

Book review

Elena Raviola, *Organizing Independence: Negotiations between Journalism and Management in News Organizations*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2022

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As an organizational scholar interested in the field of media and news production, I find this book as an example of volumes that once you pick them up, it is almost impossible to stop reading until you turned the final page. Not only because the story of the struggles for media independence or independence of the media (especially in relation to business and financial interests) is a timely, important and compelling one. But also because the author takes us on a rich and thrilling empirical journey where the reader is invited to closely follow ongoing and never-finalised contestations, conflicts and compromises between actors that are involved in shaping one of our most central institutions.

The book opens with a discussion on how media independence can be understood theoretically – mainly in relation to the re-organisation of the news work and the journalistic practices, values, and preferences. The physical, organisational, as well as practical separation of journalism and other (business-oriented) professions occupying or entering news organisations, stand together with the development of digital tools as central to understanding how the independence of media and news production has been both maintained and challenged. With help of reasoning from the French pragmatism tradition (here embodied in the justification theory of Boltanski and Thevenot), Raviola lays out an analytical framework that allows her to approach the separation of and tensions between journalism and business as located in and partly also resolved by organisational compromises where values, preferences, and practices of the two professions meet and influence each other.

One of the most interesting merits of the book, I would argue, is to be found in the detailed descriptions of the journalistic work as it struggles to uphold its professional *raison d'être* in its continuous encounter with the business world. The three examples that are offered in the book – an Italian multimedia publishing company, a Swedish media group, and a French news website – suggest that the process in which media independence is sought to be achieved can unfold differently and with varying organisational and professional consequences. As many of the empirical examples are set in the context of the digital(ised) transformation both of the organisational processes and structures in which news is produced and the forms in which they are distributed to the audiences the book connects the question of media independence closely to the rapid technological developments not only in the media industry but also in society at large. Through these examples and stories, we learn that the contestation and defence of conventional journalism and its independence are not necessarily planned or

carefully designed. Mostly, they emerge from practical organisational arrangements and from ongoing negotiations about the form, content, focus, and rhythm of the news being produced. The book offers here a picture of journalistic work, its products (i.e., the news), and the professional and ethical values that guide the newsroom as fluid and open for adaptation – which at times means that media independence can re-gain or even conquer new grounds.

The author sees such fluidity and adaptation both as a driver and outcome of what she refers to as organisational compromises around what is typically defined as core ideals of journalism. The book offers here three types of organisational compromises. The first type labelled News vs. Money aims at sustaining ‘the walls’ that separate the practices of journalism and management – or ‘the newsroom and the company’, as the author put it. Compromises captured under News for Money are on the other hand directed towards independence by seeing news and news-producing organisations as a business case where investing in journalism, newspapers, and news corporations represent good earning opportunities. Finally, Money for News describes compromises that lead to internalisation of economic realities and re-definition of independence of media as conditioned by the entrepreneurial work of the journalists and by raising necessary financial support.

Despite their ideal-typical formulation, the three types of organisational compromises capture – as Raviola argues - the complexity and variety in which the independent work of media is organised and performed and the richness in ways in which new digital technologies are employed. The book illustrates here that the journalistic work and ideals are not static, and neither is the business perspective – people shift their opinions as they become involved in the ongoing professional, economic and technological challenges of news production and as they justify (or disjustify) certain practices, activities and priorities. Thus, organising and organisation of news drive different people and their interests into constant negotiations about what journalism is, how it should be done, and how to secure its independence. At the same time, organisational arrangements (and especially those established around new technologies) lead to stability and to a certain extent also to predictability in the ways the newsrooms and business rooms understand and relate to each other. Or as Raviola expresses this – ‘these arrangements make independence possible in practice, while simultaneously compromising the ideals of journalism and management’.

One can read Raviola’s description and analysis of the organisational compromises in the three cases as optimistic. She sees, and I would argue quite rightfully so, the independence of media not as merely threatened by non-journalistic professions and by the new technology employed in gathering, analysing, writing, and publishing news. Instead, she offers a perspective in which journalism and media independence can evolve not despite but because of the (compromises around) challenges, conflicts, and frictions that the journalistic work and values face in its different organisational, managerial, and technological contexts. This discussion is quite refreshing especially as the literature on media and news organisations has been over the last couple of decades focused on the opposite process. That is, a process where media (both as an institution and as technology) is involved in transforming other domains of our society (s.c. mediatisation) and where professional work and independence of those primarily occupying these domains are challenged, transformed, and at times even replaced by values, preferences, and practices of the media.

In extension, I read Raviola’s arguments also as an important and relevant contribution to studying and understanding (independence and transformation of) other core institutions of

our societies. The lessons drawn from the negotiations and tensions between the newsroom and business room as both emerging from and leading to organisational compromises can be transformed into the discussion of independence of (and consequently also trust in) areas such as politics, science, culture, or religion. Organisational scholars interested in how these institutions are infused and even challenged by competing logics or orders of worth can here enrich their analysis by focusing less on tensions derived from a static and idealised referential framework in which different professions are locked. And pay closer attention to continuous and ongoing seeking of organisational compromises that contribute to functional (although might be more frictional) and less rigid survival of the institutions at hand.

Keywords:

negotiation, organization, media