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The Press as Agents of Nationalism in the Queen's Golden Jubilee: How British Newspapers Celebrated a Media Event

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The Press as Agents of Nationalism in the Queen's Golden Jubilee:

How British Newspapers Celebrated a Media Event

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Abstract:

The press coverage in anticipation of and during Queen Elizabeth II's Golden Jubilee celebrations in Britain in June of 2002 illustrates Dayan and Katz's (1992) theory that the media frequently adopt a "priestly" role when it comes to media events. In the months leading up to the Jubilee, the press obsessed about whether the celebrations would fail. When it became clear that the Jubilee had been an overwhelming success, the press heralded the occasion as evidence of Britain's continued strength and national unity. The coverage of the Jubilee as a whole illustrates the role of the press in promoting and celebrating nationalism through this civic ritual.

Keywords:

Media events, journalism, monarchy, nationalism, textual analysis

In June 2002, four days of organized celebrations were held to mark Queen Elizabeth II's fifty years on the British throne, her Golden Jubilee. For many, the British monarchy symbolizes a regrettable bygone era defined by the Empire and blind patriotism; a stark contrast to the 'post-national' world that is increasingly defined by global processes rather than national identities. What would be the status of such a sentimental civic ritual in a nation that, poised between European Unionization and a 'special relationship' with America, would be only too aware of processes of globalization and internationalization?

This seeming paradox provided the motivation for studying the role of the British press in shaping perceptions of the Jubilee celebrations, both the preparations as well as the events themselves, particularly in defining, reinforcing and confirming the values of nationalism. The concept of nationalism has come under increasing scrutiny as processes of globalization seemingly threaten the relevance of the nation state (Billig, 1992; Drucker, 1997; Evans, 1997). Furthermore, the tumultuous events of the twentieth Century have made many Europeans wary of unbridled nationalism, seeing it as a major cause of the two World Wars and other regional conflicts. We were curious to explore which narratives the press would offer its readers in response to the Jubilee preparations and events, particularly in terms of ideas about national identity and its relationship to the monarchy.

The relationship between the British Royal Family and the press has been a fraught one in the last scandal-ridden decade, when the marital indiscretions of the Queen's children, her financial situation, and the Queen's apparent coldness at the death of Princess Diana, among other events, filled the pages of tabloids and broadsheet newspapers alike. In light of the press' apparent hunger for Royal scandal, and the widely held belief in the waning popularity of the monarchy, there was some question as to whether the press and the public would cooperate with the organizers of the Jubilee in their coverage. While public opinion research suggests that

support for the monarchy among British citizens has in fact remained remarkably stable over the last several decades, there is declining faith in the ability of the monarchy to survive into the future, as well as a noticeable third-person effect (Davison, 1983), wherein people seem to believe that others view the monarchy in a negative light, even if they themselves do not (Mortimore, 2002). If, as Dr Mortimore (2002) of Market and Opinion Research International (MORI) opinion polls believes, the press plays a significant role in perpetuating beliefs about the waning popularity and viability of the monarchy by reporting so incessantly on scandals and unfavorable polls (many of them quite misleading), then would the press stay true to form by reporting on the Jubilee with a cynical eye?

Royal unpopularity and a difficult relationship with the press have a long history in Britain, and in fact, it was Queen Victoria over one hundred years ago who used the Jubilee occasions to boost her popularity and visibility with her subjects (Cannadine, 1992). Just as the Golden Jubilee of 2002 was initially viewed as a risk for Queen Elizabeth II, because of the potential effects a failed event would mean for her reign and for the future of the British monarchy as a whole, so Queen Victoria was reluctant to officially celebrate her Golden Jubilee in 1887 because of her lack of popularity at the time (Cannadine, 1992). Commentators have suggested that the rituals of royalty provided comfort and a sense of stability and continuity to British citizens in an age when the Industrial Revolution was transforming everyday life, and later, when the continued dominance of the British Empire started to be in doubt (Cannadine, 1992; Billig, 1992). Would the pomp and circumstance, so well received in the 19th century, be as effective with 21st century audiences?

The difficulty of gauging the success of events through the media, outlined by Lang and Lang in 1953 on the occasion of General MacArthur's 'hero's welcome' to Chicago, means that this is not a study about the 'success' of the Jubilee. Rather this paper is concerned with how,

during the Jubilee the British considered the role of the monarchy and the place of nationalism in contemporary society, using the press as examples of the culture as well as examining their role as the established commentators on the culture.

We studied how this phenomenon was reflected in different newspapers to uncover whether through regular news reports, letters pages, and editorial commentary, the press would construct the Jubilee as an integrative national event. As Schudson (1995) writes, 'News as a form of culture incorporates assumptions about what matters, what makes sense, what time and place we live in and what range of considerations we should take seriously' (Schudson, 1995: 3). As a result, our study of the press as a source of cultural discussion about the meaning of the Queen's Jubilee allows us to look specifically at the role of the press in framing the ritual, but also to gain some insights into how the broader culture may be thinking about and reacting to the events. In other words, we assume that journalists are not immune to the cultural assumptions, or structures of feeling (Williams, 1975) that infuse their cultural milieu.

In 2002, the entire year was dedicated to commemorating the Queen's reign, including visits to four Commonwealth nations; however, the central focus of the celebrations was a four day period of festivities during the first weekend of June. The Monday after that weekend was already a bank holiday, but the Queen called for the Tuesday to be an additional national holiday resulting in a four-day weekend of organized celebrations. The centralized events in London included a classical music concert in the grounds of Buckingham Palace on Saturday evening, a horse show in front of a floodlit Windsor Castle on Sunday, a pop music concert from the Palace and spectacular fireworks display on Monday evening, and a carnival procession down the Mall, culminating in a ceremonial fly-past of the Red Arrows and Concorde on Tuesday. As well as being televised, these events were beamed to large screens in parks throughout London where millions gathered to share the experience. In addition numerous events were organized around the

country: the lighting of bonfires across the Commonwealth; large organized festivities in regional centres; as well as much smaller community celebrations mostly in the form of street parties.

Methodology

Our research examines newspaper coverage of the Golden Jubilee from January to June 2002 in five national papers, in addition to coverage in regional newspapers in the six weeks leading up to the main celebrations. We chose to examine the six months of coverage in the national papers in order to capture the different stages of anticipation about the Jubilee, as well as the immediate aftermath. We retrieved the articles for this study from the Lexis/Nexis database, examining The Guardian and The Telegraph as examples of broadsheet newspapers, and The Mirror and The Sun as examples of tabloid coverage. We chose these newspapers because of their ideological affiliation. The Telegraph is a recognized pro-monarchy, right-wing newspaper, whereas The Guardian has a left-wing emphasis and is openly Republican. The Sun and The Mirror are less clearly defined, although traditionally The Sun has been right-wing whereas The Mirror has been considered left-wing. We also searched The Herald published in Glasgow, Scotland in order to examine the coverage of the Jubilee from a non-English, but British source.

These titles were searched for articles with 'Jubilee' in the headline. This search term was used as we were interested specifically in coverage about the Jubilee, and this allowed us to retrieve the largest number of articles while avoiding, as much as possible, those about the monarchy in general. A total of 426 articles were downloaded from 1 January until 30 June 2002.

An additional search was carried out in the same database, retrieving articles from all available local newspapers with 'street party/ies' in the headline, from 1 May until 15 June. We decided to use this search term, rather than the more general 'jubilee' as we wanted to capture the local discourse about smaller community celebrations unavailable in the national papers. In 1977, when the country celebrated the Silver Jubilee, street parties were considered the primary form of

celebration, particularly in local communities. We were interested in commentary of whether they were or were not being planned for 2002, and whether they were considered successful after the event. We retrieved articles for just a six week period, because for the regional newspapers, few articles that were related to the Jubilee appeared much in advance of the organized events in June. As we were most interested in observing how the local press helped to organize and then report on local celebrations, the majority of that coverage took place from May onwards. We were able to download a total of 105 articles for the six week period.

After completing the initial phase of the data analysis, we decided that the Queen Mother's death in April acted as an unexpected but very important backdrop to the Jubilee year. We therefore gathered additional articles printed around the time of her death. Using both "Queen Mother" and "Queen Mum" as search terms in the same five national newspapers, we were able to retrieve an additional 247 articles (although a significant number of these were letters to the editor).

After the corpus was created, the articles were divided between the two authors. The regional articles were read by both authors, but the numerous national articles were divided up by month. Before starting the analysis, we discussed and compared a number of ideas and queries which had been posed in previous research on media coverage of royal events. Working separately, we analyzed the articles in order to develop a typology of the most important themes and patterns which emerged from the coverage. The results of this preliminary analysis were discussed until the most prominent themes were decided and agreed upon. We then returned to the material in order to refine our arguments and to gather the most powerful examples of each of these patterns. We also attended to exceptions and contradictions which threatened our major categories. This form of qualitative textual analysis (Lacity and Janson, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) focuses on drawing out the most important themes from a corpus, considering

when and how they appear, without quantifying or measuring how many times they appear, as in quantitative content analysis. Undertaking the analysis with two authors improves the reliability of the analysis, as it was undertaken separately and then compared, meaning that the conclusions reached could be checked against the judgment of the other author.

Thesis

The analysis of news articles revealed that the newspaper coverage of the Jubilee changed over time as the Jubilee weekend approached. The media build-up to the June celebrations was considerable because of the press' pre-occupation with the extent to which people would participate in the Jubilee. We argue that this reporting trend reflected a widespread belief that the Jubilee's success or failure as a civic ritual would be a defining moment for British nationalism, either to re-form itself outside of an attachment to the monarchy (a stance that characterized The Guardian's coverage), or that the Jubilee would succeed, and therefore re-affirm the continuity of familiar definitions of British national identity (a common theme in The Telegraph).

Our sample of articles almost universally framed the Jubilee as a defining moment for the country in the press, but the extent to which it was a defining moment was demonstrated only after the event. Only at that point, in the post-Jubilee analysis did the newspapers suddenly rush to herald the Jubilee an overwhelming success and finally explain the relevance of the events. In the afterglow, commentators clarified how support for the Jubilee ensured the continued stability of the monarchy (particularly important in light of the last rocky royal decade), confirming Britain's importance on the world stage and illustrating the collective unity of multi-cultural Britain.

We believe it is important to examine rituals of nationalism at this historical moment, when the meaning and importance of the nation state is increasingly in doubt due to the rise in influence of supra-national organizations and corporations. Our analysis of press coverage of this

particular civic ritual demonstrates that in this era of globalization the press serve as agents of nationalism, providing one of the most visible and therefore powerful forums that actively keep questions of national identity on the agenda.

The press coverage of the Jubilee further illustrates how seemingly archaic rituals still exert some considerable power in our 21st century world, causing reporters to adopt a “priestly” role, and ordinary British people to drop their cynicism and participate, even organize, events celebrating the monarchy. In the Jubilee coverage we see emotion and sentimental considerations briefly triumph over more everyday, ‘rational’ approaches to the nation and the monarchy. The pull of group-unity (Durkheim, 1915) or *communitas* (Turner, 1957) proved to be too great even for sceptical reporters and republicans, at least during the Queen’s Golden Jubilee. The surprising response to the Queen’s Jubilee suggests that the role of mass gatherings, civic rituals, and other kinds of media events in articulating definitions of nationalism should not be underestimated.

Royal Research

Media or pseudo-events (Boorstin, 1964) can refer to moments that are artificially constructed by and for the media, but we consider the Jubilee to be an example of the class of media events described by Dayan & Katz as the ‘high holidays of mass communication’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 1). In their research on media events, Dayan and Katz raise questions relevant to this study. One is the theme of media events as tools of social integration, particularly in the case of national civic rituals. They note that the purpose – sometimes stated, sometimes implicit – of many media events is to reinforce the Durkheimian sense of ‘mechanical solidarity’ through a ritual moment of national communion, in order to bolster the unity and strength of the group (Dayan and Katz, 1992: viii). A further point raised by Dayan and Katz is the role of broadcasters and journalists in reporting these media events to the public. If the press does indeed suspend their everyday allegiance to norms of objectivity and distance in favour of a ‘priestly’ role, where

they approach the event with reverence and ‘hushed tones’, then why do they do so (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 193)? In Jubilee coverage, would newspapers adhere to conventional modes of reporting, or participate in preparing the public for the civic ritual? Would the Jubilee be framed as an outdated relic, or conversely as a ritual worthy of the public’s attention?

Cardiff and Scannell (1987) foreshadow a phenomenon we encountered with the Jubilee coverage, where the media encourage and facilitate public participation in national rituals. This tactic is deemed necessary by organizers and broadcasters because of the uncertainty of the outcome of media events. Scannell writes, in relation to the careful planning of the Coronation broadcast, that the very liveness of the event which is essential to its ‘magic’ is also its source of risk and uncertainty (Scannell, 1996: 84). Organizers and broadcasters are conscious of not having control over audiences – both live and watching at home – and seek to find ways to manage that uncertainty. About the role of the BBC news program *Nationwide*, Cardiff and Scannell write:

The programme’s team worked hard to encourage public participation in symbolic national occasions, like the royal jubilee of 1977 or the royal wedding of 1981, by promoting local activities and competitions linked to the events. This is probably as close as television can come to engaging its audience in a corporate ritual. (Cardiff and Scannell, 1987: 171)

Cardiff and Scannell’s observations about the media striving to manage the uncertainty associated with live events and fickle audiences resonated with the press coverage of the 2002 Jubilee.

In some sense, we are following in the footsteps of these scholars as well as the impulse of sociologist Michael Billig (1992) who attempted to treat seriously the ways Britons talk about the royal family in order to understand the meaning of the monarchy in contemporary Britain.

Billig argues that running through everyday talk about the royal family are assumptions that naturalize ideological stances regarding social inequality and national identity (Billig, 1992: 12). Of particular interest for our project, Billig detects the taken-for-grantedness of national affiliation, such that ‘part of what it means to be a person today is to have a national identity’ (Billig 1992: 27). Billig also argues that the contemporary attachment to the monarchy is a symptom of the insecurity British people feel about the current and future status of the country. While the monarchy appears strong, popular, and continuing the great British traditions (despite their relatively recent invention, see Cannadine, 1992), people feel more secure. Billig suggests that the continuity of the royal family, sustained through its various rituals and ceremonies, plays a role in anchoring the uncertainties of people’s individual futures, as well as the uncertain future of the nation as a whole. As he points out, the public’s interest in the royals has been very predictable, despite apparent widespread cynicism, and that while ‘there might be initial indifference...as the great day approaches, this typically gives way to mounting excitement’ (Billig, 1992: 5). Would the same hold true for the Queen’s Golden Jubilee in 2002?

Media Anticipation of the Golden Jubilee

In the five months leading up to the Golden Jubilee, our sample of national newspapers devoted a significant amount of column inches to anticipating and foreshadowing the upcoming celebrations, exhibiting a preoccupation with projecting and predicting the success or failure of the June events. In their coverage the newspapers challenged the traditionally accepted but commonly flaunted role of objective bystanders, and became active participants in the process of promoting the Golden Jubilee as an event meaningful to the nation as a whole.

Journalists used a range of data, well in advance of the June celebrations, to gauge whether the general public would endorse the event. The papers reported statistics as obscure as the sale of Union Jack flags (‘German flags will fly over Queen’s Jubilee’, The Telegraph, 17

March 2002), and the holiday bookings over Jubilee weekend that seemed to indicate more Britons than usual for that time of year leaving the country ('Jubilee? Time to leave the country', The Telegraph, 2 March 2002). The more common indices of public support that the press noted were the ticket sales for the Jubilee concerts, and applications for and organization of traditional street parties.

In January of 2002, the outlook for the Jubilee seemed grim. The Guardian and The Mirror reported that inside Buckingham Palace nervousness and uncertainty reigned as to whether 'when [the Queen] waves from the balcony at Buck House, there won't be anyone waving back' ('Don't be party to this Jubilee joke', The Sunday Mirror, 27 January 2002). The dearth of applications to hold street parties several months in advance of the big weekend was alarming to the Jubilee organizers and supporters. The Sun reported, for example, that there had been no street party applications so far in Scotland, and signs of interest in only three hundred communities in England and Wales ('Save the Jubilee', The Sun, 23 January 2002). The slow rate of street party applications continued to be a bad omen for the Jubilee over the first few months of 2002, but in late February a concrete indication of possible success came in the form of a 'frenzy' of calls to enter the lottery to win tickets to classical and popular concerts organized by the BBC for the grounds of Buckingham Palace over the Jubilee long weekend ('Ma'am Idol', The Mirror, 27 February 2002).

The various kinds of 'evidence' offered for projections of Jubilee success or failure, whether street party applications, sales of flags and bunting, or official polls, worked in tandem with more impressionistic pictures of public opinion painted by the papers through guest columns, letters to the editor, or interviews with individuals. Carole Malone's column, titled 'Don't be party to Jubilee joke', in The Sunday Mirror was fairly unambiguous in its dour projections for Jubilee weekend:

It seems unlikely the streets will be awash with parties on Jubilee Day, because who wants to celebrate an institution that remains the linchpin of conservatism in this country, an institution which prevents us from evolving into an equal society? ('Don't be party to Jubilee joke', The Sunday Mirror, 27 January 2002).

Whether the Jubilee was being projected as a success or failure, the constant conjecturing on the topic framed the Jubilee as an event worthy of attention, and as a moment that would be meaningful for Britain. Although the meaning of Jubilee success or failure was rarely discussed explicitly in the months leading up to the Jubilee weekend, the fact that such success or failure would in fact be meaningful never seemed to be in doubt, this belief seemingly fueling the frenzy of coverage in the first half of 2002. The way the press anticipated the event and implicitly prepared the public for the Jubilee celebrations, even when criticizing their political meaning, arguably fits the 'priestly' model offered by Dayan and Katz (1992) to the extent that norms of 'objectivity' and professional 'distance' were abandoned in the service of trying to resolve the uncertainty created by the coming event.

Coverage of the Queen Mother's Death

The five months of press build-up to the June celebrations did not occur in a vacuum, but rather alongside, and likely in response to, current events, which may have influenced the journalistic approach to the coming Jubilee. One subject which cannot be ignored is the impact of the Queen Mother's death on 31 March, just six weeks after the passing of the Queen's sister, Princess Margaret in early February. The unexpected public interest and outpouring of support around the Queen Mother's death legitimized the pro-monarchy newspapers and their Jubilee efforts, while simultaneously challenging the assumptions of less sympathetic papers which had assumed the passing of the Windsor matriarch would be marked by an indifferent public reaction. What was critical about this particular period of coverage was the volte face which the papers

were forced to make when public reaction to the Queen Mother's death disproved the commentators' initial conclusions about the impact of her death.

The press coverage on the day immediately following the Queen Mother's death was dedicated to official obituaries, but the editorial pages of most British papers, other than the arch royal Daily Mail and The Telegraph demonstrated how the commentators expected the event to have little impact on the modern, multi-cultural, post-Diana Britain. Richard Littlejohn in The Sun exclaimed

...please spare us the enforced grieving, the media overkill, the 'Nation Mourns' nonsense.... I don't detect any great sense of national grief. The only visible signs of mourning are the usual complement of Pearly Queens and the sad cases who inevitably turn up and stand outside the Palace on the off-chance of getting on television. ('Raise A Glass To The Old Girl...It's What She'd Have Wanted' The Sun, 2 April 2002)

The article goes on to consider some of the more unglamorous truths about the Queen Mother before concluding, 'She was an anachronism. Her era passed 30-odd years ago. Britain today is not so much another country as another planet'.

The Guardian ran a front page story with the headline, 'Uncertain farewell reveals a nation divided' (The Guardian, 1 April 2002). The editorial comment by Christopher Hitchens was headlined with 'Mourning will be brief: the Queen Mother symbolized reaction and philistinism. Her death marks the end of an antidemocratic era' (The Guardian, 1 April 2002).

The Sun and The Guardian presented an image of Britons divided amongst themselves, as well as divided from their past. They argued that the present Britain is so transformed as to no longer have anything in common with its past self. These printed sentiments however appeared to be changed by the unexpected public response. Within three days over two thousand bouquets

had been laid on the lawn of St George's Chapel and the following day in the first test of public reaction, four hundred thousand people lined the route for the procession of the coffin to the lying-in-state. Over the next three days over one million queued to walk past the coffin, often having to wait as long as eight hours.

It appeared most of the papers had misjudged the mood of the country. The Daily Mail and The Telegraph openly discussed the failings of the 'liberal' press and suddenly the letters pages of all the papers were full of scathing attacks. One letter printed in The Guardian exclaimed:

You reported that few cared. Only old soldiers and old bigots would mourn. As the crowds grew, you added tourists and families to the list of mourners. But fired off the usual and boring accusations of racism, anti-Semitism. Now have you begun to realise that every person, young, old, black and white, that files passed her coffin is a vote for the Britain you despise and seek to denigrate at every opportunity?

(‘Our Respect for the Queen Mum’ The Guardian, 9 April 2002)

By the funeral on 9 April, the press had realised its mistake. It seemed that people did not want to be reminded of their differences and the discontinuities with the nation's past, but rather see themselves as united in grief, and following the traditions connected with mourning a member of the Royal family. Coverage was exhaustive and deferential. Even The Guardian conceded defeat, running an editorial in stark contrast to its headline the day after the Queen Mother's death:

Yesterday's dignified, refulgent and magnificent service at Westminster Abbey was brim-full with that symbolism - religious, feudal, military, imperial and royal. It was about whom the Queen Mother was and what she did in a long life of public service' (‘Gladly into the Night: A funeral service of symbolic importance’ The Guardian, 10 April 2002).

The celebration of the Jubilee was often mentioned in the coverage of the Queen Mother's death, with reporters using the unexpected turnout as a gauge to measure potential support for the Jubilee, commentators suggesting Jubilee organizers had discovered a newfound momentum, and letters pages full of appeals for people to make the Jubilee a success in memory of the Queen Mother.

How the Media Instructed the British Public to Participate in the Golden Jubilee

The British press did not just abandon their journalistic norms of objectivity and distance through their endless predictions of the Jubilee weekend. In fact, the press quite frequently provided explicit instructions to their readers on how they could participate in or even organize Jubilee festivities. The ways that the newspapers encouraged and instructed readers to participate ranged from prescriptive and direct, as in articles devoted to how to organize a street party in the neighbourhood, to somewhat indirect 'instructions' through discussions of Jubilee fashions, travel offers, and recipes in the style pages. Just as the producers of Nationwide did in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Cardiff and Scannell, 1987), editors and journalists in 2002 promoted reader participation in the Jubilee on a variety of levels. Whether generally encouraging interactivity by soliciting unpublished photographs of the Queen, as The Telegraph did in the months leading up to the Jubilee, or giving their readers 'permission' to celebrate even if they were republican, as a Guardian editorial did in January ('Follow the party line: The jubilee can boost communities', The Guardian, 25 January 2002), the press arguably entered into a spirit of collaboration with the Jubilee organizers.

National newspapers undertook initiatives that made them quasi-organizers of the Jubilee festivities. For example, The Sun ran a contest to pick two deserving children to present the Millennium Flame to the Queen on Jubilee weekend ('Help the Sun find Jubilee children', The Sun, 6 March 2002), and organized Jubilee commemorative greeting cards that readers could

order and send to the Queen ('Free Jubilee card for every reader', The Sun, 25 May 2002).

Newspapers also provided inspiration and instruction on organizing local Jubilee celebrations. Articles would direct readers to the official Golden Jubilee website, as well as websites that listed events around the country (for example, 'Get on the Jubilee line', The Sun, 24 January 2002).

The Sun and The Telegraph printed Jubilee recipes (for example 'Street party recipes', The Telegraph, 1 June 2002), while The Mirror published suggestions on how to make Jubilee decorations ('How to set up your DIY royal street party', 12 May 2002). The Mirror ('Planning your Day', 12 May 2002) and The Independent ('Crowning glory of a successful Jubilee', 25 May 2002) both provided detailed instructions on the logistics of planning a street party, including how to negotiate the red tape of local bureaucracies. Meanwhile The Sun and local newspapers such as the South Wales Echo ran contests, the first offering 'one group of lucky revellers' a visit from the 'Sun Bus', complete with the infamous page three girls ('The Sun bus for your Jubilee party', 1 May 2002), the second offering street party organizers the opportunity to win bread and pastries supplied by a local bakery ('Your street party can win a load of goodies for birthday bash', 16 May 2002). The Sun, however, did not stop at providing incentives for readers to participate in the Jubilee, but practically browbeat them into it, launching a 'Save the Jubilee' campaign in January and asking readers to 'Have a Bash for her Maj' (23 January 2002).

The ways that newspapers, both local and national, promoted the Jubilee festivities and encouraged reader interactivity shows how difficult it is to separate the Jubilee event itself from its coverage in the media. Whipping up support for a large civic ritual like the Jubilee through incentives and instruction is just one of the ways that the news media shifted from their supposed role of observer of national events to facilitator thereof.

Coverage of the celebrations

The coverage of the events surrounding the Jubilee events themselves was comprehensive. As this quote from the Sunday Herald explains, the blanket newspaper coverage very much followed the lead of the television channels;

So, after everything that's happened, we are still a nation of monarchists. Opinion polls throughout the nineties indicated a growing swell of republicanism.¹ Yet, if this week's television schedules are any indication, you'd be forgiven for thinking that if you utter a word of resistance towards the Golden Jubilee, you may well be taken to the Tower and find your severed head rolling around in a basket. ('All day and all of the knights: From comedy to documentary, television just can't get enough of the Jubilee' Sunday Herald, 1 June 2002).

This quote was taken from a newspaper published on the Saturday of the Jubilee weekend and the coverage from the beginning of the weekend was still tinged with uncertainty, hedging around the subject, unsure of whether the events would be well attended or supported. A confounding element was offered by the opening weekend of the Football World Cup being held in Japan and South Korea at the same time. The timing of the two events did not escape the more cynical observers, who felt the decision to time the celebrations with the World Cup had been a deliberate ploy as it could be used as an excuse if Jubilee events were not well attended.

Interestingly, the differences we expected to uncover by including a Scottish newspaper in our sample were non-existent. The coverage in The Herald as well as The South Wales Echo which was part of our regional newspaper search was very supportive of the Jubilee celebrations. The press coverage made it appear that the Kingdom was indeed united behind its Queen and that

¹ MORI opinion polls do not indicate that there has been a growing swell of republicanism, although Mortimore (2002) agrees that the papers often report that this is so.

this was very much a British rather than an English celebration. The Queen and the celebration of her Jubilee appears to have had the power to overcome established tensions and divisions to produce a British national identity, at least temporarily in the press.

As the celebrations unfolded over the weekend, it quickly became clear that they were being very well attended, but the main events were organized for Monday. The newspapers on Tuesday 4 June provided the first description of the impact of the celebrations, and the Jubilee was clearly the most important story in all outlets, judging by the amount and prominent placement of the coverage. The following quote from The Telegraph is a representative example of the opening line of almost all reports, whatever the ideological affiliation of the paper.

More than a million people poured into central London last night for the biggest Golden Jubilee party of all, the star-studded Party at the Palace with a spectacular pyrotechnic finale. A day of festivities throughout Britain climaxed with extraordinary scenes as crowds far surpassing expectations watched the unprecedented rock and pop concert [emphasis added]. It was followed by a display of fireworks and water fountains in a dazzling 15-minute son et lumiere that enveloped the Buckingham Palace in a brilliant kaleidoscope of colour. It was a magnificent end to the day that proved Britain could party with the best ('A Million Rock to the Jubilee' The Telegraph, 4 June 2002).

The Sun, under the headline, 'Jubilee: We Loved It', began their coverage with the statement, 'She had promised to throw a party to remember - and, God bless 'er, she kept her word' (4 June 2002).

By the following day, the coverage was fully engaged in an analysis of the proceedings. Through this coverage we can see a collective sigh of relief, as journalists considered the potential implications of a 'failed' jubilee through their emphasis of what the 'successful' jubilee

meant for the country. Despite the large numbers who attended the events both official and unofficial, the newspapers continued to discuss the uncertainty which had plagued organizers throughout the year, as a way of emphasizing the importance of the high attendance figures. The Mirror for example wrote 'For the Queen, it was the light of her life. For everyone else who saw it, it was the most spectacular outdoor show ever... and one of the most unexpected' ('Greatest Show of the Mall' The Mirror, 5 June 2002). In the same way as reporters had used ingenious methods of measuring potential support for the Jubilee through ticket sales, parking permits and even campsite reservations, the analysis was packed with statistics reinforcing its success. The Jubilee's status as a media event was highlighted by observers, the global television viewing figure of 200 million being a common inclusion in the analysis stories. Citing this fact was an attempt by journalists to demonstrate that even more people were experiencing the celebrations than the throngs seen on the Mall.

Many of the reports were 'eye-witness' accounts of the proceedings, using the experiences of visitors to portray the events. In a formulaic article which appeared in The Mirror but was effectively repeated in all papers, the reporter writes up her analysis of the events and the impact of the jubilee through her experience on the Mall.

For hours before the arrival of the fairytale carriage, the crowds here had talked about how 'real' their Queen felt to them today. The triumphant Party at the Palace had shown her to be accessible. Fun-loving. One of us. But her appearance yesterday, cocooned in the glittering Gold State Coach, was a potent reminder of the sheer magic of majesty. More than a million lined the streets of Central London yesterday to witness the climax of a Golden Jubilee celebration that was as unexpectedly thrilling as it was triumphant. The crowds stood 12-deep and hitched their children on to their shoulders as they cheered and waved flags, eager

to play their part in one of the biggest parties London has ever seen. There was a collective gasp as they caught their first glimpse of the Queen - then a deafening thunder of applause which seemed to last all day. It wasn't a typically British response. One woman in front of me leapt in the air and flailed her arms around her head. Her husband confided that the last time he'd witnessed this, they'd been at Woodstock ('Look Daddy it's Cinderella' The Mirror, 5 June 2002).

The Telegraph used the 'success' of the events to confirm its conservative ideology, 'During the week, the national euphoria drew deep on a sense of rediscovered confidence. With the Jubilee, it was the restoration of pride in emblems of sovereignty that our new Establishment has been too quick to disown in recent years' [emphasis added] ('Unforgettable, That's What it Was' The Telegraph, 5 June 2002).

The enthusiasm of the traditional pro-monarchy papers was even found in The Guardian which had been so firmly anti-Jubilee. In an editorial on 5 June, they were forced to acknowledge that their negative predictions had been wrong.

We need to face up to the facts...This has undoubtedly been a great weekend for the House of Windsor and for the Queen in particular. It would not be true to say that their popularity has never been greater, but it is undoubtedly true that this is one of the best mornings the monarchy has ever had ('A Spectacular Jubilee: The Queen Enjoys a Memorable Weekend' The Guardian, 5 June 2002).

The Guardian demonstrates an acute awareness of the development of the press coverage in the months leading up to the Jubilee,

Nevertheless, the uncertainty, the sense of risk, the genuine fears that Britain might have become indifferent, or possibly even hostile to the Queen were real. They did not come out of nowhere. They came out of a decade of roller-coaster

rejection, some of it emotional, some of it rational, most of it tabloid-driven, of the kind of monarchy that had evolved under Elizabeth II's apparently indifferent rule. The court was right to worry. But they did not need to. In the end the crowds came and cheered. In the end, the mixed levels of irritation and anger against individual members of the royal family, against the House of Windsor in general, and against the irrelevance of modern monarchy in particular were not great enough to dislodge the nation's fundamental comfort and, yes, even its pride in its institutions. ('A Spectacular Jubilee: The Queen Enjoys a Memorable Weekend' The Guardian, 5 June 2002).

While the Jubilee did not force The Guardian to change its principles, this editorial illustrates how the declared success of the events brought a level of comfort. If crowds had not cheered, if street parties had not been organized, if events had been attended by only the country's fervent monarchists, it would have been clear that something serious had happened to the most fundamental British institution. Even those who support such a seismic change were forced to admit the level of impact such an outcome would have caused.

Discussion

As Dayan and Katz (1992) predicted about media events generally, and as has been documented in past coverage of royal rituals, by and large the media embraced their role as collaborators with Buckingham Palace in promoting public participation in the Queen's Golden Jubilee. While the BBC were the most involved in this role, literally helping to plan large events, and organize the four-day celebration so as to be best captured by television, the print news media also played a role.

As Garry Wills (1980) noticed when he argued that the press 'fell in love' with Pope John Paul on his visit to North America, the press can compromise their appearance as independent

entities (in democratic countries) when they too clearly co-operate with political authorities. Our examination of the press coverage of the Jubilee celebrations reaches similar conclusions. Our focus here was to illustrate an example of a classic media event where the outcome, in terms of public participation, was genuinely unknown, and the press played an important role in negotiating that uncertainty. We showed how the press, during their Jubilee coverage, ultimately fulfilled the ‘priestly’ role described by Dayan and Katz, and in many cases abandoned even the pretence of covering this civic ritual ‘objectively’. The extensive build-up and quasi-collaboration between the print media and the event organizers shows how complicit the media was in this instance in framing and promoting nationalism.

The press’ preoccupation with the uncertain outcome of the Jubilee is a phenomenon that has been observed with past royal events by observers such as Cardiff and Scannell (1987). The ultimate ‘success’, as declared by Jubilee organizers, broadcasters, and members of the public, seemed to produce a satisfying sense of continuity and national stability, suggesting that the previous obsession with potential Jubilee failure was borne out of a sense of national insecurity. While different media outlets might bring varying political perspectives to bear, the significance of the Jubilee for the collectivity in terms of national unity and stability was implicit in the hand-wringing, cheerleading, and nay-saying (depending on the source), in the weeks and months leading up to the first week of June. Once the Jubilee weekend actually came, and proved itself a hit with the public, some of the press conveniently forgot their own scepticism regarding the outcome of the celebrations. James Whitaker of the Mirror, for example, managed to project the looming sense of doom in the first half of 2002, so apparent in the pages of his own publication, onto the Queen alone, as he wrote:

For almost the first time in her life, the Queen got something wrong. She just wouldn’t believe that people would really, really want to celebrate her Golden

Jubilee. But by teatime yesterday she knew for sure she'd made a rare misjudgement. As she stood on her balcony at Buckingham Palace – the scene of so many triumphs and days of celebration in the past 150 years – she looked down on a sea of faces, maybe as many as one million. And all of them were giving her the message: 'Well done, Ma'am. We think you're great and we want you to go on for ever' ('The Queen Worried This Would Be A Failure .. For Once She Got It All Wrong' The Mirror, 5 June 2002).

No commentator was able to offer a definitive reason for why the British public had so unexpectedly thrown themselves into the celebrations. We would suggest that the power of the civic ritual itself brought about a desire or a sense of obligation in people to join 'the masses' and be counted. Despite a variety of opinions about Britain as a nation and the place of the monarchy in it, the pull to take part in a liminal moment, where national unity can be affirmed through physical participation with others, seems to have been strong, even on a seemingly cynical public. Although our observations do not include primary data from the revellers themselves, but rather mediated accounts through the press, the overall impression of the Jubilee recalls one of Shils and Young's observations from their 1953 study on the Queen's coronation. They wrote:

The heart has its reasons which the mind does not suspect. In a survey of street parties in East London nothing was more remarkable than the complete inability of people to say why they thought important the occasion they were honouring with such elaborate ritual, and the newspapers naturally took for granted the behaviour on which this essay is a comment. (Shils & Young, 1953, p.63)

Even if for only a short time, a civic ritual like the Queen's Golden Jubilee appeared to have the 'magic' ability to sweep scandal under the carpet, triumph over cynicism, and discipline a combative press.

The negative press coverage which immediately followed the Queen Mother's death, and the quick souring of post-Jubilee media/monarchy relations as shown during the Butler scandal of October 2002, demonstrates that the gushing commentary which immediately surrounded the Jubilee events was caused by something extraordinary. Whether it was the 'magical' nature of the event, or the natural concern that a 'failed' mass ritual would demonstrate a weak nation, the behaviour of the press during this short period is significant.

The relief expressed in the media and by Buckingham Palace in the face of Jubilee success was palpable, but the ecstatic commentaries and the undeniability of millions of bodies in London and around the country visibly marking the Queen's fifty years on the throne left little airtime or inclination to ask the tough questions. What was the nature of the 'unity' and sense of Britishness that the Jubilee had tapped into? Was the event truly as inclusive as it declared itself to be, and how had the multiculturalism of modern Britain, as well as its imperial past been addressed or subsumed by the Jubilee excitement? What kind of nationalism, or group-feeling, had in fact been articulated? These questions, unaddressed in this paper, raise the concerns of critics of 'ceremonial politics' like Mosse (1980), Lukes (1975), and Birnbaum (1955), who distrust the emotional appeal of spectacular media events like the Queen's Golden Jubilee. In future work, we hope to look more closely at the Jubilee as a proposed 'integrative' event for the British nation, both in terms of the meta-narratives about nationalism and ethnicity that were offered through the celebrations, but also in terms of how the ritual was actually experienced by participants.

Just as Anderson (1991) argued that the development of newspapers was instrumental in allowing the nation-state to work as an 'imagined community', so the press continues to serve as a space where discussions over national identity take place. At a time when the status of the nation-state as a political structure is undergoing change due to the forces of globalization, we

ought to attend to how national cultures and their media seek to protect their identities and traditions. As the coverage and actual celebrations of the Queen's Jubilee seem to suggest, sentimentality and emotion about the comfort and stability of the monarchy is one way the press chooses to preserve and promote feelings of nationalism.

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