

**DOSSIER**  
*Le Monde* qui tombe?

**LA FIN DU MONDE?**  
Tradition and Change in the French Press

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*Le Monde*, or rather its current management team of publisher and editor Jean-Marie Colombani, managing editor Edwy Plenel, and director-of-the-board Alain Minc, has been the critical target over the past year of several best-selling books, accompanied by scores of articles in the rest of the French press. This avalanche of unwelcome attention for the newspaper was launched with the 630-page, exhaustively documented *La Face cachée du Monde* (*The Hidden Face of Le Monde*), by Pierre Péan, perhaps France's most highly-regarded investigative journalist,<sup>1</sup> and Philippe Cohen, economics editor for the newsweekly *Marianne*. Other critical books that appeared during 2003 included *Ma part du Monde* by former *Le Monde* journalist Alain Rollat; *Le Pouvoir du Monde* by Bernard Poulet, an assistant managing editor at business magazine *L'Expansion*; *Bien entendu ... c'est off* by former *Le Monde* political reporter Daniel Carton and *Le Cauchemar médiatique* by former *Le Monde* television chronicler Daniel Schneidermann.<sup>2</sup> These authors present a sometimes contradictory array of criticisms; what they almost all seem to agree is that over the past decade, *Le Monde* has amassed and misused its increasing power for largely selfish purposes; that Colombani, Plenel and Minc have bullied both would-be allies and enemies in the process committing serious ethical or even legal misdeeds, all while espousing a holier-than-thou moral code; and that as a result, the newspaper has "brought about a veritable degradation in democratic life"<sup>3</sup> in France.

Speaking at a seminar sponsored by the Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques shortly after the publication of *La Face cachée du Monde*, French sociologist Jean Padioleau remarked that such journalist-authored books about *Le Monde*, despite the failings that inevitably arise from the social conditions of their production (deadline pressure, moralistic narratives designed to gain a wide audience, and so on), provide an important “opportunity” for the social sciences. Such closely-guarded information about the inner workings of media power is difficult to come by. But once in the public domain, the power relations revealed by the exposés—as well as the public reactions from the accused—provide fertile material for sociological analysis.<sup>4</sup> Taking up the spirit of Padioleau’s challenge, if not all of his specific stimulating suggestions, this essay seeks less to review or critique the recent spate of *Le Monde* books than to situate them in a broader historical and cross-national comparative context. In so doing, I will attempt to provide at least preliminary answers to the following questions: To what extent has *Le Monde* actually changed in recent years, and in what ways? How can we explain the virulence of the public debate? And what do the criticisms, as well as *Le Monde*’s responses, tell us about the current state of the French press and polity?

### Les Vieux Mondes

Tradition: The word is often used in reference to *Le Monde*. But the newspaper, strictly speaking, dates back only to the period immediately following World War II. In such a short time period, traditions have been as much contested as celebrated, and they have clearly taken different forms in the 1950s through 60s, 70s, and 80s. Nevertheless, we can identify at least four distinctive traits of *Le Monde*’s professional identity: journalistic control, political engagement, in-depth information, and a certain stylistic austerity. Let us examine each of these in turn, in order to establish more clearly what is new, and not so new, at today’s *Le Monde*.

If *Le Monde* is widely known for being owned by the journalists who work for it, the newspaper did not start out that way. It was the brainchild of General de Gaulle, who felt that a post-war France needed a newspaper of record untainted by any wartime collaboration; with the exception of the Communist *L’Humanité*, the Catholic *La Croix*, and *Le Figaro* (whose ownership was transferred to a new publisher), no prewar national dailies were permitted to re-open. To accomplish this task, the General sought out Hubert Beuve-Méry<sup>5</sup>, a respected if not widely known former journalist for *Le Temps*, the most influential and respected newspaper of the Third Republic.<sup>6</sup> *Le Monde* took over *Le Temps*’ printing press and office facilities, and virtually all of the original journalists hired by Beuve-Méry had also been formerly employed by the prewar journal.

*Le Monde*’s first move toward journalistic control was thus initially synonymous with Beuve-Méry’s own struggle for autonomy. During the late 1940s and early 50s when Beuve-Méry took a “neutralist” position vis-à-vis the

Atlantic Alliance increasingly at odds with the governments of the Fourth Republic, he came under siege. In 1951, after being publicly condemned by the other two de Gaulle-appointed owners of *Le Monde* for the newspaper's failure to warmly embrace the Atlantic Alliance, Beuve-Méry tendered his resignation. Readers and journalists raised such an outcry that Beuve-Méry returned to take effective sole control of the newspaper. Shortly thereafter, he modified the newspaper's statutes to provide journalists with a 28 percent ownership share, enough to block any outside attempt to impose a new publisher. But until 1969, when Beuve-Méry retired, the only journalist with any real control over *Le Monde* was the publisher himself.

Shortly before his retirement, Beuve-Méry revised the corporate charter to shift effective majority ownership to the journalists (40 percent), other employees (9 percent), and news management (11 percent).<sup>7</sup> While Jacques Fauvet, a long-time top editor, was easily approved to be Beuve-Méry's successor and served for fourteen years, the three editors who followed him during the subsequent thirteen years had a much harder time gaining and keeping the support of the newspaper's journalists. It was during this period that so much of the effective daily control of the newspaper was ceded to editors of the specialized news sections, especially international and domestic political affairs. Each transition to a new publisher was marked by intense infighting among various factions, driven by a variety of personal, political and professional motivations. For this very reason, some now suggest, Beuve-Méry himself had never intended journalistic ownership to become a form of internal direct democracy.

To say that *Le Monde*, from the beginning, sought to establish its "independence" is not to say that it was politically disengaged, as one might characterize the American ideal. During the 1950s and 60s, *Le Monde's* political positions were certainly less predictable than other French dailies more closely linked to parties or trade unions. But Beuve-Méry and many of the newspaper's leading editors did have their own brand of ideological attachment: to the "left Christian" movement of prewar France.<sup>8</sup> The Catholic spirit of the newspaper was assured by outside members appointed to the newspaper's administrative council, such as the philosopher Paul Ricœur and Michel Houssin, general director of *La Vie Catholique illustrée*,<sup>9</sup> and this influence was visible in a consistently anticommunist, non-socialist, but socially progressive editorial policy.

Fauvet, while also a practicing and progressive Catholic, moved the newspaper closer to the causes and ideals of the Socialist party.<sup>10</sup> During the late 1960s and early 70s, a new generation of journalists came to work at *Le Monde*, many of them active in or supportive of the student protests of 1968, which the newspaper (over Beuve-Méry's objections) had covered relatively positively.<sup>11</sup> *Le Monde* endorsed François Mitterrand in the presidential election of 1974, and when he failed to win, openly maintained a critical position vis-à-vis right-centrist president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing during his *septennat* of 1974 to 1981. Fauvet was known to want to do everything within his power to prevent the re-election of Giscard.<sup>12</sup>

When Mitterrand won the presidential election in 1981, *Le Monde* had achieved its long-standing political goal. For the newspaper, it was not simply a triumph of the Left, but in ending the 23-year monopoly rule of the Right under the Fifth Republic, a victory for democracy and for the alternation of power.<sup>13</sup> But once the election parties were over, *Le Monde* found itself in a full-scale identity crisis. Its intellectual and professional clout within the journalistic field was compromised by its close association with Mitterrand, and readership began to decline.<sup>14</sup> The newspaper's tenuous professional and economic position was further destabilized by the rise of *Libération*, whose "libertarian Left" cultural politics captured the imagination of young activists and *cadres* (business managers) alike. On the issues, *Le Monde* initially responded by re-asserting its commitment to the humanitarian, universalist Catholic center. Around the issue of immigration, in contrast to *Libération's* celebration of the "right to be different," *Le Monde* took a leading role in re-asserting a French tradition of cultural as well as political integration (in contrast to the "new" *Le Monde* whose defense of a more cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic France has motivated at least some of its recent critics<sup>15</sup>).

However, the newspaper's most significant editorial response at this moment came in the form of a more aggressive style of reporting. In contrast to the "literary/political" tradition of the French press, which emphasizes stylized commentary and analysis, *Le Monde* had early on established an equally firm reputation for the quality of its information, especially on international affairs. Generally, this reporting took the form of lengthy background pieces from specialized reporters. But within the tight limits of French law and political tradition, the "old" *Le Monde* was not adverse to reporting of inside scoops or corruption scandals. Sometimes the newspaper's revelations were found to be entirely baseless, as in the 1952 unveiling of a secret memo by the American admiral Fechteler that the US should back off its commitment to defend Western Europe from a Soviet attack. At other times, the newspaper seemed on relatively sounder footing, as in its 1979 investigation (following *Le Canard enchaîné*) of a gift of diamonds from a central African dictator allegedly accepted by President Giscard d'Estaing.<sup>16</sup> During the mid-1980s, investigative reporting resurfaced again, but this time on a more permanent basis, under the lead of then political reporter Edwy Plenel. In the so-called "Rainbow Warrior" affair, Plenel and his colleague Bertrand Le Gendre reported that high government officials had planned the bombing of the Greenpeace boat of that name that had come to New Zealand to protest French nuclear tests in the region. The story was highly embarrassing to the Mitterrand administration and led to the dismissal of the defense minister. For *Le Monde*, it was the first of many investigative articles that demonstrated its willingness to criticize a Socialist government, thus re-establishing the newspaper's credibility and reputation for independence. After the intense partisan engagement of the 1970s, this emphasis on reporting could be seen as a return to the newspaper's roots. What seemed new in the mid-1980s was a particularly aggressive form of investigative reporting,<sup>17</sup> rather than back-

ground information and analysis, and perhaps most significantly, a more brash, colorful style, which brings us to the fourth of *Le Monde's* short-lived traditions.

"Be boring," the legend has Beuve-Méry telling his reporters. At least through the early 1980s, the newspaper's look was decidedly grey, broken up only by the discrete headline or political cartoon. The writing style was complex and dry, what many journalists, at least in the United States, would dismiss as "academic." And indeed, it was not at all uncommon for *Le Monde* articles to include footnotes. As early as the mid-1980s, as it began to compete more aggressively with *Libération* for young readers, *Le Monde* made the first tentative steps away from this austere style. But it is true that a radical redesign of the format, including a dramatic, two-tiered headline lead story in each issue (regardless of the day's events), did not appear until the mid-1990s.

### A New World?

As this brief historical discussion shows, *Le Monde* has had more than one tradition, and it has oscillated among these since its founding in 1944. Since the early 1980s, however, significant change has been in the air, primarily due to (or at least justified by) one reason: economics. Shortly after its founding, the newspaper's straightforward approach to information and analysis came to be seen as indispensable, and its circulation rose steadily during the 1950s, then much more dramatically in the 60s, from 182,000 in 1962 to 355,000 in 1969.<sup>18</sup> Like the rest of the French press, *Le Monde* also benefited from the post-war expanding economy, and the lack of significant advertising competition from state-run television. During the late 1960s, *Le Monde* earned nearly 60 percent of its revenues from advertising, approaching the American average.<sup>19</sup> If revenues were relatively strong, Beuve-Méry was also especially stingy on expenses; the newspaper was notorious for its low salaries. As a result, the newspaper was generally profitable, but hardly a profit center. Beuve-Méry is reported to have once exclaimed: "We are poor and intend to stay that way."

Profitable poverty, so to speak, may have worked as long as staff and salaries were modest, and circulation and advertising were rising. All of these elements, however, began to change almost as soon as Beuve-Méry retired. Staff expanded, and pent-up demand for better wages was quickly met. And since the newspaper had no significant capital reserves, precipitous drops in circulation and advertising beginning in the early 1980s placed the newspaper on the brink of bankruptcy. Journalistic control of the paper arguably exacerbated the financial problems. Publishers elected by their peers had little incentive to keep a tight control on salaries or expenses; once positions were created, they were rarely eliminated. The turning point came in 1985, when significant capital support from outside investors (including both small investors, grouped together into a new "Reader's Corporation," and institutional investors) was solicited for the first time; business consultant Alain Minc

facilitated this process and entered *Le Monde's* inner circle at this point. Journalists' ownership share was reduced, but they maintained effective voting control. This re-organization plan, including some cost-cutting, worked for a time; but when advertising again dipped sharply—down to 23 percent of total revenues in 1994<sup>20</sup>—the newspaper once more faced a serious economic crisis. After only two years in office, the first non-journalist publisher appointed to head *Le Monde*—the economist Jacques Lesourne—failed to receive the support of the paper's journalists. It was at this moment that long-time politics editor Jean-Marie Colombani won his first uncontested election as publisher; he was re-elected in 2000 to a second six-year term.

Colombani was elected promising to reform and revive the paper, though exactly how he would do this was not immediately transparent. After two redesigns—in 1995 and 2002<sup>21</sup>—*Le Monde* clearly looks different. In fact, it looks much more like its chief competitor, due in no small measure to the design advice of Jean-François Fogel and other former *Libération* editors and advisors.<sup>22</sup> Cultural coverage now centers around a daily cultural celebrity “profile,” and political news also increasingly emphasizes personalities. *Le Monde Diplomatique* media analyst Serge Halimi, drawing a link to America's most famous celebrity magazine, has dubbed this trend the “*People-ization*” of *Le Monde*. For many critics, the tendency reached an extreme with the heavy coverage accorded the reality-television show *Loft Story*.

After several years of aggressive acquisitions, the *Le Monde* “Group” now owns, or has shares in, for example, the newsmagazines *Le Nouvel Observateur* and *Le Courrier international*, the weekly television magazine *Télérama*, the specialized cultural monthly *Cahiers du cinéma*, and a regional press group in the Midi. Outside business investment has increased, although journalists and other “internal” investors (including the heirs of Hubert Beuve-Méry) together still maintain effective majority control. And under the editorship of Edwy Plenel, the tradition of investigative reporting he helped solidify in the 1980s has continued, even intensified. What these changes add up to—intellectually and politically—quickly became a topic of heated debate.

By most accounts, the first coherent criticisms originated among intellectuals and left-wing activists, the two groups sometimes but not always working in concert. Concerns about changes at *Le Monde* were initially overwhelmed by even larger transformations in French television news, especially the privatization of TF 1, the largest public channel. However, the beginnings of a critique of *Le Monde* could be seen in Pierre Bourdieu's best-selling *Sur la télévision*, where he cited an increasingly trivialized, sensationalistic approach to news at *Le Monde* as evidence of commercial television's growing weight within the “journalistic field.”<sup>23</sup> Emerging out of the social protests of December 1995, the activist media association ACRIMED (Action-Critique-Médias) was founded in 1996 and quickly made the “new” *Le Monde* one of its favored targets.<sup>24</sup> In 2000, a special “journalism” issue of Bourdieu's scholarly journal *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales* devoted several articles to recent

changes at *Le Monde*.<sup>25</sup> Another source of critique was the newspaper's long-standing monthly affiliate: *Le Monde Diplomatique*. When Colombani announced his intention to sell public shares in the *Le Monde* Group, "*Diplo*" editor Ignacio Ramonet wrote a scathing editorial condemning the move.<sup>26</sup> Beginning in June 2000, the Marseille-based PLPL (*Pour Lire Pas Lu*)<sup>27</sup>, edited by Halimi and a small team of dissident journalists and activists, offered an irreverent, biting satire of *Le Monde*, which it portrays as having been taken over by the power-hungry and corrupt troika of Colombani, Plenel and Minc.

Péan and Cohen's book marks a shift, however, in that it was the first significant criticism of *Le Monde* from more "mainstream" journalists, and in a format (a well-publicized, sensationally-written book, rather than internet websites or small-circulation journals) designed to attract maximum public attention. The book itself not only became an instant best-seller, but its main arguments were widely distributed by the rest of the press, including significant excerpts in *L'Express* published just before the book appeared in bookstores. Though their brutal broadside differs in many ways from PLPL's, *La Face cachée du Monde* begins with the same basic premise of a tripartite putsch, in which the newspaper has shifted from being a legitimate "counter-power" to systematically abusing power to promote the personal interests of its top managers.

Alleged influence-peddling, involving the mixing of "journalism" and "lobbying" as Péan put it in one post-publication interview, seems the most serious accusation.<sup>28</sup> One of the most disturbing cases cited, which Colombani has yet to effectively refute, involves the director's behind-the-scenes maneuvering to promote the introduction into France of the "free newspaper" *20 Minutes*, owned by the Norwegian Schibsted corporation.<sup>29</sup> Beginning in 2000, Colombani offered to place at Schibsted's service all "of the intellectual means that [the *Le Monde* Group] disposes in order to facilitate the success of the project." In a subsequent memo listing points of accord, *Le Monde* agreed to "put into action its influence to help establish a positive image for *20 Minutes* France, as much for public opinion in general as in the world of the press and advertising ...." In return, *Le Monde* asked for a share in the capital and a contract to print the newspaper. But since Colombani balked at committing serious capital to the project, Schibsted continued discussions with other potential French partners. When negotiations finally seemed to have broken down for good, a *Le Monde* business director fired off an e-mail billing Schibsted for 875,000 euros in lobbying services. Two weeks later, the official *Le Monde* editorial, entitled "*Le prix de la gratuité*" and signed by Colombani, waxed eloquent about the threat to democracy posed by free newspapers: "... une question de principe est posée: n'est-ce pas dévaloriser l'information que de la rendre gratuite? N'est-ce pas induire que le journalisme n'apporte aucune plus-value?" Colombani continued: "... la presse gratuite provoque une distorsion de concurrence hallucinante. Elle se présente comme un dépliant publicitaire pour être distribuée dans les gares, lieux pour nous inaccessible à la vente à la criée," a claim that Péan and Cohen characterize, justly it would seem, as "extraordinarily duplicitous"

in light of Colombani's own previously successful efforts to facilitate distribution for the "gratuits" in Paris-region train stations.<sup>30</sup> Perceiving the barely concealed threat in these lines, the Norwegian group quickly sought to buy a peace with Colombani, via an agreement that continues to this day to print *20 Minutes* one day a week at *Le Monde's* printing facility.

In another case, *Le Monde's* news coverage of the former media conglomerate Vivendi closely correlates with the state of business relations between the two. During 1997, when *Le Monde* was trying to purchase the weekly news-magazine *L'Express* from Vivendi, and generally being rebuffed, coverage was often critical. Péan and Cohen write that Colombani threatened CEO Jean-Marie Messier with *Le Monde's* journalistic opposition for twenty years.<sup>31</sup> Three years later, during a period when Alain Minc was leading discussions to facilitate Vivendi investment in *Le Monde*, the newspaper often praised its prominent CEO, even headlining one article "Jean 'magic' Messier" (28 June 2000). Vivendi's links to *Le Monde* were also smoothed via Pierre Lescure, a member of the newspaper company's board of directors and director of Vivendi-owned cable television channel Canal-Plus, as well as by Vivendi's sale of *Le Courier international* to *Le Monde* at an effectively undervalued price (including a quid pro quo for Vivendi to purchase long-term advertising in *Le Monde*). Yet during the spring of 2002, shortly after Messier fired Lescure, the newspaper abruptly changed its tone, even headlining one story: "Who wants the fall of Jean-Marie Messier?"<sup>32</sup>

To be fair, if the chronology is clear, the mechanisms and motives of all the relevant actors (especially the various reporters writing about Vivendi or *20 Minutes*) are not. Messier was undone by far more than *Le Monde's* coverage; many non-French newspapers also began to aggressively question the veracity of Vivendi's accounts around the same time. There is no question that Colombani sometimes used the newspaper's official editorials to send a message to his business partners and competitors. However, there is good reason to believe that the coordination between the business dealings of Colombani and the editorial coverage managed by Plenel was often less than airtight. Péan and Cohen even cite instances where it seems Plenel was blissfully unaware, or indifferent, to *Le Monde's* emerging business deals (as when the *Le Monde-Vivendi* first honeymoon abruptly ended in October 2000 with a front page story wrongly reporting that a proposed Vivendi-Seagram merger had fallen through).<sup>33</sup> If Colombani's arriviste ambition makes him vulnerable to attack, it is also, ironically, *Le Monde's* unique and seemingly exemplary system of journalistic ownership that ought to share the blame; the combination of the publisher and top editor in the single position of "director" creates especially strong temptations to mix business and journalism. The problem is not only conflicts of interest but the constant appearance of potential conflicts. Given *Le Monde's* increasingly dense network of business partners, one can certainly say if nothing else that Colombani has not done enough to maintain the transparency that would allay such concerns (for example, simply acknowledging during its coverage of Vivendi that Lescure was so closely associated with *Le Monde*).



The other major charge against *Le Monde*, one that originated with ACRIMED and *PLPL* but is also relayed by Péan and Cohen, Rollat and Schneidermann, is that Colombani et al. are irrevocably increasing the influence of market logic inside the newspaper, in particular via the effort to list the company on the stock market. Although a 1986 French law prohibits newspaper companies from being publicly owned, Colombani engineered a restructuring of the company that will get around this requirement. The journalist unions and the internal workers council (comité d'entreprise) opposed the stock market listing. But in the crucial election, a narrow majority of *Le Monde's* journalists voted to sell shares equaling 25 percent of the company's total capital. Originally foreseen for October 2003, Colombani announced that month that a stock market sale of *Le Monde* Group shares was being postponed until the "economic conjuncture" improved and/or additional financing could be obtained in no other way.<sup>34</sup> In the United States, public stock ownership is widely seen as one of the worst things that has happened to the press; family control of voting stock at *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* is valued precisely to the extent that it dampens the most intense pressures to maximize shareholder value, which elsewhere have led to cuts in newsroom budgets and a re-orientation of news coverage to fit with marketing needs.<sup>35</sup>

Other criticisms leveled by Péan and Cohen, as well as Rollat, Schneidermann, and Poulet, seem to be less serious ethical charges than basic disagreements over style or ideology, as well as a fundamental revulsion toward what is perceived as arrogance and hypocrisy on the part of *Le Monde's* management troika.

As investigative journalists themselves, it seems surprising that Péan and Cohen are so opposed to *Le Monde's* practice of investigation. Government officials, including Mitterrand and his chief of staff, are portrayed as helpless in the face of Edwy Plenel's probing. In a case where Mitterrand (illegally) ordered the bugging of Plenel's apartment, the president's self-justifying claim that he suspected the reporter of being a CIA agent is relayed by Péan and Cohen as if it were fact. Much is also made of *Le Monde's* reliance on judges and police for most of its inside information about government corruption. Yet in fact, investigative journalism, wherever it is practiced, cannot help but be highly dependent on such sources, so it seems unfair to portray such a practice as somehow unethical or unprofessional. In *Le Monde's* defense, it also has to rely on inside sources to the extent that French law is particularly restrictive in the use of government documents.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, the kind of simplistic, good versus evil journalism that Péan and Cohen accuse *Le Monde* of practicing pervades their own text. Is *Le Monde* a "modern-day Pravda?" Do all the journalists working for the newspaper live in a "climate of fear?" Can all the newspaper's investigative reporting be reduced to "a form of pedagogic communication aimed at the powerful, with the principle message: You have nothing to gain in taking on the trio Colombani-Minc-Plenel?"<sup>37</sup> These kinds of

charges say as much about their authors as about their intended targets, and indeed, about the unique and highly-charged atmosphere of the Parisian press.

What exactly are *Le Monde's* politics? Journalists at the *New York Times* I spoke with during the summer of 2002 see *Le Monde* as clearly “left-wing.” So do such French critics as Bernard Poulet, who also accuses the newspaper of being “Bourdiesian,” a misleading label that assimilates the late sociologist’s scholarly and left-activist engagements. However, from the perspective of ACRIMED and *PLPL*, among others, the formerly pro-socialist *Le Monde* is now seen as the leading voice for neo-liberal, laissez-faire economic policies. Since 1994, economic news has clearly increased, with regular pages devoted to business enterprises, the automobile and communications industries, and a special weekend “Money” supplement. As with business sections virtually everywhere, articles are more likely to report news from the perspective of investors rather than that of citizens<sup>38</sup> (although the Vivendi reporting at least shows that *Le Monde* is capable of attacking corporate power). At the same time, as Poulet concedes and even *Diplo* journalist Serge Halimi admits, *Le Monde* continues to accord positive news coverage to the anti-globalization movement and other activist causes, as well as providing significant room for commentaries by leading intellectuals.<sup>39</sup> The paper’s “schizophrenia” reflects the split social composition of its readership: left-leaning news at the front of the paper for the academics, teachers and government functionaries; right-leaning, or at least pro-market, news at the back for the business cadres. And what are we to make of *Le Monde's* recent editorial endorsements of candidates from both the Left (Jospin) and neo-liberal Right (Balladur)? None of these books critical of *Le Monde* offer any systematic content analysis. As with agenda-driven media criticism everywhere, the use of non-randomly chosen articles allows each of the authors to “prove” their confident characterizations of *Le Monde's* “true” political stripes.

Carton especially emphasizes the king-making efforts of Colombani along with *Le Monde*-associated pollster Jerome Jaffré and commentator Alain Duhamel (notably excusing Plenel from such campaigns).<sup>40</sup> The evidence seems irrefutable that these three had their favorites and did not hesitate to use editorials or behind-the-scenes coaching to help their candidates. But if the problem is *Le Monde's* enormous influence, what are we to make of the fact that not one of their anointed candidates—Michel Noir, Edouard Balladur, Lionel Jospin—was ultimately successful?

Control over the newspaper has most certainly become more centralized. In *Ma part du Monde*, Alain Rollat, a former avowed Colombani ally, laments the demise of the old system in which the publisher’s power was more equally shared with the section sub-editors and the Reporters’ Committee (*Société des Rédacteurs*). But in many ways, the Colombani restructuring is a return to the autocratic Beuve-Méry approach. Outside investment has indeed increased, and the journalists and other internal stockholders now possess only a bare majority of shares. More significantly, the power to choose the new publisher has been

legally shifted to the financial surveillance committee chaired by Alain Minc, with the Reporters' Committee retaining only a right of veto. On the other hand, one could say that given the economic situation in which *Le Monde* found itself in 1994, the outcome could have been worse. At least to some minimum extent, Colombani has maintained journalistic self-management (unlike, for example, at *Libération*, under the direction of former student rebel Serge July).

In *Le Cauchemar médiatique*, *Le Monde* television columnist Daniel Schneidermann sharply criticizes the overly defensive response of Colombani, Plenel and Minc to their attackers, including an attempt to censor ombudsman Robert Solé (a charge Schneidermann first made during a radio interview). Shortly after his book containing these and other criticisms was published, Schneidermann was brutally and publicly dismissed, with the notice of firing printed on page one of *Le Monde*.<sup>41</sup> Without a doubt, Colombani, Plenel and Minc play rough. Rollat, especially, documents well the behind-the-scenes plotting that led to Colombani's first election in 1994. On the other hand, for several months following the Péan/Cohen bombshell, the director did in fact tolerate a number of critical columns by Schneidermann and Solé, as well as by cartoonist Plantu. Poulet compares *Le Monde's* handling of its crisis with the *New York Times'* Jayson Blair affair: Heads ultimately rolled at the *Times*, while the same management team is still in place at *Le Monde*.<sup>42</sup> But the parallel isn't exact. Publisher Arthur Sulzberger, Jr. certainly wasn't toppled, and as long as his family owns the newspaper, he likely never will be. And it seems scarcely imaginable that a *Times* columnist would ever criticize the Sulzbergers.<sup>43</sup>

Most of all, though, what really seems to anger so many about *Le Monde* is its perceived arrogant moralizing. The moral posture, one could easily argue, originated with Beuve-Méry. The difference is that Colombani and colleagues are seen as blatant and unrepentant hypocrites, and with some reason, as the "20 Minutes" episode illustrates especially powerfully. Pierre Péan summed it up in an interview shortly after the book's publication: "The driving force of this book is the gap between the discourse and the reality."<sup>44</sup>

### Conclusion: American Discourses in Paris

If French journalistic critics have thus focused on documenting the "reality" of *Le Monde*, what can one also say about the moralizing discourse? What kinds of ideals has *Le Monde* set up for itself, and for the rest of the French press and political system? In other words, if the reality and discourse don't fit, is it at least in part a problem with the latter rather than former?

This discourse is, in many important respects, of American origin. "To understand Colombani, you have to understand that his primary reference is the Anglo-Saxon press," says Amaury de Rochemonde, an editor at the media industry journal *Stratégies*. "He has a lot of admiration for papers like the *New York Times* and the *Financial Times*."<sup>45</sup>

Likewise for Edwy Plenel, who offers the following articulation of press ethics, as in this essay in the first issue of the 2002 “new formula” *Le Monde*: “A journalist at *Le Monde* should always ask himself what happened factually (what, who, where, when, how?) before worrying about what to think of it intellectually. He must force himself to tell before judging, explain before commenting upon, demonstrate before condemning.” Such a statement rings true with the American insistence on the need to separate “facts” and “opinions.” For better or worse, it has not been the kind of journalistic practice that has traditionally been emphasized in France,<sup>46</sup> and *Le Monde’s* contemporary critics take special delight in pointing out the numerous instances of the paper’s mixing of fact and commentary, or the selective presentation of facts, or the use of the conditional verb tense in order to present unverified charges against targeted politicians, which are then subsequently shown to be false (all practices one could find elsewhere in the French press).

Another striking illustration of *Le Monde’s* public admiration for American journalism was its decision in 2002 to begin publishing—in English—a weekly selection of *The New York Times*. Shortly after the supplement was launched, *Le Monde* ombudsman Robert Solé wrote a column about the intensely negative reaction of readers disappointed in the paper’s “fascination for America and the English language” and its leading role in promoting “the Americanization of France.” Solé later commented that the supplement was “one of the topics that has provoked the largest number of letters ... and the highest level of intensity [of reader response]” since he became ombudsman in 1998.<sup>47</sup>

Times News Service editorial director Laurence M. Paul recalled around this time that when he first introduced the project to a panel of *Times* editors, one asked him if he were “comfortable putting *Times* content inside a leftist paper such as *Le Monde*?” *New York Times* journalists at the Paris bureau also seconded the view that *Le Monde* was not only left-wing, but practiced a kind of journalism far different from their own. In contrast, Eric Le Boucher, *Le Monde’s* editor in charge of the *New York Times* supplement, saw the *Times* and *Le Monde* as essentially alike: “Good journalism is universal ... precise, right to the point, well-written, not too specialized.”<sup>48</sup>

But that is precisely the question: Is good journalism universal? And if so, who defines this “universal” standard? More than just Americanization, the *New York Times* supplement seems to be part of a larger effort to assimilate *Le Monde* to what its managers perceive as a small elite of “global newspapers” and a form of journalism that is market, rather than politically or ideologically, driven. As Jean-François Fogel puts it, *Le Monde* is a “newspaper with a European, indeed, a global destiny.”<sup>49</sup>

In a special supplement on the world’s press published in its 12 December 2003 issue, this effort to assimilate *Le Monde* to the rest of the elite world press, and in the process place criticisms of *Le Monde* in a favorable context, is clearly evident. Under the headline “Investigation of a press with ‘bad press,’” we find this self-justifying passage: “The criticisms that affect the big titles like the *New*

*York Times*, *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Le Monde* reveal a profound interrogation about the place of daily newspapers in our modern societies and the role played by their editors.” In the articles that follow, including a commentary by Plenel and interviews with historian Patrick Eveno and the former director of Agence France Presse, Henri Pigeat, as well as a collection of statistical charts comparing the world’s press systems, the message is clear if not overbearing (consistent with Péan and Cohen’s characterization of the paper, there is nothing subtle in this particular “campaign”<sup>50</sup>): The kinds of changes that *Le Monde* hopes to achieve—commercial expansion, more advertising, less state interference (benevolent or otherwise)—are repeatedly portrayed as what the French press needs in general in order to keep up with the rest of the world’s quality press. If Beuve-Méry insisted that a poor press is an independent press, Henri Pigeat is there to insist that “the paradox is that it is the most commercially-oriented editors [such as Colombani?] who have most raised questions about the quality of information ... There’s not one corner where you have trivial editors, who make money, and another where you have serious editors. It doesn’t work like that.” And he goes on to insist that the French press is “under-concentrated” and that “French groups don’t have a European size[:] ... [Thus] we return to the question of knowing what to do so that [press] enterprises are capable of developing their own funds and of attracting investors to assure their independence.” Likewise, the kinds of state subsidies that were set in place after the Liberation are portrayed as overdue for cancellation: “The myth of a public service [press] is very French. Elsewhere all the ‘fortresses’ have disappeared.” Eveno, for his part, takes up the theme of the need to increase advertising revenues, and thus end another implicitly backward French “exception.”

The French backlash against *Le Monde*, I would suggest, is not because it has actually become more “Anglo-Saxon.” Rather, it is in part because it has adopted the American rhetoric and business approach, while maintaining the French professional practice and style. The intensity, and wide scope, of the criticisms it has received, thus reflect an ongoing debate in France over both the principles and the practice of journalism, and their relationship to democratic life. Further, if indeed *Le Monde* has “behaved” badly, it is not only a matter of personal and professional ethics. A range of structural constraints (many of which *Le Monde* is consciously trying to change) have encouraged *Le Monde*’s managers to act in the ways that they have.<sup>51</sup> For example, intense competition for sales—which provide the major source of revenues rather than advertising— in a centralized, concentrated national journalistic field provides a significant push for sensationalistic, scandal-driven news.<sup>52</sup> Weak overall revenues for the daily press (compared to the immense profits enjoyed by advertising-rich American newspapers with local monopolies), combined with lesser flexibility in hiring and firing, no doubt increase the desperate attempt (which is not to excuse it) to seek cash from lobbying fees, government aid, or wherever else it can be found. And, as *Le Monde*’s managers clearly

recognize, state subsidies and regulations establish both formal and informal rules of the game within which French journalism operates.

In a study of Italian journalists, Paolo Mancini found that “they continuously say that they act according to what is supposed to be the best model of journalism, a journalism which is neutral, objective, and independent of other social powers and which performs a watchdog function [yet] in reality, journalists act in a different way: they follow a different model of journalism.”<sup>53</sup> There is a reason for this lack of fit between professional rhetoric and actual journalistic behavior, Mancini suggests, and it has very little to do with the character of the journalists involved. For a variety of reasons (due to both overt propaganda campaigns as well as diffuse processes of economic and cultural globalization), the American model of “objective” journalism has become hegemonic in the Western world. This American model has “come to represent the point for measuring and judging other journalistic behaviors and models,” even when it is not adapted to the political culture in which it has been imported. For instance, the concept of objectivity makes some kind of sense in a two-party system such as the United States or Britain; in these countries, one can conceivably stake out a middle, “objective” position that is “neither one or the other.”<sup>54</sup> But in Italy—and one could say the same for France—“objectivity is almost impossible within an intricate and fragmented panorama in which a greater number of political forces act and in which even the slightest shades of meaning in a story risk stepping on the positions of one of the forces in the political field.”<sup>55</sup>

Likewise, as noted, the French press has its own tradition that is quite distinct from that of the United States. Historically, journalistic professionalism in France has been defined not as a detachment or distance from political or ideological allegiances, but in fact as the right to hold and defend a set of ideas. This ideal goes back at least as far as Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which states: “The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the rights most precious to men. Every citizen may thus speak, write, publish freely, except to be accountable for this liberty in those cases determined by law.”<sup>56</sup> This political/literary journalistic tradition developed over two centuries of heavy-handed state censorship and the political and intellectual dominance of Paris literary culture, absorbing along the way certain aspects of the “Anglo-American model,” while retaining its own distinctive character.<sup>57</sup> While American journalists are generally dismissive of any approach other than their own, media scholars such as Ben Bagdikian see in the French (and other European) press a more expansive forum for intellectual critique and contextualized reporting.<sup>58</sup>

It is precisely this tradition that a number of *Le Monde* editors defended in 1982 during internal battles to find a replacement for Jacques Fauvet: “... the function of a journalist is not neutral in society, and particularly for a large national daily newspaper, journalists have a pedagogical and democratic mission, and to cede to professionalism is to believe that one could, indifferently,

be the editor of *Le Monde*, or *Le Figaro*, or [the “popular” daily] *Parisien libéré*, indeed even [the communist] *L’Humanité* or [the far right] *Minute*.”<sup>59</sup> In the event, those that defended this view did not prevail; their candidate, Claude Julien, ultimately lost out to André Laurens, who defended precisely a more “professional, pragmatic” form of journalism.<sup>60</sup>

Two decades later, the struggle to redefine French journalism continues. Colombani writes in an essay accompanying the world press supplement that critics are wrong when they say that *Le Monde* wants to change France; rather, *Le Monde* is “only preoccupied with changing ... *Le Monde*.”<sup>61</sup> But the two cannot be separated. Just as the American “objective” model owes much to the consolidation of corporate power and the rise of consumer culture in the 1920s, the French political/literary journalistic model is the product of a political system that has undergone successive ruptures, most recently in 1944 when new state regulations were initiated, in 1981 when the Left first came to power, and in 1986 when TF 1 was privatized. Changes build upon traditions rather than entirely supplanting them; practices and attitudes are naturalized, their arbitrary quality concealed from those who adopt them.

In comparison to the American newspapers Colombani and Plenel so admire, *Le Monde* continues to look and feel quite different. The “événement” formula, both at *Libération* and *Le Monde*, may serve to sensationalize the news or elevate stories beyond their “actual” importance. Yet, the approach also has the virtue of facilitating, in principle if not nearly enough in fact, the examination of a story from a variety of angles and voices—news, features, interviews with experts, analyses and editorials—thus approaching Herbert Gans’s ideal of a “multi-perspectival” approach to the news (rather than the more limiting, and unattainable, goal of “objectivity”).<sup>62</sup> This is not to minimize the deep disappointment and disillusionment felt by *Le Monde*’s audience of auto-didacts who treasured the pre-Colombani paper,<sup>63</sup> with its lengthy, non-“newsworthy” investigations of obscure policy questions or regions of the world, and its learned references to culture and history. “That” *Le Monde* was certainly different enough that former *Times* editor-in-chief Abe Rosenthal once felt compelled to remark: “It’s the best something in the world, but whatever it is, it’s not a real newspaper.”<sup>64</sup> In recent years, the distinctiveness of *Le Monde* has no doubt faded, but it has not yet been eliminated entirely. For an American observer, what continues to remain striking is the paper’s passionate concern with ideas.

In sum, French journalism is changing. From a comparative perspective, it is still quite different from what one finds in the United States. It is only in this context that seemingly contradictory public criticisms make sense: *Le Monde* truly does “want to change France”; given the difficulty of effecting such change, the newspaper also remains a “mirror of the faults” of the French press,<sup>65</sup> as well as, one should quickly add, its many remaining virtues.

## Notes

I am grateful for close, critical readings of an earlier version of this text by Erik Neveu, Dominique Marchetti, Julien Duval and Julie Sedel, all of whom helped immensely in my understanding of the contemporary French press. Of course, any remaining shortcomings are solely the responsibility of the author.

1. Péan is the author of more than a dozen books, including *Une jeunesse française, François Mitterrand, 1934-1947* (Paris: Fayard, 1994) and, with Christophe Nick, *TF 1: Un pouvoir* (Paris: Fayard, 1997).
2. See Pierre Péan and Philippe Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde: Du contre-pouvoir aux abus de pouvoir* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2003); Alain Rollat, *Ma part du Monde: Vingt-cinq ans de liberté d'expression* (Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 2003); Bernard Poulet, *Le Pouvoir du Monde: Quand un journal veut changer la France* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2003); Daniel Carton, *Bien entendu ... c'est off: Ce que les journalistes politiques ne racontent jamais* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003); Daniel Schneidermann, *Le Cauchemar médiatique* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 2003).
3. Péan and Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, p. 20.
4. Jean-G. Padioleau, "Résumé de la communication de J.-G. Padioleau: *La Face cachée du Monde* de P. Péan et Ph. Cohen: opportunités pour la science sociale," Seminar entitled "Temps, Médias et Société," at Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Session of 14 March 2003.
5. Jacques Thibau, *Le Monde, 1944-1996: Histoire d'un journal; un journal dans l'histoire* (Paris: Plon, 1996). Other general historical information about *Le Monde* in this essay is drawn from Patrick Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995: Histoire d'une entreprise de presse* (Paris: Le Monde-Éditions, 1996); Bruno Rémond, *Sirius face à l'histoire: Morale et politique chez Hubert Beuve-Méry* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1990); and Clyde Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 1998).
6. Compared to most of its prewar competitors, with their seemingly unlimited capacity for sensationalism and corruption, *Le Temps* had a reputation for high-quality, serious writing, factual reliability and a certain staid, even intentionally "boring," tone. Nevertheless, even *Le Temps* shared in the corruption of its era. It was later revealed that the newspaper had close connections to the French steel trust and accepted direct payments for positive coverage from the Russian, Bulgarian and Greek governments. See Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, pp. 112-14.
7. Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, p. 196.
8. J.W. Freiberg, *The French Press: Class, State, and Ideology* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 85. One recent, notable *Le Monde* editor and practicing Catholic is Bruno Frappat, now director of the Catholic daily *La Croix*.
9. Thibau, *Le Monde 1944-1996*, pp. 395-96.
10. More precisely, under Fauvet, *Le Monde* adopted an "independent" socialist position, sympathetic to and sharing the ideals of French socialism without being linked officially to any political party (Freiberg, *The French Press*, p. 284), or as Thibau (*Le Monde 1944-1996*, p. 384) puts it, "incontestably, after 1968, *Le Monde* moved, politically, to the Left."
11. Freiberg, *The French Press*, pp. 89-90; Thibau, *Le Monde 1944-1996*, p. 384; Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995*, pp. 188-89.
12. Thibau, *Le Monde 1944-1996*, p. 393.
13. As Alain Rollat recalls (interview with author, October 1998), *Le Monde's* support for the "common program" of the Socialists and Communists during the 1970s did not reflect so much pro-leftist politics on the part of *Le Monde*, as support for change.



- For many *Le Monde* editors, de Gaulle had “practically committed a coup d’état” in 1958, and while grudgingly recognizing the legitimacy of the Fifth Republic, they felt that the election of a left government was necessary to solidify the democratic character of the postwar order. See also Thibau, *Le Monde 1944-1996*, p. 397.
14. In the same interview with the author, Rollat also reported that during the first Socialist government of Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy from 1981 to 1983, the newspaper had “treated the PS with some indulgence ... the feeling was that the PS didn’t have experience” so they should be given some slack. According to Rollat, it thus “took some time for *Le Monde* to regain its ‘esprit de critique.’” See also Philippe Juhem, “Alternances politiques et transformations du champ de l’information en France après 1981,” *Politix* 14, 56 (2001): 185-208.
  15. See for example Poulet, *Le Pouvoir du Monde*, pp. 99-100.
  16. Concerning these two instances of pre-1980s “investigative” reporting, see Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995*, pp. 82-84, 308; Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, pp. 193-94; Thibau, *Le Monde: 1944-1996*, pp. 214-18, 440.
  17. On the rise of investigative reporting at *Le Monde*, as well as at other national “quality” newspapers, during this period, see Dominique Marchetti, “Les révélations du ‘journalisme d’investigation,’” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 131-32 (March 2000): 30-40.
  18. Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995*, p. 207.
  19. Padioleau, “*Le Monde*” et le “*Washington Post*”: *Précepteurs et mousquetaires* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985), p. 44.
  20. Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, p. 213.
  21. On the dramatic changes in visual and stylistic format instigated by the 1995 “new formula”, see Patrick Champagne, “Le médiateur entre deux *Monde*,” *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 131-132 (March 2000): 8-29; and Julie Sedel, “La nouvelle formule du journal *Le Monde*: contribution à une étude des transformations du journalisme,” in *Questions de communication* (Presses Universitaires de Nancy, forthcoming).
  22. Author interview with Jean-François Fogel, June 2002, Paris; also see Poulet, pp. 129-32.
  23. Pierre Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision* (Paris: Liber éditions, 1996), translated into English as *On Television* (New York: New Press, 1999).
  24. According to its website statement of objectives, ACRIMED is: “une association de critique des médias qui se propose de se constituer en Observatoire des médias et d’intervenir publiquement, par tous les moyens à sa disposition, pour mettre en question la marchandisation de l’information, de la culture et du divertissement, ainsi que les dérives du journalisme quand il est assujéti aux pouvoirs politiques et financiers et quand il véhicule le prêt-à-penser de la société de marché.” See [http://acrimed.samizdat.net/article.php?id\\_article=205](http://acrimed.samizdat.net/article.php?id_article=205), accessed 6 December 2003.
  25. *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 131-32 (March 2000). See, especially, articles by Champagne, Marchetti and Julien Duval.
  26. Ignacio Ramonet, “*Le Monde*, la Bourse et nous,” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December 2001.
  27. On its website, *PLPL* describes itself as “Un bimestriel sardonique contre les organes du spectacle de l’ordre mondial capitaliste.” See <http://www.homme-moderne.org/plpl/>.
  28. Laurent Valdiguié, “Les deux auteurs s’expliquent,” *Le Parisien*, 26 February 2003.
  29. Péan and Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, pp. 499-511.
  30. *Ibid.*, pp. 507-8.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
  32. “Vivendi: Qui veut la chute de Jean-Marie Messier?” *Le Monde*, 17 April 2002, p. 1, cited in Péan and Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, pp. 428-29.

33. Péan and Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, pp. 411-12.
34. Interview with Jean-Marie Colombani, "L'introduction en bourse du 'Monde' n'est pas à l'ordre du jour," *La Tribune*, 1 October 2003, p. 22.
35. To be fair, Colombani has proposed only a partial "entrée en Bourse"; the question remains whether such a change would lead to a full-scale public stock offering at some later point. Concerning problems arising from public stock ownership of American newspaper companies, see Gilbert Cranberg, Randall Bezanson and John Soloski, *Taking Stock: Journalism and the Publicly Traded Newspaper Company* (Ames, IA: Iowa State Press, 2001); and Doug Underwood, *When MBAs Rule the Newsroom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
36. Emmanuel Derieux, *Droit des Médias* (Paris: Dalloz, 2001).
37. Péan and Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, p. 601.
38. Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 14.
39. Author interviews with Serge Halimi, Paris, spring-fall 2002. Poulet actually attempts to comprehensively categorize *Le Monde's* current politics, and in the process makes the newspaper appear either completely without an ideological agenda or extremely fair. *Le Monde* is balanced, he writes, between the "CEO meeting at Davos—which it more or less supports—and the activist summit at Porto Alegre—which it doesn't oppose" (*Le Pouvoir du Monde*, p. 142).
40. Carton, *Bien entendu ... c'est off*, pp. 145-57.
41. See "Les raisons d'un licenciement," *Le Monde*, 4 October 2003, and Schneidermann's last *chronique*, "Une chronique à la mer," printed in the same issue.
42. Poulet, *Le Pouvoir du Monde*, pp. 230-32.
43. All the publicly-aired complaints about *Le Monde* ought to put to rest any remaining idealism about journalistic ownership of the means of production. It is unruly, unfair, and highly political. It is a wonder that the journalists manage to put out a newspaper. But it also represents a distinct and worthy alternative to the *New York Times's* benign dictatorship, as well as the publicly-traded corporation that has become the rule in the United States.
44. Valdiguié, "Les deux auteurs s'expliquent," p. 8.
45. Author interview with Amaury de Rochemonde, Paris, June 2002.
46. See Pierre Albert, *La Presse Française* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1998) and Jean G. Padioleau, "Le journalisme politique à la française: Regards étrangers," *Esprit* 74 (1983):147-55.
47. Author interview with Robert Solé, *Le Monde* offices, Paris, June 2002. Of course, this statement was made about a year before the Péan/Cohen book was published, which undoubtedly far surpassed the negative reactions to the *New York Times* supplement.
48. Author interviews with Paul (by telephone) and Le Boucher (*Le Monde* offices), June 2002. After working with Le Boucher, Paul insisted: "We have the same concept of what makes good journalism. Everybody seems to be on the same wavelength." Since Paul also professed that neither he nor the other *Times* journalists working on the project had any firsthand knowledge of France or French journalism, it would seem that this professional harmony was primarily generated by the *Le Monde* journalists' success in internalizing American press norms.
49. Author interview with Jean-François Fogel, Paris, June 2002. Indeed, one of Jean-Marie Colombani's first steps after becoming director of *Le Monde* was to develop international economic and professional alliances. Eventually, Italy's *La Stampa* Group and Spain's *El País* would not only share news bureaus and articles with *Le Monde*, but they would become significant outside investors in the *Le Monde* Group.
50. Post- Péan and Cohen, even given the book's inaccuracies and exaggerations, it does seem difficult, at least for this reader, to peruse *Le Monde* without an additional

- measure of skepticism. Where are the hidden agendas, the invisible synergies with business or political allies? And does the use of the conditional verb tense indicate that *Le Monde* actually doesn't have the facts, but is only engaging in wild speculation, motivated by as yet obscure reasons? On the other hand: Wouldn't it be wise to read all newspapers with similar caution?
51. For a structural analysis of these changes, see the special issue, "Le journalisme et l'économie," *Actes de la recherches en sciences sociales* 131-32 (March 2000), as well as the forthcoming edited volume, *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, eds. Rodney Benson and Erik Neveu (Cambridge: Polity).
  52. See also Rodney Benson, "The Political/Literary Model of French Journalism: Change and Continuity in Immigration News Coverage, 1973-1991," *Journal of European Area Studies* 10, 1 (May 2002): 49-70. Comparative studies of the British and German press have likewise tended to show that the chief reason for more sensationalistic political coverage in Britain is the national, centralized character of its press system. See Frank Esser, "'Tabloidization' of News: A Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism," *European Journal of Communication* 14, 3 (1999): 291-324.
  53. Paolo Mancini, "Political Complexity and Alternative Models of Journalism: The Italian Case," in *De-Westernizing Media Studies*, eds. James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (London and New York: Routledge), p. 266.
  54. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
  55. *Ibid.* Normatively, one could go even further than this. "Objectivity" is not necessarily a particularly good doctrine even in those countries where it historically originated. If such an ideal was originally driven by a perceived need to depoliticize the news voice in order to appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of readers and advertisers, the consequence has often been an artificial ideological narrowing of public political debate.
  56. Pierre Albert, *La Presse Française* (Paris: La Documentation Française, 1990), p. 41.
  57. See for example Michael B. Palmer, *Des petits journaux aux grandes agences: Naissance du journalisme moderne 1863-1914* (Paris: Aubier, 1983); Thomas Ferenczi, *L'Invention du journalisme en France: Naissance de la presse moderne à la fin du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1993); and Jean K. Chalaby, "Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention: A Comparison of the Development of French and Anglo-American Journalism, 1830s-1920s," *European Journal of Communication* 11 (1996): 303-26.
  58. Ben H. Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly*, fourth edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 17, 204-5. See also Mark Pedelty, *War Stories: The Culture of Foreign Correspondents* (New York and London: Routledge), pp. 9-12, for a close comparison of the reporting styles of US and European foreign correspondents.
  59. Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995*, pp. 331-32.
  60. Jacques Nobecourt, "La nouvelle équipe de direction du Monde," *Universalia* 1983, pp. 313-16, cited in Eveno, *Le Monde 1944-1995*, p. 351, footnote 48.
  61. *Le Monde*, 4 December 2003
  62. Herbert Gans, *Democracy and the News* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
  63. Colombani has evidently determined that it is worth the economic risk of alienating such readers. Between 1994 and 2001, *Le Monde* reports that its paid circulation increased by 18 percent to 406,000. The precise figures are disputed by its critics, but no one questions that there has been some increase. Because of a decline in advertising, however, *Le Monde* is not yet clearly in the black.
  64. Padioleau, "*Le Monde*" et le "*Washington Post*," p. 39.
  65. Poulet, *Le Pouvoir du Monde*, p. 232.