



**Goldsmiths College
University of London**

Where is control over the mass media located?

The case studies: Argentina and Great Britain

María Raquel Tarullo

MA Communication, Culture & Society

Course: Political Economy of the Mass Media

Course Leader: James Curran

London, 3rd May 2000

INTRODUCTION

...the effects of the media, global media, media conglomerates, media and culture, media and democracy, media audiences, media and society, media dependency, media and identity, media and racism, media and gender; and then there is media and politics, and the politics of the media, regulated media, and the regulation of the media... There are so many essays, books, titles published and so many research studies done in relation to the media and all the interrelations that the media establishes with other social, economical, political spheres on a macro global level and in daily life.

Such clear evidence of widespread interest in the study of the media seems to suggest that researchers, academics, students and professionals alike take at least one thing for granted: the media has power. According to Murdock (1994), the media “play[s] a pivotal role in shaping social consciousness, and it is this special relationship between economic and cultural power that has made the issue of their control a continuing focus of academic and political concern” (118). Hence, the social, political, cultural and economical interactions that take place within the media play an outstanding role in the social construction. That is great power, indeed. Who controls it? And, where is that control located?

To suggest possible answers means yet more lists; we could look at: the government, the state, private owners, audiences, the market, political parties, economic elites, political elites, cultural elites, the ruling classes, advertisers and the interrelation of some or of all of these. And, of course, we still wouldn't come up with an exhaustive list, as there is not one answer but many—for clearly answers depend on the context where the media is studied and analysed: different contexts, different answers.

This essay will try to locate possible sites of media control in two very different countries: Argentina and United Kingdom. It is important to state before



PDF Complete

Your complimentary use period has ended.
Thank you for using PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

starting that this essay is going to focus on press and broadcasting. The film and music industries, new media and the Internet whilst extremely important would best be left as topics for further research as they go beyond the scope of the current investigation.

In order to address who controls the media, it is necessary first to speak about three processes that developed in several countries over the past twenty years: concentration, internationalization and privatization (Seymour – Ure, 1991: Stokes, 1999).

These phenomena have spanned many areas; however, this essay will center on the effects and consequences that these practices have had on the media in the United Kingdom and in Argentina.

With the deregulation of the market and the lifting of national-protectionist barriers, international capital began to enter into these countries, unimpeded. In addition, the lack of legislation on concentration and the illegal procedures of the owners of the media has allowed for the creation of a finite number of media conglomerates. In relation to this, Weymouth (1996:46) and Bagdikian (1987:245) give the example of Rupert Murdoch's News International who had acquired five national titles – *News of the World*, *Sunday Times*, *Today*, *The Times* and *The Sun* – and the Monopolies Commission did not check this procedure. In Argentina--where according to the law it is illegal to have more than one station in the same place--*Telefónica de España* (Spanish Telecom) has 50 per cent of Channel Azul (ex Channel 9) and the 100 percent of Channel Telefe (ex Channel 11) and it is also the owner of two mainstream radio national stations and eleven provincial channels. Moreover, Mexican group CIE--contrary to the National Broadcasting Law--has seven radio stations. (Sirvén, 2001: 1) In Argentina, the conglomeration and the internationalization of the media was also accompanied by its privatization--a

process that began when peronist Carlos Saul Menem assumed the presidency in 1989.¹

Before analyzing the current situation of the media in both countries and where its control-centers are located, it is important to review some important historical moments of the British and Argentinean media so as to better understand the current context within each.

Media / Government

In Argentina, the media and the official government have always held close quarters (Waisbord, 1998). All newspapers (starting in 1810, when *La Gazeta de Buenos Aires* was launched, to 1945 when *Clarín* was born) were created by politicians who used their newspapers so as to transmit their political ideas (Waisbord, 2000a; Ulanovsky, 1996).²

It is well known that the history of Argentina's politics has been characterized by many fluctuations: democratic governments, coups d'état, popular presidents, nationalist leaders and so on. And these rise and falls have historically affected the control and configuration of the media: from private hands to the state, periods of governmental appropriation of property and enforced sales, and the return to national control. This political instability, according to Fox (1997), is the main reason for the close relationship that the media has had with the government. He goes on to point out that governments in Argentina were not able to maintain an independent, supportive and commercial successful media. It is important to add that this inability could have been easily avoided were it not for corrupt and self-interest.

¹ At that moment in Argentina there were five state channels: 11, 13, 7, 2 and 9 and more than 15 radio stations. Apart from this, not more than ten private owners newspapers competed to reach a decreasing readership.

² This is stated by Waisbord, who believes that in most of the countries of South America "newspapers were generally conceived as political enterprises rather than simply commercial adventures (Waisbord, 2000a: 51)



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

After the privatization of broadcasting, the government did not cease to have direct influence. Indirect political interference, as we shall see, is still part of the media scenery --in television and radio content. On the other hand, the media has steadily increased its power, a power that is based on the weakness of other democratic institutions. In the case of the newspapers, democracy and the end of the censorship were the starting point for a new kind of press journalism, which has been characterized by Waisbord as “watchdog journalism” (2000:4). Currently, the Argentinean media milieu is an oligopoly comprised of a few conglomerates.

On the other hand, Britain--a country with a more politically and socially stable history than the Argentina's--has two very different spheres, if one is to analyze its media. The first of which, the press, is private and, according to Sparks, “first and foremost capitalist” (1999:44). He believes the political stability mentioned above has allowed the commercial logic to do its work systematically in Britain. Broadcasting, the second sphere, is regulated.

For some authors (Curran and Seaton, 2000, Seymour – Ure, 1996, Negrine, 1994) the British press had close links with political parties. In the Victorian and Edwardian periods of the history of the media in Great Britain members of Parliament had their own newspapers which received, well into the twentieth century, party subsidies (Curran and Seaton, 2000).

On the other hand, a currently non-existent radical faction is one of the main features that once characterized the British press. Founded in the last decades of the eighteenth century as a consequence of political movements and trade unions, the radical press suffered a lot of pressures, such as prosecutions, double taxes and penalties (Curran and Seaton, 2000). For these authors the radical press--which was an authentic popular force that reached a mass public--did not only reflect the growth of working class organizations, but also “deepened and extended radical consciousness,



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

helping to build support for the working class movements” (Curran and Seaton, 2000: 17).

However, in the 1850s, after the repeal of press taxes, the strength of the radical press began to wane, after it was forced to choose between two options: to move ideologically so as to attract advertisers, or to remain in a “small working class ghettos”, with ever-mounting debt (Curran and Seaton, 2000: 36). It is important to state that during the Second World War, the radical press had another moment of glory (Curran and Seaton, 2000).

At the end of the 1800s and the first decades of the 1900s, the British press was characterized by “chain ownership, an expanding market and a tendency for a few newspapers to become dominant” (Curran and Seaton, 2000: 43). During this period, the so called “the era of the press barons” (Curran and Seaton, 2000: 43), the newspapers were used by their owners with political propaganda purposes, so as to realise their political ambitions.

In relation to British Broadcasting, it is important to remember that, although the BBC – originally the British Broadcasting Company – was set up as a business, in 1926 it closed, and the British Broadcasting Corporation was born, with the aims of educating, informing and entertaining the country (Seaton, 2000).

Conceived of as a public service, it passed through many attempts of manipulation and pressures, and also tests of impartiality – an objective that the BBC tries to defend, and also the main concern of the politicians in the moment of the BBC’s creation (Curran and Seaton, 2000). However, it can survive. For Curran “public service broadcasting is also respected in Britain because it is thought to be politically independent” (1998: 188) and even though the continuous attacks and lobbies that the public service suffers during the Conservative government, and the reports--some of them radical reports, such as the Peacock Report (1986) which was



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

specially made to investigate alternative funding for the BBC, lives on (Weymouth and Lamizet, 1996, Liebes and Curran, 1998; Seaton, 2000, Crisell 1997).

Moreover, in 1954 when commercial television was launched, the new ITV had more limits than the BBC, and was vulnerable to political influence (Curran and Seaton, 2000; Crisell, 1997, 1999). The creation of the Channel 4 in the 80s was, according to Goodwin the attempt of the Conservative Government “to extend traditional public service to provision to cater for more diverse audience” (1999: 134) Goodwin (1999) sustains that the radio and the television in Britain has been “systematically and profoundly shaped by the state” (Goodwin, 1999: 130), and this author finds two reasons to explain this: politicians’ belief in the power of the broadcasting and the context of interventionist state that accompanied the starting, the maturing and the development of the broadcasting.

In relation to the launch of cable, Seaton believes that, although in the 80s the political argument to provide the cable network to all the nation, so as “to provoke a dramatic new regional and national economic revival” an important concern of the Conservative Government was “to provide advanced technology to the financial and banking sector” (Seaton, 2000: 201).

It is important to state that during the Thatcher government, there was supervision and control of videos, satellite, cable and terrestrial broadcasting. Some authors specialized in the media and communication studies (Seymour- Ure, 1991; Curran and Seaton, 2000; Goodwin, 1999) agree stating that the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was concerned about the BBC and the image that it transmitted in relation to her government and measures, and also, during her period, she tried desperately to replace the television as a public service with television as another piece of the market. As a consequence, she began a huge campaign against it which included the political pressures in the Chairman and the Board of Governors, the

Peacock Committee and also the support to the claims that pointed out television as the guilty of the decline of morality in Britain (Seymour- Ure, 1991; Seaton, 2000). ³

And Thatcher had another card to play: the collaboration of the media magnate Rupert Murdoch, who put his entire media arsenal in support of her and to annihilate public service broadcasting, which was seen by Thatcherites as “an irritating arrogant, cosily protected establishment dinosaur” (Seaton, 2000: 210). Some authors (Seymour – Ure, 1991; Seaton, 2000) suggest that during the Falklands War, Thatcher was constantly scrutinising the BBC, because in the reports the broadcasters used the phrase ‘the British troops’ rather than ‘our troops’.

In Argentina, the reporting of the Falklands War was the pinnacle of the untruth in the relationship between society and public service and the culmination of the spiral of media lies that was initiated in 1976, with the coup d’etat. Argentineans had no idea that the war had been lost until the surrender of Argentine forces. The manipulation of the information during that specific event has been the best example of how the military controlled all the media during their dictatorship (Mattelart and Schmucler, 1985).

According to university lecturer Guillermo Mastrini (2000), Argentina, like other Latin American countries, cannot escape from the influence of the USA in the politics and configuration of the media. However, in parallel, it developed another system: the commercial, governmental and public broadcasting service. Nevertheless, Mastrini notes that the state has not invested politically and economically to develop a broadcasting so as to contribute to increase the public sphere, nor is society represented in the public broadcasting. On the other hand, the public stations Channel 7 and *Radio Nacional* are socially perceived as the means used by the official government to do their own campaigns Mastrini (2000). During Menem’s government both stations were managed by his friends, and, although during his

³ Thatcher’s idea was to eliminate the license fee - which is the finance of the BBC – so as to impose cuts on BBC, and as a consequence, its power could have been limited as well (Curran and Seaton, 2000).



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

government he tried hard to privatize Channel 7 and *Radio Nacional*, the opposition did not allow him to do it. In 1999, the legislature voted a law, that could have stopped the historical public media dependency on the government, but former president Fernando De la Rúa put a veto on the law, and instead of it promoted the creation of a public conglomeration with Channel 7, *Radio Nacional* and the public news wire Telam (Mastrini, 2000; Sirvén, 2001). However with all the events, changes and problems that Argentina has been living since December 2001, the project has been forgotten.

Nationalization / Privatization

The radio was launched in Argentina in 1920, and it could develop its potential without many obstacles. According to Fox (1997) after 1930 - despite there was a military coup, and although the censorship they imposed - the commercial radio began to be organized at the end of that decade.⁴ However - and in order to show evidence that the political instability has had consequences in the conformation of the media spectrum - the radio stations were nationalized when General Juan Domingo Perón came to power in 1945, obligating their owners to sell the stations to the state at reduced prices.⁵

The television arrived at Argentina in 1951 when Perón was still president and it was part of his intention “of building a media arsenal to strengthen its communication power” (Waisbord, 2000a: 54). His wife Eva Duarte was the first television image that Argentines watched, and this event signed the close relationship that the public station was going to have with the official political power (Mastrini, 2000). In 1955, another coup d'état seized power, and the newspapers

⁴ *Radio El Mundo, Radio Belgrano and Radio Splendid* were born in that period.

⁵ Many expert Argentinean historians (Luna, 1994; Romero, 1994; Floria and García Belsunce, 1988, 1992) agree that the dissident newspapers were expropriated, or their owners were forced to sell them to Perón's closest friends.

were returned to their original owners. Besides private commercial TV licenses were awarded.⁶

However, Peron's methodology of expropriation and nationalization was implemented again in 1973 when he became president of the country for the third time. Perón died in 1974, and his third wife Isabel Martínez de Perón assumed the presidency, remaining in power until the 24th March 1976, when the dictatorship began.

During the dictatorship, even though the radio and television stations were distributed among the different military groups (Waisbord, 2000a, Blaustein and Zubieta, 1998), all newspapers were returned to private ownership. At this time another strategy of silence was implemented: not only censorship but disappearance, the torture and the killing of the dissident press worker's began. The most terrible stage of the journalistic history was this period which ended in 1983. The control of the media was located, without doubt, in the military's hands and those of their civil supporters--which included many journalists-- who collaborated to widespread the silence, the lie, the complicity and the terror among the Argentinean society.

What is important to state is that the media have never done the mea culpa for their silence or direct support to the military, and even more, they did not accompany the social claims that (after the Falklands War) began to be heard all around the country (Waisbord, 2000a; Blaustein and Zubieta, 1998)

With the elected president Raúl Alfonsín and the optimism of the recovered democracy, licenses given by the militaries were respected, and, even though there was an initial idea of changing the law, it was never put into practice. Only two licenses were transferred from the state sector to the private one: Channel 9 was assigned to Alejandro Romay and Channel 2 to Héctor Ricardo García owner also of

⁶ Channels 11, 13 and 9 in Buenos Aires, Channel 8 in Mar del Plata and Channel 7 in Mendoza and three of them became associated with ABC, CBS and NBC, the most important US television companies (Lavieri, 1996; Fox, 1997)



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

the newspaper *Crónica*, the radio station *Colonia* and the magazines *Flash* and *Esto* (Fox, 1997, Sirvén 2001)

Conglomerates / Government

According to Herman and McChesney (1997) the process of privatization and the deregulation of the market that characterized the scenery in most countries during the 80s has been part of the neoliberal ideology that the great majority of the governments all around the world have followed. These measures involved also the national broadcasting and telecommunications systems. In addition to this, Herman and McChesney affirm that this process plus the development of the new technology allowed the expansion of the global media (1997). These measures were taken up by former president Carlos Menem (1989 – 1991), a turning point in the history of Argentinian media. We can say that in the media's history there is one before and one after and it is Menem's government the crucial point of differentiation.

The privatization of the media was part of the *Ley Dromi* (Dromi's Law) which is also named as the Law of the State Reform. Channel 13 was sold to the currently most powerful media conglomerate *Grupo Clarín*, Channel 11 was sold to *Televisora Federal* (Telefé) - which owner in that moment was Constancio Vigil, a close friend of Carlos Menem. *Radio Continental*, (AM and FM), a local cable system in La Plata (capital of the province of Buenos Aires) a local TV channel and also the main important newspaper of the south of the Buenos Aires's province were properties of Telefé (Fox, 1997). However the law that allowed the internationalization of the Argentinean economy was not passed until 1991, when Menem signed a contract with USA called *Tratado de Promoción y Protección Recíproca de Inversiones* (Agreement of Reciprocity in the Promotion and Protection of Investments) which permits to North Americans to invest in Argentina under the same conditions available to Argentineans--but with the reverse not holding true! (Sirvén, 2001a).



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

This change in the conformation of the ownership of the media does not mean that the Argentinean government has stopped its influence in the media. As many authors have stated (Curran 1998; Waisbord, 2000; Nerone, 1994) the press is not independent, and there are many examples in Britain and in Argentina that gives evidence of this.

In Britain, the example of Blair/Murdoch/Thatcher is the one that best illustrates these lobbies and mutual favours that the politics and media magnates do for each other so as to achieve their own goals. For instance, some authors (Curran, 1998, Seaton, 2000) note the affair that the national British press lived with the government during the 80s: Murdoch helped Thatcher in the campaign against BBC's reputation and prestige/ Murdoch was interested in the deregulation of television and his loyalty was also based in her promises of economic reforms, such as privatization, low taxes, anti labor union legislation and so on. Curran and Seaton (2000) also mention the trip that Blair took in 1995 to Hayman Island, Australia, to have a meeting with the executives of News Corporation – Murdoch's conglomerate - so as to obtain the guarantee that Murdoch's popular media were going to support him in the following elections.

For Lavieri (1996), a writer for *Clarín*, the staff of the media is under constant 'diplomatic' pressure. Lavieri believes that one of the reasons that 'allow' for this government's influence in media contents has to do with the control that the government has over the distribution of the airwaves. Some mainstream authors in this field (Lavieri, 1996, Waisbord, 1998; 2000, 2000a; Herman and Chomsky, 1988) agree stating that this government's influence is also executed through the allocation of the loans from state owned banks, taxes, foreign exchange rates, lobbies, bribes, advertisers and so on. As a consequence, Waisbord (1998) believes that between the media and the government there is more cooperation and mutual advantages than adversarialism and autonomy.



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

In Argentina the examples are many: *Clarín*, the most popular newspaper that belongs to the conglomerate *Grupo Clarín* used to cover (in a very positive light) all news related to the former governor of the province of Buenos Aires Carlos Ruckauf. At the same time, most other forms of media revealed the economic chaos that the province suffered. The answer that explains this affair is that they could have signed a contract in which, *Ciudad Internet*, another enterprise of the conglomerate became the Internet provider of the Bank of the Province of Buenos Aires, the second most import bank in Argentina. Eduardo Eurnekian, the former owner of *Multimedios America*, was favored in the privatization of the Argentinean's airports after the axing of a critical report about Menem's fortune (Waisbord, 2000a). Besides this, in 1995, during the electoral campaign, when Menem was looking for his reelection, he was invited, and kindly treated, to all the programmes broadcasted by *Telefé* station, which in that moment was owned by Vigil, Menem's friend. Moreover, during Fernando De La Rúa 's period (1999 – 2001), all the media that belong to the *Grupo Clarín* supported with loyalty his measures. It is supposed that this conglomerate would have got a multimillion debt with the Argentinean state banks, and this situation could explain its behavior in favor of the official government, which also needs the media power that the *Grupo Clarín* offers. And last but not least: in 2000, a special programme was launched in Channel 13 – which is part of *Grupo Clarín*. This programme was based on investigations and reports – the so called 'watchdog journalism'- which is not only very popular, but also, as we shall see – very important. One the reports they did was in relation to the governor of the province of San Luis, the peronist Rodolfo Rodríguez Saá, who was accused to receive bribes. When Rodríguez Saá was chosen president on December 2001, after the social and political chaos that the Argentina lived, that report was hidden and nobody in any of the media that conform the *Clarín* conglomerate reminded that report. What did *Clarín* receive as compensation? Nobody knows.

Large Conglomerates



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

Competition between oligopolies is the common feature in both countries. Sparks (1999) notes that in Britain there are ten newspaper titles which belong to seven media conglomerates that also have other forms of media. Moreover, he also states that two companies concentrate more than 50 per cent of the circulation and the top four titles account for 90 percent of the market (Sparks, 1999). According to a report produced by Curran (2000), Murdoch's News Corporation owns--without taking into account non media enterprises--*The Sun, News of the World, The Times, The Sunday Times* (with a total circulation of 10,6 million); plus BskyB, Fox Broadcasting, Fox, New York Post, HarperCollins and Asia Star TV. The Mirror Group is the owner of: *Daily Mirror, Sunday Mirror, People, Daily Record, Sunday Mail, Independent and Independent* (with a total circulation of 9,2 million) plus other media interests such as Live TV, Mirror Television and Saltire Press. MAI and United News and Media 's business include: *Daily Express, Sunday Express, Daily Star, United Provincial Newspaper, United Magazines* (with a total circulation of 5 million), Meridian TV, Anglia TV, Channel 5, For Rent (USA), Asian Business Press (Singapore), Miller Freeman (Japan) and UPN in Spain, plus other non media companies.

Other conglomerates build the British media map, such as the Guardian Media Group, Pearson plc, which shares with the BBC the Satellite TV, Reed Elsevier, Hollinger and Daily Mail / Associated Newspapers (for a complete description see Curran and Seaton, 2000: 80 - 81)

In Argentina, the *Grupo Clarín* is the biggest and most powerful media conglomerate in Argentina. It has: the newspaper *Clarín*, which is the most popular one, with a readership of 1,700,000, Channel 13, *Radio Mitre* (both have the second position in audience's rating), FM 100, *Diario Olé* (a sport daily newspaper which is the fourth newspaper more sold), 50 per cent of Direct TV (a satellite system that concentrates the 83 per cent of the households that have this service) *Multicanal* (the most popular cable system that concentrates the 39 percent of the total), two news



wire, and also controls interests in publishing, mobile telephony and paper production (Waisbord, 2000; López Alonso and Rey Lennon, 2001)⁷

Avila Inversora owns 20 percent of the newspaper *Ambito Financiero*, 20 percent of the chain TyC that manages the transmission of football, and also the sport magazines *El Gráfico*, *Aire Libre*, *GolfDigest y Fórmula 1* and a percentage of the right-wing magazine *La Primera de la Semana*. Moreover, this company also has America TV, a station which has many political programmes which fluctuate between the left wing - i.e. *Detrás de las noticias*, *Punto Doc* and *Periodistas* - and right wing positions - such as *Después de hora*, *Impacto* - (Sencio, 2001, Plohn, 1999, Del Río and Sencio, 2000)

It is important to take into account that currently Argentinean journalism plays an outstanding role in reporting the wrongdoings of the government. Even more, as other democratic institutions have given up the reason d'être, journalism has begun to act as the public prosecutor of society, and the notion of the journalism as a fourth state has expanded in most of Latin American countries, including Argentina (Waisbord, 2000 and for examples of Argentinean 's watchdog journalism, see Waisbord, 2000: 33 – 39 and Pisani, 1997).

However, some authors (Waisbord, 1998, 2000, 2000a; Curran, 1994, 2000; McChesney, 1997) agree in the belief that this kind of 'watchdog' journalism that is continuously and meritoriously checking the government doings involves some dangerous, easy and antidemocratic practices: this scrutiny has to entail all forms of power, and this means the interests of the economical elites, which are the ones that

⁷ Another trend that characterized the conglomerates in Argentina and Britain is their expansion over the leisure industries. For instance, Patagonik Film Group is partly owned by *Grupo Clarín* – which, according to the ideology of the group produces films for a depolitized mass audience – which also shares with Carlos Avila's conglomerate *Avila Inversora* the transmission of football matches (Falivov, 2000). In Britain, “ the top five companies in each media sector controlled in the mid- 1980s an estimated 40 per cent of book sales, 45 per cent of ITV transmissions, between half and two – thirds of video rentals and music product sales, and over three – quarters of daily and Sunday paper sales” (Curran, 2000: 79)

This involvement of commercial activities outside the media business brings the increase of conflicts because of the cross of interests. Moreover the media are used to achieve the goals for the whole conglomerate, maintaining the public opinion sympathetic to private enterprise, keeping the social status quo (Curran, 2000).

support the right-wing media in Argentina. “News organizations may be interested in prioritizing relations with one or more different actors for different reasons” (Waisbord, 2000:6)

Even though journalists have been reporting many government wrongdoings and some ministers and secretaries were forced to resign after the investigations, top-level politicians have never been subject to investigation, at least not while in office, and no private enterprise or company has been reported, although it is known that there are several corrupt networks in companies and in the government--national and foreign--that allow for status quo. At the end of the day, even watchdog journalism prioritizes profits over public interests, and as Waisbord (2000) states, its agenda is shaped by both the market and the government.

For the Argentinean journalist Eduardo Aliverti this has a terrible consequences for public opinion: as there are so many reports tied in with government corruption, the system is maintained because people think that all the facts are being broadcasted (La Lupa, 1999). Another consequence is the shared feeling that all politicians are corrupted and they are the only ones guilty of the chaos in Argentina.

To add still more uncertainty, descontextualization (Curran and Seaton, 2000, Curran, 1994, 2000) is another phenomenon which is taken place in the media. For many theorists it means that neither the press nor the broadcasters explain the struggles and the pushes that undermine the relations between the elites.⁸

According to the Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski (1999), this phenomenon occurs all around the world, where the television shows the fights against the hunger in Somalia, but says nothing about the need to eradicate the world misery and famine.

⁸ For instance, in Argentina the press and broadcasters used to give the country risk – a rating done by multinational financial investment companies- as if they were talking about the weather temperature, without the explication of its origins and the real –no effects- in the our day life of the Argentineans.

It is important to bring Herman and Chomsky's theory about the propaganda model (1988), in which there are five filters through which the information has to pass before becoming a piece of news: the size, ownership and profit orientation of the mass media, the advertising, the information provided by powerful sources and agents, flack as a way to domesticate the media and anticommunism. Their thesis is that the top tier media along with the government and the economical elites that sponsor the media – and also has relations with the owners of the media giants - are the ones that determine the news agenda. To achieve this object, the government has all the strategies described above, and the advertisers decide in which media put their money, and if they agree with the content or not, which according to these authors has to be culturally and politically conservative so as to achieve the economical support of the elites (Herman and Chomsky, 1988). This topic is going to be analyzed deeply in the next section.

On the other hand, Schudson's thesis (2000) is not so deterministic. He believes that the journalists are more autonomous when doing their job, so, in the newsrooms they can decide with fewer pressures than those given in Herman and Chomsky's (1988) model. Accardo (2001) agrees with Schudson (2000) stating that journalists accommodate themselves to the political culture of the system in which they work. In a country such as Argentina, where the unemployment rate is more than 35 per cent, where there are very few chances for employment (and the job opportunities for journalists have been decreasing dramatically in the last ten years) self-censorship and the total accommodation to the ideology of the media, come as part and parcel of the job.

According to Curran (2000) the situation was different in Britain during the 80's when the journalists could leave the newspapers where they were working because of changes in the management and in the ideology of the papers.⁹ However, he points out that the current situation that journalists are facing--which applies to

⁹ For examples, see Curran and Seaton, 2000: 86-88

Britain and Argentinean equally in this case--where there are many free lance journalists, aspiring journalists willing to do unpaid work and journalists with temporary contracts, an unstable work situation brings a more acquiescent workforce. However, it is important to make a distinction: in Argentina the staff journalists are not well paid, in relation with Britain, where, according to Curran, “national newspapers offered well-rewarded berths for staff journalists” (2000: 89)

Money and the structure of the media

One of the consequences that the power of advertisers has brought is the reduced chance of the developing and maintaining of alternative media; and as a consequence large sectors of the population and their interests are not represented in the mainstream media (Waisbord, 2000a, Herman and Chomsky's, 1988; Curran, 1986, Sparks, 1999). “As a result, the distribution of advertising (and therefore commercial viability) follows the general distribution of social wealth with media producers trying to attract either mass audience or affluent minorities while paying relatively little attention to the poor and the disadvantaged” (Murdock, 1994: 145, Golding and Murdock, 1986, Sparks, 1999).

For Bagdikian the lack of opportunity for novel media projects to compete in the “marketplace of ideas”, and the wiping out process that the corporate media do so as to dominate all the field, is, finally, “as accountable as a dictatorial censorship” (1987: 251)

Curran (1998: 87) states that the high costs of publishing and the objective of advertisers that pay more to reach high-income and low-income readers are the causes of the structure of the British press and its ideology which denies opportunities to other voices to express differing opinions. For Herman and McChesney (1988) the logic of the conglomerates is the reduction of competition, the exclusion of others so as to force them to follow the same logic.

As a consequence, the spectrum of media's possibilities is not only very poor, but also right - wing orientated, defending the interests of the elites that allow them their permanence in the market. And the media magnates fluctuate politically but not ideologically so as to achieve their own goals (Waisbord, 2000, Herman and Chomsky's, 1988; Curran, 1978; Murdock, 1994).

According to several authors (Curran and Seaton, 2000, Herman and McChesney, 1997), this political fluctuation is characterized in Britain by Murdoch, the owner of *The Sun*, who moved the paper from Labour to Conservative in the 70's without regard to the fact that that the great majority of its readers were Labour's supporters. Then, in 1997, it switched again to support the New Labour because of Blair's promise of new right policies (Curran and Seaton, 2000, Curran and Leys, 2000). Curran and Seaton (2000) explain that the magnates of the media such as Maxwell, Murdoch, Black and Lord Stevens have global aspirations--different to the press barons whose media were linked to politics--and they support those who favour their own interests: their alliances are with the right-wing ideology, and it is not important the name of the party that it takes (Curran and Seaton, 2000, Seymour – Ure, 1991).

In Argentina the two most important newspapers *Clarín* and *La Nación* are centre-right wing papers--*Clarín* is closer to the centre than *La Nación*--and they move freely from one side to the other in the political spectrum, supporting the official government. For instance, *La Nación* has traditionally been right wing and deeply anti-peronist. However, currently it is supporting the president Eduardo Duhalde, who belongs to the Peronist Party.

The only right left paper is *Página/12*, whose reputation has been worsened by a rumor that it is part of the *Grupo Clarín*.^{10 11}

⁹ *Página/12* was funded in 1987 by Jorge Lanata. It has marked the history of the journalism in Argentina as it has done many reports denouncing the wrongdoings of the government. The most important and prestigious left wings journalists work in this newspaper.



PDF Complete
Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

This unfair distribution of advertisement is, according to Waisbord (2000a), even more palpable in the areas of the interior of the countries, where the media does not have the economic support of the government or the political parties or multinationals based in the capitals. Argentina has many examples that show evidence of the situation described in the former sentence, and even worse, another phenomenon has taken place in the last five years in the country: the large conglomerates have begun to buy the media from the countryside, destroying any attempt at competition. For instance, in Junín, a town of 70 thousand occupants located in the centre of country, a group of businessmen from there, launched a cable system in order to compete with *Multicanal*, an enterprise that also belongs to *Grupo Clarín*. The original idea of the new cable was to develop local production, charging its clients lower rates. However, it went bankrupt after an aggressive marketing campaign by *Multicanal*.¹² In addition, *Grupo Clarín* and the newspaper *La Nación*, which are competitors in the national press market, are partners ownership of some very important and traditional provincial newspapers acquired over the past five years: *Los Andes de Mendoza*, *La voz del Interior de Córdoba* (López Alonso and Rey Lennon, 2001). In Britain, the regional press is managed by major chains that, in 1995, concentrated the “43 per cent of combined freesheet and paid for local weekly circulation” (Curran and Seaton, 2000: 78)

Tabloidezation / Trivialization

The right-wing and decontextualized press in Britain has led to the *tabloidezation* of the press (Curran and Seaton, 2000; Sparks, 1999). On the other

¹¹ In Argentinean broadcasting the situation is similar. For instance, Fernando De la Rúa (in that moment mayor of the city of Buenos Aires) sold *Radio Municipal*, which has the greatest airwave potential, to the right wing fascist Daniel Haadad. Currently, the station, with its new name: Radio 10 -now in the hands of the North American Emmis, but still managed by Haadad- is the most popular radio in Argentina. Haadad also has 60 percent of the weekly magazine *La Primera de la Semana* and has a news programme in America Channel. All the contents share the same ideology, and all the ‘products’ are supporting by the same advertisers: multinational, ex-public enterprises, banks and so on (Sirven, 2001a; Mangone, 2000).

¹² Another example has been the landing of regional supplements in different neighbourhoods of the surroundings of the capital of the country, offering lower prices to the advertisers than the ones proposed for the regional newspaper, an unfair situation that was reported by the Press Workers Union of Buenos Aires – Unión de Trabajadores de Prensa de Buenos Aires (UPTBA)- (see <http://www.utpba.com.ar/anterior154.html>).



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

hand, in Argentina this phenomenon is more common in the broadcasting than in the press. Moreover, it is important to clarify that it has a different name because the tabloid has not the same connotation as in Britain: during Menem's government it was called the *menemización* of the media whereas currently it could be called the trivialization of the media. Nomenclature aside, the meaning is the same--and the results as well: a depolitized mass audience, which is the aim of the right wing media ownership, because the depolitized mass is easily swayed (Curran and Seaton, 2000; Curran 1994, 2000; Sparks, 1999). As a consequence, in the structure of the British press there is a politized elite press--which obtains their profits from the advertisers and as a consequence covers issues that catch attract readers that are attractive to advertisers--and depolitized mass press, that receives its revenues from sales, so they cover those topics that ensure a large circulation (Curran and Seaton, 2000; Curran 1994, 2000; Sparks, 1999). For McChesney (1999) and Sparks (1999) this state of affairs leads to a situation that threatens the democratic system.

Herman and McChesney believe that the public sphere is threatened by advertiser and owner domination: they represent the class interest from where they receive their benefits and they try to keep the status quo. As a consequence they prefer entertainment to 'serious' political issues so as to attract a greater audience and sell this audience to their advertisers. "Audience service is a means, not an end" (Herman and McChesney, 1997: 7). As a consequence, some Argentinean and British authors (Seaton and Pimlott 1987; Curran, 1994, 2000; Sparks, 1999, Mastrini, 2000; López Alonso and Rey Lennon, 2001, Farías Latorre, 1997) agree in affirming that media, through patterns of control, ownership, production and consumption, collaborates with the maintenance of the class structure.

CONCLUSION

“Economic power...converted into ideological power”

(Curran, 2000:100)

In the introduction of this paper, it was stated that there is no one answer to the question of where media control is located. The answer depends on the context within which the media operates. However, at the end of this essay, and after the evidence set forth, the answer in relation to Argentina and Britain’s media is unambiguous: despite the fact that their histories are completely unrelated, their dissimilar cultures, the political and economical elites are the ones that control the media in both countries. Nevertheless, it is important to clarify two situations: firstly, that in Britain this control is more evident in the press, because of the regulated broadcasting; whereas, in Argentina control is spread to all forms of media; secondly, the situation of the private media in both countries is the same: a lot of media in few hands, with international shareholders, global interests and a steadily expansion of these companies over other business such as leisure¹³.

Currently, media global conglomerates need the politicians to have the laws that allow them to penetrate into the market without restrictions (such as anti-monopoly laws) and market regulations. On the other hand, the politicians need the power and support of the media so as to reach the audience in a positive way.

This alliance between political and economical elites, and the aim of the media conglomerates to be more and more profitable have driven in both countries to a trivialization of content: the lack of public sphere issues and the deviation of attention into insignificant topics, so as to attract a mass audience. In Argentina this

¹³ This analysis excludes the BBC and its public function, which has nothing to do with Argentinean public radio and television station.



Your complimentary
use period has ended.
Thank you for using
PDF Complete.

[Click Here to upgrade to
Unlimited Pages and Expanded Features](#)

process has been more evident in the broadcasting, whilst in Britain has been in the press, because as Seaton states: “in Britain broadcasting has had some protection from market pressures, and has claimed political independence” (2000: 2). This strategy is followed by right-wing media groups-- which is to say almost all media groups – which are embodied by the neoliberal ideology, which, all around the world has been in charge of the campaign against the politics, accusing it as the refuge of corruption. As a consequence, and with the aggregate of the lack of alternatives due to unfair competition between huge media conglomerates and humble media projects, “news and news values are becoming more narrow, more sensational and more trivialized” (Seaton, 2000: 1). Moreover, the descontextualization helps to ever-increasingly confuse the public, creating a depolitized mass audience (Curran, 2000). However, as James Curran states: “Embedded also in its entertainment features were values and assumptions that were not quite as apolitical as they appeared to be at first sight” (2000: 107)

On the other hand the politized quality papers, with a small circulation, select an elite readership so as to attract advertisers. At the end, as stated by many investigators into the subject, (Murdock, 1994, Golding and Murdock, 1986, Sparks, 1999) the situation in the media arena is not more than the loyal reflect of the social inequality.

Within this context, journalists are in the middle of a tug of war of lobbies and networks between the political and economical elites. “Market pressures can lead to the downgrading of investigative journalism in favour of entertainment” (Curran, 2000a: 127). Even more, the watchdog journalism can only search for the government ‘s wrongdoings, ignoring the corporate wrongdoings, because, in many cases the media owners have close links with them, or are part of those wrongdoings. As Curran (2000a: 122) states, the government is not still “the seat of the power and main source of oppression”. As a consequence, he says, the media has to check both public and private power.

The question is whether in this context of powerful global media conglomerates interested in solely in ever-increasing profits, this aim can be achieved. That is, how likely is it that the media is genuinely interested in reporting the wrongdoings from the economical and financial spheres?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Accardo, A. (2000 October) Los periodistas frente a los mecanismos de cooptación, Le Monde Diplomatique Edición Cono Sur:. 34 - 35

Bagdikian, B. (1987) The Media Monopoly, Boston, Beacon Press

Blaustein E. and Zubieta M. (1998) Decíamos ayer: La prensa argentina bajo el Proceso, Buenos Aires, Colihue,

Crisell, A. (1997) An introductory History of British Broadcasting, London, Routledge

Crisell, A. (1999) Broadcasting: Television and Radio, in Stokes J. and Reading A. (eds.) The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments, London, Mc Millan Press Ltd.

Curran J. and Leys C. (2000) Media and the decline of liberal corporatism in Britain, in Curran J. and Park, M. (eds.) De-Westernising Media Studies, London, Routledge

Curran J. and Seaton, J. (2000) Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting in Britain, London, Routledge

Curran, J. (1978) Advertising and the press, in Curran, J. (ed.) The British Press: A Manifesto, London, Macmillan

Curran, J. (1986) The Impact of Advertising on the British Mass Media, in Collins, R. et al. (eds.) Media, Culture and Society: A Critical Reader, London, Sage

Curran, J. (1994) Communications, culture and social order, in Gurevitch, M. et al. (eds.) Culture, Society and the Media, London, Routledge

Curran, J. (1998) Newspapers and the press, in Briggs, A. and Copley P. (eds.) The Media: An Introduction, Harlow, Logman

Curran, J. (2000a) Rethinking Media and Democracy, in Curran J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) Mass Media And Society, London, Arnold

Falicov, T. (2000) Argentina 's Blockbusters movies and the politics of culture under neoliberalism, 1989 – 1998, in Media, Culture & Society, Vol. 22: 327 – 342, London, Sage

Fariás Latorre S. (1997) Multimedios en Argentina, III Jornadas Nacionales de Investigadores en Comunicación, Universidad Nacional de Cuyo, in www.unc.edu I(last access 14th February 2002)

Floria, C and García Belsunce, C. (1988) Historia Política de la Argentina Contemporánea, Buenos Aires, Alianza Editorial

Floria, C. and García Belsunce, C. (1992) Historia de los Argentinos II, Buenos Aires, Larrouse

Fox, E. (1997) Latin America Broadcasting: From Telenovela to Tango, Luton, University Luton Press

Golding, P and Murdock, G. (1986), Unequal information: access and exclusion in the new communications market place, in Ferguson M. (ed.) New Communication Technologies And The Public Interest, London, Sage

Golding, P and Murdock, G. (2000) Culture, Communications and Political Economy, in Curran J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) Mass Media And Society, London, Arnold

Goodwin, P. (1999) The Role of the State, in Stokes J. and Reading A. (eds.) The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments, London, Mc Millan Press Ltd.

Herman E. and Chomsky, N. (1988) Manufacturing Consent, New York, Pantheon

Herman, E. and McChesney, R. (1997) The Global Media: The New Missionaries of Corporate Capitalism, London, Cassell

Kapuscinski, R. (1999 September), Acaso los medios reflejan la realidad del mundo, Le Monde Diplomatique Edicion Cono Sur:. 26 - 27

La Lupa, (1999, May) Relatar la crisis o cambiar la sociedad. 10-11

Lavieri, O. (1996) The Media in Argentina: Struggling with the Absence of a Democratic Tradition, in Cole R. (ed.) Communication in Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media and Society, Wilmington, Scholarly Resources Inc.

Liebes, T. and Curran, J. (1998) Media, Ritual and Identity, London, Routledge

López Alonso G. and Rey Lennon F. (2001) La comunicación en América Latina, in www.comunica.org/chasqui/alonsa75htm (last access 14th February, 2002)

Luna, F. (1994) Breve Historia de los Argentinos, Buenos Aires, Planeta

Mangone, C. (2000 May) El negocio de la discriminación, Le Monde Diplomatique Edicion Cono Sur: 34 – 35

Mastrini, G. (2000, June) Televisión estatal o gubernamental? Le Monde Diplomatique Edicion Cono Sur: 32 – 33

Mattelart, A. and Schmucler, H. (1985) Communication & Information Technologies: Freedom of Choice For Latin America, Norwood, Ablex Publishing Corporation

McChesney, R. (1999) Rich Media , Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Time, Chicago, University of Illinois Press

Murdock, G. (1994) Large corporations and the control of the communications industries, in Gurevitch, M. et al. (eds.) Culture, Society and the Media, London, Routledge,

Negrine, R. (1994) Politics and the Mass Media in Britain, London, Routledge

Nerone, J. (1994) Violence Against the Press: Policing the Public Sphere in U.S. History, New York, Oxford University Press

Pisani, S. (1997 June 29) La guerra del periodismo, Suplemento Enfoques, La Nacion

Plohn, C. (1999 September) Título Señales de Vida. Target. Buenos Aires:102

Romero, L. (1994) Breve Historia Contemporánea de los Argentinos, Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica

Schudson, M. (2000) The Sociology of News Production Revisited (Again), in Curran J. and Gurevitch, M. (eds.) Mass Media And Society, London, Arnold

Seaton, J. and Pimlott, B. (1987) The struggle for balance, in Seaton, J. and Pimlott, B. (eds.) The Media in British Politics, Avebury, Aldershot.

Sencio, G. (2001, July) Avila sin aire. Apertura. Buenos Aires: 20

Seymour ó Ure, C. (1991) The British Press and Broadcasting since 1945, Oxford, Basil Blackwell



Sirvén, P (2001, July 15) Comunicación, el talon de Aquiles del Gobierno, Suplemento Enfoques, La Nación, 1- 2

Sirvén, P. (2001a, March 25) Los micrófonos son extranjeros, Suplemento Enfoques, La Nación, 1 - 2

Sparks, C. (1999) The Press, in Stokes J. and Reading A. (eds.) The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments, London, Mc Millan Press Ltd.

Stokes, J. (1999) The Structure of British Media Industries, in Stokes J. and Reading A. (eds.) The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments, London, Mc Millan Press Ltd.

Del Río, J. and Sencio, G. (2000 July) Telefónica Media. Apertura: 24

Ulanovsky, C. (1996) Paren las rotativas, Buenos Aires, Espasa

Waisbord, S. (1998) The Unfinished Project of Media Democratization, in O'Neil, P. (ed.) Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions, London, Lynne Rienner

Waisbord, S. (2000) Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability and Democracy, New York Columbia University Press

Waisbord, S. (2001a) Media in South America: Between the rock of the state and the hard place of the market, in Curran J. and Park, M. (eds.) De-Westernising Media Studies, London, Routledge

Weymouth, T. (1996) The media in Britain, in Weymouth. T and Lamizet B. (eds.) Markets & Myths: Forces For Change In The European Media, London, Logman