areas. This effort culminated in the establishment of the *Ente Radio Rurale*, a public institution dedicated to increase radio use in rural areas of Italy in the early 1930s (Monteleone 2001).

The advent of Fascism introduced an important change in the attitude of the ruling elites toward the emerging popular culture. While the dominant liberal culture had often identified "the mass" with ignorant unruly crowds, since the very beginning, fascist ideologists hailed mass media as the builders of an audience. The latter was often likened to a great assembly listening to one voice or to a crowd within which the whole nation was simultaneously present. If guided by a leader – or, even better, by *the* leader – this mass could become an active agent in history and identify completely with an idealized nation. In this idealized perspective, cinema, radio, a strictly controlled press, and forms of public art converged in a unified dialog of the Duce with the masses, which would make the crowd itself both a protagonist and an army ready to obey.

How much of this political project became reality? Traditional interpretations (cf. Cannistraro 1975) still widely accepted by many historians view Italian media as a stream-lined "factory of consent." However, the specificities of Italian cultural traditions and the many factors and processes that strongly influenced the development of media and popular culture in the 1920s, at least partially contradict this rather simplistic reading (Ortoleva 2002). First, Italy's media landscape was geographically divided in that the media industry was not concentrated in one single area. In the 1920s, Italian popular culture developed in two centers of gravity, one in the north and one in the south: Milan was the capital of print media, books, the main national newspapers, magazines, and the advertising industry, while Naples was the nationally and internationally recognized center of popular music producing many of the most famous *variété* and later of sound cinema. 1920s Turin, which had been the founding center of Italian cinema, became a crucial location for two sectors: radio broadcasting and the telephone system. Rome, meanwhile, was designated to become the film industry's capital, a process that was to be completed in the subsequent decade. One of the main reasons for this continuing division was the protracted role of dialects, particularly of the Neapolitan dialect, as *the* vernacular language of popular culture – a role fascist leaders officially opposed, but in fact tolerated. Another reason was the technological shortcomings of the Rome area compared to Italy's northwest with its big industries and great technical universities. The idea of a centralized cultural industry under direct control of a totalitarian party is, thus, not consistent with this multiplicity of languages and centers of production (Ortoleva 2002).

A second relevant contradiction lay in the ownership patterns of Italy's cultural industry. During the period from World War I until the Great Depression, the control of the country's main newspapers remained in private hands, particularly the great banks of industrial companies. While Mussolini formally criticized this ownership structure, he in fact accepted it and limited himself to choosing the directors of the main newspapers. He also created a corporative system for journalistic professionals: they had to belong to an Albo dei giornalisti (Register of Journalists) in order to direct a newspaper or make a living from journalistic activities. In the case of telephony, the fascist regime even promoted a de-nationalization in favor of a system based on a variety of firms (Balbi 2011), which went along with a strong presence of foreign capital to foster technological progress.

In the case of radio, some industrial companies such as the automobile manufacturer FIAT took a central role in early technical development. In the film industry, the regime promoted only a partial presence of the state: while the Istituto LUCE, responsible for newsreels and documentary films, was under direct control of the regime, feature-film production remained in the hands of private entrepreneurs who were only under indirect control (Brunetta 2003).

Furthermore, the influence of Catholic institutions was very relevant for the growth and transformation of Italian popular culture, and it contributed to its ambiguity. The national unification of Italy had been completed in the 1860s under the rule of a liberal ruling class against the will of the Catholic Church, and the Italian state officially remained a "lay" state until 1929 when a concordat was signed between Mussolini and Pope Pius XI. On the one hand, this led to a "parallel" presence of the church and the state, not only in respect of the school system, but also with regard to media such as magazines and cinema. On the other hand, the whole of Italian popular culture was largely influenced by a Catholic mentality: censorship of sensations, for instance, was essentially based on what the church considered to be obscene. This plurality of subjects in and influences on Italian popular culture of the time contradicts the still widely accepted idea of a political *nomenklatura* dominating the media system.

Conclusion

1920s Europe witnessed the development of a "mass media ensemble" of press and illustrated magazines, radio, and sound film, which, as Axel Schildt (2001) has argued, remained stable until the proliferation of television in the 1960s. While the differences between the national "versions" of this ensemble were profound a number of factors were found across 1920s Europe: first, where the press had been the dominant mass medium, it retained this role expanding its reach and diversifying its product range, but it also was subjected to increased economic pressure and concentration. Second, radio rose as the new mass medium of the 1920s. In most European countries, the state played a central role in its establishment, but the result was often not straightforward state control but a hybrid model, particularly in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands. While radio programming differed considerably, the conception of radio as a tool of public education (often modeled on ideas of "high culture") seemed to be a European-wide approach.

The development of the media ensemble of the 1920s, with radio and tabloid newspapers as its most spectacular representatives, caused consternation among the political and intellectual elites in many European countries. They were unified in an attempt to curtail the supposedly corrupting influence of popular media, fearing the undermining of traditional morals and the loss of national cultural character. However, it is clear from the above that such fears of social fragmentation and cultural homogenization were unfounded: particularly in places such as the Netherlands and Italy, the continuing influence of social milieus and cultural traditions still fundamentally shaped the production and consumption of media content. In many European countries, the real cultural division lay in the rural–urban divide: while European city dwellers had access to the developing new media ensemble of the 1920s – and its supposedly corrupting influence – much of the rural population only read or heard about it through their traditional media.

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