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Milo, oil on canvas, 1995.

**Typesetting & Production:**  
Mofet-Rosemarine

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## 50 YEARS OF THE ISRAELI MEDIA / Michael Keren

This issue of *Qesher*, its 25th, is devoted entirely to the media in Israel since the founding of the state. Tracing the vast changes that have occurred in the Israeli media in recent years, many of the articles point out that in spite of variety, Israel's print and electronic media do not portray a multi-cultural society whose various sectors communicate with each other intelligently. Rather, the media deal with events crafted by spokespersons or by media presenters who treat topics shallowly and unprofessionally. The articles published here do not propose a remedy to this development, but they put forward varied perspectives that engender a systematic understanding of it.

Sam Lehman-Wilzig surveys the marketing competition between the two most-read Israeli dailies, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ma'ariv*, as well as the issue of cross-ownership relevant to both, with an emphasis on the damage involved, in his view, to journalistic credibility. This problem is solvable, he believes, by legislation that would convert the country's Press Council to a statutory body empowered to differentiate between newspapers committed to freedom of the press and those that are essentially economic enterprises.

Avi Katzman, reviewing the history of *Ha'arets*, portrays the dissonance between the liberal goals of the editors and the intellectual despotism which he attributes to them, with an emphasis on the paper's struggle to eschew political dependence.

Yoram Peri surveys the rise and fall of Israel's socialist sponsored press, discussing the range of roles that party newspapers filled, and why the public eventually abandoned this press.

Newspaper closures are also the subject of Yehiel Limor's article on the history of Israeli dailies. He points to the emergence of alternative media, competition by large media conglomerates, and a misreading of the consumer market as main causes.

Mordecai Naor, analyzing Israel's army press, discusses the difficulties it faced during the 1980s in competing with the plethora of weekend feature supplements in the general press. The surviving army media, including the popular Galei Zahal radio station, continue to struggle for survival.

My own article, on *Ha'olam Hazeh*, discusses the ideological platform of this weekly, which, along with the movement that its editors founded, was geared to a public that was more imaginary than real.

Aryeh Naor surveys the history of the rightist press in Israel,

noting that the skimpier financial resources of the parties of the right taught them the harsh lessons of maintaining political newspapers earlier than the left learned them. Gahal's attempt in the 1960s to privatize its newspaper, *Hayom*, failed, he explains, because of the intrinsic contradiction between the aims of a political vis-a-vis a commercial medium.

Salem Jubran, reviewing the Arabic press in Israel, emphasizes the transformation it underwent from an explicitly political press to a multi-faceted press, the result of economic, societal, educational and political developments within the Arab population of Israel.

Tamar Liebes analyzes the role of state radio and TV during the formative years of Israel's statehood in molding national unity, a unity, she argues, which was an illusion from the start.

Gabriel Weimann challenges a widespread perception that multi-channel TV in Israel has led to cultural pluralism. He contends, rather, that it has gathered the Israeli public around a new "tribal campfire" – the Second Channel – with TV dominated by a shallow "ratings culture."

Roni Milo, formerly mayor of Tel Aviv, criticizes Israel's local (as compared to national) newspapers for failing to deal with municipal issues on a serious level and for singling out the mayor for systematic denigration.

Nurit Govrin traces the prominence traditionally given to literature in the Israeli press, a phenomenon that began to change only in the 1980s with the decline of the political press. Today, the newspapers place greater emphasis on the writer than on the book.

Hannah Herzog, in a survey of the development of the women's press in Israel, points out that the commercial women's press does not act as an advocate for the woman per se but is a vehicle for presenting a range of options to women in their confrontation with society.

Drora Baharal analyzes the motivations for *Chronicles: News of the Past*, launched in the early 1950s, which depicts events in Jewish history in a modern journalistic format.

*Qesher*, introducing structural changes in its mode of operation, will from this issue be assisted by an Advisory Board made up of Hebrew-speaking academicians in Israel and abroad who will help the Editorial Board in assessing the suitability of articles submitted for acceptance. *Qesher* welcomes articles for the November 1999 issue, which will be devoted to the role of the Jewish media throughout the world as bridges between "high" and "low" culture.

## THE 50-YEAR-OLD RIVALRY BETWEEN "YEDIOT AHARONOT" AND "MA'ARIV" / Sam Lehman-Wilzig

Two Israeli media giants, the dailies *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ma'ariv*, have been locked in a battle for supremacy for over half a century, with serious negative consequences for the public, in the author's view.

*Yediot Aharonot*, established in Tel Aviv in 1939, and in 1940 was bought out by its printer, Alexander Moses. A year later, Moses passed on the management of it to his father, Yehuda Moses, a noted business figure. Adopting a sensationalist approach for those times, the paper began to focus on the impending threat to Palestine of the German army, giving *Yediot Aharonot* its first circulation push.

The editor of the paper was Dr. Ezriel Carlebach, a brilliant journalist previously with the religious *Hatzofeh*. Other members of the staff were Dov Yudkowsky, who managed the Jerusalem branch; Shmuel Schnitzer and Shalom Rosenfeld, both formerly of *Hamashkif*; and David Giladi, formerly of *Hatzofeh*. Carlebach, finding himself at odds with publisher Moses over budget issues, initiated a "putsch" in late 1947/early 1948 that resulted in a walkout by most of the staff and the launching of a competing daily, initially called *Yediot Ma'ariv*. The new paper was established in February 1948 with the financial backing of businessman and mayor of Netanya Oved Ben-Ami.

Moses, left with practically no staff or office equipment (it had been carried off by the renegade group), rallied nevertheless and managed to put out an issue of *Yediot Aharonot* the day after the walkout, distributing it himself with the help of his family (the paper's distributors had walked off too). Revenge, combined with family solidarity, were to act as a spur for *Yediot* for years to come. The paper lost money, but Moses continued to publish it tenaciously.

Meanwhile, *Ma'ariv* quickly became the most popular daily in the country. Made up of four pages, it issued two editions – at noon and 4 p.m. Work conditions were primitive – the paper had only a single typewriter, and Carlebach had to shift his home telephone to the office. Moreover, the competition was intense: 13 dailies at the time of the proclamation of the State of Israel, jumping to 17 (11 in Hebrew) in 1950. *Ma'ariv* also became the country's most influential paper. Its editor from 1956, Aryeh Dissenchik, had a close relationship with the leaders of Mapai (the party in power) even though he, along with many of the paper's editorial staff, was an opponent of Mapai and closely affiliated with the rival Revisionist Party. The explanation for this anomalous situation lay in *Ma'ariv*'s consistently national, supra-party orientation, molded by Carlebach from the start. *Ma'ariv* was also superior qualitatively than its rival.

*Yediot*, however, turned its weaknesses into virtues, grasping, after a period of trying to imitate *Ma'ariv*, that it would be more worthwhile to cater to a lower common denominator. Early on, it adopted yellow journalistic methods eschewed by the rest of the press then, featuring reports of sex and violence when this was still considered taboo, using an idiomatic writing style, expanding the use of photos, widening out the range of editorial points of view (in contrast to *Ma'ariv*, which remained steadfastly right of center), and giving its reporters extra incentives for scoops. One such scoop, by the *Yediot* reporter in Germany, was an expose of Israeli weapons sales to West Germany in the 1950s (before the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between the two countries), which led indirectly to the fall of the government in Israel.

Moreover, *Yediot* pioneered a variety of popular columns and pages that are viewed today as integral in the daily press: a biting satiric supplement begun in 1965 that far exceeded its relatively mild contemporaries; exposes of scandals; and gossip, celebrity and glamor columns. It was also quick to anticipate counteract innovations introduced by *Ma'ariv*.

*Yediot*'s tenacity paid off, and by the late 1960s it had caught up with its rival in circulation, thereafter gaining on *Ma'ariv* steadily. This lead was enhanced by *Yediot*'s alacrity in perceiving the change in Israeli media habits with the introduction of television in the late 1960s. *Yediot* realized that a more abbreviated print news format, and the use of color photos, were required to complement and compete with TV. More broadly, the paper was more sensitive to the changes occurring in Israeli society in terms of a shift away from the traditional preoccupation with ideology and toward a desire for maximal information.

*Ma'ariv* made efforts to catch up during the 1980s, with only partial success. Its veteran shareholders were unable or unwilling to invest massively in technological modernization or to make major changes in content. Although the acquisition of the paper by Robert Maxwell in the late 1980s held out hope for a revival, this was aborted by his death and the collapse of his empire.

With the dramatic crossover by *Yediot* veteran Yudkowsky to *Ma'ariv* in 1989, *Ma'ariv* rapidly became a clone of its rival. The next major development in its history was its acquisition by business tycoon Ofer Nimrodi in 1992, ushering in a new round of cutthroat competition between the two dailies. Techniques included libelous editorial attacks and accusations, industrial espionage and the use of illegal listening devices, which eventually landed Nimrodi in prison. Both papers were the losers, as their credibility sank and their image was tarnished.

The most worrisome aspect of the rivalry, however, is the danger of cross-ownership that it exposed. Both publishers have extensive holdings in Israel's economy, with the result that the media of necessity are partisan in their treatment of their respective owners' interests. The Israeli press today, in the author's view, is thus sliding down a slippery slope in the realm of professional ethics.

Looking toward the future, the print media, in order to survive, will inevitably have to link up with both the computerized electronic media (Internet and the like) and the traditional electronic media (TV in all its formats), and create newspapers tailored to the individual. Information sources will continue to proliferate and will no longer need to be channeled through publishers. News and views can reach the consumer directly.

In the meantime, however, the major Israeli media moguls, and the publishers of *Yediot* and *Ma'ariv* particularly, are turning the media into tools of their economic and political interests. The "Fourth Estate" is rapidly becoming as powerful as the "First Estate" – government.

In Israel, as abroad, there is growing pressure to rethink the laws controlling the press. This is a complex issue because of the universal concern for protecting the freedom of the press as a cornerstone of democracy. However, since the major newspapers no longer fill the function of freedom of expression, but are essentially profit-making vehicles for their owners, a restructuring of the laws controlling them is actually mandated.

This can be brought about, the author believes, by dividing the press into two separate categories and implementing existing laws for each. The two categories are: freedom of the press in the broad

sense, or, the right of the public to know; and freedom of commercial self-expression, or, the right of private property (or, consumers' rights).

The first category refers to newspapers that have as their main aim providing credible information in a responsible way to the public at large and providing a forum for the presentation of varied ideas reflective of different sectors of Israeli society. The second category applies to newspapers that operate essentially for economic reasons, and, while obeying the law technically, do not fill the societal or professional criteria implicit in a newspaper.

The categorization of newspapers by these criteria can be accomplished by adopting legislature that would turn Israel's existing Press Council into a statutory body empowered to apply professional ethical regulations to all member newspapers. The means for doing this would be a review board made up of distinguished qualified, but neutral, persons. Membership in the council would be voluntary. Each member newspaper would be entitled to display an insignia showing that it met the professional standards of the council. The professional performance of the member newspapers would be reviewed annually. Newspapers opting not to join the council would be subject to the ordinary laws governing private property, devoid of the special legislative protection of the freedom of the press. Presumably, too, the image of the non-members would be diminished.

An additional proposal made by the author is the imposition of a legal limitation on cross-ownership of a maximum of two different media.

## IN THE LIBERAL TRADITION: "HA'ARETZ" / Avi Katzman

*Ha'aretz*, Israel's respected daily, was first published in 1918 as *Hadashot Meha'aretz Hakedoshah* ("News from the Holy Land"), an organ of the British army in Palestine. As such, its origins lie, indirectly, in the tradition of the London *Times*, as it was first edited by Lt.-Col. Harry Pirie-Gordon, who in civilian life was an editor of the *Times*. Bought out in 1919 by a group of liberal, anti-socialist General Zionists who had been closely associated with the Hebrew press in Russia, *Ha'aretz* was molded by editor Moshe Gluecksohn (1922-37) and by its loyal financial backer, I. L. Goldberg.

From the start, the paper was informally identified with the leadership of the Zionist Organization, and particularly with Dr. Chaim Weizmann, and followed a moderate pro-British, as well as an anti-Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) line. At the same time, it maintained an independent, unaffiliated identity and was

committed to qualitative reportage, critical, anti-populist commentary and a pro-civil rights anti-clerical stance.

Gluecksohn, a religious Jew from Poland who had been educated at the Universities of Marburg and Berne, combined activism in the left-Progressive wing of the General Zionists with an admiration for Maimonides' golden rule – the acceptance of the condition of conflicting views and the ability to navigate between them. He imbued *Ha'aretz* with a spirit of "regulative scepticism," self-criticism and the "courage of the middle road" at a time when the press in the *yishuv* was largely politically sponsored and had built-in readerships. Summing up the paper's credo on its tenth anniversary in 1928, Gluecksohn wrote of the difficulty of "taking a stand without having a platform" and without a "rebbe and followers," pointing out that a public person

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who didn't "shelter himself in the shade" of one of the two major political camps (the left and the right) was liable to become the "target of the arrows of both."

*Ha'aretz*, he wrote, "seeks to fill the needs of the public, but not to do its bidding." Rather, he believed, it should serve as a bridge between the various sectors of society. Only through cooperative national endeavor and solidarity, he stressed, would Israel's salvation come to pass, and when that time came, he wrote, he hoped that the paper would be remembered as devoted to planting the seeds for it day after day. Outspokenly critical of the public, Gluecksohn portrayed it as small-minded, mean-spirited and strangulating. Putting out a paper in Eretz Yisrael, he wrote, was like working in a house of glass: the necessary distance between journalist and readership was absent.

With this, Gluecksohn was a convinced nationalist, fearlessly challenging the British authorities editorially, even at the price of closures of the paper. He also stood up to the paper's new owner, S.Z. Schocken, in 1935, and was eventually fired. Schocken's son, Gershom, who became the new editor, shared Gluecksohn's liberal instincts. An admirer of the enlightened German press, he, too, was tenaciously non-party and pluralistic in his approach to the newspaper, which he believed should be a vehicle for information of the widest possible variety and for a wide range of views. Personally, he was to become a supporter of the Rafi wing of the Labor movement and an avid admirer of Moshe Dayan during the 1967-73 period. However, possibly because of his foreignness (he was a new immigrant from Germany when he began his association with the paper), he maintained a certain distance from the Israeli milieu, which was conducive to nurturing the

paper's elitist conservatism.

One of *Ha'aretz's* finest editorial writers, Dr. Moshe Keren, articulated the paper's *raison d'être* in 1953 in defending it against accusations of being overly critical and thereby "lowering morale" at a time of desperate national effort. "Whoever really loves his country with all his heart," Keren wrote, "had a particular duty to be sensitive to its failings and to the dangers that lurk as a consequence.... If [a newspaper] reaches the conclusion that...the authorities' approach to certain problems is not likely to lead to a successful solution, or might even cause real damage to the state, the newspaper must fulfill an oppositionist role."

Conceivably, the patriotic commitment of *Ha'aretz* was such that the paper did not fit the classic definition of "liberal." The paper took part in the voluntarily established Editors' Committee, whose task was to keep the newspaper establishment informed of security information banned for publication. Nevertheless, *Ha'aretz* had a contentious relationship with this body and eventually, in contrast to other newspapers, questioned the need for it entirely.

On the one hand, *Ha'aretz* represented a nationalist point of view, albeit balanced and restrained, yet on the other, it was ever ready to take on the government, violate censorship rules, or contest them in court. Ultimately, publisher and editor Schocken largely succeeded in producing a newspaper whose trademark was pithy editorial commentary, objectivity and credibility. It was never neutral, as Schocken pointed out in an editorial in 1977 – it was political, i.e., it took a stand on issues that affected the public, yet it was never politically affiliated.

## REQUIEM FOR WHAT ONCE WAS: ISRAEL'S POLITICALLY SPONSORED PRESS REEVALUATED / Yoram Peri

The expiration of the pioneering labor movement organ, *Davar*, 71 years after it had been founded in pre-state Tel Aviv, symbolized for many an inevitable, and perhaps even positive stage in the history of the Israeli media: the end of the era of the political press, and full integration into the world of the free press. The question that arises is whether privatization at any price and in every area, including the cultural domain, is preferable to a politically funded press free of the constraints of ratings and the owners' profit motive; whether public ownership, even if politically oriented, cannot champion the public interest better than ownership that is

guided by commercial motives; and whether qualitative media can be more educational than commercial media.

Most of the Hebrew press during the *yishuv* (pre-state) period was party-sponsored. At the time of the proclamation of independence in 1948, the country had 12 Hebrew party newspapers and only six commercial ones, with two-thirds of the approximately 220 journalists working for the politically sponsored press. In the highly politicized milieu then, a party organ was considered essential to the success and prestige of the party, with the party leader himself serving as editor in chief or at

the very least editorial writer. This was the case, for example, in Hashomer Hatza'ir (later Mapam), whose daily, *Mishmar* (later *Al Hamishmar*), was carefully supervised by party leaders Meir Ya'ari and Ya'akov Hazan, and with Mordecai Bentov, a minister in the government, serving as editor in chief. Ahdut Ha'avodah leader Yisrael Galili, later a key member of Prime Minister Golda Meir's inner circle, served on the editorial staff of his party's paper, *Lamerhav*, while its editor, Moshe Carmel, was a member of Knesset and a minister in the government. General Zionist leader Peretz Bernstein was editor of his party's paper, *Haboker*, as well as a minister in the government. Founder and editor in chief of Mizrahi's (later the NRP) paper, *Hatsofeh*, was Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, a leader of his movement. The veteran leader of Agudat Yisrael, Rabbi Menahem Porush, was the publisher and editor of the movement's daily, *Hamevaser*. The co-editors of Po'alei Agudat Yisrael's *She'arim* were movement leaders Benjamin Mintz and Kalman Kahane. The volatile Moshe Sneh, leader of the Communist Party, was editor of its organ, *Kol Ha'am*. Herut parliamentarian and economics guru Dr. Yohanan Bader was publisher and managing editor of the movement's daily, *Herut*.

*Davar*, perhaps, was the archetype. Berl Katznelson, the founder of Israel's Social-Democratic movement, served on its editorial staff and in its management, as did Zalman Shazar (later president of Israel), Moshe Sharett (later prime minister and foreign minister) and a number of members of Knesset. Moreover, such prominent literary figures as Avraham Shlonsky, Natan Alterman, Dov Sadan, S. Yizhar and Hayim Be'er were columnists or regular contributors.

Political parties in the pre-state era were not merely vehicles for choosing leaders at election time – they were permanent communal institutions, or clubs, or even family. They provided jobs, home financing, education and health services, cultural activities, sports clubs and, of course, a newspaper. The party's newspaper was integral to its very existence. When a faction split away from the mother party, it immediately started a newspaper of its own, and when parties merged, they merged their papers as well. Editorials in these papers had a major influence on political life. Some observers have labeled this press elitist, in that it served as a tool for preserving the status of the leaders. Others, however, find that party newspapers played a valuable watchdog role within their movements.

In contrast to the American system of government, where political parties are relatively weak and a political press has barely existed, parties in European countries constituted the very foundation of the political system, and the political press was highly developed. In Norway, for example, political newspapers actually preceded the formal establishment of the first political parties in the last century.

A differentiation must be made, however between the extent of the political newspaper's dependence on, and subservience to, its sponsor: some served explicitly as an arm of the party leadership, while others, at the opposite extreme, spoke for the internal opposition to that leadership.

By the 1960s and '70s, such differentiations appeared irrelevant to the Israeli public, which began its abandonment of the political press. The main reason went to the very essence of the party-sponsored press: the traditional emphasis on political commentary over news reportage, which was regarded as secondary. Moreover, the news that was carried passed through an ideological screening process that regularly eliminated items considered uncomfortable for the movement. The more doctrinaire the political movement, the more acute was its organ's ideological censorship. Significantly, however, there was a broad inter-party consensus in the Israeli press in one area – national goals, i.e., security, the ingathering of the exiles, the building of a new society and the settlement of the land.

With the widening of the gap between the ideologically motivated concept of a newspaper as an educational tool, and that of the commercial press, which was reportorial and critical, the former began losing readers systematically. The public perceived the commercial press as offering information that was more extensive, more detailed and more accurate. Even the writing style of the two differed: the commercial papers increasingly adopted a modern, idiomatic style, while the party papers retained the quaint, flowery old-time style.

*Davar*, as the organ of the Histadrut – General Federation of Labor, differed from other party newspapers in that its motivating ideology was broader: it sought to speak for all workers regardless of party and served as a platform for various labor trends. Internally, it was controlled by a Mapai-oriented board, but this did not make it subservient to Mapai (or later to the Labor Party), and multiple views were aired on its pages. The paper underwent a rejuvenation in the 1970s under editor Hannah Zemer, adopting a contemporary style and an independent, more critical, point of view, reversing its circulation slump for a while. Ultimately, however, the paper declined.

To some extent this was due to the same reasons that accounted for the fading of the rest of the politically sponsored press, yet it also signalled another development: the decline of the labor movement itself. In the wake of the Six Day War, the labor ideology ceased to be the driving force in Israeli society and was replaced by new trends, especially the ideology of the nationalist right. Moreover, the entire Histadrut conglomerate, which included *Davar*, had long been mismanaged, its revenues consistently squandered. It was this last factor, more than any other, that accounted for *Davar*'s demise.

In the author's view, the commercialization of culture, which positions the consumer as the sole determinant, constitutes a distortion of values. Rather, the journalist has the right and the duty to exercise his/her professional judgment in establishing cultural norms. Israelis, in moving away from the old credo of a society in the service of its country, have pushed the pendulum to the

opposite extreme – a worship of popularity ratings where the customer is king and the media the creators of a mass-produced culture. This trend has been countered in various European countries by publicly funded support for nonprofit ideological media, a concept that the author believes should be adopted in Israel in order to prevent a dangerous distortion of democracy.

## THE CRUEL FATE OF ISRAELI DAILIES / Yehiel Limor

As far back as 1863, when the first Hebrew newspaper in the Land of Israel, *Halevanon*, was launched in Jerusalem, publishers have struggled against daunting financial odds to put out newspapers and keep them afloat, a struggle that continues to the present.

While today, a total of 17 dailies operate in Israel, during the course of the 50-year history of the state, as many as 45 others closed down (documented in a series of valuable tables in the Hebrew version of this article). Put another way, only one out of every four dailies to appear in Israel since 1948 is still functioning, and their lifespan is not very long. The reasons involve economic, technological and societal factors.

Historically, daily newspapers were conceived for two main reasons: the public's need for up-to-date information, and a publisher who perceived this need and proceeded to fill it. The very first daily newspaper in the world, the English *Daily Courant* (1702), sprang from the avid interest of the English public in the conflict with France over the royal succession in Spain. An entrepreneur, one Samuel Buckley, decided to act upon this circumstance, thereby setting a precedent for other such investors both in his country and elsewhere. Side by side with the economically motivated press, an ideologically oriented press also emerged, which later branched out to a political party-sponsored press whose aim was to attract supporters of given ideas.

Eventually, both the commercial and the ideological daily press began shrinking (the party press has almost disappeared from democratic countries). In the U.S., the number of dailies in 1997 was approximately 1,500, compared to over 2,000 in the early years of the 20th century, and the decline has been even sharper in Europe. This occurred despite a rise in population, income, education and leisure time – factors that would ostensibly heighten the demand for newspapers.

The reasons for this decline are the displacement of the newspaper as the prime supplier of news, a role taken over by the electronic media; competition by alternative electronic media, home PCs and the Internet as information servers; a shift in commuter transportation modes from public transportation to cars,

thereby eliminating a traditional newspaper-reading time slot; the trend toward the incorporation of smaller newspapers into large communications conglomerates, thereby forcing out small independent papers; the high cost of the shift to modern technologies, which many small newspapers could not afford; and the imperative of new strategic, managerial and marketing techniques, which many communications empires, not to mention independent newspapers, failed to adopt.

In Israel, a governmental survey in 1995 revealed that 1,063 newspapers and periodicals were being published regularly, an overall rise of 38% as compared to the figure five years previously. However, while the number of periodicals had proliferated, the number of dailies had actually declined, from 22 to 18, and today the figure is 17: 7 Hebrew-language dailies (*Yedi'ot Aharonot*, *Ma'ariv*, *Ha'aretz*, *Globes*, *Hatsofeh*, *Hamodia* and *Yated Ne'eman*) and 10 foreign-language dailies, in Russian (*Vesti*, *Novosti Naidli*, *Vremia* and *Nasha Strana*), English (*The Jerusalem Post*), German (*Hadashot Yisrael*), Romanian (*Viatsa Nostra* and *Ultima A'ora*), Hungarian (*Uj Kelet*) and Arabic (*Al-Ittihad*). Inevitably, the lifespan of the foreign-language newspapers in Israel is finite, inasmuch as they serve an immigrant audience that eventually shrinks. The exception is the English-language *Jerusalem Post*, which also serves an audience of tourists, diplomats and readers abroad.

In terms of ownership of newspapers in Israel, 13 of the dailies (76%) are published privately and 4 (24%) are published by political parties. This contrasts sharply with the picture in the early years of the state, when party-sponsored papers constituted the majority, reflecting the widespread perception of a newspaper then as both a propaganda vehicle and a political status symbol. With the decline of the centrality of political parties in the country's societal and economic life, this press faded as well. Significantly, the four party papers that remain – three religious and one devoted to the Arab sector – serve more as communications media within their respective communities than as political tools.

With modern technologies creating new information highways,



the mass media have become interactive, permitting the consumer to access specific information at any time and turning the daily newspaper into an old-fashioned medium. Many papers throughout the world have responded by developing electronic editions alongside their print editions, although relatively few of these have proven profitable.

Two trends have emerged in the daily press in Israel: the number of foreign-language papers is shrinking (the Russian-language

press is the exception, due to the ongoing immigration process), while the number of Hebrew dailies has stabilized. Conceivably, one of the three major dailies, each of which belongs to a different conglomerate, may fold in the foreseeable future as a result of intense competition between the three parent bodies. This would mean a further shrinkage in the marketplace of ideas and opinions – a fundamental element of democratic society.

## ISRAEL'S ARMY MEDIA / Mordecai Naor

Like many Israeli institutions, the military media were initiated before the state was established. Each of the Jewish underground resistance movements of the 1930s and 1940s produced newsletters and newspapers and ran broadcasting stations, several of which metamorphosed after the establishment of the state into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) media, as well as into civilian formats. The foremost example of this transformation is *Bamahaneh* ("In Camp"), the IDF magazine published to this day, which started out as the organ of the Tel Aviv branch of the Haganah in 1934 and was incorporated into the Israeli army in 1948. Another ongoing publication from the pre-state period is *Ma'arakhot* (Campaigns/Systems"), a serious monthly/bimonthly devoted to military and defense issues that also began under the auspices of the Haganah (in 1939) and was adopted by the IDF.

Since the establishment of the state, several hundred army publications have appeared, most of them for internal consumption, though a few, dealing with issues relevant to the public, were sold by subscription and on newsstands. The latter include, in addition to *Bamahaneh* and *Ma'arakhot*, the *Air Force Magazine* – all three still ongoing. Other publicly circulated periodicals now no longer in print have included *Bamahaneh Nahal* (for the combined army-agriculture Nahal branch), *Bamahaneh Gadna* (for the pre-army Gadna program), *Mahanayim* (the organ of the military rabbinate), *Skirah Hodshit* ("Monthly Survey"), *Tsiklon* ("Kit Bag"), *Ma'arakhot Shiryon* ("Armored Corps Arrays"), *Ma'arakhot Yam* ("Navy Arrays"), *Alei Yam* ("Navy Folios") and *Kesher Ve'elektronika* ("Communications and Electronics").

The army publications were produced by three military divisions: the Education and Culture Unit of the IDF, the Hotza'at Ma'arakhot publishing unit of the Training Department, and the various corps, along with certain departments in the Ministry of Defense.

Often, the military media, including the IDF radio station, came under criticism both internally and by the public at large as wasteful or extraneous. Nevertheless, a number of the corps and units viewed their publications as vital, allocating both financial and manpower resources to publishing qualitative periodicals, or, in the case of the army radio station, programs. An unanticipated side development was the training by the army of journalists, editors, broadcasters, graphic artists, printers and photographers who later went on to pursue these careers in the civilian media.

Indisputably, the weekly *Bamahaneh*, whose first editor after it was adopted by the IDF was author Moshe Shamir, was the military media leader during the early years of the state, catering both to soldiers and to the entire public in line with a popular slogan then: "The entire country is the front, the entire nation the army." *Bamahaneh* reporters were the only media representatives allowed to accompany IDF anti-terrorist missions against *fidayun* (suicide fighters) bases inside Egyptian and Jordanian territory during the 1950s, giving the weekly a built-in advantage over the daily civilian press in reporting and photographing an aspect of the news that was vital. This state of favoritism evoked sharp criticism by the civilian press, although the problem receded of itself in light of the drop in terrorist activity following the Sinai Campaign of 1956-57 and the reduced intensity of defense topics thereafter.

Not coincidentally, the content of *Bamahaneh* shifted at that time to more civilian-oriented topics. It also adopted a magazine format with a new emphasis on bold graphics, large photos, background pieces and feature articles – elements that were a novelty in the staid Israeli press then. The magazine reached a peak of popularity between the Six Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, during which the country was largely caught up in the euphoria of victory and the myth of the invincible Israeli fighter – a perception cultivated, inter alia, by the media, including *Bamahaneh*.



*Bamahaneh*, as much of the military press, viewed itself as a multi-audience medium, publishing general-interest articles, cultural and arts columns, and interviews with the country's political leaders side by side with army-oriented pieces. Nevertheless, the 1970s witnessed the beginning of a decline in the popularity of this press, with several veteran publications coming to an end largely as a result of growing competition from the energized and expanding general periodic press. Moreover, the army command was unhappy with the often self-critical tone of some of its periodicals, resulting in a tightening of editorial control to preserve the desired IDF image. Another source of discontent was the enforced obligation of all officers to subscribe to *Bamahaneh* – an entrenched tradition in the IDF, leading to the cancellation of this duty in 1997 and a subsequent drop in subscriptions.

Even beforehand, however, in 1991, newly appointed Chief of Staff Ehud Barak announced a decision to discontinue 30 of the 33 army-sponsored periodicals in a budget-tightening move, leaving only *Bamahaneh*, *Ma'arakhot* and the *Air Force Magazine*. The glory days of Israel's military press were over.

By contrast, another veteran army medium, IDF Radio, remained vigorous, marking nearly half a century since its founding in 1950. Originally, it was established both for security purposes (as a rapid and efficient means of mobilization during

emergencies) and for another, uniquely Israeli, task: to help educate and integrate recruits, and the public at large, at a time of massive immigration, a role that the Israeli army as a whole adopted then and was to continue to play thereafter.

Still, IDF Radio remained a small, underfinanced station for years, broadcasting only four to five hours daily and featuring personal messages from soldiers, popular music and an informal broadcasting style (in contrast to the conservative Voice of Israel station). The introduction on IDF Radio of a soap opera-type series – Israel's first – in the 1960s, which became an instant hit, and an interview program on political topics, aroused controversy over the parameters of the station's scope, an issue that is still current. During the 1970s, the station expanded to include a mix of educational as well as light programming, and following the Yom Kippur War it became a round-the-clock station, retaining its popularity with its young audience while gaining stature with the intellectual and political communities as well. Moreover, army service at the station became a sought-after goal for recruits aspiring to careers in the electronic media. Each of the directors of the station (one of whom was the author, during 1974-1978), however, were forced to contend with a perpetual threat of closure for budgetary reasons. Conceivably, the consistently high popularity ratings of IDF Radio will continue to keep it on the air.

## “HA'OLAM HAZEH”: THE STORY OF AN ISRAELI POLITICAL NEWSPAPER / Michael Keren

In 1950, journalist and War of Independence veteran Uri Avneri bought out the weekly *Ha'olam Haze* (“This Week”), together with an army pal, and turned it into a vehicle for an unusual ideology in Israel at that time, based on four themes: an emphasis on Israel's young generation, perceived as free of ghetto culture and imbued with a new outlook; sharp opposition to a political regime based on religion, tradition or ethnicity; a hope for peace; and a rejection of entrenched Zionist platitudes, which needed to be replaced by new responses to the demands of a harsh contemporary reality.

*Ha'olam Haze* became a forum for the aspirations of young Israelis for whom Zionist ideology had become hollow, especially in light of its failure to produce a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict. Traditional Zionist solutions – Herzl's quest for a charter from the Great Powers; military force, as advocated by Jabotinsky;

the solidarity of Jewish and Arab workers, as socialist Zionism espoused; the bi-nationalism of the far left, which was unrealistic; the unworkable federation plan of the Brit Shalom peace camp; the theoretical neutralization of the Middle East promoted by the underground Lehi movement; or the “Canaanite” movement program to unify all the minorities of the region in opposition to Arab nationalism – all were outdated because they ignored the existence of a viable Arab nationalist movement.

What Avneri feared was what he had termed earlier, in a 1947 manifesto, as “Hebrew imperialism” – the inevitable supremacy, he predicted, of Israel's economic and military strength in the region, which would lead to long-range confrontation and not only would fail to suppress the Arab national movement but would actually fuel it. The solution that he proposed was a pan-Semitic entity that would transcend narrow Jewish/Arab self-interests as

well as traditional European imperialism and instead create a partnership based on the cultural, geographic and historic commonality of the peoples of the region. Israel's perception of its homeland, he believed, must be widened out to embrace a new Semitic unity of this kind. Such a unification plan was viewed by him as part of an even broader process of consolidation in eastern Asia under Nehru's India, as a third power between the Anglo-Saxon and the Euro-Asian spheres.

Avneri's theory had two central weaknesses: it focused exclusively on the cultural element of the history of peoples as a basis for political reorganization, canceling out ethnicity entirely; and it espoused a romanticized view of national existence that ignored all the extant political realities of the region.

Although this notion of Semitic unity served as the ideological basis of the new weekly, the appeal of the magazine, for much of its readership in the 1950s and '60s, lay in its aura of youthful rebelliousness rather than in its specific ideological platform. The new mix of sensationalism and political muckraking that the magazine pioneered projected the image of a forward-looking society emancipated from the weight of its past, with the promise of peace and prosperity just over the horizon. To achieve this promise, however, evil forces had to be overcome, and these were depicted in graphic detail each week. Such forces included the "dictatorship" of Ben-Gurion and his circle of young aides; the "network of darkness," i.e., the secret services; bureaucratic corruption; police wrongdoing; intrigues in the defense ministry; religious coercion; military censorship, and more.

Portraying itself as the defender of the country's image, *Ha'olam Hazeq* was indeed viewed by many young people as spearheading the struggle against corruption, political repression, ethnic discrimination and warmongering. Its systematic crusades against politicians, officials and bodies that it deemed guilty of wrongdoing made an indelible mark on public life. A notable example was its expose in 1969 of unethical behavior on the part of the leader of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party, Member of Knesset Menahem Porush, in such areas as charitable fund-raising, financial accountability, conflict of interest and personal integrity as a representative of Israel abroad. The magazine's reportage exposed the possibility of the existence of

political corruption in a sector that had previously been thought to be above such practices.

Ostensibly, *Ha'olam Hazeq* filled the function of a fighting critical newspaper in a democratic society. Yet, the magazine's style was problematic in this context. While it dared to investigate topics that had been considered untouchable until then, it did so in a self-righteous, ideologically motivated spirit that bordered on malice. This approach reflected a purist mindset regarding an imagined readership perceived as a young, untainted generation of Israelis who viewed their newly emerging state with distress and even repulsion.

Avneri was to refer on various occasions to a vow he had made after being wounded during the war, namely that if he survived, he would dedicate the rest of his life to two goals: preventing any future war, and ensuring that the state remain pristine, free and just. Inasmuch as the unfolding reality did not live up to these ideals, every means to overturn the existing regime was viewed by him as acceptable. The state, as depicted by *Ha'olam Hazeq*, was despotic and evil, haunted by the shadows of the past and in turn persecuting large sectors of its own citizens.

To the magazine's credit, many of its crusades were justified, especially its exposure of financial scandals, its opposition to religious coercion, and its demand for freedom of self-expression in such contexts as the Lavon affair, when military censorship was exploited for political ends. Yet, the paper's style, rather than contributing toward strengthening norms of fair play, added yet another element of invective to public discourse that was already crudely acrimonious. Moreover, while performing an invaluable service in challenging the puritanism of the East European socialist conventions that were entrenched in Israeli society, *Ha'olam Hazeq* also promoted various role models who became the darlings of the gossip columns but fell far short as sources of cultural inspiration for the new generation of Israelis.

At the root of the magazine's weakness lay its youthfully superficial, purist view of politics. Intolerant of the basic give and take of the political process, with its inevitable human accouterments of passion and ambition, *Ha'olam Hazeq* fought not only against corruption in politics but against every

## RIGHTIST POLITICAL DAILIES IN ISRAEL: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS AND THE FAILURE OF PRIVATIZATION / Aryeh Naor

The right in Israel published four dailies following the establishment of the state: *Hamashkif* ("The Observer"), the organ of the Revisionist Party, which closed down when the party failed in the elections for the Founding Assembly; *Herut* ("Freedom"), the organ of the Herut Party, published during 1948-65; *Haboker* ("This Morning"), the organ of the General Zionists, which closed in 1965; and *Hayom* ("Today"), the unofficial organ of the Gahal Party, which replaced *Haboker* and *Herut* in the wake of a merger of both sponsoring parties and appeared during 1966-69.

The financial difficulties of the rightist parties, which did not have the access to public resources that the left-wing party in power (Mapai) had, brought about the demise of the rightist political press earlier than occurred in the leftist press. Ultimately, however, the political press as a whole ceased playing a significant role in politics and public discourse, for in all cases they were preaching to the converted. Moreover, efforts at privatization as a solution were doomed from the start, inasmuch as an a priori commitment to an ideology or a political position is inherently incompatible with putting out a viable newspaper.

Underlying the expiration of the politically sponsored press in Israel was a broader transition that was taking place, from the collective ethos of the *yishuv* and early state period to an ethos of individualism. A related factor was the more qualitative and professional journalistic level of the non-party press, which prompted the political leaders themselves to attach greater priority to exposure in those newspapers than in their own press. In turn, the

audience for the party press kept shrinking, despite the dramatic growth of the population generally, the Hebrew readership particularly, and the number of members of Knesset in the Herut Party from 1948 to the latter 1960s.

Of the four newspapers in question, the last to be published, *Hayom*, was privatized under the assumption that financial viability would stimulate political vitality. This assumption proved erroneous because the paper's professional and technical infrastructure was weak, with the result that it was an ineffective medium. The collapse of the paper in 1969 thus signified both a political and a professional failure. Further evidence that the notion of privatizing a politically affiliated organ was intrinsically unworkable was to be demonstrated 25 years later when the Histadrut-sponsored *Davar* attempted the same process in a vain effort to save itself from closure.

Notably, *Hamashkif*, *Herut* and *Haboker* served as a training ground for some of Israel's leading journalists, including Aryeh Dissenchik, Shalom Rosenfeld, Shmuel Schnitzer and Moshe Zak, who were to become editors of *Ma'ariv*; Aviezer Golan, Shlomo Nakdimon, Eitan Haber and Zvi Kessler, who became senior writers for *Yediot Aharonot*; and Yoel Marcus, Dan Margalit and Uzi Benziman, who became the leading editorial writers at *Ha'aretz*. This only illustrates that even the most talented journalists cannot produce a good political newspaper. In truth, the terms "newspaper" and "party" do not go together, even if one of them is privatized or if both are privatized together.

## LOCAL NEWSPAPERS IN ISRAEL: AN ABSENCE OF LOVE / Roni Milo

The author, formerly mayor of Tel Aviv, charges that local newspapers in Israel aim to snipe, mock and criticize, and show no affection toward their city. Avoiding in-depth analyses of the city's needs, they rely, rather, on superficial headlines and on targeting the mayor for blame. Many local reporters view their job as a springboard to the national press and seem to believe that bashing the local administration will help them make a name for themselves. In the process, the basic *raison d'être* of the local newspaper – greater opportunities to cover municipal affairs, which receive little attention in the mass national daily press – has been cast aside over the years. The local newspapers have become just additional papers, their main articles devoted to non-municipal

topics.

By way of example, a crucial topic for Tel Aviv is the pressing need to provide the city with a public transportation system suitable for the 21st century. Instead of supporting the mayor in his efforts to fill this need, the local papers chose to discredit this intention as a gimmick; ignore the major investment of resources made by the city to advance plans; and neglect to report that implementation is blocked only by a national budgetary problem. They also glossed over the inescapable process of permits and other bureaucratic procedures that are part of the Israeli reality.

Another example is the issue of Yarkon Park, which the Tel Aviv weekly *Ha'ir* ("The City") systematically claimed was about to be

encroached upon by the mayor, totally disregarding the development and expansion of park space in the city under his administration. Furthermore, the local press incessantly spotlighted the mayor's trips abroad, but neglected to acknowledge the \$40 million that he raised for municipal projects during those trips.

The local press thereby creates an atmosphere of alienation

between the city's residents and the municipal administration, neutralizing any benefit inherent in the existence of this press vis-a-vis the national press. This may have something to do with the fact that the reporters tend to be young and transient, and do not relate to the city with the sense of rootedness of families and old-timers who rely on the city's educational and welfare services and who make up the backbone of the city.

## THE ARABIC PRESS IN ISRAEL / Salem Jubran

The emergence of an Arabic press in Israel stemmed from the development of the economy, society and educational system of the Arab sector and its adoption of Israeli political and communications norms.

Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, the Arabic press in Palestine was poorly developed, existing, such as it was, in three major cities – Jaffa, Jerusalem and Haifa. With the end of the Jewish-Arab war in 1948, only 155,000 Palestinian Arabs remained in Israeli territory, the vast majority of them farmers or Bedouins, with only 8% residing in the Arab cities of Nazareth and Shfaram and the mixed Arab-Jewish cities of Acre, Haifa, Jaffa, Lod and Ramleh. Even this urban sector lacked an upper or middle class, or any intelligentsia, and, like the rural villages, was a non-dynamic society with no political or intellectual base to spur the development of a press.

Two Arabic papers did appear immediately after the establishment of Israel: *al-Itihad* ("Unity"), an outgrowth of the British Mandate-period organ of the Arab Communists, later to become the organ of Maki (Israel Communist Party); and *al-Yawm* ("The Day"), published jointly by the Israeli government and the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor).

With the passage of time, other political parties took root in the Arab community, prompting the emergence of additional newspapers. In the late 1950s, a weekly, *al-Ard* ("The Land"), was launched by a new party of the same name espousing radical nationalism of the Nasserist Pan-Arab brand. Hostile to Communism as well as to Israeli rule, it championed Palestinian nationalism and highlighted the collective memory of the Palestinian tragedy. The newspaper was closed some two years after it was launched when its sponsoring party was declared illegal by the Israeli government.

Although the societal underpinnings were not yet in place for an independent non-party daily Arabic press, a periodic press developed that was partly party-sponsored and partly independent. In the early 1950s, the Communist Party began publishing a monthly for young people, *al-Rad* ("The Future"), which

eventually attained a large circulation and significant influence during the 1970s. Thereafter, it declined and closed. At the same time, Maki launched a literary and ideological monthly, *al-Jadid* ("New"), founded and edited by Emil Toma, Emil Habibi and other intellectuals, which was to play an important role in fostering local Arab literature. In time, the leading young poets and writers of the Arab community in Israel worked on its staff. *Al-Jadid* closed in the late 1980s as a result of the crisis in the Communist Party.

The first independent periodical to appear, *al-Mujtama'* ("Society"), was launched in Nazareth in 1954 by poet-educator Michel Hadad. It was the first publication truly devoted to literature, the arts, philosophy and social thought, eschewing a political point of view. As such it was attacked by Maki as being a front for the government, on the premise that neutrality was a nonexistent phenomenon. *Al-Mujtama'* made an important contribution as a literary haven for a generation of young writers of a romantic bent with moderate nationalist leanings who were intent on modernizing Arabic literature.

A second apolitical independent periodical, *al-Sharq* ("The East"), was begun in the early 1960s by Mahmud Abbasi as a monthly (today a bimonthly).

A bilingual (Arabic-Hebrew) literary quarterly published during the 1970s by the Histadrut's Jewish-Arab Center, titled *Laka'a-Mifgash* ("Encounter"), made an important contribution despite its politically sponsored origin. Edited by a group of Arab and Jewish writers and thinkers, it offered a unique opportunity for cross-cultural contact, especially by introducing Jewish readers to Arabic works in translation.

All these literary periodicals played an important role in developing and advancing a distinct local culture and an intellectual cohesiveness within the Arab population of Israel.

With the passage of over 30 years, during which the community developed its own intelligentsia, witnessed the growth of a middle class, and became experienced in multi-party politics, the time was ripe for the emergence of a commercial press. The first such paper

was a weekly, *al-Sinara* ("The Hook"), published in Nazareth by public relations expert and journalist Lutfi Mashur. Begun modestly, it grew to over 80 pages and is now published twice-weekly. A second weekly in the private sector, *Kul al-Arab* ("All The Arabs"), published by the al-Bustani advertising

agency, soon emerged as a serious competitor to *al-Sinara*. A third private weekly is *Panorama*, published in Taibe.

Additionally, a large number of local newspapers are published in the Galilee, the Triangle region and the mixed cities.

## ISRAELI BROADCAST PROGRAMMING AS A REFLECTION OF SOCIETY / Tamar Liebes

The changing nature of the electronic media, both technologically and institutionally, as well as the array of formats and contents in the media, reflect various stages of development in Israeli society and illuminate the widening cracks in its cultural hegemony. Specifically, the media in Israel reveal the meteoric metamorphosis of Israeli society from naive solidarity to a so-called consensus by which both the government and the media function as a thin overlay of a society factionalized by numerous cultures which openly compete for control, while the ethos of Western democracy gradually erodes.

Looking back, the first two decades of the State of Israel – the 1950s and '60s – appear as an innocently enthusiastic era, with state radio – the sole electronic medium then – reflecting the paternalistic, self-evident belief in the rapid integration of masses of immigrants to a secular Western "Israeli" culture that immediately after independence had in fact become, numerically, a minority culture.

TV appeared just after the euphoria of the Six Day War, at the start of a new period in which repressed religio-messianic and religio-ethnic forces began to emerge, leading to a renewal of primal tribal identities. The 1970s and '80s were also a period of protest against wars that did not elicit the traditional popular consensus, and a period in which Israelis in the political center felt less bound to the collective. TV, however, displayed no greater awareness of these changes than the establishment that sponsored it, and continued to highlight the country's hallowed institutions. It gathered the state around "Dallas" and "Love Boat," but also around "Pillar of Fire," the powerful TV series based on the BBC "World at War" format, which presented historic episodes in contemporary Jewish history that heightened a sense of nationalist feeling and made an indelible impression on the country.

Even more than state radio, state TV was expected by the authorities to act as a national unifier. In some ways this was achieved, in the sense that approximately 70% of the population watched the prime time news nightly, which generally formed the

basis of the following day's conversation. Perhaps the greatest moments that TV evoked were in covering history in the making, such as the rescue of the kidnapped Israeli passengers in Entebbe in 1976, the arrival of Egyptian President Sadat in Jerusalem in 1977, and the arrival of Prisoner of Zion Natan Scharansky in Israel in 1986. TV also invented its own national rituals, for example the widely anticipated announcement of the results of its straw poll in advance of the national election results.

During the third societal stage – the 1990s – the media that are state-sponsored have come to reflect the performance of a government ruling over competing sectors openly hostile to one another and to the establishment, such as the settlers in the territories, Shas (ultra-Orthodox Israelis of Sephardic origin), the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi *haredim*, the Arabs of Israel and the immigrants from Russia. Aware that national unity is a thing of the past, the government decided to marginalize public television by opening up a large selection of entertainment channels that feature sex, violence, celebrities and vulgar talk shows, with the aim of neutralizing public debate and contributing to the de-politicization of the public. This process encourages the entrenchment of segmented cultures in their own enclaves, informed by their own media, while leaving mainstream Israelis the choice of surfing the post-national, undifferentiated channels or simply shutting off the TV set.

The recent "Open Skies" Law passed in the Knesset will complete the transition of Israeli TV from a vehicle for involving the population in the country's political and social agenda to a video shop offering cheap entertainment, with each channel competing for the maximum number of viewers. Two sociological factors may be said to underly this development: the shift by the mainstream to greater individualism, and the tendency by both the ultra-Orthodox and the immigrant sectors toward self-segregation and even, in some cases, toward creating an alternative hegemonic culture.

## ISRAEL'S TV CULTURE / Gabriel Weimann

The roots of Israel's "ratings culture" go back to the 1930s, the early days of radio in Palestine. Due to the limited availability of broadcasting frequencies (in contrast to the unlimited opportunities inherent in the print medium), two broadcasting models developed worldwide: the private/commercial model followed in the U.S., and the public/state model adopted in Europe and most other parts of the world, including Palestine, later carried over by the State of Israel. The public model perceives broadcasting as a national resource, with ownership, accordingly, in the hands of the state and funding derived from a compulsory fee and government allocations.

This model, which was exemplified by the BBC, was entrenched in Israel for a long period, until, as occurred in many countries, public broadcasting collapsed. The state had difficulty subsidizing the costly broadcasting array; competition from a media world without boundaries, as exemplified by satellite broadcasting, blunted the state's ability to restrict the import of broadcasts; and the success of the commercial model led to the decline of public broadcasting.

By the 1990s, Israel's state monopoly of broadcasting had come to an end. After 25 years of single-channel TV, the country adopted a multi-channel mode with a second broadcasting authority for TV and radio, private franchisers, regional radio stations, and cable and satellite TV. In effect, a combined system now functions in Israel, with private broadcasting funded by commercial advertising operating side by side with state broadcasting backed by public funding.

This media revolution has had a significant impact on Israeli culture and on the rise of a ratings culture. For 25 years, Israelis gathered nightly around the tribal campfire of the country's single television channel, a TV monopoly unparalleled in any other democracy, which elicited accusations of cultural tyranny and political indoctrination by critics. Ostensibly, with the entry of Israeli TV into the multi-channel age, an era of pluralistic, varied and competitive TV had arrived, in which quality would rise to the fore. Soon, however, many of the hopes raised by multi-channel TV for cultural pluralism and qualitative content were dashed, to the point that an irrational nostalgia even exists here and there for the old single-channel days.

Surprisingly, the multiplicity of viewing options has not fragmented the Israeli viewing public significantly. Most viewers simply moved over to the livelier commercial Second Channel, prompting the publicly funded First Channel to make efforts to mimic its commercial competitor. This has led to a "safe-rating" mix of game shows, sports, entertainment shows, provocative talk shows, light news programs and sex-and-violence series. Ratings, in short, dictated catering to a low common denominator of light entertainment to please the public. The end result is that a new tribal

viewing pattern evolved, centering on the Second Channel and on aspects of it that have been incorporated by the First Channel. The illusion of cultural pluralism remains, therefore, just that – an illusion, a condition more dangerous than the era when any pretense of competition was absent, for the monolithic ratings culture masquerades as a varied heterogeneous array.

The launching of the Second Channel in 1993 was followed by intensive telephone surveys of viewer patterns, often methodologically flawed. This was later replaced by electronic monitoring (the "peoplemeter") of a selected population sample, jointly backed by media and advertising bodies, which pointed to the same formula for rating success as had been demonstrated in the U.S. for years: a mix of comedy, sports, news, disasters, celebrities, games with prizes, and a small proportion of serious content.

The Israeli campfire of vanities has been unchanging ever since: although the presenters come and go, the content and formats remain fixed. Night after night, most Israelis are drawn to this source of cultural junk food, content to be pacified by vanities and diversions.

In effect, ratings have become Israel's new cultural aristocracy – dominant, competitive and inflexible. Joining this aristocracy requires no pedigree and no mental or material attribute. The test is purely the rating itself. Whoever attains it is in. The aristocracy consists of comedians, starlets, presenters, fashion models and a small group of TV politicians who have become entertainers. Inasmuch as this elite is defined and tested entirely in terms of ratings, it seeks to entrench its status by every means, engendering a solidarity of mutual promotion between presenters and celebrities. This cultural elite has succeeded in an impressively short time in displacing the traditional elites, such as political and military figures. What is insidious is that the leaders of all sectors of society – politicians, military officers, industrial and economic leaders – must seek opportunities to appear on TV programs in order to preserve their status. Ten minutes on a talk show gives an air force commander the kind of public exposure and social prestige that long years of combat duty and battles cannot. To gain this exposure, respected public figures willingly consent to take part in such TV antics as dressing up in costumes, cavorting in comical routines, or facing confrontations with panel "guests" on trivial or degrading issues. The presenters have acquired an authority that is monolithic.

The nightly fare offered up by the ratings-inspired aristocracy is characterized by a low common denominator, the concept of entertainment at all costs, and shallow political commentary. Personalities who do not participate or cooperate are cast into oblivion for lack of exposure.

This dictatorship by the masses is knowingly implemented by

the TV producers, who either admit to and decry the vulgarity of the culture they have created, or, worse, deny its existence. Numerous surveys the world over have pointed to the influence of the medium of TV on violence, crime, cultural attributes and politics, and in particular on the cumulative damage to children and teenagers, who constitute the majority of "heavy viewers". Israeli surveys have shown a link between TV viewing and the incorporation by young people of such values as the accoutrements of money, success, social glamor and, above all, being and succeeding abroad. Other surveys reveal the link between widespread sexism in commercials and sexual stereotyping by young people, as well as the influence of viewing on the emergence of an attitude of cynicism and alienation toward politics and a loss of confidence in government.

Obviously, the Israeli TV producers are first and foremost business people, not cultural arbiters, and as such cannot be reproached. Yet, the question of monitoring these recipients of so major a societal and educational asset must be re-examined. All broadcasting media in Israel formally come under public supervision by broadcasting authorities. These bodies are managed by committees of public persons in education and the arts. However, the appointments to these committees are highly

politicized and openly party-oriented, and the real interests of the public are therefore not served. Other countries, especially in Europe, have taken measures to resist the penetration of foreign programming, encourage local productions, preserve native-language programming, and limit the extent of the vulnerability of the medium to the culture of ratings. Nevertheless, the underlying philosophical issue of the role of the media and who determines it is complex. The author's viewpoint is that the media have a societal mission to advance the public interest, widen public debate, and raise cultural levels. Society has a right to demand this of the media franchisers in exchange for the opportunity granted to them to profit financially.

With the virtual monopoly of the Second Channel over TV commercials being chipped away little by little by growing advertising on cable channels and, more significantly for the future, by plans to establish an additional commercial channel, more local cable channels, and digital satellite broadcasting, the present levels of production budgets are likely to be cut as advertising revenues reach their ceiling. This will mean cheaper, and consequently poorer, program content, and ever more aggressive courting of viewers in order to win the ratings battle.

## LITERARY SUPPLEMENTS IN THE ISRAELI DAILY PRESS / Nurit Govrin

Until recently, the line between literature and journalism in the Hebrew press had traditionally been blurred, a conception that went back to the emergence of Hebrew newspapers in the second half of the 19th century. The earliest Hebrew papers both in Europe and Eretz Yisrael were heavily weighted in favor of essays, stories and poems, with reportage of current events regarded as secondary.

This trend continued to be reflected in Palestine between the two world wars, with literary offerings, or commentary written by prominent literary personalities, considered the essential and most satisfying part of the newspaper. Even when news coverage gained prominence, every Hebrew daily during the first three decades of the State of Israel carried literary columns and published regular literary supplements, managed by a permanent literary editor. This carryover reflected a sustained editorial recognition that literary content and the contribution of acknowledged authors attracted readership. Moreover, it was a badge of distinction for both the newspaper and the party or movement with which it was associated.

In the 1980s, however, the nature of literary columns in the Israeli press began to change, a result of the nearly total

disappearance of politically sponsored newspapers, together with the entrenchment of a crude "new journalism" and mounting pressure for increased circulation. Editors began replacing short stories, poetry and essays with informational, newsy or gossipy pieces related to the literary world. Discussions of new books were shifted to the weekend supplement, with the content of these writeups focusing less on the book itself than on personal details about the writer. Literary columns were cut back in size, and only literary social events merited detailed coverage. An exception to this trend was *Ha'aretz*, which continued to take the thinking reader seriously, retaining its previous literary formats.

The principles guiding new journalism, which developed in Israel at the end of the 1970s and became dominant in the '80s and '90s, centered on "the right of the public to know," the dissemination of news "at all costs," a determined attempt to cater to the taste of the public, sensationalism, the invasion of privacy, the use of street language, and a crude critical style. While these crowd-pleasers had always existed, editors in the past had attempted to minimize the use of them, in the knowledge that shortfalls in revenue would in any case be made up by the



sponsoring political party.

The other dominant trend in the Israeli press during this period – the closure of most of the politically sponsored newspapers and the reduction in the number of general (non-religious) Hebrew dailies to three (*Ha'aretz*, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ma'ariv*), was linked to societal changes, especially the erosion of strongly held political ideologies and shifts in the composition of the political parties. In the wake of the shrinking of the daily press, increased pressure was exerted by writers on the literary columns of the surviving newspapers to showcase their work.

In this respect, the distinction between *Ha'aretz* and the other two dailies is significant: *Ha'aretz* has retained the full range and high level of its literary pages, presenting a mix of original Hebrew-language offerings and translated work, and balancing foreign with Israeli literature, aiming at an intelligent and educated audience. By contrast, *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ma'ariv*, submitting to circulation pressure, have cut down the space allocated to their literary columns, giving the impression that it is only the competition between them that preserves these columns at all, as neither paper wants to be the first to drop them entirely. Content has changed as well, with original prose and poetry now a rarity, having made way for abbreviated book reviews and items about book business. These columns have nearly ceased functioning as the central venue of Hebrew literary and cultural life, as in the past.

Meanwhile, the vacuum created by the disappearance of the party newspapers, along with their literary columns, has been

filled by alternative means, some of which are positive. *Ha'aretz* publishes a separate weekly, edited by Michael Handelzaltz, which focuses on new Israeli books and secondarily on foreign literary developments in a commendably thorough fashion. *Ma'ariv*, too, issues a special weekly, edited by Gal Ohovsky, which contains literary reviews alongside reviews of other cultural and arts media in Israel. The Friday “family” supplements of both *Ma'ariv* and *Yediot* regularly include lengthy interviews of authors of new books, although these focus more on the author than on the book. While this format may be better than nothing at all, it cannot be described as serious literary exposition. Moreover, books that are not promoted aggressively enough, or writers who are not considered sufficiently attractive, remain unexposed.

Another alternative venue that has emerged is local newspapers, which came into their own in Israel from the start of the 1980s. They, too, carry literary columns written by a permanent reviewer, although such columns are not given any special status and must compete with a large variety of other offerings in the area of culture and the arts – an arena that has expanded to include fashion, food, entertainment and leisure.

This lowering of the stature of literature to a subdivision of “culture,” and not necessarily its most important element, fits in with the postmodernist approach of our time, which has discarded the notion of an intellectual aristocracy and deems literature as equal in weight to all other societal trends.

## “CHRONICLES: NEWS OF THE PAST” – THE BIBLICAL PAST IN A CONTEMPORARY FORMAT / Drora Baharal

The most original newspaper in the history of the Hebrew press was undoubtedly *Chronicles*, a series that “covered” the entire biblical narrative, later extending to all of Jewish history up until Theodor Herzl’s time, with an emphasis on political events. Published in a contemporary newspaper format, it was written in journalistic style and contained reports from the field, features, editorials, letters to the editor and advertisements. Its editor was educator and journalist Dr. Israel Eldad, who had been a leader of the *Lehi* underground movement during the pre-state period and also edited the rightist periodical *Sullam*.

*Chronicles* was launched in Hebrew in 1952 (later published in English and Spanish) as a monthly and continued appearing in 48 issues that covered over 2,500 years of Jewish history. In total, it published half a million copies. The goal of the series, in the editor’s words, was to enliven Jewish history by utilizing a modern

newspaper format whose point of view was thoroughly Israeli and whose starting point was that “in every generation one is obliged to view oneself as if one personally came out of Egypt.”

The series painted a lively and multi-faceted picture of the lives of the Jewish forefathers that included their dramas, joys, tragedies, hopes and disappointments. The essentially political focus was rounded out by material on economics, society, religion and culture, while also illuminating the interrelationships between the various peoples in the region and beyond. So fresh and informative is the linguistic style that the contemporary reader relates easily to the events depicted. Pointed humor is revealed in such original (and historically accurate) juxtapositions as the fall of the walls of Jericho and the fall of Troy, under the headline: “Two Cities are Invaded by Virtue of Two Harlots,” authenticated by detailed listings of carefully researched historical sources.

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Undocumented stories, by the same token, are identified as such. For example, a detailed survey of political events in Egypt in the first half of the 14th century BCE is annotated as based on letters found at the important Tel al-Amarna archeological site in Egypt, while a depiction of the religious revolution led thereafter by the Pharaoh Akhenaton is noted as based on historical conjecture only.

In the introductions to each of the four bound volumes of 12 issues each, the editor explains why various events were selected as lead articles and in what way they constituted important landmarks in Jewish history, with suggestions for utilizing the newspapers as teaching aids. The table of contents of each volume indicates the central theme of every issue and contains a chronological table citing Jewish historic milestones, Hebrew and Common Era dates, and major parallel events in world history.

The construction of *Chronicles* is thematic, starting with the formative period when Abraham smashed the idols and left the old world on an odyssey to Canaan to found a new nation based on a new faith. The story moves on to Moses, who leads a by then expanded group of people out of slavery in Egypt to the promised land, finalizing the period of national and ideological coalescence. Thereafter, a period of state building begins, involving problems of conquest and settlement. The main headline in the final issue of the first volume, dated 1200 BCE, is pregnant with contemporary implications: "Canaan – The Land of Israel or the Land of the Philistines?" Another article deals with the establishment of the city of Hebron, named for its founders, the Habiru (Akkadian for Hebrew) tribes, while another report announces a law issued by the Philistine regime in Lachish forbidding landowners to sell property to the Habiru – issues that are strikingly timely.

Other problematic issues that are relevant several thousand years later were the supply of water in the region, as dealt with by Isaac in his attempted transition from sheepherding to farming; the uniqueness of the new Hebrew monotheistic religion; the status of

women, as reflected in the conflict between Hagar and Sarah; and ancient urban development as revealed by archeological finds.

In later volumes dealing with the long exile of the Jewish people, the editor's point of view is explicit: the Jews have no future anywhere without national independence, i.e., in Palestine. With this, and despite a history of persecution, repression and martyrdom, Jews in the Diaspora are also shown in pivotal positions as statesmen and military figures, for example in Babylonia. *Chronicles* traces the Muslim conquest of Palestine, the Khazar kingdom, and the feudal period in Europe, with the development of a large Jewish community there parallel to the decline of Jewry in the East.

The launching of *Chronicles* in the early 1950s soon after the establishment of the State of Israel was not historically coincidental. It reflected the intense interest in biblical research and widespread use of biblical symbols in a political context during the early years of state building. The Bible provided role models with which the new nation could identify, centering on the ancient roots of the Jewish people in the Land of Israel. With this, Eldad seemed to be attempting to balance out the popularity of the Bible heroes by showing that the long sojourn of the Jewish people in the Diaspora revealed acts of bravery and cultural and intellectual development that are no less integral in Jewish history.

Interestingly, although Eldad and David Ben-Gurion were sworn political enemies, the prime minister valued the *Chronicles* project. In his capacity of defense minister, Ben-Gurion saw to it that 1,500 copies of each issue were distributed to the army during the 1950s.

The reissue of the entire series in 1968-72 following the Six Day War and Israel's territorial expansion, and a second reissue during 1991-93 following the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords, when changes in Israel's boundaries loomed again, continued to demonstrate the startling overlap of past and present.

## THE WOMEN'S PRESS IN ISRAEL / Hannah Herzog

Although the Israeli women's press is not generally regarded as serious or prestigious, it maintains a large circulation on a sustained basis. The reasons for this success, and the societal trends reflected in this press, have not been systematically explored.

The first women's newspaper in the pre-state *yishuv* was *Tzvi Lebeit Ya'akov* (1893), edited by Haya Hirschenson and addressed to religious women in Jerusalem. By 1904, the secularist Hemda Ben-Yehuda, writing in her husband Eliezer's newspaper,

*Hashkafah* ("Outlook"), focused on women's manners, charm and the home. By the mid-1930s, regular women's columns appeared in all newspapers.

A significant development in the 1940s and '50s was an emphasis in these columns on women's legislative issues, women's organizations, and women's equality and welfare, side by side with practical questions of family nutrition during the long period of rationing in the early years of the state. A fashion column that had begun to appear in *Davar* at that time was discontinued

because of criticism that it negated the spirit of pioneering.

Organs published by women's movements preceded commercial women's magazines during the pre-state period. Probably the first of these sponsored periodicals, *Ha'ishah – Lehayeha Ule'inyanah Shel Ha'ishah Be'eretz Yisrael* ("The Woman – On the Life and Interests of the Woman in Eretz Yisrael"), was published during 1926-29 by Hadassah and the Jewish Women's Federation of Eretz Yisrael, and addressed various issues relevant to women of all political persuasions. These ranged from women's employment to women's status in politics to marriage among minors, all written from a decidedly feminist point of view. The Jewish National Fund published a monthly in Yiddish, "Daughter of Israel and Land of Israel," later renamed "Daughter of My People" (1930-40), providing information on women's organizations and their activities for immigrant women who had not yet mastered Hebrew. *Dvar Hapo'elet* ("Women Worker's News"), published by the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor) from 1934, later became *Yarhon Na'amat* – ("Na'amat Monthly"). WIZO's organ, *WIZO Bemedinat Yisrael* ("WIZO in the State of Israel"), was launched in 1948. The National Religious Women's movement began publishing *Dapei Pe'ulah* ("Activity Pages") in 1961. Women's periodicals in Arabic began to be published in 1964 by the Working Women Council. All these periodicals dealt with issues related to the status of women in society.

The first commercial women's magazine was *Olam Ha'ishah* ("Women's World," 1940-48). *La'ishah* ("For the Woman"), launched in 1947, proved more lasting, and is published to this day. Profitable from the start, *La'ishah* in fact made up for the losses incurred by its parent newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*. It eschewed political and economic issues and created a light, pleasurable and feminine ambience, playing an important role in organizing the

country's earliest national beauty pageant (1950), an "Ideal Homemaker" contest, and Israel's Mother's Day.

The only serious competitor to *La'ishah* was a reincarnated *Olam Ha'ishah*, a weekly begun in 1958 by *Yediot's* competitor, *Ma'ariv*, which lasted until 1961. *Ma'ariv* later launched a new monthly, *At* ("You"), in 1967, which continues publishing to the present. The feminist *Noga* began in 1980, joined during the '90s by *Lady Globes*, aimed at career women, and *Bat Melekh* ("King's Daughter"), aimed at religious and ultra-Orthodox women.

Interestingly, the women's organization-sponsored press – which aims to widen women's horizons and encourages involvement in public life – and the commercial press, have begun to move toward each other, the former in order to attract more circulation, and the latter adopting a more "serious" approach to appeal to the educated woman.

Editors and writers in Israel's women's press agree on certain overall characteristics of it: (1) It is commercially profitable. It has a long "shelf life," as women's magazines are often passed from hand to hand and are to be found in dentists' offices and at the hairdresser's. Moreover, the line between advertisements and editorial content is often blurred, with advertising material appearing in certain columns under the guise of editorial content, to the advertiser's delight. This is the case as well in the ultra-Orthodox women's press, where manufacturers of rabbinically approved products are eager to advertize. (2) The women's press is an important arena for discourse on such feminist issues as women's work/home conflict, women's femininity, and the status of the woman in society. The tensions engendered by new definitions of women's roles vis-a-vis the reality of their lives are reflected in this press, even if the proposed solutions do not always lean toward a change in the traditional image of the woman.

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## המחברים

סאלם ג'ובראן: משורר ומתנח, המרכז היהודי-ערבי לשלום, גבעת חביבה,

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