

Changing Channels: Television and the Struggle for Power in Russia. Rev. and exp. ed. By Ellen Mickiewicz. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999. 372p. \$19.95 paper.

Jeffrey W. Hahn, *Villanova University*

For anyone who watched Soviet television before 1985, the contrast between then and now could not be more striking. As with all Soviet media, television was centrally controlled and used by the Communist Party to communicate only the information deemed necessary by its leaders. The news was sanitized, dreadfully dull, and politically correct. The collapse of communist rule in Russia opened up space for alternative sources of political information to develop. News content today is certainly more lively and attractively packaged, but the emergence of autonomous, multiple sources of information has only partially been realized, as Ellen Mickiewicz makes clear. Furthermore, an unfortunate legacy of the Soviet period remains alive in contemporary Russian practice. It is the principal thesis of this remarkably well-informed and readable book that now, as then, television news is a “zero-sum” game: Whoever controls the news, wins. Consequently, control over television news remains the critical mechanism for gaining and holding political power, and it is the consuming goal of those who would do so.

Except for a short preface, the book under review is a paperback edition of the volume published under the same title in 1997 by Oxford University Press. Indeed, it appears that exactly the same typeface was used for both. The new edition, however, has an “Afterword” that expands the analysis through the financial collapse of 1998.

The author’s intention is to “illuminate the critical role television played at key times and with key political actors and institutions” (p. xiii) in Russia. Indeed, the first two-thirds of the book do just this by describing how policies on television coverage changed, both during the *perestroika* of Gorbachev, from 1985 to 1991, and under Yeltsin’s leadership, through the 1996 presidential election. The focus is almost exclusively on television news and on the role of the central television stations in Moscow. The style adopted in these chapters is closer to investigative journalism than to academic analysis, but what a remarkably rich and detailed picture we get of the events and players in this period and of how television influenced both. Mickiewicz made good use of her position as director of the Commission on Radio and Television Policy, co-chaired by Jimmy Carter and Eduard Sagaleyev (founder of the first private television station in Russia), to interview virtually all the major political and television decision makers in this period. Her insider access yields fascinating insight into how the battle for control of the “most powerful medium” unfolded. There is nothing in English or in Russian to compare with it.

The remainder of the book contains equally valuable, indeed path-breaking, contributions to our understanding of the role of the media in Russia today, albeit within a more traditionally academic framework of analysis. Particularly noteworthy is the author’s exploration in chapter 9 of how controversial issues were presented on television and of public tolerance for diverse viewpoints. Using data from survey research and systematic personal interviews with television executives and the general public conducted in waves between 1989 and 1995, Mickiewicz shows how closely one’s tolerance for divergent opinions on controversial issues mirrored the political polarization of society and thereby “reduced the space for a tolerant middle” (p. 212). Also of value are the sections that deal with the effects of privatization on news presentation. One effect was the great enhancement of television as source of news at the expense of the

print media. Chapter 10 and portions of the Afterword are must reading for those who want to understand the struggle for media control currently underway in Russia. The Afterword also offers a new take on the Russian television viewer. Based on focus group data collected in 1998 in cooperation with the Public Opinion Foundation in Moscow, the author concludes that Russians possess extraordinary sophistication in how they process TV news information.

One of the most revealing sections of the book deals with the emergence of the first truly independent, private television station, NTV. The story of NTV demonstrates both the possibilities and the problems confronting television journalism in Russia. Soon after it came into being in 1994, NTV earned widespread public credibility for its coverage of the war in Chechnya. The reporting was balanced, independent, and smart. “NTV got it right” and in doing so “finally spelled the end of the Soviet media system” (p. 224). The backlash from the Yeltsin administration and its media channels was predictably harsh but only enhanced the viewership for NTV. Sadly, this independence was compromised when NTV felt compelled to join the rest of the television media in virtually open support of Yeltsin’s reelection in 1996. As Mickiewicz shows, for television journalists, controlling the medium remained a zero-sum game; they could not afford a Ziuganov victory over Yeltsin. They had to take sides.

It is hard to find fault with a book as good as this one, but there are times when the claim for television’s power to control events in Russia seems exaggerated. Certainly, political leaders in Russia, as everywhere, seek to manipulate television to get out “their” message, and media in Russia are probably more politicized than elsewhere, but surely control over the broadcasting tower in Ostankino is not the only key to holding power in Russia. Beyond that, one can quibble that the book as a whole does not address larger theoretical issues in the field of comparative politics or, for that matter, in the field of political communication. Fascinating though they are, the chapters in the first two-thirds of the book are atheoretical. Mickiewicz knows the scholarly literature as well as anyone in these fields. Why not use this splendid case study more systematically to illuminate further some of the issues it raises?

The Rational Politician: Exploiting the Media in New Democracies. By Andrew K. Milton. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2000. 195p. \$64.95.

Jane L. Curry, *Santa Clara University*

The media have always been major players in transitions from authoritarian rule toward democracy. For all the discussion of the media as actors in these transitions and as the objects of political tug-of-wars, little has actually been said about how the media work or how they have been managed. *The Rational Politician* is the first look at the media in the East European transitions from communism to democracy.

This is not a complete study of the transformation of the media in the process of democratization. It does not look either at what happens inside the media (how journalists and editors act and how their behaviors change) or at how the populations receive and use the media. Instead, Milton examines the elites’ battles with and decisions about the media in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia (and the Czech Republic and Slovakia) to see whether the paths of the transitions are determined by elites’ deliberate crafting or by the legacies of the different forms of communism. He finds a remarkable continuity in how the media are actually con-

trolled: Even as systems are attacked and torn down, their opponents discover that the old controls serve their interests.

Based on a detailed review of the history of the media in the three most successful democratizing states in East Europe and of the elites' battles with and treatment of the media after communism collapsed in 1989, Milton rather sensibly argues that neither elites nor national history alone determines the fate of the media. Instead, he argues, it is a combination of the two. In focusing on the conflicts and formal relations between the media and politicians and among politicians over the media, Milton leaves out the most ironic influence on the politics of the media in postcommunist transitions: Communism may have left a set of institutional controls and ways to manage the media, but many of the leaders of the new media and many of the first postcommunist elites learned their lessons from being members of the anticommunist opposition. What they learned has not made them supportive of a free press. Rather, they see the media as an important instrument for getting and keeping political power. After all, if the opposition could push communism over the edge with underground publications, the logic goes, free media that criticize their own rule could be lethal.

Elites, Milton concludes, want to remain in charge. To that end, just as the communist elites found many of the methods of control used by the interwar regime and then the Nazis worked for them, the new "democratic" elites often use the controls they opposed in the communist system. Whatever their ideology, their real concern is with protecting their vested interests. In fact, as the media expand coverage and criticism, the elites often respond by imposing controls. They do this, they say, to protect and consolidate stability in the democracies they are building.

Milton brings together the details of how the media were managed in the precommunist, communist, and postcommunist eras. In the process, he provides a much-needed compendium of the crises in media-elite relations and of the legal and institutional regulations that existed before the transitions began in 1989 and during the first decade of the transitions. That in itself is a real service. These are, after all, four of the most successful democratizers, models for the other later or slower transitions. If elites in these countries try to constrain media freedom, imagine how tempting such constraint is for other, less successful or liberal, "democratizers." Beyond this, Milton lays out clearly and calmly the debate between "transitologists" and those who say history makes the difference. His conclusion is a sensible one: The truth lies somewhere in between.

Moral Purity and Persecution in History. By Barrington Moore, Jr. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000. 158p. \$19.95.

Adam B. Seligman, *Boston University*

From time out of mind, people have killed, maimed, and oppressed one another in two sorts of conflicts: over material interests (real estate, slave labor, agricultural surplus, war booty, and so on) and over what Max Weber would have termed "ideal interests" (conflicts over ultimate meanings, salvation, principles of justice, definitions of social order). Barrington Moore's classical and landmark study, *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (1966), explored the first mode of conflict in the making of modern nation-states. All social scientists are forever in his debt for that effort. It ranks

as one of the most important contributions to the fields of comparative and historical sociology.

The present work moves to the second realm, ideal interests, in the sense of the need to maintain boundaries of "moral purity" within collectivities and the rather vicious derivatives of this need in terms of social relations. A concern with moral purity leads to a concomitant concern with "pollution," which the author claims is the cause of much war and persecution. The book explores three cases—Old Testament Judaism (basically, the laws of Leviticus and the injunctions of the later prophets), the Huguenots in France, and Saint-Just and the French Revolution. Through these cases Moore seeks to establish the centrality of monotheism to a concern with moral purity and its lasting influence in defining issues of purity and pollution as loci of conflict, wars, and persecution in Western civilization.

At the end of the study, Moore engages in some brief asides to show how in Hinduism, Confucianism, and Buddhism concern with moral purity never led to the type of persecution that it did in monotheistic civilizations. True, Hinduism oppressed the lower castes, but it did not seek to eliminate them. A wider comparative net, however, drawing in such cases as Japanese civilization or the Zoroastrian, Sassanian Empire (226–652 C.E.), would have led to an appreciation of monotheism as only one among any number of civilizations engaged in such repressive behavior, not unique in itself. Moreover, and as Arnaldo Momigliano (*On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, 1987) has shown, the "tolerance" of the pagan empire stopped abruptly short in matters touching on political rule or regime loyalty.

Moral purity is a notoriously difficult term, deeply resonant with Christian rather than strictly monotheistic meanings. Indeed, Moore's reading of the ancient Israelite holiness code in its ruling on scale disease (and so also, the case of menstruating women, uterine blood, seminal emissions, contact with the dead) as moral defects, forms of moral pollution (p. 20), is manifestly false. Purity in the Old Testament did not have to do "mainly with sex" (p. 36). Moreover, Jacob Neusner (*The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism*, 1973) and others have argued convincingly for the inability to separate issues of ritual from moral purity in ancient Judaism. A specifically moral reading of issues of purity and pollution was not the legacy of early Hebrew monotheism. Indeed, when Moore claims that "astonishingly little" has changed in the "social implications of purity and impurity" from the ancient Israelites to the French Huguenots (p. 56), he glosses over what was perhaps the most significant change of all, that registered in the seventh chapter of the Gospel of Mark, when Jesus proclaims: "Nothing that goes from outside into a man can defile him . . . It is what comes out of a man that defiles him." Here is the real origin of a concern with moral purity, rather than the more general and cross-cultural issues of purity and pollution.

What "comes out of a man" relocates issues of purity and impurity from the external world of ritual acts (and states) to the internal realm of intentionality and belief. It was indeed the very focus on belief, on faith, as forgoing communal boundaries and solidarities that played such a salient role in the Protestant Reformation, not least in its Calvinist varieties. It is no doubt true that Calvin, and most especially Calvinists, maintained a strong separation between the church and the unchurched, between the regenerate saints and unregenerate sinners (in the language of Congregational Puritanism), but it is not at all clear that this is analogous to the terms of moral purity invoked by Moore. It is equally far from sure that the term *virtu* and its corollary, "corruption," both of which were used with such vehemence by the radical