

Journalism – the Oddities of a Profession

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Abstract: In order to highlight the current journalism foibles, some voices bring for other journalists of other time overstatements, in some cases even undeserved. While it may seem shocking to some, the press was never flawless. Despite this, the public tends to judge, perhaps too harshly, the value of nowadays journalistic publications, referring to the realities of other eras. Thus, post-communist journalist is considered inferior to the communist one, because the latter would not ever be allowed to publish the horrors that today we encounter in newspapers, on the internet or in broadcasts on radio or television. The result of man's press from the communist era is considered, however, much less valuable than the product which the journalist of interwar years offered to the public. Finally, for some editors or reporters of the years between the two World Wars, the absolute journalist model was Mihai Eminescu, who despite personal exceptional value, he was representative of a press still inferior in many respects to that of the interwar period. In this paper, our intention is to show some of the major shortcomings that have been alleged against the press throughout its existence. In our approach we will not limit, but only to texts targeting newspapers and journalists in Romania.

Keywords: history of media; blackmail; newspaper; the interwar period; school of journalism

1. Conceptual Delimitations

The Newspaper, according to C. Bacalbașa, does not have at the origins of its emergence some cultural or spiritual needs, but the desire of the public to receive the information that they need faster and systematically. (Bacalbașa, 1922, pp. 171-172) For this reason, *the press* has towards the country *duties of a national agreement* and journalists must consider daily *this responsibility of honor and character*. (*Generația Nouă/New Generation*, 1893, p. 129) For reasons easy to foresee, the press has appeared in Romania later and cumbersome, compared to what happened in other

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countries. By the outbreak of World War I, the most important newspapers were *Universul/The Universe*, *Adevărul/The truth* și *Dimineața/The morning*. These publications had tens of thousands of copies daily. In the interwar period two more will join, *Cuvântul/The Word* (1924) and *Curentul/The Current* (1928). Other newspapers were released on the market with a small number of pages and copies. (Ciachir, 2008, p. 42) To them, however, it was impossible to keep up with the newspapers of wide circulation. At the end of the period between the two world wars, of the five largest newspapers that made up the top of most sold Romanian publications only *The Universe* and *The Current* still functioned, keeping the positions of market leader.

During the communist era, the Romanian media appearance gains, as shown in a paper signed by Peter Gross, an appearance totally changed from the one in the years between the two world wars. It was characterized by mobilization and indoctrination messages that were meant to maintain the cult of personality, and political and social programs presented were inauthentic. (Gross, 1999, pp. 70-75) The same source also says that after the advent of television, newspapers and magazines remained the primary means of communication only in rural areas. Romanian media on the post-communist period, Peter Gross stated that in the early years after 1989, a large part of daily and weekly publications was represented by party publications. The other publications semi-commercial and semi-independent were related, albeit indirectly, to a political party. Friendly relations formed between owners, publishers or editors on the one hand and politicians and political parties, on the other hand, were part of the daily Romanian journalistic picture. In other words, the media, in its totality, “was highly politicized and partisan, choosing sides in the highly diversified political scene.” (Gross, 2004, p. 61)

2. An Activity with Strange Features: Journalism

Some of the drawbacks of the Romanian press were reported, since no more than a century ago, and in a booklet entitled the *Regele și presa/King and the press*, a text that was actually a *query* made by Alexander G. Djuvara in December 1887 in a meeting of the Chamber of Deputies. In this brochure they were accused the political opponents on how they understood the purpose of the press. Defendants are accused, in fact, of their double standards towards the offensive journalistic discourse: when they were in opposition they used in party publications, without any embarrassment, and when they were in power it branded and resembled press with “a fallen woman”.

In 1896, in the *Convorbiri Literare/Literary Talks* in a text entitled “Ziaristica și literatura/Journalism and literature” there were explained some of the *peculiar* issues on journalistic activity: “The journalist is, and he cannot be in any other way, a man of thought, as well as, to forgive comparison, the mountebank is a man of muscular strength and agility. Yet (and here we do not know if we can continue the comparison), nowhere it reveals more the lack of true thinking than to journalists.” (Dragomirescu, 1896, p. 302) One of the conclusions reached by the author of this text is that the journalist in his chase for passing news “crushed with his feet the offspring of steadfast future”. (Dragomirescu, 1896, p. 303)

A solution for the purposes of accountability of the Romanian journalists was proposed in 1913, in an article from *Viața Românească/The Romanian Life*. It was recommended to the press in Romania that the optimum operating model of how journalists were active in England: “Last year, three conservative newspapers have insinuated libelous information on attacking the two ministers in the current English cabinet: Lloyd George and W. Churchill. Those targeted have not addressed the justice, but have proposed the alternative to the guilty newspapers of being sued or giving, not remembering precisely how many thousands of pounds to hospitals. Newspapers have preferred to fine themselves and the maligned ministers received gratitude from public hospitals.” (VR 1913, p. 124) The author has the tendency to idealize the press in England, but no country can claim that it has a perfect model for a domain of activity or more. To the text it has to be recognized, however, the merit of having proposed a solution to address abuses made by journalists, now more than a century, newspapers and magazines.

3. Editor with Mandate

As shown in a paper published in the second half of the 19th century, the press proved to be, shortly after its release, one of the most important inventions of modern society. The media, says the source referred to, characterizes the times that we live better than any other discovery which transformed the material and moral conditions of human existence. Max Nordau, the author of the paper *Minciunile convenționale ale civilizației noastre/The conventional lies of our civilization*, had noticed in almost a century and a half ago, that the press had become a force so strong that without its support the institutions of the modern state cannot carry out daily activities. For this reason, the same author shows, the press came to be considered the fourth state power. In his work, Nordau aims at answering some questions on press activity. One

of these questions concerns the place where it springs from the great power of the press. Starting from the idea that the *newspaper* is not and it cannot be simply a *means of communication of facts*, Nordau believed that the image of the defender of public morals which readers attribute to the journalist is the source of the power of the press.

Another issue that bothers Max Nordau is the one on the right of the press *to speak for public opinion*. Specifically, the author wants to know who grants this right of the media, given that any “man without the purpose” after finding someone willing to provide the necessary money to open a newspaper, can gather its journalists, eager to use their journalistic skills to embarrass the public institutions. Nordau’s proposed solution to eliminate this drawback is that the editors are elected by direct vote by the members of the community in which they want to write for a term of 10 years. The editor would have lost the right to write under the same project, in case where a court had found him guilty of calumny. (Nordau, pp. 389-390) Although it can be cataloged at first sight as interesting, Nordau's proposal is not, in any way, rooted in reality.

4. Great Journalists and their Sins

None of the journalists that gave rise to the great Romanian newspapers have escaped from the accusations of involvement in shady business. Pamfil Șeicaru¹ was considered one of the most important *press gangsters* in the interwar era. The discussions about the alleged extortion committed by Pamfil Șeicaru were numerous at the time. The accusations against the journalist were released in several publications of the time. The problems related to this topic have even gotten into the attention of the *Jury of honor* of the Union of Journalists in Bucharest. In the *court for the judgment* of journalists Șeicaru was both the defendant and the plaintiff. Considering that he was offended by the accusations against him by some peers, he was sent to the Honorary Jury of the Union of Journalists in Bucharest on several occasions. (Petcu, 2012, pp. 197, 204) The blackmails ascribed to Pamfil Șeicaru could not be proven ever. Also, many owners of newspapers published at the beginning of the post-communist era have tried to play a role in the Romanian

¹ Pamfil Șeicaru (1894-1980) is one of the most influential Romanian journalists of all time. He was founder and director of the press trust "*Curentul/The current*", which functioned in the years between the two world wars.

politics at least as important as the one held by the director of *Curentul/The Current* in the years between the two world wars. (Tismăneanu & Mihăieș 2011, p. 536)

Nae Ionescu¹, another important name of the Romanian press, was the protagonist of a scandal at Blank Bank. It was said that, as CEO of the Center Books, an institution created by the bank, falsified the balance sheets in order to misappropriate a significant amount of money, that would have bought a villa located in a selected area of Bucharest. It is also said that Aristide Blank gave up the idea to call the police after Nae Ionescu was bound by a written statement to return, in installments, the amount appropriated by fraud, nearly one million lei. (*Crainic /The Announcer*, 1991, pp. 203-204) Nae Ionescu is, however, an “almost legendary figure of Romania in the 30s”. (Sandache, 2014, p. 79) He was so admired and blasphemed. Many have compared him with Socrates, “for his stunning ability to provide schemes of thought as ingenious, as it is thrilling his audience.” Also, Nae Ionescu was, for many devotees of the Corneliu Codreanu group², a true spiritual master. (Sandache, 2014, p. 80)

Another interesting case is starring Stelian Popescu³, who is said that with the support of Take Ionescu⁴, became the majority shareholder of the newspaper *Universul/The universe*, “the most popular newspaper in our country” (Ciachir, p. 10) in extremely dubious circumstances. (Șeicaru, 2007, p. 276) Also, *Viața unui aventurier – Cine este Stelian Popescu. Cine conduce „Universul”/The life of an adventurer brochure - Who is Stelian Popescu. Who runs the “Universe”* are several alleged strange business of the press man. The central idea is the mentioned brochure is that Stelian Popescu has left behind just *dirt*. In the years when Europe trembled in fear for the outbreak of a new world war, journalists from the *Adevărul/The truth* accusing the influential press man, which was said to have held since 1936 worth more than 400 million lei, and he turned *Universul/The Universe* in a speaking trumpet of those who supported Hitler's doctrine.

¹ Nae Ionescu (1890-1940) is known as a philosopher, logician, educator and journalist. In the interwar period, he has led *Cuvantul/The Word*, a publication read especially by young intellectuals.

² Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899-1938) was perhaps the most controversial politician of interwar Romania. He is the one who created the Legionary Movement.

³ Stelian Popescu (1874-1954) was the editor of *Universul/The universe*. According to some specialists, *Universul/The universe* is the most popular newspaper which operated in Romania.

⁴ For many researchers, Take Ionescu (1858-1922) was one of the most important statesmen of Romania.

About Constantin Mille¹, the man who turned the newspapers *Adevărul/The truth* and *Dimineața/Morning* into genuine money factories, it is said he was no stranger on the blackmails of his journalists. Asked by someone why was he allowing this kind of practice, he would have said that *journalists cannot live on air*. (Popescu, 2000, p. 105) Even so, Mille was referred to by some sources as “the greatest journalist of modern Romania.” (Samson, 1979, p. 61) Cezar Petrescu², as the director of the newspaper *România/Romania* was involved in a resounding scandal that erupted in April 1939, when Armand Călinescu, then interior minister, ordered a control at the gazette led by the popular writer. According to Liviu Rebreanu the control body of the minister found “a gap of about five million” lei. (Rebreanu, 1984, p. 178) About Nichifor Crainic³ it was said, inter alia, that he was part of intellectuals who, driven by *rushed ambitions* were sold at *consciences fairs* that were organized periodically by politicians. (Șeicaru, 1926, p. 1) None N. Iorga⁴ is also on our list. It was written that he was “an enemy of the nation” and “an ogre of national virtues.” (Cernăianu, 1932, p. 220) These are just some examples of scandals involving big names of the press in the inter wars Romania.

5. Recruiting journalists

One of the most important issues related to the proper functioning of the media is how journalists are recruited. In the novel “Retragerea fără torțe/The withdrawal without torches” (second volume of the series *Sfârșit de mileniu/End of the Millennium*), Radu Tudoran presents the Musiu Jack's case, an interwar journalist who, though illiterate, enjoys a great success. Even if he is a character of the novel, he is a reality that cannot be denied in those times. Although he was chief of *political editorship* at a newspaper in Bucharest, Jack Musiu had never written an article because he could not write. He only learned how to sign. In the breast pocket of his coat he always had a “Parker” gold ink-pen, but its role was to form the phone numbers. Jack Musiu had, however, some talents that could hardly be seen to other

¹ Constantin Mille (1861-1927) is considered by some historians as the father of the modern press in Romania.

² Cezar Petrescu (1892-1961) belongs to the category of most popular Romanian novelists. Regarding his media activity, he was, for a long time, the most important collaborator of Pamfil Șeicaru.

³ Nichifor Crainic (1889-1972) is known as a theologian, writer, poet, journalist and politician. In the interwar period, Nichifor Crainic, Cezar Petrescu and Pamfil Șeicaru were true *stars* of the press in Romania.

⁴ N. Iorga (1871-1940) is known as a historian, literary critic and documentarian, playwright, poet, memoirist, politician and journalist. He is part of Romania's most important personalities.

journalists. He was able “to walk, to eavesdrop, to spy, to find out, to know it all and to correlate them flawlessly.” The existence of the journalists of the Jack Musiu’s type is supported by another author who knows well those times. In a paper published in nearly nine decades ago shows that the press, the most powerful channel of propagation of ideas, was considered a school for the people. The trouble was that this school’s teachers were recruited without any criteria. Any dolt, any errand boy, after being kicked out by the owner as he was caught stealing, he found, without difficulty a place among the journalists. (Dafin, 1929, p. 10)

Until the outbreak of the First World War, the journalists were recruited, in most cases, from among persons who were endowed with some literary inclinations. Their training, for the vast majority was insufficient, only the writing skills managed to cover the lack of knowledge of the analyzed problems. By C. Dobrogeanu-Gherea, the Romanian press at the end of the 19th century did not have the ability to influence the actions of politicians and the reason was the poor intellectual training of most of the journalists. (Atanasiu, 1932, p. 60) This idea is reinforced by an article in *Răvaşul/Fortune cookie*, published in 1907 and signed by D. Tomescu, showing that the Romanian journalists of those times came largely from among *the filth and incapables of schools* and they were people *in conflict with honor* and without love of nation. (Tomescu, 1907, p. 172)

After the war, with increased wages paid in the media, the number of well-trained journalists increases, some authors even signaling a new presence in the newsroom for a new type of journalist: one with a doctorate. (Barna, 2005, p. 112) This growth has not, however, radical forms. That explains the Pamfil Şeicaru’s violent attacks against journalists without culture that marred the reputation of the entire guild. (Şeicaru, 1925, p. 1) The journalist indicates three sources from where journalists were recruited: young people who failed to obtain a passing grade in the failed exams, the officials with literary talent and socialist club members. (Şeicaru, 1921, p. 5) According to Pamfil Şeicaru large number of these *refractory geniuses of any culture* made from the press the most determined enemy of thought, and the responsible for the situation were the owners of press entities.

6. Journalistic Talent

Over the years, the criterion on which the journalists’ work was assessed has known more or less important transformations. Referring to press in the second half of the 19th century, C. Bacalbaşa showed that “a great journalist is not only the one who

knows how to write beautifully” but the one “who loves with intensity some of the great things: homeland, his people, people in general”. (Bacalbaşa, 1927, p. 84) According to the same author, though the journalist has a duty to write in such a way as to be understood, especially, by the audience of his time, “a great professional and a superior mind” is that a journalist who managed “to be the man today, but also the man of tomorrow.” (Bacalbaşa, 1927, p. 86)

In the years between the two world wars, the media world was stirred up by the idea launched in public space by Pamfil Şeicaru. He proposes conditional membership of the Syndicate of Journalists to hold a Baccalaureate diploma and undertaking a placement in the media. (Şeicaru 1926, p. 1) The reactions of colleagues were obviously present. First, Iosif Nădejde showed in the article “*Presa și cultura. Talent, cunoștințe și... certificate/The media and culture. Talent, knowledge and certificates*” that *talent never asks for certificates, because it is a gift from God*. It followed the answer of journalist Ion Gorun, who claimed that journalists such as Bolliac, CA. Rosetti, B.P. Haşdeu, Eminescu, Caragiale and others had no baccalaureate degree, which had not prevented them to be great journalists. The proposal was described as being absurd also by Em. Socor. (Petcu, 2005, p. 52) In a conference held in 1928, the Romanian Social Institute, Eugene Filotti claimed also the superiority of talent to the academic title, but he required the state to order the creation of an Institute of press. This educational institution must, however, be adapted to the requirements of journalism. (Filotti, 1928, p. 3)

In the years between the two world wars, the idea that prevailed was that the editor is first class journalist and the reporter is of second class. The difference between the two categories is the fact that the editor *comments* the reality, while the reporter was merely *disclosing* it. They were recognized several *categories of editors*: the editor who wrote on the first page and on special pages, the columnist specializing in a particular social activity and the external collaborator, i.e. ordinary citizens who wanted to have a response in the newspaper. So it is easy to see that the debate on the position it should occupy the editor in a newsroom in relation to the reporter were numerous and extremely bright. In 1926, in an article in the *Curentul/The Current*, Titus Devechi argued for the *reconciliation* of the two categories of journalists: “The truth is, as always, in the middle: the success of a newspaper is of everyone, reporters, editors and of the little gypsy boy who ... deforming titles or inventing “savage crime”, or “cabinet reshuffling”, deceiving at first the reader, only to the console him, then, when there is no savage murder, no government reshuffle, he read an article that he likes or an information that interests him.” (Devechi, 1926, p. 1)

7. Conclusion

Professional training of journalists today is different from the one of decades ago. Today, there are faculties where journalism is taught by well-done textbooks. In one of these manuals it shows what he needs to be a publicist for success: “A reporter therefore meets an entire sum of qualities that enable him to discover facts and to record them properly, he has some technical equipment and also intellectual equipment. In addition to being a good reporter, it will have to have a matching character. “ (Randall, 1998, p. 48) Despite the existence of schools of journalism, the journalists no longer have the brilliance that one can find only in the characters of novels, who had as inspiration figures of interwar Romanian press. The very good image of which it enjoys today the interwar media has its origins, we believe, also the way in which the interwar journalists understood the obligations that they had in relation to other citizens. The people in the service of the pen considered themselves as guardians of good and cruel enemies of all that is abuse and injustice. (Batzaria, 1928, p. 1) The place of the journalist in those days was taken by the *TV star* and the TV star status can be owned by people who have nothing to do with journalism, their only “quality” is the regular presence to certain shows. (Ionian, 2009, p. 71)

For many consumers of the Romanian press, the interwar journalism is a standard of freedom of expression, an important contribution in this respect was made by the journalists who, during the communist regime, they felt that the true value of the right of not agreeing with others.

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***Viața unui aventurier – Cine este Stelian Popescu. Cine conduce “Universul”/The life of an adventurer - Who is Stelian Popescu. Who runs the “Universe”.