It Takes Two to Blow the Whistle

Do Journalists Control the Outbreak of Scandal?

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The article argues that the exposure of scandal, often seen as constituting the highest journalistic achievement, is not necessarily controlled by the journalist. Looking at scandal as the outcome of the varying relationship between reporters and sources, the authors offer a typology of subgenres. Whistle blowing *is a story in which the source betrays his or her institutional loyalty (often for a higher cause),* entrapment *is a story in which the reporter betrays an often naïve source (possibly for the sake of a good story), and* mainstreaming *and* spotlighting *are the highlighting of violations of social norms by picking up stories from marginal media channels or by choosing to investigate routine, endemic antinormative practices. A new type of scandal emerges in the capacity of interviewees on live talk shows to surprise their hosts by violating the norms of the studio interview or of accepted social behavior.*

Keywords: *source betrayal; whistle blower; spotlighting/mainstreaming*

Journalists are usually credited with the public exposure of scandal. This is presumably the moment at which they show the power they have over public figures and institutions. Molotch and Lester (1974) proposed the definition of *scandal* as one pole in the seesaw game between political sources and reporters over who controls the agenda (Schudson, 1992). Accordingly, in routine news, the daily bread and butter with which the political establishment feeds the press, sources are on top. Scandals are the exceptional cases in which journalists have access to the antinormative actions of the powerful, carried out covertly. When they unveil the image public figures would seek to hide, the balance tilts to the side of the journalists. On one hand, these are the instances in which journalism fulfills its role of watchdog. On the other hand, they put journalists at risk vis-à-vis their sources as they shake the delicate balance both normally try to preserve. This means that in the interest of self-protection, the exposure of scandals needs to be foolproof. Recall Watergate, which only one brave publisher approved, as a time-consuming, cautious, and thorough investigation. This definition of

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scandal, however, is based on certain assumptions about the practices of journalism and the norms of society and of the political system.

In what follows, we first point out how much more complex the relationship among press, society, and political sources has become (and in some aspects has been all along) and then suggest a more complex scheme that takes these changes into account.

We propose that scandals may be caused by the following four types of short-circuiting or subversion of communication between reporters and their sources (see Table 1): (a) *whistle blowing*—when an insider, for idealistic or political or personal motives, volunteers information about a carefully hidden dark secret, damaging to the perpetrator; (b) *entrapment*—when a reporter, for professional or political or personal motives, breaks a tacit or explicit agreement with a source; and (c) *spotlighting* or *mainstreaming*—when a source or a reporter spotlights information (that may even be widely known) to prove the violation of a norm, the abuse of which is ignored, or when a source or a reporter broadcasts on mainstream media information that was shown on a marginal (printed or electronic) channel, thereby forcing an often reluctant reaction (to enforce or modify the norm).

Live broadcasting gives rise to a new kind of whistle blowing that disintermediates the reporter by addressing the public directly. It also allows for new kinds of entrapment.

WHISTLE BLOWING—BETRAYAL BY AN INSIDER

This is the classical, "purest," form of scandal, closest to the Molotch and Lester (1974) model. Here, scandal erupts when a source hostile to the perpetrator outs an institution or a person for blatantly deviant practices kept heretofore undercover. Whereas such an exposure is considered to be journalists' finest hour (because they reveal information damaging to establishment figures or institutions), we argue that reporters are much less powerful in these cases than they seem to be. It may be obvious, but it is worth reiterating that (unlike the impression given by Molotch & Lester, 1974) journalists need sources, no less for scandals than for routine news.

CAN HE OR SHE BE TRUSTED? CAN HE OR SHE BE PROTECTED? WOULD MY EDITOR PRINT IT?

In the interaction between a reporter and an insider about to blow up a scandal, both source and reporter are aware of the price they may have to pay. The source may risk his or her reputation or livelihood or even the possibility of standing trial; and the greater the treachery and the resulting damage to heretofore employers/friends, the greater he or she has to be motivated to overcome it

TABLE 1: Typology of Scandals: Three Types of Treachery

	Whistle Blowing: Treachery by Source	*Entrapment: Treachery by Journalist*	*Mainstreaming/Spotlighting: Breaking the Cycle of Pluralistic Ignorance*
Motivation	For the public good Idealistic Political Manipulative/self-interested	Political Manipulative/self-interested	Highlighting ignored/accepted deviations from norms Condemn multicultural norms
Persuasion by	Source/journalist	Journalist	Marginal/pissed-off insider zapping outsider/reporter
Journalist's dilemma	Can I protect my source? Can I convince editor? Can I trust my source? Is it newsworthy or prurient?	Can I betray my source's trust? Is it newsworthy or prurient?	Should I open the Pandora's box? Legitimate acts/opinions, make supporters emerge out of the closet
Examples	Daniel Ellsberg (Pentagon papers) Jeffrey Wigand (tobacco industry) Linda Trip (on Clinton) Nimrodi (on President Weizman)	Joe McGinnis (on Nixon) Joe Klein (on Clinton) Ben Simon (on Orr)	Lewinsky (Internet) Rodney King (home camera) Channel 7 (Biblical *Rodef* law on Rabin)

and come forward. The journalist has to face the risk of destroying crucial links with major institutions and individual sources, of failing to protect the source's anonymity, of failing to make the story foolproof, and now more than ever before, the risk of not convincing the editor (or publisher) to run the story. The hotter the story and the more powerful the object, the more doubtful is the willingness of editors or owners to pursue it and the greater the damage to the reporter if it collapses.

In the insider-type scandal, the reporter's dependence on the source is greatest. Take for example the case of the women's circumcision regularly carried out in certain communities in Britain that was generally avoided by national media until one of the victims dared to defy her community and speak out. As the (justified) fear of people within close-knit hierarchical communities of being ostracized often overwhelms their wish to speak up, deviant practices can continue undisturbed within these groups.

But not all whistle blowers are equally trustworthy or equally committed. Ironically, the ones who are most eager to tell all may be least trustworthy, may have nothing to lose by self-exposure, and may therefore anyway skip reporters altogether. The more trustworthy whistle blowers on the other hand may also be more hesitant (or scared or ambivalent) as they have most to lose, making the journalists' role crucial but placing serious responsibilities on their shoulders (Woodward and Bernstein worked hard to convince Deep Throat and managed to keep his identity undercover; Linda Tripp, eager to tell her story and receive publicity, was no journalistic feat).

THE IDEALIST INSIDER

Whereas the motivation of the reporter is to achieve professional success (without burning bridges) and to get along with his or her employer, the motivation of the whistle blower can be idealistic, political, self-serving, revengeful, or a combination of all of these. The idealist deep throat is easy to deal with as the reporter can have real empathy and a notion of shared motivation; on the other hand, idealist whistle blowers may have most to lose from changing alliances and may get cold feet in the process. Consider an insider such as Daniel Ellsberg who handed the Pentagon Papers to *The New York Times* or recently, Jeffrey Wigand, the scientist who worked for Brown and Williamson and reported to Lowel Bergman, a producer for *60 Minutes*, about the way in which the firm manufactures cigarettes to create addiction. Both had signed confidentiality agreements—one with the state, the other with the company. In the struggle to solve the dissonance between their loyalty and formal commitment to their institutional role and their conscience, both end up handing over the incriminating information. Ellsberg, who was fervently trying to influence government for withdrawal from Vietnam (by approaching congressmen and government officials, right up to Kissinger himself), was eager to see the Papers in a major

newspaper. It was the management of *The New York Times* who needed long deliberations about whether and how to publish the Papers. In the *60 Minutes* case, producer Bergman had to maneuver between persuading Wigand, his source, to deliver, persuading his bosses to put the story on, and trying to protect Wigand from the ensuing revenge of his former employers. The worse scandals seem to their perpetrators, the more they look for damage control and the greater the risk that a series of offshoot or side scandals will be produced, which may develop to overwhelm the original story. Remember the erasing of Watergate tapes and the attempts to blackmail and discredit the whistle blowers on how tobacco is made and on the how the Vietnam War was run—Wigand's pension was stopped (by the company), and the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist was broken into (by the government).

What complicates matters is that reporters (or editors or producers) are put in a position in which they make promises they cannot keep. Whereas Bernstein and Woodward managed to keep the identity of Watergate's Deep Throat secret (it was easier 20 years ago), Lowell Bergman of *60 Minutes* (as it is told in the film *The Insider*) managed to convince Wigand that he would be protected by the nationwide publicity that would be endowed on him by the top prestigious show, giving him the status of a hero. But once Bergman had managed this feat, he ran into the problem of the refusal of his editor (Ed Wallace) to broadcast the item. Whereas Bergman's professional mission put him in the same camp with the altruistically motivated whistle blower, CBS, the broadcasting institution, apparently had strong business interests against publishing and had convinced Ed Wallace to go along with them. If this policy had prevailed, Bergman would have lost an important story in terms of public interest and would have betrayed the confidence of the source who could not have completed his mission and who would have been destroyed by the company he had betrayed. (It is easy to understand why following this experience Bergman left CBS to work for PBS.)

THE INSIDER ON A PERSONAL VENDETTA

Whistle blowers can also be overenthusiastic to go public, making the reporter's part easier in terms of retrieving the information but sometimes more complex in terms of judgment: Does the story fall under public interest, or is it only of prurient interest to the public? And even worse, the framing of such a story calls on the reporter for deciding if he or she believes the charges.

This dilemma has become particularly acute in the past decade for two reasons. First, there is the broadening of the definition of deviant practices with the increasing personalization of politics. As politicians shift from right and left into center, the emphasis on trust and credibility rather than on differences in ideology or policy remain the main campaign issue. Electing a candidate for "really caring" rather than for the policy he or she proposes legitimates disregarding the separation between public and private realm and focusing increasingly on the

private mores and morals of politicians. Second, with multiculturalism and feminism taking root, there is a change in cultural norms that makes unacceptable what used to be perceived as acceptable practice. For example, the seeping in of feminist ideas means that social norms concerned with gender relations have been transformed, bringing down public figures who did not notice this change in time.

Thus, the context that made Linda Tripp's venture take hold as a big scandal is one that engages both the personalization of politics and the changing boundaries in the relationships between employers and employees. Tripp, a former White House employee, rode the high seas of the new political culture, feeding on her personal vendetta, to revenge herself on her former employers, as did General Amiram Levin, Israel's deputy head of the Mossad, who lost his head over being passed over for the top appointment. Both hurried to the media to expose the personal weaknesses of their former superiors. Such sources are gung ho to tell all and likely to enlist the support of the political enemies of their bosses and buddies. The problem for the journalist lies exactly in the overzealousness of these sources. Such whistle blowers, acting when there has been transparent hurt, are suspect, and the information they carry (or claim they do) is tainted. If not treated with caution, the story may boomerang on the reporter.

A particularly sensitive whistle blower is the woman who exposes what she claims is sexual harassment. First, the victim may need to be coaxed as it is most likely that the outer is fighting against superior powers, that it is often her word against his, and that even if she is proved truthful by the court and the press, her reputation may remain dubious and her motives questioned (the question of Anita Hill's credibility has never been fully decided). Second, as the harasser is usually in a higher status position, typically exploiting a subordinate, and as the story has the potential to become a scandal only if the accused is a public figure, it means that it may end the public career of the accused (as in the case of the complaint filed in the police by an office worker of an Israeli Cabinet Minster, an former army general and one of three candidates for prime minister in the 1999 elections). But on the other hand, the whistle blower may belong to the category of informers acting out of hurt pride, out to revenge herself for having been abandoned, or just out to blackmail the man she accuses (Paula Jones seems a case in point).

POLITICALLY MOTIVATED OR POLITICALLY EXPLOITED WHISTLE BLOWER

Whistle blowers may be themselves exploited by politically interested parties. The timing of some seemingly bona fide incriminating information about public figures may be telling, especially if it involves digging out an old or half-baked story. It may be timed just at the right moment to prevent a politician from

making a politically significant decision (or to cause him or her to take a popular but irresponsible decision aimed at lowering media and public attention to the scandal, *Wag the Dog* style). When the chances of signing a peace agreement between Israel and Syria started to look up (in January 2000), a self-defined freelance journalist called a press conference to expose President Ezer Weitzman's acceptance of "presents" from a (non-Israeli) millionaire friend while he was in public office years earlier. Speculation in the Israeli press pointed to Israeli millionaire Ya'akov Nimrodi (who owns a newspaper that had formerly employed the reporter) as the initiator of the exposé, designed to discredit the president and impair his capacity for persuading Israelis to support the peace treaty. Mordechai, the Israeli minister exposed for sexual harassment, used the same motivation to insinuate that his accuser is backed by political interests who would like to end his career because he positioned himself against a compromise with Syria; this time it sounded more like a conspiracy theory adopted in desperation.

It is worth noting that in many of these cases the reporters have become increasingly marginal. First, the label *investigative reporting* may be just a euphemism devised by a paper or a TV channel to give themselves primary credit for obtaining the scoop, which is what occurred (after the fact) in the case of the Pentagon Papers (Ungar, 1972). Second, in the era of a multiplicity of electronic channels, news formats, and live broadcasting, whistle blowers and public figures under attack often prefer to choose their own stage and dictate their own conditions. Making a statement directly on TV is a favored option. The press is then left to write background stories, interview spokespersons of the perpetrators and of the accused, and do the follow-up.

ENTRAPMENT: BETRAYAL BY THE JOURNALIST

GOING TO BED AS BEST FRIENDS AND WAKING UP?

Betrayal is always lurking when journalists walk the thin line of befriending sources while remaining free enough of personal commitment to do honest reporting. At least two American presidents (Nixon and Clinton) had the experience of being followed on the campaign trail by a reporter whom they believed (to some extent rightly) to be their fan, only to wake up to the criticism directed toward them by their supposed buddy (Joe McGinnis's *The Selling of the President* and Joe Klein's *Primary Colors*). Presumably one good reason for Klein's reluctance to reveal his identity was his embarrassment over betraying his subject (who in spite of the unflattering stories still comes out as a lovable and charismatic person). The second time is supposed to be easier, and McGinnis did it again after he was hired by an Army doctor on trial for killing his wife and two daughters. Employed to report the trial from the perspective of the accused,

McGinnis accepted the job, liked the client, at least for a while, and following the acquittal, ended up writing a book to pronounce that he was guilty after all.

ANYTHING TO GET A FOOT IN THE DOOR

Whereas between candidates and reporters there is often a tacit understanding of mutual empathy (reinforced by the ongoing coverage by the "house" reporter during the campaign), there are cases in which reporters break an explicit agreement with their interviewees who would otherwise not have talked to them or let them into their houses. Take the episode in *The Practice* in which the owners of a reputed restaurant sue TV producers for manipulating their way into the restaurant by falsely promising to do a laudatory item about the quality of the food. Instead, the reporters chose to focus on the cockroaches the restaurant was infested with, thereby ruining the family business. In spite of the fact that the owners did not claim the information was false, only that it was achieved by a breach of trust, the jury found the TV producers guilty and recommended $18 million in compensation. Taking seriously the argument that prime-time best-selling TV series give expression to the prevailing climate of opinion, this fictitious case may reveal a growing suspicion toward the media, or at least a decreasing tolerance with techniques of journalistic entrapment.

EXPOSING WHAT WAS GIVEN OFF RECORD

Another common type of entrapment is reporting information that was considered by the informant to have been told off record. The more the story involves a central public figure and the more it is a scoop (sensational, damaging, unexpected within an expected stereotype)—the more the reporter is tempted to break the (more or less) tacit agreement. And the more casual the understanding, the easier it is to break. Thus, David Bar Ilan, an ex-journalist himself and Netanyahu's spokesman at the time, who insinuated to *The New Yorker* that the prime minister's wife was not psychologically sound, must have either perceived his colleague as more loyal to him, or was fed up enough with his boss, or thought the wife was hurting the prime minister's image, and/or assumed that stories may have (or would be) leaked out anyway and doing it his way may limit the damage.

ENCOURAGING UNSUSPECTING SOURCES TO DIG THEIR OWN GRAVES

A more damaging variation or extension of publishing what the source assumed to have been said off record is egging him or her on to further entanglement. Typically, such betrayal of faith takes place with a naive or inexperienced interviewee who is cajoled to continue to express thoughts or opinions that will

get him or her into big trouble. Here the source may reveal information about himself or herself that he or she does not perceive as damaging. But as a number of public figures have discovered too late—"the bastards have changed the rules."

In an (July 27, 1998) interview given to Daniel Ben-Simon of *Ha'aretz* (Israel's most distinguished paper), Ori Orre, an ex-general and a new Labor Knesset member, talked freely about what he thinks of Knesset members from his party who are of (Jewish) Morroccan origin. "You cannot talk to them normally," he said. "The problem with Ben-Ami, Edri, Raanan Cohen and others is that they interpret any legitimate criticism as criticism motivated by ethnic prejudice." Tragically, in observing that his Morroccan colleagues suffer from an exaggerated sensitivity to their ethnic origin—which he claims prevents them from relating to points of view different from their own—Orre falls into the same trap he has pointed to, marking him as racist.

More experienced politicians know that any generalizing about an ethnic group would cause an automatic knee-jerk reaction of racism, thereby preventing any open discussion. But the role of the journalist in ending Orre's political career should not be belittled. As Ben-Simon (a Morroccan himself) recounted, following the interview, he kept on egging Orre to continue unraveling his insights about Morroccans. Whereas Ben-Simon could envisage the front-page box ("Ori Orre: The Morroccans Have No Curiosity to Look at What's Going on Around Them"), Orre unknowingly rambled on, and Ben-Simon knowingly helped him to tie the rope around his neck. This type of entrapment has become more common as the politically correct dictum of multiculturalism, for better or worse, has set strict boundaries as to which type of statements are publicly allowed. The journalist in this case is skirting on the border of another problem—taking a story out of context.

TAKING OUT OF CONTEXT

Taking out of context is a broad and complex issue, underlying routine journalistic practices, and is the usual defense of all sources who feel they have been wronged. But in the case of a damaging story on a scale that can put an end to a person's public career, it becomes particularly damaging. However scandalous the revelation of what can be labeled *racist beliefs*, journalistic reframing stereotypes, simplifies, and distorts by taking out of context.

Ironically, the context in Orre's case was his role in the effort of Ehud Barak, Labor Party's head at the time, to win over the Morroccan voters (most vote for the right-wing Likud and the ultrareligious Shas). Barak had started his campaign one year prior to the interview with a grand gesture of pleading for forgiveness from Oriental Jews. Orre, Barak's man, had been a major actor in this operation and expressed deep disappointment to Ben-Simon over the reactions he had encountered. He first expressed himself publicly on the subject (as Ben-

Simon discloses in the small print of the inside page with the complete interview) in responding to an attack (in a local paper) by Labor (Morroccan born) history professor and Knesset member (today minister) Shlomo Ben-Ami. Ben-Ami accused the party's leadership of being cut off from the masses (meaning from Morroccan Jews). The frustrated Orre, who was in the midst of campaigning for the party to change this feeling, retaliated by telling the paper (shooting from the hip?) that Ben-Ami (an antidote for everything that the stereotype of Oriental Jew stands for) should have been the subject of the novel *The Lost Honor of Katrina Bloom*: "He constantly seeks to be caressed." What Orre did not realize is that whereas Morroccans are entitled to complain about suffering as a group, reacting by criticizing them as a group is not legitimate.

That Orre was convinced he was speaking off record can be seen in his telling the reporter that he contemplated criticizing Rafi Edri, another (Morroccan) Labor Knesset member, on what Orre considered was a stupid initiative on his part. "But I did not tell him anything," he tells Ben-Simon, "because I was afraid he would be hurt and take it as an ethnic offense. One cannot say anything to these people without it being regarded as scheming against them." Had he been a little more sensitive to his interlocutor, Orre would have realized that the journalist serves as a voice of the repressed underclass in the paper and that just as in the case of Ben-Ami, academic learning and sophistication would not make him immune to ethnic generalization.

The larger context in which Orre aired his thoughts, as he told it to Ben-Simon, was his own disappointment over what he saw as Israel losing what had held it together. He hoped the second and third generations of the Oriental immigrants of the 1950s would find the power to disconnect from the past and from the feeling of bitterness. But his hope was lost. In meetings and conferences, he recounts, he heard the same poisoned slogans against his party. He saw a lack of interest, an unwillingness to listen, to understand, to become acquainted with life to distinguish between good and bad. He thought this damaging for the whole of the society. He suspected the old grudges were used to eternalize intergroup hatred and to make political fortunes at the expense of the poor classes. He also mentioned a new film (*Shchur*) by a Morroccan director "in which for the first time the Morroccan culture looks at itself critically." But these are the politically correct rules. The same observation to those which members of the group are allowed to say about themselves can end the public career of an observer from another group who says the same thing about them. Any true or useful insights are sacrificed in the opportunity to create this week's scandal and perhaps to end a good man's career. Ironically, it may be argued that the more flattering explanation to the reporter's framing is that he too demonstrates the tendency of Israelis of Morroccan origin to take any criticism an expression of ethnic prejudice, making it easy to ignore any substantive truth there may be to the argument. In this case, it was the reporter's framing, not the substance, that might be questioned. Taking out of (one) context and into another is all that is needed.

BREAKING AN AGREEMENT NOT TO PUBLISH IN THE NAME OF HIGHER VALUE

Another breach of faith is the publication or broadcasting of information that journalists agree not to make public, with the understanding that it would be damaging to a shared higher value. It is accepted that in war, reporters tend to act as citizens, not just as professionals. The risk to human lives is considered higher than that of freedom of expression or the watchdog role. One such example that is beginning to erode is the willing cooperation of the Israeli press with the military censor in not making public any information about Israel's nuclear capability and the pros and cons of having it. (Whistle blower Yizhak Va'anunu, whose report was published by the *London Times*, saw himself as an idealist.) Secrecy about semiofficial Jewish immigration from undemocratic countries was considered almost as crucial as the case of exposing military technology. It was based on the understanding that countries such as Poland, Russia, Yemen, and Ethiopia that allowed large numbers of Jews to leave their countries at certain points in time could shut their gates in an instant if the (shut eye) policy was made public. This collaboration between journalists and authorities stemmed out of the dominant Zionist ideology, which sees the absorption in Israel of Jews who suffer in other countries as the ultimate mission of the Jewish state. Yet another case of agreed-on discretion was consideration for the right to privacy where it concerned the private tragedies of public figures.

Typically, the breach of the agreement not to publish occurs after it has started to erode at the edges. During the wave of the immigration of Jews from Yemen in the mid-1990s, one paper started discussing the fight between secular and religious schools over the new immigrants, and another described them as dark, thin, and long bearded; the rest of the media followed suit (Liebes, 1997). Likewise, the consensus among media to respect the wish of Ophra Haza, a popular singer hospitalized in a critical condition, not to expose the illness she suffered from only made the topic more salient and increasingly gave rise to rumors. Israel's most serious paper decided to publish the story (after the singer's death), arguing that it was the paper's duty to contribute to fighting against the notion that any illness should be regarded as stigma. This story demonstrated that in the age of the Internet and fierce competition, such agreements are becoming all but impossible.

SPOTLIGHTING AND MAINSTREAMING

Manufacturing scandal does not necessarily entail the exposure of information heretofore unknown. It can also consist of exposing violation that takes place routinely, that may be (more of less vaguely) known but over which the authorities, the public, and the media have a tacit agreement to ignore. In spotlighting, it is an editor or reporter who decides to blow the whistle. Main-

streaming may occur in the wake of information from a whistle blower on the sidelines (that is, on one of the marginal radio or TV channels) or as a journalistic excursion outside the center to retrace the routine talk that may have led to a major violation (e.g., Rabin's assassination).

RUBBING YOUR NOSE IN A ROUTINE VIOLATION OF A NORM

Nonnormative practices—such as the import and exploitation for prostitution of young women and the living conditions of illegal foreign workers—that cannot be eradicated because they fulfill a need and/or seem better (morally or practically) than other alternatives do not have a clear-cut solution and are conceived as an ongoing condition that is not "our" problem. In a similar manner, information that is written or broadcast on small or nonmainstream media is considered not to concern "us," the mainstream public. When mainstream editors or reporters for some reason happen to spotlight processes we would rather ignore or cross over to pick up material from a channel of a cultural enclave, it has a scandalous potential.

Consider the issue of illegal foreign workers in Israel. The numbers are mounting, and without a clear policy, Israel will be facing a grave social and political problem. Most people are somewhat aware of the phenomenon but would find it easier not to be concerned; some may employ a Romanian or Ghanean housemaid or an agricultural worker or know people who do. Normally, the journalistic spotlight would not land on this kind of story. It is not as cruel as murder, there are no straightforward baddies (or goodies), no clear and implementable policy that can be drawn, and the problem has no particular relevance to most readers and viewers. To focus on this issue would take an editorial decision to cover the story of the sordid daily existence of these people and of the inhuman ways they are treated. A press (better, television) item however can put an end to this avoidance and put pressure on the various ministries in charge to act, that is, to acknowledge their responsibility in keeping to the regulations (arrest and eviction of illegal workers) and the need to either find a way to carry this out or give them legal status.

TRANSPORTING INFORMATION FROM A SIDE STAGE

The present proliferation of electronic channels—local and national radio and TV, cable, the Internet, and small media such as audio and video cassettes and home video cameras—means that the division into public knowledge, what everyone knows, and private or secret knowledge, known to no one, has been relativized. Daily interaction may be carried out among radio listeners on a Chicago Black radio channel, or on the Rush Limbaugh program in the United States, or on a pirate radio channel of Israeli West Bank settlers that the mainstream public remains unaware of. Likewise, a video cassette may be a bestseller

within a particular community and remain normally confined to its target audience; even a broadcast of a sermon broadcast by satellite to synagogues around the country is unknown information for the mainstream public. Ironically, the flooding of information and the multiplicity of channels that makes the selection of the national networks on what to put on the nation's (and/or the world's) agenda more difficult is also more crucial in terms of the public's right to know than it had been before the common sphere disintegrated.

Among the electronic channels targeted to specific audiences, the ones with most potential for the production of scandals are channels of religious, cultural, and/or ideological minority groups that provide alternative daily schedules to their audiences. Such cultural enclaves do not necessarily accept dominant universalistic principles, and therefore what they broadcast to themselves may contain what for the general public would constitute a breach of norms.

Ordinarily, mainstream media tend to ignore these side stages; not only because it considers what goes on in the wings as irrelevant enough for their audiences but also because mainstream journalists have accepted the legitimacy awarded to multiculturalism, which in its radical version is interpreted as the right for speaking in one's own voice to one's own community in a conversation that nonmembers cannot enter (Gross, 1998). This tendency is reinforced by the dictates of political correctness, that is, the tendency to avoid stepping on controversial issues in which media may find itself accused of supporting an elitist, antiminority line. Thus, nationwide media rarely bring up practices prevalent in particular religious communities such as circumcision of women or killing women in the name of family honor. This reluctance to interfere in the internal debates may be overridden only by a very good story.

THE WRITING WAS ON THEIR WALL: MAINSTREAMING AFTER THE FACT

A good story usually means some form of violence, or threat to violence, or a blatant assault on social norms that threatens mainstream society (Galtung & Ruge's [1970] rules for crossing over the threshold still hold) or have a chance to cross over. Consider the case of Israel's Prime Minster Yizhak Rabin, assassinated by a national religious zealot following the decrees of (more than 40) rabbis in the settlers' community who found the prime minister guilty of transgressing the Biblical law that prohibits giving away parts of the land of Israel. As we all knew after the fact, threats to Rabin's life were sounded months prior to the assassination on the West Bank Settlers Radio and even on the religious program on one of Public Radio's four channels. But these voices, though sounded publicly, were not picked up by any mainstream media. On the aftermath of the crime, when the rabbinical deliberations were widely discussed, Israelis, mourning the death, could not understand how they were left unaware of these currents when the writing was on the wall. The reason was that although it was

there to see, nobody outside the settlers' community had looked that way. This story of the absolute belief in the supremacy of religious law over state law, the incitement against the traitor prime minister within the settlers' community, and the negligence of the secret service became a scandal only following the assassination. Nationwide media was oblivious until tragedy struck.

Not all peripheral channels carry the same weight. C-Span is considered an important channel in spite of its small viewership. Similarly, in Israel, the weekly sermon of carried out by Rabbi Ovadia Yossef, the spiritual leader of the ultraorthodox, Oriental, Shas movement, which is transmitted by satellite to synagogues around the country, has become an important political arena. On the Saturday of the Purim holiday 2000, Rabbi Ovadia made political use of "The Wicked Hamman," the evil character in *Megilat Esther* (read in the synagogue in Purim), who according to the traditional text planned to eradicate the Jewish community. The rabbi called his followers to revenge themselves on Education Minister Yossi Sarid in the same manner as the ancient Jews revenged themselves on the Wicked Hamman. "When you will say 'cursed be Hamman in *Megilat Esther*,' say also, 'cursed be Yossi Sarid,'" ordered Ovadia, adding for good measure another major enemy of the ancient Israelites, the people of Amalek. "In the same manner that Amalek and Hamman were uprooted," he continued, "so should Sarid be uprooted." In an attempt to routinize what seems a major scandal (especially in the wake of the Rabbin assassination), one of the Shas ministers explained to Ha'aretz that nothing in this is new. This type of interweaving of curses directed at politicians (considered political enemies) with the *Megilat* in the community's synagogues has gone on for a number of years. "It's folklore," he concluded. The sudden journalistic attention and the ensuing scandal in mainstream media is the result of the strengthening of Shas (to become the second largest party in the government) and the continued pressure it exerts on the government. The threat this party represents to the society's norms makes what is said within the community relevant and makes it unacceptable to dismiss it as folklore.

A TELEPHONE TO THE NEWSROOM

Before violence has ensued, the attention of broadcasters to deviance and/or to a good story on a side channel can be drawn by whistle blowers motivated idealistically or personally to expose nonnormative or threatening voices. Consider the case of an Israeli football fan who happened to watch the 3-hour-long celebrations of the cup-winning team in Jerusalem's main town square, broadcast live on a peripheral channel of Public Broadcasting. At one point he saw the prime minister, who appeared briefly to greet the fans, waving from a balcony above the square and smiling broadly while rhythmic cries of "death to the Arabs" were heard coming from the crowd. The team's fan decided this should be shown on the evening news and notified Public Television's newsroom. The

incident (not the first of its kind) appeared on the news and became a developing scandal (Tuchman, 1978) in which the editors were accused of doing an unprofessional job to molest the prime minister (Liebes, 2000). Note that whereas nobody from within the settlers' community informed the media in time about the Rabbinical debates over Rabin's fate, it was a viewer from within the fans' community who pointed to the scandal at the celebration for the team. Whereas Rabin's assassination arose from the core beliefs of the assassin's community, the football fans' community is not normatively homogenous and racism is not part of its ethos.

HOME VIDEO CAMERA EXPOSES ROUTINE AS SCANDAL

In addition to peripheral channels, the infiltration of small media into nationwide channels has proved to play a major role in the eruption of scandal. Recall the home videocassette in the Rodney King scandal that by exposing the routine practices of the police in the flash brought about a radical change, including the resignation of the chief of police. Note that although police brutality was generally known and the subject for many articles, it needed the evidence in action to gather momentum. And television's practice of recycling good stories made it one of the most recognized clips in the past decade. Another example of the role of home camera in scandal comes from the Rabin assassination taped by an amateur photographer and sold to the highest bidder a month after the event, making heartbreakingly clear the negligence of the Israeli Security Service in guarding Prime Minister Rabin at the moments of his assassination. Mutatis mutandis, the Monica story was picked up from the semipublic Internet, and the tapes of her private conversations became a major attraction for mainstream TV viewers. Thus, community and home media provide mainstream media with an uneasy mixture of routine practice in segmented cultural communities that are considered nonnormative by the mainstream public, negligence or brutality in the practices of public institutions, and stories that appeal to voyeurism with only a slim journalistic justification.

SCANDAL: WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Since Molotch and Lester (1974) charted their scheme, journalism, the society, and politics have all been transformed. Whereas for Molotch and Lester scandal is the journalists' finest hour, in which they achieve full control over their story, it seems no longer to be the case.

In the case of whistle blowing that seems to follow the pattern described by Molotch and Lester (1974), the seesaw tilts in the direction of putting the reporter at the bottom and the source on top. Whereas some whistle blowers seek the reporter's encouragement, they typically are the heroic, or tragic, or evil

perpetrators who take most risks. For the source, initiating contact means switching loyalty from friend, employer, or country to reporter. Betrayal of former loyalties undertaken for a higher cause, or for calculated self-interest, or for taking revenge is carried out at the cost of exposing oneself to possible retaliation. In the case of entrapment, it is the reporter who knowingly betrays his or her source by breaking a formal or a tacit understanding for (what he or she considers) a higher cause or for professional success. Unlike the source, the reporter does not usually have to worry about paying a price (as the responsibility is shared with editors and publishers and as the commitment to source is ambiguous).

Mainstreaming and spotlighting differ from the first two in the sense that they do not involve the uncovering of a secret violation but of mobilizing public attention to a phenomenon, or a continuing condition, that is generally known but ignored. Paradoxically, spotlighting is the form that comes closest to the traditional notion of in-depth investigative reporting. Known but repressed issues are typically endemic (rather than a one-off personalized scandal). As such, they are less than hot, and putting them on the public agenda depends on the reporter's motivation, initiative, and dedication (although here too the exposure of an insider with interest to promote or to damage the perpetrators may be necessary). Compared to the other two, this type is much closer to classic investigative reporting.

It would make sense to assume that the rate of scandals should be decreasing in today's increasingly electronic press. Journalism's shift to TV (which allows politicians more opportunity to disintermediate journalists), the taken-for-granted mediation of spokespersons (whose function is to protect their clients) from whom reporters seems to be getting most news items readymade, and the constraints of increasing commercialization and cutthroat competition, which restrain journalists from doing investigative work, all suggest the predominance of Molotch and Lester's (1974) "routine news" in which sources, not reporters, are in control. Nevertheless, it seems that scandals have by no means disappeared; their number may even be rising. In Israel for example, it seems that there are hardly any politicians left who are not under indictment.

But arguing that scandal is still going strong does not necessarily mean that it should be regarded as journalists' finest hour. True, traditional wisdom sees scandal as the quintessence of professional journalism. Unlike the routine exchange between reporters and spokespersons, the argument goes, it is investigative reporting that digs out the sleaze from its hiding, with reporter and editor fully in control. The way to reconcile the notion of reporters as victims of public figures and their public relations staff with journalists as investigators is to argue that investigative journalism is not the only explanation for the proliferation of scandal. It can also be explained by the direct access of whistle blowers to the courts, to the police, and to the wild competitive race among commercial and fiercely competitive newspapers and TV channels to cover everything everybody else is covering (according to the paradoxical rule that the more competing

channels there are, the more homogenous their content). Whistle blowers can make use of the easy access to Internet to make press and TV follow suit. Live broadcasting and the assortment of talk shows allow whistle blowers with a good story to be interviewed directly and informally on TV. If they prefer anonymity, they can have their voices changed and their faces hidden.

Another reason for the increase of scandals is the normative changes that Western societies have undergone. Since Spiro Agnew's famous "the bastards have changed the rules," public figures who were caught on charges of corruption lament time and again (as did most recently Benyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister from 1996 to 1999, when the police recommended that he be put to trial) that everybody (for Netanyahu, all former prime ministers) had done the same.

Normative change is also the by-product of multiculturalism, with its enclaves of particularistic norms that to some extent have gained tacit agreement to be left alone. Nevertheless, scandals do emerge as a result of the inevitable clash between the norms of mainstream society and those of ethnic fundamentalist and/or ideological groups. This may happen when an insider bolts or in the interface between the way everybody acted "down home" (as was argued in the case of the behavior of Clarence Thomas as described by Anita Hill) and the way the same people are expected to act in the workplace or in public office.

The flood of stories means that scandals have to compete harder to cross the threshold and need staying power to hang in there. Scandals that take may have endless screen hours, a success that may be self-defeating as it causes the erosion of public interest.

Thus, the technological ease of producing evidence and the easy access to the screen once you have it has made the scandal game open for all. At the same time, multiculturalism and with it the sensitivities to political correctness have shaken the certainties about what constitutes normative versus antinormative action and about which private actions or community practices should be exposed as deviations for the public at large and which are nobody's business. All this has only contributed to the strengthening of the attitude of journalists to keep a low profile and stay at the strategic level of stories (Hallin, 1994). Whereas scandals used to be the exception to this rule of objectivity, the new type of scandal, not based on investigative reporting but on external initiative and on media-documented evidence, direct broadcast journalists to comply with the old practices.

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