Introducing their seminal volume, Hallin and Mancini (2004b) pay tribute to Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*, acknowledging the validity of the general question the authors of the *Four Theories* were interested in – namely, how and why is it that “the press always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates” (Siebert et al., 1956: 2). However, the authors of *Comparing Media Systems* part company with the authors of the *Four Theories* as they shift their focus from the political philosophies that Siebert et al. presumed undergird the flavor, “form and coloration” of mass media around the world. Instead, Hallin and Mancini (2004b) focus on empirical analyses of relations between media and politics in particular locales in Western Europe and North America and on the rootedness of those relations in specific histories of social and political change.

Yet, despite Hallin and Mancini’s admirable wish to give the *Four Theories* “a decent burial and move on,” two aspects of their seminal work continue to bear resemblance to some of
the original tenets of the *Four Theories*. The first aspect is Hallin and Mancini’s commitment to the continual search for *models* of media and politics (as per the book’s subtitle), albeit with the crucial stipulation that the models proposed in the 2004 volume are empirical, not normative. Second is their commitment to analyze relations between media and politics worldwide on a *systems* level (as per the book’s title), but again, with the crucial specification that media systems are often dynamic, not always stable, and undergo constant historical change.

While acknowledging the importance of structural or systems-level analysis, I argue here for an approach that foregrounds *processes* rather than systems or structures in studying the interplay of media and politics. The difficulty with a processual approach is that it forces the researcher to accept the untidiness and dynamism of media–political relations while still trying to discern some logic behind those relations, such as how they are maintained, how and when they begin to change, and how we know the change is of historical significance rather than a unique adjustment to a particular situation. In a way, the difficulty with the processual approach lies in its ambition to document history in the making, to discern “the emergent” and “the residual” (Williams, 1977) in cultural and political formations out of the endless fluctuations of everyday life.

My attention to studying processes grew out of my effort to understand the political transformation of “what was socialism and what came next” (Verdery, 1996). Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, political change in the former Soviet bloc was studied most authoritatively (with little attention paid to the role of the media) under the “transitions” paradigm, where the change worth waiting for and paying attention to was the long-awaited transition away from authoritarianism and toward liberal democracy. During those fifteen years or so, the field of
“transitology” was seen as bringing what used to be ghettoized as Soviet studies into the mainstream of comparative politics (e.g., Linz and Stepan, 1996; Markwick, 1996). With the excitement around the “third wave” of democratization eventually waning by the end of the 1990s (with many presumed democratic “candidates” getting stuck, derailed, or lost in the transition), political observers began to talk about “hybrid” regimes as a new and durable form of political rule that combines democratic and authoritarian elements (Alexander, 2008; Carothers, 2002; Diamond, 2002; Karl, 1995; Levitsky and Way, 2010). Moreover, there seems to be a consensus now in comparative politics that hybrid regimes have become the most common form of political organization around the world.

As is often the case with knowledge generated in the tradition with strong roots in structural-functionalism, “transitologists” turned “hybridologists” have set out a new task for their field: to formulate a typology of hybrid regimes. Thus appeared “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria, 1997), “delegative democracy” (O’Donnell, 1994), “imitation democracy” (Shevtsova, 2007), “electoral democracy” and “electoral authoritarianism” (Schedler, 2002), “competitive authoritarianism” (Levitsky and Way, 2002), “multi-party authoritarianism” (Linz, 2000), “non-cooperative transitions” (McFaul, 2002), “limited multi-party regimes” (Hadenius and Teorell, 2007), and many other subtypes in the political “gray zone” (Carothers, 2002) between classic liberal democracy and classic dictatorships.

While acknowledging that building typologies can be a useful analytical tool, I believe that the “foggy” (Schedler, 2002) or gray zone between democracy and dictatorship is not the best place to attempt such an exercise. I am sympathetic to the desire to classify and systematize because I am also dissatisfied with the use of “hybrid” when it denotes a lump of features that the
researcher does not know how to untangle. However, the very grayness or fogginess of the intermediary zone in question is a signal that we must shift gears and drop down into the level of analysis where things are clearer. I suggest that the ethnographic method, among other things, allows us to clear up some of the analytical fog that is inevitable in structural-typological analysis, because it connects changes that are happening “on the ground” (micro level) to changes that are potentially historical (macro level). I hope to demonstrate in this chapter that such an approach gets at the hybridity in question by untangling the complexities of media–political relations without sacrificing their dynamism or their frequent contradictions and tensions.

The plan for this chapter is then as follows. First, I further identify what I mean by “process” and how it is implicated in the maintenance of both order and change. I pay special attention to the interplay between micro and macro levels of analysis that gives the processual approach its particular advantage. In an ironic twist, I am attempting what could be interpreted as a typology of processes to help us identify what kinds of processes can and cannot be potentially compared to one another. I then move on to regard media organizations as sites where different kinds of processes intersect with and feed off of one another. Throughout, I draw on my work and the work of colleagues to point to some examples of what different processes and their interrelations might look like. In some respects, my analysis runs counter to Hallin and Mancini’s goal of sharpening the dimensions along which media and politics can be compared around the world (media markets, “political parallelism,” professionalization of journalists, and state–media relations), because the processual approach I am advocating cuts across many of those dimensions. In other respects, however, the focus on process opens up those dimensions, revealing links among them, which is one of Hallin and Mancini’s goals. The hope is that the
focus on process will offer a useful tool for studying patterns and especially shifts in relations between media and politics in societies that are changing in uncertain directions or seem to be permanently “stuck in transition” – shifts that are sometimes subtle, sometimes contradictory, and often historically significant.

A order and change

In many works drawing inspiration from poststructural theory, the idea of process is often contrasted with the idea of structure or with a stable social and political order (e.g., Buyandelgeriyn, 2008; see also Vincent, 1986). Process is seen as fluid, dynamic, and full of human agency, whereas structure is seen as stable, static, and full of rules. This is a mistaken dichotomy, however: Process can be both about the maintenance of order and about the transformation of that order; not infrequently, it is about both of those things at once.

Anthropologist Sally Falk Moore (1978) calls the first type of processes “regularizing”; I call them “order maintaining.” These processes are geared toward producing continuity, consistency, and regularity in social relations, and they do so through a continual renewal and reenactment of existing norms and rules. The countervailing variety of processes – through which social orders are dismantled or transformed rather than maintained – are rooted in what Moore (1978: 50) calls “situational adjustment.” This refers to people’s attempts to use “whatever areas there are of inconsistency, contradiction, conflict, and ambiguity… to achieve immediate situational ends.” What results from situational adjustment may or may not help generate new norms and rules and may or may not be historically significant, but it does help erode regularities if those regularities were there to begin with. I call these processes “order eroding.”

How can both order-maintaining and order-eroding processes coexist or even be in
competition with one another? This is possible, Moore (1978) explains, because at bottom, social life does not exhibit a proclivity toward either regularity or change; rather, it rests on the basic premise of indeterminacy of most social situations, which turn out one way or another depending on the articulation of social forces and the circumstances at play. This is the idea that I aimed for in Roudakova (2009) by describing the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces in post-Soviet Russian journalism. Had the centripetal forces been stronger, I argued, they would have helped carry Russian journalism more or less intact through the tribulations of the early post-Soviet period, helping maintain some regularity in professional norms and rules. However, it was the centrifugal forces that ended up being stronger in that particular period in Russia; those forces splintered journalism along the lines of situational adjustment, when every practitioner ended up, as they put it, “on their own” and “working primarily for themselves.”

The dynamic tension between order maintenance and order erosion is particularly useful in theorizing about hybrid regimes and their prospects. Several theorists of hybrid regimes (e.g., Diamond, 2002; Levitsky and Way, 2002; McFaul, 2002) explicitly recognize this dynamic as they point to tensions and ambiguities that underlie hybrid regimes. McFaul, for instance, invokes the image of “a stalemate between competing forces” [of autocracy and democratization] as a characteristic feature of hybrid regimes (McFaul, 2002: 224). Levitsky and Way, in their turn, speak of “the contradictions inherent in competitive authoritarianism” as political incumbents have to continuously “choose between egregiously violating democratic rules, at the cost of international isolation and domestic conflict, and allowing the [democratic] challenge to proceed, at the cost of possible defeat” (Levitsky and Way, 2002: 59). Significantly for us here, Levitsky and Way identify what they call “independent media” as one of their four “inherent sources of
instability” in hybrid regimes, in addition to the electoral, legislative, and judicial arenas. Independent media in hybrid regimes “are not only legal but often quite influential,” Levitsky and Way note, and journalists working for those outlets, “though frequently threatened and periodically attacked, often emerge as important opposition figures” (Levitsky and Way, 2002: 59).

There is an important point to be made here about the meaning of political change. Conventionally, much of transitology was pegged to the notion of political change away from authoritarianism and toward liberal democracy (and hybrid regimes have often been seen as states where such movement has been stalled). Many of us continue to assume, along with transitologists, that change means a shift from one state of affairs to another. However, if we look at it more processually, keeping in mind the interplay between order maintenance and order erosion in the basic field of indeterminacy, the notion of change has to be rethought in important ways. Change could indeed mean a shift from one set of regularities to another; however, it could also mean, more subtly, a shift from regularity to indeterminacy, or from indeterminacy to regularity, or from one version of indeterminacy to another (Greenhouse et al., 2002; Moore, 1978, 1987; Ortner, 1984, 2006).

In each of these scenarios, change can be conceptualized as the result of a competition between order-maintaining and order-eroding processes. In the first and third scenario, order maintenance would be seen as temporarily prevailing over order erosion; in the other two scenarios, it would be the other way around. In the transitions literature, some of these more subtle shifts are referred to as “limited political openings” or “liberalization without democratization.” While acknowledging that, of course, “every step toward political liberalization
matters (Diamond, 2002: 33)” where repression is rampant, I want to point out that conceiving of political shifts two-dimensionally (toward liberalization – away from liberalization) might be robbing us of the fuller understanding of history as it unfolds. As I argue later in this chapter, what often come to matter historically with hybrid regimes are the specific sequences of the shifts to and from indeterminacy. These historical shifts might be easily overlooked if we understand political change in binary terms.

A micro and macro

In addition to thinking about processes in terms of order and change, another way to approach them is in terms of their scale. For simplicity’s sake, we can divide them into micro and macro, and the articulations between the two are a favorite topic of ethnographers. Micro processes are the “stuff” of everyday life; they are about the daily movement of people through their social roles, situations, institutions, and positions of power. In contrast, macro processes are the material of history. They are about shifts, continuities, contradictions, and tensions in the social, political, and economic organization of societies.

Both micro and macro processes can be order maintaining and order eroding. A micro process is order maintaining when people’s daily interactions help reproduce people’s existing positions in power hierarchies. It can be order eroding if people begin to respond to those situations in novel, unanticipated ways as they detect shifts in circumstances; if enough people do so and do so often enough, these actions may become socially and historically meaningful. It is at this point that the micro and the macro level articulate with one another: after all, the making of history happens in many different places and with the help of many actors at once (Moore, 1987: 730). The making of history can indeed be order transforming; this is our conventional
understanding of history as a series of revolutions, uprisings, coups, elections, accessions to the throne, and the like. Yet history making can also be much more mundane. Historical continuity – as a process – is also a variety of history making. In that process, events may unfold in a regular, predictable manner or sequence, or as I suggested earlier, historical continuity may manifest itself through a sequence of subtle shifts from one state of indeterminacy to another. We need analytical tools that would account for both.

A structure and agency

The last component in the analysis of processes I am suggesting is closely connected to the points made earlier. In the same way in which process links order and change, and micro and macro levels, it usefully brings together structure and agency (another pair of concepts that are sometimes seen in opposition to one another in social analysis). The mutual constitution of structure and agency through process is by no means a novel idea – it is at least as old as Marx’s adage about people making history but not in circumstances of their choosing. Yet it has taken on a new significance in the human sciences and in anthropology in particular with the revival of what has come to be known as “practice theory” (Bourdieu, 1977; Ortner, 1984, 2006; Vincent, 1986). Practice theory restored the agent to the social process without losing sight of the larger structures that both constrain that agency, but are ultimately susceptible to being transformed by it (Ortner, 2006). It reminded researchers that social and political structures are rarely seamless or harmonious wholes; rather, they are made up of inconsistencies, tensions, and struggles for power both on the micro and macro levels. When participants in a social situation are successful in (temporarily) quelling those inconsistencies – whether through discursive enactment, performance, or representation of “the structure” – then structures emerge as durable social facts
(cf. Geertz, 1980; Turner, 1974). Performing and representing “the structure” are none other than order-maintaining processes discussed earlier. When, however, actors cannot contain tensions within the structure for one reason or another, order erosion takes center stage. What becomes equally important, then, are the *conditions* and *circumstances* in which social structure emerges as a coherent entity and the conditions and circumstances when it does not.

To see what all of this means for analyses of media and politics, and in hybrid regimes in particular, let us turn to Hallin and Mancini’s four dimensions as jumping-off points. Hallin and Mancini mention in the introduction to this volume that one can ask these questions of media and politics in *any* country: What is the role of the state? What is the level of professionalism of journalists? What is the extent of the links between the media and organized social and political groups? And how are media markets developed? Asking these questions, however, presupposes an analytical separation between the domains of the state, the market, and civil/political society (where social and political groups “reside” and can organize). Such analytical separation carries with it a set of core assumptions about what the nature and function of the state might be, what the nature and function of the market might be, and what civil/political society “is” and “is for.”

What the processual approach purports to do is to help us *not* make those assumptions at the outset. Once we start thinking of relations between media and politics as a set of overlapping and interlocking processes, it quickly becomes clear that Hallin and Mancini’s dimensions cannot be studied in isolation from one another. They have to be opened up, linked together, and put into motion. Let us attempt to do that, turning first to the state, then to political parallelism, and then to journalistic professionalism. (I do not devote a separate section to media markets, but simply assume that they, too, are not only a “dimension” but also a process connected to other processes,
and highlight those connections as necessary throughout my analysis.)

A the state as a process

One useful place to start seeing the state as a process is the fast-growing literature on the anthropology of the state, which builds on poststructural developments in social theory (Comaroff, 1998; Gupta, 1995, forthcoming; Hansen and Stepputat, 2001; Mitchell, 1991; Navaro-Yashin, 2002; Sharma and Gupta, 2006). This literature makes the unity of the state a phenomenon to be explained, instead of taking that unity as a point of analytical departure. States come to us culturally embedded, these anthropologists argue, and a significant amount of cultural labor goes into the everyday production of what “the state” is and does. In other words, assuming that “the state has to be imagined no less than the nation” (Gupta and Sharma, 2006: 278), anthropologists ask, How is what we recognize as “the state” culturally produced, perceived, and experienced as such?

Put differently, a cultural approach to the state attempts to simultaneously *disaggregate* and *decenter* the state as an object of analysis. Disaggregating the state means giving up the notion of the state as an a priori entity and seeing in its place assemblages of interlinked governmental and interpretive practices that sometimes do and sometimes do not add up to an overarching governing structure. Inter-bureaucratic tensions and alliance building, as well as intra-institutional contestation and conflict (considered dysfunctional in an ideal-typical Weberian bureaucracy), come to the fore here as social situations through which “the state” is actually produced (of course, in a very extended and complex way). Interestingly, this “messiness” and unevenness of state practices are something that every ethnographer of the state is immediately confronted with, yet have rarely been built into social scientists’ analytical frameworks. Instead,
like governmental officials themselves, social scientists have tended to reify the state through their discourses and representations of it (Mitchell, 1991). Borrowing a provocative phrase from Philip Abrams, an early proponent of studying the state processually, “since the task of the social scientist is to demystify,” in studying the state it should mean “attending to the senses in which the state does not exist [as much as] to those in which it does” (Abrams, 1988: 82, emphasis added).

In addition to disaggregating the state, the second emphasis is on decentering it. This means putting the state in a relational frame – that is, focusing on the processes through which the state’s institutional frames articulate with discourses about the state, representations and performances of the state, and perceptions of what the state is and does. It means seeing the state as a set of social relations enacted everyday through the daily encounters and meaning-making practices between and among state officials and other people who come into contact with the state, including, in our case, various media actors. As people come in contact with and represent the state to one another, these performances and representations, in turn, feed into people’s subsequent perceptions of and actions on “the state.”

When we think of the state in this way, we are able to put a finger on that “mushy concept that political analysts do well to avoid” (Huntington, 1991: 46), namely the question of state legitimacy and its maintenance through the media, especially through state-owned, state-funded, and government-aligned media outlets. In many respects, this is the old question of hegemony as a lived, active, shifting, “formative but also transformative” process and practice (Williams, 1977: 113), where the dominant, the residual, and the emergent elements of ideology are in a dynamic interplay and often tension. Hallin and Mancini (2004b) curiously do not focus on the ideological maintenance of state authority as an avenue along which the state “intervenes” into the media
(they focus, instead, on questions of state ownership, regulation, and funding). This is perhaps in part because in the Western European democracies they study, the legitimacy of government stems from the very procedure through which those governments come to power. Yet in hybrid regimes where governmental legitimacy is often maintained through mechanisms other than elections, how media organizations “perform” the state to citizens is one of the most important processes to pay attention to.

Let me start with the case I am most familiar with, the story of state–media relations in the Soviet Union and their transformation in post-Soviet Russia. The image of the Soviet press that many Westerners continue to have is of stolid, turgid, unbroken columns of gray text glorifying the Soviet Union’s superiority and achievements. The press as a “transmission belt” between the communist party-state and the Soviet masses, and journalists as the compliant “lapdogs” or “cogs” in the Soviet propaganda machine, are the key images Western imagination conjures up of the social institution that produced those texts. Much interesting work has come out in the last decade and a half that challenges this widespread perception. This line of work (Boyer, 2003, 2005; Boyer and Yurchak, 2010; Wolfe, 2005; Yurchak, 1997, 2003, 2006) approaches Soviet-style media precisely along the lines discussed earlier, drawing out the interconnections among media representations of the state, performances of it, citizens’ perceptions of it, and what “it” ended up being as a result of all those manipulations.

Drawing on what Zizek (1991) has called “totalitarian laughter,” and what Sloterdijk (1987) has called “humor that has ceased to struggle,” this new line of work elucidates the connections among representation, performance, and perception of states and their media in the former Soviet bloc in the following way. In encountering (and producing) turgid ideological
columns of newspaper text, the reader (and the writer) were acutely aware of both the *inevitability* and the *vacuity* of those official representations. Instead of openly recognizing that, however, citizens preferred to *misrecognize* it, because such acts of misrecognition opened doors for them to develop relations with the state they did find meaningful and fulfilling (more on this later). As people misrecognized the inevitability of the official Soviet rhetoric while enjoying what such misrecognition enabled, most could not help but notice a dissonance at the heart of such practice. Most people found that dissonance ironic, which found expression in an exquisite collection of political jokes (*anekdoty*) known to and performed across the former Soviet bloc and across all social strata (Lampland, 1991; Verdery, 1996; Yurchak, 1997). Yurchak (2003) in particular argues that such subtle shifts in the representation, performance, and perception of the Soviet state, occurring as they did during the last few decades of Soviet rule, likely played an important role in bringing about the restructuring and eventual collapse of Soviet governmental institutions in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Another commonly elided aspect of discussions about the Soviet party-press is that the latter pages of quality Soviet newspapers usually carried much livelier content than the requisite official rhetoric of the first pages. It is in those latter pages that one can get a glimpse of the *social relations* that readers were developing with newspaper journalists and, through them, with the Soviet state. In the city of Gorky (Nizhny Novgorod) in Russia where I have been conducting research, journalists who worked for the newspaper for young adults (called *Leninskaya Smena* [LS]) in the mid-1980s spent less time actually writing for the newspaper and more time working closely and carefully with readers’ letters, phone calls, and visits to editorial offices. Journalists held weekly writing workshops for high school and college students and coordinated the activities...
of the cartoonists’ club and the film lovers’ club linked to the newspaper and open to the public. They opened their offices for regular informal discussions between newspaper readers and local dignitaries. They also routinely organized professional and neighborhood competitions, festivals, restoration drives for historical monuments, environmental clean-up campaigns, rock concerts, film screenings, and many other public events in the city. Lively reports about these events would then end up on the latter pages of the newspaper. It is fair to say that the majority of socially active Gorky residents who are middle-aged today subscribed to LS in the 1970s and 1980s, enjoyed reading it, and took advantage of the opportunities for socialization it offered at some point or another during their teens and twenties.²

One of the main reasons for the popularity of LS with young adults was that its texts and the opportunities for engagement with the Soviet state it offered lacked what I call “ideological closure.” That is, in their work, LS journalists, instead of papering over the discursive and governmental tensions inherent in the Soviet project, often managed to capture those tensions and sometimes even brought them to the fore. They did so both unwittingly (because those tensions were objectively present in the Soviet project) and purposefully (when they acted on their understanding of their civic and professional roles or when they tried to stay creative in the face of “boring” orthodox practices like the requisite production of ideologically correct passages for the front pages of the newspaper).

A good example of how ideological closure was avoided was LS journalists’ interest in working with so-called difficult letters that arrived by the hundreds to its offices every week. LS published some of those letters as invitations to a conversation under the “Discussion Club” rubric that ran regularly in the newspaper. Readers wrote back, LS published some of the responses, and
LS journalists chimed in on the discussions as well. In 1983–5, conversation threads around uncomfortable but enormously popular topics included debates about the value of money and consumption in opposition to socialist ideals of modesty and intellectual pursuits; the tension between a formal approach to Komsomol (Communist Youth League) activities and a substantive one; conversations about boredom and depression and why they persist in a socialist society; discussions about the tension between individuality and collectivity and whether one should try to change oneself to “fit in”; arguments over what it meant to be a “modern” young person in the 1980s; and debates on whether listening to Western rock bands (an under-the-radar activity in the USSR) without understanding the lyrics still counted as supporting those bands’ “glorification” of self-indulgence, naval gazing, egotism, and other capitalist vices. The tensions that these discussions would highlight would be the very same tensions woven into the Soviet governmental project itself, most notably the tension between liberal humanism (with its key ideas of inquisitiveness, creativity, self-realization, and self-fulfillment) and socialism’s more community-oriented values of selflessness, altruism, modesty, and discipline.

LS journalists’ being attuned to their readers’ experiences of socialism as paradoxical and contradictory was none other than the act of journalists and readers representing and performing the Soviet state to one another, and this activity – this process – helped nurture a particular kind of cultural contract between Soviet journalists and their audiences that became especially important during the transformative late 1980s. Specifically, this process helped build trust between journalists and readers, without which Soviet journalists would not have emerged in the late 1980s as an independent cultural and moral force that propelled perestroika forward. We could say that this process drew both on order erosion and order maintenance: order erosion
when journalists would capture and highlight for readers the contradictions of the Soviet governmental project, and order maintenance when journalists would appear before their readers as representatives of “the most humane (chelovekoobraznym) department of Soviet power” (Gutiontov, 2005) when they served as intermediaries between readers and various party-state bureaucracies.

The formation of this important cultural contract (the contract that would be broken in the late 1990s) was a process that involved not only representations and performances of the state but also acting on the institutional inconsistencies in the mechanisms of ideological control of the Soviet press. *LS* was a newspaper for the young, and in the official hierarchy of Soviet media outlets, newspapers for the young were afforded more room for experimentation and criticism than their “adult” counterparts. This, I was told, was because the press’s Communist Party overseers understood that people in their teens and twenties are in a period in their lives when they intensely search for answers, ask more questions, are less compromising, more easily feel betrayed by insincerity, and are less tolerant of hypocrisy. Journalists knew that, and many of them preferred to work in outlets for young adults until retirement, despite the official expectation that they would move on to work in an “adult” newspaper once they reached their late 30s. Readers also knew that, and quality newspapers for the young like *LS* maintained large audiences in part because they included many older readers (noticeable through readers’ letters).

Of course, all of this meant that *LS* journalists had a little more leeway compared to their colleagues in other newspapers when it came to relations with their party overseers. The *LS* chief editor, who happened to have good leadership skills and was a journalist at heart, knew how to walk a very fine line: on the one hand, he knew to keep the newspaper in line with the general
mission of the state-party press, and on the other hand, he worked hard not to stifle the creativity of \textit{LS}’s more adventurous journalists (a number of whom were not party members). That meant the editor knew whom to assign the more ideologically stodgy tasks, and whom to spare, and how to edit the texts of his more spirited colleagues so that they would retain their critical edge yet would be amenable to at least some party officials. Himself a seasoned party worker, the chief editor knew how to work the corridors of the party organization overseeing the newspaper. That meant enlisting tacit support of more open-minded party officials there or knowing which battles to fight and which to drop.$^{3}$

Finally, the officials themselves at the oblast (regional) committee of Komsomol (Obkom), the organization that oversaw \textit{LS}, varied greatly. There were some, as journalists put it, who tried to “order them around” (\textit{pytalis’ stroit’ zhurnalistov}) and from whom journalists sought protection through their chief editor. Yet there were also many horizontal links between the newspaper and the Obkom because of the mirror-like doubling of many departments in the two organizations: Many journalists and rank-and-file Obkom “instructors” often worked jointly on projects, which allowed both groups to develop social and human relations with one another. In the language of the 2000s, many Obkom workers were “adequate” (\textit{adekvatyne}) people – that is, people you could reason with, who were not mortally scared of their own superiors or seeking promotion at all costs; in other words, they were people with a sense of integrity and often humor. Perhaps, more significantly, Obkom activists were often the very same people who had gone through the discussion clubs at \textit{LS} and who, therefore, had grown up ideologically in the fairly relaxed and intellectually uninhibited atmosphere of those gatherings (not to mention that, initially, they had come to know many \textit{LS} journalists as their writing mentors and were often
hesitant to talk “down” to them from their new positions as Obkom overseers).  

All of these practices helped sustain a generally positive, relaxed, and creative atmosphere in LS offices in the 1970s and 1980s; this atmosphere was felt on newspaper pages, in the editorial offices that readers frequented, and at public events LS journalists organized. In conjunction with LS representational practices that highlighted the unique paradoxes of the Soviet governmental project, this atmosphere helped people experience the Soviet state as something meaningful, and not only as something inevitable and ridiculous, as when it was the butt of (anti)Soviet jokes. Significantly, as I already mentioned, this complex process, through which the Soviet state was co-produced by LS journalists and audiences, helped foster a cultural contract between these two groups that became central to Soviet journalists’ emergence as an independent cultural and moral force during perestroika (1985–91). During that period, journalists, building on the trust they had developed with citizens, crucially contributed to the transformation of the Soviet party-state and its eventual dissolution in 1991. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, however, the relation in Russia between the media, the state, and the public has undergone a series of important shifts. Some of those shifts have been subtle, some less so, but each new articulation of relations in the media-state-public triangle has owed significantly to what had come before it. This is important, because without studying the sequence of those shifts, one cannot get an adequate picture of state–media transformation and its dynamics in Russia, which many Western liberal accounts of post-Soviet media and politics lack.

One critical juncture in those relations crystallized around the mid-1990s, when Russian journalists put their renewed moral authority to the cause of state-building, as they began to involve themselves in electoral campaigns, supporting some candidates and denouncing others.
This was simultaneously a cultural, political, and economic move on the part of journalists: Their compulsion to act as moral guardians of the nation articulated with the privatization of media outlets, the near absence of consumer advertising, and the willingness of electoral contenders to generously fund electoral battles. This period culminated in 1996 with journalists reluctantly throwing their moral weight behind Boris Yeltsin’s reelection campaign, funded by the newly emerged “oligarchs,” against Yeltsin’s communist contender. This was a decision most Russian journalists today bitterly regret, because it opened the floodgates for the so-called media wars of the late 1990s, when political and economic elites began buying up media outlets for the sole purpose of using them as weapons in political battles.

The media wars of the late 1990s therefore mark another key node in Russia’s state–media transformation, one that came as a response to the developments of the early 1990s and one that simultaneously laid the groundwork for a dismal future for Russia’s journalists in the 2000s. Intense media wars splintered the remaining professional solidarity among journalists, undercut their moral authority, and irreparably alienated their labor as it came to be “freely” bought and sold on the market of electoral promotion and political persuasion. A new and widespread discourse of journalism as “prostitution” that had been absent in the Soviet Union emerged as one of the unintended consequences of that period.

The media wars, funded by Russia’s new oligarchs, were both a symptom of and (at least partially) a cause of their spectacular rise to power. It thus makes sense that President Putin, elected in 2000 and determined to “rein in” the oligarchs, identified reimposition of state control over the oligarchs’ media resources as his key policy objective. The reintroduction of partial censorship in both state and privately owned outlets was therefore a decision made possible by
the very political developments that brought Putin’s team to power in the first place.

Ironically, once political control over most of the journalistic field was reestablished in Russia in the early 2000s, the country’s leaders and their ideologists found themselves in a new and awkward predicament. The control they had secured was control over those media producers who continue to be distrusted and disrespected by their audiences. With time, this distrust has become circular: Citizens are disdainful of both journalists and the government (e.g., Bogdanov, 2007; Levada, 2006; Oushakine, 2009a; Vedomosti, 2005); government officials distrust both journalists and citizens (e.g., Dubin, 2005; Gaaze, 2009; Larina et al., 2009); and many journalists are contemptuous both of their government overseers and of their audiences, privately referring to the latter as “the rabble” (bydlo) and pipi khavaet (“the people [who] are eating it up;” Nenashev, 2004; Petrovskaya and Larina, 2010; Shestopal and Kachkaeva, 2006; "Svoboda Mnenii v Internete," 2010).

Needless to say, this circular disrespect in the state-media-society triangle complicates and possibly undermines the very task of ideological closure the Kremlin had set out to achieve. The ideological situation in Russia today is therefore precarious, and to be able to govern through consent and not only coercion, Russia’s leaders once again need the support of journalists and intellectuals whose moral authority had not been compromised by the “chaos” of the transition or has somehow been “repaired.” Russia’s current leaders are reluctant to go that route, yet there are many indicators that some feel compelled to do something, because most of their own attempts to offer citizens a new set of cultural-ideological coordinates without the help of uncompromised intellectuals have thus far succeeded only marginally at best (Borodina, 2008; Dubin et al., 2009; Gaaze, 2009; Kolesnikov, 2009; Zygar et al., 2009). What that “something” will be, when it will
be done, and how it will articulate with other loci of power in Russia are still difficult to predict, but it will be a shift of possible historical significance, another nod in Russia’s continuing media–political transformation, coming out of what has come before.

A  **cultural production of states: comparisons**

Using the processual framework outlined earlier, how do we begin to compare the processes through which state legitimacy is maintained across countries and historical periods? This is not an easy task, but one that we can attempt nonetheless. The key to this task is the unity of ethnographic or other qualitative research methods that allows one to simultaneously tease out and link order and change, macro and micro, and structure and agency, through process. Despite the recent proliferation of scholarship aimed at de-Westernizing media studies, unfortunately there is still a real dearth of historically sensitive field research on the state-media-society dynamic, especially in countries that do not neatly fit the liberal “media and democratization” narrative. In what follows, I draw on existing qualitative research on state–media and state–community relations in China and Venezuela, in part because there is good qualitative work there and in part because those countries share with Russia an ongoing history of profound yet uncertain political change, in which the media have been a key player. Not having done any work in those countries myself, I am inevitably presenting my reading of existing research, with all the potential pitfalls of that enterprise.

It is probably important to remind readers here what kind of comparison between Russia, China, and Venezuela this will *not* be. By examining media-political relations in these three countries side by side, I am not implying that Russian, Chinese, and Venezuelan governments are “illiberal” in the same way in the political projects they are pursuing (they are not); or that they
practice press censorship and political violence against media actors in a similar way (they do
not). These kinds of comparisons have been made many times by Freedom House and other
organizations and are not particularly insightful, in my view. The kind of comparison I am offering
below, and for which I have been developing tools in this chapter, aims to find comparable and
overlapping elements in the media-political processes happening in the three countries. These
processes may be similar in some respects and different in others; what unites them is that these
processes are open-ended, are happening relatively fast, and are therefore of profound historical
significance. Let us then first turn to historical shifts in China’s relations between the state, the
media, and the public, as they have more obvious similarities to the (post)Soviet story presented
earlier. China’s history over the last several decades has been punctuated just as much as Russia’s
(and probably more so) by ongoing experiments with new forms of social, political, and economic
organization. Following Rofel (1999, 2007) and Zhao (1998, 2008), both of whom draw on Wang
(2004, 2006), I understand China’s socialist decades (1949–79) as a period of real, if wrought,
intense, and deeply conflicting public mobilization around communist ideals and goals. More
historical research needs to be done to understand the role the Chinese press played in the cultural
production and reproduction of the revolutionary state during that period. The available research
is on the postsocialist period, so that is where we must inevitably start. In the same way in which I
identified critical junctures, or forks in the road, for Russia’s media-political transformation,
similar junctures can be identified for China. The socialist Democracy Movement of 1979; Deng
Xiaoping’s neoliberal reforms in the 1980s; the June 4th Movement of 1989; the near-collapse of
state legitimacy that followed; the explosive market growth in the 1990s and the seeming
restoration of the state’s authority; the mounting challenge to the party-state in the 2000s, as the
gap between wealth and poverty widened; and the party-state’s response to that challenge – all of these can be read as key junctures in the recent history of China’s media–political relations.

The critical political economy perspective from which Yuezhi Zhao (2008) and her colleagues work helps identify many of those forks in the road; however, this approach is less helpful in fleshing out the actual process through which state legitimacy has been maintained (or eroded) “on the ground” over time. For instance, Zhao (2008; see Chapter 8) reminds us that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has always been built on intra-elite tensions and struggles, including disagreements between “liberal,” “neoliberal,” and Maoist factions; tensions between central, municipal, and local governments; disagreements between those in the CCP favoring a more popular participatory press and those favoring a more bureaucratic elitist one; and recent tensions between those who control the flows of information and those who control financial flows within media outlets and conglomerates. These intra-elite struggles have inevitably pulled media actors into their orbit over the years, sometimes creating spaces for the media to step into the political fray and “speak up for the people,” or spaces for the everyday people to “speak bitterness” – a discursive practice that both addresses the state and critiques it, with the potential both to reinforce and fragment state power. (“Speaking bitterness” has interesting parallels to readers’ “difficult” letters in the Soviet Union and to denuncias, or people’s complaints about the state in contemporary Venezuela; more on that later.)

Following media scholars such as Zhao (1998, 2008), Pan and Lu (Pan, 2000; Pan and Lu, 2003), He (2000, 2003), and Tong and Sparks (Tong, 2007a, 2007b; Tong and Sparks, 2009), we can begin to glimpse how the maintenance of state legitimacy has been carried out in China through the everyday practices of representing and performing the state through the media; what
institutional tensions have fueled those practices; and how the articulation of institutions, performances, and perceptions of the state has been contributing to shifts in what the Chinese state means to its citizens. Zhao (1998, 2008) shows particularly well how Deng’s “no debate” policy after the Tiananmen Square crackdown led to mounting social tensions that the media tried to contain and how the explosive growth of media markets happening at the same time was creating new, competing loci of social and economic power. Together, these developments both reinforced and weakened state authority by the end of the 1990s. Zhao (2008) also shows how the party-state has attempted to respond to mounting crises of authority throughout the 1990s and 2000s: The introduction of an investigative series, Focus Interviews, on CCTV and the greater critical “bite” of the People’s Daily are two such examples. Pan and Lu’s ethnographic research (Pan, 2000; Pan and Lu, 2003) portrays how journalists were reinventing themselves and their organizations in the midst of China’s economic boom in the late 1990s – practices that ended up contributing both to new forms of corruption in journalism and to the rise of respectable investigative reporting. However, Pan and Lu stop short of linking how these practices contributed (or not) to the re legitimization of the Chinese party-state throughout the 1990s. Tong and Sparks’ research (Tong, 2007a, 2007b; Tong and Sparks, 2009) several years later illuminates how investigative journalists in China “perform” the state and their new professional identities to their sources, their audiences, and their party overseers, in the face of what seems not only like stricter rules of engagement between journalists and propaganda officials but also like a greater level of trust between journalists and audiences, compared to the late 1990s. Zhou He (2000, 2003) is less optimistic: He does not see China’s journalists developing any new, culturally meaningful links to their audiences or to the Chinese state throughout the 1990s. The postsocialist
period, he argues, “alienated [journalists] from Communist ideology,” but did not bring about any new “solid bonds with alternative ideologies” (He, 2003: 208). As a result, the majority of China’s journalists in the 2000s are guided by “a mesh of vague, embryonic, and transient ideas” in their relations with the state and the public (ibid).

Perhaps not surprisingly, it is from the work of anthropologists and cultural theorists (Anagnost, 1997; Rofel, 1999, 2007; J. Wang, 2001) who do not work specifically on media organizations, but who are particularly attentive to the interplay of order and change, micro and macro, and structure and agency within a cultural process, that I was best able to grasp the changing dynamics of state-media-society relations in China over the last three decades. According to Jing Wang (2001), it was the transnational capital that came to China in the 1990s that saved the Chinese state from a crisis of confidence that almost collapsed after the Tiananmen Square crackdown in June 1989. The fact that the Chinese state managed throughout the 1990s to regulate, contain, and more or less “socialize” that windfall capital – through its preoccupation with legality, regulation, and “democratic consumerism” – greatly helped the Chinese state reestablish its legitimacy. Interestingly, according to Wang (2001), the state was able to step in and take control over public representations and perceptions of itself in the mid-1990s, in part because by then, China’s intellectuals (which include journalists) had become splintered by a decade and a half of Deng’s pro-market restructuring. When the intellectuals could no longer speak cohesively of “what was best for the people,” state actors stepped in and did so for them. This is an important point, because if it is true, there are interesting parallels here with the cultural contract between journalists and audiences in the Soviet Union I described and with the rupture of that contract as Russia’s market reforms picked up in the mid- and late 1990s. Much literature
(e.g., Faraday, 2000; Oushakine, 2009b) exists on the crisis of post-Soviet intelligentsia, showing that intellectuals’ unique claim to moral authority is recognized under socialism by audiences as long as those intellectuals act as mediators between those audiences and the ethical ideals of the socialist state. Once that state is transformed by the market, the discursive unity – and moral power – of the intelligentsia is eroded.

Lisa Rofel (2007) draws out another interesting set of conclusions about the state-media-public dynamic in China, based on her long-term fieldwork. She is struck by the fact that almost every conversation she initiated in the late 1990s and early 2000s with young and middle-aged urban Chinese women, including a number of journalists, began with their declaration – “I am completely uninterested in politics” – even as most of them “volubly, vociferously, and satirically condemned the government’s treatment of Falun Gong, for example” (Rofel, 2007: 124). Rofel eventually realizes that these women’s declarations of “disinterest” in politics were meant to underscore their desire to unlink their identities from the idea of government. Assertions that one is uninterested in politics stressed that one’s passions “were not in the least bit directed toward the state” (ibid). The history behind those desires, Rofel argues, is rooted in the decades of intense political mobilization under Mao, when people were invited to direct “the passions of the self” to the revolutionary state and its projects. Claims of “disinterest” in politics also come out of the decade and a half under Deng of recasting socialism as full of sacrifice, deprivation, and unneeded hardship. The post-Deng discourse of politics of any stripe as “uninteresting” or “boring” is thus meant to rectify what Boyer (2005) has called “the surfeit of history” with reference to contemporary West German discourses about East Germany. Boyer argues that many East Germans today have withdrawn into private lives, in part because their socialist past is
authoritatively recast for them as having “too much politics of the wrong kind.” A parallel can also be drawn to postsocialist, postwar Serbia, where young people are similarly politically apathetic, this time as a result of international democracy promoters urging them to abandon an emotional investment into the “wrong” kind of political passions, presumably located in Serbian nationalism of the 1990s (Greenberg, 2010).

Venezuela’s trajectory of recent political change is in many respects the reverse of that of Russia and China; after all, Hugo Chavez has been pursuing an anti-neoliberal revolution there with the goal of building socialism, rather than moving away from it. Yet precisely because this transformation involves profound changes to Venezuela’s social and political fabric, the question of maintaining state legitimacy *through* the transformation has been of critical importance there as well. Significantly for our analysis, supporters often colloquially refer to Venezuela’s ongoing political restructuring as *el proceso* (Schiller, 2009).

In the same way we identified key historical junctures in state-media-society relations for China and Russia, we can do so for Venezuela as well. Most observers consider the *Caracazo* – the popular riots of 1989 against the government’s neoliberal structural adjustment programs that were violently put down by the military – as “year zero” of Venezuela’s contemporary political change (Leary, 2009; Samet, 2009; Schiller, 2009; Smilde, 2009). Of key importance for us here, the *Caracazo* signaled a real crisis of legitimacy for the presidency of Carlos Andres Perez, elected just weeks before the riots began. Through televised appearances on private channels, government officials resorted to misrepresenting the rioting poor as “savages” and attempted to cover up state violence against the rioters, all in an effort to paint a coherent picture of the state being “in control.” This effort failed: The riots continued, and when the minister of the interior
went live on television to announce a curfew, he was “so overcome by nerves that he could not deliver his speech. Disney cartoons abruptly interrupted the broadcast of the suddenly helpless minister” (Leary, 2009: 31).

After the Caracazo, Venezuela experienced an almost decade-long crisis of state authority: During the 1990s, two failed coups shook the country, two main parties that had dominated politics for decades collapsed, and the president (Andres Perez) was jailed for misuse of public funds. The failed coup of 1992, led by General Hugo Chavez, is now remembered for Chavez’s ninety-second televised address to the nation, because that address captured many Venezuelans’ disaffection with the state and paved the way for Chavez’s return as a legitimate president in 1998. Importantly, in the political uncertainty of the 1990s, Venezuelans placed a great deal of faith in the press (Samet, 2009). Newspapers like El Nacional wielded a significant amount of power, “playing an active role in setting the country’s political agenda” (Samet, 2009: 5). For instance, El Nacional, along with other major news outlets, actively supported Hugo Chavez’s campaign for presidency in 1998.

Once Chavez came to power, his intense anti-neoliberal rhetoric and sweeping political reforms turned most private media outlets and most middle- and upper-class Venezuelans away from him. At the next historical juncture, in 2002–4, it was time for Chavez’s authority to be seriously tested – through an attempted commercial “media” coup against him, a nationwide strike by oil producers, and a recall referendum aimed to remove him from power. It is no doubt that it is in response to those events that Chavez and his allies have been trying to centralize power and bolster their authority since then – efforts that have included a dramatic increase in the number of state media outlets, a de facto expansion of the Popular Power branch of government (aimed at
bypassing governing structures of the pre-Chavez era), new legislation allowing Chavez’s political appointees to bypass some of the authority of governors and mayors, and new defamation and libel statutes that make it harder for the press to gain access to official information and criticize officials (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Smilde, 2009).

Naomi Schiller’s (2009) careful ethnography of relations between the Venezuelan state and government-aligned community media in Caracas is particularly illuminating of the fluctuations and shifts in how the Venezuelan state has been culturally produced and maintained over the last several years. Since coming to power, the Chavez government has centrally relied on community organizers and media producers from Venezuela’s barrios to maintain its claim to being “of the people” and “for the people.” State television workers have been recruited from the ranks of community media producers, and state TV programming has been borrowing the aesthetic of grassroots media to perform its allegiance to “the people” (Schiller, 2009). In turn, community media have been urged to take part (and often take center stage) in numerous governmental press conferences, official election coverage, state-sponsored marches, festivals, international conferences, and other events through which the Venezuelan state has been simultaneously performed and culturally (re)produced.

Yet participating in el proceso has been neither smooth nor complete for community media producers in Caracas, as Schiller (2009) demonstrates beyond doubt. The Venezuelan state has been more successful in pulling community media into its orbit during crucial moments of its recent history when the very existence of the Chavez government was in question – the presidential recall referendum of 2004 and the presidential election of 2006. Yet relying on community media to provide everyday cultural support to the legitimacy of Chavez’s “Bolivarian
revolution” has been a much more contested, open-ended, and uncertain process. The practice of televising *denuncias* – simultaneous complains to and criticisms of the government – has been one troubled area for community media producers. On the one hand, many people from the *barrios* perceive community media as “the last resort” for them to be heard by the government, when all other avenues have been exhausted. In this respect, *denuncias* are similar to Soviet citizens’ “difficult letters” to newspapers and Chinese citizens’ “speaking bitterness” through the press – phenomena that both invoke the state into being and criticize it and that interpolate government-aligned media workers as “the most humane branch” of state power.

On the other hand, broadcasting *denuncias* has been a fraught practice for government-aligned community media outlets. In the context of intense political polarization in contemporary Venezuela, any *denuncia* aired on community television can be construed as an indictment of the Chavez government and its social programs. In fact, as Samet (2009) shows, crime reporters in Caracas working for private newspapers often press crime victims from poor neighborhoods to *produce a denuncia* into a camera or a tape recorder, aware of its power to help mount a political challenge against political incumbents.

Providing ongoing cultural legitimization to Chavez’s “Bolivarian revolution” was particularly difficult in 2007, Schiller (2009) explains, when the government decided to effectively revoke the broadcast license of one of the oldest commercial stations in Caracas, RCTV, which had been an active participant in the coup against him in 2002. In contrast to generating political and cultural support for Chavez during the 2004 and 2006 campaigns, community and government media in 2007 “faced an uphill battle in building support among poor neighborhoods” for the government’s decision to exile RCTV from public airwaves (Schiller, 2009: 336). Many
community media producers explicitly perceived the public cultural battle around RCTV’s license revocation as “a test to prove the legitimacy of their revolutionary project…negotiating the terms through which the revolution’s ‘respectability’ or legitimacy would be judged” (p. 332). There was an ongoing tension, Schiller reports, between “whether state institutions were merely consulting with community organizations” or truly collaborating with them about what kind of television should replace RCTV (p. 330). Community media suggested the creation of a national community media channel, but were themselves ambivalent about such an idea, because they were unsure what such a channel would mean for their base of power (p. 348). Eventually, and without much discussion, the Ministry of Communication went for officially certified “Independent National Producers” – people who are largely educated, middle class, and produce “professional quality” programming for whoever is footing the bill. Understandably, this introduced tensions in the relations between community producers and Independent National Producers, as well as tensions among community media producers, because some of them had registered with the state as Independent National Producers while others saw this route as a petit bourgeois betrayal of “the people” (p. 356). How these tensions will play out in the future and what role (if any) they will have in the future of “the Bolivarian revolution” are hard to predict; however, what this development highlights and brings us back to is the difficult, ambivalent, and multifaceted role of intellectuals in the continuous legitimization (and sometimes delegitimization) of state power.

What Schiller’s (2009) and Samet’s (2009) ethnographies get at is the actual process through which state legitimacy has been maintained (or, possibly, has begun to be eroded) via media institutions in Venezuela over the last few years. Their analysis helps capture the dynamic between centripetal and centrifugal forces of the kind I identified for post-Soviet Russia and that
can probably be identified for postsocialist China as well. On the one hand, there is a continuing process of centralization of state power (manifested in the many legal and political moves described earlier) that continues to draw legitimacy from the work of state and community media producers. On the other hand, there is a centrifugal pull for decentralization, destabilization, and delegitimization of state power – the effect of “media wars” and other battles the government and the opposition continue to fight. Neither government-aligned nor opposition-aligned media producers would likely want either of those pulls to reach its logical conclusion (authoritarianism or civil unrest), yet they are caught in the middle of a process that, to a certain extent, contains both of those pulls at once.

**political parallelism as a process**

Hallin and Mancini (2004b) define “political parallelism” as the extent and the character of the links between media outlets and organized social and political groups. Partisanship of media content and of media audiences and personnel connections between media organizations and social and political groups they represent are all key features of political parallelism for Hallin and Mancini. Overall, political parallelism is a useful term for the analysis of media and politics beyond Western Europe, but just like with the analysis of “the state,” it needs to be opened up and put into motion to capture the dynamics of political change in much of the non-Western world.

First, it is important that we include into the definition of an “organized social group” not only parties, churches, trade unions, and other organizations claiming political participation but also individual capitalists with connections in government and factions within state bureaucracies. Second, I welcome de Albuquerque’s move (see Chapter 5) to distinguish analytically between political partisanship of media outlets, on the one hand, and an active role of media actors and
organizations in the political and state-making process, on the other. Some examples of media organizations actively intervening into the political process include commercial media staging a coup against Chavez in 2002; the same outlets urging people in 2003 to join the nationwide oil strike and not to pay taxes to paralyze the working of the Venezuelan state; Brazilian journalists’ throwing unqualified support behind Color’s bid for the presidency, announcing later they made a mistake, and contributing to his removal from power a few years later (Albuquerque, 2005); Russian journalists’ crucial intervention into the electoral process in 1996 and 1999; and “Radio Maria” contributing decisively to the election of Lech Kaczyński in Poland in 2006. Perhaps even China’s People’s Daily’s notorious “Nine Commentaries” (see Chapter 8), published as “Open Letters to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union” and credited with bringing about the Sino-Soviet split, could be considered as an example of active “interventionism” of media organizations into the political process that goes beyond mere “parallelism.” What is important here is that media outlets in these cases intervene not only in politics but also in state formation – if we think of states, as argued in the previous section, as “works in progress” (Schiller, 2009).

Next, Hallin and Mancini make an important point that organized social groups are historical formations and change over time. This historical dimension is particularly important in non-First World contexts, especially in recently postcolonial, postsocialist, postdictatorship, and postwar contexts in which intense, turbulent political change is a matter of recent history or of the present, compared to the 300-year span of Western European history with which Hallin and Mancini deal. Just as journalists’ intervention into politics is often inseparable from state formation, so is the formation of social groups. State formation and social groups’ formation do not run “in parallel,” but are part of the same historical process. Stuart Hall (2006) makes these
links clear\(^1\) with respect to the English state and class structure, highlighting the historical junctures at which the relationship between the English state and the English class structure would reach a relative “settlement” and identifying periods of “transition,” when both the form of the English state and England’s class structure would be fundamentally and thoroughly reshaped and transformed.

For postcolonial, postconflict, postdictatorship, and postsocialist societies in which state formation and the formation of classes, parties, and other social groups are a matter of ongoing historical process, media outlets have been particularly important sites for social and political mobilization, division, containment, and conflict. They have also been sites in which power relations between intellectual elites, the imagined “people,” and the transforming state have been playing out. In studying these processes, it might be helpful to think of “organized social groups” as fluid and changing rather than durable entities, as they tend to appear in Hallin and Mancini’s analysis. A good example here are my illustrations from early 2000s Russia, where the partisan links between media outlets and powerful (or not so powerful) political players would sometimes last no longer than a month, after which relations of partisanship would have to be renegotiated (Roudakova, 2008). Duncan McCargo’s (see Chapter 10) description of “partisan polyvalence” in Thailand, where journalists are valued for playing many different political “cards” at once, is another example in which “organized social groups” are fluid rather than durable.

Yet we might be better off by not drawing too hard a distinction between durable and fluid political groupings in the first place. For instance, Zhao (see Chapter 8) argues that the Chinese Communist Party, which some might consider one of the most “durable” political organizations out there, has been constantly transforming and has had many of its own “forks in the road.” Zhao
reminds readers that Deng Xiaoping’s rise to power, for example, was made possible only after Deng had traveled to southern China and was able to mobilize the more liberal media in Shanghai and Guangdong provinces to help him “win over” more conservative Beijing party circles. In her turn, Schiller (2009) studies what might appear, to outsiders, as a well-organized political grassroots movement that forms the base of Chavez’s “Bolivarian revolution.” However, on ethnographic examination, the movement turns out to be a shifting and contested terrain, a political project open to multiple and strategic deployments, contingent on various occlusions, and advanced by the erasure of some experiences while privileging others. Precisely because this political project is fluid, community organizers in Caracas are able to articulate and at times disarticulate their positions and actions with the contemporary Venezuelan state, and they do it sometimes willingly, sometimes reluctantly, and often strategically.

In evaluating the usefulness of the term “political parallelism” proposed by Hallin and Mancini, Colin Sparks (2008) suggests that we switch to political “alignment” instead of “parallelism,” to avoid the unwanted connotations of straight, parallel lines present in the latter term. It seems to me that “alignment” still keeps us within the geometry of lines; to steer clear of that, I suggest “political articulation and disarticulation” as a pair of concepts that might help us better account for the interplay of the continuities and the breaks in the processes described.

A journalistic professionalism as a process
In Comparing Media Systems, Hallin and Mancini (2004b) admirably break the analytical link between commercialism (of news media) and professionalism (of journalists), which was presumed universal by liberal and “Whig” theories of press freedom and which still underpins many democracy-promotion activities worldwide. Instead, the authors argue, the link between
commercialism and professionalism in news media is specific to countries with an early history of liberal economic and political institutions. What is not historically specific about professionalism, say Hallin and Mancini, is the presence of group autonomy for journalists, shared ethical norms, and a commitment to public service (rather than to particularistic interests).

This new three-pronged approach to journalistic professionalism is useful in many ways, not in the least because it allows the acknowledgment of professional practices in media systems with no commercial presence at all (Curry, 1990; Roudakova, 2007). However, the new three-pronged definition, like the earlier one, can quickly become ahistorical and acultural, unless the processual character of journalistic professionalism is brought center stage. (This is similar to the concern Hallin and Mancini express in the introduction to this volume that many scholars around the world are starting to treat Comparing Media Systems as the new Four Theories).

To approach professionalism as a process, we need, again, to open it up, “lay it on thick” (Geertz, 1973; Scott, 1990), and put it into everyday and historical motion. In addition, like we did with the concept of “the state,” we need to attend to the articulations between the institutional settings that enable the practice of professionalism, on the one hand, and the performances and perceptions of the idea of professionalism, on the other. To save space, I focus on the commitment to public service – the third element in Hallin and Mancini’s definition of professionalism – and demonstrate what attending to the interplay of institutions, performances, and perceptions of “the public” over time might look like. However, similar explications could be done for the group autonomy and shared ethical norms components of professionalism as well.

The public has been understood as a protean concept for quite some time now (e.g., Gal, 2002; Peters, 1995; Warner, 2002). Following this line of thought, rather than asking whether or
not a group of journalists is committed to public service, it might be more interesting to ask these questions: How is the notion of the public understood, performed, and deployed? Under what conditions and to what end are those performances and deployments carried out? What institutional incongruencies make possible subtle shifts in those deployments, and to what results? Or we could ask a related set of questions, especially important in societies undergoing a thorough social transformation: What is the difference, if any, between the public and the social? Which public is being hailed by journalists? Do journalists know their public “when they see it?” Even more interestingly, how does the hailed public recognize itself as such?

The significance of these questions is underscored by research documenting the so-called soul searching among journalists in contemporary Russia, China, and Venezuela (Dinges, 2005; He, 2003; Pan and Lu, 2003; Roudakova, 2007; Yu, 2006). Journalists’ soul searching signals a genuine sentiment that they might have lost a connection to their “public” somewhere along the way in their country’s recent history. This soul searching might be better understood as a social anxiety, the result of a social mismatch between journalists and their “publics,” when the two groups are unable to recognize one another or speak past one another. One of the more striking examples comes from Russia in the early 2000s, when a group of well-known journalists from what was considered the most professional private television station, NTV, made repeated calls to “the public” to support their protests against the effective renationalization of their station by the Russian government. Those journalists were the same ones who had given their cultural support to liberal democracy and oligarchic capitalism in Russia throughout the 1990s. It is perhaps of little surprise that those journalists’ efforts to shore up “public support” for their protests were met with a wall of silence by the majority of Russian viewers (Levada, 2001).
Dinges (2005) reports on the “crisis of conscience” in Venezuela’s professional media circles. This crisis has to do with professional journalists identifying with what passes as “civil society” in Venezuela, a concept that has explicitly bourgeois connotations in that country because it is used to mark itself off from “the mob” – the frame frequently reserved for Chavez supporters (Gottberg, 2004; Leary, 2009; Schiller, 2009). In a similar vein, Yu (2006) and Zhao (2008) draw attention to the coverage of the story of Sun Zhigang in China a few years ago, coverage that would count as “professional” by many journalists’ standards. This was an investigation into the death of a young university graduate after being detained by Guangzhou police for failing to produce his temporary resident card. Yu (2006) and Zhao (2008) both underscore that what made the reporters pick up and pursue the story out of countless other cases was the fact that it was “a university graduate beaten to death” rather than simply “a citizen beaten to death” (Yu, 2006: 321).

As journalists search for and experiment with meanings of “the public” in the shifting social terrain of their respective countries, some of their actions add up to subtle shifts in the processes of “everyday state formation,” including state legitimization, whereas others do not. For instance, the unexpectedly wide coverage of the Sun Zhigang case helped bring about the abolition of “anti-vagrancy” laws in China, so the police can no longer imprison people unable to produce their ID cards on the spot. In Venezuela, professional journalists’ soul searching has helped tame down the explicitly racist language of commercial print and airwaves over the last few years, and some professional journalists have joined the ranks of Chavez-supported Independent National Producers (Schiller, 2009). In Brazil, as Albuquerque and his colleague show (see Chapter 5; Albuquerque & Silva, 2009), communist journalists, acting on their
understanding of their “public mission,” played an important role both in the emergence of professional journalism in Brazil and in the erosion of state legitimacy during the military reign of 1964–85. In fact, Albuquerque and Roxo da Silva’s story – of communist journalists’ strategic collaboration with Brazil’s commercial media owners, the military regime’s move to “tame down” communist journalists, the inadvertent pushing of more radical varieties of communism into universities after that move, universities beginning to train a new generation of journalists, and the new generation contributing to the cultural de-legitimation of the military regime – is a chain of developments that is a particularly good example of journalistic professionalism being not merely a separate “dimension” of analysis, but a historical and cultural process intertwined with other processes, including the formation and transformation of the Brazilian state and its “organized social groups.”

A conclusion
This chapter outlined an approach to studying relations between media and politics that foregrounds processes rather than systems or structures. I identified some of the elements that a processual analysis of media and politics can build on: the interplay of continuity and change, the articulation between situational (micro) and historical (macro) developments, and the mutual constitution of human agency and social structure. I suggested that a processual analysis of this sort is particularly helpful in studying media–political relations in the so-called hybrid regimes, said to occupy the “political gray zone” between classic liberal democracy and classic dictatorship. Importantly, analysis in this chapter proceeded on the assumptions that hybrid regimes are constantly changing political formations and that this change is historical even if does not have a clear trajectory toward or away from textbook liberal democracy.
With the focus on processes, I attempted to unpack and dynamically link together three of the four dimensions proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004b) for studying media and politics worldwide. Doing so, I assumed that media organizations are sites in which many overlapping, interconnected processes feed off of one another; among such processes are the exercise of political power, the staging of ideological performances, the accumulation of economic capital, the carrying out of social struggles, the production of cultural representations, and the creation of professional identities. Carefully tracking the articulations of these different processes is a difficult task. Comparing these articulations across countries is even more difficult, because any approach that treats ethnography as history refuses to “check” historical and cultural context at the door of comparison. With context being indispensable to treating the present as historically significant, there is therefore a tentativeness to processual comparisons that is absent in structural comparisons. That is “not because of some paradigmatic failure,” to go back to Sally Falk Moore (1987: 730), but because the researcher embarking on processual comparisons is willing to admit “two significant zones of ignorance.” The first is detailed knowledge of every context being compared; the second is knowledge of the future. As contemporary ethnographies become “more candid about what cannot be ascertained…analyses of ‘current history’ must be made more candid about what cannot be predicted” (Moore, 1987: 731; emphasis added). This does not mean processual comparisons cannot be attempted at all, but it does mean that they must be undertaken carefully, cautiously, and with an explicit understanding of the purpose – the politics – of such comparisons.
References


Gupta, A. (1995). *Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and


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Endnotes

1. I agree with Colin Sparks here when he notes that such “seemingly endless proliferation of different intermediate stages between democracy and dictatorship not only reduces the elegance of the paradigm but also calls into question its explanatory power” (Sparks, 2008: 46).

2. The circulation of the newspaper during the mid-1980s was around 170,000 copies a day, with most of the subscribers living in the city of Gorky, which had a little more than a million inhabitants.

3. Sometimes it meant smoothing out explosive situations with humor or doing contradictory things like apologizing to the officials while simultaneously rewarding journalists. It also meant knowing how to keep cool under pressure when, for instance, a party superior would find out about LS plans for a “sensitive” publication and would “highly recommend” against publishing it, but would refuse to take responsibility for a flat-out prohibition of the publication.

4. During perestroika in the late 1980s, Obkom leaders in the Gorky region began to emerge as the region’s first successful entrepreneurs.

5. See also Hosking (2007).

6. It hardly needs mentioning that according to those accounts, the 1990s in Russia were a period of attempted liberal democracy and press freedom, whereas the 2000s have witnessed a reimposition of censorship and authoritarian control under President Putin.

7. The question of whether China is socialist or postsocialist continues to be a matter of debate for some; following many China scholars, I take the introduction of neoliberal reforms by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 and their acceleration throughout the 1980s and 1990s as the key development that marks the end of China’s socialism.

8. A note here on possible comparisons between Chavez opposition media wars in Venezuela and Russia’s media wars of the late 1990s and early 2000s and their outcome.


10. Similar arguments are advanced in Corrigan and Sayer (1985) and Joseph and Nugent (1994).

11. A good place to start would be Schudson (2005).