

Disparity Between Journalism Education and Journalism Practice in Four Maghreb States

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Abstract: This paper examines the major educational and training programs in journalism and broadcasting in Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia and Libya, and difficulties posed by the political, legal and media structural factors in the application of professional skills acquired through mass communication education. Observations made by journalists, students, academics and media administrators in these four Maghreb states reveal that a variety of political, legal, structural and cultural constraints are adversely affecting the professional practice of journalism and contributing to the disillusionment of an increasing number of professionally trained journalists. As a result, many of them turn away from journalism to enter advertising and public relations. A “bottom-up” approach to journalism is proposed, meaning that journalists focus on politically neutral news values to be able to practice journalism professionally.

Introduction: Information Revolution around the world has created a new challenge in countries that do not practice Western-style democratic systems or press freedoms: How to reconcile their journalism education curricula in an increasingly open global information environment to the often authoritarian or semi-authoritarian political systems around the world? North African countries of Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia -- collectively known as the Maghreb nations -- have pushed for professional education and training of journalists through government-sponsored mass communication institutes and specialized media workshops. The institutes have a combined enrollment of hundreds of students, a number of whom upon graduation and some journalistic experience pursue further media studies at pan-Arab institutions like the Arab States Broadcasting Union or at universities in Western Europe and North America. But the restrictive media environment owing to political, legal and structural factors makes it quite difficult for such professionally trained journalists to practice their skills with a high degree of professionalism so that they can compete effectively with

quality information choices on the Internet. The result is that an increasing number of well-educated journalists are said to find themselves disillusioned with journalism and turn to other communication fields.

This paper examines the major journalism education programs in the four North African states and the difficulties encountered in practicing professional skills acquired through journalism education. This qualitative study is primarily based on field research by the author in North Africa (See Note). Specifically, journalism education and/or training provided at the following institutions were examined: the Institute of Press and Information Sciences in Tunisia; the Center for the Improvement of Journalists and Communicators, also in Tunisia; the Arab States Broadcasting Union, based in Tunisia; the Higher Institute of Journalism in Morocco; the Higher Institute of Information and Communication in Algeria; and the communication studies degree program at the University of Benghazi in Libya. To determine whether real-life journalism allowed the graduates to practice their skills professionally, interviews were conducted with working journalists having degrees from these institutions, administrators and faculty members at the communication studies institutes in Tunisia and Morocco, and with journalism students in Tunisia and Morocco. Factors seen as adversely affecting professionalism in journalism are explored and implications for journalism curriculum and workable news values are proposed. Professionalism is defined as a journalist's ability to report on significant public affairs issues in an accurate, objective, fair and balanced manner.

Tunisia

Institute of Press and Information Sciences: Tunisia has the most comprehensive and well-developed facilities in mass communication education and training in the Maghreb. The Tunis University's Institut de Presse et des Sciences de l'Information (IPSI) has offered a four-year print and broadcast journalism degree program since 1967. IPSI's main goal, according to its dean, Ridha Methnani, is to bridge the gap between academic achievement and vocational needs by educating students to master the techniques required for professional work in a newspaper, magazine or broadcast newsroom.

Students wishing to study at IPSI apply to the Ministry of Education and Sciences for admission. The ministry selects applicants from among secondary school graduates, practicing journalists and foreign students. Admission prerequisites include secondary school studies in art and

literature, facility with French and English in addition to Arabic, and good oral and written skills. Approximately 5 percent of students are professional journalists. State aid is available to students seeking education in journalism and broadcasting.

The IPSI offers three "cycles of education" leading to a master's degree in journalism and a specialized master's degree. The following specializations are available: print media, radio, television, e-journalism and sports journalism. The IPSI contributes to research in the fields of information and communication sciences. It publishes a scientific journal and organizes international symposiums. Two-thirds of the curriculum of the first cycle is devoted to basic studies (languages, economics, law, information theory, history and geography, etc.), while the remaining third is devoted to studies in journalism. Successful completion of the first cycle leads to the awarding of Journalism Aptitude Certificate. Second and third cycle studies are more specialized. In the second cycle, students have to major in economics, political science or culture studies before focusing on their communication specialization. Studies include a two-month internship and the completion of a report on the internship. In the third cycle, students are required to do research work and write a thesis on a media-related topic before graduation. The institute has excellent facilities, including a specialized mass media library, a language library, computer labs, radio and television studios and production labs, a printing room, and satellite television.

Approximately 89 percent of the students graduate from the program. Dalila Ben Osman, a faculty member at IPSI, said the placement rate of graduates with print and broadcast industries is very high. A number of them are said to find teaching positions in high schools. Out of a total of about 500 students enrolled in 2005, 51 were from foreign countries, mostly from Africa and the Middle East. Sixty-five percent of the students were females. The institute has a total of 40 full-time faculty members and approximately 35 part-time faculty.

IPSI has a cooperative relationship with mass communication education institutes in several countries in Africa, Europe and North America. It has engaged in a faculty exchange program with the University of Missouri School of Journalism in the United States. IPSI Dean Methnani said that the objective of such educational opportunities is to make sure that its graduates will conduct their journalistic jobs professionally. As part of the Middle East

Partnership Initiative (MEPI), the School of Communication Studies at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has had an extensive educational and training relationship with IPSI. MEPI was founded by the U.S. Department of State to work with governments and people in the Middle East and North Africa to expand economic, political and educational opportunities.

One of the programs funded by MEPI is the U.S.-Middle East Universities Partnership Program linking colleges and universities in the U.S. Since 2003, educators from northwest Ohio and North Africa have been working together to enhance journalism education in Tunisia. The cooperation between the faculty from the School of Communication Studies at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) and IPSI has been funded by a \$100,000 grant from the MEPI in cooperation with Higher Education for Development and United States Agency for International Development. The program has involved hands-on journalism workshops for IPSI students, teaching workshops for IPSI and an intensive 3-week seminar at BGSU for students from both universities (Middle East Partnership Initiative, 2005).

The IPSI-BGSU collaboration has also focused on strengthening the IPSI curriculum to emphasize the importance of responsible reporting of key public issues -- particularly issues relating to women, the environment and the power of information technology to aid development. Before the United Nations held its World Summit on the Information Society in Tunisia in November 2005, BGSU faculty worked with two groups of IPSI students on news reporting, balanced coverage of international news, and coverage of human rights.

The partnership between BGSU and IPSI has been extended through an additional MEPI grant to bolster the Tunisian press institute's student newspaper. With help from the U.S. Embassy in Tunis, IPSI faculty applied for and received an additional MEPI grant to buy computer equipment so that their print students could regularly produce their own newspaper. At MEPI officers' urging, the grant was extended to involve an exchange between IPSI and a U.S. university. The exchange took BGSU students, the director of student publications and a professor to Tunis to work with the IPSI newspaper staff on newspaper management and news gathering skills (Middle East Partnership Initiative, 2005).

African Center for the Improvement of Journalists and Communicators: In keeping with its official policy of pushing for the development of indigenous communication systems in developing countries, Tunisia has established an institution called Le Centre Africain de Perfectionnement des Journalistes et Communicateurs (CAPJC). Inaugurated in February 1983, the center aims at improving the skills of professional journalists and communicators through refresher courses, workshops and specialized programs. It also provides training in the use of new technologies in the field of communications.

Ridha Najar, director of the CAPJC, explained that it was established with aid from Friedrich Neumann Foundation of what was then West Germany following requests by the Tunisian Ministry of Information and the Tunisian Association of Journalists. The administrative operations of the center are financed by the Tunisian government, which levies a special tax on press enterprises to facilitate continued training of journalists. The center operates under the jurisdiction of the State Secretary of Information. In recent years, the center has received funding from a variety of other international sources to finance its education and training activities. Among others, aid has come from UNESCO, the United States Information Agency, France, and the Arab States Broadcasting Union. These funds are used to cover travel, room and registration expenses of workshop participants, and to pay stipends to experts giving the workshops, according to the director of CAPJC.

The center has well-equipped print and broadcast laboratories. It also has a library and satellite telecommunications facilities to support its activities. Training sessions are conducted by academics and professionals from Tunisia and other countries, including the United States. The center holds approximately 12 training sessions per year, with each session lasting from one to three weeks, on topics such as "Arabic diction," "Page Makeup," "Economic journalism," "Sports journalism," and "Regional radio and television reporting." The center also offers evening courses, which are completed in six months. Director Najar said that most the center's activities are designed to improve the professional quality of print and broadcast journalism in Tunisia and other African countries.

The center is the partner of many institutions, including Friedrich Neumann Foundation and the African Center for training in publication and dissemination. Besides, the center collaborates with UNESCO, ALECSO, ASBU, USIA, and the European Union. The center has organized about 400 training sessions or seminars benefiting more than 6,000

participants from 77 countries from 1983 to 2005 (CAPJC, 2005-06). The center does not give any diploma, although a document indicating attendance in a training program is given. Topics for the center's activities are determined through surveys of media professionals.

Morocco

Higher Institute of Journalism: Morocco has only one journalism academic program supported by the state. There are several private programs, but their quality is not high. Mass communication education and training in Morocco is provided by the Institut Supérieur de Journalisme (ISJ) established by the government in 1977 and comes under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information. Located in the capital Rabat, ISJ offers only a graduate degree program, with specialties in print and audio-visual media. Applicants must have an undergraduate degree or equivalent and pass a competitive examination in order to be admitted into the program. The entrance examination consists of written and oral tests. Students are tested on their facility with languages, including English, German, Spanish and French, and on their general knowledge. Only about 10 percent of the applicants are accepted by the institute, which takes about 70 students each year. Approximately 50 percent of the students are females. About 50 students are from Morocco, with the remaining from other North African countries and some from as far away as Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Only about 25 percent of the students come into the program straight from their undergraduate education. The remainder is from government agencies, usually employed in some communication specialist capacity, who take study leaves to complete the degree program. Since Morocco has both Arabic and French-language media, ISJ offers curricula in both languages. Just over half of the students enrolled take the Arabic-language option, with the rest taking the curricula in French language. In the first of the two years of study, students take courses in Moroccan political institutions and economy, foreign policy and international relations, contemporary problems, communication law and history, media management, and introductory courses in print and audio-visual media. In the second year, they take theory courses such as sociology of information, media and national development, international law of information, advertising and public relations, and also pursue a specialized study in print or audio-visual media. ISJ encourages students to develop facility in other European languages, especially English, German and Spanish. There were 22 faculty members at the institute in 2005, with several holding doctorate degrees.

The institute has a good library and well-equipped computer laboratories. Students produce an Arabic-language newspaper called *Lissan Al Irfan* three times a year plus a magazine of the same name under faculty supervision. Students taking the French-language option produce a newspaper called *IS Journal* once a year. The institute subscribes to the Moroccan news agency, Maghreb Arabe Presse, and Agence France Presse to enable students to work with wire copy. There are excellent facilities for production work for broadcasting majors. In addition to the skills training, the institute also emphasizes the importance of communication research. All students are required to write a research thesis on subjects pertaining to communication and information sciences. Students receive a diploma in higher studies in journalism upon the satisfactory completion of all of these requirements. Naziha El Youssoufi, a faculty member at the ISJ, said that both the journalism curriculum and "hands-on" work with student publications emphasize the importance of reporting and writing in an "accurate, objective and responsible manner." Journalism graduates, she noted, were educated and trained to work for "specialized and serious publications".

A number of graduates receive advanced media training in France after they have had some professional experience in Morocco. Within the Arab world, the Damascus-based training center of the Arab States Broadcasting Union is an important source of refresher training. Moroccan media professionals also attend workshops given at the African Center for Improvement of Journalists and Communicators in Tunis.

In September 2008, the Moroccan Ecomédias press group will open a new journalism school in Casablanca. Forty students will get to be trained in everything from journalistic writing to how to prepare a radio show and also learn about country's press laws at the Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme et de Communication (ESJC).

"The idea for a journalism school was self-evident. Whenever we hire journalists for our various media outlets - whether print or radio - we train them. We have developed an internal training programme that runs between three to six months. Given the need to train these young people who enter the workforce, we said to ourselves, why not formalise our training programme through an actual school," Nadia Salah, editorial director for the Ecomédias group, said (RAP21, June 19, 2008).

Salah said the school will fill a void. "The only school with a good reputation is the ISJ (Institut Supérieur de Journalisme) in Rabat but this state-run institution graduates only 30 journalists a year and most of them end up as press secretaries for government ministries," she noted.

Students will be admitted to the school through entry exams, and there is an annual tuition fee of about 35,000 dirhams (3,500 euros). In the first year of study, the emphasis will be placed on acquisition of a sound general knowledge base, as well as improvement of French and Arabic language skills. "Since the public education system is so poor, we really need to emphasise these two areas in order to ensure a high standard of public service in journalism," Salah noted. At the end of the three-year program, students will graduate with a degree in their chosen specialty -- print, broadcast or web journalism. A further two-year program will be available for master's studies.

The courses will be taught by journalism professors and also Moroccan, French and Lebanese journalists. In addition, guest lecturers from other countries will regularly be invited to the school. The students will also be introduced to constitutional and press laws (RAP21, June 19, 2008).

Algeria

Degree programs in journalism are offered by four universities in Algiers, Oran, Constantine and Annaba . The programs take four years to complete. The institutes or departments offer courses in Arabic and French. Practical training for students is rare and often neglected. Most of the publishers and editors complain about their weak entry-level employees.

The most prominent of the journalism education programs is the Institut des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication (ISIC), which is a branch of the University of Algiers. ISIC provides four-year undergraduate degree programs in mass communication studies, with specializations in print writing and design, radio, television and public relations. The first two years' curriculum is heavy in theory, with the last two years focusing on studies in the specialty area (Faculte des Sciences Politiques et de l'Information).

The institute is successor to Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Journalisme (National Higher School of Journalism) established in the capital after the country's independence from France in 1962. Borrowing from the French tradition, the school initially offered journalism education at the graduate level. Students seeking admission into the program had to have a good undergraduate degree, preferably in social sciences, and pass a competitive entrance examination in general knowledge and writing skills. Education in the school tended to be heavy in theory, although students were placed as interns with area newspapers to obtain practical training.

Students can specialize to work for Arabic or French-language media in the country, although most newspapers in the country are published in French. The institute has well-equipped laboratories for hands-on training in print and audio-visual media.

ISIC maintains a cooperative relationship with sister institutions in Morocco and Tunisia, among others in the Arab world, and with a number of media institutions in Europe, especially France. Many Algerian journalists and other media professionals have obtained their education and training in France over the years. Algerian journalists have also taken advantage of media workshops and refresher courses offered by the Tunis-based African Center for the Improvement of Journalists and Communicators. Some public and private newspapers offer specific training via bilateral cooperation programs such as Germany's Foundation Friedrich Naumann, Centre Culturel Français, REMFOC (Réseau Euro-Maghrébin de Formation dans les Métiers de la Communication), Centre de Formation et de perfectionnement des Journalistes-Paris and U.S.-based Freedom House.

In late 2003, another journalism training program called Algerian Network of Journalism Trainers (Le Réseau des Formateurs de la Presse Algérienne) was established. It was created at the end of a three-part training program in Algiers, which focused on investigative reporting, human rights, and training media trainers. These sessions were conducted by the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) under Freedom House auspices with USAID funds. Two Algerian newspapers, *El Khabar* and *El Watan*, were local partners. One consultant trained 10 local journalists in investigative journalism and training techniques, and nine new trainers ran programs for 70 local journalists at nine newspapers. Each new trainer planned five to 10 additional sessions. In a final meeting held to review the initial in-house training sessions, the participants decided to create the new training network.

Members of the network are willing to work as local coordinators and recruiters for future journalism training programs in Algeria. The network is open to additional newspaper and representative journalist members. The new network already has requested additional training programs for Algerian newspapers and journalists (RAP21, November 26, 2003).

Libya

The Libyan government has shown a greater commitment to the training of broadcast journalists than their print counterparts. This situation is partly explained by the fact that there has not been a huge demand for trained personnel for print media following media nationalization in 1972, which resulted in the reduction of newspapers from 10 to one and the closure of many periodicals. Now there are only four daily, legislated newspapers in Libya, including the Arabic *Al Fajr al Jadid* (The New Dawn), published by the Jamahiriya News Agency (JANA). The Libyan state owns and controls the country's media and press systems. No opinions against the military rule are permitted. There is, by law, only one Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya Broadcasting system as the national television broadcast medium. No privately owned television stations are allowed.

Col. Muammar al-Qadhafi wanted media writing left to those who were ideologically in tune with him, which meant that political beliefs rather than journalism education was the key consideration in becoming a journalist, according to a Tunis-based Libyan journalist with his country's news agency, JANA, who chose to remain anonymous. The Qadhafi government, however, moved systematically to expand the size and operations of the broadcast media to promote its revolutionary fervor, necessitating an increased need for trained broadcast personnel, he added.

The University of Benghazi offers an undergraduate degree program in communication studies, where students can specialize in either print or broadcast media. Broadcast education, however, is more in demand because of the substantially increased job opportunities in that field. The government also provides financial incentives to journalistic and technical personnel in broadcasting to receive additional training overseas. Many journalists possess media and journalism degrees from Italy, England, the USA, or the Arab world.

At the University of Benghazi itself, the curriculum is heavy in the political indoctrination of students, focusing on Qadhafi's view of politics, democracy, and the "Arab nation," among other subjects. Skills training is provided in conjunction with the Libyan broadcasting system and other

media, according to the JANA journalist. Before the souring of U.S.-Libyan relations during the Reagan presidency, many Libyan broadcast personnel received education and training at American institutions. In 1975, for example, agreements were reached with the University of South Carolina and Ohio University to institute college-degree programs for broadcasting staff members (McDaniel, 1982, p. 190).

In recent years, Libyan media personnel have increasingly turned to training opportunities available within the Islamic world. They have included the Saudi Arabia-based Islamic States Broadcasting Services Organization, which provides training of personnel for member broadcasting systems, and the Tunis-based Arab States Broadcasting Union, which operates a training center from Damascus, Syria. A number of Libyan media personnel have participated in media workshops and refresher courses offered by the Tunis-based African Center for the Improvement of Journalists and Communicators.

Arab States Broadcasting Union

In addition to mass communication education and training available in the individual North African countries, broadcast personnel in North Africa have access to training opportunities provided by the Arab States Broadcasting Union (ASBU), the most important pan-Arab broadcasting organization. Established in 1969 with its headquarters in the Tunisian capital Tunis, the ASBU's major objective is to strengthen cooperation among broadcasting organizations in the 21 Arab states, including North Africa. Some of the specific aims of ASBU are a) to consolidate the spirit of the Arab brotherhood; b) to acquaint the peoples of the world with the authenticity of the Arab Nation, its capabilities, its aspirations and its causes; and, c) to help create a New World Communication Order that guarantees to all national cultures the right to emerge, to develop and to establish a constructive dialogue between them (Union de Radiodiffusion des Etats Arabes, 1994).

Among the permanent bodies of the ASBU is the Arab Training Center for Radio and Television, located in Damascus, Syria. It carries out specialized technical and news training courses throughout the year for the benefit of the staff of the ASBU member broadcasting organizations. The courses and related workshops are conducted by experts from international broadcasting organizations, educational institutions, and the ASBU member countries. In an interview, the news and sports coordinator of the ASBU, Jalila Kara, said that the "news training sessions focus on the development

of professional news values and carrying them out in an accurate, objective and responsible manner.” She added that broadcast journalists from North Africa "routinely" participate in the ASBU news training sessions.

The foregoing activities pertaining to journalism education and training indicate that there is a strong commitment to professionalism in journalism in North Africa, especially in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. We now turn to the views of the academics, journalists and students regarding the status of actual application of professional skills in North African journalism and factors that affect such application.

Professionalism in Journalism and Constraining Factors

The views of various journalists and students interviewed in Morocco and Tunisia regarding professionalism in the media are best reflected in the words of Jalila Kara, news and sports coordinator of the ASBU, who said that "the news policy in the entire Arab world, including North Africa, needs to open up so that the ASBU can facilitate a free, objective and balanced flow of information.” She explained that presently only news stories supportive of an individual government's political stance on national and international issues stood a chance of being aired. Ridha Najjar, director of the Tunis-based CAPJC, echoed the ASBU news and sports coordinator's concerns. "In spite of the work we have been doing to help bring up professional standards, professionalism in journalism remains the single biggest challenge in North Africa," he said. We examine below the factors that restrict professional journalistic work in the four countries.

Tunisia: Although professional journalism education and training dates back to 1956 in Tunisia, a Tunisian government information agency acknowledged that the country's media had little credibility before 1987 (*The Tunisian Mass Media*, 1994). The credibility problem was attributed to press censorship under the strong dictatorial rule of President Habib Bourguiba for over three decades, who was deposed in November 1987. His successor, President Ben Ali, eased controls on the press, but an 80-article Press Code enacted by the government in 1975 continues to effectively deny press freedoms promised under Article 8 of the Tunisian constitution and hinders objective coverage.

Dalila Osman, a faculty member at IPSI in Tunis, said that in spite of several reforms in the Press Code, "it makes it quite difficult for journalists to practice what they have been taught . . . to

always report in an accurate, objective and fair manner.” The Press Code contains many restrictive provisions, including broad powers to punish the "dissemination of false information," the publication or possession of publications which might disturb public order, and criticism of the President. The code protects all members of the government against "abuse and slander." Publications can be seized or suspended for these "crimes" or for threatening the public order (Code de la Presse, 1993). These and a variety of other restrictive provisions continue even after the code was "reformed" in August 1993 following a campaign led by Tunisian journalists, human rights groups and opposition parties against government censorship and control of the media, including the arrest and detention of journalists (IPI, 2005, Tunisia). The Press Law criminalizes defamation, and those who violate it can be imprisoned and fined.

Tunisia’s print media comprise several private pro-government and government-owned newspapers. Editors of the private media are close associates of Ben Ali’s government and typically heap praise on the leadership and its policies, while the government withholds advertising funds from publications that do not provide sufficiently favorable coverage. A few small independent newspapers, including *Al-Mawqif*, attempt to cover human rights issues and to publish mild criticisms of the government despite the difficult conditions, but their circulation is small owing to financial constraints (Freedom House, 2007). Government ownership of media outlets affects journalists' professionalism also. Hedi Zaouchi, a journalism graduate working for the government-owned news agency, Tunis Afrique Presse (TAP), said that although the agency provides some coverage of the opposition party activity in Tunisia, "we mostly cover government activity. The agency takes a pro-government stance in its coverage without becoming a propaganda organ.” In September 1992, President Ben Ali issued guidelines to the government-run press that it could cover the activities of the main opposition parties, but the opposition claims that it continues to be either ignored or portrayed in a negative manner by the government media. Another example cited by the journalist suggesting that professionalism was compromised was that news regarding presidential activities is written by the presidential staff at the palace and sent for distribution to TAP.

An information officer with the Tunisian External Communication Agency said that a variety of press perks by the government are seen as having the effect of assuring a basically loyalist press even though the government's apparent intention is to facilitate journalistic work in view of the

generally poor financial condition of the press and low journalistic salaries. Government grants and subsidized newsprint are made available to all party-affiliated newspapers. Tunisian journalists are entitled to free travel on national railways and a 50 percent reduction of fare on public buses and on air tickets.

The structure of the media affects professionalism also. As in Algeria and Morocco, much of the non-official press in Tunisia is affiliated with opposition political parties, reflecting their respective viewpoints. Such newspapers are published primarily to promote the political cause of a given party than to provide news for its newsworthiness. As a result, there is little tradition of independent, objective journalism in Tunisia. Osman, the IPSI faculty member, said that the structure of the newspaper industry forces a graduate interested in newspaper work to seek job with a publication with which he/she identifies ideologically. "That may not provide satisfaction that goes with professional journalistic work, but at least you feel you are promoting a cause you believe in," she said. Educated Tunisians, therefore, turn to external media for impartial coverage of domestic events. A Paris-based weekly political magazine, *Jeune Afrique*, which was started by Tunisian intellectuals in 1960, is a particularly popular source of reliable information.

Broadcast media, which are owned and operated by the government, pose the same problems regarding professionalism that are associated with the government-run print media. Since broadcast media are seen as tools for national integration and political mobilization, objectivity and fairness in news presentation are not the primary considerations. The director-general of Radiodiffusion Television Tunisienne, Abdelhafidah Herguem, said that locally produced news and entertainment programs could show further improvement. "We have to win the fight of quality," he said, "otherwise we would continue to lose audiences to satellite television." He noted that competing successfully with other Arab channels, such as the Saudi-owned Middle East Broadcasting Channel (MBC) from London, was also a big challenge. MBC has become an important alternative news source in North Africa. Many foreign satellite stations can be viewed in Tunisia, although the government blocks France 2 and has blocked Al-Jazeera for their negative coverage of Ben Ali. With the print and broadcast media firmly in the government's grip, the few independent voices in Tunisia publish on the Internet or outside the country.

Morocco: A graduate of Morocco's Higher Institute of Journalism employed as a journalist at the country's government-run news agency, the Maghreb Arabe Presse (MAP), explained political and legal realities that affected professional practice of journalism. Although by Arab standards Moroccan press has a considerable variety and freedom, the Media Law and government-enacted Press Code (Code de la Presse au Maroc, 1992) provide for strong controls at the same time. The MAP journalist, Abou Malik Abdesslam, said that although the agency is committed to being objective, the provisions of the Press Code often work against the realization of that objective. News treatment of Western Sahara and the King, for example, are "extremely sensitive" matters, he said, suggesting that objectivity is not the paramount concern in their treatment. "References to Western Sahara must not deviate from the government's position on this issue, and the King is never criticized," he said. "Treatment of such matters is under strict editorial control at the highest levels in the news agency."

Even on issues not protected under the Press Code, MAP tends to take the official view in editing stories. In accordance with government policy, MAP does not allow criticism of any Arab government in its own copy or that received from foreign press agencies. Abdesslam said that as a result of such practices, MAP copy suffers from a credibility problem. Its coverage of controversial issues is at times ignored by Morocco's diverse party-affiliated press, which prefers to have its own correspondents cover such issues. "Editorial constraints imposed by the Press Code and pro-government treatment of issues by MAP are not conducive to assuring a high professional morale," he said, noting that many of the staff journalists at MAP were graduates of the Higher Institute of Journalism.

Mohammed Sabik, Abdenrhim Elidrissi and Hamid Zahri, three students enrolled at the journalism institute, who had worked as reporters for newspapers run by opposition political parties, said that opportunities to practice journalism in a professional manner were no better at Morocco's non-official press. It should be noted that the Moroccan press is affiliated with about 15 political parties, with each having one or two publications promoting its political views and activities. The party press is subsidized by the state. Independent press, of which there is little, consists of monthly magazines with very low circulations. The lack of independent, specialized press is of special concern

among students at the journalism institute in Rabat since their education prepares them to work for such publications.

The three former journalists strongly agreed that the party-affiliated press promotes party news regardless of its newsworthiness. The party "news" is packaged more in the form of commentary as there is little tradition of objective reporting, a practice that is said to date back to the colonial days under French rule. Until recently, journalists were mostly members of the party for which they wrote. Although the party press has increasingly turned to the recruitment of professionally educated journalists, their working conditions have not changed. News story ideas and angles are handed down to them by the editors, whether or not the topic or the angle is professionally acceptable to them. They are allowed little freedom in coming up with story topics or in structuring their stories. Both the government and party press function in the image of their sponsors, so there is little objectivity in news writing even though journalists want to be objective. Since the party press plays up stories for political reasons rather than for their news value, sensationalism was cited as a serious ethical problem. As in Tunisia, well-educated Moroccan readers, therefore, routinely turn to international publications for reliable information about their own country.

Professionalism has not made much headway into the government-run broadcast media either. Interviews with several staff members in the English service of the government-controlled Radiodiffusion Television Marocaine (RTM) said that people get hired as news directors and journalists at RTM because of their political loyalties even though they may not have any professional media background or journalism education. This leads to a lack of professionalism in news and public affairs programming. Even experienced journalists are limited in doing their jobs properly. "There is lack of footage and good reporting because often times the stations do not provide transportation to journalists to go and cover the event," said one RTM journalist. Another journalist said that there are restrictions on what reporters working for the government media can cover. "Controversial issues like strikes are often not covered," she said. Access to information remains a severe problem. The RTM's financial constraints also make it difficult for the station to produce quality programming. Attempts to make the RTM an autonomous organization have failed.

The privately owned television station, 2M, has increasingly hired professionally trained journalists and offers better working conditions, so its news programs are found to be considerably

better from both technical and journalistic standpoints. This station is found to be more candid in discussing issues of wider public interest, the RTM staff members said.

The economic factor is seen to be interfering with professionalism also. In view of their average newspaper salary of approximately \$350 per month, Moroccan journalists are often compelled to take second jobs, resulting in potential conflict-of-interest problems. A variety of government perks for journalists, such as junkets and subsidized travel in covering news stories, further compromise the objectivity of journalists.

The Parliamentary Commission for Foreign Affairs and National Defense adopted a new national press code on February 8, 2002. Somewhat more lenient than its predecessor (it contains fewer criminal penalties for libel), the code still maintains sentences of three to five years imprisonment for defaming the King or the royal family (as compared with five to twenty years imprisonment in the previous code). Article 29 also gives the government the right to shut down any publication "prejudicial to Islam, the monarchy, territorial integrity, or public order." The Interior Ministry can seize any publication that it perceives to endanger social stability (Press Reference).

For example, in early August 2007 Moroccan police seized copies of the weekly magazine *Nichane* from newsstands, and also confiscated copies of its sister weekly, *TelQuel*, at the printing press used by both magazines, after *Nichane* ran an editorial written by Ahmed Benchemsi, the publisher of the two weeklies, questioning King Mohammed VI's commitment to democracy. Moroccan Prime Minister Driss Jettou subsequently criticized *Nichane* magazine for being disrespectful, and Benchemsi was charged with failing to show "the due respect to the King," an offence under Article 41 of the press law, which carries possible penalties of three to five years in prison and a fine of up to US\$13,500. In late 2006, Driss Ksikes, director and publisher of *Nichane*, and journalist Sanaa Al-Aji, were charged with "offences against the Islamic religion" and "publication and distribution of written material opposed to moral values," under Article 41 of the Press and Publication Law 2002. The charges carry possible prison terms of three to five years, and fines ranging from approximately US\$1,500 – 15,000.

Tough criminal and civil sanctions under the country's libel law also pose a continuing serious threat to Morocco's press. For example, in January 2007, Aboubakr Jamaï, managing editor of the Casablanca-based weekly *Journal Hebdomadaire*, resigned to spare the newspaper from paying a large amount in damages, imposed on Jamaï and one of his reporters in an April 2006 sentence for libel (IPI, 2007, Morocco).

The government provides subsidies to all newspapers, which amounted to a total of U.S. \$6 million in 2005, but it expects all journalists and editors to exercise restraint and to refrain from any negative criticism of the royal family, official state policies, or Islam. Investigative reporting is discouraged and most newspapers comply with the state's wishes by not addressing sensitive issues. The Moroccan government also exerts another measure of control on the press by requiring every journalist, editor, or foreign correspondent to qualify for an official press card.

Algeria: Of the Maghreb nations studied in this paper, the country where professionalism in journalism has suffered the most in recent years is Algeria. The bloody civil war that wrecked the country during the 1990s was sparked by an army coup after an Islamist party had won national elections. During the ensuing traumatic war, around a hundred journalists and media workers and more than 150,000 other civilians were murdered by both Islamist guerrillas and army death squads (IPI, 2004, Algeria). According to the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, Islamic extremists targeted journalists who they saw as supporting the military authorities, who in turn tightly controlled the news that correspondents could report on the political insurgency and security matters. The militants, depicting the media as government pawns, designated journalists as a prime target of their assassination campaign, along with foreigners and intellectuals.

According to the London-based International Center Against Censorship, during the more than a decade of the civil war many Algerian journalists received death threats by letter and telephone, and their families were harassed. Many used pseudonyms or resorted to self-censorship in order to survive. Several quit the profession. An estimated 200 Algerian journalists left the country because of the killings on the one hand and harsh government action against newspapers which violate strict security regulations on the other.

In February 2006, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika announced new censorship measures that restrict journalists from any commentary or investigation of the bloody civil war that ravaged Algeria in the 1990s. Access to information is limited and journalists are often restricted from obtaining government records. The country's criminal defamation law provides for sentences of two to 12 months in prison and heavy fines, ranging from approximately 500 to 2,500 euros. Such fines are applied in cases where individuals are convicted of making defamatory, insulting or slanderous remarks about the president, the parliament, or the army.

The government's willingness to use spurious criminal defamation suits to harass and threaten journalists was demonstrated on March 2, 2006, when Hakim Laalam, columnist for the daily *Le Soir d'Algérie*, was sentenced to six months in prison and a fine of approximately US\$ 3,500 for an article he wrote criticizing President Bouteflika. An appeals court upheld this ruling on March 7. The International Press Institute reported that Algerian authorities consider coverage of many security issues and the military off-limits. Criticism of the president is not tolerated and legal recrimination for "insulting the head of state" is common. Suspended sentences, exorbitant fines and jail terms were handed out on a weekly basis during parts of 2005. Because the judiciary is not independent and often fails to adjudicate fairly in trials involving journalists, they do little to stem the policy of repression of the media (IPI, 2005, Algeria).

Ahmed Benjarook, information officer at the Algerian Embassy in Tunis, said that as a result of the extremely difficult and dangerous working conditions for journalists in Algeria because of the insurgency, journalism profession or education is not the most popular career choice in the country.

Libya: Whereas restrictive press codes, among other factors, compromise professionalism in journalism in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, the nationalized press in Libya affects journalistic integrity. Col. Qadhafi has said and written that a truly "democratic" press is issued by people's committees rather than by an individual, corporate group, or an organization, which are more likely to use press to promote their respective selfish interests. A newspaper issued by a people's committee

would be devoid of the "selfish interests" of a capitalist newspaper, and ideological and atheist constraints of a Communist newspaper (Rampal, 1996, p. 71).

Newspapers issued by the people's committees, however, are no more a source of objective and balanced journalism that would be expected of a "democratic, free" press than the nationalized newspapers. Three of the four daily newspapers, *Al Jamahiriyah*, *Al Shams* and *Al Fajr al Jadid*, are funded through the General Press Office, an extension of the information ministry. The Revolutionary Committees Movement, a state-supported ideological group, controls the fourth newspaper, *Al-Zahf Al-Akhdar*. The broadcast media, consisting of a national terrestrial TV station, Great Jamahiriyah TV, and six satellite stations, are state-controlled. Journalists are not free to express criticism of the state, the political system or the country's leader and many sensitive topics. Recognizing that coverage of these issues can result in arbitrary detention, unfair trials and potential prison terms, journalists have little choice but to report within the boundaries dictated by government.

There is some evidence that the situation may be evolving, as access to alternative opinion and commentary on Libyan affairs is now available through the Al-Jazeera satellite news station and the Internet. Many journalists, when assured of anonymity, turn to the Internet to express critical views. The government routinely takes steps to curtail this movement and silence on-line debate by blocking access to Web sites or by jailing cyber-dissidents.

On March 2, 2006, cyber-dissident, Abdel Al Raziq Al Mansuri, was released from prison when the Libyan government issued a pardon to 132 political prisoners, many of whom had spent several years in detention. The release was seen as a welcome step towards reform and was met with calls for the authorities to amend the repressive laws that are regularly used to incarcerate political activists.

A Tunis-based Libyan journalist with his country's official Jamahiriyah News Agency (JANA) said that the fundamental fact about Libyan journalism is that writers who truly express the ideology of Col. Qadhafi's revolution are encouraged. Accuracy, objectivity and balance are not serious considerations, he said. Dissident Libyan journalists unable to voice their opinions in their own country have published magazines and newsletters from other states, including Chad and the Sudan.

Conclusion

The most compelling dilemma faced by professional journalists, increasingly graduates of journalism degree programs, in the four Maghreb states is how to reconcile their preference for press freedom and objectivity with constraints imposed by political and legal factors that point to a pro-government journalism. Since reconciliation between these two opposing forces is inherently impossible, the frustration level among a number of journalists and students, and some academics and administrators interviewed was palpably high. Media structure imposes additional constraints on professional journalism. The party-affiliated press in Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria has forced journalists to toe the party line, thus negating the journalistic values acquired through journalism education. The recent history of insurgency in Algeria and the extreme nature of political controls in Libya have made the job of professional journalists particularly difficult there.

Several stories were told of journalists in Tunisia and Morocco who left the profession because of their inability to really practice what they had learned in journalism institutes and taken public relations or advertising positions with the industry and even with government agencies. Journalism graduates do not mind doing government public relations because they do not feel professionally compromised in that role, which they do in print and broadcast journalism. Besides, salaries are said to be often higher in PR and advertising.

So as professionally educated and trained journalists are said to be increasingly opting to become "communication specialists" in public relations and advertising fields, journalism continues to reflect the status quo through its pro-government or pro-party orientation. Educated Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians and Libyans look to outside media for serious and credible treatment of issues in their respective countries.

This situation obviously raises serious questions for journalism and journalism education in these countries. In controlled-press systems, should the curricula continue to emphasize the inculcation of journalistic values such as objectivity, balance and reportorial neutrality, which are predicated on free press systems? Isn't such a journalistic value system bound to cause frustration when graduates go out to real-life journalism and contend with a variety of political, legal, structural and other controls on the press? Wouldn't the curricula be better off teaching how to improve the quality of journalism within the framework of existing political, legal and structural constraints on the press? If the latter

approach is taken, doesn't that point to teaching a journalistic philosophy -- and concomitant news values -- that is compatible with the political and legal orientation of a given country, yet helps in improving the quality of journalism? What sort of journalistic philosophy can make that possible? The "Development Journalism" philosophy, often seen as the answer in controlled-press, developing countries, apparently has not helped in improving either the credibility or the quality of journalism in such countries. Is it time to consider some other approach that might be more workable? One option may be to focus on issues that are critical to the population at large -- such as education, economy, health care and crime -- that are politically neutral and could be covered objectively. Singapore media, for example, has done that effectively in a media environment that is classified as "not free" or "partly free." As reporters gather experience with quality coverage of such topics, they could move on to "higher order" issues, such as the environment, women's rights, labor rights and the like, which are, again, politically neutral and could be covered professionally. Taiwan's mass media did just that effectively in the 1980s before the government granted them greater freedoms. Such an approach to journalism is likely to minimize, if not stop, the alienation from the profession that young journalists are educated and trained to practice professionally in the four North African countries.

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Note

Thirty-four interviews were conducted with the following: Administrators of mass communication academic and professional institutions: 4; academics, 4; news agency and broadcast service administrators, 4; newspaper and broadcast journalists, 12; journalism students, 6; and government communication/information spokespersons, 4.

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