The dynamics of resistance and response to mediatization in government: Whitehall press officers caught in the 'cross-field' since 1997.

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1. Introduction

This examination of mediatization in government addresses questions about how social and cultural change linked to media change may impact on central bureaucracies over time, and specifically on power balances or asymmetries between the party political and administrative dimensions of government. As a non-normative 'sensitizing concept' the idea of mediatization has the potential to enrich understandings of the interplay between long-term media change and more normative concepts such as politicization (Hjarvard 2008; Lundby 2014; Lunt and Livingstone 2016). This chapter looks at the dynamics of media-related change over time in the organization and operation of government media engagement, drawing on witness accounts from former Whitehall media intermediaries. This involves two types of actor: press officers, the impartial civil servants delegated to speak to journalists on behalf of the government, and special advisers, the politically-aligned but publicly funded officials appointed by ministers. I will argue that since the rise of 24/7 news in the late 1980s, there has been a shift from impartial to partisan styles of media management that challenges impartiality as a long-held bureaucratic value, both in the UK and other liberal democracies.

Mediatization scholars have called for more longitudinal empirical studies carried out at institutional or meso-level (Hepp 2012; Hepp et al. 2015; Hjarvard 2013). In this chapter I argue that the incoming Labour government of 1997 instituted changes to the formal and informal rules of media engagement that challenged the *resilience* of the communications structure which had been in place since 1945, enabling the service to become more *responsive* to ministers and the media while reducing its autonomy and hence its capacity to *resist* both politicization and

mediatization. Here, the resilient institution is considered to be one that "maintains its effectiveness over time despite changing external conditions, where 'effectiveness' is the extent to which the institution fulfils the core mission" (Steinberg 2009: 65). Within the context of the resilient institution, resistance and responsiveness are seen as subsidiary concepts to mediatization, providing a conceptual link with politicization that is doubly determined. Any process of change meets resistance as well as response (Hepp et al. 2015), and the dual role of the civil servant combines responsiveness to political masters with resistance through the doctrine of speaking 'truth to power' (Hennessy 2001; Wildavsky 1979).

Using in-depth interviews with former civil servants, journalists and partisan special advisers, I examine changes over time in the interactions which take place in the so-called 'cross-field' (Rawolle 2005), theorised as the intersection between three fields – politics, media and bureaucracy – where intermediaries craft the narratives that become news (Cook 1998). The question for this chapter, then, is what form did resistance and responsiveness in relation to mediatization and politicization take after 1997, and what impact did such change have on the roles of both types of government media intermediary?

2. Background

In 1997 Labour came into power on a landslide, determined to develop and exploit the resources of the civil service information machine to help them neutralize what they saw as the partisan bias of the national media, especially the press, which they believed had kept them out of power for 18 years (Blair 2012; Campbell and Stott 2007; Gould 1998; Macintyre 1999). The changes in news management wrought by the post-1997 UK governments, as in other jurisdictions such as Australia, New Zealand and Northern Europe, are thought to have increased partisan control over government communications (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010; Foster 2005), through the process known as politicization.

Government communications are little researched (Moore 2006; Sanders 2011; Strömbäck 2011), but recent studies have used multiple methods to identify ways in which central bureaucracies and executive agencies adapt to mediatization, indicating that politicization and mediatization may interact in a number of ways. A Norwegian observational study from within a government department found that competition between the "impartial expertise, the rule-based backstage of

politics", and media specialists, led to a speeding up of responsiveness to media, anticipatory media management and the simplification of policy, which was felt throughout the organization, driving a wedge between media and policy specialists (Thorbjørnsrud et al. 2014: 163). A study of the views of officials from public and third sector bodies in Australia and the Netherlands found that the more likely they were to encounter politicians as part of their work, the stronger the expectation of knowing the news (Schillemans 2012). Similarly, a Swedish observational and documentary study of executive agencies claimed that the drive to understand and exploit the promotional possibilities of news media was linked to organizational autonomy: officials opted to increase the media profile of their organizations as a way of pleasing politicians, hoping thereby to resist further interference (Fredriksson et al. 2015).

Thus, politicization, the exertion of greater power and control over bureaucracies by ruling politicians, is said to facilitate "politicization through indirect mediatization" – a process whereby officials delegated to manage the media respond to growing ministerial control over media management by increasingly identifying with and serving ministers' personal and political media needs (Fredriksson et al. 2015: 27). Hjarvard sees 'indirect mediatization' as "the development of intertextual discourse between media and other institutions", considering it to be more subtle but at least as important as direct mediatization (Hjarvard 2008: 115).

3. Theoretical Approach: Why Mediatization?

When analysing governing bureaucracies, it is tempting to consider concepts such as impartial-partisan, or bureaucratic-political as dichotomies when in practice they may be blurred or mutually reinforcing (Wæraas and Byrkjeflot 2012). Foucault, for example, proposed that conceptualisations based on dichotomies be substituted by the analysis of "the field of simultaneous and successive differences" (Miller et al. 1991: 62). Within a given field, the process of change acts not in a linear, causal fashion but interacts with internal and external forces to produce certain communicative configurations (Couldry 2014; Hepp 2013). Mediatization scholars suggest that rather than the 'zero sum game' identified in much media/political agenda-setting research (Thesen 2014), the fields of media and politics reinforce each other "enabling a simultaneous mediatization of politics and a politicization of media", (Hepp et al. 2015: 5). Thesen agrees that political and media agendas converge and reinforce each other by valorising personalisation and conflict (Thesen 2014). A field approach facilitates the analysis of qualitative data from complex institutional settings over time

using a non-normative perspective that does not assume mediatization to be inherently negative, and without relying unduly on dichotomies that may misrepresent or simplify a complex reality (Hjarvard 2008).

Mediatization, then, may impact on government media engagement in several ways. Firstly, a higher premium is placed on persuasive forms of communication among both journalists and politicians as they battle for attention in a declining market (Kunelius and Reunanen 2012). Secondly, political actors have, over time, increasingly deployed media-led strategic communications as a defence against potentially career-ending media coverage that privileges and personalizes blame and personal integrity over policy or political considerations (Hood 2011; Lindquist and Rasmussen 2012). Thirdly, as an institutionalized response to the dynamics of mediatization, the growth in the scale, scope and status of 'promotional intermediaries' within a range of sectors, including government, contributes towards a pervasive 'promotional culture' (Wernick 1991; Davis 2013; Dinan and Miller 2007).

Mediatization is a relatively new area of theoretical development, but two dominant traditions are emerging that are referred to here as the *media logic* tradition, and the *embedded media* tradition. Couldry and Hepp also identify two traditions, referring to them as "institutionalist" and "social-constructivist" (Couldry and Hepp 2013: 196), while Driessens considers the recent work of Hjarvard and Hepp as representative of each tradition (Driessens 2013). The first considers the process by which media logic intrudes into other fields and institutions, influencing both implicit and explicit understandings of what is seen as appropriate, and ultimately replacing existing rules (Esser 2013). Schulz identified four successive levels of media-related social change, in which media first *extend* the possibilities for human communication, *substitute* social activities and institutions, *amalgamate* with non-media social activities, eventually *accommodating* the behaviours of actors and institutions to media logic (Schulz 2004). Looking specifically at party politics, Strömbäck and Van Aelst outlined four dimensions of mediatization, culminating in a fourth stage where political actors incorporate news media logic into their ideas, perceptions and behaviour (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013).

The approach taken here is derived from the embedded media tradition, which argues that society has already exceeded the fourth dimension of mediatization, and that the process is intensifying, for example, through the further acceleration of the news cycle, and the incorporation of social

media into everyday life. Rather than an accommodation, or surrender to media logic, mediatization is a wider and more far reaching historical meta-process in which media proliferate and are institutionalized and normalized, to the extent that they increasingly contribute towards "the social construction of everyday life, society and culture as a whole" (Krotz 2009: 24). The empirical task is not to focus on media institutions or actors, but to examine shifting power relations between various actors within a mediatized environment (Hoskins and O'Loughlin 2015). Within any given institution, or field, that is subjected to a process of change, such as mediatization, some actors will respond while others resist (Hepp et al. 2015). Change over time, then, becomes a crucial dimension in the empirical study of mediatization. Proponents of historical institutionalism, the study of shifts in informal routines and formal institutional structures that involve disparate institutional actors, have argued that, within communications studies, mediatization scholars are among the few who have successfully adopted this approach (Bannerman and Haggart 2015).

A field-based approach to mediatization seeks to examine the process of change as it applies to *all* actors, and across all relevant institutional boundaries within a particular domain, where boundaries between formal and informal institutions and the roles and practices of actors within them become blurred or distorted in response to mediatization. Within the embedded media tradition, some scholars draw on Bourdieu's idea of social fields and the forms of capital deployed within them as a way of theorizing change in dynamic and unstable media-focused settings. Couldry, argues that the symbolic power of media constitutes a field of influence which overwhelms the social landscape (Couldry 2003). He considers such a field to be dynamic, fluid and unstable; "a bounded space of competition over specific forms of capital by defined sets of actors" (Couldry 2014: 9). Others have depicted the field as "a site of contestation over power" where "institutions, individuals or objects derive their distinctive properties from an internal relationship to all other positions in the field" (Akram et al. 2015: 351). For the Australian scholars, Lingard and Rawolle, this approach to mediatization contains the possibility of interference between fields, to create 'cross-fields' – interfaces where two or more distinct fields collide and interact to produce a unique set of patterns.

Rawolle and Lingard deployed the notion of the 'cross-field' empirically to examine negotiations between government media intermediaries and journalists to create and convey policy narratives relating to a particular news event – Australia's official review into its knowledge economy policy in 1999 (Lingard et al. 2005). In the struggle to define problems and propose solutions, the authors found that "journalists and policy agents adopted a range of strategies that produced cross-field

effects" (Lingard et al. 2005: 734). Such effects were distinctive to the cross-field, such as texts or other representations which emerge during the lifetime of a 'hot topic', snap decisions taken during a 'media frenzy', or the internal negotiations between politicians and officials in response to 'noise' within the mediatized cross-field. This is the context within which this paper conceptualizes politicization and mediatization. Within the cross-field, mediatization may interact with politicization in a range of ways, for example, leading to policy failures by speeding up political decision making in response to demands for quick solutions (King and Crewe 2013; Koch-Baumgarten and Voltmer 2010) and justifying such decisions through forms of mediated public communication which foreclose deliberation and reduce public trust (Moss and O'Loughlin 2008).

The drive by politicians to protect themselves from potentially career-ending media scrutiny may help to explain why state bureaucracies in liberal democracies have tended to become more responsive to political will over time (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010; Page 2007; Page et al. 2012; Van Der Meer and Dijkstra 2011). In the UK this has been most manifest in the steady rise of special advisers in the civil service who can manage both politics and the media (Greer 2008). Their numbers have trebled since 1997, and it has been argued that, far from being mere bag carriers, or the demonized 'spin doctors' of popular legend, they are significant media and political operators in their own right who together form a 'political civil service' (Hood 2015). This has led some to claim that the UK now has a "dual government communication system" (Sanders et al. 2011: 534). Demands from ministers for more politically responsive bureaucratic arrangements have been observed in other ministerial democracies such as Denmark and Spain but with different local effects (Hustedt and Salmonsen 2014).

4. Mediatization: The Case of the UK Government After 1997

This section uses the three subsidiary concepts referred to in the introduction – resilience, resistance and responsiveness – to examine mediatization and politicization in Whitehall after 1997, and to draw conclusions about continuity and change in government communications, taking the UK as a case study. This approach accepts the historical possibility of de-mediatization or differential mediatization within political or bureaucratic settings (Fornäs 2016). These subsidiary concepts arose inductively during the research process, as we discuss below, but they also developed theoretically, firstly, from the mediatization paradigm itself, and, secondly, from the dual, even contradictory, role of the impartial civil servant. Within Whitehall, 'restraints', or resistance,

combine with the doctrine of loyalty, or responsiveness, to uphold political leadership while providing 'checks and balances' to majoritarian political power (Eichbaum and Shaw 2010; Lodge 2013). Factors, such as mediatization, which bypass or interfere with such 'checks and balances' may be said to have constitutional impacts.

5. Methodology

To facilitate a longitudinal approach and overcome the traditional reticence of *serving* civil servants, I conducted 16 in-depth semi-structured interviews with long-serving *former* civil servants, who, collectively, had worked in government for a total of 230 years between 1961 and 2014[1]. For a more rounded and critical understanding of the press officer's role, these were supplemented by interviews with six long-serving policy journalists and three politically appointed ministerial special advisers. Sampling was purposive, ensuring a mix of respondents who had worked at different times and at various levels of seniority, both in departments and at Number 10. The interview topic guide focused on changes over time in the everyday practice of government-media relations, asking how interviewees saw their role, how politicians, special advisers and press officers worked together, and how all parties managed the interface between government bureaucracy, party politics and the media. The interview material was augmented by a thorough analysis of contemporary government and parliamentary reports into media management, archive

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Interviewee	Description (including final post)
CS1	Chief press secretary and director of communications (1978-1998)
CS2	Senior civil servant, Number 10 (1961-1998)
CS3	Number 10 press officer and director of communications (1994-2005)
CS4	Press officer (1999-2004)
CS5	Director of communications (1991-2011)
CS6	Director of communications (2001-2014)
CS7	Press officer (1999-2011)
CS8	Strategy director (1998-2010)
J1	Broadcast correspondent (1972-2002)
J2	Broadsheet specialist correspondent (1981-2012)
J3	Broadsheet specialist editor (1978-to date)
J4	Political editor and columnist (1962- to date)
J5	Broadcast reporter (1968-2002)

material dating back to the 1980s, and internal documents such as capability reviews and propriety guidance, in order to track changes in custom and practice over time. All material was subjected to thematic analysis via Nvivo. Codes were not pre-assigned but emerged inductively, resulting in a coding frame with 76 separate codes under 16 main headings. The most frequently cited themes in order of prominence were the impact on government communications of changes in governing party in 1997 and 2010; impartiality and maintaining 'the line' between impartial and partisan communication; the changing role of politically-appointed special advisers; perceptions of government communicators by other civil servants; the role of the Prime Minister's office; the priority accorded to media by ministers; and the principles and purposes of government communications.

6. Resilience: Enduring Structure But Changing Culture

Government communications has shown remarkable resilience. The structure put in place after WW2 remains largely intact, consisting of central news management support for the Prime Minister and Cabinet at Number 10; departmental press offices to disseminate information about government policy; and, until 2011 at least, a central planning agency to deliver and coordinate propaganda (Grant 1999; Moore 2006). However, less visible incremental and in some cases dramatic changes took place after 1997 and continue today, particularly in relation to the role of ministers. In 1945, a Cabinet Committee stated that governments had the obligation to provide "material on which the public could reach an informed judgement on current affairs" (Cabinet Committee: 18 September 1945)[2] but must preserve the boundaries between public information and propaganda. The minister who later took charge of government communications, Herbert Morrison, stated in a memo that there could be "no questions of Government publicity being used to boost individual ministers" (Memo: 14 September 1945). Then as now, the service was staffed by a cadre of in-house communications specialists who answered to dual political and administrative leaderships, and who, through a process of self-regulation, policed the invisible 'line' dividing impartial public information from political communication. It is this line that has been increasingly challenged both directly by the process of mediatization, and indirectly, through

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[2] National Archives: CAB 78/37.

the increasing involvement of ministers and political parties in the coordination of government publicity from the 1980s onwards, but especially after 1997.

Recently released archived documents dating from the Thatcher governments of the 1980s show how ministers began to demand a more proactive and politically focused government news service, for example, questioning whether "Whitehall's information forces are ideally deployed for the proper presentation of the overall economic message"[3]. His critique was rebutted by the Prime Minister's spokesman Bernard Ingham although he admitted to colleagues that the finance ministry was "desperately in need of some dynamic professionalism. Too much emphasis is apparently put on economic expertise, and far too little on a robust ability – and enthusiasm – to communicate simply"[4]. The archives show how, during the Thatcher years, senior government ministers met regularly, in secret, with party officials, to discuss the coordination of government presentation[5]. The fact that this meeting was held in secret and seen as so controversial, illustrates the cultural constraints on what was then considered to be improper ministerial 'interference' in government communications. Contrast this with the most recent government propriety guidance for communicators, which states that: "the press officer must always reflect the ministerial line clearly" and should "present, describe and justify the thinking behind the policies of the minister" (Government Communication Service 2014).

Despite Ingham's efforts to "introduce some of the disciplines of a newspaper office into Government Information work" and to raise its reputation and status[6], the mainstream civil service failed to rise to the challenge of the new 24/7 news media before 1997. John Major, who became Prime Minister in 1990, admitted that he was suspicious of 'political spin' and did not prioritise media relations, even at Number 10 (Bale and Sanders 2001; Hogg 1995). A No 10 press secretary at the time remembers how "the media was growing like topsy in front of us. We were running like fury to try and keep up. It was a tiny office. It was absolutely ridiculous when you think about it" (CS1). He refers to Number 10's "hair shirtism", a form of parsimony that failed to acknowledge the growing needs of journalists to the extent that no toilet facilities were available for female

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[3] National Archives: PREM 19/720.
[4] National Archives: MIO 1982; CAB 134/4382
[5] The Liaison Committee on the presentation of government policy was a long standing but intermittent post-war body which was revived in 1981 but whose existence was not shared even with the Cabinet until March 1982. According to one commentator, Bernard Ingham's presence at these meetings was "a testimony to the intimate linkage even beyond the bounds of Whitehall propriety, between party and government machines" (Young 1989)
[6] Ingham Archive, Margaret Thatcher foundation: May 1979-April 1985. Memo to Angus Maude, 15/10/1979.

correspondents, and broadcasters had to run cables through the windows to achieve a feed. The dramatic changes that took place after 1997, as we demonstrate below, reflect the release of pent-up pressures that unleashed a range of 'cross-field' effects.

7. Vulnerability: A 'Clear Run' for Labour

The failure to take media change seriously before 1997 effectively gave Labour a 'clear run' at reform, allowing them to bring into government their own nimble and aggressive 24-hour strategic communications operation, and use it as a basis for reconfiguring the service to suit their needs. This required a draconian attitude towards the existing government information service, especially those on the news frontline, about whom Labour had already formed a "poor opinion", having "run rings round it while Major was still Prime Minister" (Negrine 2008; Seldon 2005: 301). The outward form of the service remained the same, but internally there were major changes: within two years, almost the entire leadership of the government information service was replaced and as the number of special advisers doubled, substantive and permanent changes in the terms of engagement with news journalists came into effect (Franklin 2004; Oborne 1999; Public Administration Select Committee 1998).

A senior civil servant at Number 10 until 1998 described the changes as a form of politicization "in the sense that special advisers...were very much more active in dealing with press relations than their predecessors had been", and mediatization, because "they had a very sophisticated media operation. Very rapid response geared to being 24/7" (CS2). A Number 10 press officer who later became a departmental Director of Communication flourished in the post-1997 atmosphere but recalled the poisonous atmosphere in many departments where, "you had the special advisers whispering into the minister's ears saying 'this lot are not really supporting you'" (CS3). One departing Director of Information was described by a special adviser as "dead meat"; a comment which found its way into the tabloid press (Public Administration Select Committee 1998). A departmental press officer, who joined in 1999, after the initial 'cull', witnessed its aftermath:

> Slowly they were shuffled out (…) there was a head of news that had been there for quite a while, a lovely woman, but somehow, she was shuffled out against her will and they brought in a journalist who'd worked for a left wing newspaper to replace her (CS4).

Journalists spoke most forcefully about the vulnerability of government press officers after 1997. One broadcast journalist described "a complete clear-out" (J1), and a broadsheet specialist

identified "a takeover by special advisors (that) happened in most departments" (J2). Another took the view that "if you weren't quite New Labour enough then you probably didn't last very long" (J3), while a veteran parliamentary correspondent said that "they dismissed lots of very senior experienced, seasoned press officers who'd worked loyally for years for Labour or Conservative, and put in their own Labour party stooges" (J4). The last time there had been a major change of government was in 1979, and the media ecology of the time was very different, but it should be noted that in 1979 Margaret Thatcher took the advice of her most senior civil servant to appoint a career civil servant, Bernard Ingham, formerly a known Labour sympathiser, as her Chief Press Secretary.

Five of the 16 civil servants interviewed experienced the change of government after 2010, and described a similar hostility from incoming ministers. One Director who had experienced both changes of government recalled how:

> People were completely taken aback by the level of hostility to (…) communications people because they had beaten us; because we had been bad at our jobs. The clear-out has been at least as big and I think a bit bigger than it was in 1997. In 1997 the attitude was 'you're all a bit rubbish and you're going to have to improve and modernise quickly because we know how to do things – not entirely welcome but not completely unrealistic. In 2010 it's 'civil servants are useless otherwise you'd have a proper job' (CS5).

Another described the experience as "a bloodbath", where "the general impression given by ministers (was) we don't think you're very good at your job and there's too many of you'" (CS6). In contrast to 1997, in 2010 there was little media interest in job losses in government communications, suggesting that the issue had become less controversial. My own analysis of turnover among departmental communications directors found that this was significant: by March 2014 only two remained of the 20 departmental directors of communication in post in 2010 (Garland 2016). This apparent weakening of the principle of permanence within the civil service communications leadership may also be seen as a 'cross-field' effect.

8. Resistance: Speaking Truth to Power

We have seen how job losses after the 1997 election increased the perceived vulnerability of those who remained, potentially reducing their capacity to resist ministerial demands that crossed 'the line': that is, the line which protects civil servants from engaging in party political communication. An interview study conducted in 1989-90 with 49 senior Whitehall officials suggest that this

capacity was limited, even then, and mitigated by loyalty (Barker and Wilson 1997). More recently, a study examining the lead-up to the publication of the UK Government's 2002 dossier *Iraq's Weapons of Mass Destruction*, found that decisions about what information to place in the public domain were taken by a small, politically-aligned group, with little resistance from officials, a conclusion borne out by the recent Chilcot report into the Blair government's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 (Chilcot 2016; Herring and Robinson 2014). A recent report by the government's official auditor concluded that the incentives for senior civil servants to challenge ministers were "weak compared with those associated with the day-to-day job of satisfying ministers" (National Audit Office 2016).

This timidity was noticed by Blair's former policy head at Number 10 (2003-06), Matthew Taylor:

> It was clear that well-informed and well-paid civil servants were self-censoring in the face of political determination. As the minister (or prime minister) described the policy they wanted to unveil, or the commitment they wanted to make, you could see the officials wrestling with the need to provide a reality check – but all too often deciding it was better to nod sagely than look career-threateningly unhelpful (Taylor 2015).

The press officers interviewed for this study all felt that they knew where 'the line' lay and were confident that, however tricky, they could manage it, commenting that "it's in the DNA", "in the genes" and you "use your own radar". They were reluctant to argue that their own ability to challenge ministers had been compromised but several expressed concern at practices they had observed since leaving the service. One press officer who left soon after 2010 felt that "over the course of the time that I was in government there was an erosion of those standards" (CS7). A civil servant specialising in strategy and communications across five departments during the Labour years, felt that media coverage that had clearly originated from government sources showed an increasingly casual approach to the facts, which "would never have been tolerated when I was a civil servant (…) I just feel that the line has shifted a bit in the last couple of years" (CS8)

A senior civil servant who worked at Number 10 from the 1980s to the early Blair years believes that maintaining 'the line' is harder today:

> Because the political battle is conducted through the media on a 24/7 basis, then ministers and politicians obviously give more attention to that battle and they put pressure on civil servants to support them in that, and it's more difficult therefore for all civil servants but perhaps particularly media frontline civil servants not to cross the line (CS2).

On matters of media presentation, which are known to be of deep concern to ministers (Leveson 2012), and in the absence of official sanctions or externally-validated criteria, government press officers deploy "pragmatic flexibility"; using gut instinct on a case by case basis to resist the demands of ministers which they consider to be inadvisable or improper (Sanders et al. 2011: 534). Since these instincts are contextual, responding to changes in what seems appropriate at the time, this line is movable. The democratic theorist Peter Aucoin argues that there has been a transformation in the meaning of impartiality within Westminster systems, from an article of faith policed by civil servants, to the exercise of 'promiscuous partisanship' in relation to governing politicians (Aucoin 2012). The wider research project on which this chapter is based has identified a gradual change in conceptualisations of impartiality that favours governing political actors – an argument that is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter (instead see Garland 2016).

9. Responsiveness: Pleasing Ministers

The significance of the 1997 'cull' was not just that it replaced almost the entire leadership of the information service but that it brought about a permanent change in the way government news was managed. The journalists interviewed for this study expressed this most clearly. One remembers the change taking place "almost immediately. Suddenly you had this new tier of semi-political operators working with chosen journalists" (J2). Another argued that the propensity for special advisers to select who they spoke to – a practice prohibited by government press officers who have a duty to serve all media – "changed fundamentally the rules of engagement and continues to do so." Special advisers rather than civil servants took responsibility for the story of the day:

> in some cases, working with the civil service press people, but typically around them, over them, dealing with handpicked journalists who were being fed the story (…) the press officers who were left out of the loop would be trailing in the wake of this (J3).

A BBC correspondent, who was under increasing pressure to break stories for the morning news programmes, found that "if you wanted the sort of thrust of (a story), especially to get it the day before so you could put it out in the morning and help set the agenda, then the special adviser became the main conduit" (J1).

The Leveson inquiry into the ethics and practices of the press following the post-2007 newspaper phone hacking scandal revealed a consensus among leading politicians that life in the media spotlight had become almost unbearable, and that, in consequence, they needed trusted and loyal

aides who could handle the pressure (Blair 2012; Leveson 2012; Major 2012; Osborne 2010). David Cameron told the inquiry that he appointed the disgraced former tabloid newspaper editor Andy Coulson as his chief press secretary in 2007 because he needed "someone who could cope with the huge media pressure" (Cameron 2012). This illustrates Hjarvard's observation that, when "a single media scandal may put an end to a lifelong career in just a few days", politicians try to "create a deep backstage (…) in which they can trust their closest allies and friends in private" (Hjarvard 2013: 68). This too may be considered to be a 'cross-field' effect arising from indirect mediatization.

10. Conclusion

The recollections of officials who had worked in close proximity to journalists and ministers during a time of significant media change suggest that, indeed, the process of mediatization took place in tandem with politicization as politicians felt increasingly compelled to take control of the news agenda as a matter of survival. As the archived documents show, ministers were already trying to develop synergies between the official government voice and party political narratives during the 1980s but this took place tentatively and secretly and did not translate into reform or modernisation of government information services. Partly in response to civil service sensitivities and suspicions in relation to promotional culture, by the time Labour came into power in 1997, reform was well overdue, resulting in what appeared to be a sudden, and politically-driven transformation in the rules of engagement with journalists, and the arrival of a small but well-connected political civil service to manage the news agenda.

The leadership structures within government communications appear to be especially vulnerable to political pressure, and ultimately to dismissal or resignation, following a change in the party of government, even in ostensibly impartial systems such as Whitehall. As the pressure of media scrutiny on ministers increases, press officers become more concerned with meeting their needs yet still see upholding impartiality as a key part of their role, and indeed, as its defining feature. Within a self-regulating system, government press officers use their own highly context-dependent gut instincts to maintain an ill-defined line between 'impartial' and 'political' government communications. The meaning of impartiality itself is called into question as it is redefined in line with political expediency. If mediatization is considered as a meta-process impacting over time on the 'cross-field' where political, media and bureaucratic fields intersect, we can discern certain cross-field effects emerging over time, such as a climate of fear and blame that underlies much

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ministerial decision-making, and the imperative to establish a 'deep backstage'. A growing network of politically-appointed officials who are exempt from impartiality increasingly coordinates government media relations, above and below the radar, trading nuggets of information to selected journalists. This insulates and marginalises the role of government press officers, while opening up a volatile, largely unseen and unregulated space, where policy is framed and the news is made.

The advantage of a mediatization field approach to examining complex governing bureaucracies is that it can facilitate a more open, pluralistic and empirically grounded understanding of changing relationships and discreet power struggles within the administrative and political ecology of government. The extent to which officials and politicians resist or respond to the pressures of mediatization or indirect mediatization through politicization, is a question that can be applied to any liberal democratic jurisdictions either comparatively or as case studies. Specifically, it can facilitate an understanding of how certain communicative configurations are institutionalized, normalised and intensified over time.

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