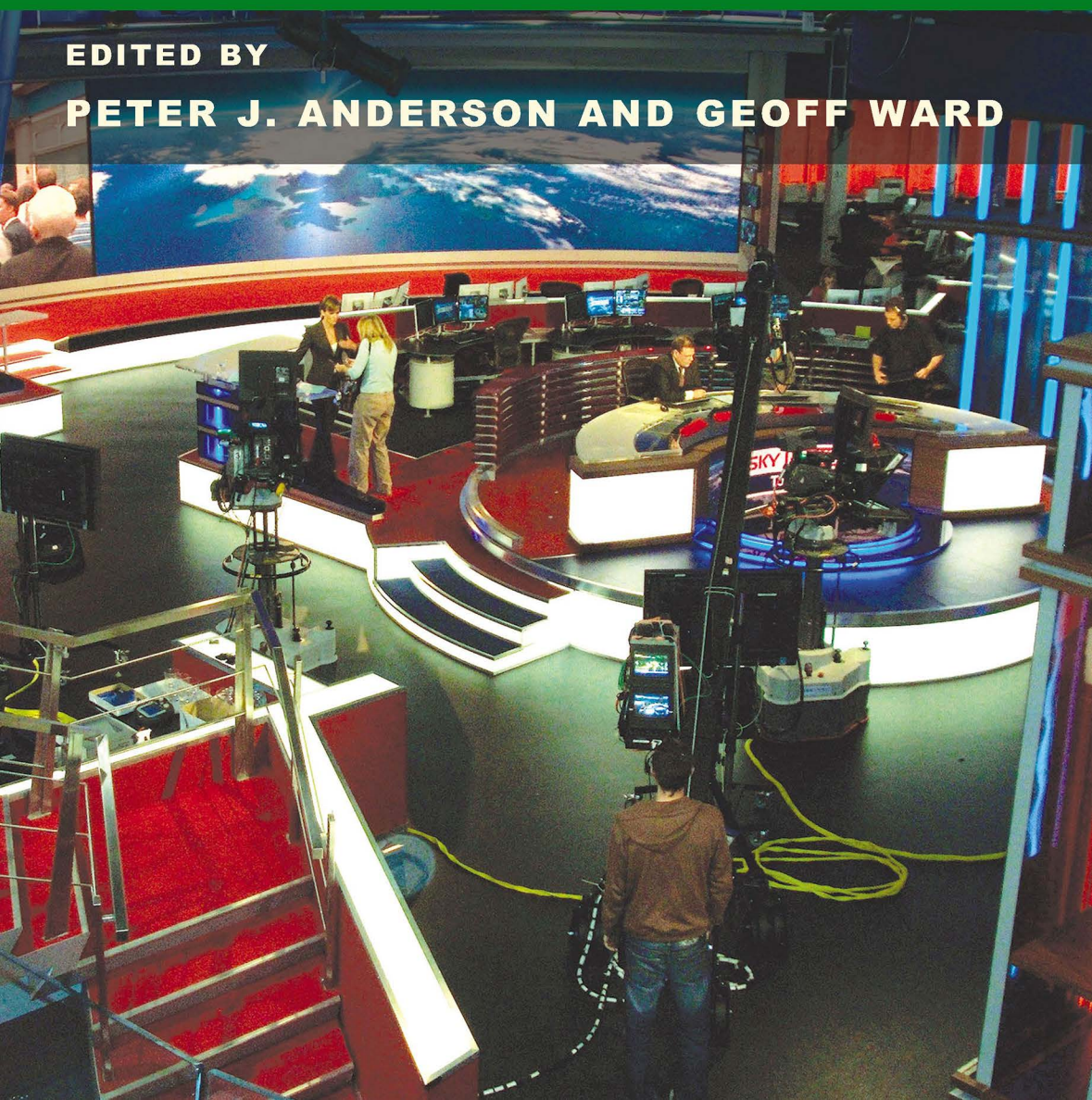# The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies

EDITED BY
PETER J. ANDERSON AND GEOFF WARD

THE FUTURE OF JOURNALISM IN THE ADVANCED DEMOCRACIES

The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies

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Part 3: Comparative Perspectives from Other Large Advanced Democracies

Preface

Omissions, Commissions
and Thanks

Every book of this nature invites questions as to the inclusion and exclusion of content. We would like briefly to explain our approach here.

This multinational project focuses on the news media of the world's most powerful advanced democracies, currently six in all. It does so because this is a group of states, from Europe, the Americas and Asia, that ticks several useful boxes from a comparative point of view – their advanced status economically and technologically, their political power and the fact that they are all liberal democracies. The US has unparalleled global reach, both economically and politically. Japan still rivals it in terms of economic influence. The UK, Germany, France and Italy are the key powers at the heart of the EU. Arguably, such power is always in need of healthy journalism. It is required to keep the peoples of such states informed as to what is done in their name and, some would say, their governments in check.

The six countries that we examine offer fascinating and in some cases disturbing insights on the ways in which journalism is changing in the twenty-first century. The reasons for the core focus on the UK are explained in detail in the introductory chapter.

We are aware also of the way the world is changing. In the view of many, for example, India will be among the large economically and technologically advanced democracies within the next half-century or less and would then be included automatically in a book of this nature.

We would have liked to include two other things of importance, the first of which would have been a larger study of the current and developing situation regarding diversity in journalism employment. We commissioned two people to provide this for us but the pressure of their other commitments prevented either from delivering by the deadline. The material that we have included, most particularly in Chapter 4, does a useful job concisely, nevertheless. Second, we had hoped for more chapters from women contributors. Four women originally were involved with the project but pressure of work forced three to withdraw before the end.

On the other hand, as some people left, other excellent writers joined and the project has benefited enormously from their presence. We are particularly pleased to have tempted Anthony Weymouth out of retirement to join the project. Besides co-authoring Chapter 2, he stepped in to edit four chapters when one of the editors' international commitments sent him flying around the globe at crucial moments. He has performed also an enormously valuable role both with regard to some of the

project's administration and with regard to the identification of areas that needed to be covered in addition to the original agenda for the book.

   We would like to thank the Faculty for providing a six-month sabbatical for one of the editors and for meeting some of the project's costs; also Mike Green, for supplying the paperback cover photograph and sorting out troublesome software gremlins that struck, with immaculate timing, right on the deadline. We owe another debt of gratitude to Cathy Darby and Delwyn Swingewood for their valuable assistance during the proof-reading stage. Finally, we appreciate greatly the patience, support and courtesy throughout of the editors at Ashgate.

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March 2006

Notes on Editors and Contributors

Editors

Peter J. Anderson is the Journalism Research Coordinator at the University of Central Lancashire. He has published a variety of books, articles and book chapters on both communication and politics, including (with Anthony Weymouth) (1999), *Insulting the Public? The British Press and the European Union* (Harlow: Longman); (with Christopher Williams and Georg Wiessala, eds) (2000), *New Europe in Transition* (London: Continuum); and (1996) *The Global Politics of Power, Justice and Death* (London: Routledge). He taught previously at the universities of Lancaster and Southampton and runs a small consultancy on the EU, the news media and the citizenry.

Geoff Ward currently is Principal Lecturer in Journalism at one of the UK's two oldest journalism schools, now part of the University of Central Lancashire, and is responsible for the university's international journalism programmes. He was a journalist for 25 years before joining the lecturing staff at Preston in 1992. He was a senior news sub-editor at the *Daily Mail* in Manchester for 12 years, a reporter for an independent news agency and has worked for a number of regional daily newspapers. He has also edited a group of weekly newspapers.

Project Consultant

Anthony Weymouth was a Principal Lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire until 1997 and has many years of experience teaching and writing about the news media. Latterly a freelance writer and consultant on the media, he has written a variety of books, articles and papers including (with Bernard Lamizet, eds) (1996), *Markets and Myths: Forces for Change in the European Media* (Harlow: Longman); (with Peter J. Anderson) (1999), *Insulting the Public? The British Press and the European Union* (Harlow: Longman); (with Stanley Henig, eds.) (2001), *The Kosovo Crisis* (Harlow: Reuters).

Contributors

Robert Beers is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire. He is the winner of many US national and regional awards, including two Gold Medals at the New York International Film Festival and an Emmy. He has been news manager of WTVJ/CBS Miami. After being hired by CBS News as a reporter to run their Miami Bureau, he covered Central and South America. He

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John Drury has had a long and distinguished career as a journalist and television executive. He has won many plaudits, including a British Press Award (as a newspaper journalist with *The Sunday Times*), the Sony Best Documentary award (twice), a Royal Television Society award for Best Documentary and has been a BAFTA runner-up for Best Factual Drama. His wide experience includes periods as a Head of Factual Programmes at Granada International and the BBC, as well as a spell as Commercial Director of the BBC's Manchester Network Centre. Currently he is CEO of Top Notch Productions and Acrobat Ltd and also works part-time at the University of Central Lancashire, where he contributes to its broadcasting teaching programmes.

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Knut Hickethier is Professor of Media Studies in the Institute for Media and Communications Studies at the University of Hamburg. His work focuses on film theory, television theory and the history of broadcasting and television in Germany and Europe. His publications include: (1998), *Geschichte des deutschen Fernsehens in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Metzler); (2003), *Einführung in die Medienwissenschaft*

(Stuttgart: Metzler); (ed.) (2005), *Kriminalfilm* (Stuttgart: Reclam); (ed.) (2006), *Komiker, Komödianten, Komödiendarsteller* (Remscheid: Gardez Verlag).

Guy Hodgson is a Senior Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire and continues to write on a regular basis about international and Premiership football for the *Independent on Sunday*. He has been a journalist for more than 30 years, during which time he has worked for the BBC, *The Independent* and the *Independent on Sunday*. He was golf and tennis correspondent for the *Independent on Sunday* and northern sports correspondent for *The Independent*, during which time he also reported on two Olympic Games.

Raymond Kuhn is Professor of Politics at Queen Mary, University of London. He has written widely on the French media and on political communication in France and Britain. His 1995 monograph, *The Media in France* (London: Routledge), is the standard work in English on the subject. In 2002 he co-edited with Erik Neveu a book entitled *Political Journalism: New Challenges, New Practices* (London: Routledge).

Paolo Mancini is full Professor at the Dipartimento Istituzioni e Soceità, Università di Perugia. His major publications in English include: (with David Swanson) (1996), *Politics, Media and Modern Democracy* (New York: Praeger); and (with Dan Hallin) (2004), *Comparing Media Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). With this book Hallin and Mancini won the 2005 Goldsmith Award from Harvard University.

François Nel has been a Senior Lecturer in the Journalism Department at the University of Central Lancashire since 2000 and currently is the Course Leader for the Journalism Leaders programme. He gained experience in radio, television and newspapers, before emigrating from Zimbabwe to South Africa in 1991. He has been a head of department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in Cape Town. He remains an active freelance journalist. He has authored two books for Oxford University Press: *Writing for the Media in Southern Africa* (3rd edition in 2005) and *The South African Style Guide*, a usage and reference dictionary for media writers. He holds fellowships from the Poynter Institute in the US, and from the Media Institute of Southern Africa, Namibia. His other awards include the South African Specialist Press Association's top award for magazine journalism.

Alan Rawlinson is Course Leader for the MA in Online Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire. He is a former print reporter, columnist and sub-editor with the Weekly News Group on Merseyside (Swale Press), the *Altrincham and Sale Guardian*, the *Evening Leader* (North Wales Newspapers) and the *Shropshire Star*. He has also worked as a freelance page designer and sub-editor across North and Mid-Wales and the north-west Midlands. He became a university lecturer in 1996

and in 2000/1 was also employed as a writer by <about.com>, the New York web publisher.

Mike Ward is Head of the Department of Journalism at the University of Central Lancashire. A former BBC journalist, Mike writes, broadcasts and provides consultancy on digital and online journalism. His widely selling book *Journalism Online* was published by Focal Press in 2002. He was recently instrumental in bringing the Johnston Press Chair in Digital Journalism to the department.

Yoshikazu Yada has worked as a journalist for the *Asahi Shimbun* for around 20 years. He has been an economic correspondent covering the car, machinery and electronic manufacturing industries in Japan. He also covered macro economic policy during the Koizumi Cabinet. In addition, he has worked for the weekly magazine *AERA*, published by the *Asahi*, as a staff writer and as an editor. In connection with this he launched the magazine *AERA English*, which was intended to be a new bilingual news magazine in Japanese and English. Currently he works as an editor for the Saturday edition, *be*.

Part 1
The Key Issues Facing Journalism in the Advanced Democracies

Chapter 1

Introduction

Peter J. Anderson (with Geoff Ward)

Introduction

Much of the debate about journalism is conducted within two largely separate camps, those of academics and journalists. Even then, the discussion is a lopsided one, with academics debating the key issues much more than journalists seem inclined to do. This is a book which attempts to rectify the imbalance and stimulate exchanges of ideas and opinions within the professional world of journalists that are at least as wide and as vigorous as those within the media-observing community of academics. This work sets out to bring the two groups together, both in terms of the people who write it and the common 'language' in which it is written, one which will avoid unnecessary jargon without any sacrifice of intellectual rigour.

Journalism is a much maligned profession. Politicians in the UK and elsewhere frequently accuse the media of sensationalism, trivialisation, narrowness of focus and straightforward factual inaccuracy. However, the same politicians employ 'spin doctors' to try to generate favourable publicity, submit themselves to media training in order to learn how to communicate effectively on radio and television, sometimes announce new initiatives to the media before parliaments have been informed, are not reluctant to schedule major announcements to fit in with the agendas of prime time news programmes and frequently are hungry for media appearances when they have a view or a policy to sell.

Indeed, journalists and the news media for which they work are the main point of contact between politicians and the people whom they are supposed to represent. The truth of this assertion could not be better illustrated than by the furious altercation between the UK government and the BBC in 2004 over allegations that the Blair government 'sexed up' a key document which it used to sell the idea of the war against Iraq to the British electorate. The general population does not tend to read political manifestos or look at the details of the speeches delivered by politicians throughout the year. Such activities are still the preserve of a minority within electorates and most people retain their reliance on the reports and interpretations produced by journalists when trying to keep abreast of political events. Equally, as government becomes ever more complex and time-consuming, politicians do not, for the most part, have very much opportunity to communicate directly with significant numbers of the electorate and rely on the media to provide a channel through which they can contact potentially thousands or millions of the voting public.

In addition, the following facts should be considered: firstly, the news media overall employ still significant numbers of journalists to report on those activities of politicians deemed newsworthy; secondly, even with decreasing circulations, the populations of democracies such as the UK still buy newspapers in their millions; and thirdly, the television and radio audiences for major political events such as the Iraqi or Afghan wars, or the attempted impeachment of former US President Bill Clinton, encompass millions around the globe. It can therefore be stated with confidence that journalism sits at the heart of the political process. It is expected to carry on its shoulders some of the most crucial responsibilities of the democratic societies.

However, when referring to the political process, it is important to note that we do not see political journalism as pertaining solely to the reporting of parliamentary news, for example. Throughout, the term political journalism will refer to reporting and commentary on politics in its widest sense, whereby the latter:

> ... can be defined as the processes by which decisions are made which regulate people's freedoms, rights, obligations and access to resources within local, national and global society. It determines everything from the way in which people are allowed to treat animals, to the amount of income they are allowed to earn, to their right to engage in religious worship, to their chances of being killed by acts of terrorism and war, or tortured or executed by the state. It is therefore the most fundamental concern of everyone's daily lives and is ignored at their peril (Anderson, 2003).

The heterogeneous development of the media in the post-1945 period is such that there is not simply one type of journalism that occupies the position within the political process referred to above. The higher end of the market (that represented by *The Guardian* or *The Times* in the UK, or *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* in the US, for example) is supposedly in the business of providing predominantly news and comment that is sufficiently serious and detailed to allow 'news consumers' to make informed, objective judgements about political/economic/social issues and events. It is generally the rule that the more newspapers or broadcast programmes adopt popular tabloid-type news agendas and methods of presentation, then the more difficult it becomes to distinguish much of their news reporting and comment writing from entertainment, or 'infotainment'. It would therefore be easy to dismiss popular tabloid-style news media as non-serious players in the political process.[1] But the scandal, sex and celebrity-focused UK *Sun*, for example, makes claims for the influence of its usually very limited amounts of political reporting and comment that would be less surprising were they to come from a newspaper at the quality end of the market. Those claims are backed up by widely leaked information from inside the Westminster village that one of the key factors shaping Prime Minister Blair's caution about joining the EU's single currency has been his fear of *The Sun*'s

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1   However, it should be realised that, while there are very distinct examples of popular and quality news providers, there are also some who inhabit a middle ground between the two. Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper or *News at Ten* TV programme are examples of the latter.

opposition and its alleged ability to shape the voting intentions of millions of people. Equally, increasingly the UK quality newspapers are accused of adopting styles of presentation, news values and story contents that have been imported from the popular press.

There is therefore clearly a crossover 'zone' where both the popular and the quality press and their broadcast equivalents engage in reporting and commentary on matters of a serious political, economic or social nature. While this zone is one that, in countries like the UK, is much more substantially inhabited by the quality newspapers and BBC news programmes like *Newsnight*, if the claims of *The Sun*'s influential former chief political correspondent, Trevor Kavanagh, are to be believed, then it is not the proportion of a paper or programme that is devoted to serious news that matters in terms of political influence but the size and nature of its readership/ audience. In short, in terms of its impacts upon political events, it could be argued that popular journalism can be even more significant than the so-called 'quality' or 'highbrow' journalism and needs therefore to be treated just as seriously.

But as technologies become ever more numerous and sophisticated, traditional print and broadcast media are no longer the only conveyers of serious news. The Internet is now heavily populated by news websites run by anyone from dedicated amateurs through to news organisations of high professional status like the BBC. While, as later chapters will show, electronic journalism is still in its relative infancy, it does provide entirely new ways of accessing recent and breaking news 24 hours a day. Potentially it could be argued that the Internet provides a channel through which news provision can be truly democratised. Despite his enormous power and influence within the print and broadcast media, for example, Rupert Murdoch's newspapers and television stations can find their view of the news world challenged and contradicted by anti-capitalist news sites on the web that people all over the world are able to view whenever they want and without charge. As will be shown later, such sites have not as yet achieved sufficient trust or status to enable them to attract viewers in the numbers that would be required for them to provide an electorally significant alternative to the existing primary news media. But clearly the potential for electronic journalism is enormous. Even at its currently relatively low levels of take-up it provides an extra string to journalism's bow and supplies it with the means by which it can reach those news consumers whose clear preference is for computer-based news provision.

So, having demonstrated something of the range and current importance of journalism, it would be useful to explain the precise nature of the concerns that lie at the heart of our analysis of this most crucial profession.

The Aims and Scope of the Book

This book is being written when the world of communication is undergoing a period of rapid and often quite fundamental change. The technological developments of the last ten to fifteen years – perhaps symbolised most dramatically by former Russian President Boris Yeltsin's use of satellite news link-ups during the Moscow-

led resistance to the attempted coup by Communist hardliners in 1991, the dramatic growth of the Internet and the highly competitive news environment created by the advent of digital multichannel broadcasting – have both accelerated greatly the speed at which news can be transmitted and affected significantly the range of issues that can be covered. At the same time, the organisational structures within which news is gathered, selected and distributed have been undergoing fundamental changes, with the growth of conglomeration and cross-media ownership, which have been seen as serious cause for concern from the point of view of the media's role within democratic societies. Politically, the US has become even more of a dominant global force after the massacres of its citizens in September 2001 than it was during the previous 'American century'. Its increasingly interventionist policies mean that it is more important than ever before that the American public has available to it a balanced and effective news media that can enable it to make informed electoral judgements on what its President does in its name. The evidence suggests that such a facility is missing, as a later chapter will show. The increasingly complex range and nature of issues that confront the world's citizens as a result of scientific and technological progress – from cloning to the rights and wrongs of the genetic modification of foodstuffs – place an ever more demanding requirement on journalists to be able to mediate and explain adequately the key issues to their readers, viewers and listeners.

This book is a response to the challenges that all of this change presents. For example, one of the accusations frequently made against the advent of multichannel television in the US is that the increased competition that it has produced has helped reduce the resources available to the traditional quality terrestrial news broadcast programmes and helped push the news agenda of television in an ever more populist direction. One of the core questions that we will ask, therefore, is: *to what extent is traditional hard news losing ground to soft news*[2] *across the media of the advanced world and what can be done to reverse this trend if this is a serious problem?*

Rightly or wrongly, conglomeration and cross-media ownership have been accused of being likely to reduce the range of issues covered. Equally the charge is heard that multichannel television makes it too easy to flip channels whenever a complex issue is discussed on a news programme and that this knowledge acts as a pressure to reduce the depth of coverage of such issues in a competitive multichannel media environment. The second core question we will ask, therefore, is: *to what extent is the range and depth of coverage of news issues within the advanced democracies adequate for the purpose of ensuring that electorates are adequately informed about the world around them?*

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2   What is meant by hard news and soft news will be explained in detail shortly. For the moment it is sufficient to note that the former term is used here to refer to news that has a significant political, economic or social impact on people's daily lives and well-being, while the latter refers to coverage of sport, celebrity, music, and so on. The term 'hard news' is used interchangeably with 'news journalism' throughout the book.

Equally, it has been argued that the increasing concentration of media ownership raises serious questions about the extent to which it is possible for viewers, readers and listeners to have access to a diverse and balanced presentation of the news. In the UK, for example, it is possible already for a reader of the Murdoch newspapers *The Sun* or *The Times* to switch on their televisions and rely on the Murdoch television channel Sky for their broadcast news, thereby seeing the world entirely through the eyes of Murdoch-owned news producers. Under former Prime Minister Berlusconi the problem was far more acute for consumers of the Italian media. The third core question that we will ask, therefore, is: *to what extent is it possible to access balanced presentations of the news within the various advanced democracies within this study?*

However, in addressing this last question the chapter concerned with the US will confront the arguments for balance head-on with the counter-arguments of those who believe that there is a strong case for what might be termed 'benevolent bias'.

It is of course possible to argue that there are other questions about journalism of at least equal importance that should be asked in a book like this. However, given the range and depth of material that will be covered in the chapters in which the three core questions will be addressed, a firm limit has to be set on the overall number of questions to be asked. Why we believe that these are the most important questions will become apparent in the next section. Many of the additional questions have already been discussed in some depth in the US (see McChesney, 2000, for example) and in the UK (see Lloyd, 2004, for example).

In addressing the three questions we will be looking at everything from local newspapers and local radio stations through to global media players such as the BBC or News Corporation. We will do this first of all within the UK and will then move out into a comparative focus. This will bring in the very different media markets of countries like Italy, where Berlusconi's democratically problematic role and influence during his period as Prime Minister will be examined, together with those of Germany and the US. As will be seen later on, currently there are some particularly worrying trends affecting journalism within the latter.

Where we find that there are deficiencies in the media in respect of the answers provided to each of the above three questions, at the end of the book we will attempt to provide a means of resolving the problems that those deficiencies create.

Before we proceed any further, however, it is necessary to define precisely what it is that we mean by journalism within this study.

Defining Journalism

Past studies have provided a range of answers to the question of how journalism should be defined and clearly the discussion so far has implied some very specific understandings of the term. We have defined already what we understand to be involved within a specific *variety* of journalism, namely *political* journalism. We now wish to look a little more at the root idea of journalism itself, from which the

varieties spring. At its most *basic*, journalism can be defined simply as the practice of news gathering and presentation. Precisely because this definition is basic, it is also unsatisfactory, telling us little about the sophistication of much modern-day journalism. The interesting questions about any form of journalism relate to issues concerning the *types* of news gathered, the *range* of events and issues covered and the *manner* in which news is presented in terms of its *interpretation, analysis and context.* The focus here, for the most part, is upon journalism of the most important kind in terms of its subject matter and potential consequences. For the initial purposes of our discussion here we shall refer to this kind of reporting as hard news journalism. By this we mean journalism that covers the political/economic/social issues *that affect significantly people's lives* at a global, regional, national or local level within one or several parts of the world. For now it is perhaps sufficient to say that it is journalism that can be recognised as having the primary intent *to inform and encourage reflection, debate and action* on political, social and economic issues.

The huge swathes of journalism that fall outside our definition (as represented by much of the journalism pertaining to periodicals, sport, music, popular culture in general, and so on – often referred to as the coverage of 'soft' news) are not unimportant. Nor are they necessarily irrelevant to many of the themes and issues pursued in this book. Indeed, for reasons that will be examined in that chapter, we have included a piece on sports journalism which looks very specifically at its relevance, among other things, to helping provide the very financial foundation upon which hard news journalism depends. In other words, we are not adopting some elitist, or paternalistic, viewpoint that would deny audiences the possibilities of engagement in the worlds of, for instance, entertainment, celebrity, gossip and the off-beat. We acknowledge also that the important can, and should, be made interesting and that the interesting can be often important. Ultimately, however, it is necessary to get down to basics. It is a simple truth that the amount of *freedom* available for the pursuit of activities such as sport, art and popular culture is determined by the key political, social and economic decisions, ideas and movements that govern societies. This was usefully demonstrated by the discrimination against black athletes during the apartheid period in South Africa, or the difficulties involved in trying to stage theatrical productions seriously criticising the Soviet Union for most of its existence. The journalism that covers these types of issues must be regarded as being the most important for people's daily lives, even if this is not appreciated currently by many of (particularly) the younger readers, listeners and viewers.

This said, we have some problems with the term 'hard news'. It is taken often as denoting what many teens and twenties see as a staid and stodgy form of news communication, where the subject matter is dull and the style of presentation rather formal and uninspiring. Hard news, as we define it, might be perceived by middle-class under-thirties as the type of news that they would expect to find in whatever quality newspaper many of their parents would buy. Many are much more inspired by the 'now', informalised journalism of *Heat* in the UK or its overseas equivalents, where the focus is on accessible language, vibrant formats and a mishmash of (appropriately) hot topics centred around celebrity, lifestyle, music, and so on. In

addition, it is notable how some of the key ideas that have developed and been debated within the broad spectrum of postmodernism have been filtering down to the young via film-makers (*The Matrix* is an obvious case in point) and others who feed into the media-led dimensions of youth culture. This contemporary philosophical mode of thought seems to have spawned new, often globally linked (via the Internet and other evolving technologies) protest movements against globalisation, environmental abuse, and so on, which have in common a cultural contempt for traditional sources of social organisation and power, combined with a rather hazy view of what should replace them. This creates additional problems for the communication of 'hard' news in so far as the young often equate it precisely with these, as they see it, discredited power sources and structures.

The Problems of the Present and Looking to the Future

Bearing in mind these problems, in thinking of the journalism of the future, one of the ideas that needs debating is how far it is possible to reinvigorate the language and presentational formats of traditional 'hard news' journalism (which we will refer to also as *news journalism* in common with practice elsewhere) in order to attract a wider audience for its subject matter without debasing the core quality of the fact and informed opinion dimensions at its heart. One of the things that could be investigated is the idea that it is possible to weave the styles that characterise news journalism and soft news styles and even content together (in a rather more successful manner than that attempted by, for example, *The Daily Mirror* in the UK in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the US) in such a way as to convey successfully the core concerns raised by 'traditional' news journalism stories to a much wider and inclusive audience than previously has been possible. It would be useful also to look at ways of communicating the kinds of stories news journalism traditionally selects that provide for their conversion into a form where their importance can be seen and noted by younger (as well as older) audiences, instead of their minds being instantly turned off on the grounds that political news, for example, equals just the irrelevant ramblings of a discredited establishment.

What we are talking about here is only 'dumbing down' if it is done badly. At its best this is a very sophisticated and extremely demanding form of the journalist's art that balances delicately the measured use of soft news techniques with the need to get across to readers, viewers or listeners the most crucial issues that arise within the sphere of news journalism. To a degree it is being experimented with already – from the use of the visually and linguistically highly expressive, 'put it in a nutshell' journalism of former BBC political editor Andrew Marr and his successor Nick Robinson, to some of the visually arresting, semi-popular tabloid formats used to convey hard news on the front pages of the UK quality newspaper *The Independent*, for example, during and after the 2003 war against Iraq. The need is to think through the furthest extremes to which this technique can be taken before cracking and collapsing into what is frequently derided as 'dumbing down'.

We will be suggesting in the final chapter of the book a means by which all of this could be debated in a better resourced and potentially more effective manner than has been the case so far.

The focus needs to be very precisely on how to make serious news more accessible without compromising it in terms of its range of chosen subject matter, or the presentation of its complexity and context. The concern is the most crucial conundrum at the heart of contemporary journalism, that of how to begin to reverse what critics of the media have argued to be a distinct trend that increasingly is diluting the quantity of news journalism within even its historically most committed providers, such as the quality print press.

The fact that traditional news journalism has been losing ground to what frequently has been referred to as its soft news counterpart is worrying, but not entirely unexpected. In addition to the influences of popular youth culture (Hobsbawm, 1995) and the diluted and often misunderstood posturings of postmodernism, it is a frequently observed phenomenon that freedom is something that is easily taken for granted and even squandered by those who have not had to fight for it or experienced its loss. Equally, it could be argued that the growth of Western prosperity during the last decades of the twentieth century (that paradoxically was won by a more politically aware generation than the present) has taken much of the 'sting' and interest out of politics for the beneficiaries. The convergence of political parties around the centre in countries like Britain has exacerbated this phenomenon. Nevertheless these disparate and deep-rooted problems should not be seen as causes for despair but rather measures of the heights which journalism has to scale if it is both to preserve then reclaim and expand its audience for serious news. This is the fundamental challenge. This book attempts to point the way towards some of the solutions.

Turning to the second of our core questions outlined at the beginning, the alleged problem of the inadequate *breadth and depth* of the serious news agenda that is set across the media's different arms will be examined. The question of the numbers and types of issues which touch ordinary people's daily lives that are *not* covered within one or more of the several branches of journalism that make a claim to covering serious news is of course an interesting one. That which the media leave out of their news agendas within advanced democracies frequently tells us much about the underlying ideologies and commercial pressures that shape currently dominant news values (and the chapter about the US will provide a useful case study in this regard). Those values in turn obviously are crucial because they shape the version of 'the world and its problems' that is communicated to the man and woman on the street. If things are being left out that are important to people, we both need to know why and how.

Obviously, it should be expected that there will be variations between the different countries and cultures that the book will examine in terms both of the ideologies and the commercial pressures shaping dominant news values. One of the book's functions will be to note and analyse these variations.

However, it is not enough simply to look at the range and depth of issues that are presented to audiences. Turning to the third of our core questions addressed at the beginning of the chapter, it is possible, obviously, for there to be an extremely wide

range of in-depth news coverage within a newspaper, or other news medium, which is cast in such a biased manner that the reader might well have been better off being left completely uninformed for all the similarity to the 'real world' that the reports might bear. Inevitably, therefore, we are brought face to face with the problem of objectivity. Much as the highly opinionated journalism of *The Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Mirror* might be disliked by many, British notions of free speech mean that it would be unreasonable to insist that they aimed for the kind of balance that the BBC is required to pursue within its overall coverage. The traditional way of dealing with the bias of particular news providers has been to argue that as long as there is a diversity of newspapers and other news media available, then the requirements of democracy are met because citizens can check off one set of reports and views against another and make up their own minds. However, the problem with this approach is that many news 'consumers' simply buy the newspaper that fits their views and do not bother to cross-check what they read with accounts provided by other news providers. There is, in addition, the previously mentioned problem of the multi-ownership of news providers with regard to people like Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi.

As pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, therefore, our concern will be to establish the extent to which balance is lacking across the advanced democracies that we discuss and, where appropriate, to propose remedies to deal with any deficiencies.

Together, we see our three questions as deriving from the most fundamental requirements for the media dimension of the *public sphere*, Habermas' compelling view of what democracies need at their heart if they are to provide a satisfactory means for the public fully to participate in the governance of their societies (Habermas, 2002). This is why they are put forward here as the potential core of the book. The analysis that occurs during the course of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will confirm the extent to which that potential is realised as an important by-product of the main discussion. The content of the three chapters is explained below.

Setting the Background Context for the Case Study Chapters

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will provide the background context for the case study chapters that follow them, as well as evaluating in more detail than here the appropriateness of focusing on the three questions already outlined. The three chapters will provide an analysis of the range and significance of the changes that journalism has been undergoing in recent years and will assess the extent to which they provide normative challenges for the profession. Should it be decided ultimately that the three questions are indeed appropriate as the core of the study, then the background context that the next three chapters provide will feed directly into their consideration within each case study chapter.

Chapter 2 will examine the key issues facing journalism in the twenty-first century. Initially, we will analyse the nature and impact of the various changes to which the world of journalism is subject. The increasing pace of that change can

be illustrated by an examination of the telescoping histories of today's main news platforms – newspapers (340 years), radio (75 years), television (60 years) and the Internet (12 years, as at the time of writing). Our focus will be relevant political, economic, technological and cultural changes and developments and the ways these have impacted on journalism in advanced democracies. The neoliberal political and economic environments will be shown to have had inevitable consequences for the commodification of journalism and increasingly conglomerated and transnational patterns of ownership. We will assess the ways in which these factors, and allied technological developments, have altered the world journalists report on and the world they inhabit at work. New patterns of gathering, reporting and selecting/processing news will be examined and related to the wider social and cultural environments and, specifically, to the audiences who complete the 'production circuit'. An important element of these considerations will be the changing nature of the 'knowable' in a world of increasing complexity and media saturation.

Having explored some of the main determinants that explain *why* journalism is the way it is, the next chapter moves on to consider normative views of *what* journalism should be. This begins with a brief analysis of traditional journalism norms, from the fourth estate to the public sphere and the US public journalism movement. The main thrust is an evaluation of the applicability and utility of different normative perspectives in relation to the current social and cultural changes identified in the preceding chapter. This analysis leads to the reinforcement and consolidation of the key perspective that will underpin discussion in the book – that journalism's public function is (as explained above) democratic and its role (broadly) political. The chapter will discuss also the relationship between journalism and different types of liberal democracy and provide the reader with a means of gauging the extent to which democracy is present in a meaningful sense in each of the countries studied.

Drawing on the groundwork of the previous chapters, attention in Chapter 4 turns to detailed consideration of the consequences of change and the possible resolution of gaps between the existing and the ideal. Issues relating to institutional arrangements and journalism production, texts and reception are drawn together into *challenges* facing journalism now and in the future. These are discussed predominantly in terms of the *economic* and *technological* pressures and opportunities that journalism currently faces, together with the *political* and *regulatory* forces that affect them.

The precise nature of the challenges to journalism that are presented under the above headings will be explained, in detail. As stated previously, wherever they are relevant they will then feed into the answers that are sought to the book's central questions. This chapter will end by confirming the appropriateness of the three core questions put forward in Chapter 1.

The UK as a Case Study

Having laid the necessary foundations, the book then moves into a series of detailed UK case studies, which in turn lead into a broader but still substantial discussion

of the current problems of journalism and their possible remedies in a contrasting selection of additional advanced democracies. The UK is chosen as the 'base focus' from which everything else pans out for two main reasons. First and most obviously, it forms the core area of expertise of the team responsible for the book's first two sections. Second, the London-based parliamentary system is one of the oldest and least interrupted amongst all of the advanced democracies. Indeed, as noted above, Habermas identifies it as the first home of what might be termed a public sphere (Habermas, 2002). Its political communication problems and experience might therefore be expected to have the deepest roots and to provide one of the most fertile breeding grounds for potential solutions. The history of the BBC as the prototype and still most respected state broadcaster is one of the most vivid illustrators of the usefulness of this approach.

The UK section focuses primarily on the media that cover the largest number of British citizens – the newspapers, television channels, radio stations and Internet news sites that are based in England. Not everyone outside the UK is aware that Scotland, Wales and (depending upon the political situation at particular times) Northern Ireland all have their own parliamentary assemblies and executives with varying degrees of power. Currently, the Scottish Executive exercises the greatest power of all of the devolved governmental bodies and Scotland has its own national press. While, ideally, it would be useful to look at the latter, there is not the space within a book of this size to examine all of the different characteristics of the media within the various countries within the Union. It is for this simple, practical reason that it has been decided to focus on the English media as that covering the largest section of the population. However, the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland media will be referred to at points where they have a unique significance.

The English media are covered in six chapters, five of which concentrate in turn on the national print media, the local and regional print media, the key terrestrial, satellite and cable television broadcasters, the national and local radio broadcasters and the online media. An additional chapter on sports journalism within the UK is included for the reasons mentioned earlier. Each chapter will adopt a common structure to facilitate comparative analysis (although this will be less true of the necessarily distinctive sports journalism chapter and, for reasons that will be explained within it, the online journalism chapter). Looking, for example, at the television industry, key aspects of its historical development will be explained first in order to provide the background context that is necessary to understand why the structures and regulations of the present have their specific shape. Next, the key challenges facing the television industry will be identified and explained. The ways in which the normative debate outlined in the opening chapters applies to the industry will then be analysed. The three core questions will sit at the heart of the chapter in a form that is adapted to consideration of its specific subject matter, namely:

- To what extent is traditional news journalism losing ground to soft news within the UK television industry?

- To what extent is the range and depth of coverage of news issues within the UK television industry adequate for the purpose of ensuring that the electorate is adequately informed about the world around them?
- To what extent is it possible to access balanced presentations of the news within the UK television industry?

The answers that are found to these questions will be used to assess the extent to which the industry is meeting the requirements of the news dimension of the public sphere as defined by ourselves. Where deficiencies are found, then possible remedies will be suggested.

The conclusions from each of these chapters will then be brought together at the end of the book and compared with those from the chapters on a selection of other advanced democracies in an attempt to assess the current state of *the news media as a whole* across the case study states. The book's three core questions will sit at the heart of this process.

The International Comparative Studies

Part 3 introduces five additional players in the shape of the US, France, Germany, Italy and Japan. One of the key reasons for the selection of these states is explained in the preface and it is not proposed to duplicate it here. It is possible to criticise any such selection as being inadequate for a variety of reasons – for not including small states, for not including enough Pacific states, for not including enough states with particular common problems, and so on. To all such criticism we plead guilty and admit that certain logistical factors – time, the range of available expertise and the book's word limit – have imposed upon us, as they do upon journalists themselves, the need for selection. So rather than wilting under the vices of the selection made here, our intention is to concentrate on its virtues. Subsequent studies, in journals or similarly themed books, can fill many of the gaps that we are forced to leave for very practical reasons.

First, Italy selects itself. At the time of writing the Italian public is waking up to the deficiencies of a political system that allowed former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to achieve direct and indirect near-monopoly control of its terrestrial television broadcasters, together with significant influence within its print media. That such a situation could occur within a member state of the EU, especially given its memories of media control under the Fascists, is seen as a fundamental affront to the principles of democracy both by many within Italy and certainly by many outside it. For some, the challenges that the Italian media face are perhaps the most serious and the most worrying of all the advanced democracies. Our contributor, however, sees something positive that has come out of all of this as well, as his chapter will show.

The US also is an inevitable presence within the book. Given its massive and all-pervasive military, economic and political power and influence and its current role as 'the new Rome' in world politics, the extent to which the US media are able

to inform and educate their domestic public about the issues in which their country chooses to become involved around the globe is crucial. Arguably, the American public is potentially the most effective counterbalance to the power and ambitions of a presidency that neither the United Nations nor the EU is able to resist effectively on many issues. If that public is so woefully uninformed about global politics, leaving aside its own politics, as a result of deficiencies in the performance of its media, then the whole world has serious cause for concern.

Germany equally selects itself. While currently neither the German Chancellor nor the German electorate is willing to take on the leading international role that their country is capable of, it is undoubtedly both the most powerful state within the EU and potentially capable of exerting real influence on the shape of global politics. It is only because Germany chooses for the moment not to take on such a role that Britain is able still to put itself forward as the major global player within the EU. What Germany says and does matters and as an advanced democracy it is important that its voters are adequately informed about the world outside as well as internal politics. The role of the German media is therefore crucial.

France is interesting on several grounds, but one of the most influential considerations in choosing to include it within the book was the contrast which its print media provides in terms of its range of political perspectives, the quality of analysis of its best papers and the range of issues which it addresses, when compared to other advanced democracies, not least its British neighbour.

Finally, Japan was chosen both because of its role as the second most powerful Pacific democracy and because of its significance as an example of how Asian societies can adopt similar forms to Western democracies but operate them in very different ways. It will be interesting to see how these impact upon the way that the Japanese news media operate and the extent to which their problems correspond with, or are distinctive from, those of the European and American democracies.

To facilitate the most effective comparison with the UK chapters, each international chapter will adopt roughly the same structure as was outlined above for each UK chapter, with the partial exceptions of the sports journalism and online journalism chapters. While, again, it would be ideal to be able to look at each of the additional countries' media industries in the same depth as the UK, practicality in the form of a lack of space makes this impossible. Nevertheless, the overview that each chapter will present will still be of great value, given that it is produced on the basis of expert, in-depth knowledge. It will allow for the *key* challenges facing the media of each society to be identified definitively, and equally will provide sufficient detail for the book's three core questions to be addressed. It should allow for a broad picture of the current state of the media across the chosen advanced democracies to be painted and for an initial evaluation to be made of the extent to which any crucial failures in media performance can be rectified. It will also allow conclusions to be drawn concerning the degree to which different cultural, economic and political contexts shape the practicalities of what might be aspired to in terms of a media role as a key player within the advanced democracies.

In short, while the core concerns of the book – what journalism currently is about in the UK and other advanced democracies, what it should be about and how to get there – might initially seem clear-cut and simple, the comparative perspective of Part 3 will make it clear just how difficult and complex a subject matter for study all of this really is. In the overall conclusion the book will suggest a means of finding solutions to the problems that it identifies, but it will emphasise that this will not be easy to implement.

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The Changing World of Journalism

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(with Geoff Ward)

Introduction

The traditional news media in pluralistic societies have often made great claims about being at the heart of democracy. As most of the quality news media continue to lose readers and audiences and new forms of communicating news outside of the control of the media companies, such as blogging, gain popularity amongst younger people, one thing is clear. Whatever importance they ascribe to themselves, the traditional news media have no God-given right to retain their position at the communicative core of the democratic process. Indeed, as Barbie Zelizer noted in her excellent 2004 survey of the state of journalism research (Zelizer, 2004: 204), there have been four studies in recent years which have taken 'the end of journalism' as their title.

There can be no doubt that, in the face of all of this, journalism is currently undergoing an identity crisis the reasons for which are well enough documented. Over the last two decades in particular, socio-economic, socio-cultural changes and technological development have combined to impose change upon the profession and to oblige its practitioners to re-examine their roles as journalists in the context of these rapid developments at the beginning of the new century (see, for example, Lloyd, 2004). These changes are due to two principal factors. Firstly, there has been an 'information explosion', fuelled mostly by the Internet, whereby the manner in which the public receive and consume information has reduced the input by professional journalists. While the impact of this in terms of the gaining of new Internet audiences for political news remains modest overall (Van Dijk, 2005: 118–119), there are serious worries that this reduction is a process that will gather momentum during the next decade. Secondly, for reasons rooted in socio-economic development, society's perceived needs have evolved to a point where the traditional 'interpretative' functions of journalism are deemed in some quarters to be no longer necessary. These are serious developments that have implications for journalism throughout the advanced democracies, more serious in some than in others but all consistently pointing in the same direction of significant change. While this transition period brings with it great democratic potential, it can also be argued that the role of journalism is evolving in a way wherein its traditional functions and its relationship to the democratic process in reality are being redefined in a manner that is frequently not in the public interest. A key question therefore, for journalists, proprietors,

politicians and the public, is 'how can this change be managed (if indeed it can be managed at all)?' in the best interest of the profession itself and of democracy that, until recently at least, it was assumed to serve.

In the course of this chapter we shall examine the past and present journalistic practice, the way that it has been affected by the changes that have transformed its market from being 'supplier-driven' to 'consumer-driven', as well as speculate upon its future directions. First of all, let us look again at the assumed context within which the media operates in the advanced democracies.

Some Basic Principles

When we speak of advanced democracies, we assume *at least* five basic underlying principles that characterise them:

- universal suffrage;
- regular and frequent elections;
- accurate and honest voting returns;
- freedom of speech;
- freedom of movement.

These five principles are always set within a wider context of a national/international legal framework and overarching legislative assembly. The first three principles are always enshrined in the law of the country and applied in the form of strictly defined procedures governing eligibility to vote, the intervals between elections and the manner in which elections are to be conducted. Serious violations of these principles are comparatively rare in the advanced democracies because in the main they are part of a verifiable and transparent process. For reasons that we hope will become clear, both in this chapter and throughout this book, the fourth principle, the need for freedom of speech, is an issue of far greater contention for media observers than any of the others. The constraints and conditions that impinge upon journalists and determine the manner in which they represent events of primary importance to people's lives are of central interest to all those who believe in the democratic process. But unlike the first three principles listed above, the fourth – freedom of speech – is a concept open to interpretation and in consequence also open to abuse. For this reason, the manner in which the fourth condition is implemented in the countries that form the objects of our study will occupy the considerable attention of the contributors to this book. In a similar way the fifth principle, that of freedom of movement, is also a domain where the necessity, the degree of provision and manner of its implementation are frequently contested. The focus of our attention, however, necessarily is on the fourth principle: freedom of speech.

Freedom of speech is such a self-evident precondition of the democratic process that it would seem unnecessary to pursue it further. In reality, such an assumption is not merely unfounded but dangerous. The way in which information is currently