

## Chapter 1

### New vistas for peace journalism: alternative media and communication rights<sup>1</sup>

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I once asked a California-based public health advocate, concerned with the media's impact on community violence, about her group's strategies for changing the media. 'Bob,' she replied, 'the point isn't to change the media. The point is to change the world'. It was a useful reminder. Like many other forms of citizen intervention in the media field, peace journalism (PJ) is not simply about journalism. PJ is part of much broader processes and movements to challenge cultural, structural and physical violence and to achieve a more peaceful world. Communication practices and institutions (particularly journalism as a culturally central form of storytelling) are interwoven with movements for and against social justice, with contemporary processes of peace and war,<sup>2</sup> and with other intersecting crises facing humankind – impending climate catastrophe, humanitarian emergencies, terror, war, poverty, forced migrations, and human rights abuses (Cottle 2009, p15). Addressing those crises requires, *inter alia*, addressing the structured communication paradigms that (however unwittingly) may contribute to them. The task is gargantuan, but the good news is that PJ has potential allies

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2 Indeed, it can be argued that increasingly 'the news media do not only communicate or "mediate" the events of war; they enter into its very constitution shaping its course and conduct' (Cottle 2009, p109; emphasis in original).

outside the media field, including a natural affinity with longstanding and emerging campaigns and movements to democratise media.

Drawing from secondary literature, this chapter makes a case for common ground between PJ and other ‘challenger paradigms’. Each paradigm mobilises energy, generates incentives and institutional logics, organises ways of producing, legitimising and disseminating knowledge, and reinforces, challenges and/or creates power relations. While interested in the prospects for change, I start with the arguably disintegrating but still dominant ‘regime of objectivity’ (Hackett & Zhao 1998) characteristic of North American journalism’s period of ‘high modernism’ (Hallin 2000). I then situate PJ in relation to that dominant paradigm, and turn to two other challengers, each of which can be considered a form of media democratisation. If PJ has so far been an effort to reform dominant media from within, alternative media bypass dominant media by creating a parallel field, and the communication rights movement seeks to reform dominant media from without by changing the legal and political-economic contexts within which media operate. Both of these latter paradigms can be considered forms of media democratisation, which has a double sense: democratisation *through* the media – using media to democratise other areas of society (a longstanding practice of progressive social movements), and democratisation *of* the media field itself (Hackett & Carroll 2006).

To make a case that PJ might find new venues and allies in movements for media democratisation, I explore the extent to which each of the three challenger paradigms can be considered counter-hegemonic (i.e. actively opposed to some form of domination or oppression), and identify their core principles, strategies, allies and opponents. To what extent, then, do they share a project of social, political or communicative change?

### The regime of objectivity

Given the centrality of the value of objectivity in discussions of journalism’s public philosophy, including debates between critics and defenders of PJ, I begin with a discussion of this concept that has dominated Anglo-American journalism for much of the 20th century and

that is acquiring global significance as journalists seek new roles and institutional supports within formerly authoritarian regimes elsewhere. So long as we take it as a heuristic framework and not an empirically existing object, objectivity could be described as a paradigm or a regime, a metaphor that calls attention to the interlinkage of practices, norms, epistemology and structures in journalism.

Objectivity has positive connotations, such as the pursuit of truth without fear or favour. What objectivity means in practice, however, and whether it is a desirable and achievable goal for reporting in a democratic society, are debatable questions. Objectivity is not a single, fixed 'thing'. Hackett and Zhao (1998) suggest that, in contemporary North American journalism, objectivity constitutes a multifaceted discursive 'regime', an interrelated complex of ideas and practices that provide a general model for conceiving, defining, arranging, and evaluating news texts, practices and institutions. They identify five general levels or dimensions in this regime.

First, objectivity comprises goals that journalists should strive for – values concerning journalism's ability to impart information about the world (accuracy, completeness, separation of fact from opinion), and values concerning the stance that reporters should take towards the value-laden meanings of news (detachment, neutrality, impartiality and independence, and avoiding partisanship, personal biases, ulterior motives, or outside interests) (McQuail 1992, chapters 16 and 17). Second, such values are assumed to be embodied in a set of news-gathering and presentational practices, discussed below. Third, this paradigm implies assumptions about knowledge and reality, such as a positivist faith in the possibility of accurate descriptions of the world as it is, through careful observation and disinterested reporting. Fourth, objectivity is embedded in an institutional framework. It presumes that journalism is conducted by skilled professionals, employed within specialised institutions – news organisations, usually corporate-owned, but in which editorial and marketing functions are separated. In their relations with the broader society, journalists and news media are assumed to enjoy legal guarantees of free speech, and independence from the state, political parties and other outside interests. And fifth,

objectivity provides language for everyday assessments of journalistic performance. This language includes terms like 'fairness' and 'balance', which some see as more flexible and achievable substitutes for objectivity. Objectivity is often counterposed to propaganda, and personal or partisan 'bias'.

Who are the beneficiaries of the objectivity regime, and what functions does it serve? Notwithstanding the apparently high-minded altruism and universalism of its ethos – telling truth in the public interest without fear or favour – the historical and sociological roots of journalism objectivity reveal that it serves quite specific interests (Bennett 2009, pp189–92; Hackett & Zhao 1998). Nonpartisan reporting helped the commercial daily press, oriented towards emerging mass consumer markets, to displace the party-oriented papers of the 19th century, and to aggregate the broadest possible readership for advertisers. Similarly, the news agencies that emerged during the 1800s had a vested interest in providing politically neutral wire copy to newspaper clients with diverse partisan orientations. To the extent that objective reporting requires specialised skills, it enhances journalists' claim to professional status. The objectivity regime helps to manage the symbiotic relationship between news media and the state. Politicians gain access to media audiences and an opportunity to shape the public definition of political issues; conversely, so long as they follow the rules of objectivity, working journalists gain relatively stable access to senior officials and politicians, without sacrificing their public image of political independence and neutrality. Indeed, the objectivity doctrine 'obscured and therefore made more palatable [journalists'] unprofessional compromises with managerial imperatives and corporate politics' (Bagdikian 1997, p180). The claims of objectivity and professionalism also provided ideological cover for media monopolies against the threat of government antitrust legislation or regulation (McChesney 2004, pp63–64). Finally, the practices of objectivity, such as the 'balanced' reporting of political issues, opened the public forum to interest groups that had the resources and willingness to play the game (Hackett & Zhao 1998, chapter 3). A powerful coincidence of interests underpinned the longevity of the objectivity regime.

In addition to demystifying its social and political roots, academics have repeatedly demonstrated the shortcomings of existing journalism when measured against the stated ideal of objectivity, while others have advanced telling critiques of the epistemological foundations of journalism objectivity (see, for example, Hackett & Zhao 1998, chapter 5). It is more relevant here, however, to consider the regime's key narrative and reportorial practices and their systematic political consequences. These practices include 'documentary reporting' that allows journalists to transmit only facts that they can observe or that 'credible' and authoritative sources have confirmed (Bennett 2009, p193). Journalists also practise 'balance' when covering controversies that are regarded as legitimate, providing access to the most dramatic or authoritative leaders of 'both sides.' Other conventions include the separation of 'fact' from 'opinion,' and the privileging of personalities over structures, political strategies over policy analysis, and discrete and timely events over long-term processes, conditions or contexts.

When measured against sensationalism or wilful propaganda, these objectivity practices have much to recommend them (Bagdikian 1997, p179). Yet they also have predictable consequences that are highly problematic for informing public opinion, or incentivising remedial action, in relation to global crises of conflict, ecology and poverty. Take the practices of 'balance.' In American environmental journalism, 'balance' gave undue weight to climate change deniers, resulting in inaccurate reporting at odds with the scientific consensus (Bennett 2009, pp108–12). Balance constructs and reduces complex issues to two sides, marginalising other perspectives, and giving excessive weight either to dramatic and polarising voices, or to the usual official sources (such as political party leaders). Balance also naturalises the construction of conflicts as two-sided zero-sum contests, in which one party can only gain at the expense of the other; alternative conflict resolution and win-win options are thus marginalised (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005a, pp203–12).

Other practices are equally problematic. The reliance on credentialed facts from elite sources, and the privileging of events over contexts, reinforce a global status quo of misery for millions of people, sidelining

issues such as poverty, labour exploitation, or private sector corruption that are not on official agendas until they erupt in catastrophic upheavals. Such journalism can contribute to social turbulence as 'unestablished groups' adopt disruptive tactics to attract media attention (Bagdikian 1997, p213). Balance and official orientation can also make it difficult for 'objective' journalism to challenge governments' war-making policies, even when they are founded on dubious motives and evidence, in the absence of oppositional elite voices. The American media's virtually free pass to the Bush administration as it prepared to invade Iraq in 2003 is now widely recognised as a tragic case in point (DiMaggio 2009, see especially chapter 3). In a parallel fashion, the journalistic privileging of events and personalities over contexts and structures makes it easier for political leaders to foreground and demonise figures like Saddam Hussein, and to deflect attention from their own motives and contributions vis-à-vis conflict escalation, and from the 'collateral damage' of their own policies (such as the massive civilian cost of the pre-2003 sanctions imposed on Iraq).

A related line of critique asserts that the objectivity ethos directly contributes to the production of systematically one-sided or ideological news accounts, and legitimises media practices that undermine democratic public life, such as a stance of cynical negativism divorced from coherent analytical perspectives, and the framing of politics as a game of insiders motivated only by electoral success (see, for example, Bennett 2009, chapter 6).

Such critiques are contentious, but there is widespread agreement that the objectivity regime is in crisis. Anglo-American journalism is increasingly dissolving within profit-driven conglomerates, its economic basis threatened by audience fragmentation, and its occupational ethos shifting from public service (however conservatively defined) to consumerism and commercialism. No single paradigm has replaced objectivity, but several promising challengers have emerged that include PJ as an internal reform movement, operating in the corners of journalism education and news organisations to revise professional practices.

## Peace journalism

Like objectivity, PJ is a multifaceted paradigm. I do not repeat here the descriptions of PJ offered elsewhere in this book and in other publications (for example, Lynch & McGoldrick 2005a). Instead, I focus on several questions relevant to its philosophical and strategic prospects.

### *Is peace journalism counter-hegemonic?*

First, does PJ constitute a counter-hegemonic challenge to journalism, or to broader social structures? There is no unequivocal answer. While its advocates ask journalists to engage with concepts and ideas from the academic discipline of conflict analysis, they often prefer to speak in the language of journalistic professionalism. Indeed, when initiating PJ as a reform campaign within the journalism field, Lynch preferred to avoid the term 'peace journalism' which for some may imply an illegitimate prior commitment to extraneous values. He labelled the new initiative 'reporting the world' (Lynch 2002). Indeed, in justifying PJ's prescriptions, Lynch and McGoldrick (2005a, pp9, 185, 223, 242) are able to quote from formal editorial guidelines published by one of the world's bastions of the objectivity regime, the BBC, and to use its language – balance, fairness, responsibility (Lynch 2002, p3). One scholar characterises PJ as a prerequisite of good journalism, one 'which only forbids the unacceptable', such as the narrowing of news perspective to that of 'war-making elites', or acting as a conduit for propaganda (Kempf 2007a, p4; cited in Lynch 2008, pxvi). In this view, PJ embodies the best ideals of journalistic professionalism – including comprehensiveness, context, accuracy, and the representation of the full range of relevant opinions – and it critiques existing journalism from that standpoint while providing practical alternatives (Lynch 2008, pxviii).

Notwithstanding its toehold in the established media field however, PJ also has some of the characteristics of an oppositional social movement. Consider the contrasts between conventional journalism and the peace movement as paradigms for structuring thought and action. The peace movement values long-term peacebuilding processes, collective decision-making, political commitment, human solidarity, social change, and low-cost grassroots mobilisation. Dominant

journalism favours timely events, official hierarchies, a detached stance, dyadic conflict, a consumerist worldview, and costly production values (Hackett 1991, pp274–75). While PJ should not be equated with the peace movement, it shares with it some of the above-noted incompatibilities vis-à-vis dominant news discourse.

PJ constitutes, first, an *epistemological challenge* to the objectivity regime. In this view, journalism inherently involves choices; it is a matter of representation, not of reality-reflection. Notwithstanding its professed disinterestedness, conventional ‘objective’ journalism enshrines practices that predictably favour some outcomes and values over others – including, too often, war over peaceful conflict transformation. For example, in conflict situations, far from being passive observers, journalists are often caught in a ‘feedback loop’ with political players. Frequently, based on their previous experience of the media, powerful sources create ‘facts’ that they anticipate will be reported and framed in particular ways. Thus, every time journalists re-create those frames, they influence future actions by sources. By focusing on physical violence divorced from context, and on win–lose scenarios, conventional ‘objective’ news unwittingly incentivises conflict escalation and ‘crackdowns,’ impeding a morally and professionally justifiable incentivisation of peaceful outcomes (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005a, pp216–18). Objective journalism can thus be ‘irresponsible,’ in that it shuns Max Weber’s ‘ethic of responsibility’ in public affairs – the idea that ‘one should take into account the foreseeable consequences of one’s actions ... and adjust one’s behaviour accordingly’ (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005a, p218).

PJ thus challenges the very epistemological basis for a stance of detachment, calling instead for journalists to be self-reflexive vis-à-vis the institutionalised biases of their routine practices, the dangers posed by certain framing and sourcing choices, the non-passivity of sources, the interventionist nature of journalism, and the potential of its becoming an unwitting accomplice to war propaganda (Lynch 2008, pp10–14). That said, PJ is not renouncing the commitment to truthfulness, only questioning why some kinds of facts and sources are privileged, and how these feed into conflict cycles (p9). PJ rejects both the positivist



stance that journalism simply reports self-evident facts, and the relativist position that ‘it’s all spin’, that there is no independent basis to separate truth from propaganda. Instead, PJ offers interdisciplinary intellectual anchorage in peace and conflict studies, pursues the rigour of social science, and is reflexive, explicit about its normative commitments, open to justification, and aware of participant/observer interaction (ppxv, 21).<sup>3</sup>

Second, beyond epistemological differences, PJ challenges dominant *news values*, the taken-for-granted and usually implicit criteria that routinely guide journalists in selecting and constructing news narrative. In a recent update of a classic study by Galtung and Ruge (1965), Harcup and O’Neill (2001) identify ten dominant characteristics of newsworthy stories in the British press: power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news (events), magnitude or scope, relevance (to the audience), follow-up (continuity), and the newspaper’s own agenda. PJ’s emphases on conflict formation and resolution, on win–win positive outcomes, on long-term processes and contexts, and on grassroots sources, challenge the news values of violence, negativity, unambiguity, timeliness, elite nations, and elite people.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, PJ’s prescription to broaden the range of *sources* by consciously searching for the voices and options for peaceful resolution can be considered a third dimension of its challenge to conventional war reporting.

Some observers see PJ as offering an even more fundamental challenge – not just to the professional conservatism of journalists who cling to ‘objectivity’, and the routinised market share-building formats of profit-oriented news corporations – but also to the entire global war system and its ‘deadly forms of propaganda’, the ‘lethal synergy of state,

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3 A critical realist epistemology is evident in PJ’s call to critically assess the claims of war propagandists; to distinguish between stated demands and underlying needs, goals and interests; to look beyond direct physical violence to explore its ‘invisible’ effects (such as cultural militarisation or psychological trauma), and the underlying patterns of cultural and structural violence (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005a, pp28–31; Hackett & Schroeder with NewsWatch Canada 2008, p44).

4 Although some PJ scholars suggest otherwise, pointing to specific failures in specific cases, such as the ‘peace euphoria’ framing of the Oslo ‘peace process’ in Israeli media (Mandelzis 2007).

corporations, think tanks, and the media' (Richard Falk in Lynch 2008, ppv, viii).

Other critics fear that PJ challenges a liberal value central to democratic journalism – that of freedom of expression. In the view of Hanitzsch (2004), PJ implies that 'bad news' and controversial topics, whose dissemination could contribute to the escalation of conflict, should be avoided. There is no evidence, however, that peace journalists actually make such a claim. They may well recognise legitimate limitations on free speech, such as prohibitions on hate speech, but this position is shared with many others, including some communication rights theorists, discussed below.

In one sense though, PJ does challenge the currently limited definition of free speech as the right of individuals to speak without fear of state punishment. PJ implies not just a right to speak freely, but also a right of access by all significant voices to the means of public communication. Free speech needs a chance to be heard in order to be effective – a normative imperative that underpins alternative media and media democratisation movements.

#### *What is an enabling environment for PJ?*

Given that PJ is, to some extent at least, counter-hegemonic, it will encounter obstacles and opponents. Thus, a second critical question arises. What are the prospects for actually putting it into practice? What strategies, and what political, cultural and institutional enabling environments, would help it to flourish?

One broad strategy is to reform the journalism field from within. A landmark review of scholarship on 'influences on media content' suggests that there is some degree of agency for newswriters in traditional mass media (Shoemaker & Reese 1996). Excellent context-providing documentaries, or news reports on grassroots bridge-building across political divides, can be found within conventional news media – such as a Canadian national television news report that features an association of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost loved ones in the ongoing conflicts. And there is experimental evidence that structural themes and de-escalation-oriented coverage can stimulate audience

interest as much as escalation- and elite-oriented war journalism (Kempf 2007b).

Still, the barriers to PJ within conventional media are wideranging. They include the difficulties of constructing 'peace' as a compelling narrative (Fawcett 2002), the national basis of much of the world's news media and their audiences (notwithstanding the recently hypothesised emergence of 'global journalism'), and the embeddedness of dominant media and states in relations of inequality (as the New World Information and Communication Order [NWICO] movement had argued in the 1970s and 1980s) (Hackett 2007).

Unfortunately, it seems that in the Western corporate media, journalists have neither sufficient incentives nor autonomy vis-à-vis their employers to transform the way news is done, without support from powerful external allies. While systematic comparative research is lacking, it seems that PJ is likely to find more fertile ground in societies where the media is perceived to have contributed to socially destructive internal conflict or ethnic tensions, and in news organisations that have a stake in avoiding their audiences' dissolution into opposing camps. Moreover, in 'transition societies' emerging from authoritarian rule, the political roles and professional norms of journalism may be more open to self-reflexive change than they are in Washington, London, or other imperial citadels of the objectivity regime.<sup>5</sup> The uptake of PJ in Indonesia, the Philippines and some sub-Saharan African states offers preliminary support for these hypotheses.

PJ advocates focus on the dominant institutions of public communication, since these are presumably those with the greatest influence on conflict cycles. The current crisis in North American journalism presents opportunities for PJ as there are more footholds in the system for different and experimental forms of journalism. But in light of blockages to PJ in the dominant media, as well as the growing hybridity and complexity of the global media field,<sup>6</sup> it is worth exploring other spaces

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5 I am indebted to Jake Lynch for some of these points; interview, University of Sydney, 25 June 2010.

6 Grassroots internet-based outlets are introducing new voices and expanding the definition of journalism, but, at the same time, dominant media corporations

for peacebuilding communication. If indeed PJ is to become ‘more than an argument at the outer margins of political debate’ (Richard Falk in Lynch 2008, *pix*), it must become part of a broader project. One approach is to build a new field parallel to currently existing journalism. This field would draw on alternative organisations and networks and would be supported by civil society, relatively autonomous vis-à-vis corporate or state power, and potentially capable of putting into practice the ethos of PJ.

### *Alternative media*

Compared to PJ, alternative media constitutes a less coherent field or paradigm. Debates in the burgeoning scholarly literature reveal its heterogeneity on core questions. How should the phenomenon be demarcated and labelled? Various adjectives have been deployed: alternative, alterative, radical, autonomous, independent, tactical, citizens’, participatory, and community media (Kidd & Rodriguez 2010, p1). Each of these terms, which I use somewhat interchangeably below, has distinct connotations and limitations, reflecting disagreement over other questions, including:

- What are ‘the descriptive features to which we give the greatest priority’ for categorising media, and for empirical investigation? (Couldry 2010, p25)
- Should such media be defined on the basis of its own characteristics, and, if so, what – its content, or its egalitarian, participatory and/or noncommercial processes of production?
- Or, should it be defined by what it differs from – presumably the ‘mainstream’, corporate or state media?
- If so, how should such difference be understood – simply as divergence from a dominant model (perhaps meeting needs unmet by it) or as opposition and resistance to it?
- If alternative media is oppositional, what is the object of its

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are extending their influence transnationally, through a multifaceted and uneven process of globalisation of media markets, firms, formats, governance and (ambiguously) effects (Zhao & Hackett 2005, pp6–8).

contestation – the institutionalised forms and concentrated nature of ‘media power’ (Couldry 2003), or broader forms of social and political domination?

- If the latter, and if alternative media is contesting political domination, are such political challenges necessarily ‘progressive’, in the broad sense of seeking a more equitable distribution of social, economic, cultural and political resources? (Hackett & Carroll 2006)
- Or can media of the radical right (for example, racist or religious fundamentalist websites) also be considered alternative? (Couldry 2010, p25; Downing et al. 2001)

No attempt is made here to resolve these questions, beyond noting that repressive and exclusionary alternative media are unlikely to constitute communicative spaces for nonviolent conflict resolution. For analytical purposes, an ideal type of alternative journalism might include these characteristics: participatory models of production; challenges to established media power (including the professionalisation and highly capitalised economy of commercial journalism, and the division between media producers and audiences); more ‘bottom-up’ ways of scanning and reporting the world, challenging conventional elite-oriented and ideologically conservative news values; and a positive orientation to social change, social movements and/or marginalised communities (Hackett & Zhao 1998, pp206–13; Atton 2009; Atton & Hamilton 2008, p1). In light of this description, one can see that alternative journalism is complementary to PJ in several ways.

First, like PJ, alternative journalism represents dissatisfaction not only with mainstream practices or coverage, but also with the epistemology of news (Atton & Hamilton 2008, p1). By contrast with the objectivity regime, citizens’ journalism often valorises indigenous knowledge, personal testimonials and participant accounts over those of professional observers, constructing ‘a reality that opposes the conventions and representations of mainstream media’ (Atton 2008; Brooten 2008). Both participatory researchers and practitioners of alternative media embrace ‘praxis as a method – learning by doing – and

as an epistemological point of departure – knowledge starts from the experience (stories) of participants – that encourages critical thinking towards social change’ (Riaño-Alcalá 2006, p273, cited in Rodriguez 2010, p137). While alternative journalists are likely to more stridently reject the very possibility or desirability of objectivity, they share with PJ a skepticism towards dominant journalism’s claims to have achieved it.

Alternative journalism also shares with PJ a commitment to move beyond the reporting of daily events, to analyse contexts and to critically explore structures of power. Moreover, alternative journalism is opposed to poverty, the political exclusion of the poor, and top-down approaches to development (Bekken 2008; Wilkins 2008; Brooten 2008). It also resists domination along axes of gender, class, and ethnicity, and seeks to reverse the under- and mis-representation of subordinate groups. These commitments align well with PJ’s call for the voices of victims and peacemakers to be heard, and for structural and cultural violence to be exposed and analysed.<sup>7</sup>

### *The environment for alternative journalism*

What about the institutional framework for the practice of alternative journalism? PJ has relatively well-defined institutional locations – journalism education and established news organisations – albeit to date it generally operates in the margins of these. By contrast, alternative journalism is more variegated, hybrid and complex, spanning the continents and the centuries (see Downing et al. 2001). Moreover, in a

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<sup>7</sup> One example of such alternative journalism is the national magazine *Canadian Dimension*. Its masthead ‘For people who want to change the world’ is an unabashed rejection of the objectivity regime. By contrast with the corporate press, its decision-making is collective, its financing is readership- rather than advertiser-based, and its editorial content interweaves analysis and reports from a consistently progressive and bottom-up standpoint. Consider coverage of the Toronto G20 summit. While the corporate press focused on a handful of violent protesters and on security costs to taxpayers, *Canadian Dimension* (issue of September/October 2010) highlighted the mass arrests of protesters and human rights violations by Toronto police, explored the political issues the protesters were raising, and critically analysed (from a standpoint sympathetic with their goals) the tactics of various groups associated with the protests.

mediascape which is increasingly globalised, digitalised and networked, and where the producer/user distinction is blurring, it is more difficult to specify the institutional and technological scope of alternative media. Alternative media's contemporary constituencies include 'youths, immigrants, minorities, social movements, and cultural and political outsiders' (Bekken 2008). Its technological and organisational forms include community radio (arguably the most important form globally), internet 'radio', small print publications (like the Samizdat underground papers of the Soviet era), weekly urban newspapers, audiocassettes (during the 1979 Iranian revolution), public access television in the US, documentary and eyewitness video for social movements, political and citizens' journalism websites, blogs by unaffiliated individuals, and the anti-copyright open source movement. This list is illustrative only, and is far from being exhaustive or systematic. Of its various forms, those alternative media that most closely match PJ's ethos are probably those linked to communities seeking to protect themselves from direct violence, or to oppositional social movements seeking the 'four Rs' of democratisation – recognition, representation, rights, and redistribution (Sreberny 2005) – in the face of structural violence.

Under what conditions is alternative journalism likely to flourish? Alternative media faces a paradox: it tends to emerge in periods of upheaval, and in conditions of violence, repression or exclusion, to express needs ignored or actively suppressed by official or commercial media. Political or social repression obviously hinders the production and distribution of alternative media. Yet a supportive political communication regime that lowers the *costs* of mobilisation and enhances alternative media's sustainability (effective guarantees of free speech, recognition and even subsidisation by the state) would also reduce the *incentives* to mobilise. The decline of participatory underground media as post-communist regimes in eastern and central Europe consolidated offers one historical example (Sparks 2005).<sup>8</sup> Quite possibly, the perceived need for PJ arises similarly in situations of

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<sup>8</sup> But for a somewhat contrary view, see Bresnahan (2010), who argues that neoliberal media policies, more than changed political conditions, accounted for the decline of Chile's alternative media after Pinochet's downfall.

crisis, when societies are drifting towards avoidable violent conflict, or struggling to rebuild and engage in processes of reconciliation.

There are, to be sure, tensions between PJ and alternative media. First, PJ calls for responsibility and reform within the field of institutionalised journalism. It accepts the presence and desirability of professionalism, and thus the distinction between journalists and citizens/amateurs, with the former privileged in the construction of public discourse. Accordingly, PJ exhibits more concern with the framing of news *content* (in so far as it feeds into feedback loops and conflict cycles on a broader scale), than with news production *processes* as such, except for the reform of certain practices such as sourcing.

Alternative and citizens' media, by contrast, prioritise participatory processes, and people telling their own stories. Such media are (by definition) seeking to build a parallel and alternative set of practices and organisations that will often be consciously oppositional to dominant media, and competitive for some of the same resources (audiences, credibility, and occasionally revenues). Moreover, citizens' media is inherently more precarious than state-owned or market-oriented media. The seeds of PJ may find fertile soil in some corners of the alternative media field, but, organisationally, they would need frequent replanting. And, while alternative media may have profound long-term significance (Downing et al. 2001), its typically marginal status in the short-term means that it often cannot influence the immediate trajectories of conflict cycles.

Second, some alternative media advocate for one side of a conflict. These media may constitute organs of political contestation, linked to movements that advocate violence or that lack a commitment to universal human rights and/or other-oriented ethics. Within the broad spectrum of ethnic diaspora media, some amplify the most militant or uncompromising views, such as those of the Australian Muslim leader Sheik Hilaly, discussed in Jake Lynch's chapter in this volume. Such media may see themselves as representing particular communities, but the concept of 'community' is politically ambiguous: it can be employed to help construct essentialist and exclusionary identities (Downing et al.



2001, pp39–40). That kind of ‘community’ media may reject PJ’s precept of productive dialogue between the different parties in a conflict.

There are, nevertheless, profound complementarities between PJ and alternative media. Both share a commitment to social justice, and to the critical analysis of social structure beyond the quotidian spectacles of conventional news. PJ’s epistemological stance of critical realism, and its call for the exposure and removal of cultural and structural violence, offers two fundamental conceptual links between PJ and many alternative media. Both paradigms reject the epistemology of the regime of objectivity, insisting that journalists acknowledge they are embedded in social processes and communities, and act ethically on that basis. Both seek to challenge elite war propaganda, and to broaden the range of voices accessed to the public arena, especially those of peacebuilders and the victims of violence in conflict situations.<sup>9</sup>

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9 One overlap between PJ and alternative media is provided by the 18 community radio stations in the Magdalena Medio region of Colombia, home to one of the worst internal armed conflicts in the world. The stations’ participants may never have heard of PJ, but they have participated in local peacemaking processes – mediating between armed factions, cultivating nonviolent conflict resolution in a culture where violence is normalised, and buffering civilians from the negative impact of direct violence. They have done so in ‘complex, multifaceted, and context-driven’ ways (Rodriguez 2010, p143). The stations’ mediating role included providing a public forum for discussing, negotiating and finding common ground between communal groups and between bitterly opposed political candidates. Despite her own theoretical preference for the term ‘citizens’ media, Rodriguez suggests that these community radio stations are ‘almost’ alternative media, in so far as they opened ‘communication spaces in which communities can consider, experiment with, and witness’ alternative, nonviolent ways of dealing with conflict, understanding difference, and developing collective imaginaries (2010, p151). The stations’ active mediation role, however, distinguishes it from PJ: ‘The stations are not sending messages to the community *about* how to solve conflict in nonviolent ways. Instead, the stations themselves are mediating conflicts; their communication competence is not being used to design messages about peaceful co-existence, but instead the stations are constructing peaceful co-existence through communication.’ (Rodriguez 2010, p151; emphasis in original)

## Expanding peace journalism

PJ, then, could profitably seek its expansion in alternative and community media. Sometimes community media can have a direct bearing on conflict resolution, as with the abovementioned Colombian radio stations. In especially repressive regimes like Iran's, citizens' underground media may be virtually the only internal communication option for promoting peace and democracy.

At the same time, given the limitations of alternative media discussed above, and the need to address the commanding heights of public communication in most conflict situations, another paradigm that challenges the concentration of 'objective' symbolic power in the media field should also be considered. By intervening in politics and other adjacent fields to change the environment of journalism and the gravitational pulls to which it is subject, movements for reforming media policy and structure may offer new spaces for public communication favourable to peaceful social relations.

## Media reform and communication rights

Throughout the twentieth century, social movements used communications to mobilise, to gain standing with publics and policymakers, and to pursue political and social change. Implicitly, most movements thereby accepted the media system as an obdurate part of the political environment (Hackett & Carroll 2006). Recent decades have added a new dimension, however. Citizens' movements have emerged in a number of countries, demanding democratic reform of media industries and state communication policies, in order to change the media field itself (see, for example, McChesney 2004; Hackett & Carroll 2006). Social movement organisations and less formal networks operate both locally (e.g. the Media Alliance in San Francisco) and nationally (e.g. the media reform groups Free Press in the US, Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom in the UK, or the citizens' online campaign against restrictive copyright regimes in South Korea [Lee 2009]). In recent years, similar efforts have been directed towards democratising global media governance, such as CRIS – the Campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society (Ó Siochrú 2005). Such groups are not necessarily directly engaged in producing or advocating new

models of journalism. Rather, campaigning around a range of issues – intellectual property and the public sphere, broadcast content and regulation, foreign and concentrated media ownership, competition policy and the internet's accessibility and architecture – they seek to change the structures that currently constrain more diverse and democratic forms of public communication in general.

Thus, the threat against which such movements are mobilising is the democratic deficit of corporate and state media and telecommunications – a deficit often masked by claims of objectivity and responsiveness to consumers. That deficit has multiple dimensions, including the failure to constitute a democratic public sphere in the face of commercial pressures; the centralisation of political and symbolic power; the conversion of economic inequality into unequal media representation and access; the homogenisation of discourse and the displacement of civic engagement by consumerism, masked by the proliferation of channels and technologies; the loss of localism in many commercial media; the corporate enclosure of knowledge through restrictive user-pay and intellectual property regimes; secretive and elitist communications policymaking; and the erosion of privacy and free expression rights in the post-9/11 climate of surveillance and national security (Hackett & Carroll 2006, chapter 1).

Many of these democratic shortcomings are related to the commodification of communication and the global expansion of market relations. Other media deficits derive from state coercion, which, notwithstanding the claims of neoliberal ideologues, is not a phenomenon separate from and opposed to the 'freedom' of market relations. To the contrary: coercive state policies, from intellectual property regimes to growing military and prison expenditures, are integral to maintaining the inequalities generated by a market-oriented, neoliberal order (Hackett & Carroll 2006, p10).

*Is media reform counter-hegemonic?*

Against this democratic deficit of the corporate media and the social order in which they are embedded, what alternative principles do media reformers propose? And do emerging media reform movements

challenge existing media and/or the social order? As with peace journalism and alternative media as challenger paradigms, the answer is complex. Normative principles may command widespread support in the abstract, but they are multifaceted and susceptible to different and perhaps contradictory emphases. Media diversity, for instance, could refer to types of programming or ownership, ideological frameworks, competitive markets, language of service provision, or the representation of various social groups in media content and employment. Moreover, the constituencies promoting media democratisation are themselves diverse, ranging from relatively privileged professionals in academic and media institutions, to minorities of colour in the global north, to communities and social movements struggling against authoritarian regimes and/or the impact of neoliberalism in Latin America and elsewhere.

It is not surprising then, that the media reform movement is heterogeneous. At one end of the scale, liberals advocate limited reforms to state policies and legislation, with no necessary linkage to broader transformations beyond improving the operation of liberal democracy. One example is the Free Press group's advocacy of restrictions on media ownership concentration, and for non-discriminatory traffic management policies on the internet – net neutrality. This strand of activism invokes mainstream liberal values – freedom of expression, consumer choice, innovation, journalistic professionalism, media independence from the state, and indeed the protection of news objectivity – but extends them to include struggles against corporate as well as state abuse of power.

At the other, more radical end of the scale, the Media Justice campaign, articulated in particular by American activists of colour, emphasises the struggle against broader forms of domination, and links with social justice movements outside the media field (see Arevalo & Benfield 2009). This tendency has much in common with the alternative media paradigm, rejecting dominant media's claims to a universalising stance of objectivity, and pointing to the imbrication of media power with an unjust social order. If liberal reformers emphasise procedural changes, Media Justice proposes substantive moral reform and the

redistribution of resources and values. If free press advocates emphasise freeing individuals from external constraints, Media Justice may seek to forge or reinforce new collective identities, asserting the dignity and equality of subordinated communities (Hackett & Carroll 2006, p81). If liberal reformers begin with ‘the set of legal circumstances’ that may encourage progressive social outcomes, social justice advocates emphasise ‘evident realities and verifiable injustices [-] ... the actual conditions that people live in’ (Ó Siochrú 2010, p51).

One approach that in many ways straddles the liberal and media/social justice strands is the international civil society movement for *communication rights*. First articulated within UNESCO in 1969 as the ‘right to communicate’, it gained traction during the highly polarised NWICO debates of the 1980s, in the context of the East–West Cold War and demands from governments of the Non-Aligned Movement for a more ‘balanced flow’ of media content and technology between the global north and south (Padovani & Nordenstreng 2005). Hampered by its own contradictory stances (for example, grassroots participatory democracy versus national ‘cultural sovereignty’ exercised by authoritarian governments) and by the bitter opposition of media corporations and neoliberal governments in the West, NWICO was defeated as an intergovernmental movement in the 1980s. But in today’s vastly different geopolitical and technological context, the torch for redressing unjust imbalances in communication structures and policies has been picked up by certain academics, NGOs and civil society advocacy networks (such as CRIS), and redefined as an effort to implement existing internationally recognised communication rights, in the plural.

On the one hand, this nascent movement shares liberalism’s commitment (widely accepted in principle if not practice) to human rights. At first sight, a ‘human rights’ framework for media activism could have quite conservative implications. As a leading theorist and strategist for the CRIS campaign puts it, the current human rights regime ‘was carefully circumscribed at the time of its drafting in the mid-twentieth century to exclude’ radical changes to fundamental social structures (Ó Siochrú 2010, pp51–52). Allegations of human

rights violations – including violations of press freedom – have been selectively and tendentiously used by the US and its allies (the ‘international community’) to justify military and other interventions against politically hostile states in the global south (Bricmont 2006). One example is the hue and cry against alleged violations of freedom of expression by Venezuela’s leftist government of Hugo Chavez, even though most of the private mass media actively oppose the government and ‘continue to have an unfettered right to disseminate unsubstantiated rumors ... and completely partisan anti-Chavez propaganda’ (Golinger 2008, p120). Quite apart from such propagandistic uses, conventional legal protection of press and speech freedom may sometimes increase communicative inequalities; for instance, it has yielded judicial support for media corporations seeking to prevent public interest regulation of their power (Hackett & Zhao 1998, p80).

In principle, however, the defence of communication rights for all – even the important but relatively narrow principle of free expression and press freedom – can be pushed in progressive directions. First, successful resistance to authoritarian states’ repression of free expression would be a radical step on the ground, potentially empowering subordinated groups and contributing to political pluralism. Think of the consequences for Burma, for instance, if opposition groups were allowed to publish and campaign on an equal footing with the military junta.

Moreover, like peace journalism, communication rights pushes conceptually beyond a narrow focus on the ‘negative’ right of free speech. Even within a legalistic (rather than social justice) framework, the meaningful exercise of free speech entails other ‘flanking’ rights, such as privacy and the right to one’s reputation. Furthermore, the international legal instruments, which inspire the communication rights movement, entail a positive rather than merely negative view of rights. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) acknowledges not only freedom of expression, but also the right ‘to seek, receive *and impart* information and ideas through any media’, (emphasis added), implying not only *freedom from* state repression, but also *access to* the means of communication. Other provisions in the UDHR also arguably

imply a positive conception of rights, such as Article 22 ('economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for ... dignity and the free development of ... personality'), Article 26 ('education ... directed to the full development of the human personality'), and Article 27 ('the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community'). Hegemonic discourses on communications and cultural policy in the global north typically downplay such participatory dimensions, and also downplay real-world blockages to the effective and equitable use of people's right to free expression. These include the centralisation of means of symbolic production, illiteracy, language barriers, government and corporate secrecy, fear of surveillance, hierarchies of cultural capital (such as the privileging of written documents over oral traditions), and inability to afford schooling (CRIS Campaign 2005, pp19–24).

The communication rights movement highlights such social and economic blockages. It also challenges the epistemological underpinning of the established human rights standards as premised on a model of communication as 'a linear, one-way process' rather than one of 'sharing [and] making common or creating a community' (Hamelink 2003, p155). If democratic communication is a multi-staged cyclical social process of dialogue, 'free speech' addresses only part of that cycle: the ability to seek and receive ideas, to generate ideas and opinions, and to express or speak them. Free speech does not guarantee a right to be heard and understood (or the reciprocal obligation to listen and understand), nor does it address the learning/enhancing/creating and responding/sharing stages of the communication cycle (CRIS Campaign 2005, pp25–26).<sup>10</sup> This analysis extends beyond the legal framework to more broadly address the social, cultural, economic and

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10 Conversely, some forms of speech (e.g. incitement to hatred or war) may not constitute a process of dialogue aiming towards consensus or mutual understanding, and may therefore not merit legal protection as communication (Dakrouy 2009). The appropriate limits to free speech comprise an ongoing challenge within both PJ and communication rights paradigms; arguably, however, it can be addressed by working for dialogic cultural and communication environments in which hate speech can be readily countered, not least by its victims, and in which it is less likely to occur in the first place.

political environment needed to nurture democratic public dialogue – and thus points in the direction of social justice.

### *Common ground?*

Not all media reform groups adopt the rubric of communication rights, which currently has more resonance in activism oriented towards international than local or national venues. Some potential allies are sceptical for principled reasons; journalists' federations, for instance, worry that it might give governments or interest groups a tool to hamper independent journalism on grounds of accountability and responsibility. Others, including many within CRIS, worry about its strategic limitations: its complexity, the wide range of issues it encompasses, and the lack of intuitively obvious connections between communication deficits and their victims (Ó Siochrú 2010, p54).

Nevertheless, behind the diversity of declarations, frames and campaigns for media reform, it is possible to discern a reasonably coherent paradigm of democratic communication. An analysis of the People's Communication Charter, a landmark document extrapolating from international covenants and circulated by NGOs in the 1990s, suggests that democratic communication includes the following elements: independence from both government and commercial/corporate control; popular access and participation in communication and policymaking; equality, not just of rights, but of access to the means of communication; diversity and pluralism; human community, solidarity, and responsibility; and universal human rights (Hackett & Carroll 2006, chapter 4). A more recent discourse analysis of CRIS and other transnational civil society advocacy groups reveals a similar set of principles: freedom, inclusiveness, diversity, participation and knowledge as a common good (Padovani & Pavan 2009).

The overarching paradigm, arguably, is the institutional organisation of public communication so as to enable all segments of society to actively participate in constructing public cultural truth (White 1995) and to be in a position 'to introduce ideas, symbols, information and elements of culture into social circulation' so as to reach all other segments of society (Jakubowicz 1993, p41). This paradigm entails



the intertwined projects of both democratisation *of* media, and the use of media for broader social change – democratisation *through* the media. Clifford Christians (1995) identified an ethics of listening to, and taking into account, the needs of the other, as a nucleus for both democratic communication and social justice. It is encouraging that at the World Summit on the Information Society, the World Social Forum and elsewhere, communication rights activists were able to achieve ‘a degree of convergence of agendas and actions’ with other civil society organisations working on human rights and social justice (Ó Siochrú 2010, p53).

Peace journalism and media reform/communication rights could similarly envisage strategic alignment and common principles. Strategically, they have common opponents, most notably in war propaganda and the institutions that support it, authoritarian governments that stifle press freedom, the post-9/11 political climate of fear and ‘terror war’ (Kellner 2003), and (in relatively democratic countries) the regime of objectivity that inhibits journalists from joining coalitions, or departing from established practices – like those of elite sourcing (Hackett & Carroll 2006, pp131–42). Opponents of the ‘democratic ideal’ in communication also include media conglomerates, and a ‘conservative libertarian belief system that is broadcast widely across the globe’, one centred on privatisation and the reduction of democratic citizenship to consumer choice within a hierarchical social order (Hamelink 1995, p33). Albeit more ambiguously, these forces are also blockages to PJ, in so far as they institutionally subordinate communication to the imperatives of profit and marketability, and ethically prioritise egotistic expression over the kind of dialogue intrinsic to PJ.

PJ and media reform campaigns may also have common allies. Media reformers have been able, unevenly and not without setbacks, to mobilise constituencies that can be roughly conceptualised as three concentric circles (Hackett & Carroll 2006, pp51–52). The first comprises groups working within and around media industries who may experience or perceive constraints on income, creativity and public information rights generated by state and corporate media – media workers, independent

producers, librarians and communications researchers. In Britain, the work of the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, and the National Union of Journalists, provides inspiring evidence that, even in a bastion of the objectivity regime, some journalists do actively support the intertwined agendas of democratic media reform, and defence of press freedom vis-à-vis government censorship (as in the Northern Ireland conflict) and state-promoted war propaganda, such as the Blair government's threat exaggeration prior to the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Gopsill & Neale 2007, pp270–74, 316–28).

A second constituency for media democratisation comprises subordinate or marginalised social groups, whose lack of social, cultural or economic capital is paralleled by lack of access or misrepresentation in traditional and networked media, and whose interests sometimes bring them into conflict with the social order – particularly social movements that need access to public communication in order to pursue their political project. The histories of two of the longest-standing media democracy groups in the US – the San Francisco-based Media Alliance, and the national media monitoring group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting – indicates the potential for activists from other movements to turn 'media rage' into media activism (Hackett & Carroll 2006). Another example is provided in Jake Lynch's chapter in this volume: members of Sydney's Muslim community translated their discontent with their media representation into active participation in a protest coalition demanding that the Australian Broadcasting Corporation provide broader and more balanced coverage of the Middle East. One challenge is to convert particular grievances into support for universalising principles (such as those of PJ).

The outermost circle of potential constituencies for communication rights comprises more diffuse sectors for whom media issues are rarely paramount, but who may occasionally mobilise on the media front in order to promote other material or moral interests – for example, parents concerned with media impact on the young, citizens concerned with the disconnect between democratic and media agendas, or progressive religious or human rights groups advocating ethical conduct and governance. Some of these groups might find their primary

interests compatible with the principles of both peace journalism and communication rights – and coalition-building would be aided by articulating the overlap between them. Peace journalism calls on media to heed the voices of victims and peacemakers, to exercise empathy and understanding, to promote agency and creativity in peaceful conflict resolution, and to render the conflict and the interests of all parties to it transparent. These ideas articulate well with the communications rights movement's conception of communication as a multi-staged cycle of society-wide dialogue. PJ's insistence on exposing the everyday, embedded patterns of structural and cultural violence that underlie and fuel physical violence, is a key link with the commitment of media justice activists to broader social transformation.

*A coalition of challenger paradigms?*

This chapter has situated peace journalism, along with alternative media and communication rights, as paradigms that challenge aspects of established media structures and practices. I conclude with provisional thoughts on strategic directions for change.

First, we need to recognise, and turn to advantage, the ambivalent relationship of the challenger paradigms to conventional journalism, and to the broader social order of liberal capitalism. I have suggested that in certain respects they are counter-hegemonic, but they also draw upon such dominant ideals as freedom, democracy, diversity and human rights. In societies where such norms are well-established ideologically, if less so in practice, it is both principled and strategic to adopt the Habermasian approach of immanent critique, using the system's own legitimating norms to propose institutional reforms. PJ can legitimately present itself as a more complete and accurate form of journalism than the standardised and stunted practices of 'objectivity'. Movements for media democratisation are pursuing communication rights that are formally recognised in national and international law.

Indeed, from the viewpoint of democratic and antiviolent communication, the objectivity regime has normative dimensions that should be maintained: a commitment to substantive journalism and an ethic of truth-telling on matters of public interest; its capacity to

cushion the intrusion of political and commercial interests on news, and its cultivation of ethical, skilled and independent professionalism. These ideals are understandably very attractive to pro-democratic forces in 'transition societies' emerging from authoritarian regimes. In North America, traditional journalism has been 'hollowed out' by the vectors of hyper-commercialism, media mergers, neoliberal deregulation, and corporate disinvestment in journalism, bringing to a new climax the longstanding tension between a free press and profit-oriented media industries (McChesney & Nichols 2010). In seeking to preserve and reinvigorate the best of the objectivity regime in a cluttered but still corporate-dominated new media ecology, new sources of innovation and renewal may be found in all three challenger paradigms.

As for those challenger paradigms themselves, while I have noted tensions between them, there is much common ground upon which to build. They generally share the objectives of expanding the range of media-accessed voices, building an egalitarian public sphere that can raise conflict from the level of violence to that of discussion, promoting the values and practices of sustainable democracy, and offsetting or even counteracting political and economic inequalities found elsewhere (Hackett & Carroll 2006, p88).<sup>11</sup> There are also potential strategic synergies between these paradigms. For instance, alternative media helps to foreground the democratic deficit of corporate media, and has been a key ally in media democratisation campaigns, the success of which in turn creates more space for PJ, given the ideological and economic entrenchment of war journalism within existing media structures. As

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11 As an example of shared objectives, PJ has a 'democratic prospect' of promoting public deliberation on the question of war. Its critique of conventional war reporting identifies the 'missing pieces required to round out the generic war story that stifles democratic praxis'; when practised, it elevates public discourse to 'a level of complexity and awareness that confounds demonising images' (Ivie 2009, p6). Writing in the wake of the invasion of Iraq, two of the leading exponents of PJ similarly identify its relevance to the liberal-democratic ideal of free expression that can 'animate, and bring about a collision of, alternative views and propositions as to how progress can be made', a role particularly vital when political elites promote policies as drastic as war (Lynch & McGoldrick 2005b, p269).

Tehrani (2002, p80) notes, 'the structure is the message'. Particularly in the still-dominant 'legacy' news media – broadcasting and the press – structure largely governs journalism practices and content. Tehrani identifies the need for more 'structural pluralism in media ownership and control' as a precondition for more democratic checks and balances, and for more content pluralism, including the diversity of voices in conflict situations called for by PJ. Structural reforms applicable to all three challenger paradigms include public and community media that offset the biases of corporate and government media towards commercial and political propaganda; subsidies for media production and access in the global south; genuinely internationalist media; affordable and equitable access to networked digital media; and governance regimes that reinforce popular communication rights.<sup>12</sup> In the final analysis, all three challenger paradigms point beyond the objectivity regime, towards an ethos of dialogue and an epistemology of self-reflexivity, and to fundamental change in media and social structures.

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12 Curran (2002, pp239–47) similarly proposes a working model of legal supports and state subsidies for diverse media to serve different democratic purposes – including social market/minority/civic/interest group and (as the central pillar) public service broadcasting sectors.

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